



# *Leaving the Street*

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YOUNG FATHERS MOVE FROM HUSTLING TO LEGITIMATE WORK

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LAUREN J. KOTLOFF

**P/PV**

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A PUBLICATION OF PUBLIC/PRIVATE VENTURES

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Public/Private Ventures is a national nonprofit organization that seeks to improve the effectiveness of social policies and programs. P/PV designs, tests and studies initiatives that increase supports, skills and opportunities of residents of low-income communities; works with policymakers to see that the lessons and evidence produced are reflected in policy; and provides training, technical assistance and learning opportunities to practitioners based on documented effective practices.

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## INTRODUCTION

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*The only bad thing I think I really ever did was sell drugs, you know, and that really messed up my life. And when I was younger, I didn't look at it like that. [The projects] was my world at the time, and everyone in my world, this is what it was about, you know. I didn't know anything about productive. And what really opened my eyes is when I was working in Texas. I think I was 21 at the time. And that's when it really hit me: it's another world out here. And ever since then I've been striving to get a piece of that pie, just to live right, you know. And I would be happy. I don't have to be rich, you know. I just want to live a normal life, that's all.*

—Farad<sup>1</sup>

**F**arad is a participant in Fathers at Work, an initiative designed to help low-income, noncustodial fathers secure a living-wage job, increase their involvement with their children and manage their child support obligations. From age 14 until about a year before enrolling in the program, Farad relied almost exclusively on selling drugs to support himself and his family, and he was incarcerated for a drug-related crime. Drug dealing and prison took a toll on him, and he has since decided to turn his life around. He entered Fathers at Work with the hope that it could help him find a job that pays well enough to keep him out of hustling for good.

Farad is one of 27 men who took part in an in-depth interview study designed to examine the experiences of a subgroup of Fathers at Work participants who had relied on hustling—primarily selling drugs, but in two cases, committing robberies and burglaries—as a source of income.<sup>2</sup> To varying extents, these men worked in legitimate jobs while they hustled, and they balanced hustling and work in different ways. Almost all have been incarcerated for their crimes. Like Farad, they are trying to turn their lives around and are seeking employment opportunities through Fathers at Work. Their stories of hustling and working, their desire to go straight and their responses to the program are the subject of this report.

Fathers at Work was launched in 2001 in six sites across the country.<sup>3</sup> Each site offered a combination of employment, fatherhood and child support services to low-income, noncustodial fathers ages 18 to 30. The initiative was funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. The National Partnership for Community Leadership (NPCL) provided technical assistance on fatherhood and child support, and Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) managed the initiative, provided assistance on employment and evaluated the demonstration.

This interview study is part of a larger evaluation that P/PV is conducting of the Fathers at Work demonstration, which enrolled 1,222 men across the six sites. The full study will assess program outcomes, using surveys administered to all participants at the time of their enrollment and again 12 to 18 months later. In order to gain a more detailed understanding of the participants' lives, P/PV undertook an in-depth interview study of a sample of 37 Fathers at Work participants from three of the six sites. As the men began sharing their stories with P/PV interviewers, it became clear that, before enrolling in Fathers at Work, all but 10 had earned money by hustling, and most of the men who hustled had been incarcerated. At the same time, data from the initial survey of participants in the full demonstration indicated that a sizable proportion—20 percent—reported earning money through illegal means in the month prior to enrolling in Fathers at Work. Approximately 76 percent of the full sample had been convicted of a crime.

Men who have earned money illegally present unique challenges to programs designed to help them find stable employment. Many have a criminal background that creates a serious obstacle to securing a job, and their history of relying on hustling as a primary or supplementary source of income is likely to affect their long-term job retention rates. Learning more about their behavior and motivations could lead to more effective ways of helping them gain a stable foothold in the legitimate labor market.

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## THE POLICY CONTEXT

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Fathers at Work came into being in response to society's increasing demand that poor, noncustodial fathers take responsibility for the financial well-being of their children. Recent changes in the welfare laws have strengthened the formal child support system's ability to serve child support orders to low-income, noncustodial fathers. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) now requires women to identify the fathers of their children before they can receive cash benefits. And new performance standards put pressure on child support enforcement agencies to go after individual cases more aggressively. Furthermore, the agencies' ability to collect has been strengthened by the creation of a national registry of all new hires, which allows the system to find recently employed men with support orders and automatically deduct payments from their wages.

At the same time that these new policies have been implemented, recent studies have provided new insight into the factors that make it difficult for low-income, noncustodial fathers to provide for their children. Research over the past several years has largely dispelled the notion that they are uncaring, deadbeat dads who are unwilling to support their children. Instead, the evidence indicates that these men want to provide for their children but lack the financial means to do so—primarily because they themselves are poor. A study by the Urban Institute found that only 43 percent of the 2.5 million low-income, noncustodial fathers who were not incarcerated had worked at all during the previous 12 months. Most had worked only part of the year, and their average annual earnings were just over \$5,600.<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, without stable employment, low-income, noncustodial fathers will continue to fall behind in their financial obligations to their children. However, their prospects of securing a good job are severely limited because of educational deficits, poor job skills, lack of recent work experience and, in many cases, a criminal record. The Urban Institute found that more than 40 percent of the men in its study had less than a high-school education, about a third had not worked at all for more than three years, and about 30 percent were incarcerated.<sup>5</sup> Ethnographic studies reveal that many of these men have ongoing legal issues, drug and alcohol problems, and health and mental health issues that make it difficult for them to keep a job.<sup>6</sup>

Ex-offenders typically face formidable barriers to securing employment. Many employers do not want to hire people with criminal records. One survey found that while more than 90 percent of employers said they would be willing to fill a recent vacancy with a welfare recipient, only 40 percent were willing to hire an ex-offender.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, evidence suggests that the growing ease of accessing prison records is increasing the likelihood that employers will check to see if job applicants have criminal histories.<sup>8</sup>

The number of ex-offenders being released into the community has swelled in recent years. In 2001, approximately 635,000 former prisoners were released from state and federal correctional facilities, a fourfold increase since 1970.<sup>9</sup> A growing proportion of these ex-offenders are serving time for drug-related crimes. As a result of more intensive targeting of drug offenders by law enforcement, coupled with new state and federal mandatory-minimum sentencing laws, the percentage of drug offenders who are arrested, convicted and sentenced has increased. In 2000, about 57 percent of federal inmates and 21 percent of state inmates were serving time for a drug offense.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, it is very likely that employment programs such as Fathers at Work will serve increasing numbers of ex-offenders who have been convicted of drug-related crimes. What do we know about the work experiences of these men? The few studies that have addressed this question have found that drug offenders are a diverse group. They include individuals who have been mostly unemployed as well as individuals with varying ties to the labor market.<sup>11</sup> Drug offenders who do work are typically employed in low-wage jobs, are intermittently employed or work in short-lived jobs in the informal labor market.<sup>12</sup> Less is known about their attitudes toward work, their experiences of the workplace or their motivations for moving between work and hustling. A better understanding of these issues could lead to programs that are more effective in helping these men earn their living exclusively through legitimate work.

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## RESEARCH METHODS

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The 27 men that are the focus of this study were recruited from three Fathers at Work sites: Vocational Foundation, Inc. (VFI), in New York, NY; Impact Services in Philadelphia, PA; and STRIVE in Chicago, IL. (See Appendix A for a description of each site.) The interviews took place between September 2002 and June 2003. In each city, P/PV hired a local researcher experienced in ethnographic fieldwork in poor urban communities, who recruited the men for the study. Over a period of roughly three months, the researchers met with each participant three or four times for interviews of about 90 minutes in length. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed, and serve as the primary basis of information for this report.

In order to fully acquaint themselves with the program and be able to stay in contact with the men between interviews, the researchers also regularly observed program activities, such as workshops and classes, family outings and alumni meetings. They also interviewed program staff at each site.

Because we wanted to construct as diverse a sample as possible from Fathers at Work participants, the on-site researchers were instructed to recruit men for the study who differed in terms of age, ethnicity, number of children, status in the formal child support system, and level of interest and participation in the program. However, only men who completed the initial (baseline) survey that was part of P/PV's evaluation of Fathers at Work were eligible for the interview study. (Survey completion was not a requirement for receiving program services.) Because the survey was usually administered two to three weeks after the men enrolled in the program and notification of survey completion typically took several days to reach the on-site researchers, the men recruited to the interview study had all been participating in Fathers at Work for at least three weeks before they were asked to join the interview study. As a result, this study does not include the views of men who, for whatever reason, decided to leave the program before three weeks, and instead, consists of men who either completed the program or remained connected to it over several months. (See Appendix B for additional details about research methodology and sample selection.)

## THE STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Of the 27 men who participated in the interview study, 12 were from Impact, 8 from VFI and 7 from STRIVE. A number of the men were currently involved with the criminal justice system. Impact is one of the two Fathers at Work sites that exclusively serve ex-offenders. Among the Impact participants, nine were about to be released from a community correctional institution (a halfway house), two were participating in a prison work-release program and one was on house arrest. In addition, at least one of the STRIVE participants was on parole.<sup>13</sup>

The men range in age from 19 to 30. Twenty-one are African American; six are Hispanic. All are noncustodial parents of at least one child, and ten have fathered children with more than one woman. One has been married.



In general, the men's living situations have been unstable and precarious for most of their adult lives. As a group, they have moved in and out of the homes of friends, relatives and girlfriends (who most often live with their own extended families); one lived in a homeless shelter for some weeks during the course of the study. The nine Impact men who were living in the halfway house were scrambling to secure living arrangements that would be approved by their parole officers. Many of the 27 men have a history of personal or mental health problems. More than half (14) admitted to long-term, heavy use of recreational drugs (primarily daily marijuana use), and two or three said they continued using up to the point when they entered the program. Six of the men admitted having serious anger-management problems, and three have been arrested or incarcerated for domestic abuse.

The men came to Fathers at Work with a range of labor market experience. On one end of the spectrum were men who had worked steadily in a series of jobs; on the other were men who had worked only occasionally and for very brief periods of time. All but three of the sample were unemployed at the time they enrolled, and the three who were employed had part-time jobs. The intensity and length of their hustling backgrounds varied as well: the group included men who were deeply involved in criminal activities for a number of years, as well as men whose involvement was more sporadic.

The men came to the program through different routes. Eleven of the Impact participants, including the nine living in the halfway house, had enrolled at the suggestion of their parole officers. Four other men in the sample were referred by the courts because they were unemployed and thus unable to meet their formal child support payments. One was referred by family court as one of several conditions for regaining custody of his child, who had been removed from his and his girlfriend's care by child-protective services. The remaining 11 men came because they had been unsuccessful in finding a full-time job after months of searching. Regardless of the route they took, by the time they enrolled in Fathers at Work, all of the men had made a commitment to stop selling drugs or being involved in other illegal hustles. In their view, finding a full-time job with good wages offered their only chance of staying permanently away from crime. They believed that if they were working a good job, they could stabilize their lives, earn enough to support themselves and their families, and avoid slipping back into criminal activities.

While highly motivated to find full-time work, the men came to the program with many obstacles to achieving this goal. Almost two thirds (17) had not earned a high-school diploma or GED, and only four had any postsecondary education (one had completed a nurse's assistant certification program, and three others had completed some college). Although most had experience working in legitimate jobs, they tended to move from job to job, and none had built a substantial work history. Further exacerbating their problems finding employment, all but four had been incarcerated for a felony crime or misdemeanor. They were convicted of crimes ranging from misdemeanor drug possession to felony assault, robbery and burglary.

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## THE STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

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Given the obstacles these men are facing and the growing mandate that they provide financial support to their children, what approaches can programs take that will increase the likelihood that the men will find jobs and remain in the formal labor market? This report draws on the experiences of the 27 men in our study to begin answering that question. The next two chapters explore their experiences before they enrolled in Fathers at Work—Chapter II describes why they became involved in hustling and why they want to get out, while Chapter III examines their experiences with legitimate work, how they moved between hustling and work, and their motivations for doing so. Chapter IV then looks at how the men responded to the program's attempts to help them make the transition to a more legitimate lifestyle that included full-time work in the formal labor market, and how well they were succeeding a year after enrollment. Chapter V identifies challenges the men face after they leave the program, and a final chapter offers recommendations for practitioners, drawn from lessons learned from this study.

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## INVOLVEMENT IN HUSTLING

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*I was young then, and at the time, everyone around me saw jobs as, “That’s for the older people.” But whatever was going on that was quick money, I was involved in it. And being used to that planted me stiff to the point where this is what I wanted to do, and I ain’t wanna do nothing different.*

—Hareem

**T**he 27 men in our study sold drugs or committed other crimes for money over periods ranging from 2 to 14 years. Some did so until recently; others had stopped several months prior to enrolling in Fathers at Work. They all say they want to quit for good. Their stories illuminate a set of values and motivations that explain why they started hustling, what economic and social benefits they gained, and the reasons they want to stop hustling despite the dramatic decrease in income that will likely result.

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## GETTING INVOLVED

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The men in the study started hustling in their teens, a common age for initiating low-level drug dealing and other income-producing crime in poor urban neighborhoods. More than half were selling drugs by the time they were 16. Their reasons for starting are also typical of this population: a desire to participate in the material wealth of mainstream America and a lack of legitimate means for doing so, coupled with the pervasiveness of the drug trade within their communities, peer networks and families, which makes hustling normative and entry easy.

