

Child Support Report

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COMMISSIONER'S VOICE

Partnering with Fathers



June has many meanings to people: graduations, weddings and anniversaries, birthdays, and Father's Day. I was able to celebrate several of those events. The most memorable and impactful was my youngest daughter's high school graduation. This was an extremely proud moment for me as my daughter took that next step toward adulthood. As she sat with her classmates and later walked across the stage, I was flooded with all the memories of her birth and growth over the last 18 years. While I was reflecting on the things I did well and the things I did not, I couldn't help thinking about the parents who never had the opportunity to play a role in their child's life. It got me thinking about the word *support*, and how it can mean so many things, like being present in your child's life — for the big moments, as well as the everyday. Or it can refer to providing financially, caring for your child's health, or being the role model they deserve.

All of this interests us here at OCSE because, to accomplish our mission, parents have to understand how much of an impact they have on their children's lives. Likewise, we in the child support community must keep learning about the different and evolving needs of the parent populations we serve so we can provide them with the best service. To make parents equal partners in our mission, we must consider their whole experience as customers, family members, and members of their community.

For many of the fathers in our caseload, child support agencies can solidify this partnership by offering essential resources through innovative outreach programs. As you'll read about in Tatyana Phelps's article on p. 3, celebratory events and virtual customer service are just a couple of ways to engage with fathers and build trust. The Georgia Division of Child Support Services shows that they value the vital role fathers have in their children's lives and, as a result, they're seeing increased turnout in their child support-specific outreach events.

Child support professionals have the opportunity to work with engaged fathers from diverse backgrounds. And we appreciate how important parenting is to so many fathers. So it shouldn't surprise us that, [according to a Pew study](#), more fathers are involved in caring for their children than ever before. Taking time to learn about the parenting trends associated with fathers generally, as well as those in our diverse caseload, can only help us in designing better services. For some suggestions on effective outreach to Hispanic dads, check out the article by Mindy Scott and her fellow researchers at the [National Research Center on Hispanic Children and Families](#) on p. 4.

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What is a zero order and why has the percent of these orders increased among current assistance cases?

Explore the trend in the most current [Analyze This Data Blog](#).

The next *Child Support Report* will be a combined July-August edition.

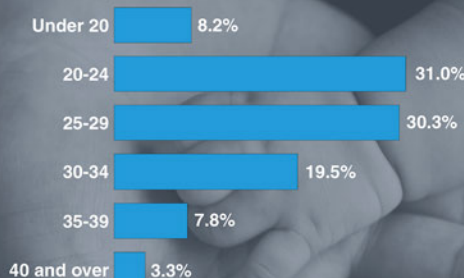
Please look for it in mid-August.

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Becoming DAD

Father's age at birth of first child



Source: 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation

United States
Census
Bureau

U.S. Department of Commerce
Economics and Statistics Administration
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU
CENSUS.GOV

Source: 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation, Wave 1
www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2017/demo/p70br-147.pdf

Thanks to the active interest of the research community and offices at the federal level, we're sure to keep seeing improved services for fathers. To start, we have the employment-related grant programs mentioned in Angela Blat's article on p. 7, along with federal partner grants, like the responsible fatherhood programs James Murray discusses below. We also know that fathers can support their child's well-being in many ways including [decreasing the child's risk for obesity through play!](#) It's incredible to think of the effect we can have on our children.

Collaborative efforts across multiple programs within the Administration for Children and Families are making it easier for fathers to find the support they need to play a positive role in their children's lives. Together, we've come

up with solutions that work to both the father's and the child's benefit. Some of the solutions build off of research about parental involvement and have practical applications in things like referrals to co-parenting programs. Others focus on fulfilling the child support program's core mission and enable fathers to address financial concerns, for example, with modifying an order or connecting to employment services. We as the child support community play an important role in helping families. I'm encouraged by the innovative work we're doing to really look at the roles parents have in their children's lives.

