



# **Tennessee Parenting Project**

## **Final Report**

**July 2010**

**Prepared by:**

**Center for Policy Research  
1570 Emerson Street  
Denver CO 80218  
Phone: 303.837.1555  
Fax: 303.837.1557  
[www.centerforpolicyresearch.org](http://www.centerforpolicyresearch.org)**

*Lanae Davis, M.P.A.  
Jessica Pearson, Ph.D.  
Nancy Thoennes, Ph.D.*



## Executive Summary

The goal of the Tennessee Parenting Project was to assess whether identifying parents with visitation problems in the child support caseload and providing services aimed at resolving them improves parent-child contact and the subsequent payment of child support. The project was conducted in child support offices and juvenile courts in three jurisdictions: Nashville (20th Judicial District – Davidson County); Chattanooga (11th Judicial District – Hamilton County) and the cities of Jackson, Lexington and Henderson (26th Judicial District – Madison, Henderson and Chester Counties). One full-time parenting coordinator and one part-time *pro se* specialist were placed in each of the three jurisdictions, respectively. Parents were assigned to different groups for treatments of varying intensity based on the last digit of the noncustodial parent’s child support case number.

- The 583 parents in the low-level treatment group were given or mailed printed information about parenting time problems and various community resources including free classes on how to pursue legal filings dealing with visitation on a self-represented basis.
- The 1,591 parents in the high-level treatment group were contacted by the parenting coordinator and offered the opportunity to participate in a free, facilitated meeting with the other parent to complete a fill-in-the-blanks parenting plan that spells out when the children will spend time with each parent. Those who were unable to produce a plan were referred to the *pro se* specialist at the court for help with filing court papers on visitation and/or to attend a free class on how to pursue legal filings on a self-represented basis.

### Key Findings

- Although child support workers were initially skeptical about asking parents about visitation, they began to screen and refer parents to project personnel once they had an on-site resource.

Sixty-three percent of child support workers surveyed in the three project sites reported that they were more likely to ask parents about access once the project started and 66 percent said that they had referred six or more cases to parenting coordinators for assistance with visitation. Most cases were referred by child support workers and court personnel at enforcement stages, although a quarter were flagged within six months of order establishment or less.

- It was difficult to deliver visitation services to parents in the child support caseload even with a dedicated worker offering on-site assistance at the child support agency and the court.

Approximately one-fifth of those parents with problems could not be served because of geographical distance, domestic violence and other factors that might make parenting-time unsafe. More than a third of parents were not served because they could not be reached to arrange a meeting or failed to appear for scheduled meetings, especially those with higher levels of parental conflict and the lowest levels of parent-child contact. As a result, project staff treated less than half (41%) of the parents in the high-level treatment group with identified visitation problems.



- Parents who received access and visitation services were non-white, never-married and poor.

Noncustodial parents in the high-level treatment group who received help with visitation were African-American (78%) and educated at the high school/GED level or lower (71%). Although 70 percent were employed full-time, 19 percent were unemployed when they enrolled in the project. A third (33%) reported personal incomes of less than \$10,000 per year, and another third (35%) reported incomes of \$10,000-\$20,000 per year.

- The key intervention that parents in the high-level treatment group received was a brief facilitation session.

Facilitation consisted of a parent meeting with the parenting coordinator to discuss how the child's time would be divided and to develop a parenting plan using a standard, fill-in-the-blank form. Ultimately, facilitation sessions were conducted with 595 child support cases in the high-level treatment group. Nearly all cases were handled in a single session that lasted an average of 40 minutes and a median of 30.

- Facilitation sessions with both parents were highly effective and almost always led to the production of full or partial parenting plans that inspired high rates of user satisfaction

Nearly two-thirds (62% and 61%) of the facilitations in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Judicial Districts resulted in comprehensive parenting plans that were submitted to the court along with existing child support orders. Another fraction of the cases resulted in partial parenting plans (8% and 3%) and/or clarification of a parenting-time schedule (9% and 25%) which were treated as informal agreements between the parents and not filed with the court. Full parenting plans were rarer in the 26<sup>th</sup> Judicial District (28%) because most facilitation sessions were held with only the noncustodial parent. When both parents participated, the agreement rate was 95 percent.

- In all Judicial Districts, facilitation sessions were most likely to result in arrangements that called for more parent-child contact than had been the case before the intervention was held.

The percent of interviewed parents in the high-level treatment group that reported seeing their children at least monthly in the pre and post-program time periods rose from 52 to 62 percent, respectively. For low-level treatment parents, those seeing their children at least monthly only increased from 52 percent pre-program to 58 percent post-program while the percentage saying that they "never" see their children rose significantly. Parents also reported that regularity of contact improved in the high-level treatment group.

- When asked to describe their relationship with the other parent prior to and following enrollment in the program, parents in both the high and low-level treatment groups typically reported improvements.



In the high-level treatment group, 49 percent of interviewed parents reported being able to cooperate with the other parent prior to enrolling in the program. This increased to 64 percent six months following program enrollment. In the low-level treatment group, parents also reported improvements with the rate of cooperation going from 43 percent to 58 percent. It is difficult to know whether the improvements merely reflect a lessening of acrimony with the passage of time, or changes in both groups as a result of receiving services or information about the importance of effective co-parenting.

- Parents in the high-level treatment group who failed to reach an agreement in the facilitation session and/or were unable to get the other parent to attend the facilitation session were offered assistance with legal filings.

In addition to meeting individually with parents to explain their legal options and procedures, *pro se* specialists offered a free class on legal filings on a periodic basis. Rates of attendance ranged from 4 percent in the 11th Judicial District where classes were offered very irregularly to 63 percent in the 26th Judicial District where classes were offered twice a month. Despite the fact that the project paid fees associated with legal filings, the incidence of filings in court to establish or enforce visitation was extremely low suggesting that *pro se* assistance rarely led to court activity.

- Most parents in the low-level treatment group recalled receiving an informational brochure on co-parenting and the resources available in their community for help with visitation, including free classes on *pro se* filings.

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of the parents in the low-level treatment group who were interviewed recalled receiving and reviewing printed materials about visitation, with approximately two-thirds indicating that they used the material to set up contact with their child and/or make visits go better. Parents who used the materials rated them highly, but smaller proportions reported following up on referrals listed in the literature (21%) or calling someone at the court to discuss *pro se* classes (32%). Ultimately, only 6 percent attended a *pro se* class, 2 percent filed legal papers in court on their own with the project paying their filing fees, and 7 percent met with a parenting coordinator to develop a parenting plan that was filed with the court.

- In the 12 and 24 months following program enrollment, noncustodial parents in the high-level treatment group paid a significantly higher proportion of their child support obligation.

Average child support payments for parents in the high-level treatment group rose from 54.2 percent to 57.6 percent in the 12 months following program enrollment, a statistically significant increase. There was no comparable increase among noncustodial parents in the low-level treatment group. The differences in payment for the two groups occurred in each judicial district and persisted over time with the high-level group showing better payment patterns for the 24 month period prior to and following program enrollment. In addition, noncustodial parents in the high-level treatment group demonstrated better payment consistency.



- There were significant post-program gains in the average percent of support paid by members of the high-level treatment group for all three treatment circumstances: those who received services, those who were denied services because of safety and geographical factors, and those who did not receive services because one or both parents failed to appear and/or cooperate.

Payment patterns were significantly higher in the 12 months following program enrollment for high-level parents who received project services, those who were denied services and those who failed to appear for services. That improvements occurred across-the-board (but not in the low-level treatment group) suggests that payment changes may have been due to something other than the formal array of services provided, but something not experienced by the low-level treatment group. One explanation for these findings offered by project staff is that noncustodial parents who were ineligible for services or dropped out because the other parent refused to cooperate, still had enough contact with project staff to feel as though they were being heard and this made them more willing to pay support.

- Most child support personnel who responded to a survey about the program gave it ratings of either “excellent” (41%) or “good” (39%) and felt that it filled an important service need.

Most surveyed child support personnel indicated that it was very (70%) or somewhat (22%) important to have someone on scene at the child support agency and/or court to help parents with access and visitation issues. Similar percentages, 67 and 30 percent respectively, indicated it was very or somewhat important to continue to provide services after the expiration of the grant. Many (41%) “strongly” agreed that parents have legitimate problems getting to see their children and few (4%) felt that parents used the project to get lower child support orders.

- Parents rated their experiences with parenting coordinators more highly than they did their experiences going to court and wanted more facilitation-type help.

While 78 percent of interviewed parents characterized themselves as “very” or “somewhat” satisfied with their experiences with parent coordinators, this was the case for just 58 percent of parents who went to court to resolve their visitation problems. Most of those who did go to court (75%) said that they wanted court personnel to try to help them and the other parent develop a parenting plan.

## Conclusions

The Tennessee Parenting Project reveals that child support agencies and courts can incorporate specialized staff to help large numbers of parents with visitation problems without experiencing case processing delays or other inefficiencies. Once they have an on-site staff resource, child support workers and judicial personnel are willing to identify and refer parents who have visitation problems at all stages of case processing. Staff strongly support the notion of providing “on-the-spot” services and feel that paying attention to visitation matters makes noncustodial parents feel that the agency cares about more than just money.



One reason visitation problems are not addressed in high-volume child support and court settings is the belief that an effective access intervention must be lengthy and time consuming. The Tennessee Parenting Project showed that many visitation problems that confront poor, never-married and non-white parents can be solved in an average of 40 minutes using a “fill-in-the-blank” parenting plan that helps them organize decision-making duties and the child’s time.

The fact that 36 percent of cases that were eligible to be served in the project failed to receive services in large part because custodial parents did not respond or refused to cooperate underscores the importance of developing ways to compel custodial parents to participate in efforts to examine and resolve visitation problems. Although the project offered noncustodial parents free classes on *pro se* filings, relatively few parents took advantage of this option. The exception to this occurred in the 26th Judicial District, a rural area where classes were offered on two Saturdays every month and parents learned about the resource through word-of-mouth techniques.

Although payment performance for noncustodial parents in the high-level treatment group rose significantly after project enrollment, it remained far from complete with the average percent of owed support due that was paid peaking at 57.6 percent. In interviews, noncustodial parents blamed their incomplete and missed payments on irregular employment patterns and/or having a new family or other children to support. The payment challenges they face are common to most parents in the child support system. Over the life of this project, the statewide rate of payment of current support in Tennessee declined from 55.68 percent in 2006 to 52.65 percent in 2009. Simultaneously, the unemployment rate rose from 4.8 to 10.7 percent. Tennessee recently initiated a demonstration project to better link unemployed and under-employed noncustodial parents to workforce programs for job search and placement services. It is hoped that by providing help with both employment and visitation, payment gains will be even more robust.

Despite the perceived importance of addressing visitation problems in the child support caseload, and the gains in payment associated with offering help with visitation, workers see no way of providing assistance without changes to the federal reimbursement policies. Without dedicated visitation staff, workers predict that they will be forced to go back to ignoring visitation matters and/or telling parents who complain about visitation to hire an attorney or go to court on their own even though they know that both options are unrealistic for parents in the child support caseload. In order for child support agencies to provide visitation assistance, regulations must be modified to allow federal reimbursement for referral and service activities dealing with visitation.



## Acknowledgements

The Center for Policy Research would like to thank the following individuals who helped conduct the Tennessee Parenting Project.

### Federal-Level Personnel

Karen Anthony, Federal Program Officer, Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement

### State-Level Personnel

Charles Bryson, Director, Child Support Field Operations and Management, Tennessee Department of Human Services

Lynn Klinghard, Program Coordinator, Tennessee Department of Human Services

Linda Chappell, Director, Field Services, Tennessee Department of Human Services

Barbara Broersma, Assistant General Counsel, Tennessee Department of Human Services

Dottie Griggs, Administrative Assistant, Tennessee Department of Human Services

Mary Rose Zingale, Programs Manager, Administrative Office of the Courts

Carrie Hargis, State Project Coordinator, Administrative Office of the Courts

Jason Johnson, Director of Child Support TCSES User Support, Tennessee Department of Human Services

Lisa Hoover, Programmer/Analyst, Tennessee Department of Human Services

### 11<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Personnel

Monica Middlebrooks, Parenting Coordinator

Southeast Tennessee Legal Services

Judge Suzanne Bailey

Magistrate Kathy Clark

Magistrate Chris Gott

Magistrate Emma Andrews

Chris Albright, Court Administrator

Martha Sanders-Tonahill, Administrator, Tennessee Department of Human Services

Jonathan Fricks, Director, Maximus

Jennifer Weller, Customer Service Supervisor, Maximus



### **20<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Personnel**

Michael Monix, Parenting Coordinator

Catherine Brockenborough, Pro Se Specialist

Scott Neely, Pro Se Specialist

Judge Betty Adams Green

Magistrate Sophia Crawford

Magistrate Bill Griffin

Magistrate Scott Rosenberg

Patti Risner, Child Support Area Coordinator

Julie Fletcher, Director, PSI

Gena Lewis, Attorney, PSI

### **26<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Personnel**

Patti Clanton, Parenting Coordinator

Lashare Woods, Pro Se Specialist

Judge Christy Little

Judge Larry McKenzie

Judge Robert Stevie Beal

Ann Skelton, Child Support Area Coordinator, Tennessee Department of Human Services

Robert Starr, Director, Child Support Services

Lawanda McNeal, Specialist 3 Supervisor, Child Support Services

Angie Taylor, Specialist 3 Supervisor, Child Support Services





# Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Need for Access and Visitation Services</b> .....	1
<b>History of AV Services in Tennessee</b> .....	2
<b>Overview of the Current Demonstration Project</b> .....	3
<b>2. Program Operations</b> .....	6
<b>Target Population</b> .....	6
<b>Treatment Groups</b> .....	7
<b>Project Setting</b> .....	8
<b>3. Evaluation Methodology</b> .....	11
<b>Records from Program Staff</b> .....	11
<b>Parent Interviews</b> .....	12
<b>Child Support Data</b> .....	12
<b>Surveys and Qualitative Interviews with Child Support Workers and Judges</b> .....	13
<b>Analysis</b> .....	13
<b>4. Project Enrollment</b> .....	14
<b>Enrollment by Site and Group Assignment</b> .....	14
<b>Enrollment by Parenting Coordinators and Pro Se Specialists</b> .....	15
<b>Referrals Source</b> .....	16
<b>Requests for Services by Mothers and Fathers</b> .....	16
<b>5. Project Participants, Children, and Relationships</b> .....	18
<b>Custodial Arrangements and Residence of Parents Enrolled in the Project</b> .....	18
<b>Children and Noncustodial Parent Access</b> .....	19
<b>Parents' Relationships</b> .....	19
<b>Access Problems</b> .....	21
<b>6. The Receipt of Services</b> .....	22
<b>Ineligible Parents</b> .....	22
<b>Parents who Dropped Out of the Program</b> .....	23



**7. Profile of Served and Non-Served Parents** ..... 25

**Noncustodial Parents** ..... 25

**Custodial Parents** ..... 26

**Comparing Served, Ineligible, and Dropped Parents** ..... 28

**8. Services Provided**..... 32

**High-Level Treatment Group: Facilitation Sessions and Pro Se Services** ..... 32

**Low-Level Treatment Group: Printed Information and Pro Se Services**..... 38

**9. Parent Reactions to Project Services**..... 40

**Characteristics of Respondents to the Follow-Up Interview**..... 40

**Reactions to Project Services** ..... 43

**10. Outcomes in Child Support Payments** ..... 51

**Child Support Case Characteristics** ..... 51

**Child Support Payment Patterns Pre and Post-Enrollment** ..... 54

**11. Child Access and Relationship Outcomes**..... 59

**Child Access** ..... 59

**Parental Relationships**..... 61

**12. Child Support and Judicial Surveys** ..... 63

**Child Support Personnel** ..... 63

**Judicial Responses**..... 68

**13. Summary, Key Findings, and Conclusions** ..... 69

    Summary ..... 69

    Key Findings..... 70

    Conclusions..... 73

**References**



# 1 Introduction

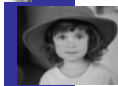
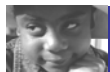
The Tennessee Parenting Project was a demonstration project conducted by the Tennessee Child Support Enforcement Division (CSE) in collaboration with the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC). The goal of the project was to demonstrate the impact of providing services to promote parent-child contact among parents in the child support system, especially those who have never married.

## Need for Access and Visitation Services

The need for access and visitation services for parents in the child support system has been documented in a number of studies, many of which have been funded by the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE). For example, the earliest OCSE study of access and visitation in the child support caseload, the Child Access Demonstration Projects, evaluated programs in seven states designed to address access issues. This study, completed in 1996, concluded that as many as 31 percent of parents with access orders already in place experienced complex, contentious, and long-standing problems getting to see their children (Pearson, *et al.*, 1996). In a study of Supportive Services for Noncustodial Parents in San Mateo County, California, 931 noncustodial parents (NCPs) mentioned having access problems to their child support workers over a 31-month period and were referred to free mediation services for an average of nearly one referral each day (Pearson, *et al.*, 2003). More recently, without any publicity, a hotline established by Legal Aid with the support of the Texas Office of the Attorney General to answer questions about access and visitation problems among parents in the child support system received 40 calls per day (10,000 per year) from men and women of all ages, races, and geographic locations (Pearson and Thoennes, 2004). When Hotline hours were doubled in 2007, call volume increased to 85 calls per day, and as of May 2010, the Hotline was handling 120 calls per day.

In 1997, the OCSE initiated the State Child Access and Visitation (AV) Grant Programs, which involve annual awards of \$10 million to states and territories to help support programs that further noncustodial parents' access to and visitation with their children. Using federal funds that range from \$100,000 to nearly \$1 million, states have implemented a variety of programs to help parents with access and visitation that included programs offering parent education, mediation, supervised visitation, parenting plan development, and counseling.

The limited research on the implementation and effectiveness of programs funded with AV grants has been promising. Since 1998, when AV grants supported 131 local programs that served 19,454 individuals, the program has grown to serve over 85,000, nearly half of whom are fathers (OCSE, 2008). In addition to serving a large number of parents, AV grant programs serve a population that is definitely at risk and has few alternative problem-solving resources. The majority of AV program participants are estimated to have incomes below \$29,000 per year, 50 percent are non-white, and 46 percent are unmarried parents who frequently lack formal visitation rights. Finally, while the court continues to generate the most program referrals (39,755), referral activity at child support agencies has increased dramatically rising from 14,300 in 2004 to 20,346 in 2008 (OCSE, 2008).



Two recent studies offer some clues on participant outcomes in state AV programs. One involved a review of child support payment records and telephone interviews with 254 mediation users in five states (OIG, 2002). The other study, which was conducted by the Center for Policy Research (CPR), involved interviews with 970 parents who used programs in nine states along with a review of child support records for 173 families with child support obligations (Pearson, Davis, and Thoennes, 2005). Although both studies had low response rates and lacked a non-treatment comparison group, they both concluded that the state AV programs appeared to be achieving the two most important objectives posited for them:

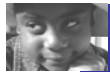
- Child support payments increased among participants following program participation, especially for never-married parents who paid a significantly higher proportion of what they owed. In the OIG study, 61 percent paid more child support after services and payments rose from 52 to 70 percent of what was owed. In the CPR study, payments for never-married parents rose from 59 to 79 percent of what was owed.
- One-third to one-half of noncustodial parents in every program type reported that parent-child contact increased following program participation.

These findings are consistent with many earlier studies that find a connection between parent-child contact and child support payment. As early as 1979, David Chambers (1979) found that fathers with little or no contact with their children after divorce paid only about 34 percent of their child support, while fathers in regular contact paid 85 percent. A decade later, Judith Seltzer (1991) found that two-thirds of parents with frequent contact paid child support, while only one-fifth of those with no contact made payments. More recently, the U.S. Bureau of Census (2003) reported that 77.1 percent of parents with joint custody or visitation rights paid at least some child support, compared with 55.8 percent of their counterparts without visitation rights or joint custody.

## History of AV Services in Tennessee

Tennessee has long recognized the importance of helping families with paternal participation and access arrangements and the particular challenges of doing so with the unmarried population. Prior to this grant, Tennessee conducted a pilot project and enacted legislation that resulted in the placement of staff in courts to assist divorcing parents in the use of non-adversarial approaches to develop parenting plans prior to their court hearing, convened a statewide conference on unrepresented litigants, developed uniform forms for unrepresented litigants in family law cases, dedicated its AV grants to assist unrepresented parents, and participated in an OCSE-sponsored planning effort aimed at maximizing the effectiveness of AV grants and mobilizing other resources to address the barriers that unrepresented parents face as they pursue parenting-time arrangements.

While the service mix for Tennessee parents clearly expanded with these undertakings, court personnel and child support staff still agreed that never-married, poor/indigent, and unrepresented parents remained particularly underserved and in need of greater attention. Indeed, 2004 surveys conducted with judges, court clerks, and child support staff as part of an OCSE-sponsored planning process revealed that a majority of



each professional group believed that these populations were “poorly” served with respect to their access and visitation problems (2006).

**Table 1. Court And Child Support Personnel Saying Tennessee Does A “Poor” Job Serving Various Groups Of Parents With Their AV Problems**

	Judges (n=62)	Court Clerks (n=115)	Child Support Staff (n=160)
Custodial Parents	14%	32%	25%
Divorcing Parents	20%	36%	37%
Families in Rural Areas	43%	53%	86%
Never-Married Parents	56%	65%	44%
Poor/Indigent Parents	58%	59%	66%
Unrepresented Parents	62%	59%	59%

This same survey found that when they heard about access problems, child support workers usually:

- Told parents child support and visitation were two separate issues (95%);
- Explained there was nothing the child support agency could do (93%);
- Suggested the parent contact an attorney (88%);
- Told the parent to go to court (69%);
- Referred parents to a *pro bono* attorney or Legal Aid (68%).

Tennessee wanted to expand access and visitation services into the child support agency, while maintaining close ties to the court. It also wanted to address the special needs of low-income, never-married parents who lack legally enforceable visitation rights when they separate and typically receive no help in developing plans that spell out when each parent will see the child. Fortunately Tennessee’s interests in extending parenting plan services to parents in the child support system coincided with federal research priorities.

### Overview of the Current Demonstration Project

The Tennessee Parenting Project was one of a series of Section 1115 demonstration and evaluation grants by the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) that aimed to explore ways of integrating access and visitation services with regular activities of the child support agency. Since the inception of the child support program in 1975, access and visitation and child support have been legally distinct and the CSE program has lacked the authority to enforce visitation orders. The OCSE awards to Colorado, Florida, Georgia, and Texas in 2004 and to Tennessee in 2005 represented novel efforts to assess whether addressing visitation problems and providing appropriate services improve parent-child contact patterns and subsequent child support outcomes and payments. The grants also aimed to determine how visitation issues can best be handled by child support agencies without introducing delays in establishing orders or creating backlogs at the court.

Tennessee responded to OCSE’s request to implement and test an access and visitation program for parents in the child support system by placing dedicated personnel in child support agencies and courts to handle child support clients with visitation problems at all stages of case processing. Parenting coordinators were the staff members placed at the child support agency on a full-time basis to help parents create parenting plans that specify how the child’s time will be divided with each parent. *Pro se* specialists were usually attorneys retained by the project to work on a part-time, contractual basis at the court in order to help parents with



self-representation. Tennessee developed a parenting plan form that was consistently used by courts for divorcing parents after July 1, 2005 to describe how the children will spend time with each parent, how holidays will be split, who will make day-to-day decisions, and how the exchange of children will take place (Tenn. Code Ann. § 36-6-404). The Tennessee Parenting Project extended the use of parenting plans to never-married parents and provided the staffing to help parents develop them.

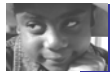
The project was conducted in child support offices and juvenile courts in three jurisdictions: Nashville (20th Judicial District - Davidson County), Chattanooga (11th Judicial District - Hamilton County), and the cities of Jackson, Lexington and Henderson (26th Judicial District - Madison, Henderson and Chester counties). One parenting coordinator and one *pro se* specialist was placed in each of the three jurisdictions, respectively.

