

Child Support Report

OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT



National Women's History Month

See the President's proclamation and womenshistorymonth.gov.

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National child support forum envisions changes in society, program

What do “millennials” have to do with the child support program? Plenty, according to Pew Research Center executive vice president Paul Taylor, who presented a session at the National Child Support Enforcement Association policy forum, last month in Washington, DC.

Millennials are the generation of American teens and twenty-somethings “who are making the passage into adulthood at the start of a new millennium,” says Taylor. They are confident, self-expressive, liberal, upbeat and open to change, as well as more ethnically and racially diverse. Nearly 3 in 4 of those who go online use social networking sites.

Millennials represent the face of the new child support customer for the coming decades, says Taylor, and child support professionals should take note. Taylor’s session was apropos for the forum’s theme of “Envisioning the Future of Child Support.”

The child support program is changing in many other ways, too. OCSE Commissioner Vicki Turetsky reviewed with the audience a paradigm shift in strategies to increase reliable support to children. Child support professionals are relying more on data analysis to select tools that will help increase child support in each particular case. Automated enforcement tools will pay off in most cases. However, for cases where standard enforcement tools are ineffective, the research indicates that additional tools can help increase support collections, including setting appropriate orders, reducing debt, distributing child support to families, addressing parenting time, and partnering with employment programs.

At least 29 states operate mostly local employment-related programs for noncustodial parents with child support program involvement that are funded through a variety of sources. The Commissioner pointed out that rigorous research studies have shown that increasing noncustodial parent participation in child support-coordinated jobs programs increases child support payments.

Other presenters at the forum featured research in their counties and states on setting appropriate orders and modification of orders, strengthening families through asset-building initiatives, addressing parenting time, and engaging parents in the child support process. And others addressed mission-based planning as the child support program continues to evolve. —*Elaine Blackman*



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

Is there more we can do to help moms?



March is National Women's History Month and a good time to consider how women—and, more specifically, moms—are faring in today's economy.

First, the good news: we are seeing an upward trend nationally in the number of newly hired employees for the last 7 months. The economy is moving in the right direction.

But the sobering news is that women have experienced substantial job loss and declining earnings. While men took the biggest employment hits during the recession, women's employment has lagged behind during the recovery. The majority of women's job losses have been in public sector employment. Overall, the poverty rate for custodial families has increased significantly in recent years. (*Falling Behind*, the Women's Foundation of California, January 2012)

The economic climate plays a role in how states set child support guidelines. When states review their child support guidelines (every 4 years), they look at studies of child-rearing expenditures that vary by age and economic method. One is the USDA's *Expenditures on Children by Families: 2010 Annual Report*.

The report shows that a middle-income family with a child born in 2010 can expect to spend about \$226,920 for food, shelter and other necessities to raise that child over the next 17 years. That projection represents a 2 percent increase over 2009. The study also notes that family income affects child-rearing costs, as do costs of education beyond high school and geographic variation.

More custodial moms are saying they have lost their jobs or are working two and three jobs just to cover basic expenses. Many jobs are part-time, minimum-wage, and do not offer health insurance. When noncustodial parents can't find work either, and stop paying reliable child support, family budgets face a perfect storm.

I understand that, up close and personal. For many years, I was that single mom raising two wonderful children by myself and working three part-time jobs. And many of you have been in the same boat, worried about how you will pay the rent, the electric bill, gas for the car, the children's new shoes, the credit card bills—how you will stay afloat until child support payments start coming in.

Our mission is clear—to obtain reliable support for

children. We have many powerful enforcement tools to collect child support when noncustodial parents have income—wage withholding, bank account seizures, and driver's license and passport suspensions. And for 70 percent of the cases with support orders, these tools result in more than \$24 billion in support income for families.

But our challenge is what to do when standard enforcement does not work. Our child support program is a balancing act, and sometimes there simply is not enough money to go around. Family-centered child support services means, quite simply, obtaining child support in a way that addresses the specific circumstances of the family in front of us. When the family needs the money, but the noncustodial parent is unemployed, we have to try something else, or the family will go without help. We need to work with both parents if we are to effectively serve families in a time of economic need. "Sorry, we can't help you" doesn't put food on the table.

A child support professional recently emailed: "I have been working in child support for over a decade. It is good that there is more assistance for fathers than there used to be, but why is there no assistance for mothers? It seems we assume the only thing mothers need is child support; that only fathers need assistance on parenting. ... There should be initiatives for both mother and father."

Although there is no question that child support programs are struggling with budget cutbacks, there are many low-cost things we can do to do a better job connecting both parents to a range of community resources to help them keep their families afloat.

