

# Child Support Report

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OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT

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## More Families May Need Our Help

By Donna Bonar  
OCSE Acting Commissioner

As our nation confronts greater economic struggles, child support agencies, and all social service programs, are going to be faced with more and more people who have never needed our support and don't know how to maneuver through government bureaucracy.

We are all working hard, particularly with the additional responsibilities under President Obama's economic recovery plan. Thank you for all you are doing.

The excerpt below is adapted from a recent e-mail sent by an Administration for Children and Families (ACF) employee to the ACF Acting Assistant Secretary. I hope you take just a minute to read and think about what we do, why we do it, and how we do it. We have the privilege to work in a program that helps our country's most vulnerable citizens; our increasing workload is helping more of those citizens.

*I took a call during lunch. The caller identified herself as a single (divorced) mother of three, the youngest age 4. She was laid off and needed child care for the 4-year-old. She is on unemployment, with 6 to 8 weeks remaining. The caller cannot actively look for work without child care. She wants to work or go to a training class for 6 months. So I told her which agency to contact for possible child care assistance. I suggested she also contact the local TANF agency to get information about her eligibility for TANF once her unemployment runs out. (She said she did not want to go on welfare; I explained the program is intended to provide temporary aid and, if eligible, she needed to consider it for herself and three minor children.) She mentioned needing to establish a support order against her ex-husband, but*

*added, "Who has money to hire a lawyer?" (I gave her our OCSE contact information.) We talked about food stamps and where she might apply. She said she preferred not to be on the public dole, so to speak. I commended her for her attitude and suggested she weigh all options for the sake of her family. She had hoped or thought that there was one agency that could help her with a range of needs. I told her that is not the current reality; I was trying to point her in the right directions and she would have to connect the dots. She said she understood and we talked through some online sites. I told her she seems to have a plan and now needs help to implement it. She thanked me for listening and making suggestions. I did not solve her problems; I wish I could, but am hopeful we can be a part of the solution with the stimulus money via ACF programs. I suggested that she contact the local office to see if her children and possibly she qualifies for SCHIP. She said I gave her some hope. Then she started to cry. I told her to hang in and we will get through these difficult times together.*

Kudos to the person who took time to help this mother! I know we will all work together to better provide information and services to all of our customers.

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# National CSE Association Maps Changes All Around

At its February Mid-Year Policy Forum and Training Conference, the National Child Support Enforcement Association (NCSEA) stayed true to form, offering timely presentations and promoting discussion through its theme, this year “Mapping Our Future: Child Support Changes and Challenges.”

Panelists delved into new legislation on Capitol Hill, just blocks from the conference site, and updates on OCSE regulations concerning international



and intergovernmental issues, safeguarding and data security, medical support, and Tribal automated systems.

At a plenary devoted to organizational change and leadership, participants learned about projects in State agencies to build relationships and improve communication. In this session, OCSE Acting Commissioner

Donna Bonar explained the realignment of regional offices and its main purpose to improve Federal services to States.

The Acting Commissioner also previewed plans under way for the National Child Support Enforcement Strategic Plan for 2010 through 2014. “Tribal programs will be more involved in this plan,” she stated, as will intergovernmental—in addition to interstate—strategies designed to help child support professionals implement its goals and objectives.

In addition, she addressed the nation’s loss of jobs, and asked the audience to consider their child support program’s flexibility to expand activities in areas such as review and adjustment, fatherhood, problem-solving courts, and prisoner reentry, possibly through OCSE grants.

Other conference topics included State medical support progress, training priorities, disaster recovery plans, interagency collaboration, and “data modeling” as a tool to analyze the effectiveness of child support projects.

