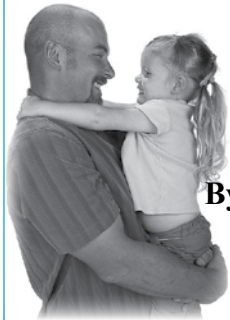




Child Support Report

OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT

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New Research Shows Power Of Problem-Solving Methods in Court

By Judge Kristin H. Ruth
Dr. Rhonda Zingraff
Raleigh, NC

In the January 2006 *Child Support Report*, Judge Kristin Ruth wrote about “breaking the cycle”—the redundant court appearances by parents who fail to pay court-ordered child support, face contempt charges, are then sentenced to jail, and, after paying enough to gain release, typically resume nonpayment until required to return to court. This revolving-door dilemma is demoralizing for everyone.

Judge Ruth described her problem-solving court strategies and her belief that wisely chosen alternatives to incarceration can break that cycle, improve parental responsibility, and better address the needs of children.

Another endorsement of problem-solving court principles followed in the August 2006 *Child Support Report* as “a recipe for improved collections” in child support enforcement. Judge Larry Holtz presented the rationale for approaching the child support docket as a problem-solving arena, suggesting that financial results, family relations, and judicial job satisfaction might all improve.

Even with such persuasive logic, however, widespread adoption of a problem-solving model for child support collections would be

unlikely without convincing proof of its powers. This so concerned Judge Ruth that she instigated research collaboration between Meredith College and the Wake County, NC, Child Support Enforcement Office. Consequently, Dr. Rhonda Zingraff, Sheenagh Lopez, and Jennifer McCoy analyzed data reflecting 30 months of Judge Ruth’s problem-solving efforts.

The research design allowed for two community-based strategies to be compared both to one another and to the more typical use of jail. One community option was electronic house arrest; the other a vocational services program. For those receiving a court order to either of these sanctions, or to jail, payment history was studied for 6 months before and after the sanction

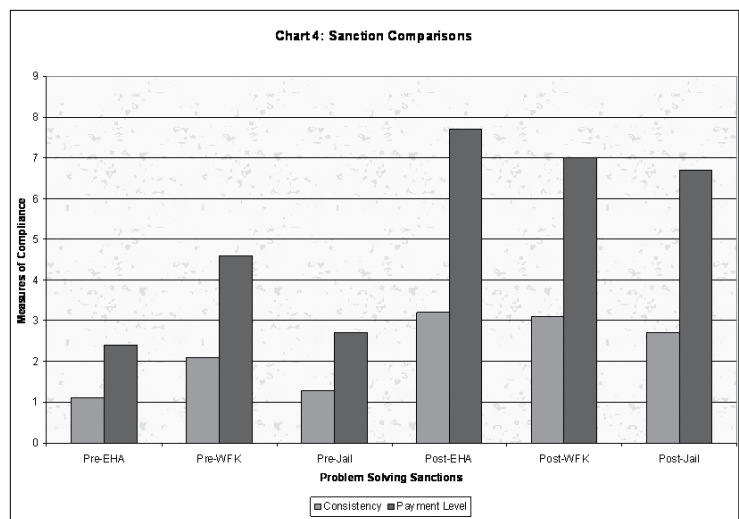



Chart excerpted from the research project’s executive summary.

See COURT, next page

Problem Solving—More Judges Get In on the Act



Following success in applying problem-solving court techniques in her own courtroom, Judge Kristin Ruth (Raleigh, NC) now is heading up a new and more inclusive endeavor.

Sponsored by the National Judicial/CSE Task Force, trial court judges from across the country will gather for a “judicial knowledge transfer”—an intensive two-and-a-half-day visit to Judge Ruth’s court to hear presentations by many community service agencies about how they were able to successfully incorporate problem-solving

techniques into a child support venue.

