FINAL PROJECT REPORT:

PERFORMANCE AND OUTCOME EVALUATION

OF THE PHOENIX PROGRAM

Phoenix is a pilot program that provides education, job training, and related life skills instruction to non-custodial parents so that they can become employed and, thus, meet their financial and parental responsibilities to their children. Located in Concord, N H, Phoenix is operated by Second Start, a non-profit community adult education and training corporation. Phoenix is funded as a welfare reform project by the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services.
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The Creative Imperative in the Practice of Evaluation

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth....

And God saw every thing that He made. "Behold," God said, "it is very good." And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

And on the seventh day God rested from all His work. His archangel came then unto Him asking: "God, how do you know that what you have created is 'very good'? What are your criteria? On what data do you base your judgment? Aren't you a little close to the situation to make a fair and unbiased evaluation?"

God thought about these questions all that day and His rest was greatly disturbed. On the eighth day, God said, "Lucifer, go to hell."

Thus was evaluation born in a blaze of glory.

Ever since the status of the profession has been somewhat in doubt: the road to salvation or a sure ticket to damnation?

From Halcom's
The Real Story of Paradise Lost
ABSTRACT

This project in Community Economic Development is an evaluation of the Phoenix Program. Phoenix is a pilot program which provides job training, remedial education, support services and barrier resolution assistance to non-custodial parents (NCPs) who are not meeting their child support payment obligations. The goal of Phoenix is to help non-custodial parents gain steady employment, make regular child support payments, and play meaningful roles in their children's lives. It is offered on a voluntary basis to NCPs who meet certain criteria.

This evaluation begins to answer questions about how Phoenix works, by looking at process, and how well Phoenix works, by looking at outcomes. It describes the design and operation of Phoenix, explores several quantitative and qualitative performance indicators or measures, and draws some initial conclusions about whether Phoenix can be deemed successful. (It can be described as promising, given its brief history and modest scope.)

Both as a process and a product, the evaluation itself achieved some of its intended objectives, while it fell short on others. Its successes and limitations are described in this report. Additionally, a separate report, based in part on the findings presented in this paper, will subsequently be produced for presentation to Second Start, which runs Phoenix, and to the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, which funds it.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"Cheshire Cat," Alice began, "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the cat.

--Lewis Carroll--

The Phoenix Program was established as a demonstration project to meet a perceived community need—a new way to deal with the systemic problem of non-payment of child support, because the existing punitive enforcement methods do not always seem appropriate or productive. This project to evaluate Phoenix was undertaken in response to a need to learn how, and whether or not, the program would work. To understand the basis for this evaluation, it is necessary to also understand the genesis and design of Phoenix.

In the United States, the aggregate amount of unpaid child support is so large that President Clinton has called the situation a national disgrace. Non-payment of child support can be measured in economic costs in increased welfare expenditures and lost productivity, in human costs in the impoverishment and marginalization of children, and in social costs in weakened communities reflected in the breakdown of families.

All states have specific laws compelling non-custodial parents to pay child support for their children. Most associated enforcement techniques, such
as incarceration, used to collect this obligation are intentionally punitive and coercive, and yield mixed results at best across the non-custodial parent population (Leavitt, 1997).

Phoenix is a philosophically divergent way of dealing with non-custodial parents. It recognizes that many of these individuals have poor educational backgrounds, marginal work experience and severe personal problems that need to be overcome before they can become responsible adults capable of providing financial and parenting support to their children. Phoenix was designed to address these multiple needs with the goal of producing positive outcomes. According to Second Start, the program, as first conceived, would attempt to achieve the following broad objectives:

1. To enable non-custodial parents to become self-sufficient and capable of meeting their financial responsibilities to their families.
2. To form partnerships with the Concord area business community to provide employment and training opportunities for the clients of the program.
3. To create opportunities through which members of separated families can enhance their ability to communicate with one another.
4. To establish an on-going support system for clients to access once they have completed their program goals.

