



Child Support Report



Office of Child Support Enforcement

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U.S., Finland Reach Child Support Agreement

By **Katie Donley**
OCSE Policy Division

On April 3, the United States and Finland signed a bilateral agreement to enforce each others' child support cases. With the agreement, American citizens both here and abroad will be assured that states can find non-custodial parents living in Finland and that the Finnish government will do all it can to ensure that child support orders can be enforced much like they would by another U.S. state.

Global Update



United States Ambassador to Finland Marilyn Ware and Director General Irma Ertman, Finland Ministry for Foreign Affairs, signed the bilateral child support enforcement agreement April 3.

increasingly important as more people cross and recross international borders as a result of globalization. Without such an international agreement, enforcement of child support obligations across international borders is difficult, if not impossible.

OCSE is working closely with the Department of State to initiate additional bilateral agreements so that the benefits of such agreements can further the chance of U.S. children getting the financial support they need. The United States now has

OCSE has a strong commitment to federal-level agreements that help children receive support wherever they are. International cooperation on family law matters has become

federal-level agreements with 10 countries and the majority of Canadian provinces. **CSR**

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'Katrina' Offices Reopen to Appreciation

OCSE Commissioner Margot Bean visited three child support offices in April that recently reopened after the devastation caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Ms. Bean heard from staff how they have overcome obstacles, and presented them with a certificate of appreciation from Dr. Wade F. Horn, HHS Assistant Secretary for Children and Families.



In New Orleans, Commissioner Bean is flanked by District Manager Anjanette Brown-Perkins, left, and Regional Administrator Lydia Scales.

See New Orleans, page 3

Increasing the Collection Rate: In Search of Successful Techniques

By Eileen Brooks

*Director, State, Tribal and Local
Assistance Division, OCSE*

from the National Child Support Enforcement Strategic Plan for FY 2005–2009 (available online at www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse):

What do Pennsylvania, North Dakota, Minnesota, South Dakota, Ohio, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Vermont, New Jersey, and New York have in common? They are the FY 2004 top 10 performers on the current support collection measure, with rates ranging from 74.4 percent to 64.7 percent. The national rate was 59.9 percent that year, the most recent for which data are available.



Families come first. Child support should be a reliable source of income for families. Parents must meet their financial and emotional responsibilities to their children and we will help those who are struggling to do so. Reliable child support and medical coverage are particularly crucial for families striving for self-sufficiency.

While performance varies among states, the national rate, just short of the 60 percent national target for 2004, continues to increase each year. The national annual current collection rate target is determined by factoring in historical actual performance with consideration given to ongoing activities and new strategies in the Child Support Enforcement Program. Although the continued increase in performance is a good sign, we should strive to do better.

In fact, improving our current collection rate is a national performance goal. Why? Consider these words

OCSE used the Logic Model to plan activities intended to increase the national current support collection rate. Go to www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/grants/ and look under Grants Resources for an “Instructional Guide – Creating and Using the Logic Model for Performance Management” for help in planning activities in your own state, tribe, or local jurisdiction. Remember that the full incentive amount on the current collection performance measure for an individual state can be achieved with a rate of 80 percent or more!

The recent passage of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (Public Law 109-171) contributes a sense of urgency to our task and a need for partnering among CSE, TANF and work programs. In TANF reauthorization, both work participation requirements and work supports are strengthened for families on assistance. The aim is for more families to enter the economic mainstream and fewer children to grow up in poverty. Increased funding to encourage responsible fatherhood is also authorized in this Act. The CSE program received new and expanded enforcement tools and distribution options that will allow states to provide more support directly to families, especially families who formerly received assistance.

