

document can be filed, but filing with the court is not the same as having a court-approved order that is signed by both parties and the judge. Some mediators reportedly charge \$500 to draft an unofficial plan, which is “a waste of time and money” because the court cannot enforce the plan. In sum, the Spokane County court won’t sign a parenting agreement unless there is a child support order.

King County interviewees did not think they could have this problem because of the way their facilitators review and track cases. One worker said that parenting plans must be entered into the court to be finalized, but clients sometimes come to an agreement by meeting with an early resolution case manager before they meet the judge. She noted that if parents get back together or decide to resolve things on their own, there is a \$30 non-compliance fee and clients who come back have to start the process from the beginning.

One Thurston County employee described the three different versions of plans:

- Proposed parenting plan—summoned by first filing
- Temporary parenting plan—signed by the judge until case is finalized
- Final parenting plan—in force until modified

The county reportedly does not have any problems with the finalization of parenting plans. When there is a temporary plan, the court “does what it can to finalize it.”

7. What interaction do you and your staff have with DCS? Do they refer families to your office?

Interviewees reported very little interaction between the county courts and DCS. King County workers didn’t know whether they receive any referrals from DCS. One noted point of contact was that “all superior courts are supposed to forward all copies of orders to child support enforcement.” Spokane County reportedly receives some DCS referrals but they are not always appropriate (“people have different levels of understanding about what we can and can’t do”). One worker also noted that “most DCS cases have parentage already adjudicated, so they wouldn’t qualify [for the grant].” Thurston County interviewees said that they can identify whether DCS refers families; they do not interact otherwise.

8. Would greater interaction with, or referrals from, DCS be valuable?

Workers at each demonstration site said they would welcome more referrals from and interaction with DCS. However, they said they were not fully aware of what DCS does and wondered if DCS is fully aware of what they do (also see above). One interviewee noted that more interaction might help to

ensure proper referrals. Another pointed out the overall benefit of fostering the relationship between the agencies: “The faster you can get child support going, the better.”

9. Are there any other ways to help families complete and file parenting plans that DCS should consider supporting?

The interviewees made several suggestions about additional ways for DCS to support the parenting plan process (recognizing that some ideas were less feasible than others):

- Developing a formal referral form for families referred by DCS (according to one interviewee, clients referred by DCS frequently do not know why they have been referred to the clerk’s office, and determining which services the client needs sometimes requires significant staff time)
- Requiring and paying for a mandatory parenting class for parenting plan clients
- Facilitating an orientation class in which court facilitators can present descriptions of their services to staff of DCS, Child Protective Services (CPS), and law enforcement agencies
- Having clients bring a copy of their court order or paternity affidavit to simplify the process of enrolling them on the grant
- Providing a copy of the award letter (the award letter shows incomes and dates so it could help determine income eligibility)
- Extending FOC to cover dissolution or non-parental custody cases (these have all of the same issues and challenges plus the extra cost of background checks for all involved adults)

EVALUATION OVERVIEW

Initially, the demonstration highlighted two key outcomes for evaluation: child support payments and parenting time with children. The first outcome is only relevant for children with IV-D cases, while the second applies to all potential clients. In particular, the impact study will focus on changes in (1) the time parents spend with their children; (2) parents' perception about changes in parenting time pre- and post-service receipt; and (3) patterns of child support payments and parenting time. The impact study will seek to answer two central questions for each outcome:

1. *To what extent does FOC appear to have affected the outcome?*
2. *How do differences in client characteristics, provider services, and other salient program characteristics relate to the observed outcomes?*

The extent to which we can identify a comparison group of families that resembles families that received FOC services but who were not part of the demonstration will determine the evaluation's success at answering the counterfactual: *How would key outcomes have been different for FOC clients if they had not received FOC services?*

STUDY CAVEATS

Soon after receiving grant funding, FOC determined that implementing an experimental research design would not be feasible. As a result, the impact study must rely on less robust methods of estimating program impacts. The study will evaluate changes in parenting time outcomes between intake and a follow-up survey conducted about six months after intake. At present, we do not anticipate having similar parenting time data for individuals who did not receive FOC services.

