

# Child Support Report

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pubs/csrindex.html>

OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT

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## Prince George's County Sends Father's Day Greetings, Greets Payments in Return

By Joan Kennedy

Prince George's County, MD

Office of Child Support Enforcement

John Clark

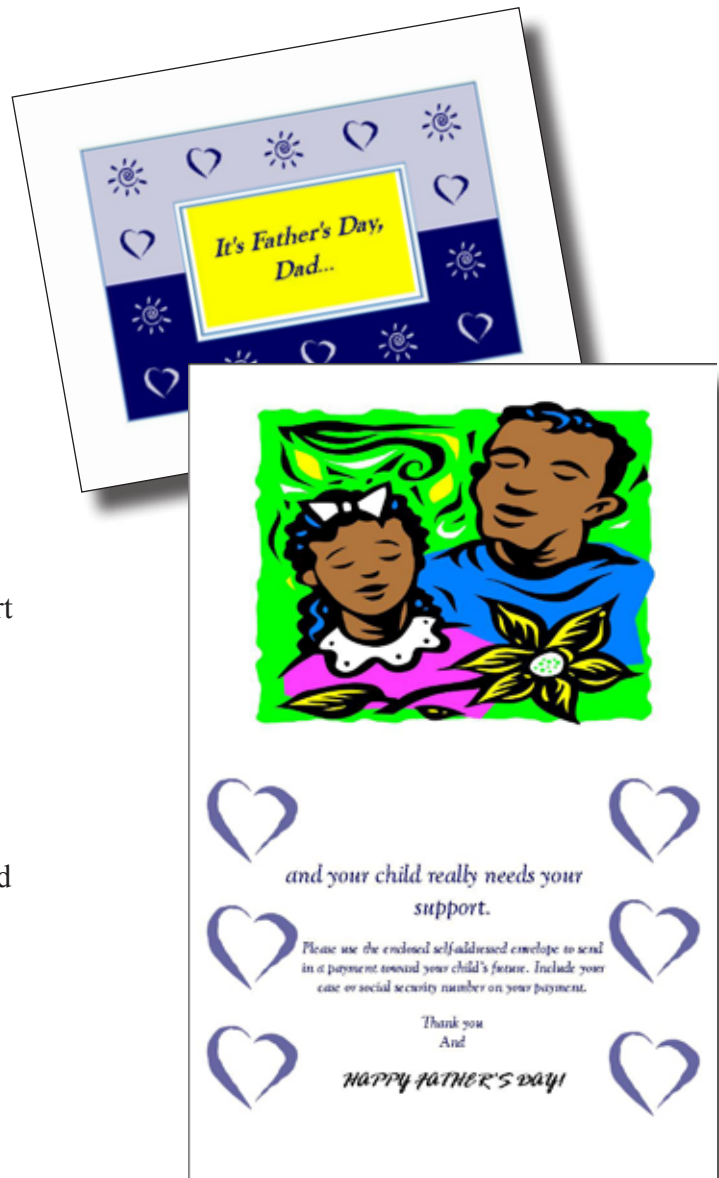
OCSE Region III

In June 2007, more than 200 children benefited from a successful "Father's Day Initiative" developed by the Prince George's County, MD, Office of Child Support Enforcement—reason enough for the agency's plan to repeat the project this June, and every June hereafter.

The agency crafted the initiative last year to address the challenge of managing collections on arrears in cases. Its results provided substantive data for the legislatively created "Task Force to Improve Child Support Compliance in Prince George's County," enacted by the State General Assembly to study ways to improve compliance on cases with more than \$10,000 in arrears. The task force is chaired by Prince George's County Circuit Court Family Division Coordinating Judge Julia Weatherly.

With data provided by the University Of Maryland School Of Social Welfare, noncustodial parents who had not made an arrears payment as of April 2007, were selected to receive a specially designed Father's Day card in June. A total 8,104 cases were identified and cards mailed to each noncustodial parent. The card wished them a "Happy Father's Day," explained that their child(ren) needed their support, and requested payment toward the child's future. A self-addressed and postage-paid envelope was included with the card. The card was mailed a few days before Father's Day so it would not arrive too far in advance of the holiday.

