Seedco’s Dads at Work Initiative

Using flexible funding and innovative program design to support fathers

For over a decade, publicly and privately funded efforts have been pioneering approaches to increase low-income, noncustodial fathers’ financial and emotional involvement in their children’s lives. In this economic environment, where many two-parent households are struggling to get by, it is even more essential to support efforts to address father absence and increase child support payments. Seedco, a national nonprofit organization that works with local partners to create economic opportunities for low wage workers, has served noncustodial parents (NCPs) through its workforce and asset building programs for over ten years. In 2006, as part of a statewide pilot funded through the New York State Strengthening Families Through Stronger Fathers Initiative legislation and led by the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), Seedco was awarded funding to launch its first program tailored specifically to meet the needs of NCPs. Seedco’s three-year Dads at Work pilot program served 875 NCPs since 2007, and met its goal of helping 56% of program participants find employment during the pilot.

This policy brief was developed to share a practitioner’s perspective on the New York State pilot, specifically focusing on opportunities to integrate or better leverage disparate funding streams to serve NCPs, strategies to incorporate supportive services that enhance the work-first program model most often used in comprehensive fatherhood programs, and ways to use principles from behavioral economics to rethink recruitment and engagement strategies for this population.

This brief is organized into three sections:

- A Growing Crisis: Low-income Men and Their Children
- Looking Within: Seedco’s Approach to Serving Noncustodial Fathers
- Policy Recommendations

Lastly, this brief was developed in anticipation of the reauthorization of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) legislation, which will provide policymakers with an opportunity to strengthen workforce and social services for noncustodial fathers, a critical poverty reduction strategy.

AUTHORS | Seedco is a national nonprofit organization that advances economic opportunity for people, businesses and communities in need. Founded in 1986, Seedco designs and implements vibrant, innovative programs, partnerships, and services to impact community economic development through three lines of work: workforce development, work and family support, and community finance/small business supports. Several current and former Seedco staff contributed to this report. Zak Schwarzman, Linda Rodriguez, and Ben Seigel wrote the report. Data analysis was completed by Miriam Schiffer. Guidance was provided by Francine Delgado, Becky Gray, and Jessica Nathan. Suzette Hunte and Jose Flores assisted with collecting partner feedback and participant stories. www.seedco.org.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | We are grateful to the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance for their leadership in this pilot and support for the development of this report. In particular, we would like to acknowledge Kenneth Braswell, who provided invaluable guidance. The NYC Department of Small Business Services and NYC Human Resources Administration also provided critical support. Last, but not least, we thank our partners: BronxWorks, Northern Manhattan Improvement Corp., St. Nicks Alliance, The Bronx Defenders/Reentry Net, Center for Employment Opportunities, and Credit Where Credit Is Due. We continue to be inspired by the work of these organizations and their dedicated staff.
A GROWING CRISIS
LOW-INCOME MEN AND THEIR CHILDREN

Nearly one out of every three children in the United States lives apart from their biological father.\(^1\) About 40 percent of these children live in poverty, compared to 9 percent of children growing up in father-present households.\(^2\) The social impact of father absence on children is equally important. There is considerable research that demonstrates a correlation between father involvement and avoidance of high-risk behaviors, higher self-esteem, and better academic performance for youth.\(^3\)

The prospects for absent fathers are also troubling – most are low-income, with limited work history and, in many cases, criminal histories or other significant barriers to financial self-sufficiency. Based on a 2007 study of child support arrears in nine states, 70 percent of arrears were owed by noncustodial fathers reporting less than $10,000 income a year, about twenty-five percent of whom had no reported income.\(^4\) Frequently caricatured as “deadbeat dads,” the truth about low-income noncustodial fathers is substantially more complex and requires policymakers, funders, and human services providers to develop responses that both address father absence and tackle the underlying causes of it, starting with increasing access to economic opportunity for low-income fathers.

While welfare reform and policy changes in the 1990s strengthened the capacity of child support collection agencies to locate and penalize noncompliant NCPs, resulting in an increase in collection efforts, many NCPs remain outside the reach of the child support and social services systems. The specter of wage garnishment and other penalties has led many NCPs to shun the formal economy.\(^5\) Anecdotally, many fatherhood programs report that low-income noncustodial fathers work off the books to support their children through direct contributions to the custodial parent instead of through the child support system, which in some cases withholds a portion of payments to reimburse welfare costs instead of passing it all through to the custodial parent for the child.