Scott Lekan

SPOTLIGHT — FATHERHOOD OUTREACH

Federal Partnerships Help Dads

James Murray, OCSE

Research shows that children are happier and healthier when their fathers are involved in their lives. They advance physically and socially and have better academic outcomes. A father's presence also positively influences children's brain and language development. The advantages don't end there. Both mothers and fathers benefit when fathers are engaged. Mothers' stress levels go down and fathers report enjoying more purpose in life. Parents consistently advise child support caseworkers that their willingness to pay support is closely linked to the amount of involvement they have with their children, and there is research to support this connection.

Outreach partnerships

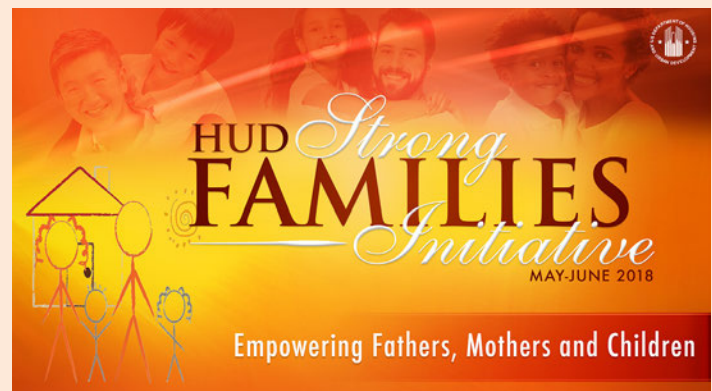
At OCSE, we work with a variety of federal partners to conduct fatherhood outreach at the state and community level. We are also committed to helping reduce risks and increase safety for victims of domestic violence, and we ensure that our partners share this commitment.

One of our key fatherhood outreach partnerships is with the Office of Family Assistance around their [responsible fatherhood grants](#). Fathers within these responsible fatherhood programs cite challenges paying their child support orders, navigating the child support system, requesting modifications to their orders when their financial situations change, and having access to their children. We work with child support agencies across the U.S. to create relationships with local responsible fatherhood grantees. Through these relationships, we help fathers understand how to meet their child support obligations and stay engaged in their children's lives. These partnerships are also opportunities to dispel common child support myths held by fathers and fatherhood program staff.

The [Office of Head Start](#) (OHS) is another one of our critical fatherhood outreach partners. We're working with OHS to integrate child support information into trainings for Head Start agencies. Our goal is to help Head Start families understand the resources available to them through the child support program. In turn OHS is sharing their father engagement techniques with us so that we can support father-friendly cultures within child support offices. OHS has years of experience with father engagement and valuable resources like their [Father Engagement Birth to Five Programming Guide](#). OHS practices have shown that when dads are engaged, they'll respond positively.

Outside of the Administration for Children and Families, we partner with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development on their [Strong Families Initiative](#). The program promotes fathers' involvement in the lives of their children and families as a way to lead to positive outcomes on health, development, and well-being. Public housing authorities host events for resident families so they can spend time together and get information from community service providers. Here at the federal office, we facilitate connections so that local child support staff can attend and share information with these families.

For more information, see the [OCSE Fatherhood webpage](#) or contact James Murray at james.murray@acf.hhs.gov.



Celebrating and Connecting with Georgia Dads

Tatyana Phelps, Communications Specialist,
Georgia Division of Child Support Services

Child support is about more than providing financially for children—it's also about providing emotional and parental support, but that's not easy for some dads. The Georgia Division of Child Support Services (DCSS) offers outreach programs such as [Georgia Fatherhood](#) to give them some help. The outreach also supports our mission of providing stronger families for a stronger Georgia by helping parents support their children.

Since January 1997, the Fatherhood program has helped noncustodial parents avoid having to appear in court by providing services that can help them achieve self-sufficiency. Our employment-based service program targets parents who are unemployed or underemployed and are, as a result, unable to pay their full child support obligations regularly. It connects parents with resources such as child support services, support order modifications, and driver's license reinstatement. They also offer GED enrollment, job training, job search and placement assistance, and help finding volunteer opportunities.

"Our team works hard to establish community partnerships that lead to increased employability and life stability for our participants," said Fatherhood Program Manager Kiska Dennis-Gear. "Many of our participants have communicated their appreciation for the support and guidance offered by our program."

