

Child Support Report

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OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT

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Child Support Directors Plan for 'Hopeful' New Year

**By Brenda Lyttle, President
National Council of Child Support Directors**



Brenda Lyttle is Director of the Wyoming Child Support Enforcement Program.

It is with great excitement and hopefulness that the Child Support Directors of the National Council of Child Support Directors (NCCSD) are looking forward to 2009. There are so many new developments in our future, and yet we are pleased that several emphases will stay in place within the CSE program.

The year 2009 will bring more work in medical support. Our NCCSD medical support workgroup is continually looking at the new regulations and planning legislative, rule, and system changes to accommodate them. Our budgets are quite tight, but we look ahead to our new role in working with the medical care needs of our children and families. Our new responsibilities in medical support will take us into the worlds of Medicaid and private health insurance carriers. We are preparing for that new journey.

As we plan for medical support, we are keeping a watchful eye on our budgets. The Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 took a chunk out of our State budget allocations, and now we are in the position of trying to do more with less. Some States have been fortunate enough to have funding restored, at least for now, but many are making tough decisions in lean times. We are a hopeful bunch, however,

and we continue to get ideas from each other and look for ways to continue our core function of getting support to kids.

Several of us are also planning system upgrades and rebuilds. We continue to rely more and more on our automated systems, and 2009 will be a year of development and research. Part of our daily decision-making is which new data match or system add-on can give us the more cost-effective results as we look at the present and plan for the future. The IT systems world does not slow down for us! But, we have great folks in our States who match and build and code and do their part to get child support and medical support to families.

In the midst of these developments, we are keeping what we consider the best of 2008. We are committed to continued collaboration with OCSE on the national PAID (Project to Avoid Increasing Delinquencies), which has helped States focus on getting regular, monthly child support payments to families and assisting noncustodial parents in paying on arrears owed. We are grateful to



Child Support Report

30 years and counting!
January 1979 – January 2009

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Commissioner Bean for developing PAID, and we look forward to new ideas within PAID and our work with noncustodial parents.

We have also been blessed with a stronger communicative relationship between NCCSD and OCSE. We believe a higher level of sharing and trust has been built between us, and we want to continue that sense of teamwork with OCSE. We hope that level of trust and communication also flows into our States as we work with legislators, judges, administrators, advocates, and leaders

in programs with whom we will be working.

The past couple of years have proven to us that when we work closely together, our program is strengthened. That strength binds us to others in the child support profession, and to our coworkers and the families in our States who rely on us. And, after all, that's why we're here.

OCSE Streamlining Automated FIDM Payment Process

By Matthew Marsolais
OCSE



The Federal Parent Locator Service attributes a great deal of its success to relationships cultivated with the private sector, including financial institutions participating in the Multistate Financial Institution Data Match (MSFIDM). The collaboration among States, OCSE, and financial institutions across the nation has resulted in thousands of children and families receiving child support which may not have been collected without the MSFIDM program.

Now OCSE is streamlining the process for sending funds seized from a delinquent obligor's account to the State. In May 2008, OCSE contacted multistate financial institutions with the most FIDM matches returned to States to share the benefits of converting from paper checks to electronic payments (e-payments). OCSE also provided the requirements for programming the FIDM application identifier (the code that indicates the type of collection being transmitted) in the electronic record.

At this time, U.S. Bank and the Washington State CSE agency are using an automated FIDM payment process. In addition to e-payments, Washington sends all FIDM lien requests electronically to the bank, eliminating the need to print and mail a hard-copy form.

OCSE aids communication between financial institutions participating in the MSFIDM program and State CSE agencies interested in e-payments. Since many in-state financial institutions participate in the FIDM program directly with their State CSE agencies, OCSE encourages States to reach out to those institutions with information about e-payments.

If you are interested in this initiative or would like a copy of the information shared with MSFIs, please contact Matthew Marsolais at matthew.marsolais@acf.hhs.gov.

Join the PAID Workplace



What is the PAID Workplace?

The PAID Workplace is an online resource that showcases best practices, analyses, presentations, and more material that may be helpful to child support professionals in their efforts to increase child support collections and prevent arrears—the goal of the national Project to Avoid Increasing Delinquencies.

How Do I Sign Up?

