

**Voices of Young Fathers:
The Partners for Fragile Families
Demonstration Projects**

**Prepared for:
Department of Health and Human Services
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation
Office of Human Services Policy
Contract Number 100-01-0027**

**By
Alford Young, Jr.
University of Michigan
and
Pamela A. Holcomb
The Urban Institute**

June 8, 2007

This report was produced under the direction of Jennifer Burnszynski and Linda Mellgren, Project Officers, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, Office of Human Services Policy, Melissa Pardue, Deputy Assistant Secretary. This report is available online at:

<http://aspe.hhs.gov/ /topic/subtopic.cfm?subtopic=374>

Voices of Young Fathers: The Partners for Fragile Families Demonstration Projects

ALFORD A. YOUNG, JR.
PAMELA A. HOLCOMB



The Urban Institute
Center on Labor, Human
Services, and Population

June 2007

**VOICES OF YOUNG FATHERS:
THE PARTNERS FOR FRAGILE FAMILIES
DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS**

Alford A. Young, Jr. Ph.D. (University of Michigan)
Pamela A. Holcomb (Urban Institute)

June 2007

The Urban Institute
2100 M Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037

Prepared for: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Planning and Evaluation
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

The Urban Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research and educational organization. Opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent official positions of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Urban Institute, or its trustees and sponsors.

CONTENTS

Executive Summary	iv
Chapter 1. Introduction	1
Study Purpose and Design	3
Organization of the Report	8
Chapter 2. Profiles of the Young Fathers	9
Common Threads: Lack of Father Involvement and Encounters with Street Life	12
Chapter 3. Fatherhood and Family Functioning	18
Becoming a Father: Initial Reactions and Concerns	18
On Being a Father: Men’s Relationships with Their Children	20
Relationships with the Mothers of Their Children	31
Learning to Manage and Reduce Conflict for the Sake of the Children	33
Chapter 4. Perspectives on the PFF Program Experience	37
Becoming Involved in the PFF Program	37
Perceptions about the PFF Services Received	37
Chapter 5. Child Support and Employment Experiences	44
Child Support	44
Employment and Labor-Market Experiences	45
Chapter 6. The Men’s Perspectives on the Future	48
Appendix A. PFF Demonstration Sites	A-1

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The evaluation of the Partners of Fragile Families (PFF) project was conducted by the Urban Institute under contract to the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Many individuals assisted in conducting the study and producing this report. Dr. Alford Young Jr., Arthur F. Thurnau Professor and Associate Professor of Sociology and African American Studies at the University of Michigan, conducted all of the fieldwork for this study, compiled and analyzed the intensive interviews with the study participants, and produced the initial drafts that include the extensive quotes and findings presented in this report.

We gratefully acknowledge the oversight and guidance provided by our project officer, Jennifer Burnszynski and to David Arnaudo of the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) at DHHS for his ongoing commitment to the project. We are also highly indebted to Linda Mellgren of ASPE, who reviewed the report and offered valuable insights and comments on how to strengthen its content. Demetra Nightingale and John Trutko reviewed earlier drafts and provided useful guidance. The report benefited greatly from the editing skills of Fiona Blackshaw. We also extend our appreciation to the PFF staff for their assistance in identifying and recruiting the study participants. Finally, we sincerely thank the eight fathers who participated in this study for their time and willingness to share their personal experiences and views on fatherhood and the PFF demonstration.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The role of noncustodial fathers in the lives of low-income families has received considerable attention from policymakers and programs in recent years. While child support enforcement efforts have increased dramatically in recent years, there is evidence that many low-income fathers cannot afford to support their children financially without impoverishing themselves or their families.

To address these complex issues, a number of initiatives have focused on developing services to help low-income fathers become more financially and emotionally involved with their families, and to help young low-income families become stable. One such initiative, sponsored by the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Ford Foundation (and other foundation support) was the Partners for Fragile Families (PFF) demonstration. The PFF demonstration operated from 2000 to 2003 in 13 projects located in nine states. It focused on promoting the voluntary establishment of paternity; connecting young fathers with the child support system and encouraging the payment of child support; improving parenting and relationship skills of young fathers; helping young fathers secure and retain employment; and strengthening family ties, commitments, and other types of father involvement when parents do not live together.

This report presents ethnographic case studies of eight young (age 19–26), unmarried, low-income fathers who participated in PFF demonstration initiatives located in Boston and Indianapolis. It is part of a multi-component evaluation sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services evaluation of the PFF demonstration projects. The evaluation also includes an implementation study and an analysis of participant child support payment and employment outcomes.

All eight men (five black, two Hispanic, and one biracial) included in this study were reared in or close to poverty. Only three men grew up with the consistent presence of more than one parent at home, including stepparents. The other five men were raised largely by single parents or other relatives. Three men had one child, four had two children, and one had three children. Six of the eight men had a juvenile or adult criminal record. PFF staff in the Boston and Indianapolis study sites identified potential candidates for inclusion in the study and the ethnographer from the evaluation team then recruited participants from this pool.

This report relies heavily on the actual words of these young fathers to illustrate the key themes and findings that emerged. The opportunity to learn in greater depth about the experiences of the young men targeted by the PFF program through these case studies offers additional insight into the challenges facing young and economically disadvantaged fathers, and how services provided by the PFF demonstration projects may help these men approach fatherhood and family life in healthier ways.

The study addresses five broad research questions:

- How did the fathers view fatherhood, and what was the nature of their relationships with their children’s mothers and their children?

- What were the fathers' experiences with the PFF program, what did they value about the program, and what did they gain from their participation in it?
- What were the fathers' views and experiences with matters related to child support?
- What were the fathers' views on employment prospects and experiences with employment?
- What were the fathers' hopes and aspirations for the future?

The fieldwork was conducted between November 2003 and July 2004 and consisted of a series of interviews, observations, and interactions with these unmarried fathers, as well as discussions with their case managers, and, in some cases, with relatives and the mothers of their children.

Key Themes and Findings

Several key themes and findings emerged through the study's in-depth discussions with the young men. These are summarized below.

Perspectives on Fatherhood and Family Functioning

The men generally lacked a strong concept of the meaning of fatherhood. All the men reported that they had neither given much thought about fatherhood while growing up, nor did any of them expect to become young fathers. All were reared in environments where absentee fatherhood was common, so there was little to observe or comprehend about fatherhood in their community settings. When they learned that they would soon become fathers themselves, the men's central concern was whether and how their current level of material resources would allow them to function effectively in that role.

The first year of fatherhood was fraught with conflict with the mother of the child; a major source of tension stemmed from the father's lack of a steady income to contribute to their child's care, coupled with his unpredictable periods of withdrawal from the child's and/or the mother's life. Each man reported encountering problems with the mother of his children within the first year of his child's life. The men who fathered children with a second partner experienced conflicts almost immediately after they informed the mother of the first child about the second. Their conflicts with the mothers ranged from consistent verbal battles to violent interactions. Yet, the men involved with mothers of their second or third children were able to develop stronger commitments to these relationships as a result of their participation in the PFF program.

The men varied in the patterns and degree of access they had to their children, but all expressed the desire to be a consistent presence in their children's lives, hoping to spare them the inconsistent or absent fathering the young men had experienced. The men placed significant emphasis on the importance of providing both discipline and affection in their children's upbringing. They suggested that PFF had given them a greater appreciation of the need for patience with children, and of the complexity and challenges involved in good parenting. They also indicated that participation in the PFF program helped them cultivate more

complex views and ideas about fatherhood than they had before their involvement. For some, these views included reconsidering the traditional roles of father and mother, expressing greater acceptance of mothers as breadwinners and fathers as caretakers, and viewing parenting as a shared endeavor.

The most powerful new idea about fatherhood transmitted to the men through their participation in the PFF program was that fatherhood represented a continually transforming experience. The men found it enlightening and useful to think about fatherhood as a process that needed to be approached as an ongoing learning experience, rather than a discrete skill or task that could be mastered with finality at some specific point in time. The men believed that they acquired a richer understanding of the responsibilities, expectations, and challenges related to fatherhood and family life and, most important, a better sense of how they should approach them. For these men, the most significant idea was that fathers needed to be a visible presence in the lives of their children, irrespective of their ability to provide material support.

The men credited their participation in the PFF program with helping them learn to work toward resolving conflict better and exercising greater patience with their children's mothers. Most fathers experienced high-conflict relationships with the mothers of their first children, and only one man was engaged in an ongoing romantic relationship with the mother of his only child at the time fieldwork for this study was conducted. The men emphasized that they made efforts to improve their relationships because it was better for their children to be spared the conflict. The men also came to appreciate certain aspects of the mothers' parenting abilities. Improved cooperation between the parents appeared strongly linked to the men's capacity to provide both materially and nonmaterially for their children, supplying money, diapers, and clothes, but also caring for and playing with the children with some consistency. For the men involved with different mothers of their second or third children, participation in PFF appeared to help the men understand more about themselves and the kinds of potential partners that might be appropriate for them so they could make better choices for themselves for partnering and possible marriage in the future, and better handle issues of conflict with their current partners.

Perspectives on the PFF Program Experience

The men typically viewed the system (e.g., courts, child support agencies, and other public agencies) as serving the inherent interest of the mothers of their children but came to view the PFF program, and its hosting agency more generally, as a distinct resource and ally. The men initially sought the services of the PFF programs either because they were mandated (by the court or under the terms of their parole or probation) or because friends or relatives suggested they do so. The degree to which agency staff were caring, knowledgeable, and eager to provide support impressed the men, and their desire to remain involved in the program was almost always based on having achieved rapport with program staff. The men's desire to commit to the program stemmed from their feeling that program staff cared about them in ways that extended far beyond the standard client-service provider relationships.

The most important feature of the PFF program for these men was the creation of a safe space to share concerns, points of confusion, and curiosities about fatherhood in the company of young men who also wanted to confront these matters. For each man, successful participation in the PFF program was also linked to the program staff's capacity to provide other services, formally or informally. These included job search, training, and placement, educational

enrichment opportunities (usually in the form of GED program), as well as fatherhood training. Thus, the men's positive views regarding the PFF program was associated with having access to a range of services and benefits that extended beyond fatherhood training, but that allowed each man to better himself along several dimensions linked to improving his capacity to function effectively as a father.

Perspectives on Child Support

None of the men experienced significant difficulty meeting the expectations of their children's mothers for financial support; all felt strongly that their capacity and willingness to provide financial support for their children should legitimate their right to have consistent access or even joint custody. Those with formal arrangements said they were timely in their payments but also relied on family members to help make child support payments when unable to do so themselves. The men also recognized that the mothers of their children to whom child support was owed were most satisfied with the consistency of formal child support orders. The men without formal child support arrangements said they provided whatever was needed, when it was needed; those with child support orders said they provided additional material and financial support in response to specific needs as they arose. Five of the eight men had formal child support orders with weekly payment obligations ranging from \$40 to \$90 for each child. The other three men, including one who had joint custody, provided child support informally. Of those who had formal support orders, PFF staff worked with the fathers to help them understand and navigate the child support system and work through various issues related to establishing paternity and child support obligations.

Perspectives on Employment

The men viewed obtaining and maintaining stable employment as essential to attaining a happier life for themselves and their children, but their employment histories were uniformly marked by unemployment spells (both short and long) and low-wage jobs. As a group, the men linked the image of successful fatherhood with self-sufficiency. They believed that improving their employment prospects would allow them to feel better about themselves, improve their capacity to be good fathers, and help establish healthier parenting relationships between the men and the mothers of their children, especially because it meant that they could provide materially as well as emotionally to the growth and development of their children.

The men who had found and maintained work (and those who had improved their residential arrangements) expressed more positive feelings about their capacity to successfully function as fathers in the future than those who had less successful experiences with employment. The fathers with more positive employment patterns appeared more aware of the obstacles and challenges standing in their way, or clearer about the additional steps they had to take to continue improving their personal and parental situations. The two men who remained unemployed tended to remain focused on getting their personal lives in better order so they could begin planning more ambitious future goals for themselves and their children. All the men emphasized that their interest in and subsequent commitment to participating in the PFF program was due in large part to the staff's willingness to help them with their education and employment goals.

Hopes and Aspirations for the Future

The men hoped and aspired to achieve basic family-centered goals: they wanted to be married and living with their children, they wanted secure and stable jobs that would provide resources to ensure their children's education, and they wanted reduced family tension and greater stability in their lives. The men also spoke of the desire for some sense of inner peace grounded in the belief that they were living their lives appropriately and responsibly. In all but one case, however, they did not envision marrying the mother of their first child, though three men indicated optimism about their relationship with the mother of their second child.

The men wanted a better life for their children but also worried whether their hopes would be realized. All the men expressed hope that their children would live in a safe community, attain an education, and be happy and well prepared for successful adult lives. This hope was tempered by the awareness that their children might face some of the same hurdles and temptations they had succumbed to. Nonetheless, the men expressed the strong desire that their children would not "have to grow up the way I grew up" and would "do a lot better than what I did." Consistent themes in discussions regarding future hopes and aspirations were that their children would acquire as much education as possible, and that the fathers would be a stable, visible, and responsible presence in their lives.

The case studies presented here highlight that there is a need for young, low-income, unmarried fathers to acquire a stronger and broader understanding of fatherhood and positive family functioning; that they face significant and complex challenges in this regard; and that the men in this study exhibited notable positive growth and development in their capacity to function as fathers. While it is unclear that any of these men will ever find themselves in an ideal family setting, it is clear that their participation in the PFF program helped them be better prepared to deal with life-course transitions and circumstances. In keeping with the intent of the PFF programs, these men also appeared to have developed a deeper and richer understanding of the many aspects of fatherhood, and to have become more financially and emotionally involved with their children.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The role of noncustodial fathers in the lives of low-income families has received considerable attention from policymakers and programs in recent years. While child support enforcement efforts have increased dramatically in recent years, there is evidence that many low-income fathers cannot afford to support their children financially without impoverishing themselves or their families. To address these complex issues, several initiatives have focused on developing services to help low-income fathers become more financially and emotionally involved with their families, and to help young low-income families become stable.

The Partners for Fragile Families (PFF) demonstration was intended to effect systems change, deliver appropriate and effective services, and improve outcomes for both parents and children in low-income families. The goal of the demonstration projects was to make lasting changes in how public agencies (especially child support enforcement agencies) and community and faith-based organizations work with unmarried families to increase the likelihood of positive outcomes for children and parents. The underlying theory of the demonstration was that by targeting new fathers at a point when they had little or no prior involvement with this system and while they still had an opportunity to develop a positive relationship with the mother(s) of their children and the children themselves, the projects could better assist these young parents to become strong financial and emotional resources to their children.

Sponsored by the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Ford Foundation (with several other foundations also making contributions), the PFF demonstration was initially developed in 1996 and operated from 2000 to 2003 in 13 projects located in nine states (see appendix A). Most projects were implemented by established, usually nonprofit, organizations. Unlike other program initiatives for noncustodial fathers, PFF targeted young fathers (16 to 25 years old) who had not yet established paternity and did not yet have extensive involvement with the child support enforcement (CSE) system.

The key elements of the PFF projects included

- promoting the voluntary establishment of paternity;
- connecting young fathers with the child support system and encouraging payment of child support;
- improving parenting and relationship skills of young fathers;
- helping young fathers secure and retain employment (so they can pay child support and otherwise financially support their children); and
- providing other services to strengthen family ties, commitments, and father involvement when parents do not live together.

HHS sponsored a national evaluation of PFF to examine the design and implementation of these projects. As part of this multi-component evaluation, this report presents ethnographic case studies of a small number of PFF participants from two demonstration sites—the Father Friendly Initiative in Boston and the Fathers Resource Program in Indianapolis (see boxes).

Other reports will address the implementation of the PFF demonstration and report on selected employment and child support outcomes of participants.

Father Friendly Initiative (FFI) Boston, Massachusetts

This PFF demonstration project was sponsored by the Boston Healthy Start, Boston Public Health Commission. Other key local partners included Child Support Enforcement Division (Massachusetts Department of Revenue); other units of the Boston Public Health Commission (referral for range of health services). The program targeted low-income fathers or expectant fathers age 25 and under at time of entry into program. The federal Office of Child Support Enforcement and Ford Foundation grants provided funding to offset about one-quarter of FFI costs. Other funding sources included the Boston Public Health Commission, the Center for Disease Control (domestic violence project grant), and the Health Resources Service Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Program Goals: The key goals of the PFF initiative included (1) responding to overall health issues of participants, including mental health, substance abuse, and physical health issues; (2) promoting responsible fatherhood, including taking care of child support payments, promoting healthy relationships with custodial parent(s), increasing contact with children, and improving parenting skills; and (3) improving each father's employment situation so he could be financially responsible and meet child support obligations.

