

Child Support Report



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Child Support's Tribal Organizations Growing With Pride

By Deborah Yates, Past President
National Tribal Child Support Association

Lisa Schwartz, President
National Association of Tribal Child Support Directors

Tribal child support enforcement has gained incredible momentum and energetic force within the global child support effort. The program history is comparatively brief having received federal authorization and funding in 2004. Now there are 37 comprehensive child support programs and 9 start-up programs.

Two tribal child support organizations have grown over the past 10 years to address the needs of the tribal child support community—the National Tribal Child Support Association (NTCSA) and the National Association of Tribal Child Support Directors (NATCSD).

NTCSA formed in 2001; its mission statement promotes partnering with tribal, state and federal professionals to “improve the quality of life for Indian children through communication, training and public awareness.” The NTCSA Annual Training Conference will be held July 25 – 29, 2010, and hosted by the Mescalero Apache Tribe at the Inn of the Mountain Gods Resort in Mescalero, NM. More information on the organization and the annual training conference may be found at www.supporttribalchildren.com.

NATCSD formed in 2005 in response to the unique needs of the tribal child support director or otherwise



Deborah Yates



Lisa Schwartz

designated leader of each tribal child support program. Semiannual meetings provide a forum for tribal child support directors to discuss common problems and solutions related to program administration, inter-jurisdictional relations, federal regulations and other matters.

Positions for the executive board—President, Vice-President, Treasurer and Secretary—in both organizations are chosen by an electoral process. Membership for the NTCSA is open to anyone in the child support field while membership for the NATCSD is limited to the director or other designee of the tribe.

Lisa Schwartz is Director of the Oneida Nation Child Support Program and can be reached at lschwartz@oneidanation.org.

Commissioner's Chirps



See the Commissioner's brief and timely messages for child support professionals now on the OCSE website.

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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Child Support Enforcement

Foreseeing Greater Communication With Tribal Programs



Today the national child support program includes 46 tribal child support programs—37 comprehensive and 9 start-up programs. This growth in tribal programs is an exciting time for the national child support program, and an important opportunity to serve children and their families living in Indian country.

Most of these programs have only become comprehensive in the past year or two, but I am impressed by the commitment and energy of tribal leaders, program directors and staff to implement and strengthen their programs to make a real difference in the lives of children in Indian country.

Many tribal programs are beginning to explore automation. Years of collaborative planning and hard work paid off in March when OCSE hosted a tribal meeting in Dallas and a web-based meeting in Denver to begin the process for tribal systems implementation. Thank you to all who participated. Please see Joe Bodmer's article on page 3 for the full story.

The power of tribal child support programs is to improve the economic resources of children, but to do so in ways that deepen the connection between children and their parents. This is vitally important work. Tribal programs operate in a range of geographic and economic environments. Yet, even before the recent economic downturn, the Bureau of Indian Affairs reported that half of the national tribal labor force living on or near reservations was unemployed, and a third of those who were working had incomes below poverty. (See [Office of Indian Services, Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Department of Interior, 2005 American Indian Population and Labor Force Report](#))

For tribal child support programs that serve parents without employment opportunities, the effectiveness of standard income withholding and other enforcement practices is limited. Instead, many tribal child support programs credit in-kind income that can contribute financially to the child's household. Tribal programs often ask a broader question that gets to the heart of the matter: how can noncustodial fathers and mothers contribute to their children? Indian and Native teens experience the highest rate of suicide of any population group in the country. By finding ways to positively re-engage fathers in their children's lives, the tribal child support program can help to repair families and communities. I can think of nothing more important.

Good government-to-government relationships means good communication, and I foresee we have a lot of good work to look forward to together. Last month in Lapwai, ID, I had the chance to visit the Nez Perce Tribe in Idaho and meet with tribal leaders, as well as directors of other Region X tribal programs. I, along with OCSE staff, will continue to reach out to strengthen our two-way communications with tribal leaders and program directors. I also appreciate the number of tribal and state child support programs that have built effective relationships that can tackle such challenging issues as jurisdiction, case transfer and state debt.

I'm honored to be part of a government program that helps fund tribes to build effective programs that will best serve tribal children and families.

Vicki Turetsky



Choices, Choices, Choices

By Joe Bodmer
OCSE

To MTS or not to MTS, that is the question. OK, maybe that's too dramatic, but at least tribes now can begin to consider the answer. The Model Tribal System (MTS) is being readied for release to tribes. The day we've worked so hard to see is finally here.

But should tribes be looking to immediately install the MTS? The short answer is no. Tribes should take their time in deciding whether the MTS, a state child support system, office automation, or building their own system (albeit with tribal funds) makes the most sense for their particular situation. There is no rush to install any one solution, and I would encourage all tribes to do their due diligence, particularly with regard to the MTS, and carefully assess their automation needs.

