

# *Arrears Management: Practical Resource Guide*

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### PART I – RESOURCE GUIDE

<b>Section 1.</b>	<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>5</b>
	<b>Why We Need Arrears Management</b> .....	<b>5</b>
	<b>How to Use This Guide</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Section 2.</b>	<b>Arrears Analysis</b> .....	<b>6</b>
	<b>Summary of Resource Documents</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Section 3.</b>	<b>Order Establishment</b> .....	<b>8</b>
	<b>Summary of Resource Documents</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Section 4.</b>	<b>Prevention of Arrears</b> .....	<b>9</b>
	<b>Summary of Resource Documents</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Section 5.</b>	<b>Early Intervention</b> .....	<b>9</b>
	<b>Summary of Resource Documents</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Section 6.</b>	<b>Accumulated Arrears Management</b> .....	<b>12</b>
	<b>Summary of Resource Documents</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Section 7.</b>	<b>Policy and Law</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>Section 8.</b>	<b>Summary and Conclusion</b> .....	<b>14</b>
	<b>Table 1: Highlights of Strategies</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Section 9.</b>	<b>References</b> .....	<b>16</b>

### PART II – GRANT ABSTRACTS

<b>Introduction to Grant Abstracts</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>Grant Abstracts</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>Alaska – “Electronic Modification of CS Orders”</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>Washington – “Determining the Composition and Collectability of Child Support Arrearages”</b> .....	<b>19</b>

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (Cont'd)

### Grant Abstracts

Colorado – “An Evaluation of Colorado’s Debt and Retroactive Child Support Initiative” .....	21
Colorado – “New Approaches to CS Arrears” .....	21
Virginia – “Developing New approaches to Collecting Arrears: The Virginia Model” .....	22
Virginia – “The Barriers Project” .....	23
Colorado – “Serving Parents Who Leave Prison: Final Report on the Work and Family Center” .....	24
Washington – “A Study of Washington Child Support Orders” .....	24
Washington – “Child Support Performance Measures, A Test for Working Hard – To – Collect Cases” .....	25
Massachusetts - “Fathers in the Criminal Justice System” .....	26
Massachusetts - “Massachusetts Arrears Analysis and Arrears Reduction Project” .....	27
Kansas – “Kansas Legal Services, Non-custodial Parent Project” .....	28
Minnesota - “Arrears Management for Low-Income Non-custodial Parents” .....	29
Texas – “Family Reintegration Project: Increasing Collections from Paroled and Released Non-custodial Parents in Texas” .....	30
Colorado - “Reduce Arrearages of Low-Income NCP’s by Reducing the Number of Default Orders” .....	31
Michigan - “Dads from Day One: A Program to Improve Front-end Services to Low-income Fathers and Increase Financial and Emotional Support for Children” .....	32
Texas - “Texas Arrears Prevention Project” .....	33

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (Cont'd)

### Grant Abstracts

Iowa – “Making Connections, Improving Collections” .....	34
Ohio - “Child Support Navigator Services” .....	34
Nebraska - “Changing the Culture: Making Child Support More Than Just Another Expense” .....	35
Tennessee - “Knox County Tennessee Non-custodial Parent Case Stratification and Early Intervention Project” .....	35
West Virginia - “Public Awareness Campaign to Educate Incarcerated Adults about Their Child Support Obligations” .....	36
Colorado - “Early Intervention in Cases with New Orders, New Delinquencies, High Orders, and TANF Involvement” .....	36
Arizona - “Arizona Statewide Arrears Calculation Tool” .....	37
North Carolina - “Improving Customer Service Through Automated Customer Service Procedures” .....	37
Michigan - “Noncustodial Parent Work First Program” .....	38
Center for Policy Research - “Early Intervention: A Multi-Site Study” .....	39
California - “Enhanced Parental Involvement Collaboration (EPIC)” .....	39
California - “Mobile Customer Support and Forms Assistance” .....	40
Kansas - “Reliable Income for Kids Coalition” .....	40
Pennsylvania - “Project SCALE – Support Children Through Learning and Employment” .....	41
NCJFCJ - (National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges) “Judicial Tools to Improve Court Practice In Child Support” .....	41

### I. INTRODUCTION:

The mission of the Child Support Enforcement Program is to enhance the well-being of children by assuring that assistance in obtaining support is available to children through locating parents, establishing paternity and support obligations and enforcing those obligations. Managing the accumulation of unpaid child support obligations, arrears, is a priority of the Office of Child

Support Enforcement (OCSE) and IV-D agencies. The National Child Support Enforcement Strategic Plan highlights the need to prevent the accumulation of unpaid support through early intervention. The Strategic Plan emphasizes the need to build a culture of compliance, in which parents support their children voluntarily and reliably. There is no single solution to managing child support arrears. A comprehensive approach is required to obtain the desired results. This document, "Arrears Management: Practical Resource Guide," is a summary of research and promising practices in arrears management. IV-D agencies can use this guide as a resource in developing and enhancing their arrears management plans.

OCSE developed this publication, "Arrears Management: Practical Resource Guide," for the benefit of nationwide child support enforcement agencies. For purposes of facilitating the end-user's research and investigation of a particular topic, many of the grants cited are hyperlinked to its corresponding abstract.

This reference document presents useful information to the user seeking guidance and direction in "how to" set up a particular strategy for more effectively managing arrears, as well as to the user who is more generally interested in research and evaluation. This document is part of the Project to Avoid Increasing Delinquencies (PAID) initiative as outlined in DCL-07-06.

#### WHY WE NEED ARREARS MANAGEMENT:

The total accumulated arrears balance continues to grow even as collections of support have increased. The balance of unpaid support in 2001 was \$88.1 billion. By 2005, the total was \$106.6 billion and growing at a rate of \$4 billion per year. Collections are growing at a rate of \$2 billion a year. Many factors contribute to the accumulation of child support arrears, as explained below. States' arrears management programs have the potential to provide significant benefits to families. States are measured on the collection of arrears and suffer financial consequences for having too many cases with uncollectible support. An effective arrears management plan also benefits the States through performance-based incentives.

Nonpayment of support by the noncustodial parent (NCP) creates an arrears balance. There are a number of factors that contribute to the accumulation of unpaid child support. They include:

- a. NCP unable to pay
- b. NCP unwilling to pay
- c. Default orders based on insufficient data
- d. Interest and fees accumulation
- e. Retroactive support orders
- f. Use of imputed income that does not reflect the NCP's ability to pay
- g. Outdated support guidelines
- h. Support guidelines that do not adjust for low-income parents
- i. Slow processing of modifications
- j. Failure to close orders when appropriate
- k. Lack of enforcement of orders
- l. States laws, policies and practices

Each State should determine the makeup of its arrears balance and target strategies that will address the specific issues identified.

#### HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE:

OCSE recognizes the seriousness of States' growing arrears accumulations. Sharing information from States' experiences and sharing arrears management research results may be helpful in managing child support arrears. This document, "Arrears Management: Practical Resource Guide," is a comprehensive review of the literature and is organized in a structured and user-friendly manner. The information is intended to assist individual States in their ongoing efforts to search for more effective strategies in the prevention, reduction and in the overall management of arrears. Specifically, this Guide includes information from studies, Section 1115 Demonstration

and Special Improvement Project (SIP) grants and best and promising practices. Wherever possible, documents referenced in this resource guide are linked to the underlying source material.

Several States have already implemented effective arrears management policies and practices, some of which are outlined below in this source document. The contents of this document are arranged around specific categories for ease of access to desired information and follow a system of classification that is widely used and understood by child support enforcement practitioners as well as researchers. Thus, the sections in this "Practical Resource Guide" are:

- [Arrears Analysis](#) (page 6)
- [Order Establishment](#) (page 8)
- [Prevention of Arrears](#) (page 9)
- [Early Intervention](#) (page 9)
- [Accumulated Arrears Management](#) (page 12)
- [Policy and Law](#) (page 13)
- [Conclusion](#) (page 14)
- [References](#) (page 16)

Note that this document is e-friendly: many resources have Web site addresses and others are hyperlinks to the Grants section of this report. It also may be printed in traditional hard copy.

## II. ARREARS ANALYSIS:

The first step in arrears analysis is to understand the underlying characteristics of the accumulated arrears. In this initial step, there are many potential questions of interest that can be asked, but ultimately States will be constrained by time, data, and resources available. Once the questions have been determined and the State's arrears balance is characterized along meaningful dimensions, the second step in the arrears analysis is to develop specific strategies to effectively prevent and better manage and reduce arrears.

The resources below will assist States to define a process for the analysis of child support arrears. States should consider NCP demographics and income levels, State law and policy, processes and practices, systems and technology and how each might contribute to the total accumulated arrears.

### Resources:

1. The Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), published, "Understanding Child Support Debt – A Guide to Exploring Child Support Debt in Your States," in May 2004. This practical Guide gives a framework for State child support enforcement program staff to examine child support debt. This Guide provides insights into how to make better use of technological tools and other resources to increase child support collections from parents who are able to pay, and prevent the accumulation of large amounts of debt from those who are unable to pay.  
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pol/DCL/2004/dcl-04-28.htm>.
2. Washington was awarded Grant No. 90-FD-0027 in 1999 to conduct a multiple- year analysis of child support arrearages. The first report published in April 2000 includes the plan for analysis of arrears. The second and third reports, "Determining the Composition and Collectibility of Child Support Arrearages, Volumes 1 & 2," were published in May and June 2003 and can be accessed at:  
<http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/pdf/esa/dcs/reports/cvol1prn.pdf> and  
<http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/pdf/esa/dcs/reports/caseassessmentfinal.pdf>. The goals of the study were to:
  - a. Understand processes and components of child support that lead to large arrears.
  - b. Document mitigating effects of interventions on collectability.
  - c. Determine impact of law and policies on arrears accumulation.

- d. Recommend strategies to reduce arrearages.
3. Colorado was awarded Grant No. 90-FD-0028 in 1999 to collect information about child support arrears. The Center for Policy Research conducted studies of Colorado arrearages. A report published in March 2001, "Understanding Child Support Arrears in Colorado," discusses the composition and demographics of both custodial parents (CPs) and NCPs on arrears cases. This report may be found on pages 47-63 of the compilation of reports prepared by The Center for Policy Research:  
<https://childsupport.States.co.us/siteuser/do/general/GetPDF?PDFNumber=84>
4. Virginia was awarded Grant No. 90-FD-0029 in August 1999 to conduct a multiyear study of its arrears. This study examines a large sample of child support cases with arrears as well as the demographics and characteristics of Virginia NCPs. It also examines trends in arrears amounts, selected enforcement methods and payment frequencies. Recommendations were made to improve the payment rate on orders and reduce the accumulation of arrears. This study may be found at:  
[http://www.dss.virginia.gov/files/about/reports/children/child\\_support/2004/arearages.pdf](http://www.dss.virginia.gov/files/about/reports/children/child_support/2004/arearages.pdf).
5. The Urban Institute conducted a comprehensive review of the demographics of those who owe back child support in California, the factors giving rise to the debt and collectability of child support debt in California. The study report can be found at:  
<http://www.childsup.cahwnet.gov/pub/reports/2003/2003-05collectibility.pdf>.
6. The Administration for Children and Families, OCSE, published, "The Story Behind the Numbers: Who Owes the Child Support Debt?," in July of 2004. OCSE issued an Information Memorandum (IM) in August 2004 to urge States to pay attention to the growing debt, the need to understand the debt and who owes it. The IM with the attached brief is found at:  
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pol/IM/2004/im-04-04.htm>
7. Massachusetts was awarded Grant No. 90-FD-0049 in 2000 to evaluate the child support orders and arrears of incarcerated and paroled parents. The Center for Policy Research in conjunction with Massachusetts issued a report, "Child Support Profile: Massachusetts Incarcerated and Paroled Parents," in May 2002. In addition to evaluating child support orders and arrears for incarcerated and paroled parents, the report also compares the accumulation of child support arrearages during incarceration at the current order amount to the amount accumulated under the new Massachusetts \$50 order for incarcerated parents. The study may be accessed at:  
<http://www.centerforpolicyresearch.org/reports/profile%20of%20CS%20among%20incarcerated%20&%20paroled%20parents.pdf>.

