



Child Support Report



OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT

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New National Initiative to Focus on Core Mission

By Margot Bean
OCSE Commissioner

How can child support professionals ensure that families who depend on child support actually receive it—paid in full? That’s the underlying question that drives our work every day, and at every level, in the National Child Support Enforcement Program. And it’s the focus of goal #4 in the national strategic plan: “All children in IV-D cases receive financial support from parents as ordered.”

Now, with this goal in mind, OCSE central and regional offices, in consultation with State child support program directors, are planning a national initiative for FY 2007 and beyond. This initiative renews our emphasis on activities that will increase the collection of current support and prevent and reduce arrears so child support will be a reliable source of income for more families.

How Can OCSE Help?

Under the national initiative, OCSE plans to place special emphasis on activities that result in increasing collections of current support and reducing arrears. These activities include:

- Focusing Federal technical assistance on efforts that address root causes of nonpayment of support (e.g., establishing appropriate orders, early intervention upon nonpayment, arrears compromise).
- Capitalizing on State best practices through training, technical assistance, and cross-regional meetings.

- Increasing awareness and encouraging use of data findings in program and policy decisions.

- Targeting automation opportunities such as eIWO, Level of Automation Guidance, and through technical assistance site visits and other outreach efforts.
- Implementing new centralized and/or standardized locate and enforcement remedies such as increasing the priority of child support cases for Federal Offset and working on the exchange of data with cell phone companies.



When Will This Initiative Begin?

To support this initiative, OCSE and States already have begun to look closely at several areas, including unreported incomes of non-custodial parents, automation for case closures, arrears reduction strategies, and data analysis to help with decision making about where to focus resources.

How Can You Help?

Determining which specific techniques will work best for a particular State and providing the resources needed to ensure successful deployment is our current challenge. OCSE is looking for your input on these and other questions:

See INITIATIVE, page 3

Three Concerns Top New Era of Change

By **Alisha Griffin**

President

National Council of Child Support Directors



Alisha Griffin

Change! The child support community is no stranger to change. In fact some would say we not only embrace change but also foster change. It is what has made us the innovative, dynamic, trend-setting family service system we are today.

The changes and challenges to come will affect everyone; the leaders, State directors and employees, our partners, and ultimately and perhaps most dramatically, the children and families who deserve child support. These changes are seen by many to pose a significant threat to the very positive performance that has been our hallmark.

These challenges will bring us once again to a crossroads where serious study of alternative ways of doing business will be necessary to preserve our progress. It is in this context that three key concerns raise our attention in our pursuit of progress.

First: How do we improve performance and practice with less money? The Deficit Reduction Act, while providing some elements for positive change, is better known for the imposition of a national \$25 fee and the repeal of

the matching of Federal funds to our earned incentives. This will lessen what States have to spend on their programs. We are facing less flexibility and must, in fact, worry about protecting the foundation we have all worked so hard to build.

Second: Are we prepared for the anticipated onslaught of retirements in the next several years? Our program has benefited in so many ways from the long-term commitment of our employees. Have we prepared and trained for succession from within? How do we pass on this critical knowledge and practice? Can we even fill the positions we currently have open? How do we entice new staff to join and can we expect the same level of commitment from them? Can we compete in the marketplace? What are the skills we need today and in the future? It will take our collective efforts to respond to these additional challenges in a proactive manner and manage to improve on performance and service.

Third: How do we drive technology to be more responsive to our changing service demands? Consumers have become more experienced in technology and their expectations and demands for service, and these demands on services will grow. How will we meet those demands? After our massive automation of the eighties and nineties, we now must adjust our systems to be more responsive. This new intuitive interactive technology does not get built without the knowledge and commitment of staff, or without the funds.

During this year as President of NCCSD, I hope that I can facilitate open communication and sharing so that we can use that collective experience and commitment to preserve our progress, strive for solutions to the very real challenges ahead, and continue to affect positive change for the nations' children and families who depend and should be able to rely on the child support program. **CSR**

In Focus

Penny For Your Thoughts?



Mary Ann Wellbank, President of the National Child Support Enforcement Association (NCSEA), listens to State experiences with automation, at NCSEA's annual policy forum, Jan. 28-31, in Washington, DC.

More photos on page 4

Tribal Directors Connect on Common Ground



From left are Dr. Kenneth Ryan, OCSE; ACF Grants Manager Joseph Lonergan; Ellen Wilson, Three Affiliated Tribes, ND; and Deborah Yates, child support program director, Osage Nation, OK. Ryan instructed meeting participants on child support program application processes; Lonergan presented updates on Federal reporting and funding requirements.

