



Child Support Report

OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT

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Another Record Shattered!

By **Brian Peeler**
OCSE

It was a very good year. In 2007, the Federal Offset Program collected a recordbreaking \$1.69 billion in past-due child support. This figure is over \$90 million more than was collected in 2006, and \$45 million more than the previous annual record year set in 2001. (See press release issued by the Administration for Children and Families at: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/news/press/2008/tax_refund_high.html)

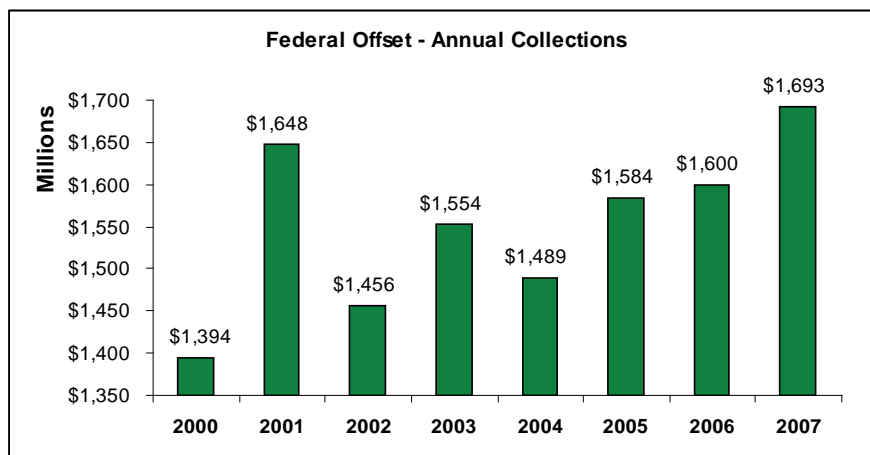


This is certainly cause for celebration. Records aren't generally shattered by such a wide margin, and typically we would be shouting from the rooftops while banging on a large drum. But we're not.

Why? We simply don't have time! There are so many great things going on now and in the months to come that all our energy is spent looking ahead.

Certified Caseload Growing By Leaps and Bounds

Due to recent legislative changes included in the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, States have certified for Federal Tax Refund Offset over 900,000 additional cases that were previously not eligible for Tax Refund Offset. We expect these cases to result in over 170,000 offsets totaling almost \$200 million annually in additional cases.



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Child support agencies are using e-OSCAR to respond to Credit Reporting Agencies electronically page 5

*Child Support Report online:
www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse*

In fact, the impact from these additional cases can already be seen in the 2008 collection figures. During the third week of February, OCSE collected \$221 million through Tax Refund Offset. This was our largest week of collections ever! The previous record was for the same week last year when

See **RECORD**, page 8

NCSEA Forum-Goers Build on Networks for Families

The national child support enforcement community is entering into a “capacity-building phase,” according to Vicki Turetsky, a researcher with the Center for Law and Social Policy. Turetsky was one of many who presented research, government policies, and child support program practices at the NCSEA Policy Forum and Training Conference in Washington DC, January 28 – 30.

Several speakers dovetailed Turetsky’s assertion that the program is moving toward reliance on linkages with fatherhood organizations, labor departments, courts, and others, as well as systematic and statewide data collection, in efforts to connect customers with means for obtaining employment.

OCSE Commissioner Margot Bean moderated a discussion on The Hague Convention, which, once ratified by the United States and at least one other country, should facilitate case processing between participating countries.

NCSEA President Sharon Santilli presented awards to certain NCSEA delegates in The Hague from 2003 to 2007: Elana Hatch, MaryAnn Wellbank, Vernon Drew, Kay Farley, Alisha Griffin, Marilyn Ray Smith, and Ann Barkley.

Commissioner Bean presented awards to people from the United States who participated in the



Participants at the NCSEA forum included OCSE Commissioner Margot Bean, top photo, and NCSEA President Sharon Santilli, second from top.

November 2007 Hague negotiations. Present at the forum were: NCSEA’s Vernon Drew, Alisha Griffin, Marilyn Ray Smith, and Ann Barkley; Bob Keith (DHHS), Lily Matheson (OCSE), Meg Haynes, and Mary Helen Carlson (DOS) from the official US Delegation; and Battle Robinson (International Bar Association). (See page 8 for additional awardees.)