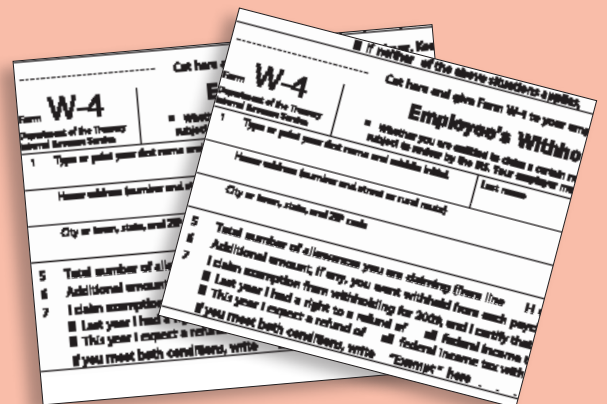


OCSE Acting Commissioner Donna Bonar and California Child Support Director Jan Sturla at the NCSEA Policy Forum last month.



14%

The number of W-4 records posted to the National Directory of New Hires in the first quarter of FY 2009 is down 14 percent compared to the number posted in the same quarter last year. In addition, Unemployment Insurance (UI) records posted are up by 1.8 million. These data show the same general economic trend as the US economy.



# Forest County Potawatomi Trained on Model System

Forest County Potawatomi Community's program and information technology staff (*pictured below*), from Crandon, WI, began training at OCSE headquarters in Washington, DC, for their role as the Pilot Testing Site for a new automated child support system aimed specifically at Tribal IV-D programs. Designed by Tribes, for Tribes, the Model Tribal System (MTS) is the first computer application to be collaboratively developed by Tribes to assist in their own operation of a public assistance program.

Once testing is complete, expected in early June, the MTS will be released to all Tribes. The MTS should improve child support case processing, paternity establishment, enforcement, and collections, advancing the lives of Native American families and children nationwide.

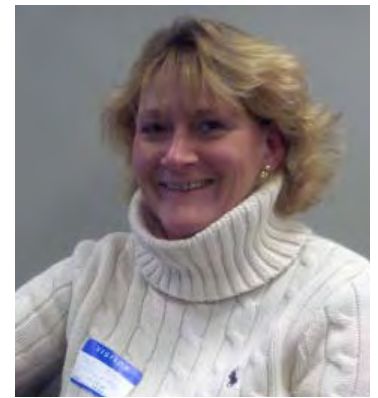
The MTS is designed to be fully compliant with industry standards, and as such is compatible with numerous operating systems, databases, servers, and Web browsers. Built entirely with freely available, open source tools, software, and database, it promises substantially lower operating and maintenance costs for Tribes versus other automation solutions in use nationwide.

The National Child Support Enforcement Program now includes 33 comprehensive Tribal IV-D programs, with 9 more receiving initial Federal funding to start a new Tribal program, and many more anticipated in the years ahead.



**Model Tribal System**

Designed By Tribes, For Tribes



**Jackie Pische**  
Tribal IV-D Director



**Mikala Smith**



**Vickie Shawano**



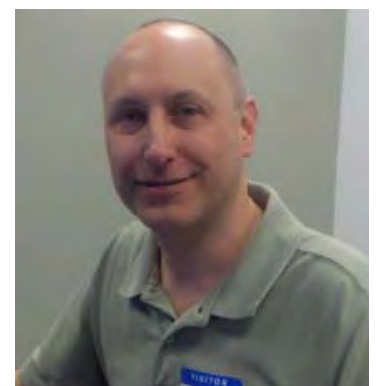
**Tamarr Vollmar**



**Sarah Adler**



**Michael Disch**



**Richard Mahlewen**

# Protecting Confidentiality

## Dauphin County, PA, Stamps Out Problem on Interstate Casework

By Nichol Burton

*Dauphin County Domestic Relations*

John Clark

*OCSE Region III*

Protecting personal information can be a challenge for the numerous people who process interstate child support cases. The problem of protecting personal information is particularly difficult when the child support case from the originating State reaches the court in the other State, where a judge may believe it is necessary to share the addresses of both the plaintiff and the defendant with both parties.

The Dauphin County, PA, Domestic Relations Section realized that protecting confidentiality was problematic. According to Director Kim S. Robison, “We want to insure the safeguarding of protected information so that everyone in Dauphin County can freely and fully participate in the child support process.”

