



Child Support Report

OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT

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From Dream to Reality New Jersey Institutes Standardized Training

By Dina Thompson

New Jersey Office of Child Support Services

The New Jersey Office of Child Support Services has reached its goal of offering statewide, standardized training on all aspects of the child support program through the New Jersey Child Support Institute (NJCSI). NJCSI is a joint venture between the State Department of Human Services, the New Jersey Judiciary, and Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, School of Social Work. NJCSI helps child support professionals meet the challenges of their job, increase efficiency, and enhance customer service by unifying the approach to all phases of the child support process.

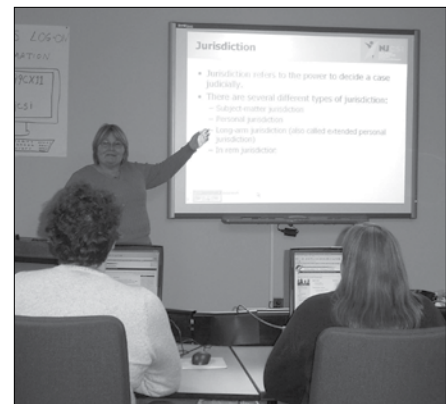
NJCSI delivered its first course in March 2007—a dream come true for Child Support Services Director Alisha Griffin, who for 10 years has crusaded for training, professionalism, and standardization across the board, and improved customer service. “People who seek child support services come at a time of need, usually through a divorce or severing of a relationship,” Griffin said. “Divorce, separation, and single parenting are difficult. People are angry. They are hurt. They are struggling. We must keep the focus on the child and the family and meet their needs.”

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Child Support Report online:
www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse

Child support workers attend a class about types of jurisdiction in judicial child support cases, at the New Jersey Child Support Institute.



Director Griffin hopes New Jersey’s experience in developing NJCSI will help other child support professionals who are creating any type of employee training.

NJCSI developed its curriculum through the gathering of information from focus groups and experts on topics from case initiation to case closure. Three regional sites operate in corporate campuses in Parsippany, Princeton, and Cherry Hill. Each classroom has state-of-the-art equipment, including laptops for each participant to facilitate a positive learning environment.

“Our instructors are all experienced investigators and supervisors who have worked in the child support network for years,” said Robert Nolan, Associate Dean of the School of Social Work. “We are proud of what we have created with the State and are confident this will benefit the entire child support system, as well as the millions of youngsters who are affected by divorce, separation, or single parenting.”

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Child Access for Noncustodial Parents Deserves National Attention

By Margot Bean
OCSE Commissioner

During the past 10 years, with an annual appropriation of \$10 million, the Federal Access and Visitation Grant (AV) program has served more than half a million, primarily low-income, noncustodial parents (NCPs) and their families.

However, I hear frustrations from many child support attorneys that IV-D funds cannot be used to incorporate a visitation plan into a child support order, particularly for unwed parents who jointly agree on a visitation schedule. I also hear concerns from line workers about working with NCPs who express frustration over having to pay child support without being able to see their children.

The Good News

While OCSE administers this grant, the State (usually the Governor) decides which entity will manage the AV grant program. The good news is that 29 State IV-D agencies have been designated this responsibility. As a result, the IV-D agencies in these States are in a position to decide which services will be funded and

which clients will be served (e.g., IV-D only, or a mix of IV-D and non-IV-D clients).

The AV Grant is, therefore, a “win-win” situation for parents, children, and the IV-D program for the following reasons:

- The gap between the establishment of paternity and the establishment of a parenting time/visitation order for unwed NCPs can be bridged through the provision of services funded through the AV Grant (e.g., mediation, development of visitation agreements, and enforcement of parenting time orders).
- The AV Grant program can provide parents in the IV-D caseload with access and visitation services that the IV-D agency cannot directly provide, since those services are not an allowable use of child support program funds. This can include, for example, incorporating visitation plans into a child support order.
- The provision of AV services to parents in the IV-D caseload—particularly to unwed NCPs—can result in an increase in compliance with child support orders.
- The most important reason of all: Children benefit from the emotional and financial support of both parents.

Future Trends

The hallmark of good planning is to anticipate future trends. For the child support program, this should include the possibility that the IV-D caseload will continue to have a large percentage of unwed parents. State child support collection rates could be affected by the large percentage of unwed parents in their caseloads, particularly if the AV needs of unwed fathers are not addressed. Nationwide, in 2005, nearly 36.8 percent, or 1.5 million, of children born were to unwed parents (National Center for Health Statistics).



