



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES



Office of Family Assistance PeerTA Network
“Strategies for Building and Maintaining Noncustodial Parent Programs”
Webinar Transcript
June 9, 2015
1:30 p.m. Eastern Time

Presenters:

- **Lisa Washington-Thomas, Office of Family Assistance, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**
- **Ann Marie Winter and Margie McGranahan, Gulf Coast Jewish Family and Community Services**
- **Juan G. Valdez, Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services**
- **Mike Roberts, Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention**

Operator:

Ladies and gentleman, thank you for standing by. Welcome to the “Strategies for Building and Maintaining Noncustodial Parent Programs” call. During the presentation, all participants will be in a listen-only mode. If at any time during the conference you need to reach an operator, please press Star, followed by the zero.

As a reminder, the call is being recorded Tuesday, June 9, 2015. And I’d now like to turn the call over to Lisa Washington-Thomas. Please proceed.

Lisa Washington-Thomas:

Thank you so much. Good afternoon and thank you for joining today’s webinar, “Strategies for Building and Maintaining Noncustodial Parent Programs.” We are happy to have a wonderful slate of expert presenters to discuss this important topic with you today.

Again, my name is Lisa Washington-Thomas. I am the Chief of the Self-Sufficiency Branch within the Office of Family Assistance in ACF, Administration for Children and Families. We’re in the Department of Health and Human Services.



We operate — we're the federal program that operates the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, and many of the stakeholders are increasingly understanding the importance of engaging noncustodial parents while also holding them accountable for the economic and social growth of their children.

Many noncustodial parents face barriers as similarly to the custodial parents, such as unemployment, underemployment, or incarceration that can hinder them from providing for their children even when they want to do so.

Some TANF agencies and their partners have built programs to provide the necessary supports and connections with these individuals to help them achieve self-sufficiency. While previous webinars have focused on strategies to engage noncustodial parents, this webinar will focus on the nuts and bolts of program development. It will introduce several programs that have supported noncustodial parents for at least ten years and will explore how these programs were planned and initiated.

At the end of this webinar, we expect participants to be aware of three models of TANF programs and their partners providing services to NCPs; understand how these programs began, including justifying the need for a program to serve noncustodial parents, mapping identifiable assets, and identifying a champion; and finally, we hope that you will identify some next steps that you could take within your agency to start a program to work with this population.

We are fortunate to have four knowledgeable presenters who will be guiding our conversation today and helping to understand the



process for setting up programs to serve NCPs. Throughout the presentation, you have opportunity to ask questions through our chat box in the bottom left corner of your screen. We encourage you to ask questions and please be sure to specify if your question is for a specific presenter or program.

If we do not get to everyone's questions, we will provide a Q and A that will appear on the PeerTA website, along with a transcript and audio recording of today's webinar.

During this afternoon, there will also be a series of polling questions that will appear on your screen. Please answer each by clicking on the radio button next to your selected response. Doing so will not only help us guide the discussion, but will also share additional information that may inform your practice.

So we're going to start with the first polling question: "How knowledgeable are you about TANF-funded programs for NCPs?" Again, "How knowledgeable are you about TANF-funded programs for noncustodial parents?" And I'll give you a few minutes.

Okay. Thank you for your responses.

Now, let me introduce our speakers for today's session. Our first two presenters today are with the Gulf Coast Jewish Family and Community Services based in Clearwater, Florida. Ms. Ann Marie Winter is the Chief Operating Officer for specialized programs and policy. She's responsible for refugee employment, Jewish family elder services, and grants department, and jointly oversees the daily operations of the entire agency.



Ms. Winter has 22 years' experience working with complex domestic and multinational social service and humanitarian organizations. Prior to joining the Gulf Coast, Ms. Winter was the Regional Director of the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program based in Nairobi, Kenya.

Also presenting with Ms. Winter is Ms. Margie McGranahan, who is the Director of Employment Services Department. She has worked with noncustodial parent employment programs for eighteen years and has been the director for the last fourteen. She works in close partnerships with the workforce centers, Creosote, Florida, and the Department of Economic Opportunity in Tallahassee.

Later in the webinar, we will hear from Juan Valdez, who serves as the manager of the Parent Support Services Unit within the Division of Child Support Services in Cook County, Illinois. Mr. Valdez has served in state government for over fifteen years, formerly as a grant manager with the Office of Energy Assistance in the Department of Healthcare and Family Services. He has a Master's Degree in Communications and Training from the Governor State University and a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology.

And finally, but definitely not least, we will hear from Mike Roberts, who is the field director with the Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention. Mr. Roberts served for over 25 years as a high school teacher and coach, where he saw firsthand the need for good parenting skills.



At the Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention, he has assisted grantees of Alabama’s TANF Fatherhood and Healthy Relationships Program with financial accountability, site visits, and grant applications. He has been involved with the Alabama Department of Human Resources and local judges in all aspects of the TANF program.

Ladies and gentlemen, without further delay, I’ll now turn the presentation over to Ann Marie Winter and Margie McGranahan of Gulf Coast Jewish Family and Community Services in Florida.

