

2013

FAMILY TIES

Project Return Family Ties Evaluation

center for **POLICY RESEARCH**

1570 Emerson Street
Denver, Colorado 80218
303/837-1555

Lanae Davis, M.P.A.
Jessica Pearson, Ph.D.
Nancy Thoennes, Ph.D.



Acknowledgements

The Center for Policy Research would like to thank the following individuals for their significant contributions to the Family Ties Project:

- David Sanchez, Assistant Commissioner, Family Assistance and Child Support, Tennessee Department of Human Services
- Charles Bryson, Director of Child Support Operations, Tennessee Department of Human Services
- Bettie Kirkland, Executive Director, Project Return, Inc.
- David Teasdale, Family Centered Services Manager, Child Support Field Operations and Management, Tennessee Department of Human Services
- Sandra Covington, Child Support Liaison, Tennessee Department of Human Services
- Magistrate Scott Rosenberg, Davidson County Juvenile Court
- Deborah Bradley, Program Specialist, Child Support Services Tennessee
- Robin Kimbrough, Legal Counsel, Tennessee Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence
- David Delbridge, Former Executive Director, Project Return
- Bobby Daniels, Former Director of Development, Project Return

Executive Summary
Executive Summary

Executive Summary

The Tennessee Department of Human Services, Child Support Division (CSD) was one of seven states to receive a grant from the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) in 2009 to conduct a project in support of the Prisoner Reentry Initiative (PRI), a collaborative effort by federal agencies to reduce recidivism by helping returning offenders find work and access other critical services in their

communities. Tennessee CSD contracted with Project Return, Inc., a Nashville-based nonprofit corporation (Davidson County), that specializes in prisoner reentry, to implement the project, which was named Family Ties. The Center for Policy Research (CPR) conducted a comprehensive evaluation that involved collection and analysis of data of Family Ties participants from multiple sources:

- A cross-site Access database that recorded information on participant demographics, employment, incarceration, service needs, and delivery of child support services.
- An Access database maintained by Project Return that recorded information on services delivered dealing with employment, transportation, and community referrals.
- An extract from the Tennessee Child Support Enforcement System (TCSES) on child support cases for participants and their payment behavior prior to and following enrollment in the project at 6-, 12-, and 24-month intervals.
- Telephone interviews completed with 104 project participants, which represented 47.5 percent of the 219 individuals who could practically be reached because they had provided a telephone number that was not disconnected.

The goal of Family Ties was to identify and address the child support needs of ex-offenders seeking job-focused services at Project Return, and try to ensure that child support supported their successful reentry and was not a barrier to their employment. To accomplish this, Project Return:

- Hired a full-time Child Support Liaison to screen for child support issues among its client population and to outreach to soon-to-be released offenders in pre-release settings.
- Contracted with the Child Support Division for a part-time child support worker who was dedicated to addressing the child support needs of ex-offenders and working their cases in an expeditious manner.
- Enrolled 589 individuals in Family Ties during April 2010 through December 2012, 45 percent recruited by the Child Support Liaison in pre-release orientations conducted in area facilities (of which 30% visited Project Return following their release and pursued the services they had learned about at the orientation session), and 55 percent recruited among the ex-offender population who appeared at Project Return for help with employment and other reentry issues.

Most of the participants in Family Ties were male and African American. The average age of the participants was 35 and approximately half had never been married.

Like most programs designed to serve ex-offenders, the participants in Family Ties were difficult to serve.

- One quarter the of participants had less than a high school diploma or GED and an additional 25 percent had obtained a GED and no further education.
- When they enrolled in Family Ties, less than 15 percent were employed outside of prison, with those who were working earning an average of \$1,083 per month.
- On average, participants had been incarcerated 4.7 times, nearly all (85%) for a felony, with two-thirds reporting a conviction for a drug or alcohol offense.
- On average, those who enrolled in Family Ties prior to their release had served approximately 40 months in prison and had 10 months remaining on their sentences. Those who had been released when they enrolled had been out for a median of two months.

Family Ties participants also faced challenging child support and other financial obligations.

- On average, participants owed \$404 for current monthly support and \$159 for child support arrears for a combined, average monthly obligation of \$474, with a third owing more than \$500.
- Nearly a third were ordered to pay restitution, which averaged \$129 per month.

Family Ties participants could access child support services as well as an array of employment-focused services offered by Project Return. The main child support services they received were:

- An individual conference about their child support case, obligations, and options (100%).
- Reinstatement of a driver's license suspended for nonpayment (20%).
- Modification of a child support order to reflect a new earning level (17%).
- Suspension of enforcement actions while actively participating in Family Ties (16%).

Nearly half (44%) of Family Ties participants received services other than child support (although it is not clear whether Project Return staff recorded all the job-focused services and referrals they provided):

- Job leads, job club, and job readiness services (31%).
- Bus passes and other types of transportation assistance (21%).
- Résumé development, clothing vouchers, and work tools (11%).

Key outcomes for Family Ties participants are as follows:

- Significant improvements in child support payment, with the average number of months of payment rising from 4.2 during the six months prior to enrollment to 7.8, 9.0, and 9.3 in the 6,

12, and 24 months following enrollment, respectively. The percentage of owed child support that was actually paid rose from 11 to 28 percent and the total amount of child support paid by program participants who enrolled following release from prison more than doubled going from \$43,675 to \$99,270 in the six months prior to and following their enrollment.

- More significant payment improvements for participants who received help with order modification, reinstatement of driver's licenses, correction of case errors, and other concrete forms of assistance, rather than just getting information about their child support case with the average number of months of payment for the two groups in the six months following enrollment standing at 4.2 and 3.2 months, respectively.
- Lower rates of return to prison for participants, which were 15 percent as compared with 39 percent reported by the Tennessee Department of Corrections at two years post release, with the lowest rates of return for employed participants and/or those who received certain services suggestive of employment such as help with résumés, tools, work clothes, and transportation (9% versus 18%).
- High rates of user satisfaction, with 53 percent of participants rating Family Ties as "excellent" and 28 percent as "good," and 80 to 90 percent characterizing all child support services that they received as "excellent" or "good."
- Increases in child support arrears balances for participants during the 20 months following their enrollment in Family Ties, with the average increase being \$6,000 and arrears balances rising from \$24,462 to \$30,335.

Conclusions

Family Ties was effective in recruiting offenders to participate in post-release services while they were incarcerated. Approximately 30 percent of those who attended a Family Ties orientation while they were still incarcerated came to Project Return following their release and participated in the Family Ties program. This is impressive given the barriers to service delivery that the ex-offender population faces, and underscores the value of outreach about reentry in pre-release settings.

Family Ties was successful in generating child support payments. Participants paid significantly more child support in the months following their enrollment in Family Ties than they did in the months prior to enrollment, with those who received substantial child support assistance (services other than pure information about the child support program and their individual cases) registering the most significant improvements. This underscores the value of outreach to offenders about child support in reentry settings and providing both information about their cases as well as tangible services to improve their child support situation.

Greater increases in child support payments might have occurred if order levels were set at more realistic levels that reflected actual earnings. On average, project participants had child support obligations of \$404 and arrears obligations of \$159, for total average and median monthly obligation of \$474 and \$385, respectively. Monthly earnings for the small fraction of Family Ties participants who were employed when they enrolled in the project was \$1,083. Not surprisingly, most (71%) of participants wanted to reduce their child support order, the “improved” monthly payments that they made following program enrollment was only a fraction of what they owed (26% to 28%), and their arrears balances increased by an average of \$6,000 from approximately \$24,000 to \$30,000 over 20 months following enrollment.

Job-focused services were not related to improvements in child support payments although it is unclear whether Project Return staff recorded all employment services they provided and/or whether Family Ties participants pursued all of the services available to them. According to records maintained by Project Return staff, 37 percent of Family Ties participants received job-focused services and smaller percentages received help with applying for benefits, housing, money management, etc. No child support benefits were detected for those who received these services and referrals. It is unclear whether these lower-than expected rates of employment and referral activity reflect the failure to integrate Family Ties clients in Project Return services, the failure of Family Ties participants to take advantage of service opportunities available at Project Return, and/or the failure of Project Return staff to accurately record the level of services and referrals that they provided. Although Project Return and Family Ties were co-located, the programs would be strengthened by better coordination and more diligent data entry regarding the delivery of employment services and referrals to community agencies.

The services provided by Family Ties and Project Reentry were appreciated by participants. Family Ties was a well-liked program. Not only was it well received by recently released noncustodial parents, the program was embraced by incarcerated parents with child support cases who were waiting to be released to the community. Virtually all of the individuals who participated in Family Ties said that one of their goals was to learn more about the child support program in general (95%). Nearly 90 percent rated Families Ties as having done an “excellent” or “good” job of explaining the child support system. No matter what type of referral was given, about 80 to 90 percent of those who followed up said the help they received was “excellent” or “good.”

Family Ties is associated with reduced recidivism. The Tennessee Department of Correction, Division of Policy, Planning and Research calculates recidivism rates of 26 percent at one year post-release, 39 percent at two years of release, 46 percent at three years post-prison release, and 55 percent at four or more years post-release. The rates of return to prison for Family Ties participants at 12, 24, and 36 months of release are 9 percent, 15 percent, and 16 percent, respectively. The participants who

registered the lowest rates of prison return were those who were employed when they enrolled in Family Ties (6% versus 17%), and those who obtained job-related help suggestive of subsequent employment, such as résumé development, tools, work clothes, and transportation (9% versus 18%).

Child support should be added to the menu of post-release and reentry services. Child support obligations are among the most substantial financial pressures that offenders face when they are released from prison and attempt to re-integrate into society. Family Ties shows that this population is strongly interested in learning about the child support system and their status and options. And they have even stronger interest in obtaining tangible help and relief including modifying orders to reflect their changed earnings, reinstating driver's licenses that were revoked for nonpayment of support, and holding enforcement actions in abeyance while they obtain employment and resurrect their lives on the outside. Family Ties also shows that helping paroled and released offenders with child support improves their payment behavior, especially when the assistance moves beyond the informational level and involves tangible actions. It takes dedicated child support staff to provide this type of assistance to incarcerated and released offenders. To achieve even stronger outcomes, child support service programs should be coupled with aggressive employment and placement efforts and the two types of assistance should be fully coordinated. Finally, child support programs should pursue right-sized orders for low-income obligors that reflect an ability to pay and consequently stem the growth in uncollectible child support arrears.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview	1
Overview of Project Return and Family Ties	1
Project Chronology and Procedures	3
Organization of the Final Report	4
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature	5
General Recommendations to Address Reentry Obstacles.....	6
Chapter 3: Project Recruitment and Enrollment	13
Recruitment and Enrollment	13
Services Provided	15
Chapter 4: Methodology	18
Data from Family Ties.....	18
Data from Other Systems	19
Participant Telephone Surveys.....	19
Interviews and Focus Groups with Staff.....	21
Chapter 5: Profile of Those Enrolled	22
Demographic Characteristics of Those Who Were Served	23
Employment Status and History.....	23
Self-Reports of Domestic Violence	25
Incarceration Status and History	26
Chapter 6: Services Provided	30
Child Support Services Received	32
Chapter 7: Outcomes	33
Child Support Payments	33
Recidivism.....	38
Chapter 8: Participant Reactions	41
Services Needed and Received.....	43
Chapter 9: Staff Reactions	50
Chapter 10: Summary and Conclusions	56
Summary	56
Conclusions	60
References	63
Appendices	
Appendix A	

Chapter 1. Introduction and Overview
Chapter 1. Introduction and Overview
Chapter 1. Introduction and Overview
Chapter 1
Introduction and Overview
Chapter 1. Introduction and Overview
Chapter 1. Introduction and Overview
Chapter 1. Introduction and Overview

In October 2009, the Tennessee Department of Human Services, Child Support Division (CSD), received a 36-month, Section 1115 Demonstration and Evaluation Grant from the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) to conduct a project in Davidson County (Nashville) in support of the Prisoner Reentry Initiative (PRI). The PRI is a collaborative effort by federal agencies to reduce recidivism by helping returning offenders find

work and access other critical services in their communities. Tennessee was one of seven sites selected to implement PRI.

CSD contracted with Project Return, Inc. a Nashville-based nonprofit corporation that specializes in prisoner reentry to implement PRI. Project Return, Inc. contracted with the Center for Policy Research (CPR) to assist with program implementation and to conduct a comprehensive evaluation. CPR is a nonprofit corporation based in Denver, Colorado, that specializes in demonstration and evaluation projects dealing with the child support program and the low-income populations it serves, including paroled and released offenders. In Tennessee, the federally funded PRI project was named Family Ties.

Overview of Project Return and Family Ties

Project Return, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 1979 to provide reentry services (both pre- and post-release) to ex-offenders in Middle Tennessee. It was founded by five ministers who sought to: “Provide services and connect people with resources needed to return successfully to work and community after incarceration.” Project Return is governed by a board of directors comprised of key state and local corrections representatives, service providers, and corporate representatives. The board evaluates and supervises the Project Return executive director, who, in turn, supervises a staff of 12 and contracts with a certified public accountant for fiscal operations. Project Return receives funding through an annual direct legislative appropriation, as well as through contracts and grants with the Department of Correction, the Department of Human Services, the Office of Criminal Justice Programs, Community Corrections of America, local foundations, and others. Project Return provided services to more than 2,500 ex-offenders during the 2012 calendar year, with 495 of these enrolling in its employment services program upon release. Based on its success and initiative in placing ex-offenders into employment, Project Return has been a finalist in both the nationwide JobRaising Challenge co-sponsored by the Skoll Foundation and the Huffington Post, and locally in the Nashville Social Enterprise Alliance’s Business for Good competition.

In addition to its in-house employment services, Project Return has developed extensive relationships with providers in the Nashville community and is able to offer individuals assistance with clothing, substance abuse and mental health treatment, housing, food, transportation, education, family reunification, and mentoring.

Although Project Return, has conducted many federally funded grant programs designed to aid ex-offenders in their reentry efforts through employment-focused services and mentoring programs, it had not addressed the issue of child support in a formal way. Although agency administrators knew that many ex-offenders had children and were involved with the child support agency and may have avoided employment or changed jobs to avoid paying child support, they were not aware of the scale of the problem or the overlap between the Project Return and child support population. Project Return lacked the personnel to assess program participants for their child support status and needs. Nor did it have the expertise to address any child support problems that were uncovered.

Family Ties was a grant program funded by the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement and awarded to the Tennessee Department of Human Services Child Support Division. It was designed to explore the extent to which child support is an issue for ex-offenders and to develop methods of addressing their child support problems. It involved a collaboration between and among Project Return, Policy Studies, Inc. (PSI), the privatized child support provider in Nashville; and the Davidson County Juvenile Court, which hears child support matters. The goal of the project was to identify and address the child support needs of ex-offenders seeking job-focused services at Project Return, and try to ensure that child support reinforced their successful reentry and was not a barrier to their employment.

To accomplish this, Project Return, hired a Child Support Liaison for Family Ties, whose job it was to screen for child support issues among its clients. Those who were found to have a child support case or problem were offered an opportunity to enroll in Family Ties. Family Ties enrollees were welcome to access all Project Return services and receive relevant child support services. Mostly, this involved a one-on-one explanation of their child support situation and their options for improving it. It also could involve getting help with specific child support actions, such as establishing paternity and a new child support order, assistance with the review and adjustment of an existing child support order, reinstatement of driver's licenses suspended for nonpayment of support, and obtaining deferrals in the collection of monthly support and the initiation of enforcement actions to permit newly released offenders to stabilize themselves in the community and obtain housing and employment. Additionally, some project participants were enrolled in the Problem-Solving Court, a specialized program at the Davidson County Juvenile Court designed to provide more customized treatment to Family Ties clients and other low-income noncustodial parents with barriers to child support payment.

Project Chronology and Procedures

Soon after Family Ties was funded in October, 2009, DHS executed a contract with Project Return. Subsequently, Project Return executed contracts with PSI for a dedicated, part-time child support worker to handle actions that needed to be taken for Family Ties clients with open child support cases, and with CPR for technical assistance and evaluation services. Project Return also retained the Tennessee Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (TCADSV) to develop a domestic violence protocol to ensure that the project did not pose any risks to the emotional and physical safety of custodial parents and children.

On February 24, 2010, a kick-off meeting was held with key project partners in Nashville. They included administrators and relevant line staff with TDHS; Project Return; PSI; the Davidson County Juvenile Court; the Tennessee Re-Entry Collaborative; TCADSV; and CPR. The meeting also involved representatives of other federally funded demonstration projects in the Nashville area, such as Nashville Works, a project funded by the Department of Justice that provided reentry services for offenders at the Charles Bass Correctional Complex in Nashville; and the Parent Support Program, funded by OCSE, that worked with unemployed and underemployed noncustodial parents in the child support program to address employment and visitation problems. It was expected that the Child Support Liaison would perform outreach to prisoners in Nashville facilities who were scheduled to be released and that Family Ties would try to help ex-offenders with a variety of issues, including employment, child support, and family reunification, the latter being addressed by the grant program coordinator affiliated with the Parent Support Program, who was prepared to help interested parents develop parenting plans.

At the kick-off meeting, project partners were introduced, their roles in the project were clarified, a timeline was reviewed, client eligibility and referral processes were discussed, and project procedures were considered. Following the meeting, Project Return, retained a Child Support Liaison to conduct relevant outreach activities, generate program enrollments, deliver relevant child support services, and make appropriate referrals. In April 2010, Family Ties began enrolling clients. In February 2011, CPR prepared an interim report that described the first eight months of project operations and the characteristics of the first 113 clients to enroll. A meeting of project partners was held in April 2011 to review the results of the interim report and discuss ways to strengthen project operations and data collection and evaluation activities. Follow-up telephone interviews were attempted with participants approximately six months post-enrollment.

Organization of the Final Report

This Report describes the evaluation of Family Ties. It is organized in the following manner:

- Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature related to incarceration, prisoner reentry, and child support enforcement. This literature review includes highlights from prior studies to measure the impact of reentry programs on rates of recidivism, as well as child support compliance.
- Chapter 3 describes the Family Ties program and how recruitment and service delivery took place.
- Chapter 4 outlines the research methods used in the evaluation, including how participants were enrolled, information drawn from Family Ties records, original data collection, data from the automated child support system, and surveys.
- Chapter 5 describes the Family Ties participants, both demographically and with respect to past incarceration and employment.
- Chapter 6 provides information on the services provided to those who enrolled in Family Ties.
- Chapter 7 presents outcomes dealing with child support and recidivism based on information electronically extracted from agency databases.
- Chapter 8 provides the results of interviews with participants to assess how the program operated and its strengths and weaknesses.
- Chapter 9 provides the results of interviews and focus groups with staff to assess how the program operated and its strengths and weaknesses.
- Chapter 10 provides a summary of the evaluation's findings and discusses next steps that are needed both in terms of programs and research.