### III. ORDER ESTABLISHMENT:

The philosophy and approach utilized to establish child support orders has a significant impact on the future accumulation of arrears. The ability to set child support orders that are appropriate for the parties and fair to children directly impacts the accumulation of unpaid child support. For example, NCPs are more likely to pay support if they believe the order is fair and States are more likely to be successful enforcing appropriate orders. There are many factors to consider in developing or changing philosophies regarding order establishment, such as:

1. How do you define appropriate orders?

2. Who do you work with in changing the approach?
3. What are the best strategies for achieving appropriate orders?
4. Is the staffing available to support the change?

Resources:

1. Washington was awarded Grant No. 90-FD-0035 in 2000 to study the outcomes from various categories of orders based on the point of origin of the order. This State investigated how well new child support orders meet the requirements of the States's guidelines. The study also set out to show the impact on orders by the process through which they are established. Washington published the final report in, "A Study of Washington States Child Support Orders." The report can be found at:  
<http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/pdf/esa/dcs/reports/FinalGrant205.pdf>.
2. Colorado was awarded Grant No. 90-FD-0028 in 1999 to study whether the suspension of debt and similar offers lead to better payment of current support due. The Center for Policy Research conducted studies of arrearages in conjunction with Colorado. The report, "Dropping Debt: An Evaluation of Colorado's Debt and Retroactive Support Initiative," may be found on pages 64-93 of the compilation of reports prepared by The Center for Policy Research: <https://childsupport.States.co.us/siteuser/do/general/GetPDF?PDFNumber=84>.
3. The Office of Inspector General issued a report titled, "State Policies Used to Establish Child Support Orders for Low Income Non-Custodial Parents," in July 2000. The Office of Inspector General examined State policies in regard to setting the order amount for low-income NCPs and examined the policies used to determine the financial obligations owed by NCPs through a close-ended survey. The report may be accessed at:  
<http://oig.hhs.gov/oei/reports/oei-05-99-00391.pdf>.
4. The Office of Inspector General issued a report titled, "The Establishment of Child Support Orders for Low income Non-Custodial Parents," in July 2000. The study can be accessed at:  
<http://oig.hhs.gov/oei/reports/oei-05-99-00390.pdf> and focuses on the relationship between the payment of child support and the order establishment practices for low-income NCPs.
5. Colorado was awarded Grant No. 90-FD-0080 in 2003 to reduce arrearages of low- income NCPs by minimizing the use of default orders and establishing appropriate orders. Some of the goals of this project are to implement electronic notification system reminder calls, establish child support orders based on accurate income determination, use Spanish legal forms and interpreters, initiate more frequent contact with the CP, etc.
6. Texas was awarded Grant No. 90-FD-0088 in 2003. The State has identified three processes that need improvement to prevent front-end accumulation: the Child Support Review Process (CSRP), the entry of new order information, and the initiation of income withholding. This project includes automation of processes to determine if the cases meet CSRP criteria and to schedule and print notices of appointments. Special training on CSRP for IV-D staff in the agency and in the court (which must still approve agreements for orders) may be provided. Policies and procedures will be finally determined after project staff has studied the initial process study in detail. When the final report summary is available, it will be posted at:  
[http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse/grants/abstracts/by\\_state.html](http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse/grants/abstracts/by_state.html) .
7. San Francisco Child Support Services was awarded Grant No. 90-FI-0063 in 2004 to conduct the Enhanced Parental Involvement Collaboration project (EPIC). EPIC is designed to develop, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of a number of alternative measures to reduce the number of default cases and/or the number of cases in which imputed income was used to establish the child support order. An abstract of this grant may be found at:  
[http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse/grants/abstracts/fy2004\\_sip\\_abstracts.html](http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse/grants/abstracts/fy2004_sip_abstracts.html).
8. The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges was awarded Grant No. 90-FI-0082 in 2005 to create innovative resources to assist with achieving the goals of OCSE's FY

2005 – 2009 strategic plan that all children have parentage established, have support orders established, have medical coverage and reliably receive financial support from parents as ordered. [Click here for an abstract of this grant.](#)

IV. PREVENTION OF ARREARS:

Prevention strategies may be initiated before or after an order is established to prevent accrual of unpaid child support. These strategies may include education about the rights and responsibilities of being a parent and supporting one's children. There are actions that can be taken before the initial request for IV-D services and even before the birth of a child. Prevention can be used as a strategy throughout the life of an order.

Resources:

1. The Center for Law and Social Policy, CLASP, published, "An Ounce of Prevention and a Pound of Cure: Developing States Policy on the Payment of Child Support Arrears by Low Income Parents," by Paula Roberts. This study contains a brief description of State policies and practices that may contribute to the accumulation of high support arrears, describes steps States might take to avoid arrears, and provides a framework for considering when arrears forgiveness may be appropriate. Pages 8-11 of this study contain information on Preventative Strategies. The full text is found at: [http://www.clasp.org/publications/an\\_ounce\\_of\\_prevention\\_and\\_a\\_pound.htm](http://www.clasp.org/publications/an_ounce_of_prevention_and_a_pound.htm)
2. The Center for Law and Social Policy, CLASP, published "Pursuing Justice: A Strategic Approach to Child Support Arrears in California," by Paula Roberts. California is one of the States with a substantial amount of accumulated child support arrears. To address this problem, the State authorized the Urban Institute to analyze the arrears caseload and assess the likelihood of collection. Based on the Urban Institute analysis, CLASP developed this options paper, which describes steps that States might take to collect that which is collectible, prevent similar problems in the future, and develop an adjustment policy for those who can never fully pay. The paper is intended to model the kind of analysis States with similar arrearage problems might undertake. It also provides information on current efforts in many States dealing with low-income noncustodial parents. The full text is found at: [http://www.clasp.org/publications/pursuing\\_justice.pdf](http://www.clasp.org/publications/pursuing_justice.pdf)
3. Michigan was awarded Grant No. 90-FD-0081 in 2003 to provide intensive services beginning at the birth of the child of low-income unwed parents, through the process of establishing a child support order and continuing for the first few months of payment. (Click on the Grant No and it will hyperlink you to a summary of the report—on page 32).
4. Ohio was awarded Grant No. 90-FD-0095 in 2004 to test the hypothesis that providing more information on NCPs at first contact will result in more paternity and order establishment and more collections. An abstract of this grant may be found at: [http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse/grants/abstracts/fy2004\\_1115\\_abstracts.html](http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse/grants/abstracts/fy2004_1115_abstracts.html).

V. EARLY INTERVENTION:

Early intervention philosophies and strategies are intended to avert or minimize the accrual of child support arrears. Such philosophies and strategies focus on education and are designed to emphasize the rights and responsibilities of the NCP. Educating NCPs about their responsibility to pay child support and informing them of their rights to request review and adjustment, modification and termination services, where applicable, are key elements in managing child support arrears. Employment outreach activities and education programs can be structured to focus on all NCPs or various groups of NCPs such as inmate parents or low-income parents.

Many factors contribute to the accumulation of arrears; however, developing proactive intervention policies and strategies will limit such accumulation. Some early intervention policies and strategies that can be implemented within the IV-D agencies include: immediate order enforcement and immediate order adjustment.

Resources:

1. The Center for Law and Social Policy, CLASP, published, “[An Ounce of Prevention and a Pound of Cure: Developing State Policy on the Payment of Child Support Arrears by Low Income Parents](#)” by Paula Roberts. This report, which may be found at: [http://clasp.org/publications/an\\_ounce\\_of\\_prevention\\_and\\_a\\_pound.pdf](http://clasp.org/publications/an_ounce_of_prevention_and_a_pound.pdf), contains a brief description of State policies and practices that may contribute to the accumulation of unrealistically high support arrears, describes steps States might take to avoid this problem in the future, and provides a framework for deciding how much of already accumulated arrears — if any — States might want to forgive. See pages 11–13 of this study for more information on Early Intervention strategies.
2. Alaska was awarded Grant No. 90-FD-0001 in 1997 to implement an automated method to review and modify orders on a regular basis. An automated system called ELMO, Electronic Modification of Orders, was developed. The report was written by Policy Studies, Inc. and can be found at <http://www.csed.States.ak.us/Publications/FinalReport.PDF>.
3. Colorado was awarded Grant No. 90-FD-0033 in 1999 to evaluate the reintegration of offenders upon their release from prison. The Center for Policy Research (CPR), in conjunction with Colorado, evaluated the results of services provided to parents leaving prison through the Denver Work and Family Center. The goals included improving the payment patterns of these parents and connecting them with their children. (Click on the Grant No. or turn to page 24 to view the summary report.) A final related report is entitled, “Work and Family Center: Serving Parents Who Leave Prison,” and is found on the CPR Web site: <http://www.centerforpolicyresearch.org/>

An additional study was conducted by The Center for Policy Research to explore the barriers and advantages of proactively working with NCPs who enter prison with an established order by notifying them of the option to apply for a review and adjustment. This study, “Testing a Modification Process for Incarcerated Parents,” may be found on the CPR Web site: <http://www.centerforpolicyresearch.org/>

4. In 1999, Virginia was awarded Grant No. 90-FD-0032, known as the Barriers I Project, and later issued Grant No. 90-FD-0063, Barriers II Project, in 2001 to provide services to NCPs facing incarceration. The intent was to increase the collection rate for court-ordered child support. The most common barriers to paying support were identified and community-based resources were developed in an attempt to lower the incidence of nonpayment. Click on the Grant No. or turn to page 23 to view the summary report.
5. West Virginia was awarded Grant No. 90-FD-0103 in 2004 to develop a video and brochures to provide information about child support to incarcerated parents prior to their release. Anticipated benefits include: more realistic orders, improved collections, reduced contempt petitions for nonpayment, and higher compliance with support orders upon release. An abstract of this grant may be found at: [http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse/grants/abstracts/fy2004\\_1115\\_abstracts.html](http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse/grants/abstracts/fy2004_1115_abstracts.html).
6. Kansas was awarded Grant No. 90-FD-0068 in 2002 to partner with Legal Services, the court, and the Shawnee County NCP project to build on the current program through coordinating selected legal and mediation services to NCPs. Click on the Grant No. or turn to page 28 to view the summary report.
7. Texas was awarded Grant No. 90-FD-0073 in 2002 to develop strategies for increasing child support payments, employment and family reintegration among paroled and released parents. This project led to the development and dissemination of information on child support and incarceration for a variety of audiences using many different methods. The project also involved an extensive, collaborative outreach and service program for 317

