

INCARCERATED AND FORMERLY INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS

ONGOING RESEARCH AND PROGRAM EVALUATION EFFORTS

June 2015

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services promotes the economic and social well-being of families, children, individuals, and communities. Several ACF programs interact with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals in an effort to promote economic self-sufficiency and social well-being for them and their families. Across ACF, we are implementing rigorous research and evaluation projects to better understand how to serve them and their families.



**Formerly
incarcerated
parents who
report
healthy
relationships
with their
children
experience
better
employment
outcomes
and are less
likely to
report
substance
use.¹**

The [Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency \(BIAS\)](#) project is the first major opportunity to apply a behavioral economics lens to programs that serve poor and vulnerable families in the United States. BIAS works with human services programs to design and test behaviorally-informed interventions to program challenges, with an ultimate goal of learning how behavioral insights can be used to improve the well-being of low-income children and families. BIAS has designed and is testing interventions related to child support among incarcerated parents in two sites:

- BIAS worked with the Texas Office of the Attorney General Child Support Division on increasing the number of incarcerated noncustodial parents who apply for child support order modifications. [Results from this evaluation](#) were published in September 2014. The behaviorally-informed intervention produced a highly statistically significant and policy-relevant impact at a relatively low cost and demonstrated the promise of applying behavioral economics to improve ACF program implementation and outcomes
- BIAS is working with the Washington State Division of Child Support on increasing the number of incarcerated noncustodial parents who apply for child support order modifications.

[Behavioral Interventions for Child Support Services \(BICS\)](#) is a national demonstration exploring the potential relevance and application of behavioral economics principles to child support services, focusing on areas such as modification of child support orders and early engagement of noncustodial and custodial parents. In 2014, the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) awarded grants to California, Colorado, the District of Columbia, Georgia, Ohio, Texas, Vermont and Washington to develop and test interventions with the goal of implementing successful interventions statewide. OCSE also awarded a grant to Washington State's Division of Child Support to oversee the national evaluation of BICS. One grantee, Thurston County, Washington, is exploring a potential intervention to focus on the order modification process for incarcerated parents, building on the work of the BIAS projects in Washington and in Texas.

The [Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration \(CSPED\)](#) is a national demonstration to test the efficacy of child support-led employment strategies for unemployed noncustodial parents, funded by OCSE. The goal is to increase the reliable payment of child support by noncustodial parents who are willing but unable to pay. In 2012, eight states (California, Colorado, Iowa, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Wisconsin) were competitively selected to run programs which consist of four core services: 1) case management, 2) employment-oriented services that include job development and retention services; 3) fatherhood/parenting activities using peer support, and 4) enhanced child support services that include review and appropriate adjustment of child support orders. The evaluation of CSPED includes an impact evaluation, an implementation evaluation, and a benefit-cost evaluation.

During the first year, 68 percent of CSPED participants self-disclosed at program enrollment that they had been convicted of a crime. Justice-involved noncustodial parents tend to owe large amounts of child support debt, much of which accumulated while incarcerated, and these debts can create a barrier to successful reintegration. To reduce this barrier, six of the eight CSPED grantees offer state-owed debt compromise programs to CSPED participants. In addition, other services and partnerships have been developed by CSPED grantees to meet the needs of the justice-involved population, such as expungement services (Stark County, OH and Charleston, Greenville and Horry Counties, SC), legal assistance (Brown County, WI), and close collaboration with the parole office and their staff (Stanislaus County, CA).



Children with involved, loving fathers are significantly more likely to do well in school, have healthy self-esteem and exhibit empathy and prosocial behavior compared to children who have uninvolved fathers.²

The [Ex-Prisoner Reentry Strategies Study](#) is an implementation study examining how Responsible Fatherhood programs can serve fathers soon-to-be released and recently released from incarceration. The study is following six grantees funded by the Office of Family Assistance (OFA), and documenting program operations, recruitment strategies, the experiences of staff and participants, and the types of activities and services offered to participants and their families. The programs begin serving fathers while they are still in prison and continue serving them after release, with the goals of stabilizing the fathers and their families, moving the fathers towards self-sufficiency, and reducing recidivism.