The parenting coordinators and *pro se* specialists publicized the project in their respective jurisdictions and worked with child support workers, court personnel, and other relevant service providers to identify parents in the child support caseload with visitation problems. Once identified, parenting coordinators helped interested parents to develop or revise a full or partial parenting plan. Parents who were able to agree on a parenting plan in a non-adversarial manner could request to have them filed with the court along with other relevant child support papers for no additional filing fee. Parents could also opt to use the parenting plans they developed as “psychological contracts” without filing them with the court.

Parents who were unable to reach parenting agreements were referred to the *pro se* facilitators, who often made fresh attempts to get parents to develop a parenting plan. In addition, *pro se* facilitators explained the process of obtaining and/or enforcing visitation in the courts and offered additional opportunities for facilitation or mediation as well as referrals for reduced-fee legal services. Finally, *pro se* facilitators conducted free classes in each participating district, so that interested parents could pursue self-represented filings in relevant juvenile or circuit courts.

To test the effectiveness of providing visitation services to parents in the child support system, parents who disclosed visitation concerns were assigned to either a high or low-level treatment group based on the final digit in their child support case number. Parents in the high-level treatment group had access to the services of parenting coordinators and *pro se* facilitators. Parents in the low-level treatment group were sent written materials on parenting and parenting resources (including the classes on *pro se* filings). Parents in the low-level group who took the initiative could contact the *pro se* facilitators listed in the printed materials and obtain many of the services offered to members of the high-level treatment group, including facilitated sessions to develop a parenting plan and free classes on self-representation and how to file legal papers for visitation in court. Unlike their counterparts in the high-level treatment group, however, they received no telephone calls or in-person services by parent coordinators.

This research design was similar to formats used in other OCSE-funded demonstration and evaluation projects dealing with the integration of access and visitation services in child support agencies conducted in Texas (2007) and Colorado (2008). All three projects involved:



- Generating two groups of families with open child support cases with parenting-time problems;
- Providing an array of in-person services to one group and printed information and a list of community resources to the other group; and
- Monitoring the impact of the interventions on clients, including levels of parent-child contact and the payment of child support.

Table 2 summarizes the key features of the Section 1115 demonstration and evaluation dealing with integrating access and visitation services in child support agencies conducted in Colorado, Texas and Tennessee.

<b>Table 2. Key Features of Section 1115 Demonstration and Evaluation Projects Dealing with Integrating Access and Visitation Services in Child Support Programs</b>			
	Colorado	Texas	Tennessee
Partner Agency	Office of Dispute Resolution (ODR), Colorado Judicial Department	Harris County Domestic Relations Office (DRO)	Administrative Office of the Court (AOC) and local juvenile courts
Award Period	10/04 - 7/07	10/04 - 5/07	10/05 - 5/10
High-Level Treatment	Referral to CSE-based worker for facilitation and filing agreements w/court orders w/o fees. Referral for ODR mediation and to classes on filings and parent education	Referral to DRO for free attorney consult and parent conference. Litigation help for qualifying NCPs. Referral to parent education classes	Referral to CSE based worker for facilitation. Referral to juvenile court based worker for <i>pro se</i> filing help. Referral to classes on parent ed/ <i>pro se</i> filings, mediation, relationship classes
Low-Level Treatment	Mailed information on court forms and community resources		
Data Collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ CP/NCP intake forms on demographics, parent-child contact, parent relationships, visitation problems.</li> <li>▪ Worker records on client needs, actions taken, outcomes.</li> <li>▪ Telephone interview 6 months after referral on user reactions, parent-child contact, perceptions of CSE agency.</li> <li>▪ Child support records check for payment behavior and enforcement actions 12 months before and after referral.</li> <li>▪ Focus groups and interviews with CSE and court workers.</li> </ul>		



## Program Operations

# 2

The Tennessee Parenting Project was conducted in three judicial districts in Tennessee: two in urban settings, the 20th Judicial District in Davidson County (Nashville) and the 11th Judicial District in Hamilton County (Chattanooga); and one in a rural setting, the 26th Judicial District, which includes the counties of Madison, Chester, and Henderson. It targeted never-married parents in the child support system who needed help working out a parenting plan; improving the level of communication and collaboration between the parents; and engaging the nonresident parent in the child's life.

The project placed a full-time parenting coordinator and a part-time *pro se* specialist in each of the three judicial districts. Parenting coordinators were full-time employees selected from the pool of applicants for a position as a Program Specialist with the Tennessee Department of Human Services. Minimum qualifications for the job included a bachelor's degree and five or more years of full-time professional work in a social services field. In the two urban settings, the *pro se* specialist was a contract attorney. In the rural setting, the *pro se* specialist was a non-attorney who arranged for an attorney to conduct periodic classes for interested parents on how to file visitation petitions in court. Based at the child support agency and integrated with the child support staff, the parenting coordinator publicized the project and reminded staff to identify parents with visitation problems and refer them to her. Based at the court and visible to judges and child support magistrates, the *pro se* facilitators attracted referrals of parents with visitation problems during court hearings.

Parenting coordinators offered parents facilitation services aimed at developing a parenting plan that specified when each parent would see the child(ren). *Pro se* specialists coordinated and scheduled unrepresented parents to attend regularly held classes on self-represented filings. *Pro se* specialists may also have tried to help parents develop a parenting plan, and/or referred them to mediation or reduced-fee legal services for further assistance.

### Target Population

Project participation was available for biological parents with an open CSE case at all stages of case processing who had a problem with access and visitation, where both parents lived in Tennessee, or those with long-arm jurisdiction.

Other groups of parents were also eligible for participation under certain conditions. Parents who did not have an open CSE case could participate if they signed an application for child support agency services. Parents who had an interstate case where the noncustodial parent lived outside of Tennessee could participate, although any parenting plan agreements they reached would likely be informal and would probably not be filed with the court.

Both custodial and noncustodial parents were recruited from staff referrals at the child support agency and the court, and through posters and fliers put up by project staff at various locations. Staff encouraged word-of-mouth and self-referrals to the project too as long as the parents had an open child support case, or were





establishing a child support case, and had issues surrounding access and visitation with the children on the case.

Interested parents completed a referral form that elicited some information needed to determine parent eligibility. Child support workers flagged other clients as potentially eligible to participate in the project and referred them to the parenting coordinator. Enrollment in the project occurred after the parenting coordinator conducted an in-person or telephone intake interview with the interested parent to gauge the nature of their visitation problem and other case circumstances including domestic violence, and child protection issues that would render a case ineligible for services.

## Treatment Groups

The parenting coordinator placed each appropriate project case in either a high-level or a low-level treatment group based on the final digit of their child support case number. If placed in a low treatment group, the parent was given and/or mailed an informational packet with community resources related to parenting, a co-parenting informational booklet and information on parent education classes, self-represented and *pro se* classes, court processes, reduced fee or *pro bono* attorneys and/or a Rule 31 mediator, and other related material. No further help by project staff was provided to these cases unless a parent contacted the *pro se* specialist who was listed in the material on community resources. At that point, the *pro se* specialist might have offered interested parents facilitation services to attempt to generate a parenting plan and/or enroll them in a free class on self-representation. Naturally, parents in the low-level treatment group could also pursue other community services listed in the materials mailed to them by project staff.

If placed in the high-level treatment group, the parenting coordinator attempted to contact both parents and schedule a joint meeting.<sup>1</sup> The goal of the meeting was to facilitate communication between the parents, in order to develop, clarify, or amend a parenting plan and generate a visitation agreement. If a parent refused to cooperate or could not be contacted, the parenting coordinator could also meet with the interested parent to talk about his or her visitation problem and discuss practical ways to reduce conflict and improve visitation.

If an agreement was reached between the parents, the parenting coordinator attached the parenting plan to the child support order and it was filed with the court with no additional filing fee. If the parties were uninterested in having the agreement formally filed with the court, the parenting plan or visitation agreement could be signed by the parents and given to them as an informal “psychological contract” between the two of them.

If the facilitation session did not generate an agreement and/or a parent refused to participate in the session, the parenting coordinator referred the complaining parent to the *pro se* specialist at juvenile court who would

---

<sup>1</sup> Cases in the 11th Judicial District that were referred to the project by the judge were not seen by a parenting coordinator and were only served by the *pro se* specialist who was an attorney.



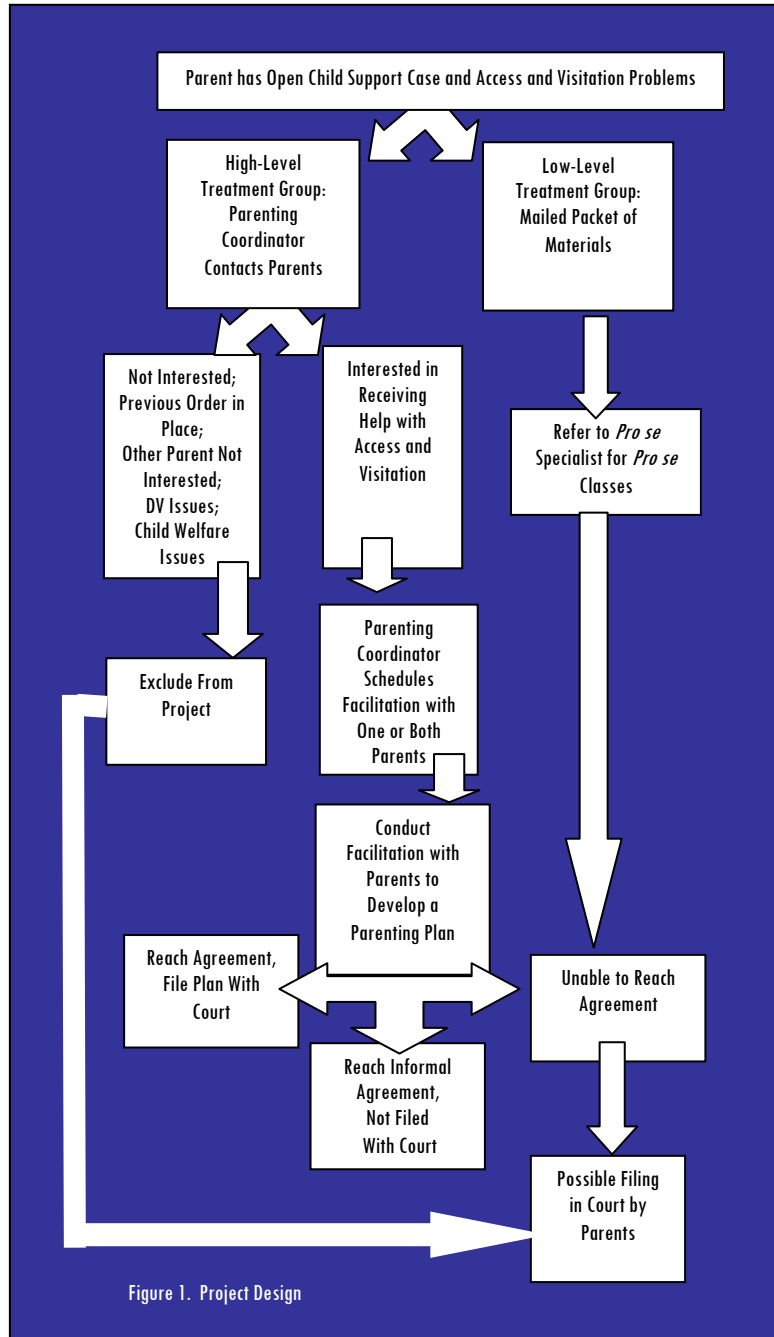
assist them with pursuing a self-represented filing at the court. The most common form of assistance was to schedule parents to attend a free class on self-representation conducted by the *pro se* specialist or another attorney.

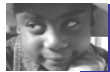
Figure 1 illustrates how high and low-level treatment groups moved through the Project.

If the parties could not reach an agreement and additional court processes were necessary, they were referred to the *pro se* specialist, who assisted them through the court process as self-represented litigants. *Pro se* specialists offered (or arranged for an attorney to offer) a periodic class that included a review of *pro se* forms, instructions on form completion, and a discussion of common case scenarios. Parents in the high-level treatment group had the option to pursue parent education courses, mediation and supervised visitation. All these services were available through independent providers within the community with fees paid for by the project.

### Project Setting

The project was conducted in local child support offices and courts in two urban and one rural judicial district in Tennessee. They were Judicial District 20 Davidson County (Nashville), Judicial District 11 Hamilton County (Chattanooga), and Judicial District 26 (Madison, Chester, and Henderson counties). Davidson County, the largest site, consists of Nashville and has the highest proportion of racial minorities (34.1%). The 26th Judicial District, the most rural site, has the lowest proportion of racial minorities as well as the lowest median income levels and high school graduation rates.





Nevertheless, the proportion of families living below poverty in the 26th is close to the level reported in Davidson County (11.9% versus 11.4%).

**Table 3. Selected Demographic Characteristics of Counties Participating in the Tennessee Parenting Project**

	Hamilton (Chattanooga) 11th	Davidson (Nashville) 20th	Madison, Chester and Henderson (Jackson) 26th
Population	330,182	620,204	49,625
Percentage high school graduates	85.0%	84.8%	72.7%
Median household income	\$46,505	\$46,780	\$34,282
Percentage of families living below poverty level	9.5%	11.4%	11.9%
Race:			
White	75.8%	65.9%	87.4%
African-American	20.1%	27.1%	9.9%
Indian	0.2%	0.4%	0.2%
Asian	1.5%	3.1%	0.2%
Hispanic	2.9%	7.5%	0.7%
Other/mixed	2.4%	3.5%	2.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey

In addition to including both rural and urban settings, the targeted judicial districts have unique administrative arrangements for the conduct of the child support program. Child support services are managed by the privatized vendors, Maximus and Policy Studies Inc. in the 11th and 20th, respectively, and the Tennessee District Attorneys General Conference in the 26th. The sites differ in caseload characteristics, including the number of out-of-wedlock children; the incidence of public assistance; and performance on key outcome measures pertaining to

paternity acknowledgement, order establishment, and payment. While the 20th has the highest caseload, the 11th has the highest paternity establishment percentage and the highest proportion of cases under order. The 26th has the lowest percentage of cases under order (61.46%) but the highest payment ratios, with 53.15 percent of owed support actually collected and 61.02 percent of cases paying arrears.

**Table 4. Selected 2009 Child Support Characteristics of Counties Participating in the Tennessee Parent Project**

	Hamilton (Chattanooga) 11th	Davidson (Nashville) 20th	Madison, Chester and Henderson (Jackson) 26th
Administrator of child support program	Maximus	Policy Studies Inc.	Tennessee District Attorneys General Conference
Number of open child support cases	24,541	41,682	13,076
Percentage TANF	21.3%	20.2%	24.2%
Percentage of cases under order	75.84%	67.81%	61.46%
Percentage of collections on current support	49.29%	47.82%	53.15%
Percentage of cases paying arrears	58.92%	56.10%	61.02%
Collections on arrears	6.64%	5.05%	7.23%
Paternity establishment percentage	102.30%	99.52%	88.25%
Number of out-of-wedlock children in child support caseload	19,994	37,222	11,406
Courts handling IV-D cases	Juvenile & Circuit	Juvenile	Juvenile



Over the life of the project, the economy deteriorated and the rate of unemployment increased. Between 2006 and 2009, the percent of current child support that was paid for the state of Tennessee as a whole dropped from 55.80 to 52.65 percent, while unemployment went from 4.8 to 10.7 percent.



## 3 Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation involved the collection and analysis of data from a variety of sources: records maintained by project staff, interviews with participating parents, child support information drawn from records maintained by the child support agency, and an on-line survey with child support and court workers.

### Records from Program Staff

Parenting coordinators or *pro se* specialists completed a data collection form that elicited information on parents in the high-level treatment group who sought help with visitation. The information was gathered in an in-person session with one or both parents or over the telephone, prior to a face-to-face meeting. The following information was gathered:

- Contact information for custodial and noncustodial parents (to permit follow-up contact by telephone interviewers in approximately six months);
- Selected demographic information for custodial and noncustodial parent including race, age, education, employment, marital status, and personal income;
- Selected information on the parental relationship and the nature and severity of the visitation problem;
- The possible existence of domestic violence or child protection issues;
- Reasons why the case was dropped from the project (if appropriate); and
- A preliminary plan of action.

For those who proceeded to discuss access and visitation with the parenting coordinator (in face-to-face or telephone formats), the form gathered information on:

- The nature and duration of the meeting and who participated;
- The topics that were discussed during the session;
- Difficulties encountered or barriers to developing a parenting plan;
- The outcome of the session;
- The anticipated legal status of any parenting plan that was developed; and
- The net change in parenting time (if any) following the meeting.



All forms that were completed by participants and/or parenting coordinators and *pro se* specialists were sent to the Center for Policy Research (CPR) for data entry and analysis.

## Parent Interviews

Six months after a case was assigned to the high or low-level treatment group, the noncustodial and custodial parent was contacted by professional telephone interviewers and asked to conduct a 15-minute interview about their visitation situation. The interviewer asked parents about each form of assistance that was offered and its usefulness. They were also asked about changes in parent-child contact and parental relationships since they enrolled in the project.

The interviews were conducted by the Public Opinion Laboratory (POL) of Northern Illinois University. All potential respondents were sent a heads-up postcard alerting them about the upcoming interview and reminding them of the \$25 gift card from Wal★Mart that they would receive upon completion of the interview. Each respondent was contacted up to eight times during different times of the day and different days of the week. In addition to respondent telephone numbers, interviewers were given names and numbers for a parent, friend, or relative in order to interview harder-to-reach respondents.

Telephone interviewing took place from May 15, 2007, thru June 2, 2009, a period of 25 months. Nearly all of the interviews (92%) occurred between six and eight months after the parent enrolled in the project. The average interview length was 23 minutes. The average and median number of calls it took to complete the interviews were 5.67 and 4.69, respectively.

Ultimately, interviewers conducted 541 interviews, for a response rate of 32 percent. Only 55 potential respondents (3%) refused to be interviewed. The biggest reasons why interviews were not conducted were the incidence of non-working, disconnected telephone and wrong numbers, which was the case for 743 individuals or 44 percent of the sample. Another 363 potential respondents (22%) were eliminated because they were unavailable after 10 attempts to reach them by telephone at each provided number.

## Child Support Data

In April 2010, programmers at the Tennessee Child Support Enforcement Division generated an extract of selected information on all cases in the high and low-level treatment groups. The information was drawn from the automated child support system, TCSES. The extract included information on selected characteristics of the case including its public assistance status, the marital status of the parents, the date the case was opened on the child support system, the date the original child support order was established, the date any modified order was established, and the total number of active cases the noncustodial parent had on the child support system. The extract also provided information on the status of the case when it was enrolled in the project, including the monthly support order, the monthly arrears payment due, the arrears balance, and whether there was a verified employer and/or a wage withholding order in effect. Finally, the extract contained month-by-month information on the amount of child support due and paid in the 24 months prior



to and following enrollment in the Tennessee Parenting Project, and the receipt of child support payments from various sources.

### **Surveys and Qualitative Interviews with Child Support Workers and Judges**

In the last few months of the project, online surveys were created and administered to child support workers and judicial personnel in the 11th, 20th and 26th Judicial Districts. They queried professionals about the frequency of visitation complaints made by parents in the child support system, their use of parenting coordinators and other project resources, their ratings of various program features, the need for the program, its perceived impact on parents in the child support program, ways to sustain the program, and the likely fate of access and visitation services for the child support population following program termination. The online surveys were supplemented with open-ended, in-depth interviews to obtain more detailed staff reactions to the program and its strengths and limitations.

### **Analysis**

The analysis of the Tennessee Parenting Project involved merging the information obtained from various data sources. We compared information on the high and low-level treatment groups in the three project sites to assess their comparability and differences. Next, we presented the characteristics of parents with access and visitation problems along with the nature of their problems. We assessed the delivery of project services, client attrition, and the nature of services that were delivered including meetings with parenting coordinators, facilitation sessions to develop parenting plans, meetings with *pro se* facilitators, and attendance at classes to assist with *pro se* filings. The outcome analysis focused on user reactions to mailed materials, facilitation sessions, *pro se* classes and other project services, and perceived changes in parent-child contact, parental relationships, and child support payment patterns following project enrollment. We also assessed the reactions of child support workers and judges in the participating sites to the project and their support for project continuation and other ways of helping parents in the child support system with visitation.



# 4 Project Enrollment

A total of 2,174 cases were enrolled in the Tennessee Parenting Project during October 2006 to December 2009, with nearly all enrollments occurring during the 36 months from October 2006 through September 2009

## Enrollment by Site and Group Assignment

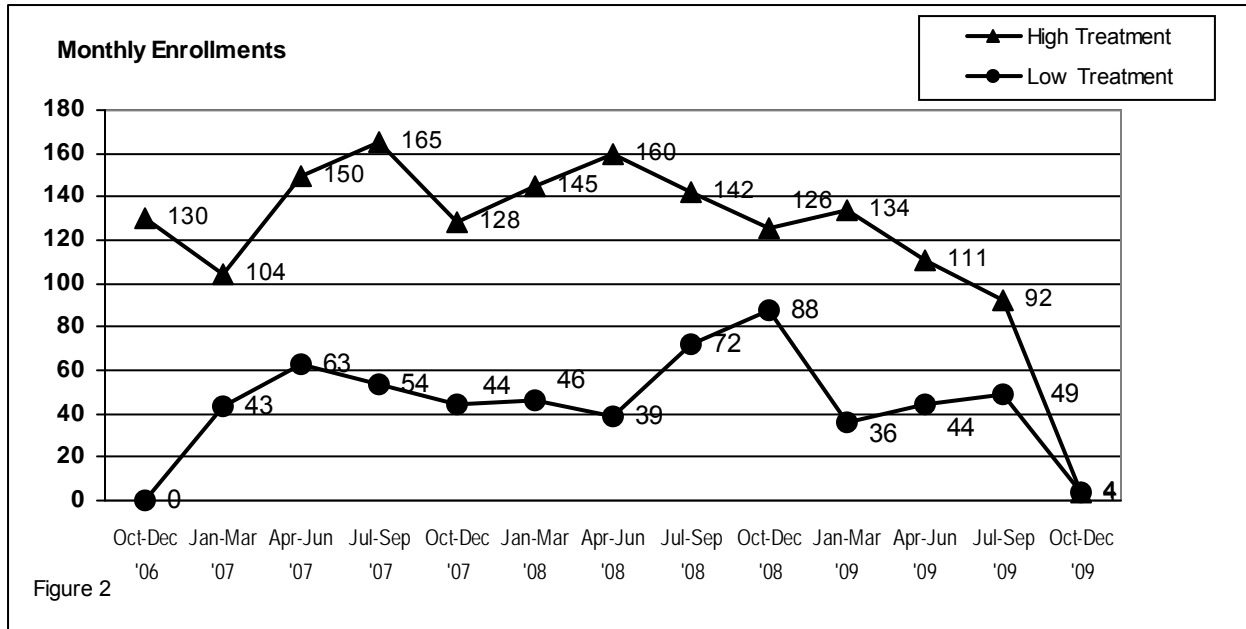
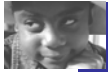
Across the three project sites, 26.8 percent of cases (583) were assigned to the low-level treatment group, with the remaining 1,591 cases going to the high-level treatment group. Group assignment patterns differed by project site. The low-level treatment group consisted of 40 percent of cases in the 20th Judicial District, 24 percent of cases in the 11th, and only 8 percent of cases in the 26th.

Group assignment was supposed to be done on a quasi-random basis with noncustodial parents with TCSES numbers ending in 0 to 2 going into the low-level treatment group and those with numbers ending in 3 to 9 going into the high-level treatment group. The protocol was not followed in the 26th, the most rural setting where many participants were recruited using word-of-mouth techniques. Project personnel found it very awkward to turn away some members of that very small community and accord them different treatment. As one staff member who had to deliver different enrollment messages to people who know one another put it, “How do I say, I can help you, but can’t help your friend?”

Project staff began enrolling cases in the high-level treatment group in October 2006 and the low-level treatment group in February 2007. Figure 2 shows that enrollment rates for each group were fairly steady after an initial start-up quarter and a wind-down at the tail end of the project. During the first 12 months of project activity (October 2006-September 2007), enrollment in the high and low-level level treatment groups averaged 46 and 20 cases per month, respectively. During the second project year (October 2007-September 2008), an average of 48 new cases per month were added to the high-level treatment group and 17 to the low-treatment group. During the third project year (October 2008-September 2009), monthly enrollment averaged 39 cases in the high-level treatment group and 15 in the low.

	11th Judicial District	20th Judicial District	26th Judicial District	Total
Low- level treatment group	24% (120)	40% (411)	8% (52)	26.8% (583)
High- level treatment group	76% (381)	60% (624)	92% (586)	73.2% (1,591)
Total enrollment	501	1,035	638	2,174





### Enrollment by Parenting Coordinators and *Pro se* Specialists

Both parenting coordinators and *pro se* specialists could handle project enrollments at each site, although it was expected that the full-time parenting coordinators would do most of them. This was the pattern in the 20th Judicial District, where the parenting coordinator was responsible for doing the intake process for 88 and 90 percent of cases in the high and low-level treatment groups, respectively. In the other judicial districts, however, *pro se* specialists were far more active in initiating case enrollments. Indeed, in both of these settings, they handled enrollment for approximately one-third of the cases in the high-level treatment group and one-fifth of cases in the low-level group. In these Judicial Districts, the division of labor between parenting coordinators and *pro se* specialists was more fluid. Thus, in addition to conducting classes on how to do a *pro se* filing and/or explaining the self-representation process to parents, the *pro se* specialist in the 11th and 26th Judicial Districts attempted to facilitate the development of parenting plans with parents who had visitation problems.

	11th Judicial District		20th Judicial District		26th Judicial District		Total	
	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
Enrolled by:								
Parenting Coordinator	65% (248)	78% (93)	88% (545)	90% (367)	67% (390)	80% (42)	74% (1,183)	86% (502)
<i>Pro se</i> Specialist	35% (133)	22% (27)	12% (77)	10% (43)	33% (196)	20% (10)	26% (406)	14% (80)



### Referrals Source

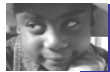
It was expected that the chief sources of project cases in the high-level treatment group would be referrals by child support workers and referrals by judicial officers at court. Table 7 shows that this was the case in the 20th Judicial District, where referrals by child support workers accounted for 65 percent of project enrollments and court referrals contributed another 17 percent. However, in the 26th Judicial District, a higher proportion of project cases was referred by the court (54%) as compared with child support referrals (43%). In the 11th Judicial District, about a fifth (22%) of cases were generated by parents themselves who called the child support agency requesting help. None of the cases in the low-level treatment group was referred by judicial officers. Judges and hearing officers in three judicial districts were eager to refer eligible noncustodial parents to parenting coordinators and *pro se* specialists who were typically based at the court during relevant hearing sessions. They did not permit the use of random assignment techniques for cases that they referred to the project. Although this violated the random assignment scheme and weakened the rigor of the evaluation design, it was a practical necessity.

**Table 7. Case Referral Source, by Site and Treatment Group**

	High Treatment Group				Low Treatment Group			
★Referral Source:	11th	20th	26th	Total	11th	20th	26th	Total
Court	14%	17%	54%	30%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Child support	62%	65%	43%	48%	70%	79%	96%	69%
Received information in mail and called	1%	1%	0%	1%	2%	2%	0%	2%
Called child support	22%	3%	2%	7%	28%	2%	0%	6%
Other	0%	13%	2%	15%	0%	18%	4%	23%
★Chi square is significant between sites at .00.								

### Requests for Services by Mothers and Fathers

A final feature of enrollment activity that CPR tracked was the sex of the parent who requested project services. Since a goal of the project was to improve child support payments by addressing the visitation problems of noncustodial parents, CPR expected that most of the service requests would come from fathers who are more apt to be noncustodial parents. Table 8 shows that this was the case in all three project counties where fathers were responsible for at least half of the referrals to the high-level treatment group. Referrals in the 11th Judicial District were more likely to be generated by both parents. This reflects the fact that in cases with visitation problems, the court in the 11th Judicial District instructed both parents to meet with the *pro se* facilitator based at the court and attempt to develop a parenting plan. It is relevant that more than a third of the cases at every project site were referred by mothers. As CPR have observed in other projects that deal with access and visitation, interventions that are designed to help noncustodial parents are also attractive to custodial parents. For example, the State Access and Visitation Grant Programs that served



over 85,000 parents in 2008 reported that equal numbers of fathers and mothers obtained assistance (Office of Child Support Enforcement, 2008).

Parenting coordinators and *pro se* facilitators felt that it was relatively easy to get child support workers and court personnel to refer parents to the project. Although child support staff and judicial personnel did not use a formal screening tool to identify parents with visitation problems, the project prompted them to ask parents about these issues. Project staff felt that their presence at the child support office and in the courts on hearing days reminded child support workers and hearing officers to consider visitation problems. In addition, since many parents complain about visitation issues on their own the project provided a convenient way for staff to divert parents to on-site personnel without consuming extra court or agency time.

**Table 8. Parent Requesting Services By Treatment Group and Site**

	11th Judicial District	20th Judicial District	26th Judicial District	Total
★ High-level treatment group				
Mother	35%	38%	38%	38%
Father	54%	61%	61%	60%
Both parents	10%	1%	0.2%	3%
★ Low-level treatment group				
Mother	30%	50%	22%	44%
Father	56%	50%	78%	54%
Both parents	14%	0%	0%	2%
★ Chi square is significant at .00.				

Table 9 shows that most cases that were referred to the project in both the high and low-level treatment groups were older and had been in the child support system for an average of 43.6 and 44.2 months, respectively. This translates into 3.6 and 3.7 years. Less than a quarter of the participants in each group had new child support orders that had been established within the preceding six months. Since visitation is not addressed in child support cases that involve never-married parents, it is perhaps not surprising that relatively few project cases occurred at early stages of case processing and most visitation disputes were picked up more than 24 months after orders had been established.

**Table 9. Age of Cases Referred to Project by Treatment Group**

	High Treatment (N=1,532)	Low Treatment (N=556)
Age of order (in months)		
Mean	43.6	44.2
Median	28.0	31.0
Range	Less than 1-189	Less than 1-169
Number	(1,237)	(445)
Percent with order established within past 6 months or less	23%	21%
6-12 months	7%	6%
12-24 months	10%	13%
More than 24 months	59%	61%



# 5 Project Participants, Children, and Relationships

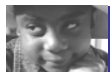
## Custodial Arrangements and Residence of Parents Enrolled in the Project

Table 10 presents selected characteristics of parents who enrolled in the project to obtain help with visitation and were assigned to the high- and low-level treatment groups. Although the two groups were mostly generated using random assignment techniques and were not expected to be different, cases referred to the project by the court were always placed in the high-level treatment group which may have introduced some differences between parents in the high- and low-level treatment groups.

The table shows that there were relatively few differences in case characteristics across the two treatment groups and the three project sites. To the extent that there were differences, they tended to involve the 20th Judicial District, which includes Nashville and is the most urban project setting. Thus, so the extent that there were any project cases with paternal and shared custody arrangements, they tended to occur in the Nashville area. Cases in the 20th Judicial District were also significantly more likely to have parents who both lived in Tennessee and in close proximity to one another. Conversely, parents in the 26th Judicial District, the most rural setting, were significantly more likely to live more than 200 miles apart. And in cases generated in both the 11th and 26th Judicial Districts, one parent was more likely to live out-of-state as compared with parents in the 20th Judicial District.

Table 10. Custodial Arrangements and Residence of Parents, by Site and Treatment Group								
High Treatment Group					Low Treatment Group			
	11th (N=331)	20th (N=535)	26th (N=577)	Total (N=1,443)	11th (N=106)	20th (N=242)	26th (N=50)	Total (N=398)
Primary caretaker of child	★							
Mother	97%	91%	94%	94%	97%	91%	96%	94%
Father	3%	5%	2%	3%	2%	5%	4%	4%
Share time equally	0%	3%	1%	2%	1%	1%	0%	1%
One child mostly with mother, one mostly with father	0%	0%	0.2%	0.1%	0%	0.4%	0%	0.3%
Other	1%	1%	3%	2%	0%	2%	0%	1%
Parents live	★							
In Tennessee	86%	94%	89%	90%	90%	93%	88%	92%
One parent lives out of state	14%	6%	11%	10%	10%	7%	12%	8%
Distance parents live apart	★							
Less than 50 miles	85%	88%	81%	84%	83%	87%	71%	83%
50 to 200 miles	5%	4%	5%	5%	10%	6%	19%	9%
More than 200 miles	10%	8%	14%	11%	7%	6%	10%	7%

★ Chi square across sites is significant at .05.



### Children and Noncustodial Parent Access

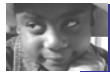
Parents who enrolled in the project at every site had an average of 1.3 and a median of 1.0 children together, with a range from one to seven. There were statistically significant differences by site in the amount of contact the noncustodial parent reported having with the children. In general, contact appeared to be most attenuated in the 26th Judicial District, the most rural project site, where the distance between the homes of the two parents was the greatest. More than half (56%) of parents in the high-level treatment group in the 26th Judicial District and 75 percent of parents in the low-level treatment group in this setting reported “none” or only a single episode of contact between the noncustodial parent and the children during the previous six months. Conversely, only 7 and 6 percent of parents in the high- and low-level treatment groups, respectively, reported seeing their children once a week or more often.

	High Treatment Group				Low Treatment Group			
	11th (N=331)	20th (N=535)	26th (N=577)	Total (N=1,443)	11th (N=106)	20th (N=242)	26th (N=50)	Total (N=398)
Number of children together								
Mean	1.2	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.1	1.4	1.2	1.3
Median	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Range	1-4	1-7	1-4	1-7	1-2	1-8	1-2	1-8
Number	(115)	(461)	(425)	(1,001)	(83)	(211)	(50)	(344)
In past 6 months, how often NCP has seen the child(ren)	★				★			
Not at all/never	26%	27%	30%	28%	23%	24%	20%	23%
About once or twice	20%	21%	26%	23%	20%	26%	55%	29%
About every other month	7%	4%	7%	6%	7%	7%	4%	7%
About once or twice per month	28%	18%	24%	23%	24%	18%	16%	20%
About every week	10%	12%	5%	9%	12%	6%	4%	7%
More than once a week	5%	8%	2%	5%	10%	11%	2%	10%
Other	3%	11%	5%	7%	3%	7%	0%	5%
★ Chi square between sites is significant at .07 or less.								

### Parents’ Relationships

As anticipated, the project served an extremely high proportion of never-married parents, particularly in the most urban setting, the 20th Judicial District, where 94 percent of participants had never been married. Cohabitation patterns also differed by site, with unmarried parents in the most rural setting, the 26th Judicial District, being significantly more likely to report having lived together. Indeed, while about half of the never-married parents in the 11th and 20th Judicial Districts reported having lived together, this was the case for 89 percent of unwed parents in the 26th Judicial District.

Although unmarried parents were more likely to have lived together in the 26<sup>th</sup>, they were less apt than their counterparts to have filed any formal domestic abuse charges or to be involved with the Department of Children’s Services concerning allegations of abuse or neglect. Since all cases referred by the court were

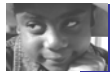


assigned to the high-level treatment group, it is perhaps not surprising that a court hearing on visitation had previously been held for approximately 20 percent of the cases at every site. Among cases in the low-level treatment group, this was the situation for only 9 percent across the three project sites.

Although they did not use the legal or child protection system to pursue grievances against one another, parents in the 26th Judicial District were significantly more likely than their counterparts in the 11th and 20th Judicial Districts to report strained relationships with one another. Nearly half (44%) of parents in the high-level treatment group and 82 percent of parents in the low-level treatment group reported being “somewhat angry” with the other parent. Asked explicitly whether they had disagreements about parenting time, 99 and 98 percent of parents in the high- and low-level treatment groups in the 26th Judicial District responded affirmatively. Another difference was the age of their parenting conflicts, with parents in the 26th Judicial District reporting significantly newer conflicts. On average, parents in this rural setting said that their parenting conflicts had lasted only for 9.1 months, as compared with 26.5 and 23.5 months for parents in the 11th and 20th Judicial Districts, respectively.

**Table 12. Parental Relationship History, by Site and Treatment Group**

	High Treatment Group				Low Treatment Group			
	11th	20th	26th	Total	11th	20th	26th	Total
<b>Marital status of parents</b>	★							
Never married	88%	94%	88%	90%	89%	89%	88%	89%
Married, living apart	4%	2%	6%	4%	7%	8%	2%	7%
Divorced	8%	4%	6%	6%	5%	3%	10%	4%
<b>If never married:</b>	★							
Percentage lived together	53%	53%	89%	70%	46%	46%	89%	53%
Percentage never lived together	47%	47%	11%	30%	54%	54%	11%	47%
<b>Percentage with an orders of protection, restraining, stay away, or domestic assault filing</b>	★							
No	91%	92%	95%	92%	95%	95%	98%	95%
Yes, mother against father	7%	4%	5%	5%	5%	3%	0%	3%
Yes, father against mother	2%	4%	0.2%	2%	0%	3%	2%	2%
<b>Department of Children’s Services has been involved with the family</b>	★							
Yes	4%	10%	5%	6%	4%	12%	0%	6%
<b>Percentage of cases where court hearing was previously held on visitation</b>	★							
Yes	17%	18%	20%	19%	13%	10%	2%	9%
<b>Relationship status of parents</b>	★							
Fairly friendly	35%	40%	28%	34%	32%	35%	10%	31%
Somewhat angry	29%	26%	44%	33%	24%	24%	82%	33%
Very angry	6%	9%	8%	8%	7%	14%	4%	11%
No contact	30%	22%	20%	23%	35%	25%	4%	24%
Other	0.4%	4%	0%	2%	2%	2%	0%	2%



**Table 12. Parental Relationship History, by Site and Treatment Group**

	High Treatment Group				Low Treatment Group			
	11th	20th	26th	Total	11th	20th	26th	Total
Parents have disagreements about parenting time	★							
Yes	77%	79%	99%	87%	87%	75%	98%	82%
Average number of months parenting conflict has lasted	★							
Mean	26.5	23.5	9.1	16.0	13.9	19.7	8.5	15.0
Median	12.0	10.0	6.0	6.0	9.0	9.5	6.0	6.5
Range	1-144	1-180	1-168	1-180	1-48	1-180	2-72	1-180
Number	(97)	(227)	(389)	(713)	(33)	(74)	(47)	(154)

★Chi square between sites is significant at .07 or less.

**Access Problems**

Table 13 itemizes common types of visitation problems reported by parents. There were many differences across the sites. One of the biggest differences was the higher rate of parental fighting about the safety of the children in the 20th Judicial District. A quarter (25%) of parents in the 20th Judicial District, as compared with 11 percent in the 11th Judicial District and 6 percent in the 26th, said there were disagreements about the safety of the children with the other parent. Parents in the 11th Judicial District were significantly less apt than their counterparts to report disagreements about when each parent will see the children and more likely to report problems with new partners. Finally, parents in the 26th Judicial District were dramatically more likely to report other types of problems dealing with the logistics and costs associated with visits. As previously discussed, parents in the 26th Judicial District lived the furthest apart and presumably faced the highest costs and time burdens in order to exercise visitation. These challenges created conflicts for 81 percent of parents in the high-level treatment group and 94 percent of parents in the low-level treatment group.

**Table 13. Access and Visitation Problems Reported By Parents, by Site and Treatment Group**

Types of problems parents report	High Treatment Group				Low Treatment Group			
	11th (N=306)	20th (N=482)	26th (N=537)	Total (N=1,325)	11th (N=106)	20th (N=165)	26th (N=50)	Total (N=321)
Disagree about when each parent will see the child	★36%	★72%	★62%	60%	★33%	★55%	★94%	54%
Fights at drop off and pick up	★7%	★15%	★7%	10%	9%	16%	6%	12%
Problems with new partner	★52%	★45%	★40%	45%	★50%	★21%	★22%	31%
Disagree about whether the children are safe with the other parent	★11%	★25%	★6%	14%	★9%	★26%	★28%	21%
Problems getting to see the children	★8%	★21%	★16%	16%	★8%	★21%	★2%	13%
Other	★43%	★59%	★81%	64%	★39%	★51%	★94%	54%

★Chi square between sites is significant at .00.



# 6 The Receipt of Services

Enrolling in the Tennessee Parenting Project was only the first step to getting help with visitation. Many parents were considered to be ineligible to receive services; many others failed to appear or could not be contacted even though they met project criteria and were considered eligible. Table 14 shows that of the 1,591 cases enrolled in the high treatment group, 43 percent received services, 21 percent were considered ineligible and were screened out of the project, and 36 percent could not be located or refused to cooperate and were not served. This reduced the number of cases in the high-level treatment group to 1,510.

**Table 14. Status of High-Level Treatment Group Cases, by Site**

		High Treatment Group			
		11th (N=357)	20th (N=612)	26th (N=541)	▲ Total (N=1,510)
★ High Treatment Case Status	Enrolled	38%	52%	36%	43%
	Ineligible, not served	17%	18%	28%	21%
	Eligible, not served	45%	30%	36%	36%

★ Chi square is significant at .00.  
▲ 81 cases lacked information needed to determine their status and were dropped from the analysis entirely.

The 43 percent service rate compares favorably with the experiences of other projects to integrate visitation services in child support agencies in Colorado and Texas. Only 34 percent of parents in Colorado who were offered the opportunity to work with a facilitator to develop a parenting plan took advantage of the offer. And while 60 percent of noncustodial parents in Texas availed themselves of services to help with visitation, most (34%) just attended a free consultation with an attorney. The proportion that participated in a conference with a facilitator about parenting was

only 26 percent.

**Table 15. A Comparison of Service Receipt by Parents in the Child Support Caseload in Demonstration Projects Conducted in Colorado, Texas, and Tennessee**

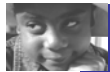
	Colorado (N=716)	Texas (N=875)	Tennessee (N=2,174)
Low Treatment Group	192	229	583
High Treatment Group	523	646	1,591
Served (Parent Conference)	176 (34%)	168 (26%)	649 (43%)
Served (Attorney Consult-Only)	N/A	221 (34%)	N/A
Not Served	347 (66%)	257 (40%)	861 (57%)

## Ineligible Parents

Before being scheduled to meet with the parenting coordinator to discuss visitation, all cases in the high-level treatment group were screened for various circumstances and problems that might compromise the safety of the parties or the children. Cases that were judged to be ineligible for program services included those with a history of domestic violence, a current or previous protection order in place, or those that had an open child protection case. Across the three

project sites, more than a quarter (28%) of the excluded cases was dropped because of safety concerns. In these instances, parents indicated that an order of protection, restraining order, stay-away order, or domestic assault had been filed. Alternatively, they indicated that they were afraid of the other parent and feared that physical violence would occur. Parenting coordinators were instructed to ask structured questions about domestic violence and other physical safety issues and were given the authority to decide if it was safe to proceed with attempting to establish a parenting plan.





Other cases were dropped from the project for a variety of other reasons, the chief one being out-of-state residence. Some cases in each judicial district had pending legal action dealing with custody or visitation and these cases were excluded to avoid the development of conflicting court orders. Still other cases were dropped because custody had changed and the children were no longer living with the biological parents. Occasionally, cases were dropped because paternity had not been resolved, the noncustodial parent was incarcerated, or the service could not be delivered in a language spoken by the parent.

### Parents Who Dropped Out of the Program

Safety considerations and other ineligibility factors were not the only reasons why parents in cases assigned to the high-level treatment group failed to receive visitation services. More than a third of the cases were ultimately dropped for other reasons, the chief ones being the inability to contact one or both parents and/or their unwillingness to cooperate with the visitation intervention. In these instances, the parenting coordinator was unable to reach a parent by telephone to schedule a meeting and/or one or both parents failed to appear for a scheduled meeting. As in Texas and Colorado, it was difficult to

**Table 16. Reasons Why High-Level Treatment Cases Were Determined to be Ineligible For Services, by Site**

Reason Ineligible for services:	High Treatment Group			
	11th (N=62)	20th (N=108)	26th (N=150)	Total (N=320)
Language barrier	0%	0%	1%	0.3%
★Paternity is in question	5%	10%	2%	5%
Domestic violence, sexual abuse, child abuse, or other safety issues	29%	31%	26%	28%
Previous visitation order in place	32%	23%	27%	27%
Parent resides out of state	16%	27%	23%	23%
NCP is incarcerated	3%	2%	2%	2%
★Legal action pending on the case	3%	16%	11%	11%
★Parental rights terminated, child not in parent's custody	13%	8%	23%	16%
Parents are divorced/divorcing	0%	2%	2%	2%
Parents are minors	0%	0%	0.7%	0.3%
★ Chi square is significant at .05 or less.				

get the custodial parent to agree to cooperate with the offer to develop a parenting plan. Indeed, these problems were cited in nearly all of the 539 cases that did not receive visitation services even though the parents were eligible to participate. Another reason for non-service was the noncustodial parent's decision to drop the matter or withdraw the request for services. This occurred in 19 percent of the cases that were eligible for service but were not served. In 8 percent of the cases, the parents worked their problems out on their own or decided that they did not want a parenting plan. And in 10 percent of the cases, parents were referred to Legal Aid or other community services because the parenting coordinator felt that the parents would be better served in another forum.



**Table 17. Reasons Why Eligible Cases in the High Treatment Group Were Not Served, by Site**

Reasons for Non-Service:	High Treatment Group			
	11th (N=160)	20th (N=185)	26th (N=194)	Total (N=539)
★ Could not contact other parent, both parents failed to appear for meeting	85%	92%	74%	84%
★ NCP withdrew request to participate, parents decided not to proceed or no longer interested in services	14%	11%	31%	19%
CP and/or NCP failed to appear for appointment, other parent did not want to meet alone	1%	3%	1%	2%
Other	1%	4%	5%	4%
Parents working it out on their own, do not want a parenting plan	11%	6%	9%	8%
★ Parents referred to Legal Aid or other community services	8%	7%	14%	10%
Parents were unable to agree to come in or were unable to participate	1%	4%	1%	2%

★ Chi square is significant at .05 or less.

The analysis of case eligibility and attrition reveals how difficult it is to deliver visitation services to parents in the child support caseload even when there is a dedicated worker offering on-site assistance at the agency. Approximately one-fifth of those with problems were ultimately dropped because of geographical distance, domestic violence, and other factors that might make parenting time unsafe and the intervention to develop a parenting plan unwise. Moving beyond safety, more than a third of parents with problems were not served because they could not be reached by telephone or mail to arrange a meeting. Still others failed to appear for scheduled meetings, lost interest in the intervention, or were judged to be better served in another forum. As a result, only 41 percent of parents with visitation problems ultimately received treatment.

Table 18 shows that these service delivery issues are common when dealing with the child support population. Like Tennessee, demonstration projects in Colorado and Texas that sought to integrate the delivery of visitation services in the child support agency found that many cases were not served because the parents could not be located and/or refused to cooperate, a parent lived out of state, a parent had a history of domestic violence or other forms of assault, and/or there was a previous parenting order in place.

**Table 18. Reasons for Exclusion of High-Level Treatment Group Cases in Projects that Provide Visitation Services for the Child Support Population in Colorado, Texas, and Tennessee ★**

	Colorado	Texas	Tennessee
Number of high treatment cases excluded or closed without being served	347	257	858
Reasons why excluded or not treated:			
Closed case – No response; NCP not interested; no cooperation	30%	50%	92%
Closed case – No response; CP not interested; no cooperation	70%	36%	(NCP or CP)
CP lives out of state	3%	Not asked	9%
NCP has sex assault/violent history of convictions	10%	1%	11%
CPS involved	Not asked	3%	6%
Previous parenting order in place	7%	Not asked	10%
NCP in jail	1%	Not asked	1%
Excluded by genetic test	1%	Not asked	2%
Parents made own arrangements/reconciled	Not asked	6%	6%

★ Multiple reasons for exclusion permitted.



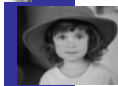
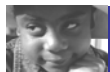
# 7 Profile of Served and Non-Served Parents

Tables 19 and 20 present information on the characteristics of parents in the high-level treatment group in each project site who were ultimately served and received help with visitation. Table 19 focuses on noncustodial parents, while Table 20 considers custodial parents.

## Noncustodial Parents

The 565 noncustodial parents who received help with visitation ranged in age from 18 to 59, with an average of 30.6 and a median of 28.2. A majority were African-American, especially parents in the 20th Judicial District (84%). More than a quarter of project participants reported their race as White in the 11th (29%) and 26th (26%) Judicial Districts. Noncustodial parents who received visitation services had lower education levels than custodial parents, with only 6 percent reporting having a college degree and 23 percent having some college or technical school experience. A majority of parents at every site had a high school degree or GED, with the cross-site average being 61 percent. Educational attainment levels were lowest among parents in the 11th Judicial District, where only 22 percent reported any education beyond the high school or GED level. Across the three project sites, 70 percent were employed full time and 19 percent were unemployed. The unemployment rate was highest in the 11th Judicial District and stood at 27 percent. Full-time employment was only 60 percent. Most noncustodial parents who received visitation services were single (76%) and had very low income levels. Approximately one-third reported annual incomes that fell below \$10,000 and between \$10,000 and \$20,000, respectively. Only 2 percent reported incomes that exceeded \$40,000 per year.

	11th (N=110)	20th (N=284)	26th (N=171)	Total (N=565)
<b>Age</b>				
Mean	31.7	31.1	28.5	30.6
Median	29.8	28.5	27.8	28.2
Range	23-51	18-59	18-46	18-59
Number	(16)	(200)	(63)	(279)
<b>★Race</b>				
African American	70%	84%	73%	78%
White	29%	12%	26%	20%
Hispanic	0%	2%	1%	1%
Native American	0%	0%	0%	0%
Asian American	0%	0%	0%	0%
Other	1%	2%	1%	1%

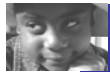


**Table 19. Selected Demographic Characteristics of Noncustodial Parents Who Received Services in the High-Level Treatment Group, by Site**

	11th (N=110)	20th (N=284)	26th (N=171)	Total (N=565)
<b>★Education</b>				
College degree	7%	7%	4%	6%
Some college/ technical school	15%	25%	25%	23%
High school/GED	63%	57%	68%	61%
Less than high school	15%	12%	3%	10%
<b>★NCP Employment status</b>				
Employed full-time	60%	68%	79%	70%
Employed part-time	10%	9%	9%	9%
Temporary/Pick-up Jobs	3%	4%	1%	2%
Unemployed	27%	20%	12%	19%
<b>NCP current marital status</b>				
Married	20%	16%	19%	18%
Marriage-like relationship	3%	4%	1%	3%
Divorced/widowed	4%	4%	3%	4%
Single	72%	76%	77%	76%
<b>★NCP annual income</b>				
Less than \$10,000	35%	36%	27%	33%
\$10-\$20,000	34%	29%	48%	35%
\$20-\$30,000	23%	25%	18%	23%
\$30-\$40,000	7%	7%	6%	7%
\$40,000+	0%	3%	1%	2%
*Chi square is significant at .02 or less.				

### Custodial Parents

Custodial parents who received help with visitation mirrored noncustodial parents in the project. They ranged in age from 18 to 53 and had an average age of 27.9 and a median of 26.5. Nearly three-quarters (72%) were African American and a quarter were White. None of the parenting coordinators offered Spanish-language services and only a tiny proportion of Hispanics were served (1%). Educational attainment levels differed across the sites with custodial parents in the 11th Judicial District registering the lowest rates of college attendance and/or completion. Overall, 9 percent of custodial parents received a college degree, 37 percent attended college and/or a technical school for some period of time, 44 percent had a high school degree or GED, and 10 percent had less than a high school diploma. At every project site, about half of the custodial parents who received help with visitation were employed full time, 16 percent were employed part time, and nearly a third (31%) were unemployed. The unemployment rate was highest in the 11th Judicial District and stood at 40 percent. Nearly all custodial parents reported being single (79%), with only 14 percent characterizing themselves as married and 4 percent saying that they were in a marriage-like relationship. With few exceptions, they reported having extremely low incomes, with nearly half (45%)

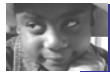


reporting annual earnings that fell below \$10,000, a third (32%) reporting earnings between \$10,000 and \$20,000, and only 2 percent reporting earnings that exceeded \$40,000.

**Table 20. Selected Demographic Characteristics of Custodial Parents Who Received Services in the High-Level Treatment Group, by Site**

		11th (N=108)	20th (N=283)	26th (N=62)	Total (N=453)
Age	Mean	28.1	28.3	25.7	27.9
	Median	28.0	26.9	25.0	26.5
	Range	22-39	18-53	18-36	18-53
	Number	(16)	(197)	(37)	(250)
★Race	African American	68%	76%	60%	72%
	White	32%	20%	37%	25%
	Hispanic	0%	2%	2%	1%
	Native American	0%	0.4%	0%	0.2%
	Asian American	0%	1%	0%	1%
	Other	0%	1%	2%	1%
★Education	College degree	3%	11%	8%	9%
	Some college/technical school	30%	38%	43%	37%
	High school/GED	58%	40%	47%	44%
	Less than high school	9%	12%	2%	10%
NCP Employment status	Employed full-time	48%	53%	54%	52%
	Employed part-time	12%	17%	15%	16%
	Temporary/Pick-up Jobs	0%	2%	0%	1%
	Unemployed	40%	28%	30%	31%
CP current marital status	Married	15%	12%	24%	14%
	Marriage-like relationship	3%	5%	0%	4%
	Divorced/widowed	3%	3%	21%	3%
	Single	79%	81%	75%	79%
★CP annual income	Less than \$10,000	48%	45%	43%	45%
	\$10-20,000	44%	26%	39%	32%
	\$20-30,000	7%	18%	15%	15%
	\$30-40,000	1%	7%	4%	6%
	\$40,000+	0%	3%	0%	2%

\*Chi square is significant at .07 or less.



### Comparing Served, Ineligible, and Dropped Parents

To determine whether parents in the high-level treatment group who received visitation services differed from their counterparts who did not because they failed to appear or dropped out, CPR compared the three groups on some key demographic and relationship variables. The comparison appears in Tables 21-24. It shows that ineligible cases were more likely to have non-parental custody arrangements. Parenting coordinators were instructed to exclude cases with third-party custody arrangements where the children were in state care and/or custody was held by a relative or foster parent. Another significant difference between served, dropped, and ineligible cases was their interstate status. Nearly all served cases involved parents who both lived in Tennessee while ineligible and dropped cases were more apt to involve an out-of-state parent. The groups also differed in the geographical distance between the parents. While 92 percent of served parents lived less than 50 miles apart, this was the case for only 83 percent of dropped parents who could not be reached, failed to appear, or declined to cooperate.

**Table 21. Number of Children, Custodial Status, and Geographic Proximity of Served, Ineligible, and Dropped Cases in the High-level Treatment Group**

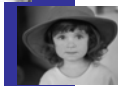
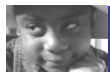
	Served (N=645)	Ineligible (N=273)	Dropped (N=448)
★ Primary caretaker of child			
Mother	96%	89%	94%
Father	3%	4%	3%
Share time equally	1%	0%	3%
One child mostly with mother, one mostly with father	0%	0%	0.2%
Other	0.3%	7%	0.4%
Average number of children parents have together	1.3	1.3	1.2
★ Both parents live in Tennessee	97%	87%	86%
★ Distance parents live apart			
Less than 50 miles	92%	87%	83%
50 to 200 miles	8%	12%	16%
More than 200 miles	0%	1%	1%
★ Chi square is significant between sites at .00.			

The three groups also differed in the amount of visitation the noncustodial parent had exercised prior to their enrollment in the project. As might be expected, those who were ultimately served reported higher levels of parent-child contact than their counterparts who were ineligible or dropped. While 41 percent of served parents reported seeing their children at least once a month, this was reported by only 30 percent of dropped parents. Similarly, while more

than one-third of parents who dropped out of the project and were not served (36%) reported no parent-child contact; this was reported by only 25 percent of parents who ultimately received project services.

**Table 22. Amount of Visitation With Children Reported by NCPs Who Were Served, Ineligible, and Dropped in the High-level Treatment Group**

★ In past 6 months, how often NCP has seen the child(ren)	Served (N=619)	Ineligible (N=264)	Dropped (N=428)
Not at all/never	25%	27%	36%
About once or twice	21%	27%	23%
About every other month	6%	5%	7%
About once or twice per month	24%	25%	19%
About every week	11%	8%	7%
More than once a week	6%	3%	4%
Other	9%	6%	4%
★ Chi square is significant between sites at .00.			

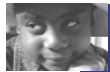


Although parents in all three groups were overwhelmingly apt to be never married, those who were determined to be ineligible were significantly more likely to be divorced from the other parent (15%). The major reasons why cases were judged to be ineligible were domestic violence and/or having a previous visitation order in place. Parents who divorce routinely get orders that address custody and visitation, while visitation rights is ignored in paternity and child support orders for never-married parents. Among never-married parents, there were no differences in cohabitation patterns for the three service groups. However, there were differences in parental relationships. Parents who received project services were significantly more likely to report having a “fairly friendly” relationship with the other parent and less likely to characterize themselves as having “no contact.”

<b>Table 23. Relationship History Reported by the NCP for Served, Ineligible, and Dropped High-level Treatment Group Cases</b>				
		Served (N=630)	Ineligible (N=273)	Dropped (N=445)
<b>★ Marital status of parents</b>				
	Never married	95%	80%	91%
	Married, living apart	3%	5%	5%
	Divorced	2%	15%	4%
<b>If never married:</b>				
	Percentage lived together	60%	81%	75%
	Percentage never lived together	40%	19%	25%
	Number	(531)	(179)	(324)
<b>★ Relationship status of parents</b>				
	Fairly friendly	48%	17%	31%
	Somewhat angry	28%	38%	33%
	Very angry	6%	16%	6%
	No contact	14%	27%	30%
	Other	3%	1%	1%
★ Chi square is significant between sites at .00.				

Given the differences in relationship status and parent-child contact patterns, it is perhaps not surprising that the three treatment groups had different patterns of disagreement about parenting time and that their problems had occurred for different amounts of time. Simply put, parents who received project services had newer disputes about visitation. On average, these conflicts had been going on for 5.6 months when the parents enrolled in the project. The average age of disputes for parents who were dropped from the project because they could not be reached or refused to cooperate or failed to appear was 8.5 months.

<b>Table 24. Incidence and Duration of Visitation Disputes for Served, Ineligible, and Dropped Cases in the High-Level Treatment Group</b>			
	Served (N=614)	Ineligible (N=261)	Dropped (N=429)
<b>★ Percentage of parents that have disagreements about parenting time</b>	85%	92%	85%
<b>★ Average number of months parenting conflict has lasted</b>	5.6	7.8	8.5
★ Chi square is significant between sites at .00.			



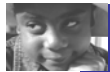
Did certain characteristics of parents and their relationships explain their service status or predict whether they received services? Table 25 shows that there were few factors that had predictive power. Both served and dropped groups had average ages of 30.6 and 30.8. Race and ethnicity was not a predictor of service status, with African-Americans and Whites having similar rates of service receipt. Nor was marital and employment status. The one demographic feature of project participants that was associated with service outcomes was the education level of the noncustodial parent. In general, parents with lower levels of education were more likely to obtain services while their college-educated counterparts were less apt to obtain help with visitation from project staff and perhaps more likely to resolve the matter on their own or find alternative forms of assistance

**Table 25. Selected Demographic Characteristics of High-Level Treatment NCPs Who Are Served and Dropped**

Average Age	Enrolled	30.6			
	Dropped	30.8			
Race		African-American	White	Hispanic	Other
	Served	89%	91%	100%	89%
	Dropped	11%	9%	0%	11%
	Number	(508)	(123)	(7)	(9)
Marital Status		Married	Marriage-like	Divorced/widowed	Single
	Served	91%	100%	85%	90%
	Dropped	9%	0%	15%	10%
	Number	(108)	(17)	(26)	(473)
★ Education		College	Some college/technical school	High School/ GED	Less than high school
	Served	83%	93%	89%	100%
	Dropped	17%	7%	11%	0%
	Number	(40)	(138)	(387)	(54)
Employment status		Full-time	Part-time	Temp./Pick-up	Unemployed
	Served	91%	88%	78%	87%
	Dropped	9%	12%	22%	13%
	Number	(434)	(58)	(18)	(121)
★ Chi square is significant between enrolled and dropped clients at .00.					

A more revealing comparison between parents who were served and those who dropped out is one that contrasts their relationships with the other parent and their contact patterns with their children prior to enrolling in the project. The comparison, which appears in Table 26, shows that dropout rates were highest among parents who characterized their relationship with the other parent as “very angry/hostile” and those who said that they saw their children “about every other month” or less often. Dropout rates were significantly lower for those who reported more cooperative relationships with the other parent and those who reported frequent contact levels with their children that exceeded once a month.





High Treatment Group						
★ Relationship with other parent		Very angry/hostile	Somewhat angry/hostile	Fairly cooperative	Very cooperative	No contact
	Served	78%	88%	92%	95%	94%
	Dropped	22%	12%	8%	5%	6%
	Number	(148)	(210)	(240)	(38)	(18)
★ Amount of visitation between NCP and children in the past 6 months		Not at all/never	About once or twice	About every other month	About once or twice a month	Every week or more
	Served	50%	56%	46%	65%	68%
	Dropped	50%	44%	54%	35%	32%
	Number	(305)	(227)	(50)	(240)	(153)
★ Chi square is significant between enrolled and dropped clients at .00.						

Parents served in the Tennessee Parenting Project resembled their counterparts in other programs that provide visitation services to the child support population. Like their counterparts in Colorado and Texas, they tended to be 30 years old, non-White, educated to the high school level, and employed full-time, but earning low wages. The project offered them services that they would otherwise be unable to afford. Although it attracted some users who were completely unemployed, it appeared to be a resource for noncustodial parents who were employed but at the low end of the pay scale.

		Colorado (N=42)	Texas (N=241)	Tennessee (N=565)
Age of NCP:	Mean	34.8	32.2	30.6
	Median	36.0	31.0	28.2
	Range	21-50	18-61	18-59
Race:	African-American	11%	54%	78%
	White	46%	9%	20%
	Latino/Hispanic	43%	35%	1%
	Native American	0%	0.4%	0%
	Other	0%	1%	1%
Education:	College degree	17%	13%	6%
	Some college/tech. school	N/A	N/A	23%
	High school diploma/GED	74%	69%	61%
	No degree	10%	19%	10%
Employment:	Full-time	74%	62%	70%
	Part-time	2%	5%	9%
	Temporary/pick-up	0	7%	2%
	Unemployed	23%	27%	19%
Personal income (annual)	Less than \$10,000	18%	24%	33%
	\$10,000-\$20,000	18%	31%	35%
	\$20,000-\$30,000	48%	26%	23%
	\$30,000-\$40,000	15%	12%	7%
	More than \$40,000	3%	7%	2%



# 8 Services Provided

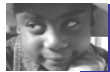
## High-Level Treatment Group: Facilitation Sessions and *Pro se* Services

The key intervention that parents in the high-level treatment group received was facilitation. This consisted of a meeting with the parenting coordinator to discuss how the child’s time would be divided and to develop a parenting plan. The parenting plan template developed by the Tennessee Administrative Office of the Court addresses day-to-day responsibilities for the care of children, the treatment of holidays and vacations, the exchange of children, and the supervision of children during visits. It also specifies the parent responsible for other key matters pertaining to the child, including major decisions, the provision of health insurance, and the primary residential parent for other legal purposes. The plan considers how disagreements or modifications to the plan will be handled, the rights of parents, and the statutory provision regarding notice to be given in connection with the location of a parent. A copy of the parenting plan form appears in Appendix A.

<b>Table 28. Facilitations Conducted by Parenting Coordinators in High Treatment Group Cases, by Site</b>				
	11th (N=135)	20th (N=319)	26th (N=197)	Total (N=651)
★Facilitation conducted with one or both parents	84% (113)	93% (297)	94% (185)	91% (595)
Chi square significant at .05.				

Ultimately, facilitations were conducted with 595 child support cases in the high-level treatment group. This comprised 91 percent of the 651 high-level treatment cases that were eligible for visitation services and were not dropped because they could not be contacted or failed to appear for a meeting.

It was expected that parenting coordinators would meet with parents in an in-person session, conducted jointly with both parents. While this was achieved in most cases, it was not accomplished all the time and some facilitation sessions were conducted separately with the parents and/or by telephone. Indeed, in the 26th Judicial District, nearly three-quarters of the sessions were held only with fathers (as compared with 4 and 9 percent in the 11th and 20th Judicial Districts, respectively), and 25 percent were held by telephone (as compared with 1 and 17 percent in the 11th and 20th Judicial Districts, respectively). Another difference in the format of the facilitation sessions across the three project sites was their location. While nearly all facilitation sessions in the 20th and 26th Judicial Districts were conducted at the child support agency (79% and 86%, respectively), this was the case for only 25 percent of facilitation sessions in the 11th Judicial District. At this location, 68 percent were held at a court, as compared with 18 percent and 14 percent in the 20th and 26th Judicial Districts, respectively. Finally, there were differences across the sites in the stage of the child support case during which the facilitation session occurred. While facilitations were held almost always after the child support order had been established in the 20th and 26th Judicial Districts (80% and 98%, respectively), this was the case for only 62 percent of cases in the 11th Judicial District. In this setting, project



staff was based at the court during order establishment proceedings and were often called upon to meet with parents before their hearing to set a child support order.

One feature of the facilitations that was common across all three project settings was its length, which averaged 40 minutes and had a median of 30 minutes. Nearly all cases were handled in a single session that ranged in length from five to 180 minutes. Indeed, only 40 of the 584 cases (6.8%) across the three project sites involved a second session.

<b>Table 29. Description of Facilitation Sessions Conducted by Parenting Coordinators in High Treatment Group Cases, by Site</b>					
		11th (N=111)	20th (N=293)	26th (N=180)	Total (N=584)
<b>★Facilitation format</b>					
	Telephone	1%	17%	25%	16%
	In-person	99%	77%	68%	78%
	Conducted both by phone and in-person	0%	7%	7%	5%
<b>★Case status at time of session</b>					
	Before CSE order	13%	4%	2%	5%
	After CSE order	62%	80%	98%	81%
	With enforcement action	10%	17%	0%	11%
	Other	15%	0%	0%	3%
<b>★Party attending facilitation:</b>					
	Mother	7%	4%	4%	5%
	Father	4%	9%	72%	27%
	Both	89%	88%	24%	68%
<b>★Location of facilitation</b>					
	CSE	25%	79%	86%	71%
	Juvenile court	14%	18%	8%	14%
	Child support court	54%	0%	6%	12%
	Other	7%	3%	1%	3%
<b>Length of initial session (in minutes)</b>					
	Mean	41.4	35.3	43.7	39.1
	Median	45.0	35.0	30	30.0
	Range	5-120	5-180	10-120	5-180
<b>★Chi square significant at .05.</b>					

Information on the content of facilitation sessions appears in Table 30. It shows that virtually all sessions dealt with the components of parenting plans: when the children will spend time with each parent, existing visitation arrangements and problems, making decisions about the child, and the importance of co-parenting. These topics were addressed in at least 80 percent of the facilitations conducted across the three project sites.



The topics that were least apt to be discussed dealt with supervised visitation, the child’s safety during drop-off and pick-up, paternity establishment and genetic testing, and pro bono mediators or legal services.

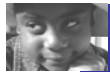
There were some differences in the content of facilitations by site. The parenting coordinator in the 26th Judicial District reported discussing eight topics in more than 90 percent of the facilitations and four more topics in at least 80 percent of the cases. In contrast, the parenting coordinator in the 11th Judicial District identified only two topics that were discussed in 80 percent or more of the cases. These included “What a parenting plan covers” (95%) and “When the children will spend time with each parent” (84%). The parenting coordinator in the 20th Judicial District indicated that he discussed four topics with parents in 80 percent or more the cases: “What a parenting plan covers” (87%), “Existing visitation arrangements and problems” (88%), “When the children will spend time with each parent” (89%), and “Making major decisions about the child” (80%).

**Table 30. Topics Discussed in Facilitation Sessions with Parenting Coordinator, by Site**

	11th (N=113)	20th (N=297)	26th (N=185)	Total (N=595)
★What a parenting plan covers	95%	87%	99%	92%
★Existing orders, visitation arrangements, problems	69%	88%	90%	85%
★Making major decisions about the child	71%	80%	98%	83%
★When the children will spend time with each parent	84%	89%	98%	91%
★Ways for the parents to improve their communication	42%	69%	98%	73%
★The importance of co-parenting	69%	76%	98%	82%
★How to ensure the children’s safety and well-being during visitation	12%	26%	80%	40%
*Supervised parenting time or supervised pick-up and drop-off	6%	12%	69%	29%
★Child support	18%	24%	80%	40%
★New partners and their role	50%	34%	95%	56%
★Developmentally appropriate parenting behaviors	13%	24%	89%	42%
★Spending time with the children consistently	56%	78%	97%	80%
★Paternity establishment/genetic or DNA testing	1%	2%	65%	22%
★Resolving future disputes	53%	61%	92%	69%
★Legal options including seeing the <i>pro se</i> specialist, legal classes, and filing for visitation in court	15%	18%	80%	37%
★Classes on pro bono legal services	3%	4%	11%	6%
★Reduced fee or pro bono mediators	0%	0%	3%	1%
★The benefits of non-adversarial dispute resolution	16%	3%	15%	9%
Other	2%	2%	1%	1%

★Chi square significant at .08 or less.

Facilitation sessions had many outcomes, ranging from producing a parenting plan to referring parents to a *pro se* specialist and/or a class on *pro se* filings so that a parent could pursue a legal remedy to his or her visitation problem. In the 11th and 20th Judicial Districts, nearly two-thirds (62% and 61%) of facilitations resulted in a fully completed parenting plan that was submitted to the court and incorporated with existing child support orders for a legally enforceable order dealing with visitation. Another fraction of the cases



resulted in partially completed parenting plans and/or clarification of a parenting-time schedule. The outcomes of these facilitations were informal agreements regarding how the child’s time would be divided.

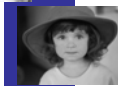
Unlike the 11th and 20th Judicial Districts, relatively few cases in the 26th Judicial District resulted in full parenting plans. It will be recalled that most facilitations in the 26th were conducted with fathers alone; only a fraction were held with both parents attending. As a result, only 28 percent of the facilitations in the 26th ended with a parenting plan and 70 percent led to a referral to a *pro se* specialist and/or a *pro se* class on how to pursue a formal legal filing for visitation in court.

**Table 31. Session Outcomes in Facilitation Conducted by Parenting Coordinators with High Treatment Cases, by Site**

	11th (N=113)	20th (N=297)	26th (N=185)	Total (N=595)
★ Completed parenting plan	62%	61%	28%	51%
★ Partially completed parenting plan	8%	3%	2%	3%
★ Clarified parenting time schedule	9%	25%	0%	14%
★ Identified areas of conflict, discussed conflict resolution	50%	46%	58%	51%
Arranged for telephone contact between parent and child	2%	1%	1%	1%
★ Referred parent to <i>pro se</i> specialist/classes on filing in court	12%	14%	70%	31%
Referred parents to supervised visitation, mediation, parent education classes, or other community resources	4%	3%	3%	3%
Other	2%	2%	0%	1%
★ Explained how the court process works and/or court forms, benefits of filing, and legal custody options	48%	15%	70%	38%
★ Explained what parenting plans are, how they work, and the benefits of obtaining one	58%	16%	63%	38%

★ Chi square is significant at .06 or less.

Not surprisingly, agreement-making was more likely to be the outcome of facilitation sessions conducted with both parents. In the 43 cases held conjointly with parents in the 26th Judicial District, the parenting coordinator reported developing a full parenting plan 95 percent of the time and a partial plan in 2 percent of the cases. In the other two Judicial Districts, where the parenting coordinators handled a larger volume of cases attended by both parties, approximately two-thirds of cases resulted in full parenting plans. Virtually none of the parents who met with the parenting coordinator together were referred to *pro se* classes for help with court filings about visitation. Nor were they sent to mediators for more extensive dispute resolution interventions.



**Table 32. Session Outcomes in Facilitations Conducted with Both Parents by Parenting Coordinators with High Treatment Cases, by Site**

	11th (N=100)	20th (N=258)	26th (N=43)	Total (N=401)
★ Completed parenting plan	68%	67%	95%	70%
★ Partially completed parenting plan	9%	2%	2%	4%
★ Clarified parenting time schedule	10%	26%	0%	20%
Identified areas of conflict, discussed conflict resolution	51%	46%	7%	43%
Arranged for telephone contact between parent and child	8%	8%	9%	9%
Referred parent to <i>pro se</i> specialist/classes on filing in court	2%	2%	0%	2%
Referred parents to supervised visitation, mediation, parent education classes, or other community resources	1%	2%	0%	2%
★ Explained how the court process works and/or court forms, benefits of filing, and legal custody options	51%	14%	5%	22%
★ Explained what parenting plans are, how they work, and the benefits of obtaining one	60%	16%	5%	25%
Other	1%	2%	0%	2%

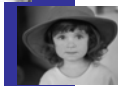
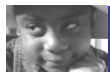
★ Chi square is significant at .06 or less.

In all Judicial Districts, facilitation sessions were most likely to result in arrangements that called for more parent-child contact than had been the case before the intervention was held. This was particularly true in the 20th and 26th Judicial Districts. The 11th Judicial District had the highest incidence of cases resulting in the establishment of contact, which reflects that fact that many facilitation sessions were held during proceedings dealing with the establishment of child support orders. These early interventions led to the establishment of parent-child contact, as opposed to changing the amount or frequency in a previously developed visitation arrangement.

**Table 33. Visitation Provisions in Agreements Reached in Facilitation Conducted by Parenting Coordinators in High Treatment Cases, by Site**

	11th (N=81)	20th (N=255)	26th (N=58)	Total (N=394)
Amount of visitation parenting plan allows for:				
★ Establishes contact	12%	4%	12%	7%
★ Allows more contact	65%	87%	85%	82%
Allows less contact	0%	0.4%	0%	0.3%
★ Allows about the same amount of contact	20%	8%	3%	10%
Contact will be supervised	0%	1%	0%	0.8%
★ Other	4%	0.4%	0%	1%

★ Chi square is significant at .05 or less.

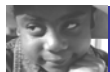


Facilitation sessions in Tennessee were briefer than conferences held in access demonstration projects conducted in Colorado and Texas, although parenting-time interventions in all three settings were almost always conducted in a single session. Colorado had the lengthiest interventions but only served 23 cases, which was barely 4 percent of the 595 parents served in Tennessee. Interestingly, rates of agreement were fairly comparable across the three programs and did not appear to suffer from the shorter conference format used in Texas and the extremely abbreviated approach undertaken in Tennessee. When the Tennessee analysis is restricted to cases where both parents attended the conference, the percentage of cases developing full parenting plans (70%) was almost identical to the agreement rates reports in Colorado and Texas (81% to 82%). As previously noted, many facilitation sessions in Tennessee were conducted in court and child support agency settings prior to the development of child support orders, and in connection with enforcement proceedings. Brevity was essential to keep case processing on track. In addition, the use of a fill-in-the-blank parenting plan in Tennessee meant that issues could be raised efficiently and decisions about when the children would see each parent could be made quickly.

<b>Table 34. Selected Characteristics of Facilitations and Conferences Held with Parents in Projects that Provide Visitation Services for the Child Support Population in Colorado, Texas, and Tennessee</b>				
		Colorado (N=23)	Texas (N=55)	Tennessee (N=595)
Number of sessions held:	Mean	2.3	1.5	1.1
	Median	1.0	1.0	1.0
	Range	1-11	1-2	1-2
Length of sessions: ▲	Mean	5.3 hours	2.2 hours	39.1 minutes
	Median	2.0 hours	2.0 hours	30.0 minutes
	Range	2-48 hours	1-4 hours	5-180 minutes
Format:	Separate sessions with parents only	13%	0%	32%
	Joint sessions with parents only	65%	100%	68%
	Both separate and joint meetings	22%	0%	N/A
Parties reached an agreement or full or partial parenting plan		82%	81%	69%*
▲ Two cases were excluded due to having up to 11 sessions and many hours of meetings. *Half (51%) of all cases completed a parenting plan and filed it with the court, and another 18 percent developed partial or informal plans.				

Parents in the high-level treatment group who failed to reach an agreement in the facilitation session and/or were unable to get the other parent to attend the facilitation session were offered assistance with legal filings. Parents in such cases may have needed to file a Petition to Set or Modify Visitation in a Parentage Case. Those who had a visitation order but were having trouble exercising visitation may have needed to file a Petition of Contempt for Failure to Comply with an Order for Visitation in a Parentage Case.

To assist parents with these activities, the project retained part-time staff to help parents obtain and complete appropriate legal forms. In the 11th and 20th Judicial Districts, the *pro se* specialist was a lawyer. In the 26th Judicial District, the *pro se* specialist had a social work background. In addition to meeting individually with



parents to explain their legal options and procedures, *pro se* specialists offered a free class on legal filings on a periodic basis. Classes were offered semi-monthly in the 26th Judicial District, where nearly two-thirds of all parents who enrolled in the project attended. In the 11th Judicial District, half of parents in the high-level treatment group met with a *pro se* specialist for one-on-one help but classes were only held when there was sufficient interest, and only 4 percent ultimately attended. In the 20th Judicial District, which experienced the most staff turnover, only about a fifth of project participants met with a *pro se* specialist and slightly over a tenth (12%) attended a *pro se* class. As in the 11th, classes were only held very occasionally, when there was sufficient interest.

**Table 35. *Pro se* Services Provided in High Treatment Group Cases, by Site**

	11th (N=135)	20th (N=317)	26th (N=197)	Total (N=649)
★ Met with <i>pro se</i> specialist	56%	19%	64%	40%
★ Attended <i>pro se</i> clinic on how to file papers in court	4%	12%	63%	26%
★ Filed papers in court, project paid filing fees	0%	2%	8%	3%

★ Chi square is significant at .05 or less.

Despite the fact that the project paid fees associated with legal filings, the incidence of filings in court to establish or enforce visitation was extremely low. It was highest in the 26th Judicial District, where 8 percent of parents in the high-level treatment group

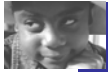
made such a filing. There were no filings in the 11th Judicial District, and only 2 percent filed in the 20th. As previously mentioned, most parents in the high-level treatment group in the 26th Judicial District were noncustodial parents who met individually with the parenting coordinator and were referred to the *pro se* specialist because the other parent would not cooperate with the development of a parenting plan.

### Low-Level Treatment Group: Printed Information and *Pro se* Services

Although the project design called for the random assignment of parents with visitation problems to high and low-level treatment groups, each of which was to receive distinct treatments, there was a certain amount of overlap in the services that were ultimately delivered to parents in the two groups. In the high-level treatment group, all parents who disclosed problems and were enrolled in the project were given the opportunity to meet with a parenting-time coordinator for a facilitated session aimed at developing a parenting plan, a *pro se* specialist for help with court filings, and free classes to learn how to file papers in court on a self-represented basis. Those who ultimately filed to establish and/or enforce visitation rights had their filing fee paid by the project.

In the low-level treatment group, all parents who disclosed problems with visitation were mailed an informational brochure on co-parenting and the resources available in their community for help with visitation. Among the programs listed in the brochure was the *pro se* class. Parents were instructed to contact the *pro se* facilitator to request admission to the free class. Those parents who attended the free class and asked for more specific help with their visitation problem were referred to the parenting coordinators, who helped them develop a parenting plan that could be filed with the court. Thus, parents in the low-level treatment group who were persistent in their efforts to obtain help with their visitation problems ultimately received the same array of services that their counterparts did in the high-level treatment group. Unlike





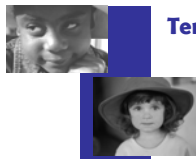
parents in the high-level treatment group, however, they received access to a facilitated session with a parenting coordinator as a last-stage intervention rather than a front-end one. Thus, while the sequence of treatments was different for the two groups, the mix of services was not.

It appears that few parents used the many services listed in the printed informational brochure on co-parenting that was distributed to all percent of the 583 parents in the low-level treatment group. Across the three project sites, only 6 percent attended a *pro se* class, 2 percent filed legal papers in court with the project paying their filing fees, and 7 percent met with a parenting coordinator and developed a parenting plan that was filed with the court. The sites differed on the use of alternative services. In the 26th Judicial District, which offered semi-monthly classes on *pro se* filings, 19 percent of parents in the low-level treatment group attended and approximately half (10%) filed petitions in court for a visitation remedy. To contrast, in the 11th Judicial District, which conducted *pro se* classes on an irregular and infrequent basis, nearly a quarter of parents in the low-level treatment group met with a parenting coordinator and developed a parenting plan that was subsequently filed for them in court.

**Table 36. Services Provided In Low Treatment Group Cases, by Site**

	11th (N=120)	20th (N=411)	26th (N=52)	Total (N=583)
Received informational brochure on co-parenting and visitation enforcement	100%	100%	100%	100%
★ Attended <i>pro se</i> class	3%	6%	19%	6%
★ Filed paperwork in court, project paid filing fee	0%	2%	10%	2%
★ Developed parenting plan, filed in court	23%	2%	6%	7%

★ Chi square is significant at .05 or less.



# 9 Parent Reactions to Project Services

## Characteristics of Respondents to the Follow-Up Interview

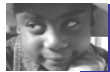
During May 2007 to June 2009, professional telephone researchers attempted to contact 1,671 participants in the high and low-level treatment groups to gauge reactions to project services. The goal of the follow-up interview was to learn about participant experiences with the project and changes following project participation in parent-child contact, parental relationships, and attitudes toward the child support agency. Interviewers attempted to contact all custodial and noncustodial parents for whom contact information was provided at approximately the six-month anniversary of their enrollment in the project. In order to reach the harder-to-serve population, names and telephone numbers for a parent, friend, or relative of the participant was also supplied to the interview firm. Interviewers made up to eight calling attempts per telephone number provided to reach a participant. Calling attempts were made on different days of the week and at different times of day. To improve the response rate, CPR mailed postcards to participants on their six-month anniversary date to remind them about the opportunity to participate in a follow-up interview. The postcard offered a \$25 gift certificate to Wal★Mart to entice participation. The interview firm’s toll-free number was printed on the card, enabling the respondents to call at a convenient time to set up an appointment or conduct the interview.

During the 25-month interview process, telephone interviews were completed with 541 project participants. This comprised 32.4 percent of the 1,671 program participants with whom an interview was attempted. All interviews were conducted in English, and the average interview length was 23 minutes. A total of 9,467 calls were made to reach potential respondents, with an average of 5.67 calls per participant. Phone disconnections and non-working numbers were the main reasons why attempted interviews were not conducted. Indeed, 44 percent of the sample had disconnected, non-working, or wrong numbers. Another 22 percent were unavailable and could not be reached after 10 call attempts per contact number. Only 55 potential respondents (3%) refused to be interviewed

It was expected that conducting interviews six months following enrollment would allow participants to receive project services and experience some impact. Accordingly the timeframe for the follow-up interview was set at six months and 92 percent of the interviews were conducted between six and eight months after the intake date. Only 2 percent were conducted more than a year after the intake date.

Table 37 shows the number of follow-up interviews completed by site and treatment group. Comparing the 541 completed interviews to the original 1,671 participants targeted for follow-up

	11th	20th	26th	Total
High Treatment Group Interviews Completed	53	202	95	350
Low Treatment Group Interviews Completed	41	140	10	191
Total Number of Interviews Completed	94	342	105	541



interviews suggests that the completed sample was generally, but not entirely, representative. For example, while 58 percent of the original 1,671 participants targeted for interviewing were in the high-level treatment group, this was the case for 65 percent of completed interviews. As to site, the 11th Judicial District was under-represented, with only 17 percent of completed interviews coming from Chattanooga, as compared with 26 percent of the original 1,671 participants seeking services in the 11th Judicial District. Nashville respondents were over-represented, with 63 percent of completed interviews coming from respondents in the 20th Judicial District, as compared with 56 percent in the overall sample. Respondents in the 26th Judicial District came close to matching the overall sample (20% versus 18%).

**Table 38. Comparison of Treatment Groups and Site Distributions for Total Sample and Completed Interviews**

	11th		20th		26th		Total	
	Sample Size	Completed Interviews	Sample Size	Completed Interview	Sample Size	Completed Interviews	Sample Size	Completed Interviews
High-Level Treatment	59% (257)	55% (48)	49% (457)	60% (191)	86% (257)	90% (93)	58% (971)	65% (332)
Low-Level Treatment	41% (179)	45% (39)	51% (479)	40% (129)	14% (42)	10% (10)	42% (700)	35% (178)
Total	26% (436)	17% (87)	56% (936)	63% (320)	18% (299)	20% (103)	100% 1,671	100% (510)

Custodial parents completed interviews to a greater degree than did noncustodial parents, and those in the high-level treatment groups completed interviews to a greater extent than did parents in the low-level treatment groups. To compensate for the over-representation of custodial parents, CPR conducted 31 additional interviews with noncustodial parents, which ultimately brought the total number of interviews with noncustodial parents to 256 and the percentage to 47 percent.

**Table 39. Comparison of Parental Status for Total Sample and Completed Interviews by Site**

	11th		20th		26th		Total	
	Sample Size	Completed Interviews	Sample Size	Completed Interview	Sample Size	Completed Interviews	Sample Size	Completed Interviews
Noncustodial Parent	50% (218)	39% (34)	48% (450)	42% (133)	63% (189)	56% (58)	51% (857)	44% (225)
Custodial Parent	50% (218)	61% (53)	48% (451)	58% (187)	37% (110)	44% (45)	47% (779)	56% (285)
Unknown			4% (35)				2% (35)	
Total	26% (436)	17% (87)	56% (936)	63% (320)	18% (299)	20% (103)	100% 1,671	100% (510)

Selected demographic characteristics of the total sample and interviewed parents in the high and low-level treatment groups are presented in Table 40. The 541 completed interviews were more heavily comprised of members of the high-level treatment group (65%), but CPR achieved balance in their sex distribution, with



half of the respondents being male and half being female. A higher proportion of married and formerly married parents were interviewed as compared with the proportion of never-married parents served in the program. This probably reflects the greater stability of married and divorced parents as compared with never-married parents. The unemployment rate for interviewed parents was higher than the rate of unemployment among members of the high-level treatment group at program enrollment in 2007 and 2008. This probably reflects the downturn in economic conditions over the life of the project and the conduct of most interviews (68%) in 2008 and 2009. Household income for respondents remained low, although the proportion of respondents reporting incomes over \$40,000 per year (12% to 13%) was higher than the proportion reporting this income level at enrollment (2%). Like project participants as a whole, most interviewed noncustodial parents lived relatively close to their children, with 71 percent to 80 percent living less than 50 miles apart and 5 percent to 11 percent living more than 200 miles apart.

**Table 40. Comparison of Selected Demographic Characteristics for the Total Sample and Completed Interviews by Treatment Group**

		High-Level Group		Low-Level Group	
		Full Sample (N=1,018)	Completed Interviews (N=349)	Full Sample	Completed Interviews (N=190)
Parent Interviewed		<i>Not available</i>			
	NCP	55%	48%		41%
	CP	45%	52%		59%
★Sex	Male		50%		40%
	Female		50%		60%
Marital status					
	Married	18%	21%		17%
	Separated/Divorced/Widowed	4%	16%		20%
	Never married	76%	54%		55%
	Unmarried couple living together	3%	10%		8%
Employment Status					
	Full-time	70%	58%		53%
	Part-time	11%	15%		17%
	Not working	19%	27%		30%
Annual Household Income					
	Less than \$10,000 per year	33%	33%		38%
	Between \$10-20,000	35%	24%		24%
	Between \$20-30,000	23%	22%		19%
	Between \$30-40,000	7%	9%		7%
	Over \$40,000 per year	2%	13%		12%
Number of miles live from children (NCP only)					
	Less than 50 miles	84%	80%	83%	71%
	Over 200 miles	11%	4%	7%	11%

\* Chi square is significant at .05.



## Reactions to Project Services

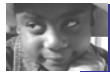
Parents participated in the project in different ways. The main intervention for noncustodial parents with visitation problems, who had Social Security numbers that ended in 0 to 2 and were randomly assigned to the low-level treatment group, was to get printed information about parenting time, the importance of co-parenting, and visitation resources that they could access in the community. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of the parents in the low-level treatment group who were interviewed recalled receiving printed materials about these topics. While an identical proportion of parents with visitation problems in the high-level treatment group (65%) reported receiving printed material on visitation too, more than three-quarters (78%) recalled meeting with a project worker to discuss visitation and try to develop a parenting plan. Similar proportions of parents in both groups recalled meeting with a *pro se* facilitator to talk about going to court to get a visitation order or parenting plan (21% versus 29%), and going to court to deal with these issues (22% versus 29%). A small fraction of both groups said that they attended a class on how to do self-represented filings on parenting time (6% versus 7%).

**Table 41. Project Services Interviewed Parents Recall Receiving, by Treatment Group**

	High Treatment (N=350)	Low Treatment (N=191)
Child support agency gave parent information in person or by mail on visitation and parenting plans	65%	64%
★ Met with a worker from the child support agency to talk about visitation and parenting plans	78%	0%
★ Met with a worker from the court to talk about going to court to get visitation and/or a parenting plan	21%	29%
Attended a legal class for help with parenting time	6%	7%
Went to court, or scheduled to go to court about visitation or parenting time	22%	29%
★ Chi square is significant at .05 or less.		

One goal of the low-level treatment group was to determine the effectiveness of distributing printed information about parenting time and visitation resources to parents. Did parents consult the printed material? Did they use it to establish visitation arrangements or to improve the quality of their visits? Did they consult any of the resources listed in the printed materials? In particular, did they inquire about free legal classes on how to file legal forms in court to obtain visitation without a lawyer?

Table 42 presents answers to these questions. It shows that nearly all interviewed parents in both groups recalled examining the printed material on visitation distributed in the project (87% versus 91%) and that high proportions of those who did consult the material used it to take various actions. Thus, approximately three-quarters of interviewed parents who looked at the information said that they used it to set up contact with their child(ren) and/or to improve the quality of their visits. Among those who recalled using the information to establish or conduct visits with their children, nearly half (49%) rated it as “very helpful.” Fewer parents contacted referral resources listed in the printed material (16% to 21%), although a half and a third of those in the high and low-level treatment groups, respectively, rated the information as “very helpful.” Parents in



the low-level treatment group who did not have access to parenting-time coordinators for facilitation services were significantly more likely than parents in the high-level treatment group to seek assistance with self-represented filings dealing with visitation (32% versus 18%). Half of those who contacted *pro se* facilitators rated them as “very helpful.”

**Table 42. Use of Printed Information on Visitation Reported by Parents and Its Helpfulness, by Treatment Group**

	High Treatment (N=224)	Low Treatment (N=122)
Parent recalled looking through material received	87%	91%
Parent used material to:	(N=195)	(N=110)
Set up contact with child	76%	71%
Level of Helpfulness		
Very helpful	42%	46%
Somewhat helpful	47%	36%
Not helpful	11%	18%
Make visits go better	72%	71%
Level of Helpfulness		
Very helpful	49%	49%
Somewhat helpful	43%	43%
Not helpful	9%	8%
Called referrals that were included in the information	16%	21%
Level of Helpfulness		
Very helpful	53%	36%
Somewhat helpful	33%	50%
Not helpful	13%	14%
★ Called someone at the court to discuss free legal classes on how to file paper in court without a lawyer	18%	32%
Level of Helpfulness		
Very helpful	44%	51%
Somewhat helpful	31%	37%
Not helpful	25%	11%
★ Chi square is significant at .05 or less.		

One project intervention was free legal classes that were offered on a periodic basis in all three project sites. The goal of the class was to review the process of filing petitions to establish or enforce visitation in court and to assist parents with completing the forms. All parents in the low-level treatment group were sent printed information on parenting time that included reference to the *pro se* classes. *Pro se* classes were offered semi-monthly in the 26th Judicial District and attracted the greatest number of attendees. They were held on an as-needed basis in the 20th Judicial District and were rarely held in the 11th Judicial District. Parents were instructed to telephone a *pro se* facilitator in each project site to learn when the next class would be offered and to schedule their participation.

Ultimately, only 13 percent of interviewed parents reported attending the free legal classes. As expected, nearly all of these attendees (84%) reported learning how to fill out visitation papers. CPR made some attempt to learn why parents with visitation problems who had been mailed information about *pro se* class

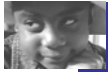


failed to attend. Overwhelmingly, they reported being unaware of the fact that there was a free legal class (72%). The remainder did not attend because they did not have the time or the class was scheduled at an inconvenient time (56%) and/or they did not think it was necessary (49%). Less frequent reasons for non-attendance was a feeling that the class would not help (28%) or a desire to talk with a lawyer (16%).

<b>Table 43. Parent Reactions to Free Legal Classes and Reasons for Non-Attendance for Parents in the Low-Level Treatment Group Sent Printed Information About Them</b>		
Went to a free legal class to get papers to file in court about visitation		(N=306)
	Yes	13%
	No	87%
At the legal class, learned how to fill out the visitation papers		(N=306)
	Yes	84%
	No	16%
If no, reason did not attend the free legal class		(N=264)
Did not know there was a free legal class		72%
Of those that chose not to attend, reason:		(N=74)
Did not think it was necessary		49%
Only wanted to talk to a lawyer		16%
Did not think going to a class would help		28%
Did not have time to go to the class or could not make the scheduled class time		56%
Other		20%

The most common project intervention for parents in the high-level treatment group was a facilitation session with a project worker, aimed at discussing visitation and developing a parenting time plan. More than three-quarters (78%) of the 349 interviewed parents in the high-level treatment group reported that they had met with a project staff person to develop a parenting plan, while 22 percent said that they had not. Most of those who reported attending a facilitation session said that the other parent had participated (63%). In one-fifth of the cases, the other parent had refused to meet and the parent coordinator had spoken with the parents individually.

<b>Table 44. Parent Report of Attending Facilitation Sessions to Develop a Parenting Plan by Parents in the High Treatment Group</b>		
Parent met with a worker from the child support agency to talk about visitation and parenting plans:		
	Yes	78%
	No	22%
		(N=349)
Status of other parent in facilitation:		
Other parent refused to meet		20%
Other parent attended facilitation		63%
Parenting coordinator spoke with the other parent individually		20%
		(N=349)



Most parents (83%) who met with a facilitator credited the worker with helping them to reach an agreement on visitation and developing a parenting plan. Half of these agreements were characterized as partial agreements, while the other half were termed complete with all the issues resolved. Nearly three-quarters (70%) filed their parenting plans with the court, with the other 30 percent keeping them as informal agreements between the parties. Overall, nearly half (46%) of parents who met with a facilitator characterized themselves as “very satisfied” with the experience, while another third (32%) said they were “somewhat satisfied.” The remaining quarter (23%) termed themselves “somewhat” or “very” dissatisfied with the facilitation service.

**Table 45. Outcomes and Ratings of Sessions to Develop a Parenting Plan Reported by Parents in the High-Treatment Group**

		(N=271)
Parenting coordinator helped parents reach an agreement on visitation or parenting time:	Yes	83%
	No	17%
Agreement reached was:	Partial (agreed on some of the issues)	50%
	Complete (agreed on all issues)	50%
Status of agreement:	Filed with the court	70%
	Informal agreement between both parties	30%
Parent report of overall satisfaction with the help received from parenting coordinator	Very satisfied	46%
	Somewhat satisfied	32%
	Somewhat dissatisfied	10%
	Very dissatisfied	13%

Facilitation sessions could cover a variety of topics. Interviewed parents were asked whether they had discussed these matters, and if so, whether they had found the discussion “very helpful.” Table 46 lists the topics that parents reported discussing in facilitation sessions in descending order of frequency. The most common dealt with setting up a plan specifying when each parent sees the child, specific times and places for visits, and arrangements during holidays and vacations. More than 80 percent of interviewed parents said that they had discussed these issues in their facilitation sessions, and more than half characterized these discussions as “very helpful.” Another set of topics that was covered in about two-thirds of the facilitations discussed in these interviews dealt with effective and negative patterns of parental communication and child support and other financial issues. Once again, approximately half of parents who discussed these issues termed the discussions as “very helpful.” It was somewhat less common for parents to talk about the child’s safety during visits (58%) and what to do during visits (31%), although approximately two-thirds of the parents who reported covering these issues termed them “very helpful.”





<b>Table 46. Topics Discussed in Facilitation Session to Develop a Parenting Plan and Helpfulness Ratings Reported by Parents in the High-Treatment Group</b>		
Percentage of parents with facilitation who reported discussing various topics and the helpfulness of the discussion	Yes, this topic was discussed (N=271)	The discussion was "very helpful"
Setting up a plan saying when each parent sees the child	88%	53%
Specific times and places for visits	82%	56%
Where the child will be on holidays and vacations	80%	56%
How to make contact more consistent and regular	71%	50%
How to communicate or deal with the other parent	64%	43%
Child support or other financial issues	63%	42%
Arguing between parents and "bad-mouthing" each other in front of child	62%	58%
The child's safety during visits (alcohol, drug use, etc.)	58%	65%
Marriage or romantic partners and how they fit into visits	45%	45%
Steps to take to get a parent back into a child's life	43%	54%
What to do during visits	31%	61%
Changes to a parenting plan already in place	31%	50%

Parents in the low-level treatment group and/or those who were unable to reach agreements about visitation during facilitation sessions were able to meet with a different project staff member known as a *pro se* worker. Based at the court, this individual could provide help with *pro se* filings and other legal remedies. He or she might also make another attempt to resolve the visitation problem using facilitation techniques. Overall, 24 percent of interviewed parents recalled meeting with a *pro se* worker.

Table 47 shows the topics these 128 parents recall discussing with the *pro se* worker and the percentage that characterized these discussions as "very helpful." The focus of most of these discussions was the attempt to develop a parenting plan. Like the parenting coordinators, *pro se* workers tried to resolve visitation problems in a non-adversarial way and to develop a parenting plan that spelled out when each parent would see the children. Parents recalled this being attempted in 80 percent of the meetings they held with *pro se* workers. Since this was typically the second attempt by a project staff member to broker a parenting plan, slightly fewer than one-half of interviewed parents (47%) termed it "very helpful." The most highly rated project interventions at the court dealt with how to file parenting plans or other visitation papers in court, how to file papers in court without paying filing fees, and free classes on how to file visitation papers in court without hiring a lawyer. These programs and conversations were rated "very helpful" by 70 percent of parents who used them. Despite their utility, they were used less frequently, with only about a third of interviewed parents recalling attending *pro se* classes or pursuing *pro se* filings that dealt with visitation.



<b>Table 47. Types of <i>Pro se</i> Assistance Received and Helpfulness Ratings Reported by Parents</b>		
Percentage of parents who reported meeting with a project staff member from the court and talked about various topics....	24% (N=128)	The discussion was "very helpful"
Setting up a parenting plan specifying when each parent will see the child	80%	47%
Child support or other financial issues	63%	46%
What happens at court	58%	58%
How to file parenting plans or other visitation papers in court	52%	70%
Free classes on how to file visitation papers in court without hiring a lawyer	34%	70%
Changes to an existing parenting plan	32%	49%
How to file papers in court without paying filing fees	31%	74%
How to find a lawyer you can afford	24%	62%

Like facilitators, *pro se* workers helped most of the parents they saw (60%) to reach an agreement on visitation and/or a parenting plan. Those who worked with court personnel were equally apt to reach partial and full agreements covering all their issues in dispute. Most agreements were filed with the court (84%), and nearly half of interviewed parents who received help from a project worker at the court rated their level of satisfaction highly, with 44 percent characterizing themselves as “very satisfied.”

Asked whether there were other types of help that they wanted from the project worker at the court, parents indicated greatest interest in getting more assistance with the development of a parenting plan, with 75 percent expressing this point of view. Approximately two-thirds said they wanted more help with their legal papers, understanding how the court system works, and understanding their legal rights and responsibilities.

<b>Table 48. Other Types of Help Parents Wanted From Project Workers at the Court</b>	
	(N=36)
More help with legal papers needed for visitation	61%
More help explaining how the court system works	64%
More help getting an attorney parent can afford	56%
More help understanding legal rights and responsibilities	64%
More help getting you and the other parent to talk about a parenting plan	75%
Help with disagreements between parents	62%

Only 6 percent of interviewed parents attended a free legal class to get help with parenting time. Although sparsely used, these 33 parents reported that the class covered many key topics that they rated very favorably. More than 80 percent of parents who attended the class reported that they had focused on how to fill out papers to establish or enforce visitation, legal rights and responsibilities, and different types of custody arrangements. The topics that received the highest favorableness ratings dealt with filing papers and avoiding paying legal fees, what would happen in court, and legal rights and responsibilities.



Percentage of parents who reported attending a free class to get help with parenting time and discussing various topics....	(N=33)	The discussion was "very helpful"
How to fill out papers to establish or enforce visitation	82%	59%
The parent's legal rights and responsibilities	82%	70%
Different types of custody arrangements	82%	52%
How to file papers in court to set up or enforce visitation	78%	60%
How the enforcement of parenting time works	73%	63%
What would most likely happen if parent got to court	73%	75%
How to file papers and avoid paying legal filing fees	63%	75%
How to find a lawyer parent can afford	50%	40%

Approximately one-fifth of interviewed parents went to court about their visitation issue. These 104 parents had different experiences at court. Some met with a project worker and developed a parenting plan (56%). Others had their case continued or rescheduled to a later date (35%). Still others were told to pursue mediation (22%), cooperate with a court-ordered custody investigation (18%), or attend classes to improve their capacity to parent (8%).

Percentage of parents who went to court and reported various actions occurring	Yes	No
Got a parenting plan	56%	44%
Told to go to parent classes	8%	92%
Told to go to mediation	22%	78%
Someone assigned to investigate case	18%	82%
Told there was not enough proof of parenting time being denied	2%	98%
Case was continued or rescheduled	35%	65%
Petition was filed for contempt	17%	83%
Request for a rehearing or appeal	24%	76%
Other	16%	

Overall, a third of parents who attended court were "very satisfied" with their experience (32%) and a quarter (26%) were "very dissatisfied." As previously noted, 46 percent of parents were "very satisfied" with the facilitation help they received from parenting coordinators who helped them to develop parenting plans and only 13 percent were "very dissatisfied." Thus, parents were more satisfied with their experiences developing a parenting plan with a parenting coordinator than they were going to court.

Overall level of satisfaction with	Parenting Coordinator (N=271)	Court (N=104)
Very satisfied	46%	32%
Somewhat satisfied	32%	26%
Somewhat dissatisfied	10%	16%



**Table 51. Parent Satisfaction with Experiences with Project Parent Coordinators and Going to Court**

Overall level of satisfaction with	Parenting Coordinator (N=271)	Court (N=104)
Very dissatisfied	13%	26%

The last category of actions that parents were asked about was a mixture of services and programs that could be activated to address visitation and parenting issues. They include legal services and supervised visitation programs. Despite the fact that supervised visitation services were provided to members of the high-level treatment group at no charge, relatively few parents pursued these services although they were rated highly by users. Even fewer reported contacting a private attorney or Legal Aid. The “other” category refers to calling the police, contacting other family members, or trying to work things out on their own.

**Table 52. Other Services Parents Report Attempting to Solve Visitation Problems and Percentage Rating Them “Very Helpful” by Group**

	High-Level Treatment Group (N=349)		Low-Level Treatment Group (N=191)	
	Action Taken	Very Helpful	Action Taken	Very Helpful
Supervised visits	23%	42%	27%	20%
Supervised pick-up/drop-off	29%	42%	28%	46%
Contacted a private attorney	11%	42%	11%	36%
Contacted Legal Aid	8%	37%	8%	35%
Other service or program	30%	26%	25%	25%

Because a substantial proportion of the low-level treatment group was able to utilize the services of project personnel based at the court (*pro se* facilitators) to develop a parenting plan and attend free classes on how to file legal papers in court without hiring an attorney, overall project satisfaction levels were not too different for the two groups. Overall satisfaction with the project was somewhat higher for members of the high-level treatment group, although the difference was not statistically significant. Overall, 31 percent of interviewed parents in the high-level treatment group characterized themselves as being “very satisfied,” with the Tennessee Parenting Project as compared with 24 percent for members of the low-level treatment group.

**Table 53. Overall Satisfaction With Help Received From the Tennessee Parenting Project, By Treatment Group**

	High Treatment (N=349)	Low Treatment (N=191)
Very satisfied	31%	24%
Somewhat satisfied	32%	32%
Somewhat dissatisfied	16%	18%
Very dissatisfied	22%	27%



# 10 Outcomes in Child Support Payments

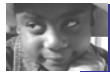
## Child Support Case Characteristics

Since past research has linked regularity of payments with regular, frequent, contact between the noncustodial parent and child, it was hoped that visitation assistance would lead to improvements in child support payment. To examine payment patterns prior to and following parent enrollment in the Tennessee Parenting Project CPR focused on the child support case for the parents and children experiencing a visitation problem that brought them into the project. This is considered the “target” case.

The vast majority of target child support cases for parents in both the high and low-level treatment groups were non-marital. Not surprisingly, most had established paternity through voluntary paternity acknowledgment. However, 26 percent of the high treatment group and 18 percent of the low treatment group required judicial action to establish paternity suggesting high levels of parental discord. Both groups were fairly evenly divided between those where the custodial parent had never received TANF and those where the custodial parent was either receiving TANF at program entry or had received it at some time in the past.

At the time they entered the project, all of the noncustodial parents had a child support obligation. However, due to mismatches in the child support numbers on project files and the child support automated system, it was not possible to determine the type of order in effect for approximately 7 and 10 percent of the cases in high and low treatment groups, respectively. Most, close to 90 percent in both the high and low treatment groups, had ongoing support obligations at program entry. Only 1 percent in each group was at the paternity establishment phase, another 1 to 2 percent was arrears-only cases, with a final 1 percent in the process of a modification. Interstate cases were rare, accounting for only 3 percent of the cases in each treatment group, and slightly over 40 percent of the cases in each treatment group had a wage withholding order in effect at program entry.

	High Treatment (N=1,532)	Low Treatment (N=556)
<b>Marital status</b>		
Never married	98%	97%
Married	1%	2%
Divorced/separated	1%	1%
<b>★ Method of Paternity Establishment</b>		
Default	8%	8%
Judicial Process	26%	18%
Marriage	6%	6%
Paternity acknowledged	60%	67%



**Table 54. Selected Characteristics of Child Support Target Cases, by Treatment Group**

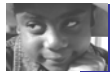
		High Treatment (N=1,532)	Low Treatment (N=556)
TANF Status	Current	23%	25%
	Never	56%	53%
	Former	21%	23%
Order description	Current support	89%	87%
	Arrears only	2%	1%
	Modified order	0.7%	0.3%
	Paternity only	1%	1%
	Unknown	7%	10%
Interstate case		3%	3%
Wage withholding order in place at enrollment		45%	41%
★Chi square is significant at .00.			

Although most of the noncustodial parents in both the high and low-level treatment groups had only a single child support obligation, this was not uniformly true. The range in the number of orders went to seven in the high treatment, and six in the low treatment group.

Adding across all of the noncustodial parent’s orders reveals that they owed, on average, \$445 (high treatment) and \$460 (low treatment) in monthly support. In addition, in both groups noncustodial parents owed, on average, approximately \$100 per month in payments towards arrears. Thus, the total monthly amount due in the high treatment group (considering all cases and both arrears and monthly support payments) was \$579, compared to \$589 in the low treatment group. The arrears balances in both groups were substantial, but comparable: \$10,567 in the high treatment group and \$11,900 in the low treatment group.

**Table 55. Description of All Orders Held by NCP By Treatment Group**

Number of cases NCP has on TCSES		High Treatment	Low Treatment
	Mean	1.6	1.5
	Median	1.0	1.0
	Range	1-7	1-6
	Number	(1,492)	(534)
Total current support order due across all cases at intake			
	Mean	\$445	\$460
	Median	\$342	\$366
	Range	\$11-\$3,157	\$10-\$2,599
	Number	(1,210)	(434)
Total monthly arrears payments due across all cases at intake			
	Mean	\$105	\$114
	Median	\$65	\$75
	Range	\$1-\$892	\$4-\$1,228
	Number	(831)	(321)
Total arrears balance at intake			
	Mean	\$10,567	\$11,900
	Median	\$4,053	\$4,630
	Range	\$1-\$166,812	\$1-\$112,265
	Number	(1,190)	(424)

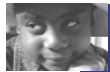


Current monthly support orders were very comparable for high and low-level treatment groups for the case that brought the parents into the program. The average order was slightly more than \$300, and half of the orders in the high-level treatment group were less than \$275, while in the low-level treatment group half of the orders were below \$290.

There were no significant differences between the two groups with respect to the arrears balances they carried, the monthly payments to be made towards arrears, or the age of the orders. Both groups had orders that were established, on average, about four years prior to project enrollment, and both groups had been accruing arrears of approximately \$400 per month.

While there was a statistically significant relationship between the treatment group and the number of months since the last child support payment, on a practical level the averages were quite similar for the two groups. On average, noncustodial parents in the high-level treatment group made their last child support payment 23 months before enrolling in the Tennessee Parenting Time Project, while their counterparts in the low-level treatment group last made a payment 20 months earlier.

<b>Table 56. Description of Child Support Orders for Target Cases, by Treatment Group</b>			
		High Treatment	Low Treatment
Current support order at intake	Mean	\$313	\$331
	Median	\$275	\$290
	Range	\$10-\$1,595	\$10-\$1,253
	Number	(1,129)	(419)
Current arrears payment at intake	Mean	\$64	\$68
	Median	\$43	\$43
	Range	\$1-\$572	\$4-\$359
	Number	(715)	(286)
Arrears balance at intake	Mean	\$6,087	\$6,485
	Median	\$2,743	\$3,081
	Range	\$6-\$72,674	\$1-\$63,156
	Number	(1,127)	(405)
Age of order (in months/years?)	Mean	43.6	44.2
	Median	28.0	31.0
	Range	Less than \$1-\$189	Less than \$1-\$169
	Number	(1,237)	(445)
★ Number of months since last payment made on the case	Mean	22.7	19.8
	Median	22.0	19.0
	Range	1-52	1-95
★ T-tests of means statistically significant at .00.			



There was a gradual increase in the amount of child support due on the target case based on the noncustodial parent’s income. Among those earning less than \$10,000 per year, the average order was \$254 per month, while those earning between \$30,000 and \$40,000 annually owed an average of \$482 per month. Tennessee uses an income-shares formula to determine child support order levels which takes into account earnings for both parents but typically rises with increases in the noncustodial parent’s income.

### Child Support Payment Patterns Pre and Post-Enrollment

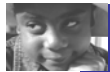
To see whether payment patterns improved following program enrollment, CPR compared the percentage of the child support obligation on the target case that was made in the 12 months prior to and 12 months following enrollment. The results of this analysis appear in Table 57. It shows that there was a statistically significant increase in the percentage of the obligation paid among noncustodial parents in the high-level treatment group. On average, payments for these parents rose from 54.2 percent to 57.6 percent. The low-level treatment group did not show any increases in the percentage of the obligation paid. Both before and after project enrollment, these parents paid an average of 52 percent of what they owed.

<b>Table 57. Amount of Current Child Support Due and Paid in the 12 Months Before and After Project Enrollment, by Treatment Group</b>				
	High Treatment		Low Treatment	
	Pre (N=1,030)	Post (N=1,383)	Pre (N=388)	Post (N=495)
Total amount of current child support due in the 12 months before and after project enrollment	★		★	
Mean	\$3,057	\$3,528	\$3,253	\$3,666
Median	\$2,700	\$3,091	\$3,090	\$3,192
Range	\$100-\$19,136	\$20-\$19,136	\$100-\$9,480	\$80-\$13,638
Total amount of current child support paid in the 12 months before and after project enrollment	★		★	
Mean	\$1,825	\$2,166	\$1,891	\$2,070
Median	\$1,247	\$1,765	\$1,309	\$1,505
Range	\$0-\$13,780	\$0-\$16,629	\$0-\$9,215	\$0-\$10,892
Percent of current support paid that was due in the 12 months before and after project enrollment	★			
Mean	54.2%	57.6%	52.3%	52.2%
Median	55.0%	65.0%	56.0%	53.0%
Range	0-100%	0-100%	0-100%	0-100%

★ T-test of means is significant at .00.

Table 58 indicates that the difference between the low and high-level treatment groups persisted over a 24 month period of time following program enrollment. Those in the high-level treatment group experienced a modest, but statistically significant increase, while those in the low treatment level group did not.





	High Treatment		Low Treatment	
	Pre (N=1,030)	Post (N=1,383)	Pre (N=388)	Post (N=495)
Total amount of current child support due in the 24 months before and after project enrollment	★			
Mean	\$5,300	\$5,960	\$5,651	\$5,967
Median	\$4,800	\$5,112	\$5,200	\$5,200
Range	\$100-\$38,272	\$20-\$38,272	\$100-\$18,960	\$80-\$27,783
Total amount of current child support paid in the 24 months before and after project enrollment	★			
Mean	\$3,134	\$3,573	\$3,211	\$3,240
Median	\$2,129	\$2,674	\$2,204	\$2,215
Range	\$0-\$22,970	\$0-\$27,182	\$0-\$18,444	\$0-\$19,054
Percent of current support paid that was due in the 24 months before and after project enrollment	★			
Mean	53.5%	56.3%	51.7%	51.0%
Median	57.0%	61.0%	54.0%	49.0%
Range	0-100%	0-100%	0-100%	0-100%

★ Chi square is significant at .00.

Table 59 looks payment performance for members of the high and low-level treatment groups in each judicial district. It shows that for members of the high-level group in all three project settings, the proportion of owed support that was paid increased significantly following program enrollment. To contrast, among members of the low-level group, payment performance was either unchanged or, as in the case of the 20<sup>th</sup> Judicial District, declined in the 12 months following enrollment. During the life of the project, child support payments deteriorated throughout the State of Tennessee as unemployment rose.

	High Treatment						Low Treatment					
	11 <sup>th</sup>		20 <sup>th</sup>		26 <sup>th</sup>		11 <sup>th</sup>		20 <sup>th</sup>		26 <sup>th</sup>	
Amount of current child support paid 12 months pre- and post project enrollment												
	Pre (N=257)	Post (N=343)	Pre (N=376)	Post (N=537)	Pre (N=397)	Post (N=503)	Pre (N=79)	Post (N=113)	Pre (N=272)	Post (N=337)	Pre (N=37)	Post (N=45)
	★		★		★				★			
Mean	\$1,890	\$2,315	\$2,006	\$2,307	\$1,611	\$1,914	\$1,772	\$2,002	\$1,946	\$2,135	\$1,748	\$1,756
Median	\$1,160	\$1,840	\$1,475	\$1,806	\$1,198	\$1,679	\$1,213	\$1,444	\$1,363	\$1,532	\$1,115	\$1,267
Range	\$0-13,780	\$0-13,874	\$0-9,046	\$0-16,629	\$0-11,845	\$0-10,776	\$0-9,215	\$0-8,377	\$0-9,144	\$0-10,892	\$0-6,070	\$0-5,178
Percentage of current child support paid that was due in the 12 months pre- and post project enrollment												
	★		★		★							
Mean	51.5%	56.7%	53.4%	54.4%	56.6%	61.7%	47.3%	51.0%	53.3%	51.1%	55.6%	63.2%
Median	52.0%	62.0%	54.0%	58.0%	58.0%	71.0%	43.0%	47.0%	58.5%	53.0%	53.0%	80.0%
Range	0-100%	0-100%	0-100%	0-100%	0-100%	0-100%	0-100%	0-100%	0-100%	0-100%	0-100%	0-100%

★ T-test of means is significant at .00.



Program participation was clearly associated with significant, positive increases in child support payments. To gauge whether the gains were tied specifically to the delivery of formal project services such as facilitation sessions and the production of parenting plans, we compared payment patterns among cases in the high-level treatment group that were (1) served, (2) ineligible for services, or (3) dropped out of the program for nonappearance or noncooperation. The results of this analysis appear in Table 60. It shows that there were significant post-program gains in the average percentage of support paid by members of the high-level treatment group for all three treatment circumstances. Payments rose significantly for members of the high-level treatment group in the 12 months after they enrolled regardless of whether they received formal program services, were deemed to be ineligible for services, or dropped out and failed to receive services.

<b>Table 60. Child Support Payments Pre- and Post-Project Enrollment In High Treatment Group Project Cases, by Final Project Status</b>						
	Served (N=376)		Ineligible (N=218)		Dropped (N=362)	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Amount of current child support paid that was due in the 12 months before and after project enrollment	★		★		★	
Average	57.6%	64.0%	54.4%	59.9%	52.1%	56.3%
Amount of current child support paid that was due in the 24 months before and after project enrollment	★		★		★	
Average	57.1%	61.8%	54.4%	58.4%	50.7%	55.3%

★ T-test of pairs between pre- and post-payment is significant .08 or less.

We observed similar patterns with respect to the consistency of child support payments for members of the high and low-level treatment groups. As with payment performance, members of the high-level treatment group were significantly more likely than their counterparts in the low-level treatment group to make at least some child support payment in the 12 months following their enrollment. In addition, these gains in improvement occurred for parents who experienced all types of treatments: those who were served, those who dropped, and those who were determined to be ineligible.

<b>Table 61. Child Support Payment Consistency Before and After Project Enrollment, by Treatment Group and Final Project Status</b>						
	High Treatment (N=1,008)		Low Treatment (N=386)			
	Before	After	Before	After		
Percentage making any payment in the 12 months pre and post enrollment	★					
	69.7%	76.4%	66.6%	68.1%		
High Treatment Group						
	Served (N=36)		Ineligible (N=218)		Dropped (N=362)	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Percentage making any payment in the 12 months pre and post enrollment	★		★		★	
	71.0%	79.8%	70.6%	77.1%	69.0%	74.3%

★ T-test between before and after is significant at .05 or less.



That child support payment levels and consistency patterns improved across the board for members of the high-level treatment group (but not in the low-level treatment group) suggests that payment changes may have been due to something other than the formal array of services provided. CPR can only speculate about these findings. Perhaps noncustodial parents who were ineligible for services or dropped out because the other parent refused to cooperate, still had enough contact with project staff to feel as though they were being heard, and this made them more willing to pay support. This was the contention of the parenting coordinators who maintained that they spent a considerable amount of time talking with and listening to all parents in the high-level treatment group, even those who were ultimately determined to be ineligible and/or dropped. As one project worker observed, “The project provides a service that is not available through any other venue...Fathers still feel the system is stacked against them, but they appreciate the project...They feel supported on some level.”

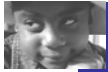
Alternatively, it is possible that child support workers paid extra attention to cases flagged for the high-level treatment group and that the extra scrutiny led to improved payment behavior. Still a third possibility is that parents in the high-level treatment group who were determined to be ineligible or were dropped were given leads about other resources to help solve their problems and ultimately experienced some resolution to their visitation issues.

Since few follow-up interviews were conducted with ineligible and/or dropped cases, it was impossible to determine which of these scenarios is the most plausible. Nor is it known whether parents in the ineligible and dropped categories experienced improvements in parent-child contact patterns and/or relationships with the other parent.

What is known is that other studies of visitation programs also yield confused and ambiguous findings about their impact on child support payment behaviors. For example, the Colorado demonstration project, which, like Tennessee, assigned parents with visitation problems to high and low-level treatment groups and had many parents who were ineligible or declined to participate in services, found improvements in payments for parents receiving high-level services and parents opting out of services. To further complicate matters, payments improved for parents in the low-level treatment group, a pattern that might be due to the fact that some parents in the low-level treatment group received project services.

Although the Tarrant County Employment Partnership Project in Texas was primarily focused on the provision of job services to improve employment rather than access services, it also reported significant increases over time in child support payments among parents assigned to the high-level treatment group, regardless of whether the parents took part in services. Evaluators concluded that the most “plausible explanation” for why all individuals assigned to the experimental group showed significant improvements—rather than only those who participated in services—is that “experimental cases were more visible to, and more actively worked by, child support workers” (Pearson and Thoennes, 2006).

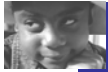
Not all studies, however, have been as confusing. One study that found a direct and strong relationship between the delivery of visitation services and child support payment patterns was the Ensuring Access,



Encouraging Support Project in Harris County, Texas. Based on a high- and low-level treatment design and pre- and post-program measures of payment performance, this project found that the only group to demonstrate statistically significant improvements was the high-level treatment group that actually received services. Thus, parents in the high-level treatment group who participated in services paid 73 percent of their obligation in the pre-program period and 88 percent in the post-program period. In contrast, parents in the high-level treatment group who failed to follow through on services demonstrated improved payment performance over time, with payments going from 75 to 81 percent, but the increase was not statistically significant (Pearson and Davis, 2007).

As in other studies of child support payment patterns, parents cited employment problems to explain their difficulties in making payments. Nearly two-thirds of interviewed parents in both the high- and low-level treatment groups blamed their payment problems on a lack of full-time, regular employment. The second most common reason given was having a new family or another child to support. Far fewer parents in the high and low treatment group (16% and 11%, respectively) mentioned visitation problems as a reason for nonpayment. During the life of the project, unemployment in Tennessee rose from 4.8 percent in 2006 to 10.7 percent in 2009. Simultaneously, statewide patterns of payment performance dropped from 55.68 percent in 2006 to 52.65 percent in 2009.

<b>Table 62. Reasons Why Project Participants Have Problems Paying Child Support, by Treatment Group</b>		
	High Treatment	Low Treatment
Not being regularly employed	58%	63%
Being injured or disabled and not able to work	13%	13%
The child support order is too high	30%	22%
Having a new family or other child to support	41%	31%
Not being able to see the children	16%	11%
The other parent not needing the money	26%	21%
Other reasons	43%	44%
Number	(170)	(106)



# 11 Child Access and Relationship Outcomes

## Child Access

The primary purpose of the Tennessee Parenting Time Project was to improve parent-child contact patterns for parents who were having problems with access and visitation. The project targeted parents with visitation problems for intervention. Indeed, all parents in both the high- and low-level treatment groups disclosed various types of visitation problems when they spoke with a child support worker or when they appeared in court.

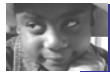
The only method of measuring access outcomes over time is to use parents' self-reports. This means that only those parents who were interviewed can be included in the outcome analysis pertaining to visitation. As noted previously, relatively few high-level treatment parents who were ineligible or dropped out of the project were interviewed. As a result, the analysis is largely restricted to parents who received high-level services.

Table 63 shows that a large majority (82%) of interviewed parents reported that the agreements and parenting plans they developed with parenting coordinators and pro se facilitators allowed them more contact with their children relative to their level of pre-program contact. In fact, 7 percent said the program helped them to establish contact where it was previously absent.

**Table 63. Agreement Terms of High Treatment Group Cases, by Site**

	11th (N=81)	20th (N=255)	26th (N=58)	Total (N=394)
Amount of visitation parenting plan allows for:				
★ Establishes contact	12%	4%	12%	7%
★ Allows more contact	65%	87%	85%	82%
Allows less contact	0%	0.4%	0%	0.3%
★ Allows about the same amount of contact	20%	8%	3%	10%
Contact will be supervised	0%	1%	0%	0.8%
★ Other	4%	0.4%	0%	1%
★Chi square is significant at .05 or less.				

As Table 64 shows, while 52 percent of the high-level treatment parents reported seeing their children at least monthly prior to program enrollment, this increased to 62 percent in the post-program period. For low-level treatment parents, those seeing their children at least monthly increased from 52 percent pre-program to 58 percent post-program. On the other hand, among low-level treatment parents, there was actually an increase from pre-program to post-program in the percentage saying they “never” see their children.

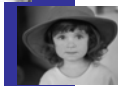
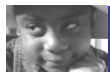


Regularity of contact also reportedly improved in the high-level treatment group. While 28 percent of the low-level parents reported seeing their children “more regularly” after the program, 42 percent of high-level treatment parents reported increased regularity of contact.

	High Treatment (N=349)		Low Treatment (N=191)	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
★How often NCP saw child in the months prior to project enrollment				
About once per week or more	25%	31%	27%	29%
About 1-2 times a month	27%	31%	25%	29%
Ever few months	14%	8%	7%	5%
A few days a year	9%	3%	15%	6%
Never	17%	15%	14%	20%
Other	10%	12%	12%	12%
★Compared to before enrollment in the Tennessee Parenting Project, the amount of time the noncustodial parent spends with the child(ren) has:				
Decreased a lot		15%		27%
Decreased a little		6%		7%
Stayed the same		34%		31%
Increased a little		19%		13%
Increased a lot		27%		22%
★Compared to before enrollment in the Tennessee Parenting Project, the noncustodial parent sees the child(ren)				
More regularly		42%		28%
Less regularly		21%		32%
About the same		38%		40%
★Chi square is significant at .06 or less.				

Not surprisingly, when regularity of contact is considered while statistically controlling for the distance between the noncustodial parent and child, we see significant differences only among those living within 50 miles of each other. Just over half (51%) of the high-level treatment noncustodial parents who lived within 50 miles of their child reported greater regularity of contact post-enrollment. For low-treatment noncustodial parents living within a 50 mile radius, 33 percent reported greater post-enrollment regularity in visits.

	★ Noncustodian lives within 50 miles of child		Noncustodian lives more than 50 miles from child	
	High-level Treatment	Low-level Treatment	High-level Treatment	Low-level Treatment
Contact with child is more regular post-enrollment	51%	33%	30%	29%
Contact with child is less regular post-enrollment	20%	33%	30%	43%
Contact with child is the same post-enrollment	29%	35%	39%	29%
Number	(134)	(58)	(23)	(21)
★Chi square is significant at .05 or less.				



Not all access programs offering high- and low-level services report greater improvement in child access for the high-level group. For example, in a similar program in Colorado, 32 percent of the parents in the high-level treatment group, and 35 percent of the low-level treatment group, reported seeing their children “more regularly” after the program. Similarly, in the Ensuring Access, Encouraging Support program in Harris County, Texas, improved regularity of contact was noted by 37 percent of the high and 31 percent of the parents in the low-level treatment groups. While none of the differences between the high and low-level treatment groups were statistically significant, parents in the high-level treatment group in Texas who received services were significantly more likely to report improvements in their visitation situation as compared with their counterparts who did not pursue services. For example, they were significantly more likely to report post-program visitation patterns that they characterized as “regular and scheduled” (40% versus 20%) and less likely to say that visitation “never” occurred.

### Parental Relationships

It was hoped that improving the quality of the parents’ relationship with one another would also improve their ability to work together as parents. Information on the quality of the parental relationship following the program is only available for those who participated in interviews. This means that little can be said about high-level treatment group parents who were ruled ineligible or who chose not to participate.

When asked to describe their relationship pre- and post-program, both high- and low-level treatment group parents typically reported improvements. In the high-level treatment group, 49 percent of the parents reported being able to cooperate with the other parent prior to the program. This increased to 64 percent following the program. In the low-level treatment group, there are also reported improvements: from 43 percent to 58 percent. It is difficult to know whether the improvements merely reflect a lessening of acrimony with the passage of time, or changes in both groups as a result of receiving services or information about the importance of effective co-parenting.

<b>Table 66. Relationship Status With The Other Parent Before and After Project Enrollment, by Treatment Group</b>				
	High Treatment (N=349)		Low Treatment (N=191)	
Relationship status with the other parent before and after project enrollment:				
	★ Before	★ After	★ Before	★ After
Able to cooperative	49%	64%	43%	58%
Hostile, angry, and unable to cooperate	27%	11%	30%	15%
No contact/communication	25%	25%	28%	27%
★ T-test between before and after is significant at .05 or less.				

Similar findings were reported in the OCSE-funded access programs that recently operated in Colorado and Texas. Both high and low-level treatment parents in those demonstration projects reported increases in their ability to cooperate following enrollment in the program. Again, it is difficult to tell if the improvements are due to the services received in each group or the passage of time.

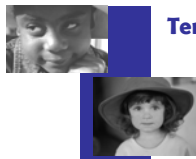


**Table 67. Relationship Status with the Other Parent Before and After Project Enrollment, by Treatment Group and Program**

	Tennessee				Colorado				Texas			
Relationship status with the other parent before and after project enrollment:	High Treatment (N=349)		Low Treatment (N=191)		High Treatment (N=106)		Low Treatment (N=56)		High Treatment (N=191)		No Treatment (N=82)	
	★		★		★		★		★		★	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Cooperative	49%	64%	43%	58%	43%	65%	38%	52%	28%	43%	38%	37%
Hostile, angry	27%	11%	30%	15%	23%	6%	23%	14%	46%	18%	27%	18%
No contact	25%	25%	28%	27%	35%	29%	39%	34%	27%	40%	35%	45%

★ Chi square significant at .05.





# 12 Reactions of Child Support and Judicial Staff

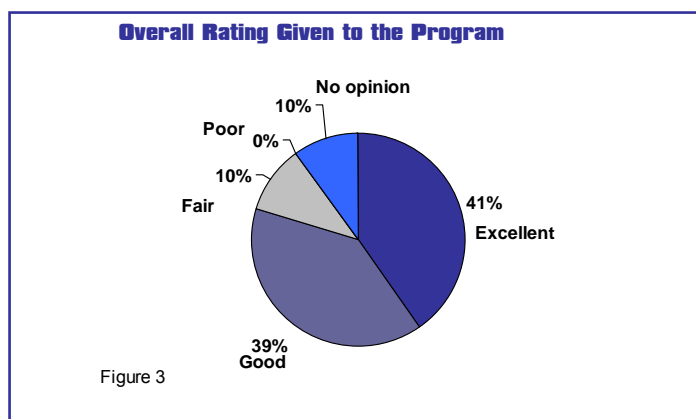
Near the end of the project, surveys were created and distributed to child support personnel and judges. They were asked to evaluate the program, report on their use of the program, assess the importance of continuing the services provided by the program, and react to ways in which such services might be continued following the end of the grant.

## Child Support Personnel

Child support personnel completed 79 surveys. Nearly half of the responses came from the 20th Judicial District. Approximately three-quarters of those responding described themselves as child support workers, while about 10 percent characterized themselves as supervisors, administrators, and attorneys, respectively. Respondents were fairly evenly divided among those handling only enforcement cases, only establishment cases, both establishment and enforcement, or strictly customer service.

Judicial District		
11th	20%	
20th	46%	
26th	16%	
33rd	18%	
Role in the child support system		
Child support worker	73%	
Child support supervisor	10%	
Child support administrator	8%	
Child support attorney	9%	
Duties in the child support system		
Enforcement only	31%	
Establishment only	23%	
Both enforcement and establishment	19%	
Only customer service	27%	

Nearly three-quarters of those who completed the child support survey said that, in their opinion, noncustodial parents often mentioned having access and visitation problems. Just over 60 percent of all custodial parents were also described as often mentioning access and visitation issues. Only 7 and 11 percent said visitation issues were rarely mentioned by noncustodial and custodial parents, respectively.



Most child support personnel who responded to the survey gave the program ratings of either excellent (41%) or good (39%). No one rated it as poor. As one worker explained, “The project provides a needed service that is not available through any other venue.”



<b>Table 69. Child Support Agency Personnel Reports of Hearing Access and Visitation Problems (N=79)</b>		
	NCP Mentions AV Problems	CP Mentions AV Problems
Often/always	74%	61%
Occasionally	19%	28%
Rarely	7%	11%

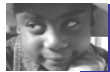
Most of the child support personnel responding to the survey indicated that they had made substantial numbers of referrals to the program. Almost half reported sending more than 10 cases to the Parenting Coordinators, and just over a quarter reported making more than 20 referrals.

<b>Table 70. Referrals by Child Support Agency Personnel to Parenting Coordinators (N=79)</b>		
How often did you refer parents to the Parenting Coordinator?		
Never		3%
Once or twice		9%
3 - 5 times		22%
6 - 10 times		20%
11 - 20 times		20%
More than 20 times		26%

Table 70 indicates the percentages who agreed with various statements related to the program. Approximately 60 percent agreed strongly (and about 90 percent agreed strongly or somewhat) with the statements:

- Our parents cannot afford to hire attorneys to get help with court filings;
- Our parents, need someone to help them fill out a parenting plan;
- Parents in our caseload need “on-the-spot” services; and
- A parenting coordinator/*pro se* facilitator makes noncustodial parents feel the agency cares about more than just money.

About 50 percent agreed strongly (and 80 percent strongly or somewhat) with the statements:



- A parenting coordinator/*pro se* facilitator makes noncustodial parents feel the agency cares about more than just money;
- Our parents cannot pay fees to get parenting plans filed with the court; and
- Parents have legitimate problems getting to see their children.

Only a small fraction of respondents strongly (4%) or somewhat (15%) agreed that parents used the project to lower their child support orders. As a result of the project, a majority of workers (63%) said that they had begun to ask parents about access problems. Although many workers acknowledged that many nonpayment problems reflected economic and employment issues rather than access concerns, they agreed “strongly” or “somewhat” that having dedicated staff to deal with access eliminates an excuse for not paying support and makes the noncustodial parent more willing to pay support. “While fathers still feel the system is stacked against them, the project gives them some measure of support that they appreciate.”

<b>Table 71. Child Support Agency Personnel Ratings of Various Aspects of Program (N=79)</b>					
How strongly do you agree with the following statements?	Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion
Our parents cannot afford to hire attorneys to get help with court filings	61%	30%	5%	0%	4%
Our parents need someone to help them fill out a parenting plan	60%	35%	3%	1%	1%
Parents in our caseload need “on-the-spot” services	58%	35%	5%	0%	1%
A parenting coordinator/ <i>pro se</i> facilitator makes NCPs feel the agency cares about more than just money	57%	27%	4%	2%	10%
Our parents cannot pay fees to get parenting plans filed with the court	50%	31%	8%	4%	8%
Parents have legitimate problems getting to see their children	41%	47%	4%	2%	6%
I am too busy to do anything about visitation other than refer parents to the parenting coordinator or <i>pro se</i> facilitator	34%	34%	13%	5%	14%
If you get both parties together, you usually can get them to do a parenting plan	31%	49%	4%	5%	11%
Since the project started, I am more likely to ask parents about access	28%	35%	17%	0%	20%
Having a parenting coordinator/ <i>pro se</i> facilitator eliminates an excuse for not paying support	28%	38%	10%	13%	10%
Having a parenting coordinator/ <i>pro se</i> facilitator makes NCPs pay more support	16%	38%	13%	11%	21%
The child support agency should deal with visitation as well as support	14%	25%	17%	30%	11%
Parents use the project to get lower child support orders	4%	15%	41%	21%	19%

Most of the child support personnel indicated that it is very (70%) or somewhat (22%) important for the program to have someone on scene at the child support agency and/or court to help parents with access and visitation issues. Similar percentages -67 and 30 percent, respectively- indicated it is very or somewhat important for program services to continue after the grant ends. They fear that noncustodial parents will



have “nowhere to turn,” and that everyone will go back to “the old way of doing business and no help will be provided.”

<b>Table 72. Child Support Agency Personnel Rating of Importance of Project (N=79)</b>	
How important is it to have someone on scene from the project to help parents?	
Very important	70%
Somewhat important	22%
Not very important	0%
No opinion	8%
How important is it for the program to continue?	
Very important	67%
Somewhat important	30%
Not very important	0%
No opinion	3%

<b>Table 73. Child Support Agency Personnel Rating of Likelihood that Child Support Can Continue Services without Future Funding (N=79)</b>	
No, will not be able to continue	74%
May be able to continue	21%
Yes, will be able to continue	6%

However, nearly three-quarters indicated that they did not believe the program could continue without some type of future funding. According to most, child

support workers do not think that they are allowed to provide and help with visitation and lack the time to do it. The net result will be that “motivated and resourceful parents will pursue help from existing community resources while the rest of the parents with problems will “fall away.”

When asked about a variety of ways in which the state might handle child support clients with visitation problems after the program ends, about half of the respondents indicated the state should:

- Require a parenting plan in all juvenile cases (like they do in divorce cases); and
- Start a docket for visitation cases and give sanctions for violations of orders.

Slightly smaller percentages indicated that the state should:

- Simplify the processes used to establish and enforce access and visitation;
- Pass a law that gives never-married parents a standard visitation schedule to use if they do not develop something on their own; and



- Screen for access problems in all relevant court hearings.

The least popular alternatives were:

- Develop written and online self-help materials and forms so parents can do things themselves;
- Hold regular classes on how to do a *pro se* filing; and
- Rely on volunteer mediators, *pro bono* attorneys, and other community volunteers to handle visitation matters for the child support caseload.

**Table 74. Ratings of Possible Ways to Fund Visitation Services After the Project Ends Given by Child Support Agency Personnel (N=79)**

How might Tennessee help parents in the child support system who have visitation problems after the project ends?	Definitely should pursue	Might pursue	Should not pursue	No opinion
Require a parenting plan in all juvenile cases (like they do in divorce cases)	48%	32%	9%	10%
Start a docket for visitation cases and give sanctions for violations of orders	48%	35%	9%	8%
Simplify the processes used to establish and enforce access and visitation	45%	42%	4%	9%
Pass a law that gives never-married parents a standard visitation schedule to use if they do not develop something on their own	43%	35%	10%	12%
Screen for access problems in all relevant court hearings	43%	37%	12%	8%
Fund someone to help develop parenting plans for the child support caseload (e.g., through filing or court fees on traffic violation, birth certificates, etc. or through special taxes such as alcohol or tobacco)	39%	39%	10%	12%
Fund someone to help develop parenting plans for the child support caseload through child support appropriations	30%	49%	8%	13%
Add parenting plans to child support orders without requiring a court filing fee	30%	48%	9%	13%
Develop written and online self-help materials and forms so parents can do things themselves	20%	52%	14%	14%
Hold regular classes on how to do a <i>pro se</i> filing	19%	50%	17%	14%
Rely on volunteer mediators, <i>pro bono</i> attorneys, and other community volunteers to handle visitation matters for the child support caseload	12%	37%	35%	16%

Finally, when asked what they would probably do when confronted with parents who describe access and visitation problems following the end of the program and the withdrawal of parenting coordinators and *pro se* specialists, most respondents said they would:

- Tell the parent that access/visitation and child support are two separate issues and the child support agency only deals with child support, or
- Suggest the parent contact an attorney or go to court.



**Table 75. Child Support Agency Personnel Reports of How They Will Handle Reports of Visitation Problems After the Program Ends (N=79)**

Most likely, what will you do when you hear about visitation problems when the project ends?	Very Often	Somewhat Often	Not very Often	No opinion
Tell the parent that access/visitation and child support are two separate issues and the child support agency only deals with child support	57%	24%	7%	13%
Suggest the parent contact an attorney or go to court	50%	30%	7%	13%
Refer the parent to a <i>pro bono</i> attorney or Legal Aid	24%	40%	24%	13%
Refer the parent directly to a community service agency for help	16%	38%	29%	17%
Help them with parenting plans	3%	16%	57%	25%
Refer the parent to a faith-based organization	1%	13%	36%	48%

### Judicial Responses

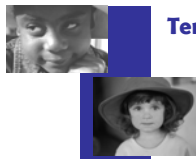
Nine judges responded to the judicial survey. All of the responding judges reported that they always or often heard from the noncustodial parent about access problems, and all reported that custodial parents mentioned access problems often or occasionally.

Approximately 90 percent of the judges said it was “very important” to have a project person available at the court, but two-thirds thought this would be unlikely without further funding. The judges also credited the program with increasing the number of parenting plans filed, as well as the number of motions for visitation. Most judges also agreed that:

- Getting both parties together typically results in a parenting plan being produced;
- Addressing visitation makes noncustodial parents feel that the agency is concerned with more than collecting support; and
- The child support agency should deal with access and visitation problems.

Project personnel based at the court confirmed these observations. They agreed that their presence at the court helped to remind referees and judges to refer parents to the project. They felt that an on-site presence at the child support agency was critical to maintaining a flow of referrals from child support workers.

Another perceived benefit of basing project personnel at the court and the child support agency is the ability to provide “on-the-spot” services to families in the child support system. As one *pro se* specialist put it, “It never goes anywhere if you are not on scene. One party doesn’t call you back. You can’t get them to show up.” Another explained, “One stop at the court works. They are already there and they have just come out of a hearing. They are in that frame of mind. You have to nab them on the spot.”



# 13 Summary, Key Findings and Conclusions

## Summary

The Tennessee Parenting Project was created as a result of a 2005 award from the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE). Like similar awards that OCSE made to Colorado and Texas, the goal of the project was to assess whether identifying parents with visitation problems in the child support caseload and providing services aimed at resolving them improves parent-child contact and the subsequent payment of child support. The project was conducted in child support offices and juvenile courts in three jurisdictions: Nashville (20th Judicial District – Davidson County); Chattanooga (11th Judicial District – Hamilton County) and the cities of Jackson, Lexington and Henderson (26th Judicial District – Madison, Henderson and Chester Counties). One full-time parenting coordinator and one part-time *pro se* specialist were placed in each of the three jurisdictions, respectively. They worked with child support workers and court personnel to identify 2,174 cases with visitation problems between October 2006 and September 2009. Parents were assigned to different groups for treatments of varying intensity based on the last digit of the noncustodial parent's child support case number.

- The 583 parents in the low-level treatment group were handed or mailed printed information about parenting time problems and various community resources including free classes on how to pursue legal filings dealing with visitation on a self-represented basis.
- The 1,591 parents in the high-level treatment group were contacted by the parenting coordinator and offered the opportunity to participate in a free, facilitated meeting with the other parent to complete a fill-in-the-blanks parenting plan that spells out when the children will spend time with each parent. Those who were unable to produce a plan were referred to the *pro se* facilitator at the court for help with filing court papers on visitation and/or to attend a free class on how to pursue legal filings on a self-represented basis.

The project evaluation assessed the number and types of parents that enrolled in the project, the services they received, and the outcomes they experienced. It was based on data gathered about parents with visitation problems on forms completed by project staff at enrollment, records of project services delivered to parents by the parenting coordinators and *pro se* specialists in each county, follow-up telephone interviews with custodial and non-custodial parents in the low- and high-level treatment groups conducted six months following project enrollment, surveys administered to child support and court workers in the participating counties, and a review of automated child support records for all project cases and extraction of information on payment activity prior to and following project enrollment.



The study had a number of limitations. Although most cases were assigned to high and low-level treatment groups using random techniques, the court insisted that all cases it referred be placed in the high-level treatment group and accorded the full array of project services. In addition, parents in the low-level treatment group who followed up on the printed literature they were given dealing with community services were able to access most project services including free classes on *pro se* filings and facilitated sessions with the other parent to develop a parenting plan. A third limitation was the availability of detailed information only on parents in the high-level treatment group who ultimately participated in services. These practices may have blurred the distinction between the treatment groups since some parents in the low-level group ultimately received the same services as those in the high group.

## Key Findings

- Although child support workers were initially skeptical about asking parents about visitation, they began to screen and refer parents to project personnel once they had an on-site resource. This led to high levels of enrollment at all stages of case processing but especially at enforcement

Sixty-three percent of child support workers surveyed in the three project sites reported that they were more likely to ask parents about access once the project started and 66 percent said that they had referred six or more cases to parenting coordinators for assistance with visitation. Ultimately, 2,174 child support cases with visitation problems were identified and enrolled in the project with an average of 65 cases per month being referred during the first two project years. Even in a small, rural jurisdiction, 638 cases were enrolled, many as a result of word-of-mouth referrals. Most cases were referred by child support workers and court personnel at enforcement stages, although a quarter were flagged within six months of order establishment or less.

- It was difficult to deliver visitation services to parents in the child support caseload even with a dedicated worker offering on-site assistance at the child support agency and the court.

Approximately one-fifth of those with problems could not be served because of geographical distance, domestic violence and other factors that might make parenting-time unsafe. More than a third of parents were not served because they could not be reached to arrange a meeting or failed to appear for scheduled meetings, especially those with higher levels of parental conflict and the lowest levels of parent-child contact. As a result, project staff treated less than half (41%) of the parents in the high-level treatment group with identified visitation problems. The challenges associated with serving the child support population are not unique to Tennessee. In similar projects conducted in Colorado and Texas, only 34 and 26 percent of parents with identified visitation problems, respectively, attended a parent conference.

