



# CHILDREN AND FATHERS BONDING

**Findings from the B3 Study of the Just Beginning Parenting Intervention**

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# Children and Fathers Bonding

## Findings from the B3 Study of the Just Beginning Parenting Intervention

OPRE Report 2021-132

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# Overview

## Introduction

A father's support—both financial and emotional—is linked to better outcomes on nearly every measure of a child's well-being. Past research has shown that fathers with low incomes—particularly those who do not live with their children—find it particularly difficult to provide that support.

To continue building an evidence base for effective, innovative interventions that support fathers and their families, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, with funding from the Office of Family Assistance (OFA), engaged a team led by MDRC to conduct the Building Bridges and Bonds (B<sub>3</sub>) study. B<sub>3</sub> partnered with fatherhood experts and practitioners to identify new and promising approaches to supporting fathers working toward economic stability and improved relationships with their children. Parenting and economic stability are in fact two of the three required program areas for OFA Responsible Fatherhood grants. The study team tested three innovative, interactive, skill-building approaches that addressed parenting and economic stability in the context of existing Responsible Fatherhood programs. Just Beginning is the parenting intervention tested in the B<sub>3</sub> study and the subject of this report. The Just Beginning intervention invited fathers with their young children to participate in one-on-one parenting training sessions that included engaging skill-building videos and father-child play activities. In Just Beginning, a father learned and tried out one new strategy for interacting with his child per session, for five sessions.

For the B<sub>3</sub> study, three organizations offering Responsible Fatherhood programs implemented Just Beginning in addition to their usual services. Fathers were randomly selected to participate in one of two groups: one group was eligible to receive the organizations' usual services, and the other was eligible to receive the Just Beginning curriculum in addition to the usual services. This report builds on previously released findings about curriculum implementation and expands on how each organization implemented Just Beginning and who participated in services. It also presents the effects of Just Beginning on father-child relationships and estimates the costs to service providers of operating Just Beginning.

## Primary Research Questions

- Is it feasible to include children in fatherhood program services, and what is necessary to facilitate their inclusion?
- Does a parenting program that works with fathers and young children together generate more positive effects on parenting and father-child relationships than standard program approaches?

## Purpose

Although fatherhood programs use a variety of approaches to encourage fathers' positive involvement with their children, the existing evidence has shown that these programs have had minimal success in achieving the goals of building parenting skills and strengthening father-child relationships. Their lack of evidence of effectiveness provided the rationale for developing and testing new approaches.

This report describes Just Beginning's effects on father-child relationships and the costs of implementing the curriculum. It also analyzes how services operated and who participated in them, information that serves as context for the other findings.

## Key Findings and Highlights

- **Just Beginning can be implemented in fatherhood programs, though recruitment and engagement are challenging.** For example, 46 percent of fathers randomly assigned to the program group never attended a Just Beginning session. Fifty-four percent of fathers in the program group completed at least one Just Beginning session and 37 percent completed at least four sessions, which the curriculum developer considered adequate exposure to the curriculum. Seventy percent of those who attended the first session attended at least four sessions. However, it took a great deal of staff effort to accomplish this level of engagement.
- **In these program and study contexts, the Just Beginning intervention did not produce statistically significant effects** on measures of father-child relationship quality, on fathers' parenting confidence, nor on levels of father-child contact, all as reported by fathers in a six-month follow-up survey. The results suggest that this intervention is not effective in strengthening parent-child relationships for a general population of fathers seeking fatherhood program services in the community.

- **The Just Beginning intervention cost \$3,220 per participant.** About one-third of this cost is attributed to identifying and recruiting eligible fathers, and to engaging children's other caregivers at the time of enrollment (in an attempt to enlist their help in getting fathers to attend the intervention with their children). Planning for and delivering Just Beginning sessions made up nearly half the cost, with the remainder attributed to training and technical assistance.

## Methods

The Just Beginning study used an experimental research design to rigorously test the effects of the intervention on the quality of fathers' relationships with their children, fathers' parenting confidence, and the frequency of father-child contact. Eligible fathers were randomly assigned to one of two research groups: a program group offered Just Beginning in addition to usual fatherhood services available at the participating organizations, or a services-as-usual group offered only usual services.

The study enrolled 738 fathers between 2016 and 2018. Program services and outcome data collection concluded in 2019. The implementation analysis relied on a variety of data sources including surveys of fathers at enrollment, interviews and focus groups with staff members and fathers, observations of program services, a staff survey, participation data from the federal management information system the organizations used (a database of information on program operations), and text surveys of study enrollees. The impact analysis relied on surveys of fathers at the time of study enrollment and approximately six months later. The cost analysis used information from staff members about how they spent their time and financial information provided by each organization.

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# Executive Summary

Stable and supportive relationships between fathers and their children can strengthen child development and be a source of purpose and meaning in fathers' lives.<sup>1</sup> In 2019, about one in four children (almost 19 million) lived in households without fathers present.<sup>2</sup> Many families face challenges in maintaining supportive parent-child relationships, but fathers who live apart from their children may be at a particular disadvantage.<sup>3</sup> Research has shown that many unmarried fathers—including those with low incomes—are deeply committed to remaining actively involved in their children's lives, but face barriers such as an inability to provide financially for children and strained relationships with their children's mothers.<sup>4</sup> While unmarried fathers tend to be present at the time of birth and intend to stay involved in raising their children, many unmarried fathers do not remain in close contact with their children as they get older.<sup>5</sup>

Recognizing the importance of strong relationships between fathers and children, Congress has authorized and funded “Responsible Fatherhood” programs to encourage fathers' continual emotional and financial support of their children, even if they live apart. The Office of Family Assistance (OFA) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awards and oversees Responsible Fatherhood grants, and grantees are required to undertake a combination of three activities authorized under the legislation:

- Activities to promote and sustain marriage and healthy relationships
- Activities to promote responsible parenting
- Activities to foster economic stability by helping fathers improve their economic status<sup>6</sup>

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**1** Natasha Cabrera, Jacqueline D. Shannon, and Catherine Tamis-LeMonda, “Fathers' Influence on Their Children's Cognitive and Emotional Development: From Toddlers to Pre-K,” *Applied Developmental Science* 11, 4 (2007): 208–213; Valarie King and Juliana M. Sobolewski, “Nonresident Fathers' Contributions to Adolescent Well-Being,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 68, 3 (2006): 537–557; Sara S. McLanahan, Laura Tach, and Daniel Schneider, “The Causal Effects of Father Absence,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 39, 1 (2013): 399–427; Tami M. Videon, “Parent-Child Relations and Children's Psychological Well-Being: Do Dads Matter?” *Journal of Family Issues* 26, 1 (2005): 55–57; Kathy Edin and Timothy J. Nelson, *Doing the Best I Can: Fatherhood in the Inner City* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013).

**2** U.S. Census Bureau, “Historical Living Arrangements of Children,” Table CH-1 (website: [www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/families/children.html](http://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/families/children.html), 2019).

**3** Edin and Nelson (2013).

**4** Kathryn Edin, Laura Tach, and Ronald Mincy, “Claiming Fatherhood: Race and the Dynamics of Paternal Involvement Among Unmarried Men,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 621, 1 (2009), 149–177; Edin and Nelson (2013).

**5** Sara McLanahan, “Fragile Families and the Reproduction of Poverty,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 621, 1 (2009): 111–131; Laura M. Argys and H. Elizabeth Peters, “Patterns of Nonresident-Father Involvement,” pages 49–78 in Robert T. Michael (ed.), *Social Awakening: Adolescent Behavior as Adulthood Approaches* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2001).

**6** Social Security Administration, “Compilation of the Social Security Laws: Grants to States” (website: [www.ssa.gov/OP\\_Home/ssact/title04/0403.htm](http://www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/ssact/title04/0403.htm), accessed on March 1, 2020).



Responsible Fatherhood programs provide this package of relationship, parenting, and employment services to benefit men in their role as fathers—fathers who come to the programs with different strengths, needs, and goals. These programs serve fathers who live with their children as well as fathers who live apart from their children.

Over the past quarter century, different Responsible Fatherhood programs have been evaluated to determine whether they improve fathers' relationships, parenting, and economic stability. Past studies have found little evidence that Responsible Fatherhood programs are effective at improving the quality of father-child relationships.<sup>7</sup> The limited evidence of effectiveness of prior programs motivated a search to identify new and innovative approaches.<sup>8</sup>

ACF's Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), with funding from OFA, initiated the Building Bridges and Bonds (B<sub>3</sub>) study to identify and rigorously test new and promising ways to help fathers with low incomes improve relationships with their children and work toward economic stability. The B<sub>3</sub> study tested three such interventions: a parenting curriculum called Just Beginning, a custom-built mobile application called DadTime that was designed to encourage participation in Just Beginning,<sup>9</sup> and a

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**7** Sarah Avellar, M. Robin Dion, Andrew Clarkwest, Heather Zaveri, Subuhi Asheer, Kelley Borradaile, Megan Hague Angus, Timothy Novak, Julie Redline, and Marykate Zukiewicz, *Catalog of Research: Programs for Low-Income Fathers*, OPRE Report No. 2011-20 (Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011); Virginia Knox, Philip A. Cowan, Carolyn Paper Cowan, and Elana Bildner, "Policies That Strengthen Fatherhood and Family Relationships: What Do We Know and What Do We Need to Know?" *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 635, 1 (2011): 216–239; Erin Kramer Holmes, Braquel M. Egginton, Alan J. Hawkins, Nathan L. Robbins, and Kevin Shafer, "Do Responsible Fatherhood Programs Work? A Comprehensive Meta-Analytic Study," (Philadelphia: Fatherhood Research and Practice Network, 2018).

**8** Since the launch of the B<sub>3</sub> study, another evaluation of Responsible Fatherhood programs—the Parents and Children Together evaluation—found positive evidence of improved father nurturing behavior, improved father engagement in age-appropriate activities with children, and increased length of time fathers were continuously employed. The study did not find effects on fathers' in-person contact with their children, financial support provided to their children, measures of social and emotional well-being, or measures of coparenting. See Sarah Avellar, Reginald Covington, Quinn Moore, Ankita Patnaik, and April Wu, *Parents and Children Together: Effects of Four Responsible Fatherhood Programs for Low-Income Fathers*, OPRE Report Number 2018-50 (Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018).

**9** Used as a supplement to Just Beginning, DadTime is a custom-built mobile application that provides a father with automated program attendance reminders and interactive tools to help him apply what he has learned in Just Beginning sessions to subsequent interactions with his child. The development of the application is described in a past [brief](#). See Rekha Balu, Shawna Lee, and Samantha Steimle, "Encouraging Attendance and Engagement in Parenting Programs: Developing a Smartphone Application with Fathers, for Fathers," OPRE Report Number 2018-68 (Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). Another, forthcoming report describes the randomized controlled trial of DadTime testing whether this application could boost program attendance and completion. See Rekha Balu, Patrizia Mancini, and Rebecca Behrmann, *Can a Smartphone Promote Fathers' Program Attendance? Findings from the B<sub>3</sub> Exploratory Study of the DadTime Intervention*, OPRE Report 2021-133 (Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, forthcoming).

cognitive-behavioral employment intervention.<sup>10</sup> The study of Just Beginning is the subject of this report; the other interventions are detailed in separate reports.

After the study team discussed potential new approaches with stakeholders, practitioners, and curriculum developers, and consulted with OPRE and OFA, it identified the Just Beginning curriculum as a promising and innovative approach to improving the quality of fathers' interactions. The Just Beginning curriculum represents an early intervention, to be implemented with young children when the father-child relationship is in a critical formative stage. Just Beginning works with fathers and children together. Each session includes videotaped parenting content, followed by direct practice in a father-child play session and immediate comments and encouragement from a trained facilitator. The combination of offering direct practice of skills and immediate comments and encouragement has had positive results in parenting programs for mothers, and differs from the parenting approaches commonly offered by fatherhood programs.<sup>11</sup> Just Beginning was adapted from a curriculum known as Baby Elmo, which showed promising results in small-scale pilot studies implemented with teenage fathers in juvenile detention centers.<sup>12</sup> The pilot studies found that the quality of father-child interactions—for example fathers' responsiveness to young children's cues—improved as fathers and their young children attended more Baby Elmo sessions together.

This report summarizes what was learned from implementing Just Beginning within three existing Responsible Fatherhood programs. The report includes findings on the intervention's implementation, effectiveness, and costs.

## Just Beginning

As mentioned, the Just Beginning curriculum is an adaptation of the Baby Elmo curriculum. Baby Elmo was designed for teenage fathers who were incarcerated and whose young children visited them in juvenile detention. For the B3 study, Just Beginning was implemented in community-based settings by three organizations funded by OFA to provide fatherhood programs: Children's Institute in Los Angeles, California; People for People, Inc. in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Seedco in New York, New York. Each organization based its operations in or near areas with high child and family poverty (see Figure 2.1 in

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**10** In the cognitive-behavioral employment intervention, traditional job-readiness services were paired with cognitive behavioral skill building that aimed to help individuals recognize and modify patterns of thinking and actions that lead to less positive outcomes. A report on the implementation of the intervention and its effects is due out in late 2021.

**11** For example, see Alan L. Mendelsohn, Harris S. Huberman, Samantha B. Berkule, Carolyn A. Brockmeyer, Lesley M. Morrow, and Benard P. Dreyer, "Primary Care Strategies for Promoting Parent-Child Interactions and School Readiness in At-Risk Families," *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine* 165, 1 (2011): 33–41; Whitney A. Grube and Kiley W. Liming, "Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-Up: A Systematic Review," *Infant Mental Health Journal* 39, 6 (2018): 656–673.

**12** Rachel Barr, Natalie Brito, Jaclyn Zocca, Samantha Reina, Jennifer Rodriguez, and Carole Shauffer, "The Baby Elmo Program: Improving Teen Father-Child Interactions Within Juvenile Justice Facilities," *Children and Youth Services Review* 33, 9 (2011): 1,555–1,562; Rachel Barr, Marisa Morin, Natalie Brito, Benjamin Richeda, Jennifer Rodriguez, and Carole Shauffer, "Delivering Services to Incarcerated Teen Fathers: A Pilot Intervention to Increase the Quality of Father-Infant Interactions During Visitation," *Psychological Services* 11, 1 (2014): 10–21.

Chapter 2) and with large percentages of Latino/Hispanic and Black residents.<sup>13</sup> Each organization implemented Just Beginning in addition to its usual fatherhood services.<sup>14</sup>

Like Baby Elmo, the Just Beginning program targeted fathers with children between 2 months and 3 years old, because the curriculum was designed to support father-child relationships during this formative stage. This targeting of fathers with young children contrasts with most parenting curricula offered at Responsible Fatherhood programs, which target all fathers with children under the age of 25.<sup>15</sup>

There were a few noteworthy contrasts between the Baby Elmo and Just Beginning studies. First, Baby Elmo fathers were incarcerated, were younger, and had less parenting experience than fathers in the Just Beginning study. Second, Baby Elmo was implemented in an institutional setting—a juvenile detention center—whereas Just Beginning was offered alongside fatherhood program services in a community-based setting. Third, the Baby Elmo curriculum included up to 10 sessions, but the Just Beginning curriculum was consolidated into 5 sessions.

The five Just Beginning sessions were offered about once per week. Trained facilitators conducted one-on-one sessions with each father and his child.<sup>16</sup> Each session comprised “learn,” “do,” and “reflect” components, ideally all occurring on the same day.

*Learn:* The father and the facilitator, without the child, viewed short videos with Sesame Street characters modeling simple parenting techniques that stimulate children’s emotional and cognitive development, such as playing peek-a-boo or labeling objects that children pick up.

*Do:* The father practiced techniques covered in the videos by participating in father-and-child play sessions observed by facilitator in the same room.

*Reflect:* The father discussed the play activity with the facilitator and received comments and encouragement, without the child present.

Each session in the ordered curriculum covered a distinct concept (see Box ES.1). Each concept was introduced in the videos (learn), practiced in the play sessions (do), then reinforced in the discussions with the facilitator (reflect)—all occurring over 60 to 90 minutes. The Just Beginning curriculum developers

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**13** The United States Census defines Latino (masculine) or Latina (feminine) as any person of “Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin.” In recent years, some research publications and other sources have started using “Latinx” as a gender-neutral reference to this population. See Andrew H. Nichols, *A Look at Latino Student Success: Identifying Top- and Bottom-Performing Institutions* (Washington, DC: The Education Trust, 2017).

**14** U.S. Census Bureau, “2014–2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Data Profiles” (website: [www.census.gov/data/developers/data-sets/acs-5year.html](http://www.census.gov/data/developers/data-sets/acs-5year.html), 2018).

**15** To be eligible for Just Beginning, a father also had to have seen his child in the previous 30 days.

**16** In contrast, most Responsible Fatherhood services are delivered in group-based settings. There is no clear evidence on whether one-on-one settings are more effective, group settings are more effective, or the two work equally as well.

## BOX ES.1. JUST BEGINNING SESSION CONCEPTS

### 1 NOTICE

**SESSION 1, “NOTICE,”** presented the Just Beginning curriculum and session format to fathers as they first learned about the importance of father-child relationships, attachment, and stranger anxiety in babies and toddlers. Specifically, they learned to notice their children’s cues.

### 2 FOLLOW

**SESSION 2, “FOLLOW,”** focused the week’s play session on learning to follow a child’s interests during play. Fathers were encouraged to follow their children’s lead by reading cues, exploring the things the children wanted to explore, and offering the children choices. Fathers had to first notice their children’s cues in order to follow them.

### 3 TALK

**SESSION 3, “TALK,”** stressed the importance of verbal communication in child development. Fathers learned to foster their children’s language and cognition skills by describing and labeling things, building on the skill of following their children’s interests. Fathers labeled objects that children were playing with. Fathers with toddlers were introduced to “pretend play” (commonly referred to as “make-believe”).

### 4 ENCOURAGE

**SESSION 4, “ENCOURAGE,”** taught fathers how to create a positive learning environment for their children through praise and encouragement. Encouragement followed directly from noticing what a child was doing (follow), and from what a father had described (talk). The curriculum also addressed common misconceptions that fathers had about spoiling their children.

### 5 PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

**SESSION 5, “PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER,”** wrapped up Just Beginning by asking fathers to recapitulate their experiences and challenges, and to describe what they learned. The session ended by asking them to think about their future goals regarding their relationships with their children.

considered participation in the first four of the five sessions to be adequate “dosage” (that is, adequate exposure to the intervention), since the fifth session wraps up topics from the first four sessions. A father could participate in at most seven to eight hours of Just Beginning in total.

To ensure that programs implemented Just Beginning as intended, the curriculum developers capitalized on technology to provide largely remote monitoring and coaching to facilitators each month—years before the COVID-19 pandemic made such remote approaches mandatory. The study team also fostered a remote learning community among the three organizations implementing Just Beginning as one way to provide technical assistance and support. The virtual community allowed staff members from the different programs to build relationships with one another that extended beyond specific meetings.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Lessons from the B3 remote community-building experience can be found in MDRC’s collection of resources for practitioners and policymakers in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, see [www.mdrc.org/publication/connecting-staff-and-strengthening-training-remote-learning-communities](http://www.mdrc.org/publication/connecting-staff-and-strengthening-training-remote-learning-communities).

Programs used a number of strategies to encourage fathers to attend Just Beginning sessions with their children. To address a potential challenge faced by fathers who did not live with their children, the curriculum developers designed an orientation for a child’s other caregiver, usually the mother of the young child but sometimes another relative (hereafter referred to as the “coparent”). At these orientations, Just Beginning staff members explained the intervention’s goals to coparents and enlisted their cooperation in allowing their children to attend Just Beginning sessions with their fathers. Incentives such as gift cards for the parents and other items that aligned with the Just Beginning curriculum (age-appropriate toys, for example) were provided to encourage session attendance.

Because federally funded Responsible Fatherhood programs are required to undertake activities to promote responsible fatherhood in three defined areas (marriage or healthy relationships, parenting, and economic stability), the fatherhood programs involved in the study offered some services that individual fathers may not have been seeking when they enrolled. For example, a father seeking employment services may be expected to attend a relationship skills and parenting workshop first. For this reason, fathers were enrolled in the Just Beginning study whether they expressed interest in receiving this type of parenting service or not. In this way, the Just Beginning study could assess how Just Beginning would work if it were to be adopted as a usual service offered at a Responsible Fatherhood program. Therefore, one question the study sought to answer was whether fathers could be encouraged to participate regardless of their initial level of interest in parenting services.

## Study Methods and Data Sources

The Just Beginning study used an experimental research design to test the effects of the intervention on the quality of the father-child relationship, fathers’ parenting confidence, and the frequency of father-child contact. Eligible fathers were randomly assigned to one of two research groups: a program group, which was offered Just Beginning in addition to the usual fatherhood services available at the participating organizations, or a services-as-usual group, which was offered only the usual services. The random assignment study design was intended to ensure that the only systematic difference between the program group and the services-as-usual group was the access to Just Beginning. Any statistically significant differences—that is, differences unlikely to occur by chance alone—that emerged between the outcomes of the two randomly assigned groups could then be attributed with confidence to Just Beginning.

The study included three components that are addressed in this report: a mixed-methods implementation analysis of how services operated and who participated in services, an impact analysis to determine whether the new approach affected outcomes of interest; and a cost analysis to estimate the costs of implementing Just Beginning within the organizations’ existing Responsible Fatherhood programs.

The study enrolled 738 fathers between 2016 and 2018. Program services and outcome data collection concluded in 2019. The implementation analysis relied on a variety of data sources including survey responses collected from fathers at enrollment, interviews and focus groups with staff members and fathers, observations of program services, a survey of staff members, management information system participation data,



and text message surveys of study enrollees.<sup>18</sup> The impact analysis relied on survey data collected from fathers at the time of study enrollment and follow-up survey data collected from fathers approximately six months later. The cost analysis used information from staff members about how they spend their time and financial information provided by each organization to estimate the in-person cost of operating Just Beginning.

## Findings And Lessons Learned

The report covers three areas: the implementation of Just Beginning, the costs of implementing Just Beginning, and the effects of adding the curriculum to Responsible Fatherhood programs. The primary lessons include:

- **Can Just Beginning be implemented in the context of a fatherhood program? Yes.** Just Beginning can be implemented in fatherhood programs, though recruitment and engagement are challenging. This report details successes and obstacles that other programs should consider if they intend to integrate Just Beginning. For example:
  - **The Just Beginning intervention was added to existing fatherhood program services in three very different settings without reducing participation in usual fatherhood services.** Three organizations with quite different structures were able to implement Just Beginning in addition to their existing services, and were able to maintain fathers' participation in those existing services at the same time. Fathers in the Just Beginning group participated in usual services at the same rate as fathers in the services-as-usual group.
  - **Because Just Beginning targeted fathers with young children, a large share of the fathers served by fatherhood programs were ineligible for the study.** Of the fathers who sought services at the three organizations and were screened for eligibility, 77 percent were not eligible for the study, most because they did not have children in the age range targeted by the intervention.<sup>19</sup> Just Beginning activities were specifically designed for fathers of young children. More generally, services tailored to the needs of subsets of fathers and children could potentially be more beneficial than parenting services that attempt to serve all fathers and children. However, it took longer than anticipated for organizations to reach the study's sample-size goals, even though they modified their recruitment approaches to find more eligible fathers.
  - **Fathers who enrolled in the study were primarily young men of color with multiple children under 18 (78 percent were under 34 years old and 63 percent had multiple children).** More than half were living with their children at the beginning of the study, about two-thirds

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<sup>18</sup> A management information system is a computer-based system used to capture information about program participants and the activities they engage in with the program's staff.

<sup>19</sup> Some fathers (12 percent of ineligible fathers) had not seen their children in the previous 30 days, which also made them ineligible.

reported that they saw their children every day or almost every day, and four in five reported they had very good relationships with their children.

- **The three fatherhood programs were moderately successful in engaging fathers, coparents, and young children in Just Beginning, although 46 percent of fathers who were randomly assigned to the program group never attended a Just Beginning session.** Fifty-four percent of fathers in the program group completed at least one Just Beginning session, and 70 percent of those who attended one session completed at least four, which the curriculum developer considered adequate dosage. In other words, 37 percent of fathers in the program group attended the recommended four or five sessions. Furthermore, 28 percent of the program group had a coparent participate in an orientation. It took a great deal of staff effort to accomplish this level of engagement.
- **What does Just Beginning cost? The Just Beginning intervention cost \$3,220 per participant.** About one-third of this cost (\$1,035) is attributed to identifying and recruiting eligible fathers into the program group, and to engaging the coparent at the time of enrollment. The study team was not able to identify a program similar to Just Beginning with published costs that could provide a comparison.
- **Is Just Beginning, as implemented and studied in this evaluation, effective? No.** In these program and study contexts, the Just Beginning intervention did not produce statistically significant effects on measures of father-child relationship quality, on fathers' parenting confidence, or on levels of father-child contact, all as reported by fathers in a six-month follow-up survey.<sup>20</sup> See the Discussion section below for possible reasons why this study did not find effects, and hypotheses about whether it could have effects if implemented in alternative contexts. These findings contrast with the more promising results when the Baby Elmo 10-session intervention was offered to teen fathers who were incarcerated. The Just Beginning results suggest that the intervention is not effective in strengthening parent-child relationships for a general population of fathers seeking fatherhood program services in the community, especially when nearly half of fathers do not attend Just Beginning sessions.

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<sup>20</sup> Since participation was low, the study team considered conducting additional analyses of whether actual program participation led to effects (sometimes called “treatment on the treated” analyses). Ultimately, the team decided against them. Treatment on the treated estimates would be a promising strategy if the estimated effects were statistically significant and were in the intended, positive direction. In that case, the treatment on the treated effects would be larger, since they would represent the effects among those who participated, but their statistical significance would generally remain unchanged. But neither precondition is the case for the Just Beginning effect estimates. None of the estimated effects is statistically significant and among the 10 primary outcomes, none is unambiguously in a positive direction. For 5 out of 10 primary outcomes, the estimated effect is 0.0 percentage points. For 1 of the 10 primary outcomes, the estimate effect is in the opposite direction to what was expected. The remaining 4 primary outcomes are categorical variables, and the directions of the effect estimates are ambiguous (because they show either small increases for both the highest and lowest categories or small decreases for both the highest and lowest categories). Given this pattern of effects, the team did not think it would be fruitful to estimate treatment on the treated effects. However, data for this study will be archived, and researchers may request the data and conduct these analyses.

## Discussion

The Just Beginning intervention represents a novel approach to supporting fathers in parenting their young children by engaging fathers and children together in a skills-based curriculum. This model stands in contrast to the didactic parenting workshops for groups of fathers that fatherhood programs typically offer. Many lessons were identified through this study. Interventions involving fathers and their children can be implemented in the context of community-based fatherhood programs. Furthermore, it is even possible to engage fathers in a new curriculum that they did not seek out. However, offering such an intervention in a fatherhood program context required a great deal of effort from program staff members and a big investment of technical support from the study team and curriculum developer. And ultimately, the number of hours fathers could spend in Just Beginning was relatively low—a maximum of five 90-minute sessions—and fewer than 40 percent of fathers attended the number of sessions the developer considered adequate.

The hope was that this parenting program model involving both fathers and their children might benefit father-child relationships. In fact, the approach studied in this project did not generate statistically significant improvements on any measure of program efficacy. These findings contrast with the more promising results found when the Baby Elmo 10-session intervention was offered to teen fathers who were incarcerated. The Just Beginning results suggest that the intervention will not be effective in strengthening parent-child relationships, when implemented in similar program contexts and in similar ways.

The lack of program effects may be explained by a combination of factors, including the relatively low percentage of fathers in the program group who received an adequate dose of the intervention. Additionally, about half of fathers were living with their children and saw their children nearly every day, and most reported a very good relationship with their young children at the start of the study. These reports of strong father-child involvement and relationship quality left little room for improvement. Sometimes policymakers and researchers begin with an assumption that low-income fathers have poor relationships with their children.<sup>21</sup> However, many fathers do not fit this portrait—as evidenced by the fathers’ reports at study entry. Many fathers seeking services in this study reported strong relationships with their children, and came to these fatherhood programs for employment services rather than parenting services.

The idea of targeting fathers with very young children was that the intervention could then take advantage of an early intervention opportunity. However, this targeting came with trade-offs. To make it more feasible for fathers to participate with their children, the intervention excluded fathers who had not seen their children in the past month. This decision meant that the remaining fathers in the study pool were more likely to have relatively strong relationships with their children at the start. If Just Beginning could have targeted the more disconnected fathers, there probably would have been more room for improvement. In fact, Baby Elmo did this targeting by delivering the curriculum to teen fathers in detention centers. However, in a community-based setting, targeting the more disconnected fathers would have exacerbated recruitment and participation challenges.

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**21** Robe Palkovitz and James Hull, “Toward a Resource Theory of Fathering,” *Journal of Family Theory and Review* 10, 1 (2018): 181–198; Maria S. Johnson and Alford A. Young, Jr., “Diversity and Meaning in the Study of Black Fatherhood,” *Du Bois Review* 13, 1 (2016): 5–23.

With these trade-offs and challenges in mind, the fatherhood field could consider implementing a program like Just Beginning with a different target group of fathers who might benefit more (those with supervised visitation, for example).<sup>22</sup> Such a group might be more like the Baby Elmo fathers and have more room for improvement in father-child outcomes. Furthermore, given the advances in remote support services many programs have adopted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it may be useful to explore approaches that use technology to support father-child relationships, including relationships between children and fathers who are more disconnected from them. Moreover, since Responsible Fatherhood programs mostly offer group-based services, future research may consider adapting and testing interventions like Just Beginning in group settings.

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**22** “Supervised visitation” means fathers can only see their children with the coparent or another approved adult present, often because they have open child-welfare cases (that is, cases involving alleged child abuse or neglect).

# A New Approach to Strengthening Father-Child Relationships



Research has shown that many unmarried fathers—including those with low incomes—are deeply committed to remaining actively involved in their children’s lives, but face barriers such as an inability to provide financially for children and strained relationships with their children’s mothers.<sup>1</sup> Beginning in the 1960s, the rate of nonmarital childbearing began a rapid rise that persisted over 40 years, and the divorce rate in the United States skyrocketed for two decades before leveling off in the 1980s.<sup>2</sup> These trends were especially pronounced among those without college degrees, and led to a high proportion of children being raised in homes without fathers and with limited financial resources.<sup>3</sup> While unmarried fathers tend to be present at the time of birth and intend to stay involved in raising their children, many unmarried fathers do not remain in close contact with their children as they get older.<sup>4</sup> Yet there is empirical evidence that fathers’ emotional and financial support are critical to children’s well-being.<sup>5</sup> Federal and state governments have therefore come to fund and operate programs to support fathers’ positive involvement with their children.

Historically, such fatherhood programs have targeted fathers with low incomes who are not living with their children. Early fatherhood programs focused on enforcing fathers’ compliance with child support orders, and on making it easier for them to comply by offering job skills training.<sup>6</sup> Since the 1990s, federal and state governments have funded programs to encourage fathers’ involvement with their children, strengthen two-parent families, and address fathers’ barriers to financial stability. These programs serve fathers who live apart from their children and those who live with their children. The Office of Family Assistance (OFA) in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awards and oversees Responsible Fatherhood grants, and grantees are required to undertake a combination of three activities authorized under the legislation:

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- 1 Edin, Tach, and Mincy (2009); Edin and Nelson (2013).
  - 2 McLanahan (2009); Schneider and Gemmill (2016); Stevenson and Wolfers (2007).
  - 3 McLanahan (2004); Ellwood and Jencks (2004).
  - 4 McLanahan (2009); Argys and Peters (2001).
  - 5 Carlson and Magnuson (2011).
  - 6 Miller and Knox (2001); Cowan et al. (2009); Osborne et al. (2014).



- Activities to promote or sustain marriage or healthy relationships
- Activities to promote responsible parenting
- Activities to foster economic stability by helping fathers improve their economic status<sup>7</sup>

This combination of activities is designed to promote fathers' positive involvement with their children, including by strengthening the emotional and financial support they provide to their children. To advance the goal of encouraging fathers' positive involvement with their children, Responsible Fatherhood programs have commonly offered parenting workshops. These workshops often focus on promoting a culture of fatherhood and being involved in children's lives, but do not teach specific skills for interacting with children. Typically they are not interactive or hands-on for the fathers who participate. Although rigorous evaluations of fatherhood programs have been relatively scarce,<sup>8</sup> the studies that have been done found that fatherhood programs had minimal success in building parenting skills and strengthening father-child relationships.<sup>9</sup> The lack of evidence of effectiveness for the standard program models created an impetus to develop and test new approaches.<sup>10</sup>

ACF's Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), with funding from OFA, initiated the Building Bridges and Bonds (B3) study in 2015 to identify and rigorously test new and promising ways to help fathers with low incomes work toward economic stability and strengthen their relationships with their children. Some of these program approaches may have been tried before, but only on a small scale. The B3 study tested three such interventions: a parenting curriculum called Just Beginning, a custom-built mobile application called DadTime that was designed to encourage participation in Just Beginning,<sup>11</sup> and a cognitive-behavioral employment intervention.<sup>12</sup> The study aimed to learn about the implementation of each approach and to determine whether it affected fathers' relationships with their children. This report—which expands on an earlier brief about Just Beginning implementation and how fathers in an early

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**7** Social Security Administration (2020).

**8** Cowan and Cowan (2019).

**9** Avellar et al. (2011); Knox, Cowan, Cowan, and Bildner (2011).

**10** Since the launch of the B3 study, another evaluation of Responsible Fatherhood programs—the Parents and Children Together evaluation—found positive evidence of improved father nurturing behavior, improved father engagement in age-appropriate activities with children, and increased length of time fathers were continuously employed. The study did not find effects on fathers' in-person contact with their children, financial support provided to their children, measures of social and emotional well-being, or measures of coparenting. See Avellar et al. (2018).

**11** Used as a supplement to Just Beginning, DadTime is a custom-built mobile application that provides a father with automated program attendance reminders and interactive tools to help him apply what he has learned in Just Beginning sessions to subsequent interactions with his child. The development of the application is described in a past [brief](#). See Balu, Lee, and Steimle (2018). Another, forthcoming report describes the randomized controlled trial of DadTime testing whether this application could boost program attendance and completion. See Balu, Mancini, and Behrmann (forthcoming).

