

# Child Support Report

OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT



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## One Phone Call Makes a Difference for New York State Partnership and Parents



By Scott Cade, Director  
New York State Center for Child Well-Being  
Division of Child Support Enforcement

In this era of exploding communication alternatives, a simple phone call can still have a profound impact on the availability and delivery of services to parents raising their children while living apart.

As a state child support program director, I speak with a broad range of individuals: staff, colleagues across the state and country, custodial and noncustodial parents, legislative offices, vendors, the courts and advocates. As New York's director over the last five years, few calls have proven as rewarding as one in 2006; rewarding in the sense that a simple idea was shared, a collaborative initiative designed, and the individuals and circumstances the initiative sought to address materialized, resulting in improved parental support for children.

Donna Linder, Executive Director for Child Find of America, called to arrange a visit to discuss a federal fatherhood demonstration grant opportunity her organization was considering. After a series of discussions, Child Find of America submitted a proposal for the Parent Help program.

As with any good partnership, the proposal was designed to bring together the strengths of otherwise independent entities to produce

the maximum output as efficiently as possible. The Parent Help proposal built upon Child Find of America's experience in family crisis intervention and offered a new opportunity for our child support program to address the issues not directly related to child support, which can interfere with a parent's ability or willingness to meet their child support obligation.



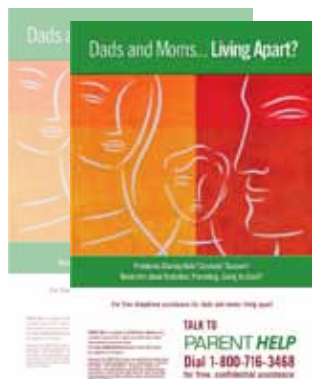
Scott Cade

### How and Why 'Parent Help' Works

The Parent Help program offers telephone-based counseling and mediation to address the poor relationships between fathers and mothers that damage a child's healthy growth. To support the program's mission, the New York child support office serves on its advisory board, provides child support training for its staff, and serves as a referral source for parents who may benefit from its services.

Since fall 2006, the Parent Help program has received more than 7,000 calls for assistance from custodial and noncustodial parents in 49 New York counties and New

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**Parent Help services are now available nationwide. Contact Donna Linder, 845-883-6060 or [donnalinder@childfindofamerica.org](mailto:donnalinder@childfindofamerica.org).**

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

## The Child Support and Domestic Violence Connection



This month is National [Domestic Violence Awareness Month](#). I hope you will take a look at [President Obama's proclamation](#) on [whitehouse.gov](#).

I hope you will also read two *Child Support Report* articles, one last month and one in this issue; both discuss the importance of reducing the risk of domestic violence as we establish and enforce child support obligations. We can do this by improving the confidentiality and safety of our procedures, training our staff, increasing client education, and providing enforcement options to parents worried that they or their children may be in harm's way. The research is clear that most domestic violence survivors want to pursue the child support that their children need and deserve if they can do so safely and confidentially.

In [last month's issue](#) (page 6), "Domestic Violence: Safely Pursuing Child Support" highlights some of the situations domestic violence survivors face and the "green, yellow and red light" strategies that child support programs can adopt to help reduce the risk of harm. Over the past decade, OCSE, several state and local child support agencies, courts and advocacy groups have worked together to identify best practices in the area of child support and domestic violence. It is my hope and expectation that state and local child support offices will renew and deepen their collaborations with domestic violence coalition partners to implement additional safeguards and protocols to reduce the risk of domestic violence.

To support and complement efforts of state and local child support programs to address the needs of domestic violence survivors, OCSE is partnering with the [National Resource Center on Domestic Violence](#) and the [Family Violence Prevention and Services Program](#) (under ACF's Family and Youth Services Bureau), and the OCSE Judicial Task Force to develop online resources for the child support community. These resources could include training material, research, brochures for parents, a caseworker referral guide, a "bench card" for the judiciary—and a blog topic devoted to domestic violence and child support.

Please send us an article about your agency's best practices so that we can showcase them in future editions of the *Child Support Report*.

The second article about child support and domestic violence, in this issue on page 3, explains the Family Violence Indicator (FVI), an important marker that flags individuals at risk of family violence in our automated systems. The article explains how the indicator helps child support workers to pursue child support while protecting the location of the parent or child who is a family violence survivor.

