

Child Support Report

OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT



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

Connecticut-Rhode Island Partnership: Crossing Fiscal Boundaries to a Better Future for Families

By Sharon A. Santilli, Director
Rhode Island Office of Child Support Services
David Mulligan, Director
Connecticut Bureau of Child Support Enforcement



Aug. 2, 2010, was a momentous day for the Connecticut and Rhode Island child support programs. After two years in the making, their consortium SDU (state disbursement unit)—the first of its kind in the nation—was ready to begin operation. Immediately, Rhode Island saw child support payments posted and processed at the Connecticut SDU, and Connecticut could see the cost savings. Why—you might ask—was the SDU for the Connecticut Bureau of Child Support Enforcement processing child support payments for the Rhode Island Office of Child Support Services?

Birth of a Project

In 2008, before anyone brought up the idea of a consortium SDU project, Rhode Island knew it was time to change its disbursement process—with staff shortages, lack of technology and, more importantly, delays in getting child support to families—but the budget didn't allow for designing and building a new SDU.

In the meantime, Connecticut had renewed a five-year contract with its SDU vendor; the SDU was highly automated and showed ample room for expansion. And Connecticut, like many other states, was facing budget deficits and searching for a way to save dollars.

The consortium concept first came up during a networking break at a national child support conference. After much discussion among leaders of both states, with critical support from the vendor, the SDU partnership took off. Connecticut realized the potential for savings on the SDU contract and the opportunity to assist a neighboring state. Rhode Island, to its benefit, was no stranger to consortiums as the host state of the Child Support Lien Network (CSLN), the largest consortium in the country, now 31 states strong.

The partnership's goal was to add the Rhode Island child support payments to the existing Connecticut SDU and to process all payments on the date of receipt, with both states saving dollars.



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Challenges Along the Way

The biggest challenge with starting any significant project is making sure all stakeholders are aware of the issues and sitting at the table. The Rhode Island stakeholders included many government entities and officials, including the state technology team and the state ARRA (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) committee that approved project funding. Among other challenges, Rhode Island had to incorporate a new Voice Response System already in the works.

Connecticut needed project approval from its umbrella department. It also faced an immediate concern—to ensure that additional functions would not negatively impact its own state’s processing. It was important that the SDU keep both states’ processes separate and distinct and provide the same excellent service to both. Among many unexpected challenges, the state had to transfer small employers from a dial-in system to an online payments system.

Other implementation challenges included modifying the vendor contract to accommodate differences in Rhode Island’s SDU requirements. Throughout implementation and transition, however, the Number One priority was to ensure that SDU enhancements were transparent to Connecticut customers, with absolutely no negative impact to existing SDU services.

During later stages of implementation, Connecticut developed a fiscal process for invoicing, billing and depositing Rhode Island’s monthly service fees, and a modified process

to disburse funds to the vendor for services rendered to each state. While not insurmountable, developing an accounting mechanism to track the different groups of services for each state proved to be more difficult and time-consuming than anticipated.

Benefits to All

One year after the momentous day in August 2010, the Connecticut/Rhode Island SDU partnership has proven its worth to program operations—and families—in both states. Rhode Island has avoided a costly procurement process and the need to redesign or build a new SDU. It also has significantly reduced errors in postings and payments, as well as the volume of calls due to late postings.

Connecticut has seen regular, monthly savings on their SDU contract, with Rhode Island paying a share of SDU costs for rent, management staff, equipment and maintenance.

Most importantly, families in both states receive their child support payments in a timely and efficient manner.

Partnering is a mutually beneficial opportunity for state child support agencies to obtain high-quality service while enjoying substantial savings. With state budget deficits, it could just be the future of the child support program—and a better future for families.

For more information, please contact Rhode Island Director Sharon Santilli at ssantilli@dhs.ri.gov.

Tech Talk



Insurance Match Program—What’s the Buzz About?

By Erica Holliman
OCSE

Word is spreading. ... The Insurance Match program gets results! Now, voluntary reports from 24 of the 53 participating state child support agencies indicate combined collections of more than \$6.7 million.

