



Child Support Report



Office of Child Support Enforcement

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From Every Angle

Nation Teams Up to Assess New Legislation

By Elaine Blackman

Quickly responding to the Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) of 2005, state and tribal IV-D child support directors joined OCSE Central Office staff and Regional Program Managers (RPM) on March 14 and 15 to review and plan for implementation of the new child support provisions. The DRA was signed into law by President Bush on Feb. 8.

The “productive meeting” provided a forum for OCSE staff to answer questions from “one of the largest gatherings of state IV-D directors at a federal meeting at one time,” says James Travis, a 31-year OCSE veteran and RPM in the Dallas Regional Office, host to the meeting.

On a panel to offer federal guidance on the provisions were OCSE Commissioner Margot Bean, National Council of State Child Support Directors (NCCSD) President Daryl Wusk, and OCSE Policy Division Director Lily Matheson. In another session, OCSE Associate Commissioner Donna Bonar and Lead IT Specialist Mike Rifkin reviewed the role of automated

systems. OCSE Director of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Joyce Pitts, and Grants Officer Michael Bratt reviewed incentives and reporting requirements. Other sessions focused on the provisions requiring a \$25 annual user fee in cases that never received TANF assistance, and assignment and distribution of child support payments.

In addition to gaining a more thorough knowledge of the child support provisions in the DRA, participants formed work-groups to further research certain aspects of the provisions. OCSE and the states will continue to work together to resolve identified implementation issues.

In thanking all assembled, Commissioner Bean referred to this meeting as one more example of the teamwork by federal, state, and tribal child support agencies. [CSR](#)

Who's who in the photos? Answers on page 2.



OCSE
Commissioner
Margot Bean
and NCCSD
President
Daryl Wusk



After Katrina

More States Stepping Up Electronic Disbursement Operations

Paper checks will be your worst nightmare!” So warned Louisiana Child Support Director Robbie Endris after the hurricanes—first Katrina and then Rita—ravaged the Gulf Coast Region, leaving communication with many customers at a standstill. Nearly eight months later, Ms. Endris stands by her advice that states without electronic processes for getting payments to custodial parents must quickly consider such options.

The good news—Louisiana has implemented direct deposit, and “we’ve been publicizing this option everywhere we possibly can,” says Ms. Endris, including on the state’s Web site (www.dss.state.la.us; click link to “Child Support”). The state also is implementing a stored value card process. Mississippi, another hard-hit state, recently began offering both direct deposit and debit cards to custodial parents. Texas had implemented the electronic payment options before the crisis and developed a way to put cases on disbursement hold.

Electronic child support disbursement to custodial parents includes direct deposit to a custodial parent’s bank account (checking or savings) or payments to a stored value card account. A stored value card is the commercial term for a card-accessed account system in which payments are electronically deposited to an account accessible for cash withdrawal (from an ATM) or that can be used as a debit card for purchases. States implementing debit card programs typically contract with a bank that has a relationship with Visa or MasterCard, so the debit card has a national brand.

Although most states already offer direct deposit to custodial parents, others are beginning to offer debit cards to custodial parents who do not have or will not open bank accounts. To exchange ideas and information about stored value or debit card options, representatives from more than 37 state child support agencies joined a nationwide conference call Feb. 23. OCSE’s James Hicks set up the call in response to dozens of inquiries for exemplary practices during the post-hurricane months. States offering guidance during the call included Georgia, Colorado, Iowa, and Ohio.

As of April, 44 state child support agencies have a direct deposit system in place. Stored value or debit card options are offered in 28 states; 18 others are participating in pilots. For further information, contact James Hicks, 202-205-3603 or jehicks@acf.hhs.gov. **CSR**

—Elaine Blackman



Who’s on First?

Left side page 1, from top:

James Travis, Region VI; Robbie Endris, Louisiana; Walley Naylor, Mississippi; Alicia Griffin, New Jersey; Marilyn Ray Smith, Massachusetts; Juanita DeVine, Region III.