Following the mid-April visit, the judges expect to incorporate similar techniques in their own courtrooms and then participate in monthly conference calls to identify both successes and obstacles. The task force expects to publish a final report for the court/judicial and child support communities as they work together to better serve families and children.

For more information about the task force, contact Larry Holtz in OCSE at 202-401-5376 or lholtz@acf.hhs.gov.

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was applied. Payment compliance took into account both frequency and amount of payments. Including evidence of labor-force participation allowed the links between sanction, work, and payment to be explored.

Each sanction was associated with statistically significant improvements in payment compliance. Gains in frequency and amount were discovered, and improvements in employment were also observed after each sanction. At all times, regardless of sanction, parents who had some evidence of employment were able to comply more with their child support obligations. The sanctions, however, did appear to positively encourage employment, and the community-based sanctions were more successful at that than incarceration.

Because those under electronic house arrest are allowed to leave home for work, this sanction is capable of creating an employment incentive that jail is unable to match. And for those receiving personalized vocational support to steer them toward employment, they have more guidance than jail can provide. In comparing the community strategies to jail’s ef-

fects, this evidence shows that electronic house arrest stimulates more impressive improvements in payment compliance, and that the vocational counseling brings about improvements that are more enduring. Jail orders were associated with rapid spikes in payment, but in subsequent months payments were erratic. The compliance gains were modest rather than dramatic, regardless of sanction, but statistical tests assure that these gains were not random.

Judges interested in the problem-solving model can take encouragement from these results. A careful comparison of the costs of community strategies to jail expenses was beyond the scope of this study, but that would be an essential next step.

Similarly, a study designed to compare jail and the problem-solving approaches in terms of family values outcomes would strategically inform judicial decisions. Hopefully, the potential benefits for children and savings to taxpayers can bring a high priority to funding more research.

For more information, contact Dr. Rhonda Zingraff at Meredith College, 919-760-8564 or zingraffr@meredith.edu. CSR

Sounds Like a Plan

By Joe Bodmer
OCSE

In the last 2 years, I've probably been asked a thousand times, "Which State's system out there do you think is best?" That's a lot of computer envy goin' on. Or as my friend, Stan King of Arkansas' Department of Finance and Administration, would say, "Looks like we're gonna need more propeller-heads."

Eventually, after I've hemmed and hawed, I reply, "Have you done a feasibility study; that would tell you which one for sure." Of course, 99 out of 100 times, I get a negative response, and so the conversation begins. How does a State plan to acquire a new child support system, AND get the Feds to pay for it?

It is not as complicated as it sounds, though truth be told, I wouldn't use the word easy. First, a State needs to compose a planning team. Your planning staff should absolutely include, or have direct access to, the services of someone who has procurement experience. You will need a project manager—even if only for the planning phase—and some program and information technology subject matter experts to do the work.

Having built your team, you now need some way to pay them. Voila! We Feds have that covered: The State needs to create and submit to our office a Planning Advance Planning Document (PAPD). This is the grant application, or funding document, that secures ongoing Federal dollars in your new system planning project.

A PAPD contains 4 sections or chapters, which combined should not exceed 15 to 30 pages. Pretty brief, huh? Well, enjoy it while you can, as it is likely the last time you'll see the word "brief" and "APD" used in the same sentence.

Anyway, these four chapters are: Problem Statement, Project Management Plan, Budget, and Total Project Cost Estimate.

The Problem Statement describes in a two- to three-page summary the kinds of issues and problems the State faces that requires a new automation solution. Examples of issues are: operating expenses for the existing system are too high; due to the system's age, maintenance staff is too expensive and difficult to find; or, the State cannot get relevant, timely management reports out of the system, etc.

Next, the PAPD must contain a Project Management Plan or PMP. The PMP presents: a list of key planning team members, an organization chart, a sufficiently descriptive list of tasks and activities to be done, and a schedule. Required planning tasks include performing a requirements analysis, a feasibility study with alternatives, and cost-benefit analyses. Optional tasks can include performing procurements to acquire contractors to assist with planning, project management, or quality assurance.