Ann Marie Winter:

Good afternoon everyone, and we are very honored to be among — such — a group of experts on the issue of noncustodial parents.

Gulf Coast Jewish Family and Community Services has been providing services to noncustodial parents in and around Florida since 1995, when the Florida legislature first appropriated funding for this program. The program is located in four counties of our state. On the West Coast, we’re in Pinellas, Pasco, and Hillsborough County, and we are in Miami in South Florida.

We’re going to provide you with a brief overview of our program and would be happy to answer any questions that you have either today or later on. Basically, our Noncustodial Parents’

Employment Program assists unemployed or underemployed noncustodial parents who are not making their child support payments and have children who receive or are eligible to receive public assistance. We try and help them to find employment, so that they can make those child support payments.



We want to motivate the participants to increase their interaction with children and, of course, we're trying to decrease dependency on TANF.

Margie McGranahan:

Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Margie McGranahan, and I will speak very briefly in regard of our participants, starting with eligibility.

Eligibility — they must be low-income. That means that both the noncustodial parent, and the child which is directly related with the custodial parent, must be below 200% of the poverty line. They must reside in the state of Florida — the child and the noncustodial parent must reside in one of the counties that we provide the services.

Our client base is basically male. It's 80%; half of that are African-American, followed by Hispanics and Caucasians. About 60% of them are ex-offenders.

Some of the barriers — the most popular barriers are — they are limited in education, work history. And most of them have criminal backgrounds, so they are the hardest to serve.

Some of the services that we provide follow the philosophy of Work First. We need to get them employed as quickly as possible, since they are already behind in their child support. We provide assessment. We provide an employment plan. We help them identify barriers of employment with the goal of them getting employed permanently and paying their child support, as well as becoming self-sufficient.



To get that, we provide supervised research. We provide the access to education and vocational, provide case monitoring and follow along. The clients have to be six — employed for six months in order to complete the program. They have to be paying their child support and be on the way to self-sufficiency.

We encourage — we help them with interview preparation and anyway all the employability skills just to get them employed quickly. And we provide a lot of counseling in regard of relationships, because sometimes it's very difficult for them to relate to the custodial parent for their own personal issues. So we work with them on thinking about their child first.

Ann Marie Winter:

Okay, let's talk a little bit about outcomes of this program. Obviously, the primary outcome of this program is to increase child support payment collection, reduce the need for public assistance, but also to help the parents regain the confidence in taking care of their families — not only financially, but holistically. We believe that everyone benefits when parents take financial responsibility for their kids.

The impact on families receiving child support is substantial. Families who receive child support are less likely to rely on TANF. Working parents are less likely to file unemployment claims, and their children are more likely to be covered by medical insurance. This has been found out through independent evaluations that we've done on the program since its inception.

We have some contractual benchmarks that we are required to meet, set forth by the Department of Economic Opportunity and



our local workforce board. And here's just a quick rundown of what some of them are.

So, of course, we have to have a certain number of clients that we enroll in the program every year. We have to place a certain number, and our minimum is 65%. We're looking at 70% at least having three months of retention in that particular position; 50% having six months in that position. We're looking at child support payments to be at least 65%.

We also try and help these — mostly men, but some women also — get wage increases, and we're looking at 30% of the total that we assist, 12% getting position upgrades, and then 54% getting some kind of training or certification to help them increase their ability to get better jobs.

This program would not be possible to do it on our own. There are a lot of different state and local actors who are involved in ensuring that this program is successful. We've listed just a couple here. They are absolutely our workforce boards, which we work very closely with. We're actually collocated at several of our workforce boards here in the area of West Florida. In Miami, we're actually right across the street from the court, which makes it very convenient.

We work very closely with the workforce boards, and one of the things that we do is, we attend all of their meetings, whether they're quarterly phone calls or annual conferences. So we're either presenting the program, talking about the program, ensuring that we have buy-in from the workforce to be able to continue the programming that we do.



Obviously, we partner with, very closely, the Department of Revenue, the court system, and the State's Attorney's Office, through which many of our clients are referred.

We also have ad hoc arrangements and agreements with ex-offender coalitions and probation officers, community social action organizations, and very importantly, employers. We have a bank of about 5,000 employers. It's really important when starting a program to nurture and develop those relationships.

Margie McGranahan:

We are not directly involved with the TANF program, since we don't work with the custodial parents, but we provide information to the courts in regard of the noncustodian in the situation and the child support payments, and all that, who, in turn, relays the information to the Department of Children and Families here in Florida.

We are working on trying to get some kind of involvement through, maybe, mediation, or trying to assist some of the custodial parents to gain employment and all that in a more specific way. But it's also depending on funding.

Ann Marie Winter:

Alright. Let's talk about funding sources. What we do in the state of Florida may be different than many other programs. As Margie mentioned earlier on, we are funded directly from an annual appropriation in the Florida legislature. The money comes from TANF welfare funds federally and then is allocated through the Florida legislature for a certain percentage to be a portion for this program, and the funding is administered through the Department of Economic Opportunity and the local workforce boards.