Indeed, the issue of father absence in low-income households has grown to such magnitude that President Obama recently made it a national priority for the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, and in doing so, the President described how he knew firsthand the linkages between absent fathers and their impact on low-income children: “I came to understand the importance of fatherhood through its absence—both in my life and in the lives of others. I came to understand that the hole a man leaves when he abandons his responsibility to his children is one that no government can fill.”\(^6\)

Mounting a Response
For over a decade, state and privately-funded efforts have been pioneering approaches to increase low-income noncustodial fathers’ involvement in their children’s lives. Beginning with a handful of demonstration projects during the 1990s and early 2000s, hundreds of fatherhood programs have sprung up throughout the country in recent years. Private philanthropies continue to underwrite many of these efforts while policymakers have increasingly taken notice and initiated publicly-funded state-level programming. Many states have supported these efforts with TANF funding, which provides the mandate to cover low-income noncustodial parents and the flexibility to test a variety of approaches. The United States
Department of Health and Human Services’ Administration for Children and Families (ACF) encouraged this practice in 1999 by providing states with guidelines and suggestions on using TANF funds to support responsible fatherhood programs for low-income noncustodial parents.

These father-focused programs have taken a number of approaches and can be loosely grouped into three categories based on their direction:

- **Employment-focused** programs have sought to train and place low-income, noncustodial fathers in jobs. Building job skills and helping these men boost their income has been viewed as a promising way to increase their child support payments and increase their financial and emotional role in their children’s lives. Dating back to 1999, 29 states reported employment and training programs for low-income, unemployed fathers.⁷

Examples include: the Minneapolis FATHER Project, a public-private collaborative program led by the community-based organization Way-To-Grow, and the Baltimore Responsible Fatherhood Project administered by the Center for Urban Families in Maryland.

- **Nurturing** programs have endeavored to build low-income noncustodial fathers’ capacity as caregivers and parents. Research highlighting the importance of fathers’ involvement in their children’s lives has provided both a social and a long-term economic rationale for this approach. In 1999, 36 states reported implementing “fathers as nurturers” initiatives.⁸

Examples include: the Jefferson Country Fatherhood Initiative operated by the Council on Prevention Education: Substances, Inc. (COPES) in Louisville, Kentucky and the Responsible Fatherhood Program run by the Latin American Youth Center in Washington D.C.

- **Healthy marriage** programs have promoted the institution of marriage and taught marriage skills. These programs attempt to increase the number of children being raised by two parents by encouraging parents to stay together through healthy marriages.

Examples include: the Healthy Marriage Project of Greater Sacramento in California and the Alabama Community Healthy Marriage Initiative operated by Auburn University and state and community partners.

Between 2002 and 2004, 28 states used TANF monies to fund father-focused programs and 15 states used TANF funds to support healthy marriage programs. These states usually blended TANF with other public and private monies to support these programs, with no state allocating more than 5% of their TANF block grants to fund responsible fatherhood or healthy marriage programs.⁹

Set against this backdrop, New York State Legislature enacted the **Strengthening Families Through Stronger Fathers Initiative** in 2006, supported by TANF funds. Building upon the lessons of past efforts, the legislation authorized a pair of complementary initiatives targeting unemployed or underemployed low-income noncustodial fathers. First, the legislation authorized funding for five local employment-focused fatherhood pilot programs throughout the State. These programs were to design and implement intensive employment and supportive services to provide financial and emotional support to NCPs. Second, the legislation established a state refundable tax credit for low-income NCPs who pay their child support order in full.

Together, these initiatives represented a fresh approach to incentivize and assist low-income noncustodial fathers to connect to the formal economy and further engage in their children’s lives. To investigate creative new approaches to move low-income fathers toward self-
sufficiency, OTDA contracted with providers that employ a range of program models to deliver services. The Urban Institute was charged with capturing lessons learned from the pilot.

