BAY AREA FATHERHOOD INITIATIVES:

Portraits and Possibilities

A Report from the Bay Area Fathering Indicators Data System (BAyFIDS) Project

Produced by

The National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF)
Graduate School of Education,
University of Pennsylvania

Sponsored by
The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
Bay Area Fatherhood Initiatives:
Portraits and Possibilities

The Bay Area Fathering Integrated Data System (BAYFIDS) Project
www.bayfids.org

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Conducted by
The National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF)
Graduate School of Education
University of Pennsylvania

In Conjunction with
SRI International and
Survey Research Center,
University of California-Berkeley

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The National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF) was established in 1994 at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education with core support from The Annie E. Casey Foundation. An interdisciplinary, practice-derived research center, NCOFF’s primary goals are to:

- **Expand the knowledge base** on father involvement, family efficacy, and child well-being within multiple disciplines through research and development, integrated discussion, and information building;
- **Strengthen practice** through practitioner-targeted conversations, information dissemination, and collaborative activities; and
- **Contribute to critical policy discussions** by creating a coherent agenda of work that is built around existing and emerging local, state, and federal efforts.

NCOFF’s research agenda includes a range of studies that use multiple methodological approaches. We focus on diverse populations of fathers and families—for example, minority families, two-parent families, those living in poverty, and those affected by welfare reform. Our primary research objective is to augment an existing, cross-disciplinary knowledge base on children, mothers, and families by encouraging the investigation of father-related issues that have emerged and those that have yet to be explored.

With few exceptions, the traditional assumption has been that knowledge flows from research to practice. NCOFF believes this perspective minimizes the potential of practice as a source of information and collaboration. Instead, we support the notion that the relationship between research and practice is bidirectional and reciprocal. Such a relationship can be achieved best by strengthening the links between researchers and practitioners, by establishing relationships of mutual learning, and by contributing to policy formulation.
NCOFF’s research, practice, and policy activities have been developed around seven Core Learnings, which were distilled from the firsthand experiences of practitioners serving fathers, mothers, children, and families. The Core Learnings now serve as an organizing framework around which the Center conducts its work. They also provide the field with guidelines for examining, supporting, testing, and interrogating key issues.

The seven Core Learnings offer an important lens through which policymakers might learn more about the implications and impact of legislation and policy decisions on the lives of large numbers of fathers, mothers, children, and families. They also capture salient issues experienced and felt deeply by many fathers and families—those who are financially secure as well as those who are the most vulnerable to poverty and hardship.

### The Seven Core Learnings on Fathers and Families

1. **Fathers care**—even if that caring is not shown in conventional ways.
2. **Father presence matters**—in terms of economic well-being, social support, and child development.
3. **Joblessness and unemployment** are major impediments to family formation and father involvement.
4. **Systemic barriers**—in existing approaches to public benefits, child support enforcement, and paternity establishment—operate to create obstacles and disincentives to father involvement. The disincentives are sufficiently compelling as to have prompted the emergence of a phenomenon dubbed “underground fathers,” men who acknowledge paternity and are involved in the lives of their children but who refuse to participate as fathers in the formal systems.
5. **Co-parenting**—a growing number of young fathers and mothers need additional support to develop the vital skills needed to share parenting responsibilities.
6. **Role transitions**—the transition from biological father to committed parent has significant development implications for young fathers.
7. **Intergenerational learning**—the behaviors of young parents, both fathers and mothers, are influenced significantly by intergenerational beliefs and practices within their families of origin.
Work on the Bay Area Fathering Integrated Data System (BAyFIDS) project and specifically on this report could not have been achieved without the generous support of a number of individuals and organizations. We extend our gratitude to our collaborators at the University of California-Berkeley Survey Research Center and SRI International. We also want to thank our project consultants, including Stanley Seiderman of the Bay Area Male Involvement Network; the individuals who served as practitioner-liaisons in the Bay Area; members of the National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families; Ed Pitt of the Families and Work Institute; and Burt Barnow, an NCOFF-affiliated researcher, from the Institute for Policy Studies at Johns Hopkins University. We also wish to thank NCOFF staff who assisted in the production of this report: Susan Haidar, Dana Jones Robinson, Brendan Skwire, Herbert Turner, Jeong-Ran Kim, Kathy Brown, Michael Coffey, Jeanine Staples, and Jennifer Turri.

We are deeply appreciative to the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, which funded this project, and particularly to our program officer, Alvertha Penny, who offered tireless support. We also thank NCOFF’s core funder, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, as well as the Ford Foundation and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, for special support that informed our work on the BAyFIDS project.

We owe a special debt to the practitioners and policymakers who spoke with us and completed an exhaustive—and exhausting—telephone and mail survey. Several practitioners allowed us to visit their programs and, along with other staff members and program participants, shared with us their vision and expertise. For their support, we are deeply and immeasurably appreciative.
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The simple dichotomy of fathers as present or absent, as good or bad, is increasingly being challenged by new demands to examine critically the continuum of fathers that exists. Our conversations with programs and participants in the San Francisco Bay Area indicated the range of experiences and needs that fathers exhibit: their different stations in life, different ages, different cultural and personal histories, and different lenses through which each views the world.

The profiles of fathers and fatherhood initiatives that emerged from the Bay Area Fathering Integrated Data System (BAyFIDS) project underscore the diversity inherent among fathers and in fathering itself—notions that are often construed as having a singular definition for a singular type of father. Our conversations with programs and participants in the San Francisco Bay Area indicated the range of experiences and needs that fathers exhibit: their different stations in life, different ages, different cultural and personal histories, and different lenses through which each views the world.

The simple dichotomy of fathers as present or absent, as good or bad, is increasingly being challenged by new demands to examine critically the continuum of fathers that exists: those who are residential or nonresidential, from a range of cultures and ethnicities, with varying relationships to the mother of their children, and with different socioeconomic backgrounds. Such a nuanced view of fathers and their experiences requires an examination of the complex relational factors involved in identifying and measuring appropriate fathering and parenting behaviors. It is against this backdrop of a changing perspective on fatherhood—images of men assuming roles beyond bill-paying (Coltrane, 1996) and projections of increasing numbers of children with fathers absent from their lives (National Commission on Children, 1993)—that efforts on fathers and families have emerged and have sought to establish a place within larger discussions of child and family support.

It is also against this backdrop that the National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF) pursued the BAyFIDS project to track, document, and analyze the operation and impact of fathering programs, as well as the nature of local and county policy efforts around fatherhood. The purpose of BAyFIDS was to develop baseline data on participant needs, program capabilities, and agency efforts. We also sought to capture information on the attitudes and values held by program participants, program staff, and government agencies regarding the challenges of supporting men in their
roles as fathers, reducing father absence, and enhancing the welfare of children and families when fathers and their families face hardships.

This report presents the first set of findings from the BAyFIDS project. It is intended to supplement current and emerging efforts to catalogue the numbers of programs that have been created, to assess the policies that have been re-examined and reformulated, and to redirect the attention that fathering has received by the research community and the general public.

Setting the Context:
From Father Absence to Father Presence

Father absence and, more broadly, father involvement have recently captured the interest of a broad cross-section of individuals and institutions concerned with the quality of life and support for children and families. A key concept in the focus on father involvement is “responsible fathering”—a term that in public discussions refers to a movement and within family studies to a field of inquiry. Work on responsible fathering and family support has expanded rapidly in a relatively short period—emerging as a community and societal issue, an area of practice and research, and an initiative of social and public policy over little more than five years. During that time, greater attention has focused not simply on father absence but also on father presence. What does it mean for children, families, and communities to have fathers actively and positively engaged? In other words, do children and families enjoy advantages when fathers are present? If that presence does matter, what difference does it make, and how can programs and policies ensure that they can help make a difference for children, families, communities, and fathers themselves?

Increasingly, these questions have become a topic of debate among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers serving children and families. The arguments in favor of deepening efforts on father involvement preferred by advocates and policymakers alike are straightforward: Children fare better and families and communities are stronger when fathers are engaged in their children’s lives and when they contribute emotionally, physically, and financially to their children’s and families’ well-being.

Surveying the Field

To understand the structure and operation of fathering programs at the county level and to determine the degree of county agency involvement in programs in the San Francisco Bay Area, NCOFF launched the BAyFIDS project, with support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and assistance by SRI International and the University of California-Berkeley. BAyFIDS, we expected, would provide baseline data on participant needs and program or agency capabilities. The project would also capture the attitudes and values held by program participants, program staff, and government agencies.
Our prior work with programs throughout the country and our conversations with practitioners and policymakers in local areas had led us to believe that, as with many new efforts, fatherhood programs were still poorly defined and their goals still in a state of flux. As we considered how to construct the BAyFIDS project, we were aware of two realities:

- There is little information about the number or quality of existing programs or the needs and aspirations of program participants.
- There is still relatively little knowledge among policymakers, social services, and educational agencies about existing programs.

Thus, we designed the BAyFIDS project to enhance our knowledge of local programs— their objectives, service populations, practices, strengths, and challenges—and to offer insights on the enduring questions about the mechanisms that affect the lives of participating fathers, their children and families, and their communities.

**Why Focus on the San Francisco Bay Area?** California and the Bay Area possess unique features that make this region an appropriate focus of our study on fathers and families programs and their relationships to county fatherhood initiatives. Like most states, California divides responsibility for child support and services to fathers between a variety of state departments, county offices, and local agencies. The rise in the number of nonwhite citizens and those emigrating from outside the United States— coupled with growing income inequality and relative uncertainty about sectors of the state's economy— make the Bay Area a compelling case to compare with other regions in the nation, particularly those with large urban and metropolitan areas.

**Why Focus on County Programs and Policies?** Although most states (California included) delegate responsibility for child welfare, family support, and child support collections to local and county government, very little is known about how these agencies seek to support fathers. Instead, policy conversations usually occur at the state and national levels and research efforts tend to focus on state and federal policy. Even less is known about how public and private efforts are coordinated with one another, if at all. Because policy and implementation varies from county to county, the nature of public-private coordination will also vary by county. Thus, we felt it was important to study county systems as a whole.

**The BAyFIDS Approach: Multiple Stakeholders, Multiple Data Collections**

To pursue the project's core goals— deepening the field's knowledge of fathers and families programs, the participants in them, and the potential for programs to contribute to integrated activities that support children and families— NCOFF developed two resources:

- The Bay Area Fathering Programs Directory— a comprehensive, regularly updated directory of fathering programs, currently

*While local fatherhood programs could serve as an obvious point of departure in launching coherent and coordinated fatherhood initiatives, many states remain disconnected from programmatic efforts at the local level.*
accessible through the World Wide Web (www.bayfids.org) and available in paper form from NCOFF.

- The Father Programs Dataset (FPD)—a database containing information on participant characteristics; program services and problems; program relationships with county agencies; and measures of county officials’ knowledge about efforts in their region, as well as their engagement with those efforts.

Unlike other studies focused on well-developed and well-defined fields and constituencies, the BAYFIDS project had much background work to do. Before beginning data collection, we:

- Conducted analyses on the status of child welfare and family support in the nine San Francisco Bay Area counties: Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, and Sonoma;
- Became familiar with demographic changes in the Bay Area, including the number of mother-headed households, poverty rates, families affected by welfare reform, and child welfare statistics;
- Assessed fathering issues through a review of reports on poverty rates, single-mother households, and child and family welfare in the Bay Area, as well as through direct observation of programs and conversations with contacts in the Bay Area;
- Developed typologies of programs;
- Created inventories of program services and objectives, as well as participant needs and challenges;
- Sought out and catalogued potential sponsors of fathering programs; and
- Constructed a network of practitioner liaisons to assist us with our data collection activities.

Based on the information provided by these sources, we arrived at a data collection strategy that hinged on three premises. First, it was clear that no one group of stakeholders would be able to provide us with the data we required to study both fathering programs and the policies that supported them. Instead, we needed to gather information from all three groups of principal stakeholders: program directors and staff, program participants, and county/municipal policymakers. Second, since it was clear that no one group could act as a single principal informant, it was also evident that we had to match our data collection methods to the needs and preferences of each stakeholder group. Finally, because so little work exists on the questions we wished to study, it was imperative that we use multiple data collection methods and multiple stakeholder perspectives for each research question.

In all, three different data collection strategies were employed: a mail and a telephone survey for program staff; site visits and focus groups with program staff and selected participants; and semi-structured telephone interviews with county-level staff in social and family services, public educational institutions, and the court system.
The Phase I Report

Our intention in this report is to provide a baseline on participant needs, program and agency capabilities and effort, and the attitudes and values all three stakeholders bring to the issue of responsible fathering and family support. This information comes with a range of complexities, not limited to any single set of issues, problems, or needs.

Throughout the report, we point out some of these complexities, focusing on how our “raw” empirical findings are at variance with the expectations and beliefs of programs as expressed both in responses to the surveys and in interviews during our site visits. We also discuss how some findings may be related to known issues of participant needs and expectations, revealed in the relationships and disparities between participant needs and expectations and provider capabilities, values, goals, and expectations.

Specifically, in Chapter 3 of the full report, we present our findings on the characteristics and needs of program participants, based upon reported data from program staff. Chapter 4 provides a profile of fatherhood initiatives in the Bay Area, discussing their primary objectives, the services they provide, and the resources they possess. In Chapter 5, we discuss our findings on the role of county and government agencies in emerging fatherhood initiatives across the nine counties in the study. Each of these chapters concludes with a perspective on the findings for either participants, the programs with which they were affiliated, or the government agencies in each county. Finally, Chapter 6 contains a general conclusion that includes our reflections on the findings and recommendations for programs, county agencies, and funders.