Are there brochures in the waiting room that tell moms and dads where to apply for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) when they are broke? Do our websites direct parents to local VITA centers (*see EITC reminder on p. 3*) that help working parents file for Earned Income Tax Credits? Do we refer unemployed mothers and fathers to the workforce one-stop in the community? Do we ask about the health care coverage of the parents, as well as the children?

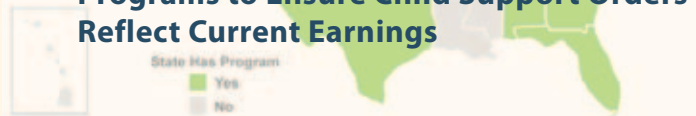
I'd like to hear more from the child support community. How do you assist moms to get help beyond traditional child support enforcement? And what about the grandparents in your caseload who are raising grandchildren? Please leave a comment on this blog.

Vicki Turetsky

New resources on OCSE website

Three new resources on the OCSE website describe innovative state child support practices across the country:

- **Work-Oriented Programs**
- **Debt-Compromise Policies**
- **Programs to Ensure Child Support Orders Reflect Current Earnings**



EITC reminder

It's tax season again and another opportunity to promote the [IRS Earned Income Tax Credit](#)

(EITC) program to our child support customers who are low- and middle-income workers. Custodial parents can particularly benefit from EITC.

New information on the [OCSE website](#) may help child support agencies increase participation in EITC. Learn about the IRS Voluntary Income Tax Assistance Centers located across the country that can help people prepare their tax returns free of charge.

EITC is one of the largest antipoverty programs. Last year, more than 26 million people received nearly \$59 billion in EITC. Four of five people eligible for the credit claim it.



States increase EFT collection rates

Despite the slow economy, almost every state increased the percent of child support payments it received electronically in 2011. OCSE asked the state disbursement units to report their electronic funds transfer (EFT) rate based on number of payments from employers, direct payers, interstate payments, and unemployment insurance payments.

Overall, the 2011 numbers were positive. The national average of EFT collections in 2011 was 56 percent; a 6 percent increase over 2010. Pennsylvania had the highest collection rate (79 percent), followed by Indiana (77 percent), Nebraska (74 percent), California (67 percent), and Florida (67 percent).

Guam had the largest increase of EFTs collected in 2011 compared to the percent of EFTs collected in 2010 (57 percent).

States that mandate EFT or that offer no-cost or low-cost online services to employers saw larger increases than others. Sixteen states and territories require employers to remit their child support payments electronically. Thirty-eight states offer online services to employers.

For further information about states using EFT, contact nancy.benner@acf.hhs.gov.



Federal offset collections up again

2011 was a good year for the children and families served by the federal offset programs. Technical innovations, added automated processes, continued collaboration with federal partners and hard work by federal, state and local child support workers helped net \$2.37 billion in past-due support. More than \$2.36 billion was collected from noncustodial parents' federal income tax refunds and another \$9 million was intercepted from administrative payments, including more than \$1 million from agricultural subsidy payments. The total was a 12.5 percent increase over the previous year and the fourth year that offset collections topped \$2 billion.



Indiana waiver sends healthy marriage classes to jail

By Sue Swayze

Program Coordinator

Hoosier Commitment: Parents TWogether for Indiana Families

We may be the last kid in, but we are giving our demonstration waiver a run for its money.

In the fall of 2007, Central Indiana was awarded the 15th—and last—Section 1115 demonstration waiver to fund a “healthy marriage” project, under the HHS Administration for Children and Families’ Healthy Marriage Initiative.

Starting just before the economic downturn, the project suffered setbacks in start-up activities and private-match fundraising. Indeed, it may have been just that awkward start that has propelled our program into directions we might have anticipated in later years: a “correctional” beginning, you might say.

With a tight budget, offering healthy marriage and relationship classes in the local jails was just the (less expensive) ticket. That led to community-based correctional settings and those, of course, led to an expansion into the reentry and social services network in the Indianapolis community.

A matter of support and commitment

Healthy marriage and relationship education helps couples and singles understand the importance of commitment to their families. It offers active development in communications, problem-solving, forgiveness, goal setting, and co-parenting skills. Indiana’s program also stresses the importance of supporting children financially and otherwise in co-parenting or step-family situations.

The Indiana Family Institute manages the Hoosier Commitment program, and the Indiana Healthy Marriage and Family Coalition provides a cadre of trained facilitators. We serve couples who are expecting children or have recently had a child. We have found in Indianapolis that women have a real thirst for curricula that offers intensive, introspective exploration and skills development for women—especially those who have experienced high drama or revolving-door relationships. Women want curricula that will help them

determine their strengths and weaknesses in relationships and set goals for their future.

Because there are so many single-mother households among the target population in Central Indiana, we are ecstatic that this particular curricula is having such success. While we strive to serve couples, we’re seeing so many single women and the organizations who serve them wanting to learn healthier relationship skills, whether for the relationships they are currently in or whether to make better choices in the future.