**12** In the cognitive-behavioral employment intervention, traditional job-readiness services were paired with cognitive behavioral skill building that aimed to help individuals recognize and modify patterns of thinking and action that lead to less positive outcomes. A report on the implementation of the intervention and its effects is due out in late 2021.

sample engaged in services—describes the Just Beginning intervention and its implementation, and shares findings on its effectiveness and costs.<sup>13</sup>

Just Beginning differs from previous parenting workshops in several ways: it is offered one-on-one, for example, where other workshops are mostly offered in group settings, and fathers participate with their children, where most Responsible Fatherhood programs offer services to fathers without their children present. Therefore, the Just Beginning study provides an opportunity to learn about and address major questions for the fatherhood field:

- Is it feasible to include children in fatherhood program services, and what does it take to make that happen?
- Does a parenting program that works with fathers and children together generate more positive effects on parenting and father-child relationships than standard program approaches?

To implement and evaluate Just Beginning, MDRC partnered with MEF Associates, Abt SRBI, and the developer of the Just Beginning curriculum.

## Just Beginning: A Novel Approach

Just Beginning is a codified parenting-education intervention that incorporates instructional videos, father-child play sessions, and facilitator-guided reflections about the play sessions. The Just Beginning program model generated promising results in earlier studies and broke new ground by engaging fathers and children in program services together.<sup>14</sup>

Just Beginning was selected by the evaluation team and ACF after they discussed potential new program approaches with stakeholders, practitioners, and curriculum developers; reviewed evidence on the effectiveness of these approaches; and consulted with experts in the fatherhood field. The team was looking for the following in a parenting program for fathers of young children:

- A curriculum that was designed specifically for fathers
- Evidence of effectiveness in previous studies
- A design that feasibly could be implemented with fathers who did not live with their children
- A model developer who would support a study partnership

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<sup>13</sup> Manno, Mancini, and O’Herron (2019).

<sup>14</sup> Barr et al. (2011); Barr et al. (2014).

- A skill-based approach that offered direct practice followed by immediate critique and praise, a combination that has shown positive<sup>15</sup> results in other parenting programs used with mothers, and an approach that differs from parenting services commonly offered by fatherhood programs<sup>16</sup>

After an extensive review of existing parenting curricula, the team settled on Just Beginning as the intervention that best fit these criteria.

## THE BACKGROUND OF JUST BEGINNING

The Just Beginning intervention was developed by Rachel Barr, a psychologist at Georgetown University, and Carole Shauffer, a lawyer and director of the Youth Law Center. It was originally known as Baby Elmo and was designed for teenage fathers who were incarcerated and whose young children visited them in juvenile detention.<sup>17</sup> The intervention was initially implemented in 2008 in one Los Angeles juvenile detention center and by 2015 expanded to a dozen facilities in California, Connecticut, and Ohio.<sup>18</sup> Non-experimental studies of Baby Elmo (that is, studies not involving random assignment, which is explained later in this report) found promising results.<sup>19</sup> These studies with small samples of fathers found statistically significant gains across program sessions in fathers' emotional responsiveness toward their children (a composite measure of positive father-child relationship quality).

Baby Elmo was originally designed as a 10-session intervention, but the number of sessions was reduced from 10 to 5 before the B3 study, and the curriculum was renamed Just Beginning. This adjustment was made to address the practical challenge of getting fathers to attend 10 sessions in a reasonable time frame. The change was informed by the findings from the early experiences of Baby Elmo that most fathers began to see gains by the fourth or fifth session. According to the curriculum developers, no major content was lost when the number of sessions was reduced. For example, multiple sessions on one topic were condensed into one session. Some topics were woven into all five of the new sessions rather than being stand-alone sessions. See Table 1.1 for more information about Baby Elmo and how it compares with Just Beginning.

The Just Beginning model involved several innovations for providing parenting services. Unlike standard fatherhood parenting curricula, Just Beginning worked with fathers and young children together and engaged the child's other caregiver, usually the mother but sometimes another relative (hereafter referred to as the "coparent") through an orientation session. At these orientations, Just Beginning staff members enlisted coparents' cooperation in permitting their children to attend. Many parenting curricula are used with fathers of children of any age, but Just Beginning targeted only fathers with children between 2 months and 3 years old, to take advantage of an early intervention opportunity. Another innovative feature was that Just Beginning incorporated accessible instructional videos that featured Sesame Street

<sup>15</sup> Statistically significant differences are those that are unlikely to be the result of chance alone.

<sup>16</sup> For example, see Mendelsohn et al. (2011) and Grube and Liming (2018).

<sup>17</sup> Before the start of the Just Beginning study in 2015, the developers changed the intervention's name from Baby Elmo to Just Beginning at the same time they adjusted some of the intervention's features, such as the number of sessions.

<sup>18</sup> Richeda et al. (2015).

<sup>19</sup> Barr et al. (2011); Barr et al. (2014).

**TABLE 1.1. COMPARISON OF THE BABY ELMO AND JUST BEGINNING INTERVENTIONS AND STUDIES**

CHARACTERISTIC	BABY ELMO	JUST BEGINNING
Target population	Teen fathers who were incarcerated	Fathers seeking community-based services from a fatherhood program
Eligibility criteria	Focal child 2 to 36 months, coparent willing and able to arrange focal child visits	Focal child 2 to 36 months, father who has seen the child in the last 30 days
Program components	Sesame Street Beginnings video, father-child play session, father-facilitator reflection	
Program sessions	10	5
Facilitator	Detention facility staff member or volunteer	Fatherhood program staff member
Setting	Child-friendly play space in a juvenile detention center	Child-friendly play space at a fatherhood program
Engagement with coparents	Brought child to visit	Invited to orientation; cooperation needed when a father did not live with his child
Primary outcome data	Brief, open-ended survey; video recorded observations	Detailed follow-up survey
Supplementary outcome data		Video recorded observations
Research design	Observational: growth-curve analysis	Experimental: comparison of outcomes for randomly assigned research groups
Sample size	20 father-child pairs <sup>a</sup> 64 father-child pairs <sup>b</sup>	798 father-child pairs

SOURCES: <sup>a</sup>Barr et al. (2011).

<sup>b</sup>Barr et al. (2014).

characters modeling developmentally appropriate ways to interact with babies and toddlers. In the earlier studies, this media-based intervention was found to be especially effective with fathers who had less formal education or who struggled with literacy.<sup>20</sup>

**20** The 10-session Baby Elmo model focused on book reading, but curriculum developers found that fathers struggled with literacy. They therefore altered the approach to integrating books when adjusting to the

## THE JUST BEGINNING MODEL IN RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD PROGRAMS

The evaluation team and its federal partners selected three organizations funded by OFA to provide Responsible Fatherhood programs—Children’s Institute in Los Angeles, California; People for People, Inc. in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Seedco in New York, New York—to add Just Beginning to their usual services.<sup>21</sup> Each organization based its operations in or near areas with high child and family poverty (see Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2); these high-poverty areas also had large percentages of Latino/Hispanic and Black residents.<sup>22</sup>

Interest in participating in parenting services, including Just Beginning, was not considered part of the screening process for fathers to participate in the study. Ordinarily, fathers looking to enroll in a fatherhood program do not have the option to select their program activities (healthy relationships, parenting, or economic stability). Therefore, one big question addressed by the study was whether fathers could be encouraged to participate in Just Beginning even though they had not sought it out.

A related question was whether fathers would be willing and able to bring their young children to Just Beginning sessions. The evaluation team assumed most fathers in the study would not live with their children, based on the experiences of the organizations selected to participate in the B3 study. A father who does not live with his child often faces barriers to seeing the child, particularly when he has a strained relationship with the coparent. To address this potential challenge, the curriculum developers designed an orientation for the coparent, to explain the program goals and gain the coparent’s cooperation. Incentives that aligned with the Just Beginning curriculum (age-appropriate toys, for example) were also provided to encourage attendance. Another strategy to make it more likely fathers could attend sessions with their children was to impose an eligibility requirement for the program: fathers had to have seen their children within the last 30 days.<sup>23</sup>

A trained facilitator conducted each one-on-one session with a father and his child. Each session incorporated “learn”, “do,” and “reflect” components. Ideally, this sequence occurred on the same day.

*Learn:* The father and the facilitator viewed short videos with Sesame Street characters modeling simple parent-child techniques that stimulate children’s emotional and cognitive development, such as playing peek-a-boo or labeling objects that children pick up. The child was not present for this part of the session.

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5-session model.

**21** Just Beginning was implemented in multiple locations in Los Angeles and New York. Seedco engaged two community-based organizations as subcontractors—Strive and BronxWorks—to implement its fatherhood program. Children’s Institute has multiple office locations throughout the city, where services could be provided.

**22** U.S. Census Bureau (2018). The United States Census defines Latino (masculine) or Latina (feminine) as any person of “Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin.” In recent years, some research publications and other sources have started using “Latinx” as a gender-neutral reference to this population. See Nichols (2017).

**23** This requirement screened out a small number of fathers (12 percent) who were unlikely to be able to participate with their children.



*Do:* The father practiced techniques covered in the videos by participating in father-and-child play sessions observed by facilitator in the same room.

*Reflect:* The father discussed the play activity with the facilitator, without the child present.

The five Just Beginning sessions, described in Box 1.1, covered distinct themes delivered in a specific sequence. Weekly themes were introduced in the videos (learn), practiced in the play sessions (do), then reinforced in the discussions with the facilitator (reflect). Each session was expected to last between 60 and 90 minutes, meaning a father could participate in at most seven to eight hours of Just Beginning in total. The Just Beginning curriculum developers considered participation in the first four of the five sessions to be adequate “dosage” (that is, adequate exposure to the intervention), since the fifth session wraps up topics from the first four sessions. Fathers were supposed to have time between sessions to use the skills they learned (assuming fathers saw their children between sessions), so the sessions were scheduled to occur about weekly.

### BOX 1.1. JUST BEGINNING SESSION CONCEPTS

#### 1 NOTICE

**SESSION 1, “NOTICE,”** presented the Just Beginning curriculum and session format to fathers as they first learned about the importance of father-child relationships, attachment, and stranger anxiety in babies and toddlers. Specifically, they learned to notice their children’s cues.

#### 2 FOLLOW

**SESSION 2, “FOLLOW,”** focused the week’s play session on learning to follow a child’s interests during play. Fathers were encouraged to follow their children’s lead by reading cues, exploring the things the children wanted to explore, and offering the children choices. Fathers had to first notice their children’s cues in order to follow them.

#### 3 TALK

**SESSION 3, “TALK,”** stressed the importance of verbal communication in child development. Fathers learned to foster their children’s language and cognition skills by describing and labeling things, building on the skill of following their children’s interests. Fathers labeled objects that children were playing with. Fathers with toddlers were introduced to “pretend play” (commonly referred to as “make-believe”).

#### 4 ENCOURAGE

**SESSION 4, “ENCOURAGE,”** taught fathers how to create a positive learning environment for their children through praise and encouragement. Encouragement followed directly from noticing what a child was doing (follow), and from what a father had described (talk). The curriculum also addressed common misconceptions that fathers had about spoiling their children.

#### 5 PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

**SESSION 5, “PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER,”** wrapped up Just Beginning by asking fathers to recapitulate their experiences and challenges, and to describe what they learned. The session ended by asking them to think about their future goals regarding their relationships with their children.

To ensure that the programs in the B3 study adhered to the Just Beginning curriculum, the curriculum developers used technology to provide largely remote monitoring and coaching to Just Beginning facilitators each month—years before the COVID-19 pandemic made such remote approaches mandatory. Facilitators provided video recordings of one session per month and the curriculum developers reviewed these videos and coached facilitators over videoconferences and phone calls on ways to improve.

## The Evaluation of Just Beginning

The evaluation of Just Beginning used an experimental—or randomized controlled trial—research design to test the effects of the intervention on the quality of the father-child relationship, fathers' parenting confidence, and the frequency of father-child contact. Eligible fathers were randomly assigned to one of two research groups: a Just Beginning program group who was offered Just Beginning in addition to the usual fatherhood services available at the participating organization, or a services-as-usual group who was offered only the usual fatherhood services available at the participating organizations. The random assignment design was intended to ensure that the only measurable difference between the program group and the services-as-usual group was the access to Just Beginning. Any statistically significant differences that emerged between the outcomes of the two randomly assigned groups could be attributed with confidence to participation in Just Beginning. The study enrolled 738 fathers between 2016 and 2018. Program services and outcome data collection concluded in 2019. A detailed description of the study design is available in a report published in 2017.<sup>24</sup>

This study included three components, the findings of which are presented in this report: an implementation analysis of how services operated and who participated in them, an impact analysis to address whether the intervention affected outcomes of interest, and a cost analysis to estimate the costs to service providers of implementing Just Beginning. See Appendix A for a description of all data sources, information about the intervention-analysis methodology, and a glossary of terms.

## About the Report

Chapter 2 of this report describes the three organizations that implemented Just Beginning and offers insights from their operations. Chapter 3 describes the process of recruiting fathers into the programs, lessons from that experience, and the characteristics of fathers who enrolled. Chapter 4 reports on what was learned about Just Beginning implementation and the contrast between the services provided to fathers assigned to the program group and those provided to fathers in the services-as-usual group. Chapter 5 presents an analysis of whether Just Beginning changed father-child relationships overall and among fathers in particular subgroups. Chapter 6 presents the costs of implementing Just Beginning. Chapter 7 concludes with overall lessons and questions for the fatherhood field to consider.

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<sup>24</sup> Harknett, Manno, and Balu (2017).

# The Organizational Contexts in Which Just Beginning Was Implemented

# 2

Just Beginning was implemented in three different organizations operating federally funded Responsible Fatherhood programs. Although all three Responsible Fatherhood programs offered services in the required areas of parenting, healthy marriage and relationship skills, and economic stability, their approaches varied in both content and structure. This chapter describes some of the broad similarities and differences of these organizations in their local populations, the structure of their usual services available to all fathers enrolled in the study, their relevant partnerships, their staff characteristics, and how Just Beginning was integrated into each organization's fatherhood program.

## Operational Insights

- Organizations implementing Just Beginning were well established in their communities and had experience implementing a wide range of human services. Organizations had many years of experience delivering services to both fathers and families.
- Responsible Fatherhood programs emphasized the combination of required service areas differently, though all three offered activities in all required service areas. People for People and Seedco were well known in their communities for their in-house employment services to promote economic mobility, while Children's Institute emphasized parenting and healthy relationships.
- Responsible Fatherhood programs also varied in structure. Children's Institute made a priority of creating a safe, flexible environment for fathers with open-entry groups (meaning that fathers could start and end participation at any time) and peer-discussion-based workshops. People for People and Seedco used a more structured approach; they emphasized minimum attendance requirements as a condition of employment support. People for People and one of the two Seedco subcontractor organizations used closed cohorts (meaning that groups of fathers were enrolled to start and end programs at the same time), and workshops structured around curricula.
- Organizations also used varying strategies to implement Just Beginning in their program flows and with their populations, including applying the same attendance standards to the program group as they did to the services-as-usual group.

“I kind of had bad experiences with other [programs]. So far, this is way better than anything else I’ve been through. [In other programs] you were in a classroom that reminded you of school. I didn’t really like that. So I came here and this is way better. It’s just a bunch of guys and I can relax more.”

—a father at Children’s Institute

## Contexts in Which Just Beginning Was Implemented

Just Beginning was implemented in fatherhood programs operated by three community-based organizations in Los Angeles, California; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and New York, New York. Figure 2.1 displays the three cities in which Just Beginning operated and the locations of the community-based organizations involved in the study. The shaded areas on the map represent high-need areas where child poverty rates were 30 percent or more. These areas also had higher percentages of non-White residents than the city averages. The organizations participating in the study were located very close to or within these high-need areas.

Children’s Institute operated its fatherhood program in several locations in the greater Los Angeles area, which of the three Just Beginning cities had the highest average percentage of Latino/Hispanic residents (73 percent) and the lowest percentage of Black residents (12 percent) in its high-need areas. Children’s Institute was also the only organization that delivered Just Beginning and its other fatherhood services in both English and Spanish. People for People operated from a single location in Philadelphia, which had the highest average percentage of Black residents (63 percent) and the lowest percentage of Latino/Hispanic residents (16 percent) in its high-need areas. Seedco’s fatherhood program operated in two locations in New York City, where, on average, 35 percent of residents in high-need areas were Black and 46 percent were Latino/Hispanic.<sup>1</sup> The demographic patterns of these high-need areas were reflected in the participants served by the fatherhood program (see Chapter 3 for more information about the fathers who enrolled in the study).

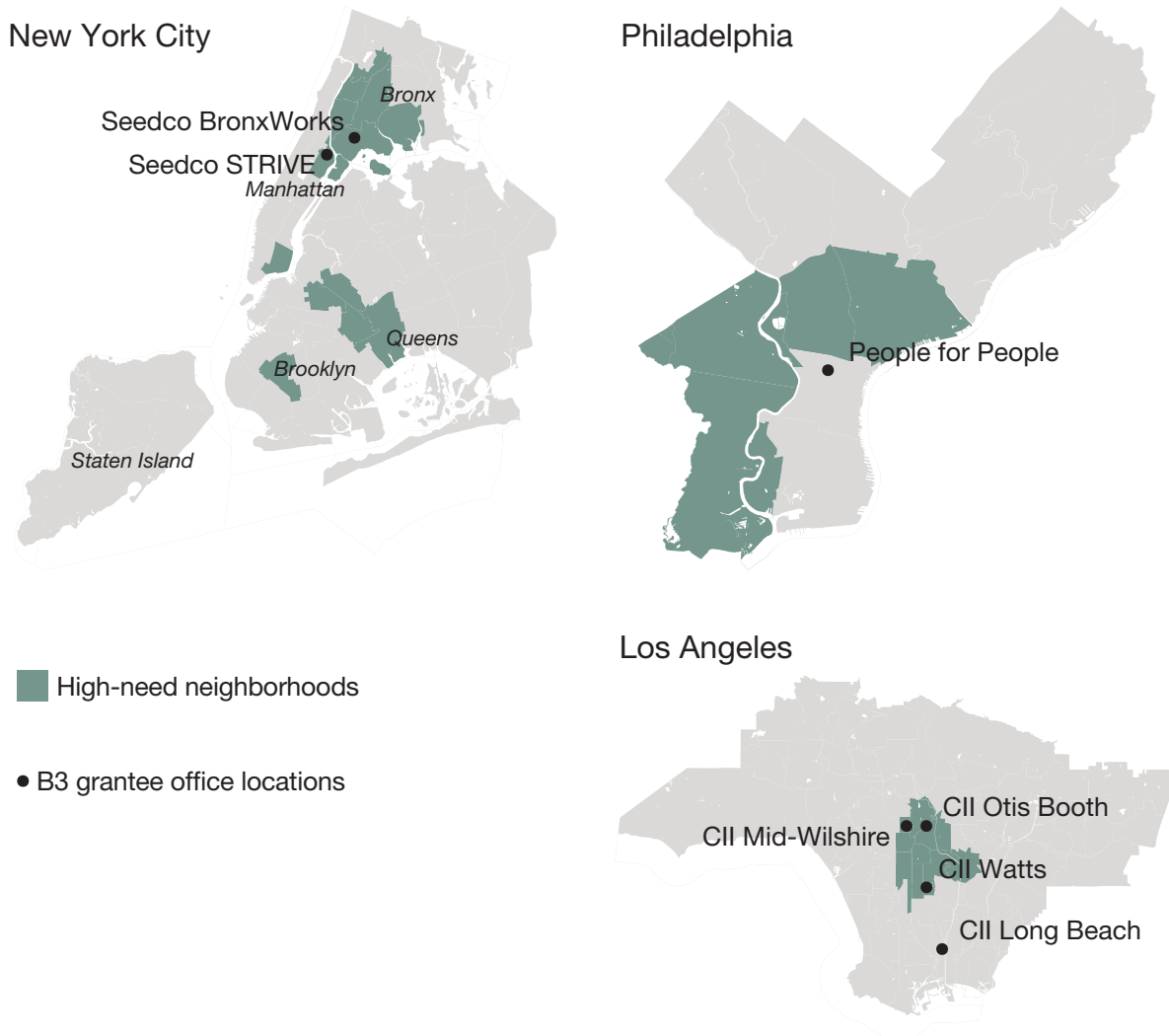
Table 2.1 notes some characteristics of each organization operating Just Beginning. The three organizations in the study operated several other programs apart from their Responsible Fatherhood programs, which suggested they had experience providing supportive services and were prepared to meet the complex needs of fathers and families. For example, Children’s Institute operated several programs that engaged children and parents, including family-based counseling services and school readiness programs such as Head Start.<sup>2</sup> People for People offered services including day care, Head Start, and postsecondary educational assistance. Seedco’s Responsible Fatherhood program operated in two community-based organizations in New York City: BronxWorks and Strive. Both organizations offered many services outside of the fatherhood program, including help gaining public benefits, obtaining employment, and finding housing; training; and youth education.

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1 U.S. Census Bureau (2018).

2 Head Start, funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, promotes the school readiness of children under 5 through education, health services, social services, and other services.

**FIGURE 2.1. MAP OF HIGH-NEED NEIGHBORHOODS IN THE STUDY ORGANIZATIONS' SERVICE AREAS**



SOURCE: The U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 American Community Survey five-year estimates.

NOTES: Public use microdata areas (PUMAs) were identified as “high-need” if they had high rates of child and family poverty. The PUMAs highlighted are those where the proportion of families with children in poverty was greater than 30 percent. There were no missing data for this sample. CII = Children’s Institute, Inc.

The Los Angeles map contains the entirety of Los Angeles County, as Children’s Institute locations serve populations throughout the county. The four northernmost and two southernmost PUMAs in Los Angeles County are excluded from the map pictured; they were not identified as high-need and did not contain any locations where Just Beginning sessions operated.

**TABLE 2.1. CHARACTERISTICS OF ORGANIZATIONS IN THE JUST BEGINNING STUDY**

	<b>CHILDREN'S INSTITUTE</b>	<b>PEOPLE FOR PEOPLE</b>	<b>SEEDCO</b>
Service area	Los Angeles County, CA	Philadelphia, PA	New York, NY
Founding	1906	1989	1987 Strive: 1984 BronxWorks: 1972
Services outside of fatherhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child and family mental health services</li> <li>• Head Start</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Charter school</li> <li>• Head Start</li> <li>• Pregnancy services</li> <li>• Postsecondary education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career coaching</li> <li>• Occupational skills training</li> <li>• Public benefits assistance</li> <li>• Reentry after incarceration</li> <li>• Housing assistance</li> </ul>
Year becoming a Responsible Fatherhood grantee	2006	2011	2011
Responsible Fatherhood program name	Project Fatherhood	Project D.A.D.	Strong Fathers, Strong Families
Responsible Fatherhood program subcontractors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chrysalis</li> <li>• Metropolitan Detention Center</li> <li>• Union Elementary School</li> <li>• Watts Labor Community Coalition</li> <li>• Homeboy Industries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strive</li> <li>• BronxWorks</li> </ul>
Number of locations operating Just Beginning	5	1	2

## The Structure of “Usual Services”

The three organizations in the study all offered services in the three areas required by federal funding guidelines: healthy marriage and relationship skills, parenting, and economic stability. But there was some variation among them in how they provided those services, particularly when it came to economic stability services. Table 2.2 summarizes the services available to all fathers in the study from each organization. People for People and Seedco’s fatherhood programs emphasized and were known in the community for their economic stability and employment services. These services included help building skills in on-the-job communication and time management, professional certification support (such as access to free



**TABLE 2.2. USUAL SERVICES AT THE JUST BEGINNING STUDY ORGANIZATIONS**

	CHILDREN'S INSTITUTE	PEOPLE FOR PEOPLE	SEEDCO
Responsible Fatherhood group workshop content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer learning support groups covering parenting and healthy relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment workshops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshops on parenting, healthy relationship skills, and economic stability</li> </ul>
Workshop curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Men in Relationship Group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic Stability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 24/7 Dads</li> <li>• The Blueprint</li> </ul>
Employment assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Referral to a job-readiness partner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional certification support</li> <li>• Job placement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional certification support</li> <li>• Job placement</li> <li>• Follow-up services after job placement</li> </ul>
Structure	Open enrollment/exit	Closed cohort	Closed cohort
Time to completion	Undefined	7 weeks	2 weeks
Timing and duration of workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One day per week</li> <li>• 90 minutes per meeting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2-4 days per week<sup>a</sup></li> <li>• 2-4 hours per day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 days per week</li> <li>• 5-8 hours per day</li> </ul>

NOTE: <sup>a</sup>Fathers in the services-as-usual group received an enhanced economic stability component consisting of two extra job-search workshops per week that dove deeper into the economic security topics. This component was added to keep the fathers in the services-as-usual group engaged in the fatherhood program, since they were not offered Just Beginning.

ServSafe certification, commercial driver's licenses, and security guard licensing), and job placement.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, Children's Institute's services focused on education in parenting, healthy marriage, and relationship skills.

Certain important characteristics of the service-delivery structure also varied among these Responsible Fatherhood programs. People for People and one of the two Seedco subcontractors delivered their fatherhood programs in closed cohorts, meaning fathers started together and were expected to progress through the program together. Both programs had clear expectations of completion, with minimum attendance requirements as a condition for receiving job placement services and free certification assistance. In contrast, Children's Institute was more flexible. It had an open enrollment and exit approach in which fathers could join peer learning groups at any time and participate for as long as they wished.

Another structural difference related to the timing, duration, and length of workshops. People for People and Seedco expected fathers to attend workshops multiple times a week for several hours at a time. People

**3** ServSafe is a certificate that indicates a person has demonstrated skills and knowledge in safe food handling. Obtaining one can help a person get a job in food preparation.

for People’s Responsible Fatherhood program was designed to be completed in seven weeks, while Seedco’s core workshops took two weeks. The Children’s Institute peer learning groups met once a week for 90 minutes; when fathers completed 14 group sessions, they were considered to have completed the responsible fatherhood program successfully.

## Background Characteristics of Fatherhood Program Staff Members

Table 2.3 displays the background characteristics of staff members at each of the three organizations, as they reported them in a staff survey fielded between December 2017 and February 2018.<sup>4</sup> The data suggest that staff survey respondents had a variety of work experiences before being involved in the study. Most had experience delivering services relevant for the Just Beginning intervention, particularly in providing parenting support and working with children.

Responsible Fatherhood program staff members were predominantly Black and Hispanic, reflecting the race and ethnicity of program participants and the communities where programs were located. Children’s Institute had the highest proportion of staff members who identified as Hispanic; as mentioned above, its high-need areas were also the most heavily Latino/Hispanic. The racial and ethnic make-ups of Seedco’s and People for People’s staffs were similarly consistent with the demographic characteristics of their surrounding areas.

**“They were always into what’s going on in your life. They were always willing to help with whatever you need to get done. They were willing to help you at any time. They would try anything to help us. They were good.”**

**—a father from Seedco**

Most Responsible Fatherhood program staff members across the three organizations were male; at Children’s Institute, they were all male. Having a predominantly male staff was a part of Children’s Institute’s strategy to create a safe, single-gender space for fathers. Seedco was the only organization to have more women than men on its fatherhood program staff. Neither Seedco nor People for People emphasized having an all-male staff in its approach to serving fathers in its Responsible Fatherhood program.

Most of the staff survey respondents were parents themselves, with several having experiences as single parents or living apart from their children. Most fatherhood staff members at Children’s Institute and People for People reported they were parents; at Seedco most reported they were not.

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<sup>4</sup> This survey was delivered only once during the study period; it does not capture information from all staff members associated with the programs during that entire time. Only data from staff members working with the program group or services-as-usual group are reported; data from other fatherhood program staff members are not reported.

**TABLE 2.3. JUST BEGINNING STAFF CHARACTERISTICS, BY ORGANIZATION**

Characteristic	Children's Institute	People for People	Seedco
Average age (years)	43.3	40.3	36.1
Gender (%)			
Male	100.0	71.4	25.0
Female	0.0	28.6	75.0
Race/ethnicity (%)			
Hispanic	42.9	0.0	33.3
White/non-Hispanic	0.0	0.0	16.7
Black/non-Hispanic	57.1	75.0	50.0
Other/multiracial	0.0	25.0	0.0
Highest degree earned (%)			
High school diploma	14.3	0.0	7.7
Associate degree	28.6	0.0	15.4
Bachelor's degree	14.3	40.0	53.9
Graduate or professional degree	42.9	60.0	23.1
Is a parent (%)	71.4	71.4	41.7
Has experience as a single parent or living apart from a child (%)	20.0	60.0	40.0
Past work experience (%)			
Working with children	85.7	57.1	61.5
Providing parenting or fatherhood services	85.7	33.3	61.5
Providing healthy relationship education	71.4	50.0	61.5
Providing referrals for clients to other services	85.7	83.3	84.6
Providing mental or behavioral health services	66.7	66.7	46.2
Helping clients prepare for or obtain employment	50.0	83.3	76.9
Working with other social service organizations on behalf of a client	71.4	100.0	84.6
Recruiting or enrolling participants into a voluntary program	66.7	66.7	83.3
Managing or supervising staff	50.0	83.3	69.2
Working in the child welfare system <sup>a</sup>	50.0	33.3	38.5
Working in the child support system <sup>b</sup>	50.0	16.7	38.5
Working as a classroom teacher	16.7	83.3	76.9
Received services from a B3 organization in the past (%)	0.0	0.0	0.0
Staff size	8	7	13

SOURCE: The B3 staff survey was administered to staff members who worked with Just Beginning program group and services-as-usual group members between December 2017 and February 2018. The response rate among such staff members was 85 percent.

NOTES: <sup>a</sup>The child welfare system can include public and private agencies and courts charged with promoting the well-being of children by ensuring their safety, achieving permanent homes for them, and strengthening families. Families often become involved with the child welfare system because of a report of suspected child abuse or neglect.

<sup>b</sup>The child support system is made up of states, territories, and tribes that administer the child support program under the oversight of the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement. These entities are empowered to establish and enforce orders for one parent (who generally does not live with the child) to pay child support to the parent who does live with the child.

## Partnerships Supporting the Fatherhood Programs

Although all three organizations established relationships with local partners, Children’s Institute stood out as having a consistent and strong partnership with a local human service agency—the Los Angeles County Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS)—that helped it recruit participants. Children’s Institute received referrals from DCFS, and fathers often sought services to meet court mandates or meet the conditions of obtaining parental rights. Children’s Institute also recruited from several other partners that referred fathers, including a detention center, an employment agency, a prisoner-reentry-service provider, and an elementary school. In contrast, neither People for People nor Seedco reported that any one partner contributed a large proportion of referrals. People for People did manage to build a partnership with the Philadelphia County Family Courts later in the grant period, although it reported mixed success in enrolling fathers from that source.

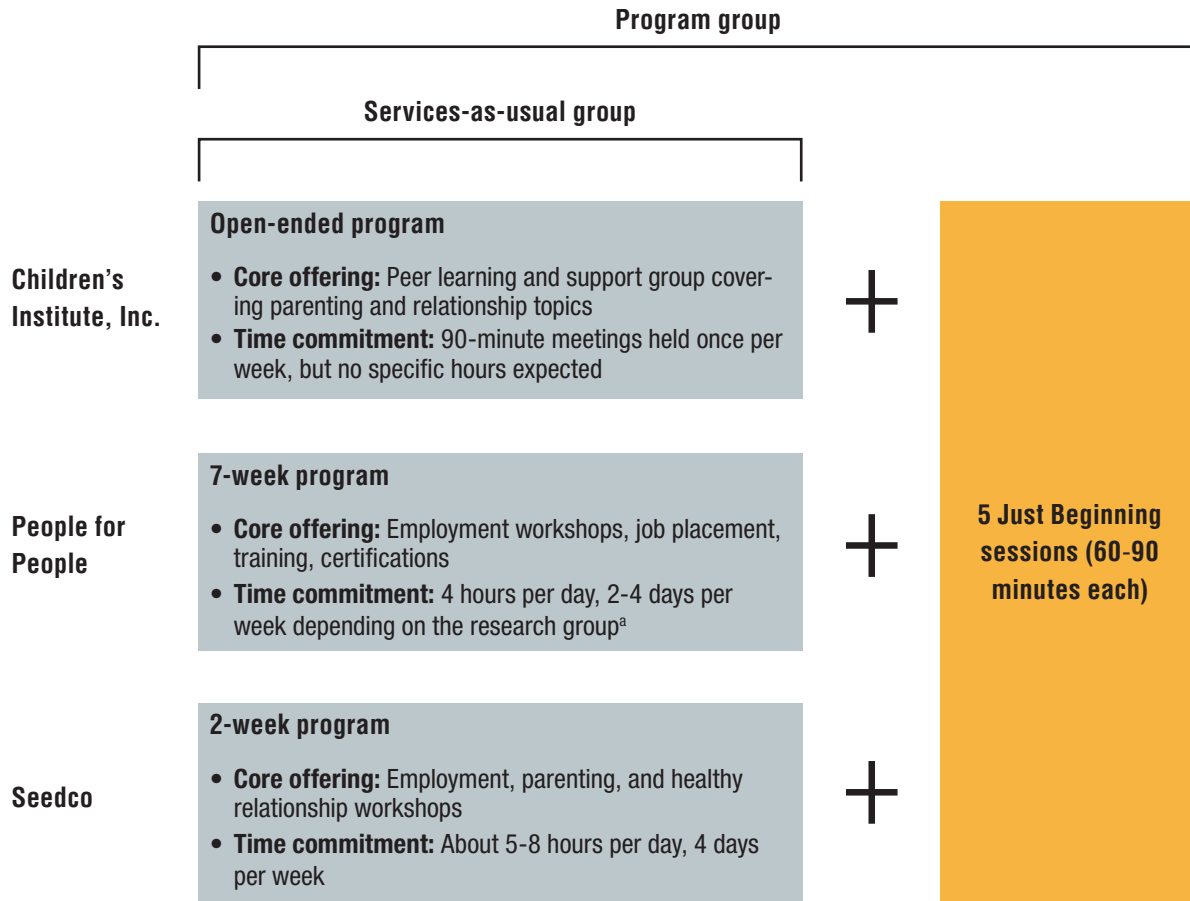
Only Seedco used partners to deliver all fatherhood services; People for People offered all fatherhood program services in-house. Children’s Institute referred fathers to a partner agency for employment assistance, as it did not provide those services.