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RATE, from previous page

OCSE is undertaking activities that we expect will lead to better performance in collecting on current support:

- Spotlight the national goal of increasing the child support current collection rate.
- Use reports, articles, conference workshops, or workgroups to promote practices that are known to lead to more timely current support payments. Practices include reducing undistributed collections, increasing debits of noncustodial parent accounts.
- Issue guidance and provide technical assistance to encourage increased levels of automation in areas likely to improve the current collection rate. Examples include automating review and adjustment, providing automated performance data to local jurisdictions and individual workers, increasing use of outbound interactive voice systems or call centers to contact noncustodial parents for initial support payments before income withholding begins.
- Sponsor peer-to-peer training (May 2006) on strategies for improving collection of current support, as well as prevention and management of arrears; follow-up with a report on research and grant findings, best practices, and recommendations.
- Sponsored peer-to-peer training (January 2006) for large urban jurisdictions to increase the use of effective practices for urban caseloads; follow-up with a report covering strategic planning in urban settings and development and use of timely local performance data.
- Use teleconferencing to work with states, employers, and federal agencies to increase wage withholdings and garnishments; follow-up with guidance and training on using New Hire data.
- Raise awareness of the value of techniques that support more consistent collection of current support, such as: using mediation to establish orders for the never-married population, minimizing routine use of default orders, initiating problem-solving courts for child support dockets, and outreach to courts and parents to ensure child support payments (IV-D and non-IV-D) are made through State Disbursement Units.
- Issue a research compilation on incarceration, re-entry and child support and a related resource guide on lessons learned from OCSE grants and IV-D programs.

If you have ideas for improving the current collection rate or strategies that you would like to share, please send them along with your name and telephone number to Sue Sosler at ssosler@acf.hhs.gov. Together we will make a difference! **CSR**

NEW ORLEANS, from page 1

The three offices were the Jefferson Parish Office of the District Attorney, the Orleans Parish Office of the District Attorney, and the New Orleans District Office of Support Enforcement Services. The latter had been submerged in several feet of water and has just been rebuilt. Staff are back, working in spartan conditions

and working off a satellite connection with their automated system.

“What impressed me the most,” says Commissioner Bean, “was the positive attitude of the staff in what are still difficult circumstances. Many still have to find places to live and then move ... their neighborhoods are still completely demolished.” **CSR**

Telling Stories In Kentucky and Florida, A Passion for Their Work

By Elaine Blackman
CSR Editor

Bette Rush loves her job. High on her list of reasons for working 23 years in the Jefferson County, KY, Attorney's Office: "We are not just coworkers; we're family. We stick together," she says, "and that's vital for someone my age."

Now a youthful 86, Ms. Rush retired at 71 in 1991, only to be asked to come back a year later (part-time) to help keep up with the growing volume of cases in the Child Support Non-Support Division. Active cases now number 64,000 in Kentucky's most densely populated county where Ms. Rush is doing the job she's "most comfortable with." Her work includes scheduling motions for nonsupport cases, generating printouts of warrants for the child support office, and filing client complaints—"They need to be precise in order to go over to court."



Bette Rush

"Sometimes they want me to do more," she adds, "if they can catch up with me."

Ms. Rush's efficiency, however, is but one reason she was asked to cut her retirement short. According to communication manager Bill Patteson, "Her perspective goes so far beyond what you and I know. She's the most down to earth, common sense, giving person ... and a source of great wisdom."

Ms. Rush attributes her ease in dealing with the public in part to a 5-year stint performing with a troupe in Spain and throughout South and Central America. She joined the troupe at 16 after leaving her foster home and heading for New York City.

She refers also to the early days of having more contact with clients, and to her observations about the changing society: "More mothers are abandoning their children, which is hard for me to understand ... and many more grandparents are raising grandchildren."



Elaine Brown

See **STORIES**, next page

Meanwhile, further south, a Florida employee this month celebrates 29 years with the Child Support Enforcement Program in the State Department of Revenue. Elaine Brown worked her way up from field supervisor to one of 15 statewide who handle the more complicated customer inquiries on legislative issues. She's managed this position for Hillsborough and Desoto Counties for the past 11 years. Ms. Brown notes the value of customer service negotiation training, as well as the years of experience in which "I've seen everything from pencil and paper to automated systems."

Like Ms. Rush, Ms. Brown is passionate about her job. "I really believe in this program. I think child support work doesn't get the recognition it deserves," she says, referring to the "number of children you reach out and touch." And, though a bit younger than Ms. Rush, Ms. Brown has a few stories of her own. She recalls, for example, a Christmas-tree farmer who was selling his business. Because the child support agency was able to put a lien on the business, this father's daughter received the money needed to attend college.