As I promote this dialogue in our city about the importance of strengthening the family unit and as I teach so many single mothers, I’m struck with the reality that many of these women face: they work several jobs, miss a lot of their children’s activities, and maybe even make some poor choices in their own recreational activities. They often allow the “boyfriend-in and boyfriend-out” syndrome in their homes. They love their children, but they are lonely and exhausted.

Given our link to services through corrections agencies, I also facilitate classes with many men. They, too, want to interact with and show their love for their children more than they do. But many don’t know how.

At its core, life wasn’t meant only for scrambling for the next babysitter, raising children with little support, or even settling for poor dating choices that end in stress and worse...domestic violence. Men, women and children need to tend to their families as a means of support and strength and, at times, rest and refreshment from the difficulties of

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Women participate in an introspective activity in a class at the Healthy Families agency.

this world. When we are in survival mode, it is hard to feel like we are doing these things called love and family very well. I promote healthy relationships as a wellness issue.

I am hopeful when I see our participants learn new skills and make stronger commitments to each other and to their families. In Indianapolis, the *Hoosier Commitment* program is committed to providing the resources to do just that.

For more information, contact Sue Swayze, program coordinator, at sue@hoosierfamily.org or 317-423-9178.



A screenshot from the Indiana video on healthy marriage classes titled “**Hoosier Commitment**”

Comments from healthy marriage class participants:

I now know how to be a better woman for myself and all around person to all those around me. The book I received shall accompany me through life's journey. (Indianapolis)

I believe this class will help in my everyday life with my partner. There are ways to communicate and get through those ups and downs that really help, and I will be using the tools I learned today. (Female in Indianapolis)

What I learned in this class will make me stronger in dealing with my emotions instead of hiding them. Deal better with my relationships and also my past. (Female in Marion County Jail)

I learned more in this class than I did in court-ordered classes in the past that were longer in class session and cost a whole lot more money. (Male in Marion County Jail)

You have given me a concept that I did not know existed, that gives me hope that I can make good decisions toward our future. (Male in Marion County Jail)

Media Matters

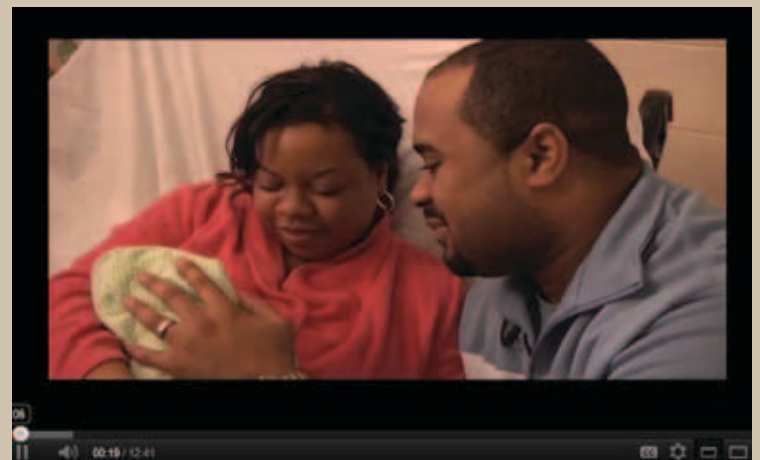
Franklin County videos bring incarcerated parents into the program

By Christy Nichols
Pathfinder Developer
Franklin County, Ohio, Child Support Enforcement Agency

Three agencies in Ohio are partnering to produce a series of videos in hopes they will educate inmates in the state's correctional institutions about child support services and help them feel comfortable with their experience.

The Franklin County Child Support Enforcement Agency's Pathfinder Program, the Ohio Office of Child Support, and the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction's Prison News Network (PNN) have completed the first video on establishing legal paternity.

The video follows four fathers as they journey through the various methods of establishment. It highlights what the child support agency can and cannot do to help parents establish paternity and the importance of keeping the agency updated on all address, incarceration and employment status.



A screenshot from Franklin County's video about paternity establishment

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The video was filmed at the county agency and state child support buildings, a local park, and two different correctional institutions, and features volunteer actors from all three agencies. An employee of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections filmed the scenes and inmates working for PNN completed the editing, sound and other final touches.

All involved are proud of the first video and now writing the script for the second about administrative adjustment reviews. The Pathfinder Program is funded by an 1115 demonstration grant in support of the Prisoner Reentry Initiative.

For more information, please contact Christy Nichols at nichoc05@odjfs.state.oh.us.