See ACCESS, next page

To help address these planning concerns, IV-D agencies might consider the following:

IV-D agencies that administer the AV Grant:

Re-evaluate your funding priorities based on the AV needs of parents in the IV-D system juxtaposed with the needs of non-IV-D parents. You are in a position to fund and provide access services to IV-D customers through the AV Grant.

IV-D agencies that do not administer the AV Grant:

Even though you are limited by the funding constraints of the IV-D program, you might consider three options:

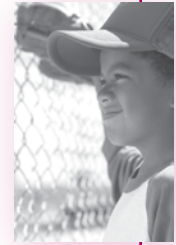
- **Collaboration with State AV program agencies:** Contact your State AV Program Coordinator to discuss the possibility of including IV-D NCPs as recipients.
- **Interagency agreements with courts:** In many States, access and visitation services—particularly mediation, development of parenting plans, and supervised visitation—are available to divorcing and separated parents through the courts. One option would be to contact the courts to see if IV-D agencies might refer NCPs to court-connected AV services on issues regarding child access and visitation.
- **Information and referral:** States might want to consider the option of making available written materials and referrals for IV-D parents to AV services through the courts or in the community.

Last, I am pleased to announce a new link on the OCSE Web site for information on the AV Grant program: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/access_visitation/

This article was adapted from the Commissioner's article in "Child Support Quarterly" (Fall 2007), published by the National Child Support Enforcement Association.

Research Supports Access

- A study by the HHS Office of the Inspector General (2002) of 190 parents who received mediation services in four States found that 61 percent paid more child support after receiving services and that payments rose from 52 percent to 70 percent of what was owed.
- A study funded through an OCSE grant of 970 parents in nine States who received mediation, parent education, and supervised visitation services showed that parents paid more support following program participation and that payments for unwed parents went from 59 percent to 70 percent of what was owed.
- OCSE has also funded five Section 1115 demonstration grants to test various models of providing AV services to IV-D customers in five States. Preliminary results support the finding that if NCPs are provided increased access to their children, they are more likely to pay child support.



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'Passport Denial' Gets Second-Largest Collection

Families Give Meaning to its Mission

By **Rebecca Hamil**
OCSE

Envision paying \$295,000 for a passport. Then picture all that money going to a mother and her three children as a child support payment. That's exactly what happened a few months ago when a noncustodial parent wanted to fly overseas to start a business. That amount was the second largest reported collection paid by a noncustodial parent owing more than \$2,500 in back child support since the national Passport Denial program was implemented in 1998.

This wasn't the only success story; 2007 saw many large payments: \$152,000 from a contractor needing pages added to his passport; \$110,000 from a businessman going on a cruise; another \$110,000 for travel over the holidays; \$100,000 from a travel agent; and \$55,000, paid by credit card, from a businessman who works over the border.

With these large amounts, it's no surprise that reported collections attributed to Passport Denial in 2007 totaled over \$40 million; up more than 80 percent over 2006. The increase

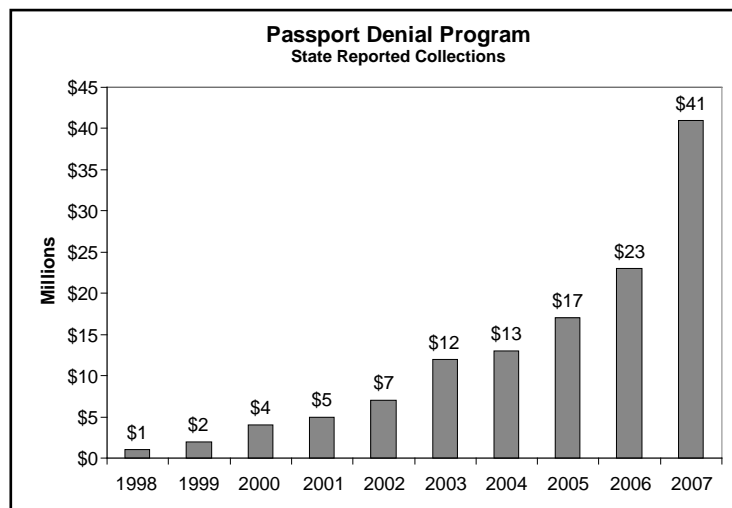
is largely due to implementation of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI). Travelers can now apply for a new type of passport, the Passport Card. This wallet-size passport is valid only for land and sea (not air) travel between the United States, Canada, Mexico, Bermuda, and the Caribbean region. The Passport Card will be subject to the same adjudication as the more familiar book passport, which should help increase collections in 2008.



