

# Fathers Advancing Community Together

## Findings from a Participant Survey

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It's a great program  
if you are determined  
in life to do better for  
yourself and want  
better for yourself.

- FACT PARTICIPANT



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# Introduction

Research has shown that greater involvement from fathers in their children's lives can yield better academic, social, health, and emotional outcomes for children (Finocharo and Vann 2019). However, fathers living in poverty face numerous barriers that limit their ability to actively engage with their children and families, barriers such as a lack of employment and income, stress related to finding employment, limited access to resources, child support and custody issues, and histories of justice-system involvement (Coley 2001; Swisher and Waller 2008). To help fathers overcome these barriers and remain engaged with their children and families, the Office of Family Assistance

(an office of the US Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families) provided funding to several Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood programs.<sup>1</sup>

With funding from the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood initiative, Rubicon Programs implemented the Fathers Advancing Community Together (FACT) program for low- to moderate-income custodial and noncustodial parents of minor children (including mothers and fathers) residing in Contra Costa County, California. FACT participants were interested in achieving long-term financial mobility.

## Program Recruitment and Enrollment

Rubicon received referrals for the FACT program through word of mouth, through walk-ins, and from other partner agencies. Program staff also recruited FACT participants directly at shelters in the Contra Costa area and through presentations at local monthly Parole and Community Team meetings for people recently released from incarceration. After being recruited, prospective participants met with an ambassador and impact coach to learn more about the program. Impact coaches met with each prospective participant at least three times to begin fostering a transformational relationship and to complete necessary intake paperwork. As part of the enrollment process, Rubicon also completed an assessment to identify any issues related to domestic violence or intimate partner violence. Should a participant demonstrate the need for additional services, Rubicon refers them

to a community partner, STAND! For Families Free of Violence. Rubicon also implemented an "alignment" process that it developed to help ensure that prospective participants were ready to engage in program activities by the time they enrolled and to ensure the program would meet their needs. Prospective participants were deemed "not ready yet" for FACT if they faced barriers to program engagement, such as untreated mental health challenges and active acute alcohol and other substance use issues. Alignment meetings convened all program staff to discuss prospective participants and potential concerns about their readiness. Prospective participants deemed not a good fit for FACT were referred to another service provider in the community for additional support; these participants were then reconsidered for enrollment in FACT at a later time.

Through the program, Rubicon provided services in three core areas—responsible parenting, healthy relationships, and economic stability—at its two program sites in Antioch and Richmond, California. In each of these areas, Rubicon offered workshops, case management, and linkages to Rubicon comprehensive services and external supports.

In partnership with Rubicon, the Urban Institute evaluated FACT to document program implementation, describe the barriers to and

facilitators of effective implementation, assess the degree to which the program led to better outcomes among participants, and assess whether it provided an effective model for parents with low incomes in Contra Costa County. In this brief, we present outcomes from a two-wave survey we administered to FACT participants. This is one of a series of publications released as part of Urban's evaluation of the FACT program and builds on survey findings presented in a [previous brief](#).

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## **Participant Survey**

As part of Urban's evaluation of FACT, we surveyed FACT participants at enrollment (baseline), which occurred between March 2017 and February 2019, and six months after enrollment (follow-up), which occurred between September 2017 and August 2019. A total of 106 people participated in both rounds of surveys. In the rest of this brief, we draw on this sample to examine changes in participants' responses to key questions from the

baseline to the follow-up surveys. These questions fall under the following categories: perceptions of parenting (including relationships and activities with children), cooperation and collaboration with coparents, and finances and employment. We also broke out the findings by age group (18 to 24, 25 to 45, and 46 and older) and by whether participants were custodial or noncustodial parents.

### **Empowerment Plans and Support Services**

After participants were enrolled in FACT, impact coaches facilitated a collaborative process to develop an empowerment plan with each participant, intended to identify personal development goals and needed services. Impact coaches also connected participants to internal Rubicon supports, such as legal guidance from staff attorneys, health and wellness services, community connections and activists, and men's and women's support groups. The coaches also referred participants to external services, such as housing, public assistance, child support, family reunification, visitation and custody support, and anger management classes.