- fathers in targeted State jails. Project participants were provided the options to pursue child support, family reintegration and employment services. This project yielded a variety of promising outcomes but also proved there are challenges to overcome. Click on the Grant No. or turn to page 30 to view the summary report.
8. Nebraska was awarded Grant No. 90-FD-0097 in 2004 to extend its phone system for customer service contact to CPs and NCPs in order to improve customer satisfaction, increase collections, identify problems and resolve questions/issues before they become problematic. Unique intervention strategies utilized by customer service representatives were designed to increase collections. An abstract of this grant may be found at: [http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse/grants/abstracts/fy2004\\_1115\\_abstracts.html](http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse/grants/abstracts/fy2004_1115_abstracts.html).
  9. Iowa was awarded Grant No. 90-FD-0093 in 2004, "Making Connections and Improving Collections," to improve collections and regular payments from NCPs by assigning caseloads stratified by likely cooperation. An abstract of this grant may be found at: [http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse/grants/abstracts/fy2004\\_1115\\_abstracts.html](http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse/grants/abstracts/fy2004_1115_abstracts.html).
  10. Tennessee was awarded Grant No. 90-FD-0102 in 2004 to apply the Australian case assessment and stratification procedure, including monitoring and employing early intervention strategies to improve collections and avoid the accumulation of arrears in Knox County. Case stratification allows agencies to target enforcement techniques and services more effectively toward different types of NCPs (i.e., unable vs. unwilling, etc.). An abstract of this grant may be found at: [http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse/grants/abstracts/fy2004\\_1115\\_abstracts.html](http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse/grants/abstracts/fy2004_1115_abstracts.html).
  11. Colorado was awarded Grant No. 90-FD-0111, "Early Intervention in Cases with New Orders, New Delinquencies, High Orders, and TANF Involvement," in 2005 to improve voluntary payment of support, reduce arrears and increase the reliability of collections on TANF cases. The Colorado Division of Child Support Enforcement proposes to conduct a three-year project aimed at improving the voluntary payment of support, reducing arrears and increasing the reliability of child support collections among Temporary Assistance for Needy Families clients. As part of the proposed project, three county child support agencies will contact parents with new or newly modified orders to identify potential barriers to payment. Parents will also be contacted when payments are missed to determine if a modification, job referral or other adjustment is needed. In addition, Colorado will evaluate the impact of the new low-income adjustment to its child support guideline on payment behavior among low-income NCPs by comparing payment behavior for samples of low-income obligors prior to and following January 2003 when the provision became effective. An abstract of this grant may be found at: [http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse/grants/abstracts/1115\\_abstracts.html](http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse/grants/abstracts/1115_abstracts.html).
  12. North Carolina was awarded Grant No. 90-FI-0046 in 2003 to implement an automatic call back system. Effective September 1, 2004, North Carolina implemented a pilot early intervention project. An automated "call back" system was put in place reminding payers of their first child support payment due, a first time delinquency, appointments for custodial parents and appointments and hearings for noncustodial parents. The focus is on reducing the number of missed appointments, reminder calls for new orders and reminders of pending delinquencies. Promising results include a decrease in the number of missed appointments, an increase in hearing attendance, and many counties are reporting decreases in delinquencies on new orders. Click on the Grant No. or turn to page 37 to view the summary report.
  13. The Center for Policy Research was awarded Grant No. 90-FI-0059 in 2004 to assess the use and impact of early intervention techniques in five jurisdictions of varying size: Mesa County (Grand Junction), CO; Lane County (Eugene), OR; Boston, MA; Tarrant County (Dallas), TX; Milwaukee County, WI. At each site, workers are making special efforts to contact NCPs and/or employers in a sample of 100 to 200 cases. The goal of these worker-

initiated outreach efforts is to explain the child support obligation and to identify and address barriers to payment before a habit of nonpayment develops and arrears accrue. [Click on the Grant No. or turn to page 39 to view the summary report.](#)

14. The Monterey County Department of Child Support Services was awarded Grant No. 90-FI-0078 in 2005 to be more responsive to the needs of a large segment of its customers who are hard to serve (isolated migrants who may not speak English or Spanish) by creating a mobile office to improve service delivery by the local child support agency. [Click on the Grant No. or turn to page 40 to view the abstract.](#)
15. The Episcopal Social Services, Wichita, Kansas was awarded Grant No. 90-FI-0079 in 2005 to test proactive interventions called "pro se legal facilitation" separately and in tandem with a customized system of arrears forgiveness. [Click on the Grant No. or turn to page 40 to view the abstract.](#)
16. The Goodwill Industries of Pittsburgh was awarded Grant No. 90-FI-0080 in 2005 to focus on customizing child support strategies for incarcerated individuals with child support obligations and significant child support arrearages in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania. [Click on the Grant No. or turn to page 41 to view the abstract.](#)

#### VI. ACCUMULATED ARREARS MANAGEMENT:

Many of the policies, strategies and best practices outlined above will have an impact on reducing future child support arrears; however, they will not have a major impact on reducing the current outstanding child support debt. The policies and strategies discussed below address ways to tackle this existing debt. There are two main case-specific contributing factors to child support arrears: (1) the underlying reason for the arrearage; and (2) likelihood of collection once the arrearage occurs. States may need to do an assessment of their arrearages to determine what amounts are collectible. Some of the variables to analyze may be:

1. How much debt is supportable and verifiable?
2. What portion of the debt is likely to be collected?
3. What are the best strategies to collect the amount deemed collectable?
4. What to do with the uncollectible?

#### Resources:

1. The Center for Law and Social Policy, CLASP, published, "[An Ounce of Prevention and A Pound of Cure: Developing State Policy on the Payment of Child Support Arrears by Low Income Parents](#)," by Paula Roberts. The document contains a brief description of State policies and practices that may contribute to the accumulation of unrealistically high support arrears, describes steps States might take to avoid this problem in the future, and provides a framework for deciding how much of already accumulated arrears — if any — States might want to forgive. See pages 13 -17 of this study for more information on Accumulated Arrears Management strategies. It may be found at: [http://clasp.org/publications/an\\_ounce\\_of\\_prevention\\_and\\_a\\_pound.pdf](http://clasp.org/publications/an_ounce_of_prevention_and_a_pound.pdf)
2. Minnesota was awarded Grant No. 90-FD-0071 in 2002 to develop a program for low-income NCPs who had substantial public assistance child support debt and continuing child support obligations. These NCPs were offered an opportunity to participate in a debt-forgiveness program in exchange for making regular child support payments. The Center for Support of Families prepared the report on this program, "Arrears Management for Low-Income Noncustodial Parents Evaluation Report - English - 2-04." It may be found at: <http://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfsrver/Legacy/DHS-4083-ENG>
3. Colorado's 1999 Grant No. 90-FD-0028 evaluated the response of NCPs to an incentive program offering debt forgiveness in exchange for regular and complete payment of child support obligations. The Center for Policy Research report, "An Evaluation of the Colorado Arrears Forgiveness Demonstration Project," is on pages 93 - 119 of a compilation of reports

prepared by The Center for Policy Research:

<https://childsupport.States.co.us/siteuser/do/general/GetPDF?PDFNumber=84>.

4. Washington was awarded Grant No. 90-FD-0038 to evaluate efforts to improve collections in hard to collect cases. This study evaluates strategies for collections of arrears and current support when there are significant barriers. The report, "Overcoming the Barriers to Collection," may be found at: <http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/pdf/esa/dcs/reports/scpfinalreport.pdf>.
5. Massachusetts was awarded Grant No. 90-FD-0067 in 2002 to analyze and reduce arrears through new arrears management programs targeted to NCPs with varying abilities to pay. Click on the Grant No. or turn to pages 27-28 to view the summary report.
6. Virginia was awarded Grant No. 90-FD-0082 in 2003, "Customer-Centered Services and Arrearage Management: An Experimental Approach to Support Payment Consistency and Arrearage Reduction for Low-Income Non-Custodial Parents." This project was implemented in two phases. The first looked at the impact of applying specified customer-centered services on the overall reduction and prevention of arrears accumulation. The second phase involved the testing of the accuracy of a payment predictor model along with the effect of applying different early intervention strategies. Upon availability, the final report summary will be available on the OCSE Web site at: [http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse/grants/abstracts/by\\_state.html](http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse/grants/abstracts/by_state.html)
7. The 14<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court/Family Court Services, Muskegon, MI, was awarded Grant No. 90-FI-0050 in 2003 to improve family welfare by increasing the emotional and financial contributions made by NCPs to their children. This program involved coordinating the services of established community agencies and creating a Noncustodial Parent Program (NCP). Click on the Grant No. or turn to page 38 to view the summary report.
8. Arizona was awarded Grant No. 90-FD-0112 in 2005 to develop and implement a web-based arrears calculation tool that would allow courts, customers, and IV-D staff to better manage child support arrears. This tool would use the information provided by the State Case Registry and State Disbursement Unit to calculate on-demand and in real time the amount of arrears owed. The tool would provide timely, accurate information on support arrears and would be available to the public, the courts, and child support workers. Click on the Grant No. or turn to page 37 to view the summary report.

## VII. POLICY AND LAW:

States' laws and policies play a significant role in the accumulation and management of child support arrears. States will benefit from evaluating existing policy and practice to identify areas in which a change might contribute to effective management and prevention of arrears. The following list includes topics to consider in the review of State law and policy.

- a. What is the basis for income used in a default order?
- b. What policy or practice changes will reduce the number of default orders?
- c. What is your policy on retroactive orders?
- d. Is your State policy for case closure more restrictive than Federal law?
- e. Do you have an effective guidelines review process? Are guidelines reviewed and adjusted on a regular basis?
- f. Do your State child support guidelines have any provisions for low-income obligors, i.e., self-support reserve?
- g. What is your policy regarding incarcerated parents?
- h. Is your modification process responsive and timely?
- i. Do you use administrative or streamlined processes when possible?
- j. Do you regularly "clean up" the caseload to eliminate duplicate cases and close appropriate cases?
- k. What is your policy on interest and fees? Do you have provisions for waiving or reducing interest or fees in exchange for regular payments or other conditions?

- I. Does State law and policy allow you to compromise accrued arrears, interest, or fees?

Refer to other sections of this guide for resources and studies related to these topics.

## VIII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

The studies listed in this guide can be a resource for developing individual State strategies for the management of child support arrears. There is no single easy answer to the issue of increasing amounts of unpaid child support. A comprehensive plan is needed to effectively manage child support arrears accumulation. However, the table below summarizes some overall interventions and considerations in each of four areas that may be broadly referred to as “management of arrears.”

**Table 1: HIGHLIGHTS OF STRATEGIES\***

<b>Prevention</b>	<b>Order Establishment</b>	<b>Early Intervention</b>	<b>Accrued Arrears Management</b>
Dissect caseload Develop matrix	Develop better guidelines	Match with Vital Record Registry to terminate orders	Caseload clean-up – apply case closure criteria
Determine the effect of State policy or regulation on the accumulation of arrears	Cap retroactive and add-on amounts	Pro-active contact at child emancipation	Maximize use of FIDM
Cross-train with community-based organizations	Set temporary default orders and keep record open	Frequent automatic reviews of order or pro-active contact	Suspend enforcement in exchange for payment plan
Segregate unable from unwilling payers	Regular review of guidelines	Pro-active NCP contact at time of unemployment	Suspend interest in exchange for payment plan
Include CP outreach	IV-D as gate to Welfare-to-Work and community-based organizations	Simplify modification process	Compromise uncollectible arrears
Focus efforts on engaging both parents to facilitate the establishment of income-based consent orders	Self-support reserve for NCPs	30/90-day contact after nonpayment	Promote “cost-effective” aspect of arrears management

*\*Adapted from the document entitled, “Managing Child Support Arrears, an Evolving Discussion Framework, the Combined Summaries of the Administration for Children and Families Regions I, II & III Meetings on Managing Arrears.”*

IX. **REFERENCES:**

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Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement. "Managing Child Support Arrears, An Evolving Discussion Framework" (April 2003).

Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement. "Understanding Child Support Debt, A Guide to Exploring Child Support Debt in Your States" (May 2004).

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The Urban Institute. "Determining Child Support Arrearages in California: The Collectibility Study" (March 2003).

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The Center for Policy Research. "Testing a Modification Process for Incarcerated Parents" (December 2001).

The Center for Support of Families. "Arrears Management for Low Income Non-Custodial Parents: Evaluation Report" (February 2004).

Washington State Division of Child Support. "Overcoming the Barriers to Collection" (June 1999)

# *Arrears Management: Grant Abstracts*

## Introduction to Grant Abstracts

The Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) recognizes the seriousness of States' growing arrears accumulation. Sharing information from States' experiences and sharing arrears management research results is very important in managing child support arrears. OCSE contracted with the State Information Technology Consortium (SITC) to conduct a literature review and assemble arrears management information in a more usable and readily available format to all IV-D agencies. This document is a supplement to the Practical Resource Guide to Arrears Management. It contains abstracts of Section 1115 Demonstration Grants and Special Improvement Project (SIP) Grants related to arrears management.

The abstracts are organized by type (1115, then SIP) chronologically. The abstracts for projects that are completed include results and findings from the final report. The abstracts for projects that are not completed or where the final report has not been submitted include a description and the goals of the project as well as preliminary results where available. The approved version of abstracts will be available on the ACF grant Web site at: <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse/grants/> in the future.

Each grant tested and/or demonstrated new concepts for dealing with the issues of child support arrears. The projects had varying degrees of success in the demonstration period. There are many creative and innovative approaches represented by these projects. Most reports identified strengths of the project and areas in which the project could be improved. Some specifically address the pitfalls to avoid should another agency wish to replicate the program.