Panelists discussed Federal and State priorities, including PAID (Project to Avoid Increasing Delinquencies), a national initiative to help child support agencies improve collection of current support and arrears, and reduce growth in arrears.

Researchers detailed studies on the affect of marital status on child support outcomes and the potential impact of increasing child support payments to TANF families. Princeton’s Dr. Hillard Pouncy reported on a study of the national child support program’s minority population, whose barrier to participation is in large part due to their difficulties obtaining employment, he explained.

Other panels offered marketing projects in State and local agencies designed to educate and involve its customers, such as crisis communications plans; media strategies; themed public events; and partnerships with courts, prisons, organizations, and retailers.



Judges Take Center Court at NCSEA Forum

By Judge Larry R. Holtz
OCSE

Although not Wimbledon judges, three judges held sway at a packed plenary session during the recent policy forum and conference sponsored by the National Child Support Enforcement Association (NCSEA) in Washington, DC. The judges—two of whom are members of the National Judicial/Child Support Enforcement Task Force and a third who is associated with the Task Forces’ Judicial Knowledge Transfer initiative—spoke about three newly published products to aid trial judges who process child support cases.

The documents were produced by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) under an OCSE Special Improvement Project (SIP) grant.

The products include a research-based article, “Integrating Problem-Solving Court Practices into the Child Support Docket,” introduced at the session by Judge Kristin Ruth from Raleigh, NC. She was followed by Judge Jim Rausch, from San Antonio, TX, who presented a practice guide entitled “Making Child Support Orders Realistic and Enforceable.” Identified as a bench card, it addresses some important touchstones for judges to consider when establishing child support orders. Judge Ellen White, from Lynchburg, VA, concluded the panel by discussing the technical assistance bulletin “Why Medical Child Support Is Important – and Complex,” an area of increasingly important dialogue between the two communities.

The products should be available soon on the NCJFCJ Web site www.ncjfcj.org. NCJFCJ also plans to make the products available to its members throughout the country—a significant number of trial court judges.



From left: Judge Jim Rausch (San Antonio), Judge Kristin Ruth (Raleigh), Judge Larry Holtz (OCSE), and Judge Ellen White (Lynchburg)

For further information about the National Judicial/CSE Task Force, contact Judge Larry R. Holtz, OCSE’s Court and Judicial Liaison, at larry.holtz@acf.hhs.gov or 202-402-5376.

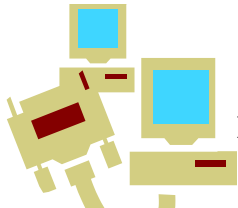
OCSE 18th National Conference To Headline Judicial Partners

The Judges’ presentation at the January NCSEA conference reflected a growing degree of collaboration between the child support and court/judicial communities in recent years as they move collectively toward improving service to families.

To support this trend, the theme for the OCSE 18th National Child Support Enforcement Training Conference this fall will be “Beyond the Bench – Partnering for Excellence in Child Support through the Courts, Fatherhood, and Employment Initiatives.”



The agenda will feature many initiatives and modalities, including those promoted by the National Judicial/CSE Task Force. The conference is set for Aug. 25 – 27, at the Grand Hyatt Washington. For information about the conference, please contact Kim Mitchell-Harley at kimberly.mitchell-harley@acf.hhs.gov or 202-205-3496.



Who Uses CSENet?

By **Kathy Miller**
OCSE

With a mobile society and the challenge of interstate child support cases, States are taking advantage of one of OCSE's interstate communication tools. The Child Support Enforcement Network (CSENet) enables States to electronically exchange interstate requests, responses, and ongoing case activities.

CSENet encompasses seven function types that define the business activities:

- LO1 – Quick Locate
- MSC – Managing State Cases
- CSI – Case Status Information
- ENF – Enforcement
- PAT – Paternity
- EST – Establishment
- COL – Collection (Tax Offset)

In an effort to assist States in improving the business use of CSENet and plan for future activities, OCSE analyzed more than 3.3 million transactions exchanged during the 6-month period from May through October 2007.