Chapter 2. Review of the Literature
Chapter 2. Review of the Literature

Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

Offenders reentering their communities after incarceration face many barriers. Indeed, while “reentry” is a single point in time when an offender is released, “reintegration” is a process that begins long before the actual date of release and continues far past the release date.¹ Many offenders meet roadblocks in reintegration and struggle to meet their

basic needs including food, clothing, housing, and transportation.² In 2011, 1,598,780³ individuals were in state or federal prisons and the jail population stood at 735,601.⁴

Many studies suggest that these barriers often result in repeat offenses and/or a return to prison. The U.S. Department of Justice estimates that within three years of release, *two-thirds* of offenders who are released from prison will be rearrested and more than *half* will return to prison or jail.⁵ And while studies have failed to identify the precise causes of recidivism, they likely include the disruption of networks such as families, employment, and other institutions in the community.⁶

Some communities are trying to better address the needs of ex-offenders by creating reentry task forces and collaborations of community-based organizations. The challenges they seek to address are considerable. Recent studies of jail populations reveal the following patterns.⁷

- Nearly 70 percent of the jail population meets the criteria for substance abuse dependence, compared to only 9 percent in the general population, and less than 20 percent receive treatment after admission to jail.
- A quarter of individuals in jail exhibit symptoms of mental illness.
- Jail populations have higher rates of communicable diseases (4% TB, 2.6% hepatitis, and 1.3% HIV). Jail populations also have higher rates of current medical problems and injuries needing treatment (37%), which may go untreated after their release from jail.
- Nearly two-thirds of the jail population (60%) lack a high school diploma or its equivalent, compared with 18 percent in the general population.
- In 2002, 59 percent of the jail population reported no or limited employment during the month before arrest, as compared with a national unemployment rate of 5.8 percent.
- 14 percent of the jail population was homeless at some point in the year before their incarceration, as compared with an estimated 3 to 6.5 percent of the general population.

The data on inmates in state prisons confirms that there are significant barriers to reintegration. One study estimates that 40 percent of inmates in state and federal prisons have neither a high school diploma nor a GED, 31 percent of state inmates have a “physical impairment or mental condition,” and 57 percent report that they have used drugs in the month before their arrest.⁸ Many offenders “enter

the criminal justice system hard to employ and leave it even harder to employ.”⁹ The response to this financial dilemma may be met in one of three ways: by finding a job, remaining unemployed, or returning to crime.¹⁰

Besides employment obstacles, returning offenders regularly face housing obstacles. Service providers have reported that prisoners lack the necessary housing-related preparation prior to release and many end up on the street. Additionally, many legal limitations restrict ex-prisoners from obtaining public housing benefits.¹¹

Unable to make financial ends meet, many ex-offenders report a heavy reliance on their families for both financial and emotional support. But constraints of imprisonment can sever those ties prior to reentry; prisoners can become disconnected from their families, causing reunification challenges following release.

General Recommendation to Address Reentry Obstacles

Few programs or projects have made significant strides in eliminating or addressing all of the obstacles faced by ex-offenders in the reentry process. However, some studies suggest ways to address some of the specific obstacles that contribute to the high rate of recidivism.

Employment Recommendations

“[E]mployment is one of the single most influential predictors that an offender will remain out of jail or prison.”¹² One approach to employment involves coordinated pre-release and post-release services. Tested in the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative, these programs include an initial assessment of vocational aptitudes and interests, appropriate vocational training before release, and job search/job placement assistance.¹³ The Pre-Release and Reentry Services of the Montgomery County Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (PRRS) is another employment-focused, community-based correctional program. PRRS conducts risk and needs assessments of eligible jail inmates who must have no history of escape, no serious pending criminal charges, and be within a year of release. The assessment process leads to the provision of comprehensive case management services and enrollment in relevant education and employment programs. An evaluation found that almost 90 percent of program participants find employment within three weeks of enrollment and that 54 percent have the same employer two months after leaving the program.¹⁴

Another notable policy initiative, the Strengthening Families Through Stronger Fathers Initiative (SFTSFI), enacted by the New York State Legislature in 2006, capitalized on flexible funding sources, using TANF

monies to create employment programs that served low-income, non-custodial fathers. Seedco, a national non-profit that focuses its efforts on bringing economic opportunity to low wage workers in New York City, was contracted to develop an employment program under this initiative. Seedco's pilot Dads at Work Program was remarkably successful and was unique in the array of comprehensive services that it offered to low-income, noncustodial fathers trying to find work. While this program did not focus exclusively on ex-offenders, through referrals from the NYC Department of Probation, Seedco did recruit many NCPs involved in the criminal justice system for the pilot.¹⁵

The Dads at Work program was based primarily on an employment-focused model, but it included more services than fatherhood programs traditionally offer. By collaborating with other community organizations, the program was able to provide fathers with access to benefit services, legal services, peer networks and support groups, parenting classes, intensive case management, financial counseling, and loans with arrears forgiveness to incentivize payment of their child support obligations. As a result of the comprehensive intervention, 56 percent of participants were able to find legal employment during the pilot. Almost 50 percent of participants also took advantage of the program's other services, including legal assistance, benefits assistance, loan assistance, and support groups. The program's popular legal services focused on modifying NCPs' child support orders and criminal records. It was found that at least 32 percent of NCPs had rap sheets with at least one significant error that could negatively affect their chances of finding employment. Legal assistance was highly correlated with improved employment outcomes, and of the participants who used the legal services, 53 percent found jobs.

The loan program for outstanding child support payments was also very successful. For those fathers who were approved for a loan, Seedco would pay the loan directly to the Office of Child Support Enforcement on their behalf. To incentivize payment and reduce the burden put on struggling fathers, once fathers had repaid half of their loan to Seedco, the remaining balance would be forgiven. Of the loans distributed, Seedco saw a 90 percent repayment rate that far exceeded their expectations. Furthermore, NCP fathers who paid their child support orders in full and on time were also eligible for a state refundable income tax credit.

Surveys and interviews with Dads at Work clients revealed that the program's peer social networks, to which participants could turn to for support, was critical to many of the client's success. These peer networks helped to foster a positive group identity among low income, noncustodial fathers and encouraged them to take on more active and influential roles in their children's lives.

It is clear that the comprehensive model of the Seedco program is what made it so successful. Fathers in the program were provided with not only practical and financial support services to help them find

work, but also emotional supports and guidance that allowed them to maintain jobs and achieve more stability throughout their professional and personal lives.

Today, transitional job programs for reentering prisoners are also gaining momentum.¹⁶ An evaluation of the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO), an employment program for former prisoners in New York City that conducts a four-day job readiness class and quickly places participants in temporary minimum-wage jobs with crews that work under contract to city and state agencies (discussed further below), finds significant reductions in recidivism for those who came to CEO within three months after release.¹⁷ Although the employment rates associated with transitional jobs versus traditional job search assistance disappeared after a year, the program had definite benefits for recently released offenders when the risk of re-incarceration is highest.

Service providers and former and current prisoners recommend that reentry programs allow prisoners to contact employers prior to their release. In focus group discussions among these participants conducted by the Urban Institute, one service provider participant stated, “Prisoners with work release have two weeks to find a job, and we are losing two to three days on administrative things.” Participants in these focus groups also suggested that prisons make supervised Internet services available to prisoners for job-search purposes.

Other suggestions are that prisons: facilitate access to employers for interviews or work release positions, provide training in résumé writing, interviewing, other job-seeking skills; and enable prisoners to earn their GED or achieve English fluency. Finally, these participants noted that skilled trade employers in areas such as plumbing and carpentry are often more open to hiring people with criminal records. Focus group participants suggested that prisons should, therefore, provide training in these skills.¹⁸

Some studies suggest that communities themselves should implement programs that better accommodate the needs of prisoners reentering the community. For example, work release programs that include a community service component could effectively facilitate offenders’ positive contributions to the community, and foster public receptivity to the process of reintegration.¹⁹ A reentry initiative in Boston that targets clients in jail who are at a high risk of committing violent crimes upon their release, finds that jail participants who were paired with mentors and caseworkers to help them obtain relevant community services were 30 percent less likely to be rearrested for violent crimes than nonparticipants.²⁰

To further accommodate ex-offender reintegration at the community level, studies also suggest improving public knowledge about federal bonding and tax credit programs for employers that hire ex-

offenders. Under the Work Opportunity Tax Credit Program, employers can receive a federal tax credit if they hire certain ex-felons. The credit is 40 percent of the first \$6,000 of wages, for a maximum credit of \$2,400. This tax credit is highly underpublicized and underused, and could be an effective way to create job opportunities for reintegrating ex-offenders.²¹

Housing Recommendations

As federal, and some state, regulations currently stand, public housing is unavailable to offenders with certain types of convictions. Local public housing authorities “often use the existence of a criminal background to automatically disqualify applicants.”²² And public housing law also “grants authority to public housing agencies to deny admission to public housing if it determines that an applicant or any member of the applicant’s household ever ‘engaged in any drug-related or violent criminal activity or other criminal activity which would adversely affect the health, safety or right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises by other residents.’”²³ Expunging criminal records can help ex-offenders find housing, and will be most helpful if done before a background check is ever conducted for public housing eligibility.

Education Recommendations

There is significant evidence that, like employment, quality education is an effective way to prevent recidivism. For example, in 2000, the Criminal Justice Policy Council produced a report on its study tracking 25,000 released Texas inmates, and found that prison education programs reduced their recidivism rates. Similar studies have found that “the more education received, the less likely an individual is to be re-arrested or re-imprisoned.”²⁴ Additional results of research studies conducted in Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, and other states suggest that implementing correctional higher-education programs in prisons yields lower recidivism rates for inmate participants.²⁵

Healthcare Recommendations

Beyond ensuring that, prior to release, service providers, prisoners, and healthcare providers work together to devise a healthcare plan before the prisoner’s release, the Urban Institute’s focus groups with ex-offenders recommend that correctional programs devote more resources to mental health and addiction treatment.²⁶ One model of how to provide a wide range of health services to prisoners comes from Hampden County, Massachusetts. The County’s Model for Corrections is a partnership that includes the Hampden County House of Corrections, Lemuel Shattuck Hospital, Baystate Medical Center, Tufts University School of Dentistry, and Behavioral Health Network along with other community health providers. At admission to the jail, jail and health services staff assess the mental and physical status of each incarcerated client and develop a treatment plan to address immediate needs and prevention measures. Treatment, prevention and health education occurs during incarceration. Discharge plans for inmates address healthcare. Continuity of care is provided by having community health clinics provide

services to clients both while incarcerated and after release. Each client is assigned to a local community health clinic upon admission to jail based on his or her zip code. The same healthcare providers see the client in the jail and in the community after release.

Evaluators report that more than 88 percent of HIV-positive clients referred for ongoing care after release from the correctional facility keep their initial medical appointments at their designated community health center.²⁷

Family Reunification and Child Support Recommendations

Providing services to the families of recently released prisoners can result in more positive outcomes for former inmates, including lower rates of physical, mental, and emotional problems; drug use; and recidivism.²⁸ According to focus groups with former inmates, family members should play a role in the reentry planning process so that they have a stake in the plan and are better able to provide support for prisoners upon release. The focus group participants also recommended that correction facilities facilitate increased visitation and telephone communication between prisoners and their families.²⁹

The same focus group participants recommended that immediately upon an offender's admission into prison, service providers should assess the offender's child support case records and educate him or her as to child support obligations going forward. The need for such augmented services is substantial. Many prisoners and ex-offenders are part of the child support caseload. In fact, a 2001 data match between Child Support Enforcement (CSE) and the Department of Corrections (DOC) in Colorado found that 26 percent of inmates in state prisons and 28 percent of parolees were in both DOC and CSE caseloads.³⁰ Similarly, a 2003 data match in Massachusetts found that 26 percent of the DOC population had at least one open child support case,³¹ and a 2004 data match in Maryland found that 13 percent of noncustodial parents were currently or previously in state prisons, with the overlap at 30 percent for families that receive public assistance.³²

Prisoners and ex-prisoners contribute disproportionately to child support arrears, which inflate the child support agency's outstanding balances as well as enlarge child support caseloads, diminish outside confidence in the agency, damage the agency's reputation, and divert the attention of workers from cases that are more amenable to payment.³³ A Colorado analysis found that approximately 18 percent of total Colorado child support arrears were owed by incarcerated or released offenders,³⁴ while the proportion of arrears held by inmates in Massachusetts state prisons was 16 percent.³⁵ A Maryland analysis found that current and previously incarcerated obligors accounted for 23.5 percent of the total debt owed to custodians and 28.9 percent of state-owed arrears even though they account for just 16 percent of all child support cases and 13 percent of all obligors.³⁶ The small fraction of obligors who

reported having no or low incomes owed the largest amount of arrears (54%) and were least apt to pay.³⁷ Older survey data confirm that 29 percent of low-income, nonpayer obligors had been incarcerated, disabled, or institutionalized.³⁸

Incarcerated people accumulate substantial amounts of debt from multiple sources, which can make compliance with child support orders exceedingly difficult, especially when child support is not the only financial demand. Many men released from prison in Texas (39%) and Ohio (58%) owed monthly probation/parole supervision fees, 12 percent owed court costs and/or fines, and those with restitution orders owed an average of \$3,500.³⁹ Probation officers in most states can require individuals to dedicate up to 35 percent of their income for the combined payment of court costs, fines, fees, surcharges, and restitution, which are rarely coordinated. More to the point, a study of probation revocations found that 12 percent were due in part to failure to meet the financial portion of probation supervision requirements.⁴⁰

Parents typically enter prison with support orders that range from \$225 to \$300 per month. Because most parents have no real income and some states disqualify inmates from obtaining reduced support orders and consider incarceration to be “voluntary unemployment,” their child support debt continues to accrue every month. A more recent assessment of incarcerated obligors in Maryland found that they have an average total arrears balance of \$22,048.⁴¹

Federal law allows child support agencies to garnish up to 65 percent of an obligor’s wages for child support. Noncustodial parents who fail to pay face a variety of enforcement remedies, including driver’s license suspensions, contempt actions, bench warrants, and re-arrest. Advocates for low-income families urge child support agencies to adopt policies that are more responsive to the many barriers released offenders face so that ex-prisoners do not choose to leave the formal labor market because of extreme wage deductions and resort to hustling to pay off their debts.⁴²

In fact, research has demonstrated that the combination of low wages and high debt can discourage people from taking and keeping jobs in the formal economy, encourage the pursuit of income through illegal activities, and jeopardize successful reentry.⁴³ In turn, high rates of recidivism occur among ex-offender obligors and recidivism undermines their ability to work and pay child support. A 2002 Massachusetts study found that more than three-quarters of the state’s prison population paid none of its mandated child support in the previous 12 months, with an average payment of \$206. In contrast, two-thirds of parolees managed to make at least partial payments with an average payment of \$1,538.⁴⁴

Finally, family connections help to reduce recidivism. Although contact with family members during incarceration has been shown to reduce the strain of separation and increase the likelihood of

successful reunification, security measures impede contact.⁴⁵ Supportive families are associated with higher rates of offender success in finding employment, avoiding substance abuse, and reducing criminal activity.⁴⁶ Thus, helping prisoners and ex-offenders with their child support obligations can support family relationships and better ensure their successful reintegration. Rather than putting more strain on family relationships with child support obligations that are impossible for incarcerated obligors to satisfy, trying to generate realistic orders and stem the growth of arrears may strengthen family ties and thereby reduce recidivism.

Chapter 3. Recruitment and Enrollment
Chapter 3. Recruitment and Enrollment

Chapter 3 Project Recruitment and Enrollment

Enrollment in Family Ties began in April 2010 and continued through December 2012. Project enrollment was open to soon-to-be released offenders and ex-offenders at both the pre- and post-release stages. Ultimately, 589 individuals enrolled.

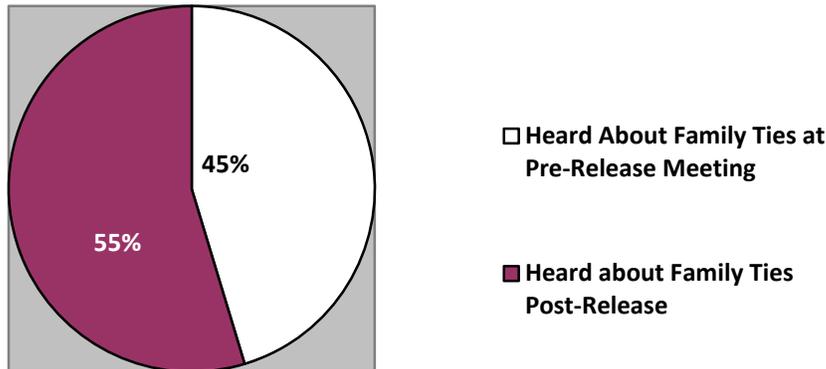
Recruitment and Enrollment

Project enrollment was open to nonresident parents who were 18 years and older with an open child support case—noncustodial parents—who were either incarcerated or released from prison and were interested in engaging in facilitated job search and/or work activities. Participants must have been convicted of a felony as an adult; imprisoned in a state, federal or tribal prison; imprisoned in a tribal, regional, county, or local jail; and never convicted of a sexual or violent offense. Clients could be enrolled in the project prior to or following their release. Participants who enrolled pre-release were recruited by the Child Support Liaison through outreach presentations that were conducted at seven Nashville area correctional facilities: the Charles Bass Correctional Complex (Main and Annex), the Correctional Development Center, the Metro-Davidson County Detention Facility, Deberry Correctional Institute, Riverbend Maximum Security Institution, and Tennessee Prison for Women.

Project participants who enrolled post-release were drawn from the Project Return client caseload. These individuals were required to be ex-offenders with child support cases (noncustodial parents) who were 1) released within the past two years and were receiving job-focused services at Project Return, 2) new to Project Return and interested in pursuing job-focused services; or, 3) on parole, probation, and with expired sentences and interested in obtaining job-focused services. Recruitment to participate in Family Ties occurred at weekly orientation sessions that the Child Support Liaison conducted at Project Return. At the orientation session, the Child Support Liaison explained the Family Ties program and enrolled attendees who self-identified as being noncustodial parents with child support issues who were interested in receiving additional help.

