

**COMMISSIONER'S VOICE**

## Putting Families in the Center: Better Outcomes by Planning Up



**H**ave you heard the old saying that failing to plan is planning to fail? The advice is sound, but it does you no good if you think that's all there is to it. Often, it takes far more work to properly plan ahead than you might guess. It pays to think carefully about not only how you're planning, but also why you've chosen that approach and whether it solves the original problem or just works like a bandage, providing a temporary or partial solution. If you make sure you're keeping your end goal in mind at each step, you'll have a much better chance of

succeeding. So from time to time, it's smart to stop, verify that you're still on track, and, if necessary, update your plan.

Under the ReImagine HHS initiative, the department's multi-year transformation effort, there's a lot of planning work going on right now. One part of this larger initiative focuses on what it takes to put families in the center of programs, and build and sustain families' economic independence. This initiative, which is called Aim for Independence (AFI), challenges us to rethink how we go about our work and how that work translates into long-lasting, positive outcomes for parents and children. We're still in the discovery and design stages, but to give you an idea of what the next steps and deliverables will look like, I caught up recently with Mishaela Duran, the AFI Initiative Lead. We discussed the research that the AFI team already conducted in field surveys with parents and states, as well as the design sessions in which she and I, along with several other HHS leaders and staff, are developing a prototype for a new HHS Center of Excellence.

One highlight from AFI's initial phase that Mishaela had shared at the [HHS Town Hall meeting in early July](#) was the [parent personas resource](#). Developed from a composite of the parents interviewed, each of the seven personas depicts a common crossroads scenario where a parent wants to or is preparing to take the next step toward greater economic independence, but has challenges or needs. By looking at the distilled narratives and empathizing with your customer/end user's lived experiences, you can then work backwards to design a human-centered service that results in more economically empowered parents.

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The mad scientists of OCSE Region IX get ready for an IDEA Lab!

Read more on [page 6](#).

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Many child support programs commemorate Child Support Awareness month in August. Look for coverage in the September-October *Child Support Report*

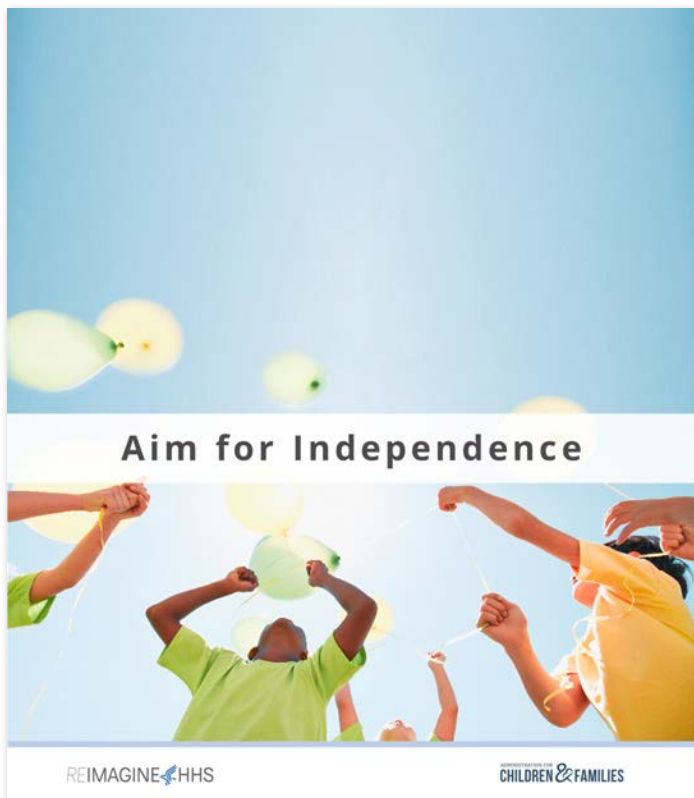
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The AFI team also spoke with end users at the state and county levels. These stakeholders gave us important feedback, identifying areas where we, at the federal level, could drive efficiency in ways that would directly improve their day-to-day reform efforts and work. Overall, their requests centered around standardizing program and eligibility requirements across programs, streamlining systems, and using the time saved to better serve families. If we could make these improvements, Mishaela noted, we could also make reporting easier for us and measure real outcomes, not just isolated processes and outputs. The data alone can't tell us how we're doing across the programs. We need outcomes, where you can follow a parent's path to self-sufficiency. And one of the ways we can get to that is by breaking down silos, understanding pain points, and building better operational systems for us to work in.

Next up for the AFI Initiative team is designing a Center of Excellence (COE), where all work will focus on promoting employment activities and better outcomes for families. I'm excited to help out with this project, especially with cross-federal coordination. We're looking at successful COEs in other federal agencies and the private sector, and we've got a bit more planning to do before bringing it to life. I'll keep you posted as we go along.

