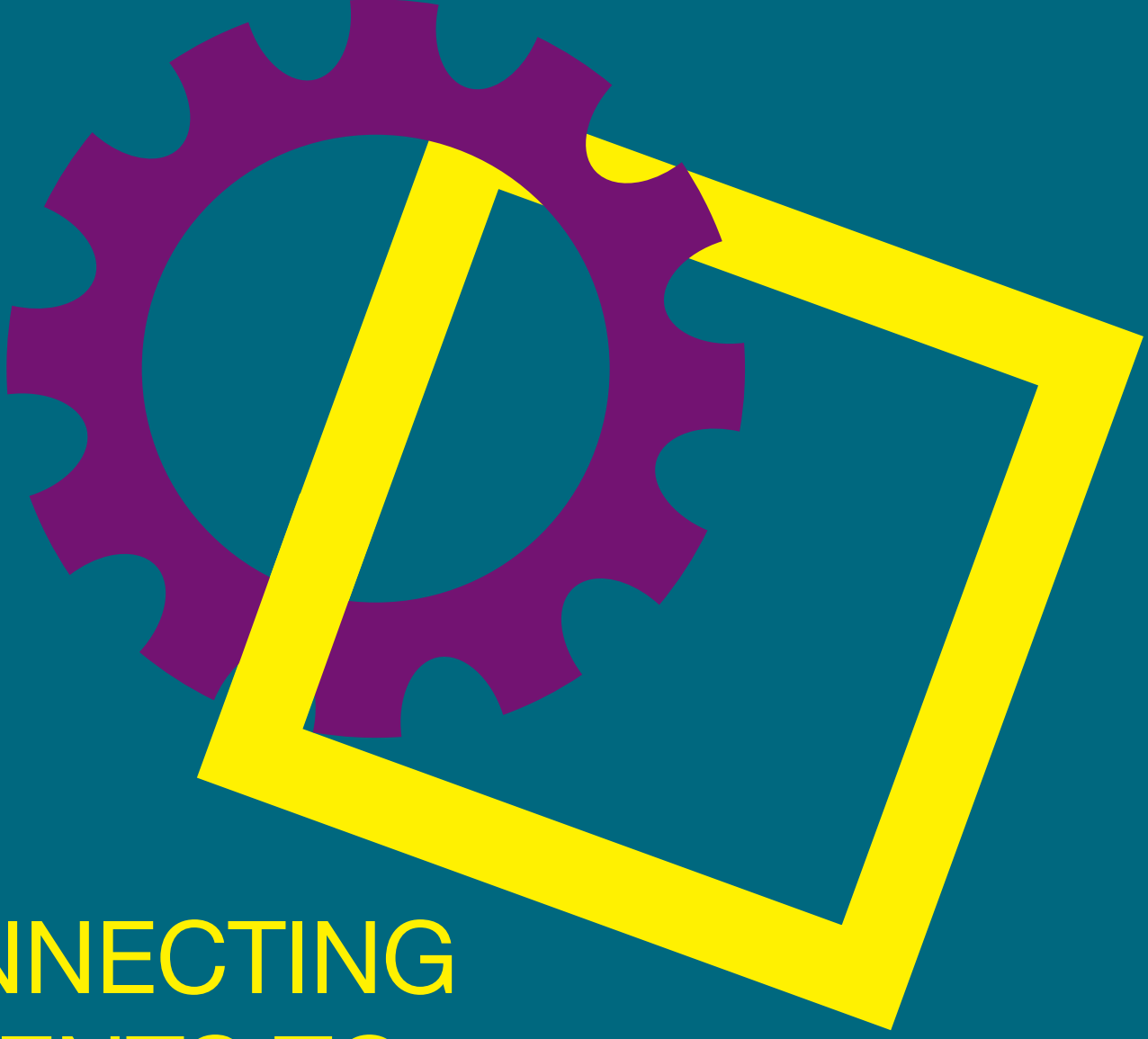


CONNECTING PARENTS TO OCCUPATIONAL TRAINING

A Partnership Between Child Support Agencies and Local Service Providers

Kyla Wasserman
Lily Freedman
Zaina Rodney
Caroline Schultz

April 2021

mdrc
BUILDING KNOWLEDGE TO IMPROVE SOCIAL POLICY

Connecting Parents to Occupational Training

A Partnership Between Child Support Agencies and Local Service Providers

Kyla Wasserman, Lily Freedman, Zaina Rodney, and Caroline Schultz

APRIL 2021

FUNDERS

Funding for the Families Forward Demonstration was supported through a grant from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, public resources raised by participating child support agencies, and matching federal funds through Section 1115 Waivers approved by the Office of Child Support Enforcement. The program in New York was additionally supported by the Robin Hood Foundation.

Dissemination of MDRC publications is supported by the following organizations and individuals that help finance MDRC's public policy outreach and expanding efforts to communicate the results and implications of our work to policymakers, practitioners, and others: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Arnold Ventures, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, Ford Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, Daniel and Corinne Goldman, The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, Inc., The JPB Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, and Sandler Foundation.

In addition, earnings from the MDRC Endowment help sustain our dissemination efforts. Contributors to the MDRC Endowment include Alcoa Foundation, The Ambrose Monell Foundation, Anheuser-Busch Foundation, Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Ford Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, The Grable Foundation, The Lizabeth and Frank Newman Charitable Foundation, The New York Times Company Foundation, Jan Nicholson, Paul H. O'Neill Charitable Foundation, John S. Reed, Sandler Foundation, and The Stupski Family Fund, as well as other individual contributors.

The findings and conclusions in this report do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the funders.

For information about MDRC and copies of our publications, see our website: www.mdrc.org.

Copyright © 2021 by MDRC®. All rights reserved.

OVERVIEW

The Families Forward Demonstration (FFD) examined new strategies to increase the earnings of parents who owe child support but are unable to fully meet their obligations due to low earnings. Operated by child support agencies in five jurisdictions across the country from 2018 to 2020, FFD sought to integrate employment and training services into existing public child support programs. The FFD program included free occupational skill-building activities, to help parents qualify for higher-paying jobs, as well as employment services and wraparound supports. It also focused on "responsive" child support services that helped parents understand their support obligations, and even suspended certain enforcement actions while parents participated in the program.

This report presents the findings from the implementation and outcome studies of FFD.

KEY FINDINGS

- When tailoring the FFD model to the local context, each child support agency leveraged flexibility within its existing policies to design its child support services. This included assigning dedicated FFD child support workers to the program. These staff members were also encouraged to consider participants' employment and training activities when deciding how or whether to apply enforcement measures that were already under the discretion of their agency.
- Recruiting parents to FFD and determining whether they would be eligible for the program was a labor- and time-intensive process. The programs struggled with recruitment for an array of reasons, including parents' negative perceptions of child support, the agencies' limited experience with recruitment, and a lack of alignment between parents' interests and the service offerings.
- Nearly all parents enrolled in the study received some responsive child support services. This customer service–oriented approach made a positive impression on parents and child support staff alike, improving parents' perception of child support and facilitating communication between the agency and participants.
- Almost 60 percent of study enrollees started an occupational skills training program. Among these parents, 70 percent completed training but less than half of them were employed at some point during the first six months after study enrollment.
- Following study enrollment, parents' monthly child support order amounts declined, reversing upward trends prior to study enrollment. Additionally, parents were more likely to make a monthly payment and their monthly total payment amounts increased, reversing steady or downward trends prior to study enrollment. Together, decreasing order amounts and increasing payments resulted in increasing compliance rates after enrolling in the study, relative to declining trends prior to enrolling.

While more rigorous testing is needed, the FFD model shows some promise for connecting parents to jobs in their chosen career path and for improving their compliance with their child support obligations. However, the program would benefit from addressing operational challenges around recruitment and service delivery to scale up and serve a greater number of parents.

CONTENTS

CONTENTS *(CONTINUED)*

LIST OF EXHIBITS

TABLE

LIST OF EXHIBITS *(CONTINUED)*

TABLE

FIGURE

LIST OF EXHIBITS *(CONTINUED)*

FIGURE

BOX

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are grateful to the W. K. Kellogg Foundation for their support of the Families Forward Demonstration (FFD), especially Loren Harris, Jonathan Njus, and Tameshia Bridges Mansfield. We are equally appreciative of the Office of Child Support Enforcement and the project officers who helped guide the project, especially Elaine Sorensen, Vernae Martin, John Langrock, Barbara Lacina, Kesha Rodriguez, and Michael Hayes.

The participating child support agencies were instrumental in developing the FFD program. These agencies included Cuyahoga County Office of Child Support Services, Franklin County Child Support Enforcement Agency, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Office of Child Support, New York City Human Resources Administration Office of Child Support Services, and Washington State Division of Child Support. In addition, Colorado Department of Human Services Division of Child Support Services and Pennsylvania Bureau of Child Support Enforcement helped shape FFD through their contributions to the planning period. We are particularly grateful to the FFD program managers for their role in coordinating the program and partnerships: Rachael Balanson, Pete Cleary, Kim Kerns, Jorji Knickrehm, Christina Nichols, and Marlowe Paraiso. We greatly appreciate the staff members at all of the FFD program locations who participated in implementation site visits and were open and thoughtful in answering our questions, as well as the staff who facilitated data collection and sharing for the project.

Angie Kamath's expertise in implementing sector-focused employment programs helped shape the FFD program model.

This research would not have been possible without the work of many individuals at MDRC. Carolyn Hill directed the project and analyses. Lauren Cates managed the budget. Dan Bloom, Louisa Treskon, and Brit Henderson provided valuable comments on drafts of this report. We are grateful to Michelle Dixon, Sally Dai, Johanna Walter, Jennifer Hausler, and Jared Smith for their work analyzing the quantitative data as well as to Pei Zhu and Marie-Andree Somers for their contributions to the analysis design. Thanks are also due to Michelle Manno for advising on the implementation analysis and to her and Jennifer Hausler for their help with qualitative data collection. We also thank Louisa Treskon for advising on the expenditure analysis and Michelle Dixon for analyzing these data. Bret Barden, Samuel Diaz, Farhana Hossain, Christine Johnston, Vanessa Martin, and Molly Williams contributed to the initial phase of this project. Christine Johnston, Jennifer Hausler, and Molly Williams provided ongoing technical assistance to FFD child support agencies and their partners. Jacqueline Groskaufmanis coordinated the publication of the report. Jill Kirschenbaum edited the report, and Carolyn Thomas prepared it for publication.

Finally, we are deeply appreciative of the parents who agreed to participate in FFD. Without them, this research would not have been possible.

The Authors

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Child support is a critical source of income for families and lifts around one million people out of poverty each year.[1] The Families Forward Demonstration (FFD) examined new strategies to increase the earnings of parents who owe child support but who are unable to fully meet their obligations due to low earnings.

Operated by child support agencies in five jurisdictions across the country, FFD sought to integrate employment and training services into public child support programs. Unlike most other child support–led employment initiatives, which focus on job search and placement services, the FFD program emphasized free occupational skill-building activities, combined with a suite of complementary services, to help parents qualify for higher-paying jobs.

This demonstration project was developed by MDRC in collaboration with the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), and participating child support agencies. MDRC studied FFD to understand how child support agencies developed and implemented FFD in their communities and to gain insight into the experiences and outcomes of parents who took part in the initiative. Over 760 parents enrolled in the study between 2018 and 2020.

FFD was supported through a grant from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, public and private resources raised by participating child support agencies, and matching federal funds through Section 1115 Waivers approved by OCSE.

Child support payments make up about half of the average income of parents with low income who receive the payments.[2] Consistent child support payments are critical to these parents, who count on the income to support their child. Yet more than half of parents who are owed child support receive no payments or partial payments.[3] At the same time, the majority of parents who struggle to pay child support are unemployed or underemployed, making it very difficult for them to meet their support obligations.[4] Under the direction of OCSE, state and local child support agencies are increasingly trying to balance holding parents accountable for their support obligations with the need to address their financial capacity to pay.

---

1. Office of Child Support Enforcement, *Child Support Fact-Sheet Series: Family-Centered Innovations to Improve Child Support Outcomes* (Washington, DC: Office of Child Support Enforcement, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011).
2. Office of Child Support Enforcement, *2018 Child Support: More Money for Families* (Washington, DC: Office of Child Support Enforcement, Administration for Children and Families, 2018).
3. Timothy Grall, *Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support: 2013* (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).
4. Elaine Sorensen, Liliana Sousa, and Simon Schaner, *Assessing Child Support Arrears in Nine Large States and the Nation* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2007).

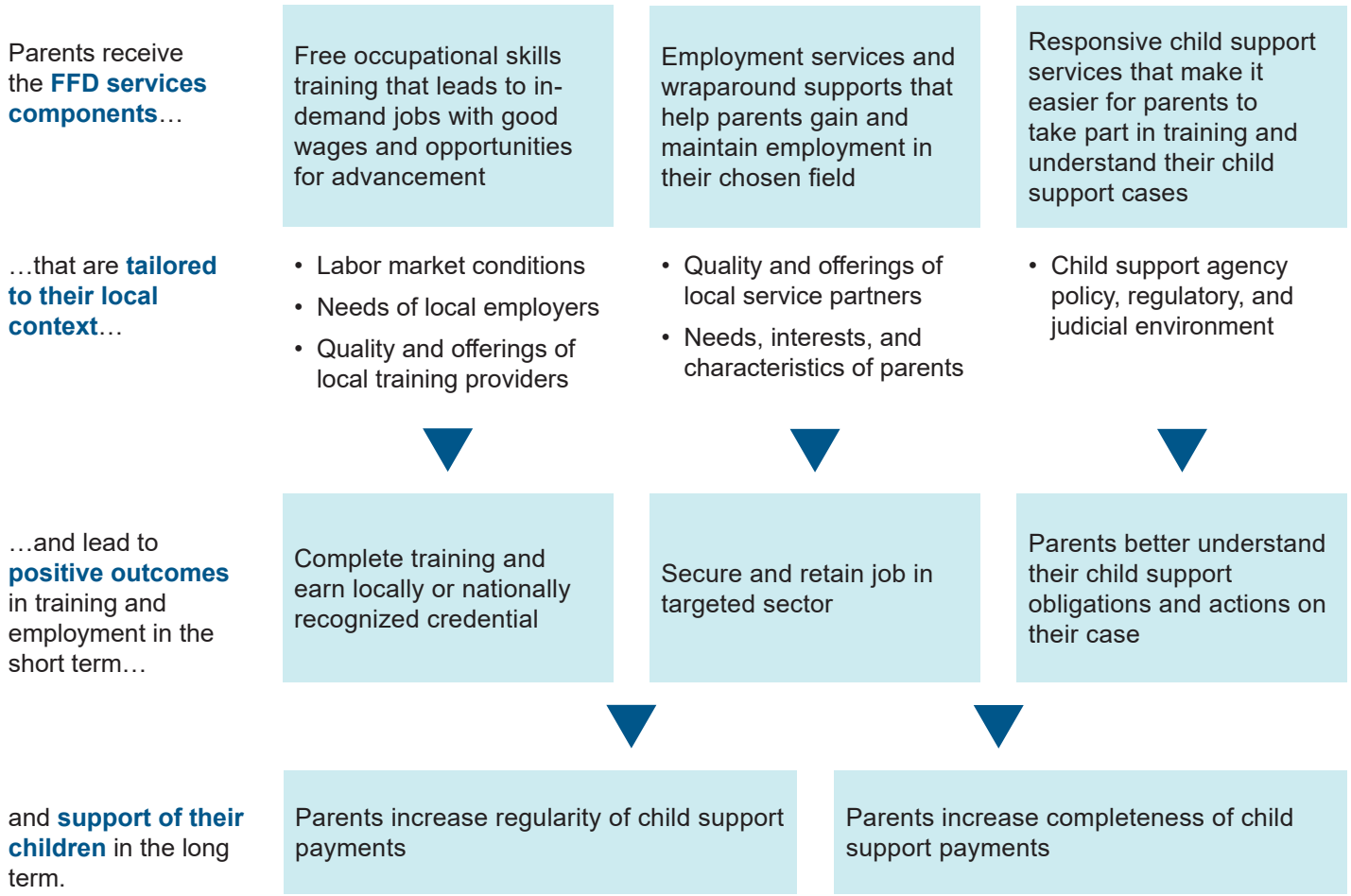
FFD PROGRAM MODEL

The overall goal of FFD was to help parents with low and moderate incomes make reliable child support payments by increasing employment, job stability, and earnings. It focused on demand-driven occupational skills training designed to meet local employers' need for skilled labor, as well as parents' need for high-quality jobs with advancement opportunities.

FFD provided access to free occupational skills training, removing cost as a barrier to entry. The program targeted middle-skill jobs that could be accessed with training that took six months or less to complete. Other program services helped parents participate in such training and find employment in their chosen field, suspended discretionary child support enforcement activities, helped parents understand their child support obligations, and guided them through order modification and arrears-forgiveness processes when appropriate. Figure ES.1 provides an overview of the FFD services and their intended outcomes.

FIGURE ES.1

Families Forward Demonstration Logic Model



Child support agencies in five locations implemented FFD: Cuyahoga County, Ohio; Franklin County, Ohio; Calhoun and Jackson counties in Michigan; New York City; and Benton and Franklin counties in Washington State. They operated the program in partnership with local colleges, training providers, workforce development agencies, and community-based organizations that offered screening and enrollment, employment, and training services. The child support agencies began designing their FFD programs in 2016 and launched the programs between 2018 and 2019 as they finalized their plans for service delivery and partnerships. The programs enrolled parents in the study through June 2020; however, many programs stopped enrolling parents earlier due to disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS, DATA SOURCES, AND ANALYSIS APPROACHES

This study focuses on how child support agencies developed and implemented FFD. It also includes some initial information about its outcomes. The research team sought to answer six questions:[5]

1. How was the FFD program developed, implemented, and adapted by child support agencies and their service partners?

2. What were the characteristics of parents who decided to take part in FFD?

3. What were enrollees' participation levels and patterns?

4. What were the experiences of parents who enrolled in FFD?

5. What were the training, employment, and child support outcomes for parents who enrolled in FFD?

6. What aspects of the local, state, and community context constrained or enabled implementation of FFD?

The study's data sources included interviews with child support agency staff and program partners who provided services; interviews with parents who enrolled in the study; survey data collected at the time of study enrollment; data from service providers on program participation, service delivery, and job placements; and administrative data from child support agencies. The COVID-19 pandemic, and the economic fallout associated with it, had direct implications for the study follow-up period. The FFD study was able to follow participants for 6 months after enrollment in all sites, and for 12 months for a subset of the study sample. Results from similar prior studies indicate that FFD's follow-up period was likely too short to observe effects of FFD on employment and child support outcomes.

5. The study also includes some initial information about the expenses associated with operating FFD.

The research team used an interrupted time series nonexperimental design to test whether trends in child support outcomes after enrolling in FFD were different from previous trends for the same individuals.[6] While suggestive, this design did not allow the research team to attribute change in these outcomes to FFD. Thus, results from these analyses should be considered exploratory.

KEY FINDINGS

The study provides important information for practitioners and policymakers about how child support agencies might support efforts to help parents increase their earnings and support their children financially.

- Child support agencies tailored the FFD model to their local context, developing plans for service delivery and partnerships. While challenges with the procurement of service partners slowed down some agencies, their development of the program's child support services was a bright spot: Child support agencies leveraged flexibility within their existing policies to design "responsive" services that focused on assigning dedicated FFD child support workers and encouraging them to take into account participants' employment and training activities when deciding how to apply the enforcement measures that were already under their discretion.

- A key question was whether parents would be interested in taking part in a skills training opportunity led by a child support agency. The programs struggled with recruitment for an array of reasons, including parents' negative perceptions of child support, the agencies' limited experience with recruitment, lack of alignment between parents' interests and the service offerings, and the general challenges of getting word out about a new program. Recruiting parents to FFD and determining whether they would be eligible for the program was a labor- and time-intensive process.

- Nearly all parents enrolled in the study received some responsive child support services. This customer service–oriented approach made a positive impression on parents and child support staff alike, improving parents' perception of child support and facilitating communication between the agency and participants.

- Almost 60 percent of study enrollees started a training program. Among these parents, 70 percent completed training but less than half of them were employed at some point during the first six months after study enrollment.

6. For additional information about interrupted time series design, see James Lopez Bernal, Steven Cummins, and Antonio Gasparrini, "Interrupted Time Series Regression for the Evaluation of Public Health Interventions: A Tutorial," *International Journal of Epidemiology* 46, 1 (2017): 348-355.

- Following study enrollment, parents' monthly child support order amounts declined, reversing upward trends prior to enrollment. Declines in order amounts are likely due to child support agencies "right-sizing" parents' orders so that they align with parents' current financial circumstances. Additionally, parents were more likely to make a monthly payment and their monthly total payment amounts increased, reversing steady or downward trends prior to study enrollment. Together, decreasing order amounts and increasing payments resulted in increasing compliance rates after enrolling in the study, relative to declining trends prior to enrolling.

While more rigorous testing is needed, the FFD model shows some promise for connecting parents to jobs in their chosen career path and for improving their compliance with their child support obligations. However, the program would benefit from addressing operational challenges around recruitment and service delivery to scale up and serve a greater number of parents.

1

Introduction

Child support is a critical source of income for families and lifts around one million people out of poverty each year.[1] However, many parents who are owed child support do not receive the full amount,[2] often because of the low earnings of the parent who is ordered to pay it. The Families Forward Demonstration (FFD) examined new strategies to increase the earnings of parents who owe child support but who are unable to fully meet their obligations due to low earnings. Operated by child support agencies in five jurisdictions across the country, FFD sought to integrate employment and training services into public child support programs. Unlike most other child support agency–led employment initiatives, which focus on job search and placement services, FFD programs included occupational skill-building activities combined with a suite of complementary services to help parents qualify for higher-paying jobs.

This demonstration project was developed by MDRC, in collaboration with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), and participating child support agencies. MDRC studied FFD to understand how child support agencies developed and implemented FFD in their communities and to gain insights into the experiences and outcomes of parents who took part in the initiative. Over 760 parents enrolled in the study between 2018 and 2020.

FFD was supported through a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, resources raised by participating child support agencies, and matching federal funds through Section 1115 Waivers approved by OCSE.[3] In addition, the Robin Hood Foundation provided support for the FFD program in New York.

1. Office of Child Support Enforcement (2011).
2. Administration for Children and Families (2018).
3. Local and Foundation funds made up 34 percent of the budget, and federal matching funds from OCSE made up the remaining 66 percent.

BACKGROUND AND POLICY CONTEXT

Child support agencies in the U.S. served 14.7 million children in 2018.[4] Higher child support payments are associated with improvements in child well-being,[5] cognitive development among young children,[6] and academic achievement among older children.[7] For an introduction to the child support program and parents who interact with this system, see Box 1.1.

BOX 1.1

Introduction to Child Support and Parents with Support Orders

What Is Child Support?

Child support is made up of the payments that one parent makes to the other parent to help with the financial costs of caring for their child.

The Child Support Enforcement program was established in 1975 under the Social Security Act. It began as a welfare-cost recovery program. Its primary purpose was to reduce public costs for the cash assistance program by requiring parents to reimburse state and federal governments for part of that aid. The program also aimed to prevent families from needing public assistance by securing consistent financial support from the parents who were ordered to pay child support. The program underwent major changes in 1996, when welfare reform measures gave child support agencies broad enforcement tools and technology updates that made it easier to track cases across state lines.

Today, child support focuses on self-sufficiency and parental responsibility. It is increasingly trying to balance its obligation to collect and distribute child support payments with parents' ability to pay those orders.

Under the oversight of the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OSCE) of the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, states, territories, and tribes administer the child support program. The program provides seven key services: 1) opening a child support case, 2) locating the other parent, 3) establishing parentage, 4) establishing a child support order, 5) setting up payment, 6) enforcing the support order, and 7) reviewing the order.

4. Administration for Children and Families (2019).
5. Sorensen and Zibman (2000).
6. Argys, Peters, Brooks-Gunn, and Smith (1998).
7. Knox (1996); Graham, Beller, and Hernandez (1994); Knox and Bane (1994).

Describing Parents Who Are Involved with the Child Support System

The child support system differentiates between the parent who receives child support and the parent who is ordered to pay child support. The parent who receives child support typically has primary custody of the child (and is sometimes known as the "custodial parent" while the other parent is known as the "noncustodial parent"). These distinctions are practical and, in many cases, necessary. However, the terms do not always capture the complexities of parenting. For example, a parent may pay support obligations for one of their children and perform primary caregiving duties for their other children. This parent may also receive child support for other children in their lives.

The parents the research team spoke to for this study described themselves as parents, often as dads, who cared for their children by making child support payments, but also by spending time with them, providing them with supplies like clothes and toys, and helping them get to where they needed to go. Some parents expressed frustration with the terms that they heard used for their family that could feel cold or clinical, such as referring to their children as "cases" or "arrears." One parent chided, "Child support treats your child like a debt and you as a debtor."

Parenting roles are complicated, lived, and deeply personal. This report focuses on parents who have child support orders. Following the lead of the individuals we spoke with for this research, we chose to refer to them simply as parents. Unless specifically noted, all mentions of parents within this report refer to parents who are ordered to pay child support.

Child support payments make up about half of the average income of parents with low income who receive the payments. Consistent child support payments are critical to these parents, who count on the income to support their child financially. Yet more than two-thirds of the parents who were owed child support in 2013 did not receive their full child support payments.[8]

Research shows that parents who are unemployed or underemployed have a limited ability to pay child support because of their earnings. A landmark 2007 study showed that the majority of child support debts (70 percent) were owed by parents who earned $10,000 per year or less. The median support order owed by these parents accounted for 83 percent of their reported income, indicating that it was likely very difficult for them to pay their orders and meet their other financial obligations.[9]

The child support system may respond punitively when parents do not meet their support obligations—by suspending their drivers' licenses, holding them in contempt of court, or even jailing them. There is growing recognition that these enforcement actions may be counterproductive,

8. Grall (2016).
9. Sorensen, Sousa, and Schaner (2007).

as parents who cannot drive or who are incarcerated will find it harder or impossible to work and support their children.[10] The practice of finding parents in civil contempt for nonpayment and jailing them for nonpayment may lead to a cycle of debt and incarceration,[11] both of which reduce child support payments and can have negative consequences for families.[12]

Moreover, penalties for nonpayment of child support can violate due process if child support agencies incarcerate parents for nonpayment without first assessing their ability to pay, according to a 2011 U.S. Supreme Court ruling.[13] This ruling, along with cultural and policy shifts taking place in child support agencies, has led these agencies to approach noncompliance in new ways. Under the direction of OCSE, state and local child support agencies are increasingly trying to balance holding parents accountable for their support obligations with their financial capacity to pay.

"We have so many tools that we can use. But we're up against a few decades of punitive practices. We're still here trying to get consistent support for the children but how we go about doing that is what we are trying to change."

— FFD child support deputy director

To increase child support payment among parents who are unemployed or underemployed, many state and local child support agencies have developed programs to provide employment services for parents. The FFD study provides valuable insights into how child support agencies can help parents support their families through these kinds of employment programs.

FFD PROGRAM MODEL

The overall goal of FFD was to help parents with low and moderate incomes make reliable child support payments by increasing employment, job stability, and earnings. The core of the FFD model was demand-driven occupational training designed to meet local employers' needs for skilled labor as well as parents' needs for high-quality jobs with advancement opportunities. Demand-driven training programs are based on the premise that skills training and credentials in high-demand sectors will eventually lead to advancements in the labor market. These advancements, in turn, can lead to increases in the amount and regularity of child support payments.

10. Cancian, Meyer, and Wood (2019a).
11. Hoback (2017).
12. Heinrich, Burkhardt, and Shager (2011).
13. U.S. Supreme Court (2011).

"We are not an enforcement agency. We are the office of child support services, and our services are for everyone. It's all about the benefit of the child, and if we don't help the non-custodial parent, we're not helping the child."

— FFD child support agency staff member

FFD provided access to free occupational skills training, removing cost as a barrier to entry. The program targeted middle-skills jobs with good wages and opportunities for advancement and could be accessed with training that took six months or less to complete. Skills training was complemented with employment services (such as career planning and job search and placement assistance) to help parents find employment in their chosen field, as well as services to help parents participate in the program.

FFD also provided "responsive child support services," including child support navigation services, arrears compromise opportunities, and suspension of discretionary enforcement action. Child support case managers rarely have the ability to call parents or have personal interactions with them, as they typically have very large caseloads—often hundreds or thousands of cases each. As a result, agencies rely on automated, mailed letters to communicate with parents about such things as missed payments, potential enforcement actions, or whether a case is eligible for a modification review.[14] At the same time, child support forms and processes can be confusing and legalistic, and parents may struggle to understand their obligations or the steps they can take to bring their payment requirements into alignment with their income.[15] FFD offered more personalized services to help parents understand their obligations and guide them through order modification and arrears forgiveness processes when appropriate. In addition, recognizing that child support enforcement actions such as license suspensions or jail sentences can make it difficult for parents to complete training, FFD services included the ability to suspend discretionary child support enforcement activities. Figure 1.1 provides an overview of FFD services and their intended outcomes.

FFD PROGRAM LOCATIONS

FFD was implemented by child support agencies in five locations. Throughout the report the program locations are identified by the following names:

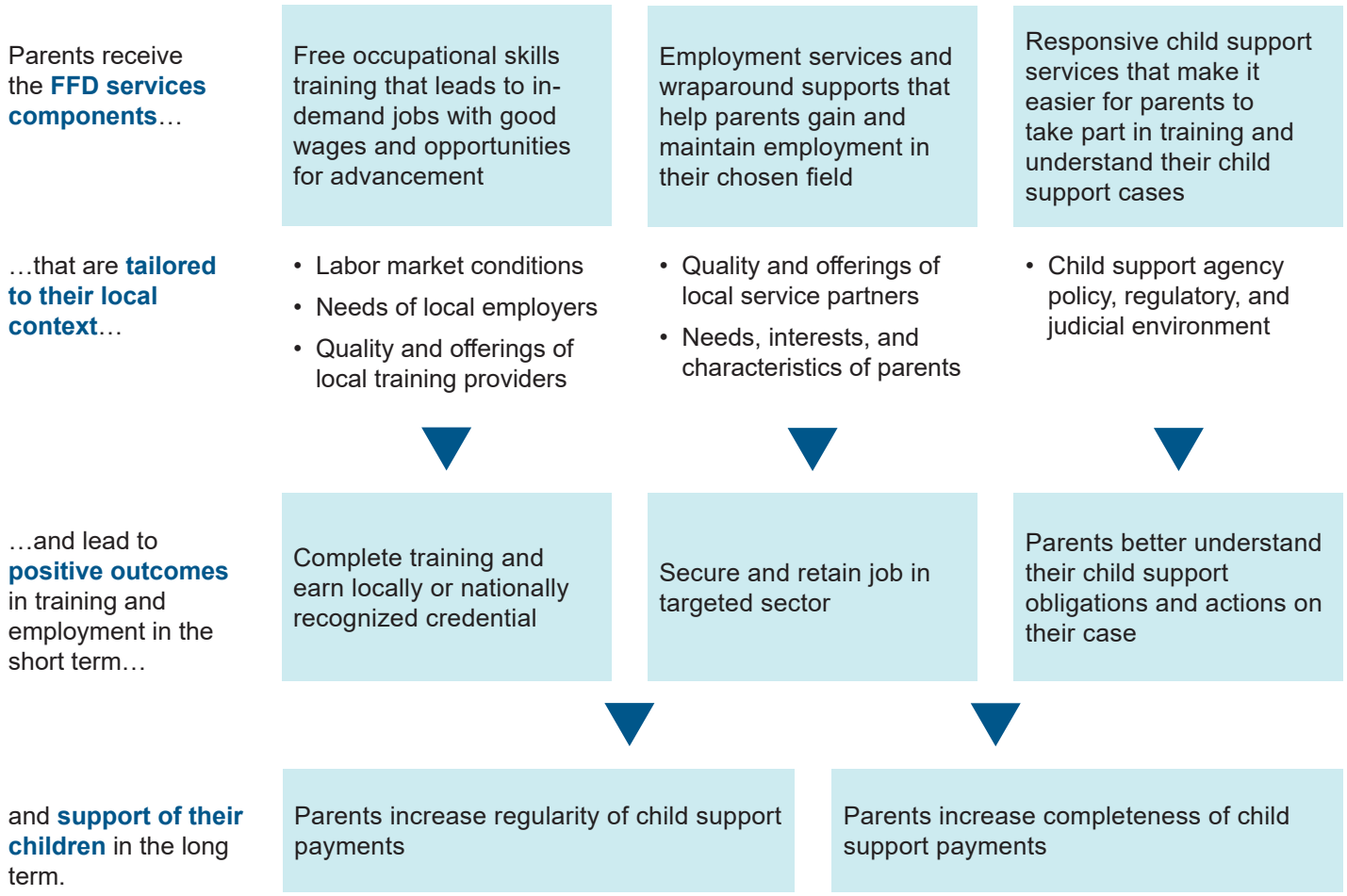
- **Cuyahoga:** County-led program in Cuyahoga County, Ohio
- **Franklin:** County-led program in Franklin County, Ohio
- **Michigan:** State-led program in Calhoun and Jackson counties

14. Kusayeva (2020).
15. Kusayeva and Miller (2019).

- **New York:** New York City–led program with service offerings in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens
- **Washington:** State-led program in Benton, Franklin, and Walla Walla counties

FIGURE 1.1

Families Forward Demonstration Logic Model



These locations reflect diverse local contexts, including medium and large cities like Columbus, Cleveland, and New York City; industrial and manufacturing hubs in Michigan; and agricultural regions in Washington.