Alfredo exemplifies one common trajectory. His childhood was marked by poverty, domestic violence and exposure to drug dealing and substance abuse. He described how, as a young teenager, he escaped to the streets to avoid conflict at home and failure at school:

*My mom, she always took care of us. It was nine of us, you know, ain’t have no pops since I was probably like five years old. And there used to be a lot of violence going down in my house. That just pushed me off, you know. I spent more time in the streets than I did home. And I felt like it was, like, a whole lot better, and I ain’t have to see all that and stress out, and then I preferred to just be in the streets and chill with my friends than come back home or be in school.*

As he spent more time in the streets, school became increasingly irrelevant, and his hustling activities increased. Like others in our study, he began to cut school frequently and eventually dropped out:

*I was missing class, and I just stopped going. I didn’t see nothing, like what am I gonna get out of this? I’m going to school for nothing, man, that’s how I was looking at it. I just stopped going and decided to be in the streets and just hustle.*

Throughout his childhood, he had seen family members selling drugs. Looking back, he felt it was almost inevitable that he followed in their path:

*I used to see some of my family, they used to be bagging up and everything. So it's like I grew up around all that. And that's why, it was already in me, you know.*

Other men began to sell drugs after joining a street gang whose members were engaged in drug dealing and other crimes. After a series of residential changes and a period spent living in a homeless shelter, Farad joined a gang at age 14 because, as he explained:

*I was never able to fit in. I had low self-esteem, and you know, that's when the gangs came along. I kind of felt I belonged to something. Then the trouble comes, with petty crime cases and misdemeanors, trespassing, you know. It wasn't that I was really a bad guy, just, you know, hanging out with a group.*

Financial pressure pushed some young men into hustling. Two reported that they started hustling in their early teens to help support their families. Four others said that impending parenthood motivated them to start hustling or to move from dabbling to more serious involvement. For example, Guy, who became a parent at 15, tried to live up to his girlfriend's expectations of what it meant to be a good father. This involved buying expensive things for his child. He dropped out of school and started hustling so his newborn son would not have to wear hand-me-down clothes:

*I had started getting in trouble more, you know, to try to support him, cause it was like some of the clothes, [my girlfriend] wouldn't let him wear them, you know, the clothes that was given [i.e., hand-me-downs]. She wanted him to have new stuff, so I had to get out there and do my thing.*

James started hustling because he couldn't find even a part-time job, and worked a corner when he needed something:

*The only reason [I sold drugs], it was because I needed money. People wouldn't give me [a job]—so I'll go get it myself then. And it used to be cold outside, talking about below zero, and I just stand outside and get the money that I needed. Other than that I won't be [hustling]. You won't even see me.*

Most of the men, however, did not begin to hustle because they lacked money for basic necessities like food and housing, but out of an intense desire to acquire expensive clothes, jewelry and other luxury goods. Even those raised by hardworking parents or grandparents who provided for their material needs hung out with peers who viewed luxury items as necessities. Chris explained:

*The things my grandmother wanted me to have, I didn't want it. I wanted to be in style. I wanted to be with my friends, you know, all my friends had the latest things. I was getting the reject stuff, and basically I just wanted to fit in.*

Omar recalled how he looked up to the young men grown rich from hustling and wanted what they had:

*I looked at the guys in the neighborhood with the money and the cars and the jewelry and the clothes and noticed they got all the girls. I said, "You know what, I'm gonna be just like him, I'm gonna have that," and you fall into it.*

At the same time, the young men saw few examples of adult men who were successfully supporting themselves and their families by working in a legitimate job. As Farad observed, “See, it’s like the projects, it’s like it’s its own little world. It’s a lot of good people there, but it’s hard to find a lot of productive good people, you know.”

Having failed in school, and with severely limited job prospects, the men viewed hustling as the most viable route to success. By the time they were in their teens, they saw that they could earn far more money faster through hustling than by working at the low-wage jobs that they had or were likely to get. In fact, the idea of working toward a future goal was not part of the reality they saw all around them. Leonard described how he decided to drop out of school and sell drugs despite the promise of a sports scholarship, because he had no faith in that vision of his future:

*I thought to myself, the chances of me going to the NFL or running track in the Olympics was very slim. So—instant gratification. I wanted results now, not go to school and obtain a degree, then my results come in 10 years. But now, 10 years is passed and I have nothing, so [laughing] maybe I should have went.*

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### GETTING CAUGHT UP

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The men hustled for varying lengths of time and with different degrees of intensity and success. Some hustled steadily over a period of several years, while others did so intermittently. Most moved between working and hustling, but about a third relied solely on hustling for their income.

There was wide variation in the amount of money the men reported earning. Many said that hustling money was not always steady or reliable, and the estimates of what they earned on good and on bad days differed considerably from person to person. Various men estimated earning between \$150 and \$400 on slow nights (often the result of increased police presence), and \$1,500 to \$3,000 on good nights.<sup>14</sup> Three of the men reported earning extraordinary amounts of money at the height of their drug dealing. Alberto, for example, estimated that at one point he was bringing in \$15,000 each Friday night from selling drugs to men who drove in from the suburbs. He began hustling relatively late, at around 19 or 20, after he had already begun working. The job he had just before he started selling drugs, bagging potatoes for a produce processing plant, paid \$5.50 an hour.<sup>15</sup>

Drug money enabled successful dealers to support lifestyles that would be impossible to think about on the low wages they earned working legitimate jobs. Omar, who worked on and off during a sustained hustling career spanning several years, recalled that drug money “took me to Canada, to Florida, it took me to Atlanta, you know, the drug money took me a lot of places. That’s why I can’t say that I regret it.” A few of the men described being almost intoxicated by the amount of money they could make. According to Derrick:

*I’d always say I would need the money, but I really didn’t need the money, I was just fascinated on how fast the money was coming and how fast I could spend it and do anything I wanted.*

At least half of the men used drugs as well, and they hustled to support their drug habits. This typically involved heavy daily use of marijuana. One man acknowledged having spent up to \$300 a day on marijuana.<sup>16</sup> Another said that he used as much as he sold. Thus, supporting their own substance use was an important reason why the men remained involved in selling drugs.

Hustling also brought social benefits, increasing the men's status among their families and friends. Carlos recalled that, because of the money he made from hustling, he was the main breadwinner in his extended family, and family members relied on him, not only for material support but also for guidance and advice—a role he relished:

*I'm not trying to brag or nothing, but it was like I was the light for the house and everything was, like, going through me, like everything. I mean, like money-wise and just family-value-wise. Like my sister going out on a date, her boyfriend—he got to come meet me first, stuff like that. I mean, like I used to pay my mom's rent and everything, I mean, buy them cars.*

Successful hustlers were looked up to by the younger men in the neighborhood, and hustling money attracted women who enjoyed the things the money could buy. Many men were proud of the fact that they could buy expensive clothes and toys for their children, and would spend as lavishly on them as they did on themselves. Talking about the outings he and his five-year-old daughter used to take, Wendell recalled:

*With [my daughter], I was always the one where anything she wanted, she got it... She want a toy or a bike, you know, she can get it on the spot. Well, she used to get it on the spot... I know she's spoiled, cause we used to go in Toys R Us just cause we was downtown, you know. If I wanted some sneakers, she [also] got some sneakers.*

But despite the money and status they earned from hustling, the men learned that it eventually brought severe negative consequences. At the point when we met them as Fathers at Work participants, they all said they wanted to stop hustling. A few had stopped several months before enrolling in the program; others had only recently made a decision to try to stop. About a quarter of the men recalled that they had made a commitment to stay away from hustling while they were serving time in prison.<sup>17</sup> Faced with loneliness and the loss of freedom, the men had the time and impetus to reflect on the negative consequences, to themselves and their families, of their criminal activities. Omar, who was just finishing his sentence, recalled how he and his buddies used to dream about how they would go straight when they got out:

*We used to just, you know, even when we wasn't supposed to be talking, we used to talk. And we all used to plan, "Can't wait until we go home," and "I'm gonna get a job," and "I'm gonna raise my kids." That's all we used to talk about.*

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## WANTING TO GET OUT

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The reasons the men gave for deciding to quit hustling centered around three main themes: they wanted to avoid the risks that come with hustling; they wanted to be better fathers; and they wanted to lead more productive, legitimate lives.

### AVOIDING THE DANGERS OF HUSTLING

The most common reason the men gave for wanting to stop hustling was to avoid the risks of violence and incarceration that hustling brought. It is clear from their stories that, in spite of the fast money, the life of a drug dealer is far from glamorous. Without exception, the men described it as filled with unrelenting stress. When asked to describe his experience of hustling, Carlos replied:

*It's really paranoid, constantly looking over my shoulder, counting the time after I serve a delivery to the time how long you think the police is gonna come up in front of you. I'm watching for them, watching for the stick-up man, watching for the man that's trying to take my pat [money], watching for the guy that's trying to beat me out some way or another, watching for the female that's trying to beat you out some way or another. Either way I go, you're always looking over your back or always watching.*

The risk of violence was even greater for men who sold hard drugs, as Anthony discovered when he moved from selling marijuana to selling narcotics:

*Before, I wasn't really into guns and all that, I ain't really need 'em. And once I got into [selling narcotics], it was a whole different game. It was like you got to walk around in the summertime, 90-, 100-degree weather, with a bulletproof vest on and heavy guns. And I started thinking, like that could be me [who gets shot]. And there was a couple times, like my man be riding down the street, and somebody jumped from behind a car and started shooting. [My friend] had no choice but to start shooting back. So I mean anything could happen.*

The threat of arrest was also ever present, and most of the men had been arrested, imprisoned or on probation at least once for a drug-related crime. Not surprisingly, the men described incarceration as a period of intense loneliness, anxiety and depression, as Guy recalled:

*Man, here it is now, I'm sitting in this jail cell thinking about what I was supposed to have been thinking about while I was out, you know, with my kids, thinking about my girl and if she gonna cheat on me, you know, things like that. Jail give you all types of feelings. They don't give you no happy feelings unless you get some mail or unless you're gonna come home. Other than that, you're gonna be in there sad and hurt, and it's like that feeling will tear you apart.*

As juveniles, the men tended to view arrest and probation as a hassle. As they began to accumulate adult cases, however, the threat of much longer prison sentences became a real possibility that they wholeheartedly wished to avoid. Charles, who had been incarcerated three times, knew that if he were arrested again, his next sentence would be much worse: "If I do something illegal, I might go to the penitentiary a long time.... If I start hustling, I might be gone, shhh, 12, 13, 14 years."

The fear of having their possessions confiscated by the police if they were arrested limited the freedom with which the men could use their hustling money, thus diminishing its chief benefit. Because the money was earned illicitly, they had to hide the goods they bought with it or risk drawing the attention of law enforcement. Many men complained about their inability to use a credit card or open a bank account. For Farad, having to hide his assets and pay in cash was more than an inconvenience; it also drew the community's attention to his outlaw status. While this may have been a source of pride when he was a teenager, as he moved into his twenties, these signs of his criminality became a source of shame, and he began to look forward to the day he could purchase things with money legitimately earned—even if it meant living with much less:

*I don't need to be making a lot of money, just to be able to say I'm doing something honest, you know. I could go places and spend money and not really be ashamed. Because [when I was] hustling, I had a lot of money, but I was ashamed to go certain places. I didn't feel right going somewhere and pulling out knots [of money] and paying cash. When you're working, you get the chance to get credit cards; and when you're hustling, you go buy a car, you got to go all cash, everybody know what you do.*

As time went on and the men matured, the risks of hustling started to outweigh the benefits. Sobered by incarceration as well as the violence of the street, some of the men now claim that they have moved away from the excessive materialism that lured them into hustling when they were teenagers, and say they no longer feel the need to own fancy cars and designer clothes. A few, like Farad, spoke of their growing sense of shame in being seen as criminals. Others, like Leonard, said they want more out of life. Now 24, he looked back with regret at the years he spent hustling:

*It's been 10 years since I left the house. I've had cars, clothes and all of that, a lot of material things, but I have nothing concrete, and I haven't progressed too much further than when I left. I like to progress in everything I do, and I saw no progression in it, I saw no progression in it.*

### RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD AND A DESIRE FOR LEGITIMACY

All of the men wanted to stop hustling to avoid the risk of violence and arrest. In addition, men who were involved with their children, about two thirds of the sample, were motivated to give up hustling because they wanted to be more responsible fathers.<sup>18</sup> They spoke of this in several ways.

At the least, they wanted to be present in the lives of their children and to avoid the separation that incarceration would bring. Many had not seen their children regularly during their incarceration, either because the distances were too great for their families to travel or because the visits were too painful for them. They regretted missing key events in their children's lives and felt frustrated at being unable to provide for them financially. Men who had endured such a separation described it as a wrenching experience. As Carlos said:

*I couldn't stand visits, the leaving-part scene, whew, in the county [prison]. [My daughter] was like two-and-a-half years old when I left. And every time it was time for her to leave after a visit, oh man, she started crying. One time, I said, "Bye," and I started walking away. When I got to the guard, they're like, "Your daughter can't come." I turn around, she's right there following me. I was like, oh man. I had to pick her up, take her to her mom. She was crying. That's why I couldn't stand visits. They made me miserable. Then I went [to a state prison], and it was almost two years I didn't see 'em, almost two years.*

Another father, Alberto, who was deeply connected to his five-year-old daughter, was overwhelmed when he talked to her for the first time after being in prison for over two years:

*Shhh, my daughter's so big already. I didn't see her in real life, but I seen her in pictures, she looks so big, so pretty. I mean, me and her had a conversation [recently]; I was like, my God, I can't believe I lost so many years. I mean, it was only like two-and-a-half years, but it seems like it's been the whole eternity.*

Men spoke of being afraid that their children would not recognize them when they returned home from jail, and were overjoyed when they did. And they realized that, if convicted again, they would likely spend a much longer time in prison and would forgo the chance of being involved in their children's lives at all. One of the older men, who was a very involved father prior to his recent incarceration, talked about his fears of one day sharing jail time with his son, something he had actually seen while in prison. He reasoned that this might happen if he continued his criminal behavior and was sent away for a longer sentence.