*Scott Lekan*



## COORDINATION POINTS

# Sticker Calendar Helps Texas Parents

**Leah Leone, Access and Visitation Director,  
Texas Office of the Attorney General**

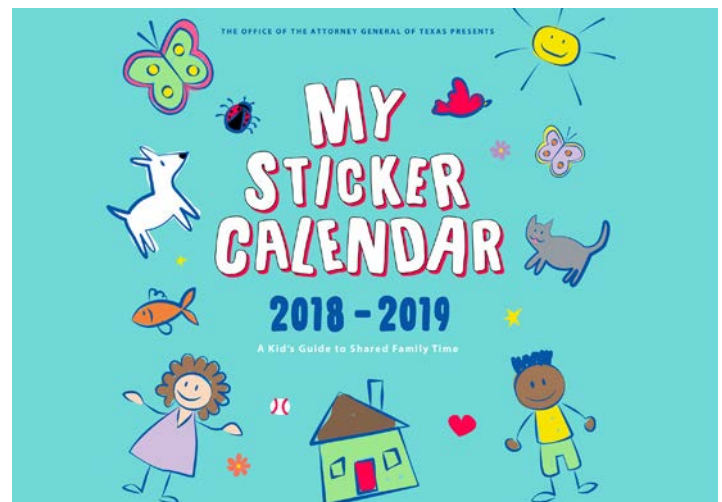
Parents who maintain separate households know how challenging it is to keep track of their shared parenting time. The Texas Office of the Attorney General, through its Access and Visitation (AV) section, has been helping parents simplify this process since 2006 when they created the [My Sticker Calendar](#).

Each of the colorful 16-month calendars features English and Spanish text. They have a useful instruction guide to help parents understand the language used in the standard possession order that most families in Texas receive. The calendars also feature artwork created by children ages 12 and under from all over the state, including several Austin-area schools. They include over 200 stickers designed by the children that encourage them to track their day-to-day activities in an interactive way. Children can place the stickers on the days that they're planning a special activity or to highlight when they're going to spend time at mom's or dad's house.

AV Director Leah Leone says, "Children are often in the middle of their parent's relationship and have little input into the time spent between their parents' homes. The My Sticker Calendar gives them a chance to not only get involved with the parenting time process, but it also gives them a sense of control."

"We want our children to feel that each parent is working together to support them in a healthy way," said Leone. "The My Sticker Calendars helps us do that one family and one calendar at a time."

*Order the My Sticker Calendar. For helpful parenting information, visit the [Texas Access website](#) or call the AV Hotline at 866-292-4636 to speak to a Parenting Time Specialist, Monday – Friday between 12:00 and 6:00 p.m. Central time.*



# Grants and Waivers Foster Program Innovation

The Office of Child Support Enforcement provides more services than people generally see. This column highlights tasks that federal child support staff handle. To read previous articles, visit [A Look Inside OCSE](#) on our website.

[Title IV, Part D](#) of the Social Security Act authorizes the federal child support program. In [Section 1115](#) — another part of the Social Security Act — Congress provided the Department of Health and Human Services the authority to fund demonstration grants and waiver projects in the child support program. As part of our on-going series, *A Look Inside OCSE*, the next two articles outline the differences between Section 1115 demonstration grants and waiver projects.

## A LOOK INSIDE OCSE — GRANTS AND WAIVERS

### Section 1115 Demonstration Grants

Michelle Jadczak, OCSE

Section 1115 gives OCSE the authority and funding to award demonstration grants to study activities not allowable under current child support program policies that could improve the program's effectiveness. In order to study these activities, we must waive specific child support program requirements during the demonstration grant. Section 1115 sets limits on what we can study through these demonstration grants. Demonstration projects must promote the objectives of the child support program and be designed to improve the financial well-being of children or the operation of the program.

#### Application and implementation

Once OCSE decides on a study topic, we issue a grant forecast to let state and tribal child support agencies know that we have a new demonstration grant planned.

The [funding opportunity announcement](#) officially invites child support agencies to submit applications. The announcement includes details about the demonstration, provides the application deadline, and outlines the information we're looking for in the applications. After the deadline, we oversee a competitive, neutral review process to determine which agencies will get a grant award.

Once the grants are awarded, we work together with the states and tribes to implement and manage the project over the life of the grant. Grantees are responsible for submitting reports and meeting all requirements detailed in the grant award.

Section 1115 allows grantees to use demonstration grant funds as their state or tribal share, enabling them to claim federal financial participation (FFP) to use toward the grant project. FFP greatly increases the amount of money they have available for demonstration activities.

As demonstrations, we expect to learn from these grants and to share those lessons to benefit the broader child support community, not just the grantees. Because of this, we try to post the research findings and reports from these [demonstrations on the OCSE website](#), and we often feature them in *Child Support Report* articles.

#### Recent examples of demonstration grants

In September 2016, we launched the [Procedural Justice-Informed Alternatives to Contempt](#) (PJAC) demonstration. The six PJAC grant sites are incorporating procedural justice principles into their child support practices and testing to see if these changes increase reliable child support payments. PJAC is a five-year project. PJAC was the subject of an article in the [April 2018 Child Support Report](#).