While the federal government provides the majority of child support enforcement funding under Title IV-D of the Social Security Act, states have considerable latitude in how they comply with Title IV-D federal regulations when implementing their own child support programs. Therefore, the administration and structure of child support programs vary widely across states, as can the judicial systems and political climates in which they operate. The child support

agencies that volunteered to take part in FFD had already demonstrated an interest in moving beyond enforcement and collection to support the whole family and help address the barriers that unemployed and underemployed parents face. These agencies had arrears compromise programs or pilots in place and had typically undertaken widespread efforts to review and "right size" child support orders to bring them into alignment with parents' incomes. The child support agencies came into FFD with experience and interest in operating employment programs for parents—generally court-ordered or voluntary programs operated by partner organizations that focused on job search and placement. The agencies also had a range of experience with programs for fathers, case management, and grant initiatives. Table 1.1 provides an overview of the FFD child support agencies' experience with services for parents at the time the agencies applied to take part in FFD. Appendix A.1 includes additional information about participating agencies' policies around orders, modifications, and arrears.

TABLE 1.1

Child Support Agencies' Experience with Services for Parents

Lead Child Support Agency	Fatherhood Initiatives	Court-Ordered Employment Programs	Voluntary Employment Programs	Case Management and Supportive Services	Implementing Federal or Large Grant Programs
Cuyahoga County Office of Child Support Services	√	√		√	√
Franklin County Child Support Enforcement Agency	√	√	√	√	√
Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Office of Child Support			√		√
New York City Human Resources Administration Office of Child Support Services	√	√	√	√	√
Washington State Division of Child Support	√	√	√	√	√

SOURCE: Information provided to MDRC by child support agencies when applying to participate in the Families Forward Demonstration.

To operate FFD, the child support agencies applied for waivers under Section 1115 of the Social Security Act. While employment services are not currently an allowable child support agency expense, OCSE has encouraged child support agencies to pursue waivers that allow them to draw down federal matching funds to support programs that help parents find work.[16] These waivers authorized FFD programs to use federal funds on employment services and other normally unallowable expenses, to operate FFD in specific jurisdictions (waiving the requirement for state-wide operation), and to use private dollars as their public share of funding in claiming federal matching funds.

PAST RESEARCH INFORMING FFD

As of 2014, 30 states and the District of Columbia had work-oriented programs for noncustodial parents, generally in one or two jurisdictions or pilots within the state.[17] These programs can be court-ordered or voluntary. Many of them are referral-based, with child support agencies and local courts referring parents to local workforce agencies and employment services partners. Common offerings include traditional employment services, such as job search assistance and career readiness training, coupled with enhanced child support services, parenting classes, and other wraparound services.

Three experimental and nonexperimental studies conducted from 2008 to 2012 indicated that traditional employment programs led by child support agencies showed promise for improving parents' employment, earnings, and child support payments.[18] An earlier national demonstration project operated in the 1990s, Parents Fair Share, also found that a child support agency–led employment program led to increased child support payments. It also raised earnings among a subset of the sample that did not have a high school credential and had little work experience.[19]

More recently, a large-scale evaluation using traditional employment services showed more mixed results. The Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED) was operated by child support agencies in eight states and offered case management as well as enhanced child support, parenting, and traditional employment services, with some opportu-

16. Section 1115 of the Social Security Act provides the Department of Health and Human Services with the authority to waive specific funding requirements or restrictions for the child support program, provided that the program meets certain criteria. For more information, see Office of Child Support Enforcement (2020). For information about OCSE's encouraging the use of these waivers for employment services, see Administration for Children and Families (2019).

17. This is the most recent information available. Some jurisdictions may have discontinued their programs. For more information, see Office of Child Support Enforcement (2016).

18. These studies included a random assignment study design evaluating the impacts of the Parents to Work program in Colorado and two nonexperimental studies of the Strengthening Families through Stronger Families program in New York and the NCP Choices program (Pearson and Davis, 2012; Schroeder and Chiarello, 2008; and Sorensen and Lippold, 2012).

19. Martinez and Miller (2000).

nities for short-term skills training. The randomized controlled trial (RCT) design found that the program improved right-sizing of support orders and parents' perceptions of child support. However, child support payments decreased and there was no effect on compliance with child support.[20] Modest effects on child support payments were also found in the recent study of the Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration (ETJD), which provided funds in four states to support temporary subsidized jobs for parents who owed child support. Using an RCT design, the study found that parents in the program group were more likely to pay any child support than parents in the control group, but overall were not more likely to increase the amount that they paid despite making some gains in earnings.[21]

Demand-driven training programs balance the employment interests of job seekers with the labor needs of employers. They focus on providing job seekers with concrete skills in certifications for jobs that are locally in demand. Research on demand-driven training programs points to their potential for improving the employment prospects of workers with low incomes.[22] However, employment programs led by child support agencies have not emphasized these kinds of approaches and there have been no rigorous evaluations of training programs for parents who owe child support.[23]

FFD sought to incorporate demand-driven employment training and supports into its design by focusing on specific occupations within sectors identified as having opportunities for advancement. The model built off ideas from WorkAdvance, a promising training program that targeted jobs in growing sectors.[24] It included a suite of services tailored to a specific sector, such as information technology or health care. Services included intensive screening; preemployment and career readiness services; occupational skills training that was aligned with employer needs and led to certifications that were in-demand in the labor market; job development and placement services based on strong relationships with employers; and post-employment retention and advancement services. An evaluation of WorkAdvance showed that it could produce and sustain increases in earnings over five years.[25] Notably, three of the four sites showed significant increases in earnings two years after enrollment in the study, and one of the sites maintained this increase in long-term follow-up (six to eight years after study enrollment). Three of the sites increased the likelihood of individuals having high earnings.

20. Cancian, Meyer, and Wood (2019a).

21. It is possible that neither ETJD nor CSPED documented substantial increases in child support payments because parents' orders were previously too high and were corrected by the program or because their earnings increases were not substantial enough to translate to higher child support payments. For more information, see Cummings and Bloom (2020).

22. U.S. Department of Labor (2014); Sama-Miller, Maccarone, Mastri, and Borradaile (2016).

23. Landers (2020).

24. For more information about the WorkAdvance program model and study see https://www.mdrc.org/project/workadvance#overview.

25. Schaberg and Greenberg (2020).

FFD aimed to see if the successes of demand-driven training programs like WorkAdvance could help parents meet their child support obligations and financially support their families. FFD explored whether and how child support agencies might integrate this promising approach into their existing suite of work-oriented programs. This included getting a better understanding of whether parents would be interested in taking part in a skills training coordinated by child support agencies and whether the parents who expressed interest were qualified for the target trainings.

EVALUATION AND DATA SOURCES

The FFD evaluation focuses on how the program was developed and implemented, and includes some initial information about its outcomes. The research team sought to answer six questions:[26]

1. How was the FFD program developed, implemented, and adapted by child support agencies and their service partners?

2. What are the characteristics of parents who decided to take part in FFD? Relatively little data about these parents are publicly available, and relatively little research has focused on their backgrounds and experiences.

3. What were enrollees' participation levels and patterns?

4. What were the program experiences of parents who enrolled in FFD?

5. What were the training, employment, and child support outcomes for parents who enrolled in FFD?

6. What aspects of the local, state, and community context constrained or enabled the implementation of FFD?

The study's data sources included:[27]

- **information about planning and operating the program** collected during ongoing calls between MDRC and each program during the planning and implementation periods;

- **interviews with program staff members and study participants** conducted during visits to each program location in fall 2019;

26. The study also includes some initial information about the expenses of operating a program like FFD.

27. Appendix A provides more detail on these sources, including the timeline for data collection.

- **baseline data** collected through a survey administered to parents at the time of study enrollment, covering domains such as demographics, employment history, finances, and barriers to employment;

- **data collected from service providers** on program participation, service delivery, and job placements;

- **child support administrative data** on obligations, payments, arrears, enforcement actions, and responsive child support services; and

- **financial information** about the costs of implementing the program in two locations.

The participating child support agencies began designing their FFD programs in 2016. They launched the programs between 2018 and 2019 as they finalized their plans for service delivery and partnerships. The programs enrolled parents in the study through June 2020; however, many programs stopped enrolling parents earlier due to disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic, and the economic fallout associated with it, had direct implications for the study follow-up period. While research on employment and training programs suggests that follow-up periods of at least 18 months are needed,[28] the FFD study only was able to measure participation and outcomes over a period of six months in all sites, and over 12 months for a subset of the study sample.

Sample sizes for the participation and outcomes analyses varied widely across sites, ranging from nine in Franklin to almost 300 in New York City. Thus, pooled, cross-site findings are driven by data in the larger sites. The study team focused on a small set of measures from provider reports on program participation, service delivery, and job placements that were relatively consistent across locations.

Interviews conducted with program staff and partners capture a period of time in implementation and may not reflect continued innovations in service delivery. Interviews with parents represent a fraction of experiences with the program; the views and experiences expressed in these interviews may not have been shared by all parents.

Analyses of quantitative data are descriptive and do not support causal inference. Analyses of child support outcomes used an interrupted time series nonexperimental design to test whether trends in outcomes after enrolling in FFD are different from previous trends.[29] While suggestive, this design did not allow the research team to attribute with confidence to FFD changes in these outcomes. The study's results should thus be considered exploratory.

28. Sama-Miller, Maccarone, Mastri, and Borradaile (2016); Card, Kluve, and Weber (2018).

29. For additional information about interrupted time series design, see Lopez Bernal, Cummins, and Gasparrini (2017).

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

Chapter 2 describes how the FFD child support agencies and their service partners developed and planned their local FFD programs. Chapter 3 highlights how the programs recruited participants and assessed their eligibility for the program. It also describes the characteristics of parents who enrolled in the study. The implementation of program services and the experiences and participation of parents who took part in the program are described in Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 6 presents the outcomes on training, employment, and child support for parents who enrolled in the study. Chapter 7 concludes the report with a summary of key findings and lessons for operating child support–led employment programs.

2

Planning and Launching FFD

This chapter describes how the Families Forward Demonstration (FFD) child support agencies and their service partners designed, planned, and launched their local FFD programs. For each program location, a core planning team—consisting of, at minimum, a child support agency and MDRC technical assistance staff members—worked to review existing local child support policies and practices, identify ways in which agency staff members could connect parents with employment and training services, plan parents' engagement in these services in tandem with child support case management and enforcement activities, and customize each set of services to reflect the employment- and earnings-focused goals of the FFD program. Each planning team also gathered and developed knowledge about parents engaged in the child support system; the local labor market; and local service providers who could serve as partners. The teams used this information to make decisions about which occupations to target and to solidify plans and partnerships for service delivery.

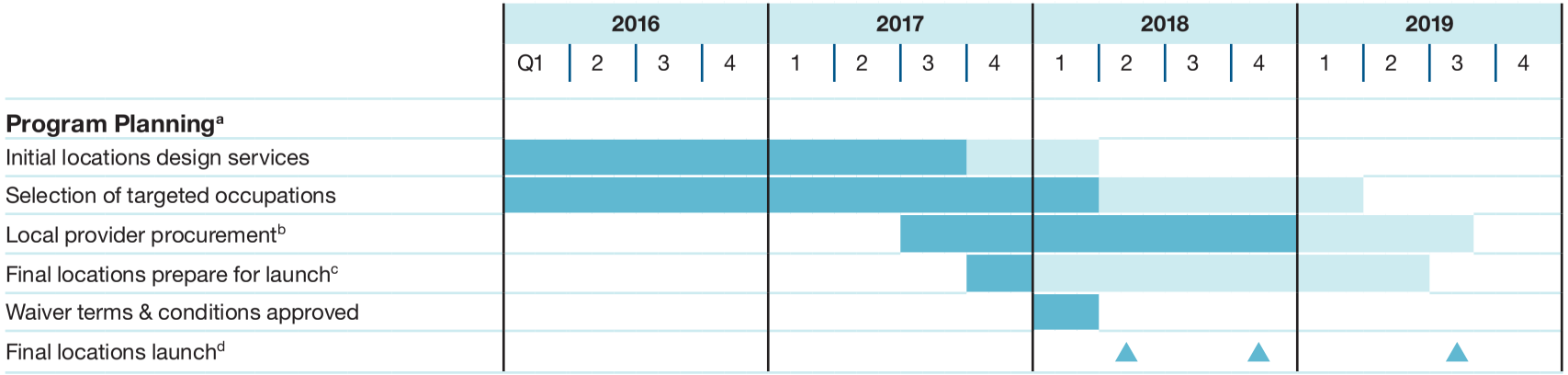
STAGES OF FFD PROGRAM PLANNING AND LAUNCH

The duration of planning and start-up activities varied by program location, as did program launch dates. Table 2.1 provides an overview of FFD activities between 2016 and 2019, including selection of program locations,[1] designing and customizing the model to fit local conditions, engaging local partners, and securing federal demonstration waivers to operate FFD. Box 2.1 describes the central role of the federal waivers in authorizing and helping to fund FFD programs. Although each child support agency was able to complete some planning and start-up tasks *concurrently*, some required more start-up time in order to complete these tasks *sequentially*. For example, the New York FFD team was granted approval to proceed with service provider procurement under the city's research and demonstration authority, and was ready to begin recruiting parents very soon after completing the federal FFD waiver approval process. Other

1. In late 2015, in consultation with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement, MDRC invited child support agencies to submit competitive applications to develop and implement programs for FFD. Six state agencies applied and were selected by MDRC in January 2016. Of these, four states completed the planning process and implemented FFD.

TABLE 2.1

Families Forward Demonstration Program Timeline



NOTES:

[a]Programs continued refining their services and adding providers after the planning period.

[b]Some locations began procuring services from providers after the federal waiver was authorized in December 2016.

[c]Six states were initially invited to participate in FFD in January 2016. Four states (five locations) moved forward.

[d]Michigan and New York both began enrollment in Q2 2018, followed by Cuyahoga and Washington in Q4 2018, and Franklin in Q3 2019.

BOX 2.1

Use of Federal Waivers in FFD

Each participating state child support agency secured a federal waiver in cooperation with the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) under provisions authorized by Section 1115 of the Social Security Act, which allows limited demonstration authority to use federal funds for employment services.

The FFD waivers included provisions to allow child support agencies to:

- draw down federal matching funds to support an array of direct and contracted employment services;
- offer these services in selected locations, rather than statewide;
- use private foundation funding to help draw down federal match funding for FFD activities; and
- cooperate with MDRC to evaluate the FFD program.

programs (such as Franklin and Washington) needed to wait until final waiver terms had been approved before undertaking their competitive procurement processes and before they could complete provider selection and contracting.[2] Despite extensive technical assistance on the waiver applications from the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), until 2017 officials within the agency were unable to act on the waiver requests that the states submitted in 2016.[3] Because FFD planning lasted longer than originally envisioned, once the planning activities were complete most sites launched directly into study enrollment rather than take additional time to operate a pilot in which to iron out operational wrinkles.[4]

2. During the FFD planning period, New York also was able to complete a competitive Request for Proposals process to select its assessment and intake partner. Some other program locations were not able to begin competitive procurement until their federal waiver terms and conditions were approved.
3. The initial delay was related to a proposed executive rule that would have made a number of important changes in the child support program and made several services offered through FFD allowable expenses. As the Obama administration neared transition, there was a strong push to finalize the rule at the end of 2016. Since the proposed rule would have reduced the need for waivers for some of the spending in FFD, the waivers became entangled with the lengthy negotiation and approval process for the rule. Ultimately a narrower version of the rule was issued, and therefore the need for FFD waivers remained.
4. Several parts of the FFD planning process took much longer than expected, mainly due to atypical factors including changes to MDRC's demonstration research design, and delays in waiver development and approval. While these factors affected both the course and timing of FFD's development, they are not issues that other, similar programs would be likely to encounter in the future. For example, following the launch of FFD, OCSE developed processes that have shortened the lead time required for child support agencies to pursue similar waivers. For more information on OCSE's 2019 guidance regarding such waivers, see Office of Child Support Enforcement (2019).

Early in the FFD planning process, the core planning teams (described above) gathered feedback from local parents about their families, jobs, and life circumstances; reviewed research literature about other employment-focused programs; and consulted with experts and practitioners from the child support and workforce development fields. The teams also reviewed data about the number of parents in each location who might be eligible for FFD: those who had a current order to pay child support regularly, yet were not up to date with paying these obligations.[5] To better understand the size of this potential FFD pool of parents, and the scale of their overdue obligations, the child support agencies summarized the dollar amounts of child support arrears owed to other parents or to the state. Table 2.2 summarizes child support arrears and other caseload characteristics in 2015, just prior to the start of local FFD planning.[6]

EXISTING CHILD SUPPORT POLICIES AND FFD CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES

FFD child support agencies report having viewed FFD as an opportunity to pursue their goals to become "family-centered" agencies rather than only focusing on collections and enforcement.[7] They also sought to use FFD to help parents increase their ability to pay support by increasing their earnings. The agencies felt this was important for their performance as child support professionals -- to help families who rely on consistent support, and to boost the morale of agency workers who can burn out or become jaded through traditional child support enforcement duties.

Appendix Table A.1 shows the child support policy and regulatory context in which each agency developed its FFD program, including information about participating agencies' policies around orders, modifications, and arrears. These policies played a role in whether parents entered FFD with orders that aligned with their income, the ease with which parents in FFD could modify their orders, and the possibilities for reducing their arrears. All agencies had child-support order policies that took into account both parents' incomes, rather than solely the parent who owed child support. Two agencies had self-sufficiency policies that limited the amount of child support a parent could owe based on the federal poverty level. There were differences in order modification criteria among sites, especially in the percentage shift in income required to trigger a change, ranging from 15 percent to 75 percent. All FFD locations had programs or policies in

5. In estimating the number of parents potentially eligible for FFD, the planning teams excluded those who were currently incarcerated or receiving federal disability benefits.

6. A parent can incur debt to a state when the state obligates the parent to help cover the costs of cash assistance that the state provided towards a child's material support. In most states, child support agencies offer opportunities for parents to reduce or eliminate state-owed debt if they meet certain criteria—for example, after the parent consistently pays current support orders for a certain number of months. FFD service plans included access to offering information to eligible parents about such arrears-forgiveness opportunities and, where existing state and local policies allowed, helped parents to pursue them.

7. This is consistent with guidance issued by OCSE. For more information, see Office of Child Support Enforcement (2011).

TABLE 2.2

FFD Child Support Agency Caseload Characteristics in 2015

Characteristics	Michigan[b]	Washington[b]	Franklin	Cuyahoga	New York City
Total Child Support caseload	35,862	11,577	70,816	123,875	390,033
Cases with current support order	14,242	7,158	58,761	77,964	186,000
Unduplicated parents who owe current support and are not incarcerated	12,985	5,900	38,304	40,000	117,991
Total arrears: $1 - $4,999	10,400	2,780	14,521	14,520	53,441
Total arrears: $5,000 - $9,999	1,027	653	4,240	4,134	12,749
Total arrears: $10,000 or above	1,558	1,297	8,705	10,989	51,801
Owe at least $5,000 to state	561	645	2,938	2,115	26,701
NCPs with known disabilities (SSI)[a]	1,406	70	N/A	1,749	6,054

SOURCE: Child support agency records as reported on application to participate in FFD.

NOTES: [a]NCP = Noncustodial parent; SSI=Supplemental Security Income.
[b]Characteristics reported for Michigan and Washington refer only to the participation jurisdictions. For more information, see Chapter 1.

place to reduce state-owed child support arrears. However, variations in these and other policies meant that the design of child support services varied across the locations.

To develop FFD's child support services, the agencies focused on identifying strategies such as having parents work with a dedicated FFD child support worker who customized management and enforcement of support cases to reflect the parent's engagement in FFD employment and training activities—taking into account these activities when deciding how to apply the enforcement measures that were already under their discretion.[8] Within the context of developing the FFD model, MDRC and local programs referred to these practices as "responsive child support services." The FFD child support staff members also helped parents to better understand and navigate among existing options and policies, such as opportunities for forgiveness of state-owed child support debt. In addition, two programs developed milestone-based programs for FFD parents with state-owed arrears. Overall, however, child support agencies did not need to revise their policies for FFD. Instead, they opted to leverage flexibility within their existing practices. Chapter 4 details how the programs implemented their responsive child support services.

LOCAL ECONOMIC CONTEXT AND SELECTING FFD OCCUPATIONAL TRAINING TRACKS

FFD programs were offered in a mix of large and mid-sized cities, manufacturing hubs, and agricultural regions. Table 2.3 shows selected economic and labor market conditions in each FFD locality in 2018. During the planning and implementation of FFD, local unemployment rates were near or higher than national averages, yet low overall as most areas continued to rebound following the Great Recession.[9] Most FFD locations also had lower median household incomes than the U.S. average, and higher rates of poverty. However, all implementation sites offered wages above the federal minimum, ranging from $8.30 (Ohio) to $15.00 (New York).

For each FFD location, the planning team conducted a scan of current and projected employment opportunities to identify potential FFD training tracks. Most FFD child support agencies also sought input from local public workforce development or economic development agencies, which contributed insights into current and emerging local industries and jobs. Also, for each local area, MDRC provided a written guide to promising occupations and industries, based on an analysis of recent trends in demand for workers, starting wages, and potential for longer-term

8. For example, FFD child support workers in some jurisdictions could refrain from initiating certain enforcement actions such as driver's license suspensions, to avoid hindering participants in their occupational training, job search, or other FFD activities. Child support staff could also identify situations in which it would make sense for a parent to pursue an existing debt-forgiveness program or explore the possibility of modifying their child support orders to reflect changed financial circumstances.

9. As the planning teams anticipated, the demographic subgroups of parents who ultimately enrolled in FFD faced disproportionately lower-than-average employment rates and lower labor force participation rates.

TABLE 2.3

Local Economic and Labor Market Context in 2018

FFD Program Location	Population	Percent in Poverty[a]	Median Household Income[a]	Average Unemployment Rate[b]	Minimum Wage	Living Wage[c]	In-Demand Occupations[d]
US	**327.2 m**	**13.1**	**$61,937**	**3.8**	**$7.25**	**-**	**Retail sales persons Cashiers Combined food preparation & serving workers**
Cuyahoga, OH	1.24 m	17.9	$50,006	4.3	$8.30	$23.48	Bookkeeping, accounting & auditing clerks Heavy & tractor-trailor truck drivers Nursing assistants
Franklin, OH	1.3 m	15.5	$60,383	3.7	$8.30	$24.27	Bookkeeping, accounting & auditing clerks Heavy & tractor-trailor truck drivers Nursing assistants
Calhoun and Jackson, MI	293 k	15.6	$54,266	4.0	$9.25	$23.10	Nursing assistants Heavy & tractor-trailer truck drivers Teacher assistants
New York City	8.4 m	16.1	$63,569	3.7	$12.00 – $15.00	$32.29	Bookkeeping, accounting & auditing clerks Nursing assistants Teacher assistants
Benton and Franklin, WA	295 k	14.6	$59,358	5.6	$11.50	$24.14	Teaching assistants Heavy & tractor-trailor truck drivers Bookkeeping

(continued)

TABLE 2.3 (continued)

SOURCES: The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018 Local Area Unemployment Statistics.
The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, The Economic Daily.
The U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates.
The U.S. Census Bureau Population Records and Statistics.
The Economic Policy Institute Minimum Wage Tracker.
The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Living Wage Calculator.
Labor Market Information Service, In-Demand Occupations at Sites.

NOTES: [a]Averaged across counties in region, when relevant.
[b]Includes averaged data from Jackson MSA and Battle Creek MSA. All other areas comprise a single MSA.
[c]Living wage for single parent with one child. Parents in FFD may have more than one child and working partners. Calculations for 2021.
[d]Top three occupations by employment for jobs requiring a high school credential and some additional training. Jackson and Battle Creek MSA top employment occupations are identical.

advancement.[10] MDRC issued guidelines to local child support agencies, outlining a process for selecting occupational tracks and providers, including the following tasks:

Understanding local labor demand. This task involved talking with local workforce organizations to understand the skills and occupations that were in demand among local employers and industries. To collect this information, child support agencies talked with public workforce development agencies, economic development agencies, employer groups (chambers of commerce and trade associations), and community college workforce divisions, focusing on questions such as:

- Which industries had current and expected future job growth, and had accessible advancement opportunities? Where were the good entry-level wage jobs—ideally, at or above the median pay level among all jobs requiring a high school diploma plus some occupational training?

- Who were the key employers in the high-growth sectors and what were their pipelines for recruiting candidates? What was the level of demand (that is, jobs available) for specific occupations?

- What skills/competencies/certifications/experiences were needed to break into a particular field? What occupations were open to those with only a high school diploma, and those with prior involvement in the justice system?

Understanding training options. This task asked child support agencies to continue conversations with workforce organizations and with the training providers *they might work with* to

10. The New York City Labor Market Information Service (LMIS) prepared these guides under a contract with MDRC. Promising indicators included the numbers of local jobs in each occupation or industry, and projections for future growth in those numbers. For each measure, LMIS set a threshold, using an average or a median (depending on the measure) to gauge performance relative to the rest of the labor market. Those that exceeded a number of these thresholds were considered "promising" and appeared in the written guides.

better understand the services available for potentially selected industries and occupational tracks. Key questions included:

- What skills/competencies were required to start a track? What types of assessments were conducted for training participant selection?
- What was the duration and intensity of training? (MDRC's FFD guidelines required that training participants be able to enter a targeted occupation with no more than six months of pre-employment occupational training.)
- Did the training offer an industry-recognized credential or certification? If so, was it part of a stackable sequence of training and credentials that could help workers move up a career ladder over time and into higher paying jobs?
- What kinds of jobs and advancement opportunities could the training lead to? For example, were the skills portable across different employers or industries?
- Who were potential local training providers?
  - Did they have experience contracting with local government?
  - Could they provide enrollment and performance data, including the number of individuals and cohorts served annually, and training completion rates?
  - Could they provide training for multiple occupational tracks?
  - Did they offer career coaching, case management, and/or wraparound support services?
  - Did they offer training in job-readiness ("soft") skills or basic skills instruction (such as adult basic education), either in-house or through a partner?
  - Did they offer training at multiple locations within the jurisdiction?

Understanding employer connections. This task continued conversations with training providers and employers to understand how strongly providers were connected to local employers and the extent to which the training offerings were developed in response to demand from employers. MDRC asked child support agencies to collect the following additional information about training providers:

- Did the provider employ dedicated job developers? Did it have partnerships with industry associations or other intermediaries to place training participants into jobs?
- Did the provider use a curriculum endorsed or informed by employers? Did it offer hands-on, experiential learning or on-the-job training?

- What were the provider's past placement and retention rates in the targeted jobs? What types of employers predominated among those placements?

- Did the provider work with its participants and employers on retention and advancement?

Understanding the fit for the target population. This task used quantitative and qualitative child support data to understand the characteristics and needs of the parents who were likely to enroll in FFD. That would inform which sectors and occupations might be a good fit. This task involved:

- reviewing administrative data on child support payment history, employment or wages, and any other data sets available for parents with current orders, to identify a subset of the caseload who could benefit most from occupational training; and

- facilitating a small focus group with the target population to gain a deeper understanding of their employment needs and interest in particular sectors. (MDRC assisted with these focus groups.)

Determining the process to procure services. Concurrently, or after identifying potential providers, child support agencies assessed their procurement rules to plan how to acquire services from training vendors. Factors they considered included:

- Would the child support agency contract with vendors directly, or through an intermediary (such as the workforce development board)?

- Would a competitive bid process be required for vendor selection?

- On average, would the per-participant cost be low enough for the FFD program budget to cover the cost of training slots for all participants?

- What were the steps and approvals required for service procurement and what were the timing implications?

- To what extent could child support agencies use performance-based contracting with vendors to incentivize the achievement of specific, measurable results?

Incorporating this information, each local planning team aimed to assemble a portfolio of in-demand occupations that offered higher-than-median starting wages and potential for advancement, and required less than a bachelor's degree to enter. This included some occupations that did not require a high school credential to enter if the applicant completed occupational training lasting six months or less. Most of the teams struggled to identify a portfolio of three to five occupations and occupational training options that met all of the criteria that MDRC specified in the initial FFD design. (As discussed in Chapter 1, FFD's model sought to focus on occupations within sectors identified as being currently in demand, and having opportunities for advancement.) Some seemingly promising occupations were ruled out simply because no suitable local

training options were available. Despite having a long planning period during which to design the local programs, in most locations the planning teams required many months to make a final selection of occupations and training providers. Some of the child support agencies' local partners expressed frustration with the occupational criteria and the constraints of the iterative selection process outlined by MDRC. The child support agencies and MDRC ultimately agreed to include some tracks and providers that fell short of meeting the ideal set of selection criteria described above. For example, some programs included hospitality and customer service training tracks that might yield lower starting wages while offering accessible opportunities for advancement into higher paying positions. Each program assembled a varied portfolio of occupational tracks that attempted to balance the FFD model's aspirational criteria with the scope of actual local opportunities and capacity.

DOCUMENTING SERVICE COMPONENTS AND FORMALIZING PROGRAM PARTNERSHIPS

Each program location documented the design of the FFD service components (occupational training, individual employment and wrap-around services, and child support services) before procuring employment and training providers. As required by the waiver terms, each site completed a written implementation plan, based on a template provided by MDRC. Each plan included each of the above components, along with plans for recruiting and enrolling parents, screening for FFD eligibility, and monitoring program participation and short-term outcomes.

Responsibility for delivering the package of FFD services was shared among multiple partners including the child support agency itself. FFD child support agencies partnered with local occupational skills training, employment, and other service providers to offer the FFD package of services. These partners had a range of expertise serving parents and working with child support agencies. For example, two partners in Franklin County, Ohio, had a long-standing relationship with the local child support agency and held contracts with the agency prior to FFD. In contrast, several partners in the New York program had not previously focused on parents as a target population and saw FFD as an opportunity to develop their capacity in this area. Each agency formally established subcontracts or direct purchasing agreements for employment and training services. In addition, some sites established contracts for providers to conduct applicant screening and enrollment, financial capability services, or program management support.[11]

As noted above, the existing pool of local providers influenced the final design for delivering each component and the extent to which the components were integrated. For individual employment service providers, child support agencies first sought out providers that had specialized in the

11. Child support agencies procured employment and training services using one of three approaches: adding FFD services to an existing contract; purchasing services directly without competitive procurement; or a formal competitive procurement process, i.e., using an RFP or a similar approach. As noted above, agencies that added FFD services to existing provider contracts were able to launch services earlier as a result.

targeted occupations or industry sectors, or provided these services as part of occupational skills training. When such specialized providers were not available (as was the case in the Washington FFD program, and for some occupational tracks in Franklin County, Ohio) the agencies selected providers that had demonstrated some experience or expertise placing jobseekers in the targeted industries. Each program location had at least one partner that had experience working with parents, and often with noncustodial parents. In three of the program locations, child support agencies and their partners had previously collaborated to provide limited employment services to parents who owed child support. These programs tended to focus on rapid job placement or employability skills—taking part in an occupational skills training program was new. Because employment services are not typically an allowable child support expense (without a federal waiver, as FFD programs obtained), those previous programs tended to be solely referral-based. In contrast, child support agencies were able to fund employment and training services for parents who enrolled in FFD—with the goal of increasing coordination with child support case management and increasing access to employment and training when other sources of funding were not available. Figures 2.1 to 2.5 illustrate the configuration of providers in each program location, including the employment contractors for individual employment services and occupational skills training.