## The Integration of Just Beginning into Each Fatherhood Program

The three organizations took different steps to implement the Just Beginning intervention within their Responsible Fatherhood programs. One consideration was to ensure that the program group’s services differed enough from those available to the services-as-usual group that the study would be a good test of the impact of Just Beginning. Therefore, to prevent the services-as-usual group from being exposed to Just Beginning content, Children’s Institute developed two separate versions of its usual fatherhood group workshop (Men in Relationships Group) sessions, with one including program group fathers and the other only including services-as-usual group fathers and other fathers not enrolled in the study. Both versions followed the same curriculum. However, the program group’s workshops were led by a Just Beginning facilitator who occasionally used the workshop to reinforce lessons from Just Beginning sessions, for example, by allowing fathers who participated in Just Beginning sessions to share their experiences in the intervention. Similarly, People for People developed separate experiences for services-as-usual group fathers that retained the employment-readiness component of its Responsible Fatherhood program but did not include the healthy relationship and parenting education workshops. This change ensured that the only fathers to receive any parenting education at People for People were those in the program group. See Figure 2.2 for a depiction of services at each organization and how they differed for the two study groups.

A second question related to how organizations decided to account for Just Beginning attendance as part of their fatherhood program requirements. People for People extended its fatherhood program attendance standards to include the Just Beginning intervention; fathers in the program group were required to complete their Just Beginning sessions in order to obtain access to certifications and job placement services. To ensure fathers in the program group and the services-as-usual groups had similar weekly program-hour requirements, People for People created enhanced economic security workshops for the services-as-usual

**FIGURE 2.2. DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES AT EACH ORGANIZATION**



NOTE: <sup>a</sup>Fathers in the services-as-usual group received an enhanced economic stability component, consisting of two extra job-search workshops per week that dove deeper into the economic security topics. This component was added to keep the fathers in the services-as-usual group engaged in the fatherhood program since they were not offered parenting and healthy relationship workshops or Just Beginning.

group.<sup>5</sup> Seedco did not require program group fathers to complete Just Beginning sessions before they could receive employment services. However, Seedco did attempt to minimize the burden to fathers in the program group by trying to schedule Just Beginning sessions on Fridays—a day when none of its other group workshops were held. Seedco also attempted to schedule Just Beginning sessions with fathers more than once per week because its standard workshop was only two weeks long; People for People's

**5** Services-as-usual fathers were required to complete two longer days of employment workshops per week (the typical structure of People for People's economic security workshops) plus two shorter days during which fathers received extra employment content.

**“It’s good to know there’s other people trying to do what you’re doing and that it ain’t easy for everybody.”  
—a father at People for People**

was seven weeks. In contrast, Children Institute’s services-as-usual group workshops did not have a clear end date, so fathers could participate for as long as they wanted. Fathers who completed 14 group sessions were considered to have completed the Responsible Fatherhood program.<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 4 for details on how Just Beginning participation varied by organization.

## Meeting Space Requirements for the Just Beginning Intervention

Creating a child-friendly space was critical for the play sessions in Just Beginning, and the organizations used different strategies to meet this need. People for People and Children’s Institute ran other programs specifically designed for children and families, so they were able to find child-friendly spaces easily. Seedco’s fatherhood program locations were mostly geared for adult learners and job-readiness training, however, so its partner organizations had to transform vacant offices and sectioned-off classroom areas into those child-friendly spaces.

The organizations also had to supervise Just Beginning children while their fathers were meeting individually with the Just Beginning facilitators. Both Children’s Institute and People for People ran existing childcare services and early childhood programs, and at both organizations the childcare staff supervised children for Responsible Fatherhood program participants—including fathers participating in Just Beginning—who brought their children with them to sessions. At Seedco, a program staff member occasionally watched children when the fathers’ coparents were not available, as the organization did not have an existing childcare program.

## In Their Own Words

Approximately six months after random assignment, fathers in the study were asked to complete a follow-up survey. Some questions asked the fathers about their current involvement with each organization and how satisfied they were with the services they received; the questions were not specific to Just Beginning or usual services but were worded generally. The program group and services-as-usual group had very similar responses to these questions (as shown in Appendix Table B.1). About 40 percent of fathers reported they still were receiving support from the B3 organization six months after random assignment. These responses suggest that the organizations kept engaging fathers after they completed their fatherhood workshops. Among the 60 percent of fathers who reported they were no longer receiving services, 30 percent reported they stopped attending because they got jobs. Fathers also reported leaving their programs

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<sup>6</sup> Staff members at Children’s Institute reported that they expected fathers referred from the Department of Child and Family Services to attend workshops based on their court mandates to participate in a parenting program.



before completion because of other commitments or coordination issues associated with getting access to their children and arranging transportation. Meanwhile, one-fourth to one-third of fathers reported they had finished their programs. Regardless of program participation, over 40 percent of fathers reported that they still had contact with the program staff at least once per month. They were in contact less often with other fathers they met through their Responsible Fatherhood programs.

The fathers surveyed had positive things to say about their Responsible Fatherhood programs. They reported that the programs' services were helpful to extremely helpful and that staff had just the right amount of contact with them. Most fathers reported that staff members had good to excellent understanding of fathers. Most also reported that they used the skills they learned through the fatherhood programs daily or almost daily.

# Just Beginning Study Recruitment and Characteristics of the Fathers Enrolled in the Study

# 3

Participating organizations added Just Beginning to their existing fatherhood programs described in Chapter 2. The addition of Just Beginning built upon the existing services and procedures at the fatherhood programs, but also required some adaptations for study recruitment, enrollment, and random assignment, which are described in this chapter. The chapter concludes with a description of the fathers enrolled in the study.

## Recruitment and Enrollment Insights

- Because Just Beginning targeted fathers with young children, a large share of the fathers served by fatherhood programs were ineligible: 77 percent of fathers (4,459 fathers) seeking services from the three fatherhood programs were not eligible for the study, most because they did not have children in the target age range. The three fatherhood programs had to modify their typical recruitment approaches to find fathers eligible for the study, and it took longer than anticipated to reach the study's sample size targets.
- Recruitment messages did not emphasize parenting services or Just Beginning, but rather the broader fatherhood program offered by each organization. Furthermore, interest in parenting services or Just Beginning was not a study screening criterion. Regardless, fewer than 4 percent of fathers who were eligible for the study said they were not interested, although many more did not complete the consent forms and intake process after saying they were interested (23 percent of those eligible).
- Fathers enrolled in the study were primarily young (78 percent were under the age of 34) and men of color. More than half of the fathers enrolled in the study lived with the children eligible for Just Beginning all or most of the time, and most had more than one child.
- Each organization used a combination of strategies to encourage fathers to attend, including contacts outside of workshops and participation incentives. The program group received more contacts to encourage attendance and earned more incentives than the services-as-usual group.

“They wanted to eliminate all the excuses you’re going to try to throw at them [program staff] saying why you can’t come. So you can’t get here ’cause you don’t have car fare, here’s car fare. Oh, you ain’t coming ’cause you’re hungry? Here, we got food for you.”

—a father at People for People

## Study Recruitment and Enrollment Approaches

Each organization worked recruitment and enrollment procedures for the study into its existing processes. This section highlights the three organizations’ commonalities and differences in recruiting and enrolling fathers.

### ELIGIBILITY AND RECRUITMENT

To be eligible for Just Beginning, a father had to have a child between 2 months and 3 years of age whom he had seen in the previous 30 days. “Fathers” could have biological or adopted children, or could simply be serving as father figures to their partners’ children. A father with more than one child who met the eligibility criteria was encouraged to designate the child he saw the most (or, if he saw multiple children with similar frequency, the youngest of those children) to bring to Just Beginning sessions. For the purposes of the study, this child was considered the “focal child”—the one he was asked survey questions about.

Although eligibility for the study was based on criteria particular to Just Beginning, the three organizations did not do any recruitment specifically for Just Beginning. Fathers came to the study because they responded to the organizations’ general fatherhood program recruitment, which emphasized the usual services provided by Responsible Fatherhood programs (and those services did not have the same restricted eligibility criteria as Just Beginning). The recruitment messages presented Just Beginning as one service fathers might be eligible for.

The three organizations received referrals for fatherhood services, and also recruited through outreach to other community-based organizations, radio announcements, social media posts, and flyers. People for People and Seedco had fairly similar approaches; Children’s Institute’s approach was different. People for People and Seedco relied primarily on direct recruitment strategies such as flyers, social media posts, or outreach to other organizations. Children’s Institute relied primarily on referrals from child welfare and dependency court. In most cases the fathers referred to them were required to participate in parenting classes because they had open child welfare cases and their parental rights were taken away or limited; participation in a parenting course was a mandate to get their rights reinstated.<sup>1</sup> (Fathers were not required to attend Children’s Institute specifically; it was one of several eligible organizations providing parenting services.) See Table 3.1 for a more detailed comparison of the organizations’ general recruitment approaches.

Over time, however, the organizations had to adjust their recruitment strategies. Because Just Beginning targeted only fathers with young children, recruiting for it turned out to require additional and more

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<sup>1</sup> Child welfare cases are those involving alleged child abuse or neglect.

**TABLE 3.1. RECRUITMENT APPROACHES USED BY ORGANIZATIONS IN THE JUST BEGINNING STUDY**

CHILDREN'S INSTITUTE	PEOPLE FOR PEOPLE	SEEDCO
<b>Direct recruitment</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion with other community-based organizations</li> <li>• Early childhood learning centers</li> <li>• Schools</li> <li>• Program for former gang members</li> <li>• Workforce development agency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion with other community-based entities</li> <li>• Early learning centers like Head Start</li> <li>• Local businesses (barbershops)</li> <li>• Handing out flyers</li> <li>• At community events</li> <li>• Outside family court</li> <li>• Radio announcements</li> <li>• Facebook posts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion with other organizations</li> <li>• Early learning centers like Head Start</li> <li>• Community health agencies</li> <li>• Presentations at community events</li> <li>• Handing out flyers</li> <li>• On public transportation</li> <li>• At community events</li> <li>• Craigslist posts</li> </ul>
<b>Formalized referral partnerships</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services</li> <li>• Family court</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not an emphasis</li> <li>• Varied success with family court</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not an emphasis</li> </ul>
<b>Word of mouth</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not an emphasis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fathers handing out flyers to friends</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Referrals from program alumni</li> </ul>

deliberate efforts. Organizations tried developing new referral partnerships—such as with early learning centers or programs that catered to mothers of young children—but this approach had mixed success.

The differences in the three organizations’ recruitment sources suggest that fathers had different motives for enrolling in fatherhood services. Table 3.2 presents the reasons fathers said they chose to enroll in the fatherhood programs. In aggregate, 39 percent of fathers indicated that they enrolled to learn about being a better parent; another 37 percent enrolled to find a job or a better job. However, these aggregate numbers mask differences across organizations. Based on interviews with program staff members and fathers, most fathers at the Children’s Institute were participating to fulfill court mandates and reinstate custody of their children; the baseline survey data also show that far more fathers at Children’s Institute indicated they were ordered by a court to enroll (not shown). In contrast, according to the baseline data (not shown) and interviews with fathers and staff members at People for People and Seedco, fathers typically enrolled in those organizations’ fatherhood services because of the employment services and credentials offered.

The staff members involved in recruitment differed among the organizations. Recruitment responsibilities were spread across many people at People for People and Seedco, including Just Beginning facilitators, although each organization also had a specific individual whose primary responsibility was outreach. At

**TABLE 3.2. REASONS FATHERS REPORTED FOR ENROLLING IN A FATHERHOOD PROGRAM, FULL JUST BEGINNING SAMPLE**

Reason for Enrolling in the Program (%)	Overall	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	P-Value
Learn about being a better parent	38.9	37.9	39.9	
Learn how to improve personal relationships	5.0	3.7	6.2	
Find a job or a better job	36.9	40.4	33.4	
Ordered by court to enroll	13.0	13.3	12.7	
Other or more than one reason <sup>a</sup>	6.2	4.8	7.6	
Sample size <sup>b</sup>	722	359	361	

SOURCES: MDRC calculations using data from the B3 applicant characteristics survey. This table contains the full sample.

NOTES: Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

To assess differences between the research groups, chi-square tests were used for categorical variables and two-tailed t-tests were used for continuous variables.

<sup>a</sup>Other reasons included being encouraged by a spouse or a parole officer, having friends enrolled in the program, or another reason.

<sup>b</sup>The overall survey sample size for the B3 applicant characteristics survey is 738. Because of survey skip patterns, 722 fathers were asked the question, “Why did you choose to enroll in this program?” and could choose only one option.

People for People, this role was filled by a former fatherhood program participant. Recruitment was more centralized at the Children’s Institute and Just Beginning facilitators were largely uninvolved.

## ENROLLMENT AND RANDOM ASSIGNMENT

The participating fatherhood programs needed to integrate the study eligibility, screening, and enrollment process with their existing intake processes. Each organization had usual intake procedures that accorded with its program model. For example, the Children’s Institute offered enrollment on a rolling basis to align with its open-ended program model, whereas People for People enrolled fathers in cohorts—meaning that groups of fathers were enrolled to start and end programs at the same time—to reflect its workshop structure. Given these differences in intake procedures, different amounts of time passed between fathers’ first contact with the organization and the end of the enrollment process. For example, fathers interested in People for People had to wait for an orientation that occurred every seven weeks; fathers interested in Seedco typically only had to wait a week or two for orientation. Meanwhile, fathers could start the process at Children’s Institute at any time because orientation and entry occurred on a rolling basis.

Organizations used different procedures to determine whether fathers met eligibility criteria for Just Beginning: screening over the phone, in person by a receptionist, or in person at a group orientation. Interest in participating in a parenting program generally, or in Just Beginning specifically, was not part of the screening criteria, because fathers looking to enroll in a fatherhood program would not ordinarily have the option to select their program activities. Therefore, the study team wanted to see how many fathers

engaged with Just Beginning even though they had not sought it out. See Figure 3.1 for a depiction of the enrollment process and the flow of fathers through it.

In total, 4,459 fathers were screened for eligibility. Of these, fewer than one-fourth were deemed eligible for Just Beginning (1,005 fathers). The primary reason for being ineligible was that fathers did not have children between 2 months and 3 years of age (86 percent of ineligible fathers). Some fathers (12 percent) with children in the age range had not seen their children in the previous 30 days, which also made them ineligible. While most fathers screened were deemed ineligible for Just Beginning, they were still eligible to participate in the organizations' typical fatherhood program services. Most fathers who were eligible for Just Beginning were interested in participating in the study (96 percent).

Once fathers indicated their interest in the study, they completed the intake administrative work: they had to sign a study consent form and take two self-administered, web-based surveys; each organization also had its own forms for them to complete.<sup>2</sup> Most interested fathers completed this step (738 of 969 fathers) and therefore were eligible for random assignment. The first survey, which took approximately 15 minutes, asked questions about how the father had heard about the program and about his demographics, financial well-being, family status, and health. The second survey, which took about 30 minutes, asked questions about the father's previous service receipt, household and family structure, contact with his child and relationship with the child, confidence in his parenting, commitment to his child, relationship with the coparent, child support arrangements, employment, perceived stress, and decision-making confidence.<sup>3</sup> Fathers completed the intake process primarily in one appointment at the organization.

After completing intake, fathers were randomly assigned to the program group, which was offered Just Beginning plus the usual services, or the services-as-usual group, which was only offered the opportunity to participate in the usual services. Fathers had a 50 percent chance of being assigned to either group; 368 fathers were assigned to the program group and 370 to the services-as-usual group.

The entire process from screening to random assignment could occur all at once or over multiple days. For example, at People for People, intake was a two-step process in which fathers attended an orientation for the fatherhood program one week and came back the next week to complete the necessary administrative work. Notably, fathers eligible for Just Beginning were separated from the larger group of fathers interested in People for People services and went through orientation and intake with Just Beginning facilitators. Children's Institute also had a multistep process, but it was intended to occur in one day: Fathers first met with one staff member to be screened for eligibility and go through random assignment. They then met with Just Beginning facilitators to complete the intake step, which involved lengthy conversations to get

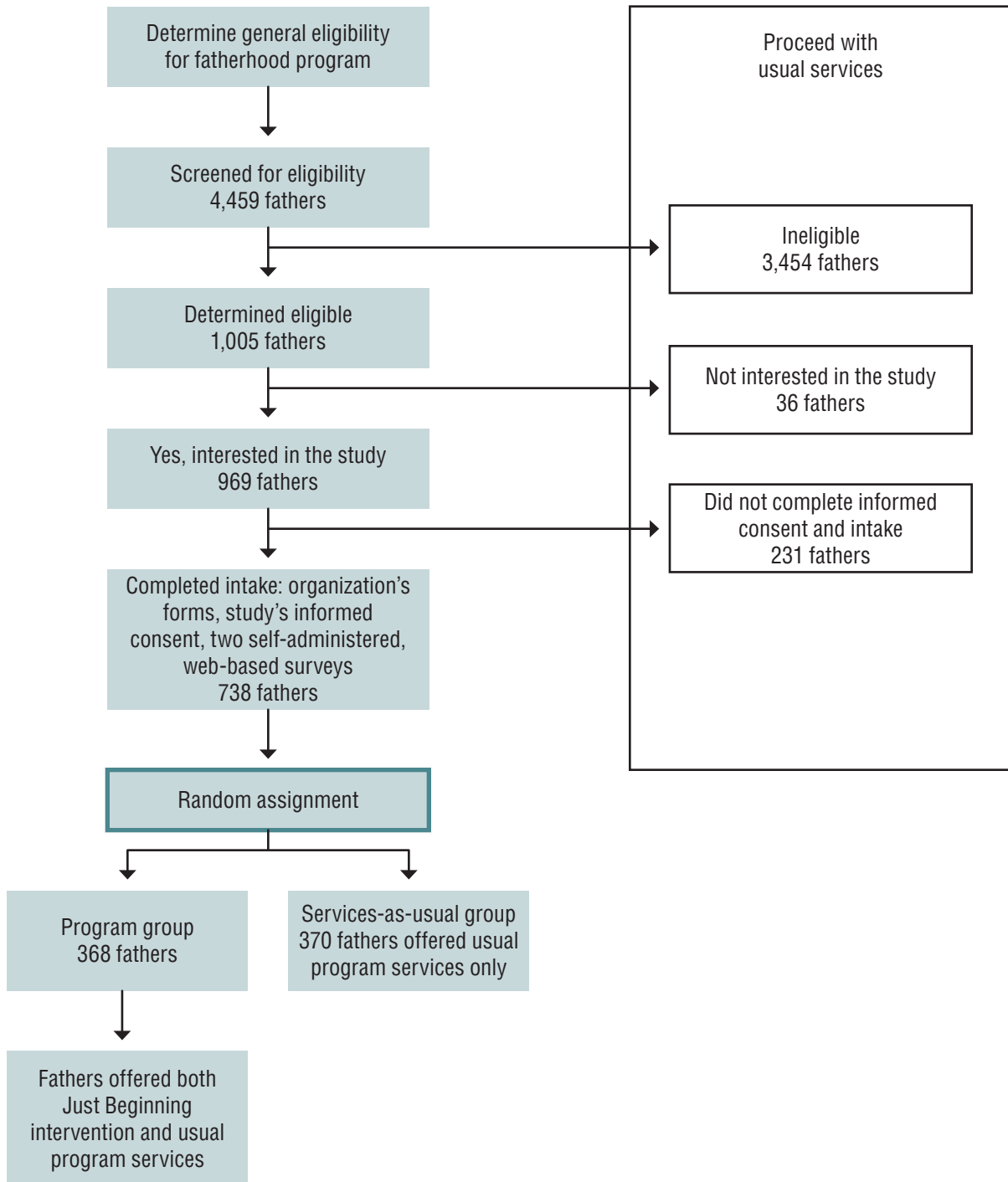
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**2** Federally funded Responsible Fatherhood grantees were required to use the same management information system (nFORM) to collect and report performance measure data. (A management information system is a computer-based system used to capture information about program participants and the activities they engage in with the program's staff.) This system included one web-based survey for fathers that was developed by the Administration for Children and Families' Fatherhood and Marriage Local Evaluation and Cross-site Project. Fathers were also asked to complete a second survey developed by MDRC to get additional information specifically for the B3 study.

**3** Fathers received a \$25 gift card for completing the baseline survey.



**FIGURE 3.1. STUDY ENROLLMENT FLOWCHART**



SOURCE: MDRC calculations using management information system data. Fathers were screened and enrolled in the study between the fall of 2016 and the spring of 2018.

to know each father. Sometimes Just Beginning facilitators were involved in completing the intake steps with services-as-usual fathers as well.

## CHALLENGES OF RECRUITMENT AND ENROLLMENT

As mentioned, most fathers seeking services at the three organizations were not eligible for the study. Therefore, it took longer to reach the study's sample size targets than anticipated. (One organization also reported a disruption with an existing referral source, which resulted in fewer fathers being referred.) To find more fathers who fit the study criteria, organizations had to explore new recruitment channels such as early childhood centers, organizations that catered to mothers with young children, or other community-based organizations. Some staff members also said it was a challenge to find enough time to do outreach for recruitment purposes and continue their direct work with fathers.

Furthermore, since most of the recruitment messages did not talk about parenting services generally or Just Beginning specifically—especially at People for People and Seedco—fathers tended to come to these organizations seeking employment services and access to certifications. As one father said, “The certifications is what brought me here. I found out later, when I got here, about the dad part.” Some coparents interviewed also said the fathers of their children came to the fatherhood programs for employment services. When fathers learned during the intake process that they would have to spend time in parenting workshops, some may not have agreed to enroll in the study or may not have gone through with all intake steps.

The study team worked with the organizations throughout the study period—primarily through remote means such as video and phone calls—to diagnose challenges and brainstorm solutions. Box 3.1 describes the primarily remote technical assistance approach used by the study team and the curriculum developers.<sup>4</sup>

## Participant Characteristics

As explained in Chapter 1, the past studies of Baby Elmo targeted teen fathers who were incarcerated and had young children. This study was implemented in community-based settings, the fathers enrolled in it were older, and about half lived with their focal children all or most of the time. Most fathers enrolled were young (26 percent were under 25; 51 percent were 25 to 34) and had multiple children under 18 (63 percent).<sup>5</sup> Few were married (12 percent) and about one-third were not in a relationship (34 percent). As mentioned in Chapter 2, more than half of fathers enrolled in the study were Black/non-Hispanic and about one-third identified as Hispanic.

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**4** To reinforce how important it was to get as many fathers as possible to enroll in the study, the study team offered organizations performance-based payments during the last year of program implementation. Performance-based payments were based on each organization's progress toward preset benchmarks for the number of fathers enrolled in the study and participation benchmarks for fathers participating in the first Just Beginning session. The total performance-based payment was the average of the enrollment payment achieved and the participation payment achieved.

**5** Only 4 percent of fathers were teenagers at enrollment. The study did not collect data from fathers about their partners.

### BOX 3.1. THE EVALUATION'S REMOTE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND COACHING APPROACH

The evaluation team supported each organization throughout the evaluation period by capitalizing on technology and applying the Learn—Do—Reflect approach that Just Beginning facilitators used with fathers in each Just Beginning session. In the primarily remote technical assistance and coaching model, the evaluation team—which included the curriculum developers—worked with program managers and program staff members collaboratively to:

**LEARN:** Program managers and Just Beginning staff members identified and defined an area for learning or improvement

**DO:** Just Beginning staff members tested proposed solutions while collecting data to help evaluate successes and roadblocks.

**REFLECT:** Program managers and Just Beginning staff members reviewed data, examined their experiences, proposed course corrections, and decided on next steps.

The technical assistance and coaching focused on strengthening recruitment and enrollment approaches to meet study enrollment goals and service delivery. Support was primarily delivered in the form of weekly or monthly phone calls, with occasional in-person visits. During these connections with managers and Just Beginning facilitators, the team reviewed enrollment and participation data, discussed challenges faced by each organization, and brainstormed potential new approaches to improve recruitment, enrollment, and participation outcomes.

Several months after random assignment began, the study team and curriculum developers launched a virtual learning community dubbed “JB Jamborees,” focused on peer learning and cross-organization collaboration among the Just Beginning facilitators. Over the course of about 20 months, the evaluation team hosted eight Jamborees. A variety of topics were addressed, including recruitment, engagement, program implementation, fidelity, and reengagement. The study team also hosted smaller “coffee” groups for Just Beginning facilitators to continue peer learning across organizations on these topics. The study team released a monthly bulletin with evaluation updates and tips that adapted engagement lessons from behavioral science and other studies for the fatherhood program context. Separately, the curriculum developers coached the Just Beginning facilitators closely to help them adhere to the program model. This coaching is described in Chapter 4.

Based on insights from the participating fatherhood programs, the study team expected that most fathers would not live with their children. However, at the start of the study, more than half of fathers reported living with their focal children all or most of the time.<sup>6</sup> At enrollment, most fathers reported having a very good relationship with their focal children (81 percent) and seeing their children every day or almost every

<sup>6</sup> In comparison, in the Parents and Children Together study, 78 percent of fathers were not living with any of their children. See Alamillo and Zaveri (2018).

day (65 percent).<sup>7</sup> This finding contradicts the stereotype that fathers with low incomes are not engaged with their children.

Although Table 3.3 shows there are a few statistically significant differences in demographic characteristics between program group and the services-as-usual group, some differences are expected by chance because of the number of characteristics shown. These differences are no more than would be expected by chance, demonstrating that the two research groups were equivalent before the start of the Just Beginning intervention.<sup>8</sup> See Appendix C for a similar table showing that the two groups had similar responses at the start of the study to the survey questions that made up the outcomes the study would ultimately measure (Appendix Table C.1).

## Strategies to Engage Fathers in Services

The three organizations used a variety of approaches to encourage fathers to participate in fatherhood program services generally. This encouragement took three forms: approaches to engage fathers during intake, outreach to fathers to encourage attendance, and incentives for program participation. Each is described in this section. Apart from these tangible strategies, staff members also said it was important that their organizations had an overall philosophy of support, and that they went out of their way to show fathers that they cared about their well-being.

### INTAKE STRATEGIES

Before fathers even completed the intake process, the organizations took steps to ensure they engaged quickly with program services—both usual services and Just Beginning sessions specifically. For example, at the Children’s Institute, facilitators tried to schedule each father to attend his first fatherhood group workshop session that same week, and his first Just Beginning session right afterward. Likewise, fathers enrolled at People for People began their usual-services employment workshops the same week they enrolled, and their first Just Beginning sessions later that same week. Fathers enrolled at Seedco started their usual-services workshops shortly after completing intake and made arrangements to begin their Just Beginning sessions.

### OUTREACH TO ENCOURAGE ATTENDANCE

Fatherhood program staff members used the nFORM management information system to record efforts to make contact with fathers once they were enrolled. For this analysis, the one-on-one contacts that lasted less than 15 minutes are considered “engagement contacts,” or those intended to encourage a fa-

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix E for a description of the sensitivity analysis performed for this variable.

<sup>8</sup> To confirm that there were no systematic differences between the two groups, a logistic regression was run using baseline variables to predict research group status. A joint test indicated that the baseline characteristics were not collectively related to whether a father was in the program group or services-as-usual group. In other words, the number of statistically significant differences between the groups is no more than would be expected by chance, suggesting that baseline differences between the groups are unlikely to be a source of bias.

**TABLE 3.3. CHARACTERISTICS OF FATHERS AT STUDY ENTRY, FULL STUDY SAMPLE**

Characteristic	Overall	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	P-Value
Relationship status (%)				0.686
Married	12.3	10.9	13.6	
Engaged	7.4	7.2	7.7	
In a relationship, living with partner <sup>a</sup>	28.0	27.0	29.0	
In a relationship, not living with partner <sup>b</sup>	18.3	19.0	17.6	
Not in a relationship	34.0	35.9	32.1	
Average age (years)	29.8	30.2	29.3	0.130
Age (%)			**	0.034
Under 25	26.3	27.4	25.1	
25 to 34	51.5	47.0	55.9	
35 to 44	16.3	17.7	14.9	
45 or more	6.0	7.9	4.1	
Race/ethnicity (%)				0.335
Hispanic	34.3	31.3	37.2	
White/non-Hispanic	2.6	2.5	2.7	
Black/non-Hispanic	56.8	60.2	53.5	
Other/multiracial	6.3	6.0	6.5	
Number of biological or adopted children under age 18 (%)			[ ]	0.926
0 <sup>c</sup>	0.5	0.5	0.5	
1	36.9	37.6	36.2	
2 or more	62.6	61.9	63.2	
Father lives with the focal child all or most of the time (%)	51.9	49.7	54.1	0.240
Currently working <sup>d</sup> (%)	38.6	39.7	37.5	0.541
Working full time <sup>e</sup> (%)	18.9	18.6	19.2	0.849
Quality of relationship with the focal child, according to the father (%)				0.212
Not too good	3.1	3.0	3.2	
Somewhat good	15.9	18.3	13.5	
Very good	81.0	78.7	83.2	
In-person contact with the focal child in the past month, according to the father (%)				0.349
Not at all	2.2	2.2	2.2	
Once	3.7	4.3	3.0	
2 or 3 times	4.7	6.0	3.5	
1 or 2 times per week	12.6	12.0	13.2	
3 or 4 times per week	11.7	13.0	10.3	
Every day or almost every day <sup>f</sup>	65.2	62.5	67.8	

(continued)

**TABLE 3.3. (CONTINUED)**

Characteristic	Overall	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	P-Value
Challenges that made it hard to spend time with the focal child in the past month, among nonresident fathers <sup>a</sup> (%)				
Work or school schedule	13.8	15.2	12.4	0.437
Car problems or lack of transportation	14.1	14.7	13.5	0.758
Not having a stable place to live	17.6	20.2	14.7	0.175
Resistance from the child's mother's spouse or partner	8.3	9.9	6.5	0.276
A court order or legal restriction	19.7	17.3	22.4	0.233
Site (%)				0.995
Children's Institute	32.0	32.1	31.9	
People for People	34.1	34.2	34.1	
Seedco	33.9	33.7	34.1	
Sample size	738	368	370	

SOURCES: MDRC calculations using data from the B3 applicant characteristics survey and the baseline survey. This table contains the full sample.

NOTES: Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

To assess differences between the research groups, chi-square tests were used for categorical variables and two-tailed t-tests were used for continuous variables.

Brackets in statistical significance levels indicates the possibility of there being a small number of individuals in a category, which reduces statistical power.

<sup>a</sup>“In a relationship, living with partner” includes sample members who reported being in a relationship and living with a partner “most of the time” or “all of the time.”

<sup>b</sup>“In a relationship, not living with partner” includes sample members who reported being in a relationship and living with a partner “some of the time” or “none of the time.”

<sup>c</sup>Fathers who reported having zero children were probably parental figures to their focal children, but not biological or legally adoptive fathers. Such fathers were included in the study.

<sup>d</sup>“Currently working” includes sample members who were working full time or part time, were employed with hours that changed from week to week, or were temporary/occasional/seasonal employees.

<sup>e</sup>“Working full time” includes sample members who were working 35 hours per week or more.

<sup>f</sup>Fathers who reported living with their focal children all or most of the time were coded as “every day or almost every day” and were not asked this survey question.

<sup>g</sup>These measures include sample members who reported that the given challenge “often” made it difficult for them to spend time with the focal child in the past month. These survey questions were only asked of the 355 fathers (48 percent of the sample) who reported not living with their focal children all or more of the time (that is, nonresident fathers).

ther to attend program services.<sup>9</sup> They included brief in-person, email, mail, phone, and text message contacts. Table 3.4 shows there are many statistically significant differences between the program and services-as-usual group in the methods organizations used to engage them.<sup>10</sup> Phone calls were the most

<sup>9</sup> Longer, more substantive service interactions are discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>10</sup> This analysis does not include any reminders from or interaction with the DadTime smartphone-based mobile application.



**TABLE 3.4. STAFF ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR THE JUST BEGINNING AND SERVICES-AS-USUAL GROUPS**

Measure	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	Difference (Effect)	P-Value
Any engagement contact with the program <sup>a</sup> (%)	92.4	66.8	25.6***	0.000
Average number of engagement contacts	6.5	2.3	4.1***	0.000
Any in-person engagement contact <sup>b</sup> (%)	57.6	37.8	19.8***	0.000
Average number of in-person engagement contacts	1.2	0.9	0.3**	0.024
Any email engagement contact (%)	12.5	8.4	4.1*	0.067
Average number of email engagement contacts	0.2	0.1	0.1**	0.031
Any mail engagement contact (%)	13.0	5.1	7.9***	0.000
Average number of mail engagement contacts	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.583
Any phone engagement contact (%)	83.2	49.5	33.7***	0.000
Average number of phone call engagement contacts	3.6	1.0	2.6***	0.000
Any text message engagement contact (%)	38.3	5.1	33.2***	0.000
Average number of text message engagement contacts	1.2	0.1	1.1***	0.000
Any other engagement contact <sup>c</sup> (%)	5.2	3.8	1.4	0.365
Average number of other engagement contacts	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.262
Average number of days between the first and last engagement contacts <sup>d</sup>	68.1	30.7	37.5***	0.000
Sample size (total = 738)	368	370		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using management information system data. This table reflects contacts no more than six months after random assignment.

NOTES: Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

The p-value indicates the likelihood of any estimated effect of this size (or larger) if the contact strategy had zero true effect.

To assess differences between the research groups, chi-square tests were used for categorical variables and two-tailed t-tests were used for continuous variables.

<sup>a</sup>Engagement contacts are defined as contacts that last less than 15 minutes and include contacts related to both Just Beginning and usual services. Contacts related to DadTime are not included.

<sup>b</sup>In-person contacts are defined as contacts that take place during a home visit, in the community, in a high school, or in the office.

<sup>c</sup>Other engagement contacts are services with “other” selected as the contact method by staff in the management information system.

<sup>d</sup>This measure is inclusive of the dates of the first and last engagement contacts. Fathers who did not receive engagement contacts of any kind have a value of 0 for this measure.

prevalent form of contact for both research groups. However, the program group was much more likely to receive any engagement contacts and received, on average, more of them. The study team heard from staff members across all the participating organizations that phone calls were commonly used to remind fathers about upcoming activities, and to follow up with fathers who did not show up. Staff members also described reminding fathers about upcoming workshops or activities when they saw them at the program; this type of reminder was most common at People for People and Seedco, where fathers were attending workshops almost daily for multiple weeks. The Children’s Institute mailed reminder cards about the fatherhood group workshop to newly enrolled fathers, but the other two organizations did not make much use of mail outreach.