Both articles point out the role of child support in helping parents at risk of domestic violence secure needed financial resources, while making sure they and their children remain safe.

**Vicki Turetsky**



**OCSE's new blog site is up and running. Share your comments and ideas with fellow child support professionals and other stakeholders in the program on topics that appear in the monthly "Commissioner's Voice."**

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York City. Most of these parents have sought the free and confidential assistance from Parent Help to resolve conflicts over child custody, visitation, child support and co-parenting. Through Parent Help, the child support program in New York serves as a catalyst for improved parental relationships that can lead to greater child support and improved child well-being.

In seeking to improve program performance, child

support directors continuously look for ways to increase efficiency, notably in a time of scarce resources. New York's involvement with Parent Help has given us the opportunity to improve performance and service delivery in a cost-efficient manner.

The call from Donna Linder in 2006 has made a difference in our program's ability to serve children and families. The next call a parent makes to Parent Help could make a difference in the life of his or her child.

## Safely Pursuing Child Support: How the 'Family Violence Indicator' Helps

By Christine Jennings  
OCSE

*This article continues the discussion in last month's [Child Support Report](#), page 6, about the critical intersection between domestic violence and child support.*



Jane has left her abusive partner, John, and moved to a safe location to protect herself and their daughter, Mary. John has moved and obtained a job in another state. Jane is working, but she is not making enough to support Mary and herself. Jane has come to your child support office for help.

Child support is an integral cornerstone for the economic well-being of many of America's families. Real concerns arise, though, if a noncustodial parent fears retribution or threats of violence when seeking child support. This is where use of the Family Violence Indicator (FVI) can provide a safety net. The FVI provides a way for child support to be pursued while protecting the location of the victim.

When welfare reform was passed in 1996, it greatly expanded OCSE's Federal Parent Locator Service (FPLS), by creating:

- The National Directory of New Hires (NDNH), which contains new hires, wage records and unemployment data from across the country; and
- The Federal Case Registry (FCR), which contains child support cases—including “person records” for each noncustodial parent, custodial party and child—from all 54 states and territories.

These two, large databases match daily to provide employment and unemployment data to states for their child support cases.

Along with this powerful access to nationwide information came a new responsibility. Welfare reform required the FCR to protect persons in danger of family violence. States were instructed to put in place processes for sending FVIs to the FCR on persons requiring protection. The FCR would release no information on anyone with an FVI.

The FVI was not intended to be put on the perpetrator of violence. The FVI is not an indicator that someone is, or may be, violent. It protects victims; a “whereabouts protection indicator,” so to speak, for safely pursuing child support. Consider this example:

Can Jane get child support without risking her and Mary's whereabouts becoming known to John?

With the FVI, the answer is *yes*. The caseworker should place an FVI on Jane and Mary's “person records” to protect their whereabouts. The FPLS will not release any information about either Jane or Mary, even if John goes to another state and tries to establish his own case just so he can find where they live.

The caseworker should not place an FVI on John. John is the perpetrator of violence, not the victim. If an FVI is placed on John, it will stop the flow of information on him from the FPLS, including employment and asset information, which is vital to collecting support for Jane and Mary.

### Important Points to Remember

- An FVI should not automatically be placed on everyone in a case; it should be placed only on those persons who need protection.
- An FVI usually is set on custodians and children in child support cases, but there can be exceptions. There might be a mother who feels forced to give up her children. The custodial party in this case might be the abuser who could harass or harm her if he can find her. The mother might need protection as the noncustodial parent.
- The FVI stops the flow of FPLS information to all states on a person shared in common. If two states have the same person on a case, neither state will receive information from the FPLS, including the state that set the FVI.
- The FCR will send a “disclosure prohibited” message if a request for information is received for a person protected by an FVI.
- The FVI remains on a person until the state that set the FVI removes it. It is up to each state to make sure FVIs are removed when they are no longer relevant.

The FVI can provide an effective means to safely pursue child support. To be most effective, however, caseworkers need to understand how to use the FVI correctly. Regular child support can make the difference between

a person staying with an abusive partner and having the wherewithal to leave.

For more information about the FVI, contact your [State Technical Support liaison](#) shown on the OCSE website.