To address its concerns, Dauphin County developed the following approach in January 2008:

When the plaintiff files for support and/or modification to another State, the worker asks the plaintiff if the address should remain confidential. If the plaintiff wants her/his address to remain confidential, the worker removes the plaintiff’s address from the forms and substitutes it with the county office address.



The plaintiff’s address then reads:

C/O Dauphin County Domestic Relations

PO Box 1295

Harrisburg, PA 17108

The worker also deletes the plaintiff’s phone number to assure that the defendant has no way to contact the plaintiff. The worker also removes any information about employers. If the plaintiff is working and provides copies of pay stubs, Domestic Relations makes a copy of the documents, “whites out” the plaintiff’s address on its copy and makes new copies so that the plaintiff’s address is nowhere to be found on any documents the court or client may receive.

The county workers then staple the necessary confidential form to the front of the UIFSA packet so that when the other State receives the packet, the workers are made aware of this request immediately. After all paperwork is printed, they stamp “Confidential” in red ink, under the county address, any place that the plaintiff’s address is required just to guarantee that the other State is aware of the request.

Good news travels fast in Pennsylvania. The benefits of Dauphin County’s successful initiative now extend to Franklin County’s Domestic Relations Office, which encountered a similar problem.

Daniel Richard, Pennsylvania Child Support Director, stated: “Pennsylvania’s goal is to ensure children receive financial support while protecting the family’s privacy by securing personal information. The Dauphin County initiative is an innovative solution for meeting that goal.”

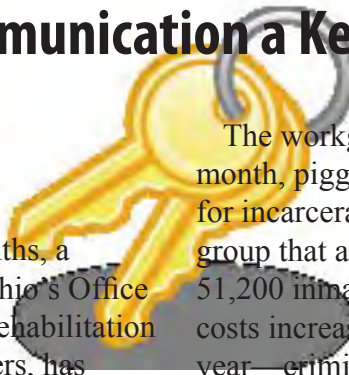
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## Ohio Workgroup: Communication a Key to Unlocking Barriers

By Elaine Blackman

*OCSE*

After meeting over the course of 17 months, a workgroup comprised of staffs from Ohio’s Office of Child Support (OCS) and Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC), and several stakeholders, has recommended ways to help incarcerated parents pay child support after exiting the prison system.



The workgroup’s recommendations, released last month, piggyback OCS’s efforts to unlock barriers for incarcerated parents with child support orders, a group that amounts to more than half of the State’s 51,200 inmates in its 32 prisons. “With Ohio’s prison costs increasing—about \$25,000 per inmate each year—criminal nonsupport has become an expensive enforcement technique,” says Carrie Brown, OCS Assistant Deputy Director of Operations.



Ohio workgroup members, from left: Tiffany Chinn, Ohio Office of Child Support (OCS); Scott Neely, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC); Carri Brown OCS; Heather Donnelly, OCS; Angi Lee, DRC; Michael Falatach, Cuyahoga County Child Support Enforcement Agency; Amy Roehrenbeck, Ohio CSEA Directors' Association, (OCDA); Linda Janes, DRC; and Alicia Handwerk, DRC. Not pictured: Cherly Casto, Rona Dorsey, and Sherri Rose, DRC; Kim Newsom Bridges, OCDA; Athena Riley, OCS; and Valerie Rust, Richland County CSEA

In addition to Brown, members of the statewide workgroup include county child support professionals, probation and parole officers, administrators, attorneys, DRC educators, and leaders of the Ohio Child Support Enforcement Agency Directors' Association.

Among the workgroup's recommendations: Connect child support information with other programs. Outreach and education to other agencies and to the incarcerated parents, the recommendations assert, will improve customer service and, ultimately, empower incarcerated and formerly incarcerated parents to meet their support obligations.

Some recommendations may not be new to some State child support agencies, for example, to collaborate with corrections employees or child support associations and produce videos for incarcerated obligors to explain child support procedures. But with the workgroup's recommendations in hand, Brown says that such avenues of communication are a growing priority for OCS.

Besides the category of communication, the workgroup's recommendations include ways to more effectively establish or modify the incarcerated parent's child support order. This category includes managing arrearages assigned (owed to the State) and unassigned (owed to the custodial parent), such as drafting legislation to include incarceration as a reason to request an administrative review of a child support order for eligible obligors.