Unfortunately, many customers don't become aware of the program until a parent falls behind in court-ordered child support. Through initiatives including Fatherhood: A Celebration, and Fatherhood: A Conversation, DCSS aims to educate even more parents about the program itself and the services we offer.

Fatherhood: A Celebration

DCSS holds these programs periodically to honor men and the role that fathers play in a child's life. The celebrations are open to fathers, parents, grandparents, and anyone who is looking to enjoy a day of information and fun with the children in their family. While we use the events to show struggling fathers that DCSS can help them provide for their children financially, the Fatherhood Celebrations offer something for everyone. Adults can take part in fatherhood program workshops and job fairs, while the children can enjoy jumping in bounce houses, getting their faces painted, and playing video games.

"Over the years, Child Support Services has come to have a reputation as a collection agency, but that's not our only goal," said Director Tangler Gray. "The word 'support' is in our name for a reason. We are here to support parents as they support their children. Our focus is to provide services to all parties versus enforcement."

Fatherhood: A Conversation

In August 2017, DCSS began a series of live-streamed events so parents could submit questions directly to a panel of child support subject matter experts. Parents could ask about the Fatherhood program and other child support initiatives, services, and resources through the streaming software without leaving their homes. DCSS found that parents were more comfortable asking questions and expressing their concerns without having face-to-face interaction with child support employees.

"Our Fatherhood Conversations are gaining momentum!" said DCSS Deputy Director John Hurst. "We're seeing an increased audience tuned in to each successive event and can tell from the questions being asked that they are receiving information that is beneficial to their specific situation."

For information on these events, visit the [Georgia DCSS website](#) and the Georgia [Department of Human Services Facebook Events page](#).

Child Support Research Agenda Coming Soon

Thinking about the future of child support research and policy? Wondering how research can support child support policy and practice? HHS will publish a new research agenda in the next few months that will summarize ideas and opportunities for how public, private, and civil society partners can contribute to the evidence base.

Role of Women in Fatherhood Programs

In March, the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse hosted a webinar that highlighted the important roles that women are playing in the field of responsible fatherhood. They discussed how women have influenced fatherhood research, advocacy, and public policy; explored the role of female professionals in the development and implementation of fatherhood services; and provided tips from female experts on how women can effectively deliver front-line case management and group facilitation. Watch [The Role of Women in Fatherhood Programs](#) from the ACF YouTube account.

Celebrating Diversity on Father's Day

Mindy E. Scott, Ph.D.; Natasha Cabrera, Ph.D.; and Lina Guzman, Ph.D., *National Research Center on Hispanic Children and Families*

Father's Day is a great tradition that encourages us to pause and think about the many ways that dads make a difference in their children's lives. But, as we all know, a father's job is year-round. Understanding what fathers do as well as the barriers they face can help us better understand how to support them as parents, celebrate their strengths, and promote everyone's well-being.

Hispanics represent the second largest racial/ethnic group in the country. In 2016, [1 in 4 children](#) in the United States were Hispanic and are projected to represent [1 in 3 children](#) in the U.S. by 2060, similar to the proportion of white children. These demographic shifts make it critical to focus on the needs of Hispanic children and their parents.

Our understanding of Latino fathers in the U.S. has been limited. Recent work from the [National Research Center on Hispanic Children and Families](#) (the Center) can help state-level child support agencies better understand the characteristics of Hispanic fathers and families in their communities — in particular, low-income families.

Living with their children and partners and working to support their families represent key aspects of Hispanic fathers' lives. The Center's research also finds that Hispanic fathers bring many strengths to their relationships with their children. For example, Hispanic fathers [give high levels of co-parenting support](#) to the mothers of their children, even when they no longer live with their children. [Other research](#) links these positive aspects of co-parenting to benefits for children, including better cognitive ability and social skills.

The Center's work also suggests that Hispanic fathers' characteristics and experiences can [differ in important ways](#) based on where the fathers were born. For example:

- U.S.-born Hispanic fathers are almost twice as likely to become a parent during their teen years (27%) as their immigrant counterparts (14%).
- Nearly 75% of immigrant Hispanic fathers are low-income, compared with roughly 27% of U.S.-born Hispanic fathers.
- Hispanic immigrant fathers are more likely to be married than non-immigrant Hispanic fathers.