Originally, this evaluation of Phoenix was intended to address the general areas reflected in these objectives by relating process measures and program outcomes to the concepts of human capital development, community development and economic development inherent in the
objectives. However, just as the accomplishments of Phoenix to date now are lessened by external events, limited resources, and time constraints, so too is the scope of this evaluation narrowed at this point in time.¹ For example, there are no available data on the rate of job retention among Phoenix graduates, so this outcome indicator is not included in the evaluation. Instead, this evaluation focuses fundamentally on measuring the first objective—to assist non-custodial parents to obtain educational and supportive services that will lead to stable employment so that they can become economically self-sufficient.

What this evaluation basically concludes about Phoenix is that it has the capacity to make a positive difference in the lives of the non-custodial parents whom it serves and, by extension, in the lives of their families and in the community. It is a model which is economically inexpensive given the potential payback, and which can be easily replicated elsewhere.

¹ As noted, a comprehensive business-oriented evaluation report will be submitted later to DHHS and to Second Start.
PROBLEM STATEMENT

The original problem statement for this CED project reads, “If no solution is found, thousands of children in single parent families will continue to live in poverty and be dependent on welfare in New Hampshire.” This is still a fair summation of the problem as far as it goes, but subsequent research has made clear the equally important human and social implications of responsible fathering\(^2\) that goes beyond the provision of financial support.

The problem increases as the demographics of parenthood change. The New Hampshire Office of Child Support cites census data which show that as of 1994 about one quarter of all fathers, or more than nine million, in the United States are non-custodial parents, and the rate of marriage dissolution is now at 50%.

Research has documented that two interrelated factors are extremely critical to the well-being of children--family income and family structure (Children’s Alliance of NH, 1996). Further, the Casey Foundation estimates that between 1950 and 1994, the percentage of children living in mother-only\(^3\) homes has jumped from 6% to 25%, and that only one in six of these children sees his or her absent father regularly. These children are: ten times more likely to be extremely poor; twice as likely to drop out of high school; more likely to be in foster care; three times more at risk (for girls) of becoming

\(^2\) Although some NCPs are mothers, most of the literature refers to fathering, not parenting.  
\(^3\) Only a very small percentage of children live in father-only homes.
single teenage mothers; and, more likely (for boys) to be unemployed as an adult, have a criminal record, and be estranged from their own children (Kids Count Data Book, 1995). Poverty and single parenthood clearly have a significant negative effect on children.

A major cause of the impoverishment of children is legally-owed but unpaid child support by absent parents (Children's Alliance of NH, 1996). In New Hampshire alone, about 35% of court-ordered child support is not paid; this uncollected amount equates to about $28 million each year (Mattil, 1996). In Merrimack County, from where Phoenix draws its clients, there are currently 2,411 cases in which paternity has been established and a court order for child support exists, according to records of the New Hampshire Office of Child Support. The total current monthly support obligation owed by these NCPs is $506,444. This means that the average support obligation is $210 a month. However, the cumulative unpaid child support is a staggering $9,383,508. About 10%, or 227 NCPs, have a minimum order of $50 per month due to their limited ability to pay.

This minimum $50 order is generally what Phoenix NCPs are ordered to pay either before they enter or while they are in the program. Typical of Phoenix NCPs is Clyde:

Clyde is 36 years old. He is divorced from his wife of ten years, who has sole custody of their 8 year old son. According to the divorce settlement, Clyde is supposed to be paying child support, but he has generally avoided doing so by claiming a lack of income. He is resentful of the custody arrangement and feels that he does not have
enough time with his son. His ex-wife has made an issue of child support in exchange for reconsidering the custody arrangement.

Clyde graduated from high school and attended a vocational program in auto mechanics for a while. He is bright and a quick learner. He dropped out after becoming involved with friends who smoked pot and was eventually arrested for possession with intent to sell. He did time at the county jail. When he got out, he worked for his father, who owned a grocery store. His father sold the business, putting him out of a job. Clyde has had difficulty finding another job, partly because he kept failing drug tests.

Clyde says is interested in working things out, but he doesn’t know where to turn.