The OCSE Insurance Match program has proven to be efficient and cost-effective. The centralized program—designed and implemented in partnership with states—compares information about individuals owing past-due support with information maintained by insurers (or their agents) concerning insurance claims, settlements, awards and payments. Now, state child support agencies are collaborating with others to tout the success of the program and to encourage insurer participation.

The California Department of Child Support Services and the California Department of Insurance partnered to send a letter to all state insurers about the options to participate

in the insurance match program. The letter emphasized the benefits of the program to children and families. The number of insurance companies signing up to participate in the program continues to grow; so do California’s collections for families. California collects about \$1 million every month and foresees even greater collections from the program.

OCSE conducts outreach to encourage participation in the program at insurance-industry conferences and in their publications. Take a look at the OCSE article in the American Insurance Association’s Advocate [magazine](#) (page 9).

As of July, more than 550 insurers, 17 state workers’ compensation agencies, and the U.S. Department of Labor participate in the program. OCSE expects two additional state workers’ compensation agencies to implement the match soon.

If your state is considering collaboration with other state agencies, organizations or associations to promote insurance data matches, contact Erica Holliman at 202-401-5730 or erica.holliman@acf.hhs.gov.

State Services Portal – A Giant Step for Our Electronic Communications



The many systems that connect caseworkers around the country have become very important to the child support program. Child support professionals are able to help families get child support payments more quickly, and families are then better able to help their children thrive.

Many of you are already reaping the benefits of the State Services Portal—an exciting step forward in the world of child support electronic communications. Thanks to the portal (part of the Federal Parent Locator Service, or FPLS), state workers have web-based access to other states' child support information through a secure, "single sign-on interface." Last year the Query Interstate Cases for Kids (QUICK) and Federal Offset and Passport Denial applications, and the e-Employer Query Page, moved onto the State Services Portal.

Now there's more! This summer we added new services and applications to the portal. Building on existing interfaces with states, users are able to access Locate, Debt Inquiry and Department of Defense (DOD) Entitlement data using the portal.

We could look at it this way. We have evolved from a program that was worker driven to one that is systems driven. But you can never take the worker out of our program. As the child support program evolves, so does the nature of our work. We want to position ourselves to be able to serve the 25 percent of the parents in our caseload who are struggling to make ends meet and manage their parental responsibilities. The State Services Portal is one way we are helping states improve services to parents.

Here are a few technical details about the portal:

- **Locate** – States struggle with making program changes to take advantage of new locate sources. This enhancement allows a caseworker to request an FPLS locate through the portal. They will receive the

NDNH data immediately and will be notified when the locate responses are available for them to view.

- **Debt Inquiry Service** – Employers and insurers now have a central place to provide information about upcoming payments, such as a bonus or claim payment. The Debt Inquiry Service is designed to match the information that they provide to the Debtor file, which contains information submitted by state child support agencies to OCSE about delinquent child support debts. Matches are sent to the appropriate states so they can collect those payments.
- **DOD Entitlement** – This enhancement gives states a faster method of obtaining information about entitlement payments for parents in the military (active and reservists). Currently states submit a subpoena to DOD for this information, which can be a time-consuming process. The NDNH provides Quarterly Wage data as a total amount that includes all entitlements. The breakdown of entitlements provided with this enhancement will allow states to set more accurate child support orders.

States now using the portal are Florida, Idaho, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, South Dakota, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, North Dakota, Minnesota, Indiana and Virginia. You can learn more from the End User Support team at 800-258-2736 or CSENet.2000@lmco.com.

I'd like to hear about your experiences with the portal. Please share your comments on this Commissioner's Voice blog.

Vicki Turetsky

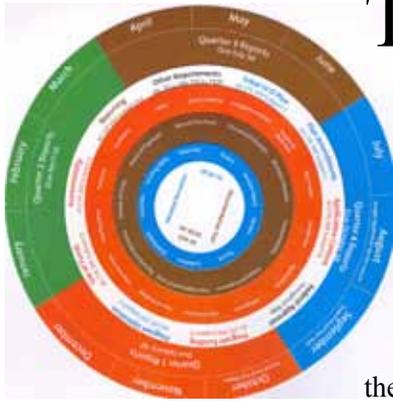


'Child Support Awareness Month'

Congratulations to those state, tribal and local child support programs offering special activities for families during August as part of your Child Support Awareness Month celebrations. You can find this poster on the website for the California Department of Child Support Services.