Reflections on the Findings

Overall, the data we collected provide a clear image about the durability of the programs over time; the inconsistencies between programs’ larger goals to support fathers and their willingness or ability to invest in basic educational, personal, employment training, and pregnancy prevention efforts; and the emerging but still limited connection between local fathering programs and county efforts for children and families. The data also identify a set of challenging circumstances within programs themselves: practitioners face day-to-day issues in implementing programs and securing funding; the duration of a father’s participation is not guaranteed; “progress” and “success” are hard to measure because most programs (like their peers nationally) do not use a set curriculum; programs have had equivocal success in securing community involvement in their and others’ efforts to support fathers and families; and local programs and county agencies rarely share ideas or funding. These overarching issues have specific relevance when examined from the perspectives of programs and practitioners, participants, and county-level agencies.

Issues for Programs and Practitioners. In many aspects, fathering programs in the Bay Area are more advanced than similar initiatives in other
regions of the United States, particularly in the comprehensive perspectives held by many practitioners who work with early childhood education and child care. At the same time, shortfalls in the number, staffing, and capacity of these programs has caused them to be insufficiently developed and self-sustaining to attend to the range and severity of issues that confront many fathers and their children and families.

- **The Number and Primary Focus of Fathering Programs.** As of Spring 2000, an estimated 154 programs in the Bay Area provided some form of fathering support. However, this figure may not reflect the full number of programs that attend to issues of parenting for men. Many organizations that provide services to fathers do not view themselves as being primarily involved in this area of social services and often do not self-identify as being fathering programs or having a fathering component. While it is not immediately apparent from the survey data, this finding may indicate that organizations which socially construct themselves as “schools,” “child care centers,” or “adult education programs” may underutilize the resources—fiscal and otherwise—that are available from governmental and private sources to support fathering. One area for future research is to explore how the social construction of social services organizations may help or hinder their ability and willingness to provide services to fathers.

- **The Diversity and Organization of Fathering Programs.** These programs are diverse in mission, ranging from improving early child care or early childhood education, to supporting men in their roles as fathers, to assisting incarcerated fathers. On the other hand, a feature of many county-supported efforts is their focus on child support enforcement. At the same time, fathering programs focus on issues ranging from male involvement to the prevention of teen pregnancy; they are likely both to be located in larger parent organizations and to exist as freestanding initiatives, unattached to any official agency, institution, or organization.

- **The Communities of Fathers Targeted for Services.** A larger number of initiatives in our study focus on fathers across income levels—particularly on middle-income white fathers—than would probably be found in other parts of the state. This bias may be due to two factors: a large share of the programs we studied are male involvement programs, and the demography of the Bay Area is diverse. Still, most programs are likely to focus on noncustodial fathers in general, although many such as Head Start and early childhood education programs are focusing increasingly on fathers in and outside of the home. Fathering programs in the Bay Area are not always targeted to low-income fathers but do overwhelmingly focus most of their services on low-income, noncustodial fathers. Some are addressing issues of gay fathers.

"With the emergence of fathers and families as an important area of research, practice, and policy, questions are increasingly being raised about the form, function, and feasibility of programs."
• **The Resource and Funding Shortfall.** Not unlike programs throughout the United States, fathering programs in the Bay Area are functioning with few resources, both in terms of funding and staff. This shortage of support is affecting the number of services that programs can provide, as well as the quality of the services provided. The programs that serve fathers who have the fewest resources—young, minority, noncustodial fathers with limited schooling and inadequate employment or employment preparation—are often vulnerable themselves. In addition, these programs typically offer short-term services, a situation that is at odds with the severity of the problems and scope of need presented by the entering father.

• **The Strengths and Weaknesses of Program Staff.** Most programs have few staff, and most staff members, other than the director, do not have professional training. However, practitioners in Bay Area fathers and families programs typically represent a broad cross-section of experience, professional expertise, and programmatic interest. Although many do not have professional experience in this area, they bring a wide range of talents to the programs and processes of supporting fathers—expertise that exists outside formal training but is often vital to identifying and supporting the needs of fathers in many programs. In addition, for most programs, a paucity of male staff either for fathering-related programs or for child-centered services has become a critical concern. Programs often search for an extended period before identifying appropriate male staff members. Because these men are in demand, turnover of male staff after only a short period of employment is very high. While program directors clearly value having male role models on staff, to date they have not discovered effective ways to recruit and retain them.

• **The Barriers to Father Involvement Embedded in Social Services.** Despite increased awareness across different types of programs, staff in child care centers or schools often actively discourage fathers—especially noncustodial fathers—from participating in programs or activities with their children. Staff members’ attitudes may help to foster and reinforce the notion that fathers have no role in schools, child care centers, and other places where social services are provided. Additionally, these attitudes may inhibit the development of fathering support services within these social services environments. We do not know how widespread this phenomenon is or what the roots of these attitudes might be—for example, such father-negative attitudes may be related to the racial or ethnic composition of a program’s surrounding neighborhood. Regardless, providing better services to fathers may depend on
finding effective ways to address these attitudinal barriers.

- **Legal and Attitudinal Barriers to Nonbiological Father Involvement.** Legal and attitudinal barriers to the involvement of nonbiological fathers—those who have no legal relationship to the children in question but who fulfill the fathering role—often create a significant barrier to their participation in programs. Most educational and child care agencies are legally barred from allowing nonbiological fathers a voice in the education and/or care of the children for which they have accepted de facto responsibility. Such legal and attitudinal barriers make it more difficult for nonbiological fathers to establish themselves as advocates for their children and thus may undermine their motivation to assume fathering roles for those children.

**Issues for Program Participants.** Both practitioners’ descriptions of participants and participants’ own accounts in our focus groups indicated a particularly difficult set of circumstances facing many Bay Area fathers.

- **The Diversity of Need.** Increased attention to fathering in the Bay Area has helped to expand the number of programs that attend to issues of fathering and male involvement. However, these programs are diverse, and there is no coordination or comprehensive attention to the range of fathers’ needs. The diversity of those needs include divorced fathers who are concerned about custody and visitation; those seeking support networks as they become single parents; those who are wrestling with questions about the quantity and quality of their involvement; and those who intend to deepen their commitment to parenting cooperatively with the mothers of their children.

- **The Scope of Difficulties Facing Young Fathers.** Young, low-income, noncustodial fathers represent the largest group of fathers served in Bay Area fatherhood programs. They often demonstrate concern about their children and a desire to contribute positively to their children’s lives. However, they are often confronted with multiple problems, including limited education and employment potential; difficult relationships with the mothers of their children and the child’s maternal extended family; and barriers created by a lack of support from their own families of origin and their friends. Developmentally, these men are often overwhelmed with the expectations of their new roles as fathers.

- **The Inattention to Physical and Mental Health Issues.** Issues of fathers’ physical and mental health are critical yet relatively unexamined. One site in particular (the Mexican American Community Service Agency, or MACSA, in Gilroy) noted the importance of providing mental health services as an integrated aspect of services offered to fathers. In fact, the staff at MACSA believe their
program's success is largely tied to their ability to package a range of several services for fathers, including mental health.

- **The Constraints on Participation.** From the perspectives of practitioners, the barriers to father involvement include time constraints due to holding multiple/informal jobs; institutional and attitudinal barriers; low educational attainment; and (to a lesser extent) discouragement from peers, families, and authority figures. These barriers increase in severity as fathers' income decrease.

**Issues for County-Level Agencies.** County-level activities have the potential to bridge state and local initiatives and expand the work of local programs, but they require a deeper knowledge of the field and of the programs already in place in order to promote that work.

- **The Potential for Support.** Efforts at the county level include initiatives based in both social services agencies and educational contexts. County agencies are as much in the business of providing programs as supporting them, particularly those focused on child support enforcement and related work.

- **The Location of County Effort.** Where issues of fathering fit into county agency work is difficult to ascertain. An initiative may exist at the county level. However, it may be promoted and/or implemented by child support enforcement authorities, family services agencies, or schools. It is unclear how decisions are made about where an effort is best placed.

- **The Lack of Knowledge Held by County Policymakers and Practitioners.** County-level policymakers and staff often demonstrate enthusiasm about the work of fatherhood initiatives but know little about programs or the broader context of fathering.

- **The Lack of a Systematic Approach.** There is no evidence of a systematic approach to integrating fatherhood in county-level initiatives on children and families.

**Primary Challenges.** From our review of findings on Bay Area fathering programs, we have identified five primary factors that challenge the provision of services, whether in programs or in social services agencies:

- **A mismatch between the expectations providers have of participants' capabilities and challenges.** In many cases, providers develop biased or unrealistic expectations—both too ambitious and too limited—of what participants want, need, or will seek out. As a result, agencies and programs often develop services that are targeted toward unexpressed needs.

- **A mismatch between participant expectations and providers' capabilities, values, and goals.** Participants may develop misapprehensions of what providers are seeking to achieve or what they can achieve. On the one hand, participants may misunderstand or overestimate the goals of the program—for example, believing that agency programs are really meant to “lure” them into the child...
support enforcement system. Alternatively, participants may believe programs offer hard-to-find services—like legal counsel—which they, in fact, cannot provide. In these cases, services go unused or programs experience retention problems.

- **The imposition of external constraints.** Providers may accurately apprehend the needs of participants but be constrained from meeting those needs by external dictates. For instance, agencies whose primary mission is to collect child support may acknowledge the need for educational enrichment or psychological assessment but be unable to provide it due to restrictions on the use of funds. Similarly, participants may be externally constrained: their work or family life may impinge on their ability to seek out or use services on a regular basis.

- **Insufficient provider capabilities.** Providers may accurately apprehend the needs of participants but lack the financial resources or expertise necessary to undertake the required services. This services shortfall may be particularly true in cases when specific expertise around mediation, literacy, domestic violence, and related areas is needed.

- **A misdiagnosis by participants of their capabilities and challenges.** Because participants in fathering programs are usually not mandated to participate, they must accurately assess their own abilities as fathers before they seek services or support. The transition to fatherhood, as research on role transitions suggests, presents challenges for fathers of all ages and income levels. Young or first-time fathers, particularly those with few resources, may lack the information necessary to assess their own knowledge gaps. In these cases, the services that programs provide may go unused because the potential participants do not recognize either their own capabilities or challenges.

**Recommendations**

We are acutely aware of the contradictions in recommending courses of action for programs that often do not have the funding to implement those improvements. The broader problems, however, are not only issues of funding but also of capacity-building, knowledge-sharing, and the effective utilization of existing services. Perhaps the greatest challenge—and question—is the degree to which programs and county agencies can initiate conversations that ultimately result in the creation of more seamless father-supporting efforts.

We are equally aware of the limitations of the data. Although the survey data from this first phase of the BAyFIDS project yield useful information about programs, they do not reveal the embedded issues facing fathering programs, fathers and families, and communities, nor do they...
explore integrated approaches that support children and families.

With an acknowledgment of both the strengths and limitations of the data, we make several recommendations for programs, county agencies, and funders to pursue.

For Bay Area fathering programs, we recommend that they:

- Focus directly on developing a curriculum to direct their activities, in part to help them determine what works and why;
- Challenge themselves to move away from immersion in familiar, traditional, or “easy” approaches to attract and sustain men’s participation and invest in activities such as literacy, parenting, mental health, and workforce development that will help men over the long-term;
- Consider themselves as the center of a service network, since they typically have expertise in specific areas but must access and think strategically about how to utilize their own resources to help participants find the other services they need—especially around education, legal assistance, and mental health care;
- Utilize that service network not only to support father participants but also to identify, prepare, and support staff members;
- Assert themselves within county and state efforts and rely less on county agencies to seek them out; and
- Create a strategic plan for recruiting and retaining participants and staff, particularly for the recruitment of male staff members, as well as for preparing staff to contend with the diversity of the populations served, their long-term needs, and the role of the program in helping them attend to these needs.

For Bay Area county agencies, we recommend that they:

- Become more knowledgeable of programs within their boundaries;
- Initiate collaborative efforts with existing fatherhood programs and more thoroughly integrate public initiatives with ongoing private efforts, in part because many fathers are reluctant to join publicly-sponsored efforts;
- Consider how state- and county-level agencies, such as labor and justice departments, can become credible fathering services providers (for example, our data found that these departments could—but rarely do—fund fathering efforts);
- Determine how data collection on fathers and fathering would help to inform service provision, since very little data is currently collected and/or shared across agencies or with programs; and
- Create strategic plans around fathering initiatives that address how data on fathers will be included and used in databases on children and families, how staff members will come to understand the integration of fatherhood in existing child and family support activities, and how staff should respond to new initiatives and mandates around father involvement.

The broader problems are not only issues of funding but also capacity-building, knowledge-sharing, and the effective utilization of services.
For Bay Area foundations and other funding communities, we recommend that they:

- Help to foster dialogue between public and private sector fatherhood efforts, particularly social services and child welfare;
- Provide funding for programs to establish curricula and to revise these curricula as needs change;
- Sponsor programs to help create community support networks, for example among fathering/male involvement programs, literacy/educational programs, and mental health programs;
- Support research that examines systematically which practices are most efficacious for which types of father/family combinations;
- Support research that identifies ways of creating supportive knowledge-sharing relationships between programs and practitioners, particularly around monitoring and measuring change in participants' fathering behaviors; and
- Challenge fathering/male involvement programs to develop interventions that address at least one aspect of their basic needs, such as some form of educational intervention for both child and parent.

County agencies could initiate collaborative efforts with existing fatherhood programs and integrate public initiatives with private efforts.
For too long, references to "families" meant "mothers." The result? Fathers receded into the background—in their importance to the child and his or her mother, except as a source of financial support. To correct this imbalance… [we must] reach schools and community-based organizations and… raise their awareness of the barriers they place in the way of father involvement.

Stanley Seideman, San Anselmo Preschool Center
In recent years, father involvement has emerged as an important social issue, and its nature and status have become salient factors for improving the futures of children and families. Yet, many approaches to the discussion of fatherhood rely on prevailing notions of who fathers are and what roles they play in their children’s lives. The profiles of fathers and fatherhood initiatives that emerged from the Bay Area Fathering Integrated Data System (BAyFIDS) project underscore the diversity inherent among fathers and in fathering itself—notions that are often construed as having a singular definition for a singular type of father. Our conversations with programs and participants in the San Francisco Bay Area indicated the range of experiences and needs that fathers exhibit: their different stations in life, different ages, different cultural and personal histories, and different lenses through which each views the world.