The third chapter, the Budget, is a one- to two-page list of planning phase costs broken down by fiscal quarter and summed to the Federal fiscal year. Budget line items should include: contracts, State staff, training, travel, hardware and software, supplies, etc.

Last, the PAPD will need a Total Project Cost Estimate: a statement providing a rough, "ballpark" estimate of what the State expects the total cost to be for planning, development, implementation, and at least 7 years of system operation and maintenance.

Eighteen States have raised the subject of planning for a new system. Is yours one? OCSE can help. Call 202-690-1244. **CSR**



Tech Talk

Turning Talk Into Action In Tennessee, 'Early Intervention' Pushes Collections Up, Arrears Down

By Paul Legler
Policy Studies, Inc.

Early intervention has received increased attention in recent years as a strategy to establish more child support orders, increase current support collections, and reduce arrears. Now, a recently completed project in Knox County, TN, has shown promising child support performance outcomes from implementation of early intervention strategies.

The premise of early intervention is that more focus should be placed on dealing with clients up-front. Many child support professionals are recognizing that if the very first child support payments are made, there is a much greater likelihood that regular payments will be made in the future. In addition, if noncustodial parents (NCPs) can make the payments from the outset, they can avoid the build-up of arrearages. Indeed, OCSE Commissioner Margot Bean often has encouraged States to implement early intervention strategies.

The Knox County Case Stratification and Early Intervention Project was funded by an OCSE 1115 demonstration grant to the Child Support Services Division of the Tennessee Department of Human Services; Policy Studies Inc. (PSI) implemented the project and conducted the evaluation.

Project case workers used a variety of early intervention strategies, including more frequent

contact with NCPs, early settlement conferences, minimizing default orders, encouraging voluntary compliance with child support obligations, more frequent monitoring of cases, and taking swift enforcement action when current support payments were not made. A case assessment and stratification tool (modeled after an Australian approach) was also used to determine the types of services that may benefit the parties and the type of enforcement actions that may be most appropriate.

The early intervention strategies were used for the project cases for 1 year, and, compared to a control group, were successful in achieving positive child support enforcement outcomes.

Project cases had a significantly higher percent of cases under order than control cases. After a year, 56 percent of project cases had an order compared to 41 percent of control cases. The project treatment had the greatest impact on public assistance cases: 50 percent of public assistance project cases had orders established compared to 22 percent for control cases.

Project cases paid more current support than control cases on average. Current support payments averaged 86 percent among all project cases and 73 percent among all control cases. Again, the difference was greatest for public assistance cases, averaging 81 percent for proj-



See TENNESSEE, next page

Put On a Happy Face!



Mary Floyd is an inspiration to fellow Washington, DC, child support staff—not only because the just-turned 80-year-old flaunts an enviable amount of energy, but also because she is known for putting the customer first throughout her 28-year career with the child support office. At her birthday celebration, Floyd was honored with certificates from CSE Director Benidia Rice, Attorney General Linda Singer, and Mayor Adrian Fenty. Floyd says she’s appreciated every opportunity to grow in her career, as well as the positive changes she’s seen under 10 supervisors and 10 agency directors. Her words of wisdom for working with customers: “We can’t have a bad attitude. (I don’t believe in complaining.) Treat others as you would want to be treated. We are all public servants.”