# Perceptions of Parenting

One of the primary goals of FACT was to instill participants with the knowledge and tools they needed to succeed as parents by providing **responsible parenting services**. The first group of survey questions we examined asked about participants' perceptions around parenting. Overall, more than two-thirds believed they were equipped with the necessary skills to be good parents (figure 1). A larger share agreed or strongly agreed with this statement six months after enrolling in FACT (73 percent) than at baseline (66 percent), though there were differences between subgroups. For example, younger parents (ages 18 to 24) demonstrated similar levels of agreement at baseline and follow-up, whereas parents ages 46 and older were less confident that they had the skills necessary to be a good parent six months later. We found the largest increases between baseline and follow-up on this question in noncustodial parents (an increase from 68 to 76 percent) and parents ages 25 to 45 (an increase from 64 to 75 percent).

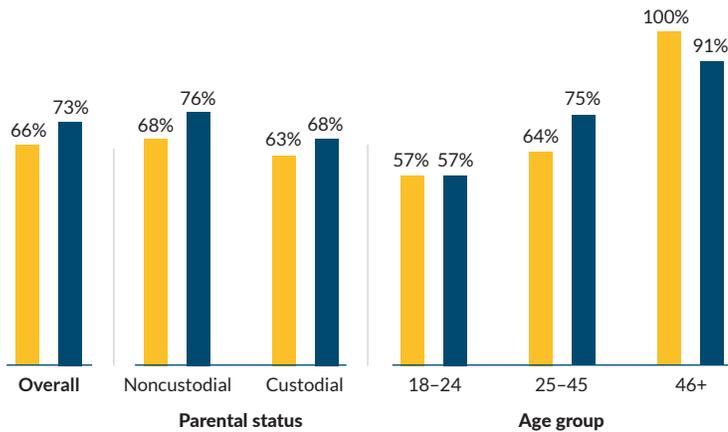
## Responsible Parenting Services

Rubicon partnered with Centerforce, a nonprofit community-based organization, to facilitate responsible parenting workshops and provide case management around participants' barriers to successful parenting. Centerforce's fatherhood coaches facilitated daily parenting workshops using its Back to Family curriculum, which focused on teaching participants parenting skills, discipline, and parent-child communication. The Back to Family workshops were two hours, four days a week, and lasted three weeks. In addition to facilitating the workshops, fatherhood coaches provided participants with case management around parenting, child support, child protective services, custody, and visiting plans.

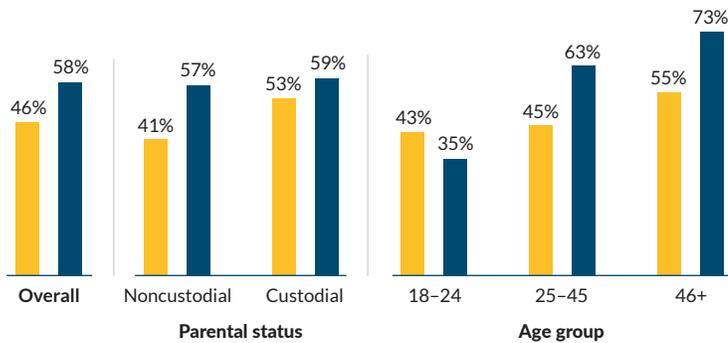
Rubicon changed my ways and put me in a better spot as a father. - **FACT PARTICIPANT**

■ Baseline ■ Follow-up

**FIGURE 1**  
Shares of Parents Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed That They Had the Parenting Skills Necessary to Be Good Parents



**FIGURE 2**  
Shares of Parents Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed They Were Meeting Personal Expectations in Caring for Their Child/Children



We also asked participants whether they were meeting their own personal expectations in caring for their child/children (figure 2). The majority agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, and more held these opinions at follow-up (58 percent) than at baseline (46 percent). This trend was consistent across all subgroups, except for young parents (ages 18 to 24): only 35 percent of young parents reported that they were meeting their own expectations as parents at follow-up, down from 43 percent at baseline.

The increases in agreement between enrollment and follow-up (which would have occurred after participants completed the responsible parenting workshops) suggest that FACT’s services equipped participants with parenting skills and instilled self-belief and motivation in them to care for and forge relationships with their children. Despite these increases, six months after enrollment, more than 40 percent of parents noted that they were still not meeting their own expectations in caring for their children. A couple reasons may help explain this finding. First, parents may have set high expectations for themselves and desired to be better parents for their children, causing them to feel they had not improved as parents. Second, this finding highlights that FACT participants need ongoing parental support, and it underscores the complex needs of parents living in poverty.