This is just a slide which demonstrates that. So our funding is very, very unique, in that it is not inherently within the budget of the workforce boards, but comes from a state appropriation every single year.

How did we get this program started? I think it's really important to discuss who the initial champions of this program were, and they very much were our past CEO, Chair of the Board, and key legislators who we call champions of this program. We'll talk a little bit about how that came about in the next slide.

So in 1995, when the National Welfare Reform Law took effect, introducing a five-year limit on federally funded cash assistance, it imposed, as you know, tough new work requirements. It restricted benefits for non-citizens and gave states more flexibility in how to design their welfare programs.

Florida went way beyond the federal law by imposing a relatively short two- to three-year time limit on benefit receipts and by cutting off all cash assistance when adults failed to comply with work requirements or other rules. So the program was very work-oriented.

What we saw was, that there was a gap, however. So, while the custodial parent and the children were being taken care of, and at the risk of losing funding, the noncustodial parent was not making those child support payments, potentially leaving that family at serious financial risk and all the consequences associated with that.



So, our chair of the board, who at the time was working very closely with Child Support Enforcement, and our CEO decided that there was a missing link, that there were not services being provided to the noncustodial parent. Without services for this population, our agency really felt that there was a gap in service — an identified need with no obvious solution.

We approached the governor of the state of Florida at the time and key legislators in our area to support this program. We met with the Department of Revenue and key Child Support Enforcement staff, and through a lot of advocacy from many different sectors, we were able to get funding for this program in 1995. And so the program started and launched in 1996, and every single year since then, we advocate before the Florida legislature to continue to champion this program.

Because of its success, internally there are some things that we've done that have been very, very important to ensure that the program is able to meet its outcomes — and that's identifying and training staff, having policies and procedures that were created specifically for this program, and ensuring that the quality of the program is at its highest level. One of the ways that we do that is to collect data.

We've had several independent evaluations, which we've paid for to show, what is the efficacy of this program? Are the outcomes positive? Is this a program that can sustain itself, and is it meeting the requirements set forth by the workforce board? And overwhelmingly, the answer is yes. Since the inception, the program has successfully served close to 20,000 noncustodial



parents. We will meet that threshold at the end of this fiscal year, which is June 30 for us.

We've helped more than 53,000 children, and that means we've helped people get more than 20,000 jobs. An average of ten parents receive custody of their children each year, and each year an average of 60 clients are assisted with the reinstatement of their driver's license, which is suspended once they have to start making child support payments and are mandated by the court to do so. Interestingly, an average of 80 families stop receiving public assistance, and we have the strong support of a number of different state and local entities.

So I want to talk a little bit about the cost effectiveness of the program, again, which our independent evaluation shows year after year. So for every one dollar that we receive for the program based on this appropriation, we return to the state by our clients through child support payments an average of four dollars. So the state is actually getting a lot of money back for every single dollar that they give up.

We collect an average of \$3.3 million in child support payments every year, and this is quantifiable data from the Department of Revenue. Approximately 80% of the clients who are enrolled in the program and leave the program continue to make child support payments.

I think that's a critical number for people to make note of, and we estimate that about \$400,000 per month — or \$4.3 million every year — is added to the Department of Revenue child support



payments because of this program. This is based on a sampling of 140 clients who reported a 73% decline in receiving Food Stamps.

Margie's going to talk a little bit about the program challenges.

Margie McGranahan:

Well, funding has always been a challenge. As she was saying, every year we have to advocate to the legislature to get this money passed. The thing is, that we are receiving the same amount every year — it is very difficult to get — to increase it.

Another one of the challenges also is that it would be — it will have more weight — the program will have more weight if we have a little perks, if you will, from the Department of Revenue. For example, like giving the clients that are in the program priority to get their driver's license reinstated or a priority on the modification of child support order — things like that that can reward the clients for doing what they need to do, because a lot of them, they think they just can't get ahead and there's no light at the end of the tunnel.

But that will make a big difference on this program.

Ann Marie Winter:

We just jotted down a couple of key items regarding similar programs which we would be happy to discuss and any questions that you have. But it's really important to get good stories to tell about noncustodial parents' successes. It's very important to have data to substantiate the need for this program. And it's very important to do your own quality improvement and independent evaluation to demonstrate the effectiveness of the program.



And with that, Margie and I would like to thank you very much for us being able to share a little bit more about our noncustodial parent employment program in Florida. Thank you very much.

Lisa Washington-Thomas: Thank you, Margie and Ann. I appreciate it. I have another polling question for the audience: “Does your TANF program currently engage noncustodial parents of children in TANF households?” “Does your TANF program currently engage noncustodial parents of children in TANF households?”

Okay, I’ll give you a few more seconds.

And now, I’m going to turn this over to Juan Valdez from Illinois, as well as Mike Roberts from Alabama. Thank you.

Juan Valdez: Good afternoon everyone, again, and thank you very much for this opportunity. I will be presenting and speaking on the TANF EarnFare program here in Cook County, Illinois. And I would like to first begin with an overview of the structure to paint a picture of how this program is set up.