To become a member of the PAID Workplace, send an e-mail message to PAID@acf.hhs.gov and provide your:

- First and last name
- Title
- Organization
- Phone number
- E-mail address
- Affiliation/State/Tribe

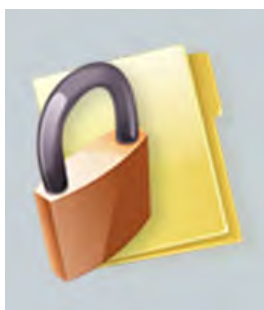
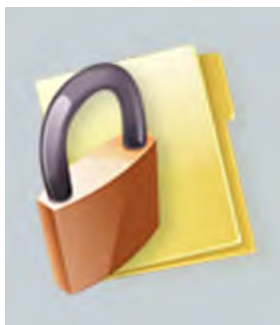
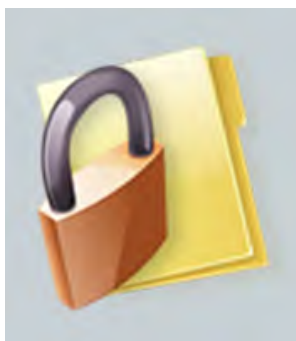
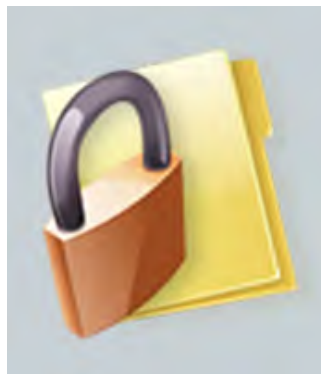
In return, you will receive a user name, password, and instructions on how to access the site. If you have any questions, please contact Alzata Ross at PAID@acf.hhs.gov.

To learn more about the national PAID, click on the PAID symbol above or this link to the OCSE Web site: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/resources/paid/>



Identity Theft *Is* a Disaster

By Joseph Bodmer
OCSE



As much as we think about, and strategize, our preparedness for floods, fires, earthquakes, and hurricanes, and the damage they can inflict, there is an ever-present risk to government that I believe receives little more than passing acknowledgement. Handled more often as policy guidance than as an element of a Disaster Recovery Plan, that risk is *identity theft and fraud*.

The scope and breadth of identity theft and fraud is not only staggering in its financial impact, but also commonplace across all sectors of our society, including Federal, State, and local governments. According to a recent Federal Trade Commission study (“2006 Identity Theft Survey Report, November 2007”) 8.3 million U.S. adults become victims of identity theft each year. This averages out to more than 22,000 victims per day, or 15 victims per minute. Clearly, identity theft is no small problem, but did you know it is primarily an employee-centric one and not, necessarily, something the propeller-heads down in IT alone can solve?

According to the Privacy Rights Clearinghouse (www.privacyrights.org) and its comprehensive Chronology of Data Breaches, from January of 2005 through November 2008

there were 245,832,230 individual records containing personally identifiable information (PII) compromised in one way or another. In examining those roughly one-quarter billion records lost, 53.7 percent of the lost or stolen data was maintained by public institutions, not the private sector. When we break these numbers down further, we find that 29.3 percent represented the loss or theft of government (versus educational institution) maintained data. Therefore, after the private sector, it seems the government is the second greatest victim of identity theft. How did we become so apparently inept at data safeguarding and security, so nonchalant about our clients’ personal information?

I was surprised to learn, according to the “Chronology of Data Breaches,” that only 23.7 percent of identity theft is the result of online computer hacking. So what is the biggest culprit in the disappearance of our personal data? Try loss and theft; in other words, stolen laptops, pinched tape cartridges, and unshredded hardcopy data reports floating in dumpsters. Yes, those very same financial and caseload reports we have lying around our offices everyday. In fact, data that is mishandled, lost, or stolen accounts for a whopping 43.3 percent of all identity theft.

The second largest reason, with 27.6 percent of all identity thefts, is something I like to call “stupidity.” Like the time in early 2006 when a large metropolitan newspaper exposed hundreds of thousands of credit and debit card records along with the routing information for customer checking accounts by inadvertently printing the PII on the same paper used to wrap newspaper bundles for distribution. The remaining 5.3 percent of compromised data is due to disgruntled employees and the dishonesty of insiders. So we need to recognize that 77 percent of all lost PII is not due to compromised, hacked computer systems, but instead, just people being people, not following security protocols, safeguarding procedures, and on occasion, being intentionally malicious.