Involved fathers hoped that by avoiding hustling and working in a legitimate job they could be better role models to their children. Omar hoped that if he worked, he could convince his children that their dad was now “clean.” Guy wanted to quit hustling and get a job for a similar reason:

*If I go to jail, what am I gonna tell [my kids]? Ain't nothing left to tell them. They gonna see me behind a glass, and I don't want them to see me like that. I'd rather want them to see me in a suit and tie, you know.*

Hareem hoped that by working rather than hustling, he could set a better example for his children than his drug-dealing father set for him:

*I wanted to do the opposite of everything my father did, you know, which means be there for my son and not on the street, right.... And what I mean by that, you know, getting up for work, letting your kids see you do all these positive things that's supposed to be done in life, you know, not get up and see your parents fighting over drugs. No, I want to raise my child. When he grow up, he'll see that his mother goes to work, his father goes to work. I want him to see a schedule. I want to teach him things that my parents ain't never taught to me.*

Hareem was one of eight men who stood out from the others because their motivation to stop hustling was rooted in their desire to establish or maintain a household for themselves, their girlfriends and their children. The other 19 men in the study, even those who were involved in their children's lives, had either fathered children within casual relationships or had become estranged from the child's mother by the time they were interviewed for this study. In contrast, these eight men were still seriously involved with the mothers of their children, and were sharing child-rearing and, to the extent possible, finances with their girlfriends. They framed their desire to stay straight not only in terms of wanting to change the way they made their living (from illegal to legal means) but in terms of wanting to become “decent” or “productive” men, as well as responsible fathers and partners, and to provide a stable home and a future for their children.

In sum, tired of the stress that came from the ever-present threat of violence and arrest, motivated by the wish to be a more responsible parent or spurred by a newfound sense of maturity, the men claimed that they were willing to forgo the economic benefits of hustling and looked forward to the time they could earn their living through legitimate work in relative peace and security. They were convinced that they would be able to succeed in staying away from hustling only if they could find stable employment at a living wage. As the next chapter shows, however, for many, their experiences in and attitudes toward legitimate work make achieving this goal a challenge.



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## EXPERIENCES IN THE WORLD OF WORK

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*Q: When you started selling drugs, were you working at McDonald's?*

*A: Yes.*

*Q: And sometimes [over the years], you would actually have a job and at the same time you would also sell drugs?*

*A: Mm hmm.*

*Q: Was it just basically to have more money, or—*

*A: Yeah. I would use my hard-earned money to buy my son stuff or my clothes, and I'd use my hustling money to just do other things, like buy cars and stuff like that.*

—Interview with Derrick

**T**he men entered the labor market in their mid to late teens, a period that roughly coincided with their initiation into hustling. Over the years, most moved between working legitimate jobs and hustling, balancing the two in different ways. Some men worked steadily, while others spent periods of time without a legitimate job. Only one man had never held a job before enrolling in Fathers at Work.

Reflecting their limited education and training, the men worked in low-skill, low-wage jobs. The most common jobs were in restaurants or fast-food franchises, warehouses, moving and hauling, and retail (stocking shelves and making deliveries, but rarely dealing directly with customers). They worked as security guards and custodians, in nonunion factories and in light construction and maintenance. Only two of the men worked in jobs that required either certification or specialized skills: one was a certified nurse's assistant, and the other was an assistant electrician/carpenter for a concert hall. Five men also developed their own entrepreneurial work as street vendors, barbers or mechanics, on which they would rely when they were earning low wages or were out of work completely.

Most men held both formal and informal labor market jobs, although a few worked exclusively in one or the other. Most jobs in construction, maintenance, and moving and hauling were in the informal labor market. Informal labor market jobs were often easier to find but lacked health benefits and the potential for advancement.

Whether the men worked in formal or informal jobs, were steadily employed or spent long periods without a job, several aspects of their labor market experiences were strikingly similar. First, their job choices were dictated by their immediate economic needs and the opportunities that were available to them at the time, rather than by a long-range career goal, which few men possessed or had the opportunity to pursue. Second, they did not stay long in any job. As a group, the length of time they stayed in a job was measured in months; fewer than a third of the men had ever stayed at a job longer than a year, and half had never worked a single job for even a year. Their brief job tenures resulted from the fact that they often worked in short-term or temporary jobs. They also frequently quit or were fired from their jobs.

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## WORKING SHORT-TERM JOBS

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The most common reason why the men left their jobs after only brief stays was that the job itself ended, often because it was temporary to begin with or the men were laid off. The fact that they worked in short-term jobs was, in part, a function of the way they found their jobs.

The most common strategy the men used to find a job was to go through their networks of friends and relatives, who either informed them about a job opening or linked them to an employer. Often men were hired by someone they already knew in the community. Because few in their circle worked in the formal labor market, the jobs they found through their personal networks were often in the informal market, working for local businesses. As such, the jobs were often temporary or short-lived, either because the business closed or the work was for a local entrepreneur who hired additional men for specific projects; once the project was completed, the men were let go.

While most of the men also responded to classified ads in the newspaper or filled out applications at local businesses where they had no personal connections, a few men in our sample who had especially poor communication skills or a spotty work history rarely did so, relying exclusively on their family and friends to hire them or link them to prospective employers. This enabled them to bypass the formal application and interview process, where their low literacy level and limited self-presentation skills would put them at a disadvantage. In fact, as the following exchange with Alfredo illustrates, they were quite intimidated by the formal job search process:

- Q: Now tell me, in terms of finding all of your jobs, it seems like you mostly got connections from somebody you knew. Do you think that's the best way to find a job?*
- A: For me personally, I think that's the best way that you can get a job. Because if you're gonna go out and you're gonna look for a job, I don't know, man, things could go wrong when you do it like that. It's like, am I going to the wrong places or something, you know what I mean? I think it's better like that, it's a whole lot better. For me, I get it faster like that.*

Another individual, Alberto, was a native Spanish speaker. He worried about going on job interviews because his limited English proficiency compounded his lack of job skills. He found most of his jobs through relatives who would refer him to local businesses that employed mainly Puerto Rican immigrants like himself. Being linked to jobs through family members allowed him to avoid the humiliation of an interview that would expose his limited skills:

- Q: Why did you end up working under the table?*
- A: Because at first my biggest fear was the interviews.*
- Q: You were afraid of the interviews?*
- A: Yeah, cause you know, I'm like, I'll be getting stuck a lot when I talk English, and then I knew that as soon as they asked me, "What are your skills?" the only thing I knew how to do at that time was the illegal thing.... So I figured that wasn't no skills right there. So most of the times I worked was because of my family. They used to be like, "Look, this is a nice job," you know, "all you gotta do is this, this, this." So to me that was like, all right, I know how to bag up things, I know how to throw water on the plants, I know how to drive tractors.*

Some men relied on temporary-employment agencies to find jobs. These agencies linked them to jobs in the formal labor market in positions in warehouses, as security guards and on assembly lines. While placements through temporary agencies can lead to permanent employment, this did not occur for the five men in our sample who found work this way: their jobs typically lasted a few weeks or months and did not lead to anything more permanent.

It is important to note that even when men found formal labor market jobs on their own (i.e., not through temporary agencies or personal connections), the jobs were often seasonal, for example in retail or the postal service during the holiday season.

Ironically, incarceration was another source of jobs—and work experience—for at least two men in our study. But, by definition, those jobs were also temporary. Leonard worked his first formal job while in prison. Charles, who worked in various jobs during multiple incarcerations, may have held more jobs in prison than out. Both of these men remember these jobs as positive experiences, as Leonard proudly recalled in this conversation with a somewhat surprised interviewer, who assumed the opposite would be true:

*Q: So you had a job while you were incarcerated.*

*A: Yes.*

*Q: And what kind of work did you do there?*

*A: My title was a sanitation specialist. I did general janitorial. However, I specialized in floor care, like stripping, waxing, buffing floors, things of that sort.*

*Q: And have you had any jobs since then?*

*A: No, not since I was incarcerated.*

*Q: And I guess this is an unusual circumstance if you were incarcerated, but what did you think about that job, and how did you like it?*

*A: I loved it.*

*Q: You loved it?*

*A: I loved it.*

*Q: What did you like about it?*

*A: Cleanliness. I liked the way I could turn the floor from shit to shine, put it that way.*

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## QUITTING OR LEAVING JOBS

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The second reason why men changed jobs so often and didn't stay long in any job was because they frequently quit or were fired. Nine of the men reported being fired from a job, and about the same number had to leave at least one job to serve a prison sentence or make court appearances. More commonly, the men quit their jobs, largely because the working conditions were onerous. Their jobs often required them to work irregular, long or undesirable hours; endure long commutes, often on public transportation; and do dirty, difficult or hazardous tasks. Tyrone, for example, quit a job at a truck-washing company one winter because the job was outside and he was always cold and wet. Alberto couldn't stand the smell of the potatoes he had to bag in a produce-processing plant. Some jobs, such as driving recycling trucks or loading and unloading trucks, required heavy lifting or operating large machinery, which was both tiring and dangerous; and at least one of the men sustained injuries on the job that resulted in his having to leave.

But the men coped differently with difficult working conditions. A close look at the reasons why men left their jobs reveals differences in their degree of commitment to legitimate work and the priority they gave to hustling. Using these criteria, the men fell into four groups based on the relative value they placed on working or hustling.<sup>19</sup> We call these groups the reluctant hustlers, the ambitious workers, the reluctant workers and the committed hustlers. As we discuss below, the priorities of the men in each group had a profound effect on how willing they were to deal with the negative aspects of their jobs, as well as their performance on the job.

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## THE RELUCTANT HUSTLERS

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The six men in this group shared a strong preference for legitimate work and typically hustled only as a last resort when they could not get a job or make ends meet with the wages they earned. They did not get caught up in the materialism that characterized the more serious hustlers, and they would stop hustling when they found work. Aside from this similarity, they had very different work histories and skills. Four had worked in numerous jobs over the years, although they also endured periods of unemployment. The other two had much more difficulty finding any kind of job and worked only sporadically despite their efforts. One of the two had a mental disability. The other had aspirations of making it in the music business and devoted most of his efforts to his music.

George was one of the more successful workers in this group. He had enjoyed working in various warehouse jobs, but after hurting his back in a car accident, he could no longer do the kind of heavy lifting those jobs required. He explained how he resorted to hustling when the seasonal or temporary jobs he subsequently found ended, and he had to support himself:

*I wouldn't [hustle] if I had a job. But if I didn't have a job, I had to find a way to have money and support myself. I mean, you do have to do something to get the money. You don't want to do it [hustle], it's like you're forced. I mean you don't have to [hustle], but at the same time, you got something in life that you do have to provide for, you got a family, you got yourself. So one way or the other, you gotta do something to get some money. Everybody can't get their grass cut every day. Everybody can't shovel snow when it ain't snowing. Everybody can't pick up garbage when there ain't no garbage out there.*

As a group, these men had a positive view of work and found it intrinsically rewarding. They relished the challenge of learning new skills, and the stability and focus a job provided, and they liked working with different types of people.

Juan—who, because of his long criminal record and unstable life, could rarely find a job—was asked why, when he could make \$300 to \$400 on a typical day of hustling, he still preferred a job cleaning fairgrounds one summer—a job that paid far less. He replied:

*No matter how much it paid, I liked the environment. I got to meet different people and see different cultures of life. I liked it cause I ain't been around that many people for so long. And then it was just fun getting up every day and going down and go to work.*

Another indication of these men's preference for legitimate work over hustling was their disinclination to quit their jobs compared to the more entrenched hustlers. Even though their working conditions were not optimal, their positive attitude toward work and negative view of hustling enabled them to focus on the value of their work and made them more tolerant of its more negative aspects. As George explained:

*I see a job as something for me to do every day. That's my daily schedule. I enjoy myself at work. I'm motivated from work. It's just gotta be something that I like doing. Even if it's not, I would find something in there that I look forward to doing.*

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## THE AMBITIOUS WORKERS

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The five men in this group (all from Impact) engaged in sustained hustling from their mid-teens to their current incarceration, which they were finishing while participating in Fathers at Work. What differentiated this group from the other sustained hustlers, whom we discuss next, was their desire to stay involved in legitimate work. As a group, they had more education than the other men in the study. Three of the five completed high school or earned a GED, and a fourth attended some college. Unlike the reluctant hustlers described above, they were not drawn into hustling to provide for their basic needs, nor did they hustle because they *couldn't* find a legitimate job. Rather, they worked fairly steadily, and liked to work, but continued to hustle even while employed so they could buy the expensive items they wanted.