The simple dichotomy of fathers as present or absent, as good or bad, is increasingly being challenged by new demands to examine critically the continuum of fathers that exists. Those who are residential or nonresidential, from a range of cultures and ethnicities, with varying relationships to the mother of their children, and with different socioeconomic backgrounds. Such a nuanced view of fathers and their experiences requires an examination of the complex relational factors involved in identifying and measuring appropriate fathering and parenting behaviors. It is against this backdrop of a changing perspective on fatherhood—images of men assuming roles beyond bill-paying (Coltrane, 1996) and projections of increasing numbers of children with fathers absent from their lives (National Commission on Children, 1993)—that efforts on fathers and families have emerged and have sought to establish a place within larger discussions of child and family support.

It is also against this backdrop that NCOFF pursued the BAyFIDS project to track, document, and analyze the operation and impact of fathering programs, as well as the nature of county policy efforts around fatherhood. The purpose of BAyFIDS was to develop baseline data on
Carlos is a married 27-year-old father of three who emigrated from Central America. He has attended a male involvement program focused on fathering for two years. His goals reflect those of thousands of other men who are fathers: He wants a good life for his family and children, as well as for himself. He describes these goals with deliberateness to demonstrate his increasing facility with and fluency in English and his marketability for the workforce. His enthusiasm and smile are noticeable as he talks about his visions and hopes, his images of a time when he can move his wife and children out of public housing and into a “good neighborhood,” and about his unassailable aspirations to be a good father—to talk to his children, read to them, ensure that they receive a good education, and “be there” for them in ways that approach his most basic motivations for coming to the United States.

Pedro, another father in the program, is about the same age as Carlos. Although he echoes Carlos’ sentiments, it is unclear whether he is motivated by the same passions or the same knowledge of possible goals and options for the future. He is separated from the mother of his son and usually sees his son once a week. He is experiencing some difficulty gaining access to his son, who as a first-grader is having problems with classwork in school. From his description, which he provides in Spanish, he is visibly concerned. His words about his son and the problems he is facing in school are threaded with a clear query to the interviewers, asking implicitly what he can do to help his son in the face of opposition to his involvement and his limited knowledge of English and the educational system.

Jim, the director of the program that Carlos and Pedro attend, is a middle-aged father of adolescent and young adult children. Middle-class and white, Jim’s life experiences appear on the surface to be markedly different from those of Carlos and Pedro. Jim has the educational, linguistic, and social access to increase his ability to provide for his children and family. Similar to Carlos and Pedro, Jim has struggled with the issues of what it means to be a “good father,” making decisions about the quality of life he should pursue and what he wants to make possible for his children. His commitment to fathering, to his spouse and family, and to the work of improving the well-being of children are practiced in the private sphere of his home, where his own fathering practices are on display. These practices are also evident in the public sphere through the program and among the families and communities that witness the fathering behaviors that Carlos and Pedro exhibit, whether their behaviors are positive and noncombative or negative and potentially harmful.

—Descriptions of three men in a Bay Area fathering program, 1999
participant needs, program capabilities, and agency effort. We also sought to capture information on the attitudes and values held by program participants, program staff, and government agencies regarding the challenges of supporting men in their roles as fathers, reducing father absence, and enhancing the welfare of children and families when fathers and their families face hardships.

This report presents the first set of findings to emerge from the BAyFIDS project. It is intended to supplement current and emerging efforts to catalogue the numbers of programs that have been created, to assess the policies that are being examined or re-examined, and to bring attention to issues that the research community and the general public have, to date, passed over.

Responsible Fathering in Research, Practice, and Programs

Father absence and, more broadly, father involvement have recently captured the interest of a broad cross-section of individuals and institutions concerned with the quality of life and support for children and families. A key concept in the focus on father involvement is “responsible fathering”—a term that in public discussions refers to a movement and within family studies to a field of inquiry. Work on responsible fathering and family support has expanded rapidly in a relatively short period—emerging as a community and societal issue, an area of practice and research, and an initiative of social and public policy over little more than five years. During that time, greater attention has focused not simply on father absence but also on father presence. What does it mean for children, families, and communities to have fathers actively and positively engaged? In other words, do children and families enjoy advantages when fathers are present? If that presence does matter, what difference does it make, and how can programs and policies ensure that they can help make a difference for children, families, communities, and fathers themselves?

Increasingly, these questions have become a topic of debate among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers serving children and families. Ross Parke, in his 1996 publication Fatherhood, describes the tension that existed throughout the twentieth century between forces that pulled for greater participation from fathers and opposing influences that pushed for their restraint and absence. Much of that tension persists today in this burgeoning fatherhood movement and research effort. However, the arguments in favor of deepening efforts on father involvement proffered by advocates and policymakers alike are straightforward: Children fare better and families and communities are stronger when fathers are engaged in their children’s lives and when they contribute emotionally, physically, and financially to their children’s and families’ well-being.

Father-Focused Research. In general, researchers agree that what fathers do with and for their children is much more important than whether
fathers simply co-reside or have frequent contact with them (Coltrane, 1996; Parke, 1996). Although using marital status or living arrangements as a measure can be useful in the initial assessment of potential father-child contact, such structural approaches leave unaddressed the actual variations in father involvement in both “father-present” and “father-absent” homes (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). Consequently, the most important recommendation to emerge from the fatherhood literature may be that measurement strategies should move past the presence/absence dichotomy to distinguish among different forms of father-child involvement across culture and ethnicity, household type, and marital or legal status.

Many public discussions focus on the concept of “responsible fathering,” but research studies are still unclear about what the characteristics of a responsible or competent father actually are (Dollahite, Hawkins, and Brotherson, 1997; Gadsden, Fagan, Ray, and Davis, 2001; Levine and Pitt, 1995; Pollack, 1995). In particular, Levine and Pitt suggest that a man who behaves responsibly towards his child and family:

- Waits to make a baby until he is prepared emotionally and financially to support his child;
- Establishes his legal paternity if and when he does make a baby;
- Actively shares with the child's mother in the continuing emotional and physical care of their child, from pregnancy onwards; and
- Shares with the child's mother in the continuing financial support of their child, from pregnancy onwards (Levine and Pitt, 1995, p. 5).

Examinations of involvement tend to distinguish between fathers' engagement, availability, and responsibility. Engagement refers to the father's direct interaction or contact with his child through caregiving and shared activities. Availability is a related concept concerning the father's potential availability for interaction, by virtue of being present or being accessible to the child (whether or not direct interaction is occurring). Responsibility refers to the role that a father takes in ascertaining that the child is cared for and arranging for the availability of resources (Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine, 1987).

Even today, responsibility is one of the least-studied and even less well-understood aspects of fathering. This form of involvement, as the definition above suggests, refers to the managerial functions of parenting, including the ways in which fathers organize opportunities for their children to participate in a wide range of activities and experiences. Here, it is important to distinguish between within-family and extra-family management: in the former case, parents organize the child's home environment by making certain parts of the home (such as the playroom) and/or certain objects (such as toys and games) available, while limiting access to other parts (such as the dining room) and/or objects (such as guns and fragile objects). In addition, fathers play a role as provider and/or restrictor of opportunities for interaction with other social agents and institutions outside the family. This role includes providing access to other play and recreational partners by...
regulating children's contact with these individuals; regulating access to schools, churches, and organized recreational opportunities (for example, sports); and taking children on informal walks, trips, and outings.

While some areas of agreement exist, there is no consensus among researchers about issues related to fathers and families. However, the presence of a debate may be interpreted as an example of the vibrancy of the topic and its status as a newly formed subset of family studies. In the past, academic research on families focused on mothers or children; only recently have researchers become concerned with testing specific hypotheses about fathers. Similarly, most government-sponsored, policy-oriented family research has focused on mothers rather than fathers, even when men were present in the home. As fathering becomes a new emphasis in the family studies field, debate on the nature of fathers' roles—particularly in reference to mothers' roles—will no doubt flourish in the literature.

In fact, since 1994 the number of published studies and articles on fathering has increased significantly, and now cut across a range of disciplines and domains. The field is growing, and such growth must include a focus on diverse cultural, class, and ethnic groups of fathers and families. A number of research studies are underway to expand the limited literature on fathers from ethnic minority groups; low-income fathers; noncustodial, nonresidential fathers; never-married fathers; adolescent fathers; and working poor fathers. At the same time, the field continues to examine issues faced by both absent fathers and fathers present in the home, whose interactions with their children may vary by income, history, race, class, and culture and in ways that we have yet to understand fully.

**Father-Focused Programs.** Like most academic and policy research, family assistance programs have typically focused on mothers and children—leaving fathers out or even discouraging their participation. Newer programs embrace a variety of specific goals related to the encouragement of father-child connectedness. Program goals often include increasing paternity establishment at birth, teaching parenting skills to new fathers, increasing men's compliance with child support payments, fostering continuing positive contact between fathers and children, and enhancing father-child relations. These programs often serve specific target populations and are typically part of integrated services designed for the benefit of at-risk populations.

Father-focused programs vary in several ways—clearly, one size does not fit all. First, they differ by clientele or participant: some programs focus primarily on nonresident, noncustodial, low-income fathers, while others are directed at resident fathers across income levels. Second, programs differ in their original missions. Some programs are established to serve fathers only, while others provide a range of support and resources to fathers and men in general. Other programs differ in the services they provide, with some offering general parent education services, early childhood education, or literacy assistance. Third, programs differ according to the focus of their effort. Several programs are dedicated to workforce development, entrepre-
neurship, or employment training, while some emphasize paternity establishment and child support. Still others are attempting to help fathers reconnect with their children after a long-term absence. Fourth, programs differ in their ability to provide regular supports to participants and community members. Finally, they differ by funding sources and financial stability.

In newly emerging fields in which a real or perceived urgency exists, it is often true that the apparent need outweighs the incentive for initiatives to create a systematic approach or to address systemic issues. To some degree, this problem looms over fatherhood practice and programming, which have grown more rapidly than the accompanying knowledge base. Information is lacking on what resources exist, what initiatives have been implemented, and with what effects. This disparity in the growth of programs and the knowledge base is exacerbated by the fact that, until the previous decade, research studies provided only limited data on fathers. However, any cursory review of the state of father involvement research today would reveal a significant increase in the number and variety of studies on fatherhood over the past decade. On the other hand, a similar examination of research on programs would reveal a remarkable dearth of work.

Fathering programs, in everyday terms, are the bedrock of the fatherhood effort in the United States; the issues they raise help to advance responsible fathering to the top of national and state agendas. Organizations such as the National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families provide compelling evidence of the magnitude and intensity of fathering activities. They acknowledge that programs may be established as freestanding collectives, components of newly developed family programs, and new divisions within traditionally mother- and child-focused programs in family and human services agencies, school systems and other educational institutions, and the courts. In addition, fathering program demonstrations are also likely to address child support, Head Start and Early Head Start, and children’s schooling.²

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Ephesians Children’s Center

Occasionally, programs require a catalyzing event to help them blossom. According to Executive Director Newt McDonald, such an event is exactly what energized a male involvement program at Ephesians Children’s Center. The Center serves a low-income, inner-city neighborhood where “drug trafficking” and violence are prevalent. It had operated a small male involvement program “as far back as the War on Poverty,” says McDonald, and was involved with the Bay Area Male Involvement Network (BAMIN) from the network’s early days. However, the program at Ephesians only gained momentum after the male involvement group worked to reclaim a park from drug dealers and gang members. The men in the community, working with Ephesians, banded together to stabilize the neighborhood, creating a space for men and children to interact. For this group, male involvement means creating effective male intervention in city and police affairs in order to create a safer environment for their children.

Unlike other programs, the Ephesians group actively recruits neighborhood men who have no children or no children living at home. Not only does this strategy increase the “mass” of activists in the community seeking to combat drugs and other forms of instability, it also provides younger fathers with role models and children with a sense that men throughout the community stay involved in child caregiving and development.

Like other programs, Ephesians reports difficulty in recruiting male staff. For McDonald, this problem is a priority because he believes the Center must expose children to men—especially men of color—who have pursued higher education and are employed in professions. McDonald seeks to create activities where men from both the university community in Berkeley and the surrounding neighborhoods may interact as equals with the children from the Center. Early exposure to positive role models, he believes, may change the expectations children have for their own lives. Child-centered activities also provide a chance for reciprocal, mutually beneficial relationships to develop between members of these often-estranged communities.

McDonald also has found it challenging to negotiate the right relationship between staff, children, and parents when custodial or marital issues arise. Sometimes it is unclear, for instance, whether a father has the legal right to see his child; on the other hand, the Center does not wish to interrupt contact between fathers and children. The legal and institutional status of “de facto fathers” (men who fulfill fathering roles but have no legal standing as a guardian or parent) is another source of concern and difficulty. As a licensed child care center, it is not always clear how to reconcile the legal requirement that only parents and guardians gain access to a child when another male is clearly serving in the role of father.
Although there is no verifiable statistic on the current number of fatherhood programs in existence, it is estimated that perhaps as many as 2,000 are currently in operation. In addition, no systematic study of fathering programs has been undertaken to identify the breadth and scope of their work, the preparation of practitioners, the issues practitioners face, or the participants engaged in programs. In the absence of such data, fathering and family specialists have relied heavily on practitioners' reports of the issues faced by fathers in their programs—programs that are often typecast as serving poor, unwed, minority men who shirk their responsibilities to their children. Both data from emerging research such as fragile families and child well-being studies (e.g., Reichman, Garfinkel, McLanahan, and Teitler, 2000) and work with young, urban fathers (e.g., Anderson, 1999; Wilson, 1996; Gadsden, Wortham, Pinderhughes, and Ray, 2000) provide diverse and expansive images of the varied nature of the populations served in fatherhood programs. These studies suggest that there is a fair amount of negotiation surrounding roles and responsibilities that is reliant, in large part, on relationships in the extended family.

