



Promoting the Economic Stability of Fathers with Histories of Incarceration

Activities and Lessons from Six Responsible Fatherhood Programs

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Importance of Economic Stability Activities for Fathers with Incarceration Experiences

People return from incarceration with limited resources, accumulated debt, weak employment histories, and no means of supporting themselves financially (McLean and Thompson 2007; Visher, Debus, and Yahner 2008; Visher, Yahner, and La Vigne 2010). For many of these people, their ability to achieve economic stability in the community is exacerbated by other reentry challenges they might face that may preclude or hinder their ability to find and maintain employment (La Vigne and Kachnowski 2005; La Vigne, Shollenberger, and Debus 2009; La Vigne, Visher, and Castro 2004; Visher and Courtney 2007; Visher et al. 2004, Visher, Yahner, and La Vigne 2010). Adding to the importance of their achieving economic stability, the majority of people returning to their communities after incarceration also have minor children and/or family members who rely on them financially and emotionally (Fontaine et al. 2015; Glaze and Maruschak 2008). Furthermore, the communities where people with criminal justice histories are concentrated are often economically disadvantaged (Fontaine et al. 2015; Lynch and Sabol 2004; Rose and Clear 1998).

Time spent in prison puts a sizable gap in a person's employment history and prevents them from developing marketable work skills and job networks (Holzer 2007). Stable employment is important; finding and maintaining employment can help returning people avoid reliance on earning illegal income, build prosocial connections and supportive networks, gain a sense of self-efficacy and a positive self-image, and establish a new set of roles, routines, and social supports to ease the transition from incarceration into the community (Graffam et al. cited in Duran et al. 2013; Solomon et al. 2004).

BACKGROUND

With funding from the Office of Family Assistance (OFA), the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation contracted with the Urban Institute to conduct an implementation evaluation of OFA's Community-Centered Responsible Fatherhood Ex-Prisoner Reentry Pilot Projects ("Fatherhood Reentry").¹ Six organizations were funded to implement a range of activities intended to help stabilize fathers and their families, help move fathers toward economic self-sufficiency, and reduce recidivism. The following organizations received funding and were included in Urban's evaluation:

- **Kanawha Institute for Social Research and Action, Inc. (KISRA)**, headquartered in Dunbar, West Virginia, which called its program the West Virginia Pathways to Responsible Fatherhood Initiative²
- **Lutheran Social Services (LSS)**, headquartered in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, which called its program Fatherhood and Families
- **New Jersey Department of Corrections' (NJDOC) Office of Substance Abuse Programming and Addiction Services**, headquartered in Trenton, New Jersey, which called its program Engaging the Family
- **PB&J Family Services, Inc. (PB&J)**, headquartered in Albuquerque, New Mexico, which called its program the Fatherhood Reentry Program
- **The RIDGE Project, Inc. (RIDGE)**, headquartered in McClure, Ohio, which called its program TYRO
- **Rubicon Programs, Inc. (Rubicon)**, headquartered in Richmond, California, which called its program Promoting Advances in Paternal Accountability and Success in Work

As required by the authorizing legislation, each organization provided activities in three areas: responsible parenting, healthy marriage, and economic stability.³ The activities in the three areas were implemented in collaboration with various nonprofit and government agencies. As a complement to the OFA-funded activities authorized by legislation, the organizations helped participants address their reentry and fatherhood needs by using external referrals to nonprofit and government agency partners and internal referrals to services supported by non-OFA funding streams. This brief describes the range of services available to Fatherhood Reentry project participants during the evaluation period.

A note on language: the authorizing legislation uses the term "healthy marriage" as one of the three core activities. Throughout this brief, we use the term "healthy relationship," which represents one aspect of the authorized healthy marriage service provision. As made permissible by the authorizing legislation and discussed throughout this brief, the programs primarily provided healthy relationship classes and services within the healthy marriage activity area and characterized their programs as such.

The Fatherhood Reentry projects provided activities to fathers (and their families) in institutional settings as they were nearing release ("prerelease") and in their offices located in the community ("postrelease"). All six projects provided services in multiple institutional settings: federal prisons (KISRA), state prisons (KISRA, LSS, NJDOC, PB&J, RIDGE, and Rubicon), county/regional jails (KISRA, PB&J, RIDGE, and Rubicon), and residential substance abuse treatment facilities (Rubicon). All projects provided services in their community-based offices for participants served by the program prerelease. With the exception of the NJDOC project, fathers who were formerly incarcerated could be enrolled and served in the community-based offices without having been served by the programs in the institutions.⁴ Four projects (KISRA, LSS, NJDOC, and RIDGE) provided services in multiple communities across their respective states, and two (PB&J and Rubicon) provided services in one county.⁵ Five projects (KISRA, LSS, NJDOC, PB&J, and RIDGE) were operational from September 2011 through September 2015, and the sixth (Rubicon) was operational from September 2012 through September 2015.

This brief, one of three in a series,⁶ focuses on the economic stability activities implemented by the projects. Economic stability was a core focus of the Fatherhood Reentry projects based on the extant literature highlighting formerly incarcerated people's needs for assistance in achieving self-sufficiency to reach their reentry and family reunification goals. Incarceration is a risk factor for unemployment, and formerly incarcerated people have difficulty achieving economic stability for various reasons that encompass both personal challenges and systemic barriers. This brief provides a short overview of this literature, highlighting the importance of economic stability activities for fathers who are incarcerated or were formerly incarcerated, the barriers people face upon their return to the community, and how employment is associated with better outcomes among returning people, their families, and the community. We then include descriptions of the activities the Fatherhood Reentry projects used to foster economic stability for participating fathers and their families. We conclude with recommendations, based on the experiences of the Fatherhood Reentry projects, for practitioners implementing economic stability activities for the reentry population.

