



Local Evaluation Highlights from the 2015 Cohort of Responsible Fatherhood Grantees

Responsible Fatherhood (RF) grantees seek to help fathers be the parent, provider, and partner they want to be. Children whose fathers support them emotionally and financially typically fare better than those without that support, even if they do not live with their fathers.¹ Evaluations can help grantees improve services and better support families by examining what is working well and what is not. In the 2015 RF grantee cohort funded by the Office of Family Assistance in the Administration for Children and Families, 40 RF grantees served fathers or couples in the community or fathers reentering the community after incarceration. Fifteen of those grantees conducted local evaluations (Exhibit 1).

In a local evaluation, a grantee works with an independent evaluator to design and execute a study to address questions of interest about the grantee’s programs and clients. The grantees that conducted local evaluations were not necessarily representative of the full 2015 cohort of RF grantees, or of RF programs in general. However, the results from their evaluations can be helpful to other organizations that currently or plan to serve similar populations or provide similar services.

This brief highlights selected results from the RF grantees’ local evaluations. Full reports are available online (for more information, see the [Office of Family Assistance’s Data and Reports](#)). This brief first describes the services offered by RF grantees, which provides context for interpreting the evaluation findings. Next, it summarizes findings from the descriptive evaluations that examined strategies for recruiting fathers and supporting and engaging them in RF services. Although descriptive local evaluations

Exhibit 1. Local evaluations conducted by RF grantees



Grantees conducted descriptive evaluations about grantees’ **program operations, service implementation, and changes in client outcomes** over time



Grantees conducted impact evaluations that answered questions about whether and **how the programs affected clients’ relationships, parenting, and economic well-being**

focused on several topics, this brief focuses on recruitment and attendance findings because low participation is a common implementation challenge that grantees face. The brief concludes with highlights from impact evaluations on the effects of the RF programs or from enhancements designed to increase the intensity of services.

RF grantee services

RF grantees typically offered group-based workshops in responsible parenting, economic stability, and healthy marriage and relationship education to build fathers' parenting and relationship skills and their economic prospects. Workshops took place during one or more sessions, and most fathers (85 percent of community fathers and 94 percent of reentering fathers) participated in at least one RF workshop. Fathers participated in a median 24 hours of workshops.

Some grantees also offered individual service contacts, such as case management. On average, community fathers participated in three service contacts, and reentering fathers participated in one service contact (the median).

The remainder of this brief focuses on the subset of grantees that conducted local evaluations. A [full report](#) has more information on all grantees and those that conducted local evaluations.²

Recruitment and high attendance: A focus of descriptive evaluations

Recruitment and sustained attendance are common challenges for RF programs, and the grantees conducting evaluations were not exceptions. However, they did identify several promising strategies.

Word of mouth was relatively effective. The [Friends Outside in Los Angeles County](#) evaluation of Dad's Back! Academy examined the percentage of fathers who attended orientation events and who later attended a workshop session. On average, for every four men recruited to attend program orientation, only one began program workshops. But the percentage of men moving from orientation to a workshop session differed based on how they learned about

the program. When participants and alumni referred their friends and family to the program, a little more than half of those referred went on to attend workshop sessions. In contrast, two large residential centers that conducted many orientation events enticed just 23 percent of those attending orientation to start the program. Although large orientation events yielded a smaller percentage of men who attended services, overall, a larger number of fathers in the program were recruited through these events. For that reason, the program needed both word of mouth and events to recruit enough men to fill the program.

Investing in partnerships took time but increased referrals. A local evaluation of [Child Development Resources'](#) Investing in Fatherhood program also examined the relative success of various approaches to recruiting fathers. The evaluation found that before partner staff would dependably recruit new applicants for the fatherhood program, the grantee staff needed to engage in multiple conversations with the partner agency's leaders and frontline staff to explain the program and its benefits. A partner hospital provided a steady stream of referrals after program staff helped labor and delivery nurses better understand the value of the program. Another strategy that yielded more referrals than other approaches was to ask partner organizations to host a series of the grantee's fatherhood workshops at the partner's site. If partners agreed, they would also advertise the availability of the workshops to their own clients.

Workshops should be accessible and convenient. [Vista Community Clinic's Dad's Club](#) evaluation found that fathers with lower levels of education participated in more case manager-delivered workshops, which the program offered to fathers who missed the primary workshops on parenting and relationship education workshops. The evaluators suggested that a book-based

approach to these workshops (that is, facilitators used a handbook during workshop activities) might have been uncomfortable for fathers with lower education levels, and the schedule for the workshops might not have fit their work schedules, but future research would need to explore these ideas. These fathers also used more supportive services but were less likely to attend one-session financial workshops compared with fathers with higher education.

Intensive services helped build strong bonds between staff and fathers. [Osborne Association's](#)


Prepare program served reentering fathers or father figures who had been released from jail or prison in the past six months. The program offered workshops for five hours daily for four weeks, covering parenting, relationships with a coparent and partner, and hard and soft job skills. Based on focus groups with participants and staff interviews, the evaluation reported that strong bonds developed among workshop participants and program staff after this intense period together. Nearly 80 percent completed the program once enrolled, although the evaluation cannot definitively link this to the relationships between the staff and fathers. Fathers also could obtain specific job skills and certifications and work with program staff who supported their job searches. The evaluation found that nearly 60 percent of fathers who entered the program found employment. Staff and focus group participants also suggested several ways to improve the program for reentering fathers. They suggested adding videos and visuals to the workshop materials and updating anecdotes and language in the curriculum to strengthen engagement. Their other ideas included helping participants catch up on what they missed while incarcerated by covering current events and trends, providing technological support, adding a mental health

component, and offering social activities with partners and families to further support reentry and reconnection.