Figure 3.1 shows that 45 percent of Family Ties participants heard about the program at pre-release meetings, while 55 percent were recruited following their release when they visited Family Ties to obtain help with reentry and attended a Family Ties orientation session.

Figure 3.1. Family Ties Recruitment Source (N=589)

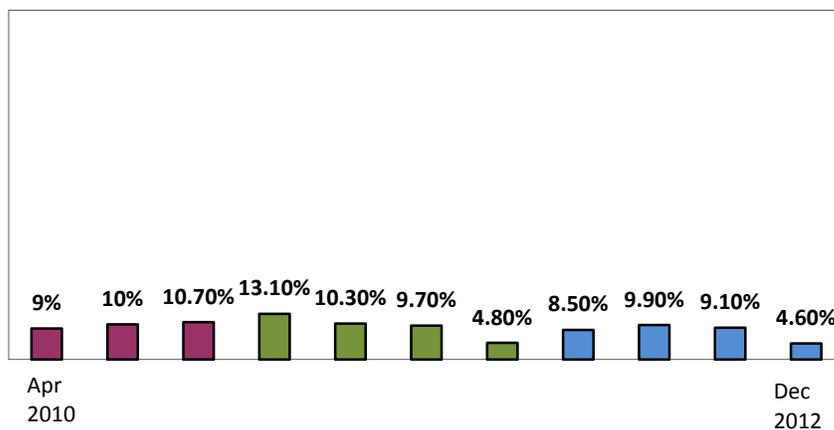


Other referral sources were the Board of Probation and Parole who referred clients to the Child Support Liaison at Project Return, and placed posters and brochures about Family Ties in their offices.

The DOC facilitated referral activity by permitting the Child

Support Liaison to make presentations about child support to soon-to-be-released offenders at pre-release meetings held at area correctional facilities. At these sessions, the Child Support Liaison explained the child support process to attendees and provided them the opportunity to ask one-on-one case specific questions about their child support case. The Child Support Liaison invited eligible individuals to visit Project Return, upon their release.

Figure 3.2. Quarterly Enrollments in Family Ties as a Percentage of the Total Enrolled (N=589)



As Figure 3.2 shows, enrollment got off to a strong start and remained steady from the beginning in April 2010 through the end in December 2012.

Services Provided

Family Ties participants received different amounts of service, with the level of service delivery varying with the timing of their recruitment into the project. Many Family Ties participants were recruited into the project when they were incarcerated and attended a pre-release meeting. They were enrolled but did not appear at Project Return following release. These individuals only attended an orientation session on Family Ties and child support held by the Child Support Liaison at the pre-release meeting. Other individuals who were recruited and enrolled while they were still incarcerated visited Project Return following their release and received a wider range of services from both Family Ties and Project Return. Table 3.1 shows that 30 percent of offenders who heard about Family Ties prior to their release subsequently appeared at Project Return following their release and requested various forms of help, including child support assistance. There were also 322 individuals who enrolled in Family Ties following their release from prison. They arrived at Project Return to obtain reentry help and self-identified as having a child support case for which they wanted assistance. Table 3.1 summarizes these enrollment patterns:

Table 3.1. Pre- and Post-Release Enrollment Patterns for Family Ties Participants

Total Enrollment in Family Ties	589
Number who contacted Family Ties post-release	322
Number who received orientation while incarcerated	267
Number of those who received orientation while incarcerated who contacted Family Ties and received services post-release	83 (30% of those with pre-release orientation)
Total who received services through Family Ties	322+83=405

Project Services Dealing with Child Support: The Child Support Liaison had access to the automated child support system and was able to review the child support status of Family Ties participants at the Project Return office. Using this information, he was able to provide the participant with case-specific information about his child support situation and options for further action. Since the Child Support Liaison was an experienced child support worker, he was able to explain child support matters with a high degree of specificity. He was also able to undertake a variety of actions and to coordinate with the specialized worker at PSI for needed follow-up. In addition, some project participants were enrolled in the Davidson County Juvenile Court’s Problem-Solving Court, which permitted them to qualify for adjustments to normal child support procedures during successful project participation. All accommodations were made on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of the magistrate. The dedicated PSI child support worker filed a simple motion with the court to enroll project participant in the problem-solving court.

The following is a list of actions that the magistrate at the Juvenile Court might have taken with Family Ties participants.

- Order Establishment: The magistrate might have considered actual earnings in establishing child support orders. Normal practice in Tennessee for unemployed obligors is to calculate a child support order level based on imputed earnings of a minimum wage job at 40 hours per week.
- Order Modification: The magistrate might have considered actual earnings in modifying child support orders. Normal practice in Tennessee is not to modify child support orders for those who are unemployed or underemployed and assume that they should be able to work 40 hours per week and earn the minimum wage.
- Defer Payment: The magistrate might have deferred payment of current monthly support during successful project participation and engagement in job readiness, search, and placement activities. However, missed payments would still be owed and become part of the obligor's child support arrears balance.
- Defer Enforcement: The magistrate might have deferred the initiation of enforcement actions for nonpayment of support during successful project participation and engagement in job readiness, search, and placement activities.
- Conduct Review Hearings: The magistrate might have scheduled and conducted periodic review hearings to determine whether the obligor was complying with job readiness, job search and job placement activities. The Child Support Liaison would support this activity by providing factual information on obligor compliance to the court.
- Reduce Arrears Payments: The magistrate might have considered reducing arrears payments to a minimal amount during successful project participation and engagement in job readiness, search, and placement activities. This would serve to reduce the monthly child support burden that participants experience, but does not address the total amount of arrears that they owe.

In addition to child support actions taken by the Magistrate, the Child Support Liaison and the PSI case manager had the ability to pursue other measures that support employment and the ability of the obligor to succeed in the community. This included reinstatement of driver's licenses; review of child support cases to correct errors that might result in reduced arrears balances and obligations; closing cases when paternity was excluded; the custodial parent withdrew a request for services; the child became emancipated; and/or arrears balances had been paid; establishing paternity; and deferring administrative enforcement remedies, such as bank account liens.

Other Project Services: Family Ties participants also had access to case managers at Project Return and the menu of services available to Project Return clients, both at the agency and through its extensive network of referrals. Thus, interested Family Ties participants could obtain assistance with job readiness, search, and placement from counselors at Project Return. They also were referred to a variety of public and private providers for other needed services, including the agencies that participate in the Tennessee Re-entry Collaborative (TREC). TREC is an extensive community-wide network of 51 agencies committed to improving community reentry. They represent corrections, probation and parole, community corrections, community treatment and housing providers, universities, law enforcement, private and public industry, children’s services, health, and veteran affairs.

Parenting Time and Family Reunification: Noncustodial parents who were interested in reuniting with their families and/or pursuing parenting time plans and other access and visitation arrangements were referred to the Parent Support Program, an OCSE-funded demonstration project that helped parents in the child support program in Davidson County with employment and parenting time. To address any potential safety issues associated with family reunification and parenting time, Tennessee Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (TCADSV) was retained to develop screening tools to identify domestic violence issues for both the custodial and noncustodial parents enrolled in Family Ties. TCADSV developed a Domestic Violence Protocol for Family Ties, Project Return, and PSI staff to follow when enrolling participants and measures to take to enhance safety in all cases. They also conducted training on domestic violence with relevant staff at those agencies and programs.

Chapter 4. Methodology
Chapter 4. Methodology

Chapter 4 Methodology

Chapter Four provides detailed information on the time points at which information was collected on Family Ties participants, as well as the type of data collected. Data was collected at multiple points in time from multiple sources. CPR prepared a release of information that was provided to all Family Ties enrollees and ensured that each noncustodial parent gave informed consent for their information to be used in this report.

Data From Family Ties Database

Participant enrollment information including demographics, education and employment history, family relationship history, and service needs were recorded in an online Access Database. OCSE retained the Urban Institute to develop an Access database for all seven sites in the PRI Initiative funded by OCSE, of which Tennessee was one. The database was used to record information about project participants, the services they received, and key outcomes such as employment. As the local evaluator of Family Ties, CPR contracted with an independent consultant to integrate additional items approved by Family Ties into the existing online database in an effort to enhance the information that was gathered for the evaluation.

Collecting data and entering it on the online Access Database was difficult with participants who were enrolled while still incarcerated. A large number of inmates attended each pre-release meeting where the child support orientation was given and the option of enrolling in Family Ties was presented. Thus, it was impossible for the Child Support Liaison who conducted the session to do a lengthy interview with each interested participant. To compound the problem, the liaison was not allowed to bring a computer into the prison and was consequently unable to enter any interview information electronically. As a result, there was missing data on many items on the database developed to record information about project participants among those who enrolled pre-release. Data collection for those entering post-release also involved a lengthy intake interview and entry of data into the Family Ties database. A total of 589 individuals were entered into the Family Ties database; however, more detailed information on participants was available for only those who enrolled post-release at Project Return.

Another data limitation was the lack of detailed information on services provided to project participants by agencies other than Project Return. While the database allowed project staff to record the services provided to Family Ties clients if the service was provided in-house by staff at Project Return, there was no way to determine whether clients received help from outside agencies to which they were referred.

Thus, while project staff noted that they made a referral for services on the database, no information was available on whether the client followed up with the referral and/or whether service was provided.

The online MIS elicited the consent of the noncustodial parent to participate in the research study. A hard copy release of information form signed by the noncustodial parent was obtained at the close of the intake session, allowing NCPs records to be shared with partner agencies for purposes of the evaluation.

In addition to the intake data collected from the online MIS, CPR obtained data on services provided to participants by Project Return. An extract of all 589 enrollees was generated from Project Return's database, describing the services each Family Ties enrollee received from Project Return. These services included employment assistance, transportation assistance, and bus passes, as well as referrals to community organizations.

Data from Other Systems

CPR obtained an extract of child support data for all 589 Family Ties enrollees from the Tennessee Child Support Enforcement System (TCSES). Child support information such as payment history, order levels, arrears balances, numbers of cases, and age of orders was extracted and provided to the evaluators.

Data on recidivism for Family Ties enrollees was collected via a manual look-up in Tennessee's DOC database. In the summer of 2013, all 589 enrollees were searched for in the Department of Correction database to determine their status at the close of the project. If clients had returned to prison, information was extracted on the date of return and the reason for the return.

Participant Telephone Surveys

CPR designed a follow-up telephone interview that was administered to Family Ties enrollees six months following the date they enrolled in the program. CPR contracted with the Northern Illinois University Public Opinion Laboratory (POL) to administer the follow-up telephone interview. POL has conducted telephone interviews with noncustodial parents in the child support system for several prior CPR evaluations. As in past projects, POL was responsible for readying the questionnaire for telephone interviewing and pre-testing it, preparing the sample for deployment, scripting the questionnaire in the Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) system, training interviewers, monitoring data collection, conducting sample management, and delivering a final data file.

The telephone survey was conducted approximately six months following enrollment. Its purpose was to gain an understanding of the helpfulness of the Family Ties program and the reasons why participants may not be paying child support following program participation. It consisted of 66 items, with appropriate skips to eliminate service questions that were not relevant for a particular respondent. At the end of the survey, all respondents were asked to verify their name and mailing address if they wanted to receive a Wal-Mart gift certificate for participating in the study. All participants chose to receive the gift certificate.

The survey included questions on the Family Ties services that participants used and their perceived helpfulness. Participants also indicated the possible reasons why they might have problems with child support payment. The survey included a series of questions about employment, including current income, experiences with employment and unemployment, and job searches. Participants were also asked questions about their relationship with their children before and after enrolling in Family Ties. Finally, participants were asked to rate the helpfulness of Family Ties and program staff.

The CATI system allowed interviewers to schedule appointments, set callback times, and leave messages in a comments area to enable other interviewers to make subsequent calls with as much information as possible. The CATI system allowed for skip patterns to be implemented so only relevant questions were asked of respondents.

Data collection began in February 2011 and concluded in March 2013. Prior to a telephone contact attempt, potential respondents were sent a postcard alerting them to the fact that they would be receiving a call. The card also included a toll-free number so that the participant might schedule an appointment at their convenience.

During the 18-month interviewing period, 489 individuals were targeted for interviewing, a total of 2,707 calls were placed to them, and 104 surveys were completed. On average, each person slated for an interview received 5.5 calls. The average call time for completed interviews was 25.6 minutes.

The 104 completed interviews represents 21.3 percent of the 489 enrollees targeted for follow-up interviews. However, since the sample including 122 cases for which no telephone number was provided and an additional 148 with telephone numbers that were disconnected, no longer in service, or numbers where the potential respondent was unknown or had moved, only 219 individuals were practically eligible to be interviewed. The 104 completed interviews among these 219 individuals represent a response rate of 47.5 percent.

Table 4.1. Disposition of Cases Targeted for Follow-up Telephone Interviews

	489 total targeted for contact
Minus 122 with no known telephone number	- 122
Minus 148 disconnected, no longer in service, or numbers where the potential respondent was unknown or had moved	- 148
Interviews completed	219 potentially eligible for contact 104 completed 47.5% completion rate

Interviews and Focus Groups with Staff

CPR staff conducted telephone interviews and focus groups with staff at Family Ties and Project Return. This included the Child Support Liaison and the specialized child support worker at PSI, case managers at Project Return who provided employment services and other forms of support to some Family Ties clients, and the executive director of Project Return. A focus group was held with Family Ties staff mid-way through program enrollment. Follow-up, one-on-one interviews were held with all Family Ties staff at the end of program operations. The executive director of Project Return, the Child Support Liaisons, and the designated child support technician at PSI were interviewed separately by CPR staff in June 2013 to get their overall reactions to the program. Program staff was asked open-ended general questions about program operations, what improvements could be made to the program, sustainability plans, and any changes they suggest to enrollment, recruitment and service delivery.

Chapter 5. Profile of Those Enrolled
 Chapter 5. Profile of Those Enrolled

Chapter 5 Profile of Participants

This chapter provides a profile of the participants who enrolled in Family Ties. It includes basic demographic data, as well as information related to the individual’s history with the criminal justice system, current and past employment, and, for those who enrolled after their release from prison, information about the individual’s current living situation. Table 5.1 compares the three groups on basic demographic characteristics. As it shows, there

were no differences by age. Those who received only an orientation while incarcerated, those enrolled after release and those with an orientation pre-release who returned to the program following their release were all in their mid to late thirties. There were significant differences in the three groups with respect to race/ethnicity and gender. Those with only a pre-release orientation (who never participated in any services post-release) were disproportionately African American and male. In other words, those who received some services in addition to a program orientation were disproportionately likely to be white and female.

Table 5.1. Age, Race/Ethnicity, and Gender, by Enrollment Pattern

		Only Received Pre-Release Orientation	Enrolled Pre-Release and Served Post-Release	Enrolled Post-Release
Age	Average Number	37.9 (321)	35.9 (119)	35.5 (143)
Race/Ethnicity★	African American	71%	59%	51%
	White	28%	40%	49%
	Number	(321)	(119)	(143)
Gender★	Male	88%	79%	65%
	Female	12%	21%	35%
	Number	(322)	(120)	(156)

★Chi square significant at .05.

Demographic Characteristics of Those Who Were Served

Table 5.2. Age, Race/Ethnicity, Education, and Marital Status of Participants, by Gender

	All Females	All Males	Total
Education			
Less than high school	38%	21%	24%
GED	8%	29%	25%
High school diploma	33%	22%	23%
Some college	17%	22%	22%
AA /College degree	4%	6%	3%
Number	(24)	(216)	(240)
Marital Status at Enrollment			
Married	0%	13%	12%
Married, separated	18%	15%	15%
Divorced	32%	23%	23%
Never married	50%	49%	49%
Widowed	0%	1%	1%
Number	(22)	(209)	(231)

Basic demographic characteristics of the men and women who received services through Family Ties are shown in Table 5.2.

Most of the women and men who enrolled in the program had either completed high school or obtained a GED (46% of women and 50% of men); however, relatively few had a two-year degree from a junior college and none had a four-year degree.

When asked about their marital status at the time of enrollment, most men and women reported being never married.

Employment Status and History

Most program participants were not working when they enrolled in Family Ties, and less than 15 percent were working outside of prison. Women who were released and employed earned an average monthly salary of \$498, while men earned, on average, \$1,176 per month.

Virtually none of the women and very few of the men reported receiving any type of fringe benefits through their current or most recent jobs. None of the women and only 11 percent of the men said they received medical benefits for themselves, and none of the women and 8 percent of the men said their children were entitled to medical benefits. Paid vacation time, paid sick leave, and retirement benefits were also rare for men and virtually non-existent for women.

When asked how many jobs they had held in the past five years, a small percentage said none. About half of the men and women said one or two. However, 44 percent of the women and 27 percent of the men reporting working at four or five different jobs in the past five years, and changing jobs every year. Three years was the longest time with a single employer, for men and women.

Table 5.3. Participant Employment Status and History by Gender

	All Females	All Males	Total
At enrollment, is participant working?			
No	85%	83%	80%
Yes, in prison	4%	3%	2%
Yes, outside of prison	11%	14%	18%
Number	(109)	(462)	(571)
If working outside of prison, average monthly wage	\$498	\$1,176	\$1,083
Number	(8)	(48)	(56)
Percentage reporting receiving the following benefits at their current or most recent job			
Vacation time	0%	12%	11%
Paid sick leave	0%	9%	8%
Retirement benefits	0%	4%	4%
Medical coverage for self	0%	11%	10%
Medical coverage for child	0%	8%	7%
Percentage reporting receiving <u>any</u> benefits at current or most recently held job	8%	14%	13%
Number	(13)	(125)	(138)
Number of jobs held in the past five years			
None	5%	6%	6%
One	24%	21%	21%
Two	24%	25%	25%
Three	5%	20%	18%
Four	24%	15%	16%
Five or more	20%	12%	13%
Number	(21)	(188)	(209)
Longest time at any job			
Average years	3.1	3.6	3.5
Median years	2.0	3.0	3.0
Number	(20)	(183)	(203)

Self-Reports of Domestic Violence

Table 5.4 shows the responses of those who were enrolled in Family Ties to a series of questions about domestic violence. Relatively few women or men reported that social services had been contacted due to violence they had perpetrated. Virtually no one reported having weapons in the home, and very few reported have been the subject of restraining order or order of protection.