The [Linking Low-Income Men to Medicaid and the Health Insurance Marketplace \(LIM\)](#) project aims to provide states and community-based programs, including those that serve fathers, with guidance and long-term strategies on how to connect low-income men to health coverage and care, either through Medicaid or the Health Insurance Marketplace. The project's goals are to: 1) understand the characteristics of newly eligible low-income men and their barriers for accessing and utilizing health insurance and services; 2) identify promising outreach, enrollment, and messaging strategies for low-income men; and 3) determine the feasibility of child support, responsible fatherhood, and other ACF programs becoming vehicles for enrollment. LIM intends to release a brief that will focus specifically on linking incarcerated and reentering men to health coverage and care.

The [Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration \(STED\)](#) is evaluating the effectiveness of the latest generation of subsidized and transitional employment approaches for low-income populations. The project examines subsidized employment strategies in seven sites designed to address two distinct goals: 1) provide work-based income support for people who are not able to find regular, unsubsidized jobs; and 2) to improve the employability of disadvantaged groups. Each subsidized employment program is being evaluated using a random assignment design. One site, the Bridges & Pathways program in Chicago, IL, is targeting 16-24 year olds as they are released from incarceration to provide transitional employment, educational opportunities, and a cognitive-behavioral therapy component in an effort to curb youth violence and reduce recidivism.



Noncustodial fathers who are involved with their children are more likely to pay child support, and noncustodial fathers who pay child support are more likely to stay involved in their children's lives.³

More About Us

The [Administration for Children & Families \(ACF\)](#) is a division of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. ACF promotes the economic and social well-being of families, children, individuals, and communities. ACF programs aim to:

- Empower families and individuals to increase their economic independence and productivity;
- Encourage strong, healthy, supportive communities that have a positive impact on quality of life and the development of children;
- Create partnerships with front-line service providers, states, localities, and tribal communities to identify and implement solutions that transcend traditional program boundaries;
- Improve access to services through planning, reform, and integration; and
- Address the needs, strengths, and abilities of vulnerable populations including people with developmental disabilities, refugees, and migrants

The federal [Office of Child Support Enforcement \(OCSE\)](#) in ACF oversees the national child support program, and partners with federal, state, tribal, and local governments and others to promote parental responsibility so that children receive reliable support from both of their parents as they grow to adulthood. The mission of OCSE is to increase the reliability of child support paid by parents when they live apart from their children by:

- Locating parents;
- Establishing legal fatherhood (paternity);
- Establishing and enforcing fair support orders;
- Increasing health care coverage for children; and
- Removing barriers to payment, such as referring parents to employment services, supporting healthy co-parenting relationships, supporting responsible fatherhood, and helping to prevent and reduce family violence.

The [Office of Family Assistance \(OFA\)](#) administers federal grant programs that foster family economic security and stability, including the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program and the Tribal TANF program, Native Employment Works, Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood grants, Health Profession Opportunity Grants, and Tribal TANF-Child Welfare Coordination grants.

OFA's two top priorities for 2015-2016 are to:

- Increase family economic security and stability by supporting our state, territory, tribal, and community grantee partners to design and implement programs that focus simultaneously on parental employment and child and family well-being.
- Promote collaboration among human services agencies, workforce agencies, and educational institutions to encourage service delivery that addresses outcomes for both parents and their children.

The [Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation \(OPRE\)](#) studies ACF programs and the populations they serve through rigorous research and evaluation projects. These include evaluations of existing programs, evaluations of innovative approaches to helping low-income children and families, research syntheses, and descriptive and exploratory studies. OPRE aims to build and disseminate knowledge about effective approaches to helping low-income children and families.

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Sources

¹ <http://www.urban.org/publications/411911.html>

² http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/programs/css/12_child_support_and_parenting_time_final.pdf

³ <http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/Parenting/index.shtml>