There are 183 valid transactions that can be exchanged in CSENet. In reviewing the 3 million transactions, OCSE compared those used most frequently with those used most frequently in 2006. OCSE also validated the use of the transactions identified within the core set of transactions. The core set of transactions (available on the OCSE Web site at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pol/DCL/2007/dcl-07-20.htm>) were developed in partnership with States to help streamline transactions.

These are some findings from the analysis:

- 53 States sent 4 common function types, LO1, CSI, MSC and ENF, compared to 2006, when LO1 was the only common function sent by 53 States. (The 53 excludes South Carolina, which can receive but not send transactions. The State is developing a statewide system.)

- 37 States sent all 7 functions.
- 179 of the 183 valid transactions were used.
- 87 percent of the transactions were part of the core set.
- MSC transactions were the largest volume of all functions, representing 63 percent of the total transactions.
- 50 States used the MSC case closure transactions.
- 51 States used acknowledgment transactions.
- 40 States used COL transactions.

OCSE recommends that States continue to improve interstate communications by: reviewing the CSENet transactions being sent by your State; focusing resources on the core set of transactions during initiatives to improve existing programming or increasing CSENet functionality; incorporating use of the core set of transactions during worker training; and expanding exchange agreements with other States.

An immediate benefit to States sending a core set of transactions is increased standardization through the use of the same transactions. Additional benefits to States could include increased opportunity for using transactions for the same purpose, fewer CSENet transactions to focus on, and increased ability to pursue transaction automation.

OCSE's future activities include helping States to focus on the core set of transactions and determining the future of those transactions that are not included in the core set.

For more information, contact Kathy Miller at kathy.miller@lmco.com, or the Service Desk at 1-800-258-2736. A list of CSENet technical representatives is available at: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/newhire/csenet/contacts/csenet_contacts.htm.





Making Life Easier With e-OSCAR

By Monique Miles
OCSE

Credit Reporting Agencies (CRAs) have developed a web-based system to help expedite the dispute resolution process. The electronic Online Solution for Complete and Accurate Reporting, or e-OSCAR, gives IV-D agencies the opportunity to respond electronically to the CRAs regarding child support arrearage disputes.

Before the implementation of e-OSCAR, CRAs and IV-D agencies responded to consumer disputes by mail, telephone, and/or fax. E-OSCAR is currently used by the four largest CRAs: Experian, Equifax, Innovis, and TransUnion. Though CRAs require data furnishers (e.g., IV-D agencies) to use e-OSCAR to resolve disputes, three CRAs (Equifax, Innovis, and TransUnion) use e-OSCAR but also continue to resolve disputes by mail, telephone, and/or fax. Presently, Experian is the only CRA using e-OSCAR exclusively. However, the three other CRAs have confirmed that they, too, will eventually only use e-OSCAR.

This change may significantly impact States not using e-OSCAR. For example, any obligor who disputes his/her arrearage or claims a mistake of identity with a CRA, will result in the CRA updating the debt to current or deleting the arrearage completely from the credit report. If a child support agency has not signed up for e-OSCAR, the CRA has no other alternative but to update the credit report based on the obligor's claim. This change may mean a reduction in collections, in addition to non-compliance of credit reporting and Fair Credit Reporting Act requirements.

The initial registration for e-OSCAR is free. However, there is a \$21 quarterly fee to use the system. States will have the option of selecting how many users and registrations will be needed for their State operation; this will depend on each State's preference and/or workload. The

e-OSCAR Web site provides an online help desk that can help IV-D agencies implement the system within each State.

Fourteen States are realizing the benefits of using e-OSCAR: Alabama, California, Connecticut, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Vermont, Wisconsin, Florida, and Washington.



Here is what child support staff in Louisiana and Washington have to say:

“Using e-OSCAR has been extremely beneficial to Louisiana Support Enforcement Services. Prior to using e-OSCAR, credit disputes were handled in the State office via hard-copy requests which were much more time consuming and inefficient. With e-OSCAR we have the ability to update and delete (if necessary) reported accounts online via the e-OSCAR Web site. From January 2007 through December 2007, we responded timely to 3,484 disputes and updated 26 other reports. We believe that e-OSCAR will continue to prove to be a modern and effective tool in the handling of consumer credit reporting disputes for Louisiana Child Support Enforcement Services.”