As soon as each program completed its implementation plan, received waiver approval, and completed contracts for each of the core FFD services, it began local recruitment and service delivery. Chapter 3 describes these activities.

FIGURE 2.1

Families Forward Cuyahoga County Program Flow

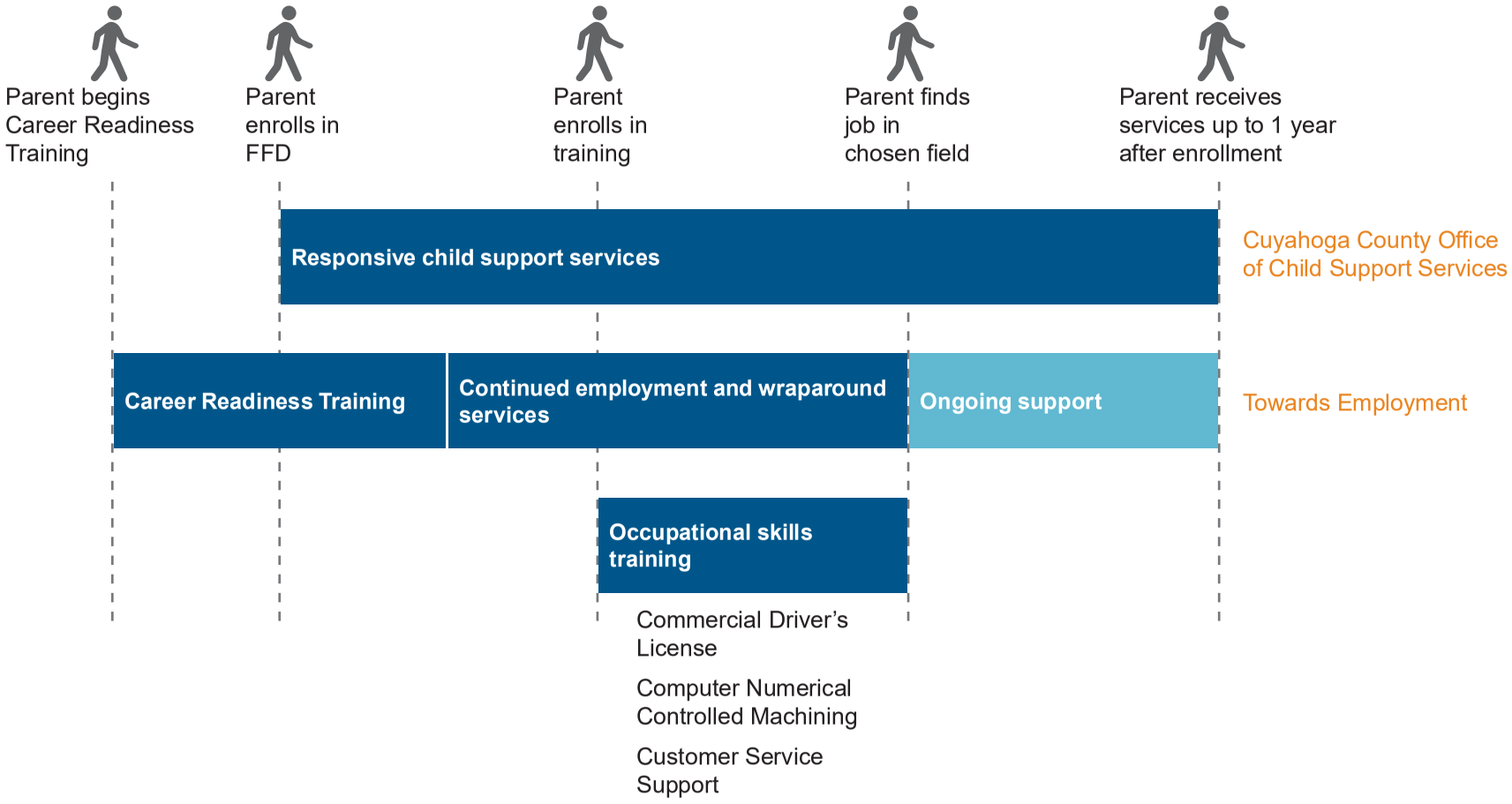


FIGURE 2.2

Families Forward Franklin County Program Flow

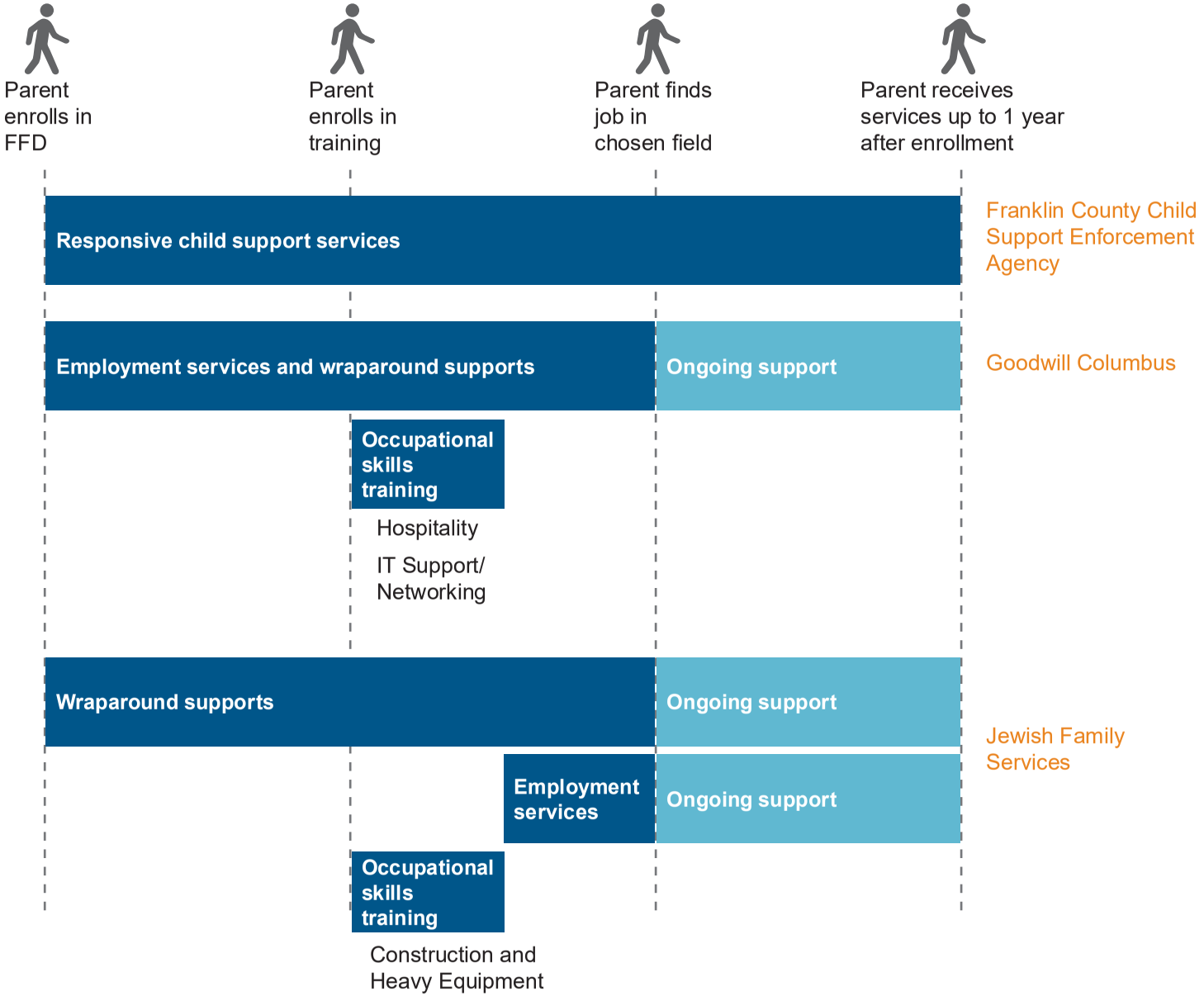


FIGURE 2.3

Families Forward Michigan Program Flow

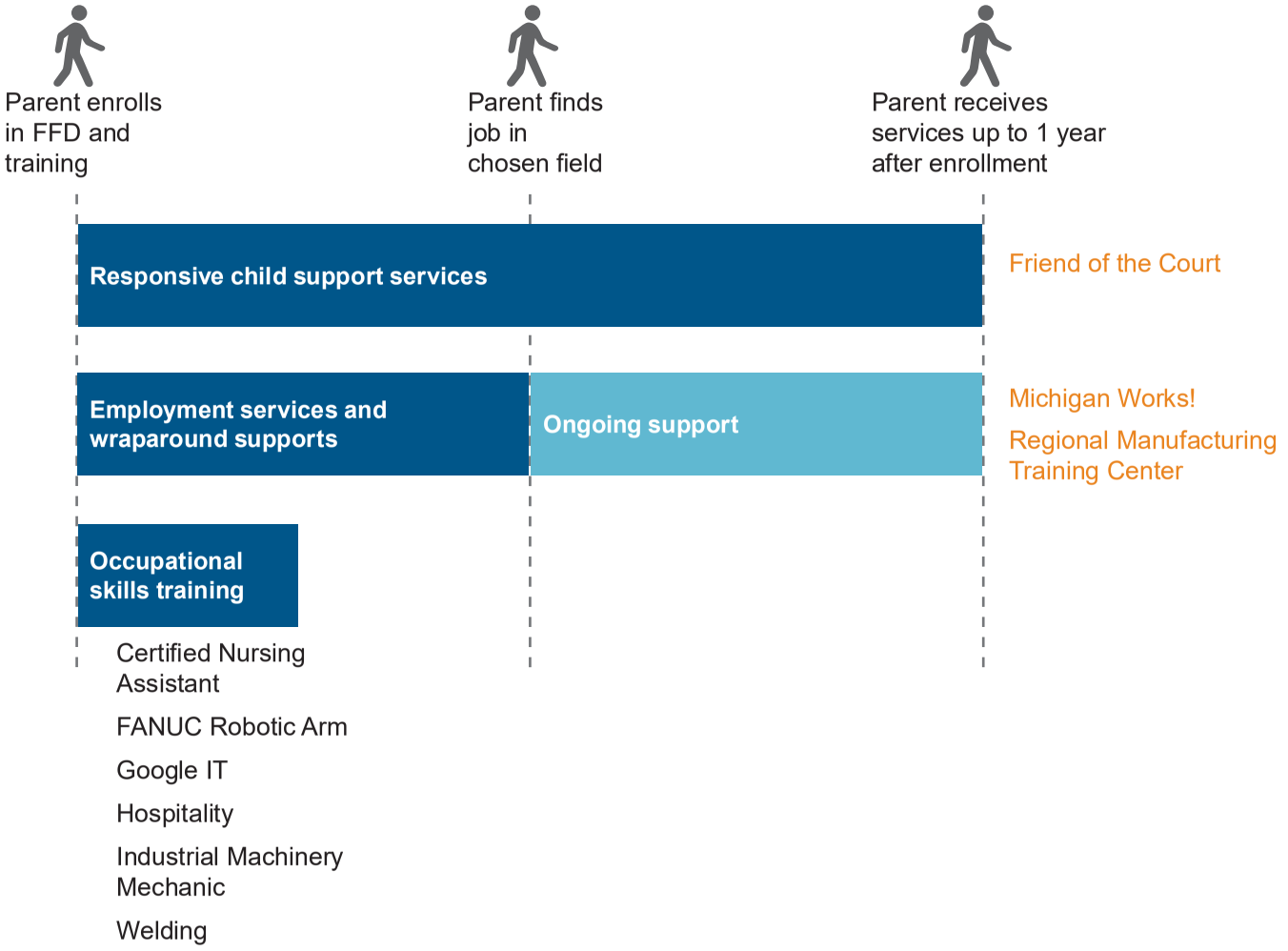


FIGURE 2.4

Families Forward New York Program Flow

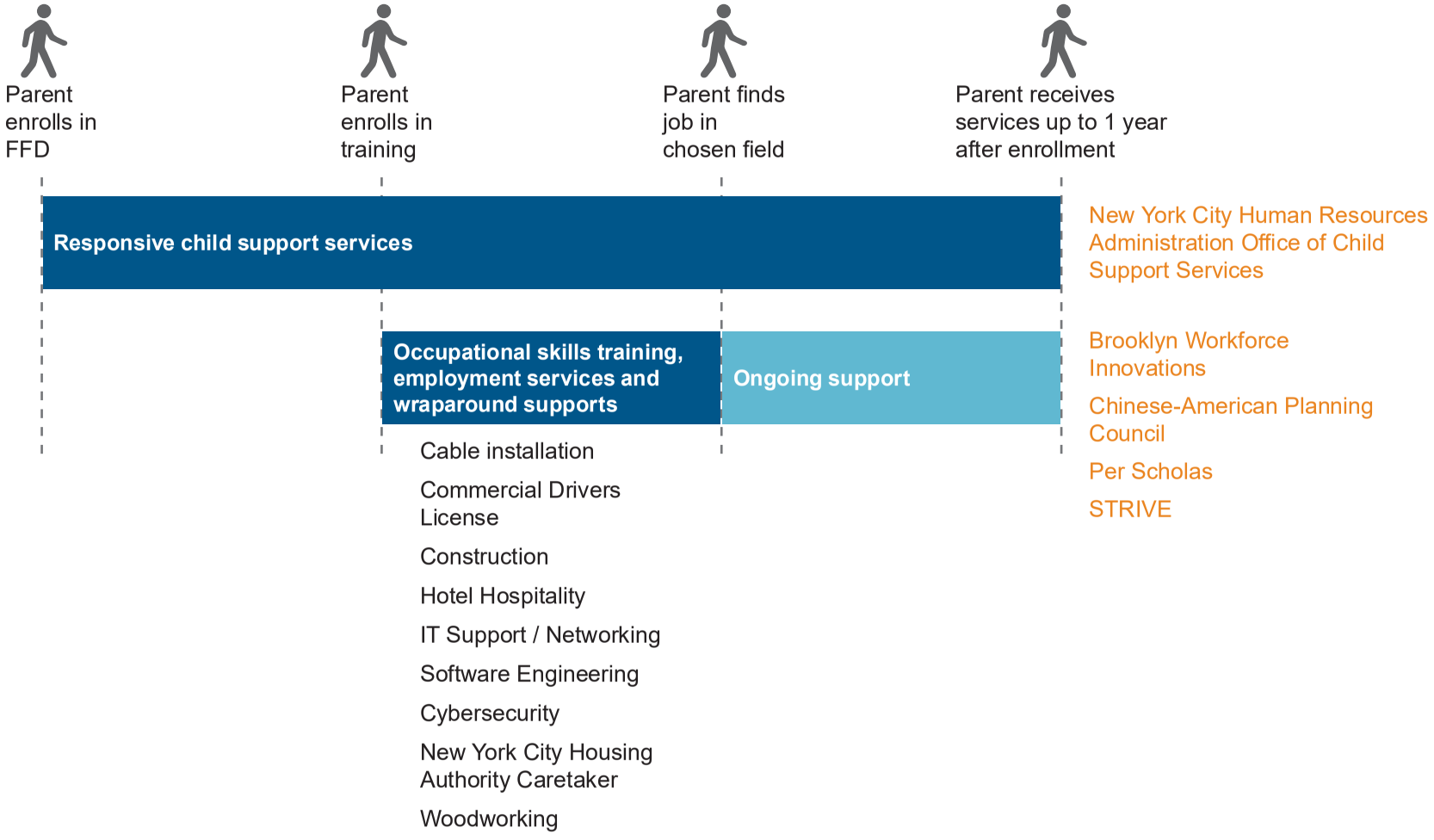
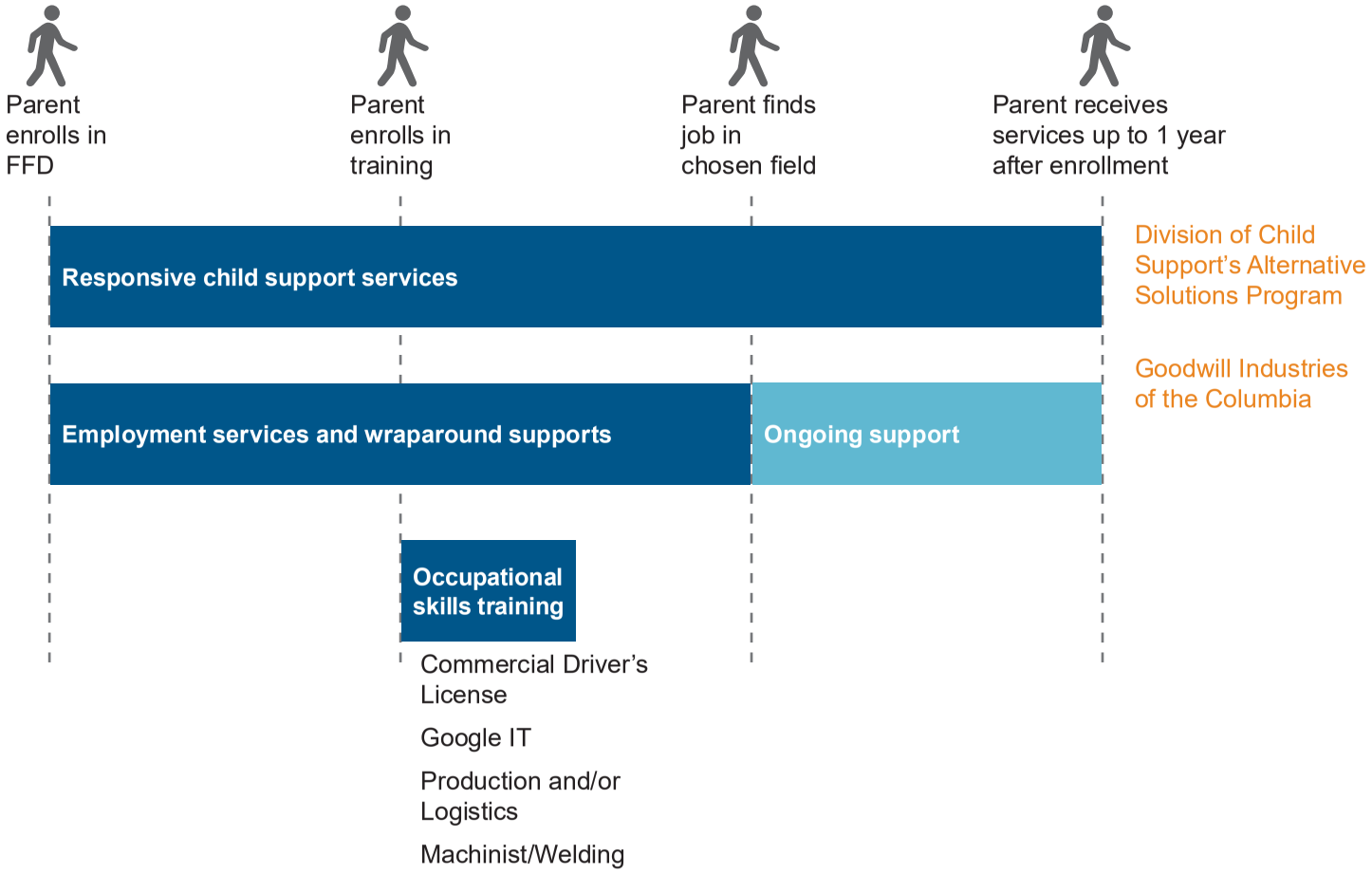


FIGURE 2.5

Families Forward Washington Program Flow



KEY FINDINGS

- **Child support agencies engaged local partners and providers to customize the model to local needs and opportunities,** incorporating input from OCSE and MDRC.

- **Child support agencies leveraged flexibility within their existing policies to design FFD-responsive child support services.** Programs focused on assigning dedicated FFD child support workers to customize management and enforcement of support cases to reflect the parent's engagement in FFD employment and training activities. In addition, child support agencies identified opportunities for parents to reduce their state-owed child support debts.

- **Programs identified a varied portfolio of occupational tracks, but not every track met all of the criteria that MDRC specified in the initial FFD design.** Programs scanned current and projected employment opportunities, along with local training providers, to identify FFD training tracks, taking into account the characteristics of parents who were likely to enroll in FFD, local labor market demand, the scope and competencies of local employment and training providers, and the extent to which providers had existing connections with employers. Child support agencies and their local partners expressed some frustration with MDRC's occupational criteria and the iterative process of selecting tracks and providers.

- **Overall, the design and start-up of FFD programs took longer than initially envisioned.** The staging of start-up activities varied by program location, as did program launch dates. Potential changes in federal policy led to an initial delay in approving federal waivers. In addition, provider procurement required many additional months in some locations.

3

Recruitment and Enrollment

This chapter describes how the Families Forward Demonstration (FFD) programs attracted parents to the programs and identified parents with the skills and background to succeed in training and obtain a job in their chosen field. It also describes the backgrounds and characteristics of parents who decided to enroll in FFD.

THE FFD TARGET POPULATION

The FFD model was designed for parents who are ordered to pay child support but have difficulty paying due to their earnings. Child support agencies have considerable information about the regularity and completeness of child support payments. However, agencies often do not have information on parents' educational attainment or credentials, which can stand in the way of parents' ability to get a living-wage job and in turn support their families through child support. Participating child support agencies saw FFD as an opportunity to learn about which parents in their caseloads would be interested in and qualified for a skills training program.

Occupational skills training programs often have strict eligibility requirements that are designed to help participants succeed in intensive, fast-paced trainings, including those conducted full time, like some in FFD.[1] FFD was designed for parents with a high school credential and some work history, thus it did not include bridge services—such as those to help parents earn a high school credential or improve core reading or math skills.[2] In addition, FFD was designed for parents who could start skills training right away; therefore, FFD's case management and supportive services were less intensive than other programs for parents have been.[3] These aspects of the target population were less salient in practice, however. Intake and recruitment staff

1. For example, Work Advance included "intensive screening" as a part of its program model. For more information, see Tessler et al. (2014).
2. One training track in New York offered bridge services; no FFD participants took them up, possibly because the bridge was for young adults between the ages of 16-24; most FFD participants were over the age of 30.
3. For example, see Cancian, Guarin, Hodges, and Meyer (2018); Sorensen and Lippold (2012); and Martinez and Miller (2000).

overwhelmingly said that interest in the program was the most important factor in being considered a good candidate for FFD.

Parents could not take part in the FFD program and receive its services without enrolling in MDRC's study. To be eligible for both, parents had to:

- **Have a current child support order.** Regular child support payments help alleviate child poverty, a long-term goal of the program's intent to increase child support compliance.[4] Parents who owed arrears but did not have current orders were not eligible.[5]

- **Be of working age (18-64), legally able to work in the United States, and not receiving or applying for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI).** These requirements meant that parents who entered the program would be able to work and that FFD would not interfere with any SSI or SSDI applications or receipt.

- **Have a low to moderate income.** A parent's annual income was capped at $62,000 per year.[6] Programs could choose to set lower income requirements if appropriate for their region.

- **Meet the requirements of training partners.** Parents had to meet the same eligibility requirements as any other people taking part in the training they selected. Parents' eligibility for training could be assessed before or after they enrolled in the study depending on the program location.

These requirements formed the minimum eligibility criteria to participate in FFD. As shown in Table 3.1, most FFD program locations tailored the minimum eligibility criteria to their local context. Several programs added additional eligibility requirements such as setting age limits on the youngest child for whom a parent paid child support, lowering the income cap to focus on parents with lower incomes, and adding criteria regarding criminal history. Over time, however, nearly all programs relaxed their eligibility criteria in order to reach more parents.

4. The "compliance rate" is a mandated performance measure used in child support calculations, often expressed as the current payment amount divided by the current order amount. More information about compliance is provided in Chapter 6.

5. To widen their recruitment pool, the Michigan program began accepting arrears-only cases in mid-2019.

6. This threshold corresponds with the Free File benefits program cutoff for 2016, which allowed individuals with adjusted gross incomes of up to $62,000 to access free online tax preparation services. It is a proxy for moderate income.

TABLE 3.1

FAMILIES FORWARD DEMONSTRATION ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

FFD programs adapted the cross-site eligibility criteria to their local context, making it **+ more retrictive** or **- less restrictive**.

	Age	Income	Work Status	Child Support	Criminal History	Other Requirements
Cross-site eligibility criteria	**18-64**	**Earn less than $62,000/ year**	**Legally permitted to work in the US and not applying for or receiving SSI/SSDI**	**Has case with a current order in target jurisdiction**		**Meet the requirements of local training tracks**
Cuyahoga	18-64 +	$30,000 -	No SSI/SSDI restrictions +	Current case in the jursidiction with child under the age of 18 +	No felony in past 10 yrs for violent/ sex crimes +	HSD/HSE Meet requirements of training providers
Franklin	18-64 +	$35,600 -	Indivduals applying for SSI/SSDI eligible	Current child support in jurisdiction +	No history of violent or sexual felony +	Meet requirements of training providers Not referred for contempt or in determination
Michigan	18-64	$62,000	Legal work status, not applying/receiving SSI/ SDI -	Case in Michigan Arrears-only cases accepted		
New York	18-64	$62,000	Legal work status, not applying/receiving SSI/ SDI		+	Meet requirements of training providers
Washington	18-64	$62,000	Legal work status, not applying/receiving SSI/ SDI -	Current child support order in Washington or an interstate order for which Washington is the lead	+	HSD/HSE or WorkKeys assessment indicating middle grade skills

ENROLLING PARENTS IN THE FFD STUDY, PROGRAM, AND TRAINING

The FFD enrollment processes were complex and included enrollment in the study, the program, and training.[7] The FFD eligibility processes were different in each program location, and often varied with the requirements of different training pathways and the sequencing of program services. Figures 3.1 to 3.3 illustrate the FFD eligibility determination and intake procedures in three locations. Most programs started with an orientation and interview to tell the candidate about the program, and to learn about the candidate's interests and ability to take part in program activities. If relevant, parents then took assessments required by the program or training and, if deemed eligible, enrolled in the FFD study and program. Uniquely, the Cuyahoga County program required candidates to complete at least half of a career-readiness training before they could enroll in the program or study.

In most program locations, child support staff confirmed that candidates met the child support and other minimum criteria required to take part in the FFD study and program and then referred the parent to another service partner to continue the next step in eligibility determination. Two FFD programs streamlined the FFD eligibility determination process by allowing FFD partners to confirm a parent's child support eligibility. Box 3.1 details their approaches. Except for criteria related to child support, parents themselves provided information for other minimum eligibility criteria.

In nearly all FFD program locations, the partner that was responsible for providing employment services also handled the next phase of eligibility determination in which program staff made sure that candidates were interested in an FFD training, were likely to qualify for a job in their chosen field, and, ideally, were eligible for their chosen training. Staff members talked with parents about their interest in the training offerings and associated career paths, and helped them decide which training they would like to take part in. Most parents already had a strong idea of which training they wanted to pursue, staff members said, and participant interest and choice were the most important factors in training track selection. Staff members talked with parents about their background, including barriers that would keep them from entering the program or obtaining a job in their field of interest. (For example, many jobs disqualify people with marks on their driving record or who have a criminal history.) Staff members also discussed the training schedule and parents' strategies to balance training with work, child care, and other responsibilities. Talking about the time requirements of training was also key at this stage, as parents who were working (about one-third of study enrollees) might need to quit their jobs or reduce their hours to accommodate training schedules. This was particularly important in the New York program, where all the trainings were full time; other program locations had a range of schedule options.

7. The requirements of the study added to the complexity of the enrollment process, as it required designated, trained staff to gather parents' informed consent to take part in the study, administer a brief survey, and input information about parents who enrolled in the study into a study data collection system. Without the study, eligibility determination might have been more streamlined.

FIGURE 3.1

Timing of Enrollment and Start of Skills Training in the Washington Program

THE WASHINGTON PROGRAM intake process had few steps and confirmed target population and training eligibility prior to enrolling in the study.

Parent attends orientation

Staff confirms parent meets study eligibility requirements

Parent takes WorkKeys assessment if they do not have a high school credential

Parent enrolls in FFD study and program

Parent enrolls in and starts training

Intake and Employment Services Partner
Goodwill Industries of the Columbia

FFD Occupational Skills Training Partners
Oxarc Welding
T Enterprises
Columbia Basin College
Google IT

FIGURE 3.2

Timing of Enrollment and Start of Skills Training in the New York Program

THE NEW YORK PROGRAM
intake process had more steps and included partners in determining training eligibility.

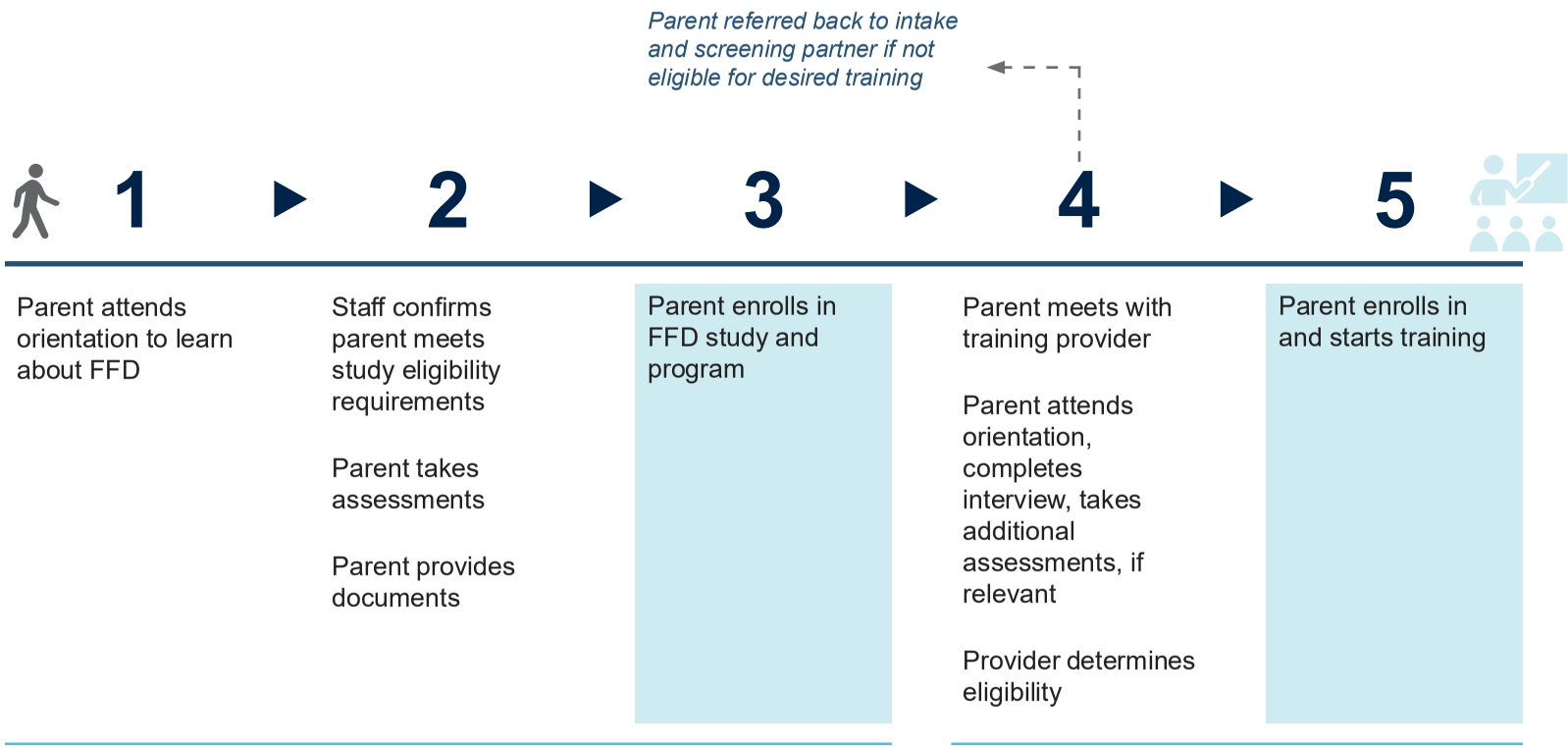


FIGURE 3.3

Timing of Enrollment and Start of Skills Training in the Cuyahoga Program

THE CUYAHOGA COUNTY PROGRAM intake process had more steps than any other FFD site.