Right side page 1, from top:

Lily Matheson, Central Office; Diana McCampbell, Alabama; Gary Dart, Oklahoma; Nick Young, Virginia; Joanne Krudys, Region II; Alicia Key, Texas.

Center page 1:

Commissioner Bean previously served as IV-D child support director on Guam and in New York State; Daryl Wusk is director in Nebraska.

Going the Distance in Nebraska Call Center Gives New Customers a 'Fair Shake'

By Elaine Blackman

From inside their glass-enclosed cubicles nestled on one side of Nebraska's Child Support Customer Service Call Center, Noreen Lind and Diane Miller are proving that it's worth it—for everyone involved—to go the extra mile with new child support customers.

The two customer service representatives are members of a project, an OCSE-funded Section 1115 demonstration grant, that's testing the power of communication with both custodial and noncustodial parents who have new child support court orders. Both Ms. Lind and Ms. Miller were 4-year Call Center veterans when they joined the project at its start in 2004. "That put them in the know," says Call Center director Lori Bengston, about "why it's important to educate parents early on" in every aspect of the child support process. And, by dedicating the same staff members solely to this project, "they discover which scripts are

working, the best time of day to call customers, and so on."

The project builds on the success of the nearly 5-year-old call center located in the State's northeast town of Wausa, where some 28,000 calls come through each month. It's the reps' "nonthreatening approach" to explaining the complex child support program, says Ms. Miller, that's given way to new customers who appreciate the help and are increasing not only their understanding of the program, but also their child support payments. And it's giving Ms. Lind and Ms. Miller the opportunity to identify problems and resolve questions before they become larger issues. The proactive nature of these calls, they say, also enables the representatives to build early relationships with noncustodial parents that are positive and informative.

See **NEBRASKA**, page 7

Read All About It!

Help with understanding Federal OCSE discretionary grants—and applying for them—now is just a click away from the home page: www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse/. The home page displays an icon—Funding Opportunities Announced—that takes users to a page with three hotlinks: current announcements for OCSE's Section 1115 Demonstration Grants; Special Improvement Project (SIP) Grants; and OCSE Discretionary Grants Information. The third hot-

link leads to pages that include summaries of both types of grants, abstracts of past grant projects, application kits and tools, and resources to help grant writers get started.



Look for this (green) icon on the OCSE home page.

In addition, the Web site for the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) offers information on developing and writing a grant proposal. Log onto: www.grants.gov/Resources, and then click on "Writing a Grant Proposal."

Sticking to the (Strategic) Plan Study Confirms Need to Reach Hispanic Mothers

By Frank Fajardo

Preliminary findings from a federally funded study suggest that child support professionals should translate successes with paternity rates into establishing more child support orders by Hispanic mothers. In so doing, we will also strengthen our focus on a primary goal in the National CSE Strategic Plan, which states that all children in IV-D cases have support orders.



The Minority Child Support Participation Study (Spectrum Consulting Associates) evaluated child support participation by minorities and found that child support order rates for unwed Hispanics lagged at 32 percent behind that of all mothers. The study also showed that deprivation (related to low income) affects order establishment with Hispanic mothers. In addition, data from the ongoing Fragile Family Survey, considered in the study, show paternity establishment rates at 77 percent for Hispanics, and the percentage of child support orders paid about the same for unwed Whites and Hispanics, at 53 percent and 54 percent respectively. Fragile Family data also show Hispanics have a 45 percent rate of birth to unwed mothers, a number that other studies have shown is steadily increasing.

The Minority Participation Study evaluated child support participation by African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Asians using national data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (1990-2002) as well as data on unwed births from the Fragile Family Survey.

Findings also included the following reasons

that mothers in all minority groups said they did not have a child support order:

- Did not want legal involvement (30 percent);
- Father could not afford to pay (23 percent);
- Did not want contact with the father or want the father to pay (almost 50 percent of Whites, Native Americans, and Asians);
- Father pays what he can (almost 25 percent of African Americans and Native Americans);
- Lack of paternity or locate information (almost 50 percent Hispanics and 37 percent African Americans).