Clyde is a member of the sub-set of non-custodial parents that Phoenix is designed to reach with its non-punitive, non-traditional approach. One question that arises is whether there are research and empirical evidence to support the Phoenix approach. Doherty and others at the University of Minnesota have examined the dynamics of fathering and have concluded, in part, that “...programs should involve an employment dimension. Employed fathers often deal with how to balance work and parenting responsibilities. Unemployed fathers, both in residential and non-residential contexts, are at even greater risk for under-responsible fathering. Unemployed...fathers are apt to withdraw emotionally from their children and become more punitive. Unemployed nonresidential fathers are at risk of becoming irregular in their contact with their children, of falling behind in child support payments, of losing parenting support from the mother, and of losing contact completely. Comprehensive fathering programs already involve assistance for unemployed fathers in finding paid work and, if necessary, developing the
skills that successful employment requires.” A clear two-way relationship exists between fathering as a social construct and being unemployed; it has been found that “when a nonresidential father becomes more involved with his child, he often becomes more motivated to find employment” (Doherty, 1996).

The federal Department of Health and Human Services through its Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), which is responsible for collecting child support, supports this type of research and has funded a limited number of related community-based projects (see Fathers and Families, Making the Connection). In looking at the issues of fatherhood and child support, DHHS has established several guiding principles, among which are:

- All fathers can be important contributors to the well-being of their children.
- Parents are partners in raising their children, even when they do not live in the same household.
- Men should receive the education and support necessary to prepare them for the responsibility of parenthood.
- Government can encourage and promote father involvement through its programs. (Department of Health and Human Services, 1995)

One OCSE-funded initiative is the Step-Up demonstration project in Arizona. It was designed to go beyond traditional job counseling and referral in attempting to achieve the goal of self-sufficiency for young fathers. It “was
broadly defined, with program partners and counselors seeking to help their clients achieve harmonious family relationships and healthy minds and bodies as well as adequate provider incomes. This "multi-dimensional program focus" of the Step-Up program reflected the key research assumption that the "fathers needed the right attitude, as well as the necessary abilities, to achieve their self-sufficiency goals" and that "they frequently had difficulty in understanding the steps needed to get [a] job" (Office of Child Support Enforcement, 1996).
The seed for the Phoenix Program was planted, according to Leavitt, with an anecdotal observation by the JOBS program director that parallels this research. He pointed out that some of the non-custodial parents who defaulted on child support were very likely to have backgrounds and life experiences similar to mothers receiving Aid For Dependent Children (AFDC), in that they themselves came from poverty, probably had less than a high school education, and most likely did not have job skills adequate to make them self-sufficient, let alone pay child support on a regular basis.

Phoenix is designed to target a group of unemployed or underemployed non-custodial parents having these characteristics. Its main objective is to enable these non-custodial parents to become self-sufficient and fulfill their financial responsibilities to their children.

In practice, the following program components are used to address the multiple needs of the program participants:

- screening and referral
- comprehensive individual assessment
- individualized education, training, or job placement action plan
- support, counseling, and advocacy
- stabilization services

Non-custodial parents are first screened for appropriate characteristics (e.g., lack of education) in addition to a history of non-payment of child support. They are referred to Phoenix directly from the local Office of Child
Support (OCS) serving Merrimack County (in reality from a single child support enforcement officer to the one part-time Phoenix coordinator, who is actually a case manager). Each NCP then meets with Phoenix staff to review the screening information, discuss program expectations, and begin to look at barrier resolution and academic/vocational goals.

Assessment varies depending on the particular needs and background of the individual NCP. It can extend from a basic review of skills and work history to full scale academic and vocational testing. The process may include standardized and non-standardized testing. Second Start uses available testing services from other agencies such as the New Hampshire Job Training Council (the JTPA agency).

Once the assessment process has been completed, the case manager reviews all available information about the NCP and prepares a prioritized list of the NCP’s needs. This list provides a rationale for the components included in the action plan. A specific action plan is then developed, detailing the NCP’s weekly responsibilities and the benchmarks for determining completion of those responsibilities. Supportive activities to be provided by or through the Phoenix staff are also specified. The plan focuses on two primary areas: activities leading to full time employment and activities to secure support services the NCP will need to be successful.

The employment activities may include:

- Remedial basic education or completion of high school
- Instruction on appropriate work behaviors
• Vocational training
• Internships, on-the-job training, or intensive job search

To the extent possible, individuals receive these services through Second Start, but, when necessary, can also be referred to existing community agencies and programs, such as local technical colleges for these activities.