Are there things you can do? Sure, but your first course of action must be to anticipate the moment. Identify the steps to take, the people to alert, and your reaction to the incidents that will inevitably occur. Then, put someone in charge, and train everyone on *their* roles and responsibilities and *your* planned responses. Does that sound like a Disaster Recovery Plan to you? It should.

West Virginia Takes Pride in Reducing Arrears, Creating Culture of Compliance

Susan McComas
West Virginia Bureau for
Child Support Enforcement
Joan Kaub
OCSE Region III



The West Virginia Bureau for Child Support Enforcement (BCSE) has met the challenge of the national Project to Avoid Increasing Delinquencies (PAID): Collections are up and arrears are down! While the State's total child support arrears had increased by almost \$100 million from 2001 to 2004, in the last 3 years BCSE has reduced arrears by over \$53 million.

How did BCSE reverse the trend? There is no easy answer. It has taken considerable hard work. There are many paths to generating payments. What works for one case may not work for another. West Virginia uses the standard collection methods of income withholding, tax offset, etc. But it also uses technology, educating its customers, and other techniques to generate payments. For example:

- Through PayConnexion, parents owing child support can pay by credit card or electronic check, 24 hours a day, on the BCSE Web site or by telephone. In the first 18 months of PayConnexion's availability, the State received almost \$2 million in payments. Each month, the amount of payments increases as more and more obligors become aware of this option.
- Under its Lien Project, BCSE has set a goal of filing liens in 80 percent of a designated caseload by Sept. 30, 2009. Many obligors pay as soon as they are notified that a lien has been filed just because they do not want anything clouding the title to their property.
- BCSE also looks for ways to revise procedures. For example, it no longer refunds overpayments that are less than or equal to 1 month's support; the overpayment carries over to the next month to meet that month's obligation.
- Occasionally the State holds a roundup. BCSE sends notices to nonpaying obligors requesting they either pay by a certain date and/or come to the local office during a certain roundup time period. Local management and caseworkers are all available during the set time period to discuss the obligor's case, answer questions, and accept payments.

- BCSE continually educates obligors about the importance of paying child support, letting them know that they are expected to support their children on a regular basis. BCSE phones parents about payments due and/or court hearings. BCSE also sends cards and letters informing obligors how and where they can make payments, along with a prepaid envelope.



Susan Shelton Perry,
Commissioner, West Virginia
Bureau for Child Support
Enforcement

What is in BCSE's future? West Virginia is developing a Web site called WIN to withhold casino table game winnings. If an obligor wins more than \$10,000, the casino will ask for an SSN, enter it into the Web site, and, if the obligor owes more than \$150, an income withholding will be issued to intercept the winnings.

In addition, the State reduced the percentage of interest on arrears from 10 percent to 5 percent, effective July 2008.

West Virginia is working hard to create a culture of compliance by aggressively pursuing child support payments right from the beginning, so the obligor will not adopt the attitude that it's OK to not pay.

For more information, please contact Susan McComas at 304-558-1277 or susan.d.mccomas@wv.gov, or Joan Kaub at 215-861-4006 or joan.kaub@acf.hhs.gov.



Third Time Around, Princeton Students 'Step Up to the Plate'

Six Princeton University undergraduate students faced an audience of child support professionals, January 8, to present their conclusions from a semester-long study of "Income Security Policy for Poor Children."

The presentations by each in the third group of students to take Dr. Hillard Pouncy's course and meet with OCSE staff, offered recommendations for the future of the child support program in the areas of: teenage and young adult child support education interventions; Hispanics in the child support enforcement system; multiple partner fertility and multiple child support orders; incarcerated parents; community and healthy marriage initiatives, and access and visitation.

As part of the coursework, the students received coaching from Vicki Turetsky of the Center for Law and Social Policy and a Federal perspective of the national child support program from OCSE Commissioner Margot Bean. Senior student Cindy Hong, a graduate of last year's course, provided overall guidance.

Dr. Pouncy said, "This year again I am impressed with the work developed by these bright, hardworking students who have stepped up to the plate with their thoughtful studies. We would truly benefit from their pursuing work in the field of child support down the road."

To obtain copies of the students' papers, or to learn more about the course, please contact Dr. Pouncy at hillard.pouncy@gmail.com.



