

Child Support Report

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COMMISSIONER'S VOICE — COLLABORATION

Finding Collaborative Opportunities



For many of us in the child support community, the past two months have been busy! In February, we gathered for the annual National Child Support Enforcement Association's Policy Forum, and in the federal office, we launched a new internal OCSE Strategic Plan full of task-oriented targets. In March, I attended the Region 2 directors meeting, as well as a combined Region 9 and 10 tribal directors meeting. I had many notable moments, in particular I really enjoyed discussing the future

of child support with my Administration for Children and Families peers in the opening plenary of the policy forum and hearing from the wide range of speakers over the three-day conference. For those of you who missed it, check out the policy forum highlights on the next page.

As I came away from the panel discussions and engaging conversations, I was reminded of how closely intertwined the ideas of collaboration and communication are. For the federal office, we're especially thinking about how these two ideas overlap since they are two of OCSE's four internal strategies, see the [September 2017 Commissioner's Voice](#). And already, we see what