Primary Project Services: The core activity was a weekly two-hour workshop, lasting 16 weeks. The curriculum had an African-centered perspective that took a holistic approach to development in which the body, the mind, and the spirit were focal points. The workshop covered a wide range of topics including manhood, healthy lifestyles, sexuality, HIV prevention and reducing sexual risks, co-parenting, relationship skills, parental skills within the context of the developmental level of the child, and domestic violence. Clinicians and case managers led the workshop sessions. Peer support sessions were included as part of the workshop.

Participants received individualized assistance from program case managers and referrals to specialized services as needed. FFI program clinicians (MSWs) provided assessments and ongoing counseling on substance abuse and mental health issues. At the request of PFF staff, child support staff provided information and guidance as needed. FFI case managers educated participants about the child support enforcement system and responded to problems as they emerged (through the CSE contact person). If a child support order was in effect, FFI staff tried to get the participant signed up for automatic wage withholding. Where appropriate and desired, FFI case managers accompanied participants to court or meetings with CSE agency.

Fathers Resource Program Indianapolis, Indiana

This PFF demonstration project was sponsored by the Fathers and Families Resource/Research Center (FFRRC), which was in turn affiliated with Wishard Health Services. The Marion County Prosecutors Office/Child Support Division was a key local partner in this initiative. The program targeted low-income fathers or expectant fathers age 16 to 24 who had at least one child not covered by a child support order. The PFF project was funded through the Ford Foundation and Lilly Endowment; other FFRRC staff were funded from range of other sources

Program Goals: Major goals of FRP included the following: (1) establishment of paternity and child support orders (with a goal of 100 percent on both dimensions); (2) improved basic skills and/or vocational skills through GED preparation or referral for vocational training; (3) improved employment situation (e.g., finding a job, getting more hours, improving pay in an existing job); and (4) improved parenting skills and relationship with other parent through offering of co-parenting activities.

Primary Project Services: The primary program service was a four-week fatherhood development workshop, which met five hours a day, five days a week. Topics covered included: manhood development, parenting and child development, sexual responsibility, child support and paternity establishment, financial planning, life skills, anger management, and the criminal justice system. The program placed a strong emphasis on helping workshop participants find a job that paid a sufficiently high wage to enable participants to pay their child support. Job readiness training was incorporated into the fatherhood development workshop, with much of the final week of the workshop devoted to employment preparation and initiating a work search.

Participants also received individualized help from FFRRC staff in securing a job or finding a higher paying job; this assistance included job leads, help with resume preparation and completing job applications, and referral to other resources, including one-stop centers. In addition, the program provided monthly two-hour peer support sessions and an on-site GED program that met for two hours daily before the workshop. A six-week co-parenting workshop (which included both parents) was also available with weekly meetings. Participants received individualized assistance from program case managers and referrals to specialized services as needed.

The project featured close collaboration with the county's child support office, including full-time colocation of a child support worker in the project office. This person spoke at workshop classes and worked individually with PFF participants to (1) obtain genetic testing for paternity establishment, (2) establish a child support order, and (3) counsel participants about how to negotiate the child support system.

Study Purpose and Design

The overall purpose of these ethnographic case studies is to (1) provide a richer understanding of how young, low-income men view and experience fatherhood and (2) explore the interplay among their life histories before becoming fathers, their relationships with their children and partners, their labor-market experiences, participation in PFF, and involvement with the child support system, and (3) identify common themes that emerge from this in-depth examination regarding these important topics.

This report relies heavily on the actual words of these young fathers to illustrate the key themes and findings that emerged. This component of the overall evaluation is intended to serve as a complement to the evaluation's implementation study, the findings of which are based primarily on discussions with program staff and key partners (see Martinson et al. forthcoming). The opportunity to learn in greater depth about the experiences of the young men targeted by the PFF program offers additional insight and nuance, allowing for greater understanding of the challenges facing young and economically disadvantaged fathers and how services provided by the PFF demonstration projects may help these men approach fatherhood and family life in healthier ways.

Eight fathers from two PFF sites, Boston and Indianapolis, were included in the case studies.¹ Five fathers—three black and two Hispanic—were selected from the Father Friendly Initiative at Healthy Start, which was operated by the City of Boston's Health Department. These fathers are referred to as Tony, Eduardo, Harold, Samuel, and Darnell.² Three fathers—two black and one biracial—were selected from Father Resource Program, the PFF program operated by the community-based organization Fathers and Families Resource/Research Centers and Families Resource. These fathers are referred to as Derrick, Brian, and Maurice. Each father had completed the PFF program. PFF staff in the Boston and Indianapolis study sites identified potential candidates for inclusion in the study and the ethnographer from the evaluation team then recruited participants from this pool.

The fieldwork was conducted between November 2003 and July 2004 and included three site visits in Boston and two in Indianapolis. The fieldwork consisted of interviews, observations, and interactions with these fathers, as well as with their case managers, a few relatives (typically the fathers' mother), and, when possible, the mothers of their children. The field interviews with the fathers explored several topics, including the men's views of fatherhood and parenting, relations with the mothers of their children, experiences with the PFF demonstration project and services, child support experiences, employment experiences, hopes for the future, and how the men's personal histories related to each these point of concern.

Discussions with PFF caseworkers were conducted by phone or in-person throughout the course of the fieldwork and at necessary points during the data analysis. The key issues explored with the caseworkers included the family problems and issues encountered by participants, the nature of the services rendered to the PFF participants, their perceptions on the level of client satisfaction with the services, and their views on additional or different services that would benefit the family. Interviews with relatives, mothers of children, and other significant individuals in the lives of the father were much less formally structured and took place in the days, weeks, or months following initial interviews with the fathers.

¹ The original design called for two rounds of detailed, in-person discussions with eight young fathers of different ethnicity/races and different age ranges; each father was supposed to lack a high school diploma (but could have a GED), to have consistently participated six months or more in the PFF program, and to have fathered no more than two children (both with the same partner). It was not possible to successfully recruit a set of men that met all the target criteria; therefore, the demographics of the men included in the study differ in some critical ways from the targeted profile (see table 1 for more detail on key characteristics of the men included in the study).

² All names used to identify the men are pseudonyms.

Table 1
Profile of the Men Participating in the Ethnographic Case Study

Name/Age	BRIAN age 20	DARNELL age 24	DERRICK age 19	EDUARDO age 25	HAROLD age 20	MAURICE age 26	SAMUEL age 26	TONY age 22
Site	Indianapolis	Boston	Indianapolis	Boston	Boston	Indianapolis	Boston	Boston
Race/ethnicity	Black	Black	Biracial	Hispanic	Black	Black	Hispanic	Black
Schooling	HS graduate (some community college)	GED (attending community college)	GED	Some HS	Some HS	GED	HS graduate (some community college)	GED
Family background	Raised by father and stepmother	Raised by mother	Raised by mother and stepfather	Raised in El Salvador by grandfather (from age 9 to 14), then an uncle	Raised by mother	Raised by mother, aunt, and grandmother	Raised by mother	Parents divorced at age 10; lives with mother but has frequent contact with father
Employment	Warehouse laborer since March 2004 (previously unemployed)	Community college student; part-time security guard	Drywall and construction since spring 2004 (previously unemployed)	Per diem work in carpentry	Unemployed	Unemployed	Research assistant for an advocacy group	Status unknown (receptionist for Father Friendly Initiative from December 2003 to May 2004)
Criminal record	Juvenile record	None	Juvenile record	None	Served time in county penal institution	Juvenile record	Served time in state penal institution	Served time in state penal institution
Children	1-year-old son and 3-year-old daughter (separate partners)	3-year-old daughter	2-year-old son; 2-year-old daughter and 1- year-old son (two different partners)	3-year-old daughter and 16-month-old son	8-month-old son	3-year-old son and newborn daughter as of June 2004 (separate partners)	2-year-old son and 2-year-old son (separate partners)	3-year-old daughter
Current household	Resided with father and stepmother (as of April 2004, residing with brother)	Resided with roommate (as of May 2004, relocated and now lives alone)	Resides with fiancée and their two children	Resides with uncle	Resides with mother (occasionally cohabiting with girlfriend at her mother's residence)	Resides with mother, cousin, and mother's boyfriend	Resides with mother of second child	Resides occasionally with daughter (joint custody)

Name/Age	BRIAN age 20	DARNELL age 24	DERRICK age 19	EDUARDO age 25	HAROLD age 20	MAURICE age 26	SAMUEL age 26	TONY age 22
Access to children	Weekly visitation with younger child; minimal contact with older child	Near-daily visitation	Resides with two youngest children; minimal contact with oldest child	Monthly weekend visits with both children (children live with mother in a homeless shelter)	Daily access	Near-daily visitation with older child (provides near-daily at-home day care); consistent visits with younger child	Resides with younger child; regular visitation with older child	Joint custody
Child support (per week)	\$65 for daughter, \$60 for son (his parents sometimes assisted with payments)	\$90	\$70 (his mother often helped with payments before he started work)	None (no report of formal child support order)	None (no formal child support order)	\$40 for son, he often provides \$25 a week	\$50 for older son	None (no formal arrangement due to joint custody)

HS = high school

The first round of site visits (November–December 2003) to Boston and Indianapolis provided rich and detailed information about each father’s views on fatherhood, parenting practices and relations with the mothers of his children, the socioeconomic and sociocultural context in which he resided, and the physical and social organization of his neighborhood. These conversations focused extensively on the men’s life histories (especially those dimensions that pertained to their thoughts about and preparation for parenting and fatherhood), their relationships with their children and the mothers of their children, their ideas about ideal and potential family arrangements, their participation in the PFF program, their employment histories, and their child support experiences. These interviews also explored the men’s views about the fatherhood and the duties and obligations associated with it, their experiences and expectations relevant to fatherhood and family living, and a selection of “quality of life” issues. All first-round discussions were conducted at or near the PFF sponsoring agency.

A series of phone conversations took place between the first- and second-round field visits. The conversations were held with the eight fathers, their caseworkers, and some relatives (most often their mothers). These interviews and conversations ranged from 5 to 20 minutes, and as many as possible were audio recorded. Many could not be recorded, however, because they occurred ad-hoc in connection with attempts to reach a father to set up future conversations.

The second-round site visits occurred approximately six months after the first round (May–July 2004). These visits provided opportunities to return to the core questions explored in the earlier semi-structured discussions, informal conversations, and observations. They also focused on uncovering any changes or new developments in the fathers’ understanding and expectations about fatherhood and family. The homes of three men were visited during this phase of fieldwork, providing opportunities to observe the household setting and casual family interaction. In addition to these activities, the study’s ethnographer toured each father’s neighborhood.

Three fathers withdrew from the study after the first interview. In one case, a father from Boston (Harold) was incarcerated in March 2004 for probation violations. Before his incarceration, he had participated in one in-person interview and two brief telephone calls. Another Boston father (Tony) withdrew from the study after abruptly leaving his job as a receptionist for the Father Friendly Initiative program in May 2004. His phone numbers were disconnected and he discontinued all contact with program staff, so there was no way to reestablish contact. He had participated in an initial in-person interview, followed by one telephone conversation. Finally, neither research or program staff were able to locate another Boston participant (Eduardo) after the first interview.

Only two of the fathers’ partners were willing to be interviewed, one in each site. Derrick’s fiancée and mother of his two youngest children agreed to participate in the study. The other, Darnell’s former partner, agreed to talk about her child’s father but stated that she did not care to be a study “research participant” and chose not to sign respondent fee payment forms or other official documentation. No other partner agreed to participate in this research.³

³ In Indiana, the mother of Maurice’s oldest child did not return any telephone calls. The mother of his youngest child also chose not to make herself available, apparently because she was pregnant and then a very recent mother during the course of the study’s fieldwork. The study did not receive contact information for the mothers of Brian’s

Each man was asked to explain why the mother(s) of his children resisted participating in the study. Some nonparticipating mothers expressed to the fathers a lack of interest in speaking “on the record” to a researcher. Their desire not be interviewed appeared coupled with the view that the ethnographer—who made contact with the mothers only after having made connections with the fathers—was aligned with the fathers’ perspectives on mother-father relational dynamics. It also appeared that the men did not aggressively try to connect the study’s ethnographer with the mothers of their children, viewing such efforts as potentially adding tension to their already problematic relationships.

Organization of the Report

The remainder of the report is organized as follows. The next chapter (chapter 2) provides briefly profiles of the men in this study and then highlights two common threads that run through their life stories—lack of consistent or positive involvement of their own fathers during childhood and adolescence and involvement with the streets and legal authorities. Chapter 3 examines a range of issues that pertain to fathering and family functioning, including an in-depth account of the men’s initial responses to becoming fathers and evolving views on fathering in relation to their interactions and relationships with their children and the children’s mothers. Chapter 4 reports on the men’s experiences with the PFF program, including how they become involved in it, their relationships with staff, and the aspects of the program they most appreciated. Chapter 5 describes the men’s views and experiences related to child support and employment. This is followed by an account of the fathers’ hopes and aspirations for themselves and their children (chapter 6).

two children. Of the Boston-based cases, the mother of Eduardo’s two children had relocated to another part of the state and was inaccessible. The other mothers informed the fathers that they had no interest in being contacted for this project.

CHAPTER 2. PROFILES OF THE YOUNG FATHERS

This section provides brief biographical profiles of the men included in this study and then highlights some common aspects of their childhood and adolescence. All eight young fathers included in this study were reared in or close to poverty. In general, the childhood years were less difficult for three men than those of the other five. Darnell and his family ended up in a stable, working-class community by his adolescent years. Brian and Tony were reared in family settings with two working parents. While some parents of the other men worked, their incomes were less stable or they had significantly more children to support. Only three men grew up with the consistent presence of more than one parent at home (stepparents included). The rest were largely raised by a single parent or by other relatives. Irrespective of family socioeconomic status, all had encountered problems with school or with legal authorities at some point in their youths that hindered their subsequent economic progress. Hence, none entered adulthood secure in the labor market, and all had the financial burden of providing for one or more children.

Brian

Brian, age 20 and black, was a participant in the Indianapolis PFF program. Brian grew up on the east side of Indianapolis in a predominantly black, working-class and lower-income community. He was raised by his father and stepmother—who entered Brian’s life at the age of 2—although he remained in contact with his biological mother (who also remarried). Brian’s stepmother worked as a clerk and his father was a blue-collar worker in Indianapolis. His father’s interactions included coaching him in various sports throughout his childhood. Since the age of 15, he had worked with his father in warehouses and in construction. Brian’s childhood included consistent exposure to people that fell along both sides of the law and close proximity to the life of the streets. He was expelled from school in his senior year for habitual truancy and eventually completed his high school studies at an alternative school in Indianapolis.

Brian had two children, a 3-year-old daughter with a former partner and a 1-year-old boy with another former partner. He interacted with his son weekly, but longed for equal time with his daughter, who he now only saw during court appointments in a protracted visitation and custody battle. He owed \$65 a week in child support for his daughter and \$60 a week in child support for his son. During the course of the study, Brian attained a new job that involved working with his brother at a warehouse, and they moved into an apartment together in spring 2004. Brian was unsuccessful in establishing visiting rights to his daughter, and he was not hopeful that the situation would improve any time soon. He reported that he kept himself busy by going to work and providing for his son, and that he avoided both people and situations that could interfere with his ability to focus on work and family.

Darnell

Darnell, age 24 and black, was a participant in the Boston-based Father Friendly Initiative. He was raised by his mother and had no contact with his father after the age of 7 when he moved with his mother and older brother from the low-income Boston community of Dorchester to the more socioeconomically stable suburb of Brookline. Darnell’s mother was gainfully employed throughout his youth as a social services caseworker. In Brookline, Darnell and his family

encountered a significantly more positive urban environment than found in predominantly black neighborhoods in Boston, such as Roxbury and Dorchester. His social networks were largely made up of fellow students from the public schools he attended throughout his childhood, and he was grateful to have had the chance to attend Brookline schools, which he thought were far superior to those in Boston. At 17, he began living on his own in the community of Roslindale after he had a falling out with his mother and was asked to leave the family's home.