To evaluate changes in child support outcomes, we will analyze child support data that DCS matched to FOC client data. While we will ultimately also have access to child support records for non-participants, unobserved differences between FOC participants and non-participants with similar observed characteristics could produce differences in outcomes. For example, FOC might attract only the parents who are the most committed to supporting their child financially. If so, we might observe better child support outcomes for this group not because of FOC, but because of the unobserved difference in motivation.

Because we lack a meaningful control group, our findings regarding program impact will remain suggestive rather than conclusive of causality. If DCS ultimately produces a flow of new referrals to demonstration sites, a

comparison of DCS-referred FOC clients and otherwise similar clients in non-FOC regions could potentially provide more robust estimates of program impact. At present, it seems unlikely that DCS referrals will occur early enough or be numerous enough to make this approach feasible.

A further limit to the study results from the fact that we have no way to measure the extent to which FOC clients receive services they would not otherwise have received. As of publication, all FOC clients decided independently to seek assistance with a parenting plan. In many cases, fee waivers for FOC services would have been available even without the FOC demonstration. As noted above, FOC sites do not always advertise the availability of waivers, and FOC may well increase access to these services. But we cannot easily identify clients who receive services they would not or could not have received without FOC.

Despite these caveats, the data analysis will, at a minimum, augment what little is known about the characteristics and child support outcomes of populations seeking AV services through the court system.

THE INTAKE FORM

The intake form requests client contact information, basic demographic data, and the following additional information (see the Appendix for a blank intake form):

- *Referral source (DSHS, court, self, attorney, child support, other)*
- *Whether the respondent lives with the children listed on the form*
- *How often the respondent spends time with the children (more than once a week, once a week, one or more times per month, less than once per month, or never)*
- *How often the other parent spends time with the children (as above)*
- *How difficult is it for the respondent to agree with the other parent on visitation (no contact with the other parent, not difficult, difficult but usually reach agreement, or difficult and one parent misses visitation opportunities because of the disagreement)*
- *Whether the respondent and the other parent agree on the amount of time each should spend with the children (mostly agree, the other parent wants more time than respondent thinks is fair, or the other parent wants to have less time than respondent thinks is fair)*

As noted earlier, the demonstration sites submit one or more completed intake forms to FOC for each client who requests and receives services.

BILLING DATA

Each FOC provider sent ECONorthwest spreadsheets itemizing the services for which the site invoiced the grant during the analysis period. We linked billing data to intake form data using the FOC case number. The data

included the FOC case number assigned by the provider, the date of service, type of service, and amount billed for the service. For analytic purposes, we collapse the available FOC services into the following categories:

- **Admin:** FOC paid client fees for various administrative services, including provision of forms, court clerk fees, ex parte fees, and certified copies of documents.
- **Parenting plan filing:** FOC paid client fees for filing documents with the court.
- **Parent seminar:** FOC paid client fees for a parenting seminar (King County only).
- **Facilitation:** FOC paid client fees for court facilitator services.
- **Mediation:** FOC paid client fees for mediation (King County only, not provided as of August 2010).
- **Modification of parenting plan:** FOC paid clients fees for modification of a parenting plan.

The billing data also includes case status that indicates whether the parents have completed a parenting plan. FOC instructed the demonstration sites to update the case status indicator as data become available.

CHILD SUPPORT DATA

ECONorthwest manually entered intake form data for clients entering the program between April and August 2010, and provided client identifiers to DCS for matching to child support records contained in DCS's Support Enforcement Management System (SEMS). For this report, SEMS staff provided the following types of data for FOC clients with matching IV-D cases:

- **Case information.** Data elements include type of case (e.g., TANF or non-TANF), status (open or closed), the monthly current support amount and arrears amount owed as of the reporting month.
- **Individual information.** Data elements include individual role (child, CP, NCP), paternity establishment indicators, and date of paternity establishment.
- **Payment information.** Data elements include the amount of current support and arrears paid on each case in each month for all payments from May 2009 to the most recent reporting month.