Under the [Behavioral Interventions in Child Support Services](#) (BICS) demonstration, eight grantees are developing and testing interventions informed by behavioral science. BICS interventions have targeted a number of different challenges in child support processes, including streamlining the review and modification process and increasing initial payments after order establishment. See page 11 in this issue for more information about BICS.

The 2012 [National Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration](#) (CSPED) is in its final year. The eight CSPED grantees have developed and implemented programs that provide employment services to noncustodial parents in the child support system. CSPED was featured in the [June 2018 Child Support Report](#).

Most recently, OCSE announced a new demonstration grant focused on digital marketing. The application deadline for that opportunity has passed, and we are currently reviewing applications. We'll share more information about this demonstration later this year.

Looking forward, OCSE anticipates issuing Section 1115 grants again in 2019. Our current plan is to issue a forecast that includes topic and demonstration goal by the end of 2018.

For more information, visit the [OCSE Grants webpage](#) or contact Michelle Jadczak at [michelle.jadczak@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:michelle.jadczak@acf.hhs.gov).



## Section 1115 Waiver Projects

John Langrock, OCSE

Under Section 1115, OCSE also has the authority to waive specific program requirements outside of demonstration grants, under certain circumstances. When we approve a waiver project, we are agreeing to allow a state or tribal child support agency to conduct pilot activities that would not otherwise be allowable. This is a powerful authority, so Congress has set some limitations on Section 1115 waivers. As with demonstration grants, waivers must promote child support program objectives and be designed to improve the financial well-being of children or the operation of the child support program. Additionally, waivers must be time-limited and they cannot disadvantage children who need support.

### Funding for waiver projects

If a state or tribe is considering requesting a waiver, they must be able to invest new funds to pay their share of the cost of the pilot activities. This is where Section 1115 waiver projects differ from Section 1115 demonstration grants. States and tribes must provide their share of funding under a waiver, rather than federal grant funds serving as the state share under a Section 1115 demonstration grant. They cannot re-direct funds that would have been spent on the child support program. If the office is going to use money from a foundation or other private source as the state or tribal share, this must be part of the waiver request.

If OCSE approves the waiver project, the state can use its state or foundation funds to pay for the pilot activities and claim the FFP for those funds, which increases the amount of money available for the pilot activities. Without a waiver, these same activities would NOT be eligible for FFP. This is one key way that Section 1115 waivers are different from child support incentive payment exemptions — states cannot claim FFP when they spend their incentive payments, even with an exemption.

### Additional requirements

OCSE can only issue waivers to the state or tribe, not to a county or other government agency, even when the services or activities will be piloted in a limited area. Additionally, states or tribes must specify the program requirements they wish to have waived or the services they wish to provide that are not allowed under current regulations. Finally, the state or tribe must provide detailed implementation and evaluation plans for the pilot project.

If a state or tribe requests a waiver and is approved, we will work with that agency to establish clear terms and conditions for that specific waiver, including limits on the FFP that it can claim for the pilot activities. The terms and conditions also specify reporting requirements and procedures for project evaluation and monitoring. Whenever possible, we try to share lessons learned in waiver projects with the broader child support community, such as in the *Child Support Report* or on the OCSE website.

### Examples of waiver projects

Michigan had a waiver for a pilot project in Genesee County called Acquiring DNA and Paternity Timely (ADAPT). This pilot tested the potential benefits of providing genetic testing of the parents and other services, such as parent education, before the birth of their child. You can read more about this project in the [July 2016 Child Support Report](#).

New York is concluding a waiver for the Paycheck Plus project in New York City. Paycheck Plus is an experiment designed to simulate an expanded earned income tax credit for low-income single workers without dependent children, including noncustodial parents. The [May 2016 Child Support Report](#) featured this project.

For more information, contact OCSE's Division of Program Innovation at [ocse.dpi@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:ocse.dpi@acf.hhs.gov).

### Did you know?

Parents getting Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits or child care subsidies may not be receiving beneficial child support services. The HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation developed a [Child Support Cooperation Policy infographic](#) that shows how many more families might be reached if child support cooperation requirements in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Medicaid were expanded to include SNAP and subsidized child care.



## PROMISING PRACTICES

# Butler County's Successful Pay-by-Phone Option

Dusty Dunaway, Public Relations Coordinator,  
Butler County, OH, Child Support Enforcement Agency

Parents in Butler County, Ohio, are taking advantage of a year-old child support payment method in a big way. In early 2017, the Child Support Enforcement Agency (CSEA) made it easier and more convenient for parents to pay by accepting credit card payments over the phone.

During the first quarter of 2017, the CSEA collected 115 phone payments totaling nearly \$74,700. By comparison, parents made over 1,100 phone payments totaling more than \$425,000 during the first quarter of 2018 — an increase of more than 500%.