For fathers particularly, earning a wage also enables them to financially support their children and their families (Graffam et al. cited in Duran et al. 2013; Lippold et al. 2011; Solomon et al. 2004). Because studies have shown that recidivism rates are lower for people with jobs than for those without, the community also benefits from the resultant increased public safety (Uggen 2000; Visher and Courtney 2007; Visher, Debus, and Yahner 2008).

Unfortunately, there are personal and systemic barriers to economic stability for people who have been incarcerated. Following incarceration, individual-level barriers include a lack of work experience, limited hard and soft skills, and low education attainment (Holzer, Raphael, and Stoll 2003a; La Vigne and Kachnowski 2005; Visher, Debus, and Yahner 2008; Visher and Travis 2003). For example, based on a nationally representative sample of inmates in state and federal prisons, nearly 40 percent of fathers in state prison did not have a GED or high school diploma when they were admitted (Glaze and Maruschak 2008). Many people who are incarcerated also have poor health (Maruschak, Berzofsky, and Unangst 2015), substance use and mental health issues (James and Glaze 2006; Karberg and James 2005), and problems with housing instability or homelessness (see Fontaine and Biess 2012 for review) that may hinder their ability to achieve economic stability, including finding, getting, and keeping a job (Bushway 2003; Holzer, Raphael, and Stoll 2003b; Solomon et al. 2004; Western 2002). These disadvantages are further compounded by less visible but equally problematic obstacles experienced by people returning to the community after incarceration, including obtaining identification, transportation, and child care necessary for getting and keeping a job.

There are also systemic barriers. Employment discrimination of those with incarceration histories has been well documented, directly challenging peoples' job prospects and economic stability upon release (Holzer 2007; Holzer, Raphael, and Stoll 2003a, 2003b; Pager 2003). Employers are often averse to hiring people who were incarcerated—they are even less likely to hire formerly incarcerated people than other stigmatized populations, such as welfare recipients (Holzer, Raphael, and Stoll 2003a; Pager 2003; Wallace and Wyckoff 2008). Some people face additional hurdles; for example, people with certain offense histories may face restrictions on where and among whom they can work (Berger and DaGrossa 2013; Dale 1976).

Programs that focus on employment or job readiness for people with histories of incarceration have been shown to help them secure jobs (Drake 2003; Fontaine et al. 2015; Northcutt Bohmert and Duwe 2012; Rossman and Roman 2003), earn higher wages (Drake 2003; Fontaine et al. 2015; Spaulding, Grossman, and Wallace 2009), and stay out of prison (Berk 2007; Drake 2003; Fontaine et al. 2015, Redcross et al. 2012; Rossman and Roman 2003; Uggen 2000; Visher, Debus, and Yahner 2008). Although literature on best practices in employment services for the reentry population is mixed, the emerging consensus suggests that programs should assess and tailor services to participants' level of job readiness and engage people during incarceration or shortly following their release, and that providing training in a particular industry or sector and job coaching for that industry helps people secure jobs in those sectors (instead of more general employment readiness training; see Duran et al. 2013; Northcutt Bohmert and Duwe 2012; Redcross et al. 2012; and Rossman and Roman 2003). It is also important for programs to

address barriers unrelated to skill building or development, such as mental health and substance abuse issues, before engaging people in workforce readiness services (Duran et al. 2013).

Fatherhood Reentry Programs' Approaches to Providing Economic Stability Activities

Economic stability activities were one of three core components of the Fatherhood Reentry projects.⁷ Although this brief focuses on economic stability activities exclusively, the three components were intended to be complementary.

Case Management

Case management services were a central part of all six programs' economic stability services. Case managers served participating fathers and their families, providing one-on-one coaching and counseling, assessing participants' needs, and making referrals, connections, and links to services offered through their Fatherhood Reentry program or through external partners. Case management activities were intended to help fathers address their self-sufficiency needs and to help fathers reunify and support their children and families. Case management was not a structured service with mandatory weekly or biweekly meetings; instead, case management was an individualized service provided to fathers based on their specific needs and the needs of their families.

Three programs (LSS, PB&J, and RIDGE) structured their case management services so the same staff member worked with the participating father on all three core components: responsible parenting, healthy marriage, and economic stability. In these three programs, case managers worked with fathers to help them achieve their parenting, relationship, and economic stability goals through activities provided by the programs and by their external partnerships. The other three programs (KISRA, NJDOC, and Rubicon) assigned participants an additional case manager who focused solely on their employment goals. This case manager worked with the fathers to develop career plans in addition to the case management services they received in other component areas.

Case management functioned as a conduit for fathers to access the programs' economic stability services and resources in the community. Case managers collected information from fathers upon their entry into the program and through one-on-one meetings to learn about their education level, career interests, and previous work experience. RIDGE used formal employment assessments such as the Online Work Readiness Assessment while fathers were incarcerated; other programs administered intake assessments or surveys with questions about fathers' job interests, employment barriers, and work histories. Informed by this individualized case management, case managers connected fathers to various services and opportunities, including workforce development programs, education and vocational training and tuition assistance, transitional employment, and employers. Case managers also discussed job leads with fathers and helped them with résumé writing, job searching, and interview skills.