The next section of this brief provides a practitioner’s perspective from the NYS pilot, with an in-depth review of key features of the Seedco program model.
LOOKING WITHIN: SEEDCO’S APPROACH TO FATHER-FOCUSED SERVICES

For over two decades, Seedco has worked as an intermediary with community-based organization (CBO) partners to develop programs that create economic opportunities for thousands of jobseekers and low-wage workers, including noncustodial parents. Approximately fifty percent of all Seedco workforce program participants are low-income men, many of whom are noncustodial parents. Drawing on lessons learned from previous fatherhood programs, Seedco’s Strengthening Families Through Stronger Fathers pilot, known as the Dads at Work Program, used an employment-focused model that first addressed the most pressing needs of these fathers, such as access to employment, benefits, and second, laid the foundation for long-term self-sufficiency and increased father involvement by providing customized services such as legal services, peer networks, financial education, and loans. Seedco partnered with three CBOs and the New York City Department of Small Business Services-funded One Stop system to implement this pilot.

Key components of the model included:

- Leveraging the infrastructure of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA)-funded public workforce system to expand the reach of Seedco’s fatherhood program and exceed enrollment targets;
- Robust specialized services to address acute barriers to employment and achieve strong outcomes; and
- Customized services, such as peer support networks and an innovative loan fund designed specifically for NCPs.

Over 875 NCPs were part of the three-year pilot.

FATHERHOOD PILOT PARTNERS

Fatherhood Sites
BronxWorks
Northern Manhattan Improvement Corp.
St. Nicks Alliance

Specialized Services
The Bronx Defenders/Reentry Net
Center for Employment Opportunities
Credit Where Credit is Due

Barber Shops and Workforce1 Career Centers
Correcting a high level of father absence in low-income communities has the potential to decrease poverty rates and transform the lives of children who might otherwise grow up without fathers in their lives. Efforts to engage non-custodial fathers in fatherhood programs refine this message and remind families of the importance of involving fathers for socioeconomic reasons, in addition to the potential emotional benefits of having another involved parent in a child’s life. Strategies for raising awareness about these facts and recruiting participants to fatherhood programs typically include traditional grassroots marketing activities such as engaging NCPs in community settings like health clinics, churches, and other CBOs that provide direct services. The Seedco pilot added a unique and effective outreach strategy by recruiting NCPs through the public workforce system.

Men comprise about half of the 19,000 new customers seen annually at the Upper Manhattan Workforce1 Career Center. As the operator of the Upper Manhattan Workforce1 Center, Seedco
was able to recruit pilot program participants from the large numbers of eligible NCPs who already sought services through the Workforce1 Center. The challenge of connecting the intensive pilot program with the light-touch Workforce1 Center model involved both 1) modifying WIA-approved client flows and intake forms to quickly identify eligible NCPs and 2) training Workforce1 Center staff to convince clients who had come for employment services to participate in the more robust pilot program. After reviewing the Workforce1 client flow, Seedco identified two key points at which these fathers would most likely be identified by Workforce1 staff: at initial intake and through meetings with Seedco’s EarnBenefits counselors (customers meet one-on-one with counselors to discuss benefits and work supports). Intake forms were modified, Workforce1 staff was trained to ask customers about child support, and enrollment processes were streamlined to “fast track” NCPs, connecting them to fatherhood staff as quickly as possible. To advertise this pilot to Workforce1 customers, flyers were posted around the center and information was added to the customer welcome packet. About 37% of fatherhood participants were recruited through the Workforce1 Center.

In addition to adjustments to the intake process, the key elements to this success were an onsite fatherhood program coordinator, on-site supportive services, such as legal assistance and support groups, and the cultural competence of the Workforce1 staff, who are accustomed to working with NCPs on a routine basis.

Word of mouth and grassroots marketing efforts, such as partnering with faith groups, education institutions, and conducting outreach in places where men often congregate, such as barber shops, recreational facilities, health clinics, and street fairs, resulted in about 16% of program enrollments in the pilot. The three Seedco fatherhood partners that offered neighborhood-based services on-site relied on these strategies to recruit a significant number of program participants and generate enthusiasm for the pilot in their communities.

To further leverage existing infrastructure, Seedco also formed successful referral partnerships with city agencies that already serve large numbers of NCPs. About 47% of pilot referrals came from the Support Through Employment Program (STEP), which is operated by the NYC Human Resources Administration’s Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE). Prior to the pilot, Seedco had partnered with OCSE to serve STEP participants through a NYC TANF welfare-to-work program. Additionally, a similar Seedco pilot included a partnership with the NYC Department of Probation that allowed Seedco to recruit many of the NCPs in the criminal justice system.

With these strategies in place, Seedco far surpassed its goal of 230 enrollments in the first year of the program, serving over 875 NCPs by the end of the three-year pilot.