Too few women were asked about their perpetration of violence to be included in the analysis. For the men with information available, over half acknowledged having abused drugs or alcohol. Approximately 20 percent reported hitting, pushing, or kicking the other parent. Similar percentages reported breaking things or hitting walls or behaving violently in public. Virtually none of the other items in Table 5.4 were reported by the men who were questioned about violent behavior in a domestic context. Approximately 20 percent of the men reported that the children had been adversely affected by the family violence they had observed.

Table 5.4. Self-Reported Domestic Violence, by Gender

Percentage responding "yes"	All Females	All Males
Social services has been contacted because of abuse you perpetrated	7%	3%
There are weapons in your home or possession	0%	1%
The other parent has petitioned for an Order of Protection or Restraining Order	11%	18%
Number	(26)	(212)
Percentage responding "yes" to "Have you ever..."		
Hit, punched, slapped, pushed, or kicked the other parent or any partner		18%
Broken things, punched walls, or slammed doors		27%
Threatened to hurt the other parent, children, yourself, or others		7%
Followed or stalked the other parent or children		1%
Exhibited reckless behavior (e.g., drove too fast with children in the car)		6%
Behaved violently in public		20%
Threatened to use a weapon		9%
Threatened to harm or kidnap the children		1%
Abused alcohol or drugs or been in treatment for drug or alcohol abuse		57%
Called the children degrading names		0%
Touched the children in a way that may them feel uncomfortable		0%
Assaulted the other parent while they were holding the child		1%
Forced the children to watch or participate in the abuse		1%
Children have been adversely affected by the drug/alcohol use		21%
		(141)

Incarceration Status and History

Table 5.5. Participant Incarceration Status and History, by Gender

	Female	Male	Total
Total number of times incarcerated			
Average	4.7	5.8	4.7
Median	4.0	3.0	3.3
Range	1-10	1-55	1-55
Number	(23)	(478)	501
Last incarceration was a felony or misdemeanor?			
Felony	93%	86%	85%
Misdemeanor	7%	14%	14%
Number	(95)	(391)	(486)
Ever convicted on a drug or alcohol offense?			
No	29%	35%	34%
Yes	71%	65%	66%
Number	(21)	(206)	(227)

The total number of incarcerations for Family Times enrollees averaged 4.7 for women and 5.8 for men. Over half the women had been incarcerated four or more times, and for the men the comparable figure was three.

Just over 70 percent of the women and 65 percent of the men had been convicted on an offense related to drugs or alcohol abuse.

In the vast majority of cases, the most recent incarceration was for a felony conviction.

As shown in Figures 5.1 and 5.2, those individuals, both men and women, who were enrolled in the program prior to their release from prison had served

approximately 40 months and had between 9 and 10 months remaining on their sentences.

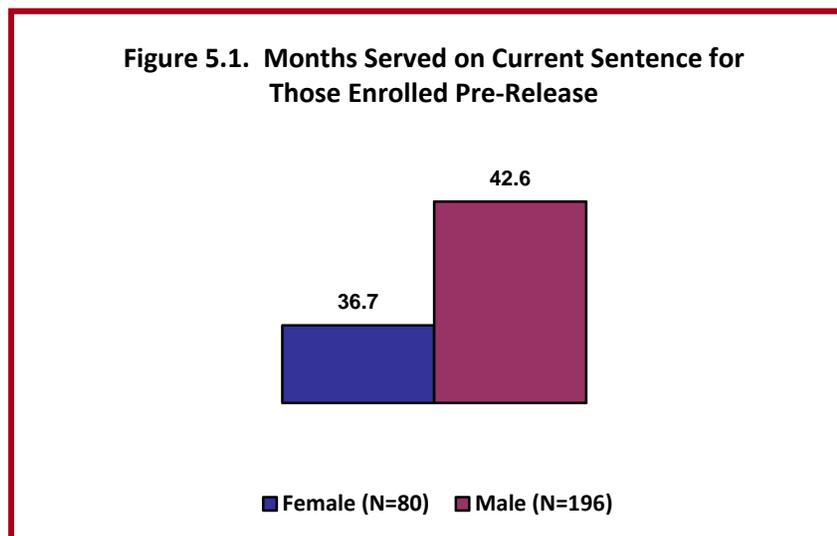


Figure 5.2. Months Remaining on Sentence for Those Enrolled Pre-Release

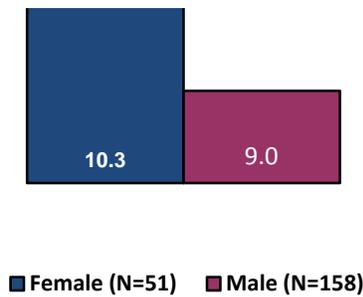


Figure 5.3. Months Served on Last Sentence for Those Enrolled Post-Release

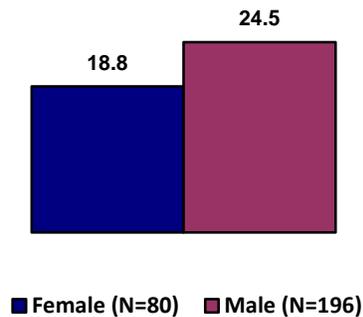
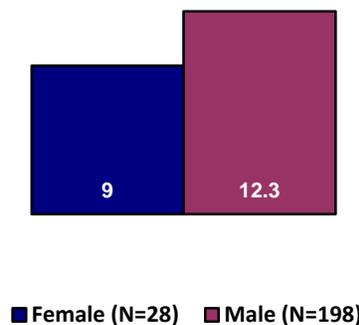


Figure 5.4. Months Since Release for Those Enrolled Post-Release



For individuals enrolled in the program following a release from prison, women reported their last incarceration lasted approximately 19 months. Men reported an average of 24 months (see Figure 5.3).

Women enrolled post-release had been out of prison for an average of nine months at enrollment. For men, the comparable figure was 12 months (see Figure 5.4). However, for both men and women, the median amount of time since their release was two months. Thus, half of post-release enrollees contacted Project Return soon after their release and obtained help within two months.

Table 5.6 shows the conditions of release for those enrolled after they left prison. Information is generally only available for men, although a small number of women were asked about their conditions of release too. For both men and women, approximately a third were required to pay restitution. The average amount for men was \$129.

Virtually all men and women reported being required to do drug and/or alcohol testing and to seek

employment. Approximately 60 percent of both men and women said they were also required to attend some type of class, such as anger management.

Table 5.6. Conditions of Release, by Gender, for Those Enrolled Post-Release

	Female	Male
Percentage reporting they have to...		
Pay restitution	32%	32%
If restitution was ordered, average amount	<i>Too few cases</i>	\$129
If restitution was ordered, range		\$10-\$2,000
Do drug testing	100%	100%
Seek employment	100%	94%
Attend some type of classes	60%	62%
Number	(11)	(92)

Most of the women who were enrolled post-release reported living in a halfway house at the time of the intake interview (63%). Men were more likely to report living with relatives (45%) or with a wife or girlfriend (20%). Very few men or women said they were living alone.

When asked about their social support system, most men (84%) and women (63%) said that they had a friend or family member who would provide them with a place to stay if needed. Slightly fewer said they had someone who would loan them money in an emergency.

The primary mode of transportation reported by female participants was using a bus (57%), followed by asking friends or family for a ride (24%). Men also reported relying on these modes of transportation, but a third also reported owning a car. A quarter of the participants depended on family and friends for transportation.

Table 5.7. Living Situations for Those Enrolled Post-Release

	Female	Male	Total
Percentage Living...			
Homeless shelter	7%	5%	6%
Halfway house	63%	16%	26%
Alone	4%	3%	3%
With spouse or partner	0%	20%	15%
With friends	4%	6%	5%
With relatives	22%	45%	38%
Other arrangement	0%	4%	4%
Number	(27)	(184)	(211)

Table 5.7. Living Situations for Those Enrolled Post-Release

	Female	Male	Total
Percentage reporting they have family or friends who would...			
Provide them a place to stay	63%	84%	83%
Loan them some money	47%	66%	65%
Number	(19)	(166)	(185)
Primary mode of transportation:			
Bus	57%	38%	40%
Own car	9%	33%	30%
Rides from family or friends	24%	26%	24%
Walk	9%	4%	6%
Number	(21)	(173)	(194)

Chapter 6. Services Provided
 Chapter 6. Services Provided

Chapter 6 Services Provided

This chapter looks at the services that clients enrolled in Family Ties received, typically through the parent agency for the project, Project Return. When the service discussed below is described as a “referral,” it means that the service was not provided by staff at Project Return and the client was told to go somewhere else to obtain assistance. It is not known whether the client followed up with this recommendation and whether services were delivered.

As shown in Table 6.1, all Family Ties clients received some type of assistance with their child support case. This was expected because Family Ties focused on helping clients with their child support situation. This ranged from helping the client to understand his or her child support order and the consequences of noncompliance to helping the client to work with the child support agency to stay enforcement actions until he or she found employment.

Table 6.1 also shows that nearly 45 percent of Family Ties clients received services unrelated to child support. Over a third (37%) received employment related services, including help with transportation, work tools and clothing, as well as job readiness services and job leads. Small percentages of clients also received assistance related to applying for benefits or food stamps, getting medical care, or help with housing and education.

Unfortunately, it is not clear whether these lower-than-expected service figures are accurate. They may reflect lapses by Project Return staff in reporting employment service activity and other referrals for Family Ties participants, the failure to fully integrate child support services offered through Family Ties with the employment program offered at Project Return, and/or the failure of Family Ties clients to take advantage of the employment-focused services and other referrals available to them at Project Return.

Table 6.1. Types of Services and Referrals Provided to Family Ties Clients at Project Return

Percentage receiving the following services	
Assistance with child support	100%
Any services other than child support	44%
★ Employment Assistance such as job leads, job club, job readiness	31%
★ Help with transportation (bus passes)	21%
★ Assistance with résumé, suit voucher, work tools, clothes	11%
Any of the work-related services above with a ★	37%
Money management	11%
Relapse prevention program	10%

Table 6.1. Types of Services and Referrals Provided to Family Ties Clients at Project Return

Percentage receiving the following services	
Assistance getting financial benefits or food stamps	9%
Assistance getting an ID	3%
Medical referral	2%
Education referral	2%
Referrals or assistance with housing	1%
Number	(589)

Table 6.2 shows the number of services that Family Ties clients received. As noted in the table footnote, assistance in some areas, such as employment, can involve multiple discrete services. For example, one client may receive multiple job leads, or one client may receive a job lead and assistance getting work tools. When adding up the services received by the client, each of these is counted individually. However, because bus passes are dispensed along with job leads and job search coaching, both of which can occur multiple times, receiving bus passes is counted only once.

The number of services that clients received ranged from 1 to 19, with an average of 2.9 services and a median of 1 service. Over 80 percent of all clients received between one and five services. If child support services are removed from the analysis, the average number of services declines to 1.9 and the median is 0 services. However, 30 percent of Family Ties enrollees received one to five services.

Table 6.2. Number of Services and Referrals Provided by Project Return to Family Ties Clients

Total number of services received ★	
Range	1-19
Mean	2.9
Median	1.0
1 -5 services	83%
Number	(589)
Total number of services received not related to child support	
Range	0-18
Mean	1.9
Median	0
1 -5 services	30%
Number	(589)

★Bus passes are only counted once, no matter how many were received. All other categories are counted multiple times if they occurred multiple times (e.g., four job leads count as four services).

In addition to these services, the records kept by Family Ties staff indicate that approximately 8 percent of Family Ties clients returned to Project Return at a later date to receive additional information and/or assistance.

Further analysis shows that the patterns in Table 6.2 hold for both men and women. The only exception is that men were somewhat more likely than women to receive help getting work tools or clothing. This may mean that men were more likely than women to be pursuing employment leads that required them to provide their own tools or be less likely than women to have clothes appropriate for a job interview.

There were no differences in the types of services provided to Family Ties clients when controlling for the number of times the individual had been incarcerated, the length of the incarceration, or whether the incarceration was due to a felony or misdemeanor conviction.

Child Support Services Received

Table 6.3. Child Support Services Provided to Family Ties Clients

Received child support services other than an orientation or explanation of their cases:	
Genetic testing	5%
Paternity establishment	5%
Order establishment	9%
Order suspension	1%
Order modification downward	17%
Order modification upward	1%
Help establishing custody	1%
Wage withholding	4%
Enforcement delay	16%
Driver's license suspension	1%
Driver's license reinstatement	20%
Other license suspension	0%
Other license reinstatement	0%
Help correcting child support errors	13%
Other child support services	12%
Number	(442)

As noted in Table 5.1, all Family Ties clients received child support services. However, this may have consisted solely of an explanation of their obligation, the way the system works and their options. Table 6.3 provides more detailed information regarding the nature of the child support assistance provided beyond an explanation of the system or the client's obligation. The most common services provided were help getting a driver's license reinstated, help with a child support modification (downward), and help delaying enforcement activity while the client was engaged in job search.

This chapter explores the child support outcomes and recidivism patterns experienced by Family Ties participants. Improving child support payment patterns was the primary focus of Family Ties. The program sought to help clients understand the child support program better, both in general and with respect to their individual cases. In addition, Family Ties was designed to assist participants with child support problems and promote payments. Recidivism rates for Family Ties participants and the general DOC population are reported too.

Child Support Payments

Table 7.1 presents the overall child support picture for all individuals who enrolled in Family Ties, regardless of whether they enrolled pre- or post-release from prison. Of the 589 individuals entered into the Family Ties database, a total of 507 (86%) were found in the automated child support data system. The remaining 14 percent included some cases that only had interstate obligations that were not addressed in the project, as well as some cases that could not be located with the information available.

Most (73%) of the Family Ties enrollees that were in the child support system had monthly support obligations that were due at program intake. An even greater percentage (83%) owed child support arrears when they enrolled in Family Ties. Each participant had an average of 1.7 active child support orders (covering current and/or arrears payments) at enrollment.

Adding across the current support obligations that project participants had when they enrolled in Family Ties, shows that they owed an average of \$404 per month in current support. The range was from \$40 to \$2,457 per month. Fewer than 20 percent owed \$200 or less toward current monthly support, while 37 percent owed \$400 or more.

When arrears balances are reduced to monthly obligations, they averaged \$159 per month, with a median of \$108. The range ran from \$1 to \$830 per month. Nearly half (48%) of those with monthly arrears payments owed \$100 or less.

When current monthly support is added to monthly arrears payments, the total monthly obligation that project participants faced averaged \$474, with a median of \$385. The range ran from \$1 to \$3,160. A third owed more than \$500 per month, and 13 percent owed \$200 or less.

Table 7.1. Number of Child Support Cases and Monthly Obligations for Family Ties Enrollees at Program Intake

Number of active child support cases at intake		
	Average	1.7
	Median	1.0
	Range	1–7
	Number	(490)
Percentage of cases with a current support obligation at program intake		73%
If current support is due, amount due across all child support cases at Program entry		
	Average	\$404
	Median	\$331
	\$100 or less	1%
	\$101 - \$200	18%
	\$201 - \$300	28%
	\$301 – 400	17%
	\$401 - \$500	14%
	\$501 or more	23%
	Range	\$40 - \$2,457
	Number	(370)
Amount due toward arrears across all child support cases at Program entry (if arrears are due)		
	Average	\$159
	Median	\$108
	\$100 or less	48%
	\$101 - \$200	21%
	\$201 - \$300	17%
	\$301 – 400	8%
	\$401 - \$500	4%
	\$501 or more	3%
	Range	\$1 - \$830
	Number	(422)
Total obligation across all child support cases (current + arrears, if either/both were ordered)		
	Average	\$474
	Median	\$385
	\$100 or less	5%
	\$101 - \$200	8%
	\$201 - \$300	26%
	\$301 - \$400	14%
	\$401 - \$500	14%
	\$501 or more	33%
	Range	\$1 - \$3,160
	Number	(457)

The analysis of child support payment performance is limited to those individuals who were out of prison when they enrolled in Family Ties. This increases the likelihood that they had child support due in the months leading up to their enrollment in Family Ties, which, in turn, allows for a comparison of months with payments prior to and following enrollment. Similarly, it allows for a comparison of the amount paid prior to and following enrollment. In addition, for simplicity, the analysis is limited to payment patterns for the first child support case if the enrollee had more than one order. In general, child support payments that are received are divided across a noncustodial parent’s child support cases so payment patterns for a single case are reflective of behaviors across multiple cases.

Table 7.2 compares child support payments pre- and post-enrollment in Family Ties. The child support measure used is the number of payments made in the six months prior to and following enrollment (the analysis is restricted to those cases with support due for at least six months pre- and post-enrollment). In the six months before enrollment, 38 percent of the enrollees made no child support payment. In the six months post-enrollment, 20 percent made no payments. Comparing the average number of months that Family Ties participants made payments prior to and following enrollment shows a significant increase: from 4.2 payments to 7.8 payments. The improvements are undoubtedly due, at least in part, to the fact that many Family Ties clients may have been incarcerated and unable to pay in the six months pre-enrollment.

The Table goes on to show payments made in the 12 months and 24 months following enrollment. The average number of months with payments is nine at both time points, which is an increase over the six month plus post-enrollment average of 7.8 months of payment. The fact that the number of months without any payment does not steadily increase from 6 months to 12 months to 24 months is also encouraging. It remains approximately 20 percent at all three time points.

Table 7.2. Payments in the Months Prior to and Following Family Ties Enrollment
(Only Those Enrolled Post-Release and Only the First Child Support Case)

Months with payment	6 months pre-enrollment	6+ months post-enrollment (those with 6+ months due post-enrollment)	12 months post-enrollment (those with 12+ months due post-enrollment)	24 months post-enrollment (those with 24+ months due post-enrollment)
Paid 0 months	38%	20%	17%	20%
Paid 1 month	9%	4%	2%	1%
Paid 2 months	8%	7%	6%	6%
Paid 3 months	7%	10%	10%	10%
Paid 4 months	7%	6%	5%	8%
Paid 5 months	3%	6%	2%	3%
Paid 6 months	28%	47%	58%	52%
Number	(212)	(192)	(132)	(79)

Table 7.2. Payments in the Months Prior to and Following Family Ties Enrollment
(Only Those Enrolled Post-Release and Only the First Child Support Case)

Months with payment	6 months pre-enrollment	6+ months post-enrollment (those with 6+ months due post-enrollment)	12 months post-enrollment (those with 12+ months due post-enrollment)	24 months post-enrollment (those with 24+ months due post-enrollment)
Average months paid	4.2	7.8	9.0	9.3
Median	2.0	5.0	7.0	6.0

A more stringent measure of child support performance is to calculate the total amount of current child support that is supposed to be paid each month and compare it to the amount actually paid. Table 7.3 shows the percentage of the amount due that was paid at 6, 12, and 24 months prior to and following enrollment.