The workgroup also recommends "diversion activities" as a proactive approach to being "smart on crime." Diversion programs piloted in seven Ohio counties have demonstrated promise through focusing on employment and providing the courts with alternative sanctions for nonpayment of child support, according to Brown.

In addition, the workgroup's recommendations recognize the importance of ongoing communication networks when agencies serve the same population.

"Information exchange is important not only to improve services to clients, but also to increase the probability of obtaining Federal grant funding," says Brown. This category of recommendations includes stationing a child support expert at the prisons to help with re-entry plans.

Some workgroup members conducted interviews with incarcerated parents and gauged their understanding of child support procedures and practices. Based on these interviews, several recommendations emerged, such as including financial management, cooperative parenting, child support, and job opportunity topics in education and outreach materials to DRC inmates.

The workgroup, formed in August 2007, began by identifying current practices and researching best practices and ideas in other States. Next it developed specific initiatives and recommendations designed to empower parents to successfully remove barriers to paying child support. An additional objective of the group was to share information about the DRC staff with OCS staff and vice versa.

"Almost immediately, members reported their involvement on the workgroup was helping them to improve the quality of service to children and families," says Brown. For example, DRC educators were able to respond to general questions about modification and payment of child support orders based on knowledge they gained from participating in the workgroup. Similarly, OCS workgroup members were available to answer specific questions from family members of incarcerated parents and could make appropriate referrals for community services. Incarcerated parents received information about the importance of staying in touch with the local child support agency and how child support obligations accrue while parents are incarcerated.

For more information about the Ohio workgroup, or to obtain a PDF of the workgroup's report, please contact Carri Brown at [carri.brown@jfs.ohio.gov](mailto:carri.brown@jfs.ohio.gov).



## The Rules of the Game



By Joseph Bodmer  
OCSE

Baseball season is now upon us. As a kid growing up I dreamed of playing third base for the Washington Senators. As I got older, I sucked it up and adjusted my goals. I turned my attention to following in the footsteps of the late, great sportswriter Shirley Povich to write about my beloved Senators. Yeah, that didn't pan out too well either. I joined the Navy.

So here I am, years later in OCSE, trying tortuously to write about information technology (IT) and the rules surrounding its acquisition under Federal grants management regulations; a far cry from thoughts of Spring Training. Yet, rules are rules, be it in baseball or government, and I think baseball can help us brush up on our regulations. As a Hall-of-Fame catcher, coach, and manager for baseball's Yankees and Mets over five decades, Yogi Berra was a genius at explaining arcane situations and rules. His nuggets of baseball wisdom called *Yogi-isms* are, I think, no less applicable today in our IT acquisitions than they were to the ballplayers of his day.

**"It's like déjà vu all over again."** The rules ensuring free and open competition for States to avoid organizational conflicts of interest, have been an ongoing issue since I first came to the government in 1988. Every 5 or 6 years it seems another State, another firm, has forgotten the Federal mantra of free and open competition. Federal regulations at 45 CFR 92.36(c)(1)(v) specifically warn States away from circumstances that limit competition, situations that involve a conflict of interest. As recently as 2006, OCSE restated its guidance around issues of free and open competition and organizational conflicts of interest in an Action Transmittal dated Aug. 11, 2006. Found in Section F of [OCSE-AT-06-03](#), the agency made clear that FFP would not be available in procurements where such conflicts of interest existed.

**"I didn't really say everything I said."** When a vendor working for a State assists in defining an agency's strategic plan for information technology, for automation, or for how their automated systems should work, they have assumed the mantle of having insider

information. Therefore, planning phase consultancies, though encouraged, must come with some compromise. Arguments to the contrary notwithstanding, such consulting work, without boundaries, brings with it both real and perceived conflicts of interest with regard to any follow-on design, development, and implementation work. If allowed to bid these follow-on project phases, these offerers would inherently know more about a State's direction, resources, and budget than any other outside offerer, thus creating a conflict of interest limiting free and open competition.