1

Staff confirms parent meets study eligibility requirements

Parent learns about basics of FFD

Triage Team
Office of Child Support Services

2

Parent attends orientation to learn more about FFD

Parent completes an interview

3

Parent takes required assessments

Parent decides to participate

4

Parent begins and completes half of Career Readiness Training (CRT)

FFD Employment + Wraparound Services Partner
Towards Employment

5

Parent enrolls in FFD study and program

FFD Employment + Wraparound Services Partner
Towards Employment

6

Parent finishes CRT

7

Parent finalizes choice of training track and provider

Parent completes required paperwork and assessments to enroll in training program

8

Parent enrolls in and starts training

FFD Training Partners
New Horizons
Cuyahoga Community College
Vocational Guidance Services
Cleveland Industrial Training Center
Great Lakes Truck Driving School
Lutheran Metropolitan Ministries

BOX 3.1

Verifying Child Support Eligibility Through Service Partners

The FFD programs in Washington and New York streamlined their intake processes with procedures that enabled their service partners to verify whether parents met the child support eligibility requirements to take part.

Release forms and phone calls in Washington

The Washington State Division of Child Support (DCS) used an existing release form that authorized the agency to share information with partners. By signing the form, the parent gave permission to DCS to disclose information to the program's designated intake and screening partner, Goodwill Industries of the Columbia. Because some parents may not have been eligible for or would not have chosen to take part in FFD, the form was time-limited—only authorizing the agency to share information for screening and assessment purposes. If the parent enrolled in FFD, they were asked to sign a second version of the form that allowed the agencies to share information about the parent and his child support case with their partners for the duration of the program. Parents also had the option of taking part in a three-party call—with the parent, DCS, and Goodwill—during which DCS could confirm the parent's eligibility by phone.

Child Support Snapshot in New York

Prior to FFD, the New York City Office of Child Support Services developed an online tool, the Child Support Snapshot, through which partner agencies—with the permission of a parent—can access information about a parent's child support case, including information on payment history, how much money is owed and to whom, and what kinds of enforcement actions have been taken. It also provides information about steps parents can take regarding their cases. The goal of the Child Support Snapshot is to leverage the trust and relationships that partner organizations have with their participants to increase the information parents have about their cases. In FFD, the intake and screening partner used the Child Support Snapshot to confirm that candidates were eligible for the program during the eligibility determination process. Training and employment partners later used the tool to talk with parents about their cases as a part of the program's responsive child support services.

Three of the FFD program locations partnered with training providers that had additional, training-specific eligibility requirements, such as minimum reading and math skills, technical skills (such as basic computer skills), and an interest in the career. The programs either screened parents for the criteria prior to study enrollment, for example by administering a Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) that the training provider would accept, or coordinated with the training provider to complete additional testing.[8] The two remaining programs did not have

8. The TABE is a widely used assessment of the skills and knowledge of adult learners. For more information, see https://tabetest.com/

training-specific eligibility requirements, so the programs added simple requirements to help confirm that parents were likely to succeed in training, such as testing for middle grade reading and math skills. In all cases, enrollment into training was contingent upon eligibility and the schedule of the training provider.

Despite FFD's complex enrollment process, some interviewed parents found it to be easy, and they felt that the requirements of the program and training were well-communicated. The interview sample did not include parents who did not complete the enrollment process.

RECRUITING PARENTS TO FFD

Child support agencies led FFD program recruitment in all locations. In most cases, a program manager or leadership team at each child support agency guided decisions about the recruitment strategy and approaches. Front-line staff—either from child support or a service partner—provided more information about the program to parents, answered their questions, and helped determine whether they were eligible to enroll. Service and community partners helped spread the word about FFD with flyers and through word of mouth.

The work in Donell's industry slowed down between October and April.[9] He wanted more consistency and felt that FFD came at the perfect time. He was first in contact with someone from the child support office about FFD over email, and then they exchanged a few phone calls. After several negative interactions with child support, he had been suspicious whenever they contacted him. However, after learning about FFD, he took the opportunity to build his resume and have a chance to advance in his field.

Staff members reported that most parents who came forward were interested in the program for the opportunity to take part in a free training. It was not uncommon for parents to join because of their interest in a specific training, such as for a commercial driver's license or in the information technology (IT) sector. Some parents who took part in interviews with the research team noted that they had long wanted to complete such a training, but that cost had been a barrier. A few parents also noted that they were drawn to the program because they thought it would help them pay their child support.

Program locations used an array of recruitment strategies to generate interest in FFD. Understanding that parents might need to hear about FFD from a variety of sources before deciding to inquire about the program, agencies tried different strategies throughout the implementation period and often used several different ones at the same time. Some common approaches included:

9. This name is a pseudonym. Other identifying details may have been obscured or omitted to protect this parent's privacy.

- **sending direct mailings, emails, or texts** to parents;
- **circulating information within child support agencies** such as posting information on the agency's website, training staff to make referrals, and playing ads about FFD that parents would hear on the telephone while on hold, waiting to talk to child support staff;
- **posting flyers in strategic locations** such as child support agency offices, partner offices, courts, and other community locations that parents were likely to frequent;
- **information tables** at child support agencies, courts, job fairs, and other events parents might attend;
- **mass-marketing approaches** such as ads on buses, billboards, promos that played before movies in local theatres, and radio spots; and
- **social media and targeted online ads,** including ads and postings on Facebook, targeted web search ads, and cookie trackers.

Ideas about which recruitment strategies were the most successful differed between programs and sometimes among staff members and partners within a program. Box 3.2 details several promising approaches that the FFD programs identified.

All FFD programs struggled with recruitment and reported that there was lower interest in the program than they anticipated. Staff members in several program locations reported a key challenge was parents' disbelief that a free training program offered through child support was legitimate—they thought it was too good to be true or a scam. Some parents who took part in interviews confirmed this sentiment. Some child support staff thought that parents might think the program was a trap designed by the agency (something they admitted may not have been out of the realm of possibility in the past). Staff members agreed that the program would only be successful when word of mouth got out that the program was credible and worth parents' time.

"My job is to make people feel comfortable, motivated, and not discouraged. People tend to come in feeling beaten down, and I really want to motivate them."

– FFD recruitment staff person

Several factors other than distrust in child support may have contributed to lackluster interest in the program. These include low unemployment rates at the time and relative ease in finding employment (leading to lower interest in training programs generally), or lack of interest in the service offerings or in the particular occupational training opportunities offered by the program. Some locations reduced their enrollment goals during the implementation period and redirected resources toward recruitment.

BOX 3.2

Promising Recruitment Approaches Used in FFD

The FFD programs identified several promising recruitment approaches to help them reach parents and enroll them in the program.

- **Build credibility.** Nearly all programs said that parents needed to know that this new program was legitimate and worthwhile before taking a chance on it. In many locations, part of building credibility included combatting an image of child support as untrustworthy or "out to get parents." Programs attempted to build credibility by selecting child support staff members for recruitment roles who were friendly, empathetic, and customer-service oriented. Parents interviewed by MDRC remarked that they were surprised by how friendly and respectful their interactions with child support staff members were during the recruitment process.

- **Use personalized touches.** Two programs found that personalized approaches—such as handwritten notes on flyers or using a parent's name in a text message—seemed to yield higher responses. Program staff reported that parents liked that the person they had received a handwritten note from answered their call about the program.

- **Use data to target recruitment.** All child support agencies used their records to avoid contacting parents who would not be eligible for the program, such as those who were currently incarcerated or who did not have a current support order. About half of the programs used additional targeting in their recruitment efforts. For example, the Franklin County program conducted targeted recruitment in zip codes with high arrears.

- **Leverage reverse referrals.** Some programs found "reverse referrals"—where a partner referred to the program individuals who were interested in its services—to be very successful. In Washington, for example, reverse referrals accounted for more than a quarter of enrollees.

- **Avoid recruitment methods that could lead parents to sign up to avoid enforcement action.** One program found that recruiting at court proceedings could lead parents to enroll in FFD to avoid sanctions such as jail time or suspension of their driver's license. The program found that many parents recruited under these circumstances did not start or sustain their attendance in the program, as they may have signed up for the program because it seemed like their best option and not because they had a genuine interest in the service offerings.

Child support agencies led recruitment efforts for FFD in large part due to restrictions around data sharing and the privacy of parents. However, FFD program partners suggested that child support agencies might not have been the best partner to recruit for the program. Partners in about half of the program locations thought child support's efforts could have been more robust or frequent and that marketing materials could have been fresher or more participant-friendly. They pointed out that many child support agencies were not accustomed to recruiting for voluntary programs and more commonly relied on mandated participation. One partner also said that child support agencies' roles in enforcement kept them from being able to effectively market the program because parents who were behind on payments tended to avoid the agency and felt anxious about interacting with it. Several partners suggested that they were better positioned to

market the program because they knew how to sell their services and understood them better than a third party.

ABOUT PARENTS IN FFD

FFD enrolled 761 parents in the FFD study across all locations. Program locations varied in how many parents they enrolled, ranging from 19 parents in Franklin to 473 parents in New York. Several factors contributed to the number of parents each program location succeeded in enrolling, including the recruitment, screening, and intake processes; the size of the caseload pool from which to recruit; and the date that the program launched and began recruitment. More information on recruitment pool and program start dates are discussed in Chapter 2.

Intake staff at each FFD program location administered a questionnaire to all participants at the point of study enrollment. These baseline data offer unique details on parents who enrolled in the FFD study—not just those who ended up receiving services—who were having trouble meeting their child support obligations and were looking for and interested in employment. Child support agencies might consider leveraging this information to identify parents who owe child support and would be interested in other employment programs like FFD. This report refers to those who enrolled in the FFD study as the "parents in the study sample" or "parents who enrolled in the study."

The data collected at baseline show that few parents in the study sample had postsecondary education credentials, which could have made it difficult to find and sustain employment and maintain financial stability. These parents were largely Black and Hispanic men, groups that face systemic barriers to quality education, jobs, and supports. When employed, study participants reported earning at or above local minimum wage, though below the living wage. However, many had been out of work for quite some time, and a minority had jobs that offered benefits. These factors, coupled with study participants' large child support debts, current obligations, and other types of debt, present a picture of a group of parents who had significant financial obligations and did not have the necessary supports to meet them.

The remainder of this section describes parents' characteristics in more detail, and draws comparisons to parents in the Child Support Noncustodial Parent Demonstration Evaluation (CSPED), described earlier, which also focused on a sample of noncustodial parents recruited for child support agency–led employment programs.[10] These comparisons highlight how the FFD research participants differ slightly from those in other studies focused on parents who owe child support.

Demographics. Table 3.2 presents information on key demographic characteristics of those who enrolled in the study. Nearly all study participants were male (96 percent). Almost three-

10. Cancian, Guarin, Hodges, and Meyer (2018).

TABLE 3.2

Baseline Characteristics of the Study Sample: Demographics

Characteristic	Michigan	New York	Cuyahoga	Franklin	Washington	All
Gender (%)						
Male	87	97	96	95	96	96
Female	13	3	4	5	4	4
Age (mean)	35	39	37	37	35	38
Age (%)						
19-24	5	2	2	5	2	3
25-34	55	34	35	16	48	37
35-44	24	35	45	68	44	37
45-59	15	28	16	11	6	22
60 and older	0	1	2	0	0	1
Race/ethnicity (%)						
Hispanic	5	37	6	6	42	28
Black, non-Hispanic	51	55	85	53	6	56
White, non-Hispanic	35	2	7	41	48	11
Multiracial, non-Hispanic	9	3	2	0	4	4
Asian, non-Hispanic	0	2	1	0	0	1
American Indian or Alaska native, non-Hispanic	0	1	0	0	0	0
Marital status (%)						
Single, never married	71	65	70	42	57	66
Married	13	13	13	37	20	14
Divorced	14	13	12	21	20	14
Legally separated	1	8	4	0	2	6
Widowed	0	0	1	0		0
Language(s) spoken (%)						
English	100	99	100	100	100	100
Spanish	4	26	2	5	34	20
Other	2	11	2	5	0	8
U.S. Armed Forces involvement (%)						
Never served on active duty	98	96	91	89	94	95
Previously served on active duty	2	4	9	11	6	5
Currently on active duty	0	0	0	0	0	0
Highest level of education completed[a] (%)						
No high school diploma or equivalency	24	18	50	-	-	19
High school equivalency or GED	33	16	0	-	-	18
High school diploma	10	22	50	-	-	21
Some college but no degree	33	28	0	-	-	28
Associate's degree	0	7	0	-	-	6
Bachelor's degree or higher	0	9	0	-	-	8
Has a postsecondary degree	3	16	15	26	0	14

(continued)

TABLE 3.2 (continued)

Characteristic	Michigan	New York	Cuyahoga	Franklin	Washington	All
Currently enrolled in any education programs (%)	10	2	2	11	4	3
Sample size	92	473	127	19	50	761

SOURCE: Calculations are based on data collected through MDRC's study enrollment system and include all individuals who enrolled in the study through June 2020.

NOTE: [a]The sample for this measure includes only those who enrolled in the study through November 2018, due to data limitations.

quarters were between the ages of 25 and 44; the average age was 38. Over half of the study sample was Black, non-Hispanic; this was also true at the site-level in Michigan, New York, and Franklin. In Cuyahoga, the percentage of Black participants was much higher (85 percent) while in Washington it was much lower (only 6 percent). Most study participants were single and had never been married (66 percent). Over half of the study sample had not completed any education beyond a high school degree, high school equivalency, or GED.[11]

Parents in the FFD study share some characteristics with those in CSPED.[12] Among CSPED participants, the average age was 35 years; 40 percent identified as Black, non-Hispanic; and just over half had never been married. Similar to the FFD study sample, just 32 percent of CSPED participants had some education beyond a high school degree or equivalency.

Employment and wages. As shown in Table 3.3, all but one parent in the study sample reported any past employment. However, most were not employed at the time of study enrollment (68 percent) and those in this group had been out of work for just over a year, on average. Only about half of the full study sample had been employed for at least two out of the past three years. These data suggest that the study sample did not have much recent employment.

When employed, study participants earned more than the minimum wage, on average. Those who were employed at baseline reported earning $14 per hour, on average; those who were not employed at baseline earned slightly more—$16 per hour, on average—at their most recent job. At the site level, the average wages were at or above the minimum wage for the respective location (see Table 2.3). These numbers are not surprising, given that the FFD target population was made up of parents who had low to medium incomes, and the annual income cap was set at $62,000, as mentioned earlier. For context, this stands in contrast to the CSPED sample, in which the majority of participants fell well below the poverty level. However, it is important to

11. Due to a system programming error, information on educational attainment was not available for those who enrolled in the study after November 2018.

12. Cancian, Guarin, Hodges, and Meyer (2018).

TABLE 3.3

Baseline Characteristics of the Study Sample: Employment

Characteristic	Michigan	New York	Cuyahoga	Franklin	Washington	All
Ever employed (%)	100	100	100	95	100	100
Months worked in past 3 years (%)						
6 months or fewer	7	8	5	5	6	7
7 to 12 months	18	11	7		10	11
13 to 24 months	33	19	17	37	20	21
25 months or more	40	56	69	42	62	57
Never employed in past 3 years	2	6	2	11	2	4
Never employed	0	0	0	5	0	0
Number of employers in past 3 years (mean)	3	2	2	2	3	2
Among those ever employed (%)						
Ever worked for the same employer for 6 months or longer	92	96	96	89	96	96
Has experience in the industry of the assigned training track[a]	71	25	36	40	27	32
Participated in health insurance offered by most recent employer	20	21	33	29	39	24
Currently employed	30	27	43	28	50	32
Sample size	92	473	127	19	50	761
Among those currently employed						
Hours worked per week across all current jobs	36	29	36	35	41	33
Hours worked per week at main current job	36	30	33	32	41	33
Hourly wage at main current job ($)	12	15	13	13	17	14
Sample size	28	124	53	5	25	235
Among those not currently employed						
Hourly wage at most recent job ($)	13	17	14	14	18	16
Months since most recent job	8	15	10	19	9	13
Sample size	63	339	71	11	23	507

SOURCE: Calculations are based on data collected through MDRC's study enrollment system and include all individuals who enrolled in the study through June 2020.

NOTE: [a]Due to data collection issues, this information is not available for 40 to 50 percent of the sample in Cuyahoga and Franklin.

note that the average wages among the FFD study sample were still well below the living wage for a single parent with one child (see Table 2.3).

Barriers to employment. Table 3.4 illustrates some of the factors that may have contributed to study participants' difficulty finding or maintaining employment. The most commonly reported barriers were not having the right education or skills (48 percent), child care responsibilities

TABLE 3.4

Baseline Characteristics of the Study Sample: Barriers to Employment

Characteristic	Michigan	New York	Cuyahoga	Franklin	Washington	All
Reason reported for difficulty finding or keeping a job in past year (%)						
Not having education or skills employers are looking for	67	42	43	47	86	48
Child care responsibilities	45	28	35	44	76	35
No access to transportation	49	20	30	28	67	28
No driver's license	54	31	22	24	65	34
No steady place to live	35	22	31	22	71	28
Criminal record	49	14	43	44	70	27
Other family care responsibilities	18	15	28	24	54	20
Physical health	25	10	19	33	62	17
Mental health	24	8	20	28	50	16
Alcohol or drug use	8	2	9	6	49	7
Reported any reason for difficulty finding or keeping a job in past year (%)	96	70	75	78	92	76
License ever suspended due to nonpayment of child support (%)	23	50	29	37	35	42
License currently suspended due to nonpayment of child support (%)	4	33	4	11	2	22
Ever convicted of a crime (%)	73	31	68	47	51	44
Ever incarcerated as an adult (%)	89	29	53	47	64	43
Among those ever incarcerated						
Ever incarcerated for child support issues (%)	63	4	20	0	18	24
Number of times in jail/prison	6	3	3	3	3	4
Longest time spent in jail/prison (months)	21	25	17	16	9	21
Number of months since last release from jail/prison	32	111	86	99	89	82
Sample size	92	472	127	19	50	760

SOURCE: Calculations are based on data collected through MDRC's study enrollment system and include all individuals who enrolled in the study through June 2020.

(35 percent), and not having a driver's license (34 percent). Also, a sizable portion of the study sample reported prior involvement in the criminal justice system (44 percent); the proportion is relatively high in some program locations compared with others, such as Michigan (73 percent) and Cuyahoga (68 percent). Even so, just 27 percent of the study sample overall viewed their criminal record as a barrier to finding or maintaining employment in the past year. Among those who had ever been incarcerated (43 percent), about a quarter had ever been incarcerated for child support issues. Further, Black men, who make up most of the study sample, face discrimination in the labor market. This discrimination is especially pronounced for Black men with a criminal record.[13]

In comparison, the CSPED study sample had a higher overall rate of involvement in the criminal justice system (about 65 percent), based on self-reports. CSPED study participants also reported similar barriers to employment, most commonly having issues getting to work, having a criminal record, and not having a steady place to live.

Finances and child support. Tables 3.5 and 3.6 present information that sample members reported about their financial situations and child support obligations. Study participants who were employed at baseline were working at or above the minimum wage—but below the living wage—and likely not earning enough to support their considerable financial obligations. Those who were not working at baseline—the majority of the study sample—faced an even greater strain. At the time of study enrollment, FFD participants owed an average of about $11,500 in arrears, and had a current monthly obligation amount of $356, on average.[14] Nearly two-thirds had types of debt other than child support, and over two-thirds reported that they typically did not have enough money at the end of the month to make ends meet. Still, the vast majority of the study sample (84 percent) reported making at least one child support payment in the year prior to study enrollment.

Over half of the parents had child support obligations for just one child. Further, most parents reported that they supported their children in other ways besides making child support payments, such as paying for clothing, food, and other items and activities.

Experiences with child support. Interviewed parents mostly expressed negative sentiments toward child support staff and payment expectations. Most parents found child support obligations confusing and hard to understand; however, a few parents said their cases were straightforward. Parents also suggested that they did not think of child support as a direct way to care for their children or to address their immediate needs. Parents spoke about other examples of financial support, spending recreational time with their children, and providing emotional support. One parent explained, "If my kid needs something, I'm not going to call child support and wait for payment to go through." Parents also felt that child support payment expectations did not account for these ways of providing for their children. Some parents felt that having to pay child support

13. Pager (2003).

14. This amount is similar to the median monthly order amount among CSPED participants of $335 (Cancian, Guarin, Hodges, and Meyer, 2018).

TABLE 3.5

Baseline Characteristics of the Study Sample: Finances

Characteristic (%)	Michigan	New York	Cuyahoga	Franklin	Washington	All
Has any current debt, other than child support debt	84	52	85	80	83	64
Type(s) of current debt						
Credit card	16	31	37	41	40	31
Unpaid medical bills	57	13	48	25	47	26
Student loans	23	21	48	44	20	26
Car loan or car title loan	13	8	33	25	36	15
Other	21	9	20	8	37	14
Financial well-being						
Usually has some money left over at the end of the month	9	8	11	24	23	10
Has just enough money to make ends meet at end of the month	35	19	27	18	33	23
Does not have enough money to make ends meet at end of the month	56	73	62	59	44	67
Receiving SNAP benefits[a]	39	35	27	21	30	33
Use of financial services in past 12 months						
Cashed a check somewhere besides a bank or credit union	32	42	26	26	13	36
Paid a bill at a check casher	8	18	10	17	6	15
Used an ATM card to access cash	66	67	92	74	78	72
Got a cash advance on a credit card	1	6	4	5	6	5
Got a payday loan	8	1	12	0	4	4
Borrowed money from friends or family	68	51	60	53	53	55
Wrote a check for more money than in account	5	3	4	11	4	4
Had trouble paying for basic needs in past 12 months						
Rent	48	33	49	22	35	37
Utility bills	40	25	54	47	34	33
Telephone bill	41	26	46	53	41	33
Food	26	18	28	33	20	21
Prescription medicine	15	5	9	16	14	8
Seeing a doctor/medical assistance	15	6	21	26	22	11
Sample size	91	472	127	19	50	759

SOURCE: Calculations are based on data collected through MDRC's study enrollment system and include all individuals who enrolled in the study through June 2020.

NOTE: [a]SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

TABLE 3.6

Baseline Characteristics of the Study Sample: Child Support

Characteristic	Michigan	New York	Cuyahoga	Franklin	Washington	All
Made any child support payment in the past year (%)	92	81	89	89	88	84
Has more than one open child support case (%)	60	19	42	22	31	29
Current order amount[a] ($)	285	389	306	288	269	356
Balance of arrears owed ($)	10,567	11,158	17,880	10,994	10,179	11,505
Number of minor age children (%)						
One	23	37	30	21	32	33
Two	14	30	24	32	24	27
Three	28	22	21	26	22	23
Four or more	34	11	25	21	22	17
Number of minor age children for whom NCP has child support obligations (%)						
One	40	66	46	53	56	58
Two	22	24	28	32	26	25
Three	22	7	16	16	14	11
Four or more	16	3	10	0	4	6
Age of youngest child for whom NCP[b] owes child support (%)						
Two years old or younger	34	11	9	0	0	12
3-5 years old	24	17	19	11	16	18
6-12 years old	27	39	46	61	60	41
13-18 years old	13	26	26	28	24	24
19 years or older	2	7	1	0	0	5
Forms of support provided to youngest child for whom NCP has a child support order, in past 30 days (%)						
Bought clothing	69	59	76	56	58	63
Bought or made meals	68	58	66	56	52	60
Paid for other items or activities	63	45	66	50	69	52
Bought school supplies	34	47	50	39	25	44
Provided child care	26	42	38	28	17	37

(continued)

TABLE 3.6 (continued)

Characteristic	Michigan	New York	Cuyahoga	Franklin	Washington	All
Forms of support provided to all children for whom NCP has a child support order, in past 30 days (%)						
Bought clothing	67	59	75	63	63	63
Bought or made meals	66	59	69	63	65	62
Paid for other items or activities	62	45	69	53	73	53
Bought school supplies	43	49	55	47	24	48
Provided child care	26	43	40	32	20	39
Sample size	92	468	124	19	50	753

SOURCE: Calculations are based on data collected through MDRC's study enrollment system and include all individuals who enrolled in the study through June 2020, with the exception of the measures on child support payments, number of cases, order amounts, arrears, which are based on data from local child support agencies and include only those who enrolled in the study through October 2019.

NOTES: [a]The amount shown here for Cuyahoga reflects the total order amount, which includes any payment owed toward the arrears balance each month.
[b]NCP = Noncustodial parent.

contributed to their financial difficulties, as it made it harder for them to support themselves, and that could feel like a source of stress that negatively affected their mental health. Parents also noted that unstable employment made it harder for them to make their payments.

Some interviewed parents also felt that their relationship with their child's other parent could affect how missed payments were enforced: If they had a difficult relationship then the custodial parent might advocate for more punitive enforcement by the child support agency. (Enforcement actions are guided by state and local policy.)

KEY FINDINGS

- **Recruitment was a challenge in all FFD locations.** FFD's eligibility requirements, specific training offerings, and training schedule meant that the program would appeal to fewer parents. This was especially challenging for locations with small recruitment pools. In addition, child support agency–led employment programs must address the fact that parents who owe child support, especially parents who are behind on support payments, may mistrust or fear child support agencies. Programs may benefit from increased collaboration on recruitment between child support agencies and their service partners. Partners are experts in recruiting for their own programs and, as trusted community members, may be able to lend credibility to the program.

- **Enrollment in FFD could be a lengthy process that involved determining eligibility for the study, program, and training.** The intake process required coordination among the child support agency, screening and intake partners, and sometimes training providers.

- **Parents in the study often had negative past experiences with the child support system and staff members.** They often thought of child support as a burden on top of already existing financial troubles. Because they often interacted with and provided for their children in other ways, they did not see child support payments as the primary way they provided for their children. Though the research team did not interview parents who received the child support, it is possible that these parents felt differently about the value of these payments.

- **Based on study participant characteristics, FFD served the types of individuals that the program was designed to reach.** FFD was designed for parents who would be ready to participate in an intensive skills training program. While study participants certainly faced barriers to employment, they had some employment history and earned above the minimum wage, on average. Most of the study sample, but not all, had a high school degree or credential. At the same time, parents in the study had a variety of significant financial obligations that they found challenging to meet.

4

Implementing and Participating in Responsive Child Support Services

The Families Forward Demonstration (FFD) offered "responsive child support services" to help parents understand their child support obligations and navigate order modification and arrears forgiveness when appropriate, and to suspend discretionary enforcement activities. This chapter describes how these services were implemented across the five program locations. It also describes the experiences of participants in the program and their interactions with these services.

IMPLEMENTATION OF RESPONSIVE CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES

Child support is a highly automated system in which caseworkers with caseloads in the hundreds or thousands often rely on forms and mailed letters to communicate with parents about their cases. Caseworkers do not have the time to proactively review cases for errors, communicate with parents about pending enforcement actions, or walk them through processes to pursue changes to their cases. In addition, enforcement actions such as license suspension or incarceration can make it difficult or impossible for parents to complete training or get to work. To address this, FFD included responsive child support services to improve parents' communication with child support and reduce the barriers that child support could pose to parents' participation in the program. These services included child support navigation, arrears compromise programs, and suspension of enforcement action. Parents were eligible for these services as long as they participated in training and other FFD services.

Donell says his previous child support caseworker did not connect with him, even though she had been assigned to his case for years. Donell thinks he spoke with her twice: once over the phone and the other time in person, which was after weeks of trying to get in touch with her. The combination of going through a six-year child custody battle with the other parent and having a caseworker he felt was "inattentive" made Donell feel

like he was being treated like a criminal, despite being very active in his children's lives. "For me and a lot of people that I know, child support has been very one-sided," Donell explained.

The responsive child support practices offered by FFD sites differed with each agency's policies and regulatory or judicial environment, and not all FFD programs offered the same responsive child support services. Table 4.1 shows responsive child support services by location. Most of the child support agencies did not create new programs or policies for FFD; instead, they routinized practices that already were available to participants but not consistently implemented. For example, any parent can request a modification to their support order if they meet the local requirements. But FFD programs proactively reviewed all participating parents' orders to see if they might be eligible for and likely to benefit from a modification. The child support staff members could then help the parent complete the steps necessary to request a modification and help them understand whether and why the request was or was not granted. (See Appendix Table A.1 for more information about child support policies in each state, including requirements for order modifications.)

"Our ultimate goal, while we want parents to be paying as much as they can right now, is we want them to succeed in the program and be on a better path for themselves and their families."

—FFD child support case worker

TABLE 4.1

Responsive Child Support Practices in FFD Programs

	Specialized Caseload	Navigation Support	Enforcement Suspension[a]	Arrears Compromise[b]
Cuyahoga	√	√	√	
Franklin	√	√	√	√
Michigan			√	
New York		√		√
Washington	√	√	√	

NOTES: [a]Suspension of discretionary enforcement action. Mandatory and automatic enforcement actions still taken, such as tax intercepts or passport suspensions.
[b]Only new, FFD-specific initiatives are noted. Eligible parents in all sites could take part in existing arrears reduction programs for state-owed arrears.

Child Support Navigation

Child support processes are typically legalistic, complicated, and difficult for parents to understand.[1] Nearly all FFD programs provided child support navigation services (sometimes called "customer service" within child support agencies) to help parents understand their obligations, the actions they could take, and the processes for requesting changes. Most programs identified one or two designated child support caseworkers who provided responsive child support services. They worked exclusively with FFD parents or had at least 50 percent of their caseload reserved for the program. In Washington, Cuyahoga, and Franklin, parents' cases were transferred to an FFD caseworker. Smaller caseloads afforded them the time they needed to adequately guide their clients. The programs tapped experienced caseworkers who had a strong understanding of child support policies so they could help parents navigate their cases.

FFD caseworkers routinely reviewed parents' cases, looking for errors or actions parents might be eligible to take to help them manage their child support obligations, such as applying for an arrears compromise program. In most program locations, these caseworkers aimed to talk with parents about their cases at least once, and some talked with parents routinely while they were in the program.

Child support orders are set based on one or both parents' income at a point in time.[2] If the parents who are ordered to pay child support lose their job or their income decreases, the order may be too high to pay, and they may be eligible to have their order amount reduced through a modification process. FFD caseworkers often helped parents determine whether it might be appropriate and helpful to pursue a downward modification of their support order. The parent ultimately decided whether to pursue a modification, but FFD caseworkers might not recommend applying for a modification if they anticipated that the request would be denied or that the order might *increase* following the review process. Some FFD caseworkers reported that many parents in the program already had appropriate orders because of efforts in their agency to "right size" orders—that is, to bring orders into alignment with parents' incomes.

New York was the only program to include their program partners in child support navigation services. In addition to a case review conducted by a designated child support caseworker, staff persons from the training and employment providers used an online portal to access basic information about parents' cases (with parents' permission) and talked with them about their cases. They received training and ongoing support about child support topics that might affect parents in FFD. They also had access to the designated FFD child support caseworker, who could help answer questions, provide expert advice, or join a call among all three parties. Despite these resources, the partners in the New York program didn't feel fully equipped to answer parents' questions and felt they needed more training to do this job well.

1. Kusayeva and Miller (2019).
2. See Appendix Table A.2 for information about policies for determining order amounts in the FFD child support agencies.