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<th>PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS</th>
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<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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<td>• 9% of Seedco participants were between the ages of 16 and 24,</td>
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<td>• 40% were between 25 and 35, and</td>
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<td>• the majority, 51%, were 36 and over.</td>
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<th>Education</th>
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<td>• 41% of participants had not attained a high school diploma or GED, and</td>
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<td>• Four in five participants had not completed any post high school education.</td>
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<td>• Participants with higher education did not have better employment outcomes; however, those who secured employment had higher wages.</td>
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<td>• About half, 49%, of pilot participants were Hispanic.</td>
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<td>• 48% were African American.</td>
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<td>• Seedco served more than double the number of Hispanics compared to any of the other pilot sites.</td>
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Enhancing the Employment Focused Model

Based on previous experience and a scan of the field, Seedco knew that many factors besides employment status contribute to father absence. Therefore, Seedco created a pilot that tested the effectiveness of incorporating key specialized services to enhance the employment-focused program model by addressing barriers to self-sufficiency and responsible fatherhood. Specifically, Seedco tested the impact of intensive legal services to address family court issues and criminal histories, financial services to tackle debt and lack of information about financial management, and parenting classes to build fatherhood skills. To provide these services, Seedco partnered with experienced specialized services providers: The Bronx Defenders/Reentry Net, Center for Employment Opportunities, and Credit Where Credit is Due. Lastly, Seedco and its lending subsidiary, Seedco Financial Services, developed a new loan program for NCPs, with an arrears forgiveness component to incentivize child support payments.

Joaquin Ramirez

Joaquin was referred by the court because he was not paying child support. He rarely saw his child. He was frustrated when he enrolled — owing $18,000 in arrears. He participated in support groups, legal services, job readiness, and other activities. He is now a full-time security guard, pays child support, and visits his child once a week.

Consistent with Seedco’s approach to the management of workforce programs and emphasis on performance, all pilot partners had subcontracts that included financial incentives for achieving program goals (e.g. fee for service or performance-based payments). With the flexibility afforded through the NYS OTDA contract structure, Seedco was able to refine the payment structure in the second year of the contract, based on lessons learned from the first year of the pilot, such as offering additional payments for support groups.

This flexibility was essential to Seedco’s success—allowing Seedco to tweak its model and concentrate on the services that were proving to be most effective. Based on partner feedback and pilot data, Seedco shifted program resources to expand legal services and decrease financial services. Since most fatherhood pilot participants had experienced unemployment for several months prior to program enrollment, they were less likely to engage in financial management services (i.e. they were experiencing financial crises due to lack of income and chose to focus on the barriers that most impacted employability first).

During the first year of the pilot, Seedco invested significant resources in technical assistance and partner capacity building. Despite the experience each partner had serving this population in a specific service area, such as legal services, delivering a full-range of services to pilot participants required Seedco and its partners to share their knowledge and best practices to become more knowledgeable about services outside of their areas of expertise. For example, Bronx Defenders offered workshops on family law and addressing criminal histories during the job search process to our core workforce partners. In addition, Seedco was able to leverage the training resources available through the NYC HRA Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE). OCSE conducted workshops for Seedco staff and provided support as needed to resolve specific child support issues. Lastly, Seedco used its performance management tools, including management reports, throughputs, and performance-sharing meetings, to troubleshoot challenges and learn from on-the-ground experiences.
The Seedco pilot was designed to provide participants with intensive neighborhood-based services, coordinated by a case manager or career counselor. The focus was employment services, which participants cited as their most pressing need.

Following are the services that were provided to program participants:

- **Employment services**, including job readiness training, occupational skills training, transitional employment, supported work experience, and placement into full-time unsubsidized employment;
- **Intensive case management** and counseling, including assistance with substance abuse problems and anger management;
- **Parenting training**, with a focus on managing a healthy relationship with the custodial parent(s) and maintaining an active and positive role in the lives of the children;
- **Legal services**, including criminal record checks, rap sheet cleansing, application assistance for New York State Certificates of Relief from Disabilities, and full representation around child support orders and other legal needs;
- **Financial counseling**, including assistance managing finances to meet child support obligations and repairing credit scores to improve financial standing;
- **Access to income-enhancing work supports**, including a tax-season campaign to provide eligibility screening and application assistance for the State’s new, expanded Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) program for non-custodial parents; and,
- **Child support order payment incentives**, including an innovative loan product that provided low-interest, flexible term financing, with a recoverable grant portion, to non-custodial parents with arrears.