From left: Deputy Commissioner Donna Bonar, Molly Alarcon, Myles Schlank (OCSE), Eric Macias, Debra Pontisso (OCSE), Jonathan Nussbaum, James Thorman, Monica Ramirez De Arellano, Dr. Hillard Pouncy, Jessica Gamboa, Vicki Turetsky (CLASP), Commissioner Margot Bean





Michael Hayes



Michael Hayes is the Deputy for Family Initiatives in the Child Support Division of the Texas Office of the Attorney General. His extensive experience includes the development of policy, partnerships, and projects that support family stability, paternity establishment, father involvement, and child support program improvement. Before his current post, he helped create and was director of the Texas Fragile Families Initiative, a statewide project involving community-based, faith-based, and public agencies to support fragile families. CSR spoke to him recently. When asked how he views his work in child support, Hayes said, “I’m working to build family-centered child support,” adding that the tagline for the Family Initiatives section he oversees is “a catalyst for family-centered child support.” More from the interview:

You say you’re “working to build family-centered child support.” What exactly do you mean?

Family-centered child support is a philosophy of child support that’s tied to this question: “How can we best perform our IV-D child support function in a way that provides support to the healthy functioning of families?” When you ask most child support workers what motivates them to work in the program, they don’t recite the four statutory purposes of the IV-D program; they say “the children.”

I think of the functions of the IV-D program as the “head” of child support, while the child support program’s “heart” is summed up in the national child support program’s strategic plan where it states that one of our guiding principles is: “Children can count on their parents for the emotional support they need to be healthy and successful.” In a healthy body, the head and heart are

working together—and likewise, in child support I think that a family-centered approach means that you can provide strong, traditional enforcement services at the same time that you keep the entire family’s healthy functioning in mind; the two are not mutually exclusive.

Attendees at regional or national child support conferences have likely seen you at the podium. Do you enjoy public speaking?

Most people would never guess this, but I’m really an introvert. So, when I’m speaking it is only enjoyable when I’m presenting about something I really am passionate about. I try to make my presentations both educational and entertaining since I think we’ve all sat through too many workshops where we wish we’d just read the book rather than gone to see the show!

I appreciate the opportunities to share ideas we’ve learned from projects here in Texas and it’s especially enjoyable when I’m on a panel with professionals from other States and we can build off each other’s ideas and presentations. I also enjoy speaking in training and conference settings around the country to professionals from other fields, such as teen pregnancy, early child development, family law, family violence prevention, and prenatal awareness. We are serving so many of the same families and I feel like we need to learn and cooperate more across different professional and policy perspectives.



How did you come up with “Maps for New Dads”?

I wish I had come up with it! Really the idea came from some creative folks at the Healthy Families San Angelo program, where they’ve worked with expectant and new

fathers and families for many years. Gardner Wiseheart is one of my professional heroes and he and others there put together the first version of the book. I was just lucky enough to get to see it in action with dads in their program, and they were generous enough to let us adapt it for distribution across the State (and now country—if you look to New York State, you’ll see their “Roadmaps for New Dads” looks very familiar!).

“Maps for New Dads” is a prenatal handbook for men who are about to be fathers. It describes all the roles they can play, such as legal and financial roles, as well as emotional roles, and relays what the mom is going through and what the dad can do about this. It’s a great example of a “very early” intervention tool. We first started publishing it about 3 years ago and have distributed more than 50,000 to WIC, Head Start, Teen Parent Programs, and other fatherhood groups.

What do you hope to achieve through Parenting and Paternity Awareness [p.a.p.a.], the Family Initiatives project that won the Commissioner’s Award for Innovative Partnership last August?

I hope that teens will gain the knowledge, awareness, and skills to thoughtfully plan when they become a parent—hopefully after they’ve completed their education, started a career, and are in a healthy committed relationship.

The 14 sessions of p.a.p.a. have evolved over the last 20 years. We started with just a single classroom presentation about child support enforcement laws and today it has matured into an evidenced-based child support education curriculum that promotes personal responsibility in parenting, encourages involvement of fathers, and the formation of strong, stable families.

Last year the Texas Legislature made p.a.p.a. a mandatory part of the high school curriculum so every student starting high school in the 2008-2009 school year should receive the curriculum. That’s a lot of students (about 350,000 in 1 year). To get the curriculum implemented we’ve been busily training teachers and other educators and have trained about 3,600 since January 2008. It’s very heartening that the response from these teachers has been overwhelmingly positive; they see the need for this kind of real-life education.