So what is their due diligence? First and foremost, it's considering whether or not the MTS would be overkill for their particular program. But how would they know? Well, let's think about that. This article identifies some of

the considerations, assumptions, constraints and risks that every tribe should weigh before deciding which option best suits their needs.

Even before they think about cost, there are many other factors to consider, such as the size of their program, caseload and staff; whether or not their program could technically support a complex, automated child support system; and probably most important, will the MTS meet their tribal child support program's needs without significant change or enhancement?

Of course, cost is a factor, even though the tribes will only have to pay 10 percent of the total cost to install the MTS. Under the new systems regulations at 45 CFR 310, installation costs of the MTS are matched at the 90 percent Federal Financial Participation reimbursement rate.

Nevertheless, the tribal share of those costs could be as high as \$5,000 to \$10,000, and likely more for large tribes. And that's only the beginning. There are also ongoing costs for maintenance and operations; costs that can reasonably be estimated to run about \$1,000 to \$2,000 per month, or up to \$24,000 per year. Again, larger



Model Tribal System

Designed By Tribes, For Tribes

Attendees at the Model Tribal System training



tribes may have higher costs. The tribal share of these maintenance and operations costs, however, unlike MTS installation, are only reimbursable at the tribes' regular rate of reimbursement, meaning they could run anywhere from \$2,400 to \$4,800 or more per month.

Alternatively, tribes could choose to negotiate with and install or use a state's child support system under an intergovernmental agreement, enter into a service agreement with another tribe, form a tribal consortium, or continue to rely on office automation to handle the tribes' child support program operations. Would these alternatives cost more or less? Most tribes already know the cost of office automation by using their office networks, printers, personal computers, etc. Installing a state's system, however, could entail costs that equal or exceed those of the MTS. But tribes won't know until they do the research and negotiations—their due diligence. (I'll save for a future article a conversation about potential

design and development costs for enhancements to the various automation choices out there.)

So tribes are probably asking themselves, what is the bottom line? I would say the bottom line is to take time in making a decision. Given the six years the tribal child support program collectively spent designing, developing and testing the MTS, not to mention the publishing of systems regulations, it just seems reasonable to take some time, maybe a few extra months, to assess the options, the path to automating their tribal child support program. After all, what's the old adage? "If you don't have time to do it right, you must have time to do it over."

If you have questions about this article or your automation options, Joe can be reached at 202-690-1234 or joseph.bodmer@acf.hhs.gov.



HHS Regional Director Margorie Petty spoke at the the Model Tribal System rollout" this March in Dallas.



New Video

'Native American Veterans: Storytelling for Healing'

Storytelling has often played an essential part in healing in indigenous cultures. Stories that heal contain many of the values important to native cultures. These values include acceptance, courage, truth and spirituality. When these are in place, some individuals can begin to make meaning of their experiences.

On Veterans Day last November, the Administration for Native Americans (ANA) launched a video to help Native American veterans and their families face certain issues through storytelling. The video "Native American Veterans: Storytelling for Healing" features interviews with Native American veterans from World War II, Vietnam, the Gulf War and Operation Iraqi



Freedom. See the [ANA website](http://www.ana.gov) for more about helping Native American veterans, such as interview tips for using storytelling for healing, and veterans' challenges to accessing help for healthcare, substance abuse, unemployment, homelessness and mental health issues.

Order the [free video](#) online. See a list of all available [resources](#) on the ANA website.



President's Advisory Council Recommends Partnerships To Increase Father Involvement

By Debra Pontisso
OCSE

In February 2009, President Obama created the Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships to strengthen partnerships between government and community-based organizations serving the most vulnerable in our society. The Advisory Council brought together leaders and experts around six “priority areas,” including fatherhood and healthy families.

As part of the Advisory Council’s recent report to the President, the Task Force on Fatherhood and Healthy Families issued its recommendations. ([See pages 26-51 in the report.](#))

The task force formed its recommendations with the belief that “responsible, engaged fathers are critical to the financial, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual well-being of children.” The report also acknowledges that responsible fatherhood requires the determination to postpone becoming a father until adequately prepared to accept full responsibility.

Here’s an overview of the recommendations to the President on increasing father involvement:

- Convene quarterly White House Partnership Roundtables to encourage a variety of sectors, including private foundations and corporations, to form partnerships with existing fatherhood groups, and experts to address areas in which increased father involvement can strengthen the well-being of children in America.
- Host an annual Father’s Day celebration at the White House to honor exemplary fathers and to highlight advances in father involvement resulting from the government’s interdepartmental working groups and the strategic partnerships formed at the quarterly roundtables.