Training and Technology Take the Wheel at the National Tribal Association Conference

By Barbara Lacina
OCSE Region VII



The nearly 300 attendees at the 11th Annual National Tribal Child Support Association (NTCSA) Training Conference were part of a thoughtful, educational and culture-rich event. Hosted by the Northern Arapaho Tribe Child Support Program on June 26 – 30, in Denver, CO, the conference brought together representatives from comprehensive

and start-up tribal child support programs, tribes exploring the opportunity to develop a child support program, and OCSE central and regional offices.

The national child support program now includes 41 comprehensive and 10 start-up tribal child support programs.

Commissioner Turetsky addressed the conference, emphasizing consultation at every level—HHS, ACF and OCSE—to ensure effective tribal child support programs and to balance federal funding with tribal sovereignty. She highlighted the Tribal Training Wheel (pictured) and the Model Tribal System as key tools for program development and efficiency. And she pointed to the federal reports as instrumental in telling the story of tribal child support program success and acknowledging tribal sovereignty and cultural issues.

The Model Tribal System, presented by OCSE's Joe Bodmer and Jackie Pische, director of the Forest County Potawatomi Community, has been piloted and tested by two tribal programs and is expected to be available to all comprehensive programs later this year.

The Tribal Training Wheel, presented by Brenda Chamberlain of the Region VII Office of Grants Management, is a uniquely designed desk aid to help tribal staffs "build" a tribal child support program. It combines program requirements, allowable costs, reporting timeframes, and other key elements from several sources into one quick and colorful reference tool.

Conference workshops covered issues important to tribal agencies, such as genetic testing, review and modification, fatherhood, IRS safeguarding, social media, child welfare, TANF and domestic violence. In one session, the Chippewa Cree Tribe shared a demonstration of their Traditional Peacemakers Circle, a cultural approach to mediation and justice within their contemporary tribal judicial system.

The conference was opened and closed with flag ceremonies



Brenda Chamberlain (center) of the Region VII Office of Grants Management (Kansas City, MO), shows off the Tribal Training Wheel with Roberta Coons (left) and Barbara Lacina from the OCSE regional office.

from the host tribe, and was threaded throughout with Native American languages, practices and humor. Lee Spoonhunter, director of the Northern Arapaho Tribe Child Support Program and Vice-President of NTCSA, coordinated the conference events with Chance Rush, Master of Conference Ceremonies and motivational speaker.

With more tribal programs each year, the NTCSA annual training conference continues to grow in importance and attendance. Visit the NTCSA website at www.supporttribalchildren.org.



Same Time Next Year

The Penobscot Nation Child Support Agency will host the 12th annual NTCSA conference, July 22 – 27, 2012, in Bar Harbor, Maine. Since 2008, the Penobscot Nation Child Support Agency has been assisting families in the areas of case management, paternity, support and enforcement, referral services, focus and education groups, and community outreach. Its goals are to improve the lives of children, assist parents in decision making, enhance family values to the benefit of family members and their tribal community, and strengthen tribal sovereignty through greater use of tribal institutions.

San Francisco Pilots Collaboration to Help Victims of Domestic Violence

This article demonstrates **Family Violence Collaboration**. See details in the **OCSE Fact Sheet**.

By Karen M. Roye, Director
San Francisco Department of Child Support Services



Karen Roye speaking at a “paternity forum” in June. (See article on the next page.)

Last year I was speaking at a community town hall meeting where I met a mother whose story has stayed with me to this day. At the end of my presentation, a mother came up and asked for my help; she was holding her young son’s hand.

What struck me about her was the large black and blue left eye, swollen lip, and the right eye that looked like it was recovering from a previous assault. I knew instantly that this woman was a victim of violence, and I needed to get her help. I told her I would contact the police on

site and have her taken to the hospital. She said, “No. Please, I need your help. Help me get some money for my child.” At that point she reached down and took off her son’s shoe to show me the cardboard covering a huge hole in the bottom of his shoe!