We begin with the Department of Healthcare and Family Services, known as HFS. Within that department is the Division of Child Support Services. Under the Division of Child Support Services is the unit that I manage, which is Parent Support Services.

This is a rather new unit — touching now a little bit on the history and then giving a perspective towards this program. In 1995, this program — this unit, rather, was begun to help assist the noncustodial parents. We wanted to change the thinking of the community, going from an enforcement agency to a service



agency — one that is geared towards looking at the self-sufficiency efforts of our noncustodial parents, so that they are able to make child support payments and contribute towards the well-being of their children.

And so at that time, the Parent Support Services was established to provide people with job search assistance, referrals to other community agencies, and financial help with transportation and training needs. The EarnFare program is one of the many self-sufficiency and employment programs within the unit. Specifically, it is state-sponsored, and it provides training and assistance, so that noncustodial parents can gain on-the-job employment skills.

Let me say that what we tried to do is coordinate these services as best as we can because, again, being that the unit was begun in 1995, I've come in as manager November of 2012, knowing about this program and beginning the discussion of how we can better the program for our noncustodial parents and improve on what had been previously done, because one thing that was found out was that we were on the verge of losing this program completely.

And let me give, now, a background understanding of how this program is administered. The Food Stamp, Employment, and Training program that's administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services — a sister agency — they are the ones that provide the resources as far as contracting, in this case, Civic Staffing, an outside provider, to help us with those employment needs of our noncustodial parents.



So there is a firm relationship between Civic Staffing and HFS — Healthcare and Family Services — so that they afford our agency — our division — fifteen slots a month. With these slots, we identify those appropriate referrals to send to Civic Staffing under the EarnFare program.

Again, this — let me talk a little bit about the EarnFare program itself. EarnFare is a six-month, paid on-the-job employment training program for individuals who are unemployed. We help any individual that may be court-ordered, is a walk-in, or sets up a child support case administratively outside of the court. When we find out that there is a noncustodial parent who is under or unemployed, we will connect them to those self-sufficiency efforts.

If the CP is receiving TANF, they may be obligated by the court to participate in the EarnFare program. Because the unit was established in 1995, the relationship with the court began expeditiously with a lot of different referrals coming into our unit. We started to provide them and having to build those relationships with our community partners. That relationship with Civic Staffing went off to the side for a while and needed to be restructured, needed to be rebuilt, and involved the participation and involvement of some parties that I will be discussing here a bit further.

The EarnFare program is an opportunity for our noncustodial parents to acquire job skills, while meeting a portion of their child support obligation. The child support obligation is a minimum of \$50, as required by the court order.



Do note, though, that if we receive an individual who, again, is eligible to participate in EarnFare and may not have specifically indicated through the court order that they should be referred, we will still make that connection. We will provide them the transportation assistance and look and ensure that they have the resources necessary, so that they receive the job skills training and the assistance with employment through Civic Staffing.

A brief description of who these participants are — again, they can be court-ordered NCPs. The minimum on the order, of course, is fifty dollars. The NCP may or may not be receiving Food Stamp assistance. If the NCP has certain felony convictions, we are able to work with Civic Staffing and, depending on the conviction, still make the referral on behalf of the NCP so that they are engaged. After the first month of completing the EarnFare assignment, they will be tested, and that will determine their ongoing eligibility.

NCPs — what we have tried to do to better this program is take a look at what were the prior needs when making a referral for our noncustodial fathers. We found that the eligibility criteria had changed, based on our working relationships with the State's Attorney's Office.

Many of the courts had rules and regulations that didn't always include in the court order, specifically identifying for us to make that referral. So we could not enforce it by saying to the noncustodial parent that it was suggested by the court for them to attend. We had to find ways to be creative and engage these



noncustodial parents so that they saw it worthwhile to be referred to Civic Staffing.

What our staff here do is, we do a full holistic screening and assessment of the needs of the noncustodial parent. We will look to see where they are at and make that appropriate referral. We then go ahead and reach out to Civic Staffing to ensure that there is a slot available, making the proper connections so that the person just does not show up at any given time or date. We want to make sure that when we do make the referral, they're expecting this individual — that person is arriving to a name and a face at an appropriate time and place. We provide them, again, with that transportation assistance.

Once we find out that the noncustodial parent showed, we want to make sure that we follow up with them. We go ahead and engage in the conversation after their appointment by calling them to find out if it was a perfect fit, if they are now properly engaged to begin their work assignment. We will also communicate with Civic Staffing to make sure that we provided them with a correct referral of an NCP.

If upon hearing from Civic Staffing, and we find out that that person was not an appropriate referral, we will reengage them in our other services towards their self-sufficiency and child support efforts.

As I was stating, we found out that the funding source came to us through federal Food Stamp Employment and Training funds, and the state general revenue funds. We felt that it was very important



to provide this on-the-job training to our noncustodial parents and wanted to secure those fifteen slots a month.