There are a number of factors to consider when deciding whether or not to replicate a particular project. First, each State must understand the make-up of its arrears including the major factors contributing to the arrears. This step will define problem areas to be targeted by an arrears management program. Once a clear understanding of the major contributing factors is achieved, a State should select a variety of strategies in developing an overall arrears management plan. If State law contributes to the growth of arrears, then legislation may need to be part of the plan. If a particular State's policy adds to the arrears growth, alternative policy choices may need to be considered.

If any State decides to replicate a successful demonstration project from another State, careful review and consideration must be given to project implementation, including potential barriers. In addition, understanding how the Demonstration State is both similar and dissimilar to an Inquiry State is very important. This could make a difference in the level of success. For example, if a project focused on establishing appropriate orders in a State using administrative processes, the success and the value of the project may differ significantly for a State that uses a judicial process. If a State currently does not assess interest on arrears, selecting a project that uses accrued interest and penalties as a major component of an arrears compromise program may not be the best model to use. There may also be barriers to the replication of a successful program from another State. For instance, if the project requires dedicated staffing and a State does not have the needed staff resources, the project may not be successful or may have unintended consequences due to reassignment of needed staff. If implementation of the project requires legislation, careful consideration must be given to whether support for the change can be obtained and, more importantly, how it can be obtained.

Finally, there is no single solution to managing child support arrears. Therefore, this portion of the "Practical Resource Guide" is also broken into four categories to help identify management strategies easily. These categories include: (1) prevention of arrears; (2) order establishment; (3) early intervention; and (4) accumulated arrears management. States can use this information to establish effective arrears management programs and thereby improve upon the overall child support service delivery system.

## I. Grant Abstracts

### Alaska

#### **Alaska Department of Revenue Child Support Enforcement Division “Electronic Modification of Child Support Orders”**

**NOTE:** Includes findings from the final report

This project addresses a more efficient way of reviewing and adjusting child support order amounts on a regular basis. PROWRA allows States to use cost of living adjustments and automated methods to review and modify child support orders. Alaska Child Support Enforcement Division (CSED) was particularly interested in developing an automated tool that could use quarterly wage data from automated sources. Alaska’s population includes a large number who work seasonally in Alaska and in other States the remainder of the year.

CSED developed and tested an automated system called Electronic Modification (ELMO) that uses income information from sources linked electronically to CSED’s automated child support system to review child support orders. ELMO reviews all child support orders annually in the month the order was originally established. It conducts a prescreening of the case and then searches for income information from automated sources. If it finds income information for four consecutive quarters, it completes a guidelines calculation. If the result of the calculation is a change of at least fifteen percent (Alaska’s threshold), ELMO targets the case for manual review. ELMO was built with the capacity of issuing automated modifications in certain cases. However, during testing of this feature, some issues arose and this functionality was not implemented.

#### **Project Results:**

- A fourfold increase in the number of cases reviewed each month was recognized.
- Sixty-eight percent of cases ELMO targeted for review are modified.
- Ninety percent of orders are modified upward. Only ten percent are modified downward.
- The average percentage change between the prior and modified support award was significant (eighteen percent).
- ELMO-initiated reviews take 72 days on average to modify. This is less than half the amount of time allowable under Federal Regulations.
- Modified child support orders better reflect the obligor’s ability to pay. ELMO obtains better and more complete income information and has reduced the number of support awards based on imputed income.

The overall goal of this project was to streamline the review and adjustment process by taking advantage of automated income information available to CSED. Alaska has successfully met this goal. It developed a process that reduced staffing needs and results in child support orders in line with the obligor’s ability to pay.

Final report can be found at: <http://www.csed.States.ak.us/Publications/FinalReport.PDF>.

**Grant Number:** 90FD0001, 1997 Section 1115 Demonstration Grant

**Project Period:** 1997 to 1999

### Washington

#### **Washington Department of Social and Health Services, Division of Child Support “Determining the Composition and Collectibility of Child Support Arrearages”**

**NOTE:** Includes findings from the final report

Washington initiated a study to determine patterns of debt behavior in child support cases. The goals were to understand the processes and components of child support that lead to large debts; document the mitigating effects of interventions on collectibility; determine the impact of law and policies on debt growth; and recommend changes that will lead to lower arrearages.

An intensive case assessment was conducted on a sample of cases. The case assessment covered the complete history of the sampled cases up to March 2001. It examined order setting and maintenance, locate and collection work, payment and debt records, and characteristics of the noncustodial parent (NCP) that constituted barriers to collection. The case assessment integrated policy recommendations with its analysis of the reasons for past debt growth.

### **Project Findings:**

Four distinctive debt patterns were identified. They were:

- steadily increasing arrears
- steadily decreasing arrears
- intermittent arrears, increasing and decreasing at various times
- no change in arrears

The central finding of the project concluded that the debt growth occurred mainly among low-income NCPs whose monthly order amount was set too high for their reported wages. The study showed that when the monthly order amount exceeded 20 percent of reported gross wages, child support debt usually grew.

The NCPs in the four debt patterns showed distinctive payment and debt records. Order setting and maintenance was by far the most significant factor associated with debt growth. Four major issues related to orders were identified:

1. The ratio of monthly support order to reported wages.
  - default orders based on imputed income
  - NCPs in the increasing debt pattern were more likely to have multiple orders on multiple cases
2. Once orders were set they were seldom modified.
  - the process for modifying court orders was complex and time consuming
  - review of cases often didn't result in an adjustment due to criteria for change
3. Many NCPs faced a large debt before they were ever delinquent with payments.
4. Paternity orders were disproportionately associated with the increasing debt pattern.

Certain intractable barriers to collection were associated with increasing and intermittent debt patterns. The barriers examined were: corrections record, history of receiving public assistance/ grants, multiple IV-D cases as NCP, NCP also the custodial parent on another IV-D case, and documented drug/alcohol abuse.

The focus of the program has been on quality locate and collection work. The findings of this project indicate that priorities need to change. The path to increased collections and lower debt lies in better, more appropriate orders. Final reports can be found at:

<http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/pdf/esa/dcs/reports/cvol1prn.pdf> and  
<http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/pdf/esa/dcs/reports/caseassessmentfinal.pdf>.

**Grant Number:** 90FD0027, 1999 Section 1115 Demonstration Grant

**Project Period:** 17-month project with an award year of 1999

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## **Colorado**

### **Colorado Department of Human Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement “An Evaluation of Colorado’s Debt and Retroactive Child Support Initiative”**

**NOTE:** Includes findings from the final report

This study examined whether the suspension of debt and retroactive support orders lead to better payment of current support obligations. New cases needing an order established in two counties were randomly assigned to an experimental group or a control group. The cases in the experimental group had no debt or retroactive support established, while those in the control group were treated as usual with respect to debt and retroactive support. The sample was further refined to only include those cases that had incurred a financial obligation to the State or custodial parent prior to the establishment of a child support order and would have been required to pay debt or retroactive support under normal case processing procedures in Colorado. There were 105 cases in the experimental group and 112 cases in the control group.

#### **Project Findings:**

The debt treatment was not known to the noncustodial parents (NCPs). The two groups were statistically equivalent, with twenty-four to twenty-nine percent of each group failing to appear and receiving a default order. Average monthly support for the groups was \$234 and \$239 respectively. Cases were reviewed at 6, 12, and 24 months. The review found NCPs in both groups paid statistically equivalent amounts of child support. Their payments ranged from 32 to 37 percent of what they owed. Nearly one-third of the NCPs in both groups paid almost nothing at 6 months. After 24 months, thirteen to twenty percent of NCPs in both groups had paid over 75 percent of what they owed.

The manner in which NCPs handle their child support obligations tends to be consistent with how they handle their consumer debt. The most delinquent child support payers had the worst commercial credit records. Average annual income for NCPs in the study ranged from \$10,716 to \$16,800. The sample did not include NCPs with higher incomes. So, no conclusion can be drawn as to whether arrears forgiveness is more effective in promoting payment of child support among slightly more prosperous parents.

The final report can be found beginning on page 64 at:

<https://childsupport.States.co.us/siteuser/do/general/GetPDF?PDFNumber=84>.

**Grant Number:** 90FD0028, 1999 Section 1115 Demonstration Grant

**Project Period:** 17-month project with an award year of 1999

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## **Colorado**

### **Colorado Department of Human Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement “New Approaches to Child Support Arrears”**

**NOTE:** Includes findings from the final report

This project included a survey of State policy and practice related to arrears, an analysis of child support arrears in Colorado and an evaluation of Colorado’s Debt and Retroactive Child Support Initiative. The study was intended to provide recommendations to Colorado for improvement in the management of child support arrears.

Child support arrears are a serious problem of particular significance in Colorado. Nationally, about half of all open child support cases have arrears. In Colorado, the figure at the time of the study was closer to seventy-two percent. A random sample of 386 cases was selected from all

cases with at least \$1,500 in arrears. Data was collected manually from each of these cases. Demographic and case data were used to analyze the arrears.

**Project Findings:**

The study found that a variety of factors contribute to the greater than average problem with arrears. These factors include: calculation of retroactive support back to the date of birth of the child; mandatory minimum order amount; default orders; imputation of income; interest added to the debt; noncustodial parents (NCPs) with multiple orders; incarcerated NCP orders not systematically reviewed and adjusted; and open cases that could have been closed.

The purpose of the study was to develop a profile of child support arrears in Colorado to inform future discussion and debate about possible changes in policy or practice related to arrears.

The final report can be found at:

<https://childsupport.States.co.us/siteuser/do/general/GetPDF?PDFNumber=84>.

**Grant Number:** 90FD0028, 1999 Section 1115 Demonstration Grant

**Project Period:** 17-month project with an award year of 1999

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**Virginia**

**Virginia Department of Social Services, Division of Child Support Enforcement  
“Developing New Approaches to Collecting Arrears: The Virginia Model”**

**NOTE:** Includes findings from the final report

Virginia conducted a multiyear study of a large sample of cases with arrears. The project examined various aspects of these cases including the demographics and characteristics of noncustodial parents (NCPs), trends in arrears amounts, and selected enforcement methods and payment frequencies. The results of this study produced a number of recommendations to the Division of Child Support Enforcement (DCSE) to promote the payment of arrears and reduce their accumulation, individually and in the aggregate.

In July 1999, a random sample of 6,653 cases with arrears was selected for analysis. The sample was tracked for 2 years, July 1999 through July 2001. During this time the sample had decreased to 5,151 cases due to normal attrition. The project used presumed causes for the occurrence of arrears in developing the hypotheses to test.

**Project Findings:**

The project tested 11 hypotheses and many more propositions. Here is a summary of the results:

1. Charging fees on cases increases the difficulty in collecting payments. NOT SUPPORTED
2. Charging interest on arrears balances is an effective strategy for the Commonwealth and custodial parents (CPs) to motivate the NCPs to pay. NOT SUPPORTED
3. Large arrears balances result from large support order amounts. SUPPORTED for arrears balances of \$5,000+
4. NCPs who owe arrears are either young or elderly. NOT SUPPORTED
5. Proportionately, female NCPs owe more arrears than male NCPs. NOT SUPPORTED
6. Race is a factor in NCPs being unable to pay current support. NOT SUPPORTED
7. Proportionately, NCPs who have multiple support orders owe more arrears than NCPs who have a single order. NOT SUPPORTED
8. NCPs that have large arrears amounts are less likely to pay current support and arrears. SUPPORTED

9. Large arrears balances dissuade NCPs from making payments. SUPPORTED
10. Basing federal incentive payments on States' performance in collecting arrears is a realistic strategy. OUTSIDE SCOPE
11. The accrual of arrears is often due to factors beyond the States' control. SUPPORTED

The final report including recommendations can be found at:

[http://www.dss.virginia.gov/files/division/dcse/publications\\_reports/dcse\\_reports/Arrearages.pdf](http://www.dss.virginia.gov/files/division/dcse/publications_reports/dcse_reports/Arrearages.pdf).

**Grant Number:** 90FD0029, 1999 Section 1115 Demonstration Grant

**Project Period:** 17-month project with an award year of 1999

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### **Virginia**

#### **Virginia Department of Social Services, Division of Child Support Enforcement "The Barriers Project"**

**NOTE:** Includes findings from the final report

The Barriers Project was a multiyear study aimed at providing special services to noncustodial parents (NCPs) facing incarceration such as assisting them in overcoming barriers that prevent their payment of child support. This project contained two phases. The first phase was conducted from March 1, 2000 to April 1, 2001. The second phase was conducted from April 1, 2001 to June 1, 2005.

Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Courts judges in the Fredericksburg, VA, area referred 294 NCPs representing 490 cases for case management services in lieu of incarceration. A control group of cases was maintained for comparison purposes. Two treatments were available to the NCPs in the experimental group:

- an assessment and a minimum of 30 days of case management services; and
- a referral for services through the Community Partners Network (CPN).

All NCPs in the experimental group received the case management services and 27 were referred for services from agencies in the CPN. Only nine actually used them.

#### **Project Findings:**

Compared to the control group, the experimental group of NCPs achieved the following results:

- Made larger monthly payments for current support;
- Had higher rates of support payment; and,
- Made significantly higher payments towards their arrearages.

In addition to these comparisons, the following results were achieved by the NCPs in the experimental group.

- The percentage of NCPs in the project that made their child support payments for a full quarter increased from 12 percent before the project to 36 percent in the first quarter and 65 percent by the fourth quarter.
- The overall rate of payment of current support and arrears increased from 6 percent to 17 percent while enrolled in the project.
- Due to NCPs' progress in making support payments while in the project, they served less than 1 percent of the number of days in jail that they were sentenced by the court, with the remainder suspended by the judge.

The researchers concluded the project was successful due to these and other positive results.

**Grant Number:** 90FD0032 and 90FD0063, 1999 and 2001 Section 1115 Demonstration Grants

**Project Period:** 3/1/00 to 4/1/01 (extended to June 1, 2005)

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### **Colorado**

#### **Colorado Department of Human Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement “Serving Parents Who Leave Prison: Final Report on the Work and Family Center”**

**NOTE:** Includes findings from the final report

This project evaluated the characteristics and experiences of 350 clients seen at the Work and Family Center (WFC) from August 1999 to March 15, 2001. The WFC is a multi-agency collaboration to enhance the successful reintegration of offenders upon their release from Colorado prisons. All clients in this study had minor-aged children and were known to the child support agency in Colorado. They were offered assistance with employment, child support issues, and family reintegration.

Ex-offenders who visited the WFC met with case managers who helped them with employment and child support issues. Some received bus tokens and work tools. Clients also had the opportunity to meet with a family law attorney who could help them with custody and visitation issues and a therapist for individual and family counseling sessions.

#### **Project Findings:**

At the end of two years, the project was evaluated. The following outlines some of the significant findings:

- Multi-service interventions for paroled and released offenders should be created.
- Child support assistance should be included in the mix of services.
- Faster appointments for services are needed as ex-offenders face strict timelines.
- More sustained interventions over a longer period of time are needed for clients to reconnect with their children and deal with family reintegration.
- The child support agency should establish more realistic support orders and arrears obligations for low-income noncustodial parents.
- Reintegration programs like the WFC are a promising strategy to reduce recidivism.

Very impressive results for the clients and families were achieved over the course of the study. In order to gauge the potential of the project, data needs to be tracked over a longer period of time. A longer time period is also needed to gauge child support payment behaviors and the return to prison rates.

The final and related reports can be found at

**Grant Number:** 90FD0033, 1999 Section 1115 Demonstration Grant

**Project Period:** 17-month project with an award year of 1997

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### **Washington**

#### **Washington Department of Social and Health Services, Division of Child Support “A Study of Washington Child Support Orders”**

**NOTE:** Includes findings from the final report

This project was an investigation of the outcomes that flow from the point of order origin. The plan was to investigate how well new child support orders in the State of Washington meet the requirements of the Washington State Child Support Schedule (Schedule). The project had several goals:

1. Conduct a comparative analysis of the non-IV-D child support orders with the orders for IV-D cases.
2. Investigate how well recent child support orders conformed to the requirements of the Schedule.
3. Examine ways to improve data collection for subsequent required periodic Schedule reviews by ensuring a more representative sample and by experimenting with the use of automated data.
4. Conduct a process analysis of how child support orders are set in the absence of non-custodial parent (NCP) income information and/or the nonappearance of the NCP.
5. Examine findings from the arrearages project.

The four categories of child support orders sampled were Direct Pay orders, Payment Services Only orders, IV-D Court orders, and IV-D Administrative orders. A stratified sampling strategy was used, selecting orders separately from the four categories of orders. The sample was drawn from the universe of orders entered in Washington from October 2000 to March 2001. The final sample was 4,300 orders.

### **Project Findings:**

One goal was to determine the income basis for recent orders. The Schedule is used to compute the order amount. Since some parents do not participate in the process, imputing income was necessary. The study found 32 percent of IV-D orders used imputed income. Deviations from the Schedule were also quite common.

Another goal was to examine balancing the economic needs of children and NCPs. Custodial parents (CPs) and their children typically experience a much greater drop in their standard of living than the NCPs following family breakup. However, there was a decided difference in the economic well-being between the IV-D families and the non-IV-D families. Poverty was virtually absent among the non-IV-D cases. Poverty rates for IV-D families were 21 percent even when households were intact. Poverty rates for CP-mothers and children rose to a mean of 49 percent. Meanwhile, the NCP-fathers' poverty rate was 15 percent, indicating a drop in poverty rate for them.

The final report includes more results and recommendations and can be found at:  
<http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/pdf/esa/dcs/reports/FinalGrant205.pdf>.

**Grant Number:** 90FD0035, 2000 Section 1115 Demonstration Grant

**Project Period:** 17-month project with an award year of 2000

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### **Washington**

**Washington Department of Social and Health Services, Division of Child Support  
"Child Support Performance Measurements, A Test for Working Hard-To-Collect Cases"**

**NOTE:** Includes findings from the final report

This project began in 1996 to study how to improve collections on delinquent cases. The Division of Child Support (DCS) set up the project to determine whether improved collections on difficult cases would improve performance on the Federal performance measures. The purpose of the project was to improve collections on hard-to-collect cases with debts over \$500, on which DCS had not collected a payment in the preceding 6 months, except for IRS offsets. The core goal was to assess the effectiveness of assigning hard-to-collect cases to a specialized unit within the child support agency.

The project examined a sample of 3,937 cases. Half the cases were randomly assigned to a treatment group and half were assigned to a control group. DCS created a small unit, the Special Collections Unit (SCU), to work the treatment cases. The control cases remained within

the regular field office caseload, and staff could not identify them as sample cases. SCU applied comprehensive and aggressive locate and collection methods to the treatment cases. They attempted to reach the noncustodial parents (NCPs) by telephone and letter and negotiated payment arrangements.

**Project Findings:**

The SCU produced higher payment outcomes than the control group. When automated matches were excluded, the SCU contributed 54.6 percent of the total collections, compared to the control group at 45.4 percent. The difference in the rate of payment was also statistically highly significant. The difference the SCU was able to make was limited to certain case types. One of the disappointing results was the SCU efforts made no difference on current support cases.

Apart from payment outcomes, the most notable finding of the project was the pervasiveness of serious, recurring barriers to collection. Three major barriers were noteworthy from the beginning. They were: the prevalence of multiple cases, the number of NCPs currently and recently on public assistance or SSI, and the number of NCPs with corrections records. These barriers are an important factor in explaining project collection outcomes on current assistance cases.

Project findings suggest that DCS is least likely to improve collections on the category of cases the Federal incentive measures favor. They strongly indicate that special collections units aimed at current assistance cases are not worthwhile. A special collection unit can be a valuable tool in pursuing certain kinds of hard-to-collect cases. The State would need to clearly define the purpose and goals for the unit. Such a unit could be used for quality control or to have an intensive locate project. Any focus on hard-to-collect cases must address the barriers to collection to be successful.

Other recommendations from the project were to develop a match with the Department of Corrections, enhancements to the child support system, and providing a more efficient means of determining whether a case is currently workable. The final report can be found at: <http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/pdf/esa/dcs/reports/scpfinalreport.pdf> .

**Grant Number:** 90FD0038, 2000 Section 1115 Demonstration Grant

**Project Period:** October 1, 1996 to February 28, 1998 (extended to February 28, 1999)

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**Massachusetts**

**Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Child Support Enforcement Division  
“Fathers in the Criminal Justice System”**

**NOTE:** Includes findings from the final report

This project was a collaboration between child support and the criminal justice agencies in Massachusetts. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the child support cases of incarcerated and paroled parents, examine the demographics of the cases and analyze the accumulation of child support arrearages during incarceration. The case population was identified by an electronic match between child support records and records maintained by the Department of Correction, the Parole Department, and the Suffolk County House of Correction.

A total of 3,246 incarcerated and paroled parents have at least one open Massachusetts child support case. There were 4,258 cases, an average of 1.3 to 1.4 cases each. The vast majority of these individuals are male, and most are over the age of 30. There are 4,952 children named on the orders in these cases. Other data collected included marital status, need for paternity to be established, the average amount due each month, the amount of arrearages, and whether

the custodial parent (CP) and children are currently receiving public assistance or have received public assistance in the past.

The project evaluated the payment pattern, the total amount due and the projected growth in arrearages for incarcerated parents. They found that only 8 to 11 percent of inmates had a modification of the current support amount. The average arrears due was over \$8,000 for prison inmates and the total arrears on these cases was over \$30 million, not including interest and penalties.

### **Project Findings:**

Child support and criminal justice agencies have an overlapping population. Incarcerated parents enter prison with child support arrearages and accrue more debt as inmates. Most of them do not have income with which to pay current support. Most do not get a modification of their child support order and do not know they can request a modification.

Recommendations included:

- Information should be given to individuals at the time of intake into incarceration about child support so they can take appropriate actions to minimize the build-up of arrearages.
- The child support agency should explore the possibility of establishing paternity in prison.
- The child support agency should develop procedures to implement modifications for incarcerated parents in a timely, simple, and cost effective manner.

The final report can be found at:

<http://www.centerforpolicyresearch.org/reports/profile%20of%20CS%20among%20incarcerated%20&%20paroled%20parents.pdf>.

**Grant Number:** 90FD0049, 2000 Section 1115 Demonstration Grant

**Project Period:** 3-year project with an award year of 2000

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### **Massachusetts**

#### **Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Child Support Enforcement Division “Massachusetts Arrears Analysis and Arrears Reduction Project”**

This demonstration project consisted of a data analysis of arrears held by Massachusetts as well as several strategies undertaken by the Child Support Enforcement Division of the Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR) to manage its arrears. When this project began in September 2002, arrears in Massachusetts had reached nearly \$2 billion, including principal, interest, and penalty. Since Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 1998, arrears had been growing at an average rate of 12 percent per year. Child support collections had also been growing during this same period but at a slower rate of 9 percent per year. DOR wanted to understand why arrears had been growing faster than collections and what could be done to reduce arrears growth.

The analysis identifies four significant factors that contributed to arrears growth in Massachusetts. One factor was the introduction of the assessment of interest and penalty in January, 1998. A second factor was that many orders appeared to be too high for low-income obligors, when compared to their reported gross income. Nearly one-quarter of the obligors in Massachusetts had orders that exceeded 50 percent of their most recent reported gross income. A third factor identified was that cases which appear to meet Federal case closing criteria remained open with significant arrears. The fourth major factor contributing to arrears growth is a lack of payment compliance that spans the income spectrum.

All of these factors contributed to one of the most significant findings of the project: one-tenth of Massachusetts obligors held half of the Commonwealth's arrears and each of these obligors owed at least \$44,000 in arrears. These obligors tended to have low reported incomes and have older cases than the general obligor population. In addition, these obligors were more likely to have multiple cases, have no known current address, and live outside of Massachusetts than the average obligor. The lack of reported income and location information will continue to make it difficult for DOR to collect the majority of these arrears.

In 2004, DOR promulgated an arrears management regulation (830 CMR 119A.6.2) that allows for the settlement or equitable adjustment of arrears that have been permanently assigned to the Commonwealth by parents who received public assistance. As part of this project, DOR conducted a pilot program in its southeastern Massachusetts regional office. DOR contacted selected obligors who might qualify for equitable adjustment and offered to work with them in an effort to reduce their arrears. Obligor selected for the pilot program owed at least \$2,000 in arrears to the Commonwealth, and for the tax years 2003 and 2004 had reported income that was below what a minimum wage job would pay.