Darnell had one child, a 3-year-old daughter, with whom he had almost-daily visitation. He owed \$90 a week in child support. He had a GED and attended community college for a short time (e.g., about a semester) before withdrawing because he was living on his own and could not pay for tuition in addition to other bills. By the end of the study, Darnell lived in his own apartment in Boston and was again attending community college while working part-time as a security guard. His current partner (not the mother of his child) was a high school graduate who worked as a bank clerk. He had no criminal record.

Derrick

Derrick, age 19 and biracial, participated in the Indianapolis Father Resource Program. His mother was white and his father was black. He had little contact with his biological father and was brought up by his mother and her husband, both of whom were white. Derrick was born and raised in Indianapolis, where he lived in a largely working-class and poor white neighborhood after his mother married his stepfather. Derrick had a GED and a juvenile record.

Derrick had three children of his own, two sons and a daughter. He had minimal contact with the older son, who was 2 years old at the time of the study, and had only seen him in the courtroom in the past year. He had a \$70 weekly child support obligation for this older son. The daughter, also 2 years old, and a 1-year-old son, were the children of Derrick and his fiancée. At the start of the study, Derrick and his fiancée and their two children lived in his mother's home, but they later moved into their own apartment in Indianapolis.

Eduardo

Eduardo, age 25 and Hispanic, was a PFF participant in the Boston-based Friendly Family Initiative.⁴ He was born in El Salvador and spent his early childhood there. Between the ages of 9 and 14, he was raised by his grandfather, during which time he had no contact with his own father and only monthly contact with his mother (who worked in another city). Eduardo moved to the United States at the age of 14 where he was raised by an aunt and uncle in what he called a "pretty, calm, decent neighborhood" in East Boston consisting of Central American and South American immigrants. Eduardo had had no formal schooling beyond 9th grade. As the translator said, "The majority of times he spends either at work and from work he goes straight to his house." He did not regularly socialize with people beyond those he knew from work. He worked in carpentry, although he had no license and thus had to work in informal arrangements only.

⁴ Eduardo's interviews were conducted with the assistance of a translator (his caseworker) because of his limited ability to speak English and the ethnographer's lack of Spanish-language proficiency.

Eduardo was the father of two children, a 3-year-old daughter and a 16-month-old son. The children's mother was a teenage girl who had completed the 9th grade and was currently unemployed and living with their two children in a homeless shelter in western Massachusetts. With the help of the PFF program, Eduardo had begun to have monthly weekend visits with his children, but he had no sense of what kind of consistent access to his children he would have in the future. Eduardo had no formal child support arrangement.

Harold

Harold, age 20 and black, was a PFF participant in the Father Friendly Initiative. He had lived in Boston since the age of 5 when his parents separated and his mother moved to the Boston area. Eventually, Harold's mother received Section 8 housing in Dorchester, where Harold grew into adulthood along with a younger brother. Harold had some high school education but no diploma or GED. His mother raised him, and, a stepfather also lived in the home for part of his childhood. Harold had very limited interaction with his biological father and was not close to his stepfather. He was heavily involved in the streets since his early adolescence. He had a criminal record and was completing his probation at the time of the study.

Harold had one child, a son who was 8 months old at the time of the study. Unlike the other fathers in our study, his girlfriend's pregnancy was both desired and planned. Harold lived with his mother, though occasionally he also lived with his girlfriend (the mother of his son) at her mother's home. His girlfriend was unemployed. Harold had daily access to his son and no formal child support commitment. Harold worked for Northeastern University in a catering department when his son was born. He was laid off a few months before the first interview for this study, however, and was looking for work.

Maurice

Maurice, age 26 and black, participated in the Indianapolis-based Fathers Resource Program. He was an only child and raised by his mother, aunt and grandmother in the small town of Kokomo, Indiana. His father paid child support but was only minimally involved in his life, making contact with him a little more than once a year. A number of adults in Maurice's household, including his mother, were substance abusers at various points during his childhood, and he too became a substance abuser at a very young age. He ultimately moved to Indianapolis, where his mother also relocated following successful substance abuse treatment. Maurice commented about the reason for his move to Indianapolis, "I was tired of going to jail." Maurice did not finish high school, although he received a GED in 1998. He had a juvenile record.

Maurice was the father of two children, a 3-year-old boy with one partner, and a newborn daughter (born in June 2004) with another. The mother of his daughter, his partner at the time of the study, was finishing her degree in registered nursing. Maurice had near-daily visitation with his son, taking care of him several days a week, and he visited his daughter consistently. He was obligated to pay \$40 a week in child support for his son.

At the time of the study, Maurice was unemployed and lived in Indianapolis with his mother, her boyfriend, his cousin, and his uncle. During the course of the study, Maurice began using narcotics again and then went back into recovery after entering a 72-hour rehabilitation

program. He returned home shortly before the birth of his daughter and resumed living as he had before his relapse.

Samuel

Samuel, age 26 and Hispanic, was a PFF participant in the Father Friendly Initiative. He was born in the Dominican Republic, and at around 6 years old, migrated with his mother, sister, and younger brother to the Dominican-populated Washington Heights area of New York City. When he was 11, the family moved again to Boston, where an aunt resided. He lived in various Boston neighborhoods throughout his youth, primarily Roslindale and Roxbury. Samuel was largely raised by his mother and had little contact with his biological father since coming to the United States. He graduated from high school and attended a computer school for the equivalent of two semesters, as well as a community college for a couple of semesters. His postsecondary education was interrupted because he was arrested and eventually served time. Samuel declined to discuss his criminal record, simply noting that he served “a couple of years” and was released on parole within the year before the first interview for this study.

Samuel had two children, a 2-year son with his current partner and a 4-year-old son from a previous relationship. He had regular visitation with his older son, for whom he owed \$50 a week in child support. His current partner had an associate’s degree and was a preschool teacher. The mother of Samuel’s first child was a high school graduate and a physical therapist. At the time of the study, Samuel worked as a research assistant for an advocacy group and attended community college at night.

Tony

Tony, age 22 and black, was a PFF participant in the Friendly Family Initiative. Tony was raised in a two-parent family until his parents divorced when he was 10 years old. He said that both his parents were small-scale community activists who supported many community empowerment initiatives, often taking their five children (three girls and two boys) to events related to such causes. Both parents worked—his father was a construction worker and his mother was a phone company clerk. After his parents’ divorce, Tony lived with his mother but maintained consistent contact with his father.

Tony was the father of one child—a 3-year-old daughter—for whom he had joint custody. By high school, he had been placed in a juvenile detention program and later served time in jail as an adult. He earned a GED after dropping out of high school. His current partner (not the mother of his daughter) had an associate’s degree and was a clerk for a graphic design company. Tony worked as the front-desk office receptionist at the Boston Father Friendly Initiative. He abruptly left his job in the spring, however, and as of August 2004, had lost complete contact with agency staff and the study’s ethnographer.

Common Threads: Lack of Father Involvement and Encounters with Street Life

The remainder of this section details the circumstances and views of these young fathers regarding two common threads that run through all their life stories to varying degrees—

involvement with the streets and attendant problems with school and/or legal authorities, and the absence of consistent, positive involvement of a father or father figure.

Harold had minimal contact with his father throughout his tumultuous life and only saw his father occasionally during visits to New York City when Harold and his mother went to visit other relatives. Harold believed that his own situation as a young, impoverished, and troubled father was partially due to his own mostly fatherless childhood. Although his mother eventually remarried in Boston, Harold explained that he never got along with his stepfather. He also rarely paid any attention to the minimal advice that his stepfather gave him. As he said:

That's why I think I'm in the predicament I'm in now because I never had a father to really sit down with me and talk to me...[My stepfather] sat down to talk to me, but it's like we didn't get along...so like, yeah, I never had a father. To me I have a father [his biological father], but he was never really around.

Throughout his childhood, Harold's mother referred to his absentee father as a counter-example of how he should live his own life:

She sits down with me and tells me how I should do things, but me, I got to learn on my own. I listen to her and I take advice from her, but...I got to experience by myself. You know what I'm saying? [She told me] don't be like your father. You know, you know how...female mothers are...If your father wasn't around, they'll tell you, "Don't be like your father, don't be like this, don't do this, get off the street, because your son...your son looks at that when he gets older." "...Don't hit on your girl," and all this stuff, you know...[My mother's] like "Take care of responsibility, just get a job," you know. She tells me every day, "Get a job, get a job."

Harold was drawn into street life at an early age and was soon immersed in the streets. Although his father was largely absent from his life and he was not close to his stepfather, Harold said he maintained a close relationship with his mother throughout his troubled adolescence. He spoke extensively about how concerned his mother was about him while he was growing up and that she consistently raised her concerns about his neighborhood associates, who were mostly older and involved in various illicit activities. His mother tried to steer him in the right direction by allowing him to stay overnight in a juvenile detention center at the age of 13 after he was caught in a stolen vehicle. While Harold had not spent time in jail since then, he continued to have problems with the law. Because he served as an accomplice to robberies and was involved in numerous fights and other disturbances of the peace, Harold was charged with assault and battery while a juvenile. Although he claimed that he curtailed his involvement in violence when he became a young adult, he remained in trouble, and was on probation for an assault and battery charge at his first interview for this study in November 2003.

Derrick believed that some problems he experienced resulted from his white stepfather's inability to fully accept a part-black stepson in the house, the absence of his own father, the turmoil going on within the household and Derrick's own rebelliousness as an adolescent. He recalled:

And my stepdad, we used to fight a lot. He'd be drunk, you know what I mean? He's a drinker...He used to beat on my mom and shit. I used to watch it, you know what I mean? And one day, you know, he was beating on me, and then like I was probably about 16 years old. I was like damn, I can't wait until I turn 18. I told him that, because I'm going, I'm going to get me some...He never put his hands on me again. And then he did the same shit to my mom, put his hands on her again, I said, "You better watch it," and then he stopped that too, so, you know what I mean?...He get to slapping when he's drunk. And, I don't like that shit.

Derrick relied on his extended family to help him out when situations got severe at home. He claimed that his two male cousins were his main base of family support, encouraging him to find work and stay out of trouble. Derrick tried to emulate them, working as much as he could, taking jobs in warehouses and factories when he could find them.

In contrast to the other men, Brian was raised by his biological father and, from an early age, a stepmother as well. His father and stepmother were actively engaged in parenting and he remained close to his biological mother as well. In discussing family life and his relationship with his stepmother, Brian said:

She treated me just like her own son...She treat me just like blood, and I look at her like that's, that's my mother...That's the woman that raised me, so I call her my mama. I mean, I respect my mama for bringing me in the world, but that's...that's my mother, and she raised me, took care of me when I was sick, went upside my head when I did something silly, all that.

Brian recalled that his father and stepmother would talk to him and his half-brother (who was the same age) about the choices available to them in life as they were growing up. They wanted him to go college, and his father continued to talk to him from time to time about his future goals and plans.

Although Darnell did not have contact with his father and was raised from an early age solely by his mother, he emphasized the positive influence of moving from Dorchester to a better urban environment, saying:

Brookline's...it's like semi-suburban, you know...There's projects and stuff...but it was clean projects...It was like, of course, predominantly white, but you had a decent amount of black families there, some Hispanic families and stuff...And in my schools too. You had the METCO Program,⁵ which brought a lot of black kids from Boston then, so you got to, you got to be exposed to a few different cultures and stuff...I mean, some people would sort of like, what, sell weed or whatever. But there wasn't like big-time crack dealers or, you know, or shootings or anything like that....There were people there that still got in trouble, but...I benefited from living in that environment rather than living somewhere deep in

⁵ METCO (the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity) is a public school initiative that allows Boston-based children to attend schools in neighboring communities in order to advance the racial integration of the schools.

the inner city....Most of my friends had their parents...it's like my family and only a couple others that I know of really didn't have like both of their parents there.

In contrast to Darnell, who saw the benefits of moving to a better area, Harold remained in Dorchester and had this to say about what it was like to grow up there:

Growing up in Boston is crazy...It's like everybody's killing each other and all this.... You can't just look at somebody without them like wanting to beef at you and all like that. But me, I ain't that type of person. I don't go out here causing drama with nobody. Unless drama comes to me, then I'll handle it. I'll handle it. Sometimes I handle it in a physical way, sometimes I handle it in a positive way. It all depends on how it goes....I'm 20 and I see a lot of people my age or a little younger, getting killed, shot, you know what I'm saying?...I think sometimes to myself, like damn, I'm lucky....I could be one them people, you know what I'm saying? It's hard. Boston's hard to grow up in because...you got all these gangs. Not even gangs. You just got dudes out here wrecking blocks and stuff.

Samuel lived with both parents while in the Dominican Republic, but since coming to the United States had only seen his father during infrequent trips to his homeland. He lived in various Boston neighborhoods (primarily Roslindale and Roxbury) throughout his youth, and stated, "I was doing pretty good during school time. I was doing pretty good....But then I went to high school and...everything changed." This change was a result of exposure to the urban adolescent culture of Boston public high schools. As he explained:

It was high school [in the early 1990s]...in like different gangs and stuff like that. And it was kind of if you were...if you were a Dominican, you were in this type of gang...And if you were Puerto Rican...then you were there....I had to watch my back all the time.

Samuel explained that his mother was attentive to his efforts to manage the turbulent street life that he encountered, but not in ways that allowed him to feel safer or more efficacious. "She was strict," he said. "She was overprotective and then that's why, like I got, I got pissed off....And when I had the chance to leave, I just left, because I was tired of having to run from school back to home."

As a youngster, Brian moved between inner-city schools and township schools when his family moved out of Indianapolis to put together a better life for the family, but then returned within a few years. The differences between the two allowed him to recognize the strengths of township schools but also to learn the cultural capital relevant for surviving in inner-city school environments. Because his father was the only one of four siblings that had not gone to jail at various points in their lives, Brian grew up in a much more stable household than did others in his extended family. Brian knew his uncles quite well and knew about their involvement in narcotics, robbery, and other illegal activities. Brian learned a lot about the street life from these uncles, but he explained that he also learned that their path was not the right one to follow.

In making this point, he told a story about one of his cousins, whose father was arrested in front of the boys:

I was coming home from baseball practice, and it's me and my brother [and] my cousin. My daddy dropping...dropping off my cousin. His daddy getting walked off to handcuffs, they just right at his house. They walking out with big duffel bags and towing his cars away and all that. And I'm seeing this stuff, I'm 9 years old. My cousin's daddy about to go to jail...I mean, yeah, we was in the house, we seen money sitting around, dope and stuff and all that, and I mean, he have that...I've seen that, yeah, that's nice and everything, the cars and the women, but he about to go to jail.

The lesson he did take from one uncle, however, was the importance of turning one's money into investments that garnered payoffs. In talking about his favorite uncle, he said:

He used to sell drugs or whatever, but like when he got his money, instead of flashing it and buying cars and all that, he was buying houses. He was renting out houses and stuff. He used that money and before he passed away, he was 28, he owned nine houses, seven in the same neighborhood...If it wasn't for him, lot of my family members...they'd been homeless if it wasn't for him. I admire him for that...I mean...he did what he had to do...I really, I looked up to him...I mean, he took care of business, is what I liked about him.

As an adolescent, Brian began to follow the path taken by many of his peers in Indianapolis. But, aside from a very brief stint in county jail for violating a protection order issued against him at the request of the mother of his daughter, Brian had not served time. Brian said that the few hours spent in jail as a result of this violation and the contact he had with the people he met there gave him a strong desire not to return. Discussing his life since that experience he said, "I cut out doing a lot of stuff, separating my stuff from a lot of people."

Derrick did not graduate from high school and explained his schooling experiences and their effect on the rest of his adolescent life as follows:

There was a lot of thugs probably when I was in about...7th, 8th grade, somewhere around there. That's when I started doing wrong stuff...hanging out, you know, staying out all the times of the night, you know, not coming in, disrespecting my moms and shit and, you know. That's when I was dumb really...I'd say most of the time, man, I was either fighting or doing things that was really not supposed to be done.