These different experiences for U.S.-born and immigrant Hispanic fathers can facilitate or hinder fathers' abilities to contribute in positive ways to their children's lives. Programs that work with Hispanic fathers and families should consider these diverse characteristics and experiences when designing services. However, [program approaches](#) may not always reflect the unique family formation patterns and service needs of Hispanic fathers.

For example, fatherhood programs that target noncustodial fathers may not appeal to Hispanic fathers living with their children. Programs also may not offer the types of educational and employment services that may best support Latino fathers. Program staff, including staff from child support agencies can learn more about how to effectively engage Hispanic fathers and families in their programs through the following resources:

- [Developing Culturally Responsive Approaches to Serving Diverse Populations: A Resource Guide for Community-Based Organizations](#)
- [Working with Latino Individuals, Couples, and Families: A Toolkit for Stakeholders](#)
- [Findings from the Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative: Grantee Implementation Evaluation, 2007-2013](#)

Mindy Scott is a senior research scientist, Natasha Cabrera is co-investigator, and Lina Guzman is co-principal investigator at the [National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families](#). Follow the Center on Twitter [@NRCHispanic](#).



In honor of Father's Day, we have a few facts to share about Hispanic fathers and recent findings about their families. We hope this information is useful to child support professionals to better understand this group of fathers in your caseload.

Did you know that [most Hispanic fathers...](#)

- Are immigrants (64%), and half are Spanish-dominant speakers
- Are currently married or cohabiting (82%)
- Are employed, but have low levels of formal education, with few having received more than a high school education
- Live with their children and partner

Celebrating Fathers in NYC

Barbara Andrews, *ACF Immediate Office of the Regional Administrator, Region 2*

During the past few years, you may have heard about how human service programs are taking a whole family or multi-generational approach to increasing family economic mobility. These approaches ask you to consider weaving in ways to serve the needs of children and their parents. Multi-generational concerns and strategies are certainly not new to child support. The Administration for Children and Families' Office of Child Support Enforcement and child support programs throughout the country recognize the importance of both parents having loving, nurturing relationships with their children and being actively involved in their lives. Child support programs have a legacy of being attentive to fathers through their everyday efforts and special initiatives like the development of *Telling Fatherhood, Digital Stories by New York City Fathers*.

"Powerful," "touching" and "inspiring" are three adjectives that came to mind when I viewed *Telling Fatherhood, Digital Stories by New York City Fathers*, on Friday, January 26, 2018, as part of a celebration of fathers and fatherhood, sponsored by the New York City Human Resources Administration's Office of Child Support Services and the Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College, a senior college of the City University of New York. An enthusiastic and supportive audience of one hundred fathers, human services professionals, academics, advocates and students were on hand to view the stories and learn about a new curriculum on fatherhood.

The digital stories complement a new social work curriculum on fatherhood that was recently developed through a partnership between the NYC Office of Child Support Services and the Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College. The curriculum has eight modules that can be taught in sequence or as individual, stand-alone units for undergraduate, graduate or continuing education students. The digital stories are integrated as part of each curriculum module. The eight modules include:

- 1 Historical Overview of Fatherhood
- 2 The Socialization of Man-Culture Of Fatherhood and Manhood
- 3 Working with Diverse Populations of Fathers
- 4 The Importance of Fathers' Involvement and Effective Engagement
- 5 Engaging Nonresident Fathers: Benefits and Barriers
- 6 Engaging Fathers Involved in the Child Welfare System
- 7 Engaging Fathers in Various Social Services and Systems
- 8 An Overview of Child Support

Following welcoming remarks by Dr. Gerald P. Mallon, Associate Dean of Scholarship and Research at the Silberman School and Lisa Fitzpatrick, Chief Program Officer for the NYC Human Resources Administration, Department of Social Services, Dr. Mallon and Frances

continued

We hope that this curriculum will help current and future social workers better understand and engage fathers and, ultimately, strengthen families.