That entailed, back in November 2012, to bring in DHS, to bring in Civic Staffing and my staff, and have the discussion of what were the expectations then, versus the referral expectations now. We wanted to ensure that we found the ways for our customers to get to them, that we were presenting the program in a clear manner so that there was no misunderstanding of what will be expected of the noncustodial parent.

We wanted to provide our staff with training, so that they knew exactly what the program called for and how to present that as well. We created guides for our staff, as well as for the parents to take with them. We revised our referral form. All of these steps were taken to ensure a smooth process and document notable successes or challenges. That in itself was a challenge.

As of 10/1/14 — and please keep something in mind— we have a total caseload of 300 noncustodial active cases — active fathers, primarily. That is a very low number. Our unit, since 2012, has gone through many different transitions in identifying the roles of the staff, whether we complete account reviews, whether we engage individuals in self-sufficiency efforts.

Now that we have been able to narrow down who our active population is and have identified that our role and effort is within the self-sufficiency and employability of noncustodial parents, we want to build and retain the EarnFare program to the benefit of our fathers.



As of 10/1/14, we have identified and referred 16 successful noncustodial parents to the EarnFare program. While that number is very low, again, this is a rather new program, if you will — one that has been revamped, resurrected. And it's one that has shown positive outcomes for those sixteen individuals, to the extent that it has proven ninety-day and better retention. We have found that working through the EarnFare program, it assists those individuals that now have the fifty dollars taken away and automatically provided to their child or children.

This is, again, a little bit about the EarnFare program and how it touches with regards to TANF and contributes towards the children here in Cook County, Illinois. That concludes my presentation.

Lisa Washington-Thomas: Thank you Juan. Mike will be next. Mike, are you on mute?

Mike Roberts: I'm here. Are my slides coming forward? Oh, there we go.

Okay. Again, this is Mike Roberts. I'm the field director here at the Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention. The key word there is prevention. We try to get involved before the abuse and neglect takes place. We work closely with the Alabama Department of Human Resources, who is the initial champion of this program.

The initial program with DHR originally focused entirely on single mothers, but when the Welfare Reform mandates came down, it changed to focusing also, not just for the single mothers, but also fatherhood, job preparation, work preparation, and healthy marriages. Joel Sanders, who is the Family Assistance



Division Director, initiated the program and, as I said, the noncustodial fathers became the focus of this program.

I'd like to thank Ms. Fannie Ashley, who may be listening in today. She's the TANF coordinator at the DHR who helped us with pulling up the history of this program. I won't be able to spend as much time on it as I'd like just because of our time limitations.

And also thank Harrison Black, who's another one of our field directors who did the PowerPoint visual for today.

The initial population was the DHR clients that they already had. And then, DHR reached out and made connections with agencies and organizations that had similar goals. They went through the target population and statistics. Like I said, they decided they would have to make changes in their basic program and, of course, that's where the fatherhood concentration came on. So they discovered that there was inadequate access of the fathers regarding information — also motivational technique and financial management.

And as far as goals and expected outcomes, ours will be a lot like the other two presenters, so I'm going to spend more time and make sure I have time at the end to talk about some of the nuts and bolts that I found as the field director going around my first two years, especially. Half of my caseloads is fatherhood and the things I saw were the boots on the ground which made a program either successful or not.



One of our main goals, of course, was the custodial dollar/noncustodial child support fund that needed to go to the mothers, but the other was to encourage the noncustodial fathers to reconnect with their children. One of the things that you may have heard through the years is how prison offers all their prisoners cards for Mother's Day and the whole population sent out Mother's Day cards. So they saw it was successful, so they tried it again on Father's Day and had no takers. So that tells you something of the problem.

Some of the percentages — and I'll just mention a few — as far as the problems with absentee fathers, children from father-absent homes are five times more likely to live in poverty, three times more likely to fail in school, two or three times more likely to develop emotional/behavior problems, three times more likely to commit suicide. 70% of adolescents charged with murder are from fatherless homes; and up to 70% of long-term prison inmates are from fatherless homes. So with those statistics, it's a wonder that we don't see more money spent on fatherhood programs.

I'll get to — if I have a chance later — some of the statements that I heard made by these noncustodial fathers as I went out on these site visits.

Other goals and expected outcomes — again, we want the child support payments because finances are one of the most — the highest stressors according to the single moms. Collections — the first step to any communication — you might think that would be the other way around. You hear so much about communication. But as I told someone the other day, until their collections begin



with these fathers, there's not going to be any communication with the mothers.

A key thing, again, as I mentioned is to encourage the parents to realize that the child does come first. One thing, though, that we have to work on as we're healing the noncustodial father's wounds — he's also most of the time been rejected by his own father and has no father figure to teach him what it meant to be not only a good parent, but also just a real man.

Program components and services also — we have teaching sessions with the fathers. We work directly with DHR through the court system for the payments. We have — the others — assist in training and employment for the fathers. Job readiness has to do with resume skills, interview skills, and the job searches in the communities.

Some of the things that we try to offer through our community college are short-term skills training. We had one college that's very good as far as a welding program, and others do things like long haul truck driving licenses. The fathers receive counseling services, visitation rights. They often don't know their rights and often even when they start paying, the mothers, for one reason or another, don't give them the rights.