Maurice said that his very early years were enjoyable, and his mother, aunt, and grandmother took him on vacation to family resorts and pursued similar activities. He was active in sports during the times he went to school: "I was good in sports...basketball, football, baseball." But things changed once the family's problems with drugs began to develop. When asked about the conversations he had with his mother and other relatives about his future since those early years, Maurice said, "Nah. We didn't really talk about stuff like that [his goals and plans for the future]...I was too busy running the streets, gang-banging, trying to sell dope and fit

in with the in crowd...It was like hang for yourself. Like they [his relatives] was worried about stuff they was doing, so I just ran the streets.”

Tony referred to his household as a very loving one, until his parents separated. Tony moved to Dorchester at the age of 10 with his mother and siblings after his parents’ divorce. Tony explained that his father was not very affectionate, but that he still interacted with his children quite regularly and played sports with his sons. Tony said that he was by far the worst behaved of his brothers and sisters. The pressure that his mother felt in trying to care for five children single-handedly made it easier for him to slip through the cracks and start getting into trouble. As he said, “I tried to do the street thing...started when I was like 13, I caught my first case. And even now, I still deal with judicial issues...I got a couple of things on my adult record.”

In general, being reared in environments where absentee fatherhood was the norm provided the men little to observe or comprehend about fatherhood in their community setting. In addition, the men’s past involvement in profligate behavior had been influential in shaping their lives and became an important point of reference in the men’s discussions of what constituted responsible fatherhood. As will be described in greater detail later in this report, the men credited the PFF program with helping them develop some basic ideas about fatherhood and healthy family living that stood in sharp contrast to their everyday lives before participating in the PFF program.

CHAPTER 3. FATHERHOOD AND FAMILY FUNCTIONING

This chapter examines a range of issues that pertain to fathering and family functioning, including an in-depth account of the men's initial responses to becoming a father and evolving views on fathering in view of their relationships and interactions with their children and the mothers of their children.

Becoming a Father: Initial Reactions and Concerns

For most of the men, life without consistent involvement of a parent, especially a father, left them with little understanding of life in a two-parent family structure. All the men reported that they had neither given much thought about fatherhood while growing up, nor did any of them expect to become young fathers. Except Harold (who said that he and his girlfriend had planned to have their child), the men's first serious consideration of fatherhood occurred either when they found out that their partners were pregnant or when they were told they were fathers after their children had been born. Tony, for example, explained that his family had held no serious discussions about parenting or fatherhood, "No real family deep discussions about fatherhood or really how to be a man....My pops would say something like, 'Yeah, a man will do this. You got to...' you know what I mean, say something like that. And that's that."

Upon being informed that they would soon become fathers, most of the men responded with shock or anxiety. Darnell said, "I never expected to become one [laughs]. I really didn't. I mean, I guess it would cross my mind now and then, but nah, I mean...to say I put any kind of real thought into it, no."

Samuel described his reaction to the news of becoming a father in this way:

It was weird, because I never thought about being a father. NEVER thought about being a father. It was kind of weird. It was like what should I do now?...I think I told her, "I'm going to be there. [I'm] not going to be hanging out and stuff"....Right after that is when I got arrested and then it was kind of...not even thinking of the kid, [instead] just thinking..."How I was going to get out just not going to jail for a long time."...I was working...going to college...going to court...when the baby was born...I was there in the hospital when the baby was born....And I was there for like the first two weeks...She knew that I had that problem [with the court case]...I think she didn't pressure me a lot, because she knew...It was a big case, you know, it was like going on...And I never knew when I was going in [to court again]. It was unpredictable.

Because the pregnancy of Harold's girlfriend was planned, his reaction to the news that was going to be a father differed from the other men:

See, me...me and my girl,...we chose this, we planned this, so...you know, she told me like she was pregnant, I was happy...I was kind of excited and I was always around her every day rubbing her stomach and I can't wait till she have it, you know. Now that he's here, it's like, it's even more, it's even more exciting,

because he's getting bigger and bigger. He's like...it's...it feels good to see another part of you in the world.

All the men explained that they were reared in environments where absentee fatherhood was common, so there was little to observe or comprehend about fatherhood in their community. Their knowledge that many fathers were present neither in their lives nor in the lives of their peers led them to regard absentee fatherhood as the norm. However, none recalled thinking much early on about why these fathers were absent from the households. Beyond asserting that they had no intention of replicating the pattern of absentee fatherhood that was abundant in their neighborhoods, there was essentially nothing said either at home or among their friends about fatherhood. In short, almost nobody talked about it. For example, Derrick noted that his conversations with his stepfather did not venture even that far into the topic of potential fatherhood. As he said, "If we did talk, it be about fishing or working."

The topic was also virtually absent in conversations with their own mothers, except warnings about the need for the men to protect themselves before entering into sexual relations. As Derrick said, "Yeah, my mom used to be worried about it. She used to be, 'Boy, you better strap that raincoat on.' I ain't listen. I did not listen. I should have, but I didn't." Mimicking his mother Derrick said, "You better wear a condom before your ass fool around and die out here on these streets!" Harold provided an example of the kind of terse messages that mothers often delivered to the men as a means of addressing their son's potential for early fatherhood. He said, "My mother usually joke around and stuff, like because there's a lot of girls calling my house. And she be like, yeah, just don't be bringing no grandbabies to my house."

The three men's mothers that participated in this study (Brian's stepmother, and the mothers of Derrick and Maurice) said that they had a great deal of concern that their sons might end up as young fathers but also felt extreme inefficacy when it came to preventing their sons from getting women pregnant. All of them said that their sons simply followed the path pursued by so many men in their communities, and there was nothing to gain by trying to determine why their sons could not follow an alternative route.

The anxiety and confusion arising from the realization that they would soon become fathers was followed by some effort to understand the impending responsibilities of assuming this new role. The men's critical concern was whether and how their current level of material resources would allow them to function effectively in that role. The unemployed men, like Harold, spoke about the need to find work. After the birth of his son, Harold recounted thinking:

Well, I sat down and thought about it like that. "What I should do? How am I going to do this? How am I going to make sure he got what he wants?" I just got up and went out and got a job. That solved it right there, because when money comes through, you can get him anything he wants, anything he needs. Especially when you got a good paying job.

Regardless of their employment status, the men recalled being concerned with the fact that they were not able to offer much in the way of material support for their children. As Tony said:

I was surprised, kind of surprised, kind of not surprised, because, now I know we do [have a child on the way]...I was so scared. Scared because now I got...I got a life besides my own I got to take care of. And I got to provide for her. And at that time, I didn't have a place of my own.

Darnell had a similar reaction:

I kind of went with day by day, you know. I knew, I knew me and baby's mom had to get money together, we start to move in together, you know, and so...I kind of bounced around from job to job a couple times, you know, just to find the right, you know, right spot, whatever for me. I finally settled into a security job, and like I said, we ended up moving in together and stuff and it, it wasn't...it was nothing like I expected, dealing with a pregnant woman [laughs].

Regardless of the level of anxiety that accompanied each man's introduction into fatherhood, the actual birth of the child provided some measure of relief and excitement. The men who were present at the birth of their children reported the event as exciting and enriching. Eduardo, Maurice, and Brian were present for the birth of their second children; Derrick was present for the birth of his second and third. Eduardo could not find the words to explain the birthing process, even as our interpreter struggled to help. Instead, he breathed deeply as if to convey how powerful the experience of observing his child being born was for him.

While the men spoke about anxiety and confusion regarding their new role as fathers, Harold also readily shared the joy that he felt in having his son in his presence. It seemed as if his son brought a measure of comfort and security to what was otherwise a turbulent and strife-ridden lifestyle. He went on to say:

I'll watch him and he'll just play around and he'll play to the point where he gets tired, so I just gave him his bottle and I'll go to sleep. Me and him go to sleep and just, me and him just laying down next to each other, you know. Feels good when you're laying next to your son or your daughter, you know.

In an especially poignant commentary, Harold described an outing with his newborn son:

I brought him to Six Flags [amusement park]...Even though he was a little baby, he can't get on no rides or nothing...even though he was little, I want him to look around, see colors and stuff like that, you know what I'm saying?...get used to being outside and stuff.

On Being a Father: Men's Relationships with Their Children

This section presents the men's views about what it meant to be a father since participating in the PFF program and the nature and quality of interactions with their children. In general, the men came to understand fatherhood as a highly dynamic role and a continually transforming

experience. As expressed by Eduardo through a translator, a common sentiment held by the men was that: “every day is a learning...it’s a learning lesson, every day he should learn to become a better father in every way.” The acceptance of the need to be open to new perspectives and outlooks is important to bear in mind when reading this section because it suggests that the fathers themselves recognized that their notion of fatherhood was still evolving, even when they spoke with certainty about their perspectives on fatherhood and their behavior in this role.

Access

The men’s relationships with their children were shaped in large part by their level of access to them. The level of access was, in turn, influenced by whether the father was still involved with the mother of the child and whether he had multiple children by different mothers, two interrelated factors that differed across the eight cases.

The men who were unemployed—Maurice and Harold—tended to stay at home with their children during weekdays when the mothers of these children worked (Maurice also had near-daily visitation with a newborn daughter). Tony’s daughter also stayed with him at his home during his nonwork hours and Darnell had near-daily contact with his daughter. Brian had consistent visitation with his son, yet almost none with his daughter over the past year. Samuel, who lived with his youngest son, had some access to his older son, although there was no formal visitation arrangement. Derrick, who lived with his fiancée and their two children, had no regular contact with his oldest child. Harold saw his son regularly until Harold was arrested for violating the terms of his probation in spring 2004. Eduardo, whose children resided with their mother in a shelter in western Massachusetts, initially had limited access to his children. By December 2003, and with the help of staff at the Father Friendly Initiative, however, he had established a twice-a-month weekend visitation.

When provided with access to their children, the men who did not have daily or near-daily interaction engaged in the same activities with them as those men who had daily access. Time at home with children included some television watching, coloring and basic artwork, dancing to music videos, and similar types of indoor activities when the weather did not permit trips to a neighborhood park. Those fathers with boys beyond the early toddler stage would also wrestle with their sons and play more traditionally masculine games (e.g., indoor “puff” basketball and such). Aside from maintaining a physical presence with their children, all the men tended to such duties as changing diapers, feeding, and participating in play activities, activities that reflected an understanding that child care duties and services were no longer exclusively within the mother’s domain, but simply duties that either parent should attend to for the child.

During field observations, Maurice, Brian, and Derrick were seen engaging their children in this way. In fact, Brian interrupted a study interview at the Fathers and Families Center to read part of a children’s book to his son (an activity that he had promised to do before the child’s nap, which was to have begun before the interview was completed). This activity clearly excited both father and child. Derrick played with his two youngest children after work one summer day, which included engaging in a machismo-like banter with his son that seemed a regular activity. One interview with Maurice took place while he was in the midst of assembling a wading pool in the small backyard of his mother’s home. Maurice was quite pleased with himself for creating an opportunity to introduce his son to water-play during the hot summer months of 2004.

Those men with children with little or no access to their children lamented that they could not be a part of their lives to the degree that they were with their other children. Samuel's interaction with his older son was limited to seeing him during his frequent visits to the home of his aunt (which, for legal reasons, was Samuel's official address), who was a family day care provider and took care of Samuel's son. Samuel said that he was constantly on guard to ensure that he did not anger the mother of this child so this awkward visitation arrangement would not be ruptured. In the mean time, he explained that he accepted the situation, and as for his feelings, he said:

I mean, I wish...we could have like more interaction, because I see him every day, but we don't have that much interaction...Like I don't want his mom making up something and...(us) going back to, you know, a stage-one thing. Because right now...I'm trying to get...you know, I'm just trying to...how can I say, like, I'm just trying to get out of it [the problems that his son's mother is having with her own life].

And Darnell said:

Like I said, the way me and my baby's moms are, there's really no way me and her really could be together. You know, I've realized that. But like when a father's not in the house or whatever, you know...it hurts, I definitely think it hurts the relationship between the father and child, but I don't know....I guess the bottom line is as long as the child feels like the father is there when they need them and is always there to support them and show up to like the piano recitals and the, you know, the graduation and...and whenever the child needs help or they could call their father, as long as they know that the father's there to help them when they need it, and they could always count on their father, whether the father's in the house or not in the house, that's the main thing...for a child to know that both their parents is there for them.

Derrick was fully involved in raising his two youngest children but had virtually no access to his oldest son and continued to long for quality time with his oldest child. As he said, "I love my kids to death. You know what I mean?...Even though I don't get to see my oldest son...I mean, I still got to love him, because he's, you know, out of me." Derrick went on to say, "I don't even have contact with him, really, you know what I mean. I ain't seen him since, you know, every time we go to court, that's the only time I get to see him." Derrick had been spending a great deal of the past few years trying to obtain consistent access to his son and relying on Fathers and Families staff for help with the matter. He feared that the child's mother was trying to move to Chicago, which would essentially eliminate his access to him.

As was the case with Derrick, the noncustodial fathers who worked out patterns of interaction with their children also lamented that their inability to provide an unregulated, everyday presence in their children's lives was painful for them, and they were concerned for their children. Darnell said, "It's going to take a toll. It is. I mean, best-case scenario, you know, I would rather be in the whole family, you know." Speaking in solidarity with that sentiment Samuel said, "They [the children you do not live with] want you there....They don't want to just see you whenever...they want....because when they go to school and they [other students] ask

you, ‘Well, who’s your father?’ whatever, this and that, I mean, what are they [your children] going to say?”

Brian, who continued to have significant problems with the mother of his daughter, said that he was committed to doing whatever it took to ensure that the child has clear sense of both parents being in his life. As he put it:

I don’t want him growing up...I’m on this side of town, and his mother on this side of town, and he just moving back and forth and every other weekend he looking at a different dude [in that woman’s home]...Really, every time I went over my mother’s house, it’s a different dude over there...And I don’t want my son going through that. I want him looking at his mother and his father every day. I mean, I respect...my stepmother...I mean, taking care of me like that, but it’s just the fact of having your own mother in the house. The woman who brung you into the world.

Harold expressed resigned regret that he was not yet residing full-time with his son:

Well, if like, say, my son was like 4 or 5 years old right now. He’ll be like, “Where’s daddy?” And it’s like, because I don’t live with him. But it’s like they’ll understand as they get older why we live...why we wasn’t...like why I wasn’t in the household...When my baby’s mother was pregnant, I was living with her. You know what I’m saying? Just temporarily ‘til she had the baby, because I know when a female’s pregnant, she needs you...So, I was always there. I was there every day. If I wasn’t at work, I was over here. You know. So, but they’ll understand as they get older. It’s not that we’re split apart or nothing like that. Just that we just don’t got our things together right now to go get our own apartment or anything like that. Just going to have to hold on, pause for a minute.

Exercising Patience, Responsibility, Discipline, and Affection

In speaking about key aspects of fathering, the men discussed their views on patience, responsibility, discipline and affection.

Patience

The men often referred to the need for patience when talking about interactions with the mothers of their children as well as with their children. The importance of developing and exercising patience cannot be overstated when taking into account the kinds of social backgrounds from which these men were produced. Many of them were active in the streets, where turbulence, anxiety, and adventure were the principal components of everyday life. Their life experiences had left them with little preparation for being patient. Their becoming fathers placed additional anxiety and turbulence in their lives. Importantly, they credited their participation in the PFF program as an opportunity to learn to value and adapt to modes of behavior that were unknown to them before becoming fathers.

As the following comments reveal, the circumstances where they found the need for patience critical had to do with adjusting to the social role of father, learning how to interact

responsibly with a woman experiencing pregnancy, and learning how to interact with newborns and young child. Darnell, speaking in terms that reflected the perspective of others, explained:

One word. Patience. That's one thing I didn't have going into my relation with my baby's moms...To be honest right now, I'm still working on being a patient person, you know. And if you don't have patience...that's one thing's going to get you...Patient with your baby's moms, patient with your child...when they're screaming and yelling for the first four months and you can't get them to sleep. I mean, patience is a virtue...you really need to be a very patient person...And get some understanding about you. You have to educate yourself...You have to learn.