Arrears Compromise Programs

If parents who owe child support miss a payment or do not pay their monthly order in full, they can accrue debt known as "arrears" that may accrue interest. Arrears can be owed to the parent who receives child support or to the state.[3] Child support agencies have discretion to forgive or compromise on arrears owed to the state, and nearly all states in the U.S. have some form of arrears compromise program, including the states taking part in FFD.[4] Agencies do not have discretion over arrears owed to the parent who receives child support; only that parent can forgive the debts they are owed.

Parents taking part in FFD could participate in the existing arrears compromise programs offered in their state. In addition, two programs developed milestone-based initiatives for FFD parents with state-owed arrears. In New York, parents could reduce their arrears by $1,000 if they completed occupational skills training, an additional $1,000 if they were employed for 30 days, and $1,500 if they maintained employment for 90 days. An initiative in Franklin worked similarly: The program could forgive a percentage of a parent's state-owed arrears if the parent met milestones such as completing training and setting up wage withholding. Franklin built directly on the state's existing arrears reduction program by making participation in FFD a way to qualify.

In interviews, program staff reported disappointment that more parents were not eligible for the arrears compromise programs because the arrears were due to the parent who received child support (as opposed to the state). Staff members in New York reported that some parents declined to participate or stopped communicating with the child support agency after learning they were not eligible for the arrears milestone program, indicating that the opportunity to eliminate this debt was a key reason for participating FFD.

Suspension of Discretionary Enforcement Actions

Nearly all FFD programs suspended discretionary enforcement actions for parents who were participating in the program and routinely lifted actions such as driver's license suspensions or bench warrants related to nonpayment.[5] (Programs could not stop automatic actions like pass-

3. If parents have dependent children who receive public assistance, parents are required to reimburse part of the state's financial contributions through child support payments; missed payments result in arrears that are owed to the state. Most arrears are owed by parents with low incomes, and in many cases the arrears owed to the state are not realistically collectable. For more information, see Sorensen, Souza and Schaner (2007).
4. Office of Child Support Enforcement (2018b).
5. The New York program did not have the authority to stop administrative enforcement or to lift driver's license suspensions. Statutorily required enforcement continued to take place in this program location. In addition, the child support agency did not pursue judicial enforcement of cases owing arrears to the Division of Social Services. However, if arrears were owed to the custodial parent, that parent could pursue judicial enforcement.

port suspension or tax intercepts.) Child support caseworkers in some locations also said that lifting an enforcement action was a way they could quickly build rapport and trust with a parent.

In most program locations, parents in FFD who did not make full child support payments while in the program would not have discretionary enforcement action taken on their case. Parents who enrolled but didn't start program activities, or who stopped participating, may have had standard enforcement activities resume on their case.

Child support caseworkers said they found it refreshing to be able to offer parents training rather than enforcement, and said that working in FFD helped them "unplug" from their typical role as child support officers. One caseworker said, "To have [parents] actually tell you things voluntarily and want to work with you has been an interesting shift. They're excited and want to come in." Caseworkers agreed that parents in FFD were more open and communicative than other parents they had worked with, in part because of the program's customer service approach. Another caseworker said that parents were often "shocked" by the amount of personalization and attention they received.

"We don't control the codes and the statutes, but we can assist you in getting a job."

- FFD child support caseworker

Program partners in three locations thought that responsive child support service offerings should be more robust, and they wanted increased options for participants struggling with arrears owed to the other parent. Staff from both child support agencies and partner organizations suggested that offering mediation services would have helped the program address issues such as visitation and arrears owed to the other parent.[6] They also suggested adding legal supports to navigate court proceedings. A few program locations, such as New York, offered referrals to these services but the degree to which they were used by parents is not clear.

PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCES WITH RESPONSIVE CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES

Donell's FFD caseworker reached out to check on him about every two weeks and could meet within a day or two if Donell needed it. "She doesn't just treat me like a number," he said. It was important to Donell that his caseworker took the time to understand his case and his employment situation. She helped modify his order to better reflect his income, which had decreased by more than 30 percent. She also explained his

6. While mediation services may be beneficial in addressing conflicts related to both visitation and arrears, visitation is not under the purview of child support.

options to review his case again once two of his children turned 18 years old. Donell said he understands the changes in his child support case much better now because his FFD child support caseworker took the time to explain all of it. He thinks that FFD could help to change parents' perception of child support "from the outside in."

In interviews with a limited sample of parents, they indicated that child support navigation and positive interactions with FFD child support caseworkers were the most noteworthy aspects of FFD responsive child support services. Like Donell, many parents felt that being a part of FFD improved their understanding of their child support case. Some parents who were interviewed received help understanding the implications of an order modification and pursuing one as part of the child support navigation offered through the program. One parent had never tried to get an order modification prior to FFD. Some parents said their FFD caseworker explained child support processes and policies to them, for example, by providing a checklist of the paperwork and the staff involved in the order modification process, or by explaining that payments might go to the state if the other parent had received cash assistance or other public benefits. There were a few parents who found their cases to be straightforward and did not feel that they needed help to understand them. For example, one parent said that although the processes were complicated, if parents followed instructions then child support was easy to navigate.

Generally, parents were satisfied with the child support navigation provided by FFD. A few parents had issues that could not be resolved by the support offered in the program and wanted more tailored support to walk them through these processes, which were mostly on judicial or court procedures that FFD caseworkers had limited ability to address.

Interviewed parents were particularly struck by the nature of their interactions with FFD caseworkers, which seemed to affect their overall impression of the responsive child support services. Most had some contact with their caseworker, which varied from one conversation throughout the course of the program to talking multiple times per week. Parents felt that FFD caseworkers treated them with respect, listened to them, empathized with their struggles as parents who owed child support, and were nice to them. Parents appreciated that the FFD caseworkers were easy to reach and would return their calls relatively quickly. FFD caseworkers also understood some of the complex child support arrangements that parents could be involved in and respected how parents wanted to handle these cases. For example, one parent who both received payments and owed payments through child support on separate cases did not want to set up automatic wage withholding from her job. Instead, she used the child support payments that she received to make payments on the child support order that she owed. Parents found interactions with their FFD caseworkers validating, and many remarked that they felt like they had someone on their side. Some said that being treated in this way helped to change their opinion of child support and improved their communication with the FFD caseworker. These views contrast with parents' previous experiences with child support staff members whom they viewed as not being caring or empathetic.

PARTICIPATION IN RESPONSIVE CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES

Program data on the receipt of responsive child support services was limited. This section discusses a few measures based on the six-month period following study enrollment, for those who enrolled in the study through October 2019.[7]

Nearly all study enrollees had their case reviewed by child support staff. A case review could be defined as a discussion between the parent and child support staff, or as a staff person reviewing the parent's case without the parent present.

The New York program provided additional data on responsive child support services. As part of FFD, the New York Office of Child Support Services did not pursue judicial enforcement (bringing a parent to court for nonpayment of child support) and also reduced arrears for FFD participants through its arrears compromise program. However, the program could only limit judicial enforcement for cases with state-owed arrears; if arrears were owed to the custodial parent, the custodial parent could still bring the noncustodial parent to court. Over the six-month period following study enrollment, only 1 percent of participants were ever brought to court for nonpayment of child support, a potential reflection of New York's efforts not to pursue judicial enforcement. Further, among those who had state-owed arrears, just over a third of participants in New York had some amount of arrears forgiven through the FFD arrears compromise program. Among those who had state-owed arrears, the average amount forgiven was $274.[8]

The study also measured receipt of responsive child support services in New York over the 12-month period following study enrollment, for the subset of the sample that enrolled through April 2019. Over the 12-month period, all participants in this subset had their case reviewed, and just 1 percent were brought to court for nonpayment. Among those who had state-owed arrears, the percentage of the sample who had arrears forgiven increased to 41 percent, and the average amount forgiven increased to $433.[9]

KEY FINDINGS

- **The FFD programs succeeded in providing nearly all FFD participants** with some form of responsive child support services.

7. Measures discussed in this section do not include Michigan participants, due to additional data limitations.

8. Participants who had state-owed arrears in the 6-month follow up period but did not receive any arrears forgiveness were treated as $0 for the calculation of this average. Among those who had state-owed arrears *and* received forgiveness in the 6-month period, the average amount forgiven was $797.

9. Participants who had state-owed arrears in the 12-month follow up period but did not receive any arrears forgiveness were treated as $0 for the calculation of this average. Among those who had state-owed arrears *and* received forgiveness in the 12-month period, the average amount forgiven was $1,173.

- **FFD programs made positive changes in how child support agencies worked with parents** by activating service offerings and approaches that are available to all parents but may not be routinely accessed. Notably, the most successful responsive child support services, such as help navigating child support processes and suspension of discretionary enforcement, did not require changes to policy. Lowering caseload sizes to provide more individualized services, as most FFD programs did, would likely increase costs to the child support program.

- **Responsive child support services helped child support staff build trust with the parents on their caseloads,** easing communication and facilitating casework. FFD caseworkers found that parents in FFD were more forthcoming than other parents they worked with. While this may have been related to the experiences, backgrounds, and personalities of the parents who chose to enroll in the program, interviews with staff and parents suggest that the "customer service" approach built into responsive child support practices changed how parents thought about sharing information with child support. This could make it easier for caseworkers to communicate with parents who are ordered to pay child support, establish withholding orders, and respond to parents' needs and concerns.

- **Parents appreciated having more personal interaction with FFD caseworkers, who they felt listened to them and were empathetic.** These interactions made parents feel validated, which contrasted with their previous negative experiences. This helped parents feel less like the child support system was "against" them. Similar interactions have been linked by researchers to further engagement in child support.[10]

10. Kusayeva (2020).

5

Implementing and Participating in Training and Employment Services

Training for job skills that are locally in demand, coupled with services to help parents succeed in training and work, were core parts of the Families Forward Demonstration (FFD) model. The program was designed to help parents gain access to jobs with good wages that would make it easier for them to support themselves and their families. This chapter describes how occupational skills training, employment, and wraparound services were implemented in the five FFD program locations and experienced by participants. It also reports on participation rates in these various services.

OCCUPATIONAL SKILLS TRAINING

All trainings were free to FFD participants. As discussed previously, they took between two weeks and six months to complete and led to certifications for jobs that were locally in demand, had good wages, and had opportunities for advancement. The certifications were locally recognized, such as a certificate of completion from a reputable program, or nationally recognized, such as a commercial driver's license or CompTIA A+ certification for informational technology (IT) network support.

The FFD model focused on occupational skills training that aimed to align the needs of local employers with the interests and qualifications of program participants. All trainings were free to FFD participants. Table 5.1 shows the trainings available in each FFD program. Each program had a range of offerings (between three and nine trainings per program) to meet the interests, skills, and backgrounds of different parents. For example, program staff tried to offer trainings they thought would appeal to women and men, that provided opportunities across a variety of sectors, and that included options for parents with a criminal history. Even so, most programs found that the initial offerings were too limited and added training tracks over the implementation period to attract more participants to the program.

TABLE 5.1

Occupational Skills Trainings Offered in the Families Forward Demonstration

Industry	Training	Cuy	Fr	MI	NY	WA
Construction	Construction/Heavy Equipment		√		√	
Health	Certified Nursing Assistant			√		
	Medical Secretary					X
Hospitality	Customer Service and Culinary[a]	√				
	Hospitality, Mixed[b]		√	√		
	Hotel Hospitality				√	
IT	Google			√	√	√
	Cybersecurity				√	
	Software Engineering				√	
	Support/Networking	√	√		√	
Manufacturing	CNC Machining[c]	√				
	FANUC Robotics Arm[d]			√		
	Industrial Machinery Mechanic			√		
	Production and/or Logistics			X		X
	Welding			√		√
Commercial driving	CDL[e]	√			√	√
Other	Cable Installation				√	
	NYCHA Housing Caretaker[f]				√	
	Woodworking				√	

√ added training during implementation period

√ offered throughout implementation period

X training removed during implementation period

(continued)

TABLE 5.1 (continued)

NOTES: [a]May include Food Prep, ServeSafe Management or Food Handler certification, Culinary Arts certification.
[b]May include training in Microsoft Office, computer literacy, communication skills.
[c]Computer numerical controlled machine.
[d]Training on FANUC robotics arm.
[e]Commercial Driver's License.
[f]Janitorial training for New York City Housing Authority Housing Caretaker (J) position. Caretakers maintain the grounds, buildings, and public spaces of NYCHA developments.

Evie's grandfather drove buses and dump trucks.[1] She had always been interested in driving oversize vehicles but without a commercial driver's license, her options were limited. She was interested in pursuing one even before learning about FFD. The cost of training had previously been a barrier, and Evie was skeptical when she heard about the free program. However, after being assured that the program wasn't a scam, she went for it. Evie chose evening classes that didn't interfere with her work schedule. The first step was an assessment, followed by three weeks learning safety procedures. Then finally she started driving.

Local partners such as community colleges, trade schools, and community-based organizations offered trainings. FFD programs either purchased slots in existing trainings or asked a partner agency to run a special cohort session for FFD. Programs using the latter struggled to attract enough parents and had to cancel trainings because they did not have enough interest to run the cohort. As a result, they moved away from this approach during the study implementation period. The slot-based approach proved to be more successful. However, it was not uncommon for parents to experience long waits for a training slot, either because there was misalignment between their enrollment and the training cycle or because the training was very popular.

Some FFD training programs were full time while others offered flexible schedules, including part-time offerings (such as evening or weekend courses) or self-paced trainings. Full-time trainings gave parents the opportunity to earn a desirable and robust certification in a relatively short time frame. However, full-time trainings also required parents who were working to quit their jobs or reduce their hours for several weeks or months.[2] Staff members noted that a small number of parents dropped out in the final weeks of longer trainings because they needed to make money. The staff members said that to succeed in a full-time training, parents needed stability and support, such as a partner or spouse who could financially support the household

1. This name is a pseudonym. Other identifying details may have been obscured or omitted to protect this parent's privacy.
2. The program model anticipated that taking part in training could reduce parents' ability to pay their child support obligations. Nearly all FFD child support agencies worked to find flexible payment solutions for parents who were participating in the program. See Chapter 4 for additional information.

while they were in the program. This report is not able to determine whether differences in training schedules influenced parents' enrollment or completion rates.

FFD staff members in nearly all program locations said that finding the right training tracks was a challenge, and many expressed dissatisfaction with the program's training requirements. Some staff persons and partners who were interviewed said that the six-month cap on training was too long for parents to complete, while others thought it was too short to produce meaningful gains in employment and earnings. Several interviewees wanted more training offerings to better align with the range of parent's interests and qualifications. Some thought that a participant-driven (rather than demand-driven) approach would have been stronger because it would allow the program to serve more parents. Criticisms of the model's approach to occupational skills training came from child support agencies and their partners, including workforce agencies.

PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCES WITH OCCUPATIONAL SKILLS TRAINING

Overall, parents who were interviewed expressed positive impressions of the trainings. They valued being provided with instruction materials and schedules upfront so they could adequately plan their time. Some parents felt that the requirements of the trainings were made clear to them, and therefore they were able to commit. Open and flexible communication with instructors and encouragement from classmates aided parents' participation. For example, one parent was in a group message thread with other classmates, which allowed them to notify each other of unplanned lateness. While a few parents felt that the student-teacher ratio was too large for them to receive the specialized instruction they desired, others thought the class size was just right. Largely, parents appreciated being able to learn a skill that they had an interest in or that could lead to a higher-paying job.

Some parents continued to work while in FFD, and parents who were employed found it challenging to balance the demands of the training with their work schedules. A few people said that they needed to lean on the custodial parent to provide childcare so they could sustain their participation. One parent had scheduling conflicts between work and training despite opting for a training provider that offered a part-time course. Another parent said that working meant taking a longer time to get through the training because he spent less time per week than others learning the same material.

The majority of parents who were interviewed had already started or completed training and generally found it easy to participate, though their experiences may not be generalizable to the overall FFD sample. Some parents missed an enrollment deadline or had their first choice in trainings canceled or delayed. A few training providers had strict policies regarding attendance and lateness, which were meant to prepare parents for the standards they would be held to on the job. However, a few parents struggled with these policies, as they had to quickly adapt to a new schedule or were late because of circumstances outside of their control, such as severe train delays.

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND WRAPAROUND SUPPORTS

Kamahl came to FFD with mostly informal work experience and never having had a resume.[3] Career readiness workshops were a requirement of the program and Kamahl voiced his concern about how he would participate in them, since he had just started his first "formal" job. The FFD coordinator came up with a workaround: He and Kamahl had weekly one-on-one sessions to go over the information in the workshop.

The FFD program model included services to help parents find employment in their targeted field, and to maintain their employment and advance in their career. It also offered wraparound supports to help parents succeed in training and work. Most of the programs had a partner tasked specifically with providing employment and supportive services. The partner had one or two dedicated staff persons who spent half or all of their time on FFD. They might also play a role in screening and intake procedures. In some cases, employment services staff were embedded in the training program and were not considered FFD staff.

FFD programs leveraged the existing employment services provided by partners, and services typically were not altered or enhanced for FFD. Common services included resume development, interview skills, career mapping, job search, and job placement or development. The robustness of employment services varied with the expertise of partners, their philosophies around employment services, and the needs and interests of parents.

Partner agencies took different approaches to the sequencing of employment and training services. For example, training providers in New York typically offered employment services alongside training. In contrast, one of the providers in Franklin focused on employment supports *after* parents completed training and were ready to start work. (See Figures 2.1 through 2.5 for additional information about the flow of services in each program.)

Some partners used tailored approaches for employability services that focused on delivering only the supports that they thought an individual parent needed. For example, a program might rework a participant's resume or recommend attending an interview skills workshop. In contrast, other partners took a more standardized approach, requiring all participants to take the same employability skills courses or bootcamps. These partners thought that this information would make all participants more employable and give them a competitive edge. In most cases, the courses were full time and partners had to figure out the participation requirements for parents who were already working. Should they quit their jobs for a work readiness workshop? How would parents fare with a few weeks of reduced income in addition to the time required to take part in occupational skills training? Recognizing that parents might have reduced income during the training, all FFD programs suspended discretionary enforcement action for parents actively

3. This name is a pseudonym. Other identifying details may have been obscured or omitted to protect this parent's privacy.

participating in the program (see Chapter 4 for more information). In addition, the Cuyahoga program created an "alternative path" for FFD parents who were working that allowed them to complete a required work readiness bootcamp at their own pace.

After parents found employment, FFD offered them support for at least one year after they enrolled in the program, to help them maintain their employment, advance in their careers, or find a new job. FFD service providers reached out to parents around once a month to see if they needed help with anything. However, the quality and robustness of these services varied by service provider, and implementation studies of other employment programs indicate that providers struggle to implement these follow-up services.[4]

In addition to helping parents gain and maintain employment, FFD programs provided wraparound supports to facilitate parents' success in training and work. In most locations, wraparound supports were offered both through child support and program partners. The most common wraparound services included paying for training, work, or interview supplies, and helping with transportation. Interviewees identified transportation as a key barrier and all programs supplied transit supports, such as bus or gas cards, through FFD and/or existing grants. Programs also helped parents apply for benefits, access legal documents, and connect to counseling. Box 5.1 highlights a unique service available in Cuyahoga's program—access to an attorney who focuses on financial matters that commonly affect individuals with low incomes, such as student debt, bankruptcy proceedings, and identity theft.

PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCES WITH EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND WRAPAROUND SUPPORTS

During Kamahl's sessions with the FFD coordinator, he learned how to write a resume, complete a job application, and sharpen his interviewing skills. Not only did he learn how to adapt his informal work experience for his resume, but he also added his personal goals, something he mentioned he had not thought of before. He created a career map, which encouraged him to think through his plans after he earned his commercial driver's license. He wants to get commercial driver's license endorsements, which require passing additional tests, so he can operate special types of motor vehicles. In the long term, he wants to venture into real estate.

Kamahl felt like the program had prepared him to navigate professional settings and that the skills he learned will continue to be helpful as he advances in his career. He also hopes to continue using these services. "They give you all the resources," he said. "They take the time with you. They make it personal and put in the effort."

4. For example, see Tessler et al. (2014).

BOX 5.1

Building Parents' Financial Capacity in Cuyahoga County

Cuyahoga County's FFD employment services partner offers a unique service to its program participants: access to an attorney who focuses on financial matters that commonly affect individuals with low incomes. As part of FFD, the attorney met with FFD parents at least once to review their credit and talk about what they might need help with.

FFD parents also had access to other services through the attorney that could help them improve their financial situation. She teaches a unit in the program's career readiness workshops about banking, loans, debt, and other financial subjects. In addition, she can also represent participants and file paperwork on their behalf, so they don't have to pay for such services or hire someone on their own. For example, the attorney routinely helps participants fix errors on credit reports, address student loan defaults, file taxes, claim benefits, and go through bankruptcy proceedings. Her work is tailored to each participant's personal situation and interest. She may work with participants once to address a single credit issue, or help them through a multiyear bankruptcy proceeding.

Mario came to FFD with close to $40,000 in student loans from a now-defunct, for-profit college. The financial attorney contacted the Department of Education on his behalf and was able to reduce his student loan debt to $15,000 and his monthly payment from $200 to $5. Together, Mario and the attorney also reviewed his credit report and disputed some incorrect information. This was the first time Mario had looked at his credit report. He said he planned to keep working with the attorney to get assistance with tax offsets and child support.

Regardless of whether partners took a standardized or tailored approach to employment services, parents who were interviewed consistently reported receiving resume preparation or interview guidance. Resume preparation was frequently cited as the most helpful service. Like Kamahl, most parents valued learning how to add the skills they were developing to their resumes and receiving guidance on how to make their previous experiences relevant to the fields they were pursuing. One parent that the research team spoke with found it helpful to discuss salary expectations and negotiations. A few parents who were previously incarcerated received specialized support by discussing which employers would hire applicants with a record and how to talk about their incarceration during interviews.

Many parents remarked that help with transportation was key in helping them take part in training. Some parents said being given parking vouchers, in particular, would be a help. A few

parents said getting help paying for training or work supplies and interview clothing supported their training and job search process.

Many parents described making meaningful connections with staff members, which shaped their impressions of the employment services. One parent said that going beyond career development by talking about previous traumatic experiences and receiving encouragement from staff members built his confidence. Parents said that staff members who were patient and seemed genuinely invested in them strengthened their experience. In the Franklin and Cuyahoga programs, parents' impressions of FFD were shaped by their positive experiences with employment and wraparound service staff. Parents in these locations described receiving more structured services than parents reported elsewhere, which may be related to the Franklin and Cuyahoga programs taking a more standardized approach to career readiness training.

FACILITATING PARTICIPATION

Taking part in a time-intensive training program required parents to make tradeoffs. Participating in trainings and completing assignments often meant parents had less time for child care or work, and potentially less ability to work and pay child support. To take part in FFD, many parents needed a replacement for child care they usually provided themselves or additional resources to be able to survive on a reduced income.

Several of the FFD program services were designed to make it easier for parents to take part in occupational skills training and other program activities, including some responsive child support services and wraparound supports. In addition, the programs encouraged participation in several other ways:

- **Offering incentives through arrears compromise and milestone programs.** Two programs offered milestone-based arrears compromise programs (described in Chapter 4) to provide an incentive to complete training and find work. In addition, the program in Michigan provided financial incentives to participants for completing milestones in their training program. The total amount and number of milestones varied with the length of training, but parents typically earned $100 per milestone.

- **Connecting parents to interim jobs.** Employment service providers sometimes connected parents to "survival jobs" so they weren't without income for an indefinite amount of time.

- **Keeping parents engaged while waiting for trainings to begin.** Long waits for trainings to begin were a challenge for engagement in at least three sites. Programs tried to keep people engaged by offering employment services (in locations where these services were not offered by the training provider), working on child support cases so that court hearings and paperwork could be completed prior to training, and calling people on a regular basis.

- **Providing opportunities for peer support.** Providers in three locations began bringing together FFD participants weekly to discuss how they were doing. Staff members encouraged parents to support each other by sharing advice about child support and training. Providers also checked in about service and support needs at this time and distributed transportation vouchers. Staff members thought these meetings increased engagement and attendance and helped them develop relationships with participants. One parent who was interviewed agreed, saying that receiving encouragement from his peers helped to motivate him to get through the trainings.

PARTICIPATION IN PROGRAM SERVICES

Individual-level data were collected from all five program locations to identify who among the entire study sample received training, services, and supports through FFD. As mentioned previously, the study sample includes some individuals who went through the eligibility and study enrollment process but did not end up enrolling in training. Including all study participants in this analysis allowed for a more complete understanding of participants' experiences after they came forward to enroll in FFD. Table 5.2 presents findings based on these program data and focuses on the six-month period following study enrollment. The sample for these measures consists of everyone who enrolled in the study through October 2019.[5]

Occupational skills training. Nearly 60 percent of those who enrolled in the study started occupational skills training. At the program level, this percentage was similar in Michigan, Cuyahoga, and Franklin (68 percent, 70 percent, and 78 percent, respectively). In Washington, the figure was much higher (92 percent). The rate was lower in New York (50 percent), where eligibility for training was not determined prior to study enrollment, and many participants were required to pass additional assessments and interviews in order to qualify for training (see Chapter 3). In addition, the start dates of training classes were not synchronized with study enrollment, which meant that some parents could not start training immediately following study enrollment. These factors likely contributed to a drop-off after study enrollment. Parents who enrolled in the study but did not take part in training were eligible for other FFD services, such as support for understanding their child support obligations.

On average, parents started occupational skills training within about one month of FFD study enrollment. However, this period varied greatly by site, as each program location had nuances to their program structure, which affected the timing of program components. For example, in Michigan and Washington, the average time between enrolling in the study and beginning the training was only 12 or 10 days, respectively. In Cuyahoga, this period was 45 days, on average. This longer period was driven by a career readiness training that Cuyahoga participants were required to complete prior to occupational skills training and could last two to four weeks, ad-

5. Some measures in the table, as noted, are based on a subset of study enrollees.

TABLE 5.2

Program Participation Over the 6-Month Follow-Up Period

Measure	Michigan	New York	Cuyahoga	Franklin	Washington	All
Occupational skills training[a]						
Started training (%)	68	50	70	78	92	59
Days from study enrollment to starting training, among those who started training (mean)	12	36	45	24	10	30
Employment readiness and job development[b] (%)						
Received any employment services	6	52	97	-	100	53
Referred to any jobs	-	36	-	-	62	39
Referred to any jobs in target sector	-	32	-	-	62	36
Other services[c] (%)						
Received any follow-up services/contact	-	35	-	33	54	39
Received any financial services	-	41	76	-	31	54
Sample size	88	294	71	9	26	488

SOURCE: MDRC calculations are based on data collected from program locations and include individuals who enrolled in the study through October 2019.

NOTES: "-" indicates that the measure could not be created for the given program location due to data limitations, and therefore the program location is not included in the cross-site measure.

[a]These measures are missing data on New York participants at one service provider.

[b]These measures are missing data on New York participants at two service providers.

[c]These measures are missing data on New York participants at three service providers.

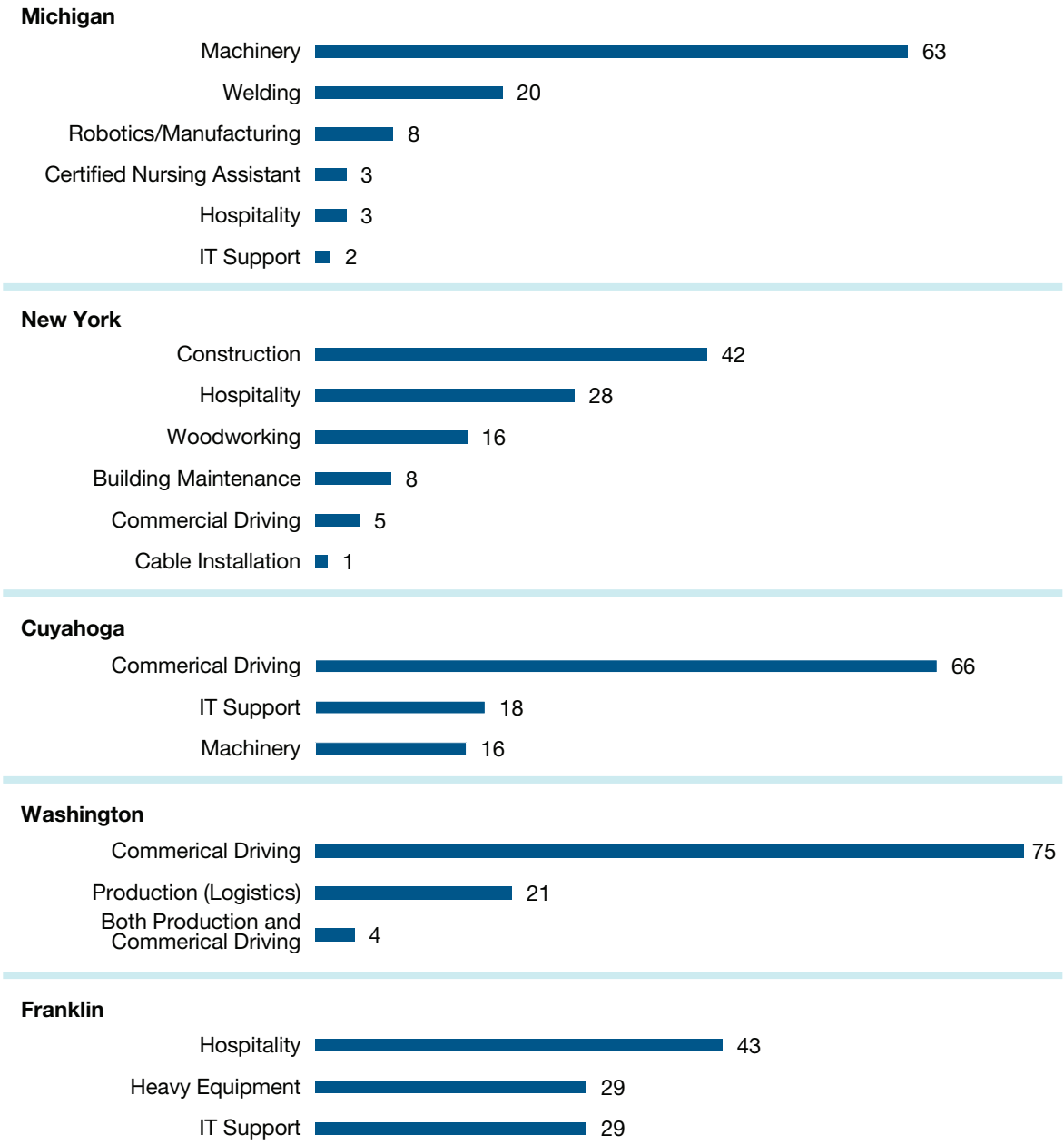
ditional eligibility determination processes required for trainings, and the wait time for training slots to open.

Figure 5.1 presents the types of trainings that participants enrolled in, by program location. Michigan, Cuyahoga, and Washington each had a training that stood out as most popular. In New York, there was more variation in the trainings that study enrollees participated in. Across the entire study sample (not shown), the most common trainings were construction, hospitality, and machinery.

Employment services and wraparound supports. About 53 percent of the study sample received employment services, such as help with a resume, preparation for an interview, or general career counseling. In New York, where the FFD employment services were built into the occupational skills training programs, the number of participants who received employment services was

FIGURE 5.1

Percentage Enrolled in Each Training Track, by Site



SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on data collected from FFD program locations. Sample includes parents who enrolled in the study through October 2019 and started occupational skills within six months of study enrollment. New York parents at one service provider are not included in these calculations, due to data limitations. Sample sizes are as follows: Michigan-60, New York-148, Cuyahoga-50, Washington-24, Franklin-7.

aligned with the number of those who enrolled in occupational skills training. Just over a third of study participants in New York (about 70 percent of those who started training) and 62 percent of study participants in Washington were referred to any jobs.[6]

Service providers appeared to be less focused on contact with parents after they found employment. Due to limitations in the data related to this program component, the research team could not distinguish between follow-up contact *attempts* made by program staff and follow-up services provided by program staff. However, the measures in the third panel of Table 5.2 provide some idea of whether and how much programs were connected to parents after they found a job. Overall, about one-third of the study sample received any follow-up services or contact.

Though not a core component of FFD, most programs offered some services to help parents increase their financial capacity. The delivery and receipt of this service varied from site to site. Across the entire study sample, over half of parents received some type of support managing their finances. Program data on other wraparound supports—such as help with transportation, on-the-job support, and referrals to other services—were limited and not consistently available from all program locations.