DCS used client-reported social security numbers, names, and other identifying information to match FOC intake data to records in SEMS. In all, SEMS identified 647 IV-D cases that involved at least one FOC parent. The payment data associated with these cases includes 3,632 case-month observations. Not all FOC cases had a matching DCS case, while others were associated with multiple cases, but the data clearly indicate that a large

majority of FOC cases had one or more parents with IV-D experience. Of the 428 unique FOC cases, 91 (21 percent) had no associated IV-D case; 57 (13 percent) had one or more parents associated with a IV-D case but for children other than those listed on the intake form; and 280 FOC cases (65 percent) were associated with a IV-D case for at least one listed child. Of these, 171 had more than one associated case.

For FOC parents associated with multiple IV-D cases, we designated a “primary” case as follows: First, we checked whether any children on the FOC case were present in each IV-D case using child name and date of birth. We excluded from consideration any cases with no matching children. Next, if we found multiple IV-D cases with matching children, we assigned the IV-D case with the most recent status date as the primary case for the purposes of the DCS data analysis presented below.

THE FOLLOW-UP SURVEY

The follow-up survey will cover the following topics:

- *Parent characteristics and family composition (age, race and ethnicity, language spoken at home, education level, marital status, employment status, distance from the residence of the child’s other parent)*
- *Level of difficulty agreeing on visitation prior to receiving services*
- *Type of services received*
- *Changes in parenting time since receiving services*
- *Perceived value of the services received*
- *Whether the parents filed a parenting plan with the court subsequent to receiving services*

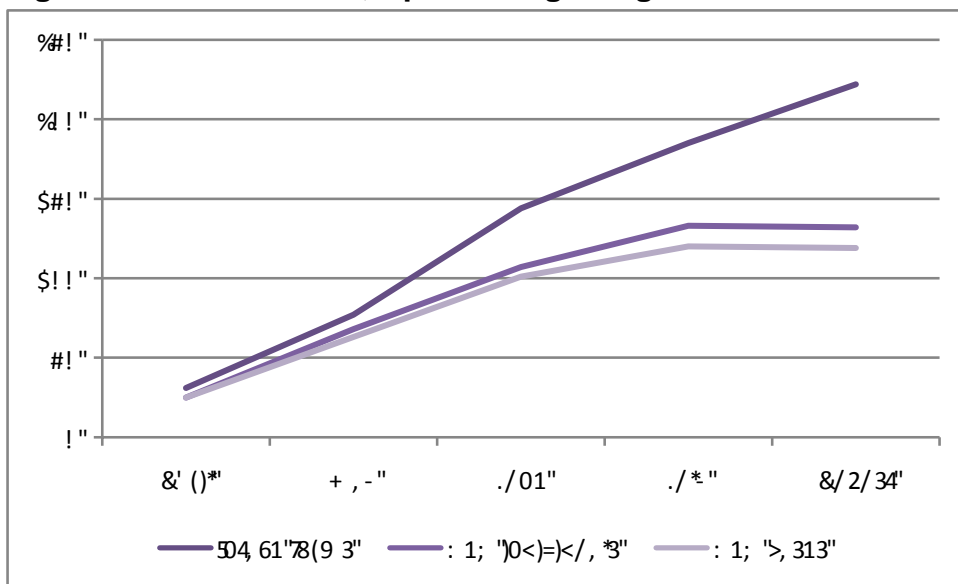
Where appropriate, the wording of survey questions will mirror the wording of similar questions on the intake form. RDA will revise the draft questions (see Appendix A) to simplify the language and to facilitate the planned telephone administration of the survey.

YEAR 1 DATA ANALYSIS

This section presents our preliminary analysis of the intake form data and linked DCS data. Because these data include relatively little data about client activities post-intake, we provide primarily descriptive statistics about client characteristics to provide a baseline context for the more detailed analysis completed during the final years of the demonstration. We begin by describing the FOC client caseload during April through August 2010, including client demographics, reported parenting time situations, case service use, measures of child support payments, and a brief analysis of child support payment data for cases with a child support case open prior to intake. We conclude with a brief description of the FOC services accessed by recent clients.