And Tony said:

Have patience with your baby. Have patience with your baby's mother, wife. Pay attention and just know that somebody else depends on you, needs you....[Fathers must know that] a baby has had the most closeness with her [the mother], you know. [The baby will] recognize her voice, her smell, her everything, so she's going to be like the baby's everything. And to be patient and to be understanding a little gentle towards your baby....Don't go...don't go off on him. He learning too.

Finally, as Harold put it:

It's going to be hard, because your baby mother is going to want you to do this and that, and you're just going to get aggravated. Then you going to want to yell at her and all this other stuff. You know what I'm saying? You can't do that. Just be prepared, you know, it's going to be hard. You got to be with that kid for 18 years. Even if after 18 years, he still going to be around, so you know what I'm saying, you'll still have to take care of him.

Responsibility

A complementary point of emphasis to patience for these young fathers was the importance of responsibility. For most men, this meant maintaining a consistent and visible presence in their children's lives, even if monetary support was not consistent. For example, in commenting about responsible fathering, Darnell said:

Taking care of your kids best way you can, however you can. I mean, if it takes you to be broke all your life to make your kids happy, that's what you're going to have to do pretty much....The influence of being a good father is seeing your kid every day...you know what I mean, having your kids, you know what I mean, saying, "I love you" and shit....Even though they don't know what it means, you know what I mean, you still get the vibe or whatever you get [from the children]....You better play your cards right because you only get one hand, and it's crazy.

In another comment on responsibility, Darnell said:

I think about settling down, not...not like living as wild as you used to and everything....Now you're not responsible for just yourself. You're responsible for a second life. Things become less centered around you and more around your child and stuff. Things that you would do before you can't do any more...You have somebody else that depends on you to live....So it's like you got to start to take stock in what you do and how your actions reflect on your community, because this is the community your child's going to grow up in.

In speaking about his changing notions of fatherhood and responsibility in the rough-and-tumble environment of low-income Indianapolis, Brian said:

Right before I had my babies, I didn't really care too much about stuff. I mean, I wasn't out here bothering people or nothing like that, but I ain't...somebody ask you to do something, "Come on, let's go out, I don't care where they at." But I have my babies, so I'm cool, man, I don't need...it ain't even worth it. I mean, I might....I know I ain't no punk. I don't care what you thinking about me, but I know I ain't no punk so, I ain't out here trying to prove nothing.

Responsible fathering also meant putting forth a conscious effort to exemplify positive behavior when in the children's presence. As Maurice put it:

[Fatherhood is a] big responsibility. Because now you got this little boy or little girl who's going to be looking up to you, and some things you might do and they pick up, like boom! You know what I'm saying? So you got to watch pretty much everything that you do, everybody that's around your child. You just got to be on your square because it's a very big responsibility....A good father, a father that listens, a father that's there, and a father that's consistent...It's hard work, man. It's hard. It's not as easy as you thought it was when he popped out and you holding him, your whole life is about to change. You can no longer put yourself first. You know what I'm saying? You can't go to the mall and just get you a pair of sneakers or something now. You got to get him some sneakers and look out for him, make sure he good to go to school before you can worry about yourself.

Eduardo conveyed that fatherhood is about the need for fathers to do the following: "To take care of themselves and to be very responsible to their children, because the children have no fault and why should they be suffering. And as we get older we do foolish things and the children don't have any fault."

Discipline and Affection

In their role as fathers, the men also discussed their views on handling discipline and showing affection toward their children. In general, the men's views toward discipline and affection were conditioned by the gender and age of the children. Affection was more appropriate for younger children and less so for older males. Discipline was important when setting boundaries for young children but a more flexible approach was needed, especially in the case of daughters, once the children matured. In all cases, the men reported that their beliefs and attitudes regarding

discipline and affection had resulted from or matured through their participation in the PFF program.

Although the issue of discipline was often a source of anxiety for the men, especially those that did not reside with their children consistently, it appeared to pose no significant or enduring problems in their relationships with their children or their children's mothers. In addition, the men explained that PFF helped them understand more fully the intricacies of effective interaction with their children and avoid being too harsh on the children as a result of problems that actually had more to do with their interaction with the children's mothers.. As Derrick put it, "I don't [try to give the older son a hard time]...nah, because it ain't his fault that he was born because I gave it up and his mama gave it up."

None of the men were opposed to spanking per se although they all claimed to be careful about how they administered discipline, and each clearly recognized and pointed out that spanking was becoming less acceptable in mainstream American society. The men did not regard spanking as a necessary response to their children's infractions, but as a last resort among a range of disciplinary options. As Maurice said:

Sometimes I whup him. Sometimes I take his stuff from him. Sometimes I just make him sit on the couch because that gets him to think better than all the other things. Other than that, I'm not too big on whupping his butt...I mean, it depends...sitting here talking to him sometimes just ain't going to get it.

All the men spoke about the need to adjust their disciplinary tactics as their children aged. They all recognized that toddlers and younger children were just beginning to make sense of rules, and they thought that being clear and somewhat forceful was appropriate. In fact, the men believed that increasingly formal discipline was appropriate as the children reached elementary school age. Darnell's approach to discipline for children of that age was shared by the other men: "I think in the beginning—extremely strict. Extremely strict. I mean, lay down the law...Like you let the child know, you can do this, this, and this. You can't do this, you can't do this....As they get older then you start releasing the reins a little bit...let them start making their own decisions a little bit."

In talking about discipline for older children, the men remained quite mindful of what the adolescent years could bring in terms of expanding curiosity, extending one's sense of independence, increasing one's desire to challenge authority, and enhancing one's willingness to take risks. Consequently, all the men said that they wanted their children to be in positions where they could make responsible choices because they believed that they could not actually force an adolescent to do the right thing. This pattern of disciplinary approaches was informed by the men's own life experiences. Darnell said, "I'd say by the time she's like 16, that's when I'll probably start just let go...I'll be, okay, 'You're at the point where you know right from wrong...You're going to make your own decisions, you're going to make your own mistakes anyway.'"

One point of difference in the discussion about discipline concerned gender. The men said that discipline should be handled differently between boys and girls. Derrick offered a view that reflected their collective sentiments:

Well, maybe with a girl, you know, [you have to go] a little bit lighter....they'll both know the same thing if they grow up...but you might be a little tougher with a boy....You don't want him to grow up acting like your girl, you know what I mean?...Not, you know what I mean, you ain't got to beat on them or nothing hard, you know. With the girl, do the same thing, I'm going to slap her lighter than I slapped him.

Above and beyond all else, the men said that honest and unfiltered communication was essential for effective and responsible discipline. Samuel said, "I think you got to be straight...You got to let your kid know what's right and what's wrong....Like, you can't play with them...you can't be switching....If you told them that's bad, that's bad. You can't just tell them that this is bad today and then tomorrow that it's right to do." Eduardo spoke in similar terms by saying "not necessarily be strong [very strict], but be honest and be truthful to whatever the situation may be."

The men were also clear that discipline should be instituted by both mothers and fathers and that it was important that the children view both parents as disciplinarians even if there were some advantages with having fathers often appear more intimidating and threatening. Samuel said, "I would say it's a shared job, and that's what I would like. But it's not like that in my situation." While the men were clear about their philosophies of discipline, they also noted that the actual practice should always be subject to modification, especially as the men were still in the process of growing more comfortable and self-assured as fathers. In terms of determining how to apply the proper amount of discipline, a common view, expressed by Darnell, was that he was "still trying to find that...that middle ground."

In terms of displays of affection, all eight of the men stressed that shows of physical affection toward their children were essential, especially toward younger children. Two men, Maurice and Brian, suggested that it was not necessary to show as much visible affection to older boys. Darnell commented on the need for affection by both males and females.

[Showing affection is] extremely important. Extremely important. I mean, mothers ain't the only ones with emotions. They're not the only ones with feelings....I grew up a very emotional person....I believe I got that from my mom....I think all...all human beings, men and female...have emotions. Just men tend to hide it more, you know....Yeah [hug and kiss sons as much as daughters], if not more. Because there ain't nothing wrong with being caring, you know what I mean? Loving your kids. But...no. Sometimes, you know, the mom might do it more than you, but you might try to do it just as much as she does, so they'll know, you know, that you both love them the same equal amount.

Most men with more than one child said that an important dimension of fatherhood is making sure that children are treated equally and given a balanced amount of attention. As Derrick said, "I know all of them got to be treated equal because, you know, they'll feel rejection and shit. I felt that when I was growing up, so I ain't, you know, I ain't going to put somebody else through that."

Views on the Respective Roles of Fathers and Mothers

The men's views on what it meant to be a father rested in part on their understanding that women had vastly increased their participation in the world of work. This led the men to reconsider both fatherhood and motherhood in the context of modern times

Speaking about the changing role of both mothers and fathers, Darnell said:

From what I've heard, fathers in the past were like pretty much just the breadwinners, and that was just about it. They would be the ones out working when the mother would stay home and deal with the child's, you know, like paternal needs and the emotional needs and stuff like that...All the father would do was earn the money, punish the kids when he comes home. Give out the spankings, you know...The father wasn't back then...as emotionally invested in the father-child relationship as they are now. You know, I've definitely seen the difference in that...I think it's definitely going in the better, in the right direction, you know. Especially with women working more...It's becoming more...more balanced out a little more, you know, it's been...the father is becoming a lot more invested in their children's personal lives and emotional stability.

In another quite telling remark, Brian said:

Like my daughter was living with me [at some point recently]...I couldn't find nobody to do my daughter's hair. I had to do it so. I mean, I ain't about to pay nobody to do it. Like I remember my friend's coming over, I'm sitting there, I got my daughter through my legs, I'm doing her hair. They like, "What you doing?" "Ain't nobody else going to do it. It's all about being a daddy..."I know I ain't no punk. I'm being a daddy. That's what I told them. That's what daddies do [nowadays].

The severe economic challenges facing these men as they strove to deal with being fathers stimulated their adoption of some more progressive sentiments about the role of mothers in relation to their involvement in the labor force. As Brian put it:

I mean, it's 2003. I mean, it's cool to be an at-home mom, but I feel like if that's...if that's going to better the household and bring more money in, then yeah, I mean, step up and get a job. I mean, if you all comfortable, the man's comfortable with you staying at home and doing that, then it's alright. Long as ain't nobody hurting, ain't nobody struggling...I just feel like in a relationship, it should be a balance. Shouldn't nobody have no higher authority than nobody. It should be a balance, but everybody got they own different set of rules. I know in my household, I ain't going to be working, breaking my back, while she sitting at home watching "Oprah" and all that all day [laughter]. She going to be right at work with me, something.

Finally, Harold said:

Because, like as parents, you're supposed to do things together. You see a lot of mothers are out here...depending on the father to do everything. And just because he's a man and whatever, and men are stronger, don't mean you all get to sit around on your asses all day and not do nothing and expect for the father, the man, the male to bring money home and bring groceries home and stuff. You know what I'm saying?...Just like a male shouldn't expect to come home and always find food on the table. This girl shouldn't have to cook all the time. You know what I'm saying? He should cook too....You as two people, you all should be partners, you know what I'm saying. You're all partners....Don't expect one another to do everything.

While all the men accepted the idea of both fathers and mothers earning income, Derrick, Darnell, and Tony were more committed to the traditional gender-based roles of the father serving as the “breadwinner” role and the mother serving as the “caretaker” of children. As Tony expressed, “If there's enough money coming in with one, then you know what I mean, and you're not looking at like upgrading your standard of living and you're pretty content, you know what I mean, you should let her be the housewife and the man go down and get the bread.”

Derrick and Darnell also often expressed more traditional sentiments when discussing how each parent should interact with their daughters in comparison to their sons. For example, while Derrick argued for the legitimacy of both mothers and fathers in the work world, he said the following about how the children's needs should be met:

A man ain't going to teach you to braid your hair or something, you know, because I don't know how to braid, and I couldn't teach my daughter how to braid. And, you know, girly stuff, you know what I mean...I think it's easier for a male to relate to a male, you know what I mean, in that kind of sense.

Despite differences in opinion on the roles of men and women in the world of work and childrearing, the men were united in their belief that two active parents were essential for providing a high-quality childhood experience for their children. Men who were raised without two parents in the home used some of their time in the PFF program to rethink the quality of their own childhood experiences now that many of them were not living with their children. Darnell offered one perspective on this:

Women's relationship with children has actually suffered somewhat because they're working....Like I said, I grew up in a single-mother home, in a single-parent home, whatever. And my mom wasn't there a lot....it definitely strained our relationship or whatever....I'm not as close to my mother as a lot of my friends I know are close to their mother, you know, because like I said, my brother raised me for the most part and stuff, you know, because she was working all the time.

Perceptions on the Role of Religion and Community Environment

In the course of the fieldwork, a significant amount of time centered on asking the men about both their sense of the resources necessary for good fathering, beyond having a job and a comfortable residence. In response to this line of inquiry, the men identified the role of religion in childrearing. Interestingly, seven of the eight men were rather nonchalant about the role of religion in their own lives, saying that they would not prevent their children from pursuing it, nor prevent their children's mothers from involving their children, but that it was not especially important for them. However, although they did not practice their faith in any consistent way, six of the eight men said that religion could be an important resource to draw upon and include in childrearing.

Darnell offered: "My thoughts about religion has always been, if it helps you be a better person, I can't knock it. You know, I can't knock something that is helping the person—helping you become a better person. If not being in church help you be a better person, that's fine. If being in church helps you to be a better person...then I mean how bad can it be?" Samuel and Harold were the only men who were dismissive of any notion of religion being important in family life.

Only Derrick, who drew from his turbulent past to explain why religion was so important, spoke of the necessity for children to have some sustained exposure to religion. He said:

Yeah, they should believe in God. I went, I went to church when I was probably...from probably about...6 years old 'til I was probably about 14...[Then] I started getting rebellious into everything. I was out of there, and started doing whatever I wanted to, staying out whenever I wanted to, but...it was crazy though. Yeah, God is a must. You need him pretty much or some kind of religion. Because if not, you're just going to be out here for no purpose.

Another line of inquiry was the extent to which fathers and mothers could help their children avoid succumbing to the often odious conditions of life in low-income, urban communities. The men were very concerned about the potential effects of their children's exposure to living in an impoverished community riddled with obstacles to stability and mobility—drugs, inadequate housing, and poor employment prospects. They were also highly conscious of how succumbing to some of these conditions threatened their capacity to be good fathers. For instance, all the men talked about the proliferation of gangs and narcotics in the neighborhoods in which they lived or were reared (although both Darnell and Derrick said that they now resided in more stable communities that did not present as severe a threat in these areas).

Each man acknowledged that these problems made it especially hard to raise children in lower-income urban communities. While each father believed he could do a great deal—though certainly not everything—to circumvent or minimize those effects, he also pointed out that once children entered into their teenage years they would begin making more independent choices about their associations and activities. The men recognized that a parent could guide children to the right choice, but not make it for them.

There was common agreement that the best strategy was to try to shield the children from threatening circumstances and conditions as much as possible when the children were young, and hope that through conversation and role-modeling the children would make the best choices for themselves as they got older. Ultimately, the men were hopeful that they could offer the right kind of guidance for their children, but aware enough of their own backgrounds and choices to know that their children will become independent actors, just as they did at some point in their lives.

In explaining how individual initiative would matter in the end, Brian said:

It depends on the person really...you got a choice. I mean, like if you living in the hood, I mean, it's around you all at time, and it's kind of hard for you to get away from...That's why there's so many... young dudes get caught up in it... But I mean it really just depends on a person...what type of character they got and what they want for theyself. Because I got a cousin right now who's a freshman at IU [Indiana University], lived in the hood and his mother strung out on dope or whatever. He in college right now. He ain't get caught up in...and he never smoked no weed, never drunk nothing. But he looking at it all day. His little brother, same [household] situation. He got caught up in it...One little cousin doing time right now, whatever, and that's perfect example—one in college, one in jail...It depends on you, really.

Relationships with the Mothers of Their Children

The men's relationships with the mothers of their children were complex and varied, in part because all but one had more than one child by a different mother. The relationships were often marked by tension and conflict. This section first describes the men's relationships with the mother(s) of their children and discusses the degree of importance and effort the men placed on reducing conflict between themselves and these women to be better fathers and lead healthier lives.