For example, Anthony, now 21, started hustling while still in high school. Over the next two years, he moved from selling marijuana and cocaine to being in charge of the heroin trade of an entire block. At the same time, he still managed to graduate from high school and hold down a job. He explained his motivations:

*Like I worked, I was never dumb about it. Like a lot of guys, they just go out there and do it [hustle], and that's all they did. I [hustled], but I worked, too. And I still finished school. But it was like, to get what I want, I mean to keep a car, keep buying sneakers every two, three days and clothes and then go out every week, you know what I mean. Then on top of that, I was smoking a lot of weed, so I had to support my habit. And I was spending about \$300 a day on that.*

Like the sample as a whole, the five men in this group did not stay in their jobs for very long. However, they were unique in claiming that they had never been fired from a job, suggesting that they possessed relatively well-developed workplace skills. They were also hard workers; both in the drug trade and in their legitimate jobs, they had energy and drive. Derrick was successful at work even while he maintained an active and highly lucrative hustling career. He had ambition and wanted to succeed, and claimed that when he works, "I'm there to learn so I can progress. I'm not gonna stay in the same position, I'm there to progress." At 20, he had been working in various fast-food restaurants for about three years. Hearing about a possible managerial position opening at another restaurant, he took a job there, was soon promoted to manager-in-training and took pride in being given increasing responsibilities. But despite his success at work, he continued to sell drugs during his off-work hours—and later, even on the job:

*The next thing you know I'm one of the best that work there. I always did overtime whenever they needed it, opened and closed the store. So it worked out except for I couldn't leave [selling] the drugs alone. It was too easy. I mean I didn't have to sit on no block corners, all I had to do was sit in the house, and if somebody paged me, I'd go out to the curb with like 12 bags of weed [to sell]. And I'm go shoot pool, somebody page me, and I tell 'em meet me outside. So it was too easy. I mean it was easy, that's all.*

Tyronne was undoubtedly the most enterprising of the group. By his late twenties, he had passed through a number of different jobs in the formal and informal labor markets. While reluctant to give many details about his illegal activities, he acknowledged that he also hustled on the side. A skilled, self-taught mechanic and entrepreneur, he described how he nurtured contacts with the elderly people in the housing projects where he worked as a security guard, so he could build a clientele for the auto and appliance repair business he ran on the side:

*Like a lot of the seniors and stuff, I used to help them out because a lot of [car mechanics] get over on them. Like one old guy, I did his fuel pump, I changed his carburetor, I think I charged him like \$140.*

*Q: Now how did he find out about you?*

*A: I was a security guard in the building.*

*Q: So then you would be able to kind of pick up other jobs that way?*

*A: I pick up jobs anywhere. I still do it to this day, I pick up jobs any way possible.*

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### THE RELUCTANT WORKERS

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The six men in this group also combined hustling and working. However, unlike the men described in the previous sections, who placed a high value on legitimate work, these six men consistently made hustling their priority.

As a group, the six had periods when hustling was their only source of income and periods when they worked and hustled at the same time. Less consistently employed than the more ambitious workers, they moved in and out of legitimate work. Their decision to seek work depended more on the opportunities and hazards of the street at any given time. They did not seem to get the kind of satisfaction or feelings of self-worth from working that the men in the previous two groups did. One individual summed up their priorities: “As long as [work] didn’t interfere with me selling drugs, I’d do it.”

Lewis, for example, valued jobs that facilitated his hustling activities. In contrast to Tyronne, who used his security guard jobs to build a clientele for his repair business, Lewis liked to work as a security guard because the job was easy and thus left him enough time and energy to hustle after work.

Omar moved between hustling and work. He would cut back (but never completely stop) hustling and get a job after he was arrested or when on probation, to avoid rearrest. He recalled how, after leaving his first job at 16, he hustled until he was arrested three years later:

*After that [first job at 16] I ain’t worked again until I got caught up [arrested]. When I caught that case and got that probation, I think I took another under-the-table job, just because I was on probation. That was the thing about me, like I would only work when I was in trouble, because I was on the run or on probation. I knew if I didn’t work, I’m end up getting locked up again.*

The men in this group readily quit their jobs if the work was too hard or interfered with their hustling or recreation time. While keeping up an active presence on the corner, Romero would occasionally work. By the time he was 28, he had worked in numerous jobs, all of them for less than a year. On several occasions, he quit his job to return to selling drugs full time when the work became too challenging or inconvenient. He claimed that, in most cases, his work experiences were all right, but some challenge or problem would arise that was not insurmountable but would make working the corner seem easier. For example, he enjoyed learning to operate the trucks and equipment while working at a trash company, but he did not like the fact that he was not paid overtime, and left the job after seven months. When he was working at a car wash doing auto detailing, he liked the job and the employers liked him, but it took a long time to travel there (it was in the suburbs). When his cousin, whom he used to ride with, quit, he eventually quit also. He left a landscaping job because the season ended and the snow shoveling work that they offered was “not me.” In short, the jobs were less convenient for him than selling drugs. As he explained, “My thing is I don’t mind work. It was just easier selling drugs.”<sup>20</sup>

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## THE COMMITTED HUSTLERS

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Prior to enrolling in Fathers at Work, this group of eight men had earned their incomes almost exclusively through hustling and had little experience working in either the informal or formal labor market. Compared to the rest of the sample, they began hustling at a relatively young age. Six of the eight were selling drugs or stealing by the time they were 15 and had begun hustling before they ever had a job. By the time they reached Fathers at Work (at ages 21 to 25), most had been hustling for 7 to 10 years.

These men turned away from legitimate work in favor of hustling early in their lives. For example, Carlos had begun to sell drugs at 13, attracted to the streets after seeing the money his cousins were earning from selling. At 16, he found a job delivering groceries at a local supermarket. Because he liked the people he worked for, he initially tried to keep the job and sell drugs on the side. Soon, however, he quit his job and returned to the corner because he saw that he could make more money faster:

*I tried to do both though, you know what I mean, cause I was still at the supermarket; when I would get off, I would go to the block [to sell drugs]. But it was just, like I'm wasting time at the supermarket, being there eight hours. And I would be on the block for an hour, get like \$500, and this is [more than] what I'm making all week at this place. So I gave it a shot for like about a week, and I was like, I'm wasting time, and I left.*

Until he was incarcerated in his early twenties, he made only two more brief attempts to work, both in temporary weekend jobs that he left after a few weeks because he found the work boring and it cut into his recreation time.

The men in this group rarely sought employment, and when they did, their searches were typically half-hearted and ineffectual. For example, Farad's occasional efforts to find jobs, usually prompted by fear of arrest, failed because of poor job search strategies and a daily marijuana habit that left him "living in a cloud," numbed his initiative and made him easily discouraged when he was unsuccessful. Guy, who was 23 when he enrolled in Fathers at Work, had supported himself, his girlfriend and their growing family solely by hustling since he'd become a father at 15. He explained that prior to his recent decision to turn his life around, he had never had a job, nor made a serious effort to find one:

*Q: Before your uncle told you about this program, had you ever tried to get a formal job or anything like that?*

*A: I thought about it, but it didn't happen because that just was a thought.*

*Q: You never moved beyond thinking about it?*

*A: The only time I thought about it was when they locked me up or when they was gonna lock me up. But something always pushed me back out there, you know.*

When the men did work, they did not do well on the job. Of the six men in this group who worked prior to enrolling in Fathers at Work, four were fired from at least one job. The reasons varied, but generally stemmed from their turbulent lives and lack of job readiness skills. Brendon, for example, was fired from his first job after two weeks for flunking a drug test and from another job for absenteeism due to his court appearances. Hareem was fired from the one formal job he ever had for frequent absences that were the result of the depression he suffered after the death of his mother. Although he loved the job, Farad lost his only formal labor market job because, he explained, after years of hanging in the streets with people who were "not productive," he lacked the social skills needed to be a team player and was eventually dismissed. Leonard explained why sustained hustling is poor preparation for the demands of the workplace:

*If you decide to turn over a new life and try to make it legit, you're gonna be lost, because you don't have no idea, no structure. I didn't know any workplace etiquette. Take, for instance, the STRIVE program. We come here every day nine to five, you have to be here on time. Say like with selling drugs, I could come out at eight at night and leave at nine if I wanted to. But when you step back into reality, it's not gonna work. It's not gonna work at the workplace.*

Because of their lack of firsthand experience, the men in this group displayed unrealistic expectations of the workplace. Farad's idealized vision of work, based on his brief, three-week experience, was tinged with nostalgia and rendered in idyllic terms when he compared it to the stress of the streets:

*[Having a job] makes things a lot different because, you know, you're able to relax, you're able to live in peace, you know. Ever since I first really started hustling, I was never really able to live in peace. And just in those three weeks [that I worked] it was almost like a dream. But I would say if it was a dream, it was one of the best dreams that I ever had in my life.*

To summarize the men's experiences, in addition to earning money illegally, most had engaged in some form of legitimate work, although to varying degrees. They typically had held a series of low-wage, dead-end jobs in either the formal or informal labor market. They left their jobs quickly, for structural reasons (the jobs were, by their nature, short-term) or personal reasons (they quit or were fired). As a result, they moved from one job to another through different sectors of the labor market without building skills that could lead to sustainable labor market success. Finally, as they moved between working and hustling, they developed different levels of attachment to legitimate work.

Despite differences in their work experiences and hustling backgrounds, at the point when the men enrolled in Fathers at Work they all sought full-time employment as a means to stabilize their lives and avoid criminal activities. The next chapter explores their experiences in the program and how they benefited from participating.



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## PARTICIPATING IN FATHERS AT WORK

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*A lot of guys come to us having done the drug dealing and want to make a change but don't know how. It's STRIVE's responsibility to guide them.*

—STRIVE staff member

**F**athers at Work was designed to help men find and keep a job with decent wages, increase their involvement with their children and manage their child support obligations. While there were some variations in the design, length and content of their programs, the three study sites all offered the following core services (see Appendix A for further details about each program):

- ◆ **Fatherhood Development Workshops** were designed to deepen the men's relationships with their children by addressing issues of responsible fatherhood, visitation and custody. Discussions and activities in the workshops, which were led by trained facilitators, focused on personal development, life skills, interpersonal relationships, health and sexuality.<sup>21</sup>
- ◆ **Child Support Advocacy and Planning** included providing the men with information about their status in the child support system. In addition, programs were expected to help men modify existing orders, if need be, to make them more manageable.
- ◆ **Employment Services** included job search and job placement assistance; training in job readiness and workplace expectations; GED classes and occupational-skills training (at VFI); and employment retention support for at least one year.

As a group, the men responded positively to Fathers at Work. The goals of the program were consistent with their personal goals, which were to find a job, stabilize their lives and become more responsible fathers. For a few of the men who had been committed hustlers, simply completing the program was an accomplishment they had not experienced before. They described themselves as habitual quitters and remarked that the program was the first "school" they had ever finished, and that alone increased their belief that they could go on to accomplish other things. For example, when our interviewer expressed surprise at Farad's instant recall of the date he graduated from STRIVE, he replied:

*I'll never forget it. I can't find the words for it, but it seemed like before STRIVE, I was just out here taking up space or something, you know, I was doing nothing useful with my time. That date reminds me of when I started doing something constructive. It was only for 30 days, but it was something that I started and I completed, so, you know, that's why I remember it like that.*

In their overall assessment of the program, there were no striking differences between men with different hustling backgrounds; nor were there differences in the responses of men who were referred to the program by the court or parole officers and those who came to the program on their own. However, as we discuss later in this chapter, there were indications that the hustling and work experiences that the men brought to the program were having an effect on their initial employment outcomes. The next sections discuss how the men felt they benefited from participating in Fathers at Work. Then, using data from a follow-up survey, we examine their employment status 12 months after enrollment.

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## TRUSTING STAFF WHO “KEEP IT REAL”

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In talking about aspects of the Fathers at Work program they found most helpful, the men often pointed to their interactions with program staff. Having had few prior experiences with people who believed in their ability to succeed or who took a personal interest in their well-being, they greatly appreciated, and were motivated by, the support they received from program staff. Their comments identify staff practices that can engage and motivate this population, as well as those that can create disillusionment. Their comments also point to the social, psychological and material needs of a group of men who often feel stigmatized, isolated and distrustful.

The men generally responded positively to staff who had come out of experiences similar to theirs and who had succeeded in turning their own lives around. They viewed these staff as credible because they had “been where [we’ve] been at, on parole, you know, and can relate to all [we’re] going through.” One Impact participant appreciated that the staff felt comfortable around ex-offenders, unlike many people he met. The Impact men particularly respected one case manager because he had recently come out of the same boot camp as they had and was now working for the program. For Carlos, he was a role model:

*I want to be somebody like him, like just to change my life around. That’s why he gets all my respect. Every time I see him, I be [telling him], “Man, I want to be like you.” Because he just did a whole 360, came from being upstate [in prison] to being on the boot camp, come out and just, man, now he’s helping people and helping ex-offenders to get jobs. That dude gets all my respect.*

The men also appreciated staff’s active concern for their welfare. The two counselors at VFI were frequently mentioned in this regard. They provided individuals with assistance with their material needs, such as housing, clothing and transportation, and with their legal problems (e.g., by accompanying them to court), and they occasionally provided them with money for a meal.<sup>22</sup>

The emotional support the counselors provided was equally valued, especially by those men who lacked a support network outside the program. As Lewis stated:

*Some of them really do be believing in us sometimes, you know. That’s a motivation. I don’t know, sometimes it feels good to know somebody is hoping you do good.*

Wendell made similar comments:

*The staff here, they call your house, they’ll call your cell phone, they’ll call your girlfriend’s house, they really try. And they really check up on you, too, and sometimes they even call you to see how you’re doing. Sometimes you need that, you know; maybe ain’t nobody talking to you, they call and ask you how you feeling, are you all right or something.*

While VFI took a nurturing approach to the men, STRIVE staff applied a more “tough love” philosophy designed to foster determination and perseverance. The men in our study who completed the program felt they had benefited from this approach, even if they had resisted at first. One STRIVE graduate, George, said that meeting the program’s challenges increased his belief in himself:

*Yeah, they helped me a lot. I like P. [teacher] because she made it hard, and I like a challenge. The harder she pushed me, the harder I pushed back. She just showed me that if you could fight in this program, you can fight for going out and getting a job.*

Participants found the dedication of the staff gratifying and even inspiring. However, men in all three programs were quick to criticize any staff who they believed were not being straight with them. Such criticism was voiced by a minority of the men and was most often directed at what they saw as staff members overstating their ability to find the men jobs that paid well. For example, an Impact participant felt that the job developers “pump your head up too much” with unrealistic expectations. A VFI participant felt that the job developers should avoid “selling the guys dreams” or sending them on interviews for jobs for which they were unqualified. Leonard, a STRIVE participant who otherwise was very positive about the program, voiced a similar concern:

*STRIVE builds up expectations that the day after graduation there's going to be a thousand jobs lined up. I haven't really seen that. I've seen a couple of people get jobs out of [the program], but it's not as much as they make it seem. I think they should be telling people that they give you the keys to getting a job and give you the know-how.*

While such views were voiced by only a few men, they point to the challenge staff faced in promoting realistic expectations for immediate employment while motivating the men to reach beyond what they have achieved in the past.