“In Washington State, e-OSCAR is a much more efficient way to respond to disputes from NCPs; everything is done online. Also, when we have to correct our reporting, we are able to complete the process online and submit to the four CRAs at once. E-OSCAR's new format is more user-friendly and makes processing disputes easier than ever before.”

Please visit the e-OSCAR Web site at www.e-oscar.org to learn more about how this system can enhance child support enforcement in your State.

Iowa, South Dakota Families Paid Arrears

Families in Iowa and South Dakota recently received long awaited arrearages from the noncustodial parents owing child support.



pay child support obligations for federal investigation and prosecution, which led to the noncustodial father's indictment that June. In March 2007, the father was arrested in Arizona, where he was operating a construction company. In February 2008, he paid his entire outstanding arrearage of \$68,346.

In the Iowa case, which began in 1998, a noncustodial father had been making sporadic payments for his children, 12 and 11, who reside with their mother in Texas. Last May, after the Iowa Child Support Recovery Unit had exhausted all means to recover the arrearage, it referred the case to the Project Save Our Children (PSOC) Task Force for federal investigation and prosecution due to the parent's failure to pay legal child support obligations.

In another South Dakota case, which began in 1996, the last of five payments had been received as a result of a tax offset, for about \$2,000, in March 2005.

During the investigation, the father was found residing in Canada, which led the Office of Inspector General, Office of Investigations, in conjunction with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the United States Department of Agriculture, to verify his location and employment. Then, as a result of RCMP's encounter with the father, he sold property he owned in Iowa and paid off his arrearage total of \$25,206.

Three years later, the same parent was ordered to pay monthly child support for one child from a different mother. The last of three payments was received in this case, also in March 2000.

In 2005, a custodial parent and 15-year-old child living in South Dakota had received the last current child support payment on their case, which began in 1993. In April 2006, South Dakota referred the case for failure to

In April 2007, South Dakota referred the case to PSOC, which led to a June 2007 indictment. That August, the parent was arrested in Florida, where he was working at temporary employment agencies. He has since paid close to \$31,500 toward his outstanding child support arrearage, bringing the total down to \$1,500.

For information about the national Project Save Our Children task force, contact Nick Soppa at 202-401-4677 or nicholas.soppa@acf.hhs.gov.

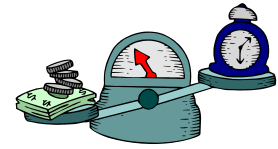
License Sale Pays Off in Lancaster County

After being picked up on a bench warrant, a noncustodial parent who owed child support informed the Judge that he would soon be selling his liquor license. That information was passed on to the Lancaster County Pennsylvania Domestic Relations Section (DRS), which is responsible for child support actions in the county.

The result: Last July, the DRS issued an attachment against the proceeds, and settlement took place in November. In this arrears-only case, the DRS received the full payment of \$35,423 for two children, with \$33,173 going to the family and the balance to the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare.

—**John Clark, OCSE, Region III**

Time is Money



By Joe Bodmer
OCSE

So it seems, I've been turned loose, as Stan King of Arkansas likes to say, to be a "Propeller-Head" and talk shop once again. This, of course, could be dangerous, especially coming from someone who likes to sound off as much as I do.

With some 20-odd States either exploring or actively planning a second-generation system, I am always looking for that one nugget of wisdom I can share that will have the biggest impact across all of these new and proposed projects. I think I found it. A recurring theme in all these projects is the need for solid project management.

In the past I've talked about hiring experienced, professional project managers, and that is important. However, where do project managers get their good perspectives, insights, and focus? Well, one important source is a Project Management Office, or PMO, for short.

PMOs can have widely varying charters, ranging from simple project offices, to comprehensive, enterprise-wide organizations. But in almost all instances, a PMO is entrusted to deliver three basic disciplines: *Schedule Management*—tracking the innumerable milestones, activities, and tasks in a project; *Task Management*—establishing the methodologies and standards, and monitoring the actual execution of projects; and, *Resource Management*—getting and keeping projects staffed, and their resource conflicts resolved.

So, where do you start? Here are four ideas for either creating a successful PMO from scratch, or making an existing PMO stronger:

#1— Empower the PMO. To get everyone focused on project success, the PMO must be empowered and equipped to serve. It must be

capable of quantifying and solving problems, like assigning the right resources to tasks, and then holding those resources accountable. It should also provide a collaborative repository for information sharing, and foster communication horizontally across project teams and vertically within them.