These data are not specific enough to determine what program group contacts were used to encourage Just Beginning session attendance specifically, rather than attendance at other services. However, the study team worked closely with each organization to establish expectations for Just Beginning staff members that emphasized they should reach out to program group fathers mainly by text message and telephone. Remote peer-to-peer learning opportunities that staff members from all organizations participated in emphasized engagement, frequent outreach, and effective outreach messages (as described in Box 3.1). This added focus on engagement probably boosted the outreach to the program group.

### PROGRAM PARTICIPATION INCENTIVES

Organizations commonly used incentives to encourage fathers to participate in fatherhood services and to reward them for doing so. Each fatherhood program approached incentive distribution differently. Overall, Children’s Institute did not typically provide monetary incentives, while People for People or Seedco did. See Table 3.5 for a more detailed comparison of the incentives the organizations used.

**TABLE 3.5. INCENTIVES OFFERED FOR PARTICIPATION IN USUAL SERVICES AT JUST BEGINNING STUDY ORGANIZATIONS**

CHILDREN’S INSTITUTE	PEOPLE FOR PEOPLE	SEEDCO
<b>Monetary incentives</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did not provide</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gift cards for a week of perfect attendance (\$25/week) in fatherhood services, available up to 4 weeks for a total of \$200</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Round-trip pass for New York City’s transit system each day a father attended services</li> <li>• Up to 3 additional transit passes for social service appointments or job interviews</li> <li>• Up to 5 weekly transit passes once employed (at placement, 30, 60, 90, and 180 days).</li> </ul>
<b>Nonmonetary incentives</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diapers, cribs, or car seats</li> <li>• Certificates of completion or a letter validating program participation for the court or Department of Child and Family Services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to certificate training programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breakfast and lunch</li> <li>• Access to free suits and haircuts</li> <li>• Access to job training</li> <li>• Other incentives (varying between subcontractors)</li> </ul>

The study was designed to offer specific incentives to fathers participating in Just Beginning sessions. Fathers in the program group at Children’s Institute and Seedco were eligible to receive up to \$75 in gift cards for Just Beginning session attendance.<sup>11</sup> At all three organizations, a coparent was eligible for a \$25 gift card for completing the coparent orientation. Additionally, nonmonetary incentives were offered to reinforce the skills learned in Just Beginning sessions, including small toys such as balls, board books, rattles, and baby mirrors. Each father also received a certificate of completion and a framed photo of himself with his child after completing the last session.

Table 3.6 presents data about incentive distribution for the program group and services-as-usual group for all organizations combined. The table does not distinguish the incentives meant specifically for Just Beginning participation. In the aggregate, the program group was more likely to receive incentives. On average, more program group fathers got monetary incentives and transportation incentives than did fathers in the services-as-usual group, but these overall differences all reflect differences at Children’s Institute (data not shown), which did not typically use incentives in its fatherhood program. In contrast, the incentive distribution across research groups at People for People and Seedco was much more even. As expected, a larger percentage of program group fathers received nonmonetary incentives, which include the items received for completing Just Beginning sessions.

**TABLE 3.6. INCENTIVES DISTRIBUTED TO JUST BEGINNING AND SERVICES-AS-USUAL GROUPS**

Measure	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	Difference (Effect)	P-Value
Received any program incentive (%)	70.1	52.4	17.7***	0.000
Average number of incentives	7.1	6.5	0.6	0.270
Received any monetary incentive (%)	69.6	49.5	20.1***	0.000
Gift card (%)	97.3	95.6	1.6	0.353
Average number	2.9	2.8	0.1	0.435
Average value (\$)	97	100	-3	1
Transportation assistance (%)	46.9	61.7	-14.9***	0.002
Average number	6.6	6.6	-0.1	0.934
Average value (\$)	60	77	-17**	0
Other <sup>a</sup> (%)	3.5	2.7	0.8	0.646
Average number	1.0	1.2	-0.2	0.190
Average value (\$)	32	33	-1	1

(continued)

<sup>11</sup> Program group fathers enrolled in the study at People for People did not receive additional incentives on top of those they were eligible to receive for perfect attendance as outlined in Table 3.5. The perfect-attendance incentive was contingent on fathers completing Just Beginning sessions each week.

Measure	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	Difference (Effect)	P-Value
Received any nonmonetary incentive <sup>b</sup> (%)	23.9	3.5	20.4***	0.000
Average number of nonmonetary incentives	0.8	0.1	0.8***	0.000
Sample size (total = 738)	368	370		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using management information system data. This table reflects incentives received no more than six months after random assignment.

NOTES: Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

The p-value indicates the likelihood of any estimated effect of this size (or larger) if the incentives category had zero true effect.

To assess differences between the research groups, chi-square tests were used for categorical variables and two-tailed t-tests were used for continuous variables.

<sup>a</sup>Other monetary incentives include emergency assistance and assistance with employment-related costs.

<sup>b</sup>Nonmonetary incentives include children's books and toys, bibs, diapers, and clothing for fathers.

# Just Beginning Implementation and the Service Contrast Between the Program and Services-as-Usual Groups

# 4

This chapter describes how the Just Beginning intervention was implemented and how the intervention influenced the services received by the program group compared with the services-as-usual group. The chapter starts with a discussion of Just Beginning staffing, then turns to how fathers engaged in Just Beginning, how participation varied by organization and among fathers in the program group with different characteristics, and fathers' challenges participating in Just Beginning. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how service receipt differed between the program and service-as-usual groups.

## Implementation Insights

- Just Beginning facilitators did not need to have any specific training or background aside from participating in a robust training and certification process. At the end of this process, Just Beginning facilitators were certified to deliver the five Just Beginning sessions. Curriculum developers used monthly video observations and virtual reflection meetings to monitor how faithfully Just Beginning facilitators implemented the curriculum. For the most part, facilitators adhered to the model, thanks to extensive curriculum-developer involvement.
- Just over half of the fathers who were randomly assigned to the program group participated in at least one Just Beginning session. Once fathers participated in at least one session, they typically participated in at least four of the five sessions, an amount curriculum developers deemed to be an adequate dose of Just Beginning (adequate exposure to the intervention). However, only 37 percent of fathers received an adequate dose overall.
- The rate of Just Beginning participation varied across the three organizations. For example, fathers at People for People completed nearly twice as many sessions, on average, as fathers at Seedco. Fathers who lived with their children completed about 25 percent more Just Beginning sessions, on average, than fathers who did not live with their children.
- Coordination with coparents to bring young children to Just Beginning sessions proved to be a significant challenge. Fathers also faced challenges such as unemployment, lack of transportation,

and homelessness. Just Beginning staff members spent significant time and resources to help fathers attend fatherhood services, particularly their first Just Beginning sessions.

- Fathers in the program group participated in the usual services as much as fathers in the services-as-usual group, suggesting that participation in Just Beginning did not detract from their participation in other fatherhood services.

**“You watch videos and get instructions, then you visit with the child and do it hands-on. It is like a job; you need hands-on training. Now it is part of my everyday routine.”**

**—a father at People for People**

## Just Beginning Staffing

Table 4.1 summarizes the staff roles and responsibilities at the three Just Beginning organizations. The main staff roles for Just Beginning were facilitating the program activities (working directly with fathers in sessions); coordinating the intervention, which was defined slightly differently at each organization but involved supporting facilitators in various ways; and overseeing the intervention and the staff generally. Children’s Institute and People for People experienced very little turnover among Just Beginning staff members during the study, while Seedco experienced turnover in every Just Beginning-related position. Staff turnover was most detrimental when the organization lost a facilitator, which slowed down Just Beginning sessions, or when it lost a coordinator, which reduced the organization’s ability to provide sufficient administrative support to facilitators.

Organizations generally found that they could not simply reassign existing staff members but needed to hire new people to support recruitment, engagement in Just Beginning, and the delivery of Just Beginning sessions and parenting services. People for People and Children’s Institute did reassign some staff members, but Seedco hired new people to fill all facilitator and coordinator positions for the intervention.

Just Beginning facilitators at each organization had responsibilities that overlapped and that went beyond the intervention specifically. For example, at Children’s Institute, facilitators were responsible for the fatherhood group workshops (described in Chapter 2) in addition to Just Beginning sessions. In contrast, Just Beginning facilitators at People for People and Seedco led Just Beginning sessions without leading any other workshops, although they did engage in recruitment efforts for the fatherhood program. Just Beginning facilitators (among others) at People for People also provided case management to program group fathers (that is, they assessed the fathers’ needs and connected them to services to address those needs).

Just Beginning coordinators at all three organizations provided administrative support for facilitators and assisted with intake, but other responsibilities varied among the locations. For example, Just Beginning coordinators at Seedco and People for People provided case management. The Just Beginning coordinator at People for People took further steps to engage fathers and their families by conducting coparent orientations; at Seedco and Children’s Institute, facilitators took on this task. The Just Beginning coordinator at



**TABLE 4.1. JUST BEGINNING STAFF ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

STAFF ROLE	CHILDREN'S INSTITUTE	PEOPLE FOR PEOPLE	SEEDCO
Facilitation (additional roles and responsibility above facilitating sessions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshop facilitation for program fathers</li> <li>• Case management</li> <li>• Coparent orientation</li> <li>• Appointment reminders</li> <li>• Letters for court attesting to fathers' participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment for fatherhood program</li> <li>• Intake</li> <li>• Random assignment</li> <li>• Case management for Just Beginning fathers</li> <li>• Coparent orientation</li> <li>• Appointment reminders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment for fatherhood program</li> <li>• Coparent orientation</li> <li>• Appointment reminders</li> </ul>
Program coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intake</li> <li>• Random assignment</li> <li>• Assistance with the DadTime custom smartphone app</li> <li>• Back-up facilitation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intake</li> <li>• Random assignment</li> <li>• Administrative support</li> <li>• Case management for the services-as-usual group</li> <li>• Coparent orientation</li> <li>• Back-up facilitation</li> <li>• DadTime assistance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intake</li> <li>• Random assignment</li> <li>• DadTime assistance</li> </ul>
Supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment for fatherhood program</li> <li>• Administrative support</li> <li>• Supervision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervision</li> <li>• Administrative support</li> </ul>

Children's Institute also provided facilitators with information on community resources, such as housing or mental health services, on request.

As suggested in Chapter 3, all three organizations relied heavily on existing fatherhood program staff members or partners for recruitment, outreach, and screening processes for Just Beginning. Although Just Beginning facilitators occasionally participated in outreach activities, they were not heavily involved in study enrollment.

## Monitoring Adherence to the Just Beginning Curriculum

Before study enrollment began, Just Beginning facilitators and their backups at each organization participated in a three-part training and certification process. The training started with one and a half days in person with the curriculum developers and the study team to learn about the study, the background of Just Beginning, how to implement the intervention, and how to talk to fathers and coparents about Just Beginning and the study. The training included opportunities for facilitators to role-play the scripts in the manual as practice; this was the first opportunity for the curriculum developers to coach the facilitators

**“[Just Beginning] was really a great program. My daughter loved it. We played. It was very helpful ’cause they taught me certain things, not necessarily how to be a father, but better ways of being a father. If you want to do certain things with your child, how to interact with your child maybe on different levels and bond with your child a little bit more. I felt like those were things I needed help with, bonding with her.”**

**—a father at Seedco (Strive)**

on ways to improve their delivery. One facilitator described the training as “intense” but also reported having a good sense of what was expected after the end of the day and a half.

After the in-person training, facilitators thoroughly reviewed the curriculum on their own and completed online quizzes with the aim of answering at least 80 percent of questions correctly; some facilitators achieved this mark on the first try and others had to retake some quizzes before passing. Facilitators met with curriculum developers to review their quizzes and discuss missed questions.

In the final stage, facilitators achieved certification by successfully delivering Just Beginning sessions with three fathers recruited to participate in practice sessions. Facilitators recruited fathers for these practice sessions from current or previous fatherhood program participants. These practice sessions were video recorded for the curriculum developers to review and assess for fidelity (facilitators’ adherence to the curriculum and competent execution of facilitation strategies); after this review and assessment, the developers coached each facilitator in areas for improvement. Facilitators were certified in Just Beginning when they met fidelity standards for all five Just Beginning sessions. All facilitators ended up having to redo at least one session, but they were certified in most sessions in one try. Some facilitators were certified after three months; it took five months for all of them to be certified. Certification took this long because facilitators had difficulty finding fathers to participate in the practice sessions and the time between practice sessions was often more than a week (the expected time between sessions). However, the curriculum developer noted that the facilitators performed better than the threshold for certification at the end of the certification period, indicating they had a good grasp of the curriculum when they started working with fathers enrolled in the study.

Ultimately, 15 people were certified as facilitators across the three organizations; 7 functioned as backups and 8 as the primary Just Beginning facilitators. The 8 primary facilitators were ethnically diverse and had a range of ages and prior training experiences. Five were male; 2 were certified to deliver Just Beginning in both Spanish and English. One Just Beginning facilitator, who did not have a lot of experience with technology, described the certification process as a “struggle” mainly because of challenges he experienced with recording his sessions and getting those recordings to the curriculum developer. He also said he found the expectations for the certification process to be unclear, but noted that the curriculum developers worked closely with him and he valued their support. Another facilitator described the training process as stressful at first because the certification was very detailed and rigid, as the curriculum developers were coaching facilitators to adhere strictly to the curriculum.

The curriculum developers continued to monitor the primary facilitators’ fidelity after random assignment began—mainly using a remote coaching model. Each facilitator was required to submit a recording of a session once a month for a fidelity check. Just Beginning curriculum developers met individually with

Just Beginning facilitators at least monthly—and typically more often than that—in a combination of planned calls (to reflect on what the facilitator observed in the recording submitted and to provide coaching related to the monthly fidelity checks) and unplanned calls or video calls. While the curriculum developers mostly provided remote support to the Just Beginning facilitators, they did occasionally visit each organization. Box 4.1 describes more about how the curriculum developers assessed facilitators’ adherence to the curriculum remotely through video recordings and video or phone calls. Overall, facilitators were very faithful to the curriculum. Of the over 100 sessions that were checked, fewer than 10 failed to meet session fidelity criteria.

#### **BOX 4.1. REMOTE MONITORING OF AND COACHING FOR CURRICULUM FIDELITY**

Curriculum developers capitalized on technology both in the certification process and during monthly fidelity checks. In both phases, they reviewed video footage and applied a prespecified analysis approach to evaluate the facilitator’s adherence to the program’s curriculum components quantitatively, and to evaluate the delivery qualitatively. After each observation, the developers reflected on the scores with the facilitators and provided targeted coaching to address opportunities for them to adhere more closely to the curriculum or otherwise improve their delivery techniques. Fidelity to the curriculum was the primary focus in year one and quality of delivery a focus in year two. This coaching was provided remotely through video conferences and phone calls.

**ADHERENCE.** Using a tracking form, developers kept track of whether the facilitator and participant used specific strategies during the training session, and if they did use them, how often. For example, did the facilitator compliment the father? Did the father answer the facilitator’s questions? Did the facilitator refer to a concept from a previous session? The curriculum developers also looked for strategies during the “reflect” component of the session that occurred after the father-child play component: Did the facilitator link the practice back to the session content? Did the father discuss future plans? Did the facilitator identify areas for the father to improve? The father-child play component was not part of the assessment process.

**DELIVERY.** Curriculum developers adapted a well-known rubric for coding parent-child interactions to assess facilitator and participant engagement qualitatively.\* They rated how often facilitators and participants did things such as conveying acceptance and warmth, using descriptive language, responding to questions, or using a harsh voice. Each was rated on a 5-point scale where 1 meant “never,” 3 meant “occasionally/sometimes inconsistent,” and 5 meant “often and consistently.” Scores were tallied to determine whether the facilitator maintained adequate quality in that session.

NOTE: \*Specifically they adapted the Individual Growth and Development Indicators from the Indicator of Parent-Child Interaction measure. See Baggett, Carta, and Horn (2009).

## Fathers' Participation in Just Beginning

On average, fathers in the program group completed two of the five Just Beginning sessions. As shown in Table 4.2, 54 percent of fathers in the program group completed at least one Just Beginning session and 37 percent completed four or five sessions, which the Just Beginning curriculum developers considered to be an adequate dose. (Four sessions was considered to be adequate because session number five was a wrap-up.) In comparison, in the 2014 study of Baby Elmo's 10 sessions, fathers who were incarcerated completed about 5 sessions, on average. Of the fathers in the current study who attended at least one Just Beginning session, 70 percent completed sessions one through four, or had an adequate dose. In comparison, in the 2014 study of Baby Elmo with fathers who were incarcerated, 16 percent made it through the ninth session, which was the last session before the wrap-up.<sup>1</sup>

About 28 percent of program group fathers had a coparent participate in a Just Beginning orientation; about half of these fathers lived with their children all or most of the time. See Box 4.2 for more about coparent orientations. Among the fathers who completed at least one Just Beginning session, 50 percent had a coparent complete an orientation. There are two possible explanations for why more fathers who completed at least one session had coparents complete orientations: It could be that coparents were more likely to attend orientations if they had more cooperative relationships with fathers to begin with, and those cooperative relationships also made it more likely that fathers would have access to their children for Just Beginning sessions. Alternatively, the coparent orientations themselves may have made coparents more amenable to having their children participate in Just Beginning with their fathers.

It is not entirely clear why some fathers assigned to the program group never started Just Beginning. As described earlier, it was a voluntary service within a voluntary program and fathers were not screened for interest in Just Beginning when enrolling in the Responsible Fatherhood program. To qualify for Just Beginning, fathers had to have seen their their children in the previous 30 days, but sometimes it turned out they did not have regular access to their children and had just happened to see them recently (often because of a recent holiday). Among a small sample of 15 text message–survey respondents who had not yet attended any fatherhood services, fathers said they had not attended because the time or location was inconvenient, or because of their work schedules. No father said he was not interested in fatherhood services; the questions did not specifically ask about Just Beginning.<sup>2</sup>

Staff members reported multiple reasons why fathers did not complete Just Beginning. According to them, some became unavailable because they got new jobs. Others saw their relationships with coparents deteriorate or had custodial issues. Some faced a lack of transportation or stable housing, a change in contact information, or another type of personal crisis. This information from staff members is somewhat

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**1** As described in Chapter 1, the Baby Elmo study was conducted with teenage fathers incarcerated in juvenile detention centers. Reasons for noncompletion varied but included being released or transferred to a different facility. See Barr et al. (2014).

**2** Text message surveys were delivered to fathers in the program group and services-as-usual group between January 2017 and December 2018. These short mobile phone surveys collected fathers' perspectives about the programs, their challenges, and the support they received while engaged in them. Fathers received a maximum of five short surveys over their first five weeks of being enrolled in the fatherhood program. See Appendix A for information about the text message surveys.

**TABLE 4.2. PARTICIPATION IN JUST BEGINNING SERVICES**

Outcome	Program Group
Completed at least 1 session (training, play, and reflection) (%)	53.8
Average number of sessions completed	2.1
Sessions completed (%)	
1	8.7
2	4.6
3	3.0
4	4.6
5	32.9
Coparent participated in an orientation (%)	28.3
Among those who completed at least 1 session (training, play, and reflection)	
Average number of sessions completed	3.9
Sessions completed (%)	
1	16.2
2	8.6
3	5.6
4	8.6
5	61.1
At least 1 session that included a coparent or partner (%)	28.3
Average number of days between first service and last service <sup>a</sup>	34.6
Coparent participated in an orientation (%)	49.5
Sample size	368

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using management information system data. This table reflects services received no more than six months after random assignment.

NOTE: <sup>a</sup>Fathers who only attended one service, or who attended their first and last service on the same day, are not included in this measure.

corroborated by the text message survey. Among 15 respondents to the text message survey who did not attend the program in the last week, more than one-third said personal scheduling conflicts were the reason.

## In Their Own Words

Both fathers and their coparents described Just Beginning sessions as positive experiences. Fathers gave examples of how they used what they learned to benefit their children in daily life. One father said:

I learned [to] follow the baby or see what he wanna do or you know, see what he wanna play with.... What I learned is to see what he wanna do first versus telling him what we gonna do.

## BOX 4.2. INVOLVING COPARENTS IN JUST BEGINNING

Just Beginning required a father to attend sessions with his child. A critical element of the intervention was to help fathers who did not reside with their children communicate with coparents to negotiate access to their children for sessions. Just Beginning facilitators set up orientation sessions with children's mothers and legal guardians to share information about the program's goals and content, and the intervention's potential benefits for their children. Orientations were held in person or over the phone and were available to all fathers and coparents, regardless of whom the child lived with. Participation was optional and coparents were given a \$25 gift card for participating.

One mother noted that her orientation was helpful: *"I'm not big on trusting other people with [my son]. So yeah, it definitely made me feel more comfortable."*

Beyond the coparent orientation, some mothers interviewed noted how they were benefiting from the father's participation in Just Beginning. For example, one mother mentioned: *"He's learning how to cope with [our daughter]. I really like it. And he's teaching me too. I learn from him and he learns from [the program]."*

Another father described how he learned how to talk to his child to encourage language development:

When I start playing—like, let's say it's a toy truck, I was like, "Truck." Now I describe the colors to him or like shapes and stuff. That's something I learned more with this program.

Similarly, one father—who also had older children—reported that he picked up a lot of new tips he did not know before. For example, he thought changing his voice when talking to his child was just being silly, but Just Beginning taught him that it had an actual meaning to it.

Furthermore, one mother described how her relationship with her child's father changed since he started Just Beginning:

He's been a little more understanding of a lot of responsibilities that are on me to do when I'm at home with the kids.

A second mother had a similar thought:

I've seen him [the father] do a lotta stuff that he never really used to do with [our son], like sitting down and reading to him, talk to him when I'm doing stuff with the kids. He'll say something to him like, "What letter is that?"

Another mother mentioned how the father applied one specific lesson with his daughter:

He's been making kind of a big deal about this whole parenting voice thing. He never really knew how to talk with [our daughter] before, so whenever we see each other now he's trying to



make a point to talk like that.... Today, I was getting ready and [our daughter] started getting a little fussy, and [her father] picked her up and said, “It’s okay, Mommy’s getting ready.”

These interviews with fathers and coparents jibe with text message survey responses from 37 program group fathers. Respondents reported they were learning a lot about their children’s behavior from the program (74 percent) and over half (52 percent) said they learned a lot about relating better to coparents. In another text message survey, 47 program group fathers responded to a question asking how they had used their skills from the fatherhood program. Most respondents in the program group indicated they used their skills from the fatherhood program mostly in dealing with their children (58 percent) or with another adult (21 percent). Fewer indicated they used their skills looking for work or at work (16 percent)—skills that would have been taught in the services-as-usual portions of the programs. While the overall response rate to the text message surveys was low, these data suggest that fathers saw benefits to the fatherhood program, especially Just Beginning. See Appendix Tables D.1 and D.2 for all text message survey responses.

## Variation in Father Participation

This section examines how participation in Just Beginning varied by organization or based on characteristics of the fathers in the program group. The analysis focused on characteristics fathers reported during intake and that the study team thought could influence Just Beginning session participation: whether the father was a first-time father or not, whether the father resided with his child or not, whether the focal child was older or younger than 18 months, and whether the father was currently employed or not. Many of the same characteristics were also used to analyze the impact data discussed in the next chapter.

### VARIATION BY ORGANIZATION

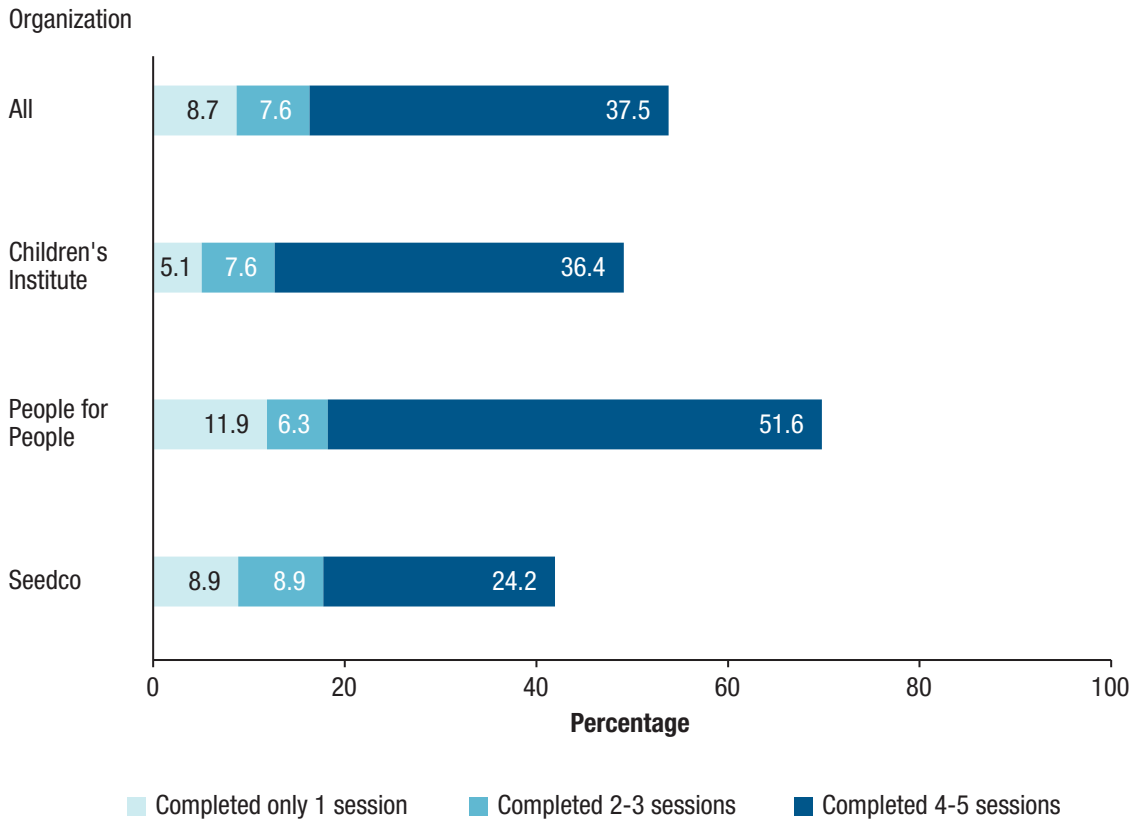
Father participation in Just Beginning varied significantly by organization, as shown in Figure 4.1. People for People had more fathers complete at least one Just Beginning session (70 percent) than the other two organizations, which both had fewer than half of fathers complete one session. The leading theory for this pattern was that fathers at People for People were scheduled for their first Just Beginning sessions before leaving intake, with that first session scheduled to occur later in the same week. In contrast, Children’s Institute staff members said in interviews that it took longer than expected to engage fathers in the first Just Beginning session. This delay is probably because the fathers had less access to their children; fewer fathers at Children’s Institute lived with their children than fathers at other organizations. Children’s Institute also had many fathers who could only visit with their children under the supervision of the coparent or another approved adult, which made it especially challenging to coordinate times for those sessions.

People for People also had the highest average number of Just Beginning sessions completed (2.8)—almost double the number for Seedco (1.5)—six months after fathers entered the study, as shown in Figure 4.2. The quick scheduling of

**“I was ... happy, like ... this actually might work, [it is] not just a bunch of crap.... It’s actual interactive parenting classes.... I have noticed since he’s been more interactive with her. Personally, I think it’s sexy.... I think it’s cool that he’s getting involved.”**

**—a coparent at Children’s Institute**

**FIGURE 4.1. PARTICIPATION IN ANY JUST BEGINNING SESSIONS, BY ORGANIZATION**

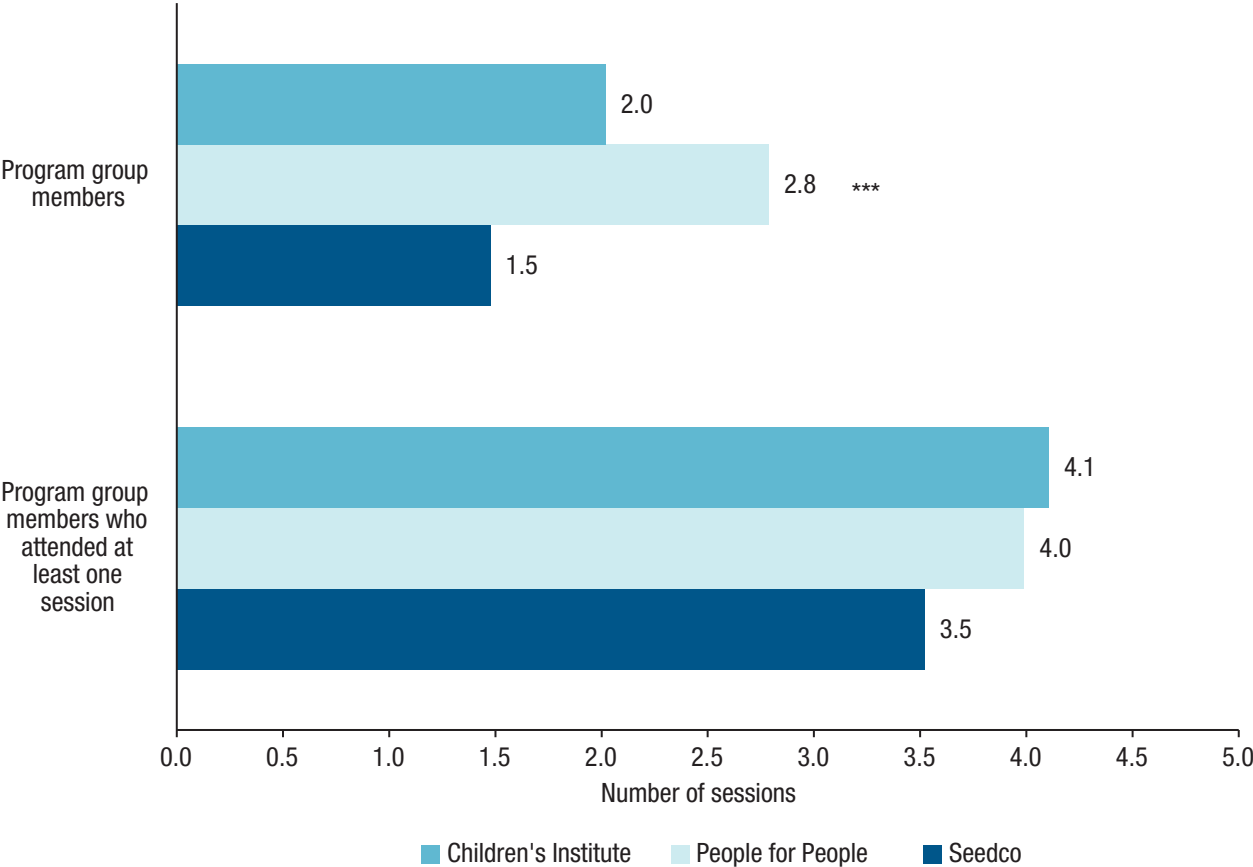


SOURCE: MDRC calculations using management information system data. This figure reflects services received no more than six months after random assignment.

the first session at People for People, coupled with the length of the organization’s usual fatherhood program (seven weeks) may have made it easier for fathers to stay engaged in Just Beginning and complete more sessions; in comparison, the two-week usual workshops at Seedco did not align as well with the Just Beginning schedule. People for People also set high expectations and strict attendance policies that included Just Beginning attendance, so a father could not qualify for the attendance incentives offered by the program unless he completed all usual services and Just Beginning requirements. See Appendix Table D.3 for more details about comparisons across organizations.

However, among fathers who attended at least one Just Beginning session, there were no statistically significant differences in the average number of sessions completed across the three organizations, as shown in Figure 4.2—all were around four sessions. (See also Appendix Table D.4.) This parity suggests that the characteristics of the organization or its Just Beginning staff did not influence participation in the intervention, since once fathers attended one session, they were usually able to progress through the curriculum to receive an adequate dose—that is, the first four of five sessions—at all the organizations. Staff members

**FIGURE 4.2. AVERAGE NUMBER OF JUST BEGINNING SESSIONS COMPLETED, BY ORGANIZATION**



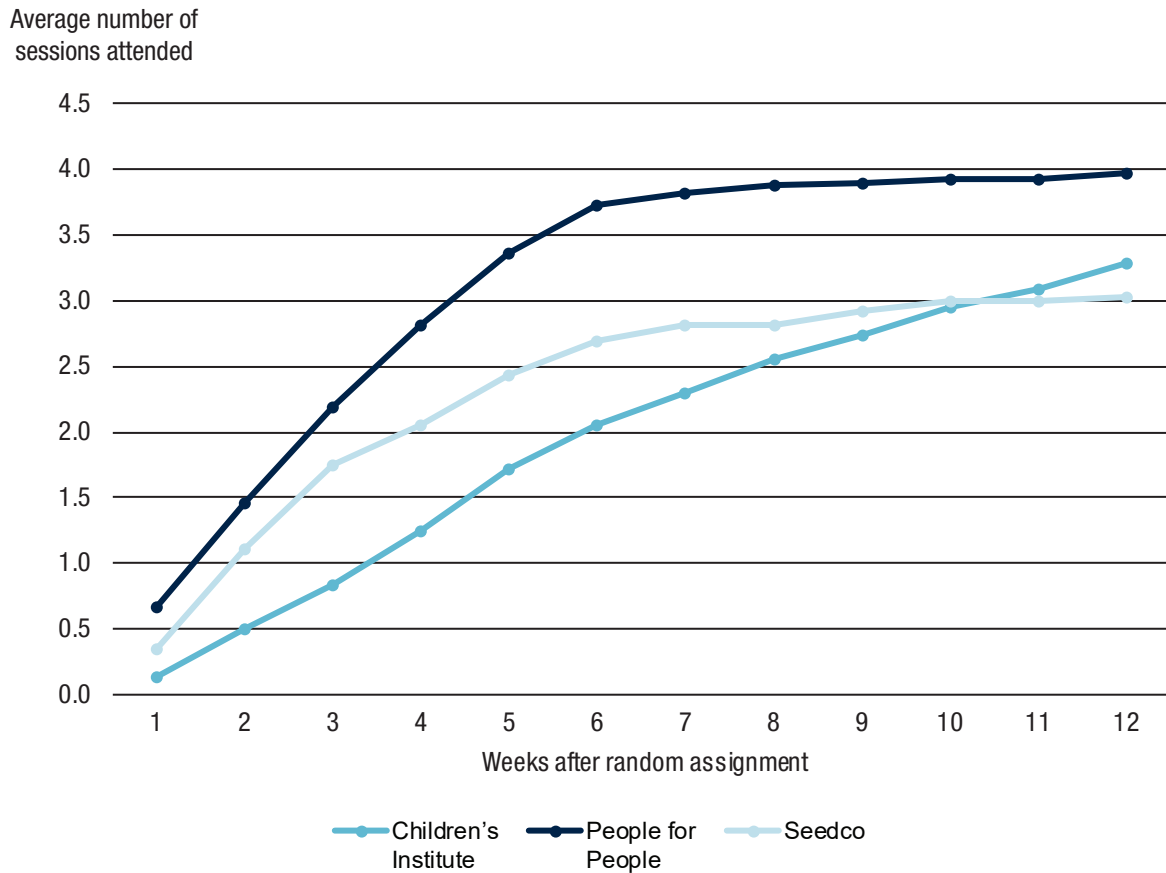
SOURCE: MDRC calculations using management information system data. This figure reflects services received no more than six months after random assignment.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent. There is a statistically significant difference among the organizations in the average number of Just Beginning sessions completed by program group fathers.

reported that once fathers started Just Beginning and saw its value, they became more committed to it and continued.