**"You can observe a lot just by watching."** Major enhancement projects of IT systems in the States rarely stay under \$5 million. In truth, most planning efforts for new systems acquisitions likewise rarely stay under the \$5-million threshold requiring prior Federal review and approval. Yet some States still hesitate to submit these contracts to OCSE for review until, upon exercising the contract's option years, they realize it will exceed Federal thresholds. Unfortunately, once OCSE does review such a contract, we too often find conflicts of interest embedded in the scope of work—conflicts granting the planning vendor, the business process reengineering vendor, and similar consultants, responsibilities in the option years that would not otherwise have been allowed had the original contract been submitted for Federal review. When this happens, we require a new procurement that precludes the planning vendor from bidding on any design and development efforts going forward, or worse, deny Federal funding in any of those contract activities deemed unallowable.

**"I made a wrong mistake."** It is one of my all-time favorite *Yogi-isms*, and one we can avoid by establishing and maintaining good communications between our Office and yours. In my 21 years on the job, I've not seen any conflict of interest situation persist unchallenged, nor ultimately succeed. So, in the words of that fabled coach with a flair for the malapropism, "If you don't know where you are going, you will wind up somewhere else." Think about it before you sit down to write that sweeping planning contract. Then call me (202-690-1234) or your respective IT analyst here in OCSE to talk about your IT project's plans, direction, and goals, and how we might help you avoid any procurement pitfalls along the way.



## Jim Keyes

In 2001, when Jim Keyes began work for the Virgin Islands Department of Justice, Paternity and Child Support Division (PCSD), he had not yet mastered its regulatory environment, but he was well-adjusted to the Caribbean climate. Keyes settled in the Virgin Islands several years earlier, after a stint in chilly Connecticut drove him south. (He admits his upbringing in warm and humid New Orleans and southeast Texas influenced the decision.)

Keyes' contractual job with PCSD was to manage the implementation and Federal certification of the Virgin Islands' Child Support Tracking and Reporting System (CSTARS). He was confident that his prior experience managing both technical and business process changes associated with network and software implementations for a variety of companies had primed him for the challenge. And he quickly learned that a specific attribute—"relationship building"—would be critical to getting the job done. It was a skill-set he had developed from previous professional experience—not to mention from his "offshore" experience:

"One of my favorite things to do is deep-sea fish. When I was living in the Virgin Islands, I fished in a lot of 'small boat' billfish tournaments. The idea in this context is that the team on each boat is going to have to work together to catch the fish," says Keyes, adding that his favorite job on the team is captaining the boat. "We have a small boat—maybe 22 feet in length—with big fish—blue marlin up to 700 pounds—and we're trying to release the fish without killing them after we catch them, which makes this a team sport in every sense. The Virgin Islands is one of the best known locations in the world for blue marlin fishing."



*"... getting the right people together and providing a clear description of the requirements and a solid commitment to ongoing communication solved an apparent problem."*

For the certification process, Keyes explains, "I started out reading the Federal regulations and then reviewing the related local regulations. I spent a lot of time in JAD [Joint Application Development] sessions with the PCSD staff and then discussing the daily business processes with the PCSD case managers and legal staff to get a better idea of the business model the new system was going to have to support. I also met the team from the software developer, and met with the certification team from the Federal office and the staff from Region II for the first time.

"Because of the certification penalties, the project needed to be completed pretty quickly. The CSTARS system was a transfer of the KEIKI system in Hawaii and that helped speed up the overall implementation. But it seemed likely to me from day one that the most critical component for success was going to be an open and constant dialogue between the Territorial stakeholders, the Federal stakeholders, and the software

development vendor. It seemed to me that when the priorities of these three stakeholder groups were aligned, we would be able to complete the certification process.

"I was really lucky to have Mike Fitzgerald assigned as the lead certification reviewer for OCSE. He took a lot of time to explain to me the rationale for the certification process in general and specific regulations and policies as needed," says Keyes, "which in turn helped me bring this rationale, clearly, thoroughly, and continually, to the many key players in the project. I also worked with a great team at PCSD with two awesome Directors who helped educate me in the program."