The Passport Denial program is not just about the numbers; it's also about helping families. The \$55,000 credit-card payment closed five cases in two counties involving five children, six custodial parents, and Foster Care. The

custodial parent who received \$152,000 had not heard from the noncustodial parent in years and will divide the money among her children.

And what about the family who received the \$295,000 check? During a phone interview, the custodial parent said the money would be used for college tuition for her two sons and to help her daughter get established in her career. "The only reason he chose to pay, after many years of nonsupport, was because he needed his passport."



That New System Smell

By Joe Bodmer
OCSE

The new year always brings along one of my favorite fantasy-based traditions; a fabulously stupid way for me to idle away a day or three with no regrets. It begins with promises of faster performance, using hot, new technologies, and ends with everything all wrapped-up in really cool, sporty looks. That's right. It's time for the Detroit Auto Show to roll around again. From more powerful engines, to slick, pushbutton starting, there's always something new and improved on the horizon.

Last week, as I looked through brochures on the latest gizmos and gadgetry being packed into next year's models, I thought about what it was that always drew me back, year after year, to the Auto Show. As anyone interested in upgrading their obsolete, hard-to-maintain, and expensive-to-drive jalopy knows, the Auto Show is *the* place to go. Whether looking for souped-up, pedal-to-the-metal tips and tricks, or searching for a reliable, understandable, family-sedan-dependable new car answer, the Auto Show never fails as a one-stop-shop of information. And, oh, that new car smell!

Wouldn't it be nice to find an "Auto Show-like" conference geared toward child support automation? Alas, as much as it sounds like a no-brainer, finding news about all the latest trends and hottest topics in child support computing, all in one place, just hasn't happened. In fact, it seems if you want to learn about new computing opportunities or share innovative automation ideas, you're forced to attend two or three different national conferences each year. Even then, those conferences present few cohesive, structured learning steps, sessions designed to build one upon the next. However, this year is different. There is a meeting that will bring everything and everyone concerned with child support automation under one roof:

"OCSE's 2008 State Systems Symposium" in Washington DC, March 18–20.



Tech Talk

Yes, once again OCSE is sponsoring the symposium; this year's ultimate training opportunity for people looking to replace or modernize their existing child support system. This year's symposium will focus on only two related tracks: Planning and Modernization.

For those looking for a new, revved-up system, the Planning Track will be just the ticket. Concentrating on what you need to do to identify, justify, and ultimately acquire that new child support system, Federal and State staff who have walked the walk will lead you through each step in the process. From hiring a contractor, to helping you craft your Feasibility Study, securing Federal funding, and envisioning the possibilities of tomorrow's technologies, we'll be lifting the hood and getting you the knowledge to succeed in your system planning effort.

But, we won't be stopping there. The Modernization Track will focus on innovative technologies; we'll try to help you decide which ones might make sense for you, and which won't. This track will help you find ways to fast-track your next procurement, build that new QUICK (Query Interstate Cases for Kids) interface, get the most out of your Federal and employer databases, create some slick Web-based initiatives, learn the latest on data standards, and more.

So, make your plans to come to Washington, March 18–20, to attend the "OCSE 2008 State Systems Symposium," and see how many "computing tires" you can kick in a day.

For more information and to register, log on to: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pol/DCL/2008/dcl-08-03.htm>

Study Analyzes Minority Participation In Child Support Enforcement Program

A report now available on the OCSE Web site titled “Minority Families and Child Support” shows the results of a study that compared participation of minorities in the Child Support Enforcement Program in recent years. The study used a Census Bureau national survey, “Current Population Survey—Child Support Supplement,” and combined data over the years to achieve sufficient sample sizes.

In general, the study shows that child support participation by minorities lags significantly behind Whites. Comparable data from 1994 to 2002 show that child support orders were es-



Census Bureau photo

tablished for 66 percent of eligible Whites, compared with rates of 43 percent for African Americans, 43 percent for Hispanics, 51 percent for Native Americans, and 46 percent for Asian Americans. In terms of compliance, Whites paid 62 percent of the amount owed, African Americans paid

44 percent, Hispanics paid 53 percent, Native Americans paid 52 percent, and Asian Americans 58 percent.

Analysis shows that the critical variable for these differences was the high rate of unmarried births and separations, as opposed to divorced or remarried status, by minorities.

Recently, child support participation differences between Whites and African Americans have narrowed significantly. African-American order rates increased from 31 percent in 1990 to 47 percent by 2002, while White rates have stabilized or declined. By 2002, more African-American mothers had orders than those who did not.

This study also analyzed data from Princeton University’s “Fragile Family and Child Wellbeing Study” of 2,000 urban unwed mothers in the third year after an unwed birth. Paternity establishment rates of these unwed mothers were comparable at 85 percent for Whites, 80 percent for African Americans, and 77 percent for Hispanics.