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## **FIDM Report: Oklahoma Collects \$40,000—and More With a Little Help from its Friends**

**By Matthew Marsolais**  
**OCSE**  
**Andy Szymak**  
***Oklahoma Child Support Services***

The Oklahoma Child Support Services office recently received a check for \$81,000 for one family, with a little help from its friends—the in-state and multi-state FIDM (Financial Institution Data Match) programs. Here’s how it happened:

Oklahoma Child Support Services received a “limited services request” from the Arizona Division of Child Support to freeze and seize an account in a financial institution in Oklahoma. The custodial parent in Arizona had received information that the obligor obtained a large property insurance settlement in Oklahoma. After locating the obligor, a caseworker in Arizona referred the request to Oklahoma. Arizona sent a UIFSA transmittal, a copy of the child support order, and the potential location of the obligor’s bank to Oklahoma for review and assistance.

The Oklahoma child support worker responding to the request contacted financial institutions near the small town where the obligor lived. After significant investigation, the Oklahoma worker confirmed that the obligor had an account at a financial institution and sent a levy to seize the obligor’s assets totaling \$81,000.

### **Negotiating the Settlement**

Following the levy action, the obligor’s attorney initially argued that Oklahoma had no jurisdiction to work the levy on behalf of Arizona. He also went on to argue that there was no solid underlying basis for the levy action. However, after a response from Oklahoma stating that the agency did have jurisdiction and that there was an order establishing paternity, the obligor ran out of arguments. It was then only a matter of reaching a negotiated settlement

over the \$81,000 Oklahoma had in its possession from the levy.

After much negotiation among the obligor’s attorney, Oklahoma, Arizona and the custodial parent, the final settlement amount of \$40,709 was reached. Though the activity between Oklahoma and Arizona did not involve a data match received by either state from the obligor’s financial institution, the existing relationship between child support agencies and the financial community quickened the process to freeze and seize the delinquent obligor’s account.

### **Insurance Settlement Case**

In another example of partnership to collect past-due child support, a custodial parent provided information to Oklahoma Child Support Services about funds the obligor received from an insurance settlement. The obligor in this case was an “inconsistent payer” who owed \$17,000. In November 2009, the custodial parent advised her local child support office in Shawnee, OK, that the obligor received a lump-sum payment from a life insurance policy. With assistance from the custodial parent, Oklahoma located the financial institution where the obligor conducted business and initiated a levy action, resulting in the family receiving \$17,323. This allowed the obligor to become current with his child support obligation.

### **Process with Bank Pays Off**

The last example of cooperation involves Wells Fargo Bank and the Texas Attorney General. Wells Fargo will process Oklahoma FIDM levies only if they are accompanied with a Texas cover letter stating that Oklahoma FIDM levies are compliant with Texas law. A system has been in place for a number of years in which Oklahoma faxes their levies to the Texas Special Collections Unit where they are then forwarded to Wells



Fargo in Phoenix, AZ. With the cooperation of the Texas Special Collections Unit, Oklahoma collected \$607,225 since the fourth quarter of 2004.

### **FIDM Partnerships Helping Families**

During these difficult economic times, it is especially important to build new and foster existing relationships

between the public and private sectors to ensure families with children receive reliable sources of support. The FIDM program is an excellent example of how the partnership between state and federal government agencies, financial institutions and custodial parents results in payments to the children and families we serve.

### **Regional Highlights**

## **Model Initiatives Shine for Region II Directors**



OCSE Region II (New York) and the Puerto Rico Administration for Child Support cosponsored this year's annual Region II Child Support Directors meeting in San Juan, July 29 and 30. Commissioner Vicki Turetsky (*below, center*) discussed three major national policy initiatives: family-focused services, program efficiency enhancements, and the implementation of medical support within the context of national health care reform.

The importance of family-focused services was evident by the spectrum of guests. Warden Jerry Martinez and Reentry Coordinator Kirk Pigott of the Federal Bureau of Prisons discussed a Memorandum of Understanding with Puerto Rico's child support agency to better support an inmate's reentry process. Administrator Esteban Perez of Puerto Rico's TANF agency highlighted the child support and TANF interface process. Yanira Martinez of the Puerto Rico Governor's office expressed the Governor's support of family-centered services.