The mom told me that she had received public assistance, but exhausted her grant. She asked her eligibility worker about child support, and the worker told her the case was closed by child support for “good cause.” She was told if she wanted child support she must speak with the child support office directly. She learned that I would be at the community center that day. We have since opened her case and she is receiving child support.

Opportunity for a New Approach

Over the last two years, the San Francisco Department of Child Support Services has seen a dramatic and alarming increase in the number of cases with domestic violence issues. In FY 2008-2009, the department had 392 cases involving domestic violence. Today it has 1,745 cases—a 346-percent increase! It is not clear whether this increase in cases is solely attributable to an increase in violence or also represents an increase in domestic violence survivors who are seeking our help for the first time. Either way, we need to respond. These cases were opened by custodial parents who requested child support, medical support, paternity establishment, and modification of orders.

The child support program gives clear direction on how to

manage the unique circumstances of these cases, which demand higher levels of service to the custodial parent. Higher levels of service means greater communication and confidentiality, referring the custodial parents to services for victims of violence, and arranging for restraining orders against the noncustodial parent. In the past, management of these cases has been one-sided, concentrating on greater communication with the custodial parent or victim. However, effective management of these cases also requires greater interaction between the program and the noncustodial parent.

Now San Francisco is changing its approach. We are working on a pilot collaboration with the Sheriff’s Department, Adult Probation, the District Attorney, Juvenile Probation, the Office of Economic and Workforce Development, Goodwill, Inc., and the SF Unified Family Court to identify, educate, and instruct noncustodial parents who have been the perpetrators of family violence. The Department of Child Support Services is co-located with Probation Officers in our satellite office where the noncustodial parent will receive training from our partners and the child support staff on how to behave with the custodial parent and with the child support office staff. They will be assigned a dedicated caseworker who will act as their point of contact with the department, and they will be required to check in regularly at the satellite office.

It will be made clear to the noncustodial parent that appropriate and respectful behavior is expected at all times and that any feelings of frustration, concern, or anxiety concerning their child support case must be brought to the satellite office. Any contact with the custodial parent will be strictly forbidden. This is important because it lets the noncustodial parent know the agency is in control of the case and its direction, not the custodial parent, thus diffusing any anger the noncustodial parent may feel towards the custodial parent. The noncustodial parent will also have a dedicated attorney assigned to the case. The probation plan for these clients will require successful and cooperative relationships with the child support department—or the probation will be revoked!

A successful relationship begins with a court order that requires the noncustodial parent to comply with anger management classes, parenting classes, workforce-readiness programs, and the realistic reintroduction of child support as the parent accomplishes his or her personal improvement plan. Upon successful completion, the parent will be referred to the family law facilitator to begin a conversation around access and visitation. The team will meet regularly to discuss the noncustodial parent’s progress and next steps.

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Where We Are Today

We have identified the cases, caseworkers and attorney, and they have been trained in communication management by family violence experts. We have all the partners mentioned on board and committed to the collaboration, and we are working with the court to establish video conferencing for court appearances rather than requiring physical appearances. We have also created a mechanism to track our success with the parents. We are noticing the noncustodial parents (some through court order) at special hearings and will work with the most difficult clients first—those who have been incarcerated for domestic or family violence.

For more information, contact Karen M. Roye, 415-356-2919 or Karen.roye@sfgov.org.

Stay Tuned ...

Look for more articles about domestic violence issues in the child support program in the October 2011 *Child Support Report*.



Coordination Points

Forum Highlights Paternity Establishment

By Peggy S. Hawkins, Chief Assistant Director
Contra Costa County Department of Child Support Services

This June, the first region-wide forum to focus on the importance of paternity establishment convened 11 San Francisco Bay area local child support agencies and the Child Support Directors Association of California. Themed “Paternity Forum: Beyond Biology,” the forum was inspired by the child support program’s shared vision and goal that all children have parentage established. The forum brought together partner agencies to explain the benefits of legal fatherhood and the state’s Paternity Opportunity Program (POP), understand the genetics of paternity, and provide opportunities for collaboration with the local child support agencies.