As a result of these services, and Seedco’s focus on employment, about 56% of program participants found employment during the pilot.11

Besides employment services, the services in greatest demand were legal assistance services, support groups, and assistance accessing benefits – about 50% of clients participated in each of these services one or more times. Legal assistance services (including the formal legal assistance offered by the Bronx Defenders and utilized by about 34% of clients and informal legal assistance that CBO staff offered to clients) were in particularly high demand but limited due to funding constraints. From the beginning of the pilot, it was clear that legal services for this population were scarce in New York City, and that Seedco would need to creatively address this gap through the fatherhood pilot program.

One useful strategy was developed to train case management staff to identify legal issues and work closely with the staff from Bronx Defenders to follow-up on legal advice provided. This approach was less costly than having attorneys provide legal advice and complete all follow-up. According to the Bronx Defenders, the majority of legal consultations focused on downward child support order modifications (including many erroneous child support payment orders). In addition, the Bronx Defenders reviewed the criminal histories of 230 participants and found that 32% of rap sheets had at least one significant error. More than 1/3 of those had more than one error. These errors affect employment opportunities for participants – about 96% of employers conduct background checks12.

**PARTICIPANT ARREARS**

Older fathers tended to have higher arrears. While limited data about arrears was available, there did appear to be a strong correlation between age and arrears. **Fathers under 25 years old had an average of $2,800 in arrears. Fathers between 25 and 34 had an average of $9,000 in arrears. And fathers 35 and older had the highest rate of arrears, owing an average of $16,300 each.**
Of the three most popular services – legal assistance, support groups, and benefits access – legal assistance was most noticeably correlated to improved job outcomes. Of participants who did not access legal assistance, 44% found employment. Of those who accessed legal assistance, 53% found employment. Interestingly, support groups were also in high demand (attended by 49% of participants) even though they weren’t noticeably correlated with employability. CBO partners continued to strongly encourage participation in support groups as this popular offering proved to be an incentive for participants’ continued program engagement. As program participant Duane Jacobs shared, “to hear so many situations on life was a learning lesson.” Like support groups, benefits screenings were popular (accessed by 46% of participants) but not directly correlated to employment outcomes. However, the impact of benefits screenings may manifest over time, as participants continue to reap financial advantages. The reason for such high uptake of benefits screenings was that Seedco’s EarnBenefits program was already implemented at all CBO partner sites as a standard program component.

The services used less frequently were parenting classes (about 30% of clients accessed these services); financial counseling (10%); and skills training (10%). Based on assessments completed for each client, these services may have been helpful to more clients; however, most clients who enrolled in the program were eager to work, and therefore primarily used services that would either address an urgent barrier to work or would immediately boost their employability.

As mentioned above, skills training was accessed by only about 10% of clients. Receiving skills training did not significantly impact one’s likelihood of finding employment. But, those who received skills training found work earning an average of $70 more per week than those who did not receive skills training. The higher weekly wages were due to a combination of slightly higher hourly wages and slightly higher hours worked.

Fostering A Positive Group Identity
Building on the spirit of the Enhanced Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Seedco sought to combine a supportive program atmosphere with affirmative incentives for program participation to build a positive group identity amongst low-income noncustodial fathers who frequently find themselves marginalized and see the system aligned against them.

In addition to the robust service offerings at each site, Seedco’s partners created a buzz around the Dads at Work program, with special events and participant incentives (e.g. Metrocards, program dinners, tickets to events to attend with children, like basketball games). Over half of program staff reported that they were more enthusiastic about this pilot than other programs. Interestingly, they also reported that 75% of participants were more enthusiastic about this program than other programs. This observation, coupled with the findings from a research report completed by Colette Labrador, which found that fatherhood pilot participants had better outcomes than men served through other programs, raises interesting questions about the branding of fatherhood programs and the role that enthusiasm plays in engagement and outcomes. Obviously, there are a number of potential reasons for this – intensity of services, specialized services offered – but one potential factor was the creation of a community of fathers who provided additional support and guidance to their...
peers. Based on client surveys and informal interviews, the social network clients formed was critical to their success. For example, pilot participant Rejji Freed shared that the most valuable part of the program was that it provided an opportunity for “sharing and dealing with personal problems.”