Renaë Kingbird, left, Red Lake Nation, MN, and Linda Tresaugue, child support program director, Puyallup Nation, WA



Automated systems, medical support, and application review and approval processes were among the issues discussed by directors of Tribal child support programs at their annual meeting, Jan. 16-18 in Clearwater Beach, FL. About 20 attendees included representatives from both comprehensive and start-up child support programs.

Upon her return from the meeting, OCSE Commissioner Margot Bean reported that “everyone was engaged in thoughtful and candid discussion about their child support programs, and all are committed to strengthening our working partnerships.”

Linda Tresaugue, Director of child support in Puyallup Nation, WA, said attendees were grateful for the opportunity to be so candid with the Commissioner about their concerns over issues such as funding timelines, needs for case management computer systems, reporting requirements, recoupment of birthing costs, and communication.

“Commissioner Bean listened and heard—that was important to us. We felt her commitment.” said Tresaugue. *CSR*

INITIATIVE, *from page 1*

- How can we capitalize on successes to move the program forward and avoid backsliding given the reduction of Federal funding, DRA implementation needs, and the resulting impact on resources?
- On which activities should OCSE and States focus our resources over the short and long term to increase collections of current support and reduce arrears?
- To name this national initiative, some have suggested **PAID**: Project to Avoid Increasing Delinquencies. Will this or another title help us focus our efforts?

Please contact Linda Keely with your ideas at linda.keely@acf.hhs.gov.

Whether we call it PAID or something else, the sentiment of support for the initiative was perhaps best described by Colorado State IV-D Director John Bernhart: “I am excited about the new Federal initiative and focus on improving the collection of current support. We are strongest as a program when the Federal, State, Tribal, and local child support agencies are all in the boat together, rowing in the same direction. When we do that, we can accomplish anything we set our minds to.” *CSR*

NCSEA Members Peer Beyond Horizon



OCSE Commissioner Margot Bean, center, is flanked by new NCSEA Executive Director Colleen Eubanks, left, and NCSEA Communications Director Kay Cullen. Commissioner

Bean told an audience of 400-plus about the national child support program's recent growth, including new Tribal programs, the role of contractors in automated systems, collections reaching \$23.9 billion, and heightened interest among State Attorneys General. She urged States to take a fresh look at business practices that can help their efforts to increase collections and reduce arrearages. Eubanks thanked OCSE staff for their participation in the forum, saying they were a significant component of the event's success.

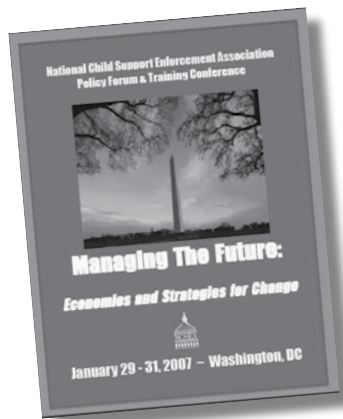


From left, Ginnie Kirkland and Donna Larson from Tarrant County, TX, compared notes about county operations with Lillian Kirby and Helen Meacher from Talbot County, MD.

Jennifer Ehreth and David A. Sanchez from Tier Technologies in Reston, VA, agree on their mission: to "positively impact children's lives."



Marsha Best, left, with coworker Valerie Griner, attended this—her first—child support conference, after 14 years in the Florida State child support office. Best is eager to get started with new systems programming as a result of a change in tax offset requirements under the Federal Deficit Reduction Act.



Jerry Hawkins and Deborah Brevard from Prince George's County, MD, said they are looking forward to the next few years when new legislative criteria will help their agency collect more medical support for children.



NCSEA board member Ann Barkley stepped up to the mic after a panel of experts offered advice on influencing members of Congress, such as how to present effective testimonies and use the media. Barkley's question: "How do we look at strategy as we move forward?"



After panelists shared State experiences with large automated systems, Colorado technical manager Curtis Rose asked if they could offer any advice on small projects as well. OCSE's Robin Rushton led these presentations with an update on a soon-to-be published guide on automation for State child support programs.



OCSE's Judge Larry Holtz discussed examples of problem-solving courts for child support cases with Sondra Rester, Program Manager in Tulare County, CA.



Don't Leave Home Without It!