Participants represented child support and human services agencies, hospitals, community services, the sheriff’s and corrections offices, and community-based organizations. Topics covered community engagement in fatherhood services, cross-cultural fatherhood issues, divorced dads and how to co-parent, helping teen fathers grow into the parents they want to be, how DNA is used to establish paternity, and the concept of a mobile electronic “paternity declaration.”

Michael Hayes, Deputy for Family Initiatives in the Child Support Division in Texas, noted in his keynote address that in 2008, 40 percent of births were to unwed parents—a steady increase over 5 decades and expected to continue. The statistics highlight the need for continued outreach to parents about the importance of paternity establishment.

Hayes suggested that the hospital setting after the birth of a baby may not be the most opportune time to present parents with the benefits of paternity establishment because

of the many other distractions. He challenged the audience to consider earlier opportunities to give parents this valuable information by partnering with other agencies that serve the same population.

Speaker presentations are available online. For more information, contact Peggy S. Hawkins at Peggy.Hawkins@dcss.cccounty.us or 925-313-4401.



Speakers at the June “Paternity Forum” in California (See presentations online.)

Take-Away Themes: Poverty, Communication, Role as Ambassadors

By Nathan Ray, Support Enforcement Officer
Washington State Division of Child Support



Nathan Ray

Three overlapping themes emerged for agencies at all levels of government at the 5th annual “Strengthening the Family Summit,” sponsored by the Region X Administration for Children and Families and OCSE in May. These themes—working with clients in poverty, communication

with fathers, and our role as ambassadors—sent a resounding message to attendees from the Washington State Division of Child Support that fathers need to be part of the family and institutional barriers that are excluding fathers need to be taken down.

Poverty

Regardless of race or gender, people living in poverty have a different frame of reference than most middle-class Americans. One of the most valuable things we can do for our impoverished clients, whether custodial or noncustodial parents, is point them toward resources. As professionals, we need to educate our clients and help guide them. Impoverished clients may not be aware of resources we take for granted. Treating people with respect and verifying they actually “get” what we are saying can provide a sense of hope and show that we care. This can make a huge difference in their lives.

Communication

Most fathers truly want to support their children and remain involved in their lives. However, they are often pushed away from being involved with their children by other factors, including our country’s welfare system. When a child support case is opened, fathers may be dealing with many pressures and stresses—the emotional toll of a broken relationship, separation from their children, a new living situation, financial obligations and more. The frustration, fear and confusion that are the natural result of these stressors may be expressed as anger. If child support professionals learn to address the underlying issues, rather than reacting to the anger, most situations can be resolved and a positive tone can be set around communication for years to come.

Role as Ambassadors

Every interaction we have with clients influences future communication. In every contact, we represent ourselves, our co-workers and the state. We have training and years

of experience, but many clients have never dealt with child support issues before. By taking a few minutes to educate them and listen to their fears and concerns, we can set a tone of cooperation for the rest of the time our clients are involved in the system. Most child support professionals took jobs in the public service field with an ideal of helping people. By reminding ourselves of this, we can look for ways to guide clients toward better results for themselves and their families.

Feedback from Conference Goers

- *I was challenged to be more intentional about sharing my skills and knowledge whenever and wherever the opportunity arises. As professionals we know what to do, how to do, and where to go; there are people all around us that could use that information.*
- *Dr. Donna Beegle grew up in poverty. Her insight into the lives and experiences of those who grow up less privileged than others will help my interactions with individuals with similar backgrounds.*
- *The presentation on treating addiction was fantastic. It was interesting to hear the difficulties that are faced when an individual coming out of treatment returns to an “unhealthy” family.*
- *Dr. Johnny Lake spoke about how each of us is an ambassador for our department. The individual seeking services may form an opinion on the agency based on whichever representative that person works with. First interactions may play a huge part in how clients interact with us and our agency down the road.*
- *Because many of us lack the understanding of causes and behaviors of generational poverty, it is hard for us to connect on a personal level. To really help someone, you have to connect at a personal level—that is how they know you care!*



'Open Saturday' Event Shows Promise for Riverside County

By Ed McCue, Chief Child Support Attorney
Riverside County, CA, Department of Child Support Services

One Saturday last April set an example for successful customer service for California's Riverside County Department of Child Support Services as the office took the opportunity to reach out to the community by offering services on a Saturday. The office provided all of its regular services, and made its phone center and genetic testing available; however, the focus this time was to increase collections on arrears and establish new orders. The event targeted cases with and without an arrears balance on a monthly support order, as well as unobligated cases that did not involve a paternity issue.