With the exception of Harold (who had an ongoing relationship with the mother of his only child), the men had extremely tense relationships with the mothers of their oldest children. The men reported encountering problems with the mothers within the first year of their child's life. The four men who fathered children with a partner other than the mother of their first child, (i.e., Brian, Samuel, Derrick, and Maurice), experienced conflicts with the mother of the first child almost immediately upon informing her about the forthcoming child. The other major source of conflict was grounded in the men's inability to provide financial support or to serve effectively as a base of emotional support for the mothers.

Darnell's account of the conflict that soon emerged between him and the mother of his daughter richly describes the general pattern experienced by most of these men. He said:

I never had to deal with a pregnant woman in my life....The pregnancy itself was a big factor in us breaking up because it was just a tremendous amount of stress....I didn't know about the hormones that went through a woman's body when she was pregnant and stuff. So all her mood swings and everything was

such a shock to me. It surprised me, because like she would attack me out of nowhere, you know, verbally and everything....I didn't know what to attribute it to, so I kind of just saw it as her flipping out, you know, on her own or something....So I ended up, you know, saying some things I didn't mean, she said some things she didn't mean and stuff and, you know, it gets to a point where you say something that you can't take back.

The worst relationship of the eight appeared to be that of Brian, who soon developed an extremely hostile relationship with the mother of his first child that continued throughout his time in the study. Although he claimed that he did not engage in violent encounters with her, a protection order was issued after a loud fight between the two of them. Brian explained that she took advantage of the order to deny him access to his daughter as well as to get him in trouble with the law. In assessing his situation with the mother of his daughter Brian went on to say:

I get to see my son whenever I want to...It just ain't no problem....But my daughter's mother, "Can I come?" I got to call her like...like put a 'pointment in or something like that [laughs]...It's either "I'm going out of town," or "We got family coming in." It's always something. Always....I get tired of getting rejected. The situation my daughter is in now...I don't know what's she doing on a day-to-day basis....Her mother, she ain't right, and the guy that she with used to be my best friend [laughs]...He got a baby by her now....When I come over there to see her, he just treats me like a stranger. I mean, I ain't really got no...too many words for him anyway. It's just one them things—met her, slept with her, and baby....He end up getting her pregnant....This guy see my daughter more than me. That's what really messes me. I mean, that burns me up on the inside. Like birthdays and holidays, this dude's seeing my daughter.

Maurice, who also had a strained relationship with his child's mother, commented:

You know, if she would just let me be me and let me kick it with my son, because I don't, I don't put my baby in no harm's way. I don't drink around him. I don't smoke around him, so, you know what I'm saying? I don't want him doing the same stuff I did growing up....I thought we was going to get married and, you know, have a nice little happy home, but she ran me up in the funnies [had police reports filed on him] one too many times for things I didn't do. Things that's on my record that I got to get expunged and they want a gang of money for that. It was better for me to leave her alone or I was going to prison.

Despite problems with former partners, all the men desired a strong relationship with a woman and a stable family life. Three of the eight desired marriage with their current partners, all of whom were the mothers of at least some of their children. Derrick continued his relationship with his second partner while participating in the PFF program, and Maurice entered into the second relationship after completing participation in the program. In both cases, the men were able to draw from their experiences in the program in order to evaluate their earlier relationships and to come to appreciate their current relationships more fully.

Derrick wanted to marry his current partner, the mother of his second and third child. Maurice also expressed some hope that he might marry the mother of his newborn daughter (his second child). Both pairings emerged after the men developed irreconcilable differences with the mothers of their first children. Samuel, whose relationship with his current partner was already well established before enrolling in the PFF program, also indicated that he hoped they would marry and that participation in PFF allowed him to acquire some skills and resources that became crucial for establishing the stability and comfort that he felt were the keys to his success in this relationship thus far. Brian was also more confident about the future prospects with the mother of his younger child. As he said:

I been with her since I was 15 years old. I mean, she stuck with me when she found I made another baby. So that's one thing....I mean, it's just like a normal relationship. We get mad at each other now and then. But I know she still going to be there for a while. I mean, I don't know what's going...what's going to happen in the long-term...(but) I see us still being together. We just...we have our ups and downs just like anybody else.

As noted above, Harold's situation stood apart from the other men in that he was in an ongoing relationship with the mother of his only child. As for the men involved with different mothers of their second or third children, they viewed their participation in PFF as instrumental in helping the men to make more appropriate choices for themselves (or at least help them prepare to make more appropriate choices) for partnering and possible marriage in the future, as well as deal with issues of conflict with their current partners.

Learning to Manage and Reduce Conflict for the Sake of the Children

Although each man exhibited significant growth and development as fathers, most were not yet functioning in stable or desired family settings or had a fully secure sense of how all their children would find desired places in their lives. This meant that their capacity to function as fathers was closely tied to their relationships with at least one woman with whom they did not intend to re-partner or marry. Accordingly, the men explained that they had to be careful in navigating actual and potential conflicts with these women. It also meant that they had to work hard to shield their children from conflict in the course of their interactions with the mothers.

The major lesson that PFF emphasized that the men were able, to varying degrees, to put into practice was to work toward reducing conflict whenever possible and, when or if it emerged, manage it in ways that would not exacerbate the problems at hand. The importance of stepping away from conflict—conveyed by the men saying that they would literally walk out the door until tensions had subsided—was a major point of emphasis. As Maurice said in talking about the mother of his first child:

I been trying and I been biting my tongue a lot, because cussing and arguing ain't going to get me no where, back to stage one...You know what I'm saying. I'm not even going to go there with you. Plus in front of my son, so...I mean, we have to have a relationship for my baby, but I think our relationship should just be mother and father relationship...nothing any more than that. And, I don't need to be her

friend, I don't need to know your business. Long as you taking care of my baby, we good.

While talking about relations with the mother of his oldest son, Derrick said, "I usually don't do it [argue] around my kids...because they be freaking out looking at you like you fittin' to kill something. Shit. But if we start arguing like that, I end up leaving. I take off walking."

The men also learned to take into account that the emotional anxieties or tensions that sometimes continued to surface in their interactions with their children's mothers were not to be directed at the children. In other words, they came to see that their children were not at fault for the often-difficult circumstances that entered into their parents' lives. Darnell spoke much about the intense fights that he had with the mother of his daughter, referring to the exchanges as vicious and the woman's attitude toward him as riddled with hatred. Darnell said that he had learned to calm down, withdraw from the scene of conflicts, and forgo arguments that could create an unpleasant environment for his daughter. Reflecting upon the relationship, he said:

I know there's a lot of things I could have changed, that I could have done better....When she yelled at me, instead of yelling back, I should have gave her a hug...or should have left the house, you know. Or something like that. Just should have let things die down....I'm not the one to like back down easily from an argument. So when someone's coming at me, I'm going to attack you right back, you know....So, like I said...it was a terrible, like messy breakup. But like several months down the line, I started to realize all the things that I did wrong and ways that I could have done better and realized all the things...how I messed up and stuff. So I ended up apologizing to her about that. We had like a long talk about it, everything....We ended up breaking up like a month, a month and a half after my daughter was born....Ten months later, is when I apologized to her. It wasn't until last January...when she actually said to me that she forgive me, that she's willing to put everything behind us....that was like right before my daughter turned 3. So I mean, even though I apologized to her when my daughter was like 10 months, it wasn't 'til my daughter was almost 3 that she said, "Darnell, let's...let's bury the hatchet..." She saw the way I changed.

Samuel explained that even though arguments persisted between him and his sons' mothers, they are handled much better now, especially with the mother who maintained a relationship with him since he entered and completed PFF:

I think it's good. It's good. It's not great because we...we...you know, we have...kind of like arguments and stuff like that, but...it's not because we want itIt's just because of the stress. We get too stressed out because we can't...like we got a lot of bills and stuff like that and, you know. That's what it is. It's not, it's not more than that. But it could be better. Like once we...we start getting out of bills, debt and all that.

Commenting on how his son reacted if he were present during a vitriolic exchange between the mother and Samuel, he said, "They do pick up everything. He even acts different

when she's in the house. Like if I want him, if I want him...he will act a certain way and when she come, he will act certain way, different way. So they know, they know a lot."

In discussing his relations with his fiancée, the mother of his two youngest children, Derrick said "We argue, but you know, I mean...every relationship do. And I don't know...I think it's mostly because we ain't got our own place, you know. When you still living under somebody roof and we trying to raise our own family...She's living with me and my parents." Unfortunately, Derrick continued to have problems with the mother of his older son over whom Derrick was immersed in a long-standing custody battle. As Derrick put it, "My fiancée and her [the mother of his older son], they don't get along; I don't get along with her. Nobody get along with her." Rather than express overt hostility though, Derrick calmly said that he continued to work with the situation as best as he can.

Eduardo claimed that when he did see his children and their mother (who were residing in a homeless shelter in a different part of the state), both made extraordinary efforts to avoid conflicts and both were committed to maintaining open communication.

Consistent with the other men's views, Tony said the following:

In some cases, you know, maybe the parents, it's best for the parents not be together. But as long as the father's in the kid's life, whether he's living at home with them constantly or not, then he'll be affected by his father. But it can't have an effect if he's not in their life...You know, like I said if he doesn't see his father or not...If it's going to be more detrimental to the kid [the parents should not be together], you know what I mean? Seeing a lot of fighting and arguing, that affects a kid, you know. All that negativity and violence, just too much anger and pressure.

A critical factor in the relationship between these fathers and mothers appeared to be how other women in these men's lives affected the men's interaction with their children. Some of these women were mothers of the men's other children, and some women were the most recent acquaintances in the men's lives. Whatever the case, the men were mindful that they had to be careful and observant about how their children reacted to the presence of these other women. Darnell talked about how his daughter reacted somewhat awkwardly whenever she saw him kissing his current girlfriend. He said that without having a clear sense of how to manage this issue, he did talk to his daughter about the differences in his life and her mother's life, and why each may have different important people in their lives.

Harold's situation is different in that he was the only man who reported consistently positive interactions with the mother of his first and only child. As he explained, "Me and my girl we was like, you know, we really feeling each other, you know, feeling we going to be with each other forever. You know, even though we go through our little problems here and there, but there's always a lot of love in between. You know, so me and her get along." It is important to note, however, that Harold did confess to having "occasional" physical altercations with this woman before he entered the PFF program at Boston's Father Friendly Initiative.

The provision of nonmaterial support appeared critical in reducing tensions, especially for men who found it difficult to provide money, clothes, or diapers. Both mothers who were interviewed at length (Darnell's ex-girlfriend and the mother of Derrick's two youngest children) said that one of the most positive and valued aspects of how these men functioned as fathers was not only that they spent time with the children, but that they performed duties that were traditionally regarded as motherly obligations.

Each man was able to readily identify some positive traits in how these women functioned as mothers, and this was a pivotal factor in their own effort to try to function as responsible parents when in the company of these women. For example, when focusing specifically on the mother of his older son Samuel said, "Like even though the other girl...I don't trust her, whatever, but she's still like a good person." He went on to say that she cared for their son and he believed that she was willing to do whatever it took to acquire the best for him even if, as Samuel believed, she was not fully committed to Samuel's best interest. He said that he tried to prevent that lack of concern from affecting his interaction with her because that kind of behavior, he believed, "play[s] a big role in the kid's life. It does, because I seen it. I seen it."

Similarly, Tony spoke of a more positive situation with the mother of his child as time progressed, even as he was pursuing a relationship with another woman:

It's pretty good. It was bad, but then it got better. You know...growth, maturity, time apart....She's just going be the mother of my daughter. You know what I mean? Because I got me a girl. And I ain't trying to let her go. She's a good one. But I just want my daughter's mother to, like to always confide in me, always...you know what I mean, come to me when she needs things and....I just still want...me [and her] to be on good terms always, you know what I mean....Um, lot of times her attitude towards me can anger me...And the same with me. You know, I mean my attitude may anger her, or my mentality. You know. But she also does things that makes me be a better father. Like when I see her reading with my daughter and playing with her and I'm just sitting back watching them, like if she do a good job, and I know I do a good job, and I mean, so it kind of keeps my level pretty high, you know, kind of compete-not competing, but always...wanting good for my daughter.

Each man discussed his improvement as a father as a result of participating in the PFF program. At the same time, it is important to note that while some men saw an improvement in their relationships with their former partners and were appreciative of their positive attributes as mothers, each man had a history of conflict at different points with the mothers that ranged from consistent verbal battles to violent interactions. The end result was that, apart from Harold, none of the men believed that a meaningful relationship, much less a marriage, could transpire with the mother of their first-born children. The problems, conflicts, and tensions associated with the first pregnancy and the months following the birth left seven of these men feeling that long-term partnering with the mothers of these children would not result in a healthy family situation for the child, mother, or father. Instead, the major benefit of participation in PFF for these men was the development of a richer and deeper understanding of the myriad aspects of fatherhood, including what a father should expect, prepare for, and take into account in current or future efforts at partnering, so that more conducive family arrangements might be achieved.

CHAPTER 4. PERSPECTIVES ON THE PFF PROGRAM EXPERIENCE

This chapter describes the young father's experiences with the PFF program, including how they learned about and became involved in the program, the aspects of the program they most valued, and the ways the program had made a positive difference in their lives.

Becoming Involved in the PFF Program

The men in this study learned about the PFF program in various ways and were attracted to the program for various reasons (see box). Eduardo, Samuel, Harold, and Tony were all mandated by court, parole, or probation orders to enter into a program that would help them to stabilize their lives and garner support for employment as well as for fatherhood. The other men were encouraged to consider participating in the program by friends, relatives, agency staff, or others concerned about their situation. Darnell was the only man to report that conflicting relations with the mother of his child was the primary reason for his interest in engaging in the PFF program. Other services and resources that attracted the men to the program included employment assistance, anger management, parenting education, and counseling.

Perceptions about the PFF Services Received

The men said that the most important contribution the PFF program made was the creation of a safe space to share concerns, points of confusion, and curiosities about fatherhood in the company of other young men who also wanted to confront these matters. Informal as well as formal interaction with agency staff became pivotal dimensions of their experience, and a large part of what compelled them to sustain their participation. The men also highly valued the comprehensive design of the PFF initiative, and the men's initial interest and subsequent commitment to the PFF program was largely grounded in the range of services provided by the PFF sponsoring agency. They became committed to the PFF program because they found it a valuable source of support for education, information, and employment, as well as emotional growth and development. In particular, finding out that the PFF program included help in addressing these employment-related shortcomings made them even more willing to commit to a "fatherhood" program.

While the men were attracted to the PFF program for various reasons and not out of any specific desire to focus on fatherhood, each of them felt that he was soon receiving information and training that allowed him to prepare for or better manage his situation as a father. In praising the quality and intimacy of the counseling that he received along with the additional services, Darnell said:

The one-on-one counseling too...that they give is a tremendous help too. And, like I said, just other things that they do as far as, you know, housing placement, and on jobs and stuff like that...Those are important as far as, like I say...when you become a father, all these things about being a man becomes that much more important...it's like the stronger you are as a man, the better you are as a father, you know....[They] help strengthen you and like, like your self-esteem.

PFF Program Exposure and Entry Experiences

Discussions about how the men learned about the PFF programs and what attracted them to enroll included the following accounts:

Darnell: “I believe it was, a woman came to us when me and my baby’s mom was together...We came to this from what was called Healthy Baby...Healthy Family, or something like that...And she was just like talking to us, consulting us about different programs for us...different like benefits and stuff like that...And she told me about the Father Friendly Initiative.”

Derrick: Derrick said that he found out about the PFF program when he sought court-ordered paternity testing services offered by the PFF sponsoring agency, the Fathers and Families Resource/Research Center (FFRRC) A FFRRC counselor told Derrick about the various programs and resources offered. These included the PFF program and a GED program, both of which Derrick joined.

Brian: “My father had heard about the Father Resource on the radio one day and asked me about it or whatever, and I got involved with the program. I got a paternity test done to get involved with them, and found out...Well, I already knew she was my daughter, but I had to take the test...And after that, we just started going to little dinners they was having and stuff like that, and I got involved with a counseling program they used to have at this church...And my daughter would come sometimes and stuff.”

Maurice: “I got involved through a friend of mine, (he) told me about it...I needed an anger control class, and plus they offered the parenting, and I was about to have a baby, so I figured that would be good for that too.”