Seedco combined this encouraging culture with positive incentives tailored specifically to the needs of low-income fathers. New York State’s Enhanced EITC offered low-income noncustodial fathers a financial reward for child support payment, adding a carrot to an incentives mix traditionally dominated by sticks.

Seedco complemented this affirmative instrument with its innovative fatherhood loan program. Based on Seedco’s experience operating a family loan program and working with NCPs, the organization wanted to test the effectiveness of offering NCPs another new positive incentive for paying child support. If a program participant was approved for a loan, Seedco would pay the loan directly to the Office of Child Support Enforcement on behalf of the participant. As an incentive for payment, once the participant repaid half of the loan, the remaining balance was forgiven.

Eligibility criteria for loan applicants included:
(1) Enrollment in the fatherhood program;
(2) Employment for at least three months (to demonstrate financial stability);
(3) Ability to repay loan (as demonstrated in the loan application budget); and
(4) Arrears of less than $3,000 (to prioritize participants with lower arrears).

Seventeen loans were approved, with an average loan size of $1,439. Loan volume was slightly lower than anticipated because few participants met all of the eligibility criteria. Seven loans were paid in full, eight loans were partially repaid, and two will likely not be paid – representing about a 90% payment rate and far exceeding Seedco’s projections. While this was a modest number of loans, and further study is required to fully explore the potential for a successful fatherhood loan program, the results were positive and demonstrate the potential value of positive incentives for child support payments.
**Policy Recommendations**

1) **Complementary systems should be aligned to recruit and serve low-income noncustodial fathers.** Flexible TANF and private funding are key sources of support for father-focused programs. However, low-income noncustodial fathers already access services that are funded through other sources and provided through separate delivery systems. Better aligning these funding sources and delivery mechanisms would help future fatherhood programming leverage existing infrastructure to enhance TANF-funded job readiness, placement and supportive services for low-income noncustodial fathers.

For example, integration with the WIA-funded Workforce1 Career Center was a critical element in surpassing Seedco’s recruitment targets. While TANF funds programming for NCPs, historically this population seeks out job placement services through the One-Stop system. Harnessing the high-volume One Stop model to engage NCPs in TANF-funded fatherhood programming proved to be a powerful tool and serves as an example for how to integrate complementary systems in the future.

2) **Increased guidance should be offered surrounding service prioritization for responsible fatherhood programs.** The recent surge in fatherhood programs and pending TANF reauthorization offer opportunities to examine fatherhood programs from the past decade and promote program models that have proven successful. Specifically, policy makers should note the services and interventions that helped NCPs overcome their most pressing barriers to employment upon program entry. Following TANF reauthorization, agencies could build off of the 1999 ACF guidelines to advise state legislatures and future program managers on how to prioritize services to best serve low-income noncustodial fathers.

For instance, Seedco’s experience showed an acute need for job placement upon program entry. Arrears and criminal records were by far the most common barrier to employment. Consequently, legal assistance was amongst the most heavily utilized of all program offerings, second only to support groups (which also frequently dealt with legal issues). However, neither TANF funds nor existing legal service funding adequately covered the cost of providing legal services to NCPs through this program. Incorporating prioritization of funding for these and other high-demand services in TANF reauthorization may increase participant enrollment and positive outcomes.

3) **Promote positive group identity through affirmative incentives for program participation.** States should develop and expand positive incentives for low-income noncustodial fathers to financially and emotionally support their children. Seedco found that New York State’s enhanced EITC and its pilot loan program diminished program participants’ adversarial view of the child support collection system and, together with a nurturing environment, fostered a sense of empowerment and positive group identity. While these tools showed initial success, more and varied approaches need to be tried to bring this historically marginalized population into the formal economy and their children’s lives. Additionally, positive incentives should focus on both initial engagement and success and long-term stability and familial involvement. Both of these areas require additional study and experimentation. TANF reauthorization should incentivize states and program managers to try new affirmative methods that foster positive group identity and promote individual success.
**CITATIONS**

8. Ibid.
10. EarnBenefits is a proprietary screening and facilitated enrollment technology tool and case management approach developed by Seedco to connect individuals with income enhancing work supports, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit, Food Stamps, and Medicaid.
11. The placement rate was 56% as of August 2009. Seedco’s placement rate hovered around 66% until November 2008. As the recession progressed, the placement rate slowly dropped.
13. Seedco internal staff survey, 2010
14. Colette Labrador produced this research while working as an MSW intern for Seedco.