The initiative was successful in collecting both current



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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Administration for Children and Families  
Office of Child Support Enforcement

and arrears payments. However, a major lesson was learned: Because many of the cards did not reach the noncustodial parent, as current addresses may not have been provided or updated in the automated system, future initiatives of this type will incorporate verification of mailing addresses in advance. Time constraints did not allow for address verification for this project.

At the end of last July, the initiative was reviewed to determine its success, as defined by payments made after the mailing date since these cases had no payment prior to mailing. Approximately 235 cases showed payment, with a total collection of \$153,330 (payments through July 2007). That amount included \$78,157 in current support and \$75,174 in arrears payments.

Joseph Jackins, Director of the Maryland Child Support Enforcement Program, says, "I believe that we have to

constantly look for ways to reconnect to our customers. This initiative proves that when we reach out to our customers, many of them will respond positively. Our challenge is to replicate efforts such as this so that our entire program benefits, in the interest of the children and families of Maryland."

This project made a difference in the lives of many children, not only because valuable financial assistance was restored to them, but also because it allowed many fathers to reconnect to their children. It was yet another opportunity to apply the Prince George's County child support agency's philosophy of building bridges and strengthening families. Promising results are expected this June as well. ■

## Chicago Grant Program Explores Healthy Marriage, Brightens Future for Fragile Families

By Andrew Lyke

*Coordinator of Marriage Ministry  
Archdiocese of Chicago*

A bright light shines on marriage on Thursday nights in Chicago's South Side Roseland community. There the F.U.T.U.R.E. program—Families United Through Understanding Relationships and Empowerment—has changed perspectives on marriage for more than 100 couples since October 2004. The program is a collaboration of church and government entities that together have transformed lives for fragile families and given couples new reasons to believe in lifelong, loving relationships.

Funded under a 3-year OCSE Section 1115 Healthy Marriage waiver grant with the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services, the program's purpose includes providing information to unmarried or divorced parents about the benefits of paternity establishment and child support and encouraging healthy marriage by providing relationship skills education.

F.U.T.U.R.E. consists of relationship training workshops; employment training, consultation and placement; and social services. It is directed by Catholic Charities and housed at the Roseland WIC Center. Employment services are provided by Chicago Area Project, a municipal agency of the City of Chicago.

The relationship training workshops, detailed in this article, are coordinated by Family Ministries of the Archdiocese of Chicago.



### It Takes a Village

Each of the program's eight relationship training workshops is preceded by dinner for the couples and their children. After dinner the children take off to the childcare area and the couples push the dinner tables back to create a circle in which they sit and begin the week's lessons.

The eight modules cover a broad scope of relationship skills building. Session one is dedicated to establishing a "village" to which all participants are accountable. Each person is valued as part of the village. The roles of the facilitators are clarified as guides, coaches, and resources, rather than experts. The facilitators and the participants promise to "keep it real" by connecting the lessons with real-life experiences.

When the initiative began, facilitators were concerned about retaining couples through the entire 8-week process. However, usually after the first session, a committed group eagerly stays with the process. This success with retention is largely due to two factors: the personal connections with the case managers who take genuine interest in the lives of the couples, and the creation of

“safe space” by the curriculum facilitators. It is in this first session that “safe space” is established by requiring safety, trust, and respect among participants.

### Process Over Content

The most important components of the program are the connections strengthened between each couple and built among all the participants, including the facilitators. These components are fueled and supported by the elements of safety, trust, and respect—all of which make up the process of the program. Facilitators are trained to allow the process to take priority over curriculum content components, including scheduled activities, worksheets, and allotted time frames for carrying out such activities. The curriculum has proven to be highly adaptable in making such adjustments.

### Credible Witness of Success

As couples begin to identify with the facilitators in terms of experiencing some of the same interpersonal concerns, their growing bonds with the facilitators reveal for them that to be healthy and successful in a committed relationship doesn't require perfection.