The way organizations structured their usual services appears to have influenced the rate at which Just Beginning sessions were completed. Fathers were meant to participate in Just Beginning at the same time they were participating in the usual services, meaning that, ideally, Just Beginning sessions were scheduled when fathers were already involved with the general fatherhood program. However, since the fatherhood workshops at Seedco were two weeks long, fathers at that organization had to stay engaged with Just Beginning after completing their other workshops. Figure 4.3 presents data for the 12 weeks after fathers entered the study, and shows that fathers at Seedco began to complete additional sessions at a lower rate after those initial two weeks. In interviews, staff members at Seedco said that it became more difficult to

**FIGURE 4.3. AVERAGE CUMULATIVE NUMBER OF JUST BEGINNING SESSIONS ATTENDED, UP TO 12 WEEKS AFTER RANDOM ASSIGNMENT, AMONG FATHERS WHO ATTENDED AT LEAST ONE SESSION**



SOURCE: MDRC calculations using management information system data.

engage fathers after they completed the usual services and were returning to the program only for Just Beginning sessions. In contrast, the average number of sessions completed leveled off for People for People fathers around the same time as their usual services workshops ended (week 7). Children’s Institute offered an open-entry and open-exit approach to its fatherhood program, so Just Beginning sessions were always a distinctive activity outside of usual services. As a result, unlike the other organizations, Children’s Institute’s average number of sessions completed continued to grow throughout the first 12 weeks after random assignment, reflecting its usual approach in which fathers are welcomed to attend workshops at any time, and continue attending for an indefinite amount of time. Taken together, this analysis suggests that programs looking to add an intervention like Just Beginning should consider their existing program structures and how they might affect fathers’ ability to participate.

## VARIATION BY FATHER CHARACTERISTICS

The focal child's age and the father's employment status were not correlated with participation patterns in Just Beginning, which suggests that these two characteristics were not associated with a father's ability to participate in the intervention or the number of sessions he attended (see Appendix Tables D.5 and D.6).

However, participation did vary based on whether a father lived with his child and whether he was a first-time father at the time of the study. These two characteristics are not associated with fathers' likelihood of completing at least one Just Beginning session, but they are associated with differences in the number of sessions completed. As shown in Figure 4.4, fathers who resided with their focal children completed more Just Beginning sessions, on average, than fathers who did not (see also Appendix Tables D.7 and D.8). Furthermore, among those completing at least one Just Beginning session, fathers who did live with their children completed more sessions, on average, than fathers who did not. Similarly, those who were not first-time fathers—who tended to be older than first-time fathers—completed more Just Beginning sessions. It was not surprising that fathers who resided with their children completed more sessions, since they had easier access to their children. However, as mentioned in Chapter 3, based on the experiences of the fatherhood programs engaged in the B3 study, it was surprising that about half the fathers enrolled in the study lived with their focal children all or most of the time.

**“[It is] nice that they do stuff like that for dads. 'Cause it seems like there's ... a lot more support for moms than for dads, so it's nice to see something that dads get to do.”**

**—a coparent at People for People**

## Challenges to Participating in Just Beginning

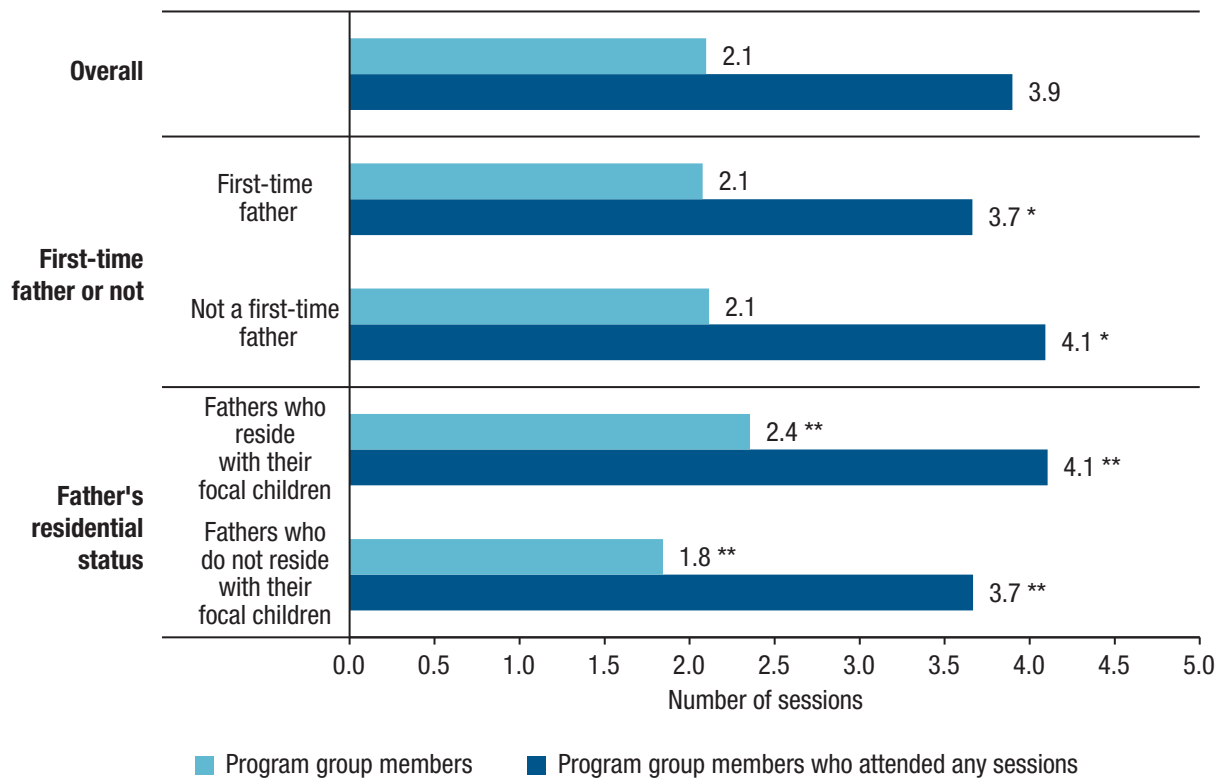
As discussed above, fathers were not asked whether they were interested in parenting services—or Just Beginning specifically—before they were enrolled in the study. As shown in Table 3.2 (in Chapter 3), 39 percent of fathers chose to enroll in the fatherhood program to learn about being a better parent and 37 percent enrolled to find a job or a better job. Furthermore, many fathers interviewed in two of the three fatherhood programs emphasized their interest in employment services and job-related certifications as motivation to enroll. One research question of interest was whether fathers could be encouraged to participate in Just Beginning even though they had not sought it out. It would not be surprising if some fathers were not interested in engaging in an intervention like Just Beginning, particularly given its extra burden of coordinating to get the child to sessions, and chose not to participate in any Just Beginning sessions.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, fathers who enrolled in the study experienced hardships that made it difficult to make Just Beginning sessions a priority. According to Just Beginning staff members, many fathers struggled financially and were searching for work. Some were even experiencing homelessness or living in shelters, and

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**3** At Children's Institute, fathers were motivated to participate in services to get letters documenting their participation for their court judges or Department of Child and Family Services caseworkers. Participating in Just Beginning was more than what fathers had to do to qualify for these letters.

**FIGURE 4.4. AVERAGE NUMBER OF JUST BEGINNING SESSIONS COMPLETED, BY FATHER CHARACTERISTIC**



SOURCES: MDRC calculations using management information system data and the baseline survey. This figure reflects services received no more than six months after random assignment.

NOTE: Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

others lacked transportation. As one father said: “Right now, housing is a number one priority. I need a place to live ... my own place.... I can’t stay at my mother’s place.”

Many fathers who worked had inconsistent and unpredictable schedules, making scheduling a challenge. The child’s schedule was another factor; one father said it was difficult to attend Just Beginning sessions because he did not want to take his child away from her set schedule at school—she would miss naptime or lunch. Only Children’s Institute scheduled Just Beginning sessions to occur on the weekends, which could help parents coordinate schedules for children in day care or preschool.

Furthermore, as expected, coordination with coparents to bring young children to Just Beginning sessions proved to be a significant challenge, particularly for those fathers who did not live with their children (about half the fathers in the program group). One father said it was hard to get to Just Beginning sessions because of where his coparent and child lived: If he picked up his child to come to a session, they had approximately a three-hour commute to the fatherhood program by public transportation. Another father



said it was challenging to coordinate with his coparent to get his child to the fatherhood program, though he was able to arrange his custody periods to align with Just Beginning sessions, making it easier for him to bring his child himself. However, fathers with custody issues or visitation restrictions had added challenges to completing Just Beginning. Box 4.3 describes how Just Beginning was implemented for fathers who had supervised visitation with their children.

### **BOX 4.3. JUST BEGINNING AS SUPERVISED VISITATION SUPPORT**

Many fathers, especially those enrolled with Children’s Institute, could have only supervised visitation with their children (meaning they could only see their children with the coparent or another approved adult present) because they had open child welfare cases (that is, cases involving alleged child abuse or neglect). In fact, 35 percent of the fathers enrolled in Just Beginning at Children’s Institute reported at intake that they enrolled in the program because they were ordered by the court to participate in a parenting program.\* The requirements associated with supervised visitation made it somewhat harder to schedule Just Beginning sessions with father and child because, for example, the time the child was available to the father each week was limited. However, Just Beginning facilitators at Children’s Institute and People for People worked with the local child welfare agencies to designate space and time for supervised visitation, so that fathers could use part of their visitation time for the father-child play session portion of Just Beginning sessions.

NOTE: \*Fathers were not ordered to a specific parenting program. Children’s Institute was one of several options they could choose.

The Just Beginning staff at each organization spent significant time and resources to help fathers to overcome their challenges and attend fatherhood services—particularly to get fathers to attend their first Just Beginning sessions. Box 4.4 notes the strategies organizations used to promote participation in Just Beginning, developed with the support of the study team and the curriculum developer.<sup>4</sup>

## **Program Participation for the Two Research Groups**

This section describes how the program group’s participation in services differed from that of the services-as-usual group. Data assessing service receipt are derived from two sources: program engagement data entered by staff members at each organization into the nFORM management information system, and

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**4** To reinforce how important it was to get as many fathers as possible to participate in Just Beginning sessions, the study team offered organizations performance-based payments during the last year of program implementation. Performance-based payments were based on each organization’s progress toward preset benchmarks for the number of fathers enrolled in the study and for the number participating in the first Just Beginning session. The total performance-based payment was the average of the enrollment payment achieved and the participation payment achieved.

#### BOX 4.4. STRATEGIES USED TO PROMOTE PARTICIPATION IN JUST BEGINNING

- **FINANCIAL AND IN-KIND INCENTIVES FOR FATHERS AND CHILDREN.** Fathers received gift cards for participating in the study and two fatherhood programs offered their usual participation incentives. Fathers who participated in Just Beginning sessions received additional incentives: \$25 gift cards after sessions 1, 2, and 5; small toys for their children after each session that reinforced that session's skills; and a certificate of completion and framed photo of father and child after session 5.\* They also received other goods for their children such as diapers and wipes.
- **JUST BEGINNING SESSION SCHEDULING.** Each father at People for People left intake with his first Just Beginning session scheduled to occur later that week. Just Beginning sessions 2 through 5 were scheduled to occur on a consistent day and time that worked for each father.
- **REMINDERS AND CONTACTS.** Fathers received appointment cards when scheduling Just Beginning sessions and calls or texts as reminders in the day or two leading up to the scheduled session. Fathers were called if they missed a session.
- **DADTIME.** This smartphone-based mobile application was available immediately to half the eligible fathers in the Just Beginning program group; the other half gained access to it eight weeks after random assignment. The application sent automated reminders to attend scheduled Just Beginning sessions. It also had interactive tools to help fathers plan for sessions and to apply what they learned in those sessions to subsequent interactions with their children.
- **COPARENT ENGAGEMENT.** Encouraging coparents to participate in a Just Beginning orientation was one method to enlist their cooperation in allowing fathers access to their children. Coparents were eligible for a \$25 incentive for participating in orientation.
- **ADJUSTMENTS TO JUST BEGINNING.** Just Beginning facilitators adjusted the typical approach to Just Beginning session completion to accommodate the schedules of fathers and their children. Examples of such accommodations include combining two sessions, meeting outside of traditional business hours, or meeting a father and child at an off-site location. Just Beginning facilitators at Children's Institute were especially flexible, holding sessions in locations such as child welfare offices, parks, and coparents' homes.
- **THE STRUCTURE OF USUAL SERVICES.** Fathers enrolled at People for People attended workshops daily for seven weeks while fathers enrolled at Seedco engaged in workshops for two weeks. In both cases, Just Beginning facilitators could remind fathers of Just Beginning sessions in person. Furthermore, fathers had access to other services at each organization. The order of other services at People for People was deliberate: Fathers were eligible for certification training if they remained engaged in workshops.

NOTE: \*This was the standard Just Beginning incentive structure; however, People for People modified its approach some to align better with its existing structure, as described in Chapter 2. Fathers had to participate in all scheduled Just Beginning sessions and usual services workshops to earn incentives at People for People.

the six-month follow-up survey responses of fathers enrolled in the study. The nFORM data include all fathers who were randomly assigned whereas the survey data include only survey respondents; both data sets include both research groups and Table 4.3 includes data from both sources.

Although only about half of the program group fathers participated in any Just Beginning sessions, the analysis of participation in other services shows that most fathers (91 percent of the program group and 88 percent of the services-as-usual group) did participate in some services. The similar levels of participation suggest that organizations implementing Just Beginning were able to keep fathers engaged in their existing usual services while integrating the Just Beginning intervention. As shown in the top panel of Table 4.3, which details usual-services receipt by both groups without factoring in Just Beginning participation, there are few statistically significant differences in service receipt between the program group and the services-as-usual group across the three required areas of services the Responsible Fatherhood programs offered: parenting, healthy marriage and relationship skills, and economic stability. The primary differences—in average number of total service contacts and average number of employment service contacts—reflect the way People for People provided employment services to the services-as-usual group; fathers in that group were intentionally offered more employment workshops than the program group. (See Appendix Table D.9.) Other minor differences reflect how service participation was recorded in the management information system and the analysis decisions the study team made. Nevertheless, the overall pattern of service receipt suggests that the implementation of Just Beginning did not take away from the other services offered. As expected, when Just Beginning services are factored into the overall calculations, it becomes clear that the program group received significantly more parenting services than the services-as-usual group.

The survey data represent only follow-up survey respondents. The survey asked broad questions about services related to parenting, healthy marriage and relationships, and economic stability; fathers' answers are not confined to services received at the three organizations in the study, but may also reflect services from other organizations. The overall findings are similar to those derived from the management information system data: Fathers from the two research groups report receiving similar levels of services in the six months before the survey. For example, as shown in Table 4.3, 71 percent of fathers in the program group and the services-as-usual group reported receiving parenting services and nearly 40 percent of both research groups received support to find or keep a job.

However, while the patterns shown by management information system and survey data are the same, the levels of participation they show are not. For example, according to the management information system, 25 percent of the services-as-usual group ever participated in a parenting service, but on the survey, 71 percent of services-as-usual fathers indicated doing so. These and other differences in levels could reflect lapses in memory or could suggest that fathers thought about survey questions somewhat differently from the way the management information system defined categories.<sup>5</sup>

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**5** Most survey respondents indicated that parenting services were most often delivered in workshops. Given what was presented about each fatherhood program in Chapter 2, and that the survey questions did not define parenting services in the same way as the management information system, this pattern suggests that fathers may have considered the whole program to be a “parenting” service, or other components of the programs to be “parenting” services, apart from those defined in those terms in the management information system. Further, according to the management information system, between 56 percent and 58 percent of fathers in the program group and the services-as-usual group participated in an employment service. In contrast, on the survey around

**TABLE 4.3. SERVICE RECEIPT FOR THE JUST BEGINNING PROGRAM GROUP AND SERVICES-AS-USUAL GROUP, SIX MONTHS AFTER RANDOM ASSIGNMENT**

Measure	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	Difference (Effect)	P-Value
<b>Management information system measures<sup>a</sup></b>				
Usual services				
Ever participated in any service (%)	90.5	87.6	2.9	0.205
Average total number of service contacts	13.0	14.5	-1.5*	0.070
Ever participated in a parenting service (%)	24.5	25.4	-0.9	0.766
Average number of parenting service contacts	0.8	0.9	-0.1	0.474
Ever participated in a healthy relationship service (%)	26.1	23.2	2.8	0.371
Average number of healthy relationship service contacts	0.9	0.8	0.0	0.778
Ever participated in an employment service (%)	57.9	55.9	1.9	0.596
Average number of employment service contacts	6.5	8.7	-2.2***	0.003
Ever participated in any other service <sup>b</sup> (%)	77.7	69.7	8.0**	0.014
Average number of other service contacts	5.2	4.5	0.6	0.156
Number of usual service days	13.0	14.5	-1.5*	0.070
Average number of days between first and last service (of any kind) <sup>c</sup>	61.6	62.8	-1.2	0.776
Just Beginning intervention				
Completed at least one session (training, play, and reflection) (%)	53.8	0.3	53.5***	0.000
Average number of sessions completed	2.1	0.0	2.1***	0.000
Average number of hours spent in Just Beginning	3.8	0.0	3.8***	0.000
Coparent ever attended orientation (%)	28.3	0.0	28.3***	0.000
Usual services plus intervention				
Ever participated in any service (%)	91.6	87.6	4.0*	0.075
Ever participated in a parenting service (%)	65.5	25.4	40.1***	0.000
Average number of parenting service days	2.9	0.9	2.0***	0.000
Average number of total service days	15.1	14.5	0.6	0.539
Average number of days between first and last service <sup>c</sup>	68.9	71.0	-2.2	0.629
Average number of days between enrollment and first service <sup>c</sup>	3.6	6.3	-2.6**	0.010
Management information system sample size (total = 738)	368	370		

(continued)

**TABLE 4.3. (CONTINUED)**

Measure	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	Difference (Effect)	P-Value
<b>Survey measures<sup>d</sup></b>				
Ever received any parenting, healthy relationship, or employment service (%)	80.9	82.3	-1.3	0.674
Ever received any parenting service (%)	70.6	70.6	0.0	1.000
Average number of weeks receiving parenting services	5.7	6.5	-0.8	0.146
Average number of hours per week receiving parenting services	4.7	5.7	-1.0	0.107
Parenting services most often delivered... (%)			***	0.000
In a workshop/group setting	65.4	89.0	-23.6	
One-on-one	34.6	11.0	23.6	
Child participated in parenting services... (%)			***	0.000
Never	49.0	74.2	-25.2	
Sometimes/rarely	23.8	15.8	8.1	
Always/often	27.2	10.1	17.1	
Ever received any healthy relationship service (%)	41.8	39.5	2.3	0.561
Average number of weeks receiving healthy relationship services	2.7	2.7	0.0	0.943
Average number of hours per week receiving healthy relationship services	3.1	3.7	-0.6	0.328
Healthy relationship services most often delivered... (%)			***	0.002
In a workshop/group setting	58.4	77.1	-18.7	
One-on-one	41.6	22.9	18.7	
Spouse/partner/coparent participated in healthy relationship services... (%)				0.430
Never	81.3	82.3	-1.0	
Sometimes/rarely	10.0	7.4	2.7	
Always/often	8.7	10.4	-1.7	
Ever received help to find or keep a job	39.5	38.8	0.7	0.867
Employment services most often delivered... (%)				0.262
In a workshop/group setting	48.3	55.7	-7.3	
One-on-one	51.7	44.3	7.3	
Survey sample size (total = 598)	299	299		

(continued)

**TABLE 4.3. (CONTINUED)**

SOURCES: MDRC calculations using management information system data and the six-month follow-up survey. The management information system data include all fathers who were randomly assigned, whereas the survey data include all fathers who responded to the six-month follow-up survey.

NOTES: Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

The p-value indicates the likelihood that the estimated effect (or larger) would have been generated by an intervention with zero true effect.

To assess differences between the research groups, chi-square tests were used for categorical variables and two-tailed t-tests were used for continuous variables.

<sup>a</sup>Management information system measures capture in-person services provided at the organization, including in-person, one-on-one services that were 15 minutes or longer and all group workshops. These measures reflect services received no more than six months after random assignment.

<sup>b</sup>Other services include child support services and other social services such as food assistance, mental health referrals, and legal assistance referrals, for example.

<sup>c</sup>If the first and last service were on the same day or the respondent only attended one service, a value of zero is assigned.

<sup>d</sup>Survey measures capture services provided by any provider, including the organization participating in B3. These measures reflect services received between random assignment and the follow-up survey.

## Summary of Lessons from the Implementation Analysis

Operationally, it turned out to be feasible for organizations with different structures to implement a program that involved fathers, their children, and coparents showing up to sessions. These findings demonstrate that programs were able to manage the logistics of child involvement and coordination with coparents. It was also possible to maintain fathers' participation in existing Responsible Fatherhood programs while implementing an additional intervention, since fathers in the program and services-as-usual groups participated in the usual services at the same rate while the program group received significantly more parenting services.

However, it was difficult to promote high levels of engagement—requiring significant time of Just Beginning staff members. Only about half of the program group fathers participated in at least one Just Beginning session and 37 percent of fathers completed four or five sessions, which was considered adequate exposure to the intervention. Several factors may have contributed to this low percentage. Fathers were not asked whether they were interested in participating in a parenting program with their children before being randomly assigned, so it is likely that some fathers assigned to the program group were not interested in the service. Furthermore, fathers also experienced a variety of challenges participating in Just Beginning with their children (especially fathers who did not live with their children). Staff members spent significant time and resources to help fathers to attend fatherhood services, particularly their first Just Beginning sessions, but some of the challenges may not have been surmountable. Nevertheless, the fatherhood programs saw success in engagement with the fathers who completed at least one Just Beginning session. A high proportion of these fathers continued and received adequate exposure to the intervention. Some structural features of the organizations probably contributed to higher engagement—People for People's practice of scheduling the first session shortly after intake appeared to support higher participation in the initial session, for example.

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40 percent of program group and services-as-usual group fathers reported receiving help to find or keep a job. This difference may be the result of fathers not thinking a service was employment-focused, or not remembering receiving a service, depending on how much time passed between the service and the survey.



# Just Beginning's Effects on Father-Child Relationships

# 5

The Just Beginning intervention was designed to strengthen the father-child relationship by providing fathers with a parenting curriculum that included structured play opportunities. This chapter reports on Just Beginning's effects on multiple dimensions of the father-child relationship as well as on other outcomes, such as fathers' confidence in their parenting abilities. The impact analysis relies upon fathers' responses to a follow-up survey fielded six months after they entered the study.

## Impact Insight

- Just Beginning did not generate statistically significant effects on the primary outcome measures. Specifically, Just Beginning did not generate statistically significant effects on fathers' engagement with their young children, fathers' parenting confidence, father-child relationship quality, or father-child contact.

## Rigorous Evidence on the Effects of Just Beginning

### RESEARCH DESIGN

As described in earlier chapters, the study used an experimental research design to provide evidence on the effects caused by the Just Beginning intervention. Eligible fathers were randomly assigned either to the program group—encouraged to participate in Just Beginning and usual services—or to the services-as-usual group, whose members were not eligible for Just Beginning but could attend the usual services offered by the fatherhood program.

Program effects were estimated as the difference in outcomes between all program group fathers and all fathers in the services-as-usual group.<sup>1</sup> The impact analysis was a test of whether the access to Just Beginning services had effects on fathers' responses on the six-month survey.

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<sup>1</sup> Although it is not the topic of this report, it is worth noting that the DadTime mobile application intervention introduced some slight variations into the experiences of fathers randomly assigned to the program group. These variations had to do with access to DadTime, which reminded fathers to attend Just Beginning sessions and reinforced Just Beginning curriculum content. Fathers in the program group without smartphones did not have access to DadTime reminders or reinforcements. Those with smartphones who were randomly

## SAMPLE

The total impact sample comprised 598 fathers who responded to the six-month follow-up survey, which was 81 percent of the fathers enrolled in the study. Fathers who responded to the follow-up survey were similar in their background characteristics to their counterparts who did not respond to the follow-up survey. Across 16 baseline characteristics covering demographics, employment, and father-child contact and relationship quality, only one difference was statistically significant between survey respondents and nonrespondents. With this number of characteristics compared, it is likely that one statistically significant difference could occur by chance.

As shown in Chapter 3, the program and services-as-usual groups were, on average, equivalent at enrollment in most of their background characteristics (see Table 3.2 and Appendix C for further details).

## OUTCOMES

The study team prespecified 10 “primary outcomes” and a broader set of “secondary outcomes” before estimating program effects.<sup>2</sup> The primary outcomes were those that should have been affected by the intervention, according to its logic model (its theory of how it was supposed to bring about change). The selection of primary outcomes was also informed by prior research and consultation with experts in the fatherhood field. For further details, see the *Building Bridges and Bonds (B3) Study Design Report*.<sup>3</sup>

The primary outcomes provide the core assessment of whether the Just Beginning intervention achieved its goals. The secondary outcomes are a wider variety that may be of substantive and policy interest, but whose results should be considered “exploratory.”<sup>4</sup> One type of secondary outcome is one that falls within one of the primary outcome domains and that the intervention may affect indirectly, though it does not target it directly. For example, the Just Beginning curriculum did not teach parenting skills such as changing diapers or feeding babies, but if Just Beginning were to increase fathers’ parenting comfort and confidence, then they might engage in these caretaking activities more frequently. Other secondary outcomes—such as those related to employment or child support—are in policy-relevant *domains* not targeted by the Just Beginning curriculum. Just Beginning could have an indirect effect in these areas if it strengthened fathers’ relationship with their children, which in turn gave them added motivation to work to support their children financially. A third type of secondary outcome provides more detail about a

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assigned to a Full DadTime group received reminders to attend Just Beginning sessions and application-based reinforcements of the Just Beginning curriculum content during and after the period in which they were attending Just Beginning sessions. Those with smartphones who were randomly assigned to a Partial DadTime group did not receive reminders and only received reinforcements of the curriculum after Just Beginning session attendance had ended. For the purposes of estimating Just Beginning effects, outcomes for all fathers assigned to the program group are averaged together.

- 2 The analysis plan for the Just Beginning impact analysis was registered at the American Economic Association’s registry for randomized controlled trials in May of 2019. It can be accessed at [www.socialscienceregistry.org/trials/4028](http://www.socialscienceregistry.org/trials/4028).
- 3 Harknett, Manno, and Balu (2017).
- 4 Exploratory analyses provide an in-depth look at a subject, but not conclusive evidence.

primary outcome. For example, the primary outcome measure might be a composite measure that puts together several more detailed measures, and those subscales could then be considered secondary outcomes.

All outcome measures were based on fathers' responses on the six-month follow-up survey. The primary outcomes were grouped into the following four domains.

## I Developmentally Appropriate Engagement with the Child and Father-Child Interaction Quality

- *Labeling*: A measure of how often a father talked to his child about the things that the child looked at, grabbed, or pointed to.
- *Verbal engagement*: Whether a father agreed that it was worthwhile to talk to his child.
- *Warm and supportive parenting scale*. How often a father reported expressing verbal and physical affection for his child.
- *Father-child dysfunctional interaction scale*. Derived from an existing Parenting Stress Index, 11 survey items designed to capture a weak or strained father-child relationship.<sup>5</sup>

## 2 Parenting Confidence and Commitment

- Parenting efficacy scale. A scale capturing a father's level of confidence in his parenting abilities in relation to his focal child.

## 3 Father-Child Relationship Quality

- *Overall quality of the parent-child relationship*: A father's assessment of the quality of his relationship with his child.
- *Father's positive and negative feelings about the child*. A scale measure of father-child relationship quality that combined different positive and negative feelings a father might have about his child (for example, "feels disappointed in the focal child" or "feels proud of the focal child").
- *Perceived influence*: A father's perception of how much influence he had on his child's life then and in the future.

## 4 Father-Child Contact

- *Father-child contact*: How frequently a father had seen his child in the previous 30 days.

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<sup>5</sup> Abidin (1990).

- *Father's reliability for planned time with the child.* How often a father canceled plans with his child.

Additional details on these primary outcome measures are provided in Appendix E.

## METHODS

The study estimated Just Beginning's effects on each of the primary and secondary outcomes. Because of the random assignment design, effects can be estimated by comparing the outcomes of the program and services-as-usual groups. To increase the precision of those estimates, the effects are regression-adjusted using baseline characteristics. The analysis pooled the findings from the three organizations together. Appendix E provides further detail on the model specifications and methodology.

In addition to the overall effect estimates on primary and secondary outcomes, effects on outcomes for four prespecified subgroups were also estimated. The subgroup estimates are considered exploratory because the modest sample size of the subgroups does not provide the statistical power that would be needed to detect differences in effects between subgroups unless those differences were quite large. The four subgroups were defined as follows: (1) first-time fathers compared with fathers with other, older children; (2) fathers whose focal children were younger than 18 months compared with those whose children were 18 months and older; (3) fathers who did not reside with their children compared with fathers who did; and (4) fathers whose focal children were boys compared with those whose focal children were girls. The subgroup results are mentioned in this chapter and presented in detail in Appendix Tables E.5 through E.11.

Appendix E also describes results from sensitivity analyses, which are designed to test the robustness of the findings by presenting results using different options for some of the analytic decisions made. The results from the sensitivity analyses are consistent with those presented in this chapter.

## Results

### EFFECTS ON PRIMARY OUTCOMES AND RELATED SECONDARY OUTCOMES

Tables 5.1 through 5.4 present effects for the four primary outcome domains. These tables show that none of the estimated Just Beginning effects on primary outcomes are statistically significant. There is no evidence that Just Beginning had effects on father reports of engagement with focal children, fathers' parenting confidence, father-child relationship quality, or father-child contact. Among a large number of related secondary outcomes presented in Tables 5.1 through 5.4, only one estimated effect is statistically significant.

Table 5.1 presents the estimated effects for four measures of fathers' engagement in activities with their children. Overall, fathers in the program and services-as-usual groups reported similarly high levels of engagement with their young children.

The Just Beginning curriculum encouraged fathers to speak with their children and to label items that children looked at, grabbed, or pointed to, but did not generate statistically significant effects on these parenting behaviors. There was essentially no difference in the frequency of labeling between fathers in the

**TABLE 5.1. JUST BEGINNING EFFECTS ON DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE ENGAGEMENT WITH THE CHILD AND FATHER-CHILD INTERACTION QUALITY**

Outcome	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	Difference (Effect)	Effect Size	P-Value
<b>Primary outcomes</b>					
Father reports using “labeling” (%)					0.984
Rarely or not at all in the past month	14.7	13.7	1.0	0.03	
A few times a month	7.5	7.4	0.1	0.00	
A few times a week	17.1	18.4	-1.3	-0.03	
About once a day	14.2	15.2	-1.0	-0.03	
More than once a day	46.6	45.4	1.2	0.02	
Agrees it is worthwhile to talk to the child (%)	89.1	89.3	-0.2	-0.01	0.928
Engages in warm and supportive parenting (1 = never to 6 = more than once a day)	4.9	5.0	0.0	-0.03	0.685
Father-child dysfunctional interaction (1 = least dysfunctional to 5 = most dysfunctional)	1.8	1.8	0.0	0.05	0.545
<b>Secondary outcomes</b>					
Father-child engagement (1 = not at all in the past month to 6 = more than once a day)					
Caregiving activities	3.8	3.9	-0.1	-0.07	0.346
Learning and play activities	4.1	4.0	0.1	0.06	0.407
Physical play activities	3.9	4.0	0.0	-0.03	0.686
Socialization activities	3.1	3.2	-0.1	-0.07	0.379
Discipline (0 = never to 5 = more than 10 times in the past month)					
Harsh discipline	0.6	0.6	0.1	0.06	0.437
Harsh physical discipline	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.05	0.534
Positive discipline	1.9	1.7	0.1	0.10	0.216
Sample size	299	299			

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on responses to the six-month follow-up survey. The sample includes all fathers who responded to the survey.

NOTES: Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

The p-value indicates the likelihood that the estimated effect (or larger) would have been generated by an intervention with zero true effect.

The effect size is calculated by dividing the estimated effect of the program by the standard deviation of the outcome for the control group.

**TABLE 5.2. JUST BEGINNING EFFECTS ON PARENTING CONFIDENCE AND COMMITMENT**

Outcome	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	Difference (Effect)	Effect Size	P-Value
<b>Primary outcomes</b>					
Parenting efficacy scale (1 = lowest to 5 = highest)	4.7	4.7	0.0	0.03	0.723
<b>Secondary outcomes</b>					
Father follows through on promises made to the child (%)					0.398
Never, rarely, or sometimes	5.4	8.1	-2.7	-0.11	
Often	9.3	8.5	0.8	0.03	
Always or almost always	85.3	83.4	1.9	0.05	
Parenting financial efficacy (1 = lowest to 5 = highest)	4.8	4.6	0.1	0.18**	0.021
Father self-assessment — I am... (%)					0.466
An average parent or a person who has some trouble being a parent	16.1	18.4	-2.3	-0.06	
A better-than-average parent	15.6	17.8	-2.2	-0.06	
A very good parent	68.3	63.8	4.6	0.10	
Decision-making influence (%)					0.304
None	9.6	6.7	2.9	0.11	
Some	22.1	25.8	-3.7	-0.09	
A great deal	68.3	67.4	0.9	0.02	
Father dedication/commitment to child (1 = lowest to 4 = highest)	3.7	3.7	0.0	0.04	0.620
Would miss the child a great deal if couldn't see the child for a month (%)	98.8	99.2	-0.4	-0.04	0.636
Sample size	299	299			

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on responses to the six-month follow-up survey. The sample includes all fathers who responded to the survey.