As noted earlier, measures of employment services and wraparound supports are based on the entire study sample to provide a complete picture of participation among everyone that agreed to participate in the study.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Most programs added training tracks during the implementation period and continued to express a desire to include more training opportunities.** Prior research indicates that demand-driven training programs can lead to better chances at employment and wage growth. However, they also typically include strict eligibility requirements that can make them hard to access and limit the training options available to participants. Programs may benefit from offering a range of skills training programs to align with the skills, interests, and backgrounds of parents.

- **Parents in FFD juggled many responsibilities that could make it challenging for them to sustain their engagement in the program and complete training.** Additional supports may help parents balance training with other responsibilities such as child care and the need for income to support their families. Programs may consider strategies such as stipends to offset reduced wages, help with child care, and flexible and part-time training schedules to increase parents' access to and completion of training.

6. Data were limited on specific job development activities.

- **Most study participants received occupational skills training and employment services to some extent.** Receipt of wraparound supports such as financial services and follow-up services was less consistent.

- **While the majority of parents received occupational skills training, a significant share of study enrollees—40 percent—did not start a training.** The gap indicates that child support agencies that wish to connect parents to skills training programs may benefit from increased coordination with training providers to make stronger referrals and to better match parents with training offerings.

6

Outcomes

As discussed in Chapter 1, the Families Forward Demonstration (FFD) model was based on the premise that participation in the program services would lead to gains in employment, earnings, and child support payments. This chapter presents descriptive analyses of training completion, employment, and child support outcomes over the six- and twelve-month periods following study enrollment. Due to data limitations and resource constraints, the analyses of training and employment in this chapter focus on outcome *levels* (not *gains*). Analyses of child support outcomes use an interrupted time series (ITS) design to estimate effects on child support outcomes. These approaches garner less confidence about estimates of program effectiveness than, for example, a well-implemented randomized controlled trial. Still, the exploratory analyses provide some initial descriptive information about FFD's outcomes.

As explained earlier in the report, about 40 percent of all parents in the study did not participate in the program's core component—occupational skills training. This chapter discusses outcomes both for the full sample of study participants and for the subsample who enrolled in training.

TRAINING COMPLETION AND CREDENTIALS

Table 6.1 presents cross-site findings on training completion, credential receipt, and employment over the six-month follow-up period. These measures are based on data collected from the training providers in each program location and reflect all individuals who enrolled in the study (including those who did not start training), unless otherwise noted. Including all study participants in this analysis allows for a more complete understanding of participants' experiences after they decided to take part in the study and pursue FFD services.

As discussed in Chapter 5, 59 percent of parents in the study (288 individuals) started training within six months of study enrollment. Of those, 70 percent (201) finished within six months—or 41 percent of the study sample—suggesting that despite the challenges in getting parents to participate in trainings, program staff were successful in keeping parents engaged and parents were motivated to complete training once they started. The percentages of the study sample who started and finished training are lower than demand-driven training programs in WorkAdvance

TABLE 6.1

Training Completion, Credentials, and Employment Over the 6-Month Follow-Up Period

Measure (%)	Michigan	New York	Cuyahoga	Franklin	Washington	All
Completed training	9	48	45	56	65	41
Earned certification/credential	9	36	35	44	65	33
Ever employed[a]	27	57	36	71	79	49
Ever employed in the target sector[a]	-	51	30	43	46	46
Sample size	88	294	71	9	26	488

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on data collected from FFD program locations and include individuals who enrolled in the study through October 2019.

NOTES: Measures in this table are missing data on New York participants at one service provider.
"-" indicates that the measure was not possible to create for the given program location due to data limitations, and therefore the program location is not included in the cross-site measure.
[a]These measures were created only among those who received any occupational skills training (N=289). Also, for Washington and Cuyahoga participants, these measures could include employment that started before enrollment in the study.

that offered training to all study participants but whose screening for study enrollment was more stringent than the FFD screening.[1] The FFD rates are similar, however, to those observed in demand-driven training programs such as the Health Professions Opportunity Grants program.[2]

All FFD training tracks were designed to lead to a locally or industry-recognized credential upon successfully completing a training course. However, while 41 percent of the study sample completed training within six months, only a third of the study sample received a certification or credential in this timeframe. This may have been due to the fact that the information was not reported consistently, and some credentials required to pass an assessment or test were not guaranteed with the completion of training.

EMPLOYMENT

The research team calculated employment rates over the six-month period following study enrollment using data collected by service providers at FFD program locations (see Table 6.1). There

1. Tessler et al. (2014).
2. Peck et al. (2018).

are important caveats for interpreting this information. First, this follow-up period includes the time during which enrollees could have been enrolled in training. If participants were spending time in training that they otherwise would have spent working, employment rates would be lower during this period. Second, the employment information reflects only employment that study participants reported to service providers. It is possible that some FFD study participants were employed at some point during the follow-up period, but never reported the job to the provider. Such employment would not be reflected in these calculations. Third, because the employment data were collected by service providers, it was only possible to calculate employment for the subset of the sample who received training from those providers (about 60 percent of the full sample). Fourth, for some program locations, service providers' reports of employment may have included jobs that participants had at the time of study enrollment.

Among parents who started training, just under half were employed at some point during the six-month follow-up period. The portion employed in the target sector (the job sector specific to the training) over this period was similar (46 percent). While these measures do not present a complete picture of employment across the entire group of parents in the study, they suggest that those who found employment and reported it to the training provider usually found jobs in the target sector, a key goal of the FFD program model. Employment rates over the six-month follow-up period among parents who participated in training varied by site, ranging from 27 percent in Michigan to 79 percent in Washington, suggesting that the program locations may have had different levels of success in connecting participants to jobs or had varying levels of access to information about parents' employment.

Additional Analyses on Training Completion, Credentials, and Employment

For program locations with larger overall study samples—New York and Michigan—the research team also assessed training completion, credential receipt, and employment over a 12-month follow-up period for a smaller subset of the sample—those who enrolled in the study through April 2019 (see Appendix Table B.1). Among New York study participants, the 12-month rates of training completion and credential receipt do not differ much from the 6-month rates, suggesting that the program moved participants briskly through training as planned. Among Michigan study participants, the rates of training completion and credential receipt were about twice the 6-month rates, indicating that training stretched out over a longer time period in Michigan compared with New York. This is not surprising, because many FFD trainings in Michigan were self-paced, in contrast to regular classes for trainings in New York.[3]

3. Appendix Table B.2 shows training completion, credential receipt, and employment over the 6-month follow-up period among the subset of parents who enrolled in the study through April 2019. The 6-month follow-up rates for this group are similar to those measured among the larger Michigan sample, suggesting that the Michigan parents who could be followed for a longer time period are not markedly different from the larger group.

In New York, the employment rate over the 12-month follow-up period was higher (72 percent) than the 6-month rate (57 percent).[4] In Michigan, the employment rate over the 12-month follow-up period was about the same (28 percent) as the 6-month rate (27 percent). This suggests that in Michigan, it may have taken longer than 12 months for participants to find work, or that the program was not in contact with participants long enough to collect this information.

CHILD SUPPORT OUTCOMES

As illustrated by the FFD logic model in Chapter 1 (Figure 1.1), FFD aimed to increase parents' regularity and completeness of child support payments. The study team examined a number of specific measures of child support outcomes that are often used in child support studies.[5]

- **Order amounts.** This analysis focuses on two components of a child support obligation, also known as an order: 1) the "current" amount—that is, the amount the parent must pay at some regular interval (typically monthly); and 2) the amount owed toward the arrears balance—a separate amount that the parent owes that goes toward paying down any accrued child support debt. This report refers to the sum of these two components as the "total order amount." Order amounts can change depending on the parent's circumstances; for example, an order may be eligible for an increase when the parent obtains a higher-paying job or a decrease when the parent loses a job. The research team examined monthly current order amounts as well as monthly total order amounts. The team also computed the balance of arrears owed at the end of the follow-up period.

- **Payment amounts.** Given FFD's goals, the amount of child support payments is a key outcome measure—both the amount applied to the current order and the total amount paid in each month (which could include payments in excess of the current order).[6] Typically, any payments are first applied to the current order amount, and any amount paid over the current order is applied to the arrears balance. There are certain exceptions to this approach that vary by locality.[7] The research team also examined whether parents made any payment in a given month, and the number of months in the follow-up period in which the parent made a payment.[8]

4. As shown in Appendix Table B.2, the 6-month employment rate in New York among the subset of parents who enrolled in the study through April 2019 (58 percent) is about the same as the 6-month employment rate among all parents in New York (57 percent).
5. Cancian, Meyer, and Wood (2019a).
6. When a parent had more than one child support case, the research team combined the amounts across cases for that parent in order to compute the monthly payment.
7. For example, in New York, if a payment is made via a federal tax offset, the payment is first applied to state-owed arrears before anything else. See New York State Child Support (2021).
8. Arrears compromises were not counted as payments in any of the analyses for this report.

- **Payment amounts compared with order amounts.** Additional measures combine information about order amounts and payment amounts. A "compliance rate" is often expressed as the current payment amount, divided by the current order amount. This is one of five performance measures required by the Child Support Performance and Incentive Act (CSPIA) of 1998.[9] When multiplied by 100 and expressed as a percentage, at the individual level, the measure conveys the extent to which the parent meets the current obligations. In addition to the measure focused on current payments, the research team also examined a compliance rate based on the total order amount.

Data Sources and Research Design

The five child support agencies participating in FFD provided individual-level, monthly administrative records from up to 23 months prior to FFD study enrollment and up to 12 months following study enrollment for each parent enrolled in the study. All five agencies provided data for calculating total order amount, total payment amount, and total compliance rate. Four out of five agencies provided data for calculating current order amounts, current payment amounts, and current compliance rates.[10] The 6-month follow-up period included individuals from all five program locations. The study also analyzed data over a longer, 12-month follow-up period for a subset of individuals in Michigan, New York, and Washington. The research team analyzed outcomes for all parents in the study (whether or not they eventually received services or started training), and also for the subsample of parents who started occupational skills training.

As noted above, the analysis uses an ITS research design to examine whether child support outcomes changed after parents enrolled in the study (again, regardless of whether they eventually received any services through FFD). Of interest is whether the trend in a particular outcome changed *relative to the trend prior to enrolling in the study*. Appendix B further describes the ITS, model specifications, and sensitivity tests. Tests of statistical significance from these models indicate whether observed changes in trends are likely attributable to sampling error, or chance. In prior studies of job training programs, a common phenomenon observed is the decline of earnings in the months leading up to program enrollment, and an increase in the months after enrollment, even without intervention.[11] Since employment and earnings are linked to a parent's ability to pay child support, it is likely that similar patterns would occur in child support outcomes—for example, decreasing payments prior to program enrollment, and increasing payments afterward. To help ensure that the findings do not reflect this phenomenon, the statistical findings reported in the rest of this chapter draw on analyses that *exclude* the period from four

9. Office of Child Support Enforcement (2016).

10. The measures could not be computed for Cuyahoga County, Ohio.

11. Ashenfelter (1978); (Heckman and Smith, 1995).

months prior to study enrollment through four months after study enrollment.[12] While the ITS analysis can provide greater confidence about FFD effects than the descriptive methods used in this report to analyze other measures, it still is not possible to conclude that FFD *caused* any observed changes: The design cannot definitively rule out changes in child support outcomes that might have been caused by other factors such as changes in the labor market, other policy changes, or the parent's own characteristics such as motivation.

Figures 6.1 through 6.4 show trends over time in the child support outcome measures described above for pooled samples (that is, combining information from study participants across program locations). Each figure shows outcome trends over time (relative to month zero, the month of study enrollment) for two groups: all parents in the study (represented by solid black lines in the figures), and for the subset of parents who started occupational skills training (represented by dotted lines)—referred to throughout this chapter as "trainees." As will be seen, trainee outcome levels and trends were similar to those measured among all parents in the study, suggesting that there are few selection effects after the initial study enrollment decision.

Order Amounts

Figure 6.1 shows the average total order amount and current order amount in each month, from about two years prior to study enrollment through one year after study enrollment.[13] During most of the pre-study enrollment period, trainees' total and current order amounts were similar to those among all parents. A few months prior to study enrollment, trainees' order amounts began to dip below the average among all parents.

In terms of the trends observed over time, on average, total and current order amounts increased over the period prior to study enrollment and decreased over the period following study enrollment. Both the increase over the pre-study period and the subsequent decline over the post-study enrollment period (for both total and current order amounts) were statistically different from zero. In other words, the increase in order amounts prior to study enrollment and the decrease in order amounts following study enrollment separately are unlikely attributable to chance.[14] Importantly, the pre- and post-study enrollment trends are statistically different *from each other*, indicating that the *difference between the two trends* is unlikely attributable to sampling error.

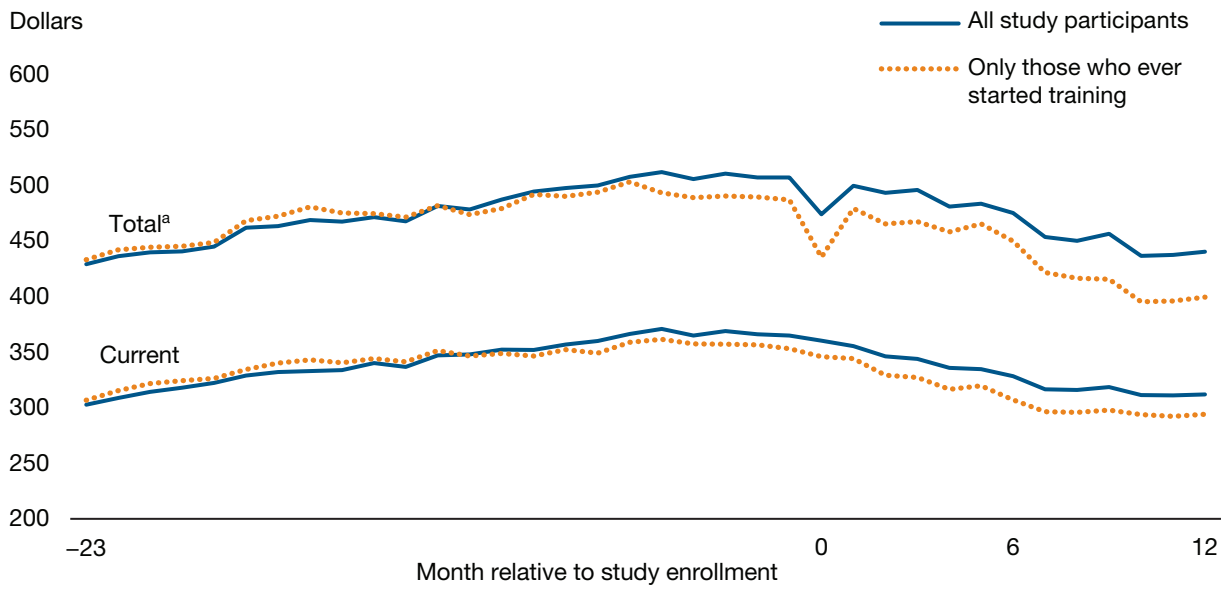
12. See Appendix Table B.3 for a complete summary of the estimated effects. Due to data security restrictions, the statistical findings from regression analyses reported in this chapter are based on information from Michigan, New York, Franklin, and Washington. The regression analyses do not include information from Cuyahoga County.

13. Sample sizes may vary by month. See figure for more information.

14. Statements about statistical significance for the trends shown in this chapter's figures are based on results shown in Appendix Table B.3 and explained in Appendix B. An estimate is considered statistically significant if its p-value is below 0.10.

FIGURE 6.1

Mean Total Order Amounts and Current Order Amounts



SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on administrative records from local child support agencies. Solid lines represent all study participants; dotted lines show only those who ever started training. Sample sizes vary by outcome measure and month. For the measures that represent all study participants, the sample sizes are as follows: total order amounts through 6 months after study enrollment include up to 565 individuals from five program locations, and total order amounts in months 7 through 12 after study enrollment include up to 377 individuals from three program locations; current order amounts through 6 months after study enrollment include up to 494 individuals from four program locations, and current orders amounts in months 7 through 12 after study enrollment include up to 377 individuals from three program locations.

NOTES: [a]Data in month 0 were incomplete for Cuyahoga participants, which may have artificially brought down the mean in this month.

Still, the month-to-month changes in both the pre- and post-study enrollment periods were relatively small compared with the overall monthly averages.[15]

Payments

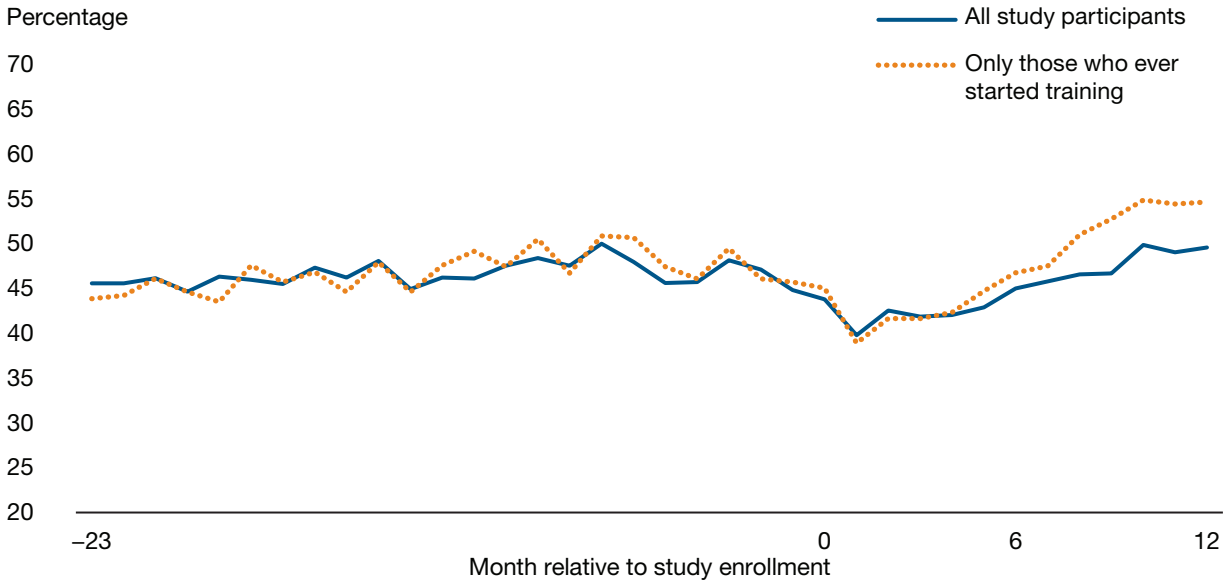
Figure 6.2 presents the percentage of parents in the study (and of the trainee subset) who made any child support payment in each month. In most months prior to study enrollment, about 40 to 50 percent of all parents made a payment.[16] Looking at the trend over time, the percentage of parents who made a monthly payment remained relatively stable over the two years prior to enrollment. Among all parents who enrolled in the study, the monthly payment rate trend was

15. The sharp drop in total orders for the full sample during the month of enrollment (month zero) reflects partial data reporting for that month in one site.

16. Appendix Figure B.2 shows monthly payment rates separately by program location.

FIGURE 6.2

Percent of Sample Who Made Any Child Support Payment



SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on administrative records from local child support agencies. Solid lines represent all study participants; dotted lines show only those who ever started training. Sample sizes vary by month. For the measure that represents all study participants, the sample sizes are as follows: payment measures through 6 months after study enrollment include up to 571 individuals from five program locations, and payment measures from months 7 through 12 after study enrollment include up to 382 individuals from three program locations.

not statistically different from zero in the pre-study enrollment period. The trend was positive and statistically significant in the post-study enrollment period, and the pre- and post-study enrollment trends were statistically different from each other.[17] These findings are also true for the trainee subset. Further follow-up data is needed to ascertain whether payment rates increase over a longer-term period. As shown in Tables 6.2 and 6.3, parents in the study made payments in 2.5 months, on average, during the 6 months after enrolling in the study and in 5.3 months, on average, during the 12 months following study enrollment.

Figure 6.3 presents the average payment made in each month from 23 months prior to study enrollment through 12 months after study enrollment.[18] Looking at the period prior to study enrollment, both total and current payments remained fairly stable. For current payment amounts among all parents, there were no statistically significant changes between the pre-study enrollment trend and the post-study enrollment trend. The same was true for the subgroup of trainees. On the other hand, for total payment amounts among all parents in the study, there

17. These findings are based on model results that exclude the four months prior through four months after the month of study enrollment. See Appendix Table B.3 for the complete set of model results.

18. Appendix Figure B.3 shows average monthly total payments in each program location.

TABLE 6.2

Child Support Characteristics Over the 6-Month Follow-Up Period

Measure	Michigan	New York	Cuyahoga	Franklin	Washington	All
Number of months in which parent made a payment						
applied to either the current amount or arrears balance	2.4	2.4	2.7	2.9	4.0	2.5
applied to the current amount	2.2	2.3	-	2.9	4.0	2.4
applied to the arrears balance	1.2	1.8	-	2.0	1.4	1.7
Balance of child support arrears owed to the custodial parent or government, at end of follow-up period ($)	11,337	12,119	15,652	11,894	10,739	12,348
Sample size	87	378	68	9	26	568

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on data collected from FFD program locations and include individuals who enrolled in the study through October 2019.

NOTE: "-" indicates the measure was not possible to create for the given program location, due to data limitations.

TABLE 6.3

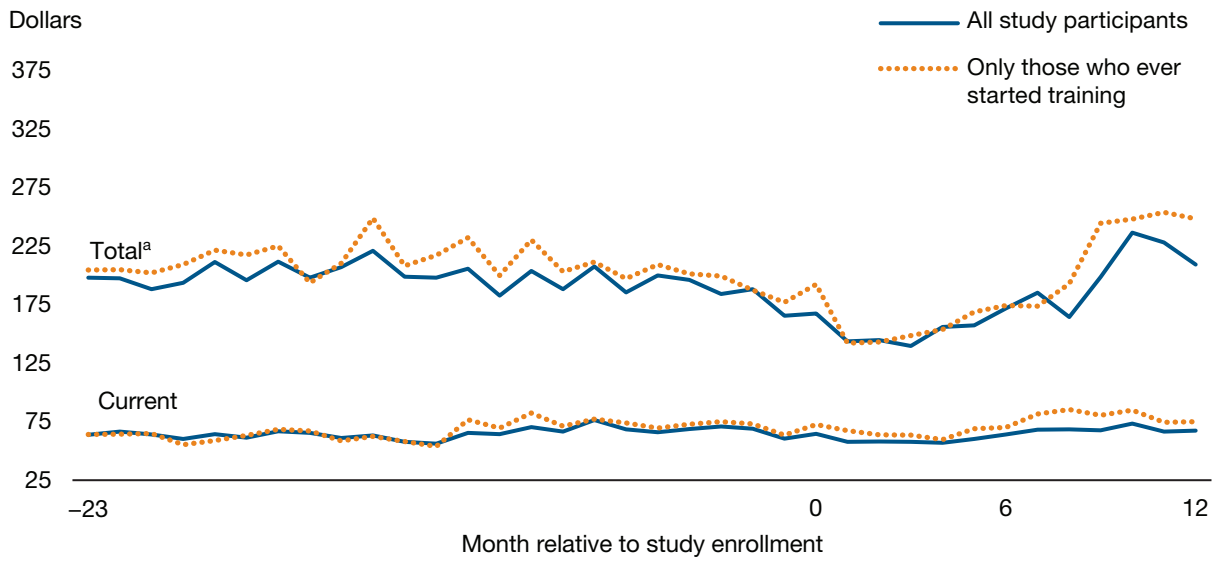
Child Support Characteristics Over the 12-Month Follow-Up Period

Measure	Michigan	New York	All
Number of months in which parent made a payment			
applied to either the current amount or arrears balance	6.2	5.2	5.3
applied to the current amount	5.4	4.9	5.0
applied to the arrears balance	3.8	4.0	4.0
Balance of child support arrears owed to the custodial parent or government, at end of follow-up period ($)	11,744	12,367	12,284
Sample size	40	269	309

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on data collected from FFD program locations and include individuals who enrolled in the study through April 2019.

FIGURE 6.3

Mean Total Payment Amounts and Amounts Paid Toward Current Order



SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on administrative records from local child support agencies. Solid lines represent all study participants; dotted lines show only those who ever started training. Sample sizes vary by outcome measure and follow-up period. For the measures that represent all study participants, the sample sizes are as follows: total payments through 6 months after study enrollment include up to 569 individuals from five program locations, and total payments in months 7 through 12 after study enrollment include up to 379 individuals from three program locations; current payments through 6 months after study enrollment include up to 497 individuals from four program locations, and current payments in months 7 through 12 months after study enrollment include up to 378 individuals from three program locations.

NOTES: [a]Data in month 0 were incomplete for Cuyahoga participants, which may have artificially brought down the mean in this month.

was a statistically significant increase between the pre- and post-study enrollment trends. The same was true for the subsample of trainees.[19] It is not possible to know from the data available whether the increasing payments would continue, or level off. The increase in total payments after study enrollment stands in contrast to the relatively stable trends in payments (both total and current) prior to study enrollment and provides somewhat greater confidence that enrollment in the study may underlie the observed changes. FFD may have increased awareness of parents' large arrears balances, resulting in parents making larger payments.,

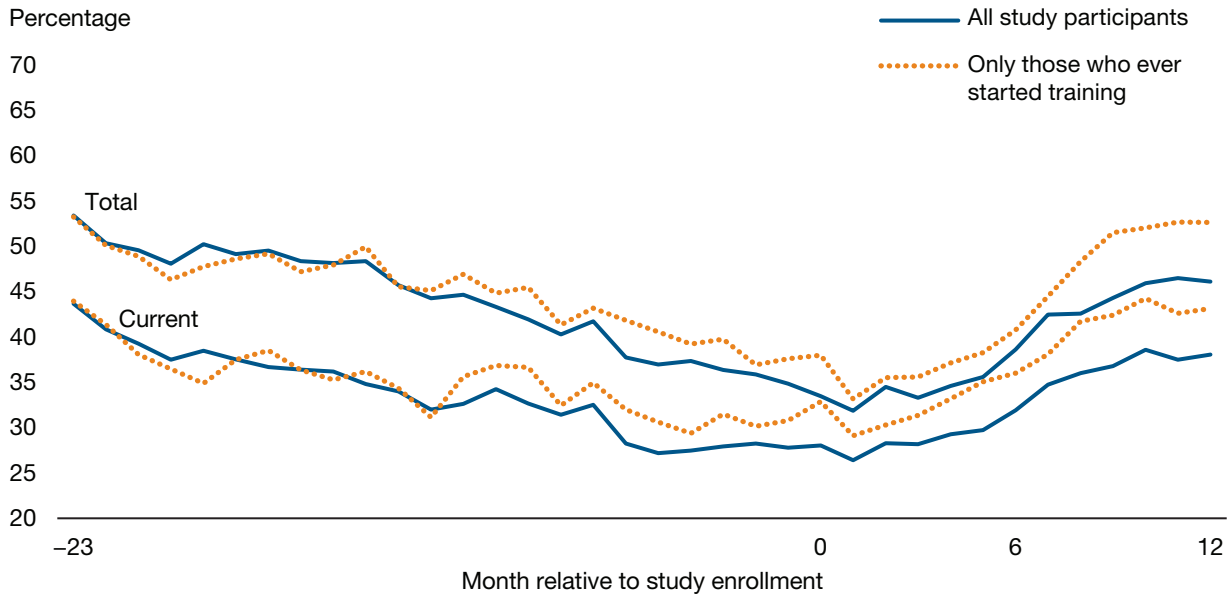
19. The findings in this paragraph are based on model results that exclude data from four months prior through four months after the month of study enrollment. See Appendix Table B.3 for the complete set of model results.

Compliance

Figure 6.4 presents payments as a percentage of monthly order amounts (referred to as compliance rates) among the two groups of interest (all parents in the study and trainees only). The analysis measured both compliance with the *total* order amount and with the *current* order amount. The findings discussed in this section apply to both measures of compliance. In the earliest months shown (almost two years prior to study enrollment), the full group of parents and subset of trainees had similar compliance rates (both total and current). Several months prior to study enrollment, these trends started to diverge; trainees showed higher compliance with both total and current monthly orders. These differences continued after study enrollment.

FIGURE 6.4

Mean Compliance Rates with Total Order Amount and with Current Order Amount



SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on administrative records from local child support agencies. Solid lines represent all study participants; dotted lines show only those who ever started training. Sample sizes vary by outcome measure and follow-up period. For the measures that represent all study participants, the sample sizes are as follows: total compliance through 6 months after study enrollment includes up to 571 individuals from five program locations, and total compliance in months 7 through 12 after study enrollment include 382 individuals from three program locations; current compliance through 6 months after study enrollment includes up to 500 individuals from four program locations and current compliance in months 7 through 12 after study enrollment includes 382 individuals from three program locations.

Compliance rates among all parents and the trainee subset were steadily declining prior to study enrollment, as a function of relatively constant payment amounts (Figure 6.3) and increasing order amounts (Figure 6.1) over the pre-study enrollment period. After study enrollment, both groups show a reversal in trend, and the pre-study enrollment and post-study enrollment trends were

statistically different from each other.[20] The month-to-month increases in compliance post-study enrollment were substantively meaningful, as well (about 1 percentage point per month), relative to the overall compliance rates. The reversal of the long-term downward trend in compliance rates offers some promise that the change is attributable to the program. Appendix B offers more detail on the trends in each program location. The increase in compliance rates in New York appears to be driven by an increase in payment amounts, while the increase in Michigan appears to be driven by both an increase in payment amounts and a reduction in order amounts.[21]

LESSONS FROM OUTCOMES ANALYSES

This chapter presented findings on training completion, receipt of training credentials, and employment, based on program data collected by service providers. It also presented findings from an ITS analysis of child support payments, orders, and compliance rates, based on administrative records from child support agencies.

As discussed in Chapter 3, there were challenges in getting parents who enrolled in the study to subsequently start a training program. As such, only 60 percent of parents who enrolled in the study started an occupational skills training program within six months. However, among parents who started training, 70 percent completed the training within six months, suggesting that training providers were successful in keeping parents engaged and parents were motivated to complete training once they started.[22] The percentages of parents who started and finished training are similar to those observed in some previous studies of demand-driven training programs with similar screening points.[23]

Among parents who participated in training, less than half were employed at some point over a six-month follow-up period after study enrollment, a time during which parents could have also been enrolled in training. These employment rates varied by site, ranging from 27 percent in Michigan to 79 percent in Washington, suggesting that the program locations may have had different levels of success in connecting participants to jobs or had varying levels of access to information about parents' employment.

The analysis of child support outcomes found the following (any trends noted below are statistically significant). Compared to the pre-study enrollment period:

---

20. These findings are based on model results that exclude data from four months prior through four months after the month of study enrollment. See Appendix Table B.3 for the complete set of model results.

21. See Appendix Figure B.1 for average order amounts by program location, Appendix Figure B.3 for average payment amounts by program location, and Appendix Figure B.4 for average compliance rates in each program location.

22. Some parents were still in training at the end of the study follow-up period and may have successfully or unsuccessfully ended training after that point.

23. Peck et al. (2018).

- Parents' total order amounts and current order amounts declined in the months following study enrollment (the same was true for the subset of trainees).

- In the months following study enrollment, parents were more likely to make a monthly payment and their total payment amounts increased (the same was true for the subset of trainees).

- Together, the decreasing trends in order amounts and increasing payments resulted in increasing compliance rates.

The change or reversal in post-study enrollment child support outcome trends, relative to pre-study enrollment trends, provides some greater confidence that the changes may be attributable to FFD and not some other factor. Still, it is difficult to reach strong conclusions in the absence of a more rigorous research design that could more convincingly isolate any changes to FFD.

Finally, the study was limited to a short-term follow-up period—6 months after study enrollment for some parents and 12 months for others, due to the COVID-19 pandemic among other factors. Longer follow-up periods of at least 18 months are often needed to fully observe the effects of training programs.[24] For this and other reasons noted in this section, the findings about FFD outcomes should be viewed as suggestive but not definitive.

