



**P A T E R N I T Y
O P P O R T U N I T Y
P R O G R A M**

POP Perspectives

A publication of the California Department of Child Support Services (DCSS)

Summer 2002

A Message From...

**Curtis Child,
DCSS Director**

I wish to take this opportunity on behalf of the Department of Child Support Services (DCSS) to thank all of the hospital staff, local child support agencies and registrars of births and deaths for making the Paternity Opportunity Program (POP) a tremendous success in California. Through your efforts more than 700,000 children in California have legal paternity established and have their father's name entered on their birth certificates. POP has not only provided these children with access to medical coverage, child support and other benefits, it has given these children a sense of belonging by knowing who both of their parents are. The new Child Support Program was started in California on January 1, 2000 and one of our goals was to work in partnership with other institutions and agencies to improve the lives of California's children. Clearly, through all of your efforts, we have achieved tremendous success in POP and we are now viewed as a national leader.

Thank You!

SF Head Start Joins The POP Team

Head Start is a national program that provides comprehensive developmental services for low-income, pre-school children ages three to five and social services for their families. The services for children focus on education, socio-emotional development, physical and mental health, and nutrition. On February 1, 2002, the Head Start Program in San Francisco began offering its parents the opportunity to voluntarily establish paternity in any of their 20 sites within the county. Head Start has made a name for itself by providing much needed services to families.

The San Francisco Head Start Program is the first one in California offering POP. In November 2001, Head Start staff received training in POP procedures from Jim Mullany of the DCSS POP Unit. The training was held with the cooperation of all of the San Francisco agencies that participate with Head Start. Milt Hyams, Director of the San Francisco County Department of Child Support Services (SFCDCSS), greeted the attendees and told them how important paternity and POP is to the children of San Francisco. Edward Hernandez, Director of the San Francisco Vital Statistics Agency, stated it was his belief that the POP form was California's new vital record. He further emphasized the importance of all fathers establishing a link to their children at birth by having the father's name placed on the child's birth certificate through POP.

Amy Ellenbogen of the San Francisco Head Start Program will coordinate the voluntary paternity process for the 20 sites. Lisa Jones,

the POP Coordinator for SFCDCSS, will be the local liaison for the program, assisting parents and Head Start staff in establishing paternity through POP. Candy Walker-Simon, San Francisco Department of Child Support Services, brought the state, county and Head Start programs together in this unique collaborative effort.

A POP Workshop was also featured at the 4th Annual California Head Start Association Conference in San Diego. Henrietta Steele of the San Diego County Department of Child Support Services led the workshop and provided POP information to those who attended. According to Henrietta, there was a great deal of interaction and discussion regarding how POP could be a valuable resource for many of the Head Start clients throughout California.

For more information about this collaborative effort, please contact Jim Mullany at (916)464-5482 or e-mail him at Jim.Mullany@dcss.ca.gov.



DO YOUR PART TO HELP CALIFORNIA SAVE ENERGY
For energy saving tips, visit the DCSS website at www.childsup.cahwnet.gov

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Bonnitta Garba

After 20 years with the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, Bonnitta Garba decided she was ready for a change and joined the Riverside County Family Support Office. The position of POP coordinator seems to be a perfect fit since her goal is to give back as much as possible to the children in her community. Sticking with that commitment, Bonnitta also works as a volunteer teacher and tutor.

Since coming to POP, Bonnitta has created booklets for internal training of child support staff and external training of local agencies and hospitals. She set up refresher training classes for the POP providers in Riverside county, which was an excellent opportunity for her to meet the people who make POP work.

Bonnitta and her supervisor Joan Del Villar have come up with creative ways to promote and publicize POP too. They have designed an insulated lunch sack, coffee mug and an informational card that has the POP logo and addresses of the Riverside County Family Support offices.

Bonnitta believes the key to success in POP is education and outreach. She is pleased (and so is the State POP Team) with the positive response received from the Riverside County POP providers.



ASKPOP E-mail Service Now Available

Parents, hospital or agency providers may now e-mail their questions about the Paternity Opportunity Program to askpop@dcss.ca.gov. This is a service in addition to our toll-free number: **1-866-249-0733**.

Here is a sample of the recent questions and answers from ASKPOP:

Question: I am able to view some of the information, instructions and POP forms on the Department of Child Support Web Site (www.childsup.cahnet.gov). Is the Declaration of Paternity form (CS 909) available on the internet web site?

Answer: No. The Declaration of Paternity form (CS 909) is a multi-part form that must be witnessed or notarized. It is not currently available on the internet website. A Declaration of Paternity can be obtained at any local child support agency, local office of the registrar of births and deaths and the local court through the Family Law Facilitators Office. If you are unable to locate one of these offices in your community, call our toll free number 1-866-249-0733 or e-mail askpop@dcss.ca.gov.



Question: I requested a copy of a declaration of paternity I thought I had completed but no record was found. What can I do now?

Answer: If no declaration of paternity form is on file at the State Department of Child Support Services, you and the father can complete one now at your local child support agency or before a notary public or you can have paternity established through the courts. You should consult with a private attorney, contact the Family Law Facilitator's office in your community or contact your local child support agency for more information.



Question: I am involved in child support outreach. We often make presentations to teen audiences who are concerned if they fill out a declaration of paternity there may be statutory rape consequences.

Answer: The California Family Code 7577(d) states a voluntary declaration of paternity signed by a minor shall not be admissible as evidence in a criminal prosecution of statutory rape. However some agencies are required by law to report alleged instances of child abuse (including statutory rape) to local law enforcement. Therefore the teen who applies for public assistance may have the situation reported as statutory rape apart from the voluntary paternity process. Young unmarried teen mothers must be reminded that they cannot get the father's name on the birth certificate unless they complete a declaration of paternity or have paternity established by the courts. The failure to have paternity established through the court may deprive the child of benefits entitled to them from the father. We have learned that some fathers who died in the 9-11 terrorist attacks without establishing paternity may have deprived their children of benefits from the many survivors funds.