The credible modeling of the facilitators, in a sense,

lowers the expectations of marriage to something that is more attainable for the participants. On the other hand, the skills taught and practiced through the curriculum raise their sights on their relationship so that they better see themselves in a healthy relationship.

### The Freedom to Dream

In the final session, the couples map out their own support network. Along with the services of Catholic Charities, the WIC Center, and other community resources, many of the couples include their new-found village among their resources for a successful, committed relationship and a strong and healthy family life.

The facilitators ask the couples to dream for themselves and for the others in the village. As part of the closing ritual, they share those dreams with the village. In the end, the most precious gift from the program is having the freedom to dream great dreams for themselves, their relationships, and their families.

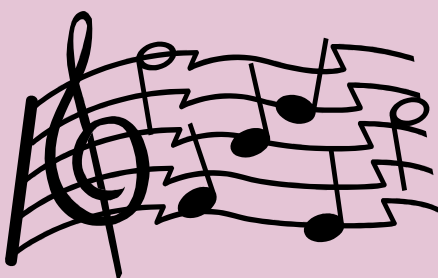
The bright light that shone on them in the beginning of the process, at the end shines through them and onto others in their families and community.

*To learn more about the F.U.T.U.R.E. program, please contact Patricia Godfrey at 773-568-2064. ■*



### ERICSA Heartstrings

The Eastern Regional Interstate Child Support Association (ERICSA) met in Memphis this April for its 45<sup>th</sup> Annual Training Conference and Exposition. Its theme was “Children: The Heart and Soul of ERICSA.” As always, attendees took advantage of the opportunity to network with their counterparts from other States and to learn from the vendor community about ways to improve productivity. In the photo below are, from left, Massachusetts Attorney Sara McCollum, ERICSA President Diane Jordan, OCSE Commissioner Margot Bean, and Tennessee IV-D Child Support Director Mike Adams. At left, Lee Sapienza (NY), Roy Nix (OCSE), and Commissioner Bean participate in an exercise during a session in which the presenter encouraged ideas about how to increase professional power while decreasing stress.





# Managing Existing Arrears



Previous issues of *Child Support Report* have highlighted various sections of the “PAID Practices Guide,” a tool available on the OCSE Web site as part of the national Project

to Avoid Increasing Delinquencies (PAID). The guide was designed to offer assistance to State child support agencies by posing questions they might consider in efforts to increase current collections and decrease the accumulation of arrears—the goal of PAID. The following is a list of questions from the guide’s section about managing existing arrears:

- Do we have a comprehensive arrears management program? Do we train our staff on how to perform arrears management activities?
  - Have we conducted an analysis of our arrears? Have we developed arrears reduction action plans based on the findings?
  - Are we providing accurate and timely information to parents about arrears balances? Do we have online tools for parents to calculate or verify their balances?
  - Do we have a process to target cases with the highest arrears and/or a long history of nonpayment for case-worker review and action? Do we track outcomes and recognize those who are most successful and share their practices with other workers?
  - Do we have data reporting systems in place to provide workers with ad-hoc reports for targeting enforcement?
  - Do we have procedures for proactively reviewing cases and contacting parents at the time of a child’s emancipation to reduce or terminate current support? Is the process automated?
- How recently have we assessed how interest affects our arrears balances and arrears payments? As a result, are we making any changes?
  - Do we have procedures to suspend interest in exchange for full or partial payment of current support or arrears? Do we use these procedures?
  - Have we offered or have we ever considered an arrears amnesty program?
  - Do we have procedures in use to compromise arrears? Do we use our CSE system routinely to monitor cases that remain open following debt compromise to ensure that noncustodial parents (NCPs) meet their agreements?
  - Do we match with Vital Records to obtain death records in order to terminate orders?
  - Do we review nonpaying arrears-only cases for possible closure? Have we reviewed the “case closure automation guide” to determine if there are ways to improve our case closure process?
  - Have we considered coordinating with our State tax office to provide low-income NCPs with tax credit if they are current on child support obligations?
  - Have we considered a program to adjust arrearages owed to the State to encourage the NCPs to have a positive involvement in the lives of their children and to make regular support payments?
  - Have we considered making equitable arrears adjustments/partial satisfactions of judgment by recalculating old orders based on current income information and guidelines in cases in which the amount owed was set by default?