Child support order rates were comparable for unwed Whites and African Americans, at 44 percent for unwed Whites and 38 percent for unwed African Americans. Unwed Hispanics lagged at a 32-percent rate. According to the report, this is due primarily to socioeconomic disadvantages for unwed Hispanics. It is significant that the child support order establishment rate was much lower than the paternity establishment rate. Order rates for the unwed fragile families are also lower than aggregate national order establishment rates (56 percent).

The compliance or proportion of an order paid by unwed fragile families approximated aggregate national levels (57 percent). The proportion of the child support order paid was comparable for unwed Whites and Hispanics at 54 percent. Unwed African Americans, however, only paid 39 percent of the amount due; this was only partially explained by socioeconomic factors.

To see the report, log on to <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pol/DCL/2007/dcl-07-43.htm>.



Setting Appropriate Orders



Setting realistic child support orders constitutes an important strategy in preventing arrears accumulation.

However, sometimes these orders are set at a level beyond the ability of the obligor to pay; i.e., when a noncustodial parent doesn't appear for a court hearing and the court imputes earnings, or because a change in circumstance makes the initial amount ordered suddenly beyond the reach of the obligor.

The "PAID Practices Guide," compiled as part of the national Project to Avoid Increasing Delinquencies, includes questions that child support agencies might consider to determine whether review and modification practices are working as well as they can. For example:

- Is our review and adjustment process initiated automatically based on receiving updated wage information or other triggers that meet our State criteria?

- Are our quantitative standards for dollar amount or percentage changes to income reasonable so as not to unduly restrict the cases that qualify for modification?
- Are we matching with prisoner data to determine when noncustodial parents become incarcerated or leave prison?
- Does our policy allow for orders to be suspended or reduced during incarceration to reflect reduced capacity to remain current?
- Have we reviewed the accessibility of the modification process for pro se noncustodial parents?

Reviewing orders regularly and simplifying the process to allow modifications when necessary are critical factors in preventing and/or reducing child support arrears.

The "PAID Practices Guide" is available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pol/DCL/2007/dcl-07-17.htm>. Please e-mail suggestions for the guide to PAID@acf.hhs.gov.

In Focus

Packed with Pride



The New Mexico Child Support Enforcement Division (CSED) captured this image of packing holiday boxes for the troops last December. From left are Lupita Capelli, Supervisor, CSED Quality Assurance and Staff Development Division; Mary McCorvy, Supervisor, CSED Program Support Bureau; Joanne Portillo, State Human Services Department; and Kathleen Cathi Valdes, CSED Deputy Director. In only a week, Portillo, assisted by Valdes, organized the statewide project that sent 17 boxes, weighing a total 706 pounds, to New Mexico soldiers serving in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kuwait. The boxes included food, baseball caps, toiletries, games, books, DVDs, and New Mexico magazines and newspapers. Most of the boxes went to relatives of Human Services employees, including Portillo's son and Capelli's nephew. Others went to soldiers from Cannon Air Force Base, Holloman Air Force Base, and the New Mexico National Guard.

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NEW JERSEY, *from page 1*

Currently, NJCSI offers “New Hire Training” (for staff with 1 year or less experience) and “Experienced Refresher Training” (for staff with over 1 year of program experience). Courses under development include “UIFSA Foundations” and training for Law Clerks, highlighting the New Jersey Child Support Guidelines and the Program Overview.

More than 2,500 employees are eligible to attend, encompassing staff in the judicial branch, which includes Probation Officers, the County Board of Social Services, and state-level agencies. The child support program in New Jersey oversees approximately 350,000 cases affecting more than 1 million parents and children. To date, NJCSI has delivered training to 310 participants, with 190 staff currently enrolled for courses through July 2008.

Participant Heather Haggerty from the Office of Child Support Services commented, “I learned a lot and had a great time doing it. The instructors kept the topics interesting. The training was much more than I expected.”

The NJCSI instructors were also impressed. “The pilot was an eye-opening experience for me. I saw first-hand the need for accurate information about the child support program,” said Lisa Bender from NJCSI Cherry Hill. “Everyone walked away from this training with a better understanding of the big picture.”

Eileen Kelly-O’Brien from NJCSI Parsippany observed how thrilled participants were to receive standardized training. “They really were interested in what the other agencies are responsible for and why something can’t be done or how to get it done,” said Kelly-O’Brien. “I believe they will use the contacts made in class for a long time.”

For further information, please log on to:
www.njcsi.org

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