Other reports reinforce this sense of a highly variegated field in which research and practice must intersect in meaningful ways. For example, Burt Barnow and his co-authors of the Lewin Group 1997 study, An Evaluability Assessment of Responsible Fatherhood Programs (commissioned by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and by the Ford Foundation), conclude that before the fatherhood field can be assessed—or before individual fatherhood programs are ready to be measured according to outcomes—the following steps are necessary:

1. Develop a core definition of what constitutes a responsible fatherhood program;
2. Conduct process evaluations, in which programs first define their objectives and activities, along with identifying best practices; and
3. Build basic Management Information System (MIS) capacity to track a client's progress throughout a program and activity after leaving the program.

Programs that serve fathers represent natural settings for examining changes in positive fathering behaviors. In focus groups with practitioners in both 1994 and 1997, NCOFF was motivated by the need to draw on the knowledge of practitioners in order to identify the areas of research that should be pursued (Kane, Gadsden, and Armorer, 1997). Practitioners, after all, had worked with fathers—and often with mothers and children—over time. We believed they represented one of the best barometers for gauging both the ability and progress of the field to become rooted and continue to grow. At this point in the field's short history, it is imperative to examine the programs that provide this support. We must continue to highlight the knowledge of practitioners and the variability of their experiences in diverse settings with diverse populations of men, whose presence in programs denotes a convergence of multiple expectations, needs, and perceptions of the role of men as fathers.
Supporting Fathers and Families in the Evolving Policy Context

Much of the attention over the past ten years on father involvement originated in discussions surrounding the 1988 Family Support Act. The Act focused both on noncustodial, nonresidential fathers who were absent as a result of divorce or separation and on men who had the ability to pay child support but did not. Subsequent policy initiatives, however, have addressed low-income fathers, particularly those who do not have custody of their children or live with them. Considerable attention given to a subgroup of this population—never-married, low-income young fathers—has led to substantial discussion of a range of issues, from their ability to provide child support to the related issue of paternity establishment.

Although the issues and initiatives surrounding responsible fathering are not without their controversies, the topic has amassed considerable bipartisan support at all levels of government. Like research and practice, the current emphasis on the role and impact of fathers in families stands in stark contrast to the period prior to the 1990s, when government-funded programs focused almost exclusively on the needs of mothers and children. Since the early 1990s, however, a groundswell of activities by federal and state governments has thrust the issues of father involvement, child welfare, and family support into the public sphere among a wide range of stakeholders.

The significance of fatherhood as a national issue has been grounded in federal initiatives focusing on father involvement, beginning with President Clinton's 1995 executive order to promote responsive federal government efforts that strengthen the role of fathers in families. The President's memorandum directed all federal agencies and executive offices to ensure that relevant policies and programs meaningfully engage fathers; modify relevant programs for women and children to include and strengthen father involvement; measure the success of appropriate programs in part by how effectively they involve fathers with their families and children; and incorporate fathers in appropriate government-initiated research on families and children.

At the same time, activities at the state level were growing both in number and substance. In 1996, the number of states with at least one identifiable state fatherhood activity, conference, or initiative numbered only 12. By 2000, all 50 states had implemented at least one initiative or core of effort. These state activities were reinforced by heightened concern about poor families, the impact of welfare reform, and a growing awareness of policies for workforce development. Using surveys that examined topics such as child support and child neglect as their yardstick of need, governors and various state government agencies began tackling the issues of responsible fatherhood. Their initial efforts ranged from local advertising campaigns to services integration, particularly around health and family services, labor, housing, and criminal and juvenile justice.
In states such as Massachusetts and Indiana, for example, governors and state agencies became engaged in deliberate activities to increase understanding among state employees of the importance of father involvement and to provide systematic support to children and families. In other states, such as Florida, commissions on responsible fatherhood were established by the legislature. In Connecticut, the efforts focused more directly on integrating isolated and disparate services to families, including an emphasis on families in low-income housing. California instituted several innovative demonstration projects and in 1999 appropriated $12.1 million for the Noncustodial Parent Employment and Training Demonstration Project.4

Despite the development of independent initiatives within states, most state-level activity around fatherhood has been linked to the devolution of welfare programs and related activities. In 1997, for example, President Clinton and U.S. Department of Labor Secretary Alexis Herman announced that the Department would award $186 million to 49 grantees in 34 states to develop innovative projects serving welfare recipients who were hardest-to-employ. The programs would help recipients acquire the skills, work experience, and resources they needed to find and keep good jobs. Among the initiatives funded were a number focusing on noncustodial fathers. These programs were intended to provide skills training and jobs to help fathers support their children and build a stronger future for them. At the same time, the 1997 Budget Reconciliation Act allocated $2.2 billion noncompetitively during the same two-year period to states, based on the population of poor citizens and adult recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) money. Programs such as TANF converged with new initiatives on fatherhood, subsequently connecting the once-isolated issues of father absence, child support, and family and child welfare (Nightingale, Trutko, and Barnow, 2000).

Although state activities on fatherhood have increased, state agencies by and large remain unfamiliar with fatherhood efforts “on the ground” or with strategies to reduce problems and redundancy in the social services systems intended to engage fathers in support of their children. While these programs could serve as an obvious point of departure for launching coherent and coordinated fatherhood initiatives, many states remain disconnected from programmatic efforts at the local level. There is no paucity of reasons, which include: the traditional divide between policy and practice; the distrust of participants in some community-based programs of child support and paternity establishment systems; the perceptions among some agencies that a focus on fathers means a reduction of effort for children and mothers; and the problems faced by these agencies regarding where and how to respond to requirements and expectations around increased father involvement.
Gardner Children's Center, Inc.

The Gardner Children’s Center serves children from the “other side” of Silicon Valley—the San Jose of immigrants, wage laborers, and nine-to-fivers who have not become “dot.com” millionaires. Primarily serving low-income families, Gardner Children’s Center attempts to break the cycle of poverty by assisting working parents while providing their children with educational services. As the director, Fred Ferrer, puts it, the Center is “trying help two generations get by.”

Working closely with the neighborhood’s public elementary school, the Center serves children between the ages of two and ten. Over the last few years, it has come to see male involvement not simply as a critical component to the success of children but also as a critical behavior to be modeled and practiced in the presence of the children.

Consistent with its goal of greater male involvement, the Center is committed to helping fathers—regardless of their custody or paternity status (within the limitations of law and custody arrangements)—gain access to their children in the context of childcare and schooling. To pursue this goal, the Center ensures that its activities and environment are welcoming to fathers. For example, because many of their children have Spanish-speaking fathers, all Center events are bilingual. As Ferrer notes, establishing comfort for fathers in a childcare environment must start by eliminating language and cultural barriers. He says the first goal is to get men “to at least show up,” and notes that the Center is struggling—like many male involvement programs—to engage men in more substantial interactions with the school and the child. However, institutional barriers are not the only reason for low father involvement in childcare and child rearing. Marital and custody difficulties often create barriers to father participation that originate with custodial mothers, who may exclude fathers from all contact with their children in the school or childcare setting. The Center attempts to address these barriers directly through educational efforts and informal mediation. The goal is to reduce mother resistance to father involvement, increasing the likelihood that fathers will choose to attend events and become more involved with their children. Above all, the Center recognizes that bonds between the child and both mother and father are critical and must be supported.

The Center works to promote male involvement in childcare by consistently demonstrating to children that men and women can and do work cooperatively to care for them. To support this effort, the Center works to identify and recruit male staff members, so that the ratio of male and female caregivers stays balanced. Silicon Valley’s high-salary, high-tech sector often makes this effort difficult, but the Center recruits male volunteers from San Jose State University and Santa Clara State University to even out its staff. Every event has male staff involved, and no event is “mother-only.” As Ferrer reports, “It simply becomes assumed that when activities happen here, men and women, mothers and fathers will both fully participate.” For children from difficult family environments, the Center may be the only place where cooperative male-female interactions may be observed and modeled.
Counties and municipalities differ from states in many important ways. County-level policymakers are advantaged by the close physical proximity that exists between agencies and programs, a proximity that provides greater opportunities for identifying fathering programs and practitioners and for determining effective ways of engaging fathers. On the other hand, county and municipal agencies can be equally limited in their knowledge of the issues or programs intended to increase father involvement. To understand the structure and operation of fathering programs at the county level and to determine the degree of county agency involvement in programs in the San Francisco Bay Area, NCOFF launched the BAyFIDS project, with support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and assistance by SRI International and the University of California-Berkeley. BAyFIDS, we expected, would provide baseline data on participant needs and program or agency capabilities. It would also capture the attitudes and values held by program participants, program staff, and government agencies about supporting men in their roles as fathers, reducing father absence, and enhancing the welfare of children and families, particularly those facing hardship.

From the outset, NCOFF recognized that BAyFIDS presented a rare opportunity to create and organize a body of information that focused on programs within a single geographic region, with a diverse population of families, with considerable state support, and with an unknown number of active initiatives dispersed throughout the area. We suspected that, as in other parts of the country, programs in California were proliferating. Their growth was linked to the onset of welfare reform, the need for a systematic approach to child support collection, and the increased understanding of issues faced by nonresidential, noncustodial fathers.
tended to overlook fathers who had not claimed paternity and children born outside of marriage.

Our prior work with fathering programs throughout the country and our conversations with practitioners and policymakers in local areas led us to believe that, as with many new efforts, fatherhood programs were still poorly defined and their goals still in a state of flux. We became aware of two realities. First, there is little information about the number or quality of existing programs or about the participants themselves, who typically are low-income men living in urban settings, disproportionately African American and Latino, are often never-married or unmarried to the mother of the focal child, and are only intermittently engaged in their children’s lives. Reports from large demonstration projects such as Parents Fair Share (1998; also see Doolittle and Lynn, 1998) and from Public/Private Ventures (see Achatz and MacAllum, 1994) provide some of the best evidence on noncustodial, nonresidential fathers. However, while both demonstrations worked with programs to identify participants and monitor change, neither focused systematically on the nature of programs themselves or the practice of service providers.

Second, there is still relatively little knowledge among policymakers and social services or educational agencies about the content of existing programs, which reduces the likelihood that coherent and meaningful agendas around child well-being, family support, and father involvement will be established. A lack of knowledge on the part of municipal and county agencies can prevent services from becoming integrated and inhibit the sustainability of programs, particularly small initiatives that do not receive government support.

The Municipal and Regional Context

Unlike other studies focused on well-developed and well-defined fields and constituencies, the BAyFIDS project had groundwork to pursue. Our first step required seeking out and cataloguing existing programs. Then, we conducted analyses on the status of child welfare and family support in the nine San Francisco Bay Area counties: Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa

Dr. William Cobb Child Development Center

The Dr. William Cobb Child Development Center (Cobb CDC) is located in a neighborhood school in San Francisco. Its fathering effort, like many others, began with a parenting focus that included mothers and fathers. Over time, the parenting group, which was organized and operated by the community center, had become almost exclusively comprised of mothers. Henry Hitz, director of parenting and father involvement activities at Cobb CDC until 1999, sought out ways to generate father involvement. After a conversation with Ethel and Stanley Seiderman, the couple largely responsible for creating the Bay Area Male Involvement Network (BAMIN), Hitz began developing a new group centered around a monthly breakfast for men. Later, this group began to include father-child activities through a grant from the Hewlett Foundation. The goal was to create an environment in which fathers and children could interact and fathers could develop their roles effectively.

Through working with this group, Hitz found that fathers want to be involved with their children’s education and be better fathers for their children than their own fathers were for them. However, they also often feel alienated from their children’s schooling and powerless to become involved in their children’s education. The reasons Hitz cites for these perceptions are complex. Many fathers are intimidated by schools, either because they experienced failure in their own school years or lack the language skills needed to be effective advocates for their children. Others lack the time and financial resources to become more involved. Hitz also believes that deeply ingrained attitudes among teachers, school administrators, and childcare professionals help to discourage father involvement. In his experience, teachers often have negative attitudes about all parents—who are sometimes viewed as a “burden” or “disruption” in the instructional day—but view noncustodial fathers and “de facto fathers” (men who fulfill fathering roles but have no legal standing as a guardian or parent) especially negatively. Noncustodial fathers and de facto fathers are usually barred from entering the building, much less exercising a voice in educational decisions. Schools often undercut the very parental involvement they seek by treating fathers from nontraditional family structures as nuisances to be excluded.

Having identified an institutional problem, Hitz began to work on promoting male involvement from a different angle: by changing the attitudes of teachers and childcare professionals through training workshops and seminars. His approach was to help teachers and childcare professionals to identify the stereotypes they use to evaluate the intentions of men seeking a voice in their children’s education. He also worked with them to identify how these stereotypes become translated into practices and policies within their classrooms, day rooms, and schools. Hitz views the training and educational function of fatherhood programs as a crucial next step in promoting male involvement in schools and childcare.
Clara, Solano, and Sonoma. We paid particular attention to demographic changes in the Bay Area, including the number of mother-headed households, poverty rates, families affected by welfare reform, and child welfare statistics. We then conducted telephone and mail surveys with program staff, coupled with case studies in selected sites where we interviewed staff members and program participants. We subsequently conducted telephone interviews with identified staff members from county departments of social and family services, education, and the court system.

From the data collected, we created a directory of programs and a database of activity designed to identify services and issues for programs and policymakers and to deepen our understanding of the programs’ potential to sustain themselves, effect change, and contribute to the stability of children, families, and communities. Although our research was focused on local agencies and programs in the San Francisco Bay Area, we knew it had the potential to inform county and municipal policies and initiatives across the nation. We anticipated that the project would enhance our knowledge of local programs— their objectives, service populations, practices, strengths, and challenges— and offer insights, as detailed in this report, to the enduring questions regarding the mechanisms that affect the lives of participating fathers, their children and families, and their communities.