The programs offering specific employment case management used a couple of different models. KISRA called its employment case managers job coaches. In the initial years of the grant, all KISRA participants were assigned a job coach. Over time, KISRA limited the job coaches to participants served at the Dunbar headquarters. At KISRA's seven other regional offices, case managers functioned as job coaches because KISRA program managers felt there were not sufficient jobs available in the community or staffing resources to warrant hiring a specific job coach for those offices. NJDOC contracted with three community-based organizations to provide employment case management services, including referrals and direct services, in three regions of the state. NJDOC's prerelease case managers referred fathers to the provider serving the region to which they would return. Rubicon's employment case managers—called reentry career coaches—were assigned to every father and began case management services once they returned to the community.

In conjunction with—and often through—the case management services offered in institutions and the programs' community-based offices, economic stability activities were intended to help fathers achieve economic self-sufficiency and facilitate family reunification by

- improving fathers' **employability** through curriculum-based workforce readiness classes and vocational training and certification services;
- increasing fathers' **financial literacy and improving their financial prospects** through curriculum-based financial literacy classes and assistance with building and managing their income and benefits;
- providing fathers with various **employment opportunities**, such as transitional job opportunities and positions within microbusinesses operated by the programs; program staff also engaged in employer networking and relationship building to increase employment opportunities for participants; and
- **reducing or removing barriers** to economic stability and self-sufficiency commonly experienced by the reentry population through referrals to substance abuse, housing, and legal assistance services, and the provision of workplace essentials (e.g., clothing, identification, and transportation).

Employability

To help fathers build their soft skills (e.g., interpersonal skills and professionalism) and hard skills (e.g., training in specific fields, such as welding and construction), all six programs implemented **curriculum-based workforce readiness classes** and **vocational training and certification services**.

CURRICULUM-BASED WORKFORCE READINESS CLASSES

All six programs delivered or referred fathers to curriculum-based classes focused on increasing their employability. These classes varied considerably in both substance and structure. Generally, classes integrated lessons on professionalism and interpersonal skills in the workplace with mock interviews and job preparation and search activities such as computer skills training, and cover letter and résumé

writing. The programs' curricula included discussion of reliability, timeliness, professionalism, interpersonal skills, team building, and job ethics as well as specific lessons for how participants could address their criminal histories in discussions with employers.

Although the six programs' curricula had the commonalities just described, the programs' implementation of workforce readiness classes differed. LSS, RIDGE, and Rubicon delivered a curriculum developed specifically by their program staff during the grant period for their participant population of people with incarceration histories, while KISRA delivered a curriculum developed by an external organization for a general audience of job seekers. Instead of using their program staff to deliver a curriculum, NJDOC and PB&J worked with their community-based partners to deliver training curriculum and services to its community-based participants.

KISRA used the Getting the Job You Really Want curriculum, delivered over 10 sessions for two hours in 10 weeks to participants in the institutions or in their community-based offices. LSS's workforce readiness curriculum, the Work Training Program, was delivered in 10 two-hour sessions in one week to eligible participants in the state correctional institutions and in LSS's community-based offices.⁸ RIDGE's curriculum, TYRO Job Ethics Training, was delivered in 16 hours over two days or 10 hours in one day to participants in the institutions and in RIDGE's community-based offices. Rubicon's curriculum, The Academy, was delivered in four-hour sessions over two weeks in their two community-based offices. In one of Rubicon's two community-based offices, participants could also attend a two-week computer literacy course offered by one of its partners. In addition to lessons on workforce readiness, Rubicon's The Academy incorporated presentations from local public agencies, such as the child support department, that could help fathers' self-sufficiency and family reunification goals. NJDOC referred participants to two of its three regional community-based employment partners for drop-in classes and workforce readiness services, and PB&J similarly referred participants to three classes developed and facilitated by one of its partners. The three classes that PB&J participants could attend—Pathways to Careers, Putting Your Best Self Forward, and a computer class—ranged in length. The Pathways curriculum was delivered in 12 hours over two sessions, Putting Your Best Self Forward curriculum was delivered in 15 hours over five days, and the computer classes were delivered from 2.5 to 3 hours over one to four weeks depending on the skills addressed.

Two programs (LSS and Rubicon) provided participant incentives for class attendance. LSS participants were paid \$8 an hour for each class they attended as part of the Work Training Program and an additional \$8 an hour for up to two weeks for any job-searching activities they completed after the program. Rubicon incorporated a web-based earning simulation into The Academy through which participants could earn virtual wages for attending the workshop and completing associated job tasks. The job tasks, such as creating a résumé or completing typing tests, had increasing levels of difficulty and were associated with different virtual wages to simulate a job environment and motivate participants and create accountability across participants.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION SERVICES

To provide fathers with specialized skills, all six programs connected fathers to vocational training services, which spanned several industries, in the community. RIDGE connected some of its participants to vocational training while they were incarcerated. KISRA and LSS referred participants to local community colleges and vocational schools to receive classes in construction, welding, forklift operation, manufacturing, green energy, home health care and nursing assistance, and food handling. PB&J provided its participants with construction training and occupational safety training at its community-based office through one of its program partners. Rubicon used its partnerships with local employers to host weekend trainings at its community-based offices where participants could earn certificates in occupational safety, forklift operation, and HAZMAT. Rubicon also connected participants to information technology training through a partnership with a local nonprofit. Each program provided resources—through either their fatherhood grant or other funds and agreements—to offset the costs of these trainings for participants.