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### LEARNING BETTER WAYS OF COPING

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Life skills issues were included in the Fatherhood Development workshops at all three study sites. In addition to addressing issues around children and parenting, the workshops were designed to help the men gain insight into the patterns of thinking and behaving that had gotten them into trouble in the past, and to help them develop strategies for avoiding similar mistakes in the future. Men from all three study sites felt they benefited from this aspect of the program.

One STRIVE participant, for example, said that the workshops increased his determination to avoid using drugs. He reported that he recently walked away from a group of his friends who were smoking marijuana to avoid the temptation to start smoking again. “See, when the drug sensation revealed itself, I was like, okay, I’m gonna go, you know what I’m saying.” Three Impact men claimed that the workshops helped them control their anger better and to “stop and think” about the consequences of their actions in order to avoid doing something impulsive and, ultimately, self-destructive: “It help me from snapping a lot: sit back, just think. It keep my temper down.”

At Impact, the Fatherhood Development workshops included activities designed to teach specific concepts related to decision-making and fatherhood. Many lessons were geared to helping the men avoid the temptations of their former lives. Carlos spoke about how one session helped him see that he needed to break with his former hustling buddies to avoid becoming reinvolvement in selling drugs:

*See, all them [workshop] activities, they meant something, right, and at the end it was a moral to it. So like, one activity we had to push each other to knock us out of balance, and what was the moral of that? They said, “If you let somebody, they’ll knock you down, they’ll knock you off your square” and stuff. I’d be like, just think about it, that’s true. If you let somebody, they gonna push you around, or even pressure you into doing something you don’t wanna do, like selling drugs and stuff. That’s what I’m locked up for. If I let the wrong people pressure me to chill with them and start hanging with them again, who knows—like I could start selling drugs tomorrow.*

Romero, another Impact participant, credited the workshops with helping him deal with the challenges he was about to face as an ex-convict returning to his family and community:

*Like how to adjust to the changes of coming home after being in jail, and being back into your kids' life and seeing them change, and trying to adjust to that. Know how to deal with a lot of things, too, when you come home, like child support issues and family, not having no money no more, no job, stuff like that. [The workshops helped me with] accepting a lot of things I probably would have not really accepted at the beginning, just coming home, you know. They made you realize that I'm not the only person going through the same thing.*

We should note that the men did not attribute their decision to stop hustling to their involvement in Fathers at Work, as they said they had made this decision prior to enrolling. However, about half of the men acknowledged that the program increased their motivation to do so and gave them important tools to help them make this change. As Derrick explained:

*I was thinking I wanted to make a change [while in prison], but I really didn't know how to. And the program gave me information to make that change, because at boot camp, I was writing letters saying, "I changed, I've grown up, I'm a changed man, I'm gonna do this, I'm gonna do that." And then the program helped me make choices, it gave me that push I needed, or the information I could take heed to.*

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### **BECOMING BETTER FATHERS**

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The Fatherhood Development workshops emphasized how important fathers are, and encouraged the men to fulfill their financial and emotional responsibilities to their children. Improving the men's relationships with their children can have important benefits for the children, of course. But staff understood that, if they could tap the deep feelings many men had for their children and strengthen the father-child bond, this could also help keep the men out of trouble.

Thus, a core message of the workshops was that being a responsible father was key to becoming a responsible man, and both required the men to avoid further involvement in hustling and other illegal activities. These messages were reinforced by program staff outside of the workshops as well. For example, a job developer at VFI said that she tries to motivate the men when they go out on job interviews by telling them that when they get their paycheck, they will be able to provide for themselves and their children. She also reminds them of the negative consequences of hustling and asks them, "Is it worth it? Not seeing your children for six months, a year?"

This message resonated with men who had been involved with their children prior to enrolling. For these men, the program appeared to deepen their sense of responsibility to their children, validate their importance as fathers and suggest practical tips on ways to deepen their involvement. Derrick acted on a suggestion from the workshop facilitator about getting involved in his child's preschool:

*Like I remember one time [the facilitator] told us, "You need to get involved with your son and show up at his school so the teachers know that they got fathers, 'cause basically the mothers always show up," and stuff like that. So I took his advice, and one day I went to my son's school just to surprise him, and he really liked that. We played together at his school, and then I took him to the park and then to the mall. Then I took him to the arcade. So I had a nice day, it turned out to be nice.*

A few men specifically mentioned that the fatherhood workshops gave them insight into their children's emotional needs and helped them see that they could discipline their children without resorting to harsh physical or verbal punishment. This said, the distance some men must go

before they can fully translate these new insights into a more appropriate parenting style was suggested in the following comments by Juan:

*I learned that every time my child does something wrong, I can't just sit and just scream at him. I have to be able to understand that while I was his size or his age, I used to do pretty crazy stuff. So basically I just learned that I have to really talk to him and just explain to him that it's not good doing what he's doing. Tell him, "just try to be good and you won't get beatings," you know, hoping that he'll comprehend that. And if he does it again, I won't beat him, I'll try to keep talking to him and talking to him until something good comes out of it.*

Helping fathers negotiate their relationships with the mothers of their children was equally important. Contentious relationships between parents are a major reason why noncustodial fathers reduce contact with their children.<sup>23</sup> Many Fatherhood Development workshop sessions were devoted to discussions of "baby-mama drama," a phrase the men used to describe their often tumultuous relationships with the mothers of their children. Observations of these sessions by P/PV researchers revealed that discussions about the mothers were often heated and bitter. The workshop facilitators strove to help the men avoid getting embroiled in conflicts with the mothers and advised them to focus instead on maintaining their relationships with their children.

Because the quality of their relationships with the mothers seemed to remain the same over the approximately three months of participation in the interview study (good relationships stayed good and bad stayed bad), we are not certain what impact these sessions had on the men. At the very least, however, the sessions offered a safe space for the men to vent their frustrations with their children's mothers. Only four mentioned the help they received coping with the mothers as a benefit of the program. One was George, who, when asked what he liked about Fathers at Work, replied: "The valuable part was that you get a chance to learn how to put up with your baby's mama if you all don't get along, and you learn how to compromise with 'em." Of particular value to him was the facilitator's sharing how he resolved his own tense relationship with the mother of his children by focusing on the children.

Another message the program emphasized was that while it is important to continue to provide for their children financially, the most important things fathers can give their children are time and love. The provider role is central to our cultural ideals of fatherhood, and the men in our study had internalized this value, even if, when angry at the baby's mother or without financial resources themselves, they sometimes were unwilling or unable to act on it. In fact, many fathers were proud of spending extravagantly on their children during their hustling days. Studies of noncustodial fathers suggest that their involvement with their child can decrease if they become unable to provide material or financial support.<sup>24</sup>

Fathers at Work staff had to walk a fine line between reinforcing the men's financial obligations to their children and emphasizing their value as fathers even if they could no longer afford to buy expensive things for them now that they had stopped hustling. The interviews suggest that this message struck home, and two or three men pointed to it as one of the most valuable things they learned from the workshops. For example, Romero said that the workshops helped him with "a lot of...issues":

*About, you know, not having no money, you know, don't want to go see my kids [because] I don't have no money anyway. You know they understand that, you know your kids still need to see you, and it's true. They want to see their father, even if you can't take them the way you used to, you still have to go see them. They [workshop facilitators] brought up a lot of little issues, and I kind of, like, understood that's what I need to do.*

There is evidence that the workshops were more effective in strengthening father-child relationships that were already good than in repairing estranged relationships. While the data are only suggestive, men who were minimally involved with their children were somewhat less likely to feel they had benefited from this aspect of the program than fathers who were already involved. One father reported feeling frustrated by the facilitators' suggestions because he knew he would not be able to carry them out, given the obstacles he faced gaining access to his children.

Further, the workshop format may not be sufficient to help men with more serious parenting issues. Our data suggest that at least three of the men could benefit from more intensive counseling. In our interviews with them, they revealed a poor understanding of their children's emotional needs, had unrealistic expectations for their behavior and described using harsh discipline practices to correct or punish them. Individual counseling would also have benefited a fourth man, who, in his interviews, revealed feelings of intense guilt about his increasingly distant relationship with two of his children since he had lost custody of them.

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### MEETING CHILD SUPPORT OBLIGATIONS

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A major goal of Fathers at Work was to provide men with assistance in meeting their formal child support obligations. Thirteen of the 27 men in the study had a formal child support order for at least one child. About half of those men had monthly payments of roughly \$50; four had monthly payments between \$100 and \$360. Of the seven men who reported the total amount of their arrears, four owed between \$1,200 and \$3,000, and three owed between \$13,000 and \$14,000.

With the recent movement toward more aggressive enforcement of child support payment obligations, noncompliance could jeopardize the men's future success. For example, if they fall behind in their payments, they risk having their driver's license taken away, which would seriously hamper their employment prospects. Worse, they could resort to hustling to pay back their debt, or face incarceration for noncompliance. Two men in our study were referred to Fathers at Work by family court as an alternative to a prison sentence for long-standing noncompliance. Others had long histories of either intermittent or total noncompliance, putting them at risk for these punitive measures.

Fathers at Work sites forged formal partnerships with local child support enforcement agencies so they could inform the men about how the system worked and their status within it (for example, whether they had an order, and if so, how much they owed). Further, the programs were expected to assist the men in modifying their existing support orders if their monthly payment obligations were out of line with their current income.

Interviews with participants and program staff indicate that the three study sites provided the men with general information about the child support system and specific information about their status, and that staff stressed to the men that it was in their best interests to meet their formal payments. Although decreasing the amount of money owed through support orders was expected to be a possibility, only one man in the study actually had his order lowered during his stay in the program. He was from VFI, where the counselors were responsible for providing individualized assistance with support order modifications. In the course of their regular contact with the men, the counselors routinely asked them when they had child support court dates, and offered to accompany them to court and advocate on their behalf.

Even with the partnerships that Fathers at Work forged with local agencies, convincing the child support system to modify a support order proved very difficult. However, two additional factors may have prevented more men in our study from having their orders modified. First, the complexity of the system and the uniqueness of each man's case made it difficult for staff at STRIVE and Impact, who had less time to devote to this task, to offer the men individualized assistance.

Second, the men tended to be reluctant to ask staff for help with their child support orders. We knew of two VFI participants who had support orders but did not want to ask their counselor to accompany them to court, despite the counselor's repeated offers. One of the two provided some insight into this when he said the men did not want to talk about child support because they did not want to seem like deadbeat dads and were ashamed to reveal how much money they owed.

The men's reluctance to ask for help with child support may be part of a more general reluctance to ask for help with any personal problem. While men did ask for material assistance from staff (for public transportation passes or money for food, for example) or help finding a job, they were more reluctant to seek out advice from staff about their children or their children's mothers, or about substance abuse or difficulties on the job. George's greater willingness to trust the P/PV interviewer (whose role was simply to listen) than program staff, who were trying to help him change (and thus perceived as more judgmental), points to the men's extreme sensitivity to criticism:

*Q: Is there any particular staff person that you feel most comfortable with, who you would be most likely to go to if you had a serious issue?*

*A: I don't know. I'm like a self person, I wouldn't really tell my problems. If I did talk to anyone, it would be you [the interviewer]. I wouldn't really talk to nobody else. Because sometimes, I'd say a few things, you know, some people try to—I don't think they do it on purpose—they criticize in a joking way. When I'm serious about something and I say something, and they get to joking, that means you're not paying me any attention, so it serves me no purpose to say anything else to them.*

There is little evidence that the men's views of the fairness of the child support system changed as a result of their participation in Fathers at Work. While most were resigned to having their support payments automatically deducted from their wages if they found a formal labor market job, the majority of the men continued to view the system as unfair (mainly because it did not take into account the level of informal support they provided), impersonal and punitive.

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## PREPARING FOR WORK

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Both STRIVE and VFI provided the men with group classes in job readiness. At STRIVE, job readiness training was delivered in daily classes that the men were required to attend during the four weeks of formal programming. In the classes, the men practiced filling out job applications and interviewing. They were given advice on how to talk about their criminal records to prospective employers; proper grooming, dress and self-presentation; and appropriate workplace behaviors, such as punctuality and professionalism. The class culminated in a "field trip" to downtown businesses where job interviews were lined up for the men to allow them to practice what they had been taught.

A discussion with one staff member illuminated the kinds of practical advice the men received about proper workplace behavior, as well as some of their challenges:

*I have to convince them that they won't get a second chance [at the job], even if getting fired was not their fault.... I tell them, do anything that's asked of you till you build a reputation and a resume, and then you can start determining what people should say to you. Give in if a boss says something disrespectful. Think about what is important and do it for them. I tell them to keep a poker face [if hassled on the job], to put up with what they have to do. They may not have the patience that it will take to slowly build up their work experience. They want immediate jobs, but it is hard to place the guys—people don't want to give them a chance.*

At VFI, the job developers delivered formal job readiness training to groups of participants. In addition, they met with men individually, reminded them about proper dress and decorum before sending them out on job interviews, and encouraged them to do better if they showed a lack of professionalism.