"Getting the money to children makes a big difference in their lives." But every case is different, she adds, allowing for interesting and varied work.

One could argue whether child support work attracts the passionate, or passion is an outgrowth of the work, or both. But surely many around the country have tales to tell, such as this one about a "gallant father" that Ms. Rush says she has always remembered:

After 18 years of loving and supporting his daughter, a noncustodial father found out he wasn't the biological dad at all. His response: "It doesn't make any difference; I've loved her all these years," recalls Ms. Rush, adding, "It made me feel good that he still considered her his daughter." **CSR**



Commissioner Bean 'Walks the Talk' in Colorado

By **Tiffany Barfield**
Special Assistant to the Commissioner

OCSE commissioner Margot Bean lauded Colorado State and local child support enforcement staff for their leadership in producing grant projects during her remarks at the annual Celebrations Conference in March, titled "Stretching to the Future." In addition to celebrating the State's accomplishments over the last 5 years, the conference rolled out the program's new strategic plan and marked the 20th anniversary of the Automated Child Support Enforcement System (ACSES).

In his introduction of the Commissioner, Colorado IV-D Director John Bernhart said that "Margot Bean walks the talk, and there is no better person for America's children."

During her visit to Denver, Ms. Bean also met with the U.S. Attorney's Office, which assists the Project Save Our Children (PSOC) task force, and with OCSE Region VIII staff. She looks forward to continuing her visits to all OCSE Regional Offices.

**There is no future in
any job. The future lies in the
person holding the job.**
George Crane

Arizona Foresees Better Management With Online Arrears Calculation

By Annmarie Mena
Arizona DCSE

Arizona is developing a web-based calculation tool that should soon allow the State's courts, child support customers, and IV-D staff to better manage child support arrears by providing timely, accurate information.

Under an OCSE Section 1115 demonstration grant that began last summer, the tool is being developed by a new collaboration among Arizona's Division of Child Support Enforcement (DCSE), Maricopa County Family Court, State Attorney General's office, and Arizona Administration of Courts.

The tool will calculate arrears on-demand and in-real-time based on the information provided by the State Case Registry and State Disbursement Unit. The tool will eliminate the need for

members of the judiciary to reschedule hearings to obtain the current arrears amount and allow for immediate recalculation of arrears based on testimony presented in court.

The tool also will reduce the time by IV-D staff calculating arrears in complex cases and allow custodial and noncustodial parents to easily obtain details about the amount of support owed—without having to contact the IV-D agency or a Clerk of the Court.

All customers with an Arizona court order, including those with an Arizona case who no longer reside in the state, will be able to access the tool 24 hours-a-day/7 days-a-week. **CSR**

For additional information, contact Annmarie Mena at 602-274-7646 or AMena@azdes.gov; or Frank Fajardo in OCSE at 202-205-4554 or ffajardo@acf.hhs.gov.



Training Updated for Tribal Programs

Computer-based training courses on child support enforcement are being revised to increase use by tribal child support enforcement programs.

The revisions will reflect the sovereign status of tribes and the choices by each tribal IV-D program to meet the individual needs of their community and legal system.