Commercial driver's license (CDL) training was a common service and was included in five of the six programs (KISRA, LSS, PB&J, NJDOC, and RIDGE). KISRA provided funding for CDL training through one of its partners, a regional workforce investment board. LSS used its partnerships with local vocational schools to provide fathers with CDL training and also funded the training. NJDOC funded two of its three economic stability partners to offer fathers CDL training in addition to training courses in building maintenance; food service and food handling; forklift operation; masonry; heating, ventilation, and air conditioning; computer repair; and web design. PB&J also referred participating fathers to a local community college that offered CDL training.

RIDGE staff established an agreement with the state correctional department to provide CDL and welding training to participants while they were incarcerated. A driving school that RIDGE collaborated with offered the CDL training to RIDGE participants in two state prisons. The training included driving instruction in a semitruck that was leased to the prison facilities. Instructors from a local community college offered the welding training course at another state prison. A local community college donated equipment for the training, and the state correctional department invested \$25,000 to upgrade one of its classrooms to accommodate the equipment. RIDGE also permitted its community-based participants who did not receive CDL or welding training in these two institutions to work with one of its local community college partners for CDL or welding training and certification.

Financial Literacy and Financial Prospects

All six programs also offered services to increase fathers' financial literacy and improve their financial prospects. Five programs engaged fathers through **curriculum-based financial literacy classes**, and four programs improved fathers' financial prospects by helping them **build and manage their income and benefits**.

CURRICULUM-BASED FINANCIAL LITERACY CLASSES

Five programs (KISRA, LSS, NJDOC, PB&J, and RIDGE) facilitated curriculum-based financial literacy classes for participants. The classes focused on money management, including managing cash flow and savings, avoiding debt, banking relationships, and consumer credit. KISRA used Financial Peace University, which covered a variety of topics, including credit, insurance, debt management, and wealth building, and discussed money with coparents and children. Financial Peace University delivered its course in 13 modules to participants in institutions and at KISRA's community-based offices. LSS offered participants a short, six-hour course focused on consumer credit issues called Credit Where Credit is Due that was delivered in institutions and in community-based offices. LSS also offered fathers who completed the Work Training Program described above a weeklong financial stability course largely based off the Money Smart curriculum developed by the Federal Deposit Insurance Company for low- and moderate-income people. NJDOC also offered Money Smart to participants in institutions in two-hour sessions once per week for approximately three weeks. NJDOC allowed participants' partners, such as the caregivers of their children or romantic partners, to attend these sessions, which were offered in the evenings in a group setting. PB&J worked with representatives from Wells Fargo to develop a financial literacy course based on the company's Hands on Banking curriculum and facilitated the course at PB&J's community-based office. Over the life of the program, the 20-hour course was provided in several iterations—at first weekly for 10 weeks and later monthly—to accommodate participants' schedules and interest. Wells Fargo representatives provided financial advice, such as how to write checks and balance a checkbook, use a debit card, and avoid overdrafts. RIDGE offered its TYRONomics curriculum, an eight-hour course delivered over one to two days in institutions and at its community-based offices. RIDGE developed TYRONomics to be responsive to the specific financial stability needs of people with incarceration histories. It developed the curriculum in partnership with a local financial literacy expert to cover basic personal finance issues and responsible financial habits.

KISRA, LSS, and PB&J also provided other services to help participants address their financial literacy needs. KISRA employed certified credit counselors that worked with fathers individually to avoid foreclosures and other issues involving credit. LSS gave participants a voucher to attend a session at its Center for Financial Resources, through which participants could receive assistance with individual budget counseling and debt management. At its participants' request, PB&J hosted Money Clubs at its community-based office, covering topics such as budgeting, financial literacy, home and business ownership, debt relief, and credit reports.

ASSISTANCE BUILDING AND MANAGING INCOME AND BENEFITS

Four programs (KISRA, NJDOC, PB&J, and Rubicon) partnered with organizations to help fathers build and manage their income and benefits by creating bank accounts, obtaining small loans, and/or connecting them with public benefits. KISRA offered participants Individual Development Accounts, special savings accounts designed to match fathers' deposits, which were intended to help fathers save money for a house, an education, or their own business. The program matched fathers' savings up to \$4,000. PB&J also offered Individual Development Accounts to a limited number of fathers. In conjunction with the Individual Development Account, these participants took a 10-week financial

literacy course. PB&J also partnered with Wells Fargo to send representatives to its community office and help fathers set up checking and savings accounts.

KISRA, NJDOC, and Rubicon also helped fathers determine their eligibility for public benefits to improve their financial prospects. KISRA referred fathers to a program run by the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources that helped them apply for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and Medicaid. One of NJDOC's economic stability services partners helped fathers apply for government benefits. Rubicon staff, after receiving training from the Contra Costa County Behavioral Health Department, conducted a public benefit screen on each participant to determine their eligibility for gaining or reinstating Social Security Disability Insurance, Medicaid, food stamps, and CalWORKs (cash aid and services) benefits.

Employment Opportunities

Beyond working with fathers to build their employability, financial literacy, and financial prospects, four programs (KISRA, PB&J, RIDGE, and Rubicon) provided fathers with several employment opportunities through **transitional job opportunities** and **program-operated microbusinesses**. All of the programs engaged in various **employer networking and relationship-building** activities to encourage businesses to hire participants.