From the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) office, Regional Administrator Joyce Thomas and Joan Gibson discussed the important connections between the ASSET initiative and OCSE programs. (The ASSET initiative refers to expanding the Assets for

Independence [AFI] program, administered by the ACF Office of Community Services, to enable community-based nonprofits and government agencies to demonstrate an assets-based approach for giving low-income families a hand up out of poverty.) OCSE is supporting collaboration projects between state child support agencies and AFI grantees to assist parents in the child support caseload, including low-income custodial and noncustodial parents, in building certain assets and to incorporate child support information in financial literacy education. (See the AFI website <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ocs/afi/index.html> for more information.)

Commissioner Turetsky presented New Jersey Director Alisha Griffin with an achievement award for the state's implementation of NJKiDS, the first of the second-generation automated child support systems, being touted as a national model. Participants likewise congratulated New York Director Scott Cade on his state's noncustodial parent initiatives in collaboration with the state's Veterans Affairs and Department of Correctional Services, as well as Virgin Islands Director Regina DeChabert on her efforts to enhance interface between the child support and TANF agencies. (See page 1 article by Scott Cade about another New York State partnership.)

Puerto Rico Director Waddy Mercado and his staff hosted the event with warmth equaled only by the sun that rises over America's "Shining Star in the Caribbean."

—Jens A. Feck, Regional Program Manager, OCSE Region II



# Programs Celebrate 'Child Support Awareness Month'

A number of state, local and tribal jurisdictions around the country branded August as Child Support Awareness Month, while Kansas selected June. The child support programs celebrated with proclamations, displays, awards and events to raise awareness of their child support services.

Here are reports from a few:

## Kansas Presents Awards, Scholarship

Each year, the Kansas Child Support Enforcement Association requests that the Governor proclaim June as Child Support Awareness Month. This year, 10 board members attended the proclamation signing ceremony. The association marked awareness month with its annual awards to deserving local child support workers. The recognitions included the "Guardian Angel" award, presented to a 35-year child support veteran (*above photo*) responsible for 56 offsets (totaling \$45,000) under the federal farm subsidies offset program. Another, the "Most Unique Collection" award, was attributed to \$2,765 paid in cash by a noncustodial parent who wanted his fishing license back. (He had been paying \$10 a month since 1994.) The association also awarded a \$1,000 scholarship to a high school student with a GPA of 3.0 or higher and who is pursuing a field of study that will affect children and families.

## Maryland's Tender Shoots

For its celebration in August, Maryland launched a logo competition for employees of the Department of Human Resources and the Department of Social Services. The winning logo (*below*), "Tender Shoots Grow Best with the Support of all their Roots," reflects the core mission of the child support program.



The Department of Human Resources displayed on its website a video of Interim Secretary Brian Wilbon encouraging payment of child support. The department also decorated its front office windows with posters and provided "Grow Cups," a recyclable cup decorated with a 12-month calendar and packed with soil and seed, to jurisdictions for distribution at all local offices and the State Fair. And the Maryland Joint Child Support Council provided animal crackers to local jurisdictions for customers.

Local jurisdictions also promoted a range of activities: Allegany County set up at the downtown Farmer's Market twice and a local radio station interviewed court and child support staffs to promote paternity establishment. Charles County promoted its efforts in a 30-second slot on a local cable channel and partnered with its sheriff's office to hold an open house featuring McGruff the Crime Dog.

Lastly, a department press release recognized "25 Child Support Workers for Exemplary Service." The workers, selected by their peers, represent every part of the state. Interim Secretary Wilbon said, "Because the work they do is so critical to many, we are acknowledging staff whose performance and dedication reached the highest level of excellence."

## Region IX States Spread the Word

Region IX's Arizona, California, Guam and Nevada celebrated Child Support Awareness Month with outreach events and media spots to help promote the importance of child support to families and for custodial and noncustodial parents to learn more about the child support process. The Governors of Arizona, California and Guam





signed proclamations to commemorate the occasion and recognize the dedication of child support professionals, parents and community organizations that provide support and care to children all year long.

The Arizona Division of Child Support Enforcement promoted the awareness month on its website and in a Department of Economic Security “CommunityConnect” newsletter. The state shared burgundy ribbons at resource fairs and with local officials and child support partners such as hospitals, vital records offices and courts. Arizona Governor Janice Brewer received letters from several custodial parents thanking her for the proclamation. One parent wrote, “As a mother who is struggling to make ends meet, with an ex-husband who owes over \$17,000 in back child support, I truly appreciate the designation of August as Child Support Awareness Month.”