SUBMIT A PHOTO: To be considered for publication in this space, please e-mail a high-quality photo of significance to your child support program, to: eblockman@acf.hhs.gov



TENNESSEE, from previous page

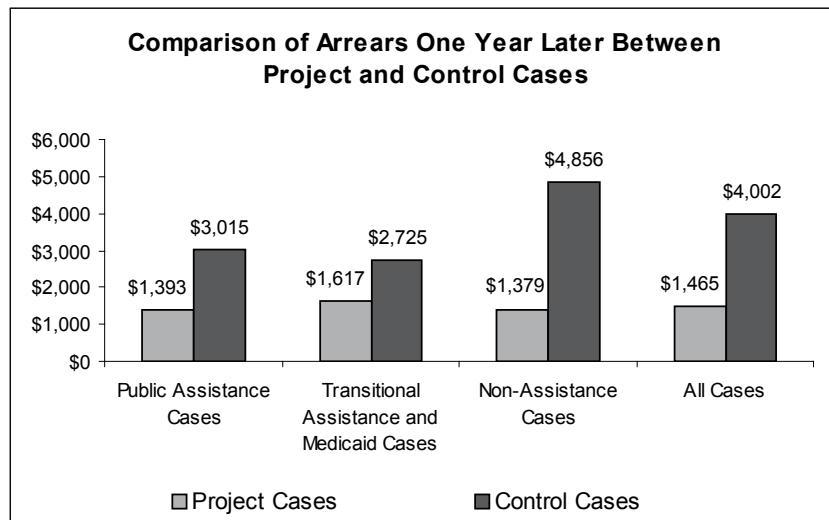


Chart excerpted from project final report.

ect cases, compared to 44 percent for control cases.

Project cases made more progress toward paying arrears than control cases. Arrears were ordered to over half of both the project (52 percent) and control cases (59 percent) at the time of order establishment. After a year, there were 10 percent more project cases with arrears and 29 percent more control cases with arrears.

About 7 percent of project cases and 0.5 percent of control cases reduced their arrears debt within the first year. In all, after a year, arrears

were less among project cases than control cases. The average amount of arrears was \$1,465 among project cases and \$4,002 among control cases.

Based upon this project, early intervention appears to be a promising strategy that child support programs can employ as they strive to improve child support performance.

For more information, contact Paul Legler at PLegler@Policies-Studies.com or 952-431-5426, or visit the OCSE Web site at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/grants/>. **CSR**



Interstate Webcast Gets Thumbs Up

By Pat Conrad
OCSE

I love the Webcast format!”

“I will seek approval to put a link to this on our training department Web site.”

“It is better than having to travel long distances for training...and you can put it on hold if you are interrupted.”

These comments are just a few of those received in recent months from viewers of OCSE’s newest training tool: the Interstate Communications Webcast.

Released in October 2006, the Interstate Communications Webcast is OCSE’s second training module available over the Internet. The Webcast combines the concepts of Web and broadcast. Webcasts are videos of real-life speakers and graphical presentations.

The purpose of the Interstate Communications Webcast is to facilitate awareness of interstate cases and the communication tools available for the child support worker to effectively process these cases. The Webcast provides four separate modules of training within the 38-minute broadcast:

- The first module defines terminology used in interstate case processing.
- The second module describes the differences between one-state and two-state interstate cases, and provides guidance on actions the state can take to use long-arm techniques to avoid establishing a two-state case.
- The third module emphasizes the importance of correct case IDs in interstate communication.

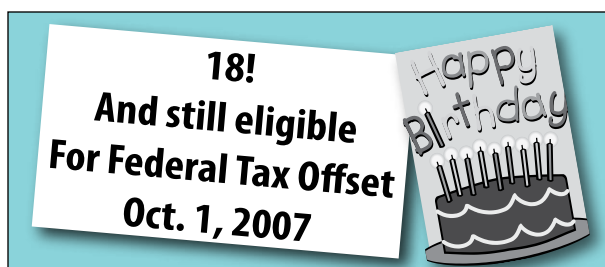
- The fourth module explains how interstate data can be communicated electronically via CSENet, and how the coding used in CSENet communication informs the other state of the data being transmitted.

An obvious advantage of the Webcast is that it can be stopped, paused, or replayed at the worker’s convenience. The Webcast also includes closed captioning for persons having difficulty hearing the audio.