NOTES: Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

The p-value indicates the likelihood that the estimated effect (or larger) would have been generated by an intervention with zero true effect.

The effect size is calculated by dividing the estimated effect of the program by the standard deviation of the outcome for the control group.

program group and the services-as-usual group: About 61 percent of fathers in each group reported that they engaged in labeling every day. There was a high level of agreement among fathers that it is worthwhile to talk with young children, with 89 percent of fathers in each group agreeing.

Just Beginning also did not generate statistically significant effects on a scale measuring warm and supportive parenting or on one measuring dysfunctional parent-child interactions. Fathers in the program and services-as-usual groups averaged around 5 of 6 on the warm and supportive parenting scale, where higher values indicate more frequent warm and supportive parenting behaviors. And they both averaged 1.8 of 5 on the father-child dysfunctional interaction scale, where higher values indicate more dysfunction.

Table 5.2 presents effects on fathers' parenting confidence and commitment. There was no difference between fathers in the program and the services-as-usual groups in parenting efficacy, with each group averaging 4.7 of 5 (where higher values indicate more parenting confidence). The only outcome in this table

**TABLE 5.3. JUST BEGINNING EFFECTS ON FATHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIP QUALITY**

Outcome	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	Difference (Effect)	Effect Size	P-Value
<b>Primary outcomes</b>					
Overall quality of the father-child relationship (%)					0.868
Poor, fair, or somewhat good	10.0	10.6	-0.6	-0.02	
Very good	25.2	23.4	1.8	0.04	
Excellent	64.8	66.0	-1.2	-0.03	
Father's positive and negative feelings about the child (1 = most negative to 5 = most positive)	4.8	4.8	0.0	-0.04	0.641
Perceived influence (1 = none to 4 = a great deal)	3.9	3.8	0.0	0.07	0.397
<b>Secondary outcomes</b>					
Father's positive feelings about the child (1 = least positive to 5 = most positive)	4.9	4.9	0.0	0.08	0.321
Father's negative feelings about the child (reverse coded) (1 = most negative to 5 = least negative)	4.7	4.8	-0.1	-0.11	0.157
Perceives a great deal of influence (%)	86.6	82.5	4.1	0.11	0.155
Perceives a great deal of influence in the future (%)	95.6	93.9	1.7	0.08	0.355
Sample size	299	299			

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on responses to the six-month follow-up survey. The sample includes all fathers who responded to the survey.

NOTES: Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

The p-value indicates the likelihood that the estimated effect (or larger) would have been generated by an intervention with zero true effect.

The effect size is calculated by dividing the estimated effect of the program by the standard deviation of the outcome for the control group.

for which there was a statistically significant effect was financial parenting efficacy, a measure of fathers' confidence that they could provide for their children financially. On this outcome, fathers in the program group reported higher values, on average, than fathers in the services-as-usual group. This is one of only two statistically significant effects on secondary outcomes, across all domains. Given the number of effects estimated, this statistically significant result should be interpreted with caution.<sup>6</sup>

Table 5.3 shows effects on father-child relationship quality as reported by fathers. There were no statistically significant differences between the program and services-as-usual groups for any of the three measures

**6** Increasing the number of estimates examined increases the likelihood that at least one estimate will be statistically significant by chance, even if the program had no true effect. If 10 independent outcomes are examined, there is a good chance that one of them will show an effect that is statistically significant purely by chance, even if the program is truly ineffective.



**TABLE 5.4. JUST BEGINNING EFFECTS ON FATHER-CHILD CONTACT**

Outcome	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	Difference (Effect)	Effect Size	P-Value
<b>Primary outcomes</b>					
Father-child in-person contact in the past month (%)					0.775
Not at all	8.2	8.7	-0.5	-0.02	
1 to 3 times in the past month	6.2	4.2	2.1	0.09	
1 or 2 times per week	10.0	9.2	0.8	0.03	
3 or 4 times per week	6.1	7.4	-1.3	-0.05	
Every day or almost every day	69.6	70.6	-1.1	-0.02	
Cancels plans with the child (%)					0.660
Often	4.5	6.3	-1.8	-0.08	
Sometimes	25.0	21.9	3.0	0.07	
Rarely	37.5	37.0	0.5	0.01	
Never	33.0	34.8	-1.8	-0.04	
<b>Secondary outcomes</b>					
Father-child contact aside from in-person contact in the past month (%)					0.715
Not at all	9.0	8.1	0.9	0.03	
1 to 3 times	4.9	4.2	0.7	0.03	
1 or 2 times per week	4.8	6.0	-1.2	-0.05	
3 or 4 times per week	7.5	4.9	2.6	0.11	
Every day or almost every day	13.9	13.3	0.6	0.02	
Father lives with focal child	59.8	63.5	-3.7	-0.08	
Number of nights in the past month father and child spent in the same house	19.0	19.9	-0.9	-0.07	0.360
Focal child lives with the father (%)	59.9	63.7	-3.8	-0.08	0.289
Father lives with any of his children (%)	67.4	69.1	-1.6	-0.04	0.631
Father contact with any of his children in the past 30 days <sup>a</sup> (%)					0.727
Saw no children	6.0	6.1	-0.2	-0.01	
Saw some children	21.5	19.1	2.4	0.06	
Saw all children	72.5	74.8	-2.2	-0.05	
Sample size	299	299			

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on responses to the six-month follow-up survey. The sample includes all fathers who responded to the survey.

NOTES: Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

The p-value indicates the likelihood that the estimated effect (or larger) would have been generated by an intervention with zero true effect.

The effect size is calculated by dividing the estimated effect of the program by the standard deviation of the outcome for the control group.

<sup>a</sup>Only fathers with two children or more are included.

of relationship quality. About two-thirds of fathers in each group reported having “excellent” relationships with their children. Fathers in both groups averaged 4.8 out of 5 on the positive and negative feelings scale (where higher values indicate more positive feelings), and 3.8 to 3.9 out of 4 on the influence scale (where higher values indicate more perceived influence on their children).

Table 5.4 presents effects on measures of father-child contact. Again, Just Beginning did not have any statistically significant effects: 70 percent of fathers in both groups reported seeing their children every day or almost every day. Around the same large share of fathers in both groups reported rarely or never canceling plans made with their children.

## EFFECTS ON ADDITIONAL SECONDARY OUTCOME DOMAINS

Tables 5.5 and 5.6 present estimated effects on secondary outcome domains. These domains are less directly connected with the Just Beginning parenting intervention but are included because of their policy relevance. The Just Beginning intervention did not generate any statistically significant effects on outcomes in these domains with one exception: Just Beginning fathers were more likely (by about 8 percentage points) to work “most of the time” or “all of the time” between random assignment and the follow-up survey. This is the second of two statistically significant effects. Given the number of comparisons made between the program and services-as-usual group, this apparent effect may have occurred only by chance.

**TABLE 5.5. JUST BEGINNING EFFECTS ON SECONDARY OUTCOMES: COPARENTING**

Outcome	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	Difference (Effect)	Effect Size	P-Value
<b>Cooperative coparenting (%)</b>					
Coparent and I make a good parenting team	79.7	80.7	-1.1	-0.03	0.737
Coparent tells me I am doing a good job	85.1	83.2	1.9	0.05	0.524
<b>Coparenting challenges subscales (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree)</b>					
Undermining subscale <sup>a</sup>	2.0	2.0	0.0	-0.01	0.937
Conflict subscale <sup>b</sup>	2.0	2.0	0.0	0.01	0.926
Coparent gatekeeping subscale <sup>c</sup>	1.8	1.8	0.0	0.00	0.995
Sample size	299	299			

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on responses to the six-month follow-up survey. The sample includes all fathers who responded to the survey.

NOTES: Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

The p-value indicates the likelihood that the estimated effect (or larger) would have been generated by an intervention with zero true effect.

The effect size is calculated by dividing the estimated effect of the program by the standard deviation of the outcome for the control group.

<sup>a</sup>The undermining subscale combines four items asking whether the father perceives that the coparent undermines him as a father.

<sup>b</sup>The conflict subscale combines five items that capture father and coparent conflicts.

<sup>c</sup>The coparent gatekeeping subscale combines two items asking whether the father perceives that the coparent makes it hard for him to spend time with and be in touch with his child.

**TABLE 5.6. JUST BEGINNING EFFECTS ON ADDITIONAL SECONDARY OUTCOMES:  
STRESS, EMPLOYMENT, AND CHILD SUPPORT**

Outcome	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	Difference (Effect)	Effect Size	P-Value
<b>Perceived stress scale (1 = least to 5 = most)</b>					
Helplessness subscale	2.5	2.4	0.1	0.12	0.123
Self-confidence subscale	3.9	3.8	0.1	0.07	0.355
<b>Employment (%)</b>					
Currently employed	68.2	63.2	5.0	0.10	0.186
Amount worked since random assignment (%)				*	0.090
Seldom/never	16.4	20.0	-3.5	-0.09	
Some of the time	7.4	13.2	-5.8	-0.19	
Half of the time	8.6	7.5	1.1	0.04	
Most of the time	27.5	23.4	4.0	0.09	
All of the time	40.2	36.0	4.2	0.09	
<b>Child support</b>					
Total amount of child support paid for any child (\$)	27.6	26.5	1.1	0.01	0.919
Amount of child support paid compared with amount owed (%)					0.700
Not required to pay any amount	86.5	87.0	-0.5	-0.01	
Paid none of what was required	4.5	5.5	-1.0	-0.05	
Paid some of, all of, or more than what was required	9.0	7.5	1.5	0.05	
Informal support provided to the focal child (number of types from 0 to 7)	3.4	3.7	-0.3	-0.16	0.228
Informal support provided to other children (number of types from 0 to 7)	3.5	3.4	0.1	0.06	0.681
Sample size	299	299			

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on responses to the six-month follow-up survey. The sample includes all fathers who responded to the survey.

NOTES: Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

The p-value indicates the likelihood that the estimated effect (or larger) would have been generated by an intervention with zero true effect.

The effect size is calculated by dividing the estimated effect of the program by the standard deviation of the outcome for the control group.

### EFFECTS ON PRIMARY OUTCOMES FOR SUBGROUPS

As specified in the B<sub>3</sub> analysis plan, effects were estimated for the 10 primary outcome measures for four subgroups defined by the focal child’s age (less than 18 months or 18 months and greater), the focal child’s gender, whether fathers were living with their children when they enrolled, and whether fathers had other, older children. These results appear in Appendix Tables E.5 through E.11.

The tables show whether there was a statistically significant effect for a particular subgroup of fathers (for example, first-time fathers). The tables also indicate whether the *difference* between the effects for one

subgroup of fathers (for example, first-time fathers) and their counterparts (in this example, fathers with other, older children) is statistically significant.

The subgroup results provide some evidence that the Just Beginning intervention was relatively more effective for first-time fathers and fathers who did not live with their children than it was for their counterparts. As shown in Appendix Table E.5, Just Beginning had a positive and statistically significant effect on first-time fathers' perceived influence on their children and did not have a statistically significant effect on fathers with older children, but the difference between the effects is just shy of statistical significance. Just Beginning's effect on warm and supportive parenting for first-time fathers was positive but falls short of statistical significance; it was negative and statistically significant for fathers with older children. The difference in effects between these two subgroups is statistically significant. As shown in Appendix Table E.10, for fathers not living with their children, Just Beginning had a statistically significant effect on reducing how often they canceled plans, while it did not have an effect for fathers who lived with their children. The difference in effects is statistically significant. These subgroup patterns should be interpreted with caution because some effects or differences in effects could appear to be statistically significant by chance given the number of comparisons tested.

## SUPPLEMENTARY ANALYSIS OF VIDEO OBSERVATIONS

A prior study of the Baby Elmo intervention, on which the Just Beginning intervention was modeled, found improvements in fathers' emotional responsiveness, not from self-reports on follow-up surveys, but rather from real-time video observations of father-child interactions. However, these positive findings were generated without a rigorously defined (that is, randomly assigned) control group and, therefore, cannot be considered evidence that the intervention caused the improvements.

To provide causal evidence, the Just Beginning study took a different approach and relied primarily on fathers' survey reports to measure outcomes. Survey reports could be collected from fathers in both the program and services-as-usual groups, allowing for experimental impact estimates and tests for statistical significance. In contrast, real-time video recordings of father-child interactions could only be collected for Just Beginning fathers and not for fathers who were randomly assigned to the services-as-usual group: Fathers in the program group were encouraged to bring their young children to Just Beginning sessions and to participate in father-child play sessions, which could then be recorded. There was no such opportunity to video record fathers in the services-as-usual group interacting with their young children.

To complement the survey analyses, however, the study included a supplementary video study component at People for People. Video recordings of father-child interactions were collected for 53 fathers and their children. For these father-child pairs, Just Beginning play sessions were video recorded, coded, and analyzed. The video study suggested some pattern of improvement in father-child interaction quality over the course of Just Beginning sessions, in particular among the fathers who did not live with their children. Further details on the video study are described in a separate paper.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Harknett, Mancini, and Knox (forthcoming).

## Discussion and Implications

The Just Beginning intervention aimed to strengthen the relationships between fathers and their young children through a five-session parenting curriculum that involved direct engagement of the focal children. Chapter 4 described what the team learned about program implementation: Just Beginning was implemented with fidelity, about half of fathers in the program group participated in the intervention, and 37 percent of fathers in the program group attended the recommended number of four or five sessions. The analysis in this chapter shows that the intervention did not generate statistically significant effects on the primary father-reported outcomes that it targeted. These outcomes spanned the areas of fathers' engagement in activities with their young children, fathers' parenting confidence, fathers' reports of the quality of their relationship with their children, and father-child contact. Just Beginning generated statistically significant effects on two secondary outcomes.<sup>8</sup>

The lack of program effects could be related to challenges in measuring and quantifying father-child relationship quality. The impact analysis relied on fathers' responses on a follow-up survey six months after program participation, which may have limited the study's ability to detect subtle or short-lived program effects. Fathers in the program and the services-as-usual groups both reported very high levels of parenting engagement, confidence, father-child relationship quality, and father-child contact, raising the question of whether these measures are sensitive enough to detect true differences in parenting and parent-child relationships. However, the recent Parent and Children Together evaluation reported a small but statistically significant effect on warm and supportive parenting using a survey measure similar to one of the primary ones in the Just Beginning study.<sup>9</sup>

The lack of program effects could also be explained in part by the characteristics of fathers in the study. In designing the study, the team projected that most fathers would not live with their children, because among the fathers the three fatherhood programs were serving before the study, most did not live with their children. But about half of fathers in the study were living with their children when they enrolled, most had previous parenting experience, and most saw their children nearly every day. Four of five fathers reported a very good relationship with their young children when they enrolled. These reports of strong father-child involvement and relationship quality at the start of the study left little room for improvement.

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**8** Since participation was low, the study team considered conducting additional analyses of whether actual program participation led to effects (sometimes called “treatment on the treated” analyses). Ultimately, the team decided against them. Treatment on the treated estimates would be a promising strategy if the estimated effects were statistically significant and were in the intended, positive direction. In that case, the treatment on the treated effects would be larger, since they would represent the effects among those who participated, but their statistical significance would generally remain unchanged. But neither precondition is the case for the Just Beginning effect estimates. None of the estimated effects is statistically significant and among the 10 primary outcomes, none is unambiguously in a positive direction. For 5 out of 10 primary outcomes, the estimated effect is 0.0 percentage points. For 1 of the 10 primary outcomes, the estimate effect is in the opposite direction to what was expected. The remaining 4 primary outcomes are categorical variables, and the directions of the effect estimates are ambiguous (because they show either small increases for both the highest and lowest categories or small decreases for both the highest and lowest categories). Given this pattern of effects, the team did not think it would be fruitful to estimate treatment on the treated effects. However, data for this study will be archived, and researchers may request the data and conduct these analyses.

**9** Avellar et al. (2018).

The large share of fathers living with their children may have stemmed from the eligibility requirements that fathers had to have seen their children in the previous 30 days and that children had to be 3 or younger. Recruitment challenges may also have played a role, as organizations engaged in broader recruitment through different channels than usual to meet enrollment targets.

Previous nonexperimental evidence from the Baby Elmo study found more promising results than this analysis finds for Just Beginning.<sup>10</sup> There are several possible reasons that may each, in part, explain the difference between these two studies.

First, the fathers served by the two programs differed starkly. Baby Elmo targeted teenage fathers in juvenile detention centers, and Just Beginning targeted fathers who were not incarcerated and who were seeking services from a Responsible Fatherhood program. Fathers in the Baby Elmo study had far more room for improvement in their parenting and father-child relationship quality than Just Beginning study fathers did. It is possible that the Just Beginning curriculum is more effective for first-time fathers or fathers who do not live with their children, because those fathers may have more room for improvement. This hypothesis has some limited support from the Just Beginning subgroup results, which showed statistically significant effects for subgroups of first-time fathers and for fathers who did not live with their children. Further, in an analysis of video recorded father-child interactions (described in a separate paper), the team also found more positive patterns of improvement for fathers who did not live with their children than for fathers who lived with their children.<sup>11</sup>

A second contrast between Baby Elmo and Just Beginning is the number of program sessions. The Baby Elmo intervention involved up to 10 sessions compared with 5 for Just Beginning. As noted in Chapter 1, the curriculum developer made the choice to consolidate the curriculum content into five sessions before the start of the Just Beginning study, because in the Baby Elmo study most fathers began to see improvements by the fourth or fifth session. Although the developer felt that four or five sessions were an adequate number to generate positive effects, the abridged curriculum may have weakened the potential effects of the program.

Third, the assessments of Baby Elmo were based on video recorded, real-time father-child interactions, which may have been more sensitive to detecting changes than the survey measures used in the Just Beginning impact analysis. The Baby Elmo research design was also nonexperimental, based on growth curve models of changes in father-child interactions across Baby Elmo sessions, and the Just Beginning study used an experimental design. Although the experimental design is more rigorous, given the major additional differences between the studies in sample composition, maximum number of sessions, and measurement, it cannot be assumed that the different study results stem only from research-design differences.

Finally, the lack of effects in the Just Beginning study could also be explained, in part, by the program group's participation level. Only 37 percent of fathers in the program group attended four or five sessions, the recommended dose established by the curriculum developer.

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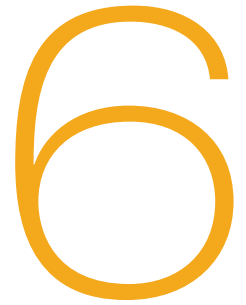
**10** Barr et al. (2011); Barr et al. (2014).

**11** Harknett, Mancini, and Knox (forthcoming).

A potential direction for future research is to further consider whether the Just Beginning curriculum is, in fact, an effective tool for first-time fathers, fathers who do not live with their children, or other groups of fathers with more room for improvement in their parenting and parent-child relationships. Although far from definitive, the findings from the previous Baby Elmo research, from the Just Beginning subgroup analysis, and from the Just Beginning video observation study are all consistent with the theory that the Just Beginning curriculum is most effective for these types of fathers.



# The Cost of Delivering Just Beginning



The cost analysis describes the cost of implementing the Just Beginning intervention within the organizations' existing Responsible Fatherhood programs during a period of relative stability in enrollment. The goal is to illustrate to fatherhood practitioners the potential costs of adding a parent-child intervention to their program services.

## Cost Insights

This chapter describes the costs of implementing Just Beginning at Children's Institute, People for People, and Seedco over the two years from October 1, 2016 to September 30, 2018. The overall cost was \$3,220 per father assigned to the program group. That cost breaks down as follows:

- Nearly one-third (\$1,035 per program group father) was for outreach and enrollment. These costs cover the effort to recruit and enroll fathers and engage coparents around the time of enrollment.
- Nearly half (\$1,483 per program group father) was for planning and delivering Just Beginning sessions.
- The remaining \$702 per program group father covered training and technical assistance.

## Methodology and Data Sources

This analysis focuses on the in-program costs to organizations of operating the Just Beginning intervention. It describes the costs of delivering the Just Beginning intervention in a "steady state" during the two-year implementation period after the training and certification period (October 2016 to September 2018). Start-up costs are discussed in Box 6.1, but are not included in the analysis because the time period when Just Beginning facilitators were being certified through practice sessions is not likely to represent implementation decisions made outside of a demonstration study context.

The cost analysis uses the "ingredients" cost method: It identifies all in-program costs associated with components of the Just Beginning intervention, develops a price for each component using the financial data organizations have available, and sums the component prices.<sup>1</sup> Box 6.2 provides a further discussion of cost ingredients. The cost analysis draws from data collected for the implementation analysis, including a portion of the staff survey that asked how staff members spent their time, along with interviews and focus groups with program staff members. It also draws on financial information provided by organizations.

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<sup>1</sup> Belfield, Bowden, and Levin (2018).

### **BOX 6.1. CONSIDERING POTENTIAL JUST BEGINNING START-UP COSTS**

In addition to the ongoing costs of delivering the Just Beginning intervention, practitioners should consider the start-up costs associated with adding a new intervention. In the context of the Just Beginning study, start-up costs covered in-person training offered by the curriculum developer, the time program staff members spent participating in the certification process, and the up-front cost of video recorders for virtual observations and coaching. Start-up may also require programs to hire and orient new people if their existing staff cannot take on the new effort, and to find and outfit play spaces for the father-child interactions.

### **BOX 6.2. HIDDEN COSTS OF ADDING A NEW INTERVENTION**

When considering whether to add an intervention like Just Beginning, it is easy to think of the obvious costs associated with delivering it, such as the staff time required to lead sessions and the incentives or supplies needed for participants. The goal of a cost analysis is to break the program into its many ingredients, which can help uncover hidden costs associated with delivering it. Program providers should consider these additional cost ingredients that also make up the full cost of the intervention:

- Time spent by staff members to coordinate schedules for attendance, to ensure children can attend and to reschedule missed sessions
- Administrative time for additional meetings, data entry, and reporting
- Staff time, mileage, and other transit costs for traveling to deliver the intervention or expand outreach activities
- Training and certification in the intervention for new staff members due to turnover or promotions
- Ongoing technical assistance or professional development for staff members to ensure fidelity to the curriculum
- Additional facilities costs to support more office space, keep up existing spaces, and add play space

There are also costs to participants that programs can choose how to factor into the forms of support they might offer. Participants could have material costs of attendance related to travel or meals, and opportunity costs of using their time on Just Beginning sessions instead of other things. In the Just Beginning study, organizations usually offered financial incentives and forms of support such as bus passes. Some programs were structured in ways that also helped address the time and travel burdens on participants.

Cost information was collected and analyzed at the organization level first, then pooled to produce an average cost across the three organizations. In cases where the actual prices for components were not readily available, cost estimates were established using program budget information or published data. For example, facilities costs were calculated using average local rents and the square footage needed for offices and play space. Finally, costs were adjusted for inflation to reflect their value in fiscal year (FY) 2018. These total costs were then divided by the number of participants who were assigned to receive Just Beginning to arrive at per-participant costs.

## Cost Categories

### OUTREACH AND ENROLLMENT

As shown in Table 6.1, outreach and enrollment costs were \$1,035 per father recruited into the program group. To calculate the costs associated with this category most accurately, the analysis first determined the costs for all fathers enrolled in the study—both the program and services-as-usual groups. (As described in Chapter 3, the Just Beginning staff spent time recruiting fathers with children who fit the eligibility criteria for the intervention; about half of these fathers were then assigned to the program group.) Then the analysis determined the portion of those costs associated with program group fathers to arrive at the totals shown in Table 6.1.

One category of the costs shown covers the time spent to enroll all eligible fathers into the study, to enroll fathers assigned to the program group into Just Beginning, and to engage coparents in the initial orientation. A second category covers staff costs for administrative activities related to outreach and enrollment, including scheduling, attending meetings, and performing data entry. Some program staff members also traveled to recruit participants, so the table also reflects the costs of their time and travel reimbursements.

### PLANNING AND SERVICE DELIVERY

Just Beginning planning and service-delivery costs totaled \$1,483 per Just Beginning father. Direct staffing costs of delivering the intervention covered staff labor for planning, coordinating, and delivering the Just Beginning intervention. Staff time for associated administrative activities includes time associated with scheduling, attending meetings, and performing data entry.

Organizations provided travel reimbursements for staff members and delivered incentives and travel support to program participants as described in Chapter 3. Program supplies and materials, including toys for the child in each session, were also provided. All three organizations also offered childcare as an option for fathers if they wanted it during the reflection session after play. Facilities costs cover space for the father-child interaction and office space for staff members working on Just Beginning.

### TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Training and technical assistance cost \$702 per Just Beginning father. Technical assistance includes fidelity monitoring and coaching for Just Beginning facilitators delivered by the curriculum developer. Training for new staff members hired due to turnover or promotions is also reflected, as are staff labor costs for

**TABLE 6.1. COSTS PER JUST BEGINNING PROGRAM GROUP FATHER**

Category	Cost per Participant (\$)
<b>Outreach and enrollment</b>	1,035
Staffing for outreach and enrollment activities	483
Management and administrative support	382
Supplies, staff travel, facilities, and intermediary costs	170
<b>Planning and service delivery</b>	1,483
Staffing for planning and service delivery	619
Management and administrative support	273
Participant incentives, engagement support, and childcare	156
Supplies, staff travel, facilities, and intermediary costs	435
<b>Training and technical assistance</b>	702
Staffing for training and technical assistance	75
Technical assistance provider	628
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,220</b>

SOURCES: MDRC calculations using management information system enrollment and participation data, staff survey data, qualitative interview and focus group responses, site invoices, and financial statements.

NOTES: Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

This analysis represents average costs in the two-year period from October 1, 2016 to September 30, 2018.

When site data were unavailable, MDRC used available data sources to estimate costs.

participation in these activities. Costs varied significantly between fiscal years 2017 and 2018, indicating that even after the initial training period, organizations continued to reduce their level of engagement with the curriculum developer.

## Cost Drivers and Variations

Recruitment costs were \$1,203 in FY 2017 per Just Beginning group member and fell to \$937 in FY 2018. Enrollment numbers in FY 2018 were slightly higher than in FY 2017, so most of this difference resulted from a reduction in total program costs, reflecting a lower level of effort on recruitment in FY 2018. Planning and service-delivery costs remained similar across the two years, at \$1,563 in FY 2017 and \$1,408 in FY 2018, due to slightly lower staffing costs and slightly higher enrollment in FY 2018, which indicates the program grew more efficient over time.

Training and technical assistance costs in FY 2017 were \$981 per participant and fell to \$436 per participant in FY 2018. These costs fell due to changes in the intervention's technical assistance approach, with the curriculum developers reducing in-person observations and coaching visits in FY 2018 while maintaining video coaching and other remote technical assistance activities. Providers should consider the

number of staff members they plan to train and the mode of delivery when considering the potential cost of ongoing training and technical assistance.

Though all the organizations incurred costs in the same basic areas, various contextual factors (such as geographic spread) and implementation factors (such as staffing structures) resulted in cost differences among them. For example, Seedco was an intermediary to two local community-based organizations and incurred additional costs to support implementation. Children’s Institute’s facilities costs were higher because the organization operated Just Beginning at four locations. It was also the only organization to incur staff travel costs for service delivery.

## Comparisons with Other Programs

There is little cost information available on parenting interventions that involve parents and their children, so it is difficult to gauge whether the costs of Just Beginning are similar to those of similar interventions. The descriptive study of Baby Elmo in its juvenile detention setting describes the program as likely to be cost-effective because of its use of prerecorded media and reliance on existing staff members or volunteers.<sup>2</sup> However, no actual cost studies of Baby Elmo have been conducted.

Furthermore, there are few cost studies of any fatherhood programs available as points of comparison, let alone cost studies of fatherhood services that engage both father and child. Since Just Beginning was implemented in a community-based setting for the B3 evaluation, it may be appropriate to compare Just Beginning with other parent-child interventions offered in the community. Home visiting models share a similar individual intervention format focused on parenting skills: They provide information, resources, and support to expectant parents and families with young children—typically infants and toddlers—family by family, in their homes. An evaluation of Family Check-Up (a brief, three-session home visiting intervention), found average costs of \$1,066 per family.<sup>3</sup> Another multisite analysis of home visiting programs found average costs of \$6,583, ranging from a minimum of \$2,122 to a maximum of \$13,962.<sup>4</sup> In that study, the enrollment period for the programs averaged 44 weeks, a much longer participation period than the average for Just Beginning (shown in Chapter 4 in Table 4.2). While these analyses provide some reference point for interventions that engage parents and children, they do not offer a direct comparison with similar programs within the fatherhood field.

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<sup>2</sup> King, Barr, and Woolard (2015).

<sup>3</sup> Kuklinski et al. (2020).

<sup>4</sup> Burwick and Zaveri (2014).

# Summary and Lessons for the Field



The Just Beginning intervention represents a novel approach to supporting fathers in parenting their young children by engaging fathers and children together in a skills-based approach. The intervention also offers an orientation session for coparents, whose cooperation is often necessary to allow young children to attend sessions. In contrast, Responsible Fatherhood programs typically offer didactic parenting workshops for groups of fathers without engaging children or coparents.

At the outset of this study, there were questions about the feasibility of implementation. Could Just Beginning be added without taking away from existing services? Would fathers be willing and able to attend program sessions with their young children? A lot was learned about the answers to these questions and others throughout the study. Although the implementation of the program involved a great deal of effort on the part of the program staff and on the part of the study team providing technical assistance, from an implementation perspective, Just Beginning was generally successful. It was possible to implement the intervention in addition to existing fatherhood services across three organizations with different structures and usual-service options. Organizations were able to maintain fathers' participation in their existing Responsible Fatherhood services while implementing Just Beginning. Fifty-four percent of fathers attended at least one Just Beginning session with their young children, and 70 percent of those fathers attended at least four sessions, which the curriculum developer considered adequate exposure to the intervention. In other words, 37 percent of fathers in the program group attended at least the first four of the five sessions.

However, the Just Beginning intervention did not produce statistically significant effects on any of the primary outcomes it targeted. The intervention had no discernable effects on fathers' engagement in activities with their children, fathers' parenting confidence, father-child relationship quality, or father-child contact.

The cost analysis illustrates the potential costs of delivering the Just Beginning intervention within a community-based fatherhood program. The intervention involved considerable program resources to recruit and engage eligible fathers and then involve coparents and children.

## Study Limitations and Implications

The Just Beginning intervention targeted fathers with children between 2 months and 3 years of age whom they had seen in the past 30 days. Targeting fathers with young children provided an opportunity for the intervention to strengthen the father-child relationship at a formative stage. Targeting fathers who had recently seen their children was designed to make it more feasible for them to participate with those children. However, these narrow eligibility criteria involved trade-offs.

First, only a small share of fathers interested in fatherhood services were eligible for Just Beginning. Only 23 percent of the fathers screened were found to be eligible for the intervention, meaning this program served a relatively small share of the overall fatherhood program population.

Second, fathers entered the Just Beginning program with limited room for improvement in their parenting and father-child relationships. Eighty-one percent of fathers reported very good relationship quality with their children when they enrolled and 65 percent reported seeing their children every day. More than half of fathers were living with their children when they enrolled, and, because it was an eligibility requirement, all fathers had seen their children in the past month. The relatively strong ties between fathers and focal children at the outset of the Just Beginning study was probably a product of only including fathers who had seen their children in the previous 30 days, and of restricting the sample to fathers with focal children under 3, since most fathers remain involved with their children in their early years.

In comparison, in the Parents and Children Together (PACT) study of four Responsible Fatherhood programs, a smaller share of fathers lived with their focal children (37 percent) and had seen their children in the previous month (68 percent). Notably, the PACT study found the fatherhood programs had effects on fathers' engagement in age-appropriate activities with their focal children and on their nurturing parenting behavior. Focal children in the PACT study were much older than those in Just Beginning (8 years old on average), and fathers in the PACT study began with more room for improvement in their father-child relationships than fathers in Just Beginning.<sup>1</sup>

If Just Beginning could have targeted fathers who were less engaged with their children, there probably would have been more room for improvement. In fact, Baby Elmo did target such fathers by targeting teenage fathers in detention centers, who had fewer opportunities to engage with their children. However, in a community-based fatherhood program setting, targeting the less-engaged fathers would have exacerbated recruitment and participation challenges.

Reflecting on the study experience, the fatherhood field could seek out opportunities to balance the trade-offs involved in targeting a program like Just Beginning. One avenue for consideration is implementing a program like Just Beginning in a Responsible Fatherhood program that serves many fathers with supervised visitation orders. This group of fathers may be more similar to the Baby Elmo fathers in that they have less opportunity to engage with their children and may then benefit more from an intervention like Just Beginning. In fact, some fathers in Just Beginning did have supervised visitation orders, and it was feasible for the organizations to structure the intervention sessions as supervised visits. Of the three organizations implementing Just Beginning, Children's Institute had the largest share of fathers who probably had supervised visitation orders—35 percent of fathers there said they were ordered by the court to participate in a parenting program, and it is likely that most of those fathers had supervised visitation orders. An exploratory analysis of effects at the three sites (not shown) suggests the potential for more positive program impacts among such fathers, though the sample sizes involved are small.

From an evaluation perspective, Just Beginning's narrow eligibility criteria also made it challenging to recruit enough fathers to get a large enough sample size. Furthermore, the marker of seeing the focal

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<sup>1</sup> Avellar et al. (2018).



child in the last 30 days was not a guarantee that the father had regular access to the child. While organizations did engage fathers, children, and coparents, doing so required a large investment of staff time. Meanwhile, the intervention did not spend a large number of hours with fathers working on new skills, with only five sessions maximum. Given that Just Beginning offered few hours of a service, had a relatively low percentage of fathers in the program group receiving an adequate number of sessions, placed a heavy implementation burden on the staff, and failed to generate statistically significant effects, it is clear that some modifications would be necessary to potentially generate better results. The following possibilities for future investigation draw on the lessons from this evaluation:

- 1 As suggested above, since this study has demonstrated that operating Just Beginning in a community-based setting is feasible, could Just Beginning have impacts on outcomes with a different group of community-based fathers who need it more?
- 2 What other kinds of adaptations might bolster the impacts of Just Beginning, apart from limiting the target group to fathers who do not see their children as much? Adaptations to consider might be to add more at-home activities to reinforce learning between sessions or add more sessions so fathers have more opportunity to engage with the curriculum.
- 3 Fatherhood programs predominantly offer group-based activities. Should future research consider adapting and testing Just Beginning in a group setting?
- 4 Now that this evaluation has shown that fatherhood programs can engage fathers and children together in program services, are there alternative curricular approaches that may have more of an impact for these fathers and their children?