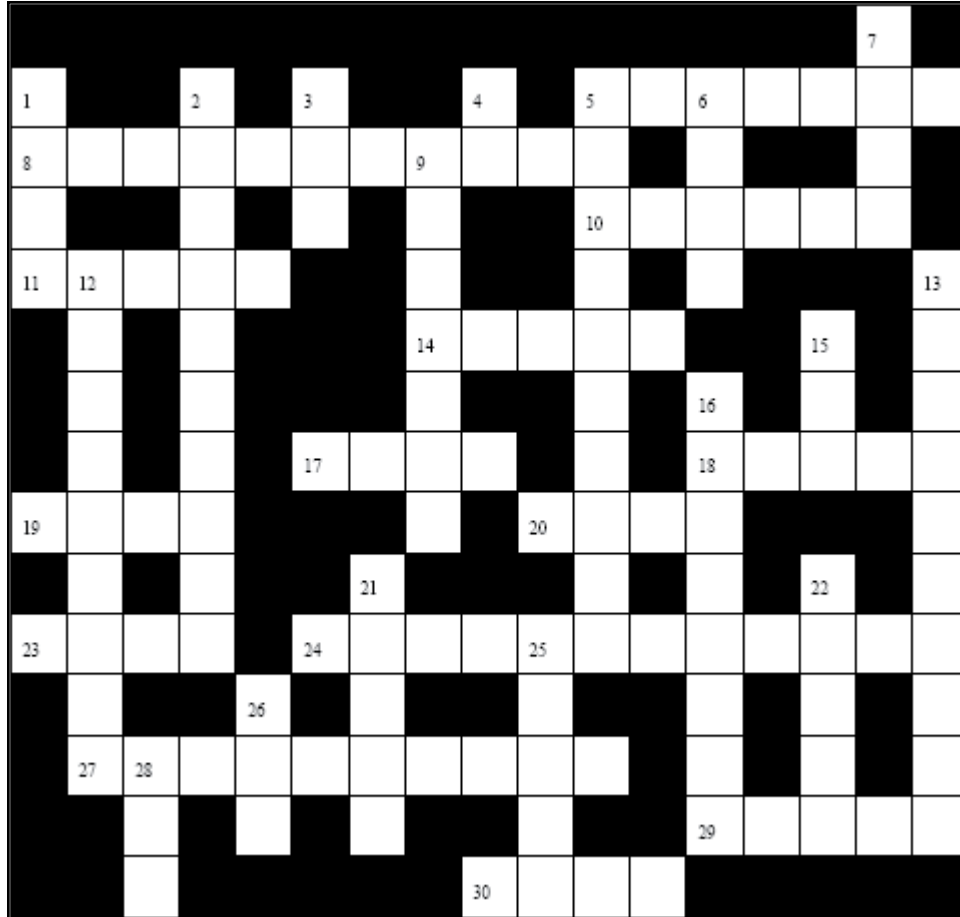
Under an OCSE contract with Policy Studies, Inc., five courses are under revision: Child Support Enforcement–Orientation, Child Support Enforcement–Locate, Child Support Enforcement–Paternity Establishment, Child Support Enforcement–Enforcing the Order,

and Child Support Enforcement–Processing Intergovernmental Child Support Cases. Technology and design of the courses also are being updated to ensure they can be used as effectively and efficiently as possible. A focus group of tribal members representing the first nine tribes to operate a tribal child support enforcement program is providing guidance during the course-revision process.

The final CD-ROM and Web-based versions of the courses are set for completion by Oct. 1.

For additional information, contact Toni Baker in OCSE at tbaker@acf.hhs.gov or 202-401-4731. **CSR**

Crossword Puzzle: All in a Day's Work



ACROSS

- 5. Meeting
- 8. A IV-D function
- 10. One of ten
- 11. A good one
- 14. Say
- 17. Program task force (acronym)
- 18. Verify
- 19. Created by Title IV-D
- 20. Skip
- 23. To-do series
- 24. Monetary
- 27. Paperless
- 29. Appreciate, as in success
- 30. Calendar period

DOWN

- 1. IV-D directors, for one
- 2. Authority
- 3. Widely used acronym
- 4. Us
- 5. Plans
- 6. Wise one
- 7. Brought to life
- 9. Not impossible
- 12. Purpose
- 13. Several of the 50
- 15. IV-D partner
- 16. Identification
- 21. Provides support
- 22. Intentions
- 25. Motivate
- 26. Expert
- 28. Test facility

Look for answers in the June *CSR*.

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Health and Human Services**

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New Web Site Offers Tips To Sustain Healthy Marriages

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF), in partnership with five universities and Child Trends of Washington, D.C., last month launched the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center (NHMRC) Web site:

www.healthymarriageinfo.org

The site offers information and resources for the public about healthy marriage programs and activities in their communities, and for practitioners wishing to implement healthy marriage programs.

Spread the Word!

Local agencies and organizations associated with the Child Support Enforcement Program may benefit from the news, views, and resources in this free publication. Please share the *Child Support Report* in your community. To view recent issues (PDF Adobe), log onto acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse, and click on *News*.

Child Support Report

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