24. Sama-Miller, Maccarone, Mastri, and Borradaile (2016); Card, Kluve, and Weber (2018).

7

Lessons from the Families Forward Demonstration

"To infuse the child support program with workforce resources only makes sense. Our performance measures include regular, consistent payments. It's in our best interest to provide the workforce services and to ensure that the person remains employed."

- FFD child support agency director

The evaluation findings presented in this report provide important information for practitioners and policymakers about the roles that child support agencies can play in helping parents increase their earnings and support their children financially.

KEY FINDINGS

About launching FFD:

- Child support agencies leveraged flexibility within their existing policies to design FFD-responsive child support services, which focused on assigning dedicated FFD child support workers and using discretionary decision-making that allowed for a range of practices under existing child support program rules. In addition, child support agencies identified opportunities for participants to reduce their state-owed child support debts.

- Among various reasons for the slow start-up of FFD programs, provider procurement processes were particularly lengthy and complex in some locations.

About recruiting parents to the program:

- Recruiting parents to FFD and determining whether they would be eligible for the program were labor- and time-intensive processes. The programs struggled with recruitment for an

array of reasons, including parents' negative perceptions of child support, child support agencies' limited experience with recruitment, lack of alignment between parents' interests and the service offerings, and the general challenges of getting word out about a new program.

About parents who enrolled in FFD:

- While study enrollees faced barriers to employment, they entered the program with some employment history and earned above the minimum wage, on average. At the same time, enrollees had significant financial obligations that could be hard to meet. Parents also reported a history of negative experiences with the child support system. They supported their children outside of the formal child support system and considered dealing with the child support agency to be a burden on top of their existing financial troubles.

About implementing and participating in FFD services:

- Nearly all parents received some responsive child support services. Customer service–oriented approaches to working with parents in FFD made a positive impression on parents and child support staff alike. Parents remarked that having positive interactions with child support staff was a welcome change. Child support staff said it was a relief to offer parents something to help their situation instead of just telling them to pay or taking enforcement action.

- Demand-driven training programs give participants a better chance of finding work by offering trainings that lead to credentials that local employers are looking for. FFD required that the credentials also lead to career pathways with good wages and opportunities for advancement, limiting the trainings that programs could offer. Most programs worried that their offerings were too limited to meet the needs and interests of their caseloads and added occupational skills training options throughout the program.

- Echoing the challenges of initially enrolling parents in FFD, only 59 percent of parents in the study started a training program. The training participation rate in New York was considerably lower than in other locations, which may have brought down the pooled average.

About the outcomes of parents in the study:

- Among parents who did enroll in training, 70 percent completed it within six months, suggesting that the FFD training providers were successful in keeping participants engaged and parents were motivated and had the necessary supports to complete training once they started. Based on data collected by service providers, less than half of all parents who participated in training were employed at some point during the first six months after study enrollment, although the employment rates varied widely across sites and may have been an artifact of differences in data collection and reporting. Many parents were also in training during the follow-up period, which may have affected their ability to work.

- Parents' total order amounts and current order amounts declined in the months following study enrollment (and the same was true for the subset of parents who started training),

reversing an upward trend prior to study enrollment. Parents were more likely to make a monthly payment and their monthly total payment amounts increased in the months following study enrollment (and the same was true for the subset of trainees). Together, decreasing order amounts and increasing payments resulted in increasing compliance rates after study enrollment, relative to declining trends prior to study enrollment.

- While the findings from the outcomes analysis are promising, the study cannot definitively attribute changes in outcomes to FFD, for two reasons. First, delays in program start-up and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 shortened the available follow-up period for the study; following participants for 6 or 12 months after program enrollment is not long enough to observe the effects of labor market programs. Second, a more rigorous study design, such as a well-implemented randomized controlled trial, is needed to attribute any observable effects to the program more confidently.

LESSONS

While more rigorous testing is needed, the FFD model shows some promise for connecting parents to jobs in their chosen career path and for improving their relationships with the child support system. However, the program would benefit from addressing operational challenges around recruitment and service delivery to scale up and serve a greater number of parents. This report points to several lessons for child support agencies that aim to advance the implementation of FFD and other employment-oriented programs for parents.

- **Child support agencies and their program partners should carefully consider the strengths of each agency and draw on these strengths to determine what role each organization will play in the program.** Child support agencies in each location tailored the FFD model to their location. Adapting the program was a significant challenge for the agencies, especially identifying training opportunities for in-demand skills and selecting partners. FFD partner organizations reported that the child support agencies expended a lot of effort trying to figure out something community partners already know how to do: design, run, and recruit for employment programs. While child support agencies and their partners generally agree that child support agencies should play a role in reducing parents' barriers to paying child support, the FFD implementation story suggests that all of the organizations involved may benefit from closer collaboration and a distribution of responsibilities based on existing areas of expertise.

- **To successfully recruit for a demand-driven training program, child support agencies and their partners will need to develop strategies to balance the career interests of parents with the needs of local employers.** Demand-driven training offerings are a promising strategy to increase the earnings of workers with low incomes; however, these programs will only appeal to some parents. The specific career pathways and training schedules, and parents' skills and backgrounds, will influence parents' interest in the program. Child support agencies may benefit from offering a suite of work-oriented programs, among which skills training is one

option. Child support agencies may also benefit from increasing their collaboration with their partners, to enhance their skill in recruiting for a sector-specific training.

- **Changing how child support agencies interact with parents by moving from an enforcement focus to a customer service focus may benefit child support operations and staff.** The director of one of the participating child support agencies said, "It [FFD] helps us brand ourselves differently. We're seen as punitive. We take money. We're restrictive. We don't care. Give me your right arm and leg and everything else.… If we meet people halfway and we have something to offer [like FFD], not only is that good for our participants but it's also good for the people who do the work. Child support can bog down people who feel like 'I'm just doing punitive work all day,' and that can bog down their sensitivities [to their clients]." Child support caseworkers working directly with FFD clients echoed this sentiment. They found it refreshing to talk with parents who were open, willing to ask questions, and ready to share information about their employment status. This could make it easier for caseworkers to establish wage withholding orders and respond to the needs and concerns of parents. Relatively small changes to how child support agencies interact with parents may have wide-ranging benefits.

- **To be successful, programs for parents will have to develop strategies to support parents' needs during training.** Individuals who have low incomes and are pursuing training often face structural barriers to accessing that training and completing a certificate. FFD participants had the additional responsibility of a child support obligation. FFD programs were largely successful in reducing child support enforcement activities for parents in the program, which may have reduced a financial stressor for parents. However, FFD parents had many financial responsibilities, including child support, and often could not afford to reduce their income for several weeks or months to complete training. Potential strategies include flexible training schedules, help balancing training with other responsibilities, tailored services that align with parents' existing skills and backgrounds, and strategies such as stipends to reduce financial hardship.

- **Evaluations of training programs like FFD would benefit from longer follow-up periods, stronger study designs, and administrative records for both employment and child support outcomes.** The current study examined outcomes over 6 months in all program locations, and over 12 months for a subset of locations and parents after study enrollment. Longer follow-up periods of at least two years are needed to ascertain the effectiveness of labor market programs like the one implemented through FFD.[1] Also needed are strong study designs that incorporate a plausible comparison group and could strengthen the evidence from tests of similar programs. Relying on administrative records (data routinely collected by state agencies) for both employment and child support outcomes could also inform the adaptation of the FFD theory of change to inform future initiatives.

1. Sama-Miller, Maccarone, Mastri, and Borradaile (2016).

LOOKING AHEAD

The federal Office of Child Support Enforcement is encouraging child support agencies to develop services to make it easier for parents who are unemployed or underemployed to meet their child support obligations. Agencies can apply for a federal waiver to operate work-oriented programs and receive up to $2 million in matching federal funding if state or private funding is first identified.[2] As more child support agencies consider these waivers, there will be opportunities to learn about a new generation of child support agency–led employment programs. This report points to several key questions to consider for child support and other agencies aiming to help parents increase their employment and earnings:

- One of FFD's underlying assumptions was that hard-skills occupational training may lead to better employment outcomes than other employment services such as work readiness and job search and placement assistance. However, hard-skills training programs are often accessible to a smaller subset of parents and are more expensive to run. How will programs serving child support agencies make decisions about the trade-off between access, cost, and outcomes?

- Under Section 1115 waivers, child support agencies must invest new funds in employment services so as not to divert money from existing programs and services. For agencies that can identify state or private funding sources, a Section 1115 waiver is a powerful opportunity to leverage federal dollars and offer employment services as an allowable child support program expense. Agencies that cannot raise such funds may pursue other opportunities to collaborate with agencies that have funding already available for employment services to parents. What, if any, is the potential role of leveraging funding or case management support from state or local public systems?

- How do child support agencies link participation in an employment program with existing debt compromise opportunities or create new opportunities for debt forgiveness? What other types of incentives, discretionary enforcement actions, or income withholding policies might encourage parents to engage in employment training or achieve employment outcomes?

- What are the strategies to include custodial parents in conversations about programs like FFD? While respecting the privacy and safety of both parents, increased communication about programs like FFD could help a custodial parent weigh payment reductions while the other parent is in training versus potential longer-term gains in economic stability and support.

2. Office of Child Support Enforcement (2019).

APPENDIX

A

Data Collection and Qualitative Analysis

This appendix describes the data used in this report, including the research questions, data sources, and timeline for data collection. Appendix Table A.1 provides information about child support policies in each state. Appendix Table A.2 displays the timeline for data collection. This appendix also describes the approaches used to analyze the qualitative data and limitations of the qualitative data. Quantitative approaches are described throughout the report and in Appendix B.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND DATA SOURCES

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- How was the FFD program developed, implemented, and adapted by child support agencies and their service partners?
- What are the characteristics of parents who decided to take part in FFD? Relatively little data about these parents are publicly available, and relatively little research has focused on their backgrounds and experiences.
- What were enrollees' participation levels and patterns?
- What were the program experiences of parents who enrolled in FFD?
- What were the training, employment, and child support outcomes for parents who enrolled in FFD?
- What aspects of the local, state, and community context constrained or enabled FFD implementation?

The analyses in this report draw on the following data sources:

- **Interviews with FFD staff and partners.** Members of the research team visited each of the FFD program locations to interview staff members at all levels, interview key partners, and observe program activities. These visits occurred in fall 2019, covering the first year and a half of program implementation. The research team conducted 62 interviews with an average of 12 interviews per program location. Of those interviews, 23 were with child support agency staff and 39 were with FFD partner agencies.
- **Interviews with parents.** During the site visits, the research team interviewed program participants selected by the local programs. MDRC conducted an average of three interviews with parents per program location, for a total of 16 interviews.
- **Baseline data.** FFD program staff administered a survey to parents at the time of study enrollment, covering domains such as demographics, employment history, finances, and barriers

APPENDIX TABLE A.1

Support Order Guidelines, Policies, and Change Criteria in FFD Child Support Agencies

	Michigan	New York	Ohio Cuyahoga and Franklin	Washington
Organizational structure				
State supervised – county administered	X[a]	X	X	
State supervised – state administered	X[a]			X
Guidelines				
Income shares (order determined by both parents' income)	X	X	X	X
Other (please specify any other major factors that go into determining the order amount, such as parenting time or a self-sufficiency fund)	Parenting time affects base amount Credit for care of other minor children Credit for insurance preimiums and child care expenses Low income formula and self-support reserve as a transition to standard support formula Child care costs	Self-support reserve (SSR) of 135% of the federal poverty level (FPL)		Obligation cannot reduce a parent's net income below 125% FPL[b] Obligation for all children may not exceed 45% of monthly net income
Minimum order amount policy				
Permissive (allowed but not required)			X	
Required, but courts can set orders below minimum		X		X

(continued)

APPENDIX TABLE A.1 (continued)

	Michigan	New York	Ohio Cuyahoga and Franklin	Washington
Imputed wage order required absent income information			X	X
Minimum order amount ($)		$25/month if income is at or below FPL (also caps arrears at $500) $50/month if obligation would reduce income below SSR but not below FPL $0/month if demonstrates cannot afford a poverty order	$80/month	$50/month per child
Order modification criteria				
Change in income	75% change in income	15% or more change in either party's gross income provided the reduction in income was involuntary and the party has made diligent attempts to secure employments	Either parent has been unemployed or laid off for 30 days 30% decrease in income or 30% increase in income for 6+ months Income is below 150% of FPL	X
Incarceration	X	X	X	X
Change in custody	X	X		X
Change in childcare arrangements	X	X	X	X
Change in health care	X	X	X	X

(continued)

APPENDIX TABLE A.1 (continued)

	Michigan	New York	Ohio Cuyahoga and Franklin	Washington
Change in education costs	X	X		
Change in the number of children legally responsible for	X	X	X[c]	X
Medical condition or disability preventing work	X	X	X	X
Voluntary agreement to modify	X	X	X[d]	X
Minimum order modification amount ($ or %)	Minimum threshold for modification is 10% of the current obligation or $50 per month, whichever is greater.		10%	Will pursue modification if support amount is expected to change 15%, over $100 per month, and $2,400 over the remaining life of the order
Other (please specify)	Passage of time (3 yrs) Call to active Military Service Increased or decreased need of the child	Passage of time (3 yrs)	Passage of time (3 yrs) Termination of child from order	Passage of time (3 yrs)
TANF pass-through and disregard				
Payments made during TANF receipt are passed through the custodial parent and disregarded from benefits calculation	X[e]	X		
Treatment of state-owed arrears				
Arrears can be compromised	X	X[f]	X	X
Arrears can be reduced	X	X[f]	X	X

(continued)

APPENDIX TABLE A.1 (continued)

SOURCE: MDRC survey to FFD child support agencies.

NOTES: [a]Friend of the Court handles judicial matters and some administrative matters, and the state handles centralizes some administrative matters.

[b]Limitation does not apply to minimum of $50 per month per child.

[c]Child being terminated from order triggers a review.

[d]Can be completed but not through the Administrative Review & Adjustment process.

[e]Michigan implemented pass-through in January 2020. Pass-through was not available during all parts of the study period.

[f]NYS has conducted pilots across multiple districts that have opted to participate in arrears compromise programs developed; NYS has also, from time-to-time, approved locally-designed pilot programs involving the compromise of assigned arrears. The reduction of arrears has resulted from these arrears compromise programs. In addition, there are several initatives to reduce arrears owed to the Department of Social Services in New York City including: Arrears Cap Initiative; Arrears Credit Program; Support Through Employment Program (STEP); Arrears Reduction Program; Families Forward Arrears Reduction Program; Pay It Off.

to employment. Data were collected on all parents who enrolled in the study from April 2018 through June 2020 (N=761).

- **Data collected from service providers** on program participation, service delivery, and job placements. These data cover the period from April 2018 through April 2020. Most measures based on these data include parents who enrolled in the study from April 2018 through October 2019 (N=572), but sample sizes may vary by measure due to missing data.

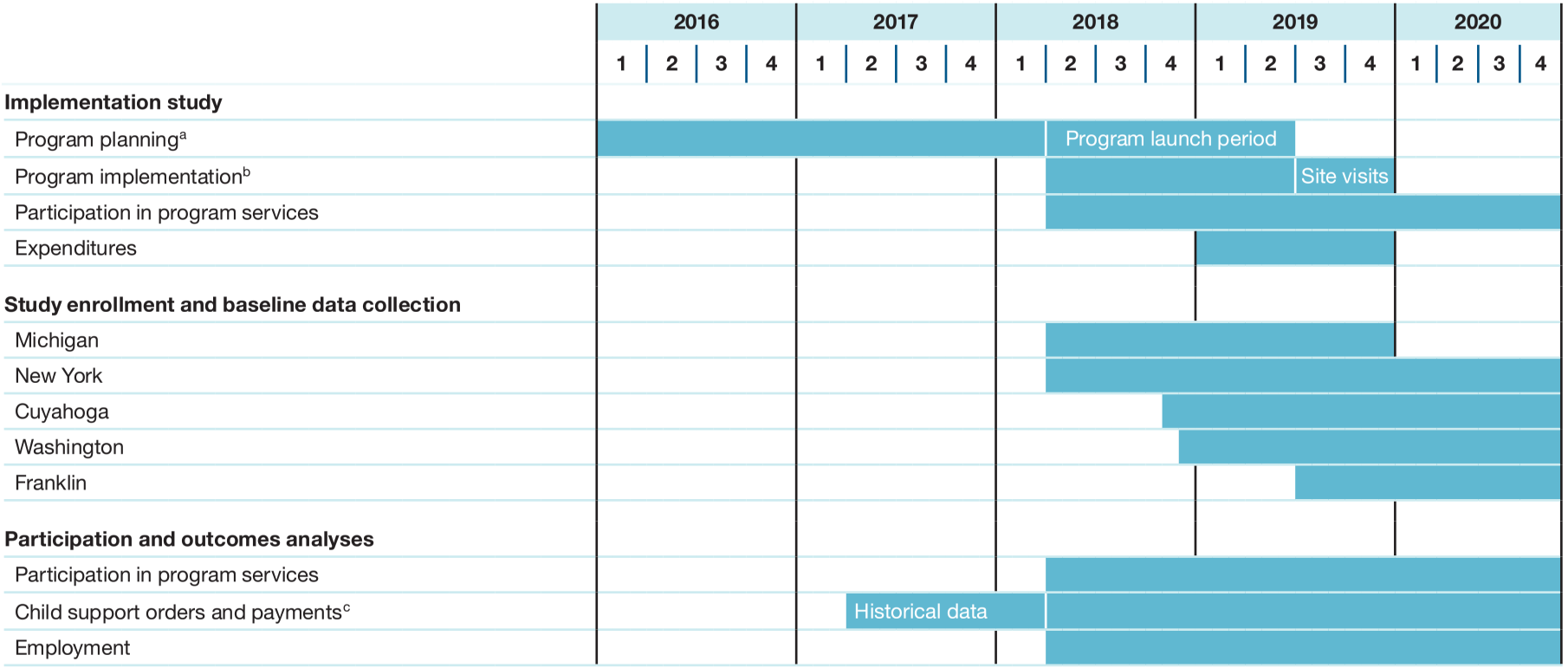
- **Child support administrative data** on obligations, payments, arrears, enforcement actions, and responsive child support services. These data were collected and shared by the child support agencies at FFD program locations. These data cover the period from April 2016 through April 2020. Measures based on these data include all parents who enrolled in the study from April 2018 through October 2019 (N=572), but sample sizes may vary by measure depending on missing data.

- **Information about planning and operating the program.** MDRC collected information about each program location throughout the planning and implementation periods, including program locations' applications to participate in FFD, visits to each location, and ongoing calls between MDRC and the program locations.

- **Financial data.** MDRC collected information about the costs of implementing the program in Washington and New York for the 2019 calendar or fiscal year, respectively.

APPENDIX TABLE A.2

Data Periods Covered by the Families Forward Demonstration Study



NOTES: [a]Program locations began designing and planning FFD in 2016. The first programs launched in Q2 2018, with the others launching as plans for service delivery and partnership solidified. The last program location launched at the end of Q2 2019.

[b]Site visits were conducted to each program location to conduct interviews with program staff and partners, interviews with program participants, and observations of program services. The study covers the program implementation period from Q2 2018 through Q4 2019.

[c]Historical data refers to data about participants prior to their enrollment in the study.

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS AND LIMITATIONS

Qualitative data were primarily gathered from interviews with staff members and program participants using semi-structured interview protocols. A team of five researchers participated in the site visits. After the visits, the researchers recorded the information gathered in structured write-up templates designed to ensure that similar data were collected across program locations. All qualitative data were uploaded to Dedoose, a mixed-methods analysis software. The research team applied structural codes to each write-up, covering domains such as program implementation, participant characteristics, and perceptions of the program. In addition, a descriptor set was attached to each interview to identify the relevant program location and interviewee characteristics. Descriptor sets are categorical or numeric variables that may be used to create subgroups of interviews (such as program location or partner type) to aid in the analysis of the qualitative data. Data were exported to Microsoft Excel documents organized by structural codes. A team of two researchers used these documents to identify key themes for each structural code. The team produced analysis memos for each structural code, which were reviewed by the lead researcher.

The FFD programs were still relatively new and undergoing change during the study period. The program locations may have continued to innovate and refine their plans for service delivery after the primary data collection period in fall 2019.

The small sample of parents who took part in interviews about FFD represents only a fraction of experiences with the program and is not reflective of the full sample. Notably, the research team was not able to interview parents who did not take up services or who lost contact with the program.

APPENDIX

B

Analyses of Child Support Outcomes

OVERVIEW

This appendix describes the methods and model specifications that the MDRC team used to estimate the effects of FFD on child support outcomes. Chapter 6 and Appendix A describe the data sources and outcome measures.

Figures 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, and 6.4 in Chapter 6 show aggregate monthly trends over time, relative to the month of FFD study enrollment, for four types of child support outcomes: order amounts, whether payments were made, payment amounts, and compliance rates. For each outcome type, the team analyzed measures of monthly totals that combined current and arrears amounts. For three of the four outcomes (order amounts, payment amounts, and compliance rates), the team also analyzed current monthly measures. For all measures, one set of regression analyses used a sample of parents who enrolled in the study in four of the five program locations,[1] and another set of analyses used a subsample of study enrollees who also started training.

The team estimated regression models to answer three questions:

1. Are the slopes in each outcome prior to FFD study enrollment statistically different from zero? (In other words, are they different from what we would expect to observe by chance?)

2. Are the slopes in each outcome after FFD study enrollment statistically different from zero?

3. Are the pre- and post-study enrollment slopes *different from each other*? (In other words, did the trends change?) With the interrupted time series (ITS) design (where the "interruption" is FFD enrollment), this is the key evaluation question. It indicates whether there is evidence that enrollment in FFD changes the *trend* in each outcome.

The team analyzed these questions using information from up to 23 months prior to FFD study enrollment through up to 12 months following study enrollment. The preferred estimates omit information from four months prior to study enrollment through four months after study enrollment (including the month of enrollment): as described in Chapter 6, outcomes in these months likely reflect "Ashenfelter's dip," short-term trends related to study enrollment itself, rather than more stable longer-term trends that could reflect the program's potential effects.[2] The chapter reports findings from these models.

As noted in Chapter 6, the ITS analyses are exploratory and do not provide rigorous evidence that FFD *caused* changes in the trends reported in this chapter.

The remainder of this appendix describes model specifications for the analyses.

---

1. Due to data security restrictions, the regression analyses use information from Michigan; New York; Franklin County, Ohio; and Washington. The regression analyses do not include information from Cuyahoga County, Ohio.
2. Ashenfelter (1978).

DATA

The unit of analysis is the "person-month" where the "person" is a parent who enrolled in the study. Monthly data on child support outcomes (for example, order amounts, payment amounts) is available for up to 23 months prior to FFD enrollment through up to 12 months after FFD enrollment. For sample members included in these analyses, enrollment month varied by program location, and occurred from April 2018 through October 2019. At least six months of outcome information after enrollment are available for all parents in the analyses, and up to 12 months are available for some parents in New York, Michigan, and Washington. Auxiliary analyses indicate no meaningful differences in levels or trends depending on the amount of follow-up data available.[3]

MODEL SPECIFICATION

The research team estimated the following specification with observations from months –23 through –5 and months 5 through 12 (that is, omitting observations from months –4 through 4, where month 0 is the month of FFD study enrollment). Removing the months around study enrollment addresses potential issues with estimation associated with "Ashenfelter's dip," described earlier.

Level 1 (person-months):

$$Y_{it} = \pi_{0i} + \pi_1 MONTH_t + \pi_2 FFD_{it} + \pi_3 FFD_{it} * MONTH_t + r_{it} \text{ where } r_{it} \sim N(0, \sum) \quad (1)$$

Level 2 (person):

$$\pi_{0j} = \beta_{00} + u_{0i}$$

where

Y_{it}	=	outcome measure *Y* for person *i* in month *t*
$MONTH_t$	=	continuous variable for time period (month) centered at the first month of enrollment in FFD for each person, = -23, -22, -21,…0,…11, 12)
FFD_{it}	=	a dichotomous indicator for FFD enrollment, = 0 if $MONTH_t < 0$,. =1 if $MONTH_t \geq 0$
$FFD_{it} * MONTH_t$	=	interaction term between FFD enrollment status and month.
β_{00}	=	a Y when month = 0 and FFD=0 (counterfactual in enrollment month).
π_1	=	the slope or trajectory of Y until the start of study enrollment.
π_2	=	change in the level of Y that occurred in the month of study enrollment.
π_3	=	difference between pre-enrollment and post-enrollment slopes of Y
$\pi_1 + \pi_3$	=	the slope or trajectory of Y after the start of enrollment

where $r_{ij} \sim N(0, \sum)$ (1)

3. Results available from the authors.

APPENDIX TABLE B.1

Training Completion, Credentials, and Employment: 12-Month Follow-Up

(Among Those Who Enrolled Through April 2019)

Measure (%)	Michigan	New York	All
Completed training	20	52	47
Earned certification/credential	20	40	36
Ever employed	28	72	64
Ever employed in target sector	-	63	63
Sample size	40	215	255

SOURCE: MDRC calculations are based on data collected from program locations and include individuals who enrolled in the study through April 2019.

NOTE: "-" indicates that the measure was not possible to create for the given program location, given data limitations. Data on New York participants were missing from one provider. Employment rates are among those who received any occupational skills training.

APPENDIX TABLE B.2

Training Completion, Credentials, and Employment: 6-Month Follow-Up

(Among Those Who Enrolled Through April 2019)

Measure (%)	Michigan	New York	All
Completed training	10	49	43
Earned certification/credential	10	39	34
Ever employed	12	58	50
Ever employed in target sector	-	53	53
Sample size	40	215	255

SOURCE: MDRC calculations are based on data collected from program locations and include individuals who enrolled in the study through April 2019.

NOTE: "-" indicates that the measure was not possible to create for the given program location, given data limitations. Data on New York participants were missing for one provider. Employment rates are among those who received any occupational skills training.

The model was estimated using SAS PROC MIXED with maximum likelihood, unstructured error variance for the random intercept π_{0j}, and an AR(1) error structure for the within-person variance-covariance of the monthly outcomes.[4]

A statistical test on the coefficient π_1 answers question (a), a statistical test on the coefficient $(\pi_1 + \pi_3)$ answers question (b), and a statistical test on the coefficient π_3 answers question (c). Appendix Table B.3 show results for each outcome measure. The first columns of the table show results for the full sample of all FFD parents in the study, and the last columns show results for the subsample of parents who started training. The results did not change when covariates for program location and for individual characteristics were included in the Level 2 model for the random intercept.[5] These covariates were not included in the Level 1 model because the study was not designed to test whether the trends over time (before or after study enrollment) varied by program location or by individual characteristics. These questions could be of interest for future research.

The research team also estimated the model using all available person-month observations from months −23 through 12. This specification is not preferred because it likely reflects changes in trends just before and just after study enrollment that may be related to the decision to enroll in the program itself.

Where all covariates are defined as for equation (1). The model was estimated using SAS PROC MIXED with maximum likelihood, unstructured error variance for the random intercept π_{0j}, and an AR(1) error structure for the within-person variance-covariance of the monthly outcomes.[6] Appendix Table B.4 shows results for each outcome measure. In this specification, the FFD main effect is included in the model to capture the months in which a parent enrolls in the study. The results did not change when covariates for program location and for individual characteristics were included in the Level 2 model for the random intercept.[7] These covariates were not included in the Level 1 model because the study was not designed to test whether the trends over time (before or after study enrollment) varied by program location or by individual characteristics. These questions could be of interest for future research.

To test whether both the main effect and the interaction term that included FFD together improved the model fit, for each outcome the research team estimated Equation (2) as an "unrestricted" model, and also a "restricted" model that included only a random intercept and the MONTH covariate. Comparing these models using a Likelihood Ratio test (based on Chi-Square distribution with 1 degree of freedom) indicated that including information about FFD resulted in statistically significant ($p<0.001$) improvements in model fit for each outcome examined.

4. The research team used guidance from Singer (1998), Little et al. (1997); and Liu et al. (2007) to explore and select an appropriate error structure for the data.
5. Results available from the authors.
6. The research team used guidance from Singer (1998), Little et al. (1997); and Liu et al. (2007) to explore and select an appropriate error structure for the data.
7. Results available from the authors.

APPENDIX TABLE B.3

Summary of Estimated FFD Effects, by Outcome and Training Status Excluding Months -4 through 4

Outcome	All Parents in the Study		Parents Who Started Training	
	Estimated Coefficient	P-Value	Estimated Coefficient	P-Value
Total orders				
Predicted mean in month of study enrollment, if not enrolled in study	537.59	<.0001	501.47	<.0001
Change in mean in month of study enrollment, if enrolled in study	-31.32	0.0053	-23.33	0.1406
Slope during pre-study months	5.46	<.0001	4.41	0.0003
Slope during post-study months	-3.69	0.0494	-5.46	0.0358
Difference in slopes between pre- and post-study enrollment	-9.15	<.0001	-9.87	0.0018
Current orders				
Predicted mean in month of study enrollment, if not enrolled in study	391.50	<.0001	378.42	<.0001
Change in mean in month of study enrollment, if enrolled in study	-41.45	<.0001	-43.91	<.0001
Slope during pre-study months	3.91	<.0001	3.36	0.0003
Slope during post-study months	-2.38	0.0568	-2.96	0.0979
Difference in slopes between pre- and post-study enrollment	-6.29	<.0001	-6.32	0.0035
Total payments				
Predicted mean in month of study enrollment, if not enrolled in study	189.01	<.0001	190.01	<.0001
Change in mean in month of study enrollment, if enrolled in study	-73.22	0.0011	-102.25	0.0016
Slope during pre-study months	0.06	0.9393	-0.04	0.9679
Slope during post-study months	8.94	0.0005	14.99	<.0001
Difference in slopes between pre- and post-study enrollment	8.88	0.0015	15.04	0.0002
Current payments				
Predicted mean in month of study enrollment, if not enrolled in study	70.56	<.0001	78.18	<.0001
Change in mean in month of study enrollment, if enrolled in study	-11.24	0.0836	-9.39	0.3477
Slope during pre-study months	0.04	0.8808	0.20	0.6174
Slope during post-study months	0.90	0.2726	1.21	0.3230
Difference in slopes between pre- and post-study enrollment	0.86	0.3495	1.01	0.4635
Compliance rate - total				
Predicted mean in month of study enrollment, if not enrolled in study	33.96	<.0001	37.62	<.0001
Change in mean in month of study enrollment, if enrolled in study	-3.23	0.2450	-5.53	0.1599
Slope during pre-study months	-0.85	<.0001	-0.65	<.0001
Slope during post-study months	1.36	<.0001	1.77	0.0002
Difference in slopes between pre- and post-study enrollment	2.21	<.0001	2.43	<.0001

(continued)

APPENDIX TABLE B.3 (continued)

Outcome	All Parents in the Study		Parents Who Started Training	
	Estimated Coefficient	P-Value	Estimated Coefficient	P-Value
Compliance rate - current				
Predicted mean in month of study enrollment, if not enrolled in study	24.21	<.0001	27.98	<.0001
Change in mean in month of study enrollment, if enrolled in study	1.29	0.5854	2.55	0.4453
Slope during pre-study months	-0.83	<.0001	-0.69	<.0001
Slope during post-study months	1.06	0.0005	1.01	0.0171
Difference in slopes between pre- and post-study enrollment	1.89	<.0001	1.70	0.0004
Any payment in a month				
Predicted mean in month of study enrollment, if not enrolled in study	0.47	<.0001	0.48	<.0001
Change in mean in month of study enrollment, if enrolled in study	-0.08	0.0130	-0.11	0.0209
Slope during pre-study months	0.00	0.2906	0.00	0.1737
Slope during post-study months	0.01	0.0261	0.02	0.0034
Difference in slopes between pre- and post-study enrollment	0.01	0.0855	0.01	0.0234

SOURCE: Estimated with data from Michigan, New York, Franklin, and Washington program locations. See Appendix B section on "Model Specification" for details.