Why Focus on County Programs and Policies? The evolving public discussion of fathers and families tends to share several features. First, these conversations typically take place at federal and state levels, and little work focuses on efforts at county or municipal levels or within diverse communities. Second, despite efforts to integrate the issue into existing family and child welfare agendas, activities to promote responsible fatherhood are typically appended to, rather than integrated into, government agendas (beyond child support enforcement) that intend to ensure children’s health, safety, and well-being. There is little effort to chronicle whether and how fatherhood-based initiatives—which usually are developed at the state level—are being realized on the ground at county and municipal levels, what degree of success they are achieving, and what forms of service delivery they provide.

In addition, county and municipal efforts within social service agencies, school systems, or court systems have little knowledge of the number, purpose, or scope of fatherhood programs operating within their jurisdictions and therefore the potential for these programs to strengthen other forms of family support. Although a critical part of the discussion focuses on the use of community-based programs to increase fathers’ involvement, little is known about the number, coherence, and viability of these programs. Also unknown is the impact of fathers’ participation in these programs on their children and of the program itself on broader community efforts.

Although indicators of fathering practices and behaviors have only recently been developed, evaluation studies conducted as a part of program monitoring and assessment suggest that they can have a salutary effect on
the quality of fathering, the cohesiveness and “strength” of families, and positive outcomes for children. However, few studies have attempted to address directly these common but under-explored dimensions. Instead, as is true in most emerging fields, initial data collection efforts have cataloged existing activities for children and fathers by state. For example, The Annie E. Casey Foundation’s project KIDS COUNT in 1995 served as the first effort to collect these data, which provided state profiles on fathers and families and the status of children’s well-being.

Since the advent of KIDS COUNT, related publications have focused on state-level activity. For example, the National Center for Children in Poverty’s Map and Track: State Initiatives to Encourage Responsible Fatherhood (1997, 1999) provides state-by-state profiles, including descriptions of state-level activities around fathers and families and the insertion of these activities into child-serving efforts. Other reports (for example, the Lewin Group’s 1997 Evaluability study) have informed us about the nature and viability of selected programs.

Although sparse, the work completed to date has shed light on the status of the field and does suggest possibilities for intervention when fathers and families are in distress. However, no study adequately answers questions that link the relevant dimensions of improving fathering within a diverse population to improved outcomes for their children. For example, we do not have strong evidence regarding the type of programmatic intervention that is likely to work best for fathers returning to families from incarceration. Nor do we know which interventions to recommend when the goal is to help improve a specific child outcome, such as persistence in school. For most permutations of these dimensions, the research community has few answers to offer. The activities of the BayFIDS Project are intended to provide researchers and practitioners with the data necessary to inform such choices at the local level. We believe the field urgently needs this type of data and guidance.

**Why Focus on the San Francisco Bay Area?** California and the Bay Area possess unique features that make this region an appropriate focus of our study on fathers and families programs and their relationships to county fatherhood initiatives. Just as the fathering programs in the Bay Area are evolving, California as a state has been described as a “work in progress” (Baldassare, 2000). Like most states, it divides responsibility for child support and services to fathers among a variety of state departments, county offices, and local agencies. Although stable for many years, the system has recently undergone a major revolution with the creation of the California Department of Child Support Services (CDSS) on January 1, 2000. (See Appendix A for a review of the role that major social service systems in California serve in supporting children and fathers.)

California is the most populated state in the nation, with a census count indicating a citizenry of more than 33 million. Demographic projections for population growth over the next few decades are as high as 50 million. An increase in the size of the population is occurring in con-
California and the Bay Area possess unique features that make this region an appropriate focus of our study on fathers and families programs and their relationships to county fatherhood initiatives. The rise in the number of nonwhite citizens and those emigrating from outside the United States—coupled with growing income inequality and relative uncertainty about sectors of the state's economy—make California a compelling case to compare with other regions in the nation, particularly those with large urban and metropolitan areas. Accordingly, California's challenges represent concerns shared by other states, such as transportation, public schools, and higher education. In many ways, the conditions in California appear to make these problems more severe in this state than in others; and, compared to other states, California ranks considerably lower in spending in these areas: 48th on highways, 37th on higher education, and 31st on public school spending (Baldassare, 2000).

The San Francisco Bay Area, in Northern California, is an especially unique region within California. The nine counties of the Bay Area account for 20 percent of the state's population and include almost 100 suburban locales. The region is home to Silicon Valley and many counties with the highest incomes in the state and most expensive housing in the nation. It contains the most adults with college degrees (49 percent), almost one-half of whom are likely to earn $60,000 or more annually. Approximately 30 percent of the region's residents are 35 years old or younger, and about 66 percent own a house. The area's population is diverse—a diversity that varies by county and within counties. For example, San Francisco continues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Total CalWORKs 1999</th>
<th>Adult CalWORKs 1999</th>
<th>Child CalWORKs 1999</th>
<th>Food Stamps 1999</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alameda</td>
<td>70,756</td>
<td>19,450</td>
<td>51,306</td>
<td>68,964</td>
<td>1,279,182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contra Costa</td>
<td>31,275</td>
<td>8,539</td>
<td>22,736</td>
<td>29,222</td>
<td>803,732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marin</td>
<td>2,466</td>
<td>728</td>
<td>1,738</td>
<td>31,246</td>
<td>230,096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napa</td>
<td>1,715</td>
<td>454</td>
<td>1,261</td>
<td>2,237</td>
<td>110,765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>23,538</td>
<td>7,354</td>
<td>16,184</td>
<td>24,127</td>
<td>723,959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Mateo</td>
<td>5,693</td>
<td>1,085</td>
<td>4,608</td>
<td>5,571</td>
<td>649,623</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Clara</td>
<td>41,430</td>
<td>10,840</td>
<td>30,590</td>
<td>39,566</td>
<td>1,497,577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solano</td>
<td>17,258</td>
<td>5,068</td>
<td>12,190</td>
<td>18,847</td>
<td>340,421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonoma</td>
<td>8,460</td>
<td>2,211</td>
<td>6,249</td>
<td>9,197</td>
<td>388,222</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 1990 U.S. Census, U.S. Census Bureau tabulations.
2 Of the total disadvantaged population in each county, the number or percentage of 16- to 21-year olds who have dropped out of high school.
3 Oakland City is included as part of Alameda County in composite statistics.
4 Richmond City is included as part of Contra Costa County in composite statistics.
5 The North Santa Clara Consortium is included as part of Santa Clara County in composite statistics.
to be a racially diverse setting; Marin County is a largely white suburb with little growth; and Contra Costa and Silicon Valley are growing, predominantly white suburbs.

Despite the concentration of wealth in this region, other demographic data imply that many Bay Area fathers and families are in need of high-quality support services (Figure 1). For example, the KIDS COUNT data show that, in California, 13.6 percent of children in 1995 lived in households with no adult male and 32.6 percent of all men between the ages of 25 and 34 earned less than the poverty level for a family of four. In 1999, five counties had California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) counts of 17,000 people or more: Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco, Santa Clara, and Solano. Four of these counties (Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco, and Solano) also have the highest percentage of families in poverty. We cannot know how many fathers need or seek services, but we do know that poverty, use of welfare support systems, and separation of the father from his family are related to decreases in fathering efficacy. If, as our BAYFIDS work leads us to believe, there are too few resources available to serve this population, it is extremely important to deploy those that are at hand in the most efficacious manner possible. Because current research provides us with only limited guidance, we designed the BAYFIDS project to help inform such efforts.
With the emergence of fathers and families as an important area of research, practice, and policy, questions are increasingly being raised about the form, function, and feasibility of programs providing support to men in their roles as fathers and family members. A multi-year study to track, document, and analyze the operation and impact of fathering programs, the BAyFIDS project was designed to address these basic questions. This report summarizes findings from the first phase of the BAyFIDS Project: the characteristics of programs, participants, and county relationships, as well as where the fathers and families effort might lead.

The purpose of this project is to deepen the field's knowledge of fathers and families programs and their potential for contributing to integrated activities that support children and families. Longer-term pursuits are to collect program information; chart service and activity change over time; and relate fathering, family, and child welfare outcomes to program variables. The project is intended to produce two broad outcomes. First, it was designed to provide local intervention activities with new knowledge and promote county-level partnerships among regional stakeholders by disseminating information on fathering services in the San Francisco Bay Area and fostering cooperation between public sector agencies and private sector service providers with an interest in fathers, children, families, and communities. Second, it has emphasized the expansion of knowledge in the fatherhood field, both within and outside the Bay Area. Because the region is broadly representative of the state of California and the United States as a whole, studying programs in the nine-county region allows us to develop and extend the field's knowledge of programs and their relationship to father, family, and community outcomes.

To realize these outcomes, NCOFF developed two distinct tools. The first is a comprehensive, regularly updated directory of fathering programs for individuals, agencies, organizations, and governments within the nine counties. The Bay Area Fathering Programs Directory is intended to serve as a catalogue of organizations that address fathering issues, broadly defined.
In addition to offering contact and referral information, the Directory also includes data on the primary and secondary populations served, the duration of programs, and the services offered. The Directory is currently accessible through the World Wide Web (www.bayfids.org) and is available in paper form from NCOFF.

The second tool was intended to improve coordination between local fathering support efforts and county government through the creation of a database that allows us to build profiles of programs, monitor change in them, and contribute to their sustainability. The Father Programs Dataset (FPD) contains information on program and participant characteristics; program services and problems; programs’ relationships with county agencies; and measures of county officials’ knowledge about efforts in their region, as well as their engagement with those efforts. This report contains the findings from an analysis of data in the FPD.

We developed an assessment of fathering issues in the Bay Area through: a review of reports examining poverty rates, single mother households, and child and family welfare in the Bay Area; conversations with contacts in the region; and direct observation of programs both in the Bay Area and throughout the country.

Based on the information provided by these sources, we arrived at a data collection strategy that hinged on three premises. First, it was clear that no one group of stakeholders would be able to provide us with the data we required to study both fathering programs and the policies that supported them. Instead, we needed to gather information from all three groups of principal stakeholders: program directors and staff, program participants, and county/municipal policymakers. Second, since it was clear that no one group could act as a principal informant, it was also evident that we had to match our data collection methods to the needs and preferences of each stakeholder group. Finally, because little work exists on the issues we wished to study, it was imperative that we use multiple data collection methods and multiple stakeholder perspectives.

In all, three different data collection strategies were employed: a mail and a telephone survey for program staff; site visits and focus groups with program staff and selected participants; and semi-structured telephone interviews with county-level staff in social and family services, public educational institutions, and the court system.

Surveys of Programs

Two surveys of Bay Area fathering programs were used to gather information on programs and participants. The goal was to collect data from program directors about their programmatic efforts, program participants, and the program’s relationship to public agencies and fathering efforts. The survey included both a mail and a telephone survey. To ensure that both instruments were sensitive to language and usage concerns in the field, both were field-tested with practitioners, located in sites similar to those in the Bay Area and drawn from the National Practitioners Network.
for Fathers and Families. (See Appendix B for the final mail survey instru-
ment.) The surveys were the primary source of information for both the
BAyFIDS Directory and Father Program Dataset. Because we were tasked
with developing a comprehensive directory, the goal of our data collection
methods was not to create a statistically valid sample but to conduct a
census of every program in the Bay Area.

Programmatic efforts in the Bay Area, we soon learned, have evolved
in a variety of settings and for a range of purposes. Some were distinctly
developed in order to respond to an immediate need for children, parents,
or families. Some programs had been organized and formally sanctioned by
parent organizations or governmental agencies—through registration as a
nonprofit organization, for instance—while others have operated informally
in churches, homes, and similar grassroots venues. Programs tend to have a
high mortality rate in the early years of development; some were listed in
the telephone directory one day, but their doors were closed the next.
However, the most daunting prospect we faced was to define what actually
constituted or could be considered a “fathering program.” On several
occasions, field-level practitioners’ descriptions of their programs were
consistent with definitions that the BAyFIDS staff had developed for
fathering programs, but the programs would often decline to participate
because their contact person did not want to define or describe the program
as such.

Given the variety of effort and lack of consensus regarding definitions,
the BAyFIDS project used a broad set of criteria to determine program
eligibility in order to identify the greatest range of organizations possible.
We included any organization that involved men or boys in a program
relating to parenting, pregnancy prevention, or male roles as fathers and
parents/caregivers for children. We arrived at the final set of programs listed
in the Directory through a five-stage process.

First, we identified resources on father involvement programs and
activities and met and talked with our existing program contacts within and

Table 1
BAyFIDS Practitioner-Liaisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Practitioner-Liaison</th>
<th>Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alameda</td>
<td>Newt McDonald</td>
<td>Ephesians Child Development Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contra Costa</td>
<td>Elizabeth London</td>
<td>Therapeutic Nursery School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marin</td>
<td>Ray Capper</td>
<td>Marin Community Development Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napa</td>
<td>Artemisa Medina</td>
<td>Los Ninos Child Care Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Clara</td>
<td>Fred Ferrer</td>
<td>Gardner Children’s Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>Sally Large</td>
<td>Friends of St. Francis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Mateo</td>
<td>Mauricio Palma</td>
<td>Bay Area Male Involvement Network (BAMIN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solano</td>
<td>Tony Glavis</td>
<td>Napa-Solano Head Start</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonoma</td>
<td>Robin Bowen</td>
<td>California Parenting Institute</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
outside the Bay Area. Those partners included individuals at the Claremont Institute; the National Center for Strategic Nonprofit Planning and Community Leadership; the Bay Area Male Involvement Network (BAMIN); community foundations; social services and educational agencies in the Bay Area; Head Start programs; and churches, schools, and community centers.

Second, we identified and contacted practitioners within each county—one per county—to serve as liaisons for the project and to assist us in identifying programs, reaching practitioners, and providing information to practitioners in their vicinity who wanted to know about our work. Such liaisons, we believed, were crucial not only to help identify programs but also to contribute to our strategies for conducting data analysis and discussions with county and municipal policymakers. With the assistance of Stanley Seiderman of BAMIN, a longtime supporter of NCOFF, we were able to establish a network of practitioner-liaisons for the project (Table 1).