The complete “PAID Practices Guide” is available at: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pol/DCL/2007/dcl-07-17.htm> Please send your suggestions to [PAID@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:PAID@acf.hhs.gov).

# Two Louisiana Districts Create Projects to Increase Collections

*At the Louisiana State Child Support Enforcement Conference in March (detailed in last month's Child Support Report), the Shreveport and Baton Rouge Districts presented projects that each had recently tested in response to State Field Operations Director Lisa Andry's challenge: to create a project that reflects the national child support initiative PAID—Project to Avoid Increasing Delinquencies. In the following two articles, the presenters summarize their District projects.*

## In Shreveport, Caseworkers' Next Steps Bring Payments on Arrears

By William Tilley  
Shreveport District Support Enforcement Office

In October 2007, the Shreveport District Support Enforcement office was given an opportunity to devise a project that would assist with increasing its collection of arrears. Our project was two-fold: We wanted to increase collection of arrears and also see which enforcement techniques worked best. Our timeframe for completing the project was 3 months.

After discussing several plans, we decided to use the State-generated INFOPAC report that lists cases with arrears, but that had no arrears distributed in the last fiscal year. Since the cases listed on the report were not just arrears-only cases, we thought our project would not only improve our arrears collection, but also improve our ongoing obligation collections. Of course, after reviewing the report for the first time, we knew we could not work every case listed in only 3 months.

We decided to develop a plan that was challenging but achievable. The caseload would have no more than 500 cases assigned to it. The caseload would also be limited to one Judicial District. We wanted to make sure the caseworker took the same actions on each case, so a spreadsheet was created that allowed us to track all actions taken on each case. Creating the spreadsheet was vital because our final report on the success of our project depended on the caseworker keeping track of all actions taken on each case.

During the project, 263 cases were reviewed. The review consisted of contacting the noncustodial parent, and the custodial parent if necessary, by phone, sending out appointment letters, suspending licenses, checking the Louisiana Department of Corrections' automated system

to verify incarceration, and, as a last resort, ruling the case back to court for contempt.



Out of the 263 cases reviewed, we were able to contact 166, or 63 percent, of the noncustodial parents by telephone or appointment letter. The remaining 97 cases, or 37 percent, included 33 noncustodial parents who were incarcerated and 4 deceased. The remaining cases had a valid employer or disability benefits, which could be garnished and have an income assignment generated. Some of the disability cases are pending court action at this time.

Out of the 263 cases reviewed, we received payments on 70, or 27 percent. Our spreadsheet indicated that for 56, or 80 percent, of the 70 cases, we started receiving money by simply contacting the noncustodial parent by telephone or mailing an appointment letter. We thought this was very interesting because sometimes we get busy with all the day-to-day tasks and forget to take those few extra minutes to contact the noncustodial parent by phone.

This project proved to us that if you take those extra steps you should see positive results. We also received payments on 13 cases, or 19 percent, because we located an employer and generated an income assignment. The remaining case had a payment received from a tax intercept.

We were satisfied with the 27 percent increase in collections on those cases where we had not received a payment during the last fiscal year. We also had the statistics to back-up how important it is for the caseworker to take those few extra steps and try to contact the noncustodial parent by telephone or send out appointment letters before taking other enforcement actions.

We are incorporating certain components of the project into our regular caseloads. We truly believe making that extra effort to contact the noncustodial parent by phone or appointment letter does improve our chances to collect.

For more information, contact District Manager William Tilley at 318-676-7007, [wtilley@dss.state.la.us](mailto:wtilley@dss.state.la.us). ■

## Baton Rouge Targets \$500 or Greater Monthly Obligation Caseload

By Katherine D. O'Brien

*Baton Rouge District Support Enforcement Office*

The Baton Rouge District Child Support office has experienced a great deal of transition and hiring for the last 2 years. Needless to say, we have had to be creative in case coverage practices, as our analysts are constantly covering for vacant caseloads.