**Project Findings:**

The two most common actions taken in pilot program cases were to enter an exemption from interest and penalty for any period obligors met exemption criteria and to make participants aware of DOR's program to waive interest and penalty which had been in effect since 2000. Other actions taken in pilot cases were referral for equitable adjustment, filing a complaint for modification of a current obligation or closing the case because it met Federal case closing criteria.

The demonstration project also resulted in DOR implementing its Top Ten Arrears project to help address the fact that a small percentage of obligors owe more than half the total arrears in Massachusetts. For the Top Ten Arrears project, caseworkers reviewed the 10 cases in their caseloads with the highest arrears to see what could be done about the arrears. The first group of Top Ten Arrears obligors owed more than \$68 million in arrears when the project began but this amount was reduced by 14 percent in the first 8 months of the project. The reduction resulted from closing eligible cases, aggressive enforcement resulting in collections, and correction of DOR's records, as many of these were older cases that had not been reviewed in years. To keep staff focused on cases with large arrears, each case owner's Top Ten list is updated every month and new cases added. Using this method, DOR will continue to systematically review and address the cases of the small percentage of obligors who owe more than half of the total debt in Massachusetts.

**Grant Number:** 90FD0067, 2002 Section 1115 Demonstration Grant

**Project Period:** 3-year project with an extension end date to February, 2006

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**Kansas**

**Kansas Department of SRS, Child Support Enforcement**

**"Kansas Legal Services, Non-custodial Parent Project"**

**NOTE:** Includes findings from the final report

The Kansas Legal Services Non-custodial Parent Project (KLS NCPP) approach is increasing child support responsibility through legal assistance. The primary objective was to increase child support payment rates for low income noncustodial parents (NCPs) enrolled in the Shawnee County NCP Project. Other objectives included: (1) increasing NCPs' contact with their children; (2) enhancing NCPs' understanding of the child support system in Kansas; (3) decreasing NCPs' dissatisfaction with visitation, support and custody arrangements; (4) offering mediation for resolving visitation and custody disputes; (5) enhancing knowledge of legal and mediation services to NCPs; and (6) creating a replicable model.

NCPs facing contempt proceedings for nonpayment of child support who are eligible for employment training services could choose to participate in the Shawnee County NCP Project. They were referred to KLS for free legal review. KLS family law attorneys then conducted a complete review including visitation, support and custody as well as needs directly related to maintaining employment.

**Project Findings:**

All program participants have a history of habitual nonpayment of child support. One of the challenges of this program is that the parents had little income. The majority of the participants had no income. Two measures were used to determine success of the program.

An important measure is the number of participants that met their full child support obligation for the preceding 3 months. The participants who met this criterion ranged from 5.5 percent in the first quarter to 12.2 percent in the last quarter. The other measure of payment examines the number of participants that made a payment of some type at any time during the preceding 3 months. This criterion was met almost 18 percent of the time in the first quarter and 30 percent of the time in the last quarter.

Did NCPs' knowledge of the program increase through the efforts of this project? The limited responses to a survey indicated that participants had a significant increase in knowledge and understanding of the child support program. These responses, though limited, also indicate satisfaction with the services provided and most recommended the services to others.

**Grant Number:** 90FD0068, 2002 Section 1115 Demonstration Grant

**Project Period:** 3-year project with an award year of 2002

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**Minnesota**

**Minnesota Department of Human Services, Child Support Enforcement Division and the Hennepin County Child Support Division**

**“Arrears Management for Low-Income Non-custodial Parents”**

**NOTE:** Includes findings from the final report

This program targeted low-income noncustodial parents (NCPs) who have accumulated substantial public assistance child support debt and have continuing child support obligations. These NCPs were offered an opportunity to participate in a debt-forgiveness program in exchange for regular child support payments.

**Project Findings:**

There were administrative challenges associated with the project. Implementation of the debt-forgiveness program required substantial efforts both to reach eligible NCPs and enroll them into the program. A significant amount of staff time was required to effectively administer the program. The administration of a larger debt-forgiveness program could be simplified with modifications to the child support system.

Overall, the program had a 24 percent success rate. For every NCP who completed the program, three NCPs left the program for not making regular child support payments. Three factors were found to predict the success or failure of the NCP: parents who were successful generally had a higher level of income, a larger amount of arrears to be forgiven, and lower monthly child support payments.

The report includes a number of recommendations to help other States who wish to replicate this demonstration. The final report can be found at:  
<http://edocs.dhs.States.mn.us/lfserver/Legacy/DHS-4083-ENG>.

**Grant Number:** 90FD0071, 2002 Section 1115 Demonstration Grant  
**Project Period:** 3-year project with an award year of 2002

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## **Texas**

### **Texas Office of Attorney General, Child Support Division**

#### **“Family Reintegration Project: Increasing Collections from Paroled and Released Non-custodial Parents in Texas”**

**NOTE:** Includes findings from the final report

The goal of this project was to develop strategies for increasing child support payment, employment, and family reintegration among paroled and released parents. State-level efforts included collaboration with criminal justice, IV-D court masters and workforce development boards. The project involved the Office of Attorney General (OAG), offices for region VI and VIII, three Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) facilities in Houston and El Paso, the Harris County Community Supervision and Correction Department, two employment service providers, and two community-based organizations (CBOs) that provide parenting and reunification services to incarcerated and released parents.

Services provided include parenting assistance and reunification services, employment services, order reviews and possible suspension of selected enforcement activity and placement of State-owed arrears in abeyance. A child support video and a parents' guidebook were developed. When appropriate, CBOs will assist paroled and released offenders with reunification and family reintegration. Information on incarceration and child support was developed and disseminated in a variety of formats for different audiences.

Some of the products of the project were:

- a video concerning child support and parental responsibility to be shown during the intake process
- a brochure on child support obligations and rights
- a training session on incarceration and child support for IV-D associate judges
- a compilation of court decisions, law and policy for judicial and policy personnel
- a Statewide workgroup to review the State's child support policies and procedures for incarcerated noncustodial parents

#### **Project Findings:**

The study had many promising findings with respect to child support payments, employment and earnings, post-release contact with children, recidivism, and satisfaction with the program. The key findings included:

- Incarcerated parents wanted help with child support, parenting, and employment, and responded positively to outreach efforts in jail settings.
- Following program participation, inmates who paid support paid more of what they owed and it tended to come from wage withholding.
- Employment was the key to child support payment following release.
- Family reintegration programs were well-used and may have helped maintain parent child relationships.
- Inmates appreciated efforts to help them with child support, employment and reintegration.

The study identified a number of challenges that are yet to be overcome. They included:

- Many released project participants failed to become employed; those that did had low earnings.
- Project participants returned to jail at about the same rate as other States jail inmates.
- Existing policies precluded staff from taking aggressive child support actions and many project participants left jail with high order levels and arrears balances.

A number of lessons can be drawn from this project on how to improve outcomes. These lessons may be useful to any States attempting to replicate the project. They include:

- Collaborative projects are labor-intensive and require the interest of top-level administrators.
- Efforts to teach inmates about family reintegration place heavy demands on staff and necessitate community collaborations.
- Employment is the key to child support payment following release.
- Basic changes are needed in inmate training and the training, employment, and earnings opportunities for paroled and released parents.
- States need to develop uniform and realistic child support policies for incarcerated non-custodial parents.
- Without changing existing child support policies, arrears balances for inmates will continue to dramatically increase.

**Grant Number:** 90FD0073, 2002 Section 1115 Demonstration Grant

**Project Period:** 3-year project with an award year of 2002

### **Colorado**

#### **Colorado Department of Human Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement “Reduce Arrearages of Low-Income NCPs by Reducing the Number of Default Orders”**

The goals of this project were to reduce default orders, establish orders based on accurate income determination, determine if a reduction in default orders results in increased child support payments, and test electronic notification system (ENS) reminder calls.

There were two treatment groups in the grant. One included cases receiving all of the extra steps and ENS calls and the other included cases only receiving ENS calls. Four basic approaches were used to lower the default rate. They were:

- Enhancements to locating obligors
- Concerted efforts to contact the obligor prior to the negotiation conference
- Incentives to encourage the obligor to appear at the negotiation conference
- Post-negotiation conference enhancements

A number of strategies were used to reduce default orders. They included:

- Use of welcome letters and calls prior to the negotiation conference
- Use of Spanish legal forms and interpreters
- More contact with the custodial party
- A 10-day window for the obligor to provide accurate income information before entering the default order
- Enhanced locate

The demonstration began in January 2005 in Jefferson and Denver Counties. Spanish forms were finalized, as almost 30 percent of parents in Denver County are Spanish-first speakers. The interfaces to implement ENS calling were completed. ENS calling was set up to call non-custodial parents (NCPs) and custodial parents (CPs) 3 days prior to the negotiation conference. If the NCP missed the conference, another call was made to let them know they still had time to possibly get a change to the default amount. Calls were also made prior to the

first payment due date and if the first payment was missed. If an ENS call is not picked up, the system redials once an hour fifteen times during preset call hours.

### **Early Results:**

Overall, early results are very promising. The default order percentage in the experimental group was 11 percent in the first 3 months of the project. In 2004, the Statewide default order rate in Colorado was 33 percent. This is a significant reduction.

Historically, county CSE units have located obligors and set up service of process to “catch the obligor before they could, run.” But this demonstration is showing that most obligors react favorably when approached through phone calls or letters that clearly state the business at hand. With this, workers and evaluators in this demonstration firmly believe the approaches used in the demonstration will change the way the CSE Program currently approaches establishment of orders.

**Grant Number:** 90FD0080, 2003 Section 1115 Demonstration Grant

**Project Period:** 3-year project with an extended end date of February 28, 2007

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### **Michigan**

#### **Michigan Family Independence Agency, Office of Child Support**

#### **“Dads from Day One: A Program to Improve Front-end Services to Low-income Fathers and Increase Financial and Emotional Support for Children”**

This project focuses on the “front-end” process of child support enforcement beginning with the birth of a child to low-income unwed parents, through the process of establishing a child support order, and for the first few months of payments. The program seeks to provide the necessary services to both parents so that they may better support the child, and it ensures that the child support expectations are realistic. As part of this front-end process, the project will provide case management services to low-income unwed fathers to increase their capacity to provide both financial and emotional support.

The major objectives of the proposed **Dads from Day One** Program are to:

- Increase the completion of voluntary affidavits of paternity.
- Increase child support payments.
- Improve parenting behavior by increasing fathers’ involvement in their children’s lives.
- Promote marriage of unwed parents where appropriate.
- Increase the employment and earnings of low-income fathers.

The major components of the **Dads from Day One** Program are:

- Identification of cases and appropriate services that could be offered at the front-end (beginning at the time that the child is born in the hospital).
- Intensive case management and a broad array of case services for low-income fathers with an emphasis on job training, job placement, and job retention.
- Promotion of marriage for unwed parents in appropriate circumstances.
- Establishment of Realistic Child Support Obligations.

### **Early Project Evaluation:**

The concept of getting fathers involved early is good. It is important to let fathers know about their child support rights. It is good that the program provides child support program information, answers their questions, and helps walk them through the process.

There are some changes that could enhance the program. These include:

- Concentrate on dads. Dads should be allowed to be a part of the program even if the mom doesn't want them to.
- Improve community outreach so that the case managers have more credibility with the clients.
- Begin the process sooner—maybe 3 months before the birth.
- Consider targeting other hospitals to obtain a higher degree of cooperation and participation.
- Make sure that the dads finish high school, since many of them have not graduated.

There have been challenges with recruiting participants for the program. Initial data on the numbers of fathers at the targeted hospital at the time of birth were overstated. Project staff recommended providing incentives for participation. It was also noted that there are limitations due to some of the program requirements. These requirements should be reevaluated.

**Grant Number:** 90FD0081, 2003 Section 1115 Demonstration Grant

**Project Period:** September 30, 2003 – September 30, 2006

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### **Texas**

#### **Texas Office of Attorney General, Child Support Division**

#### **“Texas Arrears Prevention Project”**

This is a demonstration and evaluation project designed to reduce the amount of unnecessary arrears that accumulate in cases because of front-end process inefficiencies. Texas has identified three processes that need improvement to prevent front-end accumulation of arrears. They are the Child Support Review Process (CSRP), the entry of new order information, and the initiation of income withholding.