The information in the study that related to Hispanics can prompt child support professionals to focus on encouraging Hispanic mothers to establish child support orders. This is particularly important for strategic planning as the Hispanic population continues to experience both rapid growth and a steady increase in the rate of unwed births. **CSR**

For further information about the Hispanic child support population, contact OCSE's Frank Fajardo at 202-205-4554 or ffajardo@acf.hhs.gov.

Save the Date!

**OCSE's National Child Support
Interstate & Systems Symposium
June 6-9, 2006
Silver Spring, MD**

**SITCregistration@systemsandsoftware.org
Agenda info: rrushton@acf.hhs.gov**

Honey From the Beehive

Web Site Adds Child Support Pages for Diverse Population

By Robin Koralek

Child support services are most effective when cultural differences are respected, and child support programs have an obligation to provide public education and outreach to all families in need. Holding to this guiding principle in the National Child Support Enforcement Strategic Plan, two national organizations partnered to develop online child support information specifically for low-income and ethnic/culturally diverse communities.

Under a recently completed OCSE Special Improvement Project (SIP) grant, the Urban Institute and One Economy Corporation integrated child support information into One Economy's existing Web site, www.beehive.org, known as the Beehive. (The Urban Institute analyzes policies, evaluates programs, and informs communities to improve social, civic, and economic well-being. One Economy Corporation helps low-income people use technology to build assets and join the economic mainstream.)

The new Web pages offer bilingual (English and Spanish) child support content that is easy to use and written at a sixth-grade literacy level. The pages include information about supporting children not only economically, but in other

ways, and about giving them the best start in life. They guide users through each step in the child support process: establishing paternity, obtaining a child support order, collecting child support, etc.



From a national Web page and local pages for Washington, D.C., and Portland, OR, readers can find local resources, including the IV-D child support and community-based agencies. The child support Web pages also can be accessed through related links that appear on other pages of the Beehive site about issues such as family and health, pregnancy and parenting, and money and budgeting. Likewise, the child support pages feature links to other parts of the site.

The project has shown that the bilingual Web pages can help decrease information gaps among custodial parents in Hispanic communities and assure applicants that cooperating with the child support enforcement program will not affect their immigration status.

The Urban Institute reports that some research suggests:

- **The fastest growing group of Internet users is low-income single-mother households (a 29 percent increase between 1998 and 2001).**
- **Over the past 4 years, the number of Americans with annual family incomes of less than \$25,000 using the Internet more than doubled, from 7.8 million to 16.7 million.**
- **The number of Hispanics using the Internet is growing at a faster rate than any other group.**

See BEEHIVE, next page

Even individuals without Internet access can benefit when they are given the site's information by advocates and community- and faith-based organizations. (Many low-income Internet users log on at libraries, community centers, schools, and at another person's home.)

New settlement patterns mean that providing services to diverse populations has become a new concern for some state IV-D agencies that do not have extensive experience working with linguistic and culturally diverse communities: It's no longer only the traditional immigrant-receiving states of California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona.

Broad demographic shifts have clear implications for the child support-eligible population: One out of every five children in the United States is the child of an immigrant, and 93 percent of these children are born in the United States, which makes these children U.S. citizens. Almost one in every 10 Hispanic adults is a custodial parent, and nearly 60 percent of Hispanic custodial parents are foreign-born. The number of Asian custodial parents is projected to increase by over 80 percent before 2009.