Table 7.3. Percentage of Child Support Obligation that Was Paid in the 24 Months, 12 Months, and 6 Months Prior to and Following Family Ties Enrollment
(excludes those served pre-release)

Number of months with a payment	Pre-enrollment	Post-enrollment	Number
Average percent of obligation paid in the 24 months	11%	28%★	212 pre-79 post-
Average percent of obligation paid in the 12 months	11%	28%★	212 pre-132 post-
Average percent of obligation paid in the 6 months	13%	26%★	212 pre-192 post-

★T-test is significant at .05 or less.

As shown, there was a statistically significant increase in the percentage of the obligation that was met in the time periods following enrollment in Family Ties. The absolute percentage of the obligation that was met was about 10 percent prior to enrollment, but close to 30 percent post-enrollment.

Table 7.4. Arrears Balances At Enrollment to Family Ties and At Child Support Extract †★
(Excludes those served pre-release)

Total balance	At enrollment	At child support extract
Average	\$24,462	\$30,197
Median	\$30,197	\$20,335

† The extract was done an average of 20 months after enrollment.

★ The sample size is 507.

Table 7.4 considers the total arrears balance held by participants at the time of their enrollment in Family Ties relative to the balance at the time the child support extract was generated (approximately 20 months post enrollment). Unlike the previous analysis, this analysis includes all open

child support cases, not merely the first case. On average, arrears balances increased approximately \$6,000 in the 20 months following program enrollment, going from \$24,462 to \$30,197.

Tables 7.5 and 7.6 compare child support payments made following enrollment for those receiving and not receiving specific types of services. Table 9.5 demonstrates that those who received child support services paid more child support than those who did not receive child support services. The types of child support services considered in the analysis involve more substantial forms of help and not the general, information about the child support system. This would include help with order establishment, order modification, reinstatement of driver’s licenses that were suspended for nonpayment of support, help correcting child support errors, and delaying enforcement actions.

Table 7.5. Payments Made in the Months Prior to and Following Family Ties Enrollment by Services Received
(Includes Only Those Enrolled Post-Release and Only the First Child Support Case)

Number of months with a payment	6 months Pre-Enrollment	6 months Post-enrollment (only those with 6+ months due post-enrollment)	6 months Post-enrollment For those receiving child support services other than orientation	6 months Post-enrollment For those NOT receiving these child support services
Paid 0 months	38%	20%	15%	29%
Paid 1 month	9%	4%	6%	0%
Paid 2 months	8%	7%	6%	9%
Paid 3 months	7%	10%	8%	13%
Paid 4 months	7%	6%	6%	7%
Paid 5 months	3%	6%	5%	8%
Paid 6 months	28%	37%	55%	33%
Number	(212)	(192)	(117)	(75)
Average months paid	4.2	7.8	4.2	3.2
Median	2.0	5	6.0	3.0

Table 7.6 displays differences in child support payment based on the receipt of employment services by Project Return staff. It fails to show any payment benefit due to employment services. This is true when the receipt of employment services is dichotomized into those receiving services and those not receiving services. It is also true when the number of services is considered. Thus, general provision of employment help is not sufficient to move the needle on child support payment patterns. As previously noted, staff at Project Return may not have recorded all employment service activity in their database.

Table 7.6. Payments in the Months Prior to and Following Family Ties Enrollment, by Services Received
(Includes Only Those Enrolled Post-Release and Only the First Child Support Case)

Months with a payment	6 months pre-enrollment	6 months post-enrollment (those with 6+ months due post-enrollment)	6 months post-enrollment for those receiving employment services (e.g., job leads, job club, job readiness, job retention, résumé preparation)	6 months post-enrollment for those who did not receive these employment services
Paid 0 months	38%	20%	25%	18%
Paid 1 month	9%	4%	8%	2%
Paid 2 months	8%	7%	6%	8%
Paid 3 months	7%	10%	6%	12%
Paid 4 months	7%	6%	5%	7%
Paid 5 months	3%	6%	5%	7%
Paid 6 months	28%	37%	46%	46%
Number	(212)	(192)	(65)	(127)

Finally, Table 7.7 shows the total amount of child support paid in the 6 months prior to program enrollment and in the 6, 12, and 24 months post-enrollment. The amount was just over \$40,000 in the six months prior to enrollment and over \$99,000 in the six months post-enrollment. In the 12 and 24 months post-enrollment, the amount paid increased to just over \$187,000 and just over \$303,000, respectively. When the amount of child support paid (current support plus arrears) is calculated for all 589 Family Ties enrollees and their 785 child support cases following their enrollment, it can be said that Family Ties generated nearly \$1 million (\$802,184) in child support collections.

Table 7.7. Amount Paid in the Months Prior to and Following Family Ties Enrollment,
(Includes Only Those Enrolled Post-Release and Only the First Child Support Case)

	6 months pre-enrollment	6 months post-enrollment (those with 6+ months due post-enrollment)	12 months post-enrollment	24 months post-enrollment
Total paid	\$43,675 (208)	\$99,270 (322)	\$187,556 (322)	\$303,823 (322)

Recidivism

Data matches comparing the cases enrolled in Family Ties with records maintained by the Tennessee Department of Correction were conducted in March 2013. This was an average of 615 days (or nearly two years) following enrollment in the program. The range was 64 days to 1,064 days.

The Tennessee Department of Correction, Division of Policy, Planning and Research⁴⁷ calculates recidivism rates of 26 percent at one year post-release, 39 percent at two years post-release, and 46 percent for three years post-release. Family Ties cases were matched against DOC records an average of

two years following program enrollment. Table 9.8 shows the recidivism rates for Family Ties participants at 12, 24, and 36 months following their release from prison. They are 9 percent, 15 percent, and 16 percent, respectively.

Table 7.8. Recidivism Over Time for Family Ties Participants and Tennessee Inmates in General

Recidivism within...	Data reported by The Tennessee Department of Correction, Division of Policy, Planning and Research	Family Ties participants
12 months of release	26%	9%
24 months of release	39%	15%
36 months of release	46%	16%
Number	(13,415)	(597)

Of course, Family Ties participants are not a cross-section of all inmates released or paroled from Tennessee correctional facilities. They voluntarily participate in programs that are designed to help them reintegrate into the community, and are presumably more motivated than non-participants to stay out of prison. Within this motivated group, there is evidence that those who enter the program with a job are more likely to stay out of prison. The same is true for those who received certain types of help from Family Ties including work clothes, tools, or other tangible items associated with employment.

Table 7.9. Recidivism by Employment Status at Enrollment to Family Ties

Return to prison★	Employment status at enrollment to Family Ties (excludes those employed in prison)	
	Unemployed	Employed
No	83%	94%
Yes	17%	6%
Number	(473)	(76)

★Chi square significant at .00.

On the other hand, the total number of services provided by Family Ties was not related to recidivism, nor was general assistance with job leads, and job searches.

Table 7.10. Recidivism, by Services Provided

Return to prison	Number of services provided by Family Ties			
	No services	1, 2 services	3,4 services	5 or more services
No	82%	82%	85%	93%
Yes	18%	18%	15%	7%
Number	(40)	(392)	(65)	(100)

Return to prison	Family Ties provided job leads, job search, etc.	
	No	Yes
No	84%	87%
Yes	16%	13%
Number	(456)	(141)

Table 7.10. Recidivism, by Services Provided

Family Ties provided help with résumés, tools, work clothes, transportation		
Return to prison ★	No	Yes
No	82%	91%
Yes	18%	9%
Number	(445)	(149)

★ Chi square significant at .01

Chapter 8. Participant Reactions
Chapter 8. Participant Reactions
Chapter 8. Participant Reactions
**Chapter 8
Participant Reactions**
Chapter 8. Participant Reactions
Chapter 8. Participant Reactions
Chapter 8. Participant Reactions

This chapter reports on the results of interviews with individuals who participated in the Family Ties Program. As noted in Chapter 3, the telephone survey was conducted approximately six months following enrollment. The survey included questions on project services used and ratings of their helpfulness, problems with paying child support, employment status, income and job search activities, contact with children, and the overall helpfulness of the

Family Ties program.

The chapter begins with a brief analysis of what is known about the 104 project enrollees who were interviewed and those who were not, typically because they lacked a working telephone number and/or could not be reached. As shown in Table 7.1, there are several factors that distinguished the two groups. Specifically, relative to those who were not interviewed, those who were interviewed were more likely to be:

- Male;
- African American;
- Over 40 years of age;
- Working outside of prison at the time of their entry to the Program; and
- Have multiple active child support cases at the time of the interview.

Other factors, such as education level, number of times incarcerated, and amount of time since the release from prison, were not related to participating in the follow-up interview.

Over half (57%) of those who were interviewed described themselves as unemployed or working pick-up jobs at the time of the interview. Less than a quarter (22%) were employed full time and 17 percent were employed part time.

Since interview refusal rates were low, the patterns really indicate that those who could be reached for an interview were more likely to be older, employed, and have multiple child support orders. This may represent a less geographically mobile client population that would be more likely to be reached in the interview effort. Whether being disproportionately male and African American also indicates greater geographic stability in the community is uncertain.

Table 8.1. Comparison of Family Ties Clients Who Were Interviewed and Those Who Were Not				
	★ Gender of Family Ties Participant			
	Male	Female		
Participated in interview	20%	6%		
	(478)	(120)		
	★ Race/Ethnicity of Family			
	African American	White		
Participated in interview	23%	9%		
	(371)	(208)		
	★ Age at Program Enrollment			
	Under 30	30 to 40	Over 40	
Participated in interview	11%	16%	24%	
	(113)	(297)	(186)	
	Education Level			
	Less than High School	High School or GED	At least some College	
Participated in interview	34%	30%	65%	
	(55)	(119)	(66)	
	Number of Times Incarcerated			
	Once	2-3	4-5	6+
Participated in interview	18%	32%	34%	41%
	(38)	(72)	(47)	(68)
	Number of Months Since Release From Prison (For those released at intake)			
	1-3	4-6	7-12	13+
Participated in interview	28%	45%	36%	35%
	(130)	(20)	(33)	(43)
	★ Employment at Intake			
	Not working	Working in Prison	Working Outside of Prison	
Participated in interview	15%	21%	33%	
	(474)	(19)	(78)	
	★ Number of Active Child Support Cases at Interview			
	0-1	2-3	4+	
Participated in interview	15%	23%	35%	
	(305)	(173)	(29)	

★ Difference is significant at .05 or less.

Table 8.2. How Client Learned about Family Ties

May be multiple responses	
Presentation at a jail or prison	38%
Classes at Project Return	61%
Counselor at Project Return	57%
Friend	25%
Somewhere else	28%
Number	(104)

Family Ties was designed to serve individuals who were recently released from prison. Tables 8.2 and 8.3 suggest the program achieved this objective. As shown in Table 8.2, just over a third of the participants said they heard about Family Ties through a presentation at a jail or prison before they were released.

Table 8.3. Length of Time Following Release When Client Learned about Family Ties (Excludes Those Who Learned About the Program While Incarcerated)

About 1-2 months	29%
About 3-6 months	29%
About 7 to 12 months	23%
More than 12 months	19%
Number	(56)

Table 8.3 shows that even among those who learned of the program post-release, most had been in the community for no more than six months (58%), and only 19 percent had been out for 12 months or more at program entry.

Services Needed and Received

Virtually all of the individuals who participated in Family Ties said that one of their goals was to learn more about the child support program in general (95%). Nearly 90 percent rated Families Ties as having done an “excellent” or “good” job of explaining the child support system.

Table 8.4. Client Interest in and Ratings of General Explanation of Child Support

Client wanted a general explanation of child support when he or she came to Family Ties	
Yes, wanted general explanation	95%
No, did not want general explanation	5%
Number	(74)
Rating given to Family Ties on the general explanation of child support	
Excellent	56%
Good	30%
Fair	14%
Number	(70)

Table 8.5. Client Interest in and Ratings of Explanation of Client’s Child Support Situation

Client wanted an explanation of his or her child support when he or she came to Family Ties	
Yes, wanted an explanation	96%
No, did not want an explanation	4%
Number	(103)
Did Family Ties answer all of client’s questions about his/her child support situation?	
Yes	93%
No	7%
Number	(198)
Rating given to Family Ties on the explanation of client’s child support situation	
Excellent	68%
Good	22%
Fair	9%
Poor	1%
Number	(91)

Nearly all of the Family Ties participants also wanted an explanation of their own individual child support situation, such as the amount they were supposed to be paying, the amount of their arrears, actions that might be taken for nonpayment, and options they might pursue with the child support agency to improve their situation.

As shown in Table 8.5, most (93%) clients said Family Ties was able to answer their questions about their child support situation, and 90 percent said the program did an “excellent” or “good” job with this.

Table 8.5, shows a number of other issues with which the client might have wanted help from Family Ties. Of the items listed,

nearly 70 percent of the participants said they wanted help:

- Getting a lower child support order (71%);
- Finding a job (67%);
- Talking to someone who might help them get their life back in order (65%); and
- Getting a driver’s license reinstated after it was suspended for nonpayment of child support (63%).

Only about a third of the participants mentioned that they wanted Family Ties to help them gain better access to their children (39%) or to help them apply for benefits (30%).

In many instances, a higher percentage of clients reported receiving help than wanting it. For example, while only 30 percent said they wanted Family Ties staff to help them apply for food stamps or other benefits, over 70 percent said they received this type of help. Similarly, while 65 percent said that talking to someone about getting their life back on track was a goal, nearly 90 percent said they did talk to someone about this. And while only 39 percent wanted Family Ties to help them get to see their children more often, half of those interviewed said Family Ties helped with this. It is not clear whether respondents were confused about the help they received and/or whether Family Ties staff dealt with

problematic issues even when they were not raised by the client. Of course, Family Ties staff was limited in what they could accomplish in many areas. While over 70 percent of the clients wanted help getting a lower child support order, Family Ties could help with this less than half of the time.

In general, when Family Ties provided assistance, it was rated as “excellent” or “good” by the participants. Less than 10 percent of the clients rated the assistance they received with any issue as only “fair” or “poor.”

Table 8.6. Clients’ Needs at Intake, Reports of Help Received, and Ratings of Help Given by Family Ties Program

	Percentage who wanted this	Percentage reporting Family Ties helped with this	Rating given to Family Ties on this issue	
Getting a lower child support order	71% (102)	40% (72)	Excellent Good Fair Poor	76% 17% 3% 3% (29)
Getting a license reinstated	63% (102)	57% (63)	Excellent Good Fair Poor	86% 14% 0% 0% (36)
Someone to talk to about getting your life in order	65% (68)	88% (36)	Excellent Good Fair Poor	60% 32% 8% 0% (60)
Help applying for benefits or food stamps	30% (104)	71% (31)	Excellent Good Fair Poor	82% 14% 0% 5% (22)
Help getting to see your children	39% (40)	50% (40)	Excellent Good Fair Poor	60% 35% 5% 0% (20)
Help getting a job	67% (104)	69% (70)	Excellent Good Fair Poor	69% 27% 4% 0% (70)

There were some types of assistance that Family Ties and Project Return could not provide. Clients with these types of problems were given referrals to appropriate service providers in the community and the interviewer asked the client about the outcome of the referral. As shown in Table 8.7, between 50 and 90 percent of those who were given referrals reported following up and contacting the appropriate agency. The figure was highest for child support referrals. Only about 20 to 60 percent of the participants reported being referred to the child support agency for assistance, but if a referral was made, nearly all clients reported following up. Thus, 92 percent reporting contacting child support to deal with or postpone enforcement actions, 86 percent said they contacted child support about receiving a lower order, 84 percent said they contacted child support about establishing an order, and 76 percent said they contacted the agency to establish paternity.

About 30 to 40 percent of those interviewed said they were given referrals to agencies that might help with housing, food, mental health, and drug or alcohol problems. Approximately 50 to 70 percent of those who reported receiving such a referral also reported following up on it. No matter what type of referral was given, about 80 to 90 percent of those who followed up said the help they received was “excellent” or “good.”

Table 8.7. Clients’ Needs at Intake, Referrals to Community Agencies, Reports of Follow Up, and Ratings

	Percentage who received a referral on this	Percentage reporting following up on the referrals	Rating given to referral source	
Help with housing	30% (103)	50% (28)	Excellent Good Fair Poor	57% 29% 14% 0% (14)
Help with drugs/alcohol	32% (104)	67% (33)	Excellent Good Fair Poor	68% 27% 5% 0% (22)
Help with mental health	28% (103)	68% (28)	Excellent Good Fair Poor	63% 32% 5% 0% (19)
Help with food insecurity	43% (104)	53% (45)	Excellent Good Fair Poor	67% 29% 4% 0% (24)

Table 8.7. Clients' Needs at Intake, Referrals to Community Agencies, Reports of Follow Up, and Ratings

	Percentage who received a referral on this	Percentage reporting following up on the referrals	Rating given to referral source	
Help applying for SSI or benefits	30% (104)	71% (31)	Excellent Good Fair Poor	64% 27% 9% 0% (24)
Help establishing paternity	20% (104)	76% (21)	Excellent Good Fair Poor	50% 37% 13% 0% (16)
Setting up child support	43% (104)	84% (45)	Excellent Good Fair Poor	66% 21% 11% 3% (38)
Lowering your child support order	55% (104)	86% (49)	Excellent Good Fair Poor	58% 22% 20% 0% (41)
Referral to child support to help avoid jail time or license revocation	57% (104)	92% (59)	Excellent Good Fair Poor	69% 22% 7% 2% (54)

Table 8.8. Client Reports on Problems with Paying Child Support

Not regularly employed	94%
Need money for housing, getting on my feet	90%
Order is too high	80%
Need money to pay restitution or parole	69%
Injured/disabled/not able to work	68%
Have a new family and new children to support	64%
Not being able to see children	41%
Custodial parent doesn't need the money	31%
Number	(104)

Clients who participated in the interview were asked about barriers they experienced in trying to comply with their child support orders. The most common problems had to do with a lack of employment, or needing money to get back on their feet (90 to 94%). Others noted that the order was too high and/or unaffordable given

the rival demands of needing to pay restitution or for parole (80% and 69%). Some clients mentioned injuries or disabilities that prevented them from working (68%). Over 60 percent reported having a new

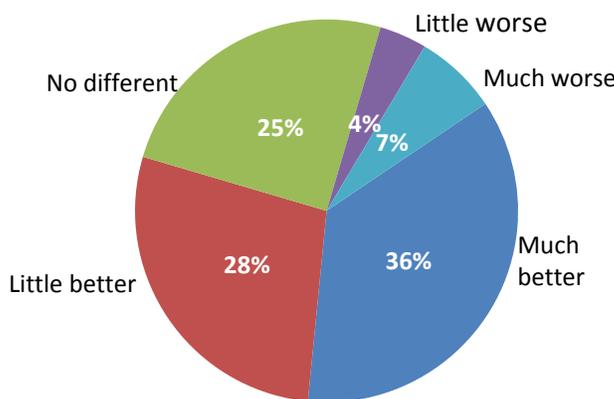
family to support, while 41 percent said nonpayment was due to having restricted access to their children. About a third of those interviewed said they simply did not believe the custodial parent needed the money to raise the children.