TRANSITIONAL JOB OPPORTUNITIES

Three programs (KISRA, PB&J, and Rubicon) offered paid transitional employment to participants. KISRA developed memoranda of understanding with local employers to hire program participants using a subsidized employment model. Under the model, KISRA subsidized fathers' salaries at \$8.25 an hour to the employer for up to eight weeks with the expectation that the employer would hire the participant full time following the transitional period (assuming satisfactory job performance). KISRA's job coaches supervised the program: coaches met with fathers to review their job skills and employment history, then developed a memorandum of understanding with the employer to hire the father in a transitional capacity. Coaches served as liaisons between employers and participants who could manage and support the program and make business owners more comfortable about employing participants. The employers KISRA worked with included department stores, local government agencies, hotels, retirement homes, and construction companies. PB&J offered participants subsidized employment at their microbusiness, Fathers Building Futures, and with other businesses in Albuquerque, New Mexico, such as warehouses and restaurants, for up to three months. PB&J paid for the first 20 hours of work each week at \$8.50 an hour, and participating employers agreed to pay for any additional hours worked. Employers agreed to provide feedback to PB&J on participants' performance and to serve as a future employment reference. Employers were also encouraged to hire fathers after the period of subsidized employment.

Rubicon offered some of its participating fathers transitional jobs at its Richmond, California, office. Participating fathers worked in a crew with other program participants and were trained in janitorial, maintenance, and landscaping skills for indoor and outdoor maintenance for three hours a day for 13 weeks. Participants were paid at minimum wage (\$8 an hour). Rubicon staff supervised the work crews and provided regular feedback to participants and their career coaches. Rubicon also offered fathers

transitional jobs with their community partners. Rubicon allocated wage subsidies (\$3,000–5,000) for a participant's first 480 days of work with one of several employers. Employers had contracts with a staffing agency to act as the employer of record and cover unemployment insurance and worker's compensation. Rubicon targeted fathers who lacked recent work history or skills for their transitional job program while keeping in mind potential restrictions on industry based on past criminal involvement: fathers who might be ineligible for indoor maintenance because of restrictions based on their conviction were placed on outdoor crews.

PROGRAM-OPERATED MICROBUSINESSES

Three programs (KISRA, PB&J, and RIDGE) operated their own microbusinesses. KISRA and PB&J built their microbusinesses to employ program participants temporarily and provide them with job experience. KISRA established a social enterprise called the Growing Jobs Project. With assistance from West Virginia State University, KISRA built three greenhouses in two of its community-based offices. West Virginia State University trained fathers to work on the farms growing organic fruits and vegetables to sell at local farmer's markets. KISRA also offered fathers at the Growing Jobs Project cooking, culinary math, and knife skills classes, as well as the certifications described above. After completing these courses, fathers could work in KISRA's commercial kitchen or food truck, which catered events in the Charleston, West Virginia, area. Fathers who were trained and worked in the Growing Jobs Project earned \$8 an hour for 40-hour weeks for up to eight weeks.

PB&J established a workforce development center called Fathers Building Futures (FBF). FBF was used to operate PB&J's microbusinesses, and PB&J hired participating fathers as transitional employees in one of several trades operated through FBF. Trades changed over time but included woodworking and automobile power washing and detailing. Fathers were hired for 23–30 hours a week for up to 30 weeks (or more in certain situations). Initially, fathers earned minimum wage (\$8.60 an hour). After 90 days of work, participants who excelled in their jobs and expressed interest were deemed eligible to become a facilitator-in-training. Facilitators-in-training were paid \$9.60 an hour for 30 hours per week. Those who qualified as facilitators were hired full time at \$12 an hour. PB&J arrived at this payment and schedule structure over time. Program staff increased the cap on participants' weekly hours from 20 to 30 hours to help them meet their parole requirements of full-time employment, ensuring they did not have to find a second job while working at FBF. This also allowed fathers additional time to gain skills or find a permanent job. One PB&J employee oversaw the operation of the FBF businesses, managing the training, work schedules, safety protocols, and employees. Through FBF, fathers received training in hard skills and soft skills. PB&J tried several different businesses to determine which was the most profitable and rewarding for its participants. Ultimately, it found that auto detailing services provided on-site or at auto dealers, as well as mobile power washing for large vehicles and parking lots, were most successful. PB&J also forged relationships with local businesses to drive demand for their products. For example, PB&J worked with FRENCH Funerals and Cremations in Albuquerque to design a prototype for urns and pine caskets that PB&J participants could produce at the FBF work site.

RIDGE launched two microbusinesses: a small farm and a mobile food venture called CarneQ, where fathers could train and practice agriculture and culinary skills. RIDGE initially conceived of its farming and agriculture training as a single farm-to-plate venture. But during initial implementation of the business, it found that participants were not necessarily interested in both aspects of the training (i.e., agriculture and culinary). Consequently, RIDGE made the agriculture and culinary trainings available as two separate opportunities. For the farm, fathers were trained over a period of six months for four days a week. The final month included a paid internship for fathers intended to help them move into permanent employment or start their own businesses. RIDGE hired a TYRO alumnus who had participated in the first cohort of the agriculture training to work on the farm. The culinary component included food skills training and paid apprenticeship with a local food vendor. In return, the vendor used the food truck equipment purchased by RIDGE to prepare and sell food at local events. Through their apprenticeships, fathers could earn a small wage from the vendor and learn culinary skills while learning how to run a small food venture.