- Continue to affirm the important role of fathers and continue to model the life of a committed husband and father.
- Challenge government departments and agencies to cross departmental lines and create working groups to address their policies that affect fathers’ involvement in the lives of their children.
- Increase participation of federal agencies in the funding of fatherhood programming, especially in areas of critical importance.
- Invest in high-quality program evaluation to help the fatherhood field define and increase its impact on specific measures and in so doing, increase public understanding of and support for this critical work.
- Develop fatherhood tools and products that are culturally and linguistically relevant.
- Engage the academic community in developing curricula to train aspiring health and human service professionals to better meet the needs of fathers.
- Ensure that programming for couples’ employment training, job placement, and financial literacy are allowable activities under federally funded fatherhood, healthy relationship and healthy marriage grants.

Joe Jones, task force member and President/CEO of the Center for Urban Families in Baltimore, MD, said, “I was excited to be included in the process of making recommendations to the President, particularly because President Obama understands what it is like for millions of children in our country who suffer the consequences of father absence.”

States' Electronic Payments Increase in 2009

By Nancy Benner
OCSE

Have we really seen more than a decade of electronic payments (e-payments) for child support? State child support agencies continue to make strides to increase the number of e-payments, helping to streamline the collections process and get money to families more quickly.

In calendar year 2009, the states' average estimated percent of electronic collections reached 46 percent, a nearly 10 percent increase from 2008.

In addition, 12 states reported an electronic funds transfer (EFT) percent above 50 percent for 2009: Alaska, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Nebraska, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Washington.

States actively promote e-payments with employers, and increasingly states are passing legislation requiring employers with a certain number of employees or orders to remit electronically. Twelve states—California, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Nevada, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas and Virginia—mandate e-payments either through legislation or through administrative rule. Those states have seen their percent of EFT payments increase significantly.

Role of the SDU

State disbursement units (SDUs) serve as the collection and disbursement agencies for state child support offices. Payments arrive at SDUs from various sources such as:

- Employers (deducting from their employees' income per the child support orders)
- Direct payers (noncustodial parents not under an income withholding order)
- Third-party providers (payroll service providers, unemployment insurance agencies, worker's compensation companies, federal benefit agencies such as the Social Security Administration)

The most common e-payments received by SDUs are:

- Automated Clearinghouse (ACH) credit payments initiated by the employer or third-party provider
- ACH debit payments made through a state's web-based payment service (state- or vendor-run), designed to accommodate small- to medium-size employers
- ACH debit payments made through a financial institution's online service

OCSE and the SDUs are working with several federal agencies (Social Security Administration, Railroad Retirement Board, Office of Personnel Management, Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Labor) to convert benefit payments attached for child support to e-payments.

If you have any questions, please contact Nancy Benner at 202-401-5528 or nancy.benner@acf.hhs.gov.

Commissioner Commends Louisiana



OCSE Commissioner Vicki Turetsky (left, with Region VI Program Manager James Travis and Charla Long) commended Louisiana Child Support Director Robbie Endris and the 400 attendees at the state training conference in March for their extraordinary accomplishments. She explained that while OCSE's core mission will remain intact, the program continues to shift from its welfare cost-recovery and law enforcement origins towards a more holistic family support approach.

She reviewed six aspects of the program: prevention, engaging fathers from birth, increasing economic stability, building healthy family relationships, increasing health care coverage, and reducing family violence. —Charla Long, OCSE Region VI





Georgia Workers Grin and Bear It For the Children

This year, the Georgia Division of Child Support Services and Fatherhood Program's annual "Bearable Hugs for Georgia's Children" campaign collected more than 16,600 teddy bears and other stuffed animals for children.

Following a kick-off event, the toys were distributed to children receiving care at pediatric facilities throughout Georgia, women's shelters, and through law enforcement agencies and other organizations serving children.

OCSE Region IV staff collected 100 bears and staff member Kimberly Pope attended the kick-off event.

Child Support Director Keith Horton said, "I am truly amazed at the generosity of our staff and the willingness of so many people in each community to help support us in spite of the tough economic times going on right now."

Georgia Fatherhood Program Manager David Harris said, "It is really unbelievable how a little stuffed animal can help a law enforcement officer to calm a child involved in a tense domestic situation, or hospital personnel bringing comfort to a child brought into the emergency room."

Staff from the Division of Child Support Services office in Griffin, GA, donated stuffed animals to local police and fire departments in February as part of the Georgia Division of Child Support Services and Fatherhood Program's annual "Bearable Hugs for Georgia's Children" campaign.

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Carmen R. Nazario
Assistant Secretary for Children and Families

Vicki Turetsky
Commissioner, OCSE

Robert Cohen
Director, Division of Consumer Services

Elaine Blackman
Editor
202-401-5353, (fax) 202-205-5927
elaine.blackman@acf.hhs.gov