Harold: “Well, I found out through the courts...I’m on probation right now, you know...They just put me in the program, the Father Friendly program...I’m saying just to keep myself out of trouble, you know. Get a little counseling, whatever, like that.”

Samuel: “A guy that was coming through these programs, that was in the same halfway house, he told me about the program and I came. When I got here, they told me that they basically could help with anything, you know, that I was a father, I was coming out of jail, they could help me with health insurance. Everything that I needed...to be a better father, so okay that’s what they told me. And I came to the program.”

Tony: “I first heard about this program when I was in jail...I was hoping it was going to help me out. And then one of these facilitators...from this program came in and facilitated that group and I was hearing how he spoke and all the things that the program offered. And I mean I seen that it was good. And so I got this number and I was saying to myself, when I get out, you know, this is going to be one of the things that I’m going to take up to like help me out.”

The degree to which agency staff were caring, knowledgeable, and eager to support them impressed the men and their desire to remain involved in the program was almost always based on having achieved rapport with program staff. This rapport allowed them to feel like they had acquired allies in their quest to stabilize and improve their lives. As Harold said:

So lot of programs, lot of staff and counselors, they don’t even remember who I really am...But when you come [here], it’s like father-friendly...The staff and

counselors are fathers with their sons, little kids. So they teach you, you know, if you just sit down and talk to us, like a father was supposed to do, sit down and talk to us, and tell us how things should go, you know what I'm saying...how do you feel about things, you know.

The actions of particular staff members made the men feel as though their feelings and points of view were as legitimate as those of the mothers of their children. Almost all the men said that the courts, and the legal system more generally, consistently favored mothers. The men regarded their case managers and other agency personnel as the only parties that were consistently empathetic and concerned for them. Hence, while the men viewed that existing institutional structures were biased toward the interests of the mothers, the PFF program became their own institutional base of support. Brian spoke to this point when he said:

I appreciate what Dr. Wallace [Dr. Wallace O. McLaughlin, Director of Fathers and Families Resource/Research Center] is doing for people...it ain't too many people out there like that, like him. I appreciate that I got the time to meet him and build a type of relationship with him...There ain't too many people out there trying to help us out. They're trying to hurt us, really. They were trying to lock us up or just...it's hard for us, man. Man, it's hard for real [laughs] because we got so many temp—temptations and stuff and you get somebody like this who trying to keep you away from it, and help you out, and people ain't really taking advantage of it like they should.

For each man, successful participation in the PFF program was predicated on the program staff's capacity to include other services, formally or informally. These included job search, job training, and job placement, educational enrichment opportunities (usually in the form of GED program), and fatherhood training. Indeed, when discussing the value of the PFF program, the men found it difficult to separate PFF program activities from their more general involvement with and access to program staff and directors, who often provided ad-hoc or special additional services that led either to jobs or to resources that could lead to employment.⁶ This enhanced the men's sense of the agency as a full-service institution to which they could turn even for issues or problems that did not fall within the specific parameters of the PFF program. Thus, the men's positive views regarding the PFF program was associated with having access to a range of services and benefits that extended beyond fatherhood training, but that allowed each man to better himself along a number of dimensions linked to improving his capacity to function effectively as a father.

Each man with a formal child support order worked out his plan with the help of PFF personnel. In addition, Eduardo, whose children lived with their mother in a shelter in western Massachusetts, initially had limited access to his children but, with the help of the PFF program (which included an on-site child support staff person), had established bimonthly weekend visitation by December 2003.

⁶ For example, in one case observed during fieldwork, the supervisor of case workers at Fathers and Families Resource/Research Center learned about a job opportunity at his local dry cleaner. This supervisor directed one of his clients (not a participant in this study) to the business where he subsequently got hired.

The men also appreciated that the PFF initiatives were designed to serve younger fathers. Darnell, for example, said:

You see young guys on the bus sometimes with their kids and stuff like that, or walking the streets with their kids and stuff. But it's one thing seeing it, it's another thing that you're talking to them and you're realizing a lot of stuff that you're going through, they're going through...being able to say, okay, well, at least what I'm doing is nothing new...I mean, there's other people going through the same exact thing as I am. So at least it gives you somebody to be able to empathize with and, you know, and be able to say, okay, yeah, I mean, if this guy can do it, I can do it too, you know.

Group discussions and advice sessions during the PFF program reportedly provided these men with opportunities to learn and share ideas about changes in fatherhood over time and life more generally over time. As Harold said:

Well, we just like sit down as a group, conversate, you know what I'm saying?...as fathers, you know, as parents....how we should be parents and stuff like that, you know, how we should do things in life, you know....It's like basically we're getting counseling...We don't just speak about...like being fathers. We just speak about like what's going on in the streets and stuff like that too.

When asked to discuss how they believed that they had changed as a result of participating in the PFF initiative, the men spoke about emotional growth, personal responsibility, an ability to better manage conflict. For example, Darnell said:

Because of the way I am, when I used to try to hide (my feelings), all it did was hurt me more, you know. It just kind of destroyed me, you know....It really wasn't until I started to, you know, confront my feelings and learn to deal with them and understand them, that actually made me a stronger person, understanding them and being able to deal with them, you know....I'm a very affectionate person, so I show a lot of affection to my daughter and everything. I want her to know that her daddy loves her, that daddy's there to support her...I don't need to be a tough guy in front of my daughter. You know what I mean? [laughs] It's one thing being out in the street when people don't know you and they judge you by the way, you know, you act and everything, but in front of my daughter, I mean, why?

For Samuel, a sense of personal control and accountability came to surface for him as a result of participating in PFF:

Actually, it just made me more stable...I'm with her [mother of his second child] real stable now...I'm providing...for both of my kids, but I'm pretty stable with, with the mother of the youngest one of them...And, um, and it feels good to be like a father....I'm focused more than, than before and, I'm always there now. And it feels good....Like before if I would have worked, then I wouldn't even think of just saving, I would just go...go to the club or whatever...And I wouldn't think of the future...because I always had work but I would work and just live my

life like a day-to-day basis...Like it's different because now I think of...you know, even health insurance, like they put that in my hand...I didn't care that much about health insurance and nothing like that...And when I came...they were like, "Oh, we got to get you health insurance." They got me health insurance...You know, like I'm thinking more in tomorrow.

Darnell said that he used to be a habitual marijuana smoker, and that participation in PFF program helped him to overcome his habit as part of its message that he had to begin taking better control of his life. His growth was also made evident by the fact that he was able to say, despite the numerous problems he had with the mother of his daughter, that he regarded her as a great mother:

I think she's a great mother. I mean...she ain't perfect....She does smoke cigarettes and smoke weed sometimes, this and that, you know, but I mean, as far as...as far as keeping my daughter disciplined and well mannered and stuff like that...yeah, she does a great job of that. I have to say that. Yeah, and educating my daughter, she does a great job of that.

Participation in the PFF program allowed these men to cultivate more complex views and ideas about fatherhood than they had before their involvement. The men argued that they acquired a richer understanding of the responsibilities, expectations, and challenges concerning fatherhood and family living and, most important, how they should approach them.

The most significant of these understandings was that they should be a visible presence in the lives of their children, irrespective of their ability to provide material support. As reflected in the following statements by Harold and Maurice, the men talked about how they learned to accept this understanding by assessing their own early childhood experiences, which for most of them unfolded without the presence of their own fathers. When speaking about the birth of his son, Maurice said:

It was beautiful, man... I mean, I was having a little boy, so I figured I got to do all the things my daddy didn't do with me. I could break the cycle....You know, instead of just paying child support and wanting to get him on the weekends...I want to participate more than that.

And, Harold said:

My father never was around....They say he promised me a lot of things and all this other crazy stuff, but I never got it. But now that I'm a father, I'm a give my son what my father never gave me.

As discussed more fully in chapter 3, the men also emphasized that their participation in PFF helped them more fully understand the intricacies of effective interaction with their children. Accordingly, a principal point of concern raised by most men about discipline was that they avoid being too harsh on the children as a result of problems that actually had more to do with their interaction with the children's mothers. The characteristic that most men pointed to in discussing where they believed they experienced greatest growth as a result of participating in PFF was in acquiring patience. A major lesson that PFF helped the men, to varying degrees, to

put into practice was to work toward reducing conflict whenever possible and, when or if it emerged, manage it in ways that would not exacerbate the problems at hand. The importance of stepping away from conflict—conveyed by the men saying that they would literally walk out the door until tensions between them and their (often former) partners had subsided—was a major point of emphasis.

Another insight that the fathers gained from participating in the PFF program was that as young, socioeconomically disadvantaged men who were now fathers they should expect to make mistakes and operate without complete clarity about how to approach certain issues and circumstances concerning fatherhood. Brian perhaps put it best when he said the following:

I mean, I feel like as far as being my age, 20 years old with two kids, I feel like I'm a good father. But, all right, it's my first time doing it, so...I got to better myself in certain situations, but I ain't never been a father before. Just I'm growing with them really [laughs]. That's basically how I look at it. I'm just growing up with them. I'm still, still a kid myself. I mean, just busted two kids early, so I just got to, got to deal with it and grow up fast.

A general finding is that is that while each man discussed his improvement as a father because of the PFF program, on the whole all but one determined that marriage to the mother of their first child was not an intended or desired option. The problems, conflicts, and tensions associated with the first pregnancy and the months following the birth left seven of these men feeling that long-term partnering with the mothers of these children would not result in a healthy family situation for the child, mother, or father. Instead, the major benefit of participation in PFF for these men was the development of a richer and deeper understanding of the myriad aspects of fatherhood, including what a father should expect, prepare for, and take into account in current and future efforts at partnering, so more conducive family arrangements might be achieved.

Personal growth and development, then, rather than the development of a more committed relationship with a prior partner, was a central outcome for these men as a result of their participation in the PFF program. The importance of personal growth and development was echoed by PFF caseworkers. The men included in this study were considered something of a PFF success story. Yet, the caseworker's assessment of their success was based largely on the degree of the men's growth, given how they came into fatherhood, rather than that each had achieved a uniform standard of positive growth as a capable father and family man. Each man's case managers spoke of how much he had matured as a father throughout their participation in the PFF program, especially in terms of understanding the complexities and demands of responsible fatherhood.

The caseworkers used the term “growth” more than any other in referring to the men, and they also clearly asserted that each father was still very much a “project” in formation. For instance, it was clear that long-term problems with employment could hinder their ability to support their children. Problematic relations with the mothers of their children also remained a key factor. Hence, the caseworkers interpreted as significant growth anything falling within a range of boundaries—from a father's capacity to overcome a substance addiction so he could be a stable, visible presence in his child's life, to a father receiving a GED or other education and training so he could attain stable employment and become a consistent financial provider for his

child. In essence, rather than meeting an absolute measure of success, each father reflected his own pattern of growth.



CHAPTER 5. CHILD SUPPORT AND EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCES

This section describes the men's views and experiences related to child support and employment.

Child Support

The eight men's child support arrangements and obligations are noted in their biographical profiles at the beginning of this report. Five men had child support orders ranging from \$40 to \$90 a week for each child. The other three men did not have formal child support arrangements: Tony (who had joint custody of his daughter), Eduardo (whose children, along with their mother, were cared for in a homeless shelter), and Harold (who had worked out an informal arrangement with his child's mother).

The child support agency was a partner in all the PFF programs, and each man with a formal child support order reported obtaining his current child support arrangement with the help of the PFF program. (In Indianapolis, the PFF program had child support enforcement staff located on site). In all cases, PFF assisted the men with determining a plan of action for paying child support and becoming involved with the child support system. Each explained that he was almost always on time with payments, but that family members provided support in weeks when payments could not otherwise be produced.

Capturing the general sentiment of all the men, Maurice said the following about child support payments and interactions with the mother of his son, "I mean, she understands because he don't want for nothing. Like if he need a pair of sneakers, I go get him a pair of sneakers or my mom will give him a pair of sneakers. Or she [the mother] need clothes, I go into the closet, just give her some clothes or whatever." Like the other men with child support orders, Maurice believed that providing support when specific needs emerged was more critical than providing a set amount of support consistently.

However, each man realized that the mothers were most satisfied with the consistency associated with compliance with a formal child support order. As Brian put it, "Long as she get that check, she happy [laughs]." The men with informal child support arrangements stated that they provided whatever was needed whenever it was needed. Again, the financial support of their own families helped them support their children. As Samuel said, "No, no [I do not have a formal payment plan for my oldest son]. Because I, like I say, my family's ready to take care of him. But I can't...like I'll give him whatever I can...fifty bucks, that's what I can. Like right now that's what I can. I wish I could give you more, but...it's a struggle."

None of these men indicated that they experienced significant difficulty in meeting the expectations of their children's mothers with respect to the amount and type of child support provided. This was the case irrespective of whether the child support arrangements were informal or officially ordered through the courts. It would be inaccurate, however, to suggest that there were no emotional residuals for the men in terms of their involvement in child support. Each man strongly stated that his capacity to provide for his children should mandate that he have consistent access to them, if not joint custody (unless they already had joint custody).

As Derrick, who had extremely limited contact with his oldest child, said:

I ain't really got to see him, so I'm sort of feeling that, you know, if I can't see him, why should I have to pay for him. You know what I'm saying? I don't know where he lives. I don't know what he's doing every day, you know, I don't....Since the last time I went to court and they told me that I had to have \$700 to him before July...July 29th...That's the only thing that I hate about paying child support, because I don't know if it's going to him and for his needs, or to his mom and for her mom's needs...I don't know.

The men shared the perspective that even if they provided nonmaterial support and routinely engaged with their children (i.e., through daily contact and providing child care), the provision of financial support was still the single most important factor legitimating their right to have access to their children. Thus, what has been construed as the most traditional duty of fatherhood, material provision, remained the most compelling argument for why they thought they should be accorded access to their children.

Employment and Labor-Market Experiences

Employment was a central issue for the men and critical on several fronts. It allowed the men to feel better about themselves, their capacity to father most effectively, and their prospects for having healthier relationships with the mothers of their children, especially because it meant that they could provide materially as well as emotionally to the growth and development of their children. Thus, the men were clear that a happier life for them and their children was contingent upon finding and maintaining work.

The men also emphasized that their commitment to PFF was largely because it provided services above and beyond parenting and fatherhood training and, in many cases, had been instrumental in helping these men find employment. PFF staff assisted Samuel in finding his job as a research assistant for an advocacy group, and Darnell received advice from the program about how to return to school so he could pursue his aspiration of becoming a journalist. Tony was employed at the Father Friendly Initiative office in Boston until he abruptly stopped going to work and dropped out of the study in May 2004. In Indianapolis, Brian found work on his own, but commented on how helpful the staff were in sharing ideas and information about jobs with him. Derrick often received leads on possible opportunities at construction sites from PFF staff (several of these informal interactions were observed during on-site fieldwork), and one led to his long-term employment at a construction site by spring 2004. He still hoped to find more permanent and less dangerous work in the future.

In some cases, the men spoke about how their criminal record made it difficult to obtain employment. For example, Harold noted: "Right now it's hard to get a job, tell you the truth...because I got a criminal record...I never did time or nothing like that. I got a record, so it's like a lot of jobs, now they look at your record, so it's hard." Having been in and out of jobs quite often during the previous few years, Harold said he rarely went very long without one and was eager to find another job. In five years of living in Indianapolis, Maurice had little success finding stable work. He said he was employed in "temp services on and off, but nothing, nothing [more than that]." While he had no felonies on his adult record, he had been arrested numerous

times for possession of illegal substances, abuse and battery, and various misdemeanors, all of which he believed stood in his way of finding work.

Darnell reported that finances were not a problem as his mother provided economic support. However, he took it upon himself to work two jobs in order to provide his own support and said that he was in no position to be an active parent when he returned home from working at both jobs each day. This angered his daughter's mother, who was dealing with her own tensions as a new parent. The mother eventually took their daughter into her own mother's home for a month in order to have a more consistent base of emotional and social support. This did not reduce the tension, however. As Darnell said:

She couldn't work, so I had to work, and the fact that we wasn't able to spend any time together, you know, so it's like, you know, she's at her mom's house, like I said, so I mean I'll come home to an empty house all the time, and we used to argue...about me not coming...to see my baby and her as often as I could and stuff. And I was telling her like "Yeah, but I'm dead tired, I'm working two jobs and everything," so...you know, so that was, that was a huge stress there...I was extremely tight on money at that time...So I didn't have really money to give her...and her stresses from taking care of a newborn and being up all night, you know, trying to get her to sleep and everything...me not being able to be there as much as she wanted me to be there, you know...It made it so that when we were together, when I did come there, we argued all the time.