Improvements are expected to be made in several areas. The existing CSRP process was labor intensive and time consuming so the project made necessary changes to increase the use of CSRP by staff. This includes automation of processes to determine if the cases meet CSRP criteria and to schedule and print notices of appointments. Special training on CSRP for IV-D staff in the agency and in the court may be provided. Policies and procedures will be finally determined after the project staff has examined the initial study of the process in detail.

Another component of the project is analyzing the order entry process and formulating recommendations to streamline the process to make it easier and quicker. The final part of the project will focus on correcting employer information and monitoring income-withholding orders that are issued but do not result in payments. The goal is to determine the reason for nonpayment. Many NCPs do not know they are responsible for payment of support until employer income withholding begins. Inefficiencies and inaccuracies in the withholding process also contribute to the accumulation of arrears.

#### **Early Results:**

Texas implemented edits to the automated and manual processes for issuing wage withholding orders. Since May 2005, these edits have prevented 3,300 orders from being issued in error and over 20,000 duplicate orders from being issued, with another 5,500 orders stopped by edits implemented the prior year. This resulted in \$547,200 savings in postage and court filing fees. Many other significant steps were completed toward full implementation of the plans developed by the project team. Positive results are expected, but it's too early to report other results.

**Grant Number:** 90FD0088, 2003 Section 1115 Demonstration Grant

**Project Period:** 3-year project with an award year of 2003

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## **Iowa**

### **Iowa Department of Human Services Bureau of Collections "Making Connections, Improving Collections"**

This grant responds to 2004 Priority Area 5: Increasing Payments and Avoiding Non-Custodial Parents' (NCPs') Debts through Stratifying NCPs by Likelihood of Paying, Taking Steps Appropriate to Their Classification, and Taking Prompt Action. The Bureau of Collections proposes to develop an innovative and coordinated approach to improve front-end services to parents in the child support system, thereby increasing the financial and emotional support of children. This proposal builds on lessons learned from child support programs in this and other countries and on the expertise developed in the private collection industry.

Through this grant, Iowa seeks to shape a trusting relationship with child support program customers, particularly NCPs, to encourage them to engage in the support establishment process and in problem solving if they encounter difficulty in making their support payments. Advanced Statewide training will enhance child support specialists' ability to initiate personal contacts in a manner that succeeds in gaining NCP involvement in support establishment and encouraging their compliance with support orders. An additional intended benefit of this approach is to increase the number of NCPs willing and able to co-parent their children.

This project will prescribe early intervention strategies for cases in accordance with the stratification of targeted NCPs. The major objectives of the proposed project are to: obtain nondefault orders commensurate with the obligor's capacity to pay; encourage timely payment of order amounts in new cases; and, remedy quickly any payment problems that do occur to prevent the accumulation of child support arrearages.

**Grant Number:** 90FD0093, 2004 Section 1115 Demonstration Grant

**Project Period:** September 30, 2004 to February 28, 2006

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## **Ohio**

### **Ohio Department of Human Services and Jobs and Family Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement**

#### **"Child Support Navigator Services"**

This grant responds to 2004 Priority Area 2: Motivating Non-Custodial Parents to Comply with Orders by Involving Them More at the Earliest Stages of Support. Fairfield County proposes to create a Child Support Navigator Service for those ordered to pay child support. This customer service initiative will focus on proactive contact with noncustodial parents (NCPs) to encourage compliance with child support procedures and court orders for support. Navigators will meet with NCPs prior to the establishment of a support order or within 30 days of the establishment of an order. Through education, outreach, and appropriate referrals to community resources, the navigators will work to improve the feelings and perceptions of child support commonly held by NCPs.

The project will include the creation of two navigators from among a pool of paying obligors or from among those who have empathy for parents and a clear understanding of the issues they face. Navigators will be available at the courts and the child support agency, during hours accessible for working parents, including evenings and weekends. Regular phone calls and correspondence will be maintained with obligors to quickly identify potential barriers to the payment of support, offer encouragement for the payment of support, provide education about the importance of child support and offer referrals for counseling, workforce, legal, or other community services. The navigators will work with child support leadership to develop accurate, readable fact sheets.

**Grant Number:** 90FD0095, 2004 Section 1115 Demonstration Grant

**Project Period:** September 30, 2004 to February 28, 2006

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## **Nebraska**

### **The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Support Enforcement**

#### **“Changing the Culture: Making Child Support More than Just Another Expense”**

This 17-month grant responds to 2004 Priority Area 5: Increasing Payments and Avoiding Non-Custodial Parents' (NCP) Debts through Stratifying NCPs by Likelihood of Paying, Taking Steps Appropriate to Their Classification, and Taking Prompt Action. In this project, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Support Enforcement, plans to utilize principles of the Australian Child Support Model to identify new NCPs, stratify their likelihood to pay child support, and interact with them early in the child support experience in order to build more positive long-term relationships, increase collections, and prevent arrears.

Building on the demonstrated success of the Nebraska Child Support Customer Service Call Center, the grantee proposes to use the Call Center to initiate and maintain contact with customers (custodial parents and NCPs) in order to improve customer satisfaction, increase collections, identify problems and resolve questions/issues before they become problematic. The grantee's goal is not solely to increase child support payments, but to also change the NCP's view of child support from "it's just another expense" to "it's really important for my children."

**Grant Number:** 90FD0097, 2004 Section 1115 Demonstration Grant

**Project Period:** September 30, 2004 to February 28, 2006 (extended to February 28, 2007)

#### **Note:**

See Best Practices Compendium for details on the Customer Service Call Center at:

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pol/IM/2004/im-04-03b.doc>

The April 2006 Child Support Report contains an article on the Nebraska Child Support Customer Service Call Center, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pubs/2006/csr/csr0604.pdf>

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## **Tennessee**

### **Tennessee Department of Human Services, Division of Child Support Services**

#### **"Knox County Tennessee Non-custodial Parent Case Stratification and Early Intervention Project"**

This grant responds to 2004 Priority Area 5: Increasing Payments and Avoiding Noncustodial Parents' (NCPs') Debts through Stratifying NCPs by Likelihood of Paying, Taking Steps Appropriate to Their Classification, and Taking Prompt Action. The Tennessee Department of Human Services, Division of Child Support Services, proposes to develop an innovative project, modeled after case assessment and early intervention techniques already successfully used in Australia. Tennessee's case stratification will be based upon an assessment completed at the time that the child support order is established and will identify financial and other parental characteristics that may be predictive of the likelihood of compliance. The case stratification will also be used to identify what interventions may be appropriate for the case, such as more frequent personal contact with NCPs, prompt modification of orders if necessary, and additional reminders to NCPs (including monthly reminders by mail or telephone).

The case stratification will allow the child support agency to better match enforcement techniques to individual case circumstances, allowing the county to more effectively and efficiently utilize its staff resources. In addition to appropriate enforcement techniques, the case stratification will enable the child support agency to better identify NCPs who are in need of services. NCPs who are unemployed or underemployed will be referred to the Child Support Employment and Parenting Partnership, an existing program designed to address barriers to child support payment.

An additional component of the proposed project will be to identify cases with unmarried parents who may benefit from marriage in order to refer them to marriage assistance programs.

**Grant Number:** 90FD0102, 2004 Section 1115 Demonstration Grant  
**Project Period:** September 30, 2004 to February 28, 2006 (extended to February 28, 2007)

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### **West Virginia**

#### **West Virginia Bureau of Child Support Enforcement**

##### **"Public Awareness Campaign to Educate Incarcerated Adults about Their Child Support Obligations"**

This grant responds to 2004 priority area 8: Projects Furthering the Child Support Mission to Ensure That All Children Receive Financial and Medical Support from Their Parents. West Virginia proposes to develop a video and brochure to provide information about child support to incarcerated parents. Prison staff will show the video to inmates shortly before their release. The anticipated benefits of the project include: petitions to the court that will lead to more realistic orders; improved collections and an improved collection/order ratio for the State; reduced contempt petitions for nonpayment; and more likely compliance with support orders upon the release of noncustodial parents from prison.

**Grant Number:** 90FD0103, 2004 Section 1115 Demonstration Grant  
**Project Period:** September 30, 2004 to February 28, 2006 (extended to September 29, 2006)

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### **Colorado**

#### **Colorado Division of Child Support Enforcement**

##### **"Early Intervention in Cases with New Orders, New Delinquencies, High Orders, and TANF Involvement"**

This project is responsive to 2005 Priority Area 2: Developing a Comprehensive System of Early Intervention That Will Avoid Future Problems. The Colorado Division of Child Support Enforcement (CDCSE) proposes to conduct a 3-year project aimed at improving the voluntary payment of support, reducing arrears, and increasing the reliability of child support collections among Temporary Assistance for Needy Families clients. As part of the proposed project, three county child support agencies will contact parents with new or newly modified orders to identify potential barriers to payment. Parents will also be contacted when payments are missed to determine if a modification, job referral, or other adjustment is needed.

In addition to the strategies noted above, Colorado will evaluate the impact of the new low-income adjustment to its child support guideline on payment behavior among low-income noncustodial parents (NCPs) by comparing payment behavior for samples of low-income obligors prior to and following January 2003 when the provision became effective.

To test the effectiveness of these interventions, cases in each county will be randomly assigned to conventional and experimental treatment categories and both will be compared for rates of child support payment, enforcement activity, and arrears balances. A qualitative analysis will also be conducted to document implementation in the three counties and to assess staff reactions to the project in the participating child support agencies and courts. Interviews will also be conducted with custodial parents and NCPs to assess reactions to simplified modification procedures and outreach efforts by child support staff.

**Grant Number:** 90FD0111, 2005 Section 1115 Demonstration Grant  
**Project Period:** August 1, 2005 to July 31, 2008

## **Arizona**

### **Arizona Department of Economic Security/Division of Child Support Enforcement**

#### **"Arizona Statewide Arrears Calculation Tool"**

This 17-month project addresses 2005 Priority Area 4: Use of Specific Collaboration Protocols with Other Agencies. The Arizona Department of Economic Security's (DES) Division of Child Support Enforcement proposes a demonstration project consisting of a new collaboration among the Arizona Division of Child Support Enforcement (DCSE), the Maricopa County Family Court, the Arizona Attorney General's office and the Arizona Administration of Courts to develop and implement a Web-based arrears calculation tool that would allow courts, customers, and IV-D staff to better manage child support arrears. This tool would use the information provided by the State Case Registry and State Disbursement Unit to calculate on-demand and in real time the amount of arrears owed. The tool would provide timely, accurate information on support arrears and would be available to the public, the courts, and child support workers.

All customers with an Arizona court order, including those with an Arizona case who no longer reside in the State, would have self-service access to this Web-based, portable tool 24 hours a day/7 days a week. This tool would eliminate the need for members of the judiciary to reschedule hearings in order to obtain a current arrears amount and allow for immediate recalculation of arrears based on testimony presented in court. The tool would also reduce the time expended by IV-D staff performing arrears calculations in complex cases and allow custodial and noncustodial parents to easily obtain detailed information about the amount of support owed without having to contact the IV-D agency or a Clerk of the Court.

**Grant Number:** 90FD0112, 2005 Section 1115 Demonstration Grant

**Project Period:** August 1, 2005 to December 31, 2006

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## **North Carolina**

### **North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Social Services, Child Support Enforcement Section**

#### **"Improving Customer Service Through Automated Customer Service Procedures"**

This project implemented automated procedures designed to improve customer service and increase child support collections. These procedures were based upon the premise that it is easier and more cost effective to prevent delinquency in child support payments and to avoid the accumulation of chronic arrears if timely and reasonable steps are taken early on in the child support payment process to systematically remind custodial and noncustodial parents (NCPs) of their scheduled appointments and NCPs of their pending arrears. The goals of the project were:

- To improve and expand customer service levels that will result in increased collections of child support.
- To provide a service to remind NCPs of appointments, hearings, and first-time payments due.
- To prevent delinquencies in the early stages of the establishment of an order.

Delays in taking such action invariably lead to missed appointments, unnecessary waste of valuable staff time and other resources, large accumulation of arrears and, worst of all, the failure of dependent children to obtain the support they desperately need and deserve.