Substance abuse can also be a problem. Anger management is one of the big areas where they need help, and legal assistance in court. They, of course, feel like everyone's against them, so we can have pro bono lawyers work with our grantees. That really helps the fathers feel like there's somebody on their side.



As far as the legal system navigation, we also have peer support. It really helps the fathers when they first come into these programs to realize that they're not alone — that there's other people like them. One of the things I was interested to see is what I call the “third session phenomenon,” where these fathers — especially the ones who are mandated and not real happy to be there — but by the third session, it usually seems to be the turning point for most of these fathers when they realize, “This is something that could really help me.”

And, of course, live skills training in every area of life — most of them really need help with. There's some redundancy here, I see, and anger management, financial training. A good work ethic is something that a lot of these men need help with. It doesn't do much good if you have them get a job if they don't know how to keep it.

Relationship restoration with the mother of the child is very important. The curricula listed here — the last one I will mention we started this year with one of our grantees was called Understanding Dads. This was to help the DHR workers and also the mothers understand some of the issues of the fathers. And it was interesting that even the title is going to probably have to be tweaked, because neither the DHR workers nor the mothers were too interested in understanding the Dad's point of view sometimes.

As far as eligibility, noncustodial mandated parents were the key — male and female. We allowed parents that needed to go into



the program, but priority as far as numbers had to be to the noncustodial parents.

As far as partners and partnerships management, I've already mentioned that to a great degree. We always have good working relationships, and we receive a great deal of help from the Department of Human Resources.

They actually got the funds from Health and Human Services sub-granted out to us, and then we have grantees that applied in our open application system. We give periodic reports to DHR, and we assess grant effectiveness with DHR at the end of the grant period. Some of the things that we do is go out and give financial oversight to our grantees. We perform site visits to make sure things are going as they were detailed in the application and any technical support that they might need.

One of the things as far as evaluation — we have a monthly chart where we would chart the numbers that were employed or laid off, the numbers that were enrolled in educational programs such as the junior college, the numbers that had graduated, and also our short-term skills program as I mentioned before, and the total number of participants here to date.

And one thing we wanted to see, for example — if we gave a grantee \$20,000, we'd like at least 20 men served and at least \$20,000 in funds come back in. And most of the time, we always outdid that, depending on locations sometimes, whether it's been a city program or out in a very rural program.

Site visits — I've already pretty well covered most of that.



And let's see. The challenges — these are the things that I wanted to cover the most. Of course, funding is always a problem. We all know that.

Available jobs is a problem with our economic system the way it is right now. Everybody understands that. But in Alabama, a lot of times, we're rural counties where there's not many programs, not many jobs available.

Felonies are always a problem. Participant buy-in — like I said, if we could get the men in the program, usually by the third time they begin to turn around a lot because of what they hear from their peers. Often times, you have guys that will finish the program and then come back to help in the program in one way or the other.

Another challenge we've had are DHR case workers' relationships with the father. They, of course, are there for the mothers, but sometimes these DHR workers have gone through the same situations, and that puts them at an adversarial view with the fathers. And that was one reason we started the Understanding Dads program this year.

As far as collection of funds, you have the mothers' view of what should be done. You have the fathers' views of — well, she's spending money getting her hair fixed, fixing her nails, new shoes. They're not real happy about that.

The new partners of the mother or the father is a problem. One thing the — one of our grantees did is make sure you tell the fathers never to take your new girlfriend to your next court visit.



Visitation rights can be a problem even when the father begins to pay, because sometimes the mother is just so angry or she just doesn't feel like the child needs to be around the father. But all of these things have to be worked around, so that they realize the child has to come first.

Somebody else mentioned, I think, the first one, about licenses being revoked. It's kind of a cut off your nose to spite your face situation. If you revoke one of these fathers' licenses for not paying, and then, of course, you can't go to a job, nor can he come to the sessions.

Another problem that I saw was the high percentage of penalty for failure to pay. These men have a high interest rate that's put on them for not paying, and it doesn't take long for them to get in a deep, deep hole. I believe one of the states that changed this to some degree was, I believe, South Carolina, where if a father paid what he was supposed to pay for a period of six months to a year, that they would knock off some of the interest payments. And I think, no matter what you feel about the noncustodial fathers, they do have to be able to see a light at the end of the tunnel.

As far as successes, the key thing — like I said, again, the absolute thing is to realize that the child must come first. To do that, you have to have less anger between the co-parents. They just have to agree not to disagree all the time and do things just for the child. It helps when the father has job stability. It helps not only the mother, not only the child, but it helps the father and it helps society in general.



So it's always good for us when we see the fathers complete the program, not only in making their payments, not only in getting a job, but the key thing is that they begin to be tied in again with their children so that that is the long-term success.

As far as my advice from what I have seen, I would say that you have to have full buy-in from judges, whether you're working on a non-mandated or a mandated situation, because judges are going to have a whole lot to say about it. So it's very important that they are on your side.