## Convenient option

We decided to offer this method to decrease foot traffic at the payment window and make it more convenient and cost-effective for parents to pay their support.

Before offering the pay-by-phone option, parents who wanted to pay by credit card had to physically visit the CSEA payment window or pay online through a third-party vendor that charged a service fee.

“This huge influx in over-the-phone payments is a testament to the desire by our customers to be able to pay their child support in the most simple and convenient way possible,” said Butler County CSEA Assistant Director Narka Gray.

Comparing the first quarter of 2017 to the first quarter of 2018 indicates parents paid nearly \$140,000 less at the payment window this year due to this more convenient phone option.

## Setting things up

“At the beginning of this process, we consulted with our financial institution who helped us create a form that staff use to gather highly sensitive data from each person who makes an over-the-phone payment. This data lessens our liability and helps prevent fraudulent payments,” said Gray.

“We also started with a pilot group of only public assistance cases with the thought process being, if a fraudulent payment is reported, it would be easier for us to get money back from the state than a custodial parent,” she said.

The CSEA then created a custom report of cases that hadn't received a payment for the past six months and called parents to ask them to make an over-the-phone payment. When we didn't have any fraudulent payments, the CSEA began offering this method to all parents.

We market this program several ways:

- Website — pay-by-phone is prominently displayed in multiple locations on the website.
- Payment Window — front desk staff hand out postcards letting people know they can pay by phone.
- Customer Service — staff advertise the option when people call the agency.
- Mass Mailings — letters go out to targeted parents letting them know they can pay by phone.
- Custom Reports — staff call noncustodial parents who have not made a payment recently to let them know they can now pay by phone.

The Butler County CSEA, located just north of Cincinnati, has the 8th largest caseload (27,000 active cases) out of 88 Ohio child support agencies and collects an average of \$56 million annually.

For information about the program, contact Dusty Dunaway at [Dusty.Dunaway@jfs.ohio.gov](mailto:Dusty.Dunaway@jfs.ohio.gov) or visit the [Butler County CSEA webpage](#).

## Interstate Case Processing Training

OCSE continues our webinar training sessions covering interstate case processing requirements and principles. We designed the training for state trainers, central registry staff, interstate managers and caseworkers, and other interstate professionals. The webinars run on Thursdays from 2:00 to 3:30 p.m. Eastern time.

September 13: Interstate 201

October 4: Interstate Case Scenarios

November 15: Interstate Payment Processing

January 10: Interstate Case Closure

February 28: OCSE's Interstate Tools and Resources

See the training materials and recordings from past sessions on the [Interstate Case Processing Training Materials](#) webpage.

OCSE will email registration invitations before each session. If you have questions, contact the OCSE Division of Policy and Training at [ocse.dpt@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:ocse.dpt@acf.hhs.gov).



## Child Support IDEA Lab

Tracy Donovan, OCSE

Are you a Brain Stormer? In 2016, OCSE Region IX along with state and local jurisdictions decided to change the format of their annual meetings from the typical presentation method to a rapid brainstorming format. There was interest in focusing on and discussing child support topical areas in a different way to generate new concepts and solutions quickly. The structure of the meeting consisted of breaking into small groups and becoming rapid Brain Stormers! We encouraged folks to think aloud and suggest as many ideas as possible, no matter how unusual or seemingly impractical. The rules included withholding judgment; quantity counts at this stage, not quality; every person and every idea has equal worth; and build on the ideas put forward by others.

The regional staff put on their white lab coats and broke out the safety glasses and beakers to host its first Child Support Idea Lab in San Francisco in September 2016. Four states, one territory, and seven counties participated in a one-day session to brainstorm innovative ideas to improve program performance and increase opportunities for child support families.

### Generating ideas

Everyone spent the majority of the day sharing and generating new strategies in small sub-groups that focused on four general areas: increasing collections, use of data, domestic violence, and re-branding the child support program. It was a fast-paced day as folks rotated among four tables every 25 minutes, giving each participant a chance to engage peer to peer on new

approaches. There was a facilitator at each table to keep the energy circulating and a timekeeper to keep the group on course.

To wrap up the day and capture the new creative ideas, we distributed blank puzzles. Each jurisdiction wrote a few of the new creative ideas that resonated with them on their puzzle pieces, and then shared the ideas with the entire group before adjourning for the day.

We didn't want to let the new ideas die, so we scheduled a series of webinars to see things through and help folks implement their new solutions. We chose the topics from the takeaway puzzles at the one-day brainstorming session to encourage more in-depth conversation about those innovative ideas. The topics included collaborating with SNAP employment and training staff; a county initiative called "Hike It Up" that educates noncustodial parents about compounding interest and the benefit of making timely payments; domestic violence information related to child support; and a county initiative focused on customer outreach at the local library.

Region IX is now into their third year of developing and facilitating successful Child Support IDEA Labs. The concept has truly caught fire and is being replicated in other jurisdictions and national conference workshops. We've been able to manage the brainstorming format well, and it has led folks to come up with creative ideas for solutions to improving their child support program. You could be a Brain Stormer, too!