Third, we collapsed information from the lists provided by Bay Area practitioners with information from several other sources—e.g., NCOFF’s existing programs database, Head Start programs and other early childhood programs, school systems, and social service agencies—which we contacted initially either by telephone or mail. Collectively, these sources yielded the names of 319 potential programs.

Fourth, we attempted to contact (or recontact) all 319 potential programs by telephone. Of this initial set, 38 could not be contacted by telephone or mail, 125 did not offer relevant services, and two ceased operation between initial and follow-up contact. The revised list consisted of 154 potential programs located across the nine Bay Area counties, as displayed in Table 2.

In the final stage, we contacted all 154 potential programs by telephone and mail to collect data for the Directory and other aspects of the BAyFIDS research project. Eighty-four programs (54 percent) provided at least basic contact information; of these, 48 completed and returned the detailed mail survey (for this reason, information on 48 of the programs is more complete). After a more in-depth telephone interview, we determined that approximately one-quarter of the programs did not offer relevant services. The remaining 25 percent were not responsive after multiple telephone calls and mailings.

Site Visits

Survey research is well-suited for capturing snapshots of average conditions but is less effective at unearthing underlying processes or gathering information beyond researcher-imposed categorizations. Because this field is rapidly evolving and thinly investigated, we felt it was critical to interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Potential Programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alameda</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contra Costa</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marin</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napa</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Mateo</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Clara</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solano</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonoma</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Potential Programs 154
It was critical to interview program directors, staff members, and program participants directly in order to understand better how programs operate, what goals they pursue and why, and what both program staff and participants hope to achieve. We also felt that program participants and staff members would be more receptive to in-person interviews than to impersonal surveys.

Accordingly, we completed five in-person site visits with program staff and two focus groups with participants and participants/coordinators. The focus groups addressed the range of issues that fathering leaders experience in their programs, the specific social and policy barriers to father involvement, and the nature of the problem in the Bay Area. The focus groups (composed of fathers only) lasted for approximately two hours and addressed three questions:

1. What do you view as your primary role in raising your children?
2. What are the barriers to fulfilling your role as a father?
3. How does the program you joined help you better fulfill your fathering role?

Site visits to programs lasted approximately two to four hours. Some sites invited the participation of staff from referral agencies who had been active in supporting their work. Program directors and staff responded to questions along six broad themes:

1. Why did you or your parent organization decide to develop a fathering/male involvement/pregnancy prevention program?
2. What motivates men to join your program?
3. What services and activities tend to keep men involved in your program?
4. What are the major issues that men bring to the program for resolution?
5. What are the major barriers to men participating in your program?
6. How does your organization work with federal, state, county, or municipal agencies addressing these issues?

County Telephone Interviews

Telephone interviews were conducted with 26 county-level agencies, 17 of which were in-depth interviews. Our goal was to contact one or more high-level representatives of each county education office, District Attorney's (DA) office, family services division of the DA's office, and the health and social services offices. From each office, we sought information on four broad areas related to support of fathers and families:

1. The scope, nature, and intensity of any agency-sponsored fathering initiatives;
2. The degree of agency and/or county-level political commitment to these initiatives;
3. The agency's general sense of the relationship between fatherhood initiatives and other child welfare or family-focused initiatives or responsibilities; and
4. The willingness of agencies to cooperate with one another and with community-based organizations on fathering and family issues, especially in the context of sharing child welfare data.

In part, we wished to see what the three focal agencies knew about fathering activities in their regions, how they addressed father involvement in their work, and how they viewed the role of fathers in mandated and optional activities. Our initial contacts were superintendents of education, directors of social services agencies, and district attorneys. These contacts often referred us to those within their organizations who, from their perspective, were more qualified to answer the interview questions. In Napa County, for example, we initially contacted the Superintendent of Education but were referred to a program specialist within the county’s office of education who works with teen fathers to prevent violence and promote responsible fatherhood. Several other contacts referred us to designated staff within the agency, also indicating that these individuals had greater expertise and knowledge about fathering efforts within the county.

The Phase I Report

Our intention in this report is to provide a baseline on participant needs, program and agency capabilities and effort, and the attitudes and values all three stakeholders brought to the issue of responsible fathering and family support. This information comes with a range of complexities, not limited to any single set of issues, problems, or needs.

Throughout the report, we point out some of these complexities, focusing on how our “raw” empirical findings are at variance with the expectations and beliefs of practitioners, as expressed both in responses to the surveys and in our interviews during our site visits. We also discuss how some findings may be related to known issues of participant needs and expectations, as revealed in the relationships and disparities between participant needs and expectations and provider capabilities, values, goals, and expectations.

Specifically, in Chapter 3, we present our findings on the characteristics and needs of program participants, based upon reported data from program staff. Chapter 4 provides a profile of fatherhood initiatives in the Bay Area, discussing their primary objectives, the services they provide, and the resources they possess. In Chapter 5, we discuss our findings on the role of county and government agencies in emerging fatherhood initiatives across the nine counties in the study. Each of these chapters concludes with a perspective on the findings for either participants, the programs with which they were affiliated, or the government agencies in each county. Finally, Chapter 6 contains a general conclusion that includes our reflections on the findings and recommendations for programs, county agencies, and funders.
Our fundamental task was to identify the characteristics and features of men who enter and seek support from programs. Although fatherhood efforts have focused on men from diverse groups and across different social classes, they have been centered on particular subsets of fathers. For instance, responsible fatherhood programs are located disproportionately in urban areas and tend to serve low-income men, who either by divorce or out-of-wedlock relationships have fathered a child and want to re-engage or strengthen their involvement.

Previous work with practitioners and programs in other states, as well as in California but outside the Bay Area, has provided insights about the men who ultimately decide to enter a program. Some have had children who rely on public assistance; others have had children with teenage mothers whose families do not welcome the father's involvement; and still others have children and families who are as likely to thrive as to survive because of limited incomes (Brindis, et. al., 1998; Kane, Gadsden, Armorer, 1997). Fathers may be “technically absent” but provide informal support such as child care, materials, toys, and diapers. They may have completed school or have dropped out. They may be motivated by judicial mandates or by the expectations of family and friends.

The only rule is that the picture varies for each father, making it difficult to know exactly who the “average” father is and what to expect in different contexts with fathers who have different cultural histories, different expectations and experiences, different demands, and different dreams and aspirations for themselves and their families.

Participant Characteristics: Who Attends or Participates in Programs?

Fathering program participants in the Bay Area are disproportionately members of minority communities, with low or no incomes and low educational attainment. In a typical program, nearly 50 percent of the
# PROFILE OF FATHER PARTICIPANTS*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16 or Younger: 10.0%</td>
<td>Hispanic: 45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 30: 57.5%</td>
<td>White: 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>African American: 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian American: 5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poverty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt;80% Below 1999 Poverty Line</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy and Numeracy</th>
<th>Employment Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read below 6th grade level: 20%</td>
<td>One full-time job: 51.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One part-time job: 15.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployed: 37.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involved in the informal economy: 47.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Attainment</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years of schooling: 10%</td>
<td>Married: 50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without GED or HS Diploma: 60%</td>
<td>Separated or Divorced: 25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College: 10%</td>
<td>Never Married: 45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Child: 45.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Children: 35.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 or more: 22.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentages will not add to 100%; Means reported, unless otherwise stated.

## Strengths:
- Desire to become more involved with children and family
- Willingness to learn
- Commitment to program
- Support of children/support of children’s mother
- Desire to overcome drug/alcohol addiction
- Desire to obtain a job
- Desire to gain training or education
- Previous experience with parenting

## Challenges:
- Inability to read/write at sufficient levels
- Insufficient time for family and child/children
- Joblessness and poverty
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Lack of support from family and friends
- Need for legal assistance with custody issues
- Lack of knowledge needed to obtain government assistance
participants are Hispanic and approximately 10 percent are African American. Another 10 percent are white/Caucasian, with a concentration in Marin, San Mateo, and Sonoma counties. Participation among African Americans is heavier in San Francisco and Contra Costa counties, although there is a substantial African American participation in all but Sonoma, Solano, and Santa Clara counties.

**Age.** On average, approximately 53 percent of program participants are over the age of 30, another 40 percent are between 17 and 20 years of age, and another 10 percent are 16 years of age or less. However, particular types of programs are likely to attract men from a particular age range. Teen programs attract adolescents; early/young fathers programs attract men between the ages of 16 and 25; and male involvement and fathering programs typically attract men over the age of 25 (although both young fathers and male involvement programs show variety in the age of participants).

**Income.** Most participants appear to fall in the category of “working poor”—those whose wages fall below the poverty line. On average, over 80 percent of program participants are likely to earn wages below the 1999 federal poverty standard ($15,050 per year). Programs in only two counties, San Mateo and Alameda, reported less than 60 percent of participants earning more than the federal poverty standard. (No data were available for Sonoma County.) On the other hand, programs in four counties—Contra Costa, Napa, San Francisco, and Santa Clara—reported that 95 percent or more of program participants earned less than the federal poverty standard.

**Employment and Child Support.** Program participants’ low economic status is only partially attributable to unemployment. Program reports indicate that a slight majority of participants (51.4 percent) held at least one full-time job; another 15.7 percent held at least one part-time job. Program staff mentioned that they suspect an average of 50 percent of all program participants are engaged in the informal economy (defined here as income-generating activities not related to the sale of illegal substances, such as street peddling, house repairs, car repairs, etc.). This information is particularly relevant to discussions of child support enforcement. Although between 40 and 50 percent of program participants have child support obligations, program staff estimated that only approximately 35 percent of participants with obligations were able to fulfill them on a regular basis.

**Education and Poverty.** Given the above-average cost of living in the Bay Area, the degree of both absolute and relative impoverishment among participants is probably understated by the federal poverty guidelines. Most participants fall in the bottom 5 to 10 percent of Bay Area residents in terms of income. One explanation for participants’ impoverished status is their generally low level of educational attainment. Programs reported that, on average, participants completed approximately ten years of schooling (indicating that most dropped out of school after the ninth or tenth grade). This finding was consistent across the eight counties for which we have data. (No data were available from Solano County.) Only Sonoma County
reported that the average program participant had at least some college education. Six of every ten participants in an average program reportedly had no high school diploma or GED. Moreover, programs reported that at least 20 percent of their participants had, in practitioners' estimation, significant problems with reading and basic mathematics.

**Participant Strengths.** Participants in fatherhood programs are often considered in terms of their needs and less often in terms of their strengths. As a result, programs tend to offer few opportunities and activities that allow the abilities and prior knowledge of participants to contribute to the growth and quality of the programs themselves. With this oversight in mind, we sought to understand not simply the perceived deficits with which fathers enter programs but also their strengths, which are fundamental to their own ability to build and sustain positive relationships with their children, spouses and partners, families, and communities.

How did practitioners view participants' abilities, and to what extent did they use their knowledge of those abilities to develop and implement programs that support fathers? We asked practitioners to review a 14-item list of strengths that participants might bring to their programs. The eight most cited strengths (each nominated by at least one-third of the respondents) were aggregated into three themes. The first is a participant's willingness to transform himself, through learning, training, employment, and treatment of addiction. The second is his commitment to and support of his role as parent. The third is his commitment to the program and the process of change the program offers.

**Child, Marital, and Family Relationships.** Programs reported that approximately 50 percent of participant fathers live with the mother of one or more of their biological children. On average, 86 percent of married men, 53 percent of separated or divorced men, and 53 percent of never-married men reside with the mother of one or more of their children. About 40 percent of fathers with one child have full custody of that child. Marital status may be linked to the relationship that exists between the father and child (and, although not apparent from these data, between the father and mother in relationship to the child). Similarly, the number and quality of contacts may be equally significant. On average, 23.8 percent of participant fathers had no relationship with their children when they entered the program, while 38.1 percent developed relationships during the program.

**Problems Faced by Fathers.** Programs also reported the prevalence of other problems that may be categorized as attitudinal, institutional, and temporal. These problems were cited by at least 30 percent of responding programs, which identified the issue as a prominent challenge for participating fathers. With respect to attitude, programs suggested that the mothers of the fathers' children, the parents and families of both the fathers and mothers, and the fathers' friends often were unsupportive of the men's efforts to become better fathers or to participate in programs.8 They also
reported that fathers tend to disassociate procreative activity with a corresponding responsibility for their children; to be unfamiliar with social and governmental institutions, assistance programs, and the family court system; and to lack sufficient time for interaction with their children or participation in the family.

Recognizing that participation often represented a father’s own realization of his need for assistance, we also asked programs to select the primary challenges they believed participants faced from a 19-item list. These challenges correspond to the sets of strengths listed earlier. The first set involves barriers to fathers’ personal transformation, including poverty, low educational attainment, and substance abuse. The second centers on barriers to fathers fulfilling their parental roles, including limitations on time spent with children and the family, lack of support from family and friends, and lack of counsel on custody issues. The third set includes barriers to fathers’ program participation, including time constraints. A fourth issue, difficulty for fathers in accessing government support programs, is an overarching problem.

**Perspectives on Participant Findings**

Our empirical findings are consistent with what program and participant informants indicated during the site visits. Practitioners agree that participants join programs because they wish to improve the quality of their parenting and interactions with their children. They suggest that the very factors that impinge on their parenting also restrict, if not reduce, their ability to participate in programs and activities that might improve their options. In our estimation, the root cause of these issues may often be traced to low levels of educational attainment, which then have an impact on at least three facets of participants’ lives—competing demands on their time, an inability to access resources, and low wages and levels of employment.9

Our data suggest that most participants are employed, but still lack the resources to provide for their family’s needs—whether they live with the mother and child or must make child support payments. In the effort to maintain a minimal standard of living, participants often retain multiple jobs, whether they are full-time, part-time, or informal. While holding multiple jobs creates a modicum of economic security, it also consumes the most precious commodity most parents have for their children: time. As we reported earlier, the second and third most-often reported challenges for participants was a lack of time for both their children and the program.