The California Department of Child Support Services offered a license release program for the month to encourage parents owing past due child support to contact the child support program. The “Get Back on the Road” program released driver licenses for noncustodial parents with suspended licenses who made a payment equal to one month of support plus \$25. The Solano County child support agency offered a workshop on child support basics, including how to open a case, establish a court

order for paternity and motivate parents to pay support. The county plans to offer workshops on review and adjustment, collecting arrears and the court process.

Guam Child Support Enforcement Division Director Barbara Cepeda wrote four weekly columns for the island’s “Pacific Daily News.” The articles focused on paternity issues, enforcement options, access and visitation and frequently asked questions. The division held weekend outreach events at local shopping centers, and a television station highlighted the program on its news broadcast.

Clark County, NV, held a Saturday “back to school” open house that celebrated both Child Support Awareness Month and the grand opening of the new Child Support Center of Southern Nevada. Hundreds of families visited the new center to meet with caseworkers and attend workshops on child support issues. Child support staff generously donated new school supplies to 286 children in the caseload.

## Up and Away in Chickasaw Nation

The Chickasaw Nation hosted three family-friendly events in August to recognize child support professionals and parents. A balloon launch kicked off the month-long celebration, where small children released balloons into the sky. More than 35 people showed their support of the awareness month by participating in a “Walk in the Park.” The celebration culminated with a Family Fun Day that featured children’s crafts, a martial arts demonstration and a children’s book giveaway. More than 200 area residents participated in the free event, with free transportation for families living in Ada, OK, offered by the Chickasaw Nation Road to Work program.

A food drive benefiting the Ada-Area Youth Shelter also was held. For more information about Chickasaw Nation Child Support Services visit [www.chickasaw.net](http://www.chickasaw.net).

—Reports from Barbara Lacina (OCSE Region VII) Rose Bynum (OCSE Region III), Rachel Freitas (OCSE Region IX) and Dana Lance (Chickasaw Nation)



Photo by Chickasaw Nation



# Reflections on 35 Years of the Program

## Interstate Case Processing: From Black Hole to Technology Innovations

By Kerry Newcombe  
OCSE

Remember when sending an interstate case to another state was like sending it to the proverbial black hole? I do! I was a caseworker 19 years ago, when interstate cases were the most frustrating and difficult to process.

Back then, interstate case processing was manual and labor-intensive. Locate tools available to caseworkers were limited, and if the noncustodial parent was in another state, it was even more challenging. I remember the elation I felt when I finally found the noncustodial parent after following countless leads—that is, until I realized the noncustodial parent lived in another state.

Undeterred, I would start the arduous task of compiling the interstate package. The first step typically required referencing a manual to determine documents needed to process the case in the other state. Next, I started the process of compiling the documentation, which normally took up to 30 days, and in some situations longer.

When it was all said and done, the entire package was on average 2 inches thick. Making matters worse, the interstate package had to be sent to the responding state by “snail mail.” Sometimes I would receive an acknowledgement back, and sometimes not.

Weeks would pass, which often turned to months, with no correspondence. It was not uncommon to spend hours tracking down the office responsible for processing the case, acquiring the caseworker name and phone number, and finally getting the caseworker to answer the phone. This was commonly referred to as the dreaded black hole; your case went in and never came out.

Over the years, OCSE and the states have improved interstate case processing with these new technologies:

- **Intergovernmental Referral Guide (IRG):** This centralized, online repository provides vital information required by the responding state to process a case and eliminates the need to sift through a manual since the information is available with just the click of a mouse. More importantly, states continually update their information.
- **Child Support Enforcement Network (CSENet):** This application enables states to send and request

updates electronically and reduces the need for snail mail. It has transformed how states communicate, streamlined case processing, and saved thousands of trees along the way.

- **Query Interstate Cases for Kids (QUICK):** This online application offers caseworkers the ability to view financial, case status and activities in the responding state in real time. The days of waiting for phone calls or anticipated correspondence are now a thing of the past.
- **Interstate Case Reconciliation (ICR):** The ICR is a process states use to synchronize interstate caseloads and provides caseworkers with the knowledge of whether their case is still open or closed in the responding state, or has been transferred to another county.

As we celebrate 35 years of the program, we should feel a sense of accomplishment for the innovative solutions in interstate processing. However, since about 20 percent of our population moves annually, we should continue to seek ways to improve. Congratulations on your efforts!

### *Child Support Report*

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