Separate from the Just Beginning intervention itself, this study has valuable contributions to make at a time when the service-delivery environment has changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic (although data collection for this study concluded before 2020). With three organizations, curriculum developers, and study team members located across the country, in-person gatherings were limited. Instead, the curriculum developers and study team capitalized on technology to build and maintain connections. The curriculum developers provided regularly scheduled virtual coaching and fidelity monitoring to each Just Beginning facilitator; the curriculum developers were also available for impromptu calls from Just Beginning facilitators. Realizing the value of connections among staff members implementing Just Beginning across multiple organizations, the study team and curriculum developers developed a community-building approach. The virtual community for peer learning and collaboration provided space for staff members to build relationships with one another. Lessons from this aspect of the B3 experience can be found in MDRC's collection of resources for practitioners and policymakers in response to the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>2</sup>

The Just Beginning experience is informing the next phase of evidence building in the Responsible Fatherhood field. The latest federally funded study, Strengthening Implementation of Responsible Fatherhood

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2 See [www.mdrc.org/publication/connecting-staff-and-strengthening-training-remote-learning-communities](http://www.mdrc.org/publication/connecting-staff-and-strengthening-training-remote-learning-communities), for example.

programs (SIRF), is exploring the challenges of recruiting, enrolling, and engaging fathers—all aspects of program operations that lessons from Just Beginning will inform.<sup>3</sup> In SIRF, fatherhood programs will test promising approaches to these implementation challenges, which may in turn contribute to the strong implementation of Just Beginning or other curricula that involve father-child interactions in the future.

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**3** See [www.mdrc.org/project/strengthening-implementation-responsible-fatherhood-programs-sirf](http://www.mdrc.org/project/strengthening-implementation-responsible-fatherhood-programs-sirf).

## APPENDIX

# A

Glossary, Data  
Sources, and  
Implementation  
Analysis  
Methods



# Glossary

**APPENDIX TABLE A.1. GLOSSARY**

<b>TERM</b>	<b>MEANING</b>
Building Bridges and Bonds (B3) study	A study funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation and the Office of Family Assistance in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that tested three program approaches to supporting fathers with low incomes: a parenting curriculum called Just Beginning, a custom-built mobile application called DadTime, and a cognitive-behavioral employment intervention that paired traditional job-readiness services with cognitive behavioral skill building.
Community-based organization	A public or private organization that works to meet community needs. All of the organizations participating in the Just Beginning study are community-based organizations.
Coparent	An additional primary caregiver of a child.
Curriculum developers	Developers of the Just Beginning curriculum and technical assistance providers (specific to the curriculum).
Efforts to engage fathers	Methods staff members used to encourage or promote father participation in services.
Engagement contacts	Outreach attempts made by Responsible Fatherhood program staff members to fathers to encourage them to participate in services.
Evaluation team or study team	The MDRC and MEF staff members who worked on the Just Beginning Study.
Experimental design	A study—such as B3—that uses a random assignment research design.
Exploratory	An in-depth look at a subject, but not conclusive evidence.
Facilitators	Staff members facilitating Just Beginning sessions with program group fathers.
Fidelity	Facilitators’ adherence to the Just Beginning curriculum and competent execution of facilitation strategies.
Focal child	The child who participated in Just Beginning sessions with the father.
Intervention	The model being tested in the study.
Job readiness	General services to prepare fathers for employment, such as workshops dedicated to résumé building or interviewing.
Just Beginning	The parenting curriculum tested in the B3 study that was implemented by three Responsible Fatherhood grantee organizations: Children’s Institute in Los Angeles, California; People for People, Inc. in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Seedco in New York, New York.

TERM	MEANING
Just Beginning study	The study of the parenting approach, Just Beginning, as part of the B3 study.
Management information system	A computer-based system used to capture information about program participants and the activities they engage in with the program's staff.
nFORM	The management information system federal Responsible Fatherhood grantees are required to use to collect and report performance-measurement data.
Nonexperimental	A study design not involving random assignment.
Participants	Fathers who consented to be randomly assigned as part of the study.
Program group	Fathers randomly assigned to participate in Just Beginning in addition to the usual services.
Reentry service provider	An organization that provides resources to people who have been involved in the justice system.
Responsible Fatherhood programs	Federally funded programs that focus on one or more of the following three areas: promoting or sustaining marriage, promoting responsible parenting, and fostering economic stability.
Services-as-usual group	Fathers randomly assigned to only receive the usual services from the Responsible Fatherhood programs in the study.
Technical assistance	Ongoing support from the study team and curriculum developers to organizations in the study with the intention of strengthening service delivery and ensuring adherence to the study design.

## Data Sources

The Just Beginning process and impact studies used a variety of data sources. For the implementation analysis the research team collected data from surveys administered to fathers and staff, and from in-depth interviews with staff members, fathers, and coparents. The implementation analysis also drew on direct observations of service delivery and participation data collected by each organization through the nFORM management information system. For the impact analysis the research team used baseline and follow-up data from surveys administered to fathers. These data sources are summarized in Appendix Table A.2 and described in more detail below.

### IMPACT ANALYSIS DATA

The impact analysis draws on the baseline and six-month follow-up surveys. The surveys collected data on service receipt; household and family structure; father-child contact; fathers' engagement in particular caregiving, learning, and recreational activities with children; father-child relationship quality; fathers'

**APPENDIX TABLE A.2. DATA SOURCES FOR THE JUST BEGINNING STUDY**

DATA SOURCE	SAMPLE	TIMING	STUDY	
			PROCESS	IMPACT
<b>Qualitative</b>				
Semistructured staff interviews	Staff members who worked with program and services-as-usual groups (65 interviews)	During site visits in the spring/summer of 2017 and 2018	<b>x</b>	
Focus groups and one-on-one interviews with fathers	A small group of fathers randomly assigned to the program group (23 fathers)	During site visits in the spring/summer of 2017 and 2018	<b>x</b>	
Focus groups and one-on-one interviews with coparents	A small group of coparents of children participating in Just Beginning (10 coparents)	During site visits in the spring/summer of 2017 and 2018	<b>x</b>	
Document review	Recruitment materials, forms used, the curriculum used, and other documents from the B3 technical assistance team	Throughout the study period	<b>x</b>	
Observations of workshops	Program and services-as-usual groups	During site visits in the spring/summer of 2017 and 2018	<b>x</b>	
<b>Quantitative</b>				
Baseline survey	Fathers in the program and services-as-usual groups	During enrollment, before random assignment		<b>x</b>
Six-month follow-up survey	Fathers in the program and services-as-usual groups	Six months after enrollment	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>
Management information system (nFORM)	Fathers in the program and services-as-usual groups	Throughout the study period	<b>x</b>	
Text message survey	Fathers in the program and services-as-usual groups with cell phones	From January 2017 to December 2018	<b>x</b>	
Staff surveys	Staff members who worked with program and services-as-usual groups	Once between December 2017 and February 2018	<b>x</b>	
Survey quality and fidelity rating	Just Beginning facilitators	Throughout the study period	<b>x</b>	
Staff coaching tracker	Just Beginning facilitators	Throughout the study period	<b>x</b>	
Expenditures	Just Beginning organizations	Throughout the study period	<b>x</b>	
Census data	Locations where Just Beginning operated	As needed	<b>x</b>	

commitment to their children; parenting confidence; discipline practices; father-coparent relationship quality; child support; employment; and perceived stress.

### ***Baseline Survey***

A survey was administered to each father at the time he enrolled in the study, before random assignment, as part of the program intake process. Baseline survey data were used to describe the characteristics of fathers in the study, to assess whether fathers assigned to the program group and the services-as-usual group were similar at the start of the study, to provide baseline measures of the outcomes studied in the impact analysis, and to define subgroups for impact analyses.

The baseline surveys were self-administered, meaning fathers took them without the help of interviewers. Fathers completed the baseline surveys on tablets or computers. To address literacy issues, fathers had the option to listen to audio recordings of the survey questions. Fathers could also decline the audio recording and read the questions themselves.

### ***Six-Month Follow-Up Survey***

Follow-up surveys were conducted 5 to 11 months after enrollment to measure the outcomes of both research groups. The follow-up survey was a computer-assisted personal interviewing survey: An interviewer was guided through the survey questions by a computer, reading questions aloud to the father and recording his responses.

## **IMPLEMENTATION ANALYSIS QUALITATIVE DATA**

The study team collected qualitative data during site visits conducted in 2017 and 2018. The team interviewed staff members one-on-one and in small groups, asking questions about how Just Beginning was implemented, including successes and challenges—and the resources needed to achieve successes and meet challenges. Additionally, some fathers in the study participated in one-on-one interviews or focus group discussions in which they gave their perspectives on the program, staff, and services. The study team also conducted one-on-one interviews and focus groups with coparents, and observed group workshops for fathers in the program and services-as-usual groups. Finally, the study team reviewed a variety of documents from the organizations, the curriculum developers, and the B3 technical assistance team, including recruitment materials, forms, the curriculum used, and documentation of program activities.

## **IMPLEMENTATION ANALYSIS QUANTITATIVE DATA**

### ***Six-Month Follow-Up Survey***

The same six-month survey described above also included questions about participation in various services related to parenting, healthy relationships, and employment.



### ***Management Information System Data***

The study used participation data tracked in a management information system called nFORM (Information, Family Outcomes, Reporting, and Management) that was developed for Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood federal grantees as a way for them to report performance to the federal government. All Responsible Fatherhood federal grantees are required to use nFORM to track various performance measures. The staff at each program organization used these data to track participation in every type of program service for each father in the study. The data include information on the different types of services that are offered both individually and in group settings, making it possible to track the amount and content of services received by fathers in both research groups. Staff members also recorded Just Beginning attendance and whether a Just Beginning session included the learning, father-child play, and reflection components.

### ***Text Message Surveys***

The B3 study used an innovative data-collection method to gather in real time fathers' perspectives about the services they received. Between January 2017 and December 2018, short mobile phone surveys, delivered by text to fathers in both the program and services-as-usual groups, collected fathers' perspectives about the programs, their challenges, and the support they received while engaging in them. Actively participating fathers received up to five short surveys of up to eight questions each over the first five to six weeks of participation. The team also used text message surveys to gather staff members' perspectives about their experiences with both services as usual and Just Beginning. A total of 2,574 text message surveys were sent and 21 percent were answered.

### ***Staff Survey***

Between December 2017 and February 2018, a web-based survey was sent to all staff members working with fathers in the study. This survey gathered information about staff members' professional backgrounds, their perspectives on the work they did with fathers, and their roles in implementing the program. The survey also gathered information about how they spent their time on a variety of tasks associated with program operations.

### ***Service Quality and Fidelity Rating***

Throughout the study period, the curriculum developers closely monitored how Just Beginning facilitators were implementing the intervention. Monitoring occurred through in-person or recorded observations of Just Beginning session delivery. Each session was rated using a prespecified rubric to determine the quality of service delivery and fidelity to the Just Beginning model.

### ***Staff Coaching Tracker***

Curriculum developers documented all coaching interactions they had with Just Beginning facilitators—both planned and unplanned calls.

## *Expenditures*

The study team collected expenditure data during the implementation analysis. These data were used to assess the costs of each intervention. The team reviewed organizations' budgets and memorandums of understanding, and tabulated invoices submitted for reimbursement to MDRC. If any information was missing, the cost team requested it from the organizations.

## *Census Data*

Historical administrative data from the Census Bureau were used to describe the larger contexts in which Just Beginning was implemented.

## Implementation Analysis Methodology

The implementation analysis is based on the qualitative and quantitative data sources outlined above. The data collected aimed to address four domains of research questions:

- 1 **Program model.** What are the usual services available to fathers at each fatherhood organization? What is the Just Beginning model? In what ways does Just Beginning differ from the usual services at each organization?
- 2 **Contextual factors.** Do staff and participant characteristics differ between the services-as-usual group and the program group? What are the contextual factors associated with each organization that might influence how the program operates?
- 3 **Implementation processes.** What does it take to implement Just Beginning? What processes are in place to support the implementation of Just Beginning? What engagement strategies were used to engage enrollees in Just Beginning? In what ways are these processes and strategies different than the processes and strategies for the usual services?
- 4 **Outputs.** What were the content, quality, quantity, and pattern of services delivered to the program group? How did the content, quality, quantity, and pattern of services delivered to the services-as-usual group differ? To what degree did staff members implement Just Beginning with fidelity to the intended model? To what degree was Just Beginning intentionally adapted during implementation?

The implementation analysis synthesized information that was learned across these research questions using a convergent mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to answer the research questions.<sup>1</sup> Findings were derived from multiple quantitative and qualitative data

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<sup>1</sup> A mixed-methods strategy was not applied to each research question equally. For example, all the information gathered to answer the questions about program models was qualitative, and therefore there was no need to align it with any quantitative data.

sources; the team also used qualitative analysis to complement quantitative analytic findings for the ultimate purpose of describing how the programs—and particularly the Just Beginning intervention—operated “on the ground.” Using these two forms of data together brought greater insight to the research questions than would be obtained from either type of data separately.

Some elements of a sequential design were also used, whereby findings from one kind of data informed the approach for another form of data collection. For example, findings from the text message surveys and analysis of management information system data informed the qualitative interview prompts used in staff interviews or father focus groups. In turn, qualitative findings from the first round of site visits in mid-2017 informed the quantitative staff survey fielded later.

## QUALITATIVE DATA

The qualitative data mainly took the form of detailed notes taken by interviewers during their meetings with Just Beginning program staff members and focus groups with fathers at each organization. A different team of interviewers visited each organization; semistructured interview guides were developed to ensure a common approach across all interviews. The interview protocols included main questions and topical probes as guidance for interviewers; the protocols were designed to gather descriptive and exploratory information to build on existing information about fatherhood programs.<sup>2</sup>

Notes from all interviews and focus groups were synthesized together to understand both the staff and father experiences with Just Beginning. Trained research staff members used Dedoose, a web-based, mixed-methods analysis software package, to code the interview notes systematically in a multistep process. While the coding and analysis strategy was designed to answer prespecified questions, it also could be adapted to accommodate unexpected but salient themes that arose.

The coding approach was iterative and rolled out in several stages. First, the interview notes were coded using broad *structural codes* based on the main topics of the interview protocols.<sup>3</sup> These broad codes (for example, “strategies or methods used to recruit participants” or “best practices and lessons for replication”) essentially served as an indexing device. They were used to evaluate the consistency of the interviews (how commonly the code was covered) and the richness of data collected (the extent to which topics were covered in the interviews), as different team members conducted interviews. Areas that were covered less consistently were less likely to be analyzed in depth, since such an analysis would only reflect the responses of a small part of the sample.

Second, more detailed subcodes were used within each structural code. Some of the subcodes used in this second round were predefined and others emerged based on the team’s review of the data during the first round of coding or throughout this more detailed coding process.

This iterative coding process occurred after both rounds of site visits to each organization. As a final analytic step, themes—the main outcomes of the coding process—were developed based on all the qualitative

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<sup>2</sup> Marshall and Rossman (1999).

<sup>3</sup> Saldana (2009).

data collected. Themes categorized a set of similar codes that highlighted repeated ideas across interviewees and multiple site visits.

The qualitative analysis also incorporated insights from the team's direct observation of program services and information culled from various documents—such as the curriculum, marketing materials, or community-level U.S. Census statistics. Each was analyzed separately and integrated with other analyses as appropriate.

## **QUANTITATIVE DATA**

The analysis of quantitative data for the implementation analysis followed many of the common practices used in the analysis of quantitative data for the impact analysis.

### ***Common Analysis Period***

Depending on his date of random assignment, every father in the Just Beginning study had a different number of months of service-receipt data in nFORM. To ensure each study member had equal opportunity to contribute to the analysis of service receipt, only the first six months of data starting from random assignment were used in the analysis.

### ***Descriptive Statistics***

Descriptive statistics (that is, means, standard deviations, frequencies, distributions, and correlations) were a primary analysis tool for the various quantitative data sources in the implementation analysis. In addition to examining each data source for outliers, crosstabs were used to see how variables varied by characteristics such as site or study group assignment. This approach was used with the applicant characteristic survey, the baseline survey, the text message survey, the management information system, and the staff survey.

### ***Missing Survey Data***

The descriptive analysis allowed sample sizes to vary to reflect nonresponses as opposed to imputing responses. Survey responses of “don't know” and “decline” were coded as missing. Missing data were reviewed and questions with high rates of missing data was excluded from analysis.

APPENDIX

B

Fathers'  
Engagement  
and  
Satisfaction  
with the Study  
Organizations



**APPENDIX TABLE B.1. FATHERS' ENGAGEMENT AND SATISFACTION WITH THE STUDY ORGANIZATIONS, SIX MONTHS AFTER RANDOM ASSIGNMENT**

Measure	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	Difference (Effect)	P-Value
<b>Program engagement</b>				
Still receiving B3 organization support (%)	40.0	41.9	-1.9	0.636
Main reason for stopping (%)				0.102
Finished	23.3	32.6	-9.3	
Got what I needed	9.1	7.6	1.5	
Did not like it/did not learn anything new	1.1	4.7	-3.5	
Other commitments/coordination issues	26.7	20.9	5.8	
Got a job	30.1	27.9	2.2	
Other	9.7	6.4	3.3	
In touch with the staff (%)				0.156
Daily/almost daily	3.4	3.1	0.3	
Weekly	16.6	24.6	-8.0	
1 to 3 times per month	34.9	30.7	4.2	
Less than monthly	11.9	8.9	3.0	
Not at all	33.2	32.8	0.5	
In touch with other fathers (%)				0.796
Daily or almost daily	8.1	9.2	-1.1	
Weekly	16.3	17.1	-0.8	
1 to 3 times per month	17.6	19.1	-1.5	
Less than monthly	4.1	5.5	-1.4	
Not at all	53.9	49.1	4.8	
<b>Satisfaction</b>				
Helpfulness of services (1 = not very helpful to 5 = extremely helpful)	4.4	4.3	0.1	0.152
Amount of contact from the staff (1 = not enough to 5 = too much)	3.1	3.1	0.1	0.236
Staff understanding of fathers (%)				0.719
Excellent	45.6	46.1	-0.5	
Good/very good	46.3	44.0	2.2	
Fair/poor	8.2	9.9	-1.7	
Use of skills from the B3 organization (%)				0.454
Daily or almost daily	79.7	77.2	2.5	
Weekly	10.5	10.9	-0.4	
1 to 3 times per month	3.4	5.8	-2.4	
Less than monthly	2.7	1.4	1.4	
Never	3.7	4.8	-1.0	
Sample size (total = 598)	299	299		

(continued)

## APPENDIX TABLE B.1 (CONTINUED)

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on responses to the six-month follow-up survey. The sample includes all fathers who responded to the survey.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

The p-value indicates the likelihood that the estimated effect (or larger) would have been generated by an intervention with zero true effect.

To assess differences between the research groups, chi-square tests were used for categorical variables and two-tailed t-tests were used for continuous variables.



APPENDIX

# C

Baseline  
Equivalence  
of Primary  
Outcome  
Measures



**APPENDIX TABLE C.1. BASELINE EQUIVALENCE OF PRIMARY OUTCOME MEASURES**

Outcome Measure (%)	Overall	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	P-Value
Father reports using “labeling” (%)			*	0.096
Rarely or not at all in the past month	17.7	20.7	14.7	
A few times a month	5.6	4.6	6.5	
A few times a week	16.3	18.0	14.7	
About once a day	9.1	8.4	9.8	
More than once a day	51.3	48.2	54.3	
Agrees it is worthwhile to talk to the child (%)	89.0	89.4	88.6	0.744
Engages in warm and supportive parenting (1 = never to 6 = more than once a day)	5.1	5.1	5.2	0.129
Father-child dysfunctional interaction (1 = least dysfunctional to 5 = most dysfunctional)	1.5	1.5	1.5	0.761
Parenting efficacy scale (1 = lowest to 5 = highest)	3.4	3.4	3.5	0.772
Overall quality of the father-child relationship (%)				0.212
Not too good	3.1	3.0	3.2	
Somewhat good	15.9	18.3	13.5	
Very good	81.0	78.7	83.2	
Father’s positive and negative feelings about the child (1 = most negative to 5 = most positive)	4.7	4.7	4.7	0.836
Perceived influence (1 = none to 4 = a great deal)	3.8	3.7	3.8**	0.041
Father-child contact (%)				0.164
Not at all	1.4	1.1	1.6	
1 to 3 times in the past month	9.2	11.4	7.0	
1 or 2 times per week	12.6	12.0	13.2	
3 or 4 times per week	11.7	13.0	10.3	
Every day or almost every day	65.2	62.5	67.8	
Cancels plans with the child (%)				0.168
Often	4.2	4.1	4.3	
Sometimes	21.6	24.8	18.5	
Rarely	38.4	38.1	38.6	
Never	35.8	33.0	38.6	
Sample size	738	368	370	

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using data from the baseline survey. This table represents the responses of the full sample.

NOTES: Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

To assess differences between the research groups, chi-square tests were used for categorical variables and two-tailed t-tests were used for continuous variables.

APPENDIX

D

Participation  
in Services, by  
Organization  
and Among  
Subgroups



**APPENDIX TABLE D.1. FATHERS' RESPONSES TO TEXT MESSAGE SURVEYS DELIVERED AFTER RANDOM ASSIGNMENT TO THE PROGRAM GROUP AND THE SERVICES-AS-USUAL GROUP**

Response (%)	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	All	P-Value
<b>Module: engagement during the program</b>				
Attended in the last week	81.8	81.0	81.4	0.918
Did not attend during the last week	18.2	19.0	18.6 [ ]	0.816
Not supposed to	25.0	28.6	26.7	
Did not really like the program	0.0	0.0	0.0	
Personal scheduling conflict	37.5	42.9	40.0	
No longer in the program	0.0	0.0	0.0	
Forgot	12.5	0.0	6.7	
Another reason	25.0	28.6	26.7	
Biggest motivation to attend			[ ]	0.874
Reminders from the staff	2.8	3.1	2.9	
Another father encouraged me	5.6	9.4	7.4	
Encouraged/required by court/case worker	5.6	3.1	4.4	
Program helped with transportation/childcare	0.0	3.1	1.5	
Future job help	50.0	50.0	50.0	
Something else	36.1	31.3	33.8	
What do you like most about the fatherhood program?			[ ]	0.609
Seeing the staff	2.9	3.1	3.0	
Interacting with other fathers	22.9	21.9	22.4	
Learning stuff	57.1	68.8	62.7	
Seeing my kid	5.7	0.0	3.0	
Something else	11.4	6.3	9.0	
Nothing				
Difficulty to attend				
Not at all difficult to attend my last session	79.4	71.0	75.4	0.430
Very or a little hard to attend my last session	20.6	29.0	24.6 [ ]	0.717
Not interested	0.0	0.0	0.0	
Transportation	20.0	18.2	19.0	
Conflict with job/interview	20.0	9.1	14.3	
Legal or law enforcement issues	0.0	9.1	4.8	
Personal/family issues <sup>a</sup>	20.0	36.4	28.6	
None of the above	40.0	27.3	33.3	
Sample size	44	42		

(continued)

**APPENDIX TABLE D.1 (CONTINUED)**

Response (%)	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	All	P-Value
<b>Module: perception of program benefits</b>				
Staff person helped me in the last week	91.5	91.1	91.3 [ ]	0.949
Where you have most used the skills from the fatherhood program			[***]	0.007
Looking for work/at work	15.8	54.3	34.2	
In dealing with my child	57.9	28.6	43.8	
In dealing with my child's other parent	0.0	0.0	0.0	
In dealing with another adult	21.1	14.3	17.8	
Nowhere	5.3	2.9	4.1	
Sample size	47	45		

SOURCE: Data from the B3 text message survey conducted through Qualtrics. All fathers in the study who owned cell phones were eligible to receive the survey. The number and sequence of modules received by respondents depended on participation behavior. The survey had a response rate of 27 percent.

NOTES: Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

The p-value indicates the likelihood that the estimated effect (or larger) would have been generated by an intervention with zero true effect.

To assess differences between the research groups, chi-square tests were used for categorical variables and two-tailed t-tests were used for continuous variables.

Brackets in statistical significance levels indicates the possibility of there being a small number of individuals in a category, which reduces statistical power.

<sup>a</sup>Personal/family issues involved living situation–related issues, among other things.

**APPENDIX TABLE D.2. FATHERS' RESPONSES TO TEXT MESSAGE SURVEYS  
DELIVERED AFTER RANDOM ASSIGNMENT TO THE PROGRAM GROUP ONLY**

Response (%)	Program Group
<b>Module: program disengagement</b>	
Main reason for not attending the fatherhood program	
Did not like the program <sup>a</sup>	0.0
Not interested in the topics	0.0
Difficult to attend	20.0
Not motivated	0.0
Not a convenient location	33.3
Not a convenient time	66.7
Too busy	0.0
Got a job	20.0
Some other reason	6.7
I did attend and this is a mistake	53.3
<hr/>	
Sample size	15
<hr/>	
<b>Module: program experiences</b>	
Just Beginning session scheduled in the last week	83.8
Person who brought the child to the last session	
Me	79.3
The child's other parent	0.0
Another family member or friend	17.2
Someone else	0.0
No one	3.4
How much the program has helped the father understand his child's behavior so far	
A lot	74.2
A little	9.7
Not at all	3.2
Too soon to tell	12.9
I have not seen my child outside of the program	0.0
How much the program has helped the father relate to his child's other parent so far	
A lot	51.6
A little	25.8
Not at all	6.5
Too soon to tell	12.9
I have not seen the other parent outside of the program	3.2
<hr/>	
Sample size	37
<hr/>	

(continued)

## APPENDIX TABLE D.2 (CONTINUED)

Response (%)	Program Group
<b>Module: relationships with peers</b>	
Number of times respondent got help from another father	
Never	14.8
Once	25.9
Twice	37.0
Three times or more	22.2
Have ever hung out with fathers from the program	37.0
Have hung out since last week	70.0
Have never hung out with fathers from the program	63.0
Haven't hung out, but communicate in other ways	29.4
Sample size	27

SOURCE: Data from the B3 text message survey conducted through Qualtrics. All fathers in the study who owned cell phones were eligible to receive the survey. The number and sequence of modules received by respondents depended on participation behavior. The survey had a response rate of 27 percent.

NOTES: Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

<sup>a</sup>The survey as designed included additional questions about why fathers did not like the program. Since no sample members responded that they did not like the program, these questions were not asked of anyone.



**APPENDIX TABLE D.3. PARTICIPATION IN JUST BEGINNING SERVICES, BY ORGANIZATION**

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Overall</b>	<b>Children's Institute</b>	<b>People for People</b>	<b>Seedco</b>
Completed at least 1 session (training, play, and reflection) (%)	53.8	49.2	69.8	41.9
Average number of sessions completed	2.1	2.0	2.8	1.5
Sessions completed (%)				
1	8.7	5.1	11.9	8.9
2	4.6	5.1	3.2	5.6
3	3.0	2.5	3.2	3.2
4	4.6	3.4	7.1	3.2
5	32.9	33.1	44.4	21.0
Coparent participated in an orientation (%)	28.3	28.0	38.9	17.7
Among those who completed at least 1 session (training, play, and reflection)				
Average number of sessions completed	3.9	4.1	4.0	3.5
Sessions completed (%)				
1	16.2	10.3	17.0	21.2
2	8.6	10.3	4.5	13.5
3	5.6	5.2	4.5	7.7
4	8.6	6.9	10.2	7.7
5	61.1	67.2	63.6	50.0
At least 1 session that included a coparent or partner (%)	28.3	24.1	25.0	38.5
Average number of days between first service and last service <sup>a</sup>	34.6	41.8	30.7	32.5
Coparent participated in an orientation (%)	49.5	56.9	53.4	34.6
Sample size	368	118	126	124

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using management information system data. This table reflects services received no more than six months after random assignment.

NOTE: <sup>a</sup>Fathers who only attended one service, or who attended their first and last service on the same day, are not included in this measure.

**APPENDIX TABLE D.4. EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPATION IN JUST BEGINNING SERVICES, SUBGROUP: ORGANIZATION**

Outcome	Overall	Children's Institute	People for People	Seedco	P-Value
Completed at least 1 session (training, play, and reflection) (%)	53.8	49.2	69.8	41.9***	0.000
Completed no sessions (%)	46.2	50.8	30.2	58.1***	0.000
Average number of sessions completed	2.1	2.0	2.8	1.5***	0.000
Among those who completed at least 1 session					
Average number of sessions completed	3.9	4.1	4.0	3.5	0.116
Sample size	368	118	126	124	

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using management information system data. This table reflects services received no more than six months after random assignment.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

The p-value indicates the likelihood that the estimated effect (or larger) would have been generated by an intervention with zero true effect.

To assess differences among the organizations, chi-square tests were used for categorical variables and two-tailed t-tests were used for continuous variables.

**APPENDIX TABLE D.5. EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPATION IN JUST BEGINNING SERVICES, SUBGROUP: FOCAL CHILD'S AGE**

Outcome	Overall	Child 18 Months or Younger	Child Older Than 18 Months	P-Value
Completed at least 1 session (training, play, and reflection) (%)	53.8	52.7	55.6	0.589
Completed no sessions (%)	46.2	47.3	44.4	0.589
Average number of sessions completed	2.1	2.1	2.1	0.774
Among those who completed at least 1 session				
Average number of sessions completed	3.9	4.0	3.7	0.143
Sample size	368	224	144	

SOURCES: MDRC calculations using management information system data and the Just Beginning baseline survey. This table reflects services received no more than six months after random assignment.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

The p-value indicates the likelihood that the estimated effect (or larger) would have been generated by an intervention with zero true effect.

To assess differences between the subgroups, chi-square tests were used for categorical variables and two-tailed t-tests were used for continuous variables.

**APPENDIX TABLE D.6. EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPATION IN JUST BEGINNING SERVICES, SUBGROUP: CURRENTLY EMPLOYED OR NOT**

Outcome	Overall	Currently Employed	Not Currently Employed	P-Value
Completed at least 1 session (training, play, and reflection) (%)	54.7	53.1	55.8	0.626
Completed no sessions (%)	45.3	46.9	44.2	0.626
Average number of sessions completed	2.1	2.1	2.2	0.767
Among those who completed at least 1 session				
Average number of sessions completed	3.9	3.9	3.9	0.811
Sample size	360	143	217	

SOURCES: MDRC calculations using management information system data and the Just Beginning baseline survey. This table reflects services received no more than six months after random assignment.

NOTES: Sample sizes may vary because of missing values.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

The p-value indicates the likelihood that the estimated effect (or larger) would have been generated by an intervention with zero true effect.

To assess differences between the subgroups, chi-square tests were used for categorical variables and two-tailed t-tests were used for continuous variables.

The subgroups in the implementation analysis were chosen based on theories of what could influence participation. This subgroup definition replaces the one based on child gender in the impact analysis.

**APPENDIX TABLE D.7. EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPATION IN JUST BEGINNING SERVICES, SUBGROUP: FATHER'S RESIDENTIAL STATUS**

Outcome	Overall	Fathers Who Reside with Their Children	Fathers Who Do Not Reside with Their Children	P-Value
Completed at least 1 session (training, play, and reflection) (%)	53.8	57.4	50.3	0.172
Completed no sessions (%)	46.2	42.6	49.7	0.172
Average number of sessions completed	2.1	2.4	1.8**	0.030
Among those who completed at least 1 session				
Average number of sessions completed	3.9	4.1	3.7**	0.050
Sample size	368	183	185	

SOURCES: MDRC calculations using management information system data and the Just Beginning baseline survey. This table reflects services received no more than six months after random assignment.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

The p-value indicates the likelihood that the estimated effect (or larger) would have been generated by an intervention with zero true effect.

To assess differences between the subgroups, chi-square tests were used for categorical variables and two-tailed t-tests were used for continuous variables.

**APPENDIX TABLE D.8. EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPATION IN JUST BEGINNING SERVICES, SUBGROUP: FIRST-TIME FATHER OR NOT**

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Overall</b>	<b>First-Time Father</b>	<b>Not a First-Time Father</b>	<b>P-Value</b>
Completed at least 1 session (training, play, and reflection) (%)	53.8	56.7	51.7	0.339
Completed no sessions (%)	46.2	43.3	48.3	0.339
Average number of sessions completed	2.1	2.1	2.1	0.876
Among those who completed at least 1 session				
Average number of sessions completed	3.9	3.7	4.1 *	0.056
Sample size	368	157	211	

SOURCES: MDRC calculations using management information system data and the Just Beginning baseline survey. This table reflects services received no more than six months after random assignment.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

The p-value indicates the likelihood that the estimated effect (or larger) would have been generated by an intervention with zero true effect.

To assess differences between the subgroups, chi-square tests were used for categorical variables and two-tailed t-tests were used for continuous variables.