For information on this project, contact Tracy Donovan in OCSE Region IX at [tracy.donovan@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:tracy.donovan@acf.hhs.gov).



Los Angeles County Child Support Services Division kicked off our very first Idea Lab in May in the beautiful city of Marina Del Rey. Over 30 staff members came together to collaborate and share ideas on how we can better serve our customers. The best way to have a good idea is to have lots of ideas!

## SPOTLIGHT — COLLECTIONS SUCCESSES

# Virginia Makes Debt Compromise Program Permanent

Victoria Dullaghan, Director of Legal Operations-Eastern Region, and Diane Asbury, Director of Field Operations-Western Region, *Virginia Division of Child Support Enforcement*

Virginia implemented a new long-term TANF Debt Compromise Program April 1 based on two successful short-term trials. The program encourages parents to make consistent child support payments by offering them a series of 5% reductions of their TANF debt if they make a number of consecutive monthly payments. They can also qualify for a limited dollar-for-dollar TANF adjustment if they make lump sum payments. We developed the current program based on successful programs we ran in 2015 and 2016 during Child Support Awareness Month.

The current program has three different tiers based on parents' ability to pay and their participation in our Family Engagement Services (FES) program. Through collaborations with community partners and other governmental agencies, FES helps parents identify barriers and overcome obstacles hindering their ability to provide emotional and financial support for their children. Parents with an annual income under \$40,000 are in Tiers 1 or 2 based on their participation in FES. Tier 3 is for parents with an annual income greater than \$40,000.

All parents who owe the Commonwealth a TANF debt under a Virginia court or administrative order are eligible to participate in the TANF Debt Compromise Program, even if they reside in another state. The parents sign a 12-month payment agreement that spells out what reductions we'll take if they pay for three consecutive months. Parents must reapply each year. We won't pursue court enforcement as long as parents participate in the program and comply with the agreement.

In March, we mailed a special postcard to parents with TANF debt and called to notify them of this exciting new program. Initial reaction has been gratifying. In the first month, over 700 parents have agreed to participate in the program.

For more information, contact Brenda Clark at [brenda.clark@dss.virginia.gov](mailto:brenda.clark@dss.virginia.gov).

## TRIBAL MATTERS

# Meskwaki Nation Adds Parenting Training

Jeff Stocks, OCSE

Meskwaki Nation Child Support Services partnered with the Meskwaki Family Services and Senior Center Services offices earlier this year to bring parenting training to tribal members. Positive Indian Parenting (PIP) is a comprehensive training program offered through the [National Indian Child Welfare Association](http://www.nationalindianchildwelfare.org). It focuses on practical parenting approaches combined with cultural awareness to bring traditional parenting strategies and approaches to modern family dynamics. The training accomplishes two things. It provides hands-on peer learning while also providing training to the trainers that often has an impact on their personal lives.

During the three-day class, the PIP trainers addressed the needs of tribal elders who often act as primary caretakers of their grandchildren. They focused on providing support and resources to improve and strengthen caretaker-child relationships. The 17 Meskwaki participants included tribal members from inside and out of tribal government. They learned about their individual parenting styles and how growing up in a tribal community shaped their views of parenting. The agenda also included discussions on lessons from Mother Earth, behavior management, and effective ways to praise children. "Every single one of the attendees expressed gratitude to be entrusted with such important work and we are all committed to making a difference in our community," said Meskwaki Child Support Director Allison Lasley.

[Meskwaki Nation Child Support Services](http://www.meskwaki-nsn.gov) is currently coordinating PIP classes for other tribal members where they will teach the course material and share the lessons they learned.

To learn more, contact Allison Lasley at [director.css@meskwaki-nsn.gov](mailto:director.css@meskwaki-nsn.gov) or Jeffrey Stocks at [jeffrey.stocks@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:jeffrey.stocks@acf.hhs.gov).





*Editor's Note: Across the child support community, we're hearing more discussion about what the rise of the gig economy will mean for the parents and children we serve. To help you think through this complex topic, we're kicking off a series of articles on the gig economy. Stay tuned for more in-depth analysis on emerging issues related to this growing world of work.*

## IN FOCUS

# On the Move in the Gig Economy

Gretchen Tressler, OCSE

You've probably heard of some of these terms by now. In general, they describe the new reality where individuals can find work faster and more easily than ever before. For many of us, these phrases might bring an image to mind: maybe of a driver of a ride sharing service pulling up to the curb or of an entrepreneur with an open laptop in a shared coworking space. We're talking about a job where a person can make money at flexible times and in various locations. It's easy to picture; but when you move beyond the general idea, it becomes a little more complicated.

## Technology use

Besides not having an office or schedule, many non-traditional workers share a common interest in using technology to their competitive advantage. Technological innovations help these workers find jobs, connect with customers far and near, and get paid quickly. Freelancers can look for gigs on virtual job boards. They might use non-traditional mobile banking tools like online payment apps.

Some use apps that connect customers to service providers so they can share their homes or cars. Other gig workers can operate completely offline, if we count tasks like babysitting, odd jobs, and yard work. Nothing new, really. It's about having some flexibility in how you earn money. For busy people, including parents, that alone can be the determining factor when deciding to pursue income-generating opportunities outside the norm.

## Demographics

So who are these people opting into the alternative workforce? Both men and women participate in it, but the number differs depending on how you slice it. The Aspen Institute Future of Work Initiative and Cornell University consider the various factors affecting the demographics for age, gender, race, education, and geography in their [Gig Economy Data Hub](#). Regarding age, many studies note that gig economy work attracts all generations, but that Millennials hold a slight majority. A closer look at this group, as outlined in a [May 2018 Deloitte meta-analysis](#), reveals that younger workers are moving more into the arts, manufacturing, and professional services, and away from administrative support, finance, insurance, or real estate work.



How many people are doing these jobs? Depending on whom you ask, the number of workers varies. There are two things researchers do not all agree on. One is defining and classifying non-traditional work. The other is determining how to measure the impact this work has on individuals and families, especially in terms of household income share.

## Part-time or full-time

Many studies have focused on workers who only supplement their income with side hustles. However, for the first time, the [Bureau of Labor Statistics \(BLS\)](#) has analyzed the situation for those who count their gig work as their sole or main job. In the widely anticipated June 2018 BLS report, they estimated that 5.9 million people as of May 2017 had contingent or alternative employment arrangements. It's important to note that [the results surprised some](#) who had expected to see a higher number.

Admittedly, as the May 2018 Federal Reserve report on [economic well-being in U.S. households](#) explains, studying this “evolving issue... can be particularly challenging” and can reveal “conflicting information on this form of employment and source of income.” Without a doubt, it's a slippery area of research. We have a long way to go to understand how the child support community could or should respond to the challenges and opportunities that come with the gig economy. But even if we come up with more questions than answers in the short term, the topic deserves our attention. All signs indicate the gig economy is here to stay.



## FATHERHOOD

# Focusing on the Importance of Fathers

Frieda Ray, Communications Chief,  
Washington Division of Child Support

The [2018 Washington State Fatherhood Summit](#) brought more than 135 people from 24 organizations to South Seattle College in June to hear from fathers and create a high-level, statewide action plan to support them. Most importantly, half of the attendees were fathers, including Wally McClure, former director of the Department of Social and Health Services' Division of Child Support.

"There has been a national movement towards supporting the role of fathers," McClure said. And he felt it was time to bring that conversation to Washington. "We realized that there was more we could do to coordinate and connect resources for fathers."

Summit attendees learned about brain science and the role fathers play in child development. Holly Schindler, an assistant professor of Early Childhood Studies at the University of Washington, told attendees that research indicates children with strong ties to their parents are able to build relationships, strengthen important life skills, and reduce their exposure to toxic stress.

Dr. Ronald Mincy, co-author of "Failing Our Fathers," shared his research on low-income fathers who did not live with their children. He's found that although more children are born to unmarried mothers, fathers who were romantically involved with the child's mother saw their kids at nearly identical rates as parents who lived together. Mincy's research also determined fathers who paid more support were more likely to engage in their child's learning activities.

But monetary support alone was not enough to raise healthy children. "I believe in money and more," Mincy said.

*continued*



The Fathers Panel at the Washington Fatherhood Summit.

## RECOGNIZING DADS

### Missouri



The Family Support Division's Child Support Program and the Jackson County Prosecuting Attorney's office participated in a local Department of Housing and Urban Development event in June. Mary Hampton and Melissa Mauer-Smith are two staff members who attended the 3rd Annual Celebrating Men and Fathers: Empowering Fathers, Mothers, and Children event in Kansas City. Organizers designed the event to celebrate the role that men and fathers bring to family structure, and emphasize the importance of empowering fathers, mothers, and children in a strong family. It provided a relaxed atmosphere for families and connected them with resources that could improve their quality of life and self-sufficiency through education, health, and economic empowerment. Staff provided information about the child support program, and served ice cream, popcorn, and water.

### Tennessee



On June 9, Metro-Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) celebrated the positive impact men have in the lives of children by hosting a Fatherhood Festival. They invited MNPS fathers, grandfathers, uncles, brothers, mentors, and other men to spend a family fun day with games, activities, music, and food. Men who volunteered in the Watch D.O.G.S. (Dads Of Great Students) program were honored by the MNPS Department of Family and Community Engagement and the Mayor's Office. Staff from the child support office were proud to host a table at this annual event alongside other local community partners.

Dads participating in a panel discussion said that, unfortunately, being the father who does more is not always easy. People often look past a father who is caring for a child, expecting the mother to be the caregiver. And some men who grew up without fathers as role models had a hard time finding peer mentors. Despite this, data presented at the summit indicated that fathers and mothers value and enjoy their role as a parent about equally.

One father described his experience as a dad as very enjoyable and had some surprising benefits. “Playing with dinosaurs is a great way to take the edge off the day,” said James Moore. “And I like chicken tenders and pizza.”

By the end of the event, the group had agreed on 10 strategies to help fathers engage with and support their children. And many attendees agreed to be participants in the next steps. The top five ideas included:

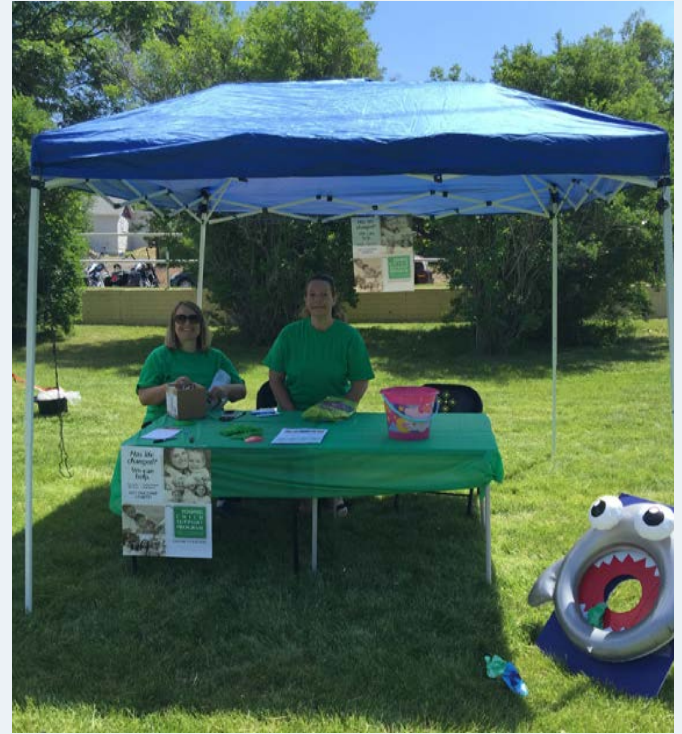
- Establishing a Fatherhood Advisory Council
- Training state employees on fatherhood engagement and adverse childhood experiences
- Investing in early childhood education and intervention
- Providing accessible resources
- Creating peer mentorship and support groups for fathers

The [Washington State Frontiers of Innovation](#) organized the summit. The event included partners and contributors whose work touches the lives of many fathers. State-level participants came from the departments of Social and Health Services, Corrections, Early Learning, and Health. Private and nonprofit partners included Divine Alternatives for Dads Services, Partnership for Fathers and Families, Washington State Fatherhood Network, and King County Community Partners for Transition Solutions.

For more information, visit the [2018 Washington State Fatherhood Summit](#) website or contact Frontiers of Innovation Project Manager Anne Stone at [anne.stone@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:anne.stone@dshs.wa.gov).

## RECOGNIZING DADS

### Wyoming



[Child Support Program](#) staff from Natrona County participated in the [Casper Housing Authority Father's Day Event](#) on June 16. Our booth had a game that kids could play to win prizes. We also gave them paper hearts so they could write messages to their someone special on Father's Day. The adults who stopped by with their kids loved this idea and were excited to see what those messages were. Many of our 360 visitors asked child support questions and walked away with information. It was a great event, and we plan to participate again next year!





# Ohio — Endless Opportunities to Improve

Rachael Balanson, Program Officer, *Cuyahoga Job and Family Services, Office of Child Support Services*

At the Cuyahoga County Office of Child Support Services, we have over six years of experience using behavioral science to improve our program. Two years before BICS launched, we were part of the [Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency](#) (BIAS) project led by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation at the Administration for Children and Families. As veteran developers and testers of behavioral interventions to improve child support, we want to highlight two of the ways we're using these methods to make it easier for parents to navigate child support programs and services. Our trials focused on genetic testing and age of majority determination.

## The genetic testing process

In Cuyahoga County, only 37% of parents appear for their scheduled genetic testing appointments. Having a low rate of completed appointments affects our paternity and order establishment performance and has long-term legal impacts for families. We used the three-step process we learned in BIAS and BICS — diagnose, design, test — to try to improve our genetic testing process and outcomes.

### Diagnosis

After mapping out our existing process, we identified two key behavioral bottlenecks that we thought might be affecting appearance rates. First, there's the potential for parents to procrastinate or avoid dealing with the uncertainty of a genetic test. Second, we realized that the notice we sent to parents might be confusing and could trigger cognitive overload.

### Design

To address these bottlenecks, we made several changes to our genetic testing procedures. First, we streamlined the appointment process to make it easier for parents to walk in for genetic testing. This reduced the hassle factors associated with having to come into the office on a specific date and time and relieved our staff from having to reschedule missed appointments.

We also redesigned the scheduling notices for parents by using simple language highlighting the benefits of genetic testing for mothers, fathers, and children. These notices include information about the new walk-in option for testing. For notices to alleged fathers, we added a bright blue, attention-grabbing insert that says, "Don't get stuck paying for someone else's child." We chose this language to motivate the recipient to come in for testing by appealing to loss aversion — the desire to avoid financial losses.

## GRANTS

### Testing Behavioral Strategies to Improve Child Support Outcomes — Lessons Learned from the BICS Demonstration Grants

OCSE awarded five-year [Behavioral Interventions for Child Support Services](#) (BICS) demonstration grants to eight child support agencies in 2014 to test how behavioral economics principles can improve child support program processes and outcomes. The eight grantees are California, Colorado, Georgia, Ohio, Texas, Vermont, Washington, and the District of Columbia. You can read early behavioral intervention results from three states in the [October 2017 Child Support Report](#).

We've shared stories from BICS grantees in this and the previous three issues. We hope that these stories have provided insights and lessons learned for all of our readers.

For more on BICS, contact OCSE project officers Michael Hayes ([michael.hayes@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:michael.hayes@acf.hhs.gov)) and Gretchen Lehman ([gretchen.lehman@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:gretchen.lehman@acf.hhs.gov)).

## Test

In order to see if the changes we made have the desired impact, we're randomly assigning 400 alleged parents into two groups. We've assigned half to a control group that receives the old notices while the other half, the treatment group, gets the new notices with the blue insert. When the test period is over later this year, we will compare outcomes to see if the new notices made a difference. Then we can make decisions about whether or not to continue using the new process and, potentially, to design and test other behaviorally informed changes.

## Children reaching majority

We've also applied our behavioral design expertise to our termination process for children turning 18 or graduating at 19 years old. This process is very challenging because it requires both parents and schools to respond to our requests for information about the age and graduation date of the child. Each month we mail letters to the parents and school to secure enrollment and graduation information for children turning 18 or graduating at 19. They must submit proof of enrollment to us either in-person or by mail or fax. These options consistently have low response rates so we spend a lot of time trying to track down information. We also see many upset parents whose child support obligation continues past the termination date noted on their order.

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In 2017, our termination process team considered behavioral interventions to simplify the process, revamp the letter, and offer more personal assistance to our customers. They developed a checklist that clearly outlines agency requirements regarding enrollment and graduation, and created a new email address that can receive scanned or photographed documents.

The team didn't just work on the parts of the process involving parents. They extended these process improvements to their work with area schools. This greatly increased the number of institutions that returned lists of graduating students, which helped us process terminations with more timeliness and accuracy.

## More opportunities ahead

The Cuyahoga County Office of Child Support Services sees endless opportunities to apply the diagnosis and design tools in our behavioral toolbox. We have a little more than a year left under BICS to continue this work, and, looking beyond BICS and BIAS, we are integrating these ideas into how we approach our mission. We seek to transform lives through innovation and service, helping the families we serve live their best lives.

# Child Support Report

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## Examples of Behavioral Bottlenecks and Interventions

This chart shows examples of bottlenecks with definitions, ways to address the bottleneck, and possible interventions staff could use.

Bottleneck	Definition	Ways to Address	Possible Intervention
Cognitive overload	We always think that we will be able to pay attention to information and then understand and remember it as long as it is important enough. However, these mental resources — that we take for granted — are more fallible than we often recognize.	Simplify materials to make them easier to understand. Provide implementation prompts. Reduce the number of choices.	Use implementation prompts to help parent make a payment plan.
Hassle factors	Small barriers such as filling out forms or waiting in lines. While these costs are trivial and often neglected, reducing or relieving them can have an outsized impact.	Make it as easy as possible. Provide implementation prompts.	Provide paid postage, pre-addressed envelope for child support payments.
Identity	Every person has many different overlapping, and sometimes conflicting identities (mother, daughter, lawyer, etc.) that are active at different times. Our decisions and actions are different depending on which identity is active, and identities can become active because of small changes in the environment.	People have multiple identities. Find one favorable to the behavior. Prime that.	Refer to noncustodial parents as a parent or father, rather than obligor.
Loss aversion	The disproportionately negative experience of a loss compared with an equivalent gain. In other words, because of loss aversion the pain of losing \$20 is greater than the pleasure of finding \$20.	Can be used as a motivator — “take this action to avoid this loss.” Can be reduced if the loss is less apparent, such as through automation of payments rather than regularly writing a check.	Emphasize how much debt can accumulate from missed child support payments.
Ostrich effect	The tendency to avoid information we do not wish to know, even when that information might have significant negative implications.	Offer help. Reframe interaction.	“Call us if you can’t make your payment in full.”
Procrastination	People are shortsighted and often put off decisions, which may be partly due to inertia, the complexity or unpleasantness of the decision to be made, and the focus they have on the present. It’s about the dilemma between what is good for us now, versus what is good for the future.	Provide reminders and deadlines. Break decisions into steps and provide planning tools.	Use of commitment devices “What day will you send your payment?” with penalties for missing deadlines.