FACT has given me tools and skills in understanding and assisting both [of] my children in more productive ways.

– FACT PARTICIPANT

■ Baseline ■ Follow-up

FIGURE 3

Shares of Parents Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed That They Shared an Affectionate, Warm Relationship with Their Child/Children

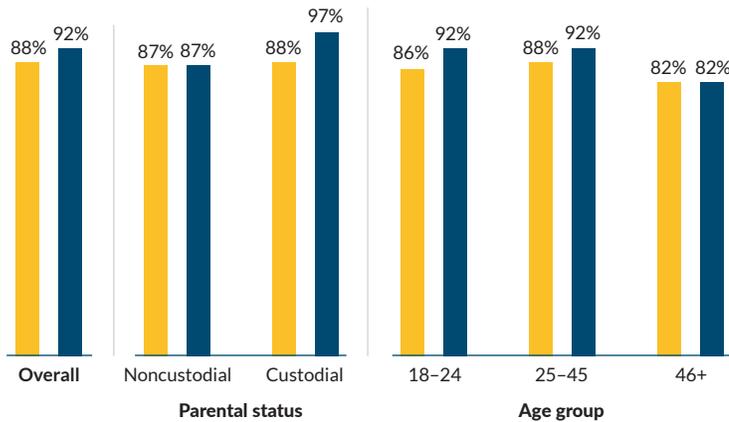


FIGURE 4

Shares of Parents Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed That They and Their Child/Children Always Seemed to be Struggling with Each Other

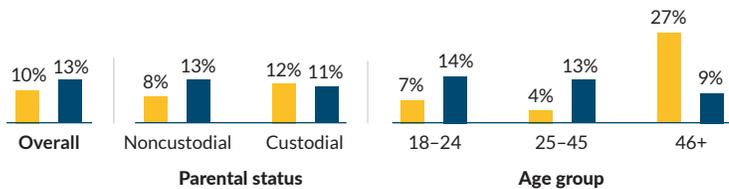
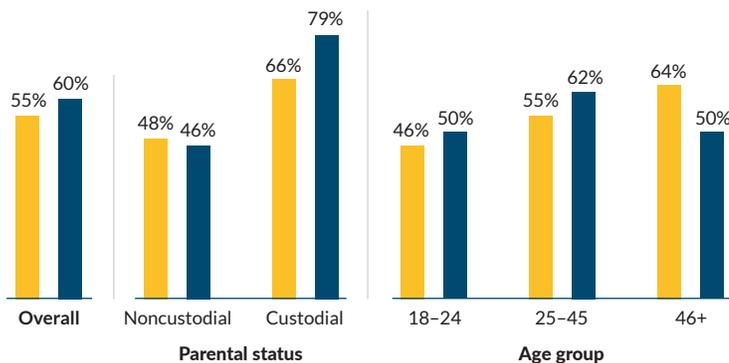


FIGURE 5

Shares of Parents Who Played, Spent Time, Talked and Listened, Fed or Shared a Meal, Read or Told Stories, and Watched TV with Their Child/Children



## Relationships and Activities with Children

In addition to the questions about participants' perceptions of their own parenting skills and expectations, we asked survey respondents about their relationships with their children. We found that a large majority of parents at baseline and follow-up reported having an affectionate and warm relationship (e.g., positive, loving) with their children (figure 3); these perceptions increased between baseline (88 percent) and follow-up (92 percent). There was, however, variation among subgroups. Responses among older parents (ages 46 and older) and noncustodial parents did not change from baseline to follow-up, whereas the remaining subgroups had increases of between four and nine percentage points on this measure.

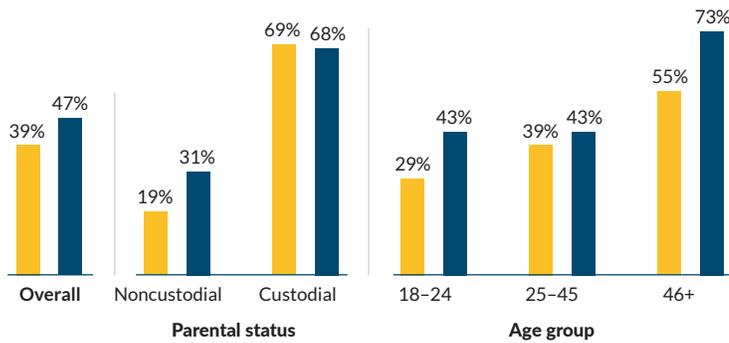
We also asked whether parents were experiencing conflict with their children (figure 4). Only a small share of parents agreed or strongly agreed that they and their child were struggling with each other, though this share increased slightly from baseline (10 percent) to follow-up (13 percent). Notably, at six months after enrollment, there was a two-thirds decline in agreement with this statement for parents ages 46 and older (from 27 to 9 percent); agreement among most other subgroups increased.