**APPENDIX TABLE D.9. FATHERHOOD PROGRAM PARTICIPATION FOR THE PROGRAM GROUP AND SERVICES-AS-USUAL GROUP, SIX MONTHS AFTER RANDOM ASSIGNMENT, SUBGROUP: ORGANIZATION**

Measure	Children's Institute		People for People		Seedco	
	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group
<b>Management information system measures<sup>a</sup></b>						
Usual services						
Ever participated in any service (%)	94.9	91.5	95.2	95.2	81.5	76.2
Average total number of service contacts	9.1	9.1	19.1	24.1	10.5	10.1
Ever participated in a parenting service (%)	5.9	6.8	0.8	0.0	66.1	68.3
Average number of parenting service contacts	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.0	2.3	2.5
Ever participated in a healthy relationship service (%)	3.4	0.0	4.8	4.0	69.4	64.3
Average number of healthy relationship service contacts	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.5	2.4
Ever participated in an employment service (%)	3.4	0.0	95.2	94.4	71.8	69.8
Average number of employment service contacts	0.0	0.0	14.4	20.5	4.6	4.9
Ever participated in any other service <sup>b</sup> (%)	94.9	91.5	84.9	77.0	54.0	42.1
Average number of other service contacts	9.0	9.1	5.0	4.1	1.6	0.7
Number of usual service days	9.1	9.1	19.1	24.1	10.5	10.1
Average number of days between first and last service (of any kind)	84.8	86.6	56.8	55.8	44.5	47.7
Just Beginning intervention						
Completed at least one session (training, play, and reflection) (%)	49.2	0.0	69.8	0.0	41.9	0.8
Average number of sessions completed	2.0	0.0	2.8	0.0	1.5	0.0
Average number of hours spent in Just Beginning	4.1	0.0	4.0	0.0	3.3	0.0
Coparent ever attended orientation (%)	28.0	0.0	38.9	0.0	17.7	0.0
Usual services plus intervention						
Ever participated in any service (%)	94.9	91.5	96.0	95.2	83.9	76.2
Ever participated in a parenting service (%)	50.8	6.8	69.8	0.0	75.0	68.3
Average number of parenting service days	2.1	0.2	2.8	0.0	3.8	2.5
Average number of total service days	11.2	9.1	21.8	24.1	12.0	10.1
Average number of days between first and last service <sup>c</sup>	88.1	86.4	56.8	55.7	48.0	48.3
Average number of days between enrollment and first service	5.6	8.9	1.2	1.9	3.3	5.9
Management information system sample size (total = 738)	118	118	126	126	124	126

(continued)

APPENDIX TABLE D.9 (CONTINUED)

Measure	Children's Institute		People for People		Seedco	
	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group
<b>Survey measures<sup>d</sup></b>						
Ever received any parenting, healthy relationship, or employment service (%)	93.0	93.1	85.0	83.2	64.6	70.9
Ever received any parenting service (%)	91.0	90.1	70.0	68.4	50.5	53.4
Average number of weeks receiving parenting services	9.8	11.8	5.1	5.3	2.1	2.4
Average number of hours per week receiving parenting services	2.6	1.8	7.2	9.4	4.4	6.5
Parenting services most often delivered... (%)						
In a workshop/group setting	74.7	91.2	51.4	95.3	68.0	78.2
One-on-one	25.3	8.8	48.6	4.7	32.0	21.8
Child participated in parenting services... (%)						
Never	40.4	71.0	38.0	76.8	68.7	74.8
Sometimes/rarely	30.3	13.0	23.0	15.8	18.2	18.4
Always/often	29.3	16.0	39.0	7.4	13.1	6.8
Ever received any healthy relationship service (%)	38.0	34.7	43.0	37.9	44.4	45.6
Average number of weeks receiving healthy relationship services	3.9	3.6	2.7	2.8	1.6	1.8
Average number of hours per week receiving healthy relationship services	0.7	0.8	3.8	4.7	4.8	5.5
Healthy relationship services most often delivered... (%)						
In a workshop/group setting	78.9	85.7	41.9	72.2	56.8	74.5
One-on-one	21.1	14.3	58.1	27.8	43.2	25.5
Spouse/partner/coparent participated in healthy relationship services... (%)						
Never	81.0	78.2	78.0	87.4	84.8	81.6
Sometimes/rarely	5.0	5.0	16.0	8.4	9.1	8.7
Always/often	14.0	16.8	6.0	4.2	6.1	9.7
Ever received help to find or keep a job	17.0	13.9	60.0	54.7	41.4	48.5
Employment services most often delivered... (%)						
In workshop/group setting	64.7	64.3	55.0	63.5	31.7	44.9
One-on-one	35.3	35.7	45.0	36.5	68.3	55.1
Survey sample size (total = 598)	100	101	100	95	99	103

(continued)

## APPENDIX TABLE D.9 (CONTINUED)

SOURCES: MDRC calculations using management information system data and the six-month follow-up survey. The management information system data include all fathers who were randomly assigned, whereas the survey data include all fathers who responded to the survey.

NOTES: Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

<sup>a</sup>Management information system measures capture in-person services provided at the organization, including in-person, one-on-one services that were 15 minutes or longer and all group workshops. These measures reflect services received no more than six months after random assignment.

<sup>b</sup>Other services include child support services and other social services such as food assistance, mental health referrals, and legal assistance referrals, for example.

<sup>c</sup>If the first and last service were on the same day or the respondent only attended one service, a value of zero is assigned.

<sup>d</sup>Survey measures capture services provided by any provider, including the organization participating in B3. These measures reflect services received between random assignment and the follow-up survey.



## APPENDIX

# E

Outcome Measures, the Analytic Approach, Sensitivity Analyses, and Subgroup Effects



## Measures Used in the Just Beginning Impact Analysis

This section provides further information on the primary outcome measures described in Chapter 5.

Each of the five scale measures is constructed by averaging together the items that comprise the scale. To inform the construction of the four scales that had three or more items and to understand their psychometric properties, the team conducted a confirmatory factor analysis, a procedure for testing the relationships among items assumed to be part of the same latent construct captured by the scale. This portion of the appendix reports on the Cronbach's alpha reliabilities and the factor loadings (which estimate the relationships between each item and the latent construct captured by the scale) for the four scale measures. Cronbach's alpha is a measure of internal consistency—that is, how closely related a set of items are as a group. It is considered to be a measure of scale reliability. The closer Cronbach's alpha is to 1, the higher the internal consistency. Thus, Cronbach's alphas above 0.80 mean that the categories are very closely related.

As discussed in Chapter 5, the 10 primary outcome measures are organized into four domains: (1) developmentally appropriate engagement with the child and father-child interaction quality, (2) parenting confidence and commitment, (3) father perception of father-child relationship quality, and (4) father-child contact.

### DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE ENGAGEMENT WITH THE CHILD AND FATHER-CHILD INTERACTION QUALITY DOMAIN

#### 1. Father reports using “labeling” (%)

Labeling is one of the behaviors targeted by Just Beginning. The labeling outcome is derived from a single survey question asking how often fathers “talk to [the focal child] about things that he/she looked at, grabbed, or pointed to.” The percentage of fathers who chose each response is reported. The survey question had six response categories, ranging from “Not at all in the past month” to “More than once a day.”

#### 2. Father agrees it is worthwhile to talk to the child (%)

This binary outcome describes the percentage of fathers who agree it is worthwhile to engage verbally with their children, another behavior targeted by Just Beginning. The outcome uses a single survey question that asks fathers their degree of agreement with the statement “There is not much point talking to my child, because he or she is too young to understand me.” Fathers who disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement are included in the percentage.

#### 3. Father engages in warm and supportive parenting scale

The warm and supportive parenting outcome measure is a four-item scale measuring how often fathers engaged in warm and supportive parenting practices in the past month. This scale was adapted from a scale developed by the Fatherhood Research and Practice Network (FRPN). The four survey items ask fathers how often they engaged in parenting practices such as hugging, praising, or soothing their children, with options ranging from “not at all in the past month” to “more than once a day.” Respondents who did not answer two or more of the survey items were coded as missing data for this scale (and therefore not includ-

ed in the overall average for the outcome measure). Higher scale values indicate more frequent use of these practices. The numeric values of fathers' responses were averaged across the four items to create a warm and supportive parenting score for each father. As shown in Appendix Table E.1, the scale showed internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.94), with factor loadings of 0.84 or greater.

**APPENDIX TABLE E.1. ITEMS AND FACTOR LOADINGS FOR THE WARM AND SUPPORTIVE PARENTING SCALE**

Scale Item	Factor Loading
Hugs or shows physical affection to the focal child	0.95
Praises the focal child	0.87
Soothes the focal child while he/she is crying	0.84
Tells the focal child "I love you"	0.93
Cronbach's alpha for the scale is 0.94.	

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on responses to the six-month follow-up survey. The sample includes all fathers who responded to the survey.

NOTES: The confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using the full sample. The set of items included in each factor was based on the items' factor loadings and on theory.

These survey items asked fathers how often they did these activities in the past month.

#### 4. Father-child dysfunctional interaction scale

Designed to measure parents' satisfaction with their children and interactions with their children, the father-child dysfunctional interaction scale covers one of three components of the Parenting Stress Index.<sup>1</sup> It is an average of 11 survey items asking about fathers' degree of agreement with negative statements about their relationship with their focal children (for example, "[focal child] rarely does things for me that make me feel good"). The survey items were coded such that a higher scale value indicates a greater degree of dysfunctional interaction. If a respondent did not answer three or more of the items in the scale, he was coded as missing data for the outcome measure. As shown in Appendix Table E.2, the scale showed internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.85). Factor loadings were 0.6 or above for five items, between 0.4 and 0.6 for five items, and slightly below 0.4 for one item. The questions are not reproduced in the table because the scale is proprietary.

<sup>1</sup> Abidin (1990).

**APPENDIX TABLE E.2. ITEMS AND FACTOR LOADINGS FOR THE FATHER-CHILD DYSFUNCTIONAL INTERACTION SCALE**

Scale Item	Factor Loading
Item 1	0.37
Item 2	0.56
Item 3	0.43
Item 4	0.58
Item 5	0.61
Item 6	0.68
Item 7	0.72
Item 8	0.79
Item 9	0.60
Item 10	0.57
Item 11	0.53

Cronbach's alpha for the scale is 0.85.

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on responses to the six-month follow-up survey. The sample includes all fathers who responded to the survey.

NOTES: The confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using the full sample. The set of items included in each factor was based on the items' factor loadings and on theory.

The text of the items in this scale is not shown because the scale is copyrighted.

## PARENTING CONFIDENCE AND COMMITMENT DOMAIN

### 5. Parenting efficacy scale

The parenting efficacy scale is composed of five items and is adapted from a scale developed by FRPN. It is designed to measure how a father thinks of himself as a parent. Fathers who did not answer two or more of the survey items were coded as missing for the scale. As shown in Appendix Table E.3, the scale showed high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.75). Factor loadings were above 0.4 for four of five items.

**APPENDIX TABLE E.3. ITEMS AND FACTOR LOADINGS FOR THE PARENTING EFFICACY SCALE**

Scale Item	Factor Loading
I am good at helping my child when he/she is upset or distressed	0.54
I am good at knowing what activity my child enjoys	0.88
I am good at getting my child to have fun with me	0.78
I am good at getting my child to understand what I want him/her to do	0.38
I am good at understanding what my child wants or needs	0.48

Cronbach's alpha for the scale is 0.75.

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on responses to the six-month follow-up survey. The sample includes all fathers who responded to the survey.

NOTES: The confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using the full sample. The set of items included in each factor was based on the items' factor loadings and on theory.

These survey items asked fathers how often they felt these statements applied to them in the past month.

## FATHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIP QUALITY DOMAIN

### 6. Overall quality of the father-child relationship (%)

Overall quality of father-child relationship is a categorical outcome drawing from a single survey question in which fathers were asked “do you feel like your relationship with [focal child] is...” with response items ranging from “poor” to “excellent.” This measure was calculated directly from the survey item.

### 7. Father’s positive and negative feelings about the child

The positive and negative feelings about the child scale draws from a series of six survey items that ask fathers how often they feel a certain way about their child. Five of the items were derived from a scale originally developed to measure adolescent parent-child relationships,<sup>2</sup> which had been adapted by FRPN to assess relationships involving younger children. One additional question was added for the Just Beginning survey (“How often does being a parent to [focal child] bring you joy?”). The items are both positively framed (for example: How often do you accept [focal child] the way he/she is”) and negatively framed (for example: “How often do you feel disappointed with [focal child]?”). The items were coded so that higher values would indicate more positive feelings about the child. Fathers who were missing two or more of the survey items were coded as missing for this scale. As shown in Appendix Table E.4, this scale showed low internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.61) and had several factor loadings below 0.40. As a result, the decision was made to keep the scale as a primary outcome but separate the positive and negative survey items into two scales, which would become secondary outcomes. The resulting secondary outcomes, “father’s positive feelings about the child” and “father’s negative feelings about the child,” still had low internal consistency, but high factor loadings overall.

### 8. Perceived influence

The perceived influence scale is an average of two survey items indicating how much influence fathers felt they had on their focal children in the present and in the future. Responses ranged from “none” to “a great deal” of influence. The responses to the two items were averaged to create the scale, which has a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.55 and no factor loadings, as the scale is only two items. The scale was kept unchanged despite the low Cronbach’s alpha.

## FATHER-CHILD CONTACT DOMAIN

### 9. Father-child contact (%)

Increased contact with focal children among fathers who did not live with those children was a goal of Just Beginning. To measure this outcome, a question derived from a scale developed by FRPN asked fathers who did not live with their children, “In the past 30 days, how often did you see [focal child] in person?” Fathers chose from six options, ranging from “not at all” to “every day or almost every day.” Fathers who

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<sup>2</sup> Stattin and Kerr (2000).

**APPENDIX TABLE E.4. ITEMS AND FACTOR LOADINGS FOR  
THE FATHER'S POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE FEELINGS ABOUT THE CHILD SCALE**

Scale Item	Factor Loading
Feels disappointed with the focal child <sup>a</sup>	0.25
Wishes that the focal child was different <sup>a</sup>	0.31
Feels proud of the focal child	0.57
Feels angry or irritated with the focal child <sup>a</sup>	0.17
Accepts the focal child the way he/she is	0.49
Being a father to focal child brings the father joy	0.81
Cronbach's alpha for the scale is 0.61.	

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on responses to the Just Beginning six-month follow-up survey. The sample includes all fathers who responded to the survey.

NOTES: The confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using the full sample. The set of items included in each factor was based on the items' factor loadings and on theory.

These survey items asked fathers how often they had these experiences in the past month.

<sup>a</sup>This item was reversed such that higher values correspond to less negative feelings.

lived with their children did not answer this question and were assumed to see their children “every day or almost every day” in the analysis.

**10. Father’s reliability for planned time with the child (%)**

To assess fathers’ reliability, the Just Beginning survey team developed a question to measure how often fathers had cancelled plans with their focal children in the previous 30 days. Fathers were asked “Sometimes things come up that get in the way of plans to spend time with children. How often do you have to cancel plans with focal child?” There were four possible answers ranging from “never” to “often.”

## Regression Models

Using these outcome measures, the team took the following analytic approach to calculate the impact estimates presented in this report.

Using PROC GLM in SAS, the following ordinary least squares regression model was used to estimate impacts for both binary and continuous outcomes:

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta_0 T_i + \sum_{k=1}^{k^*} \beta_k X_{ki} + \sum_{n=1}^{n=2} \gamma_n S_{ni} + \varepsilon_i$$

Where:

$Y_i$  = the outcome for sample member  $i$

$\alpha$  = the expected mean outcome when all other covariates equal 0

$T_i$  = one if sample member  $i$  is randomized to the program group and zero otherwise

$\beta_0$  = the difference in expected outcomes between the program group and the services-as-usual group (the average effect of intent-to-treat)

$X_{ki}$  = sample member  $i$ 's observed value on baseline characteristic  $k$ ; the baseline characteristics include a baseline measure of the outcome, demographic background characteristics, a dummy variable indicating the quarter of random assignment, and a fixed effect for the site

$\beta_k$  = the change in expected outcomes for every one-unit change in baseline characteristic  $k$

$S_{ni}$  = one if sample member  $i$  is from site  $n$  and zero otherwise

$\gamma_n$  = the difference in expected outcomes for the site  $n$  compared with the reference site

$\varepsilon_i$  = a father-level random error, assumed to be independently and identically distributed with a mean of 0 and a variance of  $\sigma^2$

Using PROC SYSLIN, the following seemingly unrelated regression model was used to estimate impacts for categorical outcomes:

$$Y_{ij} = \alpha + \beta_{0j} T_i + \sum_{k=1}^{k^*} \beta_{kj} X_{ki} + \sum_{n=1}^{n=2} \gamma_{nj} S_{ni} + \varepsilon_{ij}$$



Where:

$Y_{ij}$  = the outcome for sample member  $i$  on outcome level  $j$

$\alpha$  = the expected mean outcome when all other covariates equal 0

$T_i$  = one if sample member  $i$  is randomized to the program group and zero otherwise

$\beta_{0j}$  = the difference in expected outcomes between the program group and the services-as-usual group (the average effect of intent-to-treat) on outcome level  $j$

$X_{ki}$  = sample member  $i$ 's observed value on baseline characteristic  $k$ ; the baseline characteristics include a baseline measure of the outcome, demographic background characteristics, a dummy variable indicating the quarter of random assignment, and a fixed effect for the site

$\beta_{kj}$  = the change in expected outcomes for every one-unit change in baseline characteristic  $k$  on outcome level  $j$

$S_{ni}$  = one if sample member  $i$  is from site  $n$  and zero otherwise

$\gamma_{nj}$  = the difference in expected outcomes for the site  $n$  compared with the reference site on outcome level  $j$

$\varepsilon_{ij}$  = a father-level random error on outcome level  $j$ , assumed to be independently and identically distributed with a mean of 0 and a variance of  $\sigma^2$

## Missing Data

Although all participants were asked to complete baseline surveys at intake, the B3 evaluation is still missing some baseline data. Missing data occurred when survey respondents skipped, refused to answer, or did not know answers to baseline survey questions. To account for missing data on covariates, the research team imputed missing covariate values with a single stochastic imputation using SAS PROC MI. This method assigns values to missing variables using a regression model that predicts the value of the missing variable based on other characteristics of the sample member and the responses of other study participants who are similar. The method also adds a varying component that is randomly drawn from a distribution with the same variance as the observed values. The values were generated based on 114 variables from the baseline surveys including the following: Just Beginning organization; number of children and children's ages; employment status, father's age; frequency of parenting behaviors such as praise, labeling, and harsh discipline; residential status; child support payment status; and others. For covariates that were scales

based on several baseline items, imputation was performed at the item level before the scales were created. Scales were then constructed from these imputed items.

Missing data on outcomes were not imputed. Such imputation can lead to biased impact estimates since missing patterns in outcomes can be correlated with research group status. Missing data on outcomes generally accounted for 1 percent to 3 percent of the total impact sample.

## Sensitivity Analyses

Along with the main analysis, sensitivity tests were performed to investigate whether different analytic decisions affected the results.

### IMPUTATION

As mentioned above, in the main analysis missing data for covariates were imputed using a single stochastic imputation method. To assess the effect of the single stochastic imputation on the impact results, a sensitivity analysis was run on primary outcomes in which missing survey items and the covariates derived from them remained. Respondents with missing covariates values were accordingly excluded from this analysis; less than 5 percent of the overall impact sample for primary outcomes ended up being excluded. Running the impact analysis without including values derived from the single stochastic imputation did not meaningfully change the effect sizes or statistical significance of the results for primary outcomes.

### FOLLOW-UP PERIOD

The Just Beginning follow-up survey was meant to be administered 6 months after random assignment, but the challenges of scheduling interviews meant that the actual follow-up period varied between 5.5 and 11 months. Fathers who were interviewed more months after they were in the intervention might show weaker results than those for whom the material was fresher. To assess whether the effects faded out over time, a sensitivity analysis was run on primary outcomes that included only fathers who took the follow-up survey within 7 months of random assignment. This change reduced the sample size by up to 40 percent. The analysis also showed no major changes in the results for primary outcomes.

### BASELINE FATHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

When they enrolled in the study, Just Beginning program group fathers were found to be slightly less likely to report that they had a very good relationships with their children (as defined by the overall quality of the father-child relationship measure) than services-as-usual group fathers. Though the difference is not statistically significant, a sensitivity analysis was run to address it. The impact analysis was run using baseline father-child relationship quality as a covariate for all primary outcomes. The effect sizes and statistical significance levels did not meaningfully change from the original results.

## Subgroup Effects

Appendix Tables E.5 through E.12 present effects for subgroups defined in four ways: (1) first-time fathers and fathers with older children, (2) fathers with focal children 18 months or younger and fathers with focal children older than 18 months, (3) fathers who resided with their children when they enrolled in the study and fathers who did not, and (4) fathers of boys and fathers of girls.

**APPENDIX TABLE E.5. JUST BEGINNING SUBGROUP EFFECTS ON CONTINUOUS OUTCOMES, SUBGROUP: FIRST-TIME FATHER OR NOT**

Outcome	First-Time Father			Not a First-Time Father			Interaction P-Value
	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	P-Value	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	P-Value	
Father-child dysfunctional interaction (1 = least dysfunctional to 5 = most dysfunctional)	1.8	1.8	0.656	1.8	1.7	0.719	0.343
Father's positive and negative feelings about the child (1 = most negative to 5 = most positive)	4.8	4.8	0.942	4.8	4.9	0.512	0.467
Perceived influence (1 = none to 4 = a great deal)	3.9	3.8**	0.035	3.8	3.9	0.616	0.011
Parenting efficacy scale (1 = lowest to 5 = highest)	4.8	4.7	0.437	4.7	4.7	0.703	0.249
Agrees it is worthwhile to talk to the child (%)	87.1	93.3	0.103	90.0	86.8	0.337	0.330
Engages in warm and supportive parenting (1 = never to 6 = more than once a day)	5.1	4.9	0.118	4.8	5.0*	0.093	0.003
Sample size (total = 597)	122	126		177	172		

SOURCES: MDRC calculations using responses to the Just Beginning baseline survey and the six-month follow-up survey. The sample includes all fathers who responded to the six-month survey.

NOTES: Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Sample sizes may vary because of missing values.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

The p-value indicates the likelihood of an estimated effect of this size (or larger) if the intervention had zero true effect.

The interaction p-value indicates the likelihood of a difference in estimated effects between subgroups of this size (or larger) if the true effects in the subgroups were the same.

**APPENDIX TABLE E.6. JUST BEGINNING SUBGROUP EFFECTS ON CATEGORICAL OUTCOMES, SUBGROUP: FIRST-TIME FATHER OR NOT**

Outcome	First-Time Father			Not a First-Time Father			Interaction P-Value
	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	P-Value	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	P-Value	
Father-child in-person contact in the past month (%)			0.463			0.441	0.170
Not at all	6.0	10.1		9.9	7.4		
1 to 3 times	5.1	5.5		7.0	3.3		
1 or 2 times per week	11.4	8.1		9.4	9.6		
3 or 4 times per week	7.4	11.2		5.2	4.6		
Every day or almost every day	70.2	65.1		68.5	75.1		
Overall quality of the parent-child relationship (%)			0.706			0.780	0.572
Poor, fair, or somewhat good	8.3	11.1		11.1	10.4		
Very good	24.4	25.8		24.8	22.1		
Excellent	67.3	63.2		64.1	67.5		
Father reports using “labeling” (%)			0.713			0.703	0.437
Rarely or not at all in the past month	11.9	14.1		16.4	13.6		
A few times a month	4.7	8.3		9.7	6.5		
A few times a week	23.6	22.0		12.5	15.9		
About once a day	12.9	13.9		14.9	15.8		
More than once a day	46.9	41.8		46.5	48.3		
Cancels plans with the child (%)			0.933			0.412	0.567
Often	3.1	4.3		5.4	7.9		
Sometimes	22.6	24.6		26.4	19.8		
Rarely	36.5	35.1		38.6	38.3		
Never	37.9	36.1		29.6	34.0		
Sample size (total = 597)	122	126		177	172		

SOURCES: MDRC calculations based on responses to the Just Beginning baseline survey and the six-month follow-up survey. The sample includes all fathers who responded to the six-month survey.

NOTES: Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Sample sizes may vary because of missing values.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

The p-value indicates the likelihood of an estimated effect of this size (or larger) if the intervention had zero true effect.

The interaction p-value indicates the likelihood of a difference in estimated effects between subgroups of this size (or larger) if the true effects in the subgroups were the same.

**APPENDIX TABLE E.7. JUST BEGINNING SUBGROUP EFFECTS ON CONTINUOUS OUTCOMES, SUBGROUP: FOCAL CHILD’S AGE**

Outcome	Child 18 Months or Younger			Child Older Than 18 Months			Interaction P-Value
	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	P-Value	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	P-Value	
Father-child dysfunctional interaction (1 = least dysfunctional to 5 = most dysfunctional)	1.8	1.8	0.967	1.8	1.7	0.223	0.741
Father’s positive and negative feelings about the child (1 = most negative to 5 = most positive)	4.9	4.9*	0.076	4.8	4.7	0.495	0.403
Perceived influence (1 = none to 4 = a great deal)	3.9	3.9	0.955	3.9	3.8	0.240	0.376
Parenting efficacy scale (1 = lowest to 5 = highest)	4.7	4.7	0.824	4.7	4.7	0.865	0.559
Agrees it is worthwhile to talk to the child (%)	87.0	90.7	0.275	91.9	87.9	0.300	0.213
Engages in warm and supportive parenting (1 = never to 6 = more than once a day)	4.9	5.1	0.197	5.0	4.8	0.186	0.380
Sample size (total = 598)	186	175		113	124		

SOURCES: MDRC calculations using responses to the Just Beginning baseline survey and the six-month follow-up survey. The sample includes all fathers who responded to the six-month survey.

NOTES: Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Sample sizes may vary because of missing values.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

The p-value indicates the likelihood of an estimated effect of this size (or larger) if the intervention had zero true effect.

The interaction p-value indicates the likelihood of a difference in estimated effects between subgroups of this size (or larger) if the true effects in the subgroups were the same.

**APPENDIX TABLE E.8. JUST BEGINNING SUBGROUP EFFECTS ON CATEGORICAL OUTCOMES, SUBGROUP: FOCAL CHILD’S AGE**

Outcome	Child 18 Months or Younger			Child Older Than 18 Months			Interaction P-Value
	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	P-Value	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	P-Value	
Father-child contact (%)			0.117			0.407	0.042
Not at all	8.9	7.2		6.7	10.9		
1 to 3 times in the past month	9.1	3.0		1.8	5.6		
1 or 2 times per week	9.3	8.0		12.0	10.2		
3 or 4 times per week	5.9	8.1		6.7	6.0		
Every day or almost every day	66.8	73.8		72.7	67.4		
Overall quality of the parent-child relationship (%)			0.635			0.392	0.206
Poor, fair, or somewhat good	10.2	7.6		10.2	14.2		
Very good	23.0	25.7		27.8	21.1		
Excellent	66.8	66.7		62.0	64.7		
Father reports using “labeling” (%)			0.955			0.808	0.611
Rarely or not at all in the past month	15.7	13.9		12.0	14.3		
A few times a month	6.7	7.3		8.9	7.3		
A few times a week	19.2	17.0		14.6	19.2		
About once a day	13.1	13.8		16.0	17.1		
More than once a day	45.4	48.0		48.5	42.0		
Cancels plans with the child (%)			0.944			0.139	0.244
Often	5.9	5.2		2.2	7.8		
Sometimes	20.1	21.2		32.3	23.5		
Rarely	38.6	36.2		37.4	36.7		
Never	35.3	37.3		28.2	32.1		
Sample size (total = 598)	186	175		113	124		

SOURCES: MDRC calculations using responses to the Just Beginning baseline survey and the six-month follow-up survey. The sample includes all fathers who responded to the six-month survey.

NOTES: Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Sample sizes may vary because of missing values.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

The p-value indicates the likelihood of an estimated effect of this size (or larger) if the intervention had zero true effect.

The interaction p-value indicates the likelihood of a difference in estimated effects between subgroups of this size (or larger) if the true effects in the subgroups were the same.



**APPENDIX TABLE E.9. JUST BEGINNING SUBGROUP EFFECTS ON CONTINUOUS OUTCOMES,  
SUBGROUP: FATHER'S RESIDENTIAL STATUS**

Outcome	Fathers Who Reside with Their Children			Fathers Who Do Not Reside with Their Children			Interaction P-Value
	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	P-Value	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	P-Value	
Father-child dysfunctional interaction (1 = least dysfunctional to 5 = most dysfunctional)	1.9	1.8	0.373	1.7	1.7	0.869	0.008
Father's positive and negative feelings about the child (1 = most negative to 5 = most positive)	4.8	4.8	0.393	4.9	4.8	0.701	0.587
Perceived influence (1 = none to 4 = a great deal)	3.9	3.9	0.309	3.8	3.7**	0.030	0.473
Parenting efficacy scale (1 = lowest to 5 = highest)	4.7	4.8	0.606	4.7	4.6	0.220	0.855
Agrees it is worthwhile to talk to the child (%)	86.4	89.0	0.463	91.9	89.8	0.557	0.041
Engages in warm and supportive parenting (1 = never to 6 = more than once a day)	5.2	5.4*	0.098	4.6	4.5	0.365	0.289
Sample size (total = 598)	158	163		141	136		

SOURCES: MDRC calculations using responses to the Just Beginning baseline survey and the six-month follow-up survey. The sample includes all fathers who responded to the six-month survey.

NOTES: Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Sample sizes may vary because of missing values.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

The p-value indicates the likelihood of an estimated effect of this size (or larger) if the intervention had zero true effect.

The interaction p-value indicates the likelihood of a difference in estimated effects between subgroups of this size (or larger) if the true effects in the subgroups were the same.

**APPENDIX TABLE E.10. JUST BEGINNING SUBGROUP EFFECTS ON CATEGORICAL OUTCOMES,  
SUBGROUP: FATHER'S RESIDENTIAL STATUS**

Outcome	Fathers Who Reside with Their Children			Fathers Who Do Not Reside with Their Children			Interaction P-Value
	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	P-Value	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	P-Value	
Overall quality of the parent-child relationship (%)			0.192			0.641	0.267
Poor, fair, or somewhat good	6.0	2.2		16.0	19.1		
Very good	22.7	19.9		26.7	28.8		
Excellent	71.3	77.8		57.3	52.1		
Father reports using "labeling" (%)			0.844			0.834	0.561
Rarely or not at all in the past month	11.7	9.5		17.6	19.0		
A few times a month	2.9	4.0		12.9	11.3		
A few times a week	14.1	11.6		20.8	26.2		
About once a day	17.6	20.5		10.5	8.5		
More than once a day	53.7	54.4		38.3	35.0		
Cancels plans with the child (%)			0.689		*	0.081	0.058
Often	7.2	4.8		1.7	7.9		
Sometimes	21.9	19.6		28.9	24.1		
Rarely	33.1	37.9		42.0	36.5		
Never	37.8	37.7		27.4	31.5		
Sample size (total = 598)	158	163		141	136		

SOURCES: MDRC calculations using response to the Just Beginning baseline survey and the six-month follow-up survey. The sample includes all fathers who responded to the six-month survey.

NOTES: Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Effects for "father-child in-person contact in the past month" are not included because this question was not asked of fathers who resided with their children.

Sample sizes may vary because of missing values.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

The p-value indicates the likelihood of an estimated effect of this size (or larger) if the intervention had zero true effect.

The interaction p-value indicates the likelihood of a difference in estimated effects between subgroups of this size (or larger) if the true effects in the subgroups were the same.

**APPENDIX TABLE E.11. JUST BEGINNING SUBGROUP EFFECTS ON CONTINUOUS OUTCOMES, SUBGROUP: FOCAL CHILD’S GENDER**

Outcome	Child Is Male			Child Is Female			Interaction P-Value
	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	P-Value	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	P-Value	
Father-child dysfunctional interaction (1 = least dysfunctional to 5 = most dysfunctional)	1.7	1.7	0.663	1.9	1.8	0.122	0.008
Father’s positive and negative feelings about the child (1 = most negative to 5 = most positive)	4.8	4.8	0.333	4.8	4.8	0.918	0.850
Perceived influence (1 = none to 4 = a great deal)	3.9	3.9	0.553	3.9	3.8	0.659	0.870
Parenting efficacy scale (1 = lowest to 5 = highest)	4.7	4.7	0.630	4.7	4.7	0.281	0.783
Agrees it is worthwhile to talk to the child (%)	90.4	91.0	0.843	87.7	87.3	0.917	0.546
Engages in warm and supportive parenting (1 = never to 6 = more than once a day)	4.9	4.9	0.887	4.9	5.1	0.266	0.916
Sample size (total = 598)	154	161		145	138		

SOURCES: MDRC calculations using responses to the Just Beginning baseline survey and the six-month follow-up survey. The sample includes all fathers who responded to the six-month survey.

NOTES: Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Sample sizes may vary because of missing values.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

The p-value indicates the likelihood of an estimated effect of this size (or larger) if the intervention had zero true effect.

The interaction p-value indicates the likelihood of a difference in estimated effects between subgroups of this size (or larger) if the true effects in the subgroups were the same.

**APPENDIX TABLE E.12. JUST BEGINNING SUBGROUP IMPACTS ON CATEGORICAL OUTCOMES, SUBGROUP: FOCAL CHILD’S GENDER**

Outcome	Child Is Male			Child Is Female			Interaction P-Value
	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	P-Value	Program Group	Services-as-Usual Group	P-Value	
Father-child contact (%)		**	0.025			0.488	0.069
Not at all	7.9	11.1		9.3	4.8		
1 to 3 times in the past month	5.9	0.6		6.8	8.2		
1 or 2 times per week	10.7	6.6		8.7	12.8		
3 or 4 times per week	5.0	9.5		6.9	5.2		
Every day or almost every day	70.5	72.2		68.3	69.0		
Overall quality of the parent-child relationship (%)			0.984			0.966	0.927
Poor, fair, or somewhat good	10.3	10.7		9.6	10.5		
Very good	22.7	21.9		26.8	26.2		
Excellent	66.9	67.4		63.6	63.3		
Father reports using “labeling” (%)			0.259			0.353	0.073
Rarely or not at all in the past month	15.6	15.1		15.6	10.0		
A few times a month	7.3	2.4		8.3	12.6		
A few times a week	17.2	19.2		15.6	18.8		
About once a day	10.7	15.3		18.6	14.2		
More than once a day	49.2	48.0		42.0	44.5		
Cancels plans with the child (%)			0.659			0.271	0.166
Often	5.0	6.5		4.5	5.5		
Sometimes	20.9	23.1		29.7	20.0		
Rarely	42.5	35.7		31.2	39.7		
Never	31.7	34.7		34.6	34.7		
Sample size (total = 598)	154	161		145	138		

SOURCES: MDRC calculations using responses the Just Beginning baseline survey and the six-month follow-up survey. The sample includes all fathers who responded to the six-month survey.

NOTES: Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Sample sizes may vary because of missing values.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

The p-value indicates the likelihood of an estimated effect of this size (or larger) if the intervention had zero true effect.

The interaction p-value indicates the likelihood of a difference in estimated effects between subgroups of this size (or larger) if the true effects in the subgroups were the same.

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