Figure 3.1 characterizes FOC intakes during the analysis period. April 2010 intakes only occurred in Thurston County, with the King County and Spokane sites beginning services in May (King County had its first intake in June). The total number of intakes continues to increase throughout the period. However, because Spokane and Thurston counties submit multiple forms for individuals with multiple FOC service visits, the number of new clients actually plateaus in August. In addition, both parents completed an intake form for a small number of cases, so the number of unique new cases falls below the number of new individuals completing a form. In total, FOC providers initiated services for 428 unique cases during the five-month period.¹⁴ On average, FOC received about 1.5 forms per case. The average does not vary appreciably by month of first intake.

Figure 3.1: FOC Intakes, April through August 2010



Source: ECONorthwest analysis of FOC intake data.

Thurston County contributed 60 percent of the total cases, with Spokane contributing 38 percent, and King County the remaining 2 percent. As illustrated in Table 3.1, only King County did not submit multiple forms per case. They also have a very small caseload, which we discussed in Chapter 2. On average, providers submitted 1.5 forms per case (23 percent of cases had multiple forms).¹⁵ The table also shows the total number of children involved in the cases. The average for every site is 1.2 children per case, with 23

¹⁴ Because of inconsistencies in how parents completed the intake form during repeat visits, our totals may over- or understate the actual number of cases. Future reports may include different totals as we resolve these inconsistencies. A similar qualification applies to other statistics reported in this chapter.

¹⁵ More recent intakes are clearly less likely to have multiple forms submitted. The data bear this out: For intakes during May 2010, providers had submitted an average of 1.7 forms per case by the end of the analysis period, with 29 percent of cases having more than one form submitted.

percent of all cases involving more than one child. In other words, a large majority of cases involve only a single child.

Finally, the table shows the percent of cases originally referred to the providers (but not necessarily to FOC specifically) by DCS. The DCS referral rates are consistent with the referral rates presented in Chapter 1, although Spokane saw relatively more DCS referrals than did Thurston County. There are too few King County cases to draw any conclusions regarding DCS referrals other than that DCS is not a source of a significant number of referrals.

Table 3.1: FOC intake characteristics April through August 2010, by site

	Site			Total
	King Co.	Spokane Co.	Thurston Co.	
Intake forms	8	225	426	659
Individuals	8	176	281	465
Cases	8	162	258	428
Children	10	207	327	544
% referred by DCS	0.0	3.9	1.6	2.4

Source: ECONorthwest analysis of FOC intake data.

CLIENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 3.2 displays selected characteristics of the FOC caseload. We define “primary parent” as the parent in the FOC case who filled out the first intake form for the case (i.e., the parent who initiated the case), while “other parent” refers to the parent that did not. As highlighted in the table, the primary parent does not necessarily have custody of the children, although most do.¹⁶ The small number of King County FOC cases renders essentially meaningless the seemingly large differences between King County cases and those from the two other sites.

We find no statistically significant¹⁷ difference in age between the primary and other parents either within cases or across sites. The average age of Spokane’s FOC children was somewhat younger than that for the other sites even though parents were not appreciably younger in Spokane. The primary parents in Spokane were, however, much more likely to have legal custody and much more likely to be female than were parents at other sites. At all sites, a much smaller share of primary parents was non-Hispanic white than was the general population, as measured using data from the Census

¹⁶ The intake form asks the parent to indicate whether “the children reside with you the majority of the time.” For this report, we classify parents as CP or NCP on the basis of responses to this item on the intake form. A small number of parents did not complete this item and are excluded from tabulations based on a parent’s custodial status.

¹⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all differences reported as statistically significant have p-values less than 0.05.

Bureau's American Community Survey. The client follow-up survey will provide additional demographic characteristics of the FOC population.

Table 3.2: FOC case characteristics, April through August 2010, by site

	Site			Total
	King Co.	Spokane Co.	Thurston Co.	
Ave. age of:				
Primary parent	33.5	29.2	28.9	29.1
Other parent	28.2	29.2	29.6	29.4
Children	6.4	6.4	4.9	5.5
Primary-parent characteristics				
% custodial	25.0	62.5	73.8	68.8
% female	25.0	47.5	62.0	52.6
% non-Hispanic white	12.5	71.6	70.2	69.6
% non-Hispanic white (ACS)	67.2	87.5	80.3	72.0

Note: Table excludes 11 cases with missing parenting time information.