Photo courtesy of Flickr user Kevin Harber

Pardus-Abbadessa, Executive Deputy Commissioner, Office of Child Support Services, introduced the new curriculum and discussed its genesis and development. Joan Morse, curriculum designer and digital storytelling producer, described the purpose and process of the storytelling project and introduced seven of the fathers and their digital stories. Each story is very personal and has a distinct voice because each father wrote his own text and selected the accompanying images. Since *Telling Fatherhood* had its world premiere in the midst of the entertainment industry “award season,” it was fitting that each father received a golden statuette during the premier event.

The program notes for the January 26th launch aptly captured the spirit and goal of the project: “We hope that this curriculum will help current and future social workers better understand and engage fathers and, ultimately, strengthen families, resulting in better outcomes for children in New York City and across the country.” At ACF Region 2, we want to applaud the City of New York’s Office of Child Support and the Hunter College Silberman School of Social Work for developing a new curriculum for social work practitioners about fatherhood policy and practice. Copies of the curriculum are available at the [National Center for Child Welfare Excellence](#) at the Silberman School of Social Work.

For more information about the curriculum, contact [Dean Gerald P. Mallon](#) at the Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College, C.U.N.Y. You can view the videos on YouTube at [Fatherhood: NYC Stories](#).

In addition to supporting the development of strong parent-child relationships and other activities associated with child support enforcement, the NYC Office of Child Support sponsors a program called “STEP” (“Support Through Employment Program”). STEP helps noncustodial parents with the training and preparation needed to find paying jobs in today’s job market.

More information about STEP is available at the [Child Support Services](#) page of the New York City Human Resources Administration.



Executive Deputy Commissioner Pardus-Abbadessa, NYC Office of Child Support Services & Associate Dean Mallon, Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College, C.U.N.Y

International Child Support News

OCSE has published a major resource on the Hague Child Support Convention. We developed the [Hague Child Support Convention Judicial Guide](#) for judges, judicial officers, administrative hearing officers, and others who will deal with applications and requests under the new Convention. The guide provides an overview of matters common to all cases under the Convention, including scope, evidentiary provisions, and translation requirements. The remaining sections are organized by type of application, including recognition and enforcement, establishment, modification, and provisions related to requests for specific measures.

New participant

On June 1, the Hague Child Support Convention took effect in the Republic of Belarus. This Eastern European country of [9.5 million people](#) is the 36th participant to the Hague Convention.

The U.S. now has child support reciprocity with 51 foreign jurisdictions.

If you have questions, see [OCSE’s International webpage](#) or contact [OCSE’s international team](#).



Hague Child Support Convention Countries

Albania, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States

Foreign Reciprocating Countries (FRC)

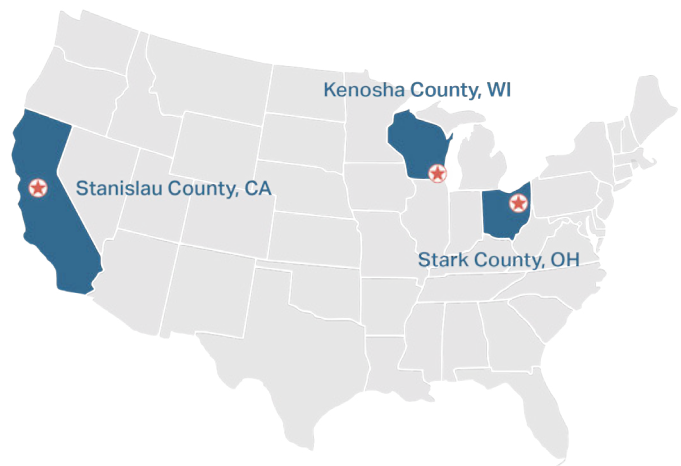
Australia, Canada, El Salvador, Israel, Switzerland

Canadian Provinces with FRC Status

Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland/Labrador, N.W. Territories, Nova Scotia, Nunavut, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan, Yukon

CSPED Fathers Moving Forward

Angela Blat, CSPED Program Manager, *Stark County, OH*; Shalonda Black, Employment and Training Programs Supervisor, *Kenosha County Child Support Agency, WI*; Sara Fearon, CSPED Program Manager, *Stanislaus County, CA*; and Michelle Jadczyk, *OCSE*



The [National Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration](#) (CSPED), an OCSE-funded Section 1115 grant, started in 2012. CSPED projects work to connect unemployed and underemployed parents with employment programs. Its primary goal is to increase reliable child support payments by parents who are willing but unable to pay.