Mandatory participation makes it easier to get the fathers to the meetings and to court situations, but sometimes — I know we have a program here now — the Responsible Fatherhood Program — that is all non-mandated.

Again, understanding by all the parties — the child must come first. Collections is one of the big keys, and the father's reattachment with the child is the other big key. I believe it helps to some degree to have mandatory participation of the mothers in some form to receive these funds. That's what I have heard from many of my grantees.

Have funding available if you can for transportation. Sometimes you're allowed to use that and sometimes not. Transportation can be very hard to get.

Have well-established rules by your grantees. I think our time's about up.



Punctuality — if you allow these gentlemen to come in at any time during the program, you’ll find that they’re going to come in quite a bit late and miss a lot of the program.

Have a continuity in your sessions if you can. For example, if you have twelve sessions, don’t have it set up where you have to complete all twelve before you allow any new men in. As soon as they’re mandated, they need to be able to come straight into the program.

Your grantees or whoever is going to meet their gentlemen when they’re mandated by the court to make payments — have them meet them, immediately start talking to them, and they can establish a rapport, rather than just giving them information expecting them to follow up on it.

I already mentioned about encouraging the reduction of payments and, again, semantics can affect receptiveness. As I mentioned before just about the Understanding Dads program, they mentioned next year that they’ll have to change it to something that’s more positive towards the mothers, so that they don’t get shut out from the beginning.

And I believe that’s all that I have.

Lisa Washington-Thomas: Thank you Mike. I appreciate all — I thank all the presenters. It was very useful information.

I have another polling — I have two polling questions — “What do you think is the biggest barrier for TANF programs to implement programs or services for noncustodial parents?” “What



do you think is the biggest barrier for TANF programs to implement programs for noncustodial parents?”

Mike Roberts: What was your first question again?

Lisa Washington-Thomas: The first question — you mean at the beginning of the webinar?

Mike Roberts: No, that you just said.

Lisa Washington-Thomas: “What do you think is the biggest barrier for TANF programs to implement programs for noncustodial parents?” It’s one of the polling questions that the audience is going to let us know their views.

Mike Roberts: Well, the biggest barrier I think for noncustodial or for non — did you say non-mandated or just noncustodial? I missed you.

Lisa Washington-Thomas: Noncustodial, but — thanks, Mike, but this is — you can — I’d be glad for you to answer the question, but it was a polling question that the audience is going to.

Mike Roberts: I’m sorry. Okay. I jumped offline.

Lisa Washington-Thomas: But that’s okay. You can share.

Mike Roberts: No, that’s fine. I’ll catch up later.

Lisa Washington-Thomas: Okay. The next question — “What federal technical assistance would be most helpful to you in implementing programs for NCPs?” “What federal technical assistance would be most helpful to you in implementing programs for noncustodial parents?”

Okay. We have received some questions and I’m going to turn the Q and A session over to my colleague, Damon Waters. He’s a



program specialist in the Self-Sufficiency Branch in the Office of Family Assistance.

Damon Waters:

And this first question — thanks, Lisa. This first question is actually going to go to all of our presenters. I know we’re running a little bit over time, so if we could keep our answers short and sweet, that’d be great.

First question — “What happens if a noncustodial parent fails to participate in the NCP program?” And that’s open to any of our speakers. “What happens if an NCP fails to participate in the program?”

Mike Roberts:

This is Mike. If they were mandated by the judges, they would be spending some jail time, which is not always the best thing, because then they can’t work and make any money, but that’s all that was open to some of them.

Damon Waters:

Thanks Mike.

Juan Valdez:

Same thing here in Cook County. Our responsibility to the court is to provide them with an array of different services, so that when we fill out a monthly compliance report that we send to the State’s Attorney’s Office, it identifies for the court our efforts in engaging that participant — that noncustodial parent — within our program and making every option available.

The determination of whether it’s jail time or whether it’s to refer back them to us, or whatever the consequence may be, is very much on the judge himself or herself.



Now if they are not mandated, what we try and do is, again, emphasize the importance of the child being there and the child needing Dad, not only economically, but in their lives. And then with that, we go ahead and just document all of our services what we are able to provide and make sure it's an appropriate fit.

Damon Waters: Thanks Juan. Ann Marie or Margie?

Margie McGranahan: Sorry, we were on mute and didn't realize. In Florida, they are returned back in contempt of court, and some of them will get their driver's license suspended. It depends on how badly they are behind in child support and their back history with the court, but usually they send them back to the program a second time. And it's been our experience that when they come a second time, they listen better and then they participate.

Damon Waters: I'll take another couple of minutes just to answer a couple more. "I heard about a number of the NCPs that are placed in jobs, particularly from the Florida program; however, what percentage actually kept their jobs for an extended period of time?"

Margie McGranahan: Our benchmark is usually 50% of the employed to retain six months, but a lot of them — there are over 85% that end up continuing to work and pay. And then afterwards, we do — in the evaluation, we check back a group, and we find that about 80% continue to work and pay.

Damon Waters: Thank you. "Are there ongoing support groups offered to NCPs who complete fatherhood curriculum and programming?" That's for anyone.