EMPLOYER NETWORKING AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

The programs also engaged in various networking and relationship-building activities to provide employment opportunities or improve the existing opportunities of their participants. Some positive outcomes of these employer partnerships are described above. Unlike the other programs, RIDGE and Rubicon hired staff whose positions were focused on liaising with employers specifically. RIDGE employed workforce development specialists to network with employers by attending local chamber of commerce events and working with one-stop centers operated by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services to help people search for jobs and provide job skills training. Rubicon employed business service representatives who researched job opportunities in one of four regions of Contra Costa County and determined whether jobs were accessible by public transportation, whether and what types of background checks were involved in the hiring process, and whether certain types of convictions were restricted for those jobs. Business service representatives presented these openings at weekly peer support groups that Rubicon hosted at its offices. In addition to these presentations, peer support groups called job clubs were opportunities for fathers to discuss their career interests and goals and share their experiences in looking for employment.

Initially, PB&J also employed a job developer tasked with building relationships with employers; however, in the later years of the program, this position's job functions were incorporated into the program manager and case managers' responsibilities because they had better rapport with fathers and were better positioned to help them find employment. With the help of a law firm, PB&J also developed a presentation to educate local employers about the benefits of hiring people with histories of incarceration, including the availability of federal bonding programs, and best practices for creating job applications that do not exclude people with criminal records.

Barrier Removal and Reduction

All the programs included activities intended to increase fathers' self-sufficiency by helping them overcome reentry-related barriers. These activities varied and included helping fathers access **substance abuse, housing, and legal assistance services, and essentials and tools needed to succeed in the workplace** (e.g., clothing, identification, and transportation). The authorizing legislation did not permit programs to use OFA funding for the provision of substance abuse, housing, or legal services; however, the programs found it useful to provide these services in response to participants' needs. Therefore, they referred participants to available community-based partners and services as well as in-house services available through non-OFA funding streams.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES

All six programs were responsive to fathers grappling with substance abuse issues. Participants were given assessments and referrals to external providers, curriculum-based classes, and counseling. LSS, PB&J, RIDGE, and Rubicon used their intake assessment process to make an initial determination about which participants needed substance abuse services. These four programs and KISRA referred participants to external partners for various substance abuse-related services. KISRA also referred participants to partner agencies for mental health services. Rubicon referred most participants to in-house substance abuse services and those with severe addictions to outpatient or inpatient treatment programs.

Unlike the other programs, NJDOC and PB&J addressed participants' substance abuse issues by incorporating these issues into their core programming. NJDOC provided the Living in Balance curriculum to all participants. Living in Balance was offered for two hours during the day once a week for three months and covered topics such as different types of drugs and their effects on the mind and body, withdrawal symptoms, triggers and cravings, the processes of addiction and sobriety, effects of substance use on relationships, stress, depression, anger, and relapse prevention. NJDOC program managers believed the Living in Balance curriculum was applicable to participants who exhibited any kind of destructive behavior patterns, including substance abuse. NJDOC also worked with the Office of Substance Abuse Programming and Addiction Services to assess participants for substance abuse issues. Based on their Addiction Severity Index score, NJDOC referred fathers to the Therapeutic Community Program in prisons. After realizing the need to address both substance abuse and trauma more directly, PB&J incorporated elements of the Seeking Safety curriculum, intended to help families with a history of trauma or substance abuse, in its group sessions. PB&J case managers were also trained to integrate relapse prevention into their case management services.

HOUSING AND LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Housing is a critical need for people returning to the community after incarceration and can be a significant barrier to economic stability. Without housing, it can be difficult for people to reunify with their children and families, find and retain a job, and feel stable (see Fontaine and Biess 2012). Although the programs could not use OFA funds to provide housing to participants, all six programs addressed fathers' housing needs. The programs typically addressed housing as part of their routine case management services, using their intake assessment processes to assess housing needs and help fathers

access available services in the community. Two programs connected a limited number of participants to in-house transitional housing programs funded by other grants, and three programs had formal partnerships with local housing providers to address some of their participants' housing needs. Many programs addressed housing needs by encouraging self-sufficiency through the various economic stability activities previously described.

KISRA and Rubicon connected a limited number of participants to transitional housing programs offered in-house and funded by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. As the state department of corrections, NJDOC was able to refer participants to some of the transitional housing units it operated in the community. Three programs (KISRA, LSS, and PB&J) established formal partnerships with local housing providers to refer and educate participants about their services. Through its partnership with a local housing authority, LSS had participants who planned to return to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, fill out applications for public housing while still incarcerated. The local housing authority also provided housing educational sessions to fathers at LSS's offices. PB&J referred participants to a local housing department to help them apply for public housing and to provide resources and information to address their housing needs. PB&J also referred participants to a transitional housing facility that provided family counseling, case management, and aftercare planning services to PB&J participants. The housing facility worked with PB&J to develop flexible payment schedules for program participants. The programs also advocated for fathers with local property owners and housing authorities, encouraging them to be inclusive of residents with criminal histories.

Rubicon referred participants to an in-house attorney who conducted legal assessments on fathers' cases to examine their record of arrest and prosecution to see if a conviction would impede their employment goals. This knowledge was intended to help fathers decide whether their criminal record would be a barrier to obtaining certain jobs and to inform them about what employers could determine by looking at their record. The attorney also helped fathers prepare to talk with employers about their criminal history and provided information on how to expunge their records. The attorney also worked closely with local legal assistance organizations to help fathers with potential legal barriers to employment, public benefits, and housing.