In order to enroll in CSPED, participants must agree to take parenting classes. Now in its final year, many CSPED sites have success stories to share about the accomplishments of participating dads. For this Father's Day, we wanted to share a few.

From student to instructor

Stanislaus County, CA, runs On My Shoulders parenting sessions facilitated by their project partner, the Center for Human Services. In December 2013, Jeremy Shuman enrolled in the CSPED program, and, as part of his participation, he attended the On My Shoulders sessions. Once Jeremy found employment, he couldn't attend the sessions regularly. Despite his work schedule, the instructor encouraged him to continue to attend whenever possible and kept in touch with him.

Two key events happened in July 2017. Jeremy completed the final session of the On My Shoulders curriculum, and the instructor needed a backup facilitator. He approached Jeremy to see if he was interested. Jeremy felt honored that they entrusted the group sessions to him and said that the opportunity to give back to a program that had done so much for him was "more than he could have hoped for."

Jeremy began shadowing the instructor during sessions and filling in as needed. When the instructor moved on to another program in February 2018, Jeremy became the full-time facilitator of the On My Shoulders parenting sessions! Jeremy shared, "Believing in people, showing them compassion, and offering them a chance to better their



Believing in people, showing them compassion, and offering them a chance to better their lives has an impact on not just their lives, but on the lives of everyone they touch.

lives has an impact on not just their lives, but on the lives of everyone they touch. One act of kindness has exponential benefits. The [CSPED] program, On My Shoulders, and other programs like these not only make a difference for those fortunate enough to be participants, but also have an impact on everyone they meet."

Proud graduates

In Stark County, OH, CSPED participants enroll in a four-week parenting program that meets for two hours every day. Once they complete the program, participants attend weekly job search sessions until they find employment. Participants build a bond with their classmates after four weeks and thrive on the support from each other.

In February 2018, nine noncustodial parents attended a graduation ceremony after completing the course. One father shared that he participated in this program for his son and is proud to be able to show his son what he accomplished for him. He got his certificate and said, "No one can take that from me."

The program facilitator says the difference this program makes in the relationship between the noncustodial parents and child support staff is amazing. But what's more important is the difference this program can make in the relationships within families.

continued



Building new bonds

Kenosha County, WI, uses an evidenced-based curriculum as the foundation of their Dedicated Dads fatherhood program. Dedicated Dads teaches parenting and nurturing skills. The program fosters a learning environment that inspires discussion and interaction among fathers. It offers peer-to-peer support and promotes practical exercises that encourage responsible parenting and co-parenting. The open dialogue and shared experiences create brotherly bonding moments.

In May 2017, they developed relationships with some local partners who began referring potential program participants. Fathers who finish the program receive certificates of completion. “Through the Dedicated Dads Program, I’ve become someone I wished I always was,” said Anthony Thomas who graduated in March. “I can honestly say I am doing my best I ever did as a father. The open communication gave me real insight and information from men I can relate to. It opened my eyes to becoming a better father.”



Through the Dedicated Dads Program, I’ve become someone I wished I always was.

Interstate Case Processing Training

OCSE is holding six webinar training sessions that will cover interstate case processing requirements and principles from basic to advanced levels. Our target audience is state trainers, central registry staff, interstate managers and caseworkers, and other interstate professionals. OCSE will email registration invitations before each session.

The webinars run on Thursdays from 2:00 to 3:30 PM Eastern Time.

- Jul 12: Interstate 101
- Sep 13: Interstate 201
- Oct 4: Interstate Case Scenarios
- Nov 15: Interstate Payment Processing
- Jan 10: Interstate Case Closure
- Feb 28: OCSE’s Interstate Tools and Resources

After each session, we’ll publish the training materials on the OCSE website.

If you have questions, contact the OCSE Division of Policy and Training at ocse.dpt@acf.hhs.gov.



Improving Outcomes by Testing Behavioral Strategies — 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.

We're running a series of stories from BICS grantees so that other child support programs can learn from their experiences. This month, we feature Washington.