To further explain his role as relationship-builder, Keyes refers to the system requirement for an electronic interface between the TANF agency, the IV-D system, and the Federal Case Registry (FCR). “PCSD had been trying to establish an electronic interface with the TANF agency for interagency updates and also to support communication with the FCR for several years but had not been able to make much progress.

“When I spoke with the software developers at the TANF agency, it seemed to me that there was plenty of goodwill on their part and there were capable staff available at FCR to support the effort—we just needed to provide better information regarding the requirements to the technical staff and open up lines of communication between our agencies. So we got developers from TANF and PCSD together in a room with the FCR support staff on the phone, clarified responsibilities and assignments, and established a schedule. Then we just kept in contact by phone calls and occasional meetings and this interface, like the other required interfaces, was operational prior to the beginning of the certification review.

“I found many times during the Virgin Islands project that getting the right people together and providing a clear description of the requirements and a solid commitment to ongoing communication solved an apparent problem.”

OCSE’s Fitzgerald says, “Jim enabled the Virgin Islands to achieve State system certification in a period of time shorter than virtually all other States/Territories.”

In 2005, Keyes moved to California and joined a contract agency in Sacramento to fill the role of California’s Department of Child Support Services Certification Manager. (Might the California sunshine have influenced this decision as well?) “I was curious to see how much of my experience would transfer from a small to a large IV-D program. For the most part, it did transfer because the underlying process for certification is the same for all States and Territories regardless of size.”

The jobs as certification manager in the Virgin Islands and California did have their differences, however, such as the number of staff in the child support agency: about 50 in the Virgin Islands and 8,000 in California. Another difference was that the California project team decided early in the project to request certification as an Alternative System Configuration (ASC) to allow certification to take place during the rolling conversion of the 52 local agency databases into the final single statewide system configuration.

“The California project also required more public speaking in more venues including large meetings with stakeholder groups that needed to understand why certain events, like the identification of certification findings that must be corrected—sometimes via system modification—will occur on the way to certification.

“I try to explain that there should be the expectation on the part of both the State and the software developer that some certification findings will be identified. It helps to view these findings as opportunities for system improvement.

I highlight the fact that the Federal review teams have seen many system approaches and the State and vendor folks should take advantage of the broad experience the Federal team brings to the table during a certification review.”

In California, “one of my first goals on the project was to build functional teams right from the beginning, so that the teams developing initial Questionnaire responses were also learning how to identify production case samples and developing presentation skills to be used in the subsequent certification activities.”

The very large and geographically dispersed staff required a proactive communication approach. “I’m not necessarily someone who schedules a lot of meetings, but I’m absolutely committed to one-on-one communication. I had really high-quality certification teams working from Los Angeles and San Francisco and I had ad-hoc teams in many other counties over the course of 2 years, as well as a number of teams working in Sacramento, and I worked with great Child Support Directors and an amazing Project Director.” Bottom line, he emphasizes, is that relationship-building skills for both projects mattered a lot.

“I’m just glad e-mail was invented before I started working on the California project,” says Keyes. At least one method of communication was a little easier in the Virgin Islands. “When I needed to talk to the Child Support Director, I could just walk across the hall. I could see if she was busy right from my desk. Now, I have to drive down the street, so I try to make an appointment first.”

—Elaine Blackman, OCSE

To recommend someone be profiled, please send an e-mail to: [elaine.blackman@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:elaine.blackman@acf.hhs.gov)







# The Little Network That Grew and Grew

## Starring: Region V Conference Calls and The Long-Time Illinois Players

By Elaine Blackman  
OCSE

When all parties had dialed in on the regularly scheduled conference call on Feb. 17, a familiar voice set the usual, comfortable tone for returning listeners; some dialing in for the first time felt a sense of openness and ease. “Welcome to our first Collaboration Network Call in 2009,” announced host Lois Rakov, “where we hope we each find new contacts, learn about resources, and hear about success stories or challenges that will inspire all of us in our work for children, fathers, and families.”