Source: American Community Survey and ECONorthwest analysis of FOC intake data.

REPORTED PARENTING TIME

Table 3.3 displays parenting time information as reported by the primary parent on the first intake form for each case. The table reports the share of NCPs who visit with their children one or more times per week for cases where the CP is the primary parent and for cases where the NCP is the primary parent. Differences in the share of primary parents reporting at weekly visits that depend on whether the parent has custody could be attributable to many factors: differing motivations for seeking FOC services (e.g., we might observe relatively more NCPs reporting weekly visits if frequent visits indicate an engaged parent who also has a corresponding interest in formalizing visitation), different perceptions about frequency of visitation, or others.

Table 3.3: Frequency of NCP visitation, by site and parent initiating the FOC case, April through August 2010

		Site			Total
		King Co.	Spokane Co.	Thurston Co.	
CP- initiated	Visits > once/wk.	50.0%	44.6%	50.3%	48.4%
	Visits < once/wk.	33.3%	30.0%	37.6%	33.5%
	No NCP visitation	16.7%	25.5%	12.1%	18.1%
	Number of cases	2	92	185	279
NCP- initiated	Visits > once/wk.	0.0%	40.0%	53.0%	44.9%
	Visits < once/wk.	82.6%	40.5%	27.5%	36.1%
	No NCP visitation	17.4%	19.5%	19.5%	19.0%
	Number of cases	6	55	66	127

Note: Table excludes 22 cases with missing parenting time information.

Source: ECONorthwest analysis of FOC intake data.

The share of NCPs who self-reported at least weekly visits is slightly higher than the share of CPs who reported at least weekly NCP visits, but the difference is not statistically significant at conventional levels. The difference

in share of NCPs with weekly visits across sites is not statistically significant either. Overall, 18 percent of primary parents reported that the NCP had no contact, a statistic that also did not vary significantly depending on whether the primary parent was CP or NCP.

Table 3.4 displays the distribution of responses to the two additional intake form questions on parenting time: “How difficult is it to agree with your children’s other parent on when and where each of you spend time?” and “Do you and your children’s other parent agree on the amount of time each of you should spend with your children?” Responses to these questions can shed light on whether the amount of visitation reported in Table 3.3 is consistent with what parents want or expect. The table displays statistics for the entire FOC caseload combined. We found no statistically significant differences in responses across FOC sites.

About one fifth of primary parents reported no contact with the other parent. A slightly smaller share reported no disagreement arranging visitations, while a majority of primary parents (62 percent) reported some level of disagreement. Primary parents who were NCPs reported more disagreement than did those who were CPs—41 percent of the NCP primary parents reported missing visitation opportunities because of the disagreement, compared to only 25 percent of the CPs, a statistically significant difference.

Table 3.4: Reported level of agreement over visitation arrangements, by parent initiating FOC case, April through August 2010

Agreement on time and place of visitation	No contact with other parent	Not difficult at all	Difficult, usually reach agreement	Difficult, missed visitation opportunities
% of CP-initiated cases	22.7	17.3	34.9	25.2
% of NCP-initiated cases	17.2	18.0	23.4	41.4
<i>% of Total</i>	<i>20.6</i>	<i>17.7</i>	<i>31.7</i>	<i>30.0</i>
Agreement on NCP parenting time	Mostly agree	Other parent wants more time	Other parent wants less time	Other*
% of CP-initiated cases	40.4	42.3	17.0	0.4
% of NCP-initiated cases	31.5	54.8	12.9	0.8
<i>% of Total</i>	<i>37.5</i>	<i>46.6</i>	<i>15.4</i>	<i>0.5</i>

*Other includes two responses indicating that the parent wanted both more and less time with children.

Notes: A small number of respondents (less than 3% of the total responses for each question) selected more than one response to at least one of the two questions. Where possible, we recoded these responses to the category that seemed most logically consistent with the individual’s response pattern. The table excludes 22 cases with missing parenting time information.