APPENDIX TABLE B.4

Summary of Estimated FFD Effects, by Outcome and Training Status

Outcome	All Parents in the Study		Parents Who Started Training	
	Estimated Coefficient	P-Value	Estimated Coefficient	P-Value
Total orders				
Predicted mean in month of study ernollment, if not enrolled in study (intercept)	509.02	<.0001	472.59	<.0001
Pre-study enrollment slope	3.98	<.0001	2.87	0.0017
Change in mean in month of study enrollment, if enrolled in study	0.09	0.9858	5.93	0.3905
Difference in slopes between pre- and post- study enrollment	-7.74	<.0001	-8.11	0.0002
Current orders				
Predicted mean in month of study ernollment, if not enrolled in study (intercept)	366.55	<.0001	351.25	<.0001
Pre-study enrollment slope	2.69	<.0001	1.97	0.0048
Change in mean in month of study enrollment, if enrolled in study	-1.70	0.5759	2.71	0.5458
Difference in slopes between pre- and post- study enrollment	-6.29	<.0001	-6.58	<.0001
Total payments				
Predicted mean in month of study ernollment, if not enrolled in study (intercept)	178.41	<.0001	185.06	<.0001
Pre-study enrollment slope	-0.63	0.2325	-0.45	0.5666
Change in mean in month of study enrollment, if enrolled in study	-49.44	<.0001	-76.20	<.0001
Difference in slopes between pre- and post- study enrollment	8.20	<.0001	12.98	<.0001
Current payments				
Predicted mean in month of study ernollment, if not enrolled in study (intercept)	68.85	<.0001	75.34	<.0001
Pre-study enrollment slope	-0.07	0.6968	0.00	0.9865
Change in mean in month of study enrollment, if enrolled in study	-10.68	0.0018	-10.66	0.0428
Difference in slopes between pre- and post- study enrollment	1.08	0.0553	1.53	0.0725
Compliance rate - total				
Predicted mean in month of study ernollment, if not enrolled in study (intercept)	34.16	<.0001	38.07	<.0001
Pre-study enrollment slope	-0.85	<.0001	-0.65	<.0001
Change in mean in month of study enrollment, if enrolled in study	-3.11	0.0334	-6.18	0.003
Difference in slopes between pre- and post- study enrollment	2.16	<.0001	2.44	<.0001

(continued)

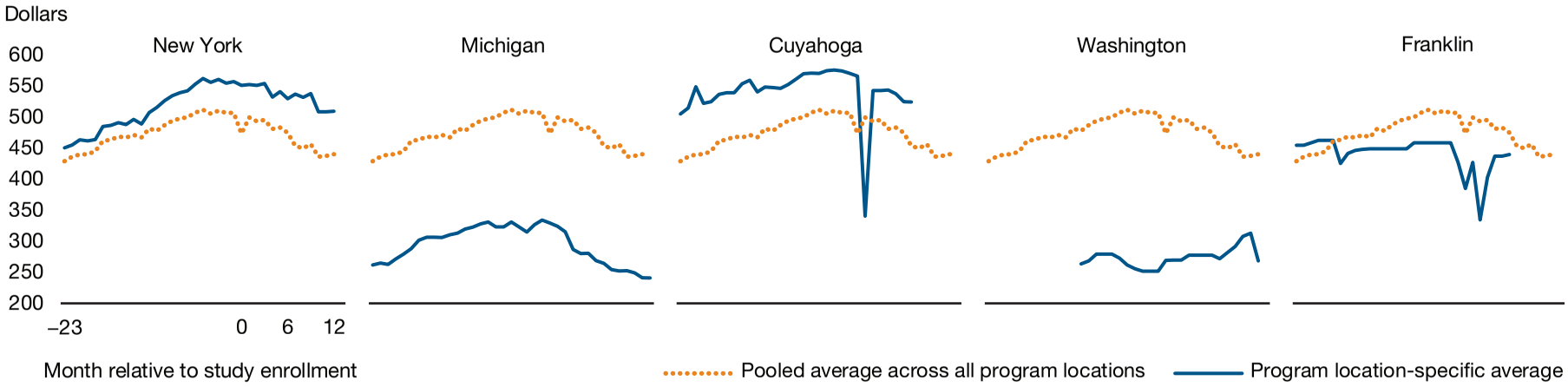
APPENDIX TABLE B.4 (continued)

Outcome	All Parents in the Study		Parents Who Started Training	
	Estimated Coefficient	P-Value	Estimated Coefficient	P-Value
Compliance rate - current				
Predicted mean in month of study ernollment, if not enrolled in study (intercept)	26.34	<.0001	30.18	<.0001
Pre-study enrollment slope	-0.71	<.0001	-0.57	<.0001
Change in mean in month of study enrollment, if enrolled in study	-1.93	0.1193	-3.69	0.0379
Difference in slopes between pre- and post- study enrollment	1.87	<.0001	2.01	<.0001
Any payment in a month				
Predicted mean in month of study ernollment, if not enrolled in study (intercept)	0.46	<.0001	0.47	<.0001
Pre-study enrollment slope	0.00	0.3406	0.00	0.2085
Change in mean in month of study enrollment, if enrolled in study	-0.07	0.0001	-0.09	0.0001
Difference in slopes between pre- and post- study enrollment	0.01	0.0095	0.01	0.0002

SOURCE: Estimated with data from from Michigan, New York, Franklin, and Washington program locations. See Appendix B section on "Model Specification" for details. For every outcome, the effect of FFD was statistically significant ($p<0.001$), using a Likelihood Ratio test with a Chi-Square test with 1 degree of freedom that compared an unrestricted model that included an intercept and covariates for month of enrollment, an indicator for FFD enrollment, and an interaction term for FFD*month, with a restricted model that include an intercept and a covariate for month of enrollment.

APPENDIX FIGURE B.1

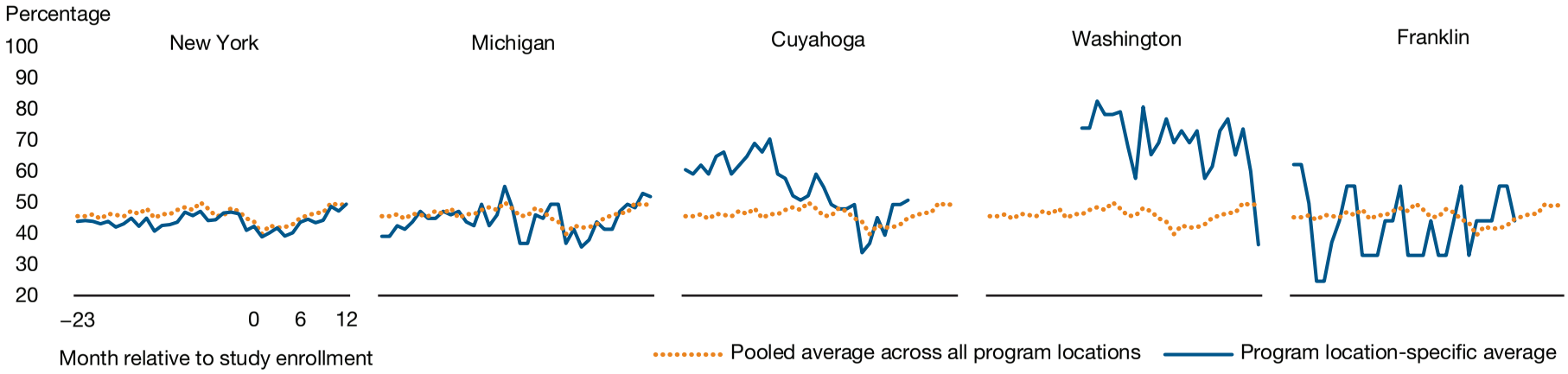
Mean Total Order Amounts, by Program Location



SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on administrative records from local child support agencies. Dashed lines represent the pooled average across all program locations; solid lines represent the program location-specific average. Data through 12 months following study enrollment is presented for New York, Michigan, and Washington. Sample sizes for each program location are as follows: New York - 372, Michigan - 87, Cuyahoga - 71, Washington - 26, Franklin - 9.

APPENDIX FIGURE B.2

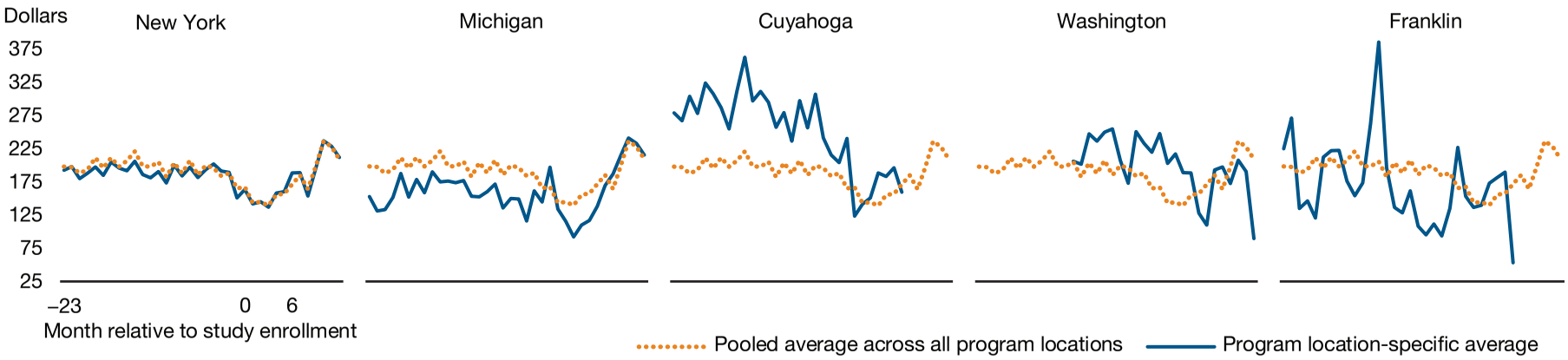
Percent of Sample Who Made Any Child Support Payment, by Program Location



SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on administrative records from local child support agencies. Dashed lines represent the pooled average across all program locations; solid lines represent the program location-specific average. Data through 12 months following study enrollment is presented for New York, Michigan, and Washington. Sample sizes for each program location are as follows: New York - 378, Michigan - 87, Cuyahoga - 71, Washington - 26, Franklin - 9.

APPENDIX FIGURE B.3

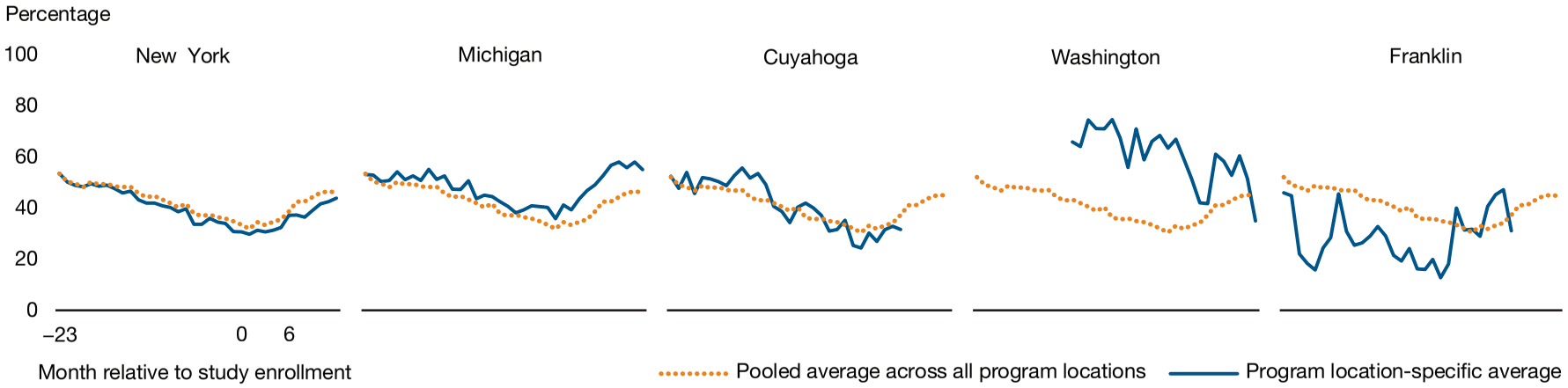
Mean Total Payment Amounts, by Program Location



SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on administrative records from local child support agencies. Dotted lines represent the pooled average across all program locations; solid lines represent the program location-specific average. Data through 12 months following study enrollment is presented for New York, Michigan, and Washington. Sample sizes for each program location are as follows: New York - 378, Michigan - 87, Cuyahoga - 71, Washington - 26, Franklin - 9.

APPENDIX FIGURE B.4

Mean Compliance Rates with Total Order Amount, by Program Location



SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on administrative records from local child support agencies. Dotted lines represent the pooled average across all program locations; solid lines represent the program location-specific average. Data through 12 months following study enrollment is presented for New York, Michigan, and Washington. Sample sizes for each program locations are as follows: New York - 378, Michigan - 87, Cuyahoga - 71, Washington - 26, Franklin - 9.

APPENDIX

C

Expenses of Operating the Families Forward Demonstration

This appendix explores the expenses of operating the Families Forward Demonstration (FFD) by looking at program expenditure data in two program locations that took different approaches to service delivery: New York and Washington. The findings highlight how differences in program structure and partnership affected expenditures related to FFD.

METHODOLOGY

The research team sought to categorize expenses by the following key FFD program components: management and administration, outreach and recruitment, screening and enrollment, occupational training, employment services, and responsive child support services. For each component, the team considered both labor expenses, as well as materials, facilities, and overhead expenses. This information was provided by the FFD child support partners in New York and Washington. Specifically, New York provided the research team with the per-participant rates charged by service providers, estimated Office of Child Support Services labor costs related to FFD activities (including in-kind costs), and expense reports from the screening and enrollment partner with labor and material costs. In Washington, the Department of Child Support Services, which was responsible for overall program administration, outreach, and responsive child support services, provided invoices documenting its labor costs. The agency also provided aggregate numbers on its subcontracted service providers' labor and material costs. For each site, these costs were summed across an entire year to estimate annual expenditures.

This analysis reflects expenditures during the 2019 calendar year in Washington and the 2019 New York City fiscal year (July 2018–June 2019). Overall, the expenditures reflect the implementation of a new program rather than a more mature program in a steady state. Both programs had only been operating for a few months at the start of the time periods. (The programs launched their programs at different times.)

It is important to note that the analysis does not include a full accounting of costs to operate the program, such as in-kind resources that do not appear in expenditure data. Programs used different approaches to reporting expenditures, thus limiting the ability to isolate the expenses for each component and compare expenses by component across the two program locations.

FINDINGS

Child support agencies received support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Each FFD location raised additional state, local, or private funding to contribute to its FFD operating budget.[1] Through the Section 1115 Waiver, these public and private dollars became a part of the agencies'

1. Per the requirements of the Section 1115 Waiver, public contributions were new dollars so as not to take away from existing child support services.

"state share" or normal operating budget (see Chapter 2 for additional information about Section 1115 Waivers). The state share accounted for 34 percent of the total FFD budget and federal financial participation approved through the waiver made up the remaining 66 percent. Nearly all staff members and partners that MDRC interviewed thought that the FFD budget was adequate.

Appendix Tables C.1 and C.2 show the expenditures for FFD in Washington and New York, respectively. The programs' structure and service partners affected how expenses were allocated and reported. These differences in program structure and data limitations associated with this analysis make it difficult to draw direct comparisons between the funds spent on individual service components. For example, a single staff person provided the bulk of recruitment, screening, and employment and wraparound services in Washington, while in New York, these services were spread among several service partners. It was not possible to isolate expenses related to employment and wraparound services in either program because they were bundled with other services. In addition, the expenditures related to staffing in New York do not include the cost of fringe benefits, while in Washington, both staff salaries and fringe benefits are included in expenditure estimates.

The New York program spent more than two times the funds that Washington spent over a twelve-month period (about $845,000 compared with almost $360,000). This is not surprising given that the New York program enrolled many more parents in the study during this period (257 compared with 31). The Washington program served a much smaller population than

APPENDIX TABLE C.1

Annual Expenditures for FFD Implementation: Washington

Service Component	Expenditure ($)	Percent of Annual Expenditures (%)
Management and administration	112,832	31.0
Outreach and recruitment, screening and enrollment, and employment and wraparound services	110,172	30.2
Occupational training	113,263	31.1
Total per participant	4,531	
Responsive child support services	28,180	7.7
Total per participant	909	
Annual expenditures to operate FFD	364,447	100.0

SOURCE: MDRC calculations are based on expenditure reports from the Washington Division of Child Support and FFD program partners in Washington, covering the period January 2019 to December 2019. Expenditures related to staffing include the cost of fringe benefits.

APPENDIX TABLE C.2

Annual Expenditures for FFD Implementation: New York

Service Component	Expenditure ($)	Percent of Annual Expenditures (%)
Management and administration	107,146	12.7
Outreach and recruitment	14,605	1.7
Screening and enrollment	167,881	19.9
Occupational training, employment services, and wraparound services	492,082	58.3
Total per participant	3,728	
Responsive child support services	62,995	7.5
Total per participant	245	
Annual expenditures to operate FFD	844,709	100.0

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on expenditure information from the New York City Human Resources Administration and FFD program partners in New York. Costs reflect the New York City fiscal year 2019 (July 2018 - June 2019). Expenditures related to staffing do not include the cost of fringe benefits.

New York and struggled with recruitment over the study period. The small number of parents enrolled in this period resulted in very high per-participant costs of operating the program in Washington (about $11,700).[2] In contrast, the total expenditures per participant enrolled in the study in New York were almost $3,300.[3]

In Washington, the majority of expenses were evenly split across program management; training; and recruitment, screening, and employment services; each accounted for 30 to 31 percent of the program's 2019 expenditures. In contrast, spending in New York was weighted more heavily to skills training, which accounted for almost 60 percent of its payments. This is likely because the program paid for many more trainings than the Washington program did during the cost analysis period (132 compared with 25). Outside of training, staffing drove a large share of expenditures for both programs.

2. The research team calculated this number as the total annual expenditure costs in Washington divided by the number of individuals who enrolled in the study in Washington in calendar year 2019 (31).

3. The research team calculated this number as the total annual expenditure costs in New York divided by the number of individuals who enrolled in the study in New York between July 2018 and June 2019 (257).

The remainder of this section describes expenditures by component. It also explores how differences in implementation in Washington and New York affected spending in each component.

Occupational skills training. The average cost of training per participant in Washington was about $4,500, while the average combined cost of training, employment, and wraparound services per participant in New York was $3,700.[4] Training costs can vary widely within and between programs based on the type of certification, partner, duration, student-teacher ratio, and other factors. For example, Washington's commercial driving training was 20 times more expensive than its information technology (IT) training. The costs presented here are an average across trainings. Trainings were purchased separately from other services in Washington and cost approximately $113,000. The program's trainings during this period were production and logistics, commercial driving, and machinist.

New York's program included nine different training offerings in IT, construction, hospitality, commercial driving, and other sectors. Training, employment, and wraparound services were bundled in New York and were purchased at a fixed cost per slot in training. The costs presented in Appendix Table C.2 reflect all trainings, which varied in price. The total spending on these services was nearly $500,000, which included over $30,000 on subway Metrocards to facilitate parents' access to training and services.

New York's per-participant training costs were 82 percent of Washington's and notably included other core FFD services. These differences may have been driven by several factors, including training expense and the kinds of partners utilized. Washington partnered with for-profit training providers while New York's training partners were nonprofit organizations, which may have played a role in how their trainings were priced.[5]

Responsive child support services. Expenses related to responsive child support services are largely associated with staffing. In New York, this amount reflects the salary of a single staff person at the Office of Child Support Services who reviewed FFD cases.[6] In Washington, these expenses are driven by the number of hours spent delivering these services across two staff persons.[7] The per participant cost in Washington was over three times that of the cost in New York ($245 compared with $909). Differences in the per participant costs may be related to the number of participants served in each location as well as differences in the frequency and dosage of services. Partners in New York also provided some responsive child support services; however,

4. For each program location, the research team calculated per-participant costs as the total expenditure amount for training in the respective location, divided by the number who took part in training during the cost analysis period (132 in New York and 25 in Washington).
5. Washington originally planned to partner with a local community college, but pivoted to for-profit training providers when the college had to cancel several training classes due to low-levels of demand.
6. The New York program's responsive child support services included other costs that are not captured here, such as some services offered by its partners and training to prepare those partners to deliver responsive child support services.
7. In Washington, the bulk of responsive child support services were provided by a program specialist. This also includes some time from the program specialist's supervisor to support and manage the work.

this is not captured in this line item. Overall, these services appear to account for a smaller share of overall expenditures compared with other components of the FFD model (around 7 to 8 percent in both locations).

Recruitment, screening, and enrollment. Compared with New York's program, Washington's program dedicated a large share of resources to outreach and recruitment during this period. Washington struggled with recruitment in early 2019 and shifted resources from training to recruitment to get the word out about FFD. In addition to one full-time staff person who supported recruitment and enrollment, it spent nearly $30,000 on advertising during this period, including ads on buses, Facebook, and in local theaters and radio spots promoted in Goodwill stores. In comparison, New York's spending in these categories was largely driven by staffing costs. The New York program had more staff persons than Washington involved with recruitment and screening, including two full-time staff persons who each specialized in intake procedures for half the program's trainings and a third part-time staff person focused entirely on community outreach. The Office of Child Support Services in New York also produced and coordinated several mailings related to outreach and recruitment. These efforts were carried out in-kind and were not captured in this analysis as material costs.

Management and administration. The two programs spent a similar amount on costs related to managing the program. While this accounts for a larger overall share of the Washington program's expenditures, this difference was likely driven by the larger amount spent on trainings in New York. This indicates that there were fixed costs related to managing the program regardless of the number of parents served.

COMPARING FFD'S EXPENSES WITH OTHER PROGRAMS

FFD appears to be a more expensive program to operate than other employment-focused programs for parents, such as the Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED), which was studied using a cost-benefit analysis. Like FFD, that program provided responsive child support services (known as enhanced case management), employment services, and wraparound supports. However, CSPED grantees focused more on job search, readiness, placement, and training services than training (although grantees could offer short-term jobs skills training and other training and education services directly related to employment). In addition, the program offered parenting classes and individual case management. Unlike the FFD analysis, the CSPED study was a marginal cost analysis and excluded costs that are fixed and are required under business-as-usual operations, such as rent and administrative costs. The average cost of serving a CSPED participant across all program locations was $2,647.[8] It is not surprising that the FFD program model was more expensive to operate than CSPED because of the program's focus on occupational skills training.

8. CSPED's costs per participant include costs related to arrears forgiveness, which is not included in FFD (Cancian, Meyer, and Wood, 2019b).

FFD's emphasis on occupational skills training makes it similar to the WorkAdvance program. WorkAdvance's program costs included services for managing the program, intensive screening of participants before enrollment, pre-employment and career readiness services, skills training, job development and placement services, and retention and advancement services. As with FFD, costs related to training were the greatest expense in WorkAdvance. FFD expenditures were less than WorkAdvance, where the gross cost per participant ranged between $5,200 and $6,700 across the program locations.[9] While FFD appears to have been less expensive than WorkAdvance, it's important to note that the WorkAdvance study used a different methodology and may have accounted for costs that FFD's analysis was not able to include.

9. Hendra et al. (2016).

REFERENCES

Administration for Children and Families. 2019. *New Memorandum Encourages the Development of Child Support Employment Services*. Washington, DC: Administration for Children and Families.

Argys, Laura, Elizabeth Peters, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, and Judith Smith. 1998. "The Impact of Child Support on Cognitive Outcomes of Young Children." *Demography* 35, 2: 159–173.

Ashenfelter, Orley. 1978. "Estimating the Effect of Training Programs on Earnings." *The Review of Economics and Statistics, 60*-1: 47-57.

Cancian, Maria, Angela Guarin, Leslie Hodges, and Daniel Meyer. 2018. *Characteristics of Participants in the Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED) Evaluation*. University of Wisconsin-Madison Institute for Research on Poverty.

Cancian, Maria, Daniel Meyer, and Robert Wood. 2019a. *Final Impact Findings from the Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED)*. University of Wisconsin-Madison Institute for Research on Poverty.

Cancian, Maria, Daniel Meyer, and Robert Wood. 2019b. *Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED): Findings from the Benefit-Cost Analysis*. University of Wisconsin-Madison Institute for Research on Poverty.

Card, David, Jochen Kluve, and Andrea Weber. 2018. "What Works? A Meta Analysis of Recent Active Labor Market Program Evaluations," *Journal of the European Economic Association* 16, 3: 894–931.

Cummings, Danielle and Daniel Bloom. 2020. *Can Subsidized Employment Programs Help Disadvantaged Job Seekers? A Synthesis of Findings From Evaluations of 13 Programs*. OPRE Report Number 2020-23. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Graham, John, Andrea Beller, and Pedro Hernandez. 1994. "The Effects of Child Support on Educational Attainment," pages 317–354 in Irwin Garfinkel, Sara McLanahan, and Philip Robins (eds.), *Child Support and Child Well-Being*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press.

Grall, Timothy. 2016. *Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support: 2013*. Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.

Heckman, James and Jeffrey Smith. 1995. *Ashenfelter's Dip and Determinants of Participation in a Social Program: Implications for Simple Program Evaluation Strategies*. Department of Economics Research Reports, 9505. London, Ontario: University of Western Ontario.

Heinrich, Carolyn, Brett Burkhardt, and Mary Shager. 2011. "Reducing Child Support Debt and Its Consequences: Can Forgiveness Benefit All?" *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 30, 4: 755–774.

Hendra, Richard, David Greenberg, Gayle Hamilton, Ari Oppenheim, Alexander Pennington, Kelsey Shaberg, and Betsey Tessler. 2016. *Encouraging Evidence on a Sector-Focused Advancement Strategy*. New York: MDRC.

Hoback, Jane. 2017. "Behind Bars, Behind in Payment: For Parents in Prison, Unpaid Child Support Bills Can Become a Crushing Debt." National Conference of State Legislatures Magazine. Website: https://www.ncsl.org/bookstore/state-legislatures-magazine/parents-prison-child-support-debt.aspx

Knox, Virginia. 1996. "The Effects of Child Support Payments on Developmental Outcomes for Elementary School-Age Children." *Journal of Human Resources* 31, 4: 816–840.

REFERENCES *(CONTINUED)*

Knox, Virginia and Mary Joe Bane. 1994. "Child Support and Schooling," pages 285–316 in Irwin Garfinkel, Sara McLanahan and Philip Robins (eds.), *Child Support and Child Well-Being*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press.

Kusayeva, Yana. 2020. "Using Principles of Procedural Justice to Engage Disconnected Parents." New York: MDRC.

Kusayeva, Yana and Cynthia Miller. 2019. "Tools for Better Practices and Better Outcomes: The Behavioral Interventions for Child Support Services (BICs) Project." New York: MDRC.

Landers, Patrick. 2020. *Child Support Enforcement-Led Employment Services for Non-Custodial Parents: In Brief*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service.

Lopez Bernal, James, Steven Cummins, and Antonio Gasparrini. 2017. "Interrupted Time Series Regression for the Evaluation of Public Health Interventions: A Tutorial." *International Journal of Epidemiology 46,* 1: 348-355.

Martinez, John and Cynthia Miller. 2000. *Working and Earning: The Impact of Parents' Fair Share on Low-Income Fathers' Employment*. New York: MDRC.

New York State Child Support. 2021. "Tax Refund Offset." Website: https://www.childsupport.ny.gov/dcse/troFAQs.html.

Office of Child Support Enforcement. 2011. *Child Support Fact-Sheet Series: Family-Centered Innovations to Improve Child Support Outcomes*. Washington, DC: Office of Child Support Enforcement, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Website: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ocse/family_centered_innovations.pdf

Office of Child Support Enforcement. 2016. *Work-Oriented Programs with Active Child Support Agency Involvement that Serve Noncustodial Parents*. Washington, DC: Office of Child Support Enforcement, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Office of Child Support Enforcement. 2018a. *2018 Child Support: More Money for Families*. Washington, DC: Office of Child Support Enforcement, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Office of Child Support Enforcement. 2018b. *State Child Support Agencies With Debt Compromise Policies*. Washington, DC: Office of Child Support Enforcement, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Office of Child Support Enforcement. 2019. *Information Memorandum: Availability of Section 1115 Waivers to Fund NCP Work Activities*. Washington, DC: Office of Child Support Enforcement, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Website: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/css/policy-guidance/availability-section-1115-waivers-fund-ncp-work-activities.

Office of Child Support Enforcement. 2020. *Information Memorandum: Section 1115 Waivers*. Washington, DC: Office of Child Support Enforcement, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Pager, Devah. 2003. "The Mark of a Criminal Record." *American Journal of Sociology* 108, 5.

Pearson, Jessica and Lanae Davis. 2012. *Evaluation: Colorado's 'Parents to Work' Deemed Success*. Denver, Colorado: Center for Policy Research.

Peck, Laura, Alan Werner, Eleanor Harvill, Daniel Litwok, Shawn Moulton, Alyssa Rulf Fountain, and Gretchen Locke. 2018. *Health Professional Opportunity Grants (HPOG 1.0) Impact Study Interim Report: Program Implementation and Short-Term Impacts*. OPRE Report Number 2018-16. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

REFERENCES *(CONTINUED)*

Sama-Miller, Emily, Alyssa Maccarone, Annalisa Mastri, and Kelley Borradaile. 2016. *Assessing the Evidence Base: Strategies That Support Employment for Low-Income Adults*. OPRE Report Number 2016-58. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Schaberg, Kelsey and David Greenberg. 2020. *Long-Term Effects of a Sectoral Advancement Strategy: Costs, Benefits, and Impacts from the WorkAdvance Demonstration*. New York: MDRC.

Schroeder, Danielle and Stephanie Chiarello. 2008. *Texas Non-Custodial Parent Choices: Program Impact Analysis*. Austin, Texas: Ray Marshall Center.

Sorensen, Elaine. 2016. *The Story Behind the Numbers: The Child Support Program is Focused on Performance*. Washington, DC: Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Sorensen, Elaine and Kye Lippold. 2012. *Strengthening Families Through Stronger Fathers Initiative: Summary of Impact Findings*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

Sorensen, Elaine, Liliana Sousa, and Simon Schaner. 2007. *Assessing Child Support Arrears in Nine Large States and the Nation*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. Website: https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/29736/1001242-Assessing-Child-Support-Arrears-in-Nine-Large-States-and-the-Nation.PDF

Sorensen, Elaine and Chava Zibman. 2000. "To What Extent Do Children Benefit from Child Support?" Discussion paper, 99-11. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

Tessler, Betsy, Michael Bangser, Alexandra Pennington, Kelsey Shaberg, and Hannah Dalporto. 2014. *Meeting the Needs of Workers and Employers: Implementation of a Sector-Focused Career Advancement Model for Low-Skilled Adults*. New York: MDRC. Website: https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/WorkAdvance_CEO_SIF_2014_FR.pdf

United States Supreme Court. 2011. *Turner v. Rogers et al., 564 U.S. 431*.

U.S. Department of Labor. 2014. *What Works in Job Training: A Synthesis of the Evidence*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

ABOUT MDRC

MDRC, A NONPROFIT, NONPARTISAN SOCIAL AND EDUCATION POLICY RESEARCH ORGANIZATION, IS COMMITTED TO finding solutions to some of the most difficult problems facing the nation. We aim to reduce poverty and bolster economic mobility; improve early child development, public education, and pathways from high school to college completion and careers; and reduce inequities in the criminal justice system. Our partners include public agencies and school systems, nonprofit and community-based organizations, private philanthropies, and others who are creating opportunity for individuals, families, and communities.

Founded in 1974, MDRC builds and applies evidence about changes in policy and practice that can improve the well-being of people who are economically disadvantaged. In service of this goal, we work alongside our programmatic partners and the people they serve to identify and design more effective and equitable approaches. We work with them to strengthen the impact of those approaches. And we work with them to evaluate policies or practices using the highest research standards. Our staff members have an unusual combination of research and organizational experience, with expertise in the latest qualitative and quantitative research methods, data science, behavioral science, culturally responsive practices, and collaborative design and program improvement processes. To disseminate what we learn, we actively engage with policymakers, practitioners, public and private funders, and others to apply the best evidence available to the decisions they are making.

MDRC works in almost every state and all the nation's largest cities, with offices in New York City; Oakland, California; Washington, DC; and Los Angeles.