Question: I'm not sure if I really am the father. Where can I go to have genetic testing?

Answer: Genetic tests are done through laboratories. Check your local phone directory under paternity testing for a lab near you. Remember, POP forms are VOLUNTARY. If you're not sure about being the father, you should seek legal advice and do not sign the form.

askpop@dcss.ca.gov



POP NOTES

FOCUS On Hospitals

POP Makes A Little Girl's Wish Come True!

A mom (currently living in Tennessee but whose daughter was born in California) contacted the DCSS POP Unit about getting the forms necessary to add the father's name to her ten-year-old daughter's birth certificate. Back when the child was about 7 years old, the mother explained to her about her birth situation – she was born out of wedlock. The mother later married the child's father, but the baby had been given the mother's last name. In February 2001, the woman gave birth to her 3rd child. The older daughter became concerned that her name was different than the rest of the family and her birth certificate had an empty space where the father's name belonged. This past December, the ten-year-old daughter said it was her Christmas wish to have her dad's name on her birth certificate and to have her name changed so it would be the same as the other children. With the cooperation of the State Office of Vital Records and the DCSS POP Unit, one ten-year-old child's Christmas wish has come true!



A Little POP Helps Cut Driving Time!

A father wanting to have his daughter baptized found himself making a trip from his home in Martinez to Sacramento. He was trying to have his name added to his daughter's birth certificate (a process he started nine months prior). He stopped in at the Secretary of State's office, then proceeded to Data Image Systems and finally arrived on the DCSS doorstep. He had a valid paternity declaration but needed to fill out an Office of Vital Records form VS-22, which amends the child's birth record. After receiving the VS-22 from a DCSS employee he proceeded on with the rest of his journey.



So next time you witness a POP DEC for parents of a new born, prior to adding dad's name to the birth certificate, know that you are likely preventing some undue frustration in the future!

POP Makes Social Security Easier To Obtain!

Recent information from a Social Security Administration Office in Northern California confirmed the importance of a POP form. A child, whose father had died suddenly in an auto accident, was able to receive Social Security Survivor's benefits because a POP form was on file with DCSS. The father had completed a POP form at the time of the child's birth, and that form was used by Social Security to determine the child's eligibility for benefits.

The Social Security office recognizes paternity declarations as primary evidence of eligibility for coverage. When paternity is established for a child via a POP form, the child can get Social Security benefits quickly and easily. Without the POP form, the surviving parent would have to get statements and documentation from other family members to prove a father/child relationship had existed. That process is time-consuming and does not ensure that a father/child relationship can be proven to the extent required by Social Security regulations.



Rose Ballestero

has worked for more than 25 years at the **University of California, Irvine Medical Center** in Orange County. For the past 7 years, she has been responsible for giving new, unmarried moms and dads the opportunity to complete a POP form. Last year, UC Irvine produced more than 400 paternity declarations. Rose gave each parent signing those forms a full explanation of how important paternity establishment is to their child. For Rose, a birth certificate with the father's name as "withheld" or "unknown" is a real tragedy for the child and the child's future. Even before the child is born, Rose tries to contact every father and explain how important it is for him to be present at the child's birth and complete a paternity declaration. For those who cannot be present, she will offer the opportunity to come back to the hospital on a weekend or holiday to make sure he can sign a paternity form and get his name on the birth certificate.

The dedication of Rose Ballestero keeps with the mission of UC Irvine Medical Center, a teaching hospital, that places the highest priority on providing new parents with full services and information. The hospital also has a regular informational tea and tour of its maternity unit every month. The success of POP is due in a large measure to the dedication of people like Rose.



Extra! Extra!



The Department of Child Support Services
PATERNITY OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM
NEWSLETTER
**POP PERSPECTIVES
WANTS YOU!!!**

Be a Special County Correspondent for the
next edition of
POP PERSPECTIVES

Simply send us your POP related:

Hospital or agency accomplishments
Unusual stories or situations
Meetings or special activities
Questions

e-mail your articles to Elena Palmi at
elena.palmi@dcss.ca.gov

See the POP Newsletter online at
[Http://www.childsup.cahwnet.gov](http://www.childsup.cahwnet.gov)

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DID YOU KNOW????



► The three most common reasons why a POP declaration is found to be invalid and returned to the parents are: 1) The form is not properly witnessed or notarized; 2) The signature of the mother is not entered on the form and; 3) There is no date of birth for the child.

► Only staff in hospitals, local child support agencies, courts, local vital statistics offices or other authorized agencies can witness the signatures of parents. People such as attorneys, correctional officers and immigration officials cannot witness the form, unless they are notary publics.

► The law says that local child support agencies and local registrars of births and deaths must have rescission forms (CS 915 forms) available for parents who wish to rescind their declaration of paternity.

► Rescinding a declaration of paternity will not automatically remove a man's name as the father of a child from a birth certificate. The man must get a court order and apply to the State Office of Vital Records in Sacramento to have his name removed.

► POP forms are required to be available at all local registrars of births and deaths offices and staff in those offices are required to witness and process the forms whenever parents wish to complete one.

► Local child support agencies must have qualified staff available to answer parents' questions regarding the declaration of paternity and the process for establishing paternity.

► If you're having trouble locating a paternity or rescission form, you can contact a State POP Analyst and have the form mailed directly to you.

► Only unmarried women are allowed to sign a paternity declaration because according to California law, a married woman's husband is presumed to be the father of her newly born child.

If you have any questions about these items, please call or e-mail your State POP analyst.