Participants are often left with a difficult trade-off. In an effort to improve their parenting skills—which may be technically sound but underutilized—they are asked or decide to put time into fathering or male involvement programs. As we will argue later, these competing goals suggest that programs must offer participants ways to escape the time trap—options for enjoying the benefits of program participation and improving their
economic status while at the same time enjoying quality time with their families.

Second, low levels of educational attainment also affect fathers’ abilities to gain access to assistance from available sources. Programs noted that participants often lack the knowledge needed to gain access to government assistance programs. Although we cannot confirm this assertion directly from the data, the prevalence of literacy and numeracy issues within the participant population suggests that these problems may contribute, in large measure, to participants’ difficulties. Our perception is supported, in part, by program respondents who told us that almost 50 percent of all participants lacked the reading and writing skills necessary to participate in legal proceedings, and 25 percent lacked the skills necessary to use program materials. These findings suggest that low literacy levels and educational attainment are major inhibitors to participants seeking and gaining effective assistance, even when they can find the time to pursue it.

Third, low educational attainment is a known risk factor for poverty, joblessness, substance abuse, and participation in illicit activities; in turn, poverty and joblessness are known to contribute to both substance abuse and criminal behavior. All four can lead to separation from family and children, and all four may be traced to an inability to read, write, and calculate at a level sufficient to engage in the mainstream economy. Clearly, our data indicate that programs are aware of these problems and the urgency of addressing low levels of literacy and numeracy among participants. Nearly every program nominated low educational attainment as a chief challenge for program participants; most programs were sufficiently familiar with their participants’ educational challenges to report data upon request. Nevertheless, as the next section will demonstrate, programs often directly treat only the symptoms of the greater problems they have identified.
Fathering and male involvement programs represent a recent and emergent form of social support. Few people know what services these programs provide or what should be expected as outcomes of a father’s participation. Consider, for example, a hypothetical on-the-street interview that randomly asked passersby about programs serving children and families. Most interviewees probably would be able to identify a child- or family-focused program or describe a child care center, a program for expectant mothers, or services for teen parents. However, it is very likely that most could not provide comparable descriptions of fathering and male involvement initiatives or be able to identify any programs. Moreover, many would not expect that such services would be found in traditional family programs. With these misperceptions in mind, the findings in this chapter are organized to reflect the varied conceptions of fathering and male involvement programs, as well as reasons why this definition is not yet settled.

Program Characteristics:
What Types of Programs Provide Services?

Our survey of programs and practitioners yielded a set of baseline statistics on how programs are organized, funded, and sustained, as well as what services they offer to participants.

Organization. As we expected, nonprofit organizations offer the vast majority of programs (almost 80 percent), although their level of formality varies widely. Many were organized under section 501(c)3 of the Federal Tax Code as nonprofit organizations, but a sizable minority represented informal networks and groups. Given recent mandates to expand services to fathers with child support orders, we were surprised to find so few programs organized through government-initiated support. In addition, most programs had been funded at a relatively low level—of the 35 programs that responded to our funding questions, 20 reported having annual budgets of less than $50,000. Another 13 have annual budgets between $50,000 and
PROFILE OF FATHERHOOD PROGRAMS*

**Types**
- Parenting: 66%
- Responsive fathering: 50%
- Early/teen fathering support: 33%
- Teen pregnancy prevention: 33%

**Organization**
- Non-profit: 79.0%
- For-profit: 7.4%
- Public agency: 7.4%

**Years Serving Fathers**
- Mean: 9.82
- Median: 6
- Less than 3 years: 25%

**Retention**
- Retention rate > 50%: 44%
- Programs reporting retention problems: 28.4%

**Median Employment**
- Full-time: 3
- Part-time: 4
- Volunteers: 6

**Primary Services**
(offered by more than 60% of programs)
- Peer support groups
- Parent education classes
- Cooperative parenting classes
- Child development education classes
- Peer/group learning opportunities

**Curriculum**
- Internally developed: 26%
- Purchased: 11%
- Developed by others: 7%
- Bought/revised internally: 2%
- Fewer than half have a curriculum

**Population Founded to Serve**
- Fathers/men: 18.5%
- Mothers: 24.4%
- Families: 23.2%
- Others: 25.0%

**Recruiting**
- Past participant word of mouth: 75.0%
- Community referral: 66.7%
- Nonparticipant word of mouth: 50.0%
- Advertising: 47.9%
- Mandates: 25.0%
- Affiliation with religious group: 6.3%

**Concerns:**
- Insufficient funding
- Uncertainty of funding
- Limited participant resources
- Low priority of government

*Percentages will not add to 100%; Means reported, unless otherwise stated.
Child-Centered Programs

Roughly 30 percent of the programs we surveyed primarily serve children. Their missions range from providing early childhood education to childcare services. The fathering components of these programs focus on encouraging men to take greater responsibility for their children. Sample mission statements include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Mission Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bayshore Child Care Services</td>
<td>To encourage the involvement of men in the rearing of children through meetings, projects, and events that discuss the importance of men serving in this role; to change attitudes about fathering issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents Place Fathers Group</td>
<td>To assist preschools in developing programs that are inclusive of fathers and to assist fathers in becoming more positively engaged with their children.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On average, programs reported budgets over $250,000 annually.

**Funding.** On average, programs report that their funding is evenly split between public and private sources. However, in actuality, there is a great deal of variation across programs in the share of public and private funding. For example, of the 35 responding programs, 13 indicated that they receive 80 percent or more of their funding from private sources, while 12 reported receiving 80 percent or more of their funding from public sources. Public funds originate at federal, state, or county departments of health and human services and education. No program reported funding from a local or municipal governmental source, and no funding flowed from federal, state, or county departments of labor and justice—an issue we will address again in the “Perspectives on Program Findings” section later in this chapter.

**Length of Existence.** On average, programs reported that they began to serve fathers approximately ten years ago—although the median reported “time since first father service” was six years. About one-quarter of all programs began their fathering/male involvement work three or fewer years ago. While most programs were not established solely to serve fathers or men, approximately 18.5 percent of the programs reported they were founded to serve this population directly. Most programs were originally founded to serve families, mothers (including teen and expectant mothers), or others in the family, and subsequently recognized the need to add a fathering or male involvement component to their programming. The most cited reasons for developing a fathering or male involvement component were: the desire to switch from a focus on mothers, children, or teens to a family focus; the realization that men were underserved; direct requests from the community; encouragement from grantors to provide services to fathers; and the work of BAMIN, including its public awareness efforts.

**Services Provided.** Most organizations described themselves as offering “parenting” or “responsive fathering” programs. Approximately one-third of all programs also offered services targeted for teens. Over 80 percent of responding organizations reported offering two or more types of programs, with the average organization offering at least three types. Organizations tend to offer services in a few distinct and repeated pairings:

- Unwanted fatherhood programs tend also to provide early teen/fatherhood support (more than 50 percent).
- Programs offering responsive fathering, parenting, and workplace services also tend to provide programs for incarcerated fathers and unwanted fatherhood prevention, as well as divorce support and abusive household support (between 35 and 50 percent).
- Parenting and early/teen fatherhood support programs also tend to provide services for incarcerated fathers and responsive fathering (between 25 and 35 percent).

Staff. In general, the fatherhood programs we studied maintain relatively small overall budgets and staffs. Many programs reported having a median of approximately three full-time and four part-time employees, with about six volunteers. However, the median disguises the great diversity in program employment. Over 50 percent of the programs reported using five or fewer full-time and part-time employees at any given time, while about 25 percent reported using more than 25 employees. When asked about the types of professionals they employ, over 50 percent of the responding programs indicated that they employed no professional of any type. Nearly 25 percent employ one professional, 12 percent employ two, and only three programs of 48 reported employing more than three professionals. Social workers were the most commonly cited professional employee, with the “other” category ranking second. No program employed professional psychiatrists; five programs employed psychologists; two employed lawyers; and one employed a medical doctor.

Recruitment. Programs reported that most participants are recruited by word of mouth and by community referral. Approximately 25 percent of programs accept mandated referrals from the criminal justice system and family courts. Although there is considerable attention being given to the role of faith-based communities at the state and national levels, very few participants were referred by or affiliated with religious groups. Only three of the 48 responding programs indicated that religious affiliations brought men to the program.

Participant persistence in fatherhood programs is reportedly higher than in many other social services initiatives. Forty-four percent of the...

**Male Involvement Programs**

A majority of the programs we studied considered promoting male involvement as their primary goal. Their intention is to provide men with a continuum of services supporting their development as contributors to families and communities. In the Bay Area, these programs have served leadership roles around fatherhood initiatives. Sample mission statements include:

**Organization**

**BAMIN South Bay**

**Mission Statement**

To increase the involvement of fathers and other significant men in the lives of children. This goal is accomplished by working with the 15 sites of network members and assisting them in creating programs. BAMIN establishes criteria for a member site to become a father-friendly organization and works to increase the number of men working in agencies and programs.

**Child Care Coordinating Council**

To provide technical assistance and advice to males who want to promote male involvement. In general, the Council provides technical assistance to daycare centers and elementary schools. The Council offers scholarships to men who want to attend male involvement conferences.

**Dr. William Cobb Child Development Center**

To organize fathers and other significant men to become more involved with their children and in particular with their children’s education.
programs surveyed reported retention rates greater than 50 percent, with only about 25 percent of programs reporting that retention was a pressing problem. While these findings are encouraging, as we will discuss below, the high retention rate may be related to the unstructured and undemanding nature of the programmatic offerings.

**Program Objectives.** The programs we surveyed were asked to identify their priority objectives from a list of 34, ranking them on a scale of 0 to 4, with 4 indicating that the objective was extremely important and 0 indicating it was not an objective of the program. In order of ranking, the top seven priorities among all programs surveyed were to:

1. Increase contact between father and children;
2. Improve parenting skills;
3. Increase the quality of father-child interaction;
4. Promote bonding and attachment of the father to his children;
5. Increase the involvement of fathers in the basic care and health of their children;
6. Decrease the incidence and prevalence of child abuse; and
7. Increase the involvement of fathers in children's schooling.

Statistical analysis of the data (using difference of means tests) found that these items were very highly ranked regardless of program type. In fact, if deviations between program types existed, it was due to the fact that some programs rated these seven items as being even more important than others did. In no case did any program type rate these seven priorities lower than their peers in other program subtypes.

Conversely, nine potential objectives received low scores relative to the mean ranking; in all cases, the average ranking was less than 2.0. The low-scoring objectives were to:

1. Provide legal services (divorce, custody, etc.);
2. Increase the number of fathers entering postsecondary education;
3. Increase the number of fathers who obtain a GED;
4. Reduce additional pregnancies outside of marriage;
5. Increase the number of fathers who complete high school;
6. Decrease likelihood of early fatherhood among nonfathers;
7. Promote effective use of contraception;

### Culturally-Oriented Programs

Roughly 10 percent of the programs surveyed have a cultural orientation. They typically focus on the needs of a specific population, such as African American, Asian American, or Latino fathers. Sample mission statements include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Mission Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black Male Rebirth Program</td>
<td>To help young men assume positive roles within the family, workplace, and community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinatown Beacon</td>
<td>To provide fun activities such as horseback riding, fishing, and boating for fathers and their children and to educate fathers on parenting issues through workshops. The organization provides holistic and integrative services to assist youth development and to improve the life of families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Hombre a Hombre</td>
<td>To encourage Spanish-speaking, monolingual Latino fathers to participate more actively in relationships with their children and in their parenting responsibilities, as well as to encourage them to take better care of their own health.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. Build close connections between and more political activity by organizations with a fathering component or focus; and
9. Increase compliance with child support obligations.

These findings were less consistent across program subtypes. For example, pregnancy prevention programs and young/early fatherhood support programs rated early pregnancy prevention, out-of-wedlock pregnancy prevention, effective contraceptive use, high school completion, GED completion, and postsecondary education more highly than did other types of programs. This difference is both statistically and practically significant. The difference in ranking was at least 1.1 ranking points for all six items, and for two objectives (contraceptive use and early pregnancy prevention) the difference was more than two ranking points.

On the other hand, the items “build connections/political activity by organizations,” “promote child support compliance,” and “promote postsecondary education” had the least agreement across program type. The “build connections/political activity by organizations” item was ranked very low by five program types, including incarcerated father programs, but very highly by four others and most highly by parenting programs. The “promote child support compliance” and “promote postsecondary education” items were ranked highly by three program types: early unwanted fatherhood prevention programs; early teen fatherhood support; and responsible fatherhood programs.

Despite disagreement on the low-ranked items, it does seem safe to conclude that virtually all programs sought quality parenting and father-child interactions as their primary objectives. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that, with the exception of early/unwanted fatherhood prevention and early/teen fatherhood support programs, these initiatives generally did not have a pregnancy prevention focus and did not seek to increase educational attainment. In addition, these fatherhood programs did not view the provision of legal aide as a primary objective.