During the period of our study, Impact's ability to deliver employment services was constrained by the men's living arrangements and correctional supervision. Participants living in the halfway house were under strict residential supervision. Because of these restrictions, Impact's access to the men was limited to the weekly Fatherhood Development workshops. Less than half of the men in the study reported meeting with an Impact job developer during their 12-week stay in the program, and formal job readiness training was not available.

The men at both VFI and STRIVE found the job readiness training helpful, and it was especially well received by men who had been committed hustlers and had little or no experience in the formal labor market. At STRIVE, for example, such men talked about how they had not previously known how to go about finding a job, and how the program helped them learn the correct way to fill out a job application, make follow-up phone calls to check the status of their applications, signal their eagerness to their prospective employers, and feel more comfortable with interviews.

Leonard, whose only job experiences had been in prison and a few weeks with a temporary-staffing agency, attributed his quick success in finding a full-time job after he graduated to the job search skills he learned from STRIVE. He applied his newly learned skills with his characteristic exuberance:

*I could say if it wasn't for the job readiness, I wouldn't be working now. Everything that I learned about employee training, I applied to finding a job. We graduated on a Friday. I think by that following Monday I was going on interviews. And I got rejected two or three times, some because of my criminal background, some because maybe I just didn't look right that day. But I stayed persistent because another thing I learned was there is gonna be some rejections. Don't give up, don't get sidetracked, so I stayed on 'em. ...And it wasn't so much that [STRIVE] found me employment: they taught me how to go about getting employment. And that's what I needed.*

Like Leonard, the other men generally tried to implement what they were learning—but not without difficulty. A VFI job developer reported that, in general, the men needed constant reminders about proper workplace dress and decorum. Two of the men in the interview study, who had been among the more committed hustlers, resisted the advice they received from staff about the need to change their dress style. One, who wore his hair in dreadlocks (a style discouraged by staff), did not feel he needed help from the program on how to present himself in an interview because, he said, he is “sweet and sharp” when talking to prospective employers, and has a “sense of style” and “new shoes.” The other did not accept staff's advice on proper dress: “They [employers] don't look at that. If you can make the company money, they don't care if you look like a bum. I don't know what they [program staff] be talking about.”

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### FINDING A JOB: EARLY OUTCOMES

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The programs offered individualized job placement and retention services. At VFI and STRIVE, job developers met with participants as they neared the end of the formal program and provided them with job leads, and they later found them new leads if they left a job for any reason. Men were also encouraged to look for jobs on their own, using the Internet, classified ads and cold calls. At Impact, individuals who expressed a desire to use the organization's job placement services could meet with a job developer during the scheduled Fatherhood Development



workshop sessions. Employment retention support for the men included personal contact by program staff to provide individualized assistance.

We were able to gather information about the men's employment during the 12 months following their enrollment in Fathers at Work. This information comes from the follow-up survey, which was administered either by phone or in person to all participants in the full demonstration between 12 and 18 months after they started Fathers at Work.<sup>25</sup> As such, these findings describe the early outcomes of program participation for the men. In some cases, data from the survey are supplemented by information from our final interviews with the men.

We have follow-up survey data for 18 of the 27 men in our interview study.<sup>26</sup> In addition to looking at employment outcomes for this group, we wanted to see whether the men with different hustling backgrounds fared differently. As we discussed in Chapter III, the men fell roughly into four groups, depending on the priority they gave to hustling versus legitimate work before they came to the program. Because of the small number of men for whom we have follow-up survey data, we collapsed the four groups into two according to whether their primary orientation had been to legitimate work or to hustling. There were eight men in the work-oriented group and nine in the hustling-oriented group. (The priorities of the 18th man could not be determined, and he was not assigned to either group.)

### EMPLOYMENT STATUS

As a group, the employment outcomes for the 18 men a year after they enrolled in Fathers at Work are encouraging. On average, they worked steadily (at least 20 hours a week for four weeks) for 9 of the 12 months following their Fathers at Work enrollment date. Over the 12 months, they held an average of two jobs, although it is still too early to determine if they were continuing their pre-enrollment pattern of frequent job change. Fourteen of the men (78 percent) were employed at their 12-month anniversary; all of these men were working full time and had been at their jobs for an average of nine months.

Before entering Fathers at Work, the men typically moved between the formal and informal labor markets. In contrast, at the 12-month point, most of the employed men held jobs in the formal labor market. Six of the 14 men (43 percent) had jobs that offered health insurance. While our sample size is extremely small, these outcomes compare favorably to those from a welfare-to-work program that offered comparable services to ex-offenders. Only 41 percent of the participants in that program were employed one year after enrolling (compared with 78 percent of the men in our sample for whom we have data), and they were earning \$7.44 an hour, on average, which was lower than the \$8.18 average hourly wages of the men in our study.<sup>27</sup>

With the exception of two individuals who worked steadily over the 12 months, as a group the hustling-oriented men were not doing as well as their work-oriented peers. Three of the four men who were unemployed at 12 months were from the hustling-oriented group. One had recently left a job after having worked most of the year, but neither of the other two had worked more than 4 of the 12 months, and both had been out of work for the past 6 months. Five of the nine men who could not be located for the follow-up survey were from this group, and three of those men had been having difficulties when we last interviewed them several months before the survey. One had failed a drug test and, by program policy, could not receive any more job referrals until he was clean. The other two, who had virtually no work experience prior to enrollment, lost their jobs within weeks of being placed. One was fired for fighting with a coworker, and the other walked off the job after a dispute with his boss despite advice from program staff to stay.

## WAGES

The mean monthly earnings for the entire group of 18 men at their most recent job was \$1,317, with an average hourly wage of \$8.18. Two of the men were doing quite well, working more than 40 hours a week for \$11 an hour in jobs that offered benefits. If the men in the group continue working at their current jobs and hours over the next 12 months, they stand to earn about \$15,800 for the year, on average. To put this figure in context, the 2004 poverty level for a household of two is \$12,490, and for a household of three it is \$15,670.<sup>28</sup>

As a group, the average monthly earnings of the hustling-oriented men lagged behind those of their work-oriented peers by \$400 (\$1,142 versus \$1,542). Still, they appear to be in a better position than they were before coming to the program. Of the five work-oriented fathers for whom we have pre-enrollment wage information, the average increase in wage was \$1.70 per hour, while the average increase among the four hustling-oriented men for whom we have information was \$3.00 per hour. This suggests that, although the hustling-oriented men may have fallen short of the work-oriented men in terms of their absolute earnings, they made greater gains relative to the pre-program period.<sup>29</sup> Thus, it is not surprising that, despite their relatively low wages, the hustling-oriented men were roughly as satisfied with their wages as their work-oriented counterparts (67 percent versus 63 percent).<sup>30</sup>

## JOB SATISFACTION

In addition to asking about wage satisfaction, the survey asked the men how satisfied they were with the opportunity for advancement in their most recent job. This is an important predictor of job retention, as people have little incentive to put up with low wages and other negative aspects of their job if they don't have reason to hope these conditions will improve. On this measure, the hustling-oriented men appeared to be much less satisfied than the work-oriented men. Only three of the eight work-oriented men expressed dissatisfaction with their opportunity for advancement, and none of these men was strongly dissatisfied. In contrast, more than half (five of the nine) of the hustling-oriented men expressed dissatisfaction with their opportunities for advancement, and four of the five were strongly dissatisfied. Another measure closely tied to retention also reflects these differences. When asked about their overall work environment, only one of eight work-oriented men was dissatisfied, as opposed to three of nine hustling-oriented men, all of whom were very dissatisfied with their work environment.

## FOLLOW-UP HUSTLING STATUS

We do not know for certain if any of the men had begun hustling again. All 18 men for whom we have follow-up survey data claimed they had not earned money illegally in the month prior to the survey. This information should be viewed with caution, however, as only 4 of the 18 acknowledged in the survey they completed when they first enrolled that they had hustled during the previous month (or the month before they were incarcerated, for those who were serving time), a claim that is not consistent with what most told P/PV researchers during the in-depth interviews.<sup>31</sup>

To summarize, as a group the men clearly benefited from participating in Fathers at Work. Even those who were initially skeptical about participation were ultimately engaged. They were receptive to staff who had overcome similar difficulties and who did not overstate what they could offer. Messages promoting responsible fatherhood were well received by the men who were already involved with their children, although less effective in helping those with more troubled relationships with their children or who used inappropriate parenting practices. Fatherhood Development workshops also helped the men identify new patterns of thinking and behaving that could help them resist the temptations of the street. Although they continued to view the formal child support system as unfair, most responded to staff's insistence that it was in their own best interest to keep up with their payments. Job readiness training helped the men who had little previous work experience learn more effective job search and application strategies.

Most importantly, the men made significant gains in employment. More than three quarters of the 18 men for whom we have information were working at full-time jobs in the formal labor market a year after starting the program, and they had been employed for most of the year. However, the men face many challenges as they move on. These challenges are discussed in the next chapter.

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## MOVING TOWARD AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

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*I'm still happy, 'cause as long as I know I'm doing right, nothing can go wrong—not unless I mess it up.*

—Derrick

**O**n the whole, the men left Fathers at Work more confident in themselves and their futures. Also, a year after enrolling, most of the men we were able to follow had full-time jobs and were earning better wages than they had before enrolling. These are important and significant gains, especially considering the limited education and work experience they had prior to enrolling. But their futures are still uncertain. Some of the more entrenched former hustlers were already experiencing difficulties, and all of the men face serious challenges as they strive to sustain the gains they made in the program and resist the temptation to return to illegal activities. Despite its risks, hustling brought material and social rewards; staying straight will require sustained resolve as well as major adjustments in the way they live their lives. This chapter discusses the challenges they face as they attempt to move forward.

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### DEALING WITH FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

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Arguably the most difficult challenge the men face is learning to live with very limited incomes without resorting to illegal means to supplement their earnings. While they were hustling, they had not made efforts to manage their money and had few ways to invest or save that could escape confiscation by the police. Now, few have any money or assets left. Although 14 of the 18 men for whom we have data were working full time a year after entering Fathers at Work—and they were earning higher wages than they had previously earned through legitimate work—they will likely earn less than \$16,000 a year for the immediate future even if they remain in a full-time job. It is reasonable to assume that their success in staying away from hustling will depend, at least in part, on their ability and willingness to support themselves and provide for their families on this income.

Child support orders will further reduce the take-home pay of about half the men in the study. Most seemed resigned about making the monthly payments (for those who are working in the formal labor market, the payments will be automatically deducted from their paychecks). However, two men who recently established paternity for their children, an action that will ultimately lead to a support order, said they worry that paying child support will make it more difficult for them to get an apartment for themselves and their families. Four others continued to neglect making monthly payments, increasing their debt and risking future court involvement and possible incarceration.

About a quarter of the men have other debts as well. These include substantial court fines (one man, for example, has to pay \$30 a month for the next four years), traffic fines as high as \$1,000, and in one case, an outstanding student loan of \$3,000. Some of the men have more than one source of debt. The most dramatic case is a man who, in addition to owing \$400 in traffic tickets, has a \$15,000 court fine and \$13,000 in child support arrears.

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## REDEFINING FAMILY AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

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The men's limited incomes will affect their family and social relationships as well. Those whose standing within their families has been defined by their ability to help support parents and siblings with hustling money will have to establish new roles for themselves. Those who had attracted women with hustling money may find the women no longer interested now that they have less to spend.

Their changed financial circumstances also affect their relationships to their children. The fatherhood workshops stressed that it is more important for fathers to be present in their children's lives than to buy them expensive gifts. While the men took this message to heart, like all fathers they view their ability to provide for their children as an integral part of the fatherhood role. A few admitted worrying that their children might not love them if they could no longer buy them expensive presents. One was concerned that he might be tempted back to the streets if his present job does not pay enough for him to support himself and his children at the level they were accustomed to. Another man, who had not yet found a job but was no longer hustling when we last interviewed him, struggled against feelings of inadequacy when his children approached their mother for money because they know "my daddy broke, but my mama, she got a little money."

The seven or eight men in the study who could rely on receiving financial and material support from their extended families for their basic necessities—and who have close relationships with their children, and girlfriends who support their attempts to go straight—may be in the best position to weather these financial and relationship challenges. Their struggle for legitimacy, and their desire to provide a better life for themselves and their families, may serve as a continuing source of motivation to avoid getting reinvolved in hustling despite their limited ability to provide financially. This has been true for Chris, who quit hustling five years ago after he met his girlfriend and they had a child. He is now trying to find a full-time job so they can move into their own apartment. When asked how he has managed to avoid going back to the streets, despite lack of steady employment, he replied:

*I had this frame of mind that if I do something stupid, I'm gonna get locked up, and I'm not gonna see my son. He's like, he's my main motivation, he's the world to me. Not leaving out [my girlfriend], you know, but my son, that's my charm right there, I love him to death. I wanna give him the most that I can.*

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## BREAKING TIES WITH FORMER HUSTLING BUDDIES

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Another difficult challenge the men face is to avoid getting pulled back into hustling by their former friends. Many men admitted that their social network consists primarily of men who are involved in illegal activities. They are aware that they need to sever ties with friends who do not support their effort to go straight. While the fatherhood workshops gave them strategies to avoid negative peer pressure, they acknowledge that, once they are back in their communities and away from the program, this will be a challenge.