Impact evaluation results: Effects of RF grantee programs on key outcomes for adults

Eight RF grantees conducted evaluations to assess how their programs affected participants' outcomes. Six of these evaluations compared fathers who were offered RF services with those who were not, to measure the effects of the program overall. Two evaluations examined enhancements designed to increase the intensity of services. These evaluations compared fathers who were offered the RF program plus additional services, such as coaching or peer mentoring, with fathers who were offered the program without these enhancements. We discuss findings from the six evaluations of RF programs overall, and then the findings from the two evaluations of enhanced services.

Not all evaluations examined the same outcomes (Exhibit 2). The number of outcomes differed within evaluation and across the five domains: coparenting skills, relationship skills, parenting



To summarize the findings of the six RF impact evaluations that compared fathers who were offered RF services with those who were not, we grouped the impact estimates by domain (such as coparenting outcomes or economic stability outcomes). We placed all impact estimates on a similar standardized scale so we could compare across outcomes originally measured on different scales. We then characterized the findings within each domain based on whether there was at least one favorable, statistically significant finding.

skills and behaviors, child and father well-being, and economic stability. For example, the relationship skills domain had three outcomes measured in two evaluations, whereas the parenting skills and behaviors domain included eight outcomes measured across four evaluations. Even so, for grantees considering how their services might affect their clients, knowing the effects of other programs is a good place to start.

The impact evaluations found some favorable results and some areas in which the programs did not achieve their goals. Exhibit 3 shows, for each domain, the number of outcomes and number of evaluations with at least one favorable impact, but many of these evaluations also had at least one outcome in that domain with no impact (that is, no statistically significant difference between the outcomes of the fathers who were offered the program and those who were not).² Favorable effects were common though not universal for economic stability outcomes. For other domains, such as coparenting, relationship skills, parenting skills and behaviors, and child and father well-being, findings with no effects were more common than favorable outcomes.

As noted earlier, two impact evaluations examined the effects of offering RF services with enhanced services intended to increase the intensity of the RF program. [Healthy Relationships California](#) added weekly phone coaching for one group to provide individualized reinforcement of themes discussed in class, and case management for members of another group to better support their economic and material needs. Researchers compared these two groups with clients who simply received the RF program. The evaluation found that adding phone coaching had favorable impacts on coparenting quality and fathers' caregiving behaviors. Adding case management had favorable impacts on job skills. [Anthem Strong Families](#) added in-person peer mentoring and online Facebook activities for one group of fathers participating in the RF program to extend services and support beyond the three-month workshop program. However, the evaluation found that the added services had no impacts on coparenting, parenting, or partner relationships.

Exhibit 3. Number of outcomes and evaluations with favorable impacts

Domain	Number of outcomes		Number of evaluations	
	Favorable	Total	Favorable ^a	Total
Relationships				
Coparenting skills	2	7	1	3
Relationship skills	0	3	0	2
Parenting, economic stability, and well-being				
Parenting skills and behaviors	1	8	1	4
Child and father well-being	1	4	1	2
Economic stability	4	6	3	4

Source: Avellar et al. (2021).

^a Evaluation had at least one favorable impact for an outcome in the specified domain.

Exhibit 4 describes a few other takeaways from the impact evaluations based on client characteristics.

Conclusion

The local descriptive and impact evaluations discussed in this brief can provide useful information for RF or other programs that seek to engage fathers in services and support

healthy families. These grantees and evaluators demonstrated a commitment to using evaluation to better understand their program operations and effects. RF leaders can build on and extend this knowledge as they implement their programs to serve fathers building healthy relationships with coparents, partners, and their children.

Exhibit 4. Selected impact evaluation findings

- **RF services designed for fathers and their coparents can be effective.** An evaluation of [It's My Community Initiative's TRUE Dads Program](#) provided relationship and parenting education to both mothers and fathers and employment services to fathers. The evaluation found favorable effects on the parents' relationships, including reduced destructive couple communication and domestic violence. The program also reduced couples' symptoms of depression, anxiety, and anger, and increased fathers' employment compared with a control group that could not access these services. The program had no effects on harsh parenting or child behavior problems.
- **[Mountain Comprehensive Care Center](#) provided RF services to incarcerated fathers while they were in regional jails but found no impacts six months after release.** The program provided relationship and parenting education and support for employment and economic mobility while fathers were in regional jails to help them prepare for reentry. Six months after release, these fathers were no more likely to be in a relationship, report parental role satisfaction, or be employed than similar fathers who served time in a different regional jail and did not receive RF services.
- **Programs offering RF services to fathers with child support cases had no or mixed effects.** [Milwaukee County Child Support Services](#) program found no effects on coparenting and parenting right after the program ended. [Rubicon Programs](#) found that six months after program entry employment and public assistance receipt increased, and more fathers had their child support payments modified, but there were no effects on the level of monthly child support payments.
- **[Pathway's](#) program, which served young men ages 20–24, had strong attendance but mixed effects.** The Brothers United Fatherhood Program offered 58 hours of programming in 24 sessions; on average, young men attended 43 hours and 14 sessions. The evaluation found favorable effects on financial planning but no effects on job-readiness skills or healthy relationships.

Endnotes

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² Avellar, Sarah, Leah Shiferaw, Christine Ross, and Joanne Lee. "Supporting Fatherhood: Final Report on the 2015 Cohort of Responsible Fatherhood Grantees." OPRE Report 2021-156. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2021. Accessed on August 26, 2022 from www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/hmrf_-2015-final-report-fatherhood-grantees-oct-2021.pdf.

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