Mike Roberts: There are our grantees that — even if the fathers — when the fathers complete the program, they will still be glad to help them with job resumes, job searches, skills training — things like this. Some of them, actually, when they finish like to come back and be peer mentors, and we’ve actually had one that went through the program, came back, and is now staff of one of our grantees.

Damon Waters: Okay.

Margie McGranahan: In Florida, we don’t have a support group, per se, but, however, when they finish the program then we are available, and they can call us at any time, and we provide any advice as needed.

Juan Valdez: Here in Cook County, we have several different tailored programs; one of which comes to mind is our peer-to-peer counseling program. This is geared towards individuals that live in the Cook County Chicagoland area, and they are a group — a session of noncustodial fathers who come together and share best practices or challenges, so that they themselves help navigate or address in discussion some of their challenges.

They also are made aware of our overall agency services — whether it’s to put in for a modification, whether it’s to go ahead and participate in a clean slate program, which is where you take away the state-owed amount if eligible, and just letting them know where they can go to speak to someone or access our services online appropriately, as opposed to just calling the 1-800 number.

Damon Waters: Okay, and two last questions — I’ll wrap them into one: “Could you give some examples or some recommendations on providing



job placement, job training, and job preparation services for parolees and those with criminal records?”

Mike Roberts:

This is Mike. I would say, make good use of any of your local community colleges.

Ann Marie Winter:

So 60% -- this is Florida. Sixty percent of the clients that we serve have some kind of previous criminal record, so we're very familiar with this. It's really important to be up front with the employers and to let them know the population they're dealing with. They may have some kind of tax benefits by actually working with this population, depending on the state. That's the case for Florida.

But it's also necessary to set the expectations of the clients, as well, as the type of jobs that they can get because of their backgrounds. But really key — to be up front with the employers, establish that relationship, get a couple guys that do a good job — that opens the way for others. This program is all about relationships — whether it's your relationship with the client, their relationship with their family. So that would be my answer.

Juan Valdez:

Very similar here in Cook County. We have regular expungement summits that brings together the State's Attorney's Office reps, the driver's license unit — a lot of different community organizations that specifically tailor towards individuals who have a background.

One of the big agencies here is the Safer Foundation, and Safer Foundation assists with employment in identifying those employers who are willing to work in some capacity with people



who have a background. We look at on-the-job training, recognizing that a high percentage of the individuals we serve do have a background. So let's see what we are able to do for them in putting them back in the workforce.

Damon Waters:

And I'm going to close out with just this one last question: "I know that a lot of the discussion about funding was on TANF. Are there other funding sources, either at the state or federal level or private funding that you access?" Open to anyone.

Juan Valdez:

Here in Illinois, I'll just say that we are always looking for opportunities, especially when it comes to different grants that may be available, so that we can look at new initiatives — new ways of servicing our noncustodial parents. For the most part, we rely on those already established programs and memorandum of understandings, or relying on our community partners who have already those longstanding contracts and relationships with the state to help our noncustodial parents.

Ann Marie Winter:

In the state of Florida — the United Way — one of the themes that they are promoting and actively providing grants for is out-of-the-box thinking for employment. And that's for the hardest to serve populations in the very urban and rural areas of Florida. And so, while it's not specifically targeted for noncustodial parents, a program with that kind of funding could serve noncustodial parents with job search and parenting skills in line with the United Way's theme in this area.

Damon Waters:

Okay, thank you. And I'll turn it back over to Lisa Washington-Thomas, Office of Family Assistance.



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Lisa Washington-Thomas: Thanks, Damon, and thanks to Juan, Mike, and Ann Marie. You gave us very useful information and I learned a lot and I hope our audience did as well.

I want to thank all of you for participating today. Please remember to provide your feedback on this webinar using the survey that will appear in a separate pop-up window when the webinar ends. A transcript and audio recording of this webinar will be available shortly on the PeerTA Network. The website is <https://peerta.acf.hhs.gov>. Again, that's PeerTA -- P-E-E-R-T-A.acf.hhs.gov.

We would also like to hear from you about future webinar topics. Please send your ideas by e-mail to Peerta@icfi.com. Again —

I don't want to say desperately, but I truly do mean we are desperate to — because we want to be responsive to you in the field. So we truly do want to hear your ideas and suggestions for future webinar topics. So, please send your ideas and suggestions by e-mail to [PeerTA – P-E-E-R-T-A@icfi.com](mailto:PeerTA-P-E-E-R-T-A@icfi.com).

Please also help us to expand our network and reach a greater number of people by directing interested colleagues from your local and state networks and agencies to our website. And I mentioned that before — Peerta.acf.hhs.gov.

We look forward to your participation on future webinars, and also, if you have TA needs, please look at our website and request those or participate in the Q and A section where we have a Q and A section on the website, so that you can hear from your peers in the field.



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So again, we look forward to your participation in future webinars. Have a great afternoon. Thank you very much.

Operator:

Ladies and gentlemen, that does conclude the conference call today. We thank you for your participation and ask that you please disconnect your line.

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