The social support services are provided by or arranged through the Phoenix program, and may include:

• Individual counseling
• Support groups for problems related to custody, family relationships, and personal barriers (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous)
• Mediation services and referrals to other social service agencies
• Team conferences and follow-up
• Financial assistance with transportation, tuition, books and fees

Similarly to what is done with work activities, existing services and agencies are accessed whenever possible, particularly those already involved in support work with other non-custodial parents.

Program activities begin immediately upon completion of the plan. To promote stability and help assure the NCP’s success in carrying out these activities, the case manager monitors activities through regular contact with the NCP and others working with him or her. When the monitoring process reveals that requirements of the action plan are not being fulfilled, changes are made to the plan. These usually involve adjusting work activities and altering support services, but may also include termination of the NCP from the program in some cases.

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4 These three items, plus child care if needed, are reimbursed by the NH DHHS JOBS program.
THE EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The service delivery paradigm used in Phoenix is essentially a case-management model based on individualized service plans. As was described above, it uses appropriate supports and draws on community resources in attempting to accomplish its objectives.

Once the project was funded, launched and implemented, the following questions were posed: does the new model work, how well does it work, and are there meaningful measurements that can be used to answer the first two questions? The answers to these and other questions about Phoenix are important to a variety of stakeholders on several levels.

Public policy makers and program managers need a frame of reference and reliable information in order to make decisions about programs and funding. On a policy level, if a human development program serves the public good and does so in a cost-effective manner, then consideration should be given to expanding it or replicating it. On an operational level, managers need useful data to design and make program changes and improvements. In turn, all these considerations have implications for program beneficiaries, their families and the communities in which they live, and all these apply directly to Phoenix and support the need for an evaluation which examines process and results.
The Evaluation Model

There is extensive literature on program evaluation theory and practice, from which many models and a variety of techniques can be drawn and applied. Existing models provide a useful contextual framework to understand how the data, information and conclusions relate to each other. This evaluation draws heavily on the two approaches described below.

One approach is suggested by the United States General Accounting Office (GAO) in its recent assessment of the JOBS program\(^5\). Known as performance monitoring, this model seeks to measure “whether a human service program...is achieving its objectives” by “collecting and analyzing performance information,” using two key concepts, indicators and goals (GAO, 1995). Indicators are classified as providing information either about process or about outcomes; goals are characterized as predefined targets against which actual performance can be measured (GAO, 1995).

A comparable research concept is offered in A Guide to Developing and Using Performance Measures in Results-Based Budgeting. This model states that results or outcomes are really the equivalent of a business bottom line, that indicators or benchmarks are measures for which data exists, and that performance measures point to how well anticipated results are met.

Using child support as an example, a self-sufficient family is a result,

\(^5\) Phoenix is patterned after the Step-by-Step training project run by Second Start as a part of the JOBS program in New Hampshire. JOBS funds employment and training for AFDC and funded Phoenix as a demonstration program.
increased collection is an indicator, and the collection to cost of collection efficiency is the performance measure. Thus, "results and indicators have to do with ends" and "performance measures and the programs they describe have to do with means" (Friedman, 1997).

Adding inputs and outputs to this model makes it possible to graphically ask the question, "How well did this program work?" and to structurally represent with quadrants where the answers should lie, as shown in Table A, below. Table B depicts the relative importance of each quadrant. The indicators in quadrants 1 and 2 are the most difficult to assess, because they typically represent the hardest inputs and outcomes to control. This model allows individuals reviewing an evaluation to focus their interest in different quadrants, based on specific interests and biases. For example, program managers may want to look primarily at quadrant 3 results. Policy makers are likely to examine quadrant 1 and 2 indicators. Public and political interest would most likely focus on quadrant 1.