This measure may be a by-product of participants learning new parenting techniques and engaging more with their families after participating in FACT programming. For example, the program's fatherhood coaches emphasized the importance of parental involvement in children's lives, of learning when and how to appropriately discipline children, and of asking "difficult" questions. It is possible that increases in some of these activities created strain or conflict in parent-child relationships where these activities were previously absent.

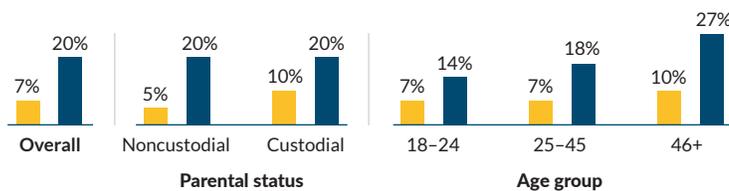
We also asked survey respondents questions about whether they participated in a variety of activities with their children. Figures 5 through 7 depict the share of parents who engaged in all these activities on a weekly basis, divided into three categories: fun or general (six total activities), rule-setting (two total activities), and school-

■ Baseline ■ Follow-up

**FIGURE 6**  
Shares of Parents Who Put Limits on Who Their Child/Children Could Hang Out with and on How Late They Could Stay Up or Stay Out



**FIGURE 7**  
Shares of Parents Who Participated in School Events, Attended Afterschool or Weekend Activities, and Talked about the Importance of Grades or Graduation



related (three total activities). Between baseline (55 percent) and follow-up (60 percent), a slightly larger share of parents reported participating in six fun or general activities on a weekly basis with their children, including talking, playing, sharing a meal, reading or telling stories, and watching television (figure 5). Notably, more custodial parents reported engaging in these activities with their children at both baseline and follow-up than noncustodial parents.

When asked about examples of rules they had set for their children (figure 6), more FACT parents reported limiting who children could hang out with and setting curfews at follow-up (47 percent) than at baseline (39 percent). This was consistent across nearly all subgroups. Again, custodial parents were more likely to report engaging in these activities with their children at both baseline and follow-up than noncustodial parents. Older parents (ages 46 and older) were also more likely to report participating in rule-setting activities than parents in the other two age groups.

Lastly, we asked FACT parents whether they participated in their children’s school-related events, attended afterschool or weekend activities, and discussed the importance of academic performance and graduation (figure 7). From baseline to follow-up, the share of parents who reported participating in all these activities on a weekly basis nearly tripled (from 7 percent to 20 percent). Similar trends were present among all subgroups.

### Spotlight on Participant Satisfaction

FACT participants expressed positive views of the program, and 80 percent of surveyed participants reported being satisfied or very satisfied with it. Participants reported that FACT staff helped change their mindsets and thought processes, and participants felt confident and focused while in FACT. Participants also noted that the workshops helped them develop skills in communication, listening,

compromising, child rearing, and coparenting. Participants described program staff as caring and having created a nonjudgmental environment where they felt welcomed. In particular, participants attributed this to their initial interactions with the impact and fatherhood coaches, whose regular communication and contact they appreciated.

# Cooperation and Collaboration with Coparents

Another key component of the FACT program was **healthy relationship services**, which focused on improving communication and collaboration between coparents and other caregivers. The survey included questions about these relationships. For example, we asked participants whether they agreed that they share information about their child/children with their caregivers (figure 8). Roughly two-thirds agreed or strongly agreed, although slightly fewer agreed at follow-up (65 percent) than at baseline (68 percent). More noncustodial parents and parents ages 25 to 45 reported sharing information about their children at follow-up than at baseline.