By **Rebecca Hamil**
OCSE

Late one January afternoon the Federal Collections and Enforcement Unit received a frantic phone call from an obligor stuck in the Bahamas. He left the United States without a passport and needed one to fly back home. He had made the same trip many times before and hadn't needed a passport—only his birth certificate. The difference this time? The first phase of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) had gone into effect Jan. 23, 2007. He wasn't alone—other obligors faced similar dilemmas. One businessman had an upcoming trip to Mexico and Brazil. Others were flying to Canada for vacation or to visit family. All were denied passports because they owed more than \$2,500 in back child support and were traveling by air within the Western Hemisphere.

The WHTI requires U.S. citizens traveling by air between the United States and Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Bermuda to present a valid U.S. passport, Air NEXUS card, or U.S. Coast Guard Merchant Mariner Document. Under the proposed implementation timeline, the second phase of the WHTI, which could go into effect as early as Jan. 1, 2008, requires that if you are traveling by land or sea (including ferries) you may be required to present a valid U.S. passport or other documentation.

In other exciting news for the Passport Denial Program, 2006 collections (which are voluntarily reported) totaled \$22.4 million—up

by 32 percent over 2005 and a staggering 69 percent over 2004. Collections are up due in a large part to the combined effects of the threshold reduction to \$2,500, the implementation of the WHTI and States' increased reporting of lump sum payments. Total collections reported in the first month of 2007 are already greater than what was reported for the first 2 months of 2006 combined. Fourteen States have doubled their reported collections, New York has increased its by 500 percent, Ohio by 800 percent, and Maryland by 2,100 percent.

Here are a few success stories behind some of the lump sum payments:

- A musician paid Washington \$73,053 so he could tour overseas with his band.
- A licensed Mariner sailing in international waters was detained and not allowed to board his ship until he paid his arrearages of \$67,144 to California.
- An obligor's parents paid his past due child support debt of \$50,498 to Illinois.
- A self-employed musician paid Washington, DC, \$46,000 so he could play gigs overseas.
- Last year a boxer paid off his arrearages of \$39,000 so he could travel overseas for a match. He lost that passport. This year his promoter loaned him \$8,930 so he could pay his newly accumulated arrearages to Nevada and fly to an upcoming match in Australia.
- A basketball player paid Pennsylvania \$23,849 so he could play ball overseas.
- A record company paid California \$22,955 so one of its star musicians could travel on a world tour. The obligor flew from Hawaii to pay in person and documented the event with a film crew.



Coming this fall...

DRA 2005

Children over 18
are eligible for

Federal Tax Offset

SF Project Brings Barriers Down, Collections Up

By **Karen Roye**
*San Francisco Department
of Child Support Services*



Karen Roye

The time was right for San Francisco. The city's culturally diverse population, coupled with a high child support default judgment rate and a high rate of support orders based on presumed

income, presented the perfect opportunity to test key customer service strategies. Our mission: to find out if these strategies could help reduce barriers to program participation and enhance program awareness and accessibility, resulting in fewer default and presumed-income orders.

So, in July 2004, the San Francisco Department of Child Support Services, in partnership with the San Francisco Unified Family Courts and its Family Law Facilitator, got to work under an OCSE special improvement project (SIP) grant to implement "Enhanced Parental Involvement Collaboration." Known as EPIC, the project served as an alternative establishment process to reduce the default judgment rate, with the goal of significantly improved collections.

From Epic Design ...

The EPIC project employed alternative measures at every stage in the establishment process, specifically addressing the issues of notice to the noncustodial parent (NCP) and the educational, cultural, and economic barriers that prevent or deter NCP participation in this process.

First, court orders established with the EPIC approach reflect an accurate financial profile of the NCP and their relationship to the child. Next, a collaborative partnership with parents is developed to communicate expectations, roles, goals and objectives, and processes. Then, materials and training are coordinated with other staff. And lastly, establishment alternatives are developed, employing tried and tested principles, such as: telephone outreach to customers; friendly letters to notify parents; pre- and post-service outreach; revised service of summons and complaint procedures with a customer-friendly information flyer attached; and post-judgment default.

To Epic Results

During the 17-month project, San Francisco reviewed 1,169 cases, with 588 identified as EPIC cases and 581 as non-EPIC cases.

Of the 588 EPIC cases, 399 resulted in judgments (only 46 were by default, 116 were by court order, and 237 were stipulated).