Table C applies examples from Phoenix to the model. Other indicators relevant to Phoenix would include:

- total number of NCPs enrolled in the program
- number successfully completing program
- reasons for program terminations
- number of employers working with the program
- current disposition of each NCP
- number of NCPs employed
- child support payment status of NCPs
- feedback from NCPs on program effectiveness

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6 Tables are adapted from Friedman.
Measuring Performance

**Table A**

What Is Measured

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<thead>
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<th>Quantitative</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Inputs</strong></td>
<td>How much service was delivered?</td>
<td>How well was service delivered?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outputs</strong></td>
<td>How much change was produced?</td>
<td>What was the effect of the change?</td>
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**Table B**

What Is Important to Measure

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<thead>
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<th></th>
<th>Quantitative</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inputs</strong></td>
<td>4th (the least critical)</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outputs</strong></td>
<td>3rd (the most critical)</td>
<td>1st</td>
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### Table C
Examples of Phoenix Indicators

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Quantitative</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Inputs</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of clients entering program.</td>
<td>% completing skills training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average dollars expended per client.</td>
<td>Cost/benefit ratio.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outputs</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number completing ABE.</td>
<td>% attaining GED.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of search contacts.</td>
<td>% employed after six months.</td>
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#### Project Research Activities

Background research, quantifiable data, and subjective information for this evaluation were gathered from a number of sources, using a variety of research vehicles and methods. Data manipulation and statistical analysis, where used, are fairly straightforward.

#### Sources of Information

- Literature reviews and readings were undertaken to research program evaluation theory and models, to look at academic studies on fathering, to examine statistical applications, and to attempt to find similar or related
educationally-based training and employment programs for noncustodial parents or similar groups which would be useful for insight and reference.

- Interviews were conducted over the length of the project with a number of individuals involved in Phoenix. Primary among these individuals were the two successive Phoenix case managers and the child support enforcement officer from whose caseload Phoenix NCPs are generally drawn. Other individuals included the Second Start executive director, the case manager of the Step-by-Step program, the State’s Office of Child Support Administrator, and managers and staff involved in child support policy formation and welfare reform initiatives.

- The researcher attended case conferences conducted by the Phoenix case manager and the child support enforcement officer at least monthly. These conferences proved to be a valuable way to gain insight and contextual information about the program and the NCPs. Two contract negotiation meetings between Phoenix staff and State DHHS staff were also attended.

- Much of the data for this evaluation, particularly data directly related to Phoenix and Step-by-Step participants, came from paper case records and computer files at Second Start and at DHHS. These latter records were the primary source of data for the cost analysis portions of this evaluation.7

Statistics from the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement were also obtained from standard agency reports.

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7 Although critical to the evaluation, these were also the most difficult and time-consuming to access and analyze because DHHS data is housed on three separate and aging databases.
Analytical Tools and Statistical Methods

• Computer-based software tools were used to aggregate, array, manipulate and analyze data. The EXCEL spreadsheet program, which has extensive mathematical and statistical functions (e.g., median and mean calculations and find and sort functions) was particularly useful. These tools proved wholly adequate to develop the statistics needed in the course of this evaluation. These statistics are primarily descriptive and comparative in nature.

• Sampling validity was not an issue, because the Phoenix sample equaled the universe of the Phoenix population during the period of the evaluation. Similarly, characteristics of the entire Step-by-Step population for approximately the same time were examined.

• The use of Step-by-Step data in this evaluation deserves particular comment. Step-by Step, also run by Second Start, was the prototype on which Phoenix is modeled. It has provided similar services to hard-to-reach welfare recipients for about five years. After its first three years of operation, it had been judged to be a successful program by DHHS. Step-by-Step serves both as a comparison group and, since Phoenix has no prior history, as a proxy for baseline expectations. There were 42 participants in Step-by-Step during the same approximate period in which 36 NCPs participated in Phoenix.
PHOENIX RESULTS IN BRIEF

Phoenix has now been running for about one year. This evaluation tracked it over the entire period of its existence. As a result, certain assessments can be made about its performance and results. It is now possible to describe some relevant characteristics about Phoenix and its NCP clients, to present several early, but key, findings and outcomes, and to formulate some preliminary recommendations for the future of the program.

Selected Characteristics

- Forty eight (48) NCPs were referred to Phoenix in the year from its inception until the fall of 1997. As of November, 1997, 16 had completed the program and were closed out, 16 are currently active in some program component, and 4 were involuntary terminated for noncompliance with a program requirement. Twelve (12) of the 48 never began the program or dropped out at intake.