Table 8.9.
Client Assessment of Things that Might Help Parents Pay Support

Percentage responding "yes" to...	
Lower orders	82%
Child support forgiving some debt	79%
Stop license suspensions or jail sentences	79%
Stop payments while client is in Family Ties	47%
Number	(104)

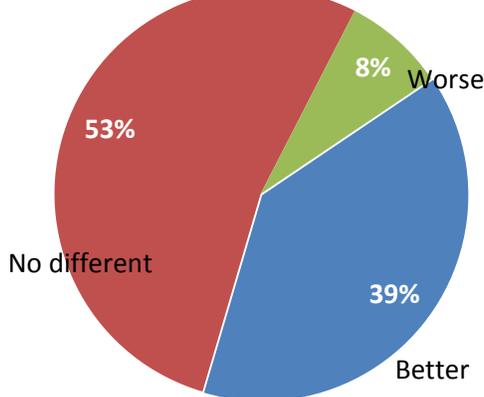
When asked what actions might help noncustodial parents meet their child support obligations, about 80 percent suggested lower orders, forgiving debt, or removing license suspension and jail time as enforcement actions. Less than half recommended a temporarily stop on payments during client participation in Family Ties.

Figure 8.1. After Using Family Ties, How Would You Rate Your Child Support Situation?



With respect to child support, about a third of the Family Ties participants said the program made their child support situation "much better" while another 28 percent said it made the situation a "little better." A quarter of those responding said the program had not changed their child support situation and 11 percent said things were worse.

Figure 8.2. Compared to Before Using Family Ties, Would You Say Your View of the Child Support Agency is Better, Worse or the Same?



When asked if participating in Family Ties had changed their overall view of the child support agency, about a third

said it improved their view and 8 percent said it resulted in a lower assessment, while the majority (53%) said their opinion of the agency did not change.

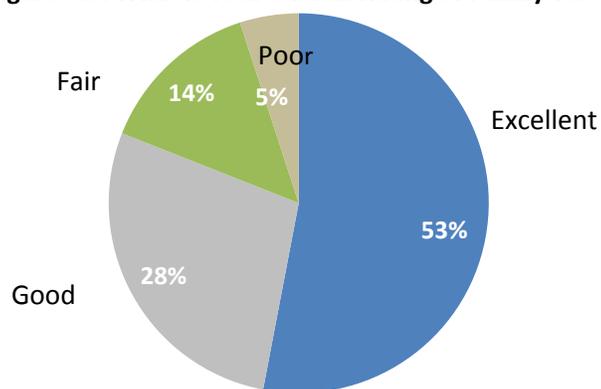
Table 8.10.
Client Ratings of Staff at Family Ties, Project Return,
and Child Support Agency

How supportive was Family Ties?	
Very supportive	66%
Somewhat supportive	27%
Not very supportive	3%
Not enough interaction with Family Ties	4%
Number	(104)
How supportive was your last child support worker?	
Very supportive	52%
Somewhat supportive	23%
Not very supportive	18%
No interaction	7%
Number	(102)
How supportive was the Project Return staff who worked with you on employment?	
Very supportive	59%
Somewhat supportive	26%
Not very supportive	9%
No interaction	7%
Number	(104)

Table 8.10 shows how those who were interviewed rated workers in Family Ties, the child support agency, and Project Return.

In each instance, more than half of those interviewed said the worker was “very” supportive, and another quarter said “somewhat” supportive. Taken together, 93 percent rated the Family Ties worker as supportive, 85 percent rated the Project Return worker as supportive, and 75 percent rated the child support worker as supportive.

Figure 8.3. What Is Your Overall Rating of Family Ties?



Finally, Figure 8.3 shows that over half (53%) of those who were interviewed rated Family Ties as an “excellent” program, while another 28 percent said the program did a “good” job. Most of the remaining respondents (14%) gave the program an overall rating of “fair.”

Chapter 9. Staff Reactions
Chapter 9. Staff Reactions
Chapter 9. Staff Reactions
**Chapter 9
Staff Reactions**
Chapter 9. Staff Reactions
Chapter 9. Staff Reactions

Project staff were interviewed and asked to describe their reactions to the Family Ties Program. All staff involved viewed the program positively and agreed that Family Ties was providing a much-needed service for a generally underserved segment of the child support caseload.

Staff were asked about project referrals and enrollment, specifically about the difference between those enrolled at pre-release meetings versus post-release at Project Return. Initially, the project called for a majority of referrals and project enrollments to come from the weekly orientation meetings at Project Return. While this was the case in the first year of enrollment, project staff saw value in offering orientation sessions and enrollment opportunities at pre-release meetings at the seven facilities within Davidson County. As a result, the Child Support Liaison began scheduling Family Ties orientation sessions in facilities. They educated inmates awaiting release about child support in general. They also instructed noncustodial parents with child support obligations to contact Project Return and Family Ties upon their release from prison.

"I went to a presentation to an inmate peer group at one of the prisons. I had 85 guys turn up. I was expecting 15 or so. I thought I would be talking to a small group around a table in a conference room and I ended up speaking to a gymnasium full of NCPs using a podium and a microphone."

Pre-release meetings at the facilities became an important and highly regarded outreach effort by Project Return staff, the Department of Correction, and the noncustodial inmates who participated in them. The Child Support Liaison said that at one of the facilities he regularly visited, word spread quickly when he was spotted approaching and inmates lined up with all their paperwork prior to his arrival. "Word of mouth spread in the prison and each time I came there were more and more guys waiting to see me. It was a lot deeper. They knew someone was there to help and they would tell each other, he's here to help—get your paperwork together."

According to the Child Support Liaison, a major benefit of the program was to dispel myths about child support that are perpetuated in the incarcerated community.

"I really like the fact of being able to go out into the facilities and educate the people on child support, because a lot of them really don't know the facts and there are SO MANY myths (about) child support. The biggest one is that President Obama passed the 'Deadbeat Dad law.' NCPs believe that there is a law that states if they lock you up 3

times for child support nonpayment you're labeled a deadbeat and then they won't lock you up any more. I hear it at the jail all the time. They say they heard Obama passed that law on the news and then they keep repeating it. I dispel this myth."

Another common myth that the Child Support Liaison heard relates to the old Tennessee child support guidelines that used to be calculated at 21 percent of noncustodial parent income. Tennessee adopted the Income Shares Model in 2005, which uses both parents' income to calculate child support order levels. According to the liaison, "A lot of people, particularly those who have been incarcerated for

many years, still think it is based on the 21 percent rule, so I like being able to share the accurate information and clear up those myths."

One Family Ties enrollee said he heard the Family Ties presentation at the facility during a pre-release meeting. On the date of his release, he came to Family Ties with his mother to get assistance with his child support. The NCP had a job lined up and needed his driver's license. The Child Support Liaison asked if he could make a lump sum payment in order to get his license reinstated. He was able to make a payment and his license was reinstated. The NCP obtained a better paying job shortly after his release, a wage assignment was issued and the NCP is now making regular payments on his child support case.

Project staff feel that offenders who enroll while awaiting release and subsequently appear at Project Return for services are particularly motivated and effective in the program. In their experience, these individuals tend to absorb what they hear about child support at the pre-release session, contact the Child Support Liaison with follow-up questions and expressions of interest, and appear at Project Return upon their release with interest in both employment and child support relief. As an additional benefit, they come to Project Return with their mothers or new girlfriends, and with that support system in their life, they start making child support payments—often for their first time in their life.

Part of the education process that the Child Support Liaison provided to clients was to inform them about the child support process. Child support education is sorely needed. As the liaison explained, "Of course, for those in prison, I don't expect them to

start making payments, but I expect them to be knowledgeable about what's going on with their case and understand child support and not be scared of child support. I let them know this (their child support issues) is not going anywhere, that you might as well deal with it now."

Another project staff member remarked, “Overall I think it is an effective program that could easily prove itself on a larger scale. I feel it proved itself. It was very well received by the NCPs that went through it and it showed the need for the information and assistance to be given to that demographic. The inmates were so overjoyed to have the help; I received many letters of thanks from the inmates. I had a greater impact on the inmates than I ever thought I would, you could see it in their reactions. A lot of them didn’t have the time, patience and skills to ask questions and get answers to their child support questions. A lot of them didn’t know the right questions to ask, until they had someone in front of them to answer their questions.”

The dedicated, part-time child support worker at PSI who worked on cases for Family Ties enrollees felt that the program was very successful and generated a lot of child support revenue that would not have been otherwise realized. She felt that the key to success with ex-offenders was developing relationships with them and building trust. In her view, communicating with clients and helping them out served to build trust and convince them to stay in touch. “I felt I made more of a difference in working this caseload because just being able to answer their smallest questions on the spot was a relief to the NCP, and was enlightening to them.” The child support worker noted that Family Ties participants are still in touch with her and will call to inform her if they are going to miss or be late with a payment. “Those kinds of relationships would not have happened if I hadn’t been there.” She has continued to work closely with Tennessee

Jim enrolled in Family Ties with well over \$100,000 in child support debt, and it was an arrears-only situation. It had been a long time – since 1997 – since he had made a payment on his child support case. When he initially came in, he was very upset and verbally lashed out at the Child Support Liaison. She gave him a chance to vent and get his frustrations out and then explained to him that it was now her turn to talk and that he needed to listen. “After I walked him through his child support case, explained his situation to him and let him know the services we could provide to him, he calmed down and apologized. After that meeting, he started working and making payments towards his child support. He switched jobs a few times, and when he got to a point where he wanted to quit he would come in and tell me about it and he stuck with the job, then he came back in a few weeks later and told me he found another job. His arrears balance is now under \$100,000 down to \$96,000. He now has his own apartment and car. When he first came in to Family Ties, he had no transportation and was living in a homeless mission.”

Department of Correction to work on getting child support information into the prison system at pre-release meetings. Although she worked on a part-time basis with Family Ties clients, she felt that she could have devoted full-time effort to meeting their needs and working their cases.

The biggest impact the child support worker felt she made was with modifying child support orders. “We did a lot of modifications and of course driver’s license reinstatement. Just getting the child support suspension lifted gave them a reason to get the other stuff on their license cleared up. It helped us (the child support agency) too because getting their child support order modified to a reasonable amount helped them come closer to meeting their full obligation.” As a result of the Family Ties program, the child support worker was able to initiate and expedite the modification process by developing relationships with the legal team, which allowed her to walk her paperwork through to the child support attorneys, have them sign off, and then walk it to administration to get a court date set. This usually cut the time required for child support order modification from approximately six months to three months or less.

Other major roles that the dedicated child support worker played with Family Ties cases was to perform arrears calculations and terminate cases in appropriate circumstances. “A lot of times I got their arrears corrected. There were some very old cases that were miscalculated for whatever reason and it was as simple as doing an arrears calculation and it would resolve a huge amount (of debt). Sometimes that was the case and we got it corrected and sometimes it didn’t change, but at least they knew it was correct and had peace of mind. It was just a matter of sitting down and talking with them and explaining it to them, and why they owed that amount.”

Another Family Ties enrollee came in with a disability. Due to his incapacitation and inability to work, the Child Support Liaison was able to get his case suspended. The NCP has since pursued rehabilitation and gained employment. The NCP called in and informed Family Ties liaison of his employer and Family Ties was able to get a wage assignment issued to his job. This allowed the client to make his first-ever payment on his child support case. The current support amount is set at \$648.00 per month and his arrears amount is set at \$100, which is high for his income. As a result of his new employment and income level, the Child Support Liaison is working closely with the NCP to assist him with getting his support modified.

The Executive Director of Project Return regards the Family Ties Program as “hugely successful and hugely impactful.” “In a State that has one of the highest rates of children living in poverty, a program like this that has, according to child support records, collected nearly \$1 million in child support payments in the past two years, makes a great difference in a child’s daily life. It could be the difference of them eating that day, having shelter and staying in school. We see it as a very important part of what we do at Project Return.” As with many grant-funded programs, sustainability once grant funding ends continues to be the main concern.

Project Return staff see child support as a key component to the services offered at the non-profit reentry organization. At least half of the population served at Project Return have child support issues, and program staff receive daily calls about child support issues. Project staff worry about ending the child support service. In their view, terminating child support help “is just another piece of evidence that shows them the system doesn’t work or doesn’t help them. We are extending a level of care and support to these NCPs that is not traditionally offered by child support services.”

Project Return administrators view child support assistance as part and parcel of an effective employment program. As the Executive Director of Project Return explained, “Getting a job and being employed is the key predictor for non-recidivism and successful reentry. We wrap that around with a lot of essential services like food and shelter. The same is true if you walk out of prison and are confronted with a wall of child support debt. It’s hard to make the right decisions to confront that debt. We paired coaching

The Child Support Liaison worked with one unemployed NCP who enrolled in Family Ties to make child support payments while simultaneously pursuing a judicial transfer so that his child support case could be processed in Davidson County (Nashville). The mother on the case lived in another state, and neither party lived in the enforcing county. As a result of the judicial transfer, all legal actions on the case were scheduled to happen in Davidson County. Once the judicial transfer was completed, Family Ties was able to assist the client in applying for and obtaining a child support modification. The case was closely monitored to determine the status of any scheduled court date, and Family Ties was instrumental in notifying the client of his court date and time and ensuring that he attended the hearing. Following the court date, the NCP called the Child Support Liaison at Family Ties to let her know that the modification was successful and that his support obligation had decreased by approximately \$500 per month.

with systems that nudge people in the right direction. It's a way to say you can move forward and we can help so you can make payments on your obligation and not get caught in a downward spiral that puts you back where you came from. We were most effective when we integrated the child support piece into the services that most people need."

Finally, project staff notes the importance of offering one-on-one service to noncustodial parents and treating them with respect upon their release. "We structure our services so folks have to engage and come to the table before we offer them services. We treat them as whole human beings who deserve these services, who are spending their time with us and trying to get help."

Chapter 10. Summary and Conclusions
Chapter 10. Summary and Conclusions

Chapter 10 Summary and Conclusions

In October 2009, the Tennessee Department of Human Services, Child Support Division (CSD) was one of seven states to receive a grant from the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) to conduct a project in Davidson County (Nashville) in support of the Prisoner Reentry Initiative (PRI). The PRI is a collaborative effort by federal agencies to reduce recidivism by helping returning offenders find work and access

other critical services in their communities. Tennessee CSD contracted with Project Return, Inc. a Nashville-based nonprofit corporation that specializes in prisoner reentry to implement PRI. Project Return, contracted with the Center for Policy Research (CPR) to assist with program implementation and conduct a comprehensive evaluation. In Tennessee, the federally funded PRI project was named Family Ties. CPR's evaluation involved data collected from the following sources:

- A cross-site Access database developed by the Urban Institute for all seven PRI sites (and enhanced in Tennessee with additional items pertaining to service delivery and outcomes) that recorded information on participant demographics, employment, incarceration, service needs, and the delivery of child support services.
- An Access database maintained by Project Return for Family Ties participants that recorded information on services delivered dealing with employment, transportation, and referrals to community organizations.
- An extract from the Tennessee Child Support Enforcement System (TCSES) on the child support cases for all 589 Family Ties enrollees and their payment behavior prior to and following enrollment in the project at 6, 12, and 24 month intervals.
- Telephone interviews completed with 104 project participants, which represented only 21.3 percent of those targeted for follow-up interviews but 47.5 percent of the 219 individuals who could practically be reached because they had provided a telephone number that was not disconnected.

Summary

The goal of Family Ties was to identify and address the child support needs of ex-offenders seeking job-focused services at Project Return, and try to ensure that child support supported their successful reentry and was not a barrier to their employment. To accomplish this, Project Return hired a Child Support Liaison for Family Ties, whose job it was to screen for child support issues among its client population and outreach to soon-to-be released offenders with child support issues in pre-release

settings. Project Return also retained a part-time child support worker who was dedicated to addressing the child support needs of ex-offenders and working their cases in an expeditious manner.

A total of 589 individuals enrolled in Family Ties during April 2010 through December 2012. Project enrollment was open to soon-to-be released offenders and ex-offenders at both the pre- and post-release stages. Participants who enrolled pre-release were recruited by the Child Support Liaison at outreach presentations that were conducted at seven Nashville area correctional facilities: the Charles Bass Correctional Complex (Main and Annex), the Correctional Development Center, and the Metro-Davidson County Detention Facility. Participants who enrolled post-release were ex-offenders who appeared at Project Return seeking help with employment and other reentry issues and self-identified as being parents with child support cases. Ultimately, 45 percent of Family Ties participants were recruited in a pre-release setting and 55 percent were recruited post-release. Nearly a third (30%) of offenders who learned about Family Ties while incarcerated visited Project Return following their release and pursued the services they had learned about at the orientation session the Child Support Liaison had conducted at their facility.

Most of the participants in Family Ties were male and African American. The average age of the participants was 35. Approximately half of the participants had never been married.

Like most programs designed to serve ex-offenders, the participants in Family Ties were a difficult-to-serve population.

- One quarter the of participants had less than a high school diploma or GED and an additional 25 percent had obtained a GED and no further education.
- When they enrolled in Family Ties, less than 15 percent were employed outside of prison, with those who were working earning an average of \$1,083 per month.
- On average, participants had been incarcerated 4.7 times, nearly all (85%) for a felony, with two-thirds reporting a conviction for a drug or alcohol offense.
- On average, those who enrolled in Family Ties prior to their release had served approximately 40 months in prison and had 10 months remaining on their sentences. Those who had been released when they enrolled had been out for a median of two months.