While viewing the Webcast, the child support worker can access links to other valuable information located on the OCSE Web site, such as the Intergovernmental Referral Guide (IRG), the Case ID Matrix with each State’s case ID format, and the CSENet site from which downloadable technical documents such as the CSENet Interface Guidance Document can be obtained. The viewer also can click on a link to the OCSE Web site Glossary that lists definitions and acronyms for child support enforcement terms—from “accrual” to “URESAs.”

A link to a feedback form also appears on the Webcast. This feedback will assist OCSE in developing and improving training courses available via the Web.

The Interstate Communications Webcast can be accessed through the OCSE Web site at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/newhire/index.htm> or from the National Electronic Child Support Resources (NECSRS) section of OCSE’s Web site at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/>. [CSR](#)



Why Nothing Can Match My Pride in MSFIDM

By Matt Marsolais
OCSE

In my brief experience with OCSE, I have had the opportunity to speak with many State child support and financial institution representatives, and one thing is clear: People want to help.

It is a pleasure to be part of an important program like the Multi-state Financial Institution Data Match (MSFIDM). It is widely recognized that child support is a noble cause, and being able to work with folks in the private sector to afford children a chance at a healthier youth makes MSFIDM an especially rewarding program.

Operated through a quarterly match with financial institutions that do business in two or more states, MSFIDM allows OCSE to obtain information about assets

owned by delinquent obligors. Once received, the information is passed along to State Child Support Enforcement (CSE) agencies that are ultimately responsible for issuing liens and levying funds. The data match has been a consistent and effective enforcement tool, generating significant collection numbers each year.

All States should be benefiting from the data provided by MSFIDM. Financial institutions returned over 2.5 million matched accounts to OCSE in the 4th quarter of 2006. Name, social security number, address, and other identifiable information are passed back to the States as part of the match. It is key that CSE agency representatives take advantage of this sensitive information.

When folks use their bank card, or deposit funds into their bank account, it may be just

another transaction, as it was for me 15 months ago. Now, I have a different positive perspective on these institutions, as I am sure many other people involved in FIDM do.



The other day, during a television advertisement for a well-known financial management company, my thoughts wrapped around a collection Ohio had obtained this past October. Instead of listening to what was being advertised, all I could think about was the \$90,000 that the State seized from a security held by that company to pay an overdue child support debt.

This past year California was able to collect a \$65,000 lump sum payment from an account

Instead of listening to what was being advertised, all I could think about was the \$90,000 that the State seized from a security held by that company to pay an overdue child support debt.

held by a bank. I hold a personal account with that same bank and now whenever I use my ATM card that collection figure stays with me, surcharge or

not. These frequent and considerable collections add up.

Over \$490 million has been collected since program inception in 1999. And even more staggering than that: MSFIDM boasts an average annual increase of 43.6 percent (since 2000).

This program affects lives. I need to sit back and think about that sometimes. Never have I worked for such an admirable cause. And although I am a novice in this industry, I would like to offer my congratulations and thanks to all of those Federal, State, and financial-industry workers who have helped to place the MSFIDM program atop the child support enforcement echelon. Without your collaborative efforts, the MSFIDM program would not be the force it is today. **CSR**

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MCP: A Resource For Child Support Programs

The Family and Youth Services Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, administers a grant program called Mentoring Children of Prisoners (MCP). Its mission is to train adult volunteers to mentor children and youth whose parents are incarcerated.

Approximately 2 million children and youth in the United States have at least one parent in a Federal or State correctional facility. In addition to suffering disruption in the relationship with their parent, these young people often struggle with the economic, social, and emotional burdens of the incarceration.



Some of the children in your caseload may be among this group. To see if an MCP program operates in your area, call Victoria Marquez, 202-401-8102, or visit www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/content/youthdivision/programs/locate.htm.

MCP also publishes a monthly e-newsletter and provides information about services and resources for children and families through its technical support clearinghouse.

To read more about incarceration and reentry, see OCSE's reports at www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pubs/index.html#ocse_report.

Child Support Report

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