- In some respects, Phoenix NCPs are a fairly homogeneous group. Of the 36 who began the program, not surprisingly almost 90% (32 out of 36) are male\(^8\) and 97%\(^9\) are white. The median age is 27.5 years. Each NCP is responsible for child support for 1.6 children.

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\(^8\) One female referee was actually both an NCP and an AFDC recipient who was diverted to participation in Step-by-Step. None of the other three completed the program.

\(^9\) There is one black and there are no Hispanics or Asians in the Phoenix population. This make-up is consistent with the racial and ethnic demographics of central New Hampshire.
• Based on self-reporting by the NCPs, the median attained educational level at referral was 10.4 years (only two had a high school diploma). Based on staff observations, the functional level is likely somewhat lower.

• Curiously, six of the 36 (16%) who participated reported they had never held a valid driver’s license.\(^{10}\)

Key Outcomes and Findings

• The average total cost per Phoenix participant was $1,276. Of this amount, $1,231 represents Second Start costs and payments for associated educational expenses, such as tuition to other schools, books and fees, and travel. Only $45 total on average was spent for child day care needed by Phoenix NCPs. During this same approximate period, for the Step-by-Step program the average total cost per participant was $3,031. Training-related expenses accounted for $1,720 of this amount and child care expenses for $1,311. (See Chart 1 below.) The average cost across the general AFDC population participating in education and training under welfare reform programs, is estimated to be only $533 (exclusive of child day care, for which no figures were available). It is not surprising that the more intensive case management models, such as Phoenix and Step-by Step, are more expensive to support.

\(^{10}\) This is seemingly a functional handicap in rural New Hampshire, but all NCPs reported verbally that they drove anyway.
Seventeen (17) NCPs successfully obtained GEDs. This represents 35% of all individuals referred, and 47% of those who actually participated. This outcome compares favorably to the baseline of about 60% for Step-by-Step participants during the first two years of that program. It is also an important outcome because of the well established correlation between education level and earnings capacity.

There are no current data available on the detailed employment status of Phoenix participants. However, based on reports from the DHHS Child

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11 For some NCPs, attaining a GED was the main objective of the individual plan.
12 Census data show lifetime earnings are one-third higher for high school graduates than for non-graduates, at about $820,000 vs. $610,000.
13 At this point, for example, no data exists on factors such as hourly wage and length of employment. These types of data are captured in Step-by-Step.
Support Office, of the 16 NCPs currently active in the Phoenix program, 5 are employed either part time or full time. Further, 17 of the 36 who were active at any time also had some paid employment at some point during enrollment in Phoenix. The child support enforcement officer estimates that one-third to one-half of this employment activity is directly attributable to Phoenix interventions. This level of employment activity compares less favorably with the baseline job placement rates experienced in Step-by-Step, which approached 70% in its first two years of operation.

- Both the child support officer and the Second Start case manager reported anecdotally that for a number of NCPs, involvement in the Phoenix program has brought about a positive change in their perception of self-worth and in their interest in improving their fathering activities.¹⁴ Neither Phoenix itself nor this evaluation were able to measure this outcome in any manner.

Recommendations

The data acquired or developed in the course of this evaluation are insufficient to support significant long-range recommendations about Phoenix. The program needs more time, extended experience, and greater maturity before a solid recommendation for statewide expansion and accompanying large funding increases can be made.

¹⁴ One NCP, in fact, reunited with his family.
However, the available data, as well as the subjective and anecdotal evidence, do show how Phoenix works as a model, and that it works well enough to produce, or at least be reasonably expected to produce, positive outcomes. For example, presuming that an NCP became employed as a result of participation in Phoenix and subsequently paid only the Merrimack county average of $210 per month in child support, the current program participation cost of $1,276 per NCP could easily be recovered over just a six month period in reduced welfare grants paid to the custodial family, assuming an average monthly grant of $436.