In addition to asking about information sharing, we surveyed FACT participants about the degree to which they make joint decisions with their children's coparents or caregivers. Overall, participants' responses did not change between baseline and follow-up; at both survey periods, 53 percent of parents indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Older parents were more likely than any other subgroup to report making joint decisions with their children's caregivers: 73 percent responded affirmatively at enrollment and 90 percent after six months.

Interestingly, both noncustodial and custodial parents' agreement with this statement remained the same from baseline to follow-up, though custodial parents (63 percent) were much more likely to report making joint decisions overall than

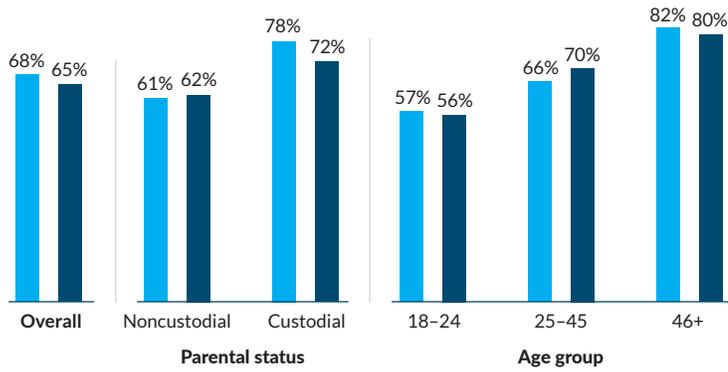
## Healthy Relationships Services

In addition to parenting classes, the Centerforce fatherhood coaches facilitated healthy relationship sessions. Centerforce used its Couples Enhancement curriculum, which focuses on topics such as healthy relationships, communication, coparenting, and conflict resolution. The workshops were held daily for three weeks, as part of the Back to Family workshops. The fatherhood coaches also provided case management to participants and couples.

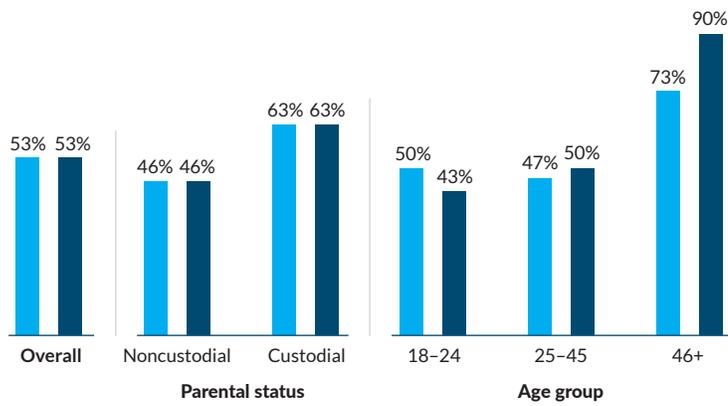
noncustodial parents (46 percent). This suggests that custodial status was a stronger indicator of parents' ability to make joint decisions about their children than participation in FACT. In other words, though the program may have taught participants coparenting techniques, these would only be effective if caregivers were willing to cooperate. Participants with custody of their children appeared to have been better positioned than noncustodial parents to collaborate with their coparents and make joint decisions about their children.

■ Baseline ■ Follow-up

**FIGURE 8**  
**Shares of Parents Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed That They Share Information about Their Child/Children with Their Caregivers**



**FIGURE 9**  
**Shares of Parents Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed That They Make Joint Decisions about Their Child/Children**



They made sense of things I have gone through in my life and helped support me in ways to get through things now.

—FACT PARTICIPANT

# Finances and Employment

A primary service provided by Rubicon focused on **financial skill building and employment**.

To measure the impact of these services on participants, we asked them about perceptions of their finances, financial practices, and employment status at enrollment and follow-up. A large majority reported at both periods that they believed in the importance of saving money (figure 10). Few differences existed between subgroups, though respondents ages 18 to 24 were less likely to agree with this sentiment at follow-up (64 percent) than at baseline (93 percent), whereas respondents in the other age categories were slightly more likely to agree after six months.