Family Ties participants also faced challenging child support payment requirements and other financial obligations.

- On average, participants each had 1.7 active child support orders (covering current and/or arrears payments), with average monthly obligations of \$404 for current monthly support and

\$159 for child support arrears. Taken together, Family Ties participants faced average monthly obligations of \$474, with a third owing more than \$500 per month.

- Nearly a third of Family Ties participants were ordered to pay restitution, which averaged \$129 per month.

Those who were found to have a child support case or problem were offered an opportunity to enroll in Family Ties, where they obtained child support services along with the opportunity to access an array of employment-focused services offered by Project Return. In the child support arena, this minimally involved a one-on-one or group conference to help clients understand their child support case, their financial obligations, the consequences of noncompliance, and their options. In addition, the Child Support Liaison and a dedicated worker at the local child support field office helped some clients reinstate a driver's license suspended for nonpayment (20%), modify a child support order to reflect new earning levels (17%), and/or stay enforcement actions for nonpayment while the client was actively participating in the program (16%).

Forty-four percent of Family Ties participants received services other than child support, the chief ones being job leads, job club and job readiness services (31%), bus passes and other types of transportation assistance (21%), and assistance with résumé development, clothing vouchers, and work tools (11%). Family Ties participants received a range of 1 to 19 services, with the mean being 2.9 and the median being 1.0. Unfortunately, it is not clear whether these lower-than-expected service figures are accurate. They may reflect lapses by Project Return staff in reporting employment service activity and other referrals for Family Ties participants, the failure to fully integrate the employment program offered at Project Return with child support services offered through Family Ties, and/or the failure of Family Ties clients to take advantage of the employment-focused services and other referrals available to them at Project Return.

Key project outcomes are as follows:

- Family Ties participants who enrolled following their release from prison exhibited significant improvements in child support payments, with the percentage paying nothing dropping from 38 percent in the six months prior to enrollment to approximately 20 percent in the 6, 12, and 24 months following enrollment, and the average months with payment rising from 4.2 to 7.8, 9.0, and 9.3, respectively.
- The percentage of owed child support that participants actually paid rose from approximately 11 percent in the months prior to enrollment in Family Ties to 28 percent in the 6, 12, and 24 months following enrollment.

- Family Ties participants who received substantial forms of child support help (e.g., more than just information about their child support case) showed significantly better child support payment patterns than their counterparts who only received information about the child support program and their case. They paid an average of 4.2 versus 3.2 months of child support in the six months following their enrollment in Family Ties. The forms of help associated with the most substantial payment gains were: help with order establishment, modification, reinstatement of driver's licenses, correcting child support errors, and delaying enforcement actions.
- The total amount of child support paid by the 589 Family Ties participants who enrolled following their release from prison rose from \$43,675 to \$99,270 in the six months prior to and following their enrollment in the project. During the 12 and 24 months following their enrollment, these individuals paid a total of \$187,556 and \$303,823 in child support, respectively.
- While child support payments did not improve for those who received employment services, the two- year rate of return to prison for all Family Ties participants was much lower than the rate reported by the Tennessee Department of Correction (15% versus 39%). In addition, participants who were employed when they enrolled in Family Ties and/or received certain job related services suggestive of employment (help with résumés, tools, work clothes, and transportation) returned to prison at a lower rate than their Family Ties counterparts who did not obtain this type of help (9% versus 18%).
- Interviewed Family Ties participants rated the program favorably, with 53 percent giving it a rating of "excellent" and 28 percent characterizing it as "good." Asked to rate their child support situation following Family Ties, 36 percent said it was "much better" and 28 percent viewed it as a "little better." A quarter of the respondents said it was "no different," and the rest (11%) said it was worse. In their assessments of program services and referrals, participants gave child support activities strong ratings, with 80 to 90 percent characterizing it as "excellent" or "good."
- Despite payment improvements, arrears balances for Family Ties participants increased approximately \$6,000 from an average of \$24,462 at enrollment to \$30,197 when the child support extract was generated, approximately 20 months after enrollment.

Conclusions

Family Ties was effective in recruiting offenders while they were incarcerated to participate in post-release services. Approximately 30 percent of those who attended a Family Ties orientation while they were still incarcerated came to Project Return following their release and participated in the Family Ties program. Although this number may seem modest, it is actually quite significant given the Family Ties population and the barriers they face to service delivery. With few exceptions, they are individuals who have sporadic work histories, low levels of education and earnings, limited transportation resources, and significant child support obligations. Other reentry programs with pre- and post-release components have reached similar conclusions. For example, the Pre-Release and Reentry Services of the Montgomery County Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (PRRS) is an employment-focused, community-based correctional program that begins with a risk and needs assessments of eligible jail inmates who are within a year of release. The assessment process leads to the provision of comprehensive case management services and enrollment in relevant education and employment programs. An evaluation found that post-release almost 90 percent of program participants find employment within three weeks of enrollment and that 54 percent have the same employer two months after leaving the program.⁴⁸

Family Ties was successful in generating child support payments. Participants paid significantly more child support in the months following their enrollment in Family Ties than they did in the months prior to enrollment. Over a period of 6, 12, and 24 months prior to their enrollment, participants paid 11 to 13 percent of current child support due. At 6, 12, and 24 months following enrollment in Family Ties, the amount of current support that they paid significantly increased to 26 to 28 percent of what was due. There was also a significant increase in the average number of months of payments among Family Ties participants following program enrollment (4.2 versus 7.8), with those who received substantial child support assistance (services other than just getting information about the child support program and an explanation of individual case status) registering the most significant improvements in payment behavior. Collectively, Family Ties participants who enrolled post-release paid \$43,675 in the six-months prior to their enrollment as compared with \$99,270 in the six months following enrollment. At 12 and 24 months following enrollment, these individuals paid a total of \$187,556 and \$303,823 in child support, respectively.

Greater increases in child support payments might have occurred if order levels were set at more realistic levels that reflected actual earnings. Across the current support cases that project participants had when they enrolled in Family Ties, average monthly child support obligations were \$404. When arrears balances are reduced to a monthly obligation, they averaged an additional \$159 per month, with a median of \$108. When current monthly support is added to monthly arrears payments, the total

average monthly obligation that project participants faced was \$474, with a median of \$385. Fully 30 percent had monthly obligations that exceeded \$500. Not surprisingly, one of the goals mentioned most often by Family Ties participants was getting a lower child support order (71%). As previously noted, 30 percent of project participants were required to pay monthly restitution of \$129, and monthly earnings among the small fraction of Family Ties participants who were employed when they enrolled in the project was \$1,083. Not surprisingly, even after they “improved” their payment behavior following program enrollment, Family Ties participants only paid a fraction of the child support that they owed (26 to 28%). Despite these improvements in payment behavior, arrears balances for project participants increased by an average of \$6,000 during the 20 months following their enrollment in Family Ties, rising from approximately \$24,000 to \$30,000.

Job-focused services were not related to improvements in child support payments although it is unclear whether Project Return staff recorded all employment services they provided and/or whether Family Ties participants pursued all of the services available to them. According to records maintained by Project Return staff, 37 percent of Family Ties participants received job-focused services and smaller percentages received help with applying for benefits, housing, money management, etc. No child support benefits were detected for the receipt of employment-focused services and other referrals. It is unclear whether these lower-than expected rates of employment and referral activity reflect the failure to integrate Family Ties clients in Project Return services, the failure of Family Ties participants to take advantage of service opportunities available at Project Return and/or the failure of Project Return staff to accurately record the level of services they provided. Although Project Return and Family Ties were co-located, the programs would be strengthened by better coordination and more diligent data entry regarding the delivery of employment services and referrals to community agencies.

The services provided by Family Ties and Project Reentry were appreciated by participants. Family Ties was a well-liked program. Not only was it well received by recently released noncustodial parents, the program was embraced by incarcerated parents with child support cases who were waiting to be released to the community. Virtually all of the individuals who participated in Family Ties said that one of their goals was to learn more about the child support program in general (95%). Nearly 90 percent rated Families Ties as having done an “excellent” or “good” job of explaining the child support system. No matter what type of referral was given, about 80 to 90 percent of those who followed up said the help they received was “excellent” or “good.”

Family Ties is associated with reduced recidivism. The Tennessee Department of Correction, Division of Policy, Planning and Research calculates recidivism rates of 26, 39 and 46 percent at one, two and three years after prison release.⁴⁹ Family Ties cases were matched against DOC records an average of two

years following program enrollment. The recidivism rates for Family Ties participants at 12, 24, and 36 months following release from prison were 9 percent, 15 percent, and 16 percent, respectively.

Child support should be added to the menu of post-release and reentry services. Child support obligations are among the most substantial financial pressures that offenders face when they are released from prison and attempt to re-integrate into society. Family Ties shows that this population is strongly interested in learning about the child support system and their status and options. And they have even stronger interest in obtaining tangible help and relief including modifying orders to reflect their changed earnings, reinstating driver's licenses that were revoked for nonpayment of support, and holding enforcement actions in abeyance while they obtain employment and resurrect their lives on the outside. Family Ties also shows that helping paroled and released offenders with child support improves their payment behavior, especially when the assistance moves beyond the informational level and involves tangible actions. It takes dedicated child support staff to provide this type of assistance to incarcerated and released offenders. To achieve even stronger outcomes, child support service programs should be coupled with aggressive employment and placement efforts and the two types of assistance should be fully coordinated. Finally, child support programs should pursue right-sized orders for low-income obligors that reflect an ability to pay and stem the growth in uncollectible child support arrears.

References

References

References

References

References

References

- ¹ Yamatani, H. (2008). "Overview Report of Allegheny County Jail Collaborative Evaluation Findings." Pittsburgh, PA: Center on Race and Social Problems, School of Social Work University of Pittsburgh.
- ² La Vigne, N. G., Wolf, S. J., & Jannetta, J. (2004). "Voices of Experience: Focus Group Findings on Prisoner Reentry in the State of Rhode Island." Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, Justice Policy Center, Research Report.
- ³ Carson, E.A. & Sabol, W.J. (2012). "Prisoners in 2011." NCJ 239808. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- ⁴ Minton, T.D. (2012). "Jail Inmates at Midyear 2011—Statistical Tables." NCJ 237961. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- ⁵ McLean, R. & Thompson, M. (2007). Repaying Debts. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Assistance and Justice Center of the Council of State Governments.
- ⁶ Rose, D. & Clear, T. (2002). "Incarceration, Reentry and Social Capital: Social Networks in the Balance." New York, NY: John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Produced for conference funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on January 30-31, 2002.
- ⁷ Crayton, A., Ressler, L., Mukamal, D.A., Jannetta, J., & Warwick, K. (2010). "Partnering with Jails to Improve Reentry: A Guidebook for Community Based Organizations." Washington D.C.: The Urban Institute.
- ⁸ Bloom, D. (2006). "Employment-Focused Programs for Ex-Prisoners: What have we learned, what are we learning, and where should we go from here?" New York, NY: MDRC. Bloom, D., Redcross, C., Zweig, J., & Azurdia, G. (2007). "Transitional Jobs for Ex-Prisoners: Early Impacts from a Random Assignment Evaluation of the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) Prisoner Reentry Program." New York, NY: MDRC. Bloom, D. (2010). "Transitional Jobs: Background, Program Models, and Evaluation Evidence." New York, NY: MDRC.
- ⁹ Bloom, D. (2006). *Ibid*, p. 3.
- ¹⁰ *Supra*, n. 8.
- ¹¹ *Supra*, n. 2.
- ¹² Philadelphia Consensus Group on Reentry & Reintegration of Adjudicated Offenders. "They're Coming Back: An Action Plan for Successful Reintegration of Offenders that Works for Everyone." Philadelphia, PA.

- ¹³ Lattimore, P. K., Steffey, D. M., & Visher, C. A. (2009). "Prisoner Reentry Experiences of Adult Males: Characteristics, Service Receipt, and Outcomes of Participants in the SVORI Multi-site Evaluation." The Multi-Site Evaluation of the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative.
- ¹⁴ Piehl, A.M. (2009). "Preparing Prisoners for Employment: The Power of Small Rewards." Civic Report. 57, May 2009.
- ¹⁵ Seedco (2011). "Seedco's Dads at Work Initiative: Using Flexible Funding and Innovative Program Design to Support Fathers." Seedco Policy Brief. New York, NY: Seedco.
- ¹⁶ Bouman, J., Antolin, J. A., & Young, M. (2007). "Attacking Poverty by Attacking Chronic Unemployment: An Update on Developments in Transitional Job Strategies for Former Prisoners." Clearinghouse Review Journal of Poverty Law and Policy. 41(3-4): 152-156.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ *Supra*, n. 2.
- ¹⁹ *Supra*, n. 16.
- ²⁰ Braga, A. A., Piehl, A. M. & Hureau, D. (2008). "Controlling Violent Offenders Released to the Community: An Evaluation of the Boston Reentry Initiative." Cambridge, MA: Harvard Kennedy School, John F. Kennedy School of Government.
- ²¹ Hirsh, A. E., Dietrich, S. M., Landau, R., Schneider, P.D., Ackelsberg, I., Bernstein-Baker, J., & Hohenstein, J. (2002). "Every Door Closed: Barriers Facing Parents with Criminal Records." Washington DC: Center for Law and Social Policy & Philadelphia, PA: Community Legal Services, Inc.
- ²² See p. 11 of Goodwill Industries International. "Road to Reintegration, Ensuring Successful Community Re-entry for People Who Are Former Offenders."
- ²³ *Ibid.*
- ²⁴ *Supra*, n. 27, p. 87.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ *Supra*, n. 2.
- ²⁷ Conklin, T.J., Lincoln, T., & Wilson R. (2002). "A Public Health Manual for Correctional Health Care." Ludlow, MA: Hampden County.
- ²⁸ Travis, J., Cincotta, E.M., & Solomon, A.L. (2003). "Families Left Behind: The Hidden Costs of Incarceration and Reentry." Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, Justice Policy Center.
- ²⁹ *Supra*, n. 2.
- ³⁰ Griswold, E., Pearson, J., & Davis, L. (2001). "Testing a Modification Process for Incarcerated Parents." Denver, CO: Center for Policy Research.
- ³¹ Griswold, E., Pearson, J., & Davis, L. (2004). "Fathers in the Criminal Justice System." Denver, CO: Center for Policy Research.

- ³² Ovwigho, P.C., Saunders, C., & Born, C.E. (2005). "The intersection of Incarceration & Child Support: A Snapshot of Maryland's Caseload." Baltimore, MD: University of Maryland School of Social Work, Family Welfare Research Training Group.
- ³³ Turetsky, V. (2000). "Realistic Child Support Policies for Low-Income Fathers." Washington, D.C.: Center for Law and Social Policy.
- ³⁴ Thoennes, N. & Pearson, J. (2001). "Understanding Child Support Arrears in Colorado." Denver, CO: Center for Policy Research.
- ³⁵ *Supra*, n. 39.
- ³⁶ *Supra*, n. 39.
- ³⁷ Sorensen, E., Sousa, L., & Schaner, S. (2007). "Assessing Child Support Arrears in Nine Large States and the Nation." Washington, D.C.: Department of Health and Human Services.
<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/07/assessing-CS-debt/index.htm>.
- ³⁸ Sorensen, E. & Zibman, C. (2001). "Poor Dads Who Don't Pay Child Support: Deadbeats or Disadvantaged?" Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute.
- ³⁹ McLean, R. & Thompson, M. (2007). "Repaying Debts." Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Assistance and Justice Center of the Council of State Governments.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid*.
- ⁴¹ *Supra*, n. 39.
- ⁴² Wyckoff, L., McVay, M., & Wallace, D. (2009). "Navigating the Child Support System: Lessons from the Fathers at Work Initiative." Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures; Levingston K. & Turetsky, V. (2007). "Debtors' Prison—Prisoners' Accumulation of Debt as a Barrier to Reentry." *Clearinghouse Review Journal of Poverty Law and Policy*. 41:3-4 (July-August): 187-197.
- ⁴³ Kotloff, L.J. (2005). "Leaving the Street: Young Fathers Move from Hustling to Legitimate Work." Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures.
- ⁴⁴ Thoennes, N. (2002). "Child Support Profile: Massachusetts Incarcerated and Paroled Parents." Denver, CO: Center for Policy Research.
- ⁴⁵ Hairston, C.F. (1988). "Family Ties During Imprisonment: Do They Influence Future Criminal Activity?" *Family Probation*. 48-52.
- ⁴⁶ Nelson, M., Deess, P., & Allen, C. (1999). "The First Month Out: Post-Incarceration Experiences in New York City." New York, NY: Vera Institute of Justice.
- ⁴⁷ Karpos, M., Gasiecki, M., & Langston, V. (2010). "Tennessee Department of Correction Recidivism Study: Felon Releases 2001-2007." Nashville, TN: Tennessee Department of Corrections, Division of Policy, Planning and Research.
- ⁴⁸ *Supra*, n. 15.
- ⁴⁹ *Supra*, n. 47.



Appendix A: Domestic Violence Protocol

TENNESSEE PRISONER REENTRY INITIATIVE
FAMILY TIES DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROTOCOL

Prepared for:

Project Return
1200 Division St., Suite 200
Nashville, TN 37203

AND:

Administration for Children and Families
Office of Child Support Enforcement
For Grant No. 90FD0148

Prepared by:

Robin Kimbrough

Legal Counsel

Tennessee Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence
2 International Plaza Drive, Suite 425
Nashville, TN 37217

615.386.9406 | Toll Free: 800.289.9018 | Fax: 615.724.1399
tcadsv.org | tnblue.org | preventn.com

With Assistance from:

Lanae Davis, M.P.A.

Jessica Pearson, Ph.D.

Center for Policy Research

1570 Emerson St.

Denver, CO 80218

Phone: 303.837.1555 Fax: 303.837.1557

www.CenterforPolicyResearch.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Key Project Partners	1
Program Description	2
Program Goals	3
Introduction	3
Scope and Purpose of Protocol	5
Terminology	5
Screening and Assessment Procedures	7
Referral Sources	8
Confidentiality	9
Training	9
Review of Protocol	9

FAMILY TIES DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROTOCOL

KEY PROJECT PARTNERS

Tennessee Department of Human Services: Tennessee has a strong track record in successfully conducting federal demonstration grants and in incorporating grant activities into permanent project operations. In addition to the Family Ties grant, it has conducted the following OCSE-funded projects: the Child Support Employment and Parenting Program in Knox County, Parental Responsibility and Healthy Marriages in Memphis, Case Assessment and Case Stratification in Knox County, Parenting Services to promote access and visitation in the 11th, 20th and 26th Judicial Districts, and a grant to create a statewide clearinghouse of information and wrap-around case management services for offenders and ex-offenders which it is currently operating in the Eastern part of the state.