WORKPLACE ESSENTIALS AND TOOLS

To remove some of the common minor (but important) barriers that people face when returning to the community from incarceration, each program provided several essentials and tools to help fathers succeed in the workplace. In particular, the programs purchased work and interview clothes for fathers and conducted mock interviews to help them build confidence and get their foot in the door with employers. One program worked to build fathers' interviewing confidence by partnering with a tattoo removal service. To overcome barriers to obtaining and maintaining employment, the programs helped fathers get their state identification cards from government agencies and provided transportation and money for transportation to and from jobs and job interviews. Most programs worked with fathers to obtain birth certificates, social security identification, driver's licenses, and other important information to help them secure employment.

To increase their employability, fathers were supplied with job interview clothes and other necessary equipment or clothes. KISRA partnered with Men's Wearhouse to equip fathers with business clothes for interviews and jobs. For those participating in KISRA's transitional jobs program, KISRA provided up to \$75 to purchase work clothes. LSS allocated \$200–250 to each participant for clothes, tools, and other equipment necessary for their jobs, which the program distributed incrementally. At the end of the first week of the Work Training Program, LSS purchased interview clothing for each participant. Once a participant found employment, LSS purchased the clothes, tools, and other necessary equipment mentioned above and spent the remaining \$200–250 on additional clothes or tools after the father was employed for 30 days. All three of NJDOC's employment partners provided similar assistance: Shiloh Community Development Corporation and A Better Way helped participants obtain clothes for interviews and work; Catholic Charities referred fathers to Suits for Success, which provided clothes for interviews; and Career Opportunity Development, Inc. gave fathers gift cards to purchase interview clothes. PB&J gave participants up to \$500 to buy clothes and materials specific to a trade. RIDGE maintained a wardrobe at its headquarters in McClure, Ohio, where participants could find interview clothes. An organization called Wardrobe for Opportunity offered Rubicon participants a personal stylist session and professional clothes.

The programs offered other services intended to build participants' confidence for interviews. PB&J provided funds to help several participants remove tattoos that could be a barrier to employment. PB&J's partner, D-Ink, charged \$6–8 per square inch of tattoo removed (compared with the market rate of \$80). All six programs also conducted mock interviews with fathers. The mock interviews, incorporated into the work readiness curricula, were provided one-on-one by case managers and/or offered by program partners. Mock interviews were intended to help build interviewing confidence and help fathers answer difficult questions about their criminal justice histories and gaps in their job histories.

To address transportation challenges, which was more of an issue for some programs than for others, the programs provided transportation assistance. KISRA provided bus passes and gas gift cards and connected fathers to the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources for further transportation assistance. LSS case managers leased a van and used it to transport fathers to and from the LSS offices for classes and to and from job interviews and work. LSS also distributed bus passes and gas gift cards, as did PB&J and Rubicon. NJDOC's employment partners offered some fathers transportation assistance. RIDGE provided fathers with transportation reimbursement, and one of its employer partners, PI&I Motor Express, drove some fathers living in halfway houses to and from its truck-driving training.

Recommendations and Conclusions

The various activities the programs implemented in institutions and through their community-based offices were designed to help fathers achieve economic self-sufficiency by increasing their employability, improving their financial literacy and financial prospects, providing them with employment opportunities, and reducing or removing barriers to economic stability. This comprehensive approach to overcoming both individual and systemic barriers is consistent with literature noting the importance of collaborative partnerships for improving outcomes for people with criminal justice histories (Duran et al. 2013; McKay, Lindquist, and Bir 2015; Spaulding et al. 2009).

The following recommendations are drawn from the experiences and lessons learned of the Fatherhood Reentry programs and are intended for practitioners seeking ways to implement their own strategies or initiatives to help fathers returning from incarceration achieve self-sufficiency and family reunification:⁹

- **Cast a wide net to find partners that can help your population become more employable.** Fathers being released from incarceration lack recent work history and may have extremely limited skills. Therefore, they need opportunities to develop and build the skills and work history necessary to be marketable to employers. Program staff did not always have the expertise to develop and build fathers' work skills, but the programs were creative in finding partners who did. The projects partnered with community colleges, vocational schools, employers, and nonprofits that could equip their participants for jobs in industries as varied as commercial truck driving, welding, information technology, and agriculture. In some cases, the programs had to build these relationships from scratch: program staff engaged new partners, hosted trainings and certification programs at their offices, managed workforce development centers in the community, established new programs in correctional institutions, and created social enterprises where fathers could pursue opportunities. In other cases, the projects leveraged internal resources to enroll fathers in trainings offered by local vocational schools and nonprofit organizations. Depending on the organization and the local context, programs may need to cast a wide net to find partners that can help them develop the economic self-sufficiency of people who are returning from incarceration and have diverse needs.
- **Offer a range of services to be responsive to participants' needs and be willing to adapt these offerings.** People released from incarceration have different employment histories and skill sets, and the programs offered a wide range of activities focused on economic stability goals. Some participants were ready to work but needed to develop a work history or receive a certification or special license. Others needed to learn a specific soft or hard skill to succeed in a work environment. And others needed to address personal barriers before they were able to focus on employment. The programs provided activities to help fathers at all levels of readiness achieve their economic stability goals. Furthermore, most programs made some modifications to their offerings based on participant feedback to retain and continue attracting participants. Some modified their curriculum, some offered more opportunities for peer-to-peer interaction, and

others modified their microbusinesses. This flexibility is consistent with literature suggesting that programs are better able to engage fathers when they adapt their curriculum to participants' concerns (see McKay, Lindquist, and Bir 2013, for example) and seems necessary when working with a reentry population with diverse needs.