One of the practices we have instituted is caseload specialization. As a part of that specialization we have created a caseload to include only those cases with \$500 or greater monthly obligation.

We decided to target these cases because of the potential gain if collected upon and the potential harm if no collection is received on these cases. Our goal is to increase the performance measure for cases paying current support obligations.

We used a monthly report of those cases not paying, or paying less than the full monthly obligation, to isolate these cases (Monthly Obligation Shortfall List). At inception of this project, there were 589 cases. The highest monthly obligation in this caseload was \$10,000 per month. While these high obligation cases make up less than 3 percent of the total cases in the Baton Rouge District office, they could potentially cause the most harm if uncollected.

In an effort to make the project as productive as possible, we hired a retiree who had been with the child support program several years ago. While there was some training required, it was not as lengthy a process as if we would have hired a new person.

In addition, intense collection and enforcement efforts were undertaken. All appropriate actions are being taken including, but not limited to, locate activities, custodial and noncustodial parent contact via phone and mail, administrative license suspension, seizure of bank accounts, and liens on assets and property. Of course all automated enforcement techniques continue, such as Federal tax offset, State tax offset, lottery offset, and consumer reporting.

Since this project began in November 2007, we have experienced a measure of success in that we have been able to close 12 cases, including the \$10,000 monthly obligation case because the noncustodial parent moved from our jurisdiction. Other closures were at the request of

the custodial parent or because the minor child has emancipated. We have reduced the number of cases not paying from 589 at the start to 443 in May 2008. This means full collections were received on an additional 134 cases. The total dollar amount collected so far over the course of this project is \$1,219,937.

A potential drawback has been the large volume of phone calls generated. However, these phone calls have yielded valuable information, which aids in collection and enforcement.

We will continue to be proactive on these cases and fully expect even greater success in the future.

For further information, contact District Manager Susan Long ([slong@dss.state.la.us](mailto:slong@dss.state.la.us)) or Assistant District Manager Katherine D. O'Brien ([kobrien@dss.state.la.us](mailto:kobrien@dss.state.la.us)) at 225-287-7450. ■



## Georgia OCSS Celebrates 35

The Georgia Office of Child Support Services (OCSS) marked its 35th birthday milestone during May with a variety of activities around the State. Pictured are Deputy Director Renorta Heard and Director Keith Horton. Governor Sonny Perdue issued a proclamation proclaiming May as Child Support Services Month in Georgia; an additional 38 mayors and county commissions



around the State issued similar proclamations. Congratulatory letters were received from US Senators Johnny Isakson and Saxby Chambliss, Congressman Jim Marshall, and OCSE Commissioner Margot Bean. Each region in the State selected a judge and a sheriff to recognize for their support of the program and honored each with a trophy at informal ceremonies in their communities. In addition, each office held a variety of events during the month to show appreciation to their staff for their work each day to help children and families.



# Cleaning Dirty Data!

By **Bill Nightingale**  
OCSE

Many things can affect the quality of data. The data may be entered incorrectly. Characters in a name or SSN may be transposed. The data could be changed during transmission. Or, the data could just be old. The quality of data can be improved. How? By cleaning the data!

An incorrect address, an invalid SSN, or a misspelled name can create additional work for case workers, as well as delays for families. For these reasons, OCSE has established a new program to improve data quality. The program includes measuring the quality of data, fixing data problems, and putting in place new automated data cleaning processes. Much like an automatic dishwasher can provide loads of clean dishes, this program will help provide data that is accurate, complete, current, and fit for use!

Clean data is critical in child support. Below are a few examples of how OCSE's Data Quality Improvement Program has helped improve the quality of data from the Federal Parent Locator Service (FPLS).

## National Directory of New Hires (NDNH)

The NDNH is a national registry of employment and unemployment insurance information that helps State IV-D agencies locate noncustodial parents, establish child support orders, and enforce child support orders. Several processes have been implemented to improve its data quality.