Project Return, Inc.: Project Return, Inc. is a non-profit organization established in 1979 that aids in the transition from incarceration to the community. It offers both pre and post-release services and currently serves approximately 3,000 unduplicated individuals per year. In addition to its employment services which include job readiness classes and job development services, Project Return, Inc has an extensive array of community partnerships offering individuals assistance with clothing, substance abuse and mental health treatment, housing, food, transportation, education, family reunification, and mentoring. Its two-year client failure rate is approximately 13 percent as compared to the 35 percent recidivism rate for individuals leaving state custody. Project Return, Inc is currently conducting a DOL-funded grant (Jobs and Futures) and a DOJ-funded grant (Second Chance) that calls for mentoring soon-to-be-released offenders. Project Return will be responsible for implementing all aspects of Family Ties including hiring a full-time employee (child support liaison) to help to identify and address the child support issues of offenders and ex-offenders who enroll in the project.

Policy Studies, Inc. (PSI): PSI is the privatized child support agency in Davidson County. PSI will provide a half-time, dedicated worker to assist Family Ties participants with their child support cases. This will include providing information, assisting with paternity, order establishment, review and adjustment, license reinstatements, case closures and obtaining deferrals in the initiation of enforcement actions and the collection of monthly support and arrears payments. The case manager will also file a motion to enroll Family Ties participants in the court's "problem-solving court."

Davidson County Juvenile Court: The Davidson County Juvenile Court handles child support matters for unmarried parents in Nashville. To maximize the flexibility it can afford to project participants, the court will enroll project cases in its "problem-solving court". On a case-by-case basis, magistrates will consider a variety of responsive actions including: motions to defer payments of child support during project participation, defer enforcement actions during successful participation in the project, modify orders, and establish orders for low-income obligors that reflect shorter work hours

TN Re-entry Collaborative (TREC): TREC is an extensive community-wide network of 51 agencies that represents corrections, probation and parole, community corrections, community treatment and housing providers, universities, law enforcement, private and public industry, children's services, health, and veteran affairs, that are committed to improving prisoner reentry. TREC members will be asked to assist clients enrolled in Family Ties.

TN Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (Coalition): The Coalition is Tennessee's only statewide network of programs, advocates, community leaders, and professional allies working together to find solutions to the problem of domestic and sexual violence. The Coalition provides information, training and technical assistance, systems advocacy, statewide planning, and public policy advocacy. Formed in 1983, the Coalition has worked to expand the number of domestic and sexual violence programs from five in 1983 to more than 60 today. These programs provide services to more than 60,000 domestic and sexual violence victims annually. The Coalition will train Family Ties staff on domestic violence and prepare a protocol outlining procedures to enhance the safety of victims.

Center for Policy Research: The project will be evaluated by the Center for Policy Research (CPR), an independent, nonprofit research organization that has done the leading studies in the nation on child support and incarceration including projects in Massachusetts, Texas, Illinois, and Colorado. CPR has published many articles on incarceration and child support and has also prepared a publication for OCSE that identifies best practices for states when dealing with incarcerated and paroled parents in the child support system (*Resource Guide on How to Work with Incarcerated and Released Parents*). CPR has also done research on child support and domestic violence.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

In October 2009, the Tennessee Department of Human Services, Division of Child Support Services (CSE), received a 36-month, 1115 Demonstration Grant from the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement to conduct a project in Davidson County in support of the Prisoner Reentry Initiative (PRI). CSE contracted with Project Return, Inc. to implement this multi-faceted project which has been named "Family Ties". Established in 1979, Project Return, Inc. offers both pre and post-release services to assist individuals in the transition from incarceration to the community. As part of this project, Project Return, Inc. hired a liaison to screen for child support issues among its clients as well as among individuals who participate in other Davidson County reentry projects funded by the Department of Labor and the Department of Justice. This includes Nashville Works, Jobs and Futures and the Second Chance Initiative. Those clients who have a child support case or problem are offered case-specific information and a variety of relevant services. These include: establishing paternity and a new child support order, assisting with review and adjustment, reinstating driver's licenses, and obtaining deferrals in the collection of monthly support and the initiation of enforcement actions to permit newly released offenders to stabilize themselves in the community and obtain housing and employment. The liaison works closely with Policy Studies Inc, the child support agency in Davidson County, for needed, case-specific actions. The liaison and PSI

workers work closely with magistrates at the Davidson County Juvenile Court Project to implement needed case actions. Project participants are enrolled in the Court's "problem-solving court" to obtain consideration of more responsive actions.

In addition to specialized child support services, project participants receive assistance with job readiness and placement from counselors at Project Return, Inc. They are referred to a variety of public and private providers for other needed services including the agencies that participate in the Tennessee Re-entry Collaborative (TREC).

The Tennessee Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence (Coalition) developed this protocol to enhance the emotional and physical safety of custodial parents participating in the project. The project is being evaluated by the Center for Policy Research, an independent, nonprofit research organization in Denver, Colorado, that has done the leading studies in the nation on child support and incarceration as well as child support and domestic violence.

PROGRAM GOALS

The goal of Family Ties is to highlight and address the child support issues of prisoners and ex-offenders who enroll in the project so that they have a greater chance of successfully reintegrating into the community. Project funds are being used to hire a full-time child support liaison to meet with Project Return clients and discuss their child support situation. In addition to obtaining information about their child support status, project participants are eligible to receive a variety of remedial services including working with a dedicated, part-time child support worker at PSI, and having their case enrolled in the Davidson County's "problem-solving court" for more responsive actions.

INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence and control are strongly linked to family economic issues. If the couple lived together, the abuser may have exercised complete control over the money in the household. He may have insisted on doing all the shopping or accompanying the mother everywhere, including trips to the grocery store, and the laundromat. The abuser may have held all the money, distributing it only on an "as needed" basis. He may have provided the mother with an allowance, from which she was expected to make all household expenditures. He may even have gone through bags of purchases and insisted on reviewing the receipts, even for groceries.

Once the parties have separated, an abuser who seemed generous while they were together may suddenly become stingy with money. He may be unwilling to provide any support for a child who no longer lives in his household. He may question the need for things that he had happily provided when the family lived together, thus requiring constant requests for money, with each request giving rise to further arguments and escalating violence.

Many of the same problems exist even if the couple never lived together. It is not uncommon, for example, for an abuser to feel that he can continue to spend all of his

money on himself, except for certain expenses he may recognize, such as diapers, baby formula, and an occasional toy. Others simply want the problem to disappear and refuse to contribute in any way.

Because control is at the heart of domestic violence, it is not surprising to see economic control issues continue long after the parties have separated. This dynamic makes it highly likely that child support problems will arise in these types of cases and that safety should be addressed by child support workers and others in the course of establishing paternity and pursuing child support. If the victim is receiving public assistance, she must cooperate with child support in locating the noncustodial parent and obtaining a child support order. Custodial parents who have serious concerns about their safety (or the safety of their children) may claim good cause for not cooperating with child support. This effectively stops the child support process. Since research finds that most public assistance recipients and other custodial parents in the child support system who have experienced domestic violence favor the collection of child support, the routine award of good cause exemptions is not the appropriate response. When a victim of domestic violence wants financial support, the challenge is to find a way to pursue child support using techniques that enhance safety.

A variety of policies and procedures can be used to pursue child support while taking into consideration the safety of custodial parents and their children. This includes using heightened measures to safeguard address information for custodial parents and limit the use of certain enforcement remedies. PSI will heighten confidentiality procedures. This might include asking the court to impound the custodial parent's address, and leaving the address off court pleadings, if appropriate. Other procedures that the court can use to minimize contact between the custodial parent and the noncustodial parent in cases where there is a risk of violence include escort services from the court to the parking lot, scheduling the noncustodial and custodial parent to appear on different days or times, and/or permitting a parent to appear by telephone.

The child support agency may limit the type of enforcement activity it takes in cases that are at-risk of harm to automated enforcement remedies and uses higher visibility enforcement remedies and bank levies only after consulting with the custodial parent. The enforcement remedies that are believed to carry the greatest risk of harm to the custodial parent include bank levies, public posters and other "most wanted" campaigns, judicial enforcement actions, driver's and professional license revocations, and asset seizures. The automated enforcement remedies that are believed to be safest to use in at risk cases are wage assignments, pension liens, tax refund intercepts, credit reporting and passport denials.

Finally, the child support agency and the court may refer custodial parents to domestic violence advocates and other community-based resources that may assist them.

SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE PROTOCOL

PSI provides child support collection services for the Davidson County, Nashville area. This protocol is designed to help identify the presence of domestic violence issues with clients. The protocol will assist in determining if domestic violence exists, and will help the safety of the client by addressing needs and using appropriate safeguards with the custodial and noncustodial parent. The underlying principles of the PSI Domestic Violence Protocol are:

- PSI recognizes that domestic violence is a complex problem in the collection of child support.
- PSI recognizes that establishing paternity may be inappropriate and dangerous when there is a history of domestic violence between the unwed parents or other safety issues.
- PSI recognizes the difficulty of disclosing domestic violence for many victims and the importance of providing opportunities for safe and confidential disclosure of domestic violence as well as information about domestic violence services.
- PSI is committed to ensure that all of its services are provided in a manner that does not compromise the safety of its clients or children they serve.
- PSI is committed to pursuing paternity and child support in cases where safety is a factor using heightened confidentiality techniques and other measures that underscore safety.

TERMINOLOGY

Domestic Violence describes a pattern of abuse and coercive behaviors, including physical, sexual, and psychological abuse as well as economic coercion used against an intimate partner. Domestic violence involves the use of a combination of tactics aimed at establishing control of one partner over the other. Domestic violence behaviors include, but are not limited to, physical, sexual and psychological abuse as well as economic coercion used against an intimate partner. Frequently, a person may not be aware that there is abuse/violence in the relationship. The most prominent domestic abuse behavior is physical violence, but there other behaviors that constitute domestic violence:

- **Emotional abuse:** verbal assaults, name calling, criticism, blaming;
- **Intimidation:** scaring a person by frightening looks, gestures, and body language;
- **Using Coercion/Threats:** verbal threats to hurt, leave, hurt/take children, commit suicide or homicide, making a person do illegal things;

- **Isolation:** controlling what a partner does, who goes, who the partner sees and talks to; limiting outside involvement, using jealousy as an excuse to justify isolation;
- **Using Children:** making a partner feel guilty about children; using children to relay messages; using visits to harass the partner; threats to take children away if child support is sought;
- **Economic Abuse:** taking all money; giving an allowance; preventing the partner from getting a job; making a partner ask for money; not letting the partner know about or have access to family income;
- **Using Male Privilege:** treating partner like a servant; acting like “master of the castle;” defining male and female roles; making all the big decisions;
- **Minimizing, Denying, and Blaming:** making light of the abuse and taking the partner’s concerns seriously; saying the abuse did not happen; shifting responsibility for the abuse; saying the partner caused it.
- **Physical and Sexual Abuse:** hitting, slapping, punching, beating, choking, forcing a partner to do sexual things he/she does not want to do; having sex after a beating; marital rape; affairs with others.

Abuse (T.C.A. § 36-3-601(1)) is a legal term, which means inflicting, or attempting to inflict, physical injury on an adult or minor by other than accidental means, placing an adult or minor in fear of physical harm, physical restraint, malicious damage to the personal property of the abused party, including inflicting, or attempting to inflict, physical injury on any animal owned, possessed, leased, kept, or held by an adult or minor, or placing an adult or minor in fear of physical harm to any animal owned, possessed, leased, kept, or held by the adult or minor.

Domestic Abuse Victim (T.C.A. § 36-3-601(5)) is defined in Tennessee law as any person experiencing abuse and falls within the following relationship categories:

- Adults or minors who are current or former spouses;
- Adults or minors who live together or who have lived together;
- Adults or minors who are dating or who have dated or who have or had a sexual relationship, [as used herein “dating” and “dated” do not include fraternization between two (2) individuals in a business or social context;
- Adults or minors related by blood or adoption;
- Adults or minors who are related or were formerly related by marriage; or
- Adult or minor children of a person in a relationship that is described above.

Sexual Assault Victim (T.C.A. § 36-3-601(10)) means any person, regardless of the relationship with the perpetrator, who has been subjected to, threatened with, or placed in fear of any form of rape or sexual battery as defined by Tennessee law.

Stalking Victim (T.C.A. § 36-3-601(11)) means any person, regardless of the relationship with the perpetrator, who has been subjected to, threatened with, or placed in fear of the offense of stalking. Stalking behavior can include excessive text messaging, emailing, use of tracking devices, and other conduct in which the perpetrator engages in to control the whereabouts of the victim.

Domestic abuse, stalking, and sexual assault behaviors are all forms of domestic violence.

Domestic abuse, stalking, and sexual assault victims may qualify for an order of protection, a document ordering the abusive party to stay away from the victim. The court may make other orders to keep the victim safe as a part of the order of protection.

SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

Family Ties staff will screen all clients for domestic violence, whether signs, symptoms, or behaviors suggest abuse is present, at the initial intake (see screening tool attached). Screening should also take place at any point during the legal process if there are indicators that abuse might be occurring between the two parties. This behavior includes signs of controlling or abusive behavior by the noncustodial parent, including threats to harm the custodial parent, the children, name calling, threats of violence, and the occurrence of violence.

Family Ties staff will evaluate all clients to determine whether there are safety issues that might be worsened by the collection of child support against the noncustodial parent.

In making this assessment, project staff will consider the safety of the custodial parent and the children. The staff person will use the Domestic Violence Screening Form to conduct the assessment. If there are safety concerns, Family Ties staff will alert the child liaison to flag the case and limit disclosure of any identifying information, such as the custodial parents address, to certain national databases.

In screening clients, Family Ties staff will take the following approach:

- Always raise the issue of domestic violence privately so that others will not overhear the conversation.
- Explain to the client that the screening process for abuse is a protective measure taken in all cases.
- Provide assurances of confidentiality, with the exception of information that requires mandatory reporting (such as child abuse.)

- Pay attention to the language of the screening questions and make sure that the terms are easily understood.
- Avoid blaming or judgmental responses.

NOTE: A negative response to the screening does not mean that abuse is not present. There may be several reasons why the client denies the existence of the abuse. This is why continuous evaluation is important.

If abuse is disclosed, follow up with questions to assess for immediate danger. Make appropriate referrals as necessary.

REFERRAL SOURCES

When disclosures of domestic violence or sexual violence occur as a result of the screening or at any point while the person is enrolled in Family Ties, an appropriate response must follow. If a disclosure is made, Family Ties staff will notify the child support liaison at PSI to flag the case on TCSES and provide appropriate referrals. These resources include the National Domestic Hotline Number (1-800-799-7233), the YW hotline number (615-242-1199), Morning Star (615-860-0003), and the Sexual Assault Center (1-800-879-1999).

If the client makes no disclosure of violence, but there are indicators that domestic violence does exist, provide the telephone numbers to local domestic violence services and other information and referrals that might be appropriate in response to the circumstances.

When providing information on domestic violence resources:

- Staff should take care to do so in a way that minimizes safety risks and maximizes the chances of follow through.
- When provided universally (i.e., regardless of whether domestic violence is indicated), domestic violence services information should be included along with information on other social services that are available in the community.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Perpetrators who discover that a victim has told someone about their abuse may retaliate with further threats, violence, or even murder the victim. For this and other reasons, it is important that information related to discourse of domestic violence be handled with the utmost care and that the privacy and confidentiality of clients receive the highest priority.

Title IV-D of the Social Security Act prohibits disclosure of Federal Parent Locator Service (FPLS) information if a state determines that it has reasonable evidence of domestic violence or child abuse and that disclosure of information could be harmful to the parent or child.

Confidentiality protocols support disclosure of domestic violence:

- Confidentiality provides a safe place to disclose. Family Ties staff should make sure the client can privately complete the Domestic Violence Screen Form.
- Confidentiality says that the person is safe to tell. The client should know that the information provided will be held in confidence.
- Confidentiality provides a clear understanding of how the information will be used. Family Ties staff should explain that any disclosures will be used to collect child support payments in a way that protects against future violence against the client or the client's children.

TRAINING

In order to effectively implement this protocol, it will be necessary to ensure that those involved in identifying domestic violence and sexual assault issues have training on the protocols, dynamics of domestic violence, and the use of the Domestic Violence screening tool.

REVIEW OF PROTOCOL

This Protocol was developed by the Tennessee Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence in collaboration with Project Return, Center for Policy Research, and PSI with funding from Grant No. 90FD0148. The protocol shall be reviewed and evaluated annually.

Project Return

OFFENDER VIOLENCE ASSESSMENT

Date:	Name:	DOB:	Phone:
-------	-------	------	--------

Address:

--

			Additional Information
Has a social service agency ever been contacted because of abuse you have perpetrated on someone else?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Are there weapons in your home or in your possession?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Has the other parent of your child/children ever petitioned for an Order of Protection or Restraining Order?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	

Have you:

Ever hit, punched, slapped, pushed, or kicked the other parent, or any partner in the past?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Ever broke things, punched walls or slammed doors?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Ever threatened to hurt the other parent, the children, yourself, or others?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Ever followed or stalked the other parent or the children?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Exhibited reckless behavior (drove too fast with yourself and/or the children in the car)?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Behaved violently in public?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Threatened to use a weapon?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

VIOLENCE ASSESSMENT CONTINUED

Threatened to or has harm(ed) or kidnap(ped) the children?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
--	------------------------------	-----------------------------

Ever abused alcohol or drugs or ever been in treatment for drug or alcohol abuse?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
---	------------------------------	-----------------------------

Have the children been adversely affected by your drug or alcohol use?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
--	------------------------------	-----------------------------

Ever called the children degrading names?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
---	------------------------------	-----------------------------

Touched the children in a way that made them feel uncomfortable?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
--	------------------------------	-----------------------------

Assaulted the other parent while they were holding the child?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
---	------------------------------	-----------------------------

Forced the children to participate in or watch the abuse?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
---	------------------------------	-----------------------------

What worries you most about your behavior?

Additional Comments or Information:
