

# **Child Access and Visitation Programs: Participant Outcomes**

## **Program Analysis**



**Department of Health and Human Services  
Administration for Children and Families  
Office of Child Support Enforcement**

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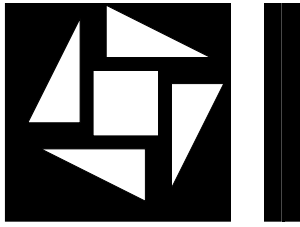
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# Executive Summary

## Purpose of the Study

This study was commissioned by the Office of Child Support Enforcement to:

- Develop critical measures of participant outcomes for the State Access and Visitation Program;
- Perform a limited, pilot evaluation using these measures in a sample of states offering the major types of access and visitation interventions;
- Assess participant outcomes and gauge the feasibility of routinely assessing such programs;
- Suggest program improvements based upon the evaluation;
- Suggest ways to improve the quality of data collected about programs and their participants.

## Study Sites and Methods

Programs in three states were selected for each of three major program types:

- Mediation: Missouri, Rhode Island, and Utah;
- Parent education: Arizona, Colorado, and New Jersey;
- Supervised visitation: California, Hawaii, and Pennsylvania.

A 10-minute telephone interview was administered to program participants an average of 17 months following service delivery. This resulted in the following:

- Completed telephone interviews with 391 noncustodial parents and 579 custodial parents, for a total of 970 interviews;
- Attempts were made to reach 4,109 participants for a response rate of 24 percent;
- The refusal rate was 7 percent, but the phone disconnection or wrong number rate was 41 percent.

The study also included a review of child support records for 173 program participants in Arizona, Missouri, and Pennsylvania for 12 months prior to and 12 months following program participation.

## Access and Visitation Participant Outcome Measures and Results

The key outcome measures studied for users of mediation, parent education, and supervised visitation programs, and the results for these measures, are:

- **Child Support Payment:** Among those who entered the program paying less than everything they owed, most noncustodial parents paid more child support in the 12 months following program participation, with official child support records showing increases for 64 percent in mediation programs, 93 percent in parent education programs, and 53 percent in supervised visitation programs.\*
- **Child Support Compliance:** The child support compliance rate (child support paid/child support owed) for never-married parents increased significantly from an average of 59 percent in the 12 months prior to services to 79 percent in the 12 months following the receipt of services. The compliance rate for divorced parents was 74 percent before services were provided and did not increase significantly following service delivery.
- **Level of Child Contact:** Among mediation participants, the proportion of noncustodial parents reporting an increase in child contact 12 months after the delivery of services was 32 percent, compared with 41 percent for those who participated in parent education, and 45 percent for supervised visitation users. Custodial parents reported lower rates of increase. Many reported that visitation stayed the same or declined.
- **Behavior of Youngest Child:** Custodial parents reported that the behavior of the youngest child had improved in the 12 months after service delivery for 27 percent of the mediation cases, 26 percent of the parent education cases, and 41 percent of the supervised visitation cases.
- **Parental Relationships:** In the 12 months after service delivery, approximately 25 percent of custodial and noncustodial parents, respectively, reported that their relationship with the other parent had improved, with only slight differences by program type. A majority reported that the relationship quality had stayed the same; some reported a decline.
- **Household Formation and Marriage:** Since marriage and household formation were not stressed in any of the programs, and most program participants had already decided to

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\*The HHS Office of the Inspector General found that 61 percent of mediation participants in a sample of cases and states increased their child support payments.

divorce or not marry, few participants reported that they began to live together (1-5%), married or re-married (2-6%).

- **Mediation Agreement Rates:** Approximately 70 percent of custodial and noncustodial parents who participated in mediation reported reaching an agreement on the issues of visitation or custody.
- **Parent Satisfaction:** Nearly all parents who participated in parent education rated these programs as “very” or “somewhat” useful. Ninety percent of parents who participated in supervised visitation characterized it as a safe place to conduct visits.

## Findings on How to Improve Program Performance

- Refer noncustodial parents in the child support caseload to State Access and Visitation Programs.
- Focus on serving never-married parents, since they show significantly better child support payment outcomes following service delivery.
- Investigate ways to expand the number of State Access and Visitation Programs and the population served.



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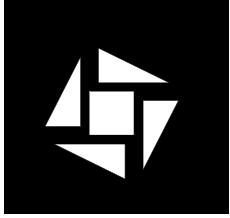
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## Chapter 1

# Introduction and Background

In his research, 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) reached similar conclusions when she 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. Census has confirmed that there are strong, practical connections between visitation and child support payment and that parents with joint custody or visitation rights are substantially more likely to make child support payments than their counterparts who lack such arrangements. According to the most recent survey, 77.1 percent of those 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 (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2003).

As research has mounted showing the importance of access and visitation and its connections with the payment of child support, the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) and state and local child support agencies, known as title IV-D agencies, have sought to find ways to address access and visitation problems without making the two contingent upon one another or undermining their legal distinctions.

- In 1990, OCSE launched the Child Access Demonstration Projects in seven states to test the impact of mediation, parent education, and counseling following parental separation and divorce and to increase the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children.
- In 1995, the evaluation of the Child Access Demonstration Projects confirmed that access was a complex problem for many separated and divorced parents (with estimates of access problems ranging from 13 to 20 percent of new divorce cases to 31 percent of post-decree cases), and recommended that courts and other agencies help parents by developing no- and low-cost dispute resolution interventions like mediation (Pearson, *et al.*, 1996).
- In 1996, Congress enacted legislation authorizing the State Access and Visitation (AV) Program, which provides total annual grant awards of \$10 million per year for states to promote the development of mediation, counseling, education, parenting plans, and visitation enforcement services, including supervised visitation, to alleviate access problems. OCSE awarded the first grants in 1997.





The limited research on the implementation and effectiveness of programs funded with AV grants has been promising.

- In its first year, the AV grants program supported 131 local initiatives in 30 states that served 19,454 individuals (Fender, *et al.*, 1999). By 2003, the program served an estimated 69,500 parents (OCSE, 2004).
- A 2002 assessment of the AV program showed that states were using their funds in a variety of ways, with many states focusing on helping parents in IV-D cases with child support obligations to obtain court-ordered visitation rights. This included programs that work primarily with IV-D populations, including low-income and never-married families; programs that work with high-conflict families; programs that work with incarcerated parents; programs that attempt to help parents enforce visitation orders; and multi-service programs in rural areas (Pearson and Price, 2002).
- A 2002 study conducted by the HHS Office of the Inspector General that focused on 190 families in four states who received mediation services to deal with access problems found that 76 percent generated mediation agreements, 42 percent reported increased contact with their children, and 61 percent paid more child support (OIG, 2002).

As the access and visitation program comes of age, interest has grown in developing mechanisms to allow for a standard means of measuring outcomes across programs. The standard measures that are currently collected at all project sites include:

- The referral sources for clients;
- The relationship of the individuals served to the children in the household;
- Marital status of the parents;
- Race and ethnicity of the parents;
- Income of the parents;
- The type of access and visitation service provided; and
- Increase in parenting time.

In 2002, OCSE awarded a Task Order to examine State Access and Visitation Programs and answer a variety of questions on outcomes for major program types. The study had several objectives. One goal was to develop ways of measuring outcomes for users of various types of programs funded by State Child Access and Visitation grants. Another objective was to conduct a limited study of program users to document the actual outcomes that they experience and to gauge the level of effort that such assessments require. Still other project goals were to: suggest ways to improve program services; explore the feasibility of having states routinely collect outcome information for program





participants; and recommend steps that states should take to make program assessment more practical and reliable.

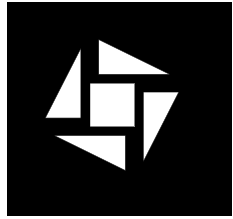
To accomplish these objectives, a data collection instrument was developed to assess participant outcomes among users of the most common types of services funded by State Child Access and Visitation grants. Those services were (1) mediation, (2) parent education, and (3) supervised visitation. States that offer these three types of services were identified and recruited to participate in the research effort. Minimally, this involved providing contact information for a large number of participants who received services at least six months prior to the initiation of field work.

Ultimately, the research focused on 18 AV programs in nine states, with three states offering mediation, parent education, and supervised visitation, respectively. Although all nine states offered a variety of services, we assessed programs offering parent education in Arizona, Colorado, and New Jersey; programs offering mediation in Missouri, Rhode Island, and Utah; and supervised visitation programs in California, Hawaii, and Pennsylvania.

This report presents the results of this research. Chapter 2 discusses the methodology for the evaluation, including how the program types and sites were selected, how the sample was generated, the interview instrument, the response rate, and the methodology used to gauge outcomes. Chapter 3 provides a description of the sites in which the study was conducted, including the nature of services provided. Chapter 4 provides a portrait of the clients served, their demographic and family characteristics, how they learned about AV programs and what other forms of assistance they have pursued to resolve their access disputes. Chapter 5 describes the types of services parents recalled receiving at the AV program and their satisfaction with those services. Chapter 6 presents outcomes following program participation, including changes in parent-child contact, parental relationships, child behavior, family formation, and child support payment. Chapter 7 summarizes key findings and compares them with prior research on mediation, parent education, and supervised visitation programs. Chapter 8 discusses the implications of the study, including ways to improve program services and to reliably assess participant outcomes. In the report, we merge data from similar sites and present patterns for mediation, parent education, and supervised visitation programs, respectively.







## Chapter 2

# Methodology

### Program Types

Under the regulations for State Access and Visitation Program grants (45 CFR§ 303.109), states and local projects can engage in a broad range of activities, including mediation, counseling, parenting education, development of parenting plans, development of guidelines for visitation and custody arrangements, and visitation enforcement. An assessment of applications submitted by states for Fiscal Year 2001 and telephone discussions with AV program coordinators in late 2001 showed that states are using their grant funds to offer a wide range of services (Pearson and Price, 2002). Among the key findings of the 2001 assessment are the following:

- **Mediation:** Forty-six states offer some mediation; 36 of those states offer both voluntary and mandatory mediation, seven offer only voluntary mediation, and three offer only mandatory mediation.
- **Counseling:** Thirty-one states offer counseling to program participants.
- **Parent Education:** Forty-six states offer education to parents.
- **Parenting Plans:** Forty-seven states help parents develop access plans.
- **Monitoring:** Thirty states include monitoring of the visitation agreement among their services.
- **Supervised visitation:** Forty-five states provide some supervised visitation services.
- **Neutral pick-up and drop-off:** Thirty-four states have some provision for this service.
- **Development of visitation guidelines:** Twenty-four states mention developing visitation guidelines in their grant application.

Although states have changed some of their service priorities since 2001, the majority continue to offer mediation services, parenting education, and supervised visitation services. As a result, this





research focused its outcome assessment efforts on users of these three most common service types. Since many programs that offer supervised visitation services also offer neutral drop-off and pick-up arrangements, these two service categories were combined and are addressed as programs offering supervised visitation. Similarly, since most mediation programs result in the development of parenting plans, it was possible to address outcomes associated with both mediation and the development of parenting plans within the same set of mediation programs selected for assessment purposes.

## Program Sites

Researchers contacted AV program directors in states offering (1) mediation services; (2) parent education; and (3) supervised visitation. The goal was to identify three states that offered each of these types of services and that were willing to provide contact information for a large number of participants who received services at least six months prior to the initiation of field work. Another objective was to avoid duplication of sites covered in the OIG's recent assessment of Access and Visitation Grant Programs. Finally, at some sites, we wanted to review child support records for actual payment behavior before and after program participation; for this analysis, we needed to recruit AV programs that collected Social Security numbers or other case identifiers recognized by the child support agency. These volume, contact, duplication, and identification criteria proved to be quite challenging.

*Volume Considerations:* In order to obtain at least 100 completed interviews at each site with parents served in AV programs during a 12-month period of time, we projected that we needed a sample pool of at least 300 families who were served over 12 months. This limited consideration to programs with larger case volumes and eliminated the many providers who serve fewer than 300 families per year.

*Contact Considerations:* Since the chief assessment tool was a telephone interview conducted with participating parents, a key requirement for site participation was the ability to provide complete contact information for program participants, including telephone numbers. It was also important to identify sites that had previously obtained a signed consent form from program participants who were willing to be contacted by telephone for evaluation purposes and/or would agree to a passive consent process that involved notifying participants about the telephone evaluation and offering them the possibility of opting out of the study by telephoning the program. These considerations led to the elimination of many sites that lacked complete contact information and/or required an active consent process whereby potential respondents would be mailed a letter about the assessment







and interested parents would be invited to authorize the program to release their names and numbers to telephone interviewers. Previous research efforts with similar populations found that active consent requirements yielded few participants, with most parents ignoring requests to mail postcards or make phone calls indicating their willingness to participate in a telephone interview (Pearson and Thoennes, 1999).

*Duplication Considerations:* In order to avoid duplication with the OIG's recent evaluation of Access and Visitation Grant Programs, we eliminated from consideration mediation programs in Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Nevada, and Oklahoma. The OIG focused on mediation programs in these five states in its 2002 evaluation of AV Programs. One of the goals of this assessment was to expand the number of state programs subject to evaluation.

*Child Support Case Identification Considerations:* Records maintained by the child support agency are the most reliable way to gauge child support obligations and/or payment patterns. In order to review child support records in a manual or automated fashion, certain identifiers, such as Social Security numbers or child support case numbers, are required. Many sites do not collect such identifiers from program participants and/or were unwilling to release them without active consent.

Ultimately, 18 programs in nine states satisfied these considerations and comprised the sites for our study. Programs offering parent education were selected in Arizona, Colorado, and New Jersey. Programs offering mediation were selected in Missouri, Rhode Island, and Utah. Supervised visitation programs were selected in California, Hawaii, and Pennsylvania. The three sites that had participant information that was sufficient to permit use of child support records were Arizona, Missouri, and Pennsylvania.

## Sample Generation

Program staff at each site identified parents who had received services during 2002 and extracted relevant contact and service information from their files. At some sites, the recruitment process was extended to include clients served in 2003; at others, it was extended retroactively to 2000 and 2001. These extensions served to expand the pool of eligible participants. In all instances, clients were contacted for assessment interviews at least six months following the date at which they entered the programs, with the range going from six to 54 months. On average, interviews were conducted 17 months after the delivery of services; the median number of months elapsing between service delivery and the interview was 14. Less than 20 percent of the interviews (18%) were conducted





24 months or more after the delivery of services. Ultimately, the sites identified and provided relevant information on 4,109 parents who had participated in the access and visitation programs.

The chief type of information on participants provided by program staff was contact information: the name, address, and telephone number for each parent served. In addition, programs were asked to identify who could be termed the “custodial” and “noncustodial” parent; the type of service each parent received; the language in which any follow-up interview should be conducted; history of or allegations of domestic violence; the date each parent first received service; and/or whether he or she was charged any fees for program services. If child support identifiers such as Social Security and/or child support case numbers were available, it was noted.

Finally, staff at mediation programs were asked to note whether the mediation effort had resulted in a full or partial agreement or no agreement at all. Staff at supervised visitation programs were asked to note whether the client was still receiving program services, had moved to a different visitation arrangement, and/or had been terminated by the program. They were also asked to indicate whether the program had communicated about the status of the case/family to the court. A copy of the form completed by program staff (“Information Supplied by Program”) appears in Appendix A.

In addition to supplying information on participants, program staff at most sites mailed a brief letter to parents alerting them to the fact that they would soon be contacted by telephone interviewers for research purposes. Pursuant to the “passive consent” process, parents were invited to contact the program to request that their names and phone numbers be withheld from lists conveyed to telephone interviewers but were not asked to explicitly authorize its use. Parents were assured that the interview information would be kept confidential and reported in an anonymous fashion. They were told that the purpose of the interview was to improve services. A copy of the letter used to inform participants about the study and permit them to opt out appears in Appendix B. At the California site in Los Angeles County, parents were sent an introductory letter in both English and Spanish.

## The Instrument

Researchers worked with the sites to develop a 10-minute interview that gathered information that was common to all program types, as well as information that was unique to mediation, parent education, and supervised visitation programs, respectively. Accordingly, the instrument began with a common set of questions about children who were the subject of the intervention and services





received; moved to sections that were specifically tailored for those who had received mediation, parent education or supervised visitation services; and concluded with a second series of common questions on program outcomes and client satisfaction. All questions were close-ended, with fixed choice responses. A copy of the parent survey (Evaluating Outcomes of the States' Access and Visitation Program) appears in Appendix C. The survey was translated into Spanish and administered on an as-needed basis, mostly with parents at the California site in Los Angeles.

Since the central objective of the assessment was to gauge participant outcomes in the areas of child support payments, parenting time, parent relationships, child behavior, household formation, and marriage, researchers designed multiple measures of key outcome variables. For example, changes in parenting time were assessed by asking parents to characterize their visitation arrangement, their frequency of visitation, and their amount of contact relative to their visitation agreement or court order in the months before they received program services and at the time of the interview. In addition, parents were asked to compare the amount of time that the noncustodial parent spent with the children before and after receiving program services. Those who noted a change were asked to assess if it could be attributed to the program. Finally, parents were asked to indicate in a “yes” or “no” fashion whether the noncustodial parent was seeing the child(ren) more often than she or he did before receiving program services.

Since another objective of the study was to compare outcomes patterns generated in this study with the results of OIG’s assessment of the extent to which the Access and Visitation Grants have led to increases in access rights, visitation, and child support payment compliance, this study used some of the same outcome questions that the OIG used. The use of multiple measures and repeated measures in independent research efforts enhances the reliability of observed results.

A final objective of the study was to generate information that was useful to the individual programs and sites. Thus, researchers attempted to accommodate the interests of participating programs by adding specific questions that might help programs to sustain themselves. For example, all providers were interested in knowing whether participating parents would be willing to pay for services and how much they would pay. Mediation providers wanted to know the issues that were discussed in mediation and whether they had resulted in agreements. In addition to general satisfaction patterns, providers of supervised visitation services wanted to know whether the program had provided a safe environment for responding parents and/or their children. Providers of parent education programs were interested in client ratings of the usefulness of various topics covered in the classes. Finally, all providers wanted to know whether participating parents were





consumers of other dispute resolution or access services and/or whether the AV programs were essentially the sole providers of access assistance.

## The Interview Process

All interviews were conducted by the Public Opinion Laboratory (POL) of Northern Illinois University, using its computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) system. POL conducted telephone surveys with custodial and noncustodial parents in the five-state study conducted by OIG. Thus, the agency's supervisors and many interviewers were familiar with access and visitation issues and the challenges associated with reaching custodial and noncustodial parents for assessment purposes. POL programmed the questionnaire on its CATI system with all appropriate skips for its administration to users of mediation, supervised visitation, and parent education services.

In addition to setting up the questionnaires in the CATI system, POL created a case file list from hard copy forms supplied by program staff. This meant that interviewers had immediate access to all potential respondents, their telephone numbers, the date they received access and visitation services, and the nature of the service they had received. The questionnaires were further customized so that interviewers could name the specific program that respondents had used and confirm whether the respondent had received the services indicated by the program.

During September to December 2003, interviewers made up to 16 attempts to contact targeted program participants and conduct telephone interviews. On average, interviewers made 3.9 attempts to reach respondents. Completed interviews were ultimately conducted with 970 of the 4,109 parents who participated in the program. This sample consisted of 391 noncustodial parents and 579 custodial parents. The cross-site response rate was 24 percent. The response rate was significantly higher for custodial parents (23%) as compared with noncustodial parents (20%). Looked at somewhat differently, interviews were conducted with at least one parent in 40 percent of the families targeted for assessment.

Relatively few targeted respondents declined to be interviewed, with refusal rates ranging from 2 to 10 percent and averaging 7 percent across the nine state sites. Client mobility was a much bigger problem, with 41 percent of targeted parents having a disconnected or wrong telephone number. Another 17 percent of call attempts resulted in no answer. Finally, 12 percent of program participants had no phone number listed and it was impossible for interviewers to locate one. There were relatively few differences in refusal and response rates for mediation, parent education, and supervised visitation programs, respectively. More to the point, there were consistent differences





in rates of completed interviews for custodial versus noncustodial parents, with the rate being significantly higher for custodial parents for every program type.

Given that data are analyzed separately for custodial and noncustodial parents, the differences in response rates do not result in greater weight being given to custodial parent viewpoints. However, the greater difficulty in locating noncustodial parents may mean that noncustodial parent responses in this survey are less representative of all noncustodial parents, while custodial parent responses are more representative of custodial parents as a whole. Table 2-1 shows call attempts, response rates, and refusals by program site and program type.

<b>Table 2-1: Attempted and Completed Interviews, by Site and Program Type</b>						
	<b>Total number called</b>	<b>Number of noncustodial parent interviews</b>	<b>Number of custodial parent interviews</b>	<b>Number of interviews completed</b>	<b>Number of Refusals</b>	<b>Average number of call attempts</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,109</b>	<b>391</b>	<b>579</b>	<b>24% (970)</b>	<b>7% (285)</b>	<b>3.9</b>
<b>Total Mediation</b>	1,479	43% (155)	57% (208)	25% (363)	9% (133)	3.9
<i>Missouri</i>	622	35% (58)	65% (107)	27% (165)	10% (60)	3.4
<i>Rhode Island</i>	544	46% (45)	54% (53)	18% (98)	8% (46)	4.8
<i>Utah</i>	313	52% (52)	48% (48)	32% (100)	9% (27)	3.4
<b>Total Parent Education</b>	1,567	38% (134)	62% (220)	22% (354)	6% (99)	3.8
<i>Arizona</i>	625	41% (64)	59% (92)	25% (156)	9% (59)	3.6
<i>Colorado</i>	397	32% (31)	68% (67)	24% (98)	5% (20)	4.2
<i>New Jersey</i>	545	39% (39)	61% (61)	18% (100)	4% (20)	3.8
<b>Total Supervised Visitation</b>	1,063	40% (102)	60% (151)	24% (253)	5% (53)	3.9
<i>California</i>	469	36% (36)	64% (64)	21% (100)	6% (26)	4.2
<i>Hawaii</i>	210	46% (20)	55% (24)	21% (44)	2% (5)	4.4
<i>Pennsylvania</i>	384	42% (46)	58% (63)	28% (109)	6% (22)	3.5

## Sample Bias

To determine whether interviewed noncustodial parents differed from their counterparts who could not be reached by telephone interviewers, we compared the limited information available for both groups. The analysis showed that noncustodial parents who were interviewed were significantly more likely to be recent AV program clients and somewhat older than their counterparts who could not be reached. Thus, while the cross-site response rate for noncustodial parents served in 2003 was 25 percent, it was only 12 percent for those served in 1999. In a similar vein, the response rate for





noncustodial parents in the 16-25 year age range was 19 percent as compared with 26 percent for those ages 36 and older.

Parent age and the recency of services were the only factors that appeared to differentiate interviewed and non-interviewed parents. Response rates were identical for those who were involved in allegations of domestic violence, used English or Spanish as a primary language, and were in or out of the child support system. The patterns suggest that it is more difficult to locate people as time passes and that younger noncustodial parents are more geographically mobile than older parents. There is no reason to believe that the AV experiences of those served in 2003 were different from the AV experiences of those served in 1999. Nor is the lower response rate of younger parents a significant concern, since the average age of the noncustodial parents served in the study (i.e., 33) closely matched the age of interviewed parents. Table 2-2 provides interview rates for selected groups of noncustodial parents.

<b>Table 2-2: Percent of NCPs Interviewed by Selected Characteristics<sup>1</sup></b>				
	Date of AV Services			
	1999	2000-2001	2002	2003
Percent of NCPs interviewed*	12%	17%	22%	25%
	(134)	(820)	(2,087)	(670)
	Age of the NCP			
	16-25 yrs	26-35 yrs	36yrs+	
Percent of NCPs interviewed*	19%	23%	26%	
	(394)	(878)	(693)	
	Did Case Involve Allegations of Domestic Violence			
	Yes	No		
Percent of NCPs interviewed	22%	22%		
	(662)	(1434)		
	Primary Language			
	English	Spanish		
Percent of NCPs interviewed	22%	18%		
	(2,893)	(82)		
	IV-D Status			
	IV-D	Non IV-D		
Percent of NCPs interviewed	23%	23%		
	(1,272)	(246)		

\* Chi square is significant at .05 or less.

<sup>1</sup> Excludes Arizona where the information provided by the program did not allow us to determine which parent had custody prior to merging with the interview data.





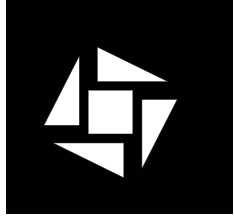
## The Review of Child Support Records

Programs in Arizona, Missouri, and New Jersey had identifiers that enabled them to locate participants in the child support system. In Arizona and Missouri, experienced child support workers did manual searches of the automated records and extracted information on obligations and payments in the 12 months prior to and following program enrollment. In Pennsylvania, an experienced child support worker conducted manual searches on a portion of the form and payment information was provided by an automated computer extract.









## Chapter 3

# Profile of the Programs

The research was conducted in nine states that offered three types of access and visitation services: mediation (Missouri, Rhode Island, and Utah); parent education (Arizona, Colorado, and New Jersey); and supervised visitation (California, Hawaii, and Pennsylvania). As previously noted, these are the most typical programs funded by State AV grants. In this chapter, we briefly describe each program included in the study.

### Mediation Programs

Mediation has become the predominant form of dispute resolution in domestic cases. In 1998, all but six states had statutes that explicitly mentioned family mediation of some type, a far cry from 1981 when California adopted the first mandatory mediation statute for contested child custody and visitation matters (Rogus and McEwen, 1998). Mediation is widely regarded as a useful adjunct to courts that hear family matters and is typically credited with producing agreements that are perceived to be fair and equitable by both mothers and fathers. Although the research evidence is mixed, many studies have concluded that mediated agreements are better complied with over time than those generated in adjudicated settings and are associated with improved parental relationships and more parent-child contact (Kelly, 1996).

With few exceptions, however, court mediation programs have aimed to assist the domestic relations bench that handles divorce and post-decree matters. Far less attention and effort have been paid to addressing the access and visitation problems experienced by never-married parents who have paternity and child support issues. A number of states, however, are attempting to remedy this omission by using their Access and Visitation grants to provide mediation services to populations served by the child support agency, including never-married parents. A recent evaluation conducted by the Office of Inspector General of the Department of Health and Human Services examined outcomes for state AV programs in five states (Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Nevada, and Oklahoma) that make a concerted effort to serve IV-D participants (OIG, 2002). This evaluation considers three additional states that make mediation services available to parents in the IV-D system: Missouri, Rhode Island, and Utah.





**Missouri's** Access and Visitation Grant is administered by the Family Support Division, which contracts with Mediation Achieving Results for Children (M.A.R.C.H.) for mediation services. Begun as a pilot project in 1997, M.A.R.C.H. mediation services have been available in twenty judicial circuits since October 2003, reaching about 800 families per year. Services are available to divorced or never married parents seeking to establish paternity or child support, or to parents who have an administrative or judicial order for child support. Independent mediators provide families with up to four hours of free planning and facilitation services to address a range of custody, visitation, and child support issues, with the objective of enhancing both parents' participation and involvement on financial and emotional levels. The steps of the M.A.R.C.H. mediation program generally include:

- An initial telephone call or fax to the Family Support Division to confirm that a child support order exists;
- Information mailed to the other parent (and the possibility of court orders for mediation);
- An intake process during which the propriety of mediation is considered;
- The scheduling of one or more mediation sessions; and
- The preparation of a verbal agreement or written summary of understanding which may be filed with the court.

A 1999 evaluation of M.A.R.C.H. indicated that the process showed great promise in helping parents resolve complex parenting issues (Fuger and Duncan, 1999). Among the findings were:

- Nearly half of parents referred to M.A.R.C.H. learned about it from child support workers, with the remainder coming from courts and other legal actors;
- Most parents participate voluntarily, but a fraction are ordered to do so by the court;
- About half the parents are divorced from each other and half are never married;
- Most served parents had low levels of education and earnings;
- The average case required 1.26 sessions and two hours and 14 minutes of mediation; and
- Over 60 percent of the parents attending mediation reached an agreement on a significant portion of the issues.





Mediation, however, is not a panacea. The M.A.R.C.H. evaluators observed that while most mothers and fathers reported substantial levels of parent child contact between the children following mediation, three-quarters of fathers reported lingering parenting time issues, while two-thirds of mothers reported child safety concerns. The evaluators recommended more follow-up information to understand the long-term results of mediation and the availability of additional mediation or other support services to address parenting issues that remain after an initial mediation agreement is reached.

Missouri maintains contact information on all mediation participants and also obtains a signed consent at intake to participate in research. Using information supplied by clients, we were able to locate them in the automated system and extract information on their payment behavior for the 12 months prior to and following mediation.

**Rhode Island**'s Access and Visitation grant is administered by the family court, which uses the bulk of its funds to support a court-based mediation program for "miscellaneous" petitions that are filed in Providence County, housing one-half of the state's population. Typically, these are *pro se* petitions for visitation filed by never-married, noncustodial parents. Two court-based mediators work with families in a confidential, facilitated process aimed at developing a mutually acceptable visitation schedule. Generally, the mediation is conducted within two sessions, the first of which is devoted to screening for domestic violence, sexual abuse, and other issues that might be barriers to a safe and effective visitation schedule.

Unlike most jurisdictions, mediation is mandatory in Rhode Island in miscellaneous petitions but not in divorce cases, where litigants are usually represented by attorneys. Mediation information is mailed out with each summons to appear for child support. It is the court's belief that child support issues are readily resolved once visitation and access issues are addressed. The court may impose a sanction on parties who fail to appear for mediation.

During the first two years of program operation, mediators successfully settled 172 cases, for an overall success rate of 75 percent. The court currently receives 75 mediation referrals per month, or about 600 to 700 per year. In addition to mediation, the family court offers supervised visitation services at the courthouse during evening hours.

**Utah** used its Access and Visitation Grant funds to create a Co-Parenting Mediation Program in the Third Judicial District in Salt Lake County. Begun in 1998, the program is a collaborative effort among the Department of Human Services, the Administrative Office of the Courts, and the Third





District Court. Among the services offered is mediation when there is a problem or dispute over court-ordered parent-time. Mediation is mandated by the court; services are provided by community mediators who charge \$75 per hour, which the parents split unless they are indigent and mediation fees are paid with grant funds. Most cases are handled in a single session lasting approximately two to three hours.

Referral to mediation is initiated by a court filing alleging a dispute or problem with court-ordered visitation. The case is screened for domestic violence, allegations of abuse, or protective orders. If appropriate, the parties appear for an in-person intake, where the issues are identified and needs are assessed. Most are referred to mediation, which takes place within 15 days of the referral being made. The program attempts to serve the IV-D population and encourages child support technicians to refer parents who complain about not getting to see their children, although most referrals come from the court and typically involve divorcing or previously divorced parents rather than the never-married. Approximately 400 mediations are conducted per year, with 60 percent resulting in full and 20 percent resulting in partial agreements.

In addition to mediation, the Program offers supervised or neutral exchange services, longer-term mediation services for parties who have attempted traditional mediation in the past with no lasting, positive effect and intensive co-parenting education to acquire skills dealing with communication and the management of emotions. The Program recently initiated a voluntary support group known as a “Talking Circle” to implement agreements reached in mediation and provide additional support.

## Parent Education Programs

Begun in 1978, parent education programs attempt to promote parent-child contact and prevent conflict by focusing on the post-divorce needs of children, the consequences of parental conflict, the importance of both parents staying involved, and the adjustment process that children face after a parental separation or divorce. By 1998, 25 states had mandated attendance at a parent education program (Clement, 1998). The average program audience consists of 20 divorcing and relitigating parents with minor-aged children who each pay a \$30 fee and receive a certificate of attendance that they present to the court as evidence of their participation. Some program variants have been developed for violent and high-conflict families as well as stepparents, never-married parents, and ethnic minorities (Geasler and Blaisure, 1998).

Assessments of parents who attend parent education programs find that most are satisfied with their experiences, with 70 percent favoring a mandatory attendance policy. Parents credit the programs





with helping to sensitize them to their children's needs. Six months after they attend, high proportions of parents report that they use the information gleaned in the program to help their children cope and to make visitation more successful and enjoyable. At the same time, education programs do not revolutionize relationships between parents, with substantial proportions reporting continuing conflict and relitigation (Thoennes and Pearson, 1999).

**Arizona** used its Access and Visitation grant to create the Parental Conflict Resolution class. The four-hour class is a joint effort of Conciliation Services and the Office of The Clerk of the Court, Superior Court of Arizona in Maricopa County (Phoenix). It targets parents who have long-standing conflict and who are noncompliant with the court's orders regarding access. Most participate by direct order of the judge in their case, typically following a court appearance. The program adopts a cognitive restructuring approach. As such, it attempts to help parents understand the emotional and psychological roots of their conflict and offers them new approaches to interacting with one another and their children.

The Parental Conflict Resolution (PCR) Program consists of a four-hour class and extensive take-home materials, including community resources for adults and children. Two custom-made videos are used. One incorporates spontaneous comments recorded in interviews with children; the second uses actors to portray embattled parents. The class is jointly conducted by a male and female presenter, both of whom hold graduate degrees and have years of experience in family courts. The two parents who are in conflict are not placed into the same class, although new spouses or partners are encouraged to attend along with the party in conflict. The average class includes 15 clients. Toward the end of the class, clients are divided into groups of three and given a vignette describing a high-conflict case. Their task is to discuss the case and arrive at a list of recommendations as to actions that each parent can take to "turn this situation around, making it healthier for the child or children." Each group shares its recommendations.

A prior evaluation that involved telephone interviews with 135 clients who had completed the PCR class at least six months prior to the interview found that the class received consistently high marks on all evaluation items. Although men rated the program somewhat more favorably than women, high proportions of mothers and fathers agreed that they had learned a lot and had a better understanding of how their children are affected by conflict. Nearly half agreed that the level of hostility had declined in the intervening six months. Separate examination of parent assessments at 12 and 15 months following class attendance showed no drop-off in the clients' assessment of the program over time, with some positive behavioral effects materializing at a later date as clients began experimenting with the tools they learned (Neff and Cooper, 2003).





For this project, staff at the Division of Child Support Enforcement searched the automated system for interviewed parents who attended the PCR class and extracted information on their payment behavior for the 12 months prior to and following class attendance.

**Colorado** uses some of its Access and Visitation grant funds to support parent education seminars in unserved or under-served areas, including rural settings. One of those sites is the Fifteenth Judicial District in Lamar, Colorado. The intervention, “Calming Down the Conflict,” is a 3.5-hour seminar held at a community college. Most participants are court-ordered to attend. There are two instructors at each seminar. Participants are given a packet of information that is covered during the seminar and an evaluation that is completed at its conclusion. Attendees also receive a certificate of completion.

A second program site is the Sixteenth Judicial District, which offers an education program to divorcing parents known as “Parenting Through Divorce.” The 3.5-hour class is offered during weekday evenings at Child Development Services in La Junta. Seminars in both Lamar and La Junta include several video clips with children talking about their experiences with parental separation and divorce. The instructors discuss the stages of loss/grief, how parents incite one another, and communication issues between parents and children.

In evaluations completed following the conclusion of the seminar, many parents noted that the most helpful part of the seminar was learning more about children’s feelings, listening to everyone’s problems, and getting group input. Asked what behavior they will change as a result of the seminar, several noted that they will try to get less emotional. As one parent put it, “I will try to remember that I am the adult here and I will continue to treat her as a business associate and not wear my heart on my sleeve when dealing with her.” Others resolved to try to spend more time with their children, make their visits with the children “valuable” and to try to be “more positive.”

**New Jersey** developed an education program specifically for non-dissolution clients known as “The Best of Us for Our Child(ren).” Offered in the Essex Family Division of the Superior Court of New Jersey, The Best of Us For Our Child(ren) targeted unmarried litigants involved in custody and parenting time disputes. A collaborative effort with the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey/University Behavioral HealthCare, the program seeks to increase litigants’ knowledge of court procedures and options, to assist in the early resolution of cases, to share information on common parenting issues, and to encourage litigants to respond as a family. The program was developed in response to the growing number of custody and visitation cases appearing in court for adversarial treatments and the recognition that many could be resolved without a court hearing.





Two types of programs are offered. The 90-minute, Level I workshop is conducted on a daily basis by a parent educator. The agenda includes a 25-minute video explaining court terms, activities, procedures, and the impact of conflict on children. This is followed by a 30-minute lecture and discussion on keeping parenting issues and personal relations separate, conflict resolution strategies, managing stress, and resources available to families including mediation and the fatherhood initiative. The program ends with a referral to other community resources, including mediation.

The Level II workshop is an intensive 12-hour program conducted over six weeks for high-conflict families that is offered on a weekly basis. It consists of specialized presentations addressing anger management, communication skills, mental health and substance abuse issues that are associated with non-payment of child support, withholding of visitation rights, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, and other crisis situations. Referrals to the Level II workshop are made by judges, mediators, probation officers, and self-referrals by Level I participants.

Most participants only pursue Level I workshops, and virtually all the clients included in this assessment fall into this category. In order to make the Level II workshop more convenient, the Family Division recently began to experiment with a new, one-day format. Although the workshops are designed for all adults, including grandparents, foster parents, and legal guardians who have primary responsibility for the parenting of a child(ren), this assessment focuses on participants who are biological parents.

According to the Family Division, the program has resulted in clear benefits, including an increase in the number of cases resolved through inter-party agreements at the court and/or through mediation. These resolutions have helped with case backlog at the court and have also induced parents to take more responsibility for their cases.

## Supervised Visitation Programs

Supervised visitation provides third-party monitoring of contact between a child and a parent. The first program began in 1982. By 1991, a Supervised Visitation Network had been developed and in 1996, Standards and Guidelines for Supervised Visitation were developed and adopted. The Supervised Visitation Network has over 600 members representing approximately 300 agencies or individuals from five countries (Pearson and Thoennes, 1999).

Supervised visitation is typically ordered by judges in highly conflicted separation and divorce cases, particularly when there is a history of or allegations of domestic violence, child sexual abuse,





visitation denial, and other forms of parental misconduct and/or safety concerns. Supervised visitation is also a way to teach inexperienced, nonmarital parents how to care for their children or to introduce them into the lives of their children, although it is used less frequently for these purposes. In addition to allowing parents to maintain contact with their children when there are safety concerns and normalizing the visitation process, the records of visitation maintained by visitation supervisors may be used to refute various allegations of misconduct. Most supervised visitation programs also offer drop-off and pick-up services that allow high-conflict parents to exchange their children for visits in the presence of a third party.

A recent evaluation of supervised visitation programs shows that they serve both noncustodial mothers and fathers and that many formats are equally effective in promoting positive visit experiences. Although parent participants tend to rate the programs highly (and the court and legal system negatively), many stop coming, with no explanation, thus making it impossible to determine whether they “outgrew” their need for supervision, stopped visiting their children totally, or engaged in unsupervised visits characterized by the same problems that initially brought them into supervision. Those who drop out tend to have been in the programs longer and are less likely to have received court attention in the form of evaluations, assessments, or review hearings. According to parents, program participation is associated with increases in parent-child contact, lower conflict between the parents, fewer problems with visitation, and increases in children’s happiness and well-being (Pearson and Thoennes, 2000).

**California** uses its Access and Visitation grant funds for supervised visitation, neutral exchange services, and education and group counseling services. Administered by the Judicial Council of California, Administrative Office of the Courts, and the Center for Families, Children and the Courts, most of California’s grant is used to support supervised visitation and neutral exchange services in 30 of California’s 58 counties, where limited or no services previously existed. California has mandatory mediation services in all family courts with minor-aged children who have a dispute about child custody or visitation (paid for by earmarked, court filing fees). California also offers parent education, with some counties providing a specific course and others incorporating educational material for parents in a mandatory orientation session prior to mediation. The California legislature focused on supervised visitation and neutral exchange services for this grant because there is a particular need to maintain parent-child contact and provide safe visitation options when there are allegations of domestic violence, substance abuse, or child (sexual) abuse.

For this project, we focused on parents who were served at Safe Access and Friendly Exchanges for Kids (SAFE for Kids) in Los Angeles County. SAFE is a non-profit social services agency that







offers an array of services such as domestic violence treatment, parenting classes, and child abuse counseling, as well as supervised visitation and exchange services. SAFE provides on-site, low-fee supervised visitation and neutral drop-off and exchange services at six agency locations throughout Los Angeles County. Visit hours are determined based on an agency's hours of operation, court orders, and the availability of the parents and the agency.

The program serves parents with a court order that specifically refers them to the SAFE for Kids program. Parents are typically ordered to utilize supervised visitation or exchange services when there are allegations of parental misconduct and the children may be at risk of emotional or physical harm. Parents referred to the program are required to make a \$5 co-payment if the parent's annual income is less than \$30,000. Other parents use the programs on a fee-for-service basis, which runs \$55 per hour for supervised visitation and \$35 per exchange (round trip). The program pays for up to two hours of visits per week for six months. Clients for this evaluation were drawn from four of six Los Angeles sites offering SAFE for Kids services: Bienvenidos Family Services, Los Angeles Wings of Faith, the Ness Center, and Richstone Family Center. All of these sites have Spanish-speaking staff available.

**Pennsylvania's** Access and Visitation grant supports five community-based organizations that were selected through a competitive Request for Proposal process, as are all AV-funded organizations. The five organizations offer supervised visitation and exchange services, as well as other services. Many of the providers of AV services are one-stop centers for parents, providing a variety of services ranging from health care to employment. Each program is unique and aims to address the needs of the region and the population that it serves. The five community programs that provide supervised visitation are:

- Armstrong Community Action Agency, Armstrong County;
- YWCA of Greater Harrisburg, Dauphin County;
- Erie Family Center, Erie County;
- Scranton Area Family Center, Lackawanna County; and
- Salvation Army, Philadelphia County.

Parents who enter Pennsylvania's Access and Visitation program are referred by a variety of sources, primarily the courts, children and youth agencies, attorneys, or the Domestic Relations Sections. The Domestic Relations Sections of the county Court of Common Pleas provide child support enforcement services at the local level. Many of Pennsylvania's AV programs also provide education services to parents while they are incarcerated and/or as part of their probation. Each





program has different prerequisites for the noncustodial parent to complete prior to visiting with the child, ranging from an orientation session to eight hours of parenting classes. Some programs require additional parent education for the visits to continue. Visits typically occur at the community agency, although they may be conducted off-site at a restaurant or the noncustodial parent's residence. Staff maintain case records to use in providing reports to the courts for review that include visitation dates, no-shows and cancellations, parent-child interactions, the efforts the parent has made to be prepared for visits with the child, concerns, and referrals for other services. The courts view each case individually with its own unique set of circumstances and schedule reviews of the case accordingly.

For this project, staff at the Bureau of Child Support Enforcement generated an automated extract that includes information on child support payments made by parents who received supervised visitation services during the 12 months prior to and following their participation in the programs. In addition, an experienced child support worker conducted manual searches to gather information for a portion of the form.

**Hawaii** also uses its Access and Visitation grant to support child visitation/exchanges. Services are available at four sites, two of which are in the City and County of Honolulu and two rural sites in the County of Hawaii. The focus on the projects, which are administered by the Family Court of the First Judicial Circuit, is safety and non-violence to parents and children during the visits and exchanges. As in California and Pennsylvania, most referrals come from court orders involving divorce, paternity, child support, and domestic violence. Priority is given to cases in which there have been, or continue to be, indications of domestic violence.

This assessment focuses on clients served at the Island of Hawaii's YMCA in its Family Visitation Center (FVC) at Hilo. The Hilo FVC is housed with a preschool which the program uses during evening and weekend hours for a child-friendly setting for visits. Established in 1999 with funding from the Attorney General's Office and the Violence Against Women Act, FVC provides a safe and neutral environment for children up to age 18 to establish and/or maintain a healthy relationship with their estranged parents, with particular emphasis on families with a domestic violence history. During nine months of 2001, the program provided services to 96 families for a total of 736 visits and 424 exchanges. Up to four visits can occur simultaneously in separate visiting rooms/areas. As in other supervised visitation programs, FVC has a variety of security procedures designed to prevent spouses from encountering one another during visits and/or exchanges, to ensure that no weapons are brought into the Center, and that kidnapping and other acts of violence do not occur.



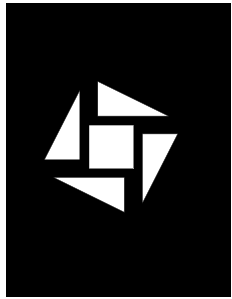


FVC charges \$7.50 to \$40.00 for visits, depending on the individual's ability to pay, although no one is refused service because of financial hardship.

According to the agency's internal assessments, 75 percent of participating parents state that they have increased knowledge of parenting skills, 80 percent say they are satisfied with the services they received, and 85 percent feel safe during the visitation process. The program has also helped families transition to less restricted visitation arrangements, with 30 percent receiving amended court orders for unsupervised visits. In addition to supervised visitation, which includes full or intermittent supervision and the preparation of an observation form after each visit, FVC offers supervised exchanges and unsupervised visitation, which allows parents to visit at the Center without any direct supervision.







## Chapter 4

# Parents Served in Access and Visitation Programs

The State Access and Visitation Grants aim “...to support and facilitate noncustodial parents’ access to and visitation of their children.” Our study examines the extent to which the three most popular services offered through the Access and Visitation grant program achieve these objectives. The types of programs we focus on are mediation, parent education, and supervised visitation. We begin the analysis with a description of the types of parents whom the programs served and how they came to learn about and utilize the programs.

### Background Characteristics

State Access and Visitation Programs offering mediation, parent education, and supervised visitation serve a fairly heterogeneous group of parents, although as Table 4-1 shows, there are some differences by program type. Parents who use mediation programs are somewhat more apt to be white than their counterparts in parent education and supervised visitation programs. Parents who use supervised visitation programs, on the other hand, are more apt to report having the lowest levels of education, the highest rates of unemployment, and the lowest income levels. Parents who attend education programs stand somewhere between these two groups. They are more racially diverse than parents who utilize mediation services, but report higher rates of employment, education, and household income than those who utilize supervised visitation services.

The programs succeed in reaching many parents at the lower socioeconomic levels. Nearly one-third to one-half of noncustodial parents using the three program types reported gross, annual household income levels of \$20,000 or less. About a third of noncustodial parents who received mediation and supervised visitation services reported being educated to the high school level or less. And 15 to 30 percent of noncustodial parents using each type of service told interviewers they were not employed. In contrast, about a quarter of noncustodial parents who used mediation and parent education services (and many fewer users of supervised visitation services) reported having college and graduate degrees or household incomes that exceeded \$50,000 per year.





<b>Table 4-1: Characteristics of Parents Interviewed, by Program Type and Custody Status <sup>a</sup></b>						
	<b>Noncustodial parents</b>			<b>Custodial parents</b>		
	<b>All Mediation</b>	<b>All Parent Education</b>	<b>All Supervised Visitation</b>	<b>All Mediation</b>	<b>All Parent Education</b>	<b>All Supervised Visitation</b>
	<b>N=153</b>	<b>N=134</b>	<b>N=102</b>	<b>N=205</b>	<b>N=216</b>	<b>N=150</b>
<b>Racial/ethnic groups:</b>	*	*	*	*	*	*
American Indian/Alaska Native	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Asian American/Pacific Islander	1%	1%	13%	1%	1%	12%
Black/African American	8%	24%	10%	5%	24%	10%
White	83%	54%	48%	87%	55%	53%
Hispanic/Latino	3%	15%	23%	2%	18%	22%
Other	4%	6%	5%	4%	1%	3%
<b>Level of education:</b>	*	*	*			
Less than high school	8%	5%	11%	4%	4%	6%
High school graduate	23%	15%	26%	21%	19%	25%
Some training beyond high school	14%	14%	19%	13%	13%	15%
Some college	26%	38%	34%	41%	45%	35%
B.A./B.S. degree	19%	18%	7%	15%	14%	14%
Graduate degree	11%	10%	4%	7%	5%	5%
<b>Employment status:</b>	*	*	*			
Not employed	15%	14%	29%	19%	20%	18%
Employed full-time	80%	76%	59%	67%	66%	59%
Employed part-time	5%	10%	12%	14%	14%	23%
<b>Annual gross household income:</b>	*	*	*	*	*	*
Less than \$10,000	11%	14%	25%	14%	15%	23%
\$10,000-\$19,000	19%	15%	25%	11%	24%	19%
\$20,000-\$29,000	16%	18%	20%	19%	22%	17%
\$30,000-\$39,000	17%	13%	17%	20%	14%	11%
\$40,000-\$49,000	11%	16%	4%	15%	11%	11%
\$50,000-\$69,000	16%	12%	2%	13%	9%	12%
\$70,000-\$89,000	4%	7%	3%	3%	3%	4%
Over \$90,000	7%	5%	3%	5%	3%	2%
*Chi square is significant at .05.						
■ Rounding may result in percentages slightly above or below 100%.						





## Family Characteristics

Parents using all three program types reported similar family characteristics. On average, these parents had 1.5 to 1.7 children, with the median being one and the range going from one to six. Most of their children tended to be six and seven years old, with the oldest being 11 to 13. Not surprisingly, all noncustodial parents reported that the children lived primarily with the other parent, while all custodial parents reported that the children lived with them. In the sampling process, we eliminated cases that involved grandparent and other third-party custodial arrangements. There were only a few joint custody arrangements in the samples generated at each program site, and they were classified as mother-only custody arrangements to simplify the analysis. Although three-quarters to four-fifths of responding parents reported living within 50 miles of their children, more than 10 percent of parents who used mediation services reported living at distances that exceeded 300 miles.

**Table 4-2: Residence, Number, and Age of Children, by Program Type and Custody Status**

	Noncustodial parents			Custodial parents		
	All Mediation	All Parent Education	All Supervised Visitation	All Mediation	All Parent Education	All Supervised Visitation
	N=153	N=134	N=102	N=205	N=216	N=150
Number of children:						
Mean	1.6	1.6	1.5	1.6	1.7	1.5
Median	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Range	1-5	1-4	1-6	1-5	1-6	1-6
Average age of only child	7.5	6.8	6.6	6.9	6.8	6.1
If more than one child,						
Average ages of oldest and youngest	*	*	*	*	*	*
Youngest	9.6	7.5	6.3	9.7	8.0	7.1
Average age of oldest	13.0	11.1	11.3	13.5	13.0	11.3
Distance between NCP and children:						
Less than 50 miles	74%	84%	88%	75%	80%	76%
51-75 miles	4%	3%	2%	7%	6%	6%
76-100 miles	2%	3%	1%	2%	1%	5%
101-200 miles	5%	3%	2%	2%	1%	3%
201-300 miles	3%	1%	2%	2%	3%	0%
Over 300 miles	12%	6%	5%	11%	6%	8%
Parent is in prison	N/A	N/A	N/A	0%	1%	2%
Parent lives out of state/country	N/A	N/A	N/A	2%	1%	1%

\* Chi square is significant at .05.  
 ■ Rounding may result in percentages slightly above or below 100%.





## Marital Status

Another characteristic of interviewed parents that we compared was their current and past marital status. Table 4-3 shows that all three types of programs served parents who had been married as well as those who had never married. Across the program types, approximately half reported that they had been married to the parent with whom they were experiencing access and visitation problems. Parents who used supervised visitation reported the lowest rates of marriage; among those who were never married, supervised visitation program users were least apt to report cohabitation. The current marital status of interviewed parents was fairly similar across program types, although those who used mediation programs were somewhat more apt to report being married than their counterparts in education and supervised visitation programs. In a similar vein, those who used supervised visitation programs were least apt to report being married and more likely to characterize their current marital status as “never married.”

	Noncustodial parents			Custodial parents		
	All Mediation	All Parent Education	All Supervised Visitation	All Mediation	All Parent Education	All Supervised Visitation
Were the parents ever married?	<b>N=153</b>	<b>N=134</b>	<b>N=102</b>	<b>N=205</b>	<b>N=216</b>	<b>N=150</b>
No	40%	44%	51%	43%	38%	49%
Yes	60%	56%	49%	57%	62%	51%
If never married, did they live together?	<b>N=60</b>	<b>N=59</b>	<b>N=52</b>	<b>N=88</b>	<b>N=82</b>	<b>N=73</b>
No	38%	30%	40%	34%	33%	43%
Yes	62%	70%	60%	66%	67%	58%
If married or cohabiting, for how many years?	<b>N=125</b>	<b>N=114</b>	<b>N=81</b>	<b>N=168</b>	<b>N=190</b>	<b>N=119</b>
Mean	6.8	8.0	6.5	*	*	*
Median	6.0	6.5	5.0	7.2	8.3	6.4
Range	1-20	1-32	1-26	6.0	7.0	5.0
Range	1-20	1-32	1-26	1-25	1-25	1-23
Current marital status:	<b>N=153</b>	<b>N=134</b>	<b>N=102</b>	<b>N=205</b>	<b>N=216</b>	<b>N=150</b>
Married	*	*	*	*	*	*
Separated	33%	28%	25%	38%	21%	26%
Divorced	6%	8%	16%	2%	5%	16%
Never married	41%	35%	30%	33%	46%	31%
	20%	29%	29%	28%	28%	27%

\* Chi square is significant at .05.  
 ■ Rounding may result in percentages slightly above or below 100%.







## Domestic Violence Status

Not surprisingly, custodial and noncustodial parents disagree on the incidence of domestic violence in their relationships. Table 4-4 shows that while 22 to 28 percent of noncustodial parents reported to the programs that domestic violence was a factor in their relationships, this was the case for 37 percent of custodial parents who utilized mediation and education services and 67 percent of those receiving supervised visitation services. Reports of domestic violence are understandably affected by social desirability factors; men typically report incidence levels that are much lower than those reported by women. More to the point, since supervised visitation programs expressly serve families with allegations of domestic violence and other forms of parental misconduct, it is likely that the accounts by custodial parents track with the conclusions of the courts that issued the orders for supervised visitation in the first place.

**Table 4-4: Physical Violence During Relationship, as Reported by Parents**

	Noncustodial parents			Custodial parents *		
	All Mediation N=154	All Parent Education N=134	All Supervised Visitation N=102	All Mediation N=204	All Parent Education N=219	All Supervised Visitation N=150
Ever any physical violence?						
No	78%	73%	72%	63%	63%	33%
Yes	22%	27%	28%	37%	37%	67%

\* Chi square is significant at .05.

## Referral Source and Voluntary or Mandatory Programs

Although the State Access and Visitation Program is administered by the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement, Table 4-5 shows that the child support community plays a relatively minor role in the process of referring parents to programs for services. Fewer than 10 percent of noncustodial parents reported learning about access and visitation programs of any type from child support workers. The percentage was slightly higher for custodial parents who utilized mediation (14%) and education (15%) programs, but still very modest. Courts are the most frequently mentioned source of program referrals, cited by one-half to two-thirds of interviewed noncustodial parents and one-half to three-quarters of interviewed custodial parents. Mediators are another important source of referrals to education and supervised visitation programs. Finally, attorneys are





important sources of referrals for all three types of programs, but especially for mediation and supervised visitation.

**Table 4-5: How Parents Learned About Services <sup>■</sup>**

	Noncustodial Parents			Custodial Parents		
	All Mediation N=155	All Parent Education N=134	All Supervised Visitation N=102	All Mediation N=208	All Parent Education N=220	All Supervised Visitation N=151
If received any services above, how heard about program?						
Someone at court	52%	69%	56%	54%	78%	72%
Mediator	7%	28%	20%	10%	21%	21%
Attorney	28%	15%	24%	32%	14%	21%
Child support	9%	9%	7%	14%	15%	2%
Friend/family	4%	5%	8%	8%	4%	8%
Flyer/ad/etc.	2%	4%	7%	4%	5%	3%
Other	9%	2%	10%	8%	4%	13%

■ Totals may exceed 100% due to multiple responses.

Perhaps because the court plays such a critical role in program referral, most parents tend to view their participation in AV programs as compulsory. Nearly all interviewed parents (80 to 90%) reported that they had been required to participate in education and supervised visitation programs. Although mediation was viewed as somewhat less of a requirement, nearly two thirds (60 to 63%) of program participants characterized their participation as mandatory (see Table 4-6).

**Table 4-6: Mandatory or Voluntary Nature of Services, by Program Type and Custody Status**

	Noncustodial parents *				Custodial parents *			
	All Mediation N=152	All Parent Education N=133	All Supervised Visitation N=92	Supervised Exchange N=16	All Mediation N=205	All Parent Education N=215	All Supervised Visitation N=144	Supervised Exchange N=19
Was participation mandatory?								
No	37%	10%	15%	25%	40%	7%	18%	10%
Yes	63%	90%	85%	75%	60%	93%	82%	90%

\* Chi square is significant at .05.





## Other Sources of Assistance

Do parents who use State Access and Visitation programs to address their problems with visitation use other problem-solving resources? To answer this question, we asked all interviewed parents whether they had used a variety of community and private services and programs to try to resolve their access and visitation issues. Their responses appear in Table 4-7. In addition to providing a picture of the extent to which Access and Visitation programs stand alone or supplement other services, the table affords some clues on the scale and duration of the access problems that participating parents bring to the programs.

Table 4-7 shows that supervised visitation program users are the biggest consumers of other services. Compared with their counterparts who attended mediation and education programs, they are more apt to report using other parent education programs, legal clinics, anger management classes, domestic violence classes, and substance abuse counseling. Mediation program users were most apt to report using a private attorney before attending the program. More than half of these parents had been married to the other parent with whom they had a visitation dispute and had pursued a legal divorce. Counseling was another source of support that about one-quarter of mediation users reported pursuing, typically before the mediation intervention. Finally, 15 to 20 percent of noncustodial and custodial parents who used mediation also attended a parent education program, usually before their mediation intervention. For clients of education programs, the most common sources of additional assistance were private attorneys (39 to 43%), counseling (41 to 43%), and mediation (37 to 46%).

	Noncustodial parents *			Custodial parents *		
	All Mediation	All Parent Education	All Supervised Visitation	All Mediation	All Parent Education	All Supervised Visitation
	N=153	N=134	N=102	N=205	N=214	N=148
Percent reporting receiving help from:						
Mediation program/ Other mediation program	13%	46%	32%	9%	37%	32%
Before or after this program:						
Before	70%	73%	79%	78%	61%	73%
After	30%	27%	21%	22%	39%	27%





<b>Table 4-7: Other Services Used to Resolve Access Problems and Timing of Service Use, by Program Type and Custody Status <sup>■</sup></b>						
	<b>Noncustodial parents *</b>			<b>Custodial parents *</b>		
	<b>All Mediation N=153</b>	<b>All Parent Education N=134</b>	<b>All Supervised Visitation N=102</b>	<b>All Mediation N=205</b>	<b>All Parent Education N=214</b>	<b>All Supervised Visitation N=148</b>
Parent Education program/Other Parent Ed program	14%	16%	44%	19%	16%	35%
Before or after this program:						
Before	86%	84%	56%	91%	67%	76%
After	14%	16%	44%	9%	33%	24%
Supervised visitation program/Other supervised visitation program	2%	8%	0%	3%	8%	17%
Before or after this program:						
Before	▲	60%	0%	40%	71%	▲
After	▲	40%	0%	60%	29%	▲
A counseling program	27%	41%	40%	26%	43%	55%
Before or after this program:						
Before	66%	63%	76%	78%	65%	68%
After	34%	38%	24%	22%	35%	32%
A private attorney	66%	43%	44%	62%	39%	64%
Before or after this program:						
Before	81%	83%	83%	82%	86%	87%
After	19%	17%	17%	18%	14%	13%
A legal clinic	5%	7%	17%	4%	9%	16%
Before or after this program:						
Before	63%	56%	73%	63%	95%	91%
After	37%	44%	27%	37%	5%	9%
Anger management class	3%	13%	30%	1%	10%	14%
Before or after this program:						
Before	80%	39%	70%	▲	50%	31%
After	20%	61%	30%	▲	50%	69%
Domestic violence class	4%	5%	17%	2%	9%	20%
Before or after this program:						
Before	▲	83%	69%	▲	68%	75%
After	▲	17%	31%	▲	32%	25%





<b>Table 4-7: Other Services Used to Resolve Access Problems and Timing of Service Use, by Program Type and Custody Status <sup>■</sup></b>						
	<b>Noncustodial parents *</b>			<b>Custodial parents *</b>		
	<b>All Mediation</b>	<b>All Parent Education</b>	<b>All Supervised Visitation</b>	<b>All Mediation</b>	<b>All Parent Education</b>	<b>All Supervised Visitation</b>
	<b>N=153</b>	<b>N=134</b>	<b>N=102</b>	<b>N=205</b>	<b>N=214</b>	<b>N=148</b>
Substance abuse counseling:	1%	3%	16%	0%	3%	5%
Before or after this program:						
Before	▲	▲	71%	0%	71%	71%
After	▲	▲	29%	0%	29%	29%

▲ Fewer than 5 respondents, percent not calculated.  
 \* Chi square is significant at .05.  
 ■ Rounding may result in percentages slightly above or below 100%.

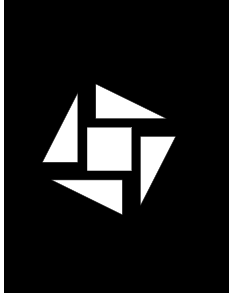
### Exclusive Use of AV Programs for Assistance

For more than half the parents served, the AV program was the only form of assistance they received with their access and visitation problems. Across the program types, this was the case for 52 percent of the 970 parents interviewed in this assessment and an identical 52 percent of the 354 who used parent education services. Among mediation participants, the proportion reporting the exclusive use of AV program services was even higher, with 63 percent saying they received no other form of assistance.

As previously noted, supervised visitation clients were bigger consumers of community services. More to the point, supervised visitation is almost always used because the court orders parents to do so in high-conflict situations involving allegations of domestic violence and other forms of serious parental misconduct. Accordingly, 64 percent of supervised visitation clients indicated that they had pursued other service avenues, the most common of which were counseling, parent education, and a private attorney. The remaining 36 percent reported that the AV program was the only help they had received, a large proportion given the troubled nature of the population being served and the seriousness of their issues.







## Chapter 5

# Types of Services Received and Parent Reactions

Interviewed parents were asked about the types of services they recalled receiving in State Access and Visitation Programs and their satisfaction with those services. Separate questions were asked of parents who received mediation, education, and supervised visitation services, respectively.

### Mediation Services

The three mediation programs featured in this study aimed to help couples reach an agreement on disputed issues dealing with their children. As in most mediation programs, the goal of the intervention was to avoid litigation and produce a consensual settlement through the use of a neutral third-party who helps parties isolate their disputes and consider alternative solutions. As noted in Chapter 4, approximately two-thirds of interviewed parents viewed their mediation intervention as mandatory. Most court-related mediation programs for domestic cases categorically mandate participation or permit judges to mandate referrals on a case-by case basis. Indeed, 15 years ago, the American Bar Association Standing Committee on Dispute Resolution estimated that 4,500 separate jurisdictions mandated mediation in contested custody and visitation disputes (Melamed, 1989).

Consistent with the access and visitation focus of the program, most parents who used mediation services at the AV program sites reported spending time discussing the visitation arrangement. This was reported by more than four-fifths of interviewed custodial and noncustodial parents (see Table 5-1). Visitation issues, however, were far from the only issues that parents discussed. About half of interviewed parents also reported discussing where the children would be living and child support matters during their mediation sessions, lending support to the observation that visitation problems rarely stand alone and are intertwined with financial concerns and custody arrangements.

Noncustodial and custodial parents reported that more than two-thirds of the issues discussed in mediation resulted in an agreement. This falls squarely in the 50 to 85 percent range of agreement rates reported for most private and court-based mediation programs (Kelly, 1996; Pearson, 1999). Indeed, the 67 to 69 percent rate of agreement is identical to the 66 percent settlement rate estimated for mandatory custody and visitation mediation interventions in California (Kelly, 1996), suggesting that the mediation process in both these settings is not overly coercive even though both are





mandatory. As part of the OCSE-funded Responsible Fatherhood Program in San Mateo County, California, child support workers referred 915 parents to mediation and 72 percent of those who tried to mediate reached an agreement (Pearson, *et al.*, 2003). The OIG found that 76 percent of parents who mediated at four of the programs it studied produced an agreement (OIG, 2002).

Rates of agreement that parents report differ somewhat from program records. According to statistics maintained at the program sites, 79 percent of mediated cases result in a full or partial agreement. Rates of agreement are higher for those who mediate on a voluntary rather than a mandatory basis, with mandatory mediation cases producing agreements at a rate of 72 percent and voluntary mediation cases demonstrating an agreement rate of 89 percent.

While more than one-half to two-thirds of all agreements generated in mediation are promulgated as court orders, a substantial proportion remain informal agreements that are not entered with the court. Many, but not all, parents who file their agreements with the court report that mediators or other program staff helped them to distill their understandings into written form.

<b>Table 5-1: Mediation Issues and Agreements by Custody Status</b>		
	<b>Noncustodial parents N=152</b>	<b>Custodial parents N=205</b>
Percent reporting they discussed the following issues in mediation:		
Where the children will live	56%	52%
The visitation arrangement	83%	84%
Child support	48%	54%
If the issue was discussed in mediation, percent reporting reaching an agreement:		
Agreement about where the children will live	69%	73%
Agreement about visitation	69%	71%
Agreement about child support	67%	63%
If an agreement was produced, percent reporting the agreement was entered with the court:		
Agreement on where the children will live entered with the court	63%	53%
Agreement on visitation entered with the court	54%	58%
Agreement on child support entered with the court	67%	78%
If an agreement was entered with the court, percent reporting the program helped them prepare something in writing for the court:		
Help with written agreement on where the children will live	61%	77%
Help with written agreement on visitation	69%	71%
Help with written agreement on child support	63%	59%







Mediation often has “sleeper” effects, with settlements occurring after the conclusion of an unsuccessful mediation attempt. Among this group of parents, more than half reported that an agreement on visitation was reached after mediation ended with no resolution. This is higher than the 20 percent post-mediation agreement rate reported in other evaluations of custody and mediation disputes (Pearson and Thoennes, 1989), but consistent with the finding that the mediation process opens up lines of communication that often lead to resolutions down the road.

<b>Table 5-2: Of Those With No Agreement on Visitation in Mediation, Percent Reporting a Resolution of the Issue, by Custody Status</b>			
	<b>Noncustodial parents N=119</b>	<b>Custodial parents N=159</b>	
If no agreement was reached on visitation during mediation, was a formal or informal agreement on visitation produced after mediation:	No	49%	42%
	Yes	51%	58%

## Parent Education

National surveys of parent education programs find that the typical program is a single, four-hour session attended by divorcing and re-litigating parents with minor-aged children who each pay a \$30 fee, which can be waived in poverty cases (Geasler and Blaisure, 1998). Education programs funded by State Access and Visitation grants tend to fit this pattern. The median number of hours of education attended by parents at the three sites in this study was four. The average was 5.6 for noncustodial parents and 4.6 for custodial parents. Although parents were discouraged from attending the program together with the other parent in order to avoid the potential of domestic violence, most (80%) reported that the other parent ultimately attended. Like parents in national surveys of education programs, most (90 to 93%) parents who participated in State Access and Visitation education programs characterized their participation as “mandatory.” Many states have enacted statutes (25) or local court and administrative rules (19) authorizing or mandating parents with minor children or those who contest custody or visitation to attend an education program (Clement, 1998).





<b>Table 5-3: Reported Hours of Parent Education, by Custody Status</b>		
	<b>Noncustodial parents N=133</b>	<b>Custodial parents N=215</b>
How many hours attended:	mean: 5.6 median: 4.0 range: 1-36	mean: 4.6 median: 4.0 range: 1-36
Did other parent attend:		
No	20%	21%
Yes	80%	79%

Consistent with national trends, the programs focused on children’s reactions to their parents’ separation and divorce (92%). Nearly all parents also report that the programs focused on co-parenting (95%) and how to prevent and resolve conflicts with the other parent (92 to 93%). A somewhat smaller proportion of parents reported that the programs focused on adult adjustment to divorce (73 to 80%) and issues pertaining to new relationships or blended families (64 to 69%). Child development and adjustment topics garnered the highest user satisfaction ratings, with half of custodial and noncustodial parents characterizing them as “very helpful.”

Co-parenting and conflict resolution issues attracted the next highest ratings, with about a third of custodial and noncustodial parents rating them as “very helpful.” Parent adjustment issues and topics pertaining to new relationships and family structures attracted somewhat lower ratings, with only about a quarter of responding parents classifying them as “very helpful.” Previous studies on parent education programs have found a range of user reactions and outcomes, leading one researcher to conclude that their effectiveness may vary according to: “(1) the level of conflict that parents report ... (2) the timing of a parent’s attendance at the divorce education program ... or (3) the content and teaching strategies used in the program” (Geasler and Blaisure, 1998).





Percent reporting they discussed:	<b>Noncustodial parents</b>	<b>Custodial parents</b>
	<b>N=115</b>	<b>N=193</b>
How to resolve conflicts with other parent:	92%	93%
Degree of usefulness:		
Very	33%	35%
Somewhat	45%	42%
Not very	9%	10%
Not at all	13%	13%
	<b>N=72</b>	<b>N=131</b>
How to deal with new relationships/blended families:	64%	69%
Degree of usefulness:		
Very	25%	34%
Somewhat	50%	47%
Not very	15%	12%
Not at all	10%	8%
	<b>N=119</b>	<b>N=189</b>
Child development/adjustment to parents' breaking up:	92%	92%
Degree of usefulness:		
Very	52%	51%
Somewhat	34%	39%
Not very	9%	6%
Not at all	5%	4%
	<b>N=88</b>	<b>N=151</b>
Parents' emotional adjustment to divorce/breakup:	73%	80%
Degree of usefulness:		
Very	28%	30%
Somewhat	56%	49%
Not very	8%	11%
Not at all	8%	10%
	<b>N=125</b>	<b>N=196</b>
How to work together as parents:	95%	95%
Degree of usefulness:		
Very	32%	37%
Somewhat	41%	36%
Not very	14%	11%
Not at all	14%	16%
■ Rounding may result in percentages slightly above or below 100%.		





## Supervised Exchange and Supervised Visitation

Three of the program sites in this evaluation offered supervised exchange and supervised visitation services. In supervised exchange, a third party monitors families when children are dropped off and picked up in order to avoid parental contact and/or conflict. In supervised visitation, a third party monitors visitation episodes in order to ensure the safe conduct of visitation.

Only a small number of interviewed parents reported using supervised exchange services and about half had stopped by the time of the interview, typically because they or the court believed that it was no longer necessary. It was much more common for interviewed parents to report that they had used supervised visitation services. Approximately four-fifths of these parents had terminated services by the time they were interviewed. On average, interviewed parents had used supervised visitation for 4.8 to 5.9 weeks, with half using it for three weeks or less. Although supervised visitation was a short-term intervention for most parents, some did report longer periods of usage, ranging from one to 48 weeks. A survey of 94 programs that provide supervised visitation services in the United States and Canada found that on average, families receive approximately nine months of supervised visitation, consisting of 4.3 visits per month each lasting 2.0 to 2.3 hours (Thoennes and Pearson, 1999).

The most common reason parents cite for stopping supervised visitation is a court determination that it is no longer necessary. This was noted by 32 percent of noncustodial and 39 percent of custodial parents. Other frequently mentioned reasons include parental decisions that it was no longer necessary (8 to 15%) and/or missed appointments by a parent (15 to 24%). A prior study of 444 supervised visitation cases in four settings found that 48 percent terminated the service because the parents simply stopped coming to scheduled visits, 19 percent ended because the court decided that it was no longer needed or that visits should not occur at all, and 17 percent decided it was no longer necessary or made other arrangements (Pearson and Thoennes, 2000).





<b>Table 5-5: Current Status and Length of Time Using Supervised Exchange and Supervised Visitation <sup>■</sup></b>		
	<b>Noncustodial parents</b>	<b>Custodial parents</b>
Using pick-up/drop-off services at the time of the interview:		
No	44%	37%
Yes	56%	63%
	(N=16)	(N=19)
Reason no longer using pick-up/drop-off services:		
Per court, not needed	22%	25%
Per parent, not needed	33%	25%
Costs too high	11%	8%
Moved to new level of service	11%	0%
Got tired of it	0%	0%
Distance/no transportation/bad hours	0%	8%
Other parent no-showed/stopped coming/missed too often	11%	17%
Other	11%	17%
Average number of weeks used supervised visitation:	N=9	N=12
	*	*
Mean	4.8	5.9
Median	3.0	1.5
Range	.5-25	.3-48
Still using supervised visitation at the time of the interview:		
No	80%	76%
Yes	20%	24%
If not still using supervised visitation, why not :		
	*	*
Per court, not needed	32%	39%
Per parent, not needed	15%	8%
Costs too high	10%	1%
Moved to new level of service	4%	1%
Got tired of it	1%	1%
Distance/no transportation/bad hours	1%	3%
Other parent no-showed/stopped coming/missed too often	15%	24%
Other	22%	23%
	N=73	N=109
* Chi square is significant at .05.		
■ Rounding may result in percentages slightly above or below 100%.		

Parents overwhelmingly viewed supervised programs as providing a safe environment for themselves and/or their children. Over 90 percent of custodial and noncustodial parents agreed that





the setting was safe for their children, and over 80 percent felt that it was safe for the adults involved. In a previous study that involved interviews with 114 custodial parents and 87 visiting parents who used supervised visitation services, 70 to 71 percent of each group characterized the statement “The program can be trusted to protect children” as “very true,” and another 21 percent of custodial parents and 7 percent of noncustodial parents termed it “somewhat true” (Pearson and Thoennes, 2000).

	<b>Noncustodial parents N=90</b>	<b>Custodial parents N=140</b>
Program provided a safe environment for you:		
No	16%	11%
Yes	84%	89%
Program provided safe environment for your children:		
No	10%	9%
Yes	90%	91%

Since supervised visitation programs are typically used by a relatively small fraction of the population for a short period of time, they are often placed in dense, geographical areas that are inconvenient for families in outlying and/or rural settings. The parents interviewed in this project reported living very close to supervised visitation facilities, with over 90 percent classifying the distance as less than 50 miles from their home. It is unclear whether and how parents who live further away are served. A 1997 survey of supervised visitation programs concluded that there were only about 300 programs in the United States with an average capacity to serve 50 families per year. Based on usage estimates generated in Canada, the United States would require 427 large programs that each serve 300 families per year to meet the need for services (Thoennes and Pearson, 1999).

	<b>Noncustodial parents N=90</b>	<b>Custodial parents N=140</b>
Number of miles you live from the Visitation Center:		
Less than 50	90%	94%
51-75	2%	4%
76-100	4%	1%
101-200	0%	1%
201-300	1%	0%
Over 300	2%	1%
<sup>■</sup> Rounding may result in percentages slightly above or below 100%.		





## Satisfaction with Program Services

Approximately one-third of noncustodial parents who utilize access and visitation services report being “very satisfied” with the services they received. Another one-third (for mediation and supervised visitation) and one-half (for parent education) of noncustodial parents report being “somewhat satisfied” with their program experiences. Taken together, approximately two-thirds of mediation and supervised visitation clients and four-fifths of education clients report at least some measure of satisfaction with the services they received at access and visitation programs. With few exceptions, all studies of divorce mediation in all countries and settings indicate that client satisfaction with both the mediation process and outcomes is quite high, in the 60 to 85 percent range (Kelly, 1996). Although satisfaction is generally higher among those who reach agreements than among those who do not, several studies found client satisfaction in the 40 to 60 percent range even among those who were unable to reach agreement (Depner, *et al.*, 1992; Kelly, 1989).

Custodial parents report slightly higher levels of satisfaction, with the proportion saying that they were “very” or “somewhat” satisfied with their mediation, education, and supervised visitation experiences standing at 76, 84, and 70 percent, respectively. More than a quarter of the noncustodial parents who used mediation and supervised visitation services reported being “very dissatisfied” with their service experience. These patterns differ somewhat from other mediation studies, most of which find no gender differences in satisfaction in contrast to the adversarial process, in which men are significantly more dissatisfied than women with the process and outcome (Emery, 1994; Kelly, 1989).

It is not surprising that substantial proportions of noncustodial parents would be dissatisfied with supervised visitation, given the mandatory nature of the intervention and the serious nature of the allegations that brought them into the program in the first place. A prior study that involved interviews with noncustodial parents who used supervised visitation programs in four settings revealed that 29 percent strongly disagreed with the statement, “I could relax and enjoy the visit, even with the supervisor present,” and 25 percent, respectively, strongly agreed that “supervisors are biased toward custodial parents” and that “program rules are too strict” (Pearson and Thoennes, 2000).





**Table 5-8: Degree of Satisfaction with Services, by Program Type and Custody Status <sup>■</sup>**

	Noncustodial parents <sup>*</sup>				Custodial parents <sup>*</sup>			
	All Mediation	All Parent Education	All Supervised Visitation	Supervised Exchange	All Mediation	All Parent Education	All Supervised Visitation	Supervised Exchange
	N=152	N=133	N=92	N=16	N=205	N=215	N=144	N=19
Very satisfied	32%	36%	36%	44%	38%	43%	44%	47%
Somewhat Satisfied	28%	50%	27%	38%	38%	41%	26%	18%
Somewhat dissatisfied	11%	8%	11%	6%	11%	9%	17%	29%
Very dissatisfied	29%	6%	27%	13%	13%	7%	13%	6%

<sup>\*</sup> Chi square is significant at .05 (excludes supervised exchange).  
<sup>■</sup> Rounding may result in percentages slightly above or below 100%.

Another way of looking at user satisfaction is to ask fee-paying clients whether the service was worth the money they had paid. Utah was the only mediation site that charged a fee. Typically, this was \$75 per hour and was split by the parties. Colorado was the only site to charge for parent education services; this was typically \$40. California and Hawaii charged on average \$25 per supervised visit.

Table 5-9 shows that about half the noncustodial parents and 44 percent of the custodial parents who participated in mediation rated it as “definitely” or “probably” worth the money. To contrast, nearly half of noncustodial parents and 57 percent of custodial parents felt that it was “probably” or “definitely” not worth the money. Parent education programs were rated more favorably than mediation and also carried a lower price tag. More than two-thirds of noncustodial (69%) and custodial (65%) parents rated it as “definitely” or “probably” worth the money. With their lower incomes, it is worth noting that 63 percent of noncustodial and 81 percent of custodial parents who paid for supervised visitation services considered it “definitely” or “probably” worth the money. This suggests that supervised visitation programs are highly valued and offer much-needed assistance to parents who would otherwise be deprived of contact with their children or forced to conduct it in unsafe circumstances.







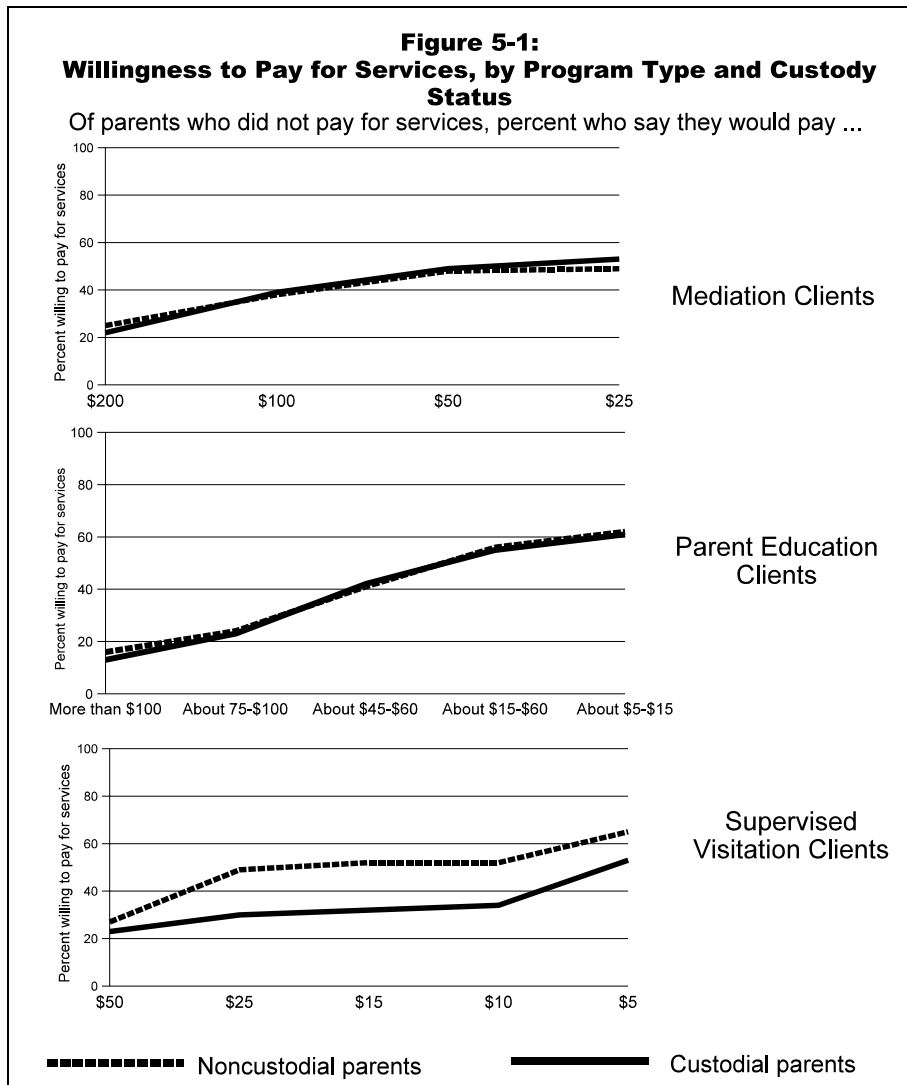
**Table 5-9: Assessment that the Program Was Worth the Fee, by Type of Program and Custody Status <sup>■</sup>**

	Noncustodial parents			Custodial parents		
	Mediation ▲	Parent Education ▲▲	Supervised Visitation ▲▲▲	Mediation ▲	Parent Education ▲▲	Supervised Visitation ▲▲▲
Of parents who did pay for services, percent who reported it was:	(N=52)	(N=30)	(N=42)	(N=48)	(N=59)	(N=59)
Definitely worth it	29%	27%	35%	31%	36%	56%
Probably worth it	22%	42%	28%	13%	29%	25%
Probably not worth it	5%	16%	9%	21%	22%	6%
Definitely not worth it	42%	13%	28%	36%	14%	14%
Not sure	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

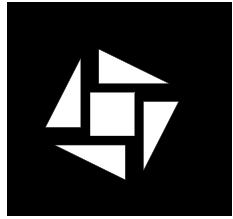
▲ Utah only (no other sites had a fee for service).  
 ▲▲ Colorado only (no other site had a fee for service).  
 ▲▲▲ California and Hawaii (no other site had a fee for service).  
 ■ Rounding may result in percentages slightly above or below 100%.

Parents who did not pay for services were asked whether they would consider paying and how much they would spend. The results of this analysis appear in Figure 5-1. It suggests that parents would only consider paying very modest amounts of money for access and visitation services, with many unwilling to spend anything. Thus, mediation services would have to be available for \$25 or less before more than half of interviewed noncustodial and custodial parents would be willing to pay. Parent education program fees would have to be in the \$16 to \$30 range before 55 percent of noncustodial parents and 56 percent of custodial parents would be willing to pay. Supervised visitation fees would have to be in the \$5 to \$10 range before at least half of interviewed parents would be willing to use and pay for services. These fees are far below market rates and less than programs require for their economic survival (Pearson and Thoennes, 2000).









## Chapter 6

# Participant Outcomes

The outcome articulated in the legislation funding State Access and Visitation Programs deals with noncustodial parents’ “access to and visitation of their children.” In this chapter, we assess the extent to which parents who participated in mediation, education, and supervised visitation services report increases in noncustodial parenting time with children. We also assess whether they report additional benefits such as improved child behavior, improved parent relationships, household formation, and marriage. Finally, we gauge whether participants experienced increases in the amount of child support paid. We assess changes in child support payment patterns two different ways: (1) we queried all interviewed parents about child support behaviors before and after program participation; and (2) at three program sites we extracted information on payment activity for participating parents from automated child support records.

### Changes in Parenting Time

Parents were asked to describe the visitation status of the noncustodial parent at program entry and when they were interviewed, an average of 17 months after they received services. Table 6-1 considers whether program participation was associated with changes in the noncustodial parents’ access rights as well as the amount of visitation that noncustodial parents exercised. More than two-thirds of parents who used mediation and education services entered the programs with court orders establishing visitation rights. Among those who enrolled in supervised visitation programs, the proportions were even higher, with 95 percent reporting a court order dealing with visitation at program entry. This contrasts sharply with access rights for users of mediation programs in four states evaluated by the OIG, most of whom (69%) lacked access rights prior to mediation.

In addition to having prior access rights, most parents in our study entered the programs without any legal restrictions or limitations on their visitation. This was the case for nearly three-quarters of parents who utilized mediation and education services. Among the minority of parents with legal restrictions, the most common were orders prohibiting contact between the parents or limits on overnight visits. Not surprisingly, parents who received supervised visitation services were more apt to have court-imposed restrictions on visitation, the most common of which was the requirement to conduct visits in a supervised setting. Although there was no difference in the incidence of legal





restrictions that parents experienced following their participation in the programs, the proportion reporting that they were required to visit and/or exchange children in a supervised setting declined and the proportion of custodial parents reporting that visits were unrestricted increased.

Both before and after program participation, most parents characterized noncustodial parent visitation with the children as “regular, scheduled visits,” with relatively few terming it “informal” or idiosyncratic. About a fifth (21%) of noncustodial parents who used mediation said that there was no visitation, as did twice as many (39%) parents who used supervised visitation. Following program participation, the proportion of parents reporting no visitation declined for all program types, although the decline was most striking for those who used supervised visitation services.

Following service delivery, noncustodial parents in every service type were significantly more apt to report seeing the children as often as their court order allowed or more. Among mediation participants, the proportion reporting this level of contact rose from 37 to 59 percent. Among those who attended education programs, the proportion rose from 56 to 63 percent. Among noncustodial parents who used supervised visitation services, the proportion went from 40 to 55 percent.

Parents who used supervised visitation programs, however, were the only ones to consistently report increases in the number of days the noncustodial parent saw the children following program participation. The proportion of noncustodial parents estimating that they saw their children at least once a week rose from 39 to 50 percent. The proportion of custodial parents estimating such high contact levels was somewhat lower, but it also rose from 31 to 40 percent. There was also a drop in the proportion of supervised visitation users reporting that they never saw their children. When they enrolled in the programs, 36 percent of noncustodial parents reported a total lack of contact. At the follow-up interview, this was reported by 25 percent of noncustodial parents.





	Noncustodial parents						Custodial parents					
	All Mediation		All Parent Education		All Supervised Visitation		All Mediation		All Parent Education		All Supervised Visitation	
	N=152		N=134		N=102		N=204		N=216		N=150	
	Program Entry	At Interview	Program Entry	At Interview	Program Entry	At Interview	Program Entry	At Interview	Program Entry	At Interview	Program Entry	At Interview
At entry to the program was there a court order allowing visits?												
No	32%	N/A	30%	N/A	6%	N/A	31%	N/A	36%	N/A	5%	N/A
Yes	69%	N/A	70%	N/A	94%	N/A	69%	N/A	64%	N/A	95%	N/A
If there was a court order, percent reporting the order called for:												
No visitation	4%	3%	2%	1%	22%	11%	6%	2%	6%	6%	29%	17%
No overnight visits	7%	3%	6%	5%	13%	15%	10%	6%	16%	8%	22%	17%
Supervised visits	5%	2%	8%	3%	37%	21%	12%	6%	7%	3%	41%	31%
Supervised pick-up/drop-off	2%	1%	8%	7%	18%	7%	7%	5%	8%	1%	13%	16%
No contact between parents	9%	4%	12%	10%	21%	25%	8%	7%	13%	7%	27%	20%
No rules/restrictions on visits	69%	73%	75%	81%	40%	40%	65%	69%	68%	76%	19%	31%
Visitation arrangement:												
Regular	47%	55%	52%	61%	42%	59%	49%	55%	45%	55%	40%	47%
Informal	10%	8%	12%	9%	8%	6%	12%	10%	14%	11%	8%	8%
Both regular/informal	13%	11%	18%	10%	5%	4%	12%	15%	10%	7%	4%	6%
Nothing set up	5%	4%	9%	10%	5%	3%	7%	5%	15%	10%	5%	3%
Holidays/summer	3%	2%	1%	2%	0%	0%	3%	4%	1%	1%	0%	0%
No visits	22%	21%	8%	9%	39%	28%	16%	11%	14%	16%	44%	37%





**Table 6-1: Access at Program Entry and at the Time of the Interview** ■

	Noncustodial parents						Custodial parents					
	All Mediation		All Parent Education		All Supervised Visitation		All Mediation		All Parent Education		All Supervised Visitation	
	N=152		N=134		N=102		N=204		N=216		N=150	
Did NCP see children as often as agreement or order allowed?												
	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Yes	20%	35%	31%	31%	23%	30%	33%	41%	28%	31%	23%	29%
Saw them more	17%	24%	25%	32%	17%	25%	13%	17%	14%	14%	6%	12%
Saw them less	36%	26%	13%	19%	28%	28%	28%	31%	26%	34%	36%	37%
N/A - no agreement	27%	16%	31%	19%	32%	18%	26%	12%	32%	22%	36%	22%
How often did the noncustodial parent see the children?					*	*			*	*		
More than once a week	37%	34%	62%	58%	23%	31%	31%	30%	38%	37%	15%	21%
About once a week	12%	13%	11%	7%	16%	19%	14%	13%	17%	15%	16%	19%
About 3-4 days/month	13%	17%	8%	11%	1%	7%	15%	17%	11%	13%	9%	9%
About 1-2 days/month	9%	7%	3%	5%	11%	10%	7%	4%	11%	9%	11%	9%
Every few months	4%	3%	4%	2%	4%	3%	6%	5%	6%	4%	9%	1%
A few days a year	7%	3%	2%	1%	3%	0%	5%	6%	6%	3%	3%	3%
Never	12%	15%	5%	6%	36%	25%	14%	14%	9%	15%	31%	36%
Other	7%	7%	6%	10%	6%	6%	8%	11%	2%	5%	5%	3%

\*Chi square is significant at .05.  
 ■ Rounding may result in percentages slightly above or below 100%.

Another way of assessing changes in noncustodial parents’ access is to ask them to compare the amount of time they spent with their children prior to and following the receipt of services. Table 6-2 shows the responses that this line of questioning produced. With the exception of mediation participants, who were almost equally apt to report that parent-child contact decreased, increased, and remained the same following program participation, most noncustodial parents felt that their contact levels had increased “a little” or “a lot.” Thus, among education participants, the proportion reporting a decline versus an increase in contact was 29 and 41 percent, respectively. Among supervised visitation program users, the proportion reporting a decline versus an increase was 37 and 45 percent, respectively. Custodial parents who mediated were most apt to report that contact levels stayed the same following program participation. Their counterparts who attended education programs and supervised visitation were equally apt to report decreased contact and no change.





Only parents who used supervised visitation programs credited the programs for any changes in parent-child contact levels that they had experienced. Nearly half of noncustodial parents in mediation and education programs said that the program had played no role in the change in contact that had occurred, and a third of the parents who used supervised visitation programs dismissed the role of the program in explaining changes. Nevertheless, parents who used supervised visitation were cognizant of the fact their levels of contact would have declined without participating in the programs. This was the assessment of 55 percent of noncustodial and 59 percent of custodial parents who were interviewed, and is consistent with other studies of visitation enforcement (Pearson and Thoennes, 1998) and responsible fatherhood programs (Pearson, *et al.*, 2003) that find the greatest increases in parent-child contact among parents who enter the programs with the most limited amounts of access.

**Table 6-2: Perceived Changes in Contact with Child from Program Entry to Interview and Perceived Role of the Program in Producing Changes, by Program Type and Custody Status<sup>■</sup>**

	Noncustodial parents *			Custodial parents *		
	All Mediation	All Parent Education	All Supervised Visitation	All Mediation	All Parent Education	All Supervised Visitation
	N=152	N=134	N=102	N=205	N=215	N=149
Compared to before services, time NCP spends with children has:						
Decreased a lot	23%	19%	31%	19%	29%	34%
Decreased a little	7%	10%	6%	9%	10%	5%
Stayed the same	38%	29%	18%	47%	40%	32%
Increased a little	19%	19%	13%	15%	9%	12%
Increased a lot	13%	22%	32%	10%	12%	17%
If changed, role of program:						
Major role	28%	24%	48%	20%	14%	49%
Minor role	23%	31%	17%	29%	28%	15%
No role	49%	45%	35%	51%	58%	36%
Without program, would see children:						
More often than now	9%	12%	17%	5%	4%	6%
Same as now	64%	69%	28%	73%	71%	35%
Less often than now	27%	19%	55%	22%	24%	59%

\* Chi square is significant at .05.  
 ■ Rounding may result in percentages slightly above or below 100%.







## Changes in Child Behavior

Improving child behavior was another goal posited for State Access and Visitation Programs. For this assessment, we questioned parents about their youngest or only child and asked whether they had perceived any changes in that child’s behavior since the parents had participated in the programs offering assistance with access and visitation. More than half of the parents in all service categories viewed their child’s behavior as unchanged following program participation. The exception to this were custodial parents who utilized supervised visitation services. Only a quarter (23%) of these parents characterized their child’s behavior as the same; more commonly these parents characterized their child’s behavior as improved (41%) or worse (36%). Among those who perceived their child’s behavior to have changed, the supervised visitation program was credited with playing a “major role” by custodial (50%) and noncustodial parents (38%). Users of mediation and parent education programs tended not to credit the program for changes in their child’s behavior. No studies of brief and/or non-therapeutic interventions like mediation, parent education, or supervised visitation programs have found statistically meaningful impacts on parent or child psychological adjustment (Kelly, 1996).

<b>Table 6-3: Perceived Changes from Program Entry to Interview, in Youngest Child’s Behavior<sup>a</sup></b>						
	<b>Noncustodial parents</b>			<b>Custodial parents *</b>		
	<b>All Mediation</b>	<b>All Parent Education</b>	<b>All Supervised Visitation</b>	<b>All Mediation</b>	<b>All Parent Education</b>	<b>All Supervised Visitation</b>
	<b>N=152</b>	<b>N=134</b>	<b>N=102</b>	<b>N=205</b>	<b>N=215</b>	<b>N=149</b>
Compared to before services, youngest child’s behavior has:						
Improved	27%	22%	26%	27%	26%	41%
Stayed the same	55%	57%	47%	60%	56%	36%
Become worse	19%	21%	27%	14%	19%	23%
If changed, role of program:						
Major role	24%	32%	38%	20%	18%	50%
Minor role	24%	21%	36%	19%	30%	23%
No role	52%	47%	27%	61%	52%	27%
* Chi square is significant at .05.						
■ Rounding may result in percentages slightly above or below 100%.						





## Changes in Parental Relationships

Some proponents of mediation, education, and supervised visitation programs contend that they help to improve parental relationships. The empirical research on the subject is mixed. In general, mediation research in the U.S. and Canada has demonstrated small but more often short-lived increases in cooperation and couple communication. Thus, some studies found benefits one year post-divorce that were no longer apparent at two years post-divorce (Kelly, 1996). A prior evaluation of users of parent education programs in five states found that most were skeptical about whether program participation would change the way they interact with their ex-partner even though they intellectually understood the need for behavior changes. Thus, the percent saying it was “definitely true” that the parent education program “improved my relationship with the other parent” ranged from 16.9 to 37.3 percent across the sites, with the average being 24.1 percent (Thoennes and Pearson, 1999).

Parents who used supervised visitation programs, on the other hand, were more apt to report improvements in their relationships with the other parent, with about half of visiting (44%) and custodial (52%) parents reporting that conflict between the parents was “less” following program participation (Pearson and Thoennes, 2000). Given the higher levels of violence and conflict reported for this population at program start and the more protracted nature of the supervised visitation intervention, it is perhaps not surprising that this group of parents was more apt to report improvements following their participation.

Interviews with users of State Access and Visitation Programs suggest that parental relationships do improve following their participation, although the findings are mixed and substantial proportions of parents report continued hostility or no contact. Table 6-4 shows that following participation in every type of program, a higher proportion of noncustodial and custodial parents reported that their relationships were “friendly and cooperative” or “strained but cooperative.” Similarly, the proportion characterizing their relationship as “hostile and angry” declined. Among noncustodial parents who participated in mediation, favorable characterizations of relationships went from 43 to 60 percent, while favorable assessments by education participants went from 47 to 59 percent. Even parents who used supervised visitation services reported improvements in relationships.

Among noncustodial parents, the percentage of favorable ratings went from 26 to 42 percent, while the percent reporting hostile relationships was halved from 54 to 26 percent. Custodial parents reported similar patterns. The percent reporting cooperative patterns doubled from 16 to 35 percent, while the percent reporting hostile relationships dropped from 45 to 14 percent. At least some of the improvement among supervised visitation clients appears to be due to their ability to avoid one





another since the proportion of noncustodial and custodial parents reporting “no contact” rose from 21 to 33 percent and from 39 to 55 percent, respectively.

Parents were less generous when they were asked to compare relationships with the other parent before and after receiving services and note whether they had improved, stayed the same, or become worse. In that assessment, most maintained that there had been no change and the rest were equally divided between noting that relationships had improved and worsened. It is clearly difficult to measure subjective outcomes such as couple relationships, child adjustment, and parent-child contact, especially in a brief telephone interview format. Different questions yield somewhat different pictures of outcome, making it hard to reach unequivocal conclusions.

<b>Table 6-4: Reported Quality of the Relationship Between Parents Before and After Program Services and Perceived Role of the Program in Creating Changes, by Program Type and Custody Status<sup>a</sup></b>						
	<b>Noncustodial parents</b>			<b>Custodial parents</b>		
	<b>All Mediation N=152</b>	<b>All Parent Education N=134</b>	<b>All Supervised Visitation N=102</b>	<b>All Mediation N=205</b>	<b>All Parent Education N=215</b>	<b>All Supervised Visitation N=149</b>
Before services, relationship with other parent was:	*	*	*	*	*	*
Friendly and cooperative	11%	11%	8%	12%	12%	2%
Strained but cooperative	32%	36%	18%	38%	28%	14%
Hostile, angry	39%	39%	54%	36%	45%	45%
No contact	18%	14%	21%	14%	16%	39%
At interview, relationship with other parent was:	*	*	*	*	*	*
Friendly and cooperative	26%	28%	20%	27%	24%	12%
Strained but cooperative	34%	31%	22%	39%	36%	23%
Hostile, angry	17%	26%	26%	14%	20%	14%
No contact	24%	15%	33%	21%	20%	51%
Compared to before services, relationship with other parent has:						
Improved	26%	▲	25%	27%	24%	20%
Stayed the same	51%		41%	52%	53%	60%
Become worse	24%		34%	21%	23%	21%





<b>Table 6-4: Reported Quality of the Relationship Between Parents Before and After Program Services and Perceived Role of the Program in Creating Changes, by Program Type and Custody Status<sup>■</sup></b>						
	<b>Noncustodial parents</b>			<b>Custodial parents</b>		
	<b>All Mediation N=152</b>	<b>All Parent Education N=134</b>	<b>All Supervised Visitation N=102</b>	<b>All Mediation N=205</b>	<b>All Parent Education N=215</b>	<b>All Supervised Visitation N=149</b>
If changed, program role:						
Major role	25%	▲	28%	21%	19%	35%
Minor role	22%		26%	26%	36%	25%
No role	53%		46%	53%	44%	40%

▲ Information is missing for noncustodial parents in Parent Education Programs.  
 \* Chi square is significant at .05.  
 ■ Rounding may result in percentages slightly above or below 100%.

## Changes in Child Support Payment Patterns: Parent Reports

Previous studies show that parents report child support payment behavior in self-serving ways, with noncustodial parents claiming higher levels and custodial parents claiming lower levels of payment (Braver, *et al.*, 1991; Pearson and Anhalt, 1993). Parents served in State Access and Visitation Programs appear to conform to these patterns. While both custodial and noncustodial parents tended to agree on whether the obligation to pay child support exists and the amount of support due per month, they disagreed quite substantially on whether it was paid. According to 85 percent of interviewed noncustodial parents in mediation and education programs, all of it was paid. The percentage of noncustodial parents reporting full payment was somewhat lower among users of supervised visitation programs, although 69 percent reported full payment and another 10 percent claimed that they paid “more than half.”

Custodial parents gave less favorable reports of child support payment, with only about half of mediation and education users characterizing payment patterns as “full” and less than a third (27%) of supervised visitation users giving it this characterization. The percentage saying that “nothing” was paid stands at 32 percent among custodial parents who used supervised visitation and 16 and 24 percent among mediation and education users, respectively.

Few parents indicated that participation in the programs had precipitated a change in the amount of child support they paid or received. Among those noting a change, noncustodial parents were more apt to report that it had increased, while custodial parents were equally apt to report payment increases and decreases.





	Noncustodial parents			Custodial parents		
	All Mediation	All Parent Education	All Supervised Visitation	All Mediation	All Parent Education	All Supervised Visitation
	N=149	N=118	N=101	N=195	N=197	N=142
Noncustodial parent is supposed to pay child support:	*	*	*	*	*	*
Yes	83%	84%	72%	86%	78%	73%
No	17%	16%	28%	14%	22%	28%
If ordered, amount of child support due per month:	*	*	*	*	*	*
Mean	\$474	\$379	\$412	\$424	\$357	\$366
Median	\$400	\$351	\$373	\$372	\$300	\$360
Range	\$75 - \$2400	\$17 - \$1000	\$80 - \$1000	\$30 - \$2400	\$15 - \$1000	\$50 - \$1000
Amount of child support paid:				*	*	*
All (100%)	81%	82%	69%	55%	43%	27%
More than half	6%	4%	10%	12%	11%	17%
Less than half	5%	3%	10%	12%	18%	15%
Nothing	3%	6%	6%	16%	24%	32%
Other	6%	4%	6%	5%	4%	9%
Compared to before services, change in child support amount:				*	*	*
Decreased a lot	3%	8%	6%	10%	20%	8%
Decreased a little	1%	6%	7%	5%	6%	5%
Stayed the same	67%	59%	61%	62%	46%	59%
Increased a little	12%	13%	9%	10%	14%	13%
Increased a lot	17%	14%	18%	13%	14%	14%
If changed, role program played:	<b>(N=40)</b>	<b>(N=37)</b>	<b>(N=28)</b>	<b>(N=60)</b>	<b>(N=82)</b>	<b>(N=40)</b>
	*	*	*	*	*	*
Major role	10%	11%	11%	38%	15%	15%
Minor role	18%	22%	21%	10%	17%	20%
No role	73%	68%	68%	52%	68%	65%
Compared to before services, payment is now:						
More regular	12%	8%	11%	19%	19%	25%
About the same	84%	85%	89%	62%	63%	61%
Less regular	4%	6%	0%	19%	17%	14%





**Table 6-5: Self-Report of Child Support Obligations and Payment, at Interview**

	Noncustodial parents			Custodial parents		
	All Mediation	All Parent Education	All Supervised Visitation	All Mediation	All Parent Education	All Supervised Visitation
	N=149	N=118	N=101	N=195	N=197	N=142
If more regular, role program played:	(N=12)	(N=9)	(N=3)	(N=32)	(N=29)	(N=6)
Major role	25%	22%	0%	50%	35%	83%
Minor role	42%	0%	0%	13%	31%	0%
No role	33%	78%	100%	38%	35%	17%

\* Chi square is significant at .05.  
 ■ Rounding may result in percentages slightly above or below 100%.

## Changes in Child Support Payment Patterns: Child Support Records

The most accurate information on child support obligations and payment patterns comes from the automated records maintained by State Child Support Enforcement Agencies. Three sites collected identifiers for parents who participated in State Access and Visitation Programs that permitted us to determine whether they were known to their state child support agency and had records that could be accessed. The sites that collected Social Security numbers or a child support case identification number were Missouri (mediation), Arizona (education), and Pennsylvania (supervised visitation). The following analysis is restricted to 80 families in Missouri, 72 families in Arizona, and 21 families in Pennsylvania who had at least one open child support case with a monthly obligation both 12 months prior to and 12 months following their receipt of program services. In light of these smaller sample sizes and the focus on a single site for each program type, we must be cautious about making firm conclusions or generalizing the data to similar programs in other states.

One striking characteristic of families who received services and met the criteria for analysis was their strong initial payment patterns. Across the program types, noncustodial parents paid 68.6 percent of the child support they owed during the 12 months prior to their project participation. There was little variation by program type, with the mean standing at 66.8 percent for mediation users, 70.3 percent for education users, and 69.3 percent for supervised visitation clients. On average, parents owed \$394 per month in child support and \$27 per month in arrears payments. Their average arrears balance was \$3,995, with half owing less than \$1,016 and balances ranging from nothing to \$56,515.





During the 12 months following program participation, payment patterns improved among users of all three programs, although the changes were only statistically significant for mediation users, whose average percent of monthly obligations paid rose from 66.8 to 71.4 percent. Among parent education program users, the average percent rose from 70.3 to 88.8 percent, and among supervised visitation users, the average percent rose from 69.3 to 71.0 percent, changes that were not statistically significant. Nationally, the child support system collected 58 percent of what was owed in current support in FY 2003. In the OIG analysis, noncustodial parents paid 52 percent of what they owed prior to mediation and 70 percent of what they owed following the intervention (OIG, 2002).

Looked at somewhat differently, the percent of parents whose payment compliance increased following program participation was 44 percent for mediation users, 51 percent for parent education users, and 38 percent for supervised visitation users. If we restrict the analysis to those cases in which the noncustodial parent was paying less than 100 percent of what he owed during the 12 months prior to project participation and there was more room for improvement, the changes were more impressive. Among this group of parents, the percentage showing increased child support payments following program participation was 64 percent for mediation users, 93 percent for parent education clients, and 53 percent for supervised visitation clients. In the OIG analysis, 61 percent of noncustodial parents increased the percent they paid of their current child support obligation after mediating (OIG, 2002).

	<b>Mediation Missouri (N=80)</b>	<b>Parent Education Arizona (N=72)</b>	<b>Supervised Visitation Pennsylvania (N=21)</b>	<b>Total (N=173)</b>
TANF status:				
Never on TANF	72%	69%	76%	75%
Formerly on TANF	17%	30%	24%	24%
Currently on TANF	2%	1%	0%	1%
Number of children covered by child support order:				
Mean	1.8	1.5	1.6	1.6
Median	2.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Range	1-6	1-4	1-5	1-6
Current monthly support order amount:				
Mean	\$408	\$373	\$415	\$394
Median	\$369	\$351	\$345	\$355
Range	\$15-999	\$10-944	\$100-1,000	\$0-1,000
Current monthly payment due towards arrears:				
Mean	\$31	\$17	\$49	\$27
Median	\$0	\$0	\$40	\$0
Range	\$0-999	\$0-433	\$4-145	\$0-999





<b>Table 6-6: Child Support Information From Agency Records, by Program Type</b>				
	<b>Mediation Missouri (N=80)</b>	<b>Parent Education Arizona (N=72)</b>	<b>Supervised Visitation Pennsylvania (N=21)</b>	<b>Total (N=173)</b>
Total arrears balance across all cases with NCP:				
Mean	\$4,287	\$4,421	\$1,428	\$3,995
Median	\$410	\$2,029	\$322	\$1,016
Range	\$0-56,515	\$0-42,471	\$0-7,695	\$0-56,515
Total amount due in the 12 months prior to receiving program services:				
Mean	\$5,422	\$4,180	\$4,348	\$4,775
Median	\$3,840	\$3,642	\$2,850	\$3,684
Range	\$74-39,384	\$105-18,350	\$70-12,950	\$70-39,384
Total amount paid in the 12 months prior to receiving program services:				
Mean	\$4,347	\$3,824	\$3,216	\$3,992
Median	\$2,584	\$3,092	\$2,022	\$2,628
Range	\$0-24,846	\$0-27,049	\$0-10,468	\$0-27,049
Total amount due in the 12 months after receiving program services:				
Mean	\$5,186	\$4,453	\$5,810	\$4,956
Median	\$4,406	\$4,147	\$4,812	\$4,400
Range	\$165-33,102	\$825-17,050	\$276-13,540	\$163-33,102
Total amount paid in the 12 months after receiving program services:				
Mean	\$4,768	\$4,735	\$4,563	\$4,729
Median	\$3,408	\$4,204	\$4,304	\$3,990
Range	\$0-35,366	\$0-27,306	\$394-15,749	\$0-35,366
Child support paid as a percentage of child support due in the 12 months prior to services:				
Mean	66.8%*	70.3%	69.3%	68.6%
Median	83.5%	98.0%	73.0%	88/0%
Range	0-100%	0-100%	0-100%	0-100%
Child support paid as a percentage of child support due in the 12 months after services:				
Mean	71.4%*	88.8%	71.0%	78.6%
Median	100%	100%	100%	100%
Range	0-100%	0-100%	0-100%	0-100%
Percent of all parents whose payments:				
Increased	44%	51%	38%	46%
Stayed same	29%	40%	19%	32%
Decreased	28%	8%	43%	21%
Percent of parents paying less than 100% prior to program entry whose payments:	(55)	(40)	(15)	(110)
Increased	64%	93%	53%	73%
Stayed same	11%	3%	7%	7%
Decreased	26%	5%	40%	20%

\* Differences between pre and post program payment patterns significant for mediation programs at the .004 level.  
 ■ Rounding may result in percentages slightly above or below 100%.







## Summary of Outcomes and Changes in Household Formation and Marriage

Table 6-7 presents a summary of the changes parents perceived to have occurred following their participation in State Access and Visitation Programs. It covers the key areas of outcome posited for programs by Congress and the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement. They include increases in child support payment, increases in contact between the noncustodial parent and the child, improvements in child behavior, improvements in parental relationships, household formation, and marriage.

As is readily discernible, the areas of change noted by the largest proportion of parents dealt with visitation levels, child behavior, and parental relationships. Approximately one-half of responding custodial and noncustodial parents who used supervised visitation services reported that their youngest child's behavior had improved since they began using program services. Somewhat lower, but still substantial proportions of custodial (37-39%) and noncustodial (35-41%) parents who used supervised visitation and education services noted such improvements. As for parent-child contact, about one-third to one-half of noncustodial parents and one-quarter to one-third of custodial parents felt that the noncustodial parent was seeing the children more often. And while the proportions reporting that parental relationships had improved were somewhat lower, this was noted by at least one-third of all parents using mediation and education services and nearly one-third and one-fifth of noncustodial and custodial parents, respectively, who used supervised visitation services. Taken together, between one-third to one-half of users of mediation, education and supervised visitation services experienced subsequent improvements in parent-child contact, child behavior, and parental relationships.

Although fewer parents perceived the programs to have affected child support payment patterns -- only one-fifth to one-quarter of responding custodial and noncustodial parents reported that they had increased-- assessments based on a review of records maintained by state child support enforcement agencies are more promising. When cases with monthly child support obligations in both the pre- and post-program study periods are compared, the percentage showing an increase in payment stands at 44 percent for mediation users, 51 percent for education clients, and 38 percent for supervised visitation participants.

Finally, there was little evidence of household formation or marriage between parents following their participation in State Access and Visitation Programs. Fewer than 5 percent of custodial and noncustodial parents using each program type reported that they had remarried or begun to live with the other parent following their participation in mediation, education, or supervised visitation. Since all three types of services aim to reduce conflict and promote cooperative parenting relationships between parents who have evidenced high levels of hostility and conflict, it is not surprising that the





programs improve the ability of parents to communicate and manage their parental responsibilities without rekindling romantic relationships.

One limitation of this analysis is the absence of a nontreatment, comparison group against which the experiences of parents who received access and visitation services might be compared. Thus, we cannot be certain whether non-served parents might report similar changes in contact, child adjustments, and parental relationships simply as a function of the passage of time or other factors.

<b>Table 6-7: Summary of Changes Since Program Enrollment, by Program Type and Custody Status</b>						
	<b>Noncustodial parents</b>			<b>Custodial parents</b>		
	<b>All Mediation</b>	<b>All Parent Education</b>	<b>All Supervised Visitation</b>	<b>All Mediation</b>	<b>All Parent Education</b>	<b>All Supervised Visitation</b>
	<b>N=153</b>	<b>N=134</b>	<b>N=102</b>	<b>N=205</b>	<b>N=216</b>	<b>N=150</b>
Percent reporting that compared to before services:						
Child support payments increased	28%	20%	27%	20%	19%	22%
NCP saw the children more often	36%	44%	49%	25%	24%	32%
Youngest child's behavior improved	35%	41%	52%	37%	39%	50%
The relationship between the parents improved	32%	35%	30%	33%	36%	21%
Parents began living together	1%	2%	2%	2%	5%	3%
Parents married each other	3%	3%	5%	5%	6%	2%
Child support records showing that compared to before services child support payments increase	44%	51%	38%	N/A	N/A	N/A

### Outcomes for Certain Sub-Groups

Are there some sub-groups of users for whom program participation produced more substantial changes? This final step in the analysis considered whether the degree of improvement in child support payment, contact between the noncustodial parent and child, child behavior, and quality of the relationship between the parents varied based on:

- Whether the parents had ever been married to each other;
- The quality of the relationship/conflict level prior to program participation;
- Presence of domestic violence allegations;
- Amount of contact between the noncustodial parent and child prior to program entry;
- Distance between the noncustodial parent and child;
- Whether participation in the program was mandatory or voluntary; and
- Whether participants in mediation produced an agreement.





### Ever and Never-married Parents

On several outcome measures, never-married parents show greater improvements than do formerly-married parents. For example, never-married parents exhibited more dramatic changes in payment following program participation as compared with their previously married counterparts. In the 12 months prior to their participation, never-married parents paid 59 percent of their child support obligation. In the 12 months following their participation, the percent of child support that they paid rose to 79 percent. The change was less dramatic for previously married noncustodial parents who entered the programs paying 74 percent of their obligations. Twelve months later, they paid 78 percent of what they owed.

	<b>Previously married (N=109)</b>		<b>Never-married * (N=64)</b>	
	<b>Pre-Services **</b>	<b>Post-Services</b>	<b>Pre-Services **</b>	<b>Post-Services</b>
Child support paid as a percentage of child support due Mean	74%	78%	59%	79%
* Differences between average amount paid pre- and post-services for never-married parents is significant at .00. ** Differences between average amount paid at pre-services by marital status is significant at .05.				

Table 6-9 indicates that never-married NCPs were also more likely than their formerly-married counterparts to report that following the AV services they saw their children more often, had a better relationship with the other parent, and saw improvements in their child’s behavior. Never-married CPs, compared to previously-married CPs, also reported that the NCP saw the children more often following services and reported improved parental relationships.

	<b>Previously married (N=207)</b>	<b>Never-Married (N=169)</b>
Percent of NCPs reporting that after the AV program...		
NCP saw children more frequently **	36%	50%
Relationship between the parents improved **	29%	36%
Youngest child’s behavior improved **	37%	46%
Percent of CPs reporting that after the AV program...		
NCP saw children more frequently **	23%	33%
Relationship between the parents improved **	29%	35%
Youngest child’s behavior improved	41%	41%
** Differences between average amount paid at pre-services by marital status is significant at .1.		





These patterns suggest that State Access and Visitation Programs may have the most potent effects on never-married parents, a group not traditionally served by access and visitation services in the court system.

### Quality of the Relationship

In general, the quality of the parents’ relationship at the time they received AV services was not related to participant outcomes. For example, parents with conflicted relationships prior to the start of services were no more or less likely to report the NCP saw the children more often following services than were more cooperative parents. The sole exception was custodial parents who reported improved parental relationship following services. Custodial parents who reported some contact with the noncustodial parent prior to the start of services were more apt to report that their post-program relationships had improved.

### Presence of Domestic Violence Allegations

If the program file noted the presence of domestic violence allegations, the post-program interview found that both the custodial and noncustodial parent were less likely to report an improved parental relationship. In such cases, the noncustodial parent was less likely to report that he was seeing the children more often.

### Geographic Distance

As shown in Table 6-10, geographic distance between the custodial and noncustodial parent did have an influence on parental reports that the program increased the amount of contact between the noncustodial parent and the child. Those noncustodial parents living more than 100 miles from their children were less likely to report increased contact compared to those living less than 100 miles apart.

	<b>CP and NCP live 50 miles apart or less (N=292)</b>	<b>CP and NCP live 51-100 miles apart (N=20)</b>	<b>CP and NCP live 101-200 miles apart (N=13)</b>	<b>CP and NCP live more than 200 miles apart (N=36)</b>
Percent of NCPs reporting that after the AV program... NCP saw children more frequently **	46%	45%	23%	23%
Percent of CPs reporting that after the AV program... NCP saw children more frequently **	32%	27%	20%	6%

\*\* Differences between average amount paid at pre-services by marital status is significant at .1.





### Mandatory Versus Voluntary Services

To determine whether outcomes are affected by the mandatory versus voluntary nature of the mediation, education, and supervised visitation interventions that parents experienced, we compared ratings for those who reported that their participation had been voluntary versus those who reported it had been mandatory. With very few exceptions, there were no differences on key outcome measures. The exceptions were that parents who reported that they had attended parent education programs on a voluntary basis were significantly more apt to report that program participation led to more frequent contact with their children (55% versus 32%) and improved relationships with the other parent (61% versus 35%). On all other outcomes measures and for participants of all other program types, patterns were identical for those reporting mandatory versus voluntary participation circumstances. This suggests that the mandatory status of many interventions offered through State Access and Visitation Grant Programs does not jeopardize desired outcomes dealing with relationships, parent-child contact, and child support payment behaviors.

	Mediation		Supervised Visitation		Parent Education		Total	
	Mandatory N=216	Voluntary N=139	Mandatory N=203	Voluntary N=41	Mandatory N=255	Voluntary N=38	Mandatory N=741	Voluntary N=209
<b>Compared to before services:</b>								
Child support payments increased	25%	21%	23%	20%	18%	8%	22%	19%
NCP saw the children more often	31%	30%	39%	45%	32%*	55%*	33%	37%
Youngest child's behavior improved	37%	34%	51%	54%	39%	51%	41%	41%
The relationship between the parents improved	31%	37%	24%	29%	35%*	61%*	30%*	38%*
Parents began living together	1%	2%	3%	0%	4%	3%	3%	2%
Parents reconciled/married each other	4%	5%	4%	0%	5%	3%	4%	4%
<b>Satisfaction with Program Services:</b>								
Very satisfied	29%*	45%*	41%	40%	36%*	58%*	37%	46%
Somewhat satisfied	33%	35%	25%	32%	42%	21%	37%	34%
Somewhat dissatisfied	13%	7%	15%	16%	11%	8%	12%	8%
Very dissatisfied	24%	13%	19%	13%	12%	13%	15%	12%

\* Chi square is significant at .05.





**Mediation Outcome**

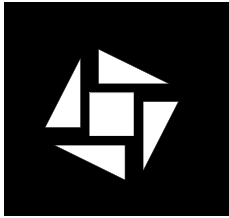
Finally, we compared outcomes for those who reached an agreement in mediation versus those who did not to gauge whether agreements reached in mediation translate into better outcomes. Noncustodial parents who reached an agreement in mediation reported they saw their children more often (41% versus 17%) and that their youngest child’s behavior had improved. Custodial parents, who reached an agreement reported child support payments had increased compared to before mediation and that their relationship with the other parent had improved (30% versus 7%). Results are presented in Table 6-12.

<b>Table 6-12: Outcomes For Those Who Do and Do Not Reach Agreement in Mediation</b>				
	<b>Noncustodial parents</b>		<b>Custodial parents</b>	
	<b>Agreement Reached</b>	<b>No Agreement</b>	<b>Agreement Reached</b>	<b>No Agreement</b>
<b>Percent reporting that compared to before services:</b>				
Child support payments increased	22%	4%	21%*	4%*
NCP saw the children more often	41%*	17%*	25%	21%
Youngest child’s behavior improved	46%*	11%*	39%	30%
The relationship between the parents improved	34%	17%	30%*	7%*
Parents began living together	0%	0%	2%	0%
Parents reconciled/married each other	4%	0%	3%	7%

\* Chi square is significant at .05.







## Chapter 7

# Summary and Conclusions

Since 1997, when the State Access and Visitation Program was initiated, Congress has appropriated \$10 million per year to promote the development of services to alleviate access problems and promote contact between noncustodial parents and children.

This evaluation examined the extent to which the most common types of programs funded by State AV grants achieve the objectives posited for them by Congress and the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement. We focused on 18 mediation, parent education, and supervised visitation programs in nine states and conducted telephone interviews with 970 parents (391 noncustodial and 579 custodial) who used the programs an average of 17 months earlier (with a range of six to 54 months) to assess whether their program experiences had led to increased parent-child contact; improved child behavior; improved parental relationships; increased child support payments; household formation; and marriage. In addition to relying on parental reports, we reviewed child support records for program users at three program sites that offered mediation, parent education, and supervised visitation services, respectively.

This analysis, along with a 2002 assessment by the HHS Office of the Inspector General of 254 mediation cases in five states, are the only quantitative evaluations of the State Access and Visitation Program and offer some clues about who the programs are serving and what effects they have.

In this chapter, we review key findings. The following chapter discusses the implications of these findings for policy and practice, and highlights what this study indicates about the potential and pitfalls of future research on Access and Visitation programs.

### **State AV programs serve a diverse group of parents, particularly those at the lower socioeconomic levels.**

The programs in nine states that we studied serve a diverse group of parents with different racial, education, income, employment, and marital characteristics. While a substantial proportion of served parents were white, college educated, and employed, most were less advantaged minorities. Across the program types and settings, parents were African-American (5 to 24%) or Latino (2 to 23%), unemployed (14 to 29%) or employed less than full-time (5 to 23%), educated at the high school level (15 to 26%) or below (4 to 11%), and in households that earn less than \$20,000 per year (25 to 52%). For example, nearly one-third to one-half of noncustodial parents using the three program types reported gross, annual household income levels of \$20,000 or less, one-fifth to one-third were educated to the high school level or less, and 20 to 41 percent were unemployed or







employed part-time. Interviewed parents were almost evenly divided between being previously married and never married.

**Supervised visitation programs serve the most disadvantaged parents and those at greatest risk.**

Parents who use supervised visitation programs had the lowest education and income levels. Compared with their counterparts in mediation and parent education programs, they also reported the highest rates of non-marriage and among non-married parents, the lowest rates of cohabitation. Across the sites, 37 percent of noncustodial parents in supervised visitation programs were educated to the high school level or less, 41 percent were unemployed or partially employed, 50 percent reported annual gross household income levels of 50 percent, 51 percent had never been married to the other parent, and among those who were never married, 40 percent had never cohabited. Parents who used supervised visitation programs were also at greatest risk for violence, with 67 percent of interviewed custodial parents reporting that there had been physical violence in their relationships with the other parent. They were also the biggest consumers of services and were more apt than their mediation and education counterparts to report attending classes dealing with anger management, domestic violence, and substance abuse counseling.

**State AV programs reach parents who cannot afford any other form of assistance and for whom it is the only type of access help that they receive.**

AV programs were the only source of access assistance for many parents, including 63 percent of all mediation users, 52 percent of education clients, and 36 percent of supervised visitation clients. State AV programs are clearly serving parents who would otherwise go only minimally or totally unassisted and could not afford to pay for program services. In order to get at least half of interviewed parents to say that they would pay for services, mediation would have to cost \$25 or less, education fees would have to be in the \$5 to \$15 range, and supervised visitation would have to cost \$5 to \$10 per visit. This falls far below rates charged in most public and private programs offering these types of services.

**Child support programs currently play a negligible role in referring families for AV services.**

Less than 10 percent of interviewed noncustodial parents reported that they had learned about AV programs from someone at the child support agency. One-half to three-quarters were referred to the programs by the court. Other common referral sources were attorneys (14 to 32%) and/or mediators (7 to 28%). Although the State Access and Visitation Program is administered by the federal OCSE and grants are awarded to State Child Support Enforcement Agencies, many states rely on the court system for program implementation and oversight.





**Two-thirds to almost three-quarters of parents report reaching agreements in mediation on custody, visitation, and/or child support issues.**

More than two-thirds of noncustodial parents reported reaching an agreement on the issues of custody and visitation (69%) and/or child support (67%). Custodial parents reported higher rates of agreement on custody and visitation (73%, 71%) and slightly lower rates on child support (63%). According to program records, 79 percent of parents who attempted to mediate reached a full or partial agreement, with those who mediated voluntarily reaching agreements at higher rates than their mandated counterparts. These are equivalent to the 50 to 85 percent range of agreement rates reported for most court and private mediation programs and the 76 percent agreement rate reported for four states in the OIG study, and suggest that mediation programs funded by State AV grants are performing to “industry standards.”

**Nearly all parents report that education programs focused on the issues of child adjustment, co-parenting, and conflict resolution, with three-quarters to 90 percent of respondents rating these discussions as “very” or “somewhat” useful.**

Consistent with national trends, parents in education programs funded by AV grants are most interested in material dealing with child development and their children’s adjustment to their break-up, with half characterizing it as “very helpful.” Other topics that are rated as “very” useful by at least one-third of respondents are how to work together as parents and how to resolve conflicts with the other parent. A recent review of research on education programs concludes that the perceived effectiveness varies, with the most benefits accruing to parents who had the highest levels of conflict (and lowest levels of adaptive parenting), those who used the programs earliest in the divorce process, and those who attended programs that focused on skill building rather than information sharing (Geasler and Blaisure, 1998). While several studies have found that parents give the programs ratings that exceed 90 percent, others find much slimmer effects, especially over time.

**Parents view supervised visitation programs as providing a safe environment for themselves and their children.**

Nearly all (90%) of custodial and noncustodial parents feel that supervised visitation programs provide a safe environment for their children and themselves. The same percentage lives within 50 miles of the supervised visitation facility. Many parents who stop using the program do so because the court determines that it is no longer necessary (32 to 39%) or because the parents decide it is no longer necessary (8 to 15%) and less often because the other parent stopped coming or missed too many visits (15 to 24%) or could no longer afford services (10%). A previous study of supervised visitation in four settings found that 48 percent stopped because the parents simply stopped coming (Pearson and Thoennes, 2000).





**Although most parents perceive AV program services to be mandatory, this does not overly reduce program effectiveness or the positive effects of participation.**

Two-thirds of mediation users and approximately 90 percent of education and supervised visitation users termed their participation in AV programs as “mandatory.” This is not unique to State AV programs. The American Bar Association estimates that 4,500 separate jurisdictions mandate mediation in contested custody and visitation disputes (Melamed, 1989); 25 states have enacted statutes and 19 states have local court and administrative rules authorizing or mandating parents with minor children or those who contest custody or visitation to attend an education program (Clement, 1998); and a survey of 94 supervised visitation programs found that the major source of referral for all programs was the court, with half only accepting cases through a court order (Thoennes and Pearson, 1999)

As in many other studies of mediation, education, and supervised visitation programs, we find that the mandatory participation status of clients in AV programs does not overly affect the outcomes that users experience. While those who mediated voluntarily were more apt to produce agreements (89% versus 72%), the mediation agreement rates of 67 to 71 percent reported by all noncustodial and custodial parents for various issues fall squarely within the range of agreement rates observed in most court and private mediation programs (50 to 85%) and are virtually identical to the 72 percent agreement rate for families referred to a court-based mediation program on a voluntary basis by child support workers in San Mateo county as part of its Responsible Fatherhood program (Pearson, *et al.*, 2003) and the 76 percent agreement rate reported by the OIG in its study of four AV programs (OIG, 2002).

More to the point, a comparison of major outcomes for program users who reported that their participation was mandatory versus those who reported it was voluntary revealed few differences. The exceptions to the overall finding of no differences were voluntary education clients who were significantly more apt to report that program participation had led to more frequent contact with their children (55% versus 32%) and improved relationships with the other parent (61% versus 35%). It may well be the case that the small fraction of parents who voluntarily chose to attend an education program were more cooperative and enjoyed higher levels of pre-program visitation.

**Between 36 and 49 percent of noncustodial parents reported increases in child contact following service delivery.**

Overall, the percent of noncustodial parents who reported an overall increase in visitation was 36 percent for mediation users, 44 percent for education users, and 49 percent for supervised visitation users. Fewer custodial parents in every service category reported increases.





The percentage of supervised visitation users who reported seeing their children at least once a week went from 39 to 50 percent, and noncustodial parents with no contact dropped from 36 to 25 percent; 45 percent reported that visitation had increased “a little or a lot.” Although the number of days of contact did not change for mediation and education users, the percent reporting that they were seeing their children at least as often as their court order or agreement allowed rose from 37 to 59 percent among mediation users and 56 to 63 percent among education users. Since most parents entered the program with visitation rights, participation did not lead to any gains in the legal right to contact.

Overall, 36 percent of all mediation users reported an increase in visits, while this was reported by 41 percent of those who reached an agreement. In the OIG study of mediation in four settings, 42 percent of mediation clients who reached an agreement reported an overall increase in visits, 33 percent reported that they stayed the same, and 11 percent reported a decrease (OIG, 2002). In a similar vein, 41 percent of interviewed parents who mediated access disputes as part of San Mateo’s Responsible Fatherhood project reported an increase in child contact (Pearson, *et al.*, 2003). The percentage of education and supervised visitation clients reporting an increase was 44 and 49 percent, respectively. Custodial parents were less apt to report changes in visit frequency, with only 25, 24, and 32 percent reporting that the noncustodial parent saw the children more often after receiving mediation, education, and supervised visitation services, respectively.

**Between 26 and 41 percent of custodial parents reported that their youngest child’s behavior had improved.**

While 26 and 27 percent of custodial parents who used education and mediation programs reported that the behavior of the youngest child had improved in the 12 months following program participation, this was reported by 41 percent of custodial parents who used supervised visitation. Most of the other parents viewed their youngest child’s behavior as unchanged and 14 to 23 percent said it was worse. No previous studies of brief and/or non-therapeutic interventions such as mediation, parent education, or supervised visitation have found statistically meaningful program impacts on parent or child psychological adjustment.

**Most parents reported that their relationships were unchanged, although fewer characterized them as “hostile and angry.”**

While fewer characterized their relationships as “hostile and angry” following program participation, most reported their relationships were “unchanged,” with those reporting change equally apt to note improvements as declines.





The percent of noncustodial parents who characterized their relationship with the other parent as “hostile and angry” following program participation dropped from 39 to 17 percent for mediation users, 39 to 26 percent for education clients, and 54 to 26 percent for supervised visitation clients. Custodial parents gave similar assessments, with the percentages going from 36 to 14 for mediation users, 45 to 20 for education users, and 45 to 14 for supervised visitation clients. At least some of the change for supervised visitation clients was due to their ability to avoid one another, since the proportion of noncustodial and custodial parents reporting “no contact” rose. At the same time, about one-half of interviewed parents said their relationship with the other parent had “stayed the same” following program participation, with the rest equally divided between characterizing the relationship as improved and worse. Some mediation studies find small but often short-lived increases in cooperation and couple communication, while parent education users are typically skeptical about whether their participation will change the way they interact with their ex-partner even though they intellectually understand the need for behavior changes. Past studies of supervised visitation users are more apt to conclude that relationships improved, perhaps because such parents enter the programs with extremely high levels of conflict and violence (Pearson and Thoennes, 2000).

**Child support records showed that payment activity improved, with never married parents showing the most dramatic increases in compliance.**

Consistent with past research, parents report child support payment behavior in self-serving ways, with two-thirds to four-fifths of noncustodial parents reporting full payment, as compared with one-quarter to one-half of custodial parents. Most interviewed parents reported that payments had stayed the same following program participation, with only about one-fifth to one-quarter noting an increase.

A review of child support records for 173 families with monthly obligations both 12 months prior to and following program participation, however, showed that payments improved. Payments increased for 44 percent of mediation users, 51 percent of education clients, and 38 percent of supervised visitation users. When we restricted the analysis to cases in which the noncustodial parent had paid less than 100 percent of what he owed during the 12 months prior to project participation and there was more room for improvement, payments increased for 64 percent of mediation users, 93 percent of education clients, and 53 percent of supervised visitation clients.





Noncustodial parents also paid a higher percentage of what they owed following program participation, although the differences were only statistically significant at the mediation site where the average percent paid went from 66.8 to 71.4 percent. For education clients, payments rose from 70.3 to 88.8 percent and for supervised visitation users, they increased from 69.3 to 71.0 percent.

Compliance rates increased significantly for never-married parents, whose average percent of child support paid following program participation rose from 59 to 79 percent. Payment compliance did not significantly change for previously-married parents who entered the programs paying an average of 74 percent of what they owed and who paid 78 percent during the following year.

The OIG's review of child support records for 111 cases found that payments rose from 52 to 70 percent following mediation and that 61 percent increased the percent of current child support that they paid.

**There was no evidence that program participation led to increases in cohabitation or marriage.**

Less than 5 percent of interviewed parents reported that they had begun to live together or marry one another following program participation. The OIG study found that parents in only two of 254 cases began living together after mediation. Since mediation, education, and supervised visitation programs aim to reduce conflict and promote cooperative parenting relationships between parents who have evidenced high levels of hostility and conflict, it is not surprising that the programs improve the ability of parents to handle their parental responsibilities without rekindling romantic relationships.

**Never-married parents exhibit the greatest improvements on many outcome measures.**

Child support payment increases were particularly striking among never-married parents, whose percentage of child support paid rose significantly from 59 to 79 percent when their pre- and post-program payment behaviors were compared. Never-married parents were also more likely than formerly-married parents to report improvements in the frequency of contact between the noncustodial parent and the children, the quality of the parents' relationship, and the youngest child's behavior.

These findings track with findings reported by the OIG and are generally consistent with findings reported in previous evaluations of access programs (Pearson and Thoennes, 1998). Indeed, regardless of whether they mediated, all families referred to free, court-based mediation for access problems by child support workers as part of a Responsible Fatherhood Program conducted in San



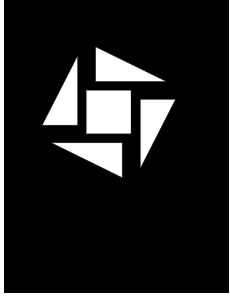


Mateo County, California, during 1998 to 2000 showed uniform and significant increases in child support payments following their referral. More to the point, never-married parents had similar rates of appearance and agreement to those produced by their married and divorced counterparts (Pearson, *et al.*, 2003). Of course, since the OIG study, the Responsible Fatherhood evaluation and this assessment all lack non-treatment comparison groups, against whose experiences families receiving services might be compared, we cannot be certain that any and all improvements in contact and payment were due to the passage of time, enforcement actions, or other factors.









## Chapter 8

# Implications for Practice and Research

### Implications for Practice and Policy

The findings suggest a variety of ways to improve services provided in State Access and Visitation Programs and enhance the outcomes that participants experience.

- **Encourage child support referrals.**

Less than 10 percent of interviewed noncustodial parents reported that they had learned about AV programs from someone at the child support agency; most were referred by the court. Since payment behavior improves following program participation, child support workers should become familiar with AV programs and refer noncustodial parents with access problems to them.

- **Consider incorporating basic child support information into parent education.**

Parent education programs are primarily focused on helping parents to successfully transition into a new parenting relationship. However, increased referrals from child support might argue for the inclusion of very basic information about the importance of child support.

- **Consider including in parent education curricula some discussion of the consequences of geographic moves on access and visitation.**

As in past research, this study confirms that the distance that separates the noncustodial parent from his child is a basic obstacle to frequent contact that cannot be easily remedied in AV programs. When discussing the importance of both parents maintaining contact with their children following a separation or divorce, parent education programs might want to underscore the barriers to contact imposed by parental relocation. Future researchers in the field may also want to include measures of parent-child interaction that capture contact other than in-person visits.

- **Focus on serving never-married parents.**

AV programs have traditionally focused on serving divorcing and divorced parents. This study demonstrates that never-married parents fare even better than formerly married parents on many outcome measures. They show better child support payment outcomes, and (based on reports by noncustodial parents) greater improvements in a variety of post-program behaviors including the





amount of contact between the noncustodial parent and the child, parental relationships and child behavior. Programs should attempt to routinely serve never-married parents.

■ **Programs should be prepared to offer resources to parents with domestic violence histories.**

Although some types of services, such as mediation, screen out parents with the most serious cases of domestic violence, this study shows that AV programs serve some parents with alleged or confirmed histories of prior domestic violence. While many of these parents experience improvements on key outcomes following their participation in AV programs, it may be appropriate for service providers to offer these parents the opportunity to pursue specialized resources dealing with domestic violence, anger management and high conflict.

■ **Continue to mandate participation in AV programs.**

Although mediation agreement rates and satisfaction levels with mediation are higher for those who participate on a voluntary, rather than a mandatory basis, mandating participation does not jeopardize desired client outcomes. More to the point, mandated participation promotes the use of helpful and effective AV services among parents who are in conflict and skeptical about finding help.

■ **Determine services you offer based on the population you want to serve and the intensity of services they require.**

Mediation, parent education and supervised visitation programs are equally effective in promoting positive outcomes in parent-child contact, child behavior and parental relationships. Although gains in some areas are greater for users of supervised visitation programs, the families who enter these programs generally have the lowest levels of contact and the highest rates of distress. Education, mediation and supervised visitation programs serve parents with low, medium and high levels of conflict, respectively, and parents who report low, moderate and high levels of parental conflict prior to their participation in AV programs perform equally well on most outcome measures. When selecting programs to fund, states should consider the population they want to serve and the intensity of services they need.

■ **Look for ways to expand the number of AV programs and the population served.**

AV programs serve parents who do not hire lawyers, obtain counseling or hire other professionals. For two-thirds of mediation and education program participants, AV programs are the only source of assistance they receive with their access and visitation problems. They report that they are unable to pay market rates for mediation, education and supervised visitation services. State Access and Visitation Programs should be expanded and made available to a larger number of parents.





## Implications for Research

One objective of this project was to determine whether it is practical for states to reliably gauge outcomes among users of their AV programs. Another objective was to identify the measures that states might take to make future assessments of participant outcomes more feasible and reliable. The following reviews the challenges that states will encounter in the evaluation process and discusses the steps that programs should take to enhance their ability to be evaluated.

- **It would be very difficult for states to reliably assess outcomes on their own.**

Given current resources for AV programs and response rate requirements, states would find it extremely challenging to reliably assess AV program outcomes. In this study, telephone interviewers phoned 4,109 numbers to obtain 970 completed interviews. They made up to 16 call-back attempts with an average of 3.9 attempts to reach an extremely mobile population, 41 percent of whom had disconnected or wrong telephone numbers. Despite these extraordinary efforts, the cross-site response rate was only 24 percent. Assessment efforts would clearly consume much of the limited funds available for service delivery without delivering very satisfactory results.

- **Collect primary and secondary contact information from program participants at intake.**

Any future outcome assessment will require that program participants be contacted after they receive services. While exit surveys can elicit information on client reactions to the program and their immediate likes and dislikes, they cannot generate information on longer-term program impacts and changes in behaviors that take time to evolve, including the outcomes which require at least 6 to 12 months and optimally 12 to 24 months or longer for reliable patterns to appear.

To preserve the opportunity to conduct follow-up assessments with program participants, AV programs should amend their intake forms to elicit address information, telephone numbers, cell numbers, and e-mail addresses for participants and a secondary contact. Secondary contacts are relatives or friends who are likely to know the whereabouts of separating and divorcing parents who are usually extremely mobile. Sending semi-annual post cards to participants requesting them to indicate changes in their contact information helps to stay current with clients and stem attrition.





■ **Collect Social Security numbers or child support case numbers at intake.**

The most reliable way to assess child support obligations, payment patterns, and changes in payment behavior is to review the automated child support records maintained by state child support agencies. Parent reports are frequently distorted by genuine confusion and lack of knowledge about their child support status, memory issues, social desirability factors, and anger towards the other parent.

Certain identifiers, however, are needed in order to access child support records for AV program participants. Minimally, programs need to collect a child support case identifier or the name and Social Security number of a noncustodial parent. In this analysis, only three of the nine project sites collected identifiers that were necessary to locate participants in the child support records.

■ **Obtain consent at intake for follow-up interviews and permission to review child support records.**

It is best to have program participants sign a consent form at intake that grants the program and/or a qualified research entity permission to contact them and/or access their child support records for a confidential assessment for research purposes. For example, the Guidelines of Mediation developed for the M.A.R.C.H. Mediation program in Missouri and signed by both parents prior to the commencement of mediation include a provision about research. With regard to the confidentiality of the mediation process, parents agree that, “Statistical data may be given to M.A.R.C.H. program evaluators for the sole purpose of determining the effectiveness of this mediation program. Parents will not be identified by name in any report or presentation. The right to privacy of all parents will be fully respected.”

Lacking a signed consent form generated during project intake, programs have the option of notifying parents about the research effort and offering them an opportunity to opt out of the evaluation. As part of this “passive consent process,” which we pursued at every site in this study except Missouri, parents were contacted by mail by the program, informed about the research, assured of its confidential nature, and told to phone a designated person at the local program if they wished to remove themselves from the study and not have their names forwarded to researchers or telephone interviewers. In this study, which involved attempts to telephone and interview 4,109 individuals, only a negligible number of parents asked to be removed from the study and only 7 percent ultimately declined to be interviewed when contacted.

The least satisfactory approach to obtaining client consent is to contact participants following the completion of services and ask them to mail back a consent form or provide verbal consent over the telephone. Active consent processes are extremely time-consuming and ineffective. This approach





was attempted by one site in Hawaii, which mailed letters to 258 former participants and obtained only 18 “active consents.” This site was ultimately dropped from the evaluation both because of low volume and concerns about the representativeness of the few participants who were motivated enough to contact the program and provide active consent. Rather than being typical of the client population, we suspected that they were unusually pleased or discontented and were not reflective of the vast majority of participants.

■ **Plan to devote adequate resources to telephone interviewing.**

Telephoning and interviewing AV program participants is extremely time-consuming and difficult. Two sites (Missouri and Utah) attempted to conduct some interviews using their own staff or volunteer resources. Ultimately, Utah completed only 39 interviews and Missouri only 10 using in-house resources. The remaining 61 interviews in Utah and 155 in Missouri, along with all interviews at the other seven program sites, were done by interviewers at the Public Opinion Laboratory (POL) of Northern Illinois University. POL interviewers phoned 4,109 numbers to obtain 970 completed interviews, for a cross-site response rate of 24 percent. The average number of call attempts they made for each completed interview was 3.9, with the range going from one to 16 call attempts. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish during day, evening, and weekend hours. The scale of the interview effort expended by POL illustrates why it is so difficult to mount large survey research efforts in a non-professional setting,

■ **Be prepared for low response rates.**

Although the cross-site refusal rate was only 7 percent and ranged from 2 to 10 percent at individual sites, many targeted respondents could not be reached. Forty-one percent of targeted parents had disconnected/wrong telephone numbers; another 17 percent of call attempts resulted in no answer; and 12 percent had no phone number listed and it was impossible for interviewers to locate one. Despite the fact that POL made up to 16 call attempts with an average of 3.9, the response rate was only 24 percent. Site response rates ranged from 32 percent in Utah to 18 percent in New Jersey and Rhode Island, which served the most impoverished parents and the least recent program users, respectively. For example, the Family Court in Rhode Island drew its list of potential telephone respondents from dated participant lists, some of which were 54 months old, and consequently included many disconnected and wrong phone numbers. Naturally, these response rates fall far below the optimal rates for statistical surveys, although they are within rates observed in many studies of unmarried, separated, and divorced parents, low-income populations, and other extremely mobile groups.





Because response rates are so low, it is important to focus on high volume programs that will generate an adequate number of participants for evaluation purposes. Alternatively, states should be prepared to coordinate the evaluation across multiple program sites.

■ **Collect information from both custodial and noncustodial parents since their perceptions differ.**

Measuring parent-child contact, parental relationships, and child adjustment is complicated. All are subjective phenomena that are difficult to reliably gauge, especially in a relatively brief interview or questionnaire. Custodial and noncustodial parents frequently give self-serving responses that are conflicting and hard to interpret. And different questions yield different outcomes. For example, we get different pictures of parent-child contact when we look at answers that custodial and noncustodial parents gave to questions on how often the noncustodial parent saw the children, whether the noncustodial parent saw the child as often as the order/agreement allowed or permitted, and whether the noncustodial parent saw the children more often following program participation.

Child adjustment is even more difficult to assess. One of the most widely used instruments in prior research with divorcing populations is the Behavior Problem Index. Although this 28-item instrument developed by Nicholas Zill and James L. Peterson (1990) is much shorter than the earlier 112-item instrument by Thomas Achenbach and Craig Edelbroch (1981) from which it is derived, it is still impractical to administer over the telephone along with many questions about other outcomes. In addition, there are serious questions about its ability to distinguish adjustment patterns in a non-clinical population. For example, among a sample of chronically litigating, high-conflict, post-divorce families, the overall mean adjustment scores of the majority of children fell within the normal range, with only 16 percent falling within the clinical range of disturbance (Johnston, *et al.*, 1989). It is clearly very difficult to measure patterns of child adjustment using paper-and-pencil techniques.

Programs and states interested in assessing the AV programs should review instruments used in previous evaluations of similar programs and try to use identically worded questions. Effort should also be made to use multiple measures of key outcome phenomena. Finally, surveys should be administered to both custodial and noncustodial parents who often have differing views.

■ **Use child support records to assess payment patterns.**

Several researchers have found that parental reports are unreliable for gauging child support payment behavior. Noncustodial parents typically overstate the payments they make, while custodial





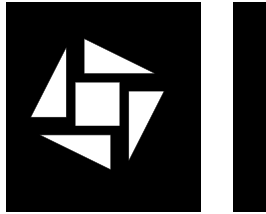
parents under-report them. Parents are also misinformed and/or confused about their child support status, including the number of open cases that they have, their monthly obligations, and arrears balances. As a result, any reliable assessment of child support payment patterns must involve a review of records maintained by the child support agency.

Reviewing child support records and extracting information on individual cases, however, is extremely time-consuming and difficult. As previously noted, child support records can only be accessed with appropriate identifiers such as a child support case number or the name and Social Security number of a noncustodial parent. Child support information is confidential and access is only permitted by the child support agency to authorized personnel for appropriate purposes.

In addition to the issue of access, evaluators will face many other challenges to reliably assessing changes in payment behavior that may be due to participation in AV programs. Because automated child support systems are very complex, were not designed for research purposes, and agency programmers typically have many other priorities, it is generally faster to obtain information for a relatively small number of cases by doing manual look-ups rather than generating a computerized extract. Nevertheless, even a manual process performed by someone who is very experienced with the system is slow and complex. Among the issues that must be addressed to reliably assess child support payment performance over time are: multiple child support cases; case closures, new cases, modified orders, and other changes in child support status; one-time payments due to intercepts, liens, levies, and other attachments; and ledger adjustments, posting errors, and other patterns that contribute to skew.

One of the key ingredients of a successful assessment process is to involve personnel who are thoroughly familiar with the automated child support system on an operational level. It is also important to clarify and simplify assessment objectives. Finally, it is important to pre-test any data collection form that is developed to ensure that it is workable and that it is generating the desired information in an unambiguous fashion.





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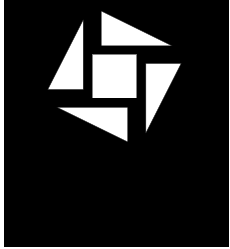


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# Appendix A

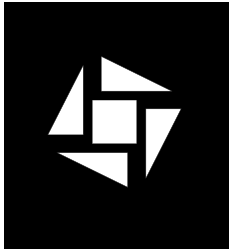
Information Supplied by Program

# Evaluating Outcomes of the States' Access and Visitation Program

## Parent Survey

### Information Supplied by Program

	Noncustodial Parent	Custodial Parent
Site:		
Program name:		
Which parent does program show as CP / NCP?	1 - Father 2 - Mother	1 - Father 2 - Mother
Name:		
Address:		
Telephone number:		
Date of Birth:	____/____/____	____/____/____
Social Security Number (if applicable):		
Child Support Case Number (if known):		
Alternate case numbers:(ATLAS Number, other):		
Language of Interview:	1 - English      2 - Spanish	1 - English      2 - Spanish
Is this a IV-D or non-IV-D case?	1 - IV-D    2 - Non IV-D    3 - No information	
Any allegation of domestic violence?	1 - Yes    2 - No	1 - Yes    2 - No
Services Program shows as provided:	1 - Mandatory mediation/develop parenting plan 2 - Voluntary mediation/develop parenting plan 3 - Pick-up/dropoff 4 - Supervised/unsupervised visits 5 - Non-monitored visits 6 - Parent education 7 - Counseling 8 - Help you file legal forms/papers 9 - Other visitation enforcement 10 - Other _____ 11 - None	1 - Mandatory mediation/develop parenting plan 2 - Voluntary mediation/develop parenting plan 3 - Pick-up/dropoff 4 - Supervised visits 5 - Non-monitored visits 6 - Parent education 7 - Counseling 8 - Help you file legal forms/papers 9 - Other visitation enforcement 10 - Other _____ 11 - None
Date first received services:	_____ 9 NA, did not receive	_____ 9 NA, did not receive
Parent continuing to receive services?	1 - No    2 - Yes	1 - No    2 - Yes
Has this parent moved on to a different visitation arrangement?	1 - No    2 - Yes	1 - No    2 - Yes
Was this client terminated by the program?	1 - No    2 - Yes	1 - No    2 - Yes
Program provided information/ reports to court?	1 - No    2 - Yes	1 - No    2 - Yes
Was this parent charged fees for services?	1 - No fee    2 - Set Fee    3 - Sliding scale	
If fees were charged, indicate amount:	Mediation                      \$_____/per hr/total (circle) Pick-up/dropoff              \$_____/per visit Supervised visits            \$_____/per visit Parent education            \$_____ Counseling                    \$_____/per visit Help with legal forms \$____total Other visitation enforcement \$_____ Other _____ \$_____	Mediation                      \$_____/per hr/total (circle) Pick-up/dropoff              \$_____/per visit Supervised visits            \$_____/per visit Parent education            \$_____ Counseling                    \$_____/per visit Help with legal forms \$____total Other visitation enforcement \$_____ Other _____ \$_____
<b>In CA only:</b> Did the client exhaust their 6 month benefit?	1 - No    2 - Yes	1 - No    2 - Yes
Was client charged a higher fee when program ran out of money?	1 - No    2 - Yes	1 - No    2 - Yes
<b>For mediation only:</b> Mediation outcome	1 - Full Agreement 2 - Partial Agreement 3 - No Agreement	1 - Full Agreement 2 - Partial Agreement 3 - No Agreement



# Appendix B

Letter From Programs to Clients

Sent out on Program Letterhead

July 1, 2003

Dear Parental Conflict Resolution Class participant,

The Parental Conflict Resolution Class (PCR) has been selected for a study on how parent education programs serve families. We need you to help by talking with telephone researchers about your experiences with the PCR class and its impact.

The study is being done by professional researchers. Interviewers will call you to talk about how the parent education class can do a better job serving families.

You should know that:

- The study is completely confidential. Your name will never be used in any report. No one will know what you say.
- The telephone interview will take approximately 10 to 15 minutes.
- If you do **NOT** wish to participate, you should call PCR at 602-506-1448 and let us know that you do not wish to participate in the study.
- You can change your mind and decide not to be interviewed when a telephone interviewer calls you.
- Your participation in the study has no effect on the benefits you receive from PCR.

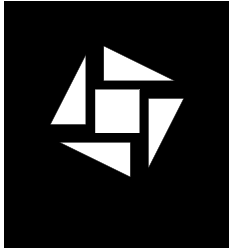
I hope you will take part in this important study. Programs all over the country need information from parents like you about how education programs can better serve families. This research can help improve programs and provide funding.

**Please note! You must call PCR at 602-506-1448 if you do NOT want to be interviewed. If you do not call the program and let us know you do not want to participate, you will be telephoned by a researcher.**

Thank you for your time and help on this important project.

Sincerely,

PCR program



# Appendix C

Parent Survey

# Evaluating Outcomes of the States' Access and Visitation Program

## Parent Survey

**Identification Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

### Introduction

I'm calling for the Center for Policy Research. We are trying to find out how well programs designed to help parents with visitation problems are working. You have been selected for this survey because the(name of program) shows that you received services from them.

Do you remember receiving these services?

1 - Yes



Would you be willing to answer some questions about your experiences with the program?

**Go to START INTERVIEW on the next page.**

2 - No



[Read description of the program from reference sheet]

Do you remember receiving these services around [insert date from information on Page 1]?

1 - Yes

Would you be willing to answer some questions about your experiences with the program? **Go to START INTERVIEW on the next page.**

2 - No

We are only interviewing program participants. Thank you for your time.

### Call Record

**Noncustodial Parent: Total Number of Call Attempts:**

**Final disposition:**

- Completed interview
- Last number tried was wrong number or disconnect, never reached this parent
- Left message on machine, no return call
- Left message with person, no return call
- Parent refused

**Custodial Parent: Total Number of Call Attempts:**

**Final disposition:**

- Completed interview
- Last number tried was wrong number or disconnect, never reached this parent
- Left message on machine, no return call
- Left message with person, no return call
- Parent refused



## Section A: Ask All Parents

	Noncustodial Parent	Custodial Parent
Do you have primary physical custody of your child(ren)?	1 - No 2 - Yes	1 - No 2 - Yes
How many children did you have with [other parent's name from Page 1] ?	_____	_____
If one, how old is this child?	_____	_____
If more than one, how old is the youngest child?	_____	_____
How old is the oldest?	_____	_____
Were you and the children's mother/father ever married?	1 - No 2 - Yes	1 - No 2 - Yes
<b>If no</b> , did you live together?	1 - No 2 - Yes	1 - No 2 - Yes
<b>If married or lived together</b>		
About how long did you live together?	_____	_____
What year did you separate?	_____	_____
At the time the program provided you/the NCP services did you have an order from the court allowing for visits?	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
Was there ever any physical violence in the relationship?	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - Refused	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - Refused
Let me double check, did you receive the following services from (program name):		
Mediation/help developing a parenting plan?	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
Supervised/Neutral pick-up and drop-off of children?	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
Supervised/Unsupervised visits?	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
Parent education classes?	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
Help you file legal forms or papers to set up or enforce visits?	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
Did you receive any other types of services (e.g. counseling)?	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
If yes, what were these other services?	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
<b>If the parent mentions receiving any services:</b>		
How did you hear about (program name)?	1 - From someone at court (judge, clerk)	1 - From someone at court (judge, clerk)
Did you hear about it...	2 - From a mediator	2 - From a mediator
	3 - From an attorney	3 - From an attorney
	4 - From child support	4 - From child support
	5 - From friend/family	5 - From friend/family
	6 - Saw flier, ad, etc	6 - Saw flier, ad, etc
	7 - Other _____	7 - Other _____

# Section B: Parents Who Mediated/Developed Parenting Plan

[If parent did not mediate, go to Section C]

	Noncustodial Parent	Custodial Parent
<p><b>In mediation, did you talk about where the children will live?</b></p> <p>If yes, did you reach some sort of an agreement about this?</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>If there WAS an agreement</b></p> <p>Was this agreement entered with the court or was it just between the parents?</p> <p>If it was entered with the court, did the program help you write up something to present to the court?</p>	<p>1 - No [GO TO NEXT BLOCK] 2 - Yes 3 - DK</p> <p>1 - No [GO TO NEXT BLOCK] 2 - Yes</p> <p>1 - Not sure 2 - Inter-party agreement only 3 - Entered with court</p> <p>1 - No 2 - Yes</p>	<p>1 - No [GO TO NEXT BLOCK] 2 - Yes 3 - DK</p> <p>1 - No [GO TO NEXT BLOCK] 2 - Yes</p> <p>1 - Not sure 2 - Inter-party agreement only 3 - Entered with court</p> <p>1 - No 2 - Yes</p>
<p><b>Did you talk about visitation (when each parent will see the children)?</b></p> <p>If yes, did you reach some sort of an agreement about this?</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>If there WAS an agreement</b></p> <p>Was this agreement entered with the court or was it just between the parents?</p> <p>If it was entered with the court, did the Program help you write up something to present to the court?</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>If NO agreements on visits ask:</b></p> <p>Were you able to reach any agreements after mediation ended?</p>	<p>1 - No [GO TO NEXT BLOCK] 2 - Yes 3 - DK</p> <p>1 - No 2 - Yes</p> <p>1 - Not sure 2 - Inter-party agreement only 3 - Entered with court</p> <p>1 - No 2 - Yes</p> <p>1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK</p>	<p>1 - No [GO TO NEXT BLOCK] 2 - Yes 3 - DK</p> <p>1 - No 2 - Yes</p> <p>1 - Not sure 2 - Inter-party agreement only 3 - Entered with court</p> <p>1 - No 2 - Yes</p> <p>1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK</p>
<p><b>Did you talk about child support?</b></p> <p>If yes, did you reach some sort of an agreement about this?</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>If there WAS an agreement</b></p> <p>Was this agreement entered with the court or was it just between the parents?</p> <p>If it was entered with the court, did the program help you write up something to present to the court?</p>	<p>1 - No [GO TO NEXT BLOCK] 2 - Yes 3 - DK</p> <p>1 - No [GO TO NEXT BLOCK] 2 - Yes</p> <p>1 - Not sure 2 - Inter-party agreement only 3 - Entered with court</p> <p>1 - No 2 - Yes</p>	<p>1 - No [GO TO NEXT BLOCK] 2 - Yes 3 - DK</p> <p>1 - No [GO TO NEXT BLOCK] 2 - Yes</p> <p>1 - Not sure 2 - Inter-party agreement only 3 - Entered with court</p> <p>1 - No 2 - Yes</p>
Were you required to go to mediation?	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
Overall, how satisfied were you with mediation?	1 - Very satisfied 2 - Somewhat satisfied 3 - Somewhat dissatisfied 4 - Very dissatisfied	1 - Very satisfied 2 - Somewhat satisfied 3 - Somewhat dissatisfied 4 - Very dissatisfied

## Section B [Parents Using Mediation] continued

If parent did NOT pay for mediation ask:	Probably would	Not sure	Probably not		Probably would	Not sure	Probably not
Would you be willing to pay for mediation if your share of the total cost was:							
\$200	1	2	3		1	2	3
\$100	1	2	3		1	2	3
\$50	1	2	3		1	2	3
\$25	1	2	3		1	2	3
<b>If parent DID pay for mediation ask:</b>							
Overall, would you say mediation was worth the money you paid?	1 - Definitely worth it 2 - Probably worth it 3 - Probably not worth it 4 - Definitely not worth it 5 - Don't know, not sure			1 - Definitely worth it 2 - Probably worth it 3 - Probably not worth it 4 - Definitely not worth it 5 - Don't know, not sure			

## Section C: Parents Using Pickup-Dropoff

### Noncustodial Parent

### Custodial Parent

Were you court ordered to use supervised/neutral pickup-dropoff services?	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
---	-----------------------	-----------------------

Approximately how many weeks/months did you use pickup/dropoff services?	_____ Weeks/Months (circle)	_____ Weeks/Months (circle)
Are you still doing pickup/dropoff?	1 - No 2 - Yes	1 - No 2 - Yes
<b>If NOT still using pickup/dropoff services:</b>		
Why are you no longer using this service?	1 - Court/agency said wasn't needed anymore 2 - We get along fine, don't need it anymore 3 - Costs were too high 4 - Moved to another level of service 5 - Just got tired of it 6 - Distance, no transportation, bad hours 7 - Other parent didn't show/stopped coming/missed too often 8 - Other _____	1 - Court/agency said it wasn't needed anymore 2 - We get along fine, don't need it anymore 3 - Costs were too high 4 - Moved to another level of service 5 - Just got tired of it or inconvenient 6 - Distance, no transportation, bad hours 7 - Other parent didn't show/stopped coming/missed too often 8 - Other _____

Overall, how satisfied were you with the services you received?	1 - Very satisfied 2 - Somewhat satisfied 3 - Somewhat dissatisfied 4 - Very dissatisfied	1 - Very satisfied 2 - Somewhat satisfied 3 - Somewhat dissatisfied 4 - Very dissatisfied
---	--	--

<b>If parent did NOT pay for pick-up/drop-off ask:</b>		
Would you be willing to pay for the exchange if you had to pay..	Probably would    Not sure    Probably not	Probably would    Not sure    Probably not
\$50 per exchange	1            2            3	1            2            3
\$25 per exchange	1            2            3	1            2            3
\$15 per exchange	1            2            3	1            2            3
\$10 per exchange	1            2            3	1            2            3
\$5 per exchange	1            2            3	1            2            3
<b>If parent DID pay for pick-up/drop-off ask:</b>		
Overall, would you say the pick-up/drop-off service was worth the money you paid?	1 - Definitely worth it 2 - Probably worth it 3 - Probably not worth it 4 - Definitely not worth it 5 - Don't know, not sure	1 - Definitely worth it 2 - Probably worth it 3 - Probably not worth it 4 - Definitely not worth it 5 - Don't know, not sure

# Section D: Parents Using Supervised/Unsupervised Visitation

	Noncustodial Parent	Custodial Parent
Were you court ordered to use supervised/unsupervised visits?	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
<b>If court ordered:</b> How long were you required to do supervised/unsupervised visits?	1 - Not specified, until court/agency said otherwise 2 - For ____ months/weeks 3 - Other _____	1 - Not specified, until court/agency said otherwise 2 - For ____ months/weeks 3 - Other _____
Approximately how many weeks/months did you use supervised/ unsupervised visitation?	_____ Weeks/Months (circle)	_____ Weeks/Months (circle)
Are you still doing supervised/ unsupervised visits?	1 - No 2 - Yes	1 - No 2 - Yes
<b>If NOT still using supervised/unsupervised visits:</b>		
Why are you no longer using this service?	1 - Court/agency said wasn't needed now 2 - We get along fine, don't need now 3 - Costs were too high 4 - Moved to another level of service 5 - Just got tired of it 6 - No transportation, distance, bad hours 7 - Other parent didn't show/stopped coming/ missed too often 8 - Other _____	1 - Court/agency said wasn't needed now 2 - We get along fine, don't need now 3 - Costs were too high 4 - Moved to another level of service 5 - Just got tired of it 6 - No transportation, distance, bad hours 7 - Other parent didn't show/stopped coming/ missed too often 8 - Other _____
Overall, how satisfied were you with the supervised/unsupervised visitation services you received?	1 - Very satisfied 2 - Somewhat satisfied 3 - Somewhat dissatisfied 4 - Very dissatisfied	1 - Very satisfied 2 - Somewhat satisfied 3 - Somewhat dissatisfied 4 - Very dissatisfied
Did the program provide a safe environment for you?	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
Did the program provide a safe environment for your child(ren)?	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
About how many miles do you live from the Supervised Visitation Center?	1 - Less than 50 miles 2 - Between 51-75 miles 3 - Between 76-100 miles 4 - Between 101-200 miles 5 - Between 201-300 miles 6 - Over 300 miles	1 - Less than 50 miles 2 - Between 51-75 miles 3 - Between 76-100 miles 4 - Between 101-200 miles 5 - Between 201-300 miles 6 - Over 300 miles
<b>If parent did NOT pay for services ask:</b> Would you be willing to pay for supervision if you had to pay..	Probably would Not sure Probably not	Probably would Not sure Probably not
\$50 per visit	1 2 3	1 2 3
\$25 per visit	1 2 3	1 2 3
\$15 per visit	1 2 3	1 2 3
\$10 per visit	1 2 3	1 2 3
\$5 per visit	1 2 3	1 2 3
<b>If parent DID pay for services ask:</b>		
Overall, would you say the supervision service was worth the money you paid?	1 - Definitely worth it 2 - Probably worth it 3 - Probably not worth it 4 - Definitely not worth it 5 - Don't know, not sure	1 - Definitely worth it 2 - Probably worth it 3 - Probably not worth it 4 - Definitely not worth it 5 - Don't know, not sure

## Section E: Parents Using Parent Education

	Noncustodial Parent	Custodial Parent
Were you required to attend parent education classes?	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
Approximately how many parent education hours did you attend?	_____ Hours	_____ Hours
Did the other parent attend?	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK	1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK

I'm going to mention some topics sometimes included in parent education classes, please tell me if it was not covered, or if you found it very useful, somewhat useful, not very useful or not at all useful.

How to resolve conflicts with the other parent	1 - Very useful 2 - Somewhat useful 3 - Not very useful 4 - Not at all useful 5 - Not included/covered	1 - Very useful 2 - Somewhat useful 3 - Not very useful 4 - Not at all useful 5 - Not included/covered
How to deal with new relationships/blended families	1 - Very useful 2 - Somewhat useful 3 - Not very useful 4 - Not at all useful 5 - Not included/covered	1 - Very useful 2 - Somewhat useful 3 - Not very useful 4 - Not at all useful 5 - Not included/covered
Child development and their adjustment to parents' breaking up	1 - Very useful 2 - Somewhat useful 3 - Not very useful 4 - Not at all useful 5 - Not included/covered	1 - Very useful 2 - Somewhat useful 3 - Not very useful 4 - Not at all useful 5 - Not included/covered
Parents' emotional adjustment to divorce/breakup	1 - Very useful 2 - Somewhat useful 3 - Not very useful 4 - Not at all useful 5 - Not included/covered	1 - Very useful 2 - Somewhat useful 3 - Not very useful 4 - Not at all useful 5 - Not included/covered
How to work together as parents	1 - Very useful 2 - Somewhat useful 3 - Not very useful 4 - Not at all useful 5 - Not included/covered	1 - Very useful 2 - Somewhat useful 3 - Not very useful 4 - Not at all useful 5 - Not included/covered

Overall, how satisfied were you with the services you received?	1 - Very satisfied 2 - Somewhat satisfied 3 - Somewhat dissatisfied 4 - Very dissatisfied	1 - Very satisfied 2 - Somewhat satisfied 3 - Somewhat dissatisfied 4 - Very dissatisfied
---	--	--

If parent did NOT pay for Parent Education ask: Would you be willing & able to pay for Parent Education if it cost you..	Probably would	Not sure	Probably not	Probably would	Not sure	Probably not
\$101 or more	1	2	3	1	2	3
\$76-100	1	2	3	1	2	3
\$61-75	1	2	3	1	2	3
\$46-60	1	2	3	1	2	3
\$31-45	1	2	3	1	2	3
\$16-30	1	2	3	1	2	3
\$5-15	1	2	3	1	2	3
<b>If parent DID pay for Parent Education ask:</b>						

Overall, was the Parent Education Program worth the money you paid?

1 - Definitely worth it  
 2 - Probably worth it  
 3 - Probably not worth it  
 4 - Definitely not worth it  
 5 - Don't know, not sure

1 - Definitely worth it  
 2 - Probably worth it  
 3 - Probably not worth it  
 4 - Definitely not worth it  
 5 - Don't know, not sure

## Section F to End of Survey Ask All Parent

### Section F:

Other than the services you received through the program, did you ever get help from the following...

	<b>Noncustodial Parent</b>	Was this before or after you used [Program name]?	<b>Custodial Parent</b>	Was this before or after you used [Program name]?
Other Mediation program	1 - No 2 - Yes	1 - Before 2 - After 3 - Not sure	1 - No 2 - Yes	1 - Before 2 - After 3 - Not sure
Other parent education program	1 - No 2 - Yes	1 - Before 2 - After 3 - Not sure	1 - No 2 - Yes	1 - Before 2 - After 3 - Not sure
Other Supervised visitation program	1 - No 2 - Yes	1 - Before 2 - After 3 - Not sure	1 - No 2 - Yes	1 - Before 2 - After 3 - Not sure
Counseling (Individual or Family)	1 - No 2 - Yes	1 - Before 2 - After 3 - Not sure	1 - No 2 - Yes	1 - Before 2 - After 3 - Not sure
A private attorney	1 - No 2 - Yes	1 - Before 2 - After 3 - Not sure	1 - No 2 - Yes	1 - Before 2 - After 3 - Not sure
A legal clinic	1 - No 2 - Yes	1 - Before 2 - After 3 - Not sure	1 - No 2 - Yes	1 - Before 2 - After 3 - Not sure
Anger management class	1 - No 2 - Yes	1 - Before 2 - After 3 - Not sure	1 - No 2 - Yes	1 - Before 2 - After 3 - Not sure
Domestic violence class	1 - No 2 - Yes	1 - Before 2 - After 3 - Not sure	1 - No 2 - Yes	1 - Before 2 - After 3 - Not sure
Substance abuse counseling	1 - No 2 - Yes	1 - Before 2 - After 3 - Not sure	1 - No 2 - Yes	1 - Before 2 - After 3 - Not sure
Anything else?	1 - No 2 - Yes	1 - Before 2 - After 3 - Not sure	1 - No 2 - Yes	1 - Before 2 - After 3 - Not sure

# Section G

## Noncustodial Parent

## Custodial Parent

Which of these best describes the visitation arrangement for your children **in the months before you received program services?**

- 1 - Regular, scheduled visits
- 2 - Informal, set up each time
- 3 - Some regular, some informal
- 4 - Not set up, noncustodial parent just came by
- 5 - Only during holidays or summer
- 6 - No visits

- 1 - Regular, scheduled visits
- 2 - Informal, set up each time
- 3 - Some regular, some informal
- 4 - Not set up, noncustodial parent just came by
- 5 - Only during holidays or summer
- 6 - No visits

Which of these best describes the visitation arrangement **today?**

- 1 - Regular, scheduled visits
- 2 - Informal, set up each time
- 3 - Some regular, some informal
- 4 - Not set up, noncustodial parent just came by
- 5 - Only during holidays or summer
- 6 - No visits

- 1 - Regular, scheduled visits
- 2 - Informal, set up each time
- 3 - Some regular, some informal
- 4 - Not set up, noncustodial parent just came by
- 5 - Only during holidays or summer
- 6 - No visits

**In the months before you received program services**, about how often did you/the NCP see the children?

- 1 - More than once a week
- 2 - About once a week
- 3 - About 3-4 days per month
- 4 - About 1-2 days a month
- 5 - Every few months
- 6 - Few days a year
- 7 - Never
- 8 - Other \_\_\_\_\_

- 1 - More than once a week
- 2 - About once a week
- 3 - About 3-4 days per month
- 4 - About 1-2 days a month
- 5 - Every few months
- 6 - Few days a year
- 7 - Never
- 8 - Other \_\_\_\_\_

**What about today**, about how often do you/the NCP see the children?

- 1 - More than once a week
- 2 - About once a week
- 3 - About 3-4 days per month
- 4 - About 1-2 days a month
- 5 - Every few months
- 6 - Few days a year
- 7 - Never
- 8 - Other \_\_\_\_\_

- 1 - More than once a week
- 2 - About once a week
- 3 - About 3-4 days per month
- 4 - About 1-2 days a month
- 5 - Every few months
- 6 - Few days a year
- 7 - Never
- 8 - Other \_\_\_\_\_

**In the months before you received program services**, had the court ordered...

- No visitation allowed 1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
- No overnight visits allowed 1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
- Only supervised visits 1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
- Supervised pick-up/drop-off 1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
- No contact between the parents 1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK

- 1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
- 1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
- 1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
- 1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
- 1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK

**What about today**, has the court ordered...

- No visitation allowed 1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
- No overnight visits allowed 1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
- Only supervised visits 1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
- Supervised pick-up/drop-off 1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
- No contact between the parents 1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK

- 1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
- 1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
- 1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
- 1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK
- 1 - No 2 - Yes 3 - DK

**In the months before you received program services**, did you/noncustodial parent see the children as often as your visitation agreement or court order allowed?

- 1 - Yes
- 2 - Seeing them more
- 3 - Seeing them less
- 4 - Not applicable, no agreement

- 1 - Yes
- 2 - Seeing them more
- 3 - Seeing them less
- 4 - Not applicable, no agreement

**What about today**, Are you/noncustodial parent seeing the children as often as your visitation agreement or court order allows?

- 1 - Yes
- 2 - Seeing them more
- 3 - Seeing them less
- 4 - Not applicable, no agreement

- 1 - Yes
- 2 - Seeing them more
- 3 - Seeing them less
- 4 - Not applicable, no agreement



## Section H

The next few questions are about **any changes you've noticed** in your relationship with the other parent, and your children **since you first received program services.**

	<b>Noncustodial Parent</b>	<b>Custodial Parent</b>
<p>Compared to before you received services, would you say the amount of time you spend/the NCP spends with the children has...</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>If it has changed</b></p> <p>How much of a role do you think the program played in this change?</p>	<p>1 - Decreased a lot 2 - Decreased a little 3 - Stayed same 4 - Increased a little 5 - Increased a lot</p> <p>1 - Major role 2 - Minor role 3 - No role</p>	<p>1 - Decreased a lot 2 - Decreased a little 3 - Stayed same 4 - Increased a little 5 - Increased a lot</p> <p>1 - Major role 2 - Minor role 3 - No role</p>
<p>Compared to before you received services, Has your youngest [only] child's behavior improved, stayed the same or become worse?</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>If it has changed</b></p> <p>How much of a role do you think the program played in this change?</p>	<p>1 - Improved 2 - Stayed the same 3 - Become worse</p> <p>1 - Major role 2 - Minor role 3 - No role</p>	<p>1 - Improved 2 - Stayed the same 3 - Become worse</p> <p>1 - Major role 2 - Minor role 3 - No role</p>
<p>Compared to before you received services, Has your relationship with the other parent improved, stayed the same or become worse?</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>If it has changed</b></p> <p>How much of a role do you think the program played in this change?</p>	<p>1 - Improved 2 - Stayed the same 3 - Become worse</p> <p>1 - Major role 2 - Minor role 3 - No role</p>	<p>1 - Improved 2 - Stayed the same 3 - Become worse</p> <p>1 - Major role 2 - Minor role 3 - No role</p>
<p>Which of these phrases best describes your relationship with the other parent before you received program services?</p>	<p>1 - Friendly and cooperative 2 - Strained but able to cooperate 3 - Hostile, angry 4 - No contact</p>	<p>1 - Friendly and cooperative 2 - Strained but able to cooperate 3 - Hostile, angry 4 - No contact</p>
<p>Which of these phrases best describes your relationship with the other parent today?</p>	<p>1 - Friendly and cooperative 2 - Strained but able to cooperate 3 - Hostile, angry 4 - No contact</p>	<p>1 - Friendly and cooperative 2 - Strained but able to cooperate 3 - Hostile, angry 4 - No contact</p>
<p>Without this program, how often do you think you would see your children?</p>	<p>1 - More often than currently seeing 2 - Same as currently seeing 3 - Less often than currently seeing</p>	<p>1 - More often than currently seeing 2 - Same as currently seeing 3 - Less often than currently seeing</p>

## Section I

The next questions are about child support.

	<b>Noncustodial Parent</b>	<b>Custodial Parent</b>
Are you currently supposed to pay or receive child support?	1 - Supposed to pay support 2 - Supposed to receive support 3 - No <b>[GO TO NEXT BLOCK]</b>	1 - Supposed to pay support 2 - Supposed to receive support 3 - No <b>[GO TO NEXT BLOCK]</b>
<b>If there is a child support order, ask</b>		
What is the amount of child support due per month?	\$ _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know	\$ _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
In the last few months how much of the child support that was due was actually paid?	1 - Everything (100%) 2 - More than half 3 - Something, but less than half 4 - Nothing paid 5 - Don't know 6 - Other _____	1 - Everything (100%) 2 - More than half 3 - Something, but less than half 4 - Nothing paid 5 - Don't know 6 - Other _____
Compared to before you received services, Has the amount of child support paid...	1 - Decreased a lot 2 - Decreased a little 3 - Stayed same 4 - Increased a little 5 - Increased a lot	1 - Decreased a lot 2 - Decreased a little 3 - Stayed same 4 - Increased a little 5 - Increased a lot
<b>If it has changed</b>		
How much of a role do you think the program played in this change?	1 - Major role 2 - Minor role 3 - No role	1 - Major role 2 - Minor role 3 - No role
Compared to before you received services, Has the payment of child support become more regular?	1 - More regular 2 - About the same 3 - Less regular	1 - More regular 2 - About the same 3 - Less regular
<b>If payment has been more regular</b>		
How much of a role do you think the program played in this change?	1 - Major role 2 - Minor role 3 - No role	1 - Major role 2 - Minor role 3 - No role

## Section J

**Overall, compared to before you received services...**

	<b>Noncustodial Parent</b>	<b>Custodial Parent</b>
Has there been an increase in the amount of child support paid?	1 - Yes 2 - No	1 - Yes 2 - No
Has the noncustodial parent been seeing the child more often?	1 - Yes 2 - No	1 - Yes 2 - No
Has your youngest/only child's behavior improved?	1 - Yes 2 - No	1 - Yes 2 - No
Has your relationship with the other parent improved?	1 - Yes 2 - No	1 - Yes 2 - No
Have you and the other parent started living together?	1 - Yes 2 - No	1 - Yes 2 - No
Have you and the other parent married/reconciled?	1 - Yes 2 - No	1 - Yes 2 - No

## Section K

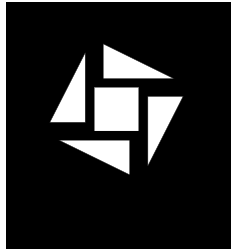
Finally, we have a few background questions about you so that we understand who the visitation programs are serving.

	<b>Noncustodial Parent</b>	<b>Custodial Parent</b>
Are you currently married, separated, divorced, or never married?	1 - Married 2 - Separated 3 - Divorced 4 - Never married	1 - Married 2 - Separated 3 - Divorced 4 - Never married
Is there a racial/ethnic group (or groups) that you identify with?	1 - American Indian/Alaska Native 2 - Asian American/Pacific Islander 3 - Black/African American 4 - White 5 - Hispanic/Latino 6 - Other	1 - American Indian/Alaska Native 2 - Asian American/Pacific Islander 3 - Black/African American 4 - White 5 - Hispanic/Latino 6 - Other
Which of these best describes your level of education?	1 - Less than high school 2 - High school graduate 3 - Some technical training beyond high school 4 - Some college 5 - B.A./B.S. degree 6 - Graduate degree	1 - Less than high school 2 - High school graduate 3 - Some technical training beyond high school 4 - Some college 5 - B.A./B.S. degree 6 - Graduate degree
Are you currently employed full or part-time?	1 - No 2 - Yes, full-time 3 - Yes, part-time	1 - No 2 - Yes, full-time 3 - Yes, part-time
Which of these best describes your annual gross household income?	1 - Less than \$10,000 a year 2 - Between \$10-\$19,000 3 - Between \$20-\$29,000 4 - Between \$30-\$39,000 5 - Between \$40-\$50,000 6 - Between \$50-\$70,000 7 - Between \$70-\$90,000 8 - Over \$90,000	1 - Less than \$10,000 a year 2 - Between \$10-\$19,000 3 - Between \$20-\$29,000 4 - Between \$30-\$39,000 5 - Between \$40-\$50,000 6 - Between \$50-\$70,000 7 - Between \$70-\$90,000 8 - Over \$90,000
About how many miles do you live from your child/children?	1 - Less than 50 miles 2 - Between 51-75 miles 3 - Between 76-100 4 - Between 101-200 5 - Between 201-300 6 - Over 300	

### **[If the other parent has not been interviewed]**

Finally, do you have a phone number or know of a way to reach the other parent? \_\_\_\_\_

If secondary contact: provide name, relationship to parent, and phone number: \_\_\_\_\_



# Appendix D

Child Support Record Review Form

**Evaluating Outcomes of the States' Access and Visitation Program  
Child Support Record Review**

Site:	Survey Identification Number(s):	
Child Support Case Number:	Alternate case numbers:(ATLAS Number, other):	
Name of Father:	Father's Date of Birth:	Father's Social Security Number:
Name of Mother:	Mother's Date of Birth:	Mother's Social Security Number:
In the target case (the case involving this father and this mother) which parent is the NCP? <input type="checkbox"/> Father <input type="checkbox"/> Mother		
Date first received services: ____/____/____		

**General Information About All the NCP's Cases**

Is the NCP in the target case listed above in the child support system?

- No [Data collection stops]
- Yes, but only as custodial parent [Data Collection stops]
- Yes, as a noncustodial parent in one or more cases

**On the date of your file review:**

On how many cases is this parent listed as the NCP? \_\_\_\_\_ (including the target case listed above)

How many of the cases with this parent as the NCP have current support due? \_\_\_\_\_

How many of the cases with this parent as the NCP have arrears? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the total due in arrears across all cases with this NCP? \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Is there an open child support case in the system with the NCP and CP listed above?

- No (data collection stops)
- Yes

**All Remaining Questions are Specific to the Target Case  
(the case listed with the NCP and the CP listed above).**

What is the TANF status of the target case?

- Never on TANF
- Formerly on TANF
- Currently on TANF

On what date was the target case first opened to the child support agency? \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

On what date was paternity established? \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

- Not applicable, married
- Not established

On what date was a child support order established?

- Established on \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_
- Not applicable, no order established

How many children are covered by this order? \_\_\_\_\_

- Not applicable, no order established

If there is a current order, what is the order amount?

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

It is to be paid

- monthly
- weekly
- bi-weekly
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Not applicable, no order established

Is there a payment amount due towards arrears?

- No
- \$ \_\_\_\_\_

To be paid:

- monthly
- weekly
- bi-weekly
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