For more information on BICS, contact OCSE project officers Michael Hayes, michael.hayes@acf.hhs.gov, and Gretchen Lehman, gretchen.lehman@acf.hhs.gov.

Washington — A Step in the Right Direction

Thomas Smith, BICS Project Director, *Washington*

Two months after taking over as the BICS project director, I found myself at a BICS grantee meeting, talking with colleagues from across the nation about the challenges noncustodial parents can face after a new order is established. Specifically, we were talking about the challenges parents face in Washington, given our state's policies and procedures. Although I had worked in child support for 17 years, this was one of the first times I had stepped back and thought about our processes from a parent's perspective. As I fielded questions, a single thought echoed through my mind: If experienced child support professionals were confused by Washington's process, how could we possibly expect parents who are new to child support to understand?

Fresh perspective

The BICS project provided us with new tools to analyze our practices. I learned to apply a behavioral lens to identify the potential obstacles parents experience in completing program requirements. Behavioral science uses insights from psychology and other related fields to help explain how and why we act in ways that are not always in our best interest — whether we are procrastinating on an important project, missing a deadline, or making impulse decisions.

Traditionally, agencies have often designed programs assuming that parents have unlimited time and ability to think through complex problems or complete several required steps. A behavioral lens can help child support programs better understand why a process may not function as intended or why people (parents or staff) behave differently than we would like. I've been the BICS project director for about 18 months and using behavioral principles to improve program operations has become second nature. Now I find myself introducing these ideas to others and trying to explain their value.

Staff reactions

When I met with staff in our Everett office that were part of our second BICS intervention, they wanted to know why we were doing this. They had recently started reaching out to noncustodial parents with new orders to review the terms of their orders, stress the importance of making regular child support payments, and develop specific payment plans.

While I felt the project had been going well so far, I wanted to hear how they felt. I asked the staff to describe their feelings about the project using just one word. They responded, "Curious." "Interested." "Frustrated." "Hopeful!"

They were curious about how the intervention would play out long term and interested in the final results. Some were frustrated with the relatively low percentage of parents they had been able to reach so far, but they were still committed to following through. Team members hoped that their work would be effective.

Caseworkers that had successfully contacted parents explained that the parents had many questions about who we were, what we did, and why we were involved. We based our intervention mainly on the assumption that parents have limited understanding when it comes to the child support process, so it was encouraging to hear some evidence that we were on the right track.

Making meaningful changes

After my meeting with the Everett staff, I felt optimistic. It was refreshing to hear them discuss the best ways to engage noncustodial parents. They would need to make cultural shifts to embrace the lessons from BICS, which takes time, energy, and leaders dedicated to the cause.

We've implemented BICS projects in both Seattle and Everett, and staff members in both locations have demonstrated they are ready for these changes. The commitment I've witnessed from our BICS team has been unwavering.

We still have a lot of work to do and data to analyze before we fully understand the impact of our efforts. From what I have already seen, I am confident that BICS is a step in the right direction.

Passport Denial Program 101

Rebecca Hamil, OCSE

Sometimes it's difficult to collect past-due child support, especially when those amounts reach into the tens of thousands of dollars. The average amount owed among noncustodial parents with child support debt is more than \$21,000. In some instances, it isn't because these parents can't pay, but because they choose not to pay. The Passport Denial Program provides an effective tool to collect past-due support from delinquent parents who want to travel outside of the United States — for vacation, work, or any other reason. OCSE received authority to initiate the Passport Denial Program as part of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996.

Back then, the Passport Denial Program promised to be a revolutionary new enforcement tool to help children and families get their past-due support. Today the program is much more successful than the child support community ever imagined.

The Passport Denial Program provides an effective tool to collect past-due support from delinquent parents who want to travel outside of the United States

Informing parents

Noncustodial parents who owe past-due support receive a Pre-Offset Notice that explains the amount they owe and provides information about the remedies OCSE can use to collect and enforce repayments of that amount. The notice explains the authority for these remedies including the Passport Denial Program. It also gives the parent an opportunity to contest the amount owed and instructions on how to appeal.