- Parents who received access and visitation services were non-white, never-married and poor.

Noncustodial parents in the high-level treatment group who received help with visitation were African-American (78%) and educated at the high school/GED level or lower (71%). Although 70 percent were employed full time, 19 percent were unemployed when they enrolled in the project. A third (33%) reported personal incomes of less than \$10,000 per year, and another third (35%) reported incomes of \$10,000-\$20,000





per year. Only nine percent had incomes that exceeded \$30,000 per year. These patterns were consistent with those observed in similar projects in Colorado and Texas

- The key intervention that parents in the high-level treatment group received was a brief facilitation session.

Facilitation consisted of a parent meeting with the parenting coordinator to discuss how the child's time would be divided and to develop a parenting plan using a standard, fill-in-the-blank form. Ultimately, facilitation sessions were conducted with 595 child support cases in the high-level treatment group. Nearly all cases were handled in a single session that lasted an average of 40 minutes and a median of 30.

- Facilitation sessions with both parents were highly effective and almost always led to the production of full and partial parenting plans that inspired high rates of user satisfaction

In the 11th and 20th Judicial Districts, nearly two-thirds (62% and 61%) of facilitations resulted in comprehensive parenting plans that were submitted to the court with existing child support orders. Another fraction of the cases resulted in partial parenting plans (8% and 3%) and/or clarification of a parenting-time schedule (9% and 25%) which were treated as informal agreements between the parents and not filed with the court. Full parenting plans were rarer in the 26th Judicial District (28%) because most facilitation sessions were held with only the noncustodial parent. When both parents participated, the agreement rate was 95 percent. Nearly all interviewed parents who met with parenting coordinators to develop a parenting plan reported being "very" (46%) or "somewhat" (32%) satisfied. These patterns were consistent with those observed in Texas and Colorado.

- In all Judicial Districts, facilitation sessions were most likely to result in arrangements that called for more parent-child contact than had been the case before the intervention was held.

The only method of measuring parent-child contact over time is to use parents' self-reports which were elicited in telephone interviews conducted with parents approximately six months after they enrolled in the project. The percent of interviewed parents in the high-level treatment group that reported seeing their children at least monthly in the pre and post-program time periods rose from 52 to 62 percent, respectively. For low-level treatment parents, those seeing their children at least monthly only increased from 52 percent pre-program to 58 percent post-program while the percentage saying that they "never" see their children rose significantly. Parents also reported that regularity of contact improved in the high-level treatment group.

- When asked to describe their relationship with the other parent prior to and following enrollment in the program, parents in both the high and low-level treatment groups typically reported improvements.

In the high-level treatment group, 49 percent of interviewed parents reported being able to cooperate with the other parent prior to enrolling in the program. This increased to 64 percent six months following program enrollment. In the low-level treatment group, parents also reported improvements with the rate of cooperation going from 43 percent to 58 percent. It is difficult to know whether the improvements merely



reflect a lessening of acrimony with the passage of time, or changes in both groups as a result of receiving services or information about the importance of effective co-parenting.

- Parents in the high-level treatment group who failed to reach an agreement in the facilitation session and/or were unable to get the other parent to attend the facilitation session were offered assistance with legal filings with high rates of attendance at free classes on *pro se* filings in the one setting with regular classes.

In addition to meeting individually with parents to explain their legal options and procedures, *pro se* specialists offered a free class on legal filings on a periodic basis. Rates of attendance ranged from 4 percent in the 11th Judicial District where classes were offered very irregularly to 63 percent in the 26th Judicial District where classes were offered twice a month. Despite the fact that the project paid fees associated with legal filings, the incidence of filings in court to establish or enforce visitation was extremely low suggesting that *pro se* assistance rarely led to court activity.

- Most parents in the low-level treatment group recalled receiving an informational brochure on co-parenting and the resources available in their community for help with visitation, including free classes on *pro se* filings. While many said they used it to set up or improve visitation, few followed up on community resources.

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of the parents in the low-level treatment group who were interviewed recalled receiving and reviewing printed materials about visitation with approximately two-thirds indicating that they used the material to set up contact with their child and/or make visits go better. Parents who used the materials rated them highly but smaller proportions reported following up on referrals listed in the literature (21%) or calling someone at the court to discuss *pro se* classes (32%). Ultimately, only 6 percent attended a *pro se* class, 2 percent filed legal papers in court on their own with the project paying their filing fees, and seven percent met with a parenting coordinator to develop a parenting plan that was filed with the court.

- In the 12 and 24 months following program enrollment, noncustodial parents in the high-level treatment group paid a significantly higher proportion of their child support obligation.

Average child support payments for parents in the high-level treatment group rose from 54.2 percent to 57.6 percent in the 12 months following program enrollment, a statistically significant increase. There was no increase in the percentage of the obligation paid in the 12 months following program enrollment among noncustodial parents in the low-level treatment group. The differences in payment for the two groups occurred in each judicial district and persisted over time with the high-level group showing better payment patterns in comparisons for the 24 month period prior to and following program enrollment. In addition, noncustodial parents in the high-level treatment group demonstrated better payment consistency.

- There were significant post-program gains in the average percent of support paid by members of the high-level treatment group for all three treatment circumstances: those who received services, those



who were denied services because of safety and geographical factors, and those who did not receive services because one or both parents failed to appear and/or cooperate.

Payment patterns were significantly higher in the 12 months following program enrollment for high-level parents who received project services, those who were denied services and those who failed to appear for services. That improvements occurred across-the-board (but not in the low-level treatment group) suggests that payment changes may have been due to something other than the formal array of services provided, but something not experienced by the low-level treatment group. One explanation for these findings offered by project staff is that noncustodial parents who were ineligible for services or dropped out because the other parent refused to cooperate, still had enough contact with project staff to feel as though they were being heard and this made them more willing to pay support.

- Most child support personnel who responded to a survey about the program gave it ratings of either “excellent” (41%) or “good” (39%) and felt that it filled an important service need.

Most surveyed child support personnel indicated that it was very (70%) or somewhat (22%) important to have someone on scene at the child support agency and/or court to help parents with access and visitation issues. Similar percentages, 67 and 30 percent respectively, indicated it was very or somewhat important to continue to provide services after the expiration of the grant. Many (41%) “strongly” agreed that parents have legitimate problems getting to see their children and few (4%) felt that parents used the project to get lower child support orders.

- Parents rated their experiences with parenting coordinators more highly than they did their experiences going to court and wanted more facilitation-type help.

While 78 percent of interviewed parents characterized themselves as “very” or “somewhat” satisfied with their experiences with parent coordinators, this was the case for just 58 percent of parents who went to court to resolve their visitation problems. Most of those who did go to court (75%) said that they wanted court personnel to try to help them and the other parent develop a parenting plan.

## Conclusions

- Visitation assistance is a valuable and needed service for a substantial number of child support clients that can be effectively integrated into agencies and courts at all stages of case processing in an on-site fashion.

The Tennessee Parenting Project reveals that child support agencies and courts can incorporate specialized staff to help large numbers of parents with visitation problems without experiencing case processing delays or other inefficiencies. Once they have an on-site staff resource, child support workers and judicial personnel are willing to identify and refer parents who have visitation problems at all stages of case processing. Staff appreciates the service and believes that it addresses a real need in the child support caseload that would otherwise go unmet. They strongly support the notion of providing “on-the-spot” services and feel that



paying attention to visitation matters makes noncustodial parents feel that the agency cares about more than just money. Once the word is out, the demand for visitation services is high and steady, even in rural settings.

- Many parents can be helped by getting them together for a brief, facilitated meetings designed to develop, clarify or amend a “fill-in-the-blank” parenting plan.

One reason why visitation problems are not addressed in high-volume child support and court settings is the belief that an effective access intervention must be lengthy and time consuming. The Tennessee Parenting Project disproves this contention. The chief project intervention consisted of a meeting with both parents that was facilitated by a trained neutral who helped parents quickly discuss, clarify and memorialize their understandings about when each parent would see the children. The project showed that many visitation problems that confront poor, never-married and non-white parents can be solved in an average of 40 minutes using a “fill-in-the-blank” parenting plan that helps them organize decision-making duties and the child’s time.

- Printed information about visitation problems and community resources are helpful, particularly if there are free resources in the community.

A substantial proportion of parents reported that they reviewed printed materials about visitation and co-parenting and termed it at least somewhat helpful, although the results might have been different if parents in the low-level treatment group had not been able to access *pro se* facilitators and free classes dealing with *pro se* filings—community resources that were developed through the grant.

- Better methods are needed to compel custodial parents to participate in interventions to address parenting-time problems. Offering free cases on *pro se* filings is a promising approach but only if regularly offered at a convenient time.

The fact that 36 percent of cases that were eligible to be served in the project failed to receive services in large part because custodial parents did not respond or refused to cooperate underscores the importance of developing ways to compel custodial parents to participate in efforts to examine and resolve visitation problems. Although the project offered noncustodial parents free classes on *pro se* filings, relatively few parents took advantage of this option. The exception to this occurred in the 26th Judicial District, a rural area where classes were offered on two Saturdays every month and parents learned about the resource through word-of-mouth techniques.

- Access interventions help improve parent-child contact patterns.

The project revealed that parental relationships improve over time for members of the high and low-level treatment groups but that members of the high-level treatment group were the only ones to reap statistically significant gains in parent-child contact. The percentage of noncustodial parents who reported seeing their children at least monthly rose from 52 to 62 percent in the six months following program enrollment and 42 percent reported seeing their children more regularly as compared with 28 percent for the low-level treatment group.



■ Access interventions improve child support payment patterns.

There were statistically significant increases in child support payments for noncustodial parents in the high-level treatment group in the 12 and 24 months following their enrollment in the Tennessee Parenting Project with payment performance going from 54.2 to 57.6 percent. The same was not true for parents in the low-level treatment group where payments did not change prior to and following enrollment in the project and remained at 52 percent. This suggests that access and visitation services are associated with payment increases and is consistent with findings reached in the Ensuring Access—Encouraging Support Project conducted in Harris County, Texas. Like the Colorado Parenting Project, however, every group of noncustodial parents in the high-level treatment group, including those who were excluded from the project or did not appear for facilitation services, registered improvements in child support payment. One interpretation of the project findings is that payments improved for all served and non-served members of the high-level treatment group because someone at the child support agency acknowledged the importance of visitation and tried to help.

■ More substantial changes in child support payment patterns will depend on increases in employment and earnings.

Although payment performance for noncustodial parents in the high-level treatment group rose significantly after project enrollment, it remained far from complete with the average percent of owed support due that was paid peaking at 57.6 percent. In interviews, noncustodial parents blamed their incomplete and missed payments on irregular employment patterns and/or having a new family or other children to support. The payment challenges they face are common to most parents in the child support system. Over the life of this project, the statewide rate of payment of current support in Tennessee declined from 55.68 percent in 2006 to 52.65 percent in 2009. Simultaneously, the unemployment rate rose from 4.8 to 10.7 percent. Tennessee recently initiated a demonstration project to better link unemployed and under-employed noncustodial parents to workforce programs for job search and placement services. It is hoped that by providing help with both employment and visitation, payment gains will be even more robust.

■ Referral and service activities dealing with visitation must be eligible for federal reimbursement.

Despite the perceived importance of addressing visitation problems in the child support caseload, and the gains in payment associated with offering help with visitation, workers see no way of providing assistance without changes to the federal reimbursement policies. Without dedicated visitation staff, workers predict that they will be forced to go back to ignoring visitation matters and/or telling parents who complain about visitation to hire an attorney or go to court on their own even though they know that both options are unrealistic for parents in the child support caseload. In order for child support agencies to provide visitation assistance, regulations must be modified to allow federal reimbursement for referral and service activities dealing with visitation.



## References

- Chambers, D. (1979). *Making Fathers Pay: the Enforcement of Child Support*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Seltzer, J. (1991). "Relationships Between Fathers and Children Who Live Apart: The Father's Role after Separation." *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 53 (1), 79-101.
- Office of Child Support Enforcement. (2005). "Child Support Access and Visitation Grants: State Profiles (FY2004)." U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C.
- Office of Child Support Enforcement. (2006). "A Collaboration and Strategic Planning Guide for States: Child Access and Visitation Grant Programs." U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C.
- Office of Child Support Enforcement. (2008). "Child Access and Visitation Grants: State/Jurisdiction Profiles for FY 2008." U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C.
- Office of the Inspector General. (2002). *Effectiveness of Access and Visitation Programs*. OEI-05-02-00300. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C.
- Pearson, J. and Thoennes, N. (2004). *Evaluation of the Texas Access and Visitation Hotline*. Center for Policy Research, Denver, CO.
- Pearson, J. and Thoennes, N. (2006). *Tarrant County Employment Partnership Project: Final Report*. Center for Policy Research, Denver, CO.
- Pearson, J., Davis, L., and Thoennes, N. (2005). *An Evaluation of Participant Outcomes in Access and Visitation Programs*. Center for Policy Research, Denver, CO.
- Pearson, J., and Davis, L. (2007). *Ensuring Access, Encouraging Support: Final Report*. Center for Policy Research, Denver, CO.
- Pearson, J., Davis, L., and Thoennes, N. (2007). *Colorado Parenting Time/Visitation Project: Evaluation Report*. Center for Policy Research, Denver, CO.
- Pearson, J., Thoennes, N., Price, D., & Williams, R. (1996). *Evaluation of the Child Access Demonstration Projects: Report to Congress*. Center for Policy Research and Policy Studies, Inc., Denver, CO.
- Pearson, J., Thoennes, N., Davis, L., Venohr, J., Price, D.A., & Griffith, T. (2003). *OCSE Responsible Fatherhood Programs: Client Characteristics and Program Outcomes*. Center for Policy Research and Policy Studies, Inc., Denver, CO.
- U.S. Bureau of Census. (2003). "Custodial Mothers and Fathers and their Child Support: 2001." *Current Population Reports*, 60-225.



# **Appendix A**

## **Parenting Plan Form**

IN THE \_\_\_\_\_ COURT OF \_\_\_\_\_ COUNTY, TENNESSEE

STATE OF TENNESSEE, ex rel	)	File No.	_____
	)		
_____	)	Division/Docket No.	_____
Petitioner ( <input type="checkbox"/> Mother <input type="checkbox"/> Father)	)		
v.	)	TCSSES No.	_____
	)		
_____	)	_____ days with Mother	
Respondent ( <input type="checkbox"/> Mother <input type="checkbox"/> Father)	)	_____ days with Father	

### PARENTING PLAN

The mother and father will behave with each other and each child so as to provide a loving, stable, consistent and nurturing relationship with the child. They will not speak badly of each other or the members of the family of the other parent. They will encourage each child to continue to love the other parent and be comfortable in both families.

This plan is a new plan.  
modifies an existing Parenting Plan dated \_\_\_\_\_.  
modifies an existing Order dated \_\_\_\_\_.

Child's Name	Date of Birth

#### I. RESIDENTIAL PARENTING SCHEDULE

##### A. DAY-TO-DAY SCHEDULE

The G mother G father shall have responsibility for the care of the child or children except at the following times when the other parent shall have responsibility:

From \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_  
*Day and Time Day and Time*  
every week every other week  
other: \_\_\_\_\_

The other parent shall also have responsibility for the care of the child or children at the additional parenting times specified below:

From \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_  
*Day and Time Day and Time*  
every week every other week  
other: \_\_\_\_\_

This parenting schedule begins \_\_\_\_\_ or date of the Court's Order.



**B. HOLIDAY SCHEDULE AND OTHER SCHOOL FREE DAYS**

Indicate if child or children will be with parent in ODD or EVEN numbered years or EVERY year:

	MOTHER	FATHER
New Year's Day	_____	_____
Martin Luther King Day	_____	_____
Presidents' Day	_____	_____
Easter Day (unless otherwise coinciding with Spring Vacation)	_____	_____
Passover Day (unless otherwise coinciding with Spring Vacation)	_____	_____
Mother's Day	_____	_____
Memorial Day (if no school)	_____	_____
Father's Day	_____	_____
July 4 <sup>th</sup>	_____	_____
Labor Day	_____	_____
Halloween	_____	_____
Thanksgiving Day & Friday	_____	_____
Children's Birthdays	_____	_____
Other School-Free Days	_____	_____
Mother's Birthday	_____	_____
Father's Birthday	_____	_____
Other:	_____	_____
Other:	_____	_____
Other:	_____	_____
Other:	_____	_____

A holiday shall begin at 6:00 p.m. on the night preceding the holiday and end at 6:00 p.m. the night of the holiday, unless otherwise noted here \_\_\_\_\_.

**C. FALL VACATION (if applicable)**

The day to day schedule shall apply except as follows: \_\_\_\_\_ beginning \_\_\_\_\_.

**D. WINTER (CHRISTMAS) VACATION**

**If children are of school age:** The mother father shall have the child or children for the first period from the day and time school is dismissed until December \_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_ a.m./p.m. in odd-numbered years in even-numbered years every year. The other parent will have the child or children for the second period from the day and time indicated above until 6:00 p.m. on the evening before school resumes. The parties shall alternate the first and second periods each year.

**If children are not of school age,** agreement of parents is as follows: \_\_\_\_\_

Other agreement of the parents: \_\_\_\_\_

**E. SPRING VACATION** (If applicable)

The day-to-day schedule shall apply except as follows: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ beginning \_\_\_\_\_.

**F. SUMMER VACATION**

The day-to-day schedule shall apply except as follows: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ beginning \_\_\_\_\_.

Is written notice required? Yes No. If so, \_\_\_\_\_ number of days.

**G. FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE NOT OF SCHOOL AGE OR NOT IN SCHOOL:**

The day-to-day schedule shall apply except as follows: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ beginning \_\_\_\_\_.

**H. TRANSPORTATION ARRANGEMENTS**

The place of meeting for the exchange of the child or children shall be: \_\_\_\_\_

Payment of long distance transportation costs (if applicable): mother father both equally.

Other arrangements: \_\_\_\_\_.

If a parent does not possess a valid driver's license, he or she must make reasonable transportation arrangements to protect the child or children while in the care of that parent.

**I. SUPERVISION OF PARENTING TIME** ( Check if applicable)

Supervised parenting time shall apply during the day-to-day schedule as follows:

Place: \_\_\_\_\_.

Person or organization supervising: \_\_\_\_\_.

Responsibility for cost, if any: mother father both equally.

**J. OTHER**

The following special provisions apply :

**K. RESIDENTIAL TIME WITH EACH PARENT**

The Primary Residential Parent is \_\_\_\_\_

Under the schedule set forth below, each parent will spend the following number of days with the children:

Mother \_\_\_\_\_ days

Father \_\_\_\_\_ days

**II. DECISION-MAKING**

**A. DAY-TO-DAY DECISIONS**

Each parent shall make decisions regarding the day-to-day care of a child while the child is residing with that parent, including any emergency decisions affecting the health or safety of a child. Babysitting arrangements for the child shall be arranged as follows:

\_\_\_\_\_.

**B. MAJOR DECISIONS**

Major decisions regarding each child shall be made as follows:

Educational decisions	mother	father	joint
Non-emergency health care	mother	father	joint
Religious upbringing	mother	father	joint
Extracurricular activities	mother	father	joint
_____	mother	father	joint

Visits with extended family members shall be arranged as follows: \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_.

Should either parent commence a relationship with a significant other, other than a spouse, the child shall be introduced to that new adult as follows: \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_.

Discipline of the child shall be as follows: \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_.

**III. FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

**A. CHILD SUPPORT**

Child Support is set by law so any deviation will have to be approved by the court.

**B. HEALTH INSURANCE**

Mother will provide health insurance for the child

Father will provide health insurance for the child.

Co-pays, deductibles, and uncovered medical expenses will be paid as follows:

\_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_.

**IV. PRIMARY RESIDENTIAL PARENT (CUSTODIAN) FOR OTHER LEGAL PURPOSES**

The child or children are scheduled to reside the majority of the time with the  mother  father. This parent is designated as the primary residential parent also known as the custodian, **SOLELY** for purposes of any other applicable state and federal laws. If the parents are listed in Section II as joint decision-makers, then, for purposes of obtaining health or other insurance, they shall be considered to be joint custodians. THIS

DESIGNATION DOES NOT AFFECT EITHER PARENT'S RIGHTS OR RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER THIS PARENTING PLAN.

### V. DISAGREEMENTS OR MODIFICATION OF PLAN

Should the parents disagree about this Parenting Plan or wish to modify it, they must make a good faith effort to resolve the issue by the process selected below before returning to Court. *Except for financial support issues including child support, health and dental insurance, uncovered medical and dental expenses, and life insurance*, disputes must be submitted to:

Mediation by a neutral party chosen by the parents or the Court.

Arbitration by a neutral party selected by parents or the Court.

The Court DUE TO ORDER OF PROTECTION OR RESTRICTIONS.

The costs of this process may be determined by the alternative dispute process or may be assessed by the Court based upon the incomes of the parents. It must be commenced by notifying the other parent and the Court by written request certified mail other: \_\_\_\_\_.

In the dispute resolution process:

- A. Preference shall be given to carrying out this Parenting Plan.
- B. The parents shall use the process to resolve disputes relating to implementation of the Plan.
- C. A written record shall be prepared of any agreement reached, and it shall be provided to each parent.
- D. If the Court finds that a parent willfully failed to appear without good reason, the Court, upon motion, may award attorney fees and financial sanctions to the prevailing parent.

### VI. RIGHTS OF PARENTS

Under T.C.A. § 36-6-101 of Tennessee law, both parents are entitled to the following rights:

- (1) The right to unimpeded telephone conversations with the child at least twice a week at reasonable times and for reasonable durations;
- (2) The right to send mail to the child which the other parent shall not open or censor;
- (3) The right to receive notice and relevant information as soon as practicable but within twenty-four (24) hours of any event of hospitalization, major illness or death of the child;
- (4) The right to receive directly from the child's school any school records customarily made available to parents. (The school may require a written request which includes a current mailing address and upon payment of reasonable costs of duplicating.) These include copies of the child's report cards, attendance records, names of teachers, class schedules, and standardized test scores;
- (5) Unless otherwise provided by law, the right to receive copies of the child's medical health or other treatment records directly from the physician or health care provider who provided treatment or health care. (The keeper of the records may require a written request which contains a current mailing address and the payment of reasonable costs of duplication.) No person who receives the mailing address of a parent as a result of this requirement shall provide such address to the other parent or a third person;

- (6) The right to be free of unwarranted derogatory remarks made about the parent or his or her family by the other parent to the child or in the presence of the child;
- (7) The right to be given at least forty-eight (48) hours notice, whenever possible, of all extra-curricular activities, and the opportunity to participate or observe them. These include the following: school activities, athletic activities, church activities and other activities where parental participation or observation would be appropriate;
- (8) The right to receive from the other parent, in the event the other parent leaves the state with the minor child or children for more than two (2) days, an itinerary including telephone numbers for use in the event of an emergency;
- (9) The right to access and participation in education on the same basis that is provided to all parents. This includes the right of access to the child for lunch and other activities. However participation or access must be reasonable and not interfere with day-to-day operations or with the child's educational performance.

**VII. NOTICE REGARDING PARENTAL RELOCATION**

The Tennessee statute (T.C.A. § 36-6-108) which governs the notice to be given in connection with the relocation of a parent reads in pertinent part as follows:

If a parent who is spending intervals of time with a child desires to relocate outside the state or more than one hundred (100) miles from the other parent within the state, the relocating parent shall send a notice to the other parent at the other parent's last known address by registered or certified mail. Unless excused by the court for exigent circumstances, the notice shall be mailed not later than sixty (60) days prior to the move. The notice shall contain the following:

- (1) Statement of intent to move;
- (2) Location of proposed new residence;
- (3) Reasons for proposed relocation; and
- (4) Statement that the other parent may file a petition in opposition to the move within thirty (30) days of receipt of the notice.

---

**Under penalty of perjury, we declare that this plan has been proposed in good faith and is in the best interest of each minor child and that the statements herein and on the attached child support worksheets are true and correct.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mother Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Father Date

COURT COSTS (If applicable)

Court costs, if any, are taxed as follows: \_\_\_\_\_.

It is so ORDERED this the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Judge