The child support addition to the Beehive Web site has been met with enthusiasm and support. The Urban Institute conducted focus groups with consumers in D.C. and Portland, and telephone interviews with child support staff

The screenshot shows the Beehive website interface. At the top, there are language options (English, Español), a search bar, and a 'Bienvenido' button. The main heading is 'La Manutención de Menores'. Below this, there are several sections: '¿Qué es la Manutención de Menores?' with a photo of a young girl, '¿Cómo Cobrar la Manutención de Menores?' with a photo of a man holding a child, and three numbered steps: 'PASO 1: Establezca la Paternidad', 'PASO 2: Consiga una Orden de Manutención de Menores', and 'PASO 3: Cobre el Pago de Manutención'. A sidebar on the left contains a 'Familia' menu with links to 'La Manutención de Menores', '¿Qué es la Manutención de Menores?', '¿Cómo Cobrar la Manutención de Menores?', 'Recursos Nacionales para la Manutención de los Menores', and 'Más Ayuda'.

and advocates from local communities. It also solicited feedback at two OCSE conferences—the Hispanic Forum and the National Training Conference. [CSR](#)

For additional information about the project, contact Robin Koralek at the Urban Institute, 202-261-5736 or rkoralek@ui.urban.org; Jessica Mendoza at One Economy Corporation, 202-558-3803 or jmendoza@one-economy.com; or Frank Fajardo in OCSE, 202-205-4554 or ffajardo@acf.hhs.gov.





Grant project staff at Nebraska's Child Support Customer Service Call Center, from left: Call Center director Lori Bengston, project supervisor Reed Stolpe, customer service representative Noreen Lind, grant writer Janet Gill, customer service representative Diane Miller, and administrative assistant Dawn Baue.

Staff also might call the custodial parent when they are unable to locate the noncustodial parent. Project supervisor Reed Stolpe says “contacting the custodial parent shows them we really do care and are trying to help. This builds their confidence so they might give us the information we need to help with their case.”

Further, Ms. Bengston believes that “the success of this early intervention project is shedding new light on the national child support program.”

Here's the process: Callers Ms. Lind and Ms. Miller take a monthly state-generated list of noncustodial parents and divide them into three random groups. They consider the first group “business as usual,” making no contact at that point; they send a guide about the program to the second group; and for the third group, they mail the same guide along with a note to inform them that a representative from Child Support Outreach will be contacting them, and follow up with a phone call approximately one week later. Then, after the one-week call, the reps follow up once again by sending the noncustodial parent a brochure about the child support program.

One year into the project, reports showed that

payment records for the first two groups were the same, suggesting to staff that those in the second group might be throwing their mail away. Some in the third group, when asked if they received the material, said, “ ‘Oh yes; maybe I should go back and read it,’ ” says Ms. Lind. Parents in this third group were paying twice as much on their orders as in the other groups.

Initially, project staff wondered if customers would take them for telemarketers. What they found “was totally opposite,” says Ms. Lind. After making calls for a year, only two people hung up on the reps once they identified themselves as child support outreach staff offering help with understanding the program.

Since the start of the grant period, the reps have contacted, either by mail, phone, or both, more than 1,500 noncustodial parents. Both reps agree that customers are grateful when they learn “we want to help them,” says Ms. Lind. “It's amazing how many customers don't know facts such as the age of emancipation, how much they owe, how income withholding works, where to send payments, or when interest starts accruing.”

The grant project ends in June, but for now, says Stolpe, “communication is flowing.”

Grant writer Janet Gill adds: “We're working to give everyone a fair shake.” **CSR**

For further information, contact Lori Bengston at 888-900-5145 or lori.bengston@hhss.ne.gov. Read more about the Call Center in the OCSE Best Practices Compendium online at: www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/prgrpt.htm.

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PSOC News

**After 14 Years,
Wyoming Family Paid in Full**

On March 9, a Nevada parent paid some \$42,000 after pleading guilty to one felony count of failure to pay child support. The lump sum included not only the total arrearage due since 1992, but also future child support for two of his children still residing with the custodial parent in Wyoming; his third child now is emancipated.

Investigations conducted by the Project Save Our Children (PSOC) task force revealed that the parent was residing in Idaho and working as a painter for local contractors.

For further information about the PSOC task force, contact OCSE project supervisor Nick Soppa at 202-401-4677 or nsoppa@acf.hhs.gov.



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