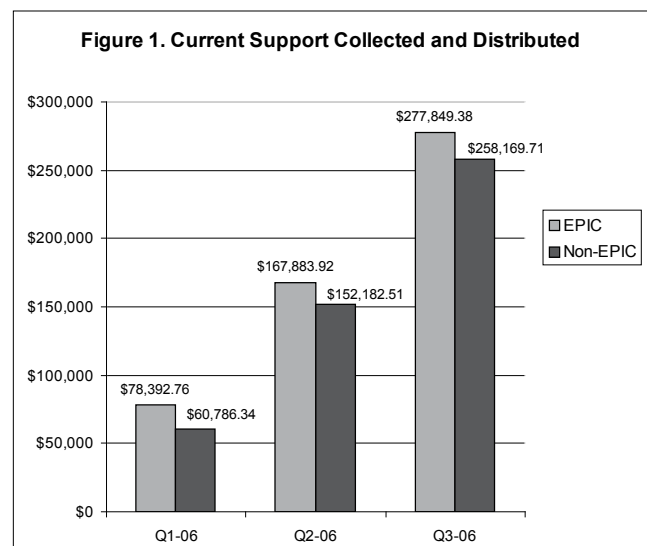


Chart excerpted from the EPIC project final report.

See EPIC, next page

Locations Prompt Full Payments in CT, FL, TX

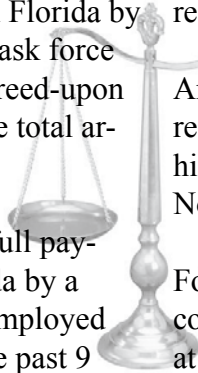
In a Connecticut case that dates back to 1990, full payment has arrived at last. The father, found working as a roof estimator in Florida by Project Save Our Children (PSOC) task force members, has paid \$92,000. This agreed-upon amount represented 43 percent of the total ar-rears.

Another PSOC investigation led to full pay-ment of \$40,500 for a child in Florida by a mother living in Georgia. She was employed as a contractor at a naval base for the past 9 years and had multiple savings and checking

accounts. She had ignored her child support order since 1995, and has remarried four times, resulting in the use of six different names.

And, a self-employed business owner paid full restitution of \$48,700 (over 17 months) for his child in Texas, after PSOC located him in North Carolina.

For further information about PSOC, please contact OCSE Project Supervisor Nick Soppa at nsoppa@acf.hhs.gov or 202-401-4677. **CSR**



EPIC, from previous page

For the 581 non-EPIC cases, 439 cases resulted in judgments (284 were by default, 63 by court order, and 92 were stipulated).

EPIC results have shown substantially in-creased participation by NCPs, resulting in a dramatic decrease in default judgments and higher performance in support collections. For example, EPIC processes show a 5.32 percent increase in the amounts collected and disbursed to families, or almost \$53,000 more than in non-EPIC cases (shown on chart).

Because of the EPIC methods, families have a better understanding of the goals and objec-tives of the child support enforcement agency, and more dollars go to them. Because of the participation by parents, paternity is estab-lished early and accurately.

The EPIC model has been adopted office-wide with the expectation that these coordinated efforts will continue to result in significant improvements in the service to families in San Francisco.

For more information, please contact Direc-tor Karen M. Roye, at karen.roye@sfgov.org or 415-356-2919. **CSR**

PASSPORT, from page 5

- Maine collected \$21,600 from an ob-ligor so he could visit family in Canada.

So what happened to the obligor stuck in the Bahamas? He's still negotiating. The business-man traveling to Mexico and Brazil? He ended up paying California \$131,957 with a no-inter-est loan from his employer. After receiving his passport, the obligor sent a thank-you letter to California praising their prompt response and help.

Karen Ritchie, Passport Denial Coordina-tor for California, said that this collection "is a great example of how we can all provide excellent customer service (through education and respect) and still collect on cases—espe-cially those of people employed. This program works!" **CSR**

Apply For GRANTS

OCSE now is accepting applications for grant projects—Section 1115 demonstration projects (deadline is May 9, 2007) and Special Improvement Projects (deadline is May 2, 2007). For details, log on to the OCSE home page www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/ and click on the "Grants Information" link.

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Health and Human Services**

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New Germany Contact Info

The New Year brings changes to the German Child Support Central Authority. The Generalbundesanwalt b. BGH has changed its name and some contact details. Here is the new information:

Bundesamt für Justiz (new office name)
Zentrale Behörde
53094 Bonn
Germany
(mailing address for correspondence and payments for German cases)

Phone: +49 228 99 410-40 (new)
Fax: +49 228 99 410-5401 (new)
Office e-mail address:
auslandsunterhalt-1@bfj.bund.de (new)

Although there is not a federal-level reciprocal agreement between the United States and Germany, most States have state-level arrangements for reciprocity.

For more information, contact J. Richard Sternowski in OCSE: phone 202-401-5566, fax 202-401-5539, or e-mail *ocseinternational@acf.hhs.gov*

Child Support Report

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