A data cleaning process reverses the first and last names when Name/SSN combinations cannot be verified. If the combination verifies following the reversal, the corrected data are returned to the submitter and also stored in the NDNH. A similar process is also applied to correct an SSN that cannot be verified.

Previously, many NDNH records that could not be validated were completely rejected. Instead of rejecting a record, the record is ranked according to the data contained in the record that can be validated. Those records that have a high enough ranking will be added to the NDNH. This improves the opportunity for more proactive matches.

The FPLS system is now scrubbing NDNH submitted addresses, storing them, and returning the corrected addresses to the submitter, thereby improving data accuracy.

A change is being developed that will replace the address of the payroll service provider with the address of the employer. This change will help get child support documents, such as withholding orders, delivered to the appropriate party.

These changes and improvements to NDNH data quality provide increased opportunity for locating and establishing and enforcing orders.

## Federal Case Registry (FCR)

The FCR is a national registry of persons in child support IV-D cases and child support orders (non-IV-D). The FCR is composed of extracts from each State Case Registry.

An anomaly was discovered in the processing of the Family Violence Indicator on cases where a noncustodial parent was involved in multiple cases within a State. A data quality improvement process has been implemented to address this issue. Correctly setting Family Violence Indicators increase the number of responses States can receive via the FCR.

## Federal Offset

Federal Offset data assists States with collecting delinquent child support debts through four programs: Federal Tax Refund Offset, Administrative Offset, Passport Denial Program, and Multistate Financial Institution Data Match (MSFIDM).

Plans are under way to proactively identify unverified SSN/Name combinations stored within Federal Offset data. A warning will be sent back to the senders alerting them that they have submitted data that cannot be verified. This change could result in additional obligors becoming subject to the Passport Denial Program.

The automatic correction of the debtor zip code will increase collection of delinquent payments via offsets by Treasury's Financial Management Service.

## Keeping Data Clean

These are a few examples of efforts to improve the quality of FPLS data. This cleaning happens automatically to reduce workload and delays. OCSE continues to look



for ways to improve the quality of FPLS data through constant attention and cleaning processes.

The data quality efforts being implemented at OCSE are aimed at helping State data quality as well as FPLS data quality. States can take steps as well to help improve the quality of the data within their own systems while maintaining data quality within the FPLS systems. When corrected data are returned to the States as a result of these cleansing activities, State CSE systems should be updated with the cleaned data. This will reduce the need to repeatedly correct the same data in the FPLS system.

OCSE will continue to monitor incoming and outgoing data for quality, fix the data when possible, and seek ways to implement new processes to automatically clean dirty data. Just as the dishwasher makes doing the dishes almost effortless, OCSE strives to provide quality data that the child support community can rely upon to help achieve our primary goal—ensuring that the children get the support they need to grow up healthy and happy. ■

**OCSE 18th National  
Child Support Enforcement  
Training Conference  
August 25 – 27, 2008  
Washington, DC**

**Registration information:**

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pol/DCL/2008/dcl-08-20.htm>

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## **Finland and United Kingdom Now Reciprocating Countries**

The United States has declared both Finland and the United Kingdom (UK) as a “foreign reciprocating country,” or FRC, for child support enforcement purposes. This means State IV-D child support agencies can now provide Finland and the UK the same child support enforcement services provided to other intergovernmental and interstate requests. Likewise, Finland and the UK each have agreed to reciprocate by establishing and enforcing child support owed to persons who are residents of the United States.

A list of contact information (address, phone, and fax) for these jurisdictions is available on the OCSE Web site in the Intergovernmental Referral Guide (IRG) at: <http://ocse.acf.hhs.gov/ext/irg/sps/selectastate.cfm>

For more information about OCSE international resources, please see: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/international/index.html>

The Department of State, in collaboration with OCSE, provides general information on international child support enforcement on its Web site at: [http://travel.state.gov/family/services/support/support\\_582.html](http://travel.state.gov/family/services/support/support_582.html)

In addition, OCSE has issued an Information Memorandum, “A Caseworker’s Guide to Processing Cases with Finland.”

### ***Child Support Report***

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