In an office-wide effort, invitations were delivered, flyers posted, and electronic messages sent. The Thursday before, outreach staff promoted the Saturday event at a Parole and Corrections Team meeting, part of an ongoing collaboration with law enforcement. During the meeting, a parole administrator from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation approached staff members Sabrina Demase and Maria Franco with child support questions. Then Demase and Franco invited all attendees to the Saturday event.

The day of the event, the parole officer arrived with six parolees. Child support staff discussed with them options and strategies for meeting their obligations, explained the state's Compromise of Arrears Program (handing out applications for the program), and released driver's licenses—overall very



Sabrina Demase, Ed McCue and Maria Franco of the Riverside County Department of Child Support Services

positive interactions. Staff members were able to help everyone in the group with removing barriers to making payments and lowering their child support obligations.

The event created a successful exchange between Child Support Services staff, the community and partnering agencies. Riverside will continue to hold Open Saturdays as a tool to enhance program services, as well as create a path to success for parents and children.

For more information, contact Ed McCue at emccue@co.riverside.ca.us.

Child Support Report

Put Your Program on the Map

A few articles in this issue or the *Child Support Report* feature different areas in California; others highlight Connecticut, Rhode Island, Arapaho Tribe, Penobscot Nation, Washington State and Arizona. Do you have an idea for a news story—or several—about a practice, innovation or activity in the child support agency where you work? Send your ideas to the editor:

elaine.blackman@acf.hhs.gov

Arizona Parent Gets Check for \$93,664

By Rosemary Ramirez

Arizona Division of Child Support Enforcement



The Arizona Division of Child Support Enforcement recently collected \$93,664—a record FIDM (Financial Institution Data Match) collection—as a result of a “bank levy” action.

Under FIDM, financial institutions and state child support programs conduct quarterly matches to identify assets and bank accounts of obligors who owe past-due child support. When a match is identified, the state child support program may issue a lien or levy for the amount.

In March, Arizona identified an obligor’s checking account with \$220,000 in it, and then issued an automated levy to the matching institution for the past-due \$93,664. A subsequent “Surrender/Demand Notice” was issued to the bank in May, after receiving no formal dispute by the noncustodial parent.

The custodial parent was asked to come to the office later in the month to discuss her case and was surprised when Arizona Department of Economic Security Director Clarence H. Carter presented her with a check. She tearfully thanked the Division of Child Support Enforcement for the collection and said, “There were many times when my daughters went without, but now I will be sharing with them.” (KPHO Channel 5 covered the event.)

Also attending from the Arizona child support program were child support director Veronica M. Hart Ragland, FIDM officer Greg Buys, outreach manager Marjorie Cook, and enforcement unit supervisor Rosie Delgado.

This success reminds us that what we do each day makes a difference in people’s lives. Since the beginning of the multistate FIDM program 12 years ago, states have voluntarily reported more than \$855 million in collections!



‘Fair’ Weather for WICSEC

Based on its success over the past seven years, the Western Interstate Child Support Enforcement Conference will offer an “Interjurisdictional Fair” at its annual training event, Oct. 30 to Nov. 3, in Austin, TX. Attendees will be able to visit with representatives from state, county, and tribal child support agencies, OCSE staff, and the Department of Justice and other partnering agencies. See the [WICSEC website](#) about scholarships and registration.



New Fact Sheets on Bubble Chart



OCSE has launched seven fact sheets to kick off its “Promoting Child Well-Being and Family Self-Sufficiency Fact Sheet Series.” Keep an eye on this series for promising practices, new research and other useful information.

Child Support Report



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