#### **Early Results:**

Attendance at appointments Statewide increased from 55.6 percent to 61.2 percent in the first year. The results in some counties were significantly better. The Statewide appearance at hearings decreased from 86.97 percent to 85.05 percent but several counties experienced

increases in the rate of appearance at hearings of 3 percent to 6 percent. Additional outcomes were:

- Decrease in missed appointments
- More effective use of staff time
- More effective use of court time
- Improved customer service
- Improved staff morale

This innovative project has been operating in the State on a Statewide basis since July 2004. This project has been successful in helping North Carolina achieve their mission and vision.

**Grant Number:** 90FI0046, 2003 Special Improvement Project Grant  
**Project Period:** January, 2003 to May, 2004 (extended to May, 2005)

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**Muskegon, Michigan**  
**Muskegon County Family Court Services**  
**“Noncustodial Parent Work First Program”**

**NOTE:** Includes findings from the final report

The primary goal of the project was to improve family welfare by increasing the emotional and financial contributions made by noncustodial parents (NCPs) to their children. This program involved coordinating the services of established community agencies and creating a Noncustodial Parent Program (NCP). The NCP was designed to augment traditional child support enforcement methods. Services were formulated to expand those already in place through the Noncustodial Parent Work First Program (Work First). The primary goal of Work First was to provide job search and readiness activities to NCPs.

The program used advertising and referrals to increase participation in the program and response was good. In order to expedite the process and serve more individuals, a dual process hearing was created. Upon enrollment in the program, two hearings are set, one to address the amount of child support, the other to obtain the courts' order for program participation. Both hearings are scheduled for the same date and time.

The NCP worked closely with the Friend of the Court and the County Prosecutor's Office. The Friend of the Court sends a greetings letter along with an NCP brochure immediately following a new case set-up. All new orders generated through the prosecutor's office include a paragraph requiring the NCP to participate in the NCP in the event he/she becomes unemployed.

**Project Results:**

The overall performance of the expanded NCP was notable. In Federal fiscal year (FFY) 2003, 288 NCPs were enrolled in the program with a total of \$101,521.89 collected. In FFY 2004, 625 NCPs were enrolled in the program with a total of \$320,713.41 collected. There was an enrollment increase of 117 percent and an over 215 percent increase in the amount of collections. More than 35 percent of the participants were able to complete the 90-day employment retention that leads to a successful termination from the Workforce Development Center. Given the high unemployment rate in the county, this is a very positive result.

**Grant Number:** 90FI0050, 2003 Special Improvement Project Grant  
**Project Period:** January 1, 2003, to September, 2004

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**Center for Policy Research**  
**"Early Intervention: A Multi-Site Study"**

Early Intervention: A Multi-Site Study is a project being conducted by the Center for Policy Research (CPR) of Denver, CO, to respond to 2004 Priority Area 4: Expanding Customer Services Through Agency-Initiated Contact. This 17-month study will assess the use and impact of early intervention techniques in five jurisdictions of varying size.

They are:

- Mesa County (Grand Junction), Co
- Lane County (Eugene), OR
- Suffolk County (Boston), MA
- Tarrant County (Dallas), TX
- Milwaukee County (Milwaukee), WI

At each site, workers are making special efforts to contact noncustodial parents (NCPs) and/or employers for a sample of 100 to 200 cases. In Oregon, outreach occurs at case opening, prior to the generation of orders. At the other project sites, outreach occurs immediately following the promulgation of a new or modified child support order. The goal of these worker-initiated outreach efforts is to explain the child support obligation and to identify and address barriers to payment before a habit of nonpayment develops and arrears accrue. If NCPs do not respond, the objective is to swiftly initiate enforcement activity.

Using a common data collection form, workers at each site record the efforts they make to reach and communicate with NCPs, employers, and custodial parents, and the results of these efforts. Project outcomes are assessed by extracting information on child support payments and enforcement actions for all cases exposed to early intervention techniques over a 12-month period of time. A sample of comparable cases that is treated using normal agency procedures rather than early intervention techniques is being generated at each site and comparable information on case characteristics and payment and enforcement outcomes is being extracted from automated child support records. Comparing the sample of early intervention cases to those treated using conventional techniques is expected to document the types of cases and the stages of case processing that are most responsive to agency-initiated outreach efforts; the most effective early intervention techniques that child support workers should use to promote payments and/or initiate child support enforcement activity in a timely manner; the benefits and costs associated with agency-initiated outreach efforts; and the variations in implementation and outcome for early intervention techniques in a variety of geographical settings of different sizes and administrative arrangements.

**Grant Number:** 90FI0059, 2004 Special Improvement Project Grant

**Project Period:** July 1, 2004 to November 30, 2005 (extended to October 31, 2006)

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**California**

**San Francisco Local Child Support Agency**

**"Enhanced Parental Involvement Collaboration" (EPIC)**

The San Francisco Department of Child Support Services, San Francisco's Local Child Support Agency (LCSA), in partnership with the San Francisco Unified Family Courts and its Family Law Facilitator, will conduct the Enhanced Parental Involvement Collaboration project (EPIC) in response to 2004 Priority Area 5: Helping Noncustodial Parents (NCPs) Meet Their Child Support and Family Responsibilities. EPIC, a 17-month project, will develop, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of a number of alternative measures designed to reduce the number of default cases and/or the number of cases in which imputed income was used to establish child support orders. The alternative measures will address the issues of notice to the NCP, and the educational, cultural, and economic barriers that prevent or deter NCPs from participating in the establishment process. The goal is to

increase NCP participation in the establishment of paternity and child support obligations, which will in turn reduce the default rate, reduce the amount of support arrearages, and increase the payment rates for low-income NCPs.

The EPIC project's alternative strategies are designed to enhance notice provision, address comprehension and literacy issues, increase outreach efforts and the amount of personal contact available to NCPs, and to encourage the physical presence of NCPs in court proceedings. The project will evaluate the effectiveness of these alternative strategies by implementing them in half of the cases opened during the funding period and comparing their effects to the other half of the cases, which will be processed according to existing procedures.

The EPIC project has identified the following performance objectives to demonstrate their success: reduced default rate; reduced number of defaults using presumed/imputed income, resulting in more accurate orders; increased NCP participation in the child support establishment process; and increased payment rates among NCPs. Measurements will be ongoing, taken at five key points in the NCP participatory process targeted by the alternative strategies: the period before a Summons and Complaint has even been filed; the service of process stage; the period of time directly after service of process but before the time for a default has elapsed; the stage of default eligibility (30 days after service of process); and the post judgment stage.

**Grant Number:** 90FI0063, 2004 Special Improvement Project Grant

**Project Period:** July 1, 2004 to November 30, 2005 (extended to June 30, 2006)

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## **California**

### **Monterey County Department of Child Support Services**

#### **"Mobile Customer Support and Forms Assistance"**

This 17-month grant responds to 2005 Priority Area 1: Customizing Approaches for Improved Customer Service. This project seeks to be more responsive to the needs of a large segment of its customers who are hard to serve, isolated migrants that may not speak English or Spanish by creating a mobile office to improve service delivery by the local child support agency. Two full-time experienced Spanish/English bi-lingual child support experts with on call access to other languages will assist parents in completing forms and working out stipulations for judgments and orders. Some of the benefits expected include: reduction in time for filing a case; obtaining accurate information on the applications; entering accurate support orders; avoidance of modification hearings due to the accuracy of the information collected; reduction in arrearages due to early intervention and increased participation by all parties to the case. The project will incrementally increase the number of direct contacts with clients from 5 per day to 20 per day over a 12-month period. The data collected and analyzed will be compared to the project goals and contact numbers at the two main child support offices to determine the added value of the proposed new service.

**Grant Number:** 90FI0078, 2005 Special Improvement Project Grant

**Project Period:** September 30, 2005 to February 28, 2007

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## **Kansas**

### **Episcopal Social Services (ESS), Wichita, Kansas**

#### **"Reliable Income for Kids Coalition"**

This 17-month project responds to 2005 Priority Area 1: Customizing Approaches for Improved Customer Service. ESS aims to test proactive interventions called "pro se legal facilitation" separately and in tandem with a customized system of arrears forgiveness. A partnership called the Reliable Income for Kids Coalition (RIK), consisting of the local IV-D agency, the State District Court, Kansas Workforce Development, and a nonprofit organization named Inner Change Freedom Initiative, will

cooperate to manage referrals, incentives and outcomes. The chief goal is to make child support a reliable source of income by helping noncustodial parents (NCPs) comply with child support orders which they have been reluctant or unable to pay.

RIK will offer access to free legal facilitation and education, arrears forgiveness incentives in exchange for consistent payment of support, and pro-active interventions to a targeted group of NCPs who have been found in contempt of court as well as a pilot group of recently released felons. The approach includes the establishment of four experimental groups to test the effect of each intervention separately and in tandem against the results from a control group. The project expects it will serve no fewer than 200 NCPs through referrals from the Sedgwick County District Court and the Inner Change Freedom Initiative (NCPs who have recently completed felony prison sentences). An independent evaluator will assess the project's success in several outcome areas including frequency of child support payments, employment, and participant satisfaction.

**Grant Number:** 90FI0079, 2005 Special Improvement Project Grant

**Project Period:** September 30, 2005 to February 28/2007

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### **Pennsylvania**

#### **Goodwill Industries of Pittsburgh**

##### **"Project SCALE - Support Children Through Learning and Employment"**

This 17-month project responds to 2005 Priority Area 1: Customizing Approaches for Improved Customer Service. The grantee will focus on customizing child support strategies for incarcerated individuals with child support obligations and significant child support arrearages in Allegheny County. The project will feature an innovative pre-release and post-release case management model that is designed to facilitate child support education, referrals and enrollment in relevant Workforce Investment and TANF programs and job readiness activities that exist both inside and outside of the regional correctional institutions. The project is built upon national and local best practices in the areas of ex-offender employment strategies and low-income noncustodial parent (NCP) programs and will leverage key services, technology, and expertise in the community targeting this population. The primary goal of this project is to facilitate full-time employment for NCPs that are ex-offenders immediately upon release, in order to increase their capacity to pay child support on a regular basis.

In order to accomplish this goal, Goodwill will work in collaboration with the Allegheny County Family Division (CSE), the Allegheny County Jail Collaborative which consists of the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, the Allegheny County Jail, the Allegheny County Health Department, and the University of Pittsburgh, to develop a service delivery model that targets incarcerated NCPs for inclusion in regional Workforce Investment Act and related supportive service programs. Participants in Project SCALE will receive intensive assessment, case management, child support education, family, legal, and employment services through this proactive approach designed to increase child support collections and improve the coordination of services between correctional institutions, the local CSE, the Workforce Investment Board, and community service providers.

**Grant Number:** 90FI0080, 2005 Special Improvement Project Grant

**Project Period:** September 30, 2005 to February 28, 2007

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### **National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges**

#### **"Judicial Tools to Improve Court Practice in Child Support"**

This 2-year grant responds to 2005 Priority Area 2: Improving Judicial/Administrative Child Support Enforcement Processes. The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) will create innovative resources to assist with achieving the goals of OCSE's FY 2005 to 2009 strategic plan that all children have parentage established, have support orders established, have medical coverage, and reliably receive financial support from parents as ordered. State court judges are an integral part of the success of the child support system. The achievement of the strategic plan's

objectives relies upon judges who are fully informed and actively involved in ensuring appropriate process service, reducing the number of default orders, setting appropriate quantum of child support orders, awarding retroactive support only for appropriate and reasonable periods, crafting support orders that adequately provide for the medical support needs of children, and taking a problem-solving approach to ensure that child support is a reliable source of income for families.

The proposed project will develop three tools: a bench card to improve court practice in service of process, default orders and retroactive support; a model order to improve court practice in medical support; and a publication containing recommendations on improving court practice in integrating problem-solving court principles into the child support docket. The project will then pilot the tools, evaluate their usefulness, and revise them. The finished products will be unveiled at two NCJFCJ-sponsored national judicial education programs and disseminated nationwide.

**Grant Number:** 90FI0082, 2005 Special Improvement Project Grant

**Project Period:** September 30, 2005 to September 29, 2007

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