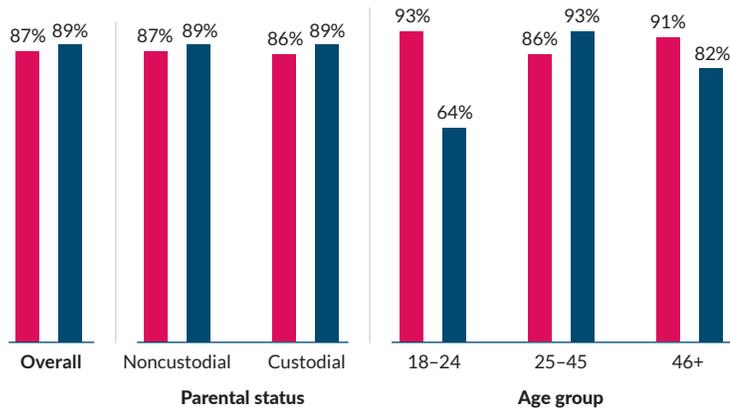
Despite recognizing the importance of saving money, most FACT participants still worried about having adequate finances (figure 11). Fewer than 25 percent overall at baseline and follow-up indicated that they rarely worried about being able to meet normal living expenses. Again, there was some variation between subgroups. Noncustodial parents were more likely to indicate that they were not concerned about meeting these expenses at follow-up (26 percent) than at baseline (14 percent), whereas the opposite was true for custodial parents (23 percent at follow-up versus 32 percent at baseline). There were also wide variations among the three age groups (figure 11).

## Financial Skill Building and Employment Services

A core component of FACT was a three-week Foundations Workshop series that included services around financial skill building and employment. The Foundations Workshops occurred for five hours daily and used a curriculum developed by Rubicon. Rubicon's coaches facilitated educational workshops on topics such as the structural causes of poverty, growth mindsets, budgeting, securing public assistance, and managing bank accounts. Furthermore, employment services involved a suite of employment readiness services, such as career exploration, a job club, résumé writing, interview preparation, subsidized employment, and referrals to job opportunities.

■ Baseline ■ Follow-up

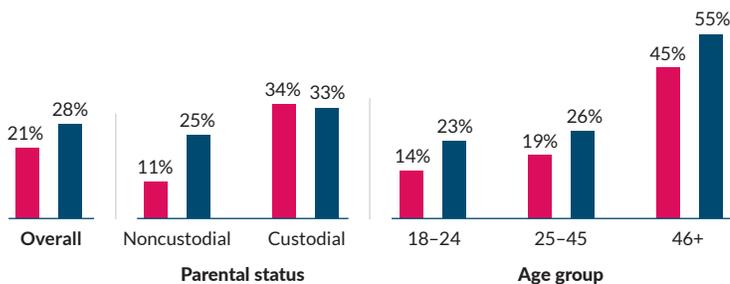
**FIGURE 10**  
Shares of Parents Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed It Is Important to Save Money Every Paycheck



**FIGURE 11**  
Shares of Parents Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed That They Rarely Worry about Being Able to Meet Normal Living Expenses



**FIGURE 12**  
Shares of Parents That Reported Using a Written Budget to Plan Spending at the Time of the Survey



Though there were few changes in FACT participants' *perceptions* of their finances from baseline to follow-up (figures 10 and 11), figures 12 and 13 show that participants' *financial practices* did improve between the two periods. For example, although only 21 percent of people overall reported using a budget at baseline, 28 percent reported using a budget at follow-up. This trend was consistent across most subgroups and was particularly noticeable among noncustodial parents, of whom only 11 percent reported using a budget at baseline (compared with 25 percent at follow-up).

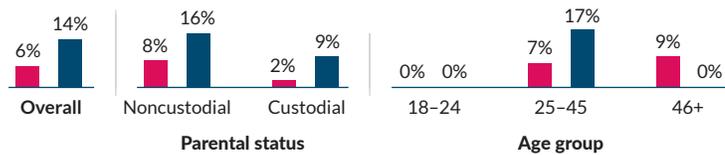
Another positive finding was that the share of people who reported putting money into a savings or retirement account more than doubled from baseline (6 percent) to follow-up (14 percent), though these numbers remained low overall (figure 13). Notably, younger adults (those ages 18 to 24) were much less likely to report using a budget and to report automatically putting money away than adults in other age groups. This could be because younger parents were newer to the workforce and therefore not in a position to start putting money into savings or retirement accounts. Conversely, parents in their prime earning years (those ages 25 to 45) were much more likely to regularly save money after completing Rubicon's Foundations Workshops.