Source: ECONorthwest analysis of FOC intake data.

A large minority of primary parents (37 percent) “mostly agreed” with the other parent on amount of time each should spend with their children, suggesting that agreement on scheduling may pose a greater hurdle to arranging visitation than quantity of time desired for many FOC clients. Nonetheless, more parents indicated that the other parent wanted too much time with the children than indicated agreement on amount of visitation

SUMMARY OF BASELINE DATA

Based on our analysis of FOC and IV-D data for FOC clients receiving services during the first four months of the demonstration, we have identified case characteristics that serve to classify FOC cases along two dimensions. First, we find strong correlations between CP and NCP agreement about NCP visitation and the extent of self-reported NCP visitations. The patterns of reported visitation across four categories of FOC case (“agreeable”, “scheduling trouble”, “disagreeable”, and “no contact”) suggest the relative need for more and less intensive AV services. For example, “agreeable” families likely need less help finalizing the details of a parenting plan than “disagreeable” families, while “no contact” cases face a different set of challenges in establishing mutually agreeable visitation arrangements. We find interesting, but only marginally significant in a statistical sense, differences in IV-D involvement across these groups of cases.

Second, we find significant differences in IV-D involvement (e.g., whether an FOC family has an open IV-D case) and financial support (e.g., whether an NCP has made a recent child support payment) depending on whether a CP or an NCP first sought AV services through the demonstration. NCP-initiated cases were more likely to fall into the “disagreeable” category, although not to a statistically significant degree. Nonetheless, the observed differences in IV-D case characteristics depending on which parent initiated an FOC case again suggest differing needs for services.

At present, the available data do not indicate significant differences in FOC service use across the FOC case categories, although it is too early to evaluate case outcomes with any rigor. Additional data collection may shed light on the extent to which FOC services address the specific needs of FOC clients and promote parenting plan development and improved child support payment outcomes.

CONCLUSIONS

At the end of this first year of the FOC demonstration, Washington has a program in place that funds family-centered services for unmarried parents. While FOC has not implemented all program elements as anticipated, FOC has laid the foundation for further experimentation during the remainder of the demonstration period. In particular, the demonstration has established, at three demonstration sites, processes for increasing the access of unmarried parents to services that facilitate completion and filing of an official parenting plan. FOC and IV-D data associated with FOC clients served during the first four months of the demonstration provide a useful

DRAFT SURVEY QUESTIONS

FOC SERVICES

1. *Identify the services that were provided to you or your children (select all that apply):* Court filing fees, other fees, a court facilitator session, a parenting education class or seminar, mediation/parenting plan development, referrals to other agencies.
2. *Overall, how valuable were these services to you?:* Extremely valuable, somewhat valuable, not at all valuable, don't know.
3. *Without Focus on the Child, would you have received the services you listed?:* Yes, all of the same services; no, I could not have afforded some of the services; no, I could not have afforded any of the services; no, I could have afforded the services but would not have requested the same services for another reason [Please explain briefly].

CLIENT DEMOGRAPHICS

4. *How far do you live from the child's other parent?:* Less than five miles, five or more miles but less than 25, 25 or more miles but less than 50, more than 50 miles, don't know where the other parent lives.
5. *What is the highest educational degree you have received?:* High school diploma or GED, College degree or higher, none.
6. *Are you currently employed?* Full-time, part-time, not employed.
7. *What is your family's annual income?* Less than \$25,000, between \$25,000 and \$50,000, more than \$50,000.

PARENTING PLANS

8. *During the past six months, have you been in mediation with your child's other parent to develop a parenting plan?* Yes, no, don't know.
9. *Do you have a completed, formal parenting plan with your children's other parent?* Yes, no, don't know.
10. *If yes, was the plan completed prior to receiving the services you identified earlier?* Yes, no, don't know.
11. *If yes, have you filed the parenting plan with the court?* Yes, no, don't know.

CHANGES IN PARENTING TIME

The specific wording of these questions may depend on whether the respondent is the custodial parent or the non-custodial parent.