When moving to discussions of future employment prospects, the men stressed job stability more than anything else. They believed that this was the key to being able to provide all that they wanted for their children. As Darnell said:

I'm probably going to go into journalism. I heard that some journalists don't get paid like a ton of money, but I mean, I really enjoy writing. I enjoy sports, so I'm thinking about going into sports journalism, so, actually, I'm getting paid decent money to go watch my favorite basketball, football players play, interview them. [laughs] It's not that bad, you know. And I really enjoy writing and stuff, so it's...like I said, if I could get up every day and say, "I can't wait to go to work," I'm happy. You know, I'm happy. I mean, if you enjoy your job, it's not really work.

Most men desired good-paying jobs that would allow them to work with their hands, which they believed was their best resource for employment. As Harold stated:

I like to work with my hands, basically. So if I was to do painting, I'll do painting...I like real men's jobs—painting, working on cars, roof...like roofing, like landscaping and stuff like that, I like to just work with my hands, I like to get my hands dirty....When you get your hands dirty...you get more experience at things. And then...when you go out there looking for the real job, you get hired because you already experienced...

And Derrick said:

I used to want to be a boxer, but...it's too much. I don't know...Right now, it's too much...I'll probably do it, you know, when I get more stable....Hopefully rapping...Because if not that, I'd say...I don't know, construction. Because I've framed for four years too...built houses. I built for C.P. Morgan, Davis Homes....Yeah, hopefully, having more money than what I got now...Yeah, I really do hope so within the next [year to get his own place]...and hope that I have enough to get a down payment on a house and then I'm going to find a construction crew or something that I can get with. Because I can't deal with this eight...seven, eight, five dollars an hour...it's crazy.

The men lamented that they did not have the kind of educational prerequisites to be more competitive in the job market. Thus, talking about future hopes and possibilities for themselves, their children, and potential families was often steeped in despair about the past as much as in wishes for the future. Derrick made this clear in the following remark:

My mom always wanted me to go to college, but...the kids popped up too....I only had like one and a half credits or something...My mom, she always wanted me to go to college. So I'll still thinking about it, going to, you know, IUP [Indiana University Purdue University at Indianapolis] or ITT Tech [Indiana Technological Institute] or something like that. But you got to...I guess you got to have you have your high school diploma to go to Tech, ITT Tech now.

Darnell also talked about the importance of education and the PFF played in helping him with education and future work prospects:

Education is huge too, as far as like, you know, like programs, training programs, getting people back into school...and not only their diplomas, but also going to college. That's huge, because nowadays, if you don't have some kind of a degree, you're not getting anywhere...Like for them [the Father Friendly Initiative] to emphasize education and everything is like just as important as getting...getting a job or anything like that, because education ultimately will get you a better job than whatever they're going to get you right now, you know...The one-on-one counseling too...that they give is a tremendous help too. And, like I said, just other things that they do as far as, you know, housing placement, and on jobs and stuff like that...Those are important as far as, like I say...when you become a father, all these things about being a man becomes that much more important...Being self-sufficient, and like having your own house...All these things are important...it's like the stronger you are as a man, the better you are as a father, you know...[They] help strengthen you and like, like your self-esteem.

CHAPTER 6. THE MEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON THE FUTURE

The study also explored the men's sense of the future as it pertained to themselves, their children, and their family life. In order to grasp more fully how these men approached their futures, this chapter first describes some pivotal changes that occurred to the fathers over the course of the study and then describes their hopes and aspirations for the future.

Among the Boston-based men, Darnell, who was living with a roommate in fall 2003, found his own apartment in Jamaica Plain, west of his prior stomping grounds of Dorchester. He explained that his former roommate was dealing drugs out of their apartment, causing him extreme anxiety, especially when his daughter was visiting. The move was for the sole purpose of having a safer place for his daughter. Although it was a much smaller apartment than the prior one, he was close to neighborhood parks and in a considerably more private community. Darnell was still going to school and working part-time as of June 2004.

Samuel continued to work at his job throughout winter and spring 2004. The excitement that he had for work when he began participating in the study was replaced by increasing frustration over his inability to conquer the mountain of bills and debts that he had collected over the year. By summer 2004, he said that while he was glad to be working, he was bothered by the fact that his salary did not allow him to establish any savings. Having completed his jail sentence, he was a free man, and he wanted to have some economic freedom as well. Unfortunately, he was not sure how to make this happen. He continued to live with his younger son and that child's mother, and he saw his oldest son consistently, even if not as often as he would have liked.

The Indianapolis-based men experienced the same range of good and bad circumstances. Derrick ultimately failed to gain custody rights to his oldest son, nor did he acquire formal visitation rights. As of summer 2004, he was still hoping to find some way to include this son in his life. In the mean time, he was happy with finding an apartment for his two other children, his fiancée, and himself in a working-class section of Indianapolis. He continued to work at the construction site, while his fiancée served as the primary caretaker for the children. He remained hopeful that he could find work that provided better hours and fewer health risks. He kept out of trouble in the past year, mostly because he focused on his family and his new job.

Brian also experienced new work and a new residential arrangement during the course of this study. He began working with his brother at a warehouse, and the two of them moved into an apartment together in spring 2004. He did not find any success in establishing visiting rights to his daughter, and he was not hopeful that the situation would improve any time soon. He said that he kept himself busy by going to work and providing for his son (whom he saw weekly), and that he avoided both people and situations that could interfere with his ability to focus on each.

Following his first interview for the study, Maurice returned to using narcotics. He explained that he began getting bored with being home, and by February 2004 was hanging out with old friends in the neighborhood. Associating with these people led him to do some things that he used to do, and by the early spring, Maurice was staying out at night and often not returning home for days at a time. One evening Maurice was with friends when a drug transaction initiated by a friend took a bad turn. The situation got violent and Maurice said that

he realized that he could have been killed just for being in the midst of it. He then decided that he had to get help. He entered a 72-hour rehabilitation program and was back home by June 2004, returning home within a few weeks of the birth of his second child. He stated that he was focusing on keeping himself together for the sake of his little girl.

With the exception of Eduardo and Tony (who dropped out of the study after the first round of interviews), this is where each man stood as of July 2004. Therefore, their views about the future, expressed at different points over the course of the study, can be considered from this vantage point.

In their considerations of the future, all the men spoke of wanting to achieve what could be described as basic family-centered goals and objectives. They wanted to be married and living with their children. They wanted secure jobs that would provide them with the ability to send their children to college, or at least as much schooling as they were prepared to handle. They wanted a life far removed from the family instability and tension they had experienced since becoming fathers. They also spoke of their desire to achieve some sense of inner peace, grounded in the feeling that they were living their lives appropriately and responsibly. In essence, these men's future hopes and plans centered on family, community, employment, children, and self.

Given the importance that he placed on the community, Darnell said that he hoped to get more involved in community affairs so he could help ensure that a healthy environment was available to his daughter when in his company:

I know my daughter's going to grow up in the same community that I'm living in right now, so I mean, I don't want her growing up with a bunch of shootings and drugs and everything. So, so if there's any way I can make that better, then, you know, that, that'll be great...I want her to be able to get good influences from me...you know, so she can be a better person growing up too....When you think about manhood, about being responsible...and having integrity and then stuff like that, you know...all these things just kind of double when you become a father, because now what you do directly affects another person.

Harold echoed some of this sentiment in stressing the desire for a safe community in which to raise his son. He said, "If we still live in the city of Boston, I want to just move...like [to] the suburbs of Boston... you know, like in the real back roads, like with a nice house and stuff. Or like even if it's like apartments back there, you know, like in a little quiet area...where there's not a lot of drama and stuff around there."

Other men simply spoke about the desire for a stable family life with children who were happy and well prepared for successful adult lives. Tony said:

I hope to have a family, you know, where I got a whole house and a family to come home to. You know, and we do family activities, do the type of things that I did as a young kid, but permanent. And make it everlasting, so when my kids get older we still do those type of things together.

Brian stressed the same points, as well as the hope that his children did not end up as he had—a parent while still a young person:

I want to see my kids happy, but I want them to be successful too. I don't want them working no dead-end job and...I mean, if they get pregnant or have a baby before a certain age, I ain't going to be disappointed. I'll probably be upset, but ain't really too much I can say. I'm just going to tell them what they need to do. But as far as that, I want them to be in college. I want them to go to school. Just, like basically, what my father taught me. Further their education as much as they can really. And just don't limit yourself, don't get too comfortable.

Darnell, who had a detailed action plan for the next few years for his daughter, said:

We haven't talked about like the distant future. We talk about the near future, about getting her into daycare... We got her into daycare right now. We're going to get her into preschool next year. And we've already, we just signed up for METCO, for the METCO program...I don't want my daughter having to suffer in these Boston schools because these schools just don't compare. So, I said, how about we get her signed up for METCO ASAP...I just started up a bank account right now, putting money in there for my daughter and stuff...I mean I know a lot of parents tend to like pave out a future for their child, but I'm trying not to do that. I just want her to get...to get into something that she enjoys, you know, something, something that can support her and something that she enjoys.

Finally, the men had hopes for themselves as members of society and in their roles as fathers, and for their children. Again, much of this conversation emphasized stability, particularly in the socioeconomic and emotional dimensions of their lives. Darnell said:

There's always room for improvement [in terms of being a father]. I don't care how good you are...It's like since I'm in school and I'm working full-time there, I tend to be tired a lot when my daughter comes and stuff. So it's hard for me to get more...like get the energy to do things with her, but, you know. I'm hoping like, especially when it gets warmer out and stuff like that, I could like bring her out more and try to do more things like that. And hoping like as she gets older it will be easier too, but I know that things I do now is going to affect her when she gets older. She feels like she can't like trust me or confide in me, or, you know, or like I...like I think she doesn't feel like she has my support now, it's going to affect the way she act towards me in the future, you know. So I don't want...I'm hoping that things I do now [being in school and working] doesn't, doesn't, you know, isn't like hurting our relationship or anything like that, for the future.

And Samuel said:

Oh, five years...I would like to have my own house...I'd be working and have my own house and be able to be more stable...It's kind of like I'm just starting right now, and...And everything's going fine, but I'm still struggling a little bit...all these debts and all this stuff that I have, you know, I got to clean it before I can,

you know, before I go in, that's what it is. And I'm doing pretty good right now. But, yeah, it's going to take a while. In five years, I see myself like doing my house and probably real stable, because I'm not...I'm not stable yet...I would like to [be married]....We haven't talked about it. We did, but we haven't like really talked about it.

The other men said that rather than pursuing clearly defined goals, they must continue to take the necessary time to define appropriate goals for their future. This was especially the case for the men who had been incarcerated more recently, or who had been in substance abuse programs and were now positioned to think more clearly about themselves and the key people in their lives. As Maurice put it, "You know, I'm still listing down my goals, trying to narrow it down what I want to do with myself."

In talking more specifically about family, not surprisingly, the men focused much of their commentary on their children and the hope that they will have the best possible futures. Maurice simply stated that he wanted his children to have opportunities to enjoy their father in their lives and for each of them to have better life than he did.

I mean, just like get to spend time with him more...Just long as he do better than me. You know what I'm saying, he ain't going to have to grow up the way I grew up...so just [as] long as he go to college and try his best, I'll be happy.

In a similar vein, Derrick said the following about his children:

I hope they do a lot better than what I did. Think smarter, you know what I mean? Not having no kids, 17, 16 years old, that's stupid, shit...I don't want them being out here doing stupid shit, selling drugs...ah, that's stupid....[They can do] whatever they want as long as it ain't in these damn streets....I'm going to tell them [what happened to me in terms of early fatherhood]...I'm probably going to get a chastity belt for my daughter....My son, probably, he probably going to get one too. For sure. Because they ain't going be like me...I just don't want them to...have them [children] at that young an age because that's...that's just...that ends all hope for whatever they had planned. You know what I mean?

On this subject, Tony said:

In the teenager years, I ain't going to let them fail or do some of the things that I did when I was a young teenager...Yeah, we [he and his daughter's mother] talk about it, but she's the same way...nothing like we're going to like push her in this direction or push her in this direction.

For the other men, the consistent theme in their conversations about their children's future was for them to acquire as much education as possible and to provide the most stable and visible presence as fathers that they could in their lives. In a remark that captured how all the men felt, the interpreter for Eduardo summarized Eduardo's view as follows: "He wants to be recognized by his children as being a responsible dad, just by the situations that he's been through with his children. I think that that is a major goal for him."

The men said that if their children ended up as parents at an early age, despite any frustrations or disappointments related to this, the men would insist they behave responsibly. Brian expressed the prevalent view:

My son...If he make a baby early...he going to do the same thing I did—take care of business. Long as I'm still walking around, long as I'm still here. I'm still walking around and breathing...He ain't going to be no dead-beat daddy, because I wasn't one...

The case studies presented here highlight that there is a need for young, low-income, unmarried fathers to acquire a firmer and broader understanding of fatherhood and positive family functioning, that they face significant challenges in this regard, and that the men in this study exhibited notable positive growth and development in their capacity to function as fathers. While it is unclear that any of these men will ever find themselves in an ideal family setting, it is clear that their participation in the PFF program helped them to be better prepared about how to deal with life course transitions and circumstances. In keeping with the intent of the PFF programs, these men also appeared to have developed a deeper and richer understanding of the many aspects of fatherhood, and to have become more financially and emotionally involved with their children.

Appendix A
PFF Demonstration Sites

APPENDIX A

PFF DEMONSTRATION SITES

Program Location	General Project Description
Men's Services Program Baltimore, MD	Operated by the Center for Fathers, Families, and Workforce Development, a nonprofit organization. Weekly workshops and peer support sessions. Some participants enrolled in the CFWD/STRIVE program for employment services.
Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers Baltimore, MD	Operated by Baltimore City Department of Social Services. Six-month program, with workshops three times a week. Employment services provided by the Urban League.
Father Friendly Initiative at Healthy Start Boston, MA	Operated by the City of Boston's Health Department. Weekly workshops lasting 16 weeks.
Family Services of Greater Boston Boston, MA	Operated by the nonprofit Family Services of Greater Boston. Weekly workshops lasting 13 weeks.
Young Fathers Program Denver, CO	Operated by Human Services, Inc., a nonprofit organization. Month-long workshops, meeting 16 hours a week, with strong emphasis on employment and parenting. CSE staff on site.
Father Resource Program Indianapolis, IN	Operated by Fathers and Families Resource/Research Center, a nonprofit organization. Month-long workshops, meeting 20 hours a week, with strong emphasis on employment. Separate peer support sessions. CSE staff on site. Co-parenting class.
Bienvenidos Los Angeles, CA	Operated by the nonprofit organization, Bienvenidos. Focus on serving Hispanic population. Weekly workshops lasting 16 weeks.
Role of Men Los Angeles, CA	Operated by the local Department of Health and Human Services. Eight-week sessions meeting 2–3 times a week.
Truevine Community Outreach Los Angeles, CA	Operated by local faith-based organization affiliated with a church. Three-week workshops meeting 3 days a week. Separate peer support sessions.
FATHER Project Minneapolis, MN	Operated as a stand-alone program in an organization created for PFF. Two-week workshops meeting three days a week focused on employment issues. Separate weekly peer support sessions and parenting sessions. Contract with Urban League for employment services. On-site CSE staff, legal staff, GED instructor, and social worker.
Fathers Strive for Family New York, NY	Operated by STRIVE/East Harlem, a nonprofit employment organization. Weekly workshops lasting 8 weeks. Referred to separate STRIVE workshops for employment services.
Children Upfront Racine, WI	Operated by Goodwill Industries, a nonprofit organization. Workshops covering 25 modules over about 3 months. Pre-apprenticeship programs.
Family Matters West Chester, PA	Operated by the local housing authority. One-week workshops (20 hours) focused on employment services. Separate peer support sessions and parenting classes. Apprenticeship programs.

Note: Illinois had a PFF project in Chicago initially, but withdrew early in the demonstration; additional projects in Los Angeles and New York City also withdrew early.