Perhaps the strongest indicator of FACT's success was the improvement in participants' employment status (figure 14) and earnings (figure 15). Between baseline and follow-up, the percentage of participants with a job increased from 32 to 54 percent. This trend was consistent across all subgroups, with a particularly large increase among noncustodial parents (27 percent at baseline versus 52 percent at follow-up) and those ages 46 and older (18 percent at baseline versus 55 percent at follow-up).

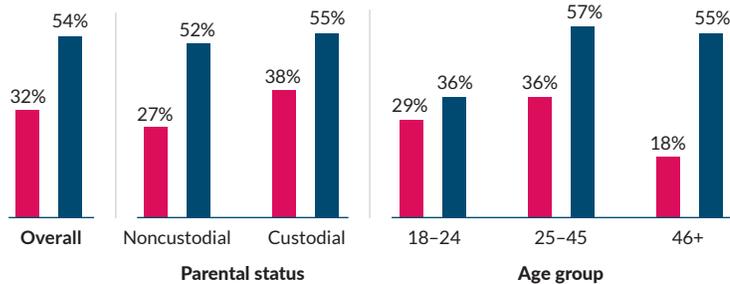
Notably, it does not appear that these increases in employment were from minimum-wage or low-paying jobs. In fact, figure 15 shows that of the subset of people who were employed at each survey period, the average monthly wages increased by more than \$700 overall (from \$1,033 to \$1,758). Again, the increase in wages was experienced among people in all subgroups, with noncustodial parents receiving the largest increase in wages between baseline and follow-up (\$996 at baseline versus \$1,961 at follow-up).

■ Baseline ■ Follow-up

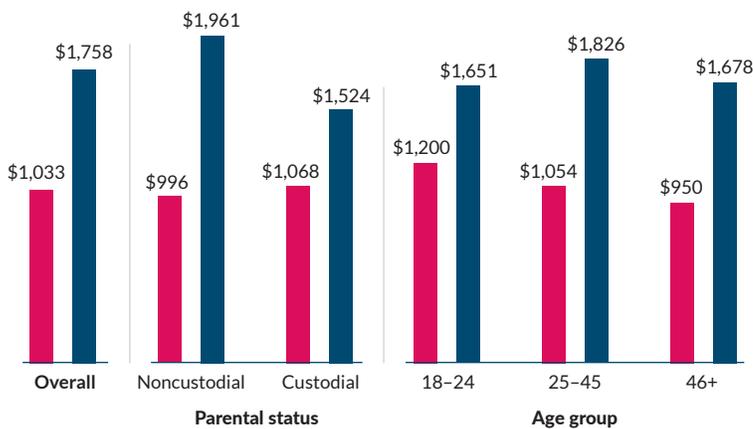
**FIGURE 13**  
Shares of Parents That Put Money into a Savings or Retirement Account Automatically



**FIGURE 14**  
Shares of Parents with Legal Jobs at the Time of the Survey



**FIGURE 15**  
Average Wages in the Past Month for Respondents with Legal Jobs



Our findings indicate that although participants' perceptions of financial practices did not change between survey periods, they were more likely to engage in good financial practices (e.g., using a written budget and saving money), more likely to be employed, and made more money overall at follow-up than at baseline. Despite this success, these findings underscore the unique challenges involved in providing services to underresourced populations and the need to further reform inequitable systems to fully mitigate the impacts of poverty. For example, although participants were engaging in good financial practices more six months after enrolling in FACT, rates remained low overall, as only 14 percent of parents reported automatically putting money into a savings or retirement account. Though rates of employment (as reported by participants) increased substantially, nearly half of participants were still unemployed at follow-up.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, of those employed, parents only made an average of \$1,758 a month. Though this is much higher than the average wages at baseline, it is well below the estimated monthly living wage in Contra Costa County, even the estimated living wage (\$3,170.27 per parent) for people with one child in a household with two working parents.<sup>3</sup> Our findings emphasize the ongoing need for organizations like Rubicon to provide employment services and financial resources in low-income communities.

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## Notes

1. The Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood initiative is a discretionary grant program originally authorized under the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 and reauthorized under the Claims Resolution Act of 2010.
2. This does not account for fluctuation in participant employment during the six-month follow-up period. Participants may have gained and lost jobs during this time. This finding is based on participants' reported employment status at the time of taking the baseline and follow-up surveys.
3. Amy Glasmeier and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, "Living Wage Calculator for Contra Costa County, California," accessed September 29, 2020, <https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/06013>.

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