Seated in a conference room with Region V folks in Chicago, Rakov proceeded to introduce guest speaker Vicki Turetsky of the Center for Law and Social Policy. “The discussion today will center on the child support-related provisions in the Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act in Congress, a timely subject in light of the bill’s reintroduction in 2007, and how the process might go if and when the House and Senate go forward,” said Rakov.

Following Turetsky’s presentation, callers from a wide variety of organizations throughout Region V took turns with questions, comments, and suggestions regarding the congressional bill, as well as related topics, such as advantages of implementing a State commission on fatherhood and how it could help address barriers to employment for incarcerated parents.

All the while, one Ohio caller listened for resources, such as Turetsky’s published summary of the bill, which he would quickly retrieve and post on a Web site accessible to all.

How did one State conference call grow to become a popular and productive regionwide networking tool?

Here’s the story:

### Prologue

Many years ago, when the national child support enforcement community was developing a growing interest in hospital-based voluntary paternity establishment, an ACF (Administration for Children and Families) workgroup, with representatives from OCSE, Head Start, Child Welfare, and others, set out to study the benefits of cross-agency cooperation on behalf of the families they served.

Meanwhile, OCSE Regions and State child support agencies also began to reach out to a variety of social service organizations in light of their interest in voluntary paternity establishment, and in search of new and better ways to improve the well-being of children.

### Act I

**Enter Illinois Child Support Enforcement.** Illinois CSE was looking for ways to partner with other agencies to educate its staff and clients about procedures used to establish legal paternity. In Fiscal Year 1997, CSE received a 3-year Federal demonstration grant to promote and facilitate access to child support services and to increase paternity establishment and child support collections for children and families in Head Start and child care programs. It was under this grant that CSE began a series of conference calls with Head Start agencies around the State.

“The idea to initiate conference calls under the Child Support/Head Start collaboration grant was to widen CSE’s ability to talk to Head Start grantees about the importance of having the father acknowledge the child on the birth certificate,” says Mike Vicars of OCSE Region V. “Not only would the CSE program benefit from having the father identified on the birth certificate in a child support case, but the child would have the advantage of knowing his/her parentage, have certain legal rights that legal paternity bestows, and would have the opportunity to maintain an emotional bond with him—a win-win

situation for all involved.”

But as the grant period was ending, Child Support and Head Start wanted to be able to keep the discussion going about the voluntary paternity establishment process and what worked and what didn't. They had learned, for example, that attitudes about child support among collaborating Head Start staff in Illinois ranged from very positive to knowing very little about the benefits of paternity establishment or the responsibilities of fathers, particularly noncustodial fathers.

## Act II

### *Enter OCSE Region V.*

To help Illinois to continue the conference calls, OCSE Region V picked up the reins. Participation on the calls soon grew from the Illinois CSE grantees, to include contacts with community action agencies and fatherhood organizations.

“Head Start was interested in getting fathers involved in the lives of the children it served,” says Vicars, so the calls further opened up to a variety of agencies around the State, and then those agencies made contacts around the region to fatherhood groups, as well as academic university groups.

In addition, says Rakov, “Region V Head Start awarded Early Head Start demonstration grants and Fatherhood Special Initiative grants, which encouraged Head Start programs to build fatherhood programs and to emphasize the importance of *both* parents in their children's lives.”

Rakov was project manager of the Illinois CSE/Head Start collaboration grant project. “The grant made it possible for a lot of people to get to know each other—and a wide diversity of people—who were involved in a variety of agencies.” She remembers that the State Head Start director saw the calls as a free training opportunity and orientation for staff about topics such as women's roles and the fatherhood movement, fathers and literacy, and how to teach children to read.

“From there, with Region V as sponsor, the calls just grew and grew,” says Rakov.

## Act III

Now, between 35 and 50 people participate in the quarterly Region V Collaboration Network Calls. Vicars announces each upcoming call on the Region V fatherhood listserv and asks for RSVPs so he can arrange for the number of phone lines and the agenda of speakers.