Videos—a frame of mind

Watching personal stories about families and couples on the screen—once limited to TV and the “big screen”—now is commonplace through web media. With just a flip camera or other low-cost equipment and a few “actors,” or through projects funded with a grant, for example, child support agencies are getting in on the act to produce videos about family situations that draw customers in and help them to better understand child support services.

You might get ideas from these videos:

- The Contra County, CA, child support agency lets people watch its video with a swipe of their smartphone over a QR code on an ad (see the [February 2012 Child Support Report](#)).
- A California website shows its [video for inmates](#).
- The article on page 4 in this newsletter points to a [video on healthy marriage classes](#) in Indiana prisons.

- [Videos on the Cuyahoga County](#) (Ohio) website cover several topics.
- The District of Columbia child support agency produced a video for customers waiting in the lobby (see the [April 2011 Child Support Report](#)).
- Two [New York City videos](#) dramatize “what you need to know about child support hearings and services” and “hospital-based acknowledgement of paternity.”



Does your agency produce videos to help people connect with your child support agency? Please tell us about your experience (contact elaine.blackman@acf.hhs.gov).

Media Matters

Case conferences: a better way to reach agreements

Cynthia Bryant, Clinical Professor
University of Texas School of Law

Most child support programs have some kind of process for obtaining orders by agreement with parents, usually called agreed orders or stipulations. Many of these agreements are reached in the hallway outside a court or hearing room, usually long weeks or months after legal documents have been prepared, filed and served.

Costs and confusion

Agreements reached in the hallways are expensive in terms of program costs: How many child support staff and court staff dealt with the case and touched the file before that hallway agreement, and how much did that staff time cost? How much were the service, processing, or filing fees before that hallway meeting? How much time did it take from the beginning of the process until the agreement, and how long

after that will it be before the parent pays child support?

In addition, for parents the hallways can be confusing—sometimes chaotic—places with many cases handled quickly by child support staff and without much time to learn about the process or the effect of the agreement. Even after reaching an agreement, many parents walk away unsure of what happened. Wanting to avoid the whole experience, other parents never show up at hearings, leading to default orders that they are less likely to pay and difficult to enforce.

What if these hallway agreements could be reached earlier in the process and at more parent-friendly locations, with the parents' active participation?

Parents invited to participate

Several child support programs have asked themselves that question, leading them to implement structured conferences



for resolving child support cases by agreement. Texas was among the first when, beginning in 2002, the state reformed its process for obtaining agreements.

Known as the Child Support Review Process (CSRP), it begins with an invitation for parents to meet with a specially trained child support staffer at the child support office. For most cases, the invitation goes out shortly after case initiation and any court proceedings. The CSRP conference focuses on educating parents about their rights and responsibilities and on attempting to agree on the order.

Parents' active participation in the conference assures that agreements reflect accurately the family's circumstances and financial situation and that they are based on the parents' informed consent. Participation in the process and reaching an agreement are entirely the parents' choice; in fact, they are informed that they may choose to have a judge decide the matter instead, if they prefer. Agreements reached through CSRP are filed with the courts and become court orders, enforceable the same as orders obtained through contested court hearings.

More orders, less time

Case conferences have proven effective and efficient. In June 2011, Texas child support director Alicia Key reported that, for FY 2010, almost 64,000 orders were obtained through CSRP and about 61,000 through the traditional court process.

Texas found that it took less than 20 days on average to dispose of a case using CSRP, while disposition through the court process took just under 100 days on average—a difference of nearly 3 months. Texas also estimates that it cost slightly less than half as much to establish an order through CSRP as it does to establish an order through the courts.



Over time, Texas found that cases handled through CSRP showed better compliance with child support payments, paying at a rate about 17 percent higher than those disposed of through the judicial system.

CSRP in the agency also paved the way for courts to improve their own efficiency. Although CSRP disposes of many cases by agreement outside the court process, courts still must resolve contested and often more complex and challenging cases, including contempt actions. Resolving cases through CSRP allows courts more docket time to deal with these difficult cases. Since CSRP came into wide use in 2002, time to dispose of cases through the courts has been reduced by nearly 30 days on average.

Other jurisdictions have streamlined their processes for obtaining agreements using case conferences with parents, adapting case conferences to their unique legal requirements and different administrative structures. These jurisdictions include Colorado, Massachusetts and some California counties.

For more information, contact Cynthia Bryant, 512-232-1574 or cbryant@law.utexas.edu.

Is that a fact?

Women in the labor force

About 71.9 million women, representing 58.6 percent of females 16 and older, participated in the labor force in 2010. (From the

[Current Population Survey: Annual Average 2010](#), Bureau of Labor Statistics.) See more data about women, in honor of National Women's History Month, on Census.gov. For more information about Women's History Month, see the President's [proclamation](#) and womenshistorymonth.gov.



National Women's History Month

Child Support Report



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