One other hope I have that may be a little bit of a stretch is that p.a.p.a. would help lower teen pregnancy rates. While it is not technically a pregnancy prevention curriculum, it does have a strong theme of “why” a teen

might not want to get pregnant and become a young parent. It would be great if we could claim that p.a.p.a. contributed to a drop in teen pregnancy, especially with the latest report from the CDC that the teen pregnancy rate went up in 2006 for the first time in 15 years. I think more realistically we can hope that schools will use p.a.p.a. in combination with other solid pregnancy prevention education and that the combination will prove effective.

One other thing—we regularly receive calls from other IV-D child support programs around the country asking about p.a.p.a. and if we will share it. Our response is “happily.” In fact, we’ve produced a text version of the curriculum just so other IV-D agencies can take the content, revise it for their State laws and goals, and then produce it with whatever graphics they want to use to make it their own.

How has your work in child support evolved?

I got linked into child support when I worked for a mental health foundation, where I helped to launch the Texas statewide version of the national Fragile Families Project. Then I moved on to a nonprofit public policy center. I have Howard Baldwin, Texas Child Support Director at the time, to thank for bringing “home” to child support. As part of the Fragile Families project, I approached him about providing training for child support workers on how to more effectively interact with fathers. Howard generously opened the door and I walked right in! That experience was indicative of openness to professional development and willingness to change that I think sets child support professionals apart from many other fields. I’m not sure that some of the innovative projects and ideas I’ve been ... That’s not to say that there still aren’t times when I’m the wild eyed dreamer about what might be in child support and I need to have some dose of reality given to me—I frequently have NCSEA board member and colleague Charles Smith to thank for that grounding.

One of the areas I’m now working in is the prenatal setting, where I’m learning more about how fathers contribute to maternal and child health.

How do see the child support program evolving in 2009 and beyond?

I think it’s a great time to work in child support as we see the program continue to grow and mature. Child support enforcement is the Federal program that is in the best position to think about and serve the entire family—

not only a mother, or a father, or a child, like so many other Federal agencies.

The current national child support enforcement strategic plan (for 2005 – 2009) clearly describes this emphasis on both emotional and financial support and the involvement of both parents. With 4 out of 10 children in the United States born to unmarried parents, there are millions of children counting on somebody or some agency to help provide structure and support to their family; who better than us? In particular, I'm hopeful about the new Administration's interest in continuing to support the involvement of fathers and I think the child support program has a wealth of knowledge and experience to bring to that task.

I also want to acknowledge the value that OCSE Section 1115 and SIP grants have had for the evolution of child support, both in Texas and around the country. Through Section 1115 grants, our Family Initiatives Section in Texas has been able to pursue the projects I've talked about, since these grants may be used to fund certain activities not normally allowed under FFP rules. The creativity and innovation that those grant programs have fostered play a big part in child support's continued growth and vision. We take pride in how we've been able to keep the work going after the grant funding expires by using careful collaboration and coordination. For example, we found we could provide additional services to parents by linking Access and Visitation partners to our child support offices. Once the parents meet with us about the support order, they are escorted to the AV staff so they can develop a parenting plan. We could not have moved as thoughtfully or as quickly without that support.

In addition to helping families, what do you consider the best aspects of your career?

I work with the absolute coolest group of compassionate, spirited, and creative staff in the Family Initiatives Section. I wish I could name them all here, but they know who they are! In general, I think the child support staff in Texas is an inspiring bunch that is driven by passion for families.

Another great part about our work in the Family Initiatives Section is the way we use research to develop theoretical models for project development, and then take that theoretical model and design the intervention, track and evaluate implementation of the intervention, and then use what we learn to inform the next generation of programs and policy. That's something I don't take for granted and it goes a long way toward making some of the more mundane tasks (like federal reports!) just a bit more tolerable.

Project Save Our Children

A noncustodial parent of three children recently paid \$70,000 toward his outstanding arrearage, leaving a balance of \$66,000, on two North Dakota child support cases. The cases had remained unpaid since 1999. The parent was arrested by HHS OIG Special Agents in Texas, in July 2008, after North Dakota referred the matters to the Project Save Our Children (PSOC) task force for investigation and prosecution in late 2006.

For information about PSOC, please contact Nick Soppa in OCSE at 202-401-4677 or nicholas.soppa@acf.hhs.gov.



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