Relationship Between Program Objectives and Services. Given their indicated primary objectives, the programs we studied have tailored their individual services quite well to their chosen missions. We asked program staff to select from a 31-item list, indicating the services they provided directly, those to which they referred participants, and those which they offered participants through a third-party contractor. Sixty percent or

Disability-Oriented Programs
Several programs are intended to help fathers and families assist their children with developmental disabilities. Sample mission statements include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Mission Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CARE/Contra Costa ARC</td>
<td>To enhance the quality of life for people with developmental disabilities. CARE's Father Support Network pursues the goal of helping fathers learn how to be their disabled child's advocate, to organize and match fathers with other fathers for support and mentoring, and to link fathers with other services to help them raise their disabled child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Resource Network</td>
<td>To assist families that have children with disabilities. Services for parents with children aged 0-3 are funded by the Department of Developmental Services in Sacramento. Services for parents with older children are funded through grants.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Family-Centered Programs

Family-centered programs are natural places to focus on fatherhood. These programs provide a range of services, from educational and prenatal classes for expectant fathers to cooperative parenting programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Mission Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Service Agency</td>
<td>To serve families that are expecting children or have children under the age of 3, where a family member (mom, dad, or child) is under stress. The Pregnancy to Parenthood program offers counseling, education, and support to parents (as couples or individuals) and the child. The Parent Aid program matches a trained volunteer to a family to provide mentoring to parents. The parenting class helps parents with issues of abuse and neglect. It also teaches about child development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father's Forum</td>
<td>To provide educational services through prenatal classes for expectant fathers; to help bring fathers together in the early years of parenting to form a community; to help fathers enjoy parenthood more and enjoy being fathers; and to help fathers feel less isolated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fathers and Families</td>
<td>To strengthen and build relationships between fathers and their children; to rebuild the bridges that have been lost between fathers and children; to foster “gender reconciliation” by getting parents and custody courts to recognize that it takes both parents to work together to raise children; and to promote new styles of parenting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the responding programs, consistent with the parenting and support focus they indicated, reported offering five services directly: peer support groups, parent education classes, cooperative parenting classes, child development education classes, and peer/group learning opportunities.

Not surprisingly, less than 15 percent of the organizations reported that they provided the following services directly: legal services for the criminal justice system, legal services for family court, assistance or mediation for custody disputes, divorce or separation counseling, paternity establishment, structured visitation, vocational training, and GED/adult education.

Rather, most organizations provided their clients with referrals to other organizations regarding legal, mental health, education, and/or medical issues. Very few programs reported contracting for services of any type.

**Curricula.** When we asked our sample of programs whether they used a specific curriculum in their fathering programs, about 25 percent indicated that they had developed a curriculum independently, and another 20 percent indicated that they had purchased a curriculum or received one from another organization.

**Barriers and Concerns.** We asked programs to rank 22 “concerns” on a scale of 0 to 4, with 4 being an “extremely important concern” and 0 being “not a concern.” Only four items exceeded an average score of 2.0: insufficiency of funding, uncertainty of funding, limited participant resources, and the low priority that government agencies place on this issue. Three of these items are related directly or indirectly to program funding. The fourth is consistent with our earlier discussion of the time and economic constraints that these participants often face. A finding of some surprise was the “mismatch between services and participant needs,” which received the lowest score of the 22 items (0.88, on average), indicating that programs believe they are addressing their target population’s needs.
Perspectives on Program Findings

Our analysis revealed a number of challenges that most programs seem to face, from a disconnect between the call for fathering support and the public funding provided for such efforts to the inherent difficulties that programs face as they evolve their missions to serve fathers and support father involvement.

The Disconnect: A Lack of Funding from Public Sources. As with many areas of social services, shortfalls and inconsistencies in fathering, male involvement, and pregnancy prevention programs can often be blamed, at least in part, on funding problems. While several small and large private foundations have begun to invest heavily in fathering support programs, public agencies are only now beginning to make an investment in fathering support services. As we noted before, two prominent types of public agencies—justice and labor departments at all levels of government—are making no public investment that we could discern in fatherhood programs. This finding is even more striking in light of the recent movement to broaden the missions of child support enforcement agencies to include assistance to fathers in need. As we will discuss more thoroughly in the next section, the public efforts currently in place are often underutilized; we believe it is because participants view these agencies as suspect providers of support. This situation could present an opportunity for public-private partnership, by leveraging public funds in private organizations that have credibility with participants and the community.

Services for Whom? A Mismatch Between Program Services and Participant Needs. The most striking finding was that program objectives and services, though generally consistent within each program, did not match the needs expressed by participants themselves. This finding in and of itself is not uncommon; many social services organizations are not conversant with the needs of their service populations for a variety of good—and less laudatory—reasons. What makes this finding noteworthy is that programs themselves identified participant needs as being at odds with what they routinely offer. In other words, a mismatch often existed between what programs identified as a high priority objective and what programs, in fact, identified as the greatest challenge facing their participants. As noted in the section on participant findings, program staff reported that, indeed, the greatest challenge their fathers faced was a lack of educational attainment, followed by a need for legal counsel. Despite this knowledge, programs rarely considered education or legal assistance to be a primary objective, nor did they offer these services directly, although they did refer participants to literacy or legal aid programs.

Teen-Focused Programs

A number of programs focus specifically on adolescents, both for the prevention of pregnancy and preparation of teens for parenthood. Sample mission statements include:

Organization | Mission Statement
--- | ---
Huckleberry Teen Health Program | To empower young men to make healthy choices with the goal of preventing unwanted pregnancy.
Teen Pregnancy Coalition of San Mateo County | To provide comprehensive sexuality education programs to youths in 8th grade through high school in San Mateo County.
The data provide some explanations for this finding. First, as noted earlier, programs usually receive low levels of funding and employ few professionals. At a basic level, most programs simply lack the wherewithal to provide the services that fathers need most. Second, these programs tended to identify themselves as filling a particular gap in the social services network. (Literacy organizations and legal aide societies do exist and can be accessed by referral.) What the data cannot tell us, however, is whether programs develop accurate and comprehensive means for determining which services participants need, as well as who or what organization is best suited for providing it and what the quality of their services are.

Third, programs may simply assume that they are meeting the needs of their clients. The lowest-rated concern among program staff was a mismatch between service offerings and participants needs. While programs understand the needs of participants, program managers construct services that primarily involve peer support and parenting education, perhaps because of the problems they face regarding funding and the assumption that other agencies or organizations will address major issues such as literacy or legal assistance. Both peer support and parenting education are meaningful and needed services, but they may address the participants' symptoms more than the root causes—low levels of educational attainment, as well as the poverty and attendant distress that often accompanies it.

**Uncertain Success: Curriculum and Program Personnel.** Programs face another challenge as they attempt to make an impact on the lives of participants: the lack of a set curriculum. For many small programs, the absence of a curriculum may reflect limited funding, personnel, and participant time. Nevertheless, in our estimation, the absence of a curriculum is a serious impediment to program growth and improvement. Curricula are more than a document; they should represent the results of a long-term planning process that matches participant needs with current and potential program resources. They provide structure for ongoing activities and standards against which to evaluate performance. They usually serve as a prerequisite for fundraising activities by demonstrating why funds are needed and how they are used. Finally, in the absence of a curriculum, it is impossible to know what works and for whom. Unless one documents and repeats practices, it is difficult to associate successes with particular services or activities. If the fatherhood field is to develop cumulative knowledge of what works, developing and testing curricula is a critical step.

### Gay/Lesbian-Focused Programs

These programs provide resources for gay fathers who otherwise might not find support in fathering settings, as well as support for parents of lesbian and gay children. Sample mission statements include:

**Organization**

**Gay Fathers Support Network**

**Mission Statement**

To educate and inspire gay fathers and to help them develop parenting skills; to provide support for gay fathers who are “coming out of the closet.”

**PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbian and Gays)**

**Mission Statement**

To support distressed parents and gays and lesbians; to provide education for the public; to engage in advocacy for parents, families, and friends of lesbians and gay men.
Understanding Challenges: Three Program Development Tracks.

Fathering and male involvement programs represent what might be termed an “emergent” field of social services. For centuries, religious orders and then governments have provided social relief to children, mothers, the indigent, and the mentally impaired. However, social services that specifically target men who fulfill the role of father are a relatively new phenomenon. While the specific reasons for the development of this new branch of social services still have no empirical support, it can be plausibly argued that five factors encouraged the development of fathering support programs:

1. Changing views on the balance between mothers and fathers in the care of children;
2. An emerging body of evidence that (a) links child outcomes to the quality of both the mother’s and father’s parenting practices, and (b) highlights differentiated roles for mothers and fathers in childrearing;
3. An increase in the rate of single motherhood concurrent with an increase in father absence;
4. A growing backlash against (a) viewing fathers primarily as sources of financial support for mothers and children, (b) the greater assertiveness of women in custody disputes, and (c) the perceived bias of courts and divisions of social services toward mothers in custody cases; and
5. Rising social pressure to enforce child support orders and the emergence of the popular image of noncustodial fathers as “deadbeat dads.”

Because the reasons for developing fathering programs are differentiated, there are essentially three paths to program development that organizations follow:

1. **Evolution.** Programs that evolve from pre-existing social services efforts when, through some combination of experiential knowledge, formal knowledge, and advocacy by opinion leaders in the existing field, the effort redefines its mission to include a greater focus on fathers.

**School-Based/Education-Oriented Programs**

Operating within and outside of formal school settings, these programs provide educational services ranging from literacy to early childhood education for children and adults. Sample mission statements include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Mission Statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marin Literacy Program</td>
<td>To provide basic reading and writing skills to adults 16 years and older who are no longer involved in the school system; to help those adults become more active members of the community; and to help them to be able to assist and take care of their families better in the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napa-Solano Head Start</td>
<td>To deliver a variety of services to families with young children in the spirit of family-focused, shared decision-making and community awareness. The family system is the program’s primary concern; it serves children through the parents and extended family. Disadvantaged populations are a central concern.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Reaction. Programs that provide a means for men to draw social support from one another in their roles as fathers and in their struggles with a custody and social services system that is largely viewed as adversarial and hostile.

3. Enforcement-orientation. Programs (often with governmental support) founded to promote paternity establishment, child support payment, and/or pregnancy prevention.

Each path to program development is accompanied by a particular set of foci and unresolved dilemmas with which programs must struggle. In our site visits and focus groups, we gained first-hand knowledge of some of these challenges, three of which we highlight below.

For programs that evolve from existing efforts, the primary challenge seems to be overcoming the institutionalized images that minimize the role of fathers as active parents, particularly noncustodial fathers. For example, several informants described how entrenched negative attitudes about father participation in schools, child care centers, and some social services agencies thwarted attempts to develop and integrate fathers into ongoing activities. For workers in these social services organizations, the focus has long been primarily on mothers and children; when fathers are considered, they are either viewed as financial supports or as neutral-to-negative forces in the lives of the primary service population. One San Francisco program director we visited decided recently to leave his program and reorient his activities solely toward deconstructing attitudes about fathers in schools and child care centers because of the frustration he experienced in his own school-based program. (See the sidebar on p. 13.)

Thus, while social services organizations may have decided to include fathers in their programs at a strategic and management level, there is still a reservoir of resistance to such change among frontline employees. Moreover, attempts to reduce resistance by incorporating male staff into programs has been undermined by the paucity of trained men in the field or men who can be prepared for the work. During our site visits, two program directors independently noted the difficulty of finding and retaining trained male staff, especially since the Bay Area job market was so “tight” in the late 1990s.

For programs that develop in reaction to systems and institutional barriers, the challenge is to create a more comprehensive mission. Programs that develop along this path tend to focus almost exclusively on peer support groups and advocacy activity.

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**Fathering/Father-Focused Programs**

These programs are specifically designed to address the needs of men regarding their role as fathers. Sample mission statements include:

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<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Mission Statement</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dads Embracing Fatherhood</td>
<td>To help and educate young fathers and males to learn personal skills and be responsible sexually and financially; to prevent teenage/young/undesired fatherhood; to provide parenting training; and to promote male involvement in children’s lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marin Community Development Program</td>
<td>To provide affordable, quality childcare for low-income families. The mission of the fathering activities of the organization is to increase the involvement of fathers in the basic care and health of their children.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A few have branched out into community organizing and general advocacy. However, the majority of programs that fit this developmental path lack the funding, expertise, and possibly the will to address more difficult problems that require reflection on the issues that men themselves bring to the programs. No finding better demonstrates this challenge than the mismatch between the identified educational needs of programs and their unwillingness or inability to provide those services directly. When we analyzed the differences in objectives between these programs and all others for which we had data, we found they were even less likely to view educational attainment, pregnancy prevention, and successful contraception as objectives, although the differences were not statistically significant. On the other hand, they were more likely to view building fathering awareness and political activity as organizational objectives (at the 5 percent and 10 percent significance levels, respectively). Programs that develop reactively must attempt to find a strong basis for their continuing work.

Programs that focus on direct behavior modification and enforcement of legal or social obligations face complex challenges. Like evolutionary programs, they face the problem of modifying institutionalized beliefs about fathers; however, they face both organizationally specific and politically and popularly entrenched beliefs. Public sector practitioners are just as likely as private sector practitioners to bring negative stereotypes and attitudes to the support work they undertake. Moreover, these attitudes may be deeply felt after working within the enforcement system for many years. However, even if the organization’s internal belief structure changes, the popular and political belief structures that provide support to service organizations may constitute a major impediment to changing the way public programs treat men. Our work with county-level decision-makers leads us to believe that politicians and the general public may accept the “deadbeat” dad stereotype and thus expect agencies to have hard-line collections and punishment-focused perspectives in their programs.

Unlike evolutionary programs, enforcement-oriented programs must also cope more directly with the real skepticism of potential participants; participants themselves harbor stereotypes—many of which are well-earned—of social services agencies. As we will discuss in greater detail in Chapters 5 and 6, public sector programs may find it difficult or impossible to shed this stereotype as long as they continue to have an enforcement mandate. Marketing psychologists tell us that buyers develop expectations of brand names that only substantial advertising and reorganization efforts can overturn. In a sense, public sector programs face this same dilemma. Mandated to provide more than collections services, they are nevertheless saddled with a “brand name” that makes it difficult to market their services to the intended population of fathers.

Legal/Criminal Justice Programs

These programs offer services to incarcerated fathers, particularly as they make the transition back into their communities, or they may provide fathers with legal information about custody, visitation, and legal issues. A sample mission statement includes:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Mission Statement</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Centerforce</td>
<td>To serve incarcerated individuals and their partners, families, and children. Centerforce keeps families intact during incarceration and offers programs for transportation, child care, literacy, health, and HIV education during visiting hours.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>