These early conclusions support a general recommendation to continue to fund and operate Phoenix as a model, but on an augmented and expanded basis. Specific, immediate recommendations would include:

- Increasing short-term funding to make the case manager position full time and to increase the number of participants.
- Making Phoenix an available child support enforcement remedy—that is, for certain NCPs participation could be mandated by court order.
- Initiating regular self-assessment surveys for participants.
- Working to firmly establish the partnership role of community employers in supporting the program.
- Implementing a peer support group composed of Phoenix graduates, as envisioned in the original Phoenix proposal.
- Expanding the program to a second pilot site, in a different geographic area of the state. (NOTE: It would be more instructive to have comparison sites for future evaluation efforts.)
CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

This project was an attempt to evaluate one initiative that deals with a less examined aspect of how communities can develop and families can be strengthened--through what Kretzmann and McKnight describe as the kind of individual capacity building intended to reach “persons who often find themselves marginalized by communities” (Kretzmann, p.6, 1993). This type of human capital development through “education, training and [job] placement” is recognized in CED literature as a valid strategy and community development practice which “addresses the mismatch in regard to skills...and the labor market” through providing “basic skills, employment training, transportation, job readiness...job linkages, and ongoing... supports” (Wiewel, p. 85, 1993). It is an initiative which reflects the supply side of labor market development, while recognizing the strong link between educational attainment and economic well-being.

The goal of this evaluation was to test the basic hypothesis that as a result of the new Phoenix paradigm, benefits would accrue to the non-custodial parents themselves, to their children, to public assistance and child support programs, and to the to the broader local community. The goal was only partially achieved in light of the following factors:

• It is inherently more difficult to measure a new program in meaningful and effective ways because there are too many variables which cannot be
reasonably foreseen or controlled. For example, one evaluation objective was
to measure how much Phoenix increased child support payments. As it
turned out, these payments are reduced to a minimum amount during the
NCPs’ participation in Phoenix, and thus are not subject to measurement.

- The scope of the evaluation was too ambitious and comprehensive from the
  outset. The evaluation plan originally envisioned an attempt to “relate
  outcomes and measures to the broad concepts of human capital
development and...community development.” Unfortunately, examining how
the roles these NCPs play in their families and communities would be
affected by their Phoenix proved impossible to even begin. Outside their
narrow roles as child support payers, the NCPs are affected by diverse
-cultural norms and community expectations, the impact of which is not
possible to evaluate in a time and resource limited project. Instead, a
project of the kind undertaken here to evaluate Phoenix requires a more
focused initial design, with more rigorous parameters.

- Greater resources and more time than were first estimated are needed to
accomplish almost any component of the evaluation. For instance, the
seemingly straightforward task of acquiring and analyzing payment data on
Phoenix and Step-by-Step from the computer data bases of the Health and
Human Service Department took almost twice as long as anticipated and
was doubly more difficult than expected.
Although this project succeeded in measuring some of Phoenix's processes and outcomes, a number of important assumptions related to the main hypothesis remain unexamined. For example, the assumption about cause and effect between steady employment and regular support payments as it relates to the specific Phoenix NCPs can only be addressed when relevant employment and child support payment data become available over time.

Phoenix provides a demonstrated social value because it attempts to address a community need in a different and, hopefully, a better and more effective way. A performance and outcome based evaluation of a program like Phoenix can be important to CED for two reasons. First, it can contribute to the body of empirical knowledge of what works in theory and practice, for both students and practitioners. Second, it promotes accountability in the real world, where decisions are made about programs and their funding. In times of shrinking resources and scarce dollars, it is critically important to have persuasive evidence in support of preserving and funding promising as well as established programs. It seems particularly relevant to the continued validation of Community Economic Development philosophy and purpose that where possible "performance [and outcome] measurements...can help build confidence in government and community institutions, and more importantly, help us create improved results for children, families and communities" (Friedman, p. 34).
Second Start was incorporated on September 3, 1971, in the State of New Hampshire as non-profit, educational corporation. The main purpose of Second Start is to provide educational and training opportunities to the community, particularly to individuals who previously have had limited success in other more traditional settings and who are primarily low income or otherwise disadvantaged. It does this through a number of programs, such as Adult Basic Education (ABE), adult tutorial services and an office skills curriculum. Second Start also operates a child day care center called First Start Day Care. Additionally, Second Start offers both educational and child day care consulting services.

In 1996, Second Start won the US Secretary of Education’s Award for Outstanding Adult Education Programming.

Its motto is, “25 Years of Empowerment Through Education.”
References and Readings


Bureau of the Census, United States Department of Commerce