Rakov handles outreach for speakers and moves the discussion along on each call, while maintaining the easygoing tone. She keeps a running list of ideas to pursue for future calls and asks for suggestions during the calls for future speakers among a widening variety of agencies and organizations throughout the

six-state region. The calls are open to anyone in the region; however anyone, anywhere, is welcome to call in.

And now, anyone, anywhere, can access notes and resources from each conference call online at [http://www.opnff.net/midwest\\_fatherhood.asp](http://www.opnff.net/midwest_fatherhood.asp), thanks to Steve Killpack of the Ohio Practitioners' Network for Fathers and

Families. Killpack's reason for posting the material, he says, started because “smaller faith-based organizations that serve fathers may not be aware of the collaboration that sponsors the calls, so I try to be the community organizing body that connects these folks to the calls.”

On every call, says Rakov, “we emphasize that there might be possibilities for grants for their fatherhood groups and others, and that people need to build on their existing partnerships with their local or State child support agencies.”

Rakov retired from the Illinois CSE in 2002, but she did not retire her passion for the calls. (She continued to work on the calls as a contractor until 2007, when her status changed to “volunteer.”) By continuing to involve more people on the calls, the subject areas have widened and the calls have given rise to partnerships, she says. The calls devoted to healthy marriage, for example, “have really helped participants to understand how they can combine healthy marriage work with child support work.”

In the past few years, topics on the calls have included: bridging fatherhood, healthy marriage, and domestic violence; helping children with incarcerated fathers; teens



Organizing the Region V Collaboration Network Call on Feb. 17 are, from left, Mike Vicars, OCSE Region V; Lois Rakov, Chicago; and Vander Green, ACF Region V Family Life and Marriage Program Specialist.



as parents (with teens as guest speakers); and the national Project to Avoid Increasing Delinquencies (PAID). On the latter call, last August, participants discussed how various activities, such as review and modification of child

support orders, contribute to decreasing arrears and increasing collections, in keeping with the goal of PAID.

“We always have good conversations,” says Vicars, but quickly adds: “Only with Lois’ contacts and knowledge

have we been able to constantly expand this immensely helpful network tool.”

*For more information about the Region V Collaboration Network Calls, please contact Mike Vicars at 312-886-5339 or [michael.vicars@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:michael.vicars@acf.hhs.gov). For information about OCSE grants, please visit <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/grants/>. To learn about the national PAID, visit <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/resources/paid/>.*



## How to Grow Your Own Collaboration Network Call

Below are suggestions for starting a network of conference calls based on Region V’s experience in the previous article:

- **Contacts:** It is important to identify people who are interested and want to participate in the calls.
- **Content:** Topics have to be relevant to participants to maintain interest. Most of the time, the participants on our calls suggest the topics.
- **Connection:** Our topics are generally centered on fatherhood, but we always emphasize the connection to the child support program. This is not difficult as there is a natural connection between fatherhood issues and child support.
- **Outreach:** We are always adding groups and individuals to our participant base as people move on to new jobs and organizations. This helps to stimulate new ideas and conversation. One of the strengths of our quarterly calls is the experience and diverse backgrounds of the participants.
- **Listserv:** In Region V, we maintain a listserv of e-mail addresses so we can easily communicate information about calls, agendas, and other topics. This saves a lot of time.

—Mike Vicars, OCSE Region V

## OCSE Grant Announcements on Web

OCSE Special Improvement Project (SIP) and Section 1115 demonstration grant announcements for FY 2009 are posted on the Web. For the first time, there is a separate announcement for each priority area.

SIP grants (applications due April 20):

- [Using new methods to improve collection rates](#)
- [Improving Child Support Enforcement and court collaboration](#)

Section 1115 grants (applications due May 4):

- [Projects in support of the Prisoner Reentry Initiative](#)
- [Projects to support data analysis of arrearages](#)
- [Projects that provide family-centered services for unwed parents in the IV-D caseload](#)
- [Projects in support of the PAID initiative](#)

To learn about OCSE grant opportunities available in the future, check the HHS Web site:

<http://extranet.acf.hhs.gov.hhsgrantsforecast/>

## Child Support Report

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

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