- ***Be willing to advocate for the reentry population.*** Employers might have preconceived ideas and misconceptions about the trustworthiness or reliability of formerly incarcerated people as employees and might be reluctant to hire them. The Fatherhood Reentry programs engaged local employers and advocated for their participants to change these misperceptions within their communities. Some programs actively promoted the fathers they served by networking with organizations and employers and presenting the benefits of hiring people who have been incarcerated. The programs were willing to invite employers to their offices to connect with participants and to subsidize fathers' employment with local businesses so they could demonstrate their work ethic and professionalism. Some programs, such as RIDGE, encouraged fathers to make themselves visible in the community and rebuild their reputation through volunteer work. Although some employers will be more willing than others to hire from the reentry population, a successful economic stability strategy should include program staff advocating strongly for the population.
- ***Build credibility with employers by communicating and demonstrating the benefits of program participation.*** Advocacy for the reentry population also includes advocacy for the specific program and the benefits it can offer employers. Given employers' reluctance to hire people with incarceration histories, program staff must communicate and demonstrate how reentry programs can make people more successful employees or trainees. The programs spent considerable time promoting the quality and importance of their activities, establishing relationships with employers, and building strong reputations. Program staff can communicate to employers how specific aspects of their program (e.g., curriculum and training activities) prepare participants for the work environment and how their program can hold participants accountable through case management activities and job clubs. Program staff, specifically case managers, can serve as another check on participants' job performance, stepping in when there are problems and using the program to address work-related issues (e.g., using job clubs to discuss how to address interpersonal issues or work habits). Over time, employers were willing to hire fathers because the Fatherhood Reentry programs were well regarded in the community and served as a source of credibility for their participants. Because of this credibility and the demonstrated success of participants in the workforce, some programs were able to establish a pathway from training or transitional employment to permanent employment opportunities.
- ***Focus on removing and reducing barriers as a critical component of economic stability.*** The reentry population faces various barriers to economic stability that are critically important to address. In addition to employment-specific barriers, these include unmet substance abuse and mental health needs, residential instability, and lack of prosocial connections or social support

networks, transportation, identification, food, and clothing. Many people returning from incarceration need (sometimes significant) help and resources to overcome these barriers and achieve stability. For example, people experiencing housing instability have difficulty finding work, and people might struggle to be successful in the workplace if they do not address any substance abuse issues. Likewise, economic stability is likely to be an elusive goal for someone who has never had a bank account. All programs dedicated resources to some of these reentry-related challenges, but they could not use OFA grant funds to address all reentry barriers, such as housing and substance abuse. The programs instead addressed these needs through partnerships and other funding streams. Likewise, any program focused on helping fathers released from incarceration achieve economic stability must contend with formidable reentry challenges, many of which require substantial resources, perhaps from different funding sources, to address properly, and programs need to be innovative in identifying alternative resources.

The experiences of the Fatherhood Reentry programs offer various lessons for practitioners who wish to work with fathers who are incarcerated or were formerly incarcerated. Gainful employment and financial management are critical to helping fathers achieve economic self-sufficiency and provide for their children and families. Incarceration puts fathers at a significant disadvantage in the labor market and places significant financial strain on their families. Equipping fathers with the skills to find and retain employment and establishing rapport with partners and employers in the community allows programs to promote the economic stability of parents and their families.

Notes

1. The Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation and the Office of Family Assistance are both part of the Administration for Children and Families in the US Department of Health and Human Services.
2. KISRA was funded under a different funding opportunity announcement than the other five projects and served fathers who may not have had recent incarceration histories.
3. The Fatherhood Reentry projects were part of the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood initiative, a discretionary grant program originally authorized under the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 and reauthorized under the Claims Resolution Act of 2010.
4. Postrelease enrollment varied widely: LSS, PB&J, RIDGE, and Rubicon enrolled fathers who had been released from incarceration in the past six months; KISRA enrolled formerly incarcerated fathers with no time limit on the recency of their last incarceration; NJDOC did not enroll any fathers in the community.
5. Additional information about implementation of the programs, including target populations, geographic locations, and partnerships can be found in a companion report (Fontaine et al. 2017).
6. Two other briefs in this series focus on responsible parenting (Fontaine, Cramer, and Paddock 2017) and healthy marriage (Fontaine, Eisenstat, and Cramer 2017).
7. The other two components were responsible parenting and healthy marriage activities. Additional information about the parenting and marriage activities the Fatherhood Reentry programs implemented can be found in two companion briefs (Fontaine, Cramer, and Paddock 2017; Fontaine, Eisenstat, and Cramer 2017).

8. The South Dakota Department of Corrections determined which fathers were eligible for the Work Training Program based on their Level of Service Inventory–Revised risk assessment score. The LSI–R™ is a quantitative survey used to assess a person’s likelihood to reoffend.
9. These recommendations include suggestions for service provision that are not allowable by the authorizing legislation that funded the Fatherhood Reentry projects.

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