How the program works

The Act provides for the denial, revocation, and restriction of U.S. passports when a parent owes at least \$2,500 in past-due support. Child support agencies submit information on parents who meet the criteria for passport denial. OCSE forwards those parents' names to the Department of State to reject their passport applications. The State Department will also revoke a current passport when the parent surrenders it to a passport agent or embassy representative for service, like to add pages, change a name, update a picture, or repair or reissue a damaged passport.

When the State Department denies or revokes a passport, it sends the parent a rejection notice and instructs them to contact the appropriate state child support agency and provides the points of contact.

continued

The Office of Child Support Enforcement provides more services than people generally see. This column highlights tasks that federal child support staff handle.



Passport Denial — Wildly Successful

Since its inception, states have reported nearly \$500 million dollars in collections through the Passport Denial Program. In 2017, states reported almost \$32 million and almost 900 success stories to go with those payments. Through May 2018, there have been five large collections of more than \$100,000, including the largest ever at over \$700,000. Here are details on four of them.

A self-employed parent owing more than \$103,000 for his three children paid the balance in full so he could travel for business. The custodial parent told South Carolina that she was “shocked and grateful.”

Beginning in 2016, a parent in California requested his release from the Passport Denial Program to go to Japan. He gave many reasons for needing a passport including employment, sick relatives, needing medical care not available in the United States, and visiting his wife. Each time the state denied his request because he made no payment. He eventually paid over \$104,000 for his two children.

New Jersey collected \$145,000 from a parent who needed to travel for business. The payment went to the family of three children.

Using the proceeds he received from a Department of Taxation seizure, a parent paid \$157,000 to New York for his four children so he could get his passport.

Criteria for removal

The law does not require child support agencies to remove individuals from the program when their past-due amounts fall below the \$2,500 threshold. States request removal according to their policies and procedures and based on case-by-case reviews. Some will work with parents to set up reasonable payment plans to help them stay current, while others will require partial or full payments.

OCSE removes the noncustodial parent from the program when the past-due balance reaches zero or the state deletes or excludes the case. Submitting states are the only agencies that can request a parent's withdrawal from the Passport Denial Program. If more than one state submits the same parent, all certifying states must request withdrawal before the State Department will issue a passport. If the state has multiple cases for the parent, the state must withdraw all of them.

Making it happen

OCSE's Passport Denial Customer Service Team acts as a liaison among state child support staff, the State Department, parents, regional staff, congressional liaisons, attorneys, employers, and others. The team has three main goals:

- Use the program as effectively as possible to help families get past-due support
- Explain the process to parents whose passports have been denied
- Provide a fast and easy way for the parent to get their passport when the state releases it

The team quickly collaborates with OCSE partners to help everyone involved. They respond to numerous telephone and email inquiries daily, sometimes handling inquiries from multiple people about the same case.

For cases where the state has not requested a parent's removal, the team may need to take additional steps including:

- Giving the parent appropriate contact information for the state child support agency and the State Department
- Coordinating with an OCSE regional office
- Communicating with congressional liaisons
- Facilitating communication between all parties involved

Coordination among child support agencies, the team, and the State Department is critical to ensure that everyone involved in the passport denial process gets prompt responses and actions.

For more information about the Passport Denial Program or to share a story about an interesting collection your state has made, contact the OCSE Special Collections Team at collections@acf.hhs.gov or visit the [Passport Denial webpage](#).

Los Angeles County's Record Setting Collection

In April, the Los Angeles County Child Support Services Department collected a record-breaking \$713,878 through the Passport Denial Program. The collection required the collaboration of staff from three divisions.

"This case is a huge testament to all of your hard work and a great example of how we never give up on cases," said Director Dr. Steven Golightly to department staff. "Can you imagine receiving a payment for over \$713,000?"

The case began as a private order in 2008. In 2012, the mother opened a case with the department. Staff reported that the father had funds in his bank account, but had not been willing to pay the amount owed. This spring, he urgently needed to travel overseas, so he needed his passport, which prompted the payment. The entire payment went to the mother.

This is not the first record collection for L.A. County. In 2004, the department was involved in a \$300,000 collection with Wisconsin through passport denial, which was one of the largest child support collections ever recorded at the time.

Child Support Report

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