Many understand that simply hanging out with friends who are still hustling could pull them back into it. Carlos has had to decline invitations to join old friends as they drive around the neighborhood smoking marijuana because they are likely to have guns in the car and, if stopped by police, he would be rearrested for violating his parole. Anthony believed that relocating might be the only way to avoid the pull of old friends:

*I really don't want to be here, I want to start over. I'm tired of being here around people I know, trying to pull me right back into what I was doing. Every time I run into somebody, they're like, "Look I need this, I need that," and I'm not into that no more. I'm just tired of everybody putting that pressure on me. Eventually, I might crawl back into that, and I don't want to do that. So I rather get outta here, just leave, start all over, new surroundings, new environment, be gone.*

The murder of a close friend convinced Farad that he needed to make a complete break from former friends. As he tells it, his friend never completely severed his ties with his own former hustling friends after he was released from prison and started his own business. He was eventually killed by a member of this circle who was jealous of his success. From this incident, Farad learned that there can be no half measures in turning away from the street:

*So my look on it is like when I change, I'm changing completely. If I had old friends, I don't care if I had 20 years with 'em, if you're not on the same path I'm on, I gotta cut you off. It's nothing personal, it's about me, my kids, you know.... Now that I'm changed, I'm not going back, in no way, no way, no shape, no form. The friends that I knew, I can't mess with 'em.*

But breaking ties with former friends can be lonely and isolating. Farad found that old buddies sense rebuke when he puts on a tie and goes to work, so he keeps to himself and tries to stay focused on what he is trying to accomplish. "It don't pay to really tell people my goals or nothing like that because they won't really respect me for it, you know. So I just keep those things to myself." At the point when he told us this, he had not met up with other young men who were trying to lead productive lives, and he had no support network beyond his girlfriend.

Fathers at Work programs were trying to address this issue by organizing regular meetings for program graduates. Ideally, these alumni groups, scheduled to meet at least once a month, will link the men to a network of peers who, like themselves, are trying to turn their lives around. At the time our study concluded, the groups were just starting. Fortunately, Farad joined the group at his site and became a frequent participant.

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### A FRAGILE BEGINNING

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In addition to having a full-time job, the men who seemed best poised to succeed at the point when we last interviewed them had the following personal resources:

- ◆ Material and financial support—from a girlfriend or other family members, for example—for housing, transportation and child support, to help relieve their immediate financial pressures.
- ◆ Commitment to establishing a family household with their girlfriend and children, which served to motivate and stabilize them and added a sense of purpose and dignity to their lives in spite of their diminished finances.
- ◆ A realistic view of the demands of the workplace, and the recognition that success will require patience and perseverance.

Derrick was one of a small group of men who had these resources. One of the "ambitious workers" before entering Fathers at Work, it is possible to be cautiously optimistic in predicting his future. He had just turned 23 when he started the program and was about to be released from the halfway house after serving an 18-month sentence for a drug-related felony. From age 16 until his arrest at 21, he worked steadily in a series of legitimate jobs and sold drugs on the side almost every night. He had been ambitious and energetic at both work and hustling. He is

deeply committed to his four-year-old son, for whose sake he now says he will stay out of trouble. His relationship with the child's mother survived a rocky period when she became pregnant by another man while he was in jail, but she has been very supportive of his effort to change and pleased about his relationship with their son.

At the end of Fathers at Work, Derrick was released from the halfway house and went to live with his girlfriend, their young son and his infant stepdaughter (with whose father his girlfriend is no longer involved) in her parents' home, where he is encouraged to contribute to the upkeep of the household in a way that allows for his limited resources. Thus, he has financial and emotional support for his effort to stabilize his life. In contrast to his former life, when his nights were spent hustling and partying, when we last talked to him he was spending most of his evenings at home and claimed he was content doing so.

He left his first job at a telemarketing company but soon found a job working under the table for a friend's business and now brings home about \$320 a week. At the time of our last interview, he told us that he was trying to avoid the kind of impatience that led him to hustle in the past. He seemed content with his new life and optimistic about his future. Eight months after that interview, he was holding his own, and was still living and working at the same place:

*I used to think life was a game and that I could try to get the most money I can, but it didn't work out that way. So now I'm happy, you know what I mean, just working hard for the money because I'm getting paid good. I got big plans. Pretty soon, hopefully by, I'll say like three months, I'll have me a car.*

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## CONCLUSION

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**E**mployment programs serving poor, young urban men are likely to attract many who, like the 27 men in our study, have earned income through criminal activities. Their criminal backgrounds and desire to turn their lives around present challenges and opportunities that are different than those of program participants who have never hustled. At the same time, however, our study has shown that men who hustle are not a heterogeneous group. They include men who have moved in and out of legitimate work and those who have relied almost exclusively on hustling to earn money. They have had different priorities regarding the value of work: some hustled only when they could not find work, and others worked only when it was convenient. They include men who are estranged from their children and men who are a regular part of their children's lives. They may be recently out of prison, or they may have been away from criminal activities for some time. Differences in our study sample's backgrounds, relationships and circumstances influenced their experiences of the program as well as the extent of their early post-program success.

We conclude this report by making recommendations, based on what we have learned from our contact with these men, about how programs can best help men who have been involved in illegal activities make a successful transition to stable employment and more legitimate lives.

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### **1** CONDUCT AN EARLY ASSESSMENT OF THE MEN ON KEY ISSUES RELATED TO SUCCESS IN THE WORKPLACE.

It is important for programs to understand as much as they can about the experiences, work-related skills and priorities of the men in order to better meet their needs. Assessing each participant's work background and his level of involvement in hustling (or other criminal activities) soon after he enrolls would help staff provide the most appropriate services.

For example, our findings suggest that men who, despite their history of hustling, are fundamentally oriented toward work possess sufficient workplace skills that they stand a good chance of succeeding with relatively little additional support once they are placed in a decent job with some growth potential. On the other hand, men who have made hustling their priority for a number of years may require more comprehensive job readiness training before they are prepared to work. They are likely to have a more difficult time making the transition to a steady existence in the formal labor market, and programs need to provide them with additional follow-up services, such as rapid re-placement if they lose their first jobs.

Early assessment could also identify participants' employment goals and aspirations, and identify key supports in their lives as well as issues and conditions (e.g., homelessness, drug or alcohol problems) that, if left unaddressed, could impede their progress in the workplace.



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## 2 BUILD ON THE MEN'S EXISTING MOTIVATIONS.

The men in our study had a strong desire to avoid incarceration and identified this as a major reason they wanted to avoid returning to hustling. This was true of men who were recently released from jail, as well as those whose incarceration was farther in the past—and even men who had never spent time in prison but dreaded ever having to. Programs can build upon the men's desire to avoid prison to guide them away from crime and toward adopting a more stable lifestyle.

Our interviews indicate that employing ex-offenders as staff can be particularly motivating to the men. These staff were living proof that the formidable obstacles the men face can be over. This said, the high rates of recidivism among the ex-offender population as a whole starkly illustrate how difficult it is for men to sustain their resolution to change in the face of the harsh realities of their lives, and both program and participants should acknowledge that long-term success requires sustained effort and resolve.

For fathers who are involved in their children's lives, program messages that link responsible fatherhood and avoiding crime can be an effective motivating tool, giving focus and purpose to the men's efforts to change. The involved fathers in our study responded to these messages and identified wanting to be there for their children as a reason to avoid hustling. However, our study suggests that this message is less effective in motivating men whose relationships with their children have become estranged.

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## 3 HELP THE MEN ADDRESS PERSONAL CHALLENGES THAT CAN BECOME MAJOR BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT.

A large percentage of the men in our study had been heavy marijuana users before enrolling in Fathers at Work. By their own admission, their level of use often decreased their motivation to seek work, interfered with their job performance and sometimes led to their being fired. Further, their marijuana habit contributed to their ongoing involvement in hustling, as they often sold drugs to support their own use. Continued drug use places the men at risk of returning to hustling to support their habit. It also may keep the men out of formal labor market jobs, as more employers are testing for drugs and will not hire or retain someone who tests positive.

Programs need to help the men address this issue. The men's interviews indicate that suggesting ways to resist negative peer pressure, increasing their awareness of the negative consequences of heavy use of recreational drugs, and requiring them to pass periodic drug tests as a condition of program participation and/or placement in a job can help the men avoid heavy use. For men who have more serious substance abuse problems, referral for treatment may be appropriate.

Reasonable, affordable child support orders also are essential to the men's long-term success in avoiding criminal activity. Without affordable support orders, the men may choose to leave the formal labor market to avoid having their payments deducted from their wages, or they may even start hustling again to pay off the debt. Our finding that men are often reluctant to ask staff for help with child support issues suggests that programs need to be proactive in providing this assistance. Because of the intricacies of the child support system, helping the men with their orders will require dedicating sufficient staff time and resources to keep abreast of each father's status in the system and provide help that is tailored to the needs of each individual case.

Men who have been recently released from prison are dealing with a unique set of circumstances. They may be highly motivated to make a change in their lives, but at the same time, they are in great need of support services to enable them to make a successful transition back into their communities. In addition to help finding a job, these men need assistance securing housing and may need guidance to help them reconnect with their families and children.

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## 4 STRENGTHEN THE MEN'S SOCIAL SUPPORTS.

In Fatherhood Development workshops, much time was devoted to helping the men defuse tensions with the mothers of their children so that these tensions would not interfere with the men's involvement with their children. While such guidance is appropriate for many, not all of the men have contentious relationships with their children's mothers. In fact, some of the men in our study were in committed relationships with their girlfriends, and the couples were struggling to establish or sustain a family household. These relationships were very fragile as the couples tried to deal with severe financial strains, lack of affordable housing where they could live as a family unit, and few skills with which to resolve their differences.

Because these committed relationships appear to play an important stabilizing role in the men's lives, programs should try to find ways to support and strengthen them. Programs might consider offering couples mediation services, as well as other benefits, such as extending employment services to the man's significant other or offering the couple help with financial planning or finding affordable housing or child care.

Programs could also strengthen the men's social supports by providing opportunities for them to establish new peer networks that support their efforts to change. Many men in our study were concerned that they would be pulled back into hustling if they remained connected to friends who were still engaged in illegal activities. But breaking ties with former friends is extremely difficult in the absence of an alternative support system.

Programs could try to address this issue by organizing regular meetings for program graduates or providing a time and space for the men to meet informally. Ideally, such strategies can link participants to a network of peers who, like themselves, are trying to turn their lives around. While not all men will be attracted to these activities, our interviews suggest that for those who do become engaged, the contact with other program participants can reduce their sense of isolation and reinforce their attempts to stay straight. Attending activities scheduled for program graduates could also help the men stay connected to the program, making it more likely they will access follow-up services.

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## 5 HELP MEN DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A PLAN FOR ACHIEVING LONG-RANGE CAREER GOALS.

The instant gratification and fast money that characterize the hustling lifestyle do not prepare men for the patience and long-term perspective they need to make a successful and sustained transition to the world of work. Programs could work with the men to develop a long-term plan for achieving their career goals while providing them with realistic expectations, based on an assessment of their skills and local labor market conditions, about their immediate employment opportunities.

The men may respond well to a program that offers additional benefits upon the achievement of interim goals. Such a design could stipulate that, if they hold a job for six months, they would be eligible for additional services that could help them meet their long-range goals. These services could include access to educational programs, money management courses, subsidized hard skills training or help finding a better job. Building in intermediate rewards could help the men tolerate early jobs that are less than ideal for the sake of attaining something better in the future.

The harsh realities of life in our nation's impoverished urban communities mean that a proportion of poor, unemployed young men are likely to have a history of earning money through criminal means. Those who have experienced the negative consequences of these pursuits and seek a safer, stable and more legitimate life will need help in overcoming the many obstacles that limit their employment prospects. If the men are going to have a chance of succeeding, programs will need to understand their aspirations as well as their limitations, and build upon their existing strengths to develop the incentives, opportunities, training and support that can help them enter and remain in the world of legitimate work.

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## ENDNOTES

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- 1 All of the names of the men in the study have been changed.
- 2 The term hustling was used by many of the men we interviewed to refer to a range of criminal activities, and we adopted the term in our analysis. Two of the men in our sample did not sell drugs, but earned their incomes by robbery, burglarizing and/or selling stolen goods. Their attitudes and behaviors about illegitimate and legitimate work, and the consequences of their criminal activities, were indistinguishable from the men who sold drugs. Thus, they are included in the sample.
- 3 The sites are the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) in New York, NY; Impact Services in Philadelphia, PA; Rubicon Programs, Inc., in Richmond, CA; STRIVE (Support and Training Result in Valuable Employees) in Chicago, IL; Total Action Against Poverty (TAP) in Roanoke, VA; and Vocational Foundation, Inc. (VFI), in New York, NY.
- 4 Sorensen and Zibman, *Poor Dads Who Don't Pay Child Support: Deadbeats or Disadvantaged?*
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 Achatz and MacAllum, *Young Unwed Fathers: Report from the Field*; Johnson et al., *Father's Fair Share: Helping Poor Men Manage Child Support and Fatherhood*.
- 7 Holzer et al. *Employment Barriers Facing Ex-Offenders*.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 Travis and Waul, *Reflections on the Crime Decline: Lessons for the Future*.
- 10 Bureau of Justice Statistics, Criminal Offenders Statistics.
- 11 Fagan, "Drug Selling and Licit Income in Distressed Neighborhoods: The Economic Lives of Street-Level Drug Users as Dealers."
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 We do not have information about the other men's status within the criminal justice system.
- 14 It is likely that the men are reporting their gross earnings; that is, before any costs incurred in buying the drugs are considered.
- 15 Other studies of hustling earnings confirm that men could bring in substantial amounts of money selling drugs, especially in comparison with earnings from legitimate jobs. See, for example, Reuter et al., *Money from Crime: A Study of the Economics of Drug Dealing in Washington, DC*.
- 16 This figure is probably exceptionally high. However, the finding that many drug dealers hustle to support their own drug use is confirmed by several studies. See Reuter et al., *Money from Crime: A Study of the Economics of Drug Dealing in Washington, DC*; Tunnell, "Inside the Drug Trade: Trafficking from the Dealer's Perspective"; and VanNostrand and Tewsbury, "The Motives and Mechanics of Operating an Illegal Drug Enterprise."
- 17 The men in the study had been in jail at different points in time. The Impact men were just finishing their sentences, and one man from STRIVE was on parole. For the others, their most recent incarceration had occurred at various points in the past. The men who talked about their prison experience as a turning point included both those who were about to be released and those who had been in prison in the past. The latter group managed to avoid getting reinvolvement in serious hustling since their last incarceration by earning money working odd jobs or as day laborers, although a few continued to hustle at reduced levels up to the point they entered the program.
- 18 We began interviewing the men during or immediately following their participation in Fathers at Work's Fatherhood Development workshops. While their identification of fatherhood as a major factor in their decision to stop hustling may have been influenced by their participation in the workshops, fathers who had strong relationships with their children prior to enrollment were much more likely to cite fatherhood as a motivating factor than were men who were estranged from their children. This suggests that the message of the workshops reinforced and amplified beliefs the involved fathers already had.
- 19 The four groups include 25 of the 27 men. The hustling orientations of the two others is unclear: both combined working and hustling over the years, but we were unable to determine which they made their priority. As a result, we did not place them in a group, and they are not included in the following analysis.
- 20 We are not entirely sure why the men in this group worked at all when not on probation or trying to avoid arrest. Romero gave some clues: he intimated that a legitimate job gave him a more predictable income, a financial cushion during times when hustling money slowed.