#2 – Focus the PMO on Methods, Processes, and Metrics. The PMO is the gatekeeper of a project's methodologies, standards, and metrics. First, audit your practice of project management.

Then allow the PMO to streamline the methodologies used, mapping-out different models, standards, or metrics, if needed, and finally determining the best practices to impose on your project, including the right software tools, reporting metrics, and processes.

#3 – Provide Access to the PMO. The PMO needs to be embraced by all project stakeholders. The only way to accomplish this is to ensure all stakeholders, inside and outside the project, have access to, and provide support for, the PMO.

#4 – Don't overcomplicate the PMO. Far too often, PMOs fall into the trap of utilizing software systems and tools built for techies, not program staff. This proverbial "black box" approach can often discourage acceptance of the whole PMO concept by project members and stakeholders. The trick is to find tools that are relatively straightforward to learn, but more importantly, can be readily implemented and their use consistently maintained over time by the entire project. A resource-loaded schedule does no one any good if it isn't kept up-to-date.

So, before you organize your next project, consider implementing a Project Management Office. It just might pay for itself in improved coordination and communication; after all, time is money.

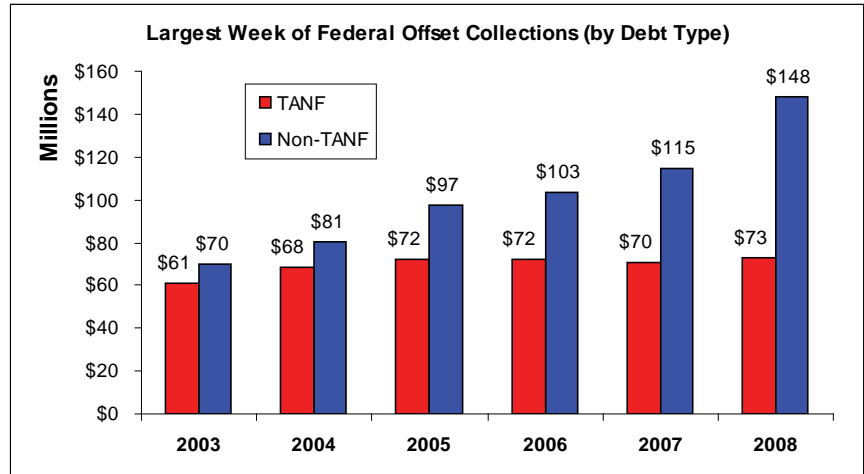
Tech Talk

we pulled in \$185 million. To put this figure in perspective, the Federal Offset Program first began in 1982. Annual collections didn't exceed \$221 million until 1985.

Normal growth in this cycle is expected. However, this kind of jump is primarily attributable to the additional cases States certified because of the DRA provision allowing non-TANF cases in which the child has passed the age of majority to be eligible for Tax Refund Offset. When you break the collections out by debt type, it becomes apparent. Notice in the chart above how 2008's non-TANF collections equal the 2004 Total (combined TANF and non-TANF)!

It's Going to be an Exciting Summer

As a result of the Economic Stimulus Act of 2008 in May of this year, the Department of Treasury will begin sending out approximately 130 million tax rebate payments totaling over \$100 billion. These payments will be eligible for offset. To say the collections attributable to these payments will be "significant" would be an understatement. After looking over the details of the package and comparing them to the



previous two tax rebate initiatives (performed in 2001 and 2003), we conservatively estimate this will result in an additional \$700 million in child support collections through Federal Tax Refund Offset.

We know what you are thinking, "No way. That number is huge!" But it's true, and most importantly, just consider what this means for children and families all across the Nation.

Additional recipients of Commissioner's award (from page 2):

Katie Donley (OCSE, US Delegation); Robert G. Spector, John Sampson, and Mariana Silveira (US Delegation); Kay Farley (NCSEA); Linda Elrod and Ann Estlin (International Society of Family Law); Gary Caswell and Gloria DeHart (International Bar Association); Shireen Fisher and Patty Whalen (International Association of Women Judges)

Child Support Report

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