- 21 At the time of our study, STRIVE subcontracted with the Health Consortium of Illinois to deliver the Fatherhood Development workshops. Fatherhood Development workshops in VFI and Impact used a curriculum distributed by the National Partnership for Community Leadership. See <http://www.npcl.org/services/workshop.htm> for a full description of this curriculum.
- 22 VFI also gave out MetroCards to pay for public transportation so the men could get to their job interviews, assistance which they found extremely helpful.
- 23 National Center on Fathers and Families Brief, *Co-Parenting: A Review of the Literature*.
- 24 Carlson and McLanahan, "Fragile Families, Father Involvement and Public Policy."
- 25 Analysis of the survey data from the full demonstration will be included in an upcoming report.
- 26 The nine men for whom we have no data have not been located by Temple University's Institute for Survey Research (ISR), the survey firm hired to administer the baseline and follow-up surveys. ISR makes repeated attempts to contact the men over a six-month period using the men's last known address and phone number. If the men cannot be reached at these known addresses, ISR uses other available sources such as Department of Motor Vehicle verification, correctional institution inquiries, directory assistance, post office verification and telephone searches for neighbors and nearby residents. ISR staff also make in-person attempts to locate the individual by visiting neighbors of the last known address, contacting family members and associates, visiting places that the participant was known to frequent and using other tracking techniques. If ISR cannot locate the men within this six-month period, the men are declared unreachable, and no further efforts are made to contact them.
- 27 Fraker et al., *The Welfare to Work Grants Program: Enrollee Outcomes One Year After Program Entry, Report to Congress*.
- 28 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2004 HHS Poverty Guidelines.
- 29 The baseline survey provides information on the fathers' preprogram wages. Unfortunately, we lack wage information for the eight fathers who were not employed during the year prior to enrolling, which prevents us from making a full comparison of the two groups.
- 30 The survey used a four-point scale to measure job satisfaction. Men were asked if they were very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with specific aspects of their most recent job.
- 31 For several reasons, we believe that the information about the men's hustling activities obtained through the in-depth interviews is more reliable than that obtained through the surveys. First, the men were more likely to confide in the interviewers about such a sensitive topic, as the interviews took place only after some degree of trust and comfort had been established. Second, the less-structured and more informal nature of the in-depth interviews allowed the men to talk about their illegal activities when they felt comfortable doing so. Finally, while the survey question asks only about hustling during the previous month, the time frame discussed in the interviews was longer, and thus more likely to capture the men's hustling activity.

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## **APPENDIX A: FATHERS AT WORK INTERVIEW STUDY SITES**

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The interview study took place in three of the six Fathers at Work sites: Impact, STRIVE and VFI. The following descriptions were compiled in early 2004; some program elements may have changed.

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### **IMPACT SERVICES, INC.**

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Since 1974, Impact Services has provided training programs for low-income people in Philadelphia and surrounding areas. Impact's offerings include the Helping Offenders Work program, which serves people with criminal records and histories of substance abuse; the Greater Philadelphia Works welfare-to-work program; and Veterans Services.

Impact's Fathers at Work program, known as Step-Up, serves ex-convicts and was created to work with two key referral sources: Philadelphia County's Work Release Program and the Pennsylvania Bureau of Probation and Parole. Services include:

- ◆ **Employment strategies:** These include individualized job development and job placement, and van services for transportation to jobs in outlying areas.
- ◆ **Fatherhood services:** These focus on a 12-week parenting class. In addition, there is an alumni group, started during Step-Up's second year and facilitated by a Step-Up case manager, that plans and implements family outings and leadership development activities.
- ◆ **Child support services:** Impact developed a new relationship with the Pennsylvania Family Court for child support enforcement. In a step unique in the Fathers at Work demonstration, Impact researched potential participants' Family Court status prior to enrollment to ensure that men either had an existing child support case or were in the Family Court system with a potential case pending. Family Court then streamlined court processes for Impact's Step-Up participants, including allowing them to bundle several petitions together for a single hearing instead of requiring them to deal with, for example, child support orders for different children at separate times.

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### **STRIVE (SUPPORT AND TRAINING RESULT IN VALUABLE EMPLOYEES)**

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STRIVE is a nonprofit job training and placement organization that serves low-income residents in Chicago. The Chicago STRIVE is part of a national network of organizations, each following a similar model for employment services. STRIVE Chicago offers four weeks of classroom-based soft skills training, followed by rapid placement and two years of follow-up services. The focus is on personal responsibility and attitudinal change, combined with training in job search techniques. STRIVE recently merged with Suburban Job Link, which operates a temporary employment agency that provides low-income people with work experience and access to employment opportunities.



Before joining Fathers at Work, STRIVE primarily served women on welfare. With the addition of services related to its Fathers at Work program, STRIVE now provides:

- ◆ Employment strategies: STRIVE offers a four-week attitudinal and job readiness program, job placement assistance, two years of retention services, and limited access to skills training and temporary employment opportunities.
- ◆ Fatherhood services: These include an active alumni group, parenting support groups and family activities.
- ◆ Child support services: Case managers help participants with child support, accompanying them to court, helping them file necessary petitions and providing general information as needed. STRIVE staff have been trained and authorized by the Illinois Department of Public Aid (IDPA) to establish paternity for participants who want to do it voluntarily. IDPA staff conduct monthly information sessions at STRIVE, and participants are required to meet with IDPA staff at their offices if they are opening or have an open child support case.

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### **VOCATIONAL FOUNDATION, INC. (VFI)**

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VFI was founded in 1936 to help New York City's disadvantaged youth achieve educational and employment goals. VFI has operated programs for young fathers since 1984 and built upon this experience to develop its new Young Fathers program. Participants in the program are supported by one of three primary case managers, called career advisors, throughout the duration of their involvement with VFI. Career advisors are available 24 hours a day, providing career counseling, crisis intervention, resource referral and all other typical case management duties, in addition to follow-up and advancement support after participants complete the program. Career advisors also conduct fatherhood workshops and provide coordination with child support enforcement agencies, and on an informal basis, provide some mediation support for conflicts between fathers and mothers. VFI's Young Fathers services include:

- ◆ Employment strategies: There are three options for participants—a Direct Placement program, with individualized job search services on an open-entry/open-exit basis, and job development and placement services provided by VFI's job developers (participants are also encouraged to participate in evening GED classes); a full-time Day Program in computer technical training, lasting five months and including GED/basic education; and an Evening Program that lasts nine months and is conducted three hours per night for four nights each week (GED instruction is offered for evening participants who need it).
- ◆ Fatherhood services: These focus on fatherhood workshops, using the National Partnership for Community Leadership curriculum, and are facilitated by the career advisors.
- ◆ Child support services: Upon enrollment, career advisors obtain information about the status of each father's case from the New York State Office of Child Support Enforcement and provide individualized support as fathers petition for modifications, to establish paternity or seek to establish support orders.

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## **APPENDIX B: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

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The interview study took place between July 2002 and June 2003. The data consisted of a series of in-depth interviews with 27 men who were participating in three of the six Fathers at Work sites (Philadelphia, Chicago and Brooklyn). In each city, P/PV hired a local researcher who was responsible for all aspects of data collection. The selection of study sites was guided by three factors: the desire to include one of the two Fathers at Work programs that served only ex-offenders, regional diversity and the availability of qualified researchers in the area.

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### **THE INTERVIEWS**

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The study consisted of a series of four semistructured interviews, each of which focused on an issue of concern to the Fathers at Work evaluation:

1. The Life History and Employment Interview included questions about the men's formative years and relationships with their families, schooling, history of employment in both the formal and informal labor markets, the strategies they have used to search for jobs and their pre-enrollment involvement (if any) in illegal income-generating activities.
2. The Fatherhood Interview focused on the men's experiences of fatherhood and asked about the conditions surrounding the birth of their children, their past and current relationships with each child and child's mother, how their employment status and hustling activities have affected these relationships, and their views of what it means to be a good father.
3. The Child Support Interview dealt with the issue of formal and informal child support and explored the men's views about their financial responsibility for their children, factors that determine the level and type of financial and material support they provide, and their attitudes toward and experiences with the formal child support system (for those fathers with formal orders).
4. The Program Interview explored the men's responses to various components of the Fathers at Work program and asked them to assess how they had benefited from participating. They were also asked whether and how the program had helped them find a job, manage their child support obligations, sustain or improve their relationship with their children, and guide them toward adopting a more legitimate lifestyle.

The series of four interviews typically took place over a two- to four- month period. Each interview took approximately 90 minutes to complete. The men were given \$25 at the conclusion of each interview to compensate them for their time and any travel expenses they may have incurred. Except in one case where the interviewer relied on handwritten notes, all of the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed.

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## SAMPLE SELECTION

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The on-site researchers selected the sample in consultation with the study's principal investigator and, in some cases, Fathers at Work staff at the sites. Only men who completed the initial (baseline) survey that was part of P/PV's evaluation of Fathers at Work were eligible for the interview study. (Survey completion was not a requirement for receiving program services.) In order to construct as diverse a sample as possible from the pool of baseline participants, the on-site researchers were instructed to select men of different ages and ethnicities, who also varied in terms of number of children, status in the formal child support system, and level of interest and participation in Fathers at Work.

Because the survey was usually administered two to three weeks after the men enrolled in the program, and notification of survey completion typically took several days to reach the on-site researchers, the men recruited to the interview study had all been participating in Fathers at Work for at least three weeks before they were asked to join the interview study. The fact that formal programming at STRIVE ended after four weeks meant that men from this site were recruited during the last week of the program and interviewed after they had completed it. At VFI and Impact, classes and workshops extended over nine and three months respectively. With the exception of the final interview of one Impact man, interviews of men from these two sites took place while they were still attending the program. This study does not include the views of men who, for whatever reason, decided to leave the program before three weeks, and instead consists of men who had either completed the program or remained connected to it over several months.

In order to fully acquaint themselves with the program and become known to the men, the researchers attended the Fatherhood Development workshops at their respective sites throughout the data-collection period and recruited participants for the interview study from among the men attending those workshops. When recruiting men for the study, the researchers explained their interest in conducting a set of interviews with each participant, reviewed the general goals of the study and the major topics covered in the interviews, explained the confidential nature of the interviews and informed the men that they would be given \$25 at the completion of each interview. The interviewer stressed that participation in the study was entirely voluntary and explained that declining to participate had no bearing on their ability to continue to receive program services. The researchers encountered no difficulty finding men who were interested in being interviewed.

The men were interviewed at the halfway house where they were living (Impact), at the program site or in a nearby restaurant or coffee shop. A room or space that afforded as much privacy as possible was selected. In order to observe the men in other contexts and maintain their relationships with them between interviews, the researchers also regularly observed program activities (e.g., family outings, alumni meetings) and periodically talked with program staff. Attending activities where the men were present or spending time in rooms where the men congregated gave the researchers more opportunities to observe and speak with the men directly about issues of interest to the study. It also enabled the researchers to get to know the men in a greater number of settings and to assess the information that they communicated during interviews within the context of more information about their lives.

Attrition across the series of interviews was remarkably low: only 3 of the initial sample of 41 men had to be dropped from the study because they were not available to complete the interviews. (Excessive background noise and problems with the tape-recording equipment made it impossible to transcribe the interviews of a fourth man, and he was dropped from the study.) A total of 37 men completed at least three of the four interviews that were part of the series. Of these, 27 acknowledged earning or supplementing their income through criminal activities. These 27 men make up the sample for this study.



**Public/Private Ventures**

2000 Market Street, Suite 600  
Philadelphia, PA 19103  
Tel: (215) 557-4400  
Fax: (215) 557-4469

*New York Office*

The Chanin Building  
122 East 42nd Street, 42nd Floor  
New York, NY 10168  
Tel: (212) 822-2400  
Fax: (212) 949-0439

*California Office*

Lake Merritt Plaza, Suite 1550  
1999 Harrison Street  
Oakland, CA 94612  
Tel: (510) 273-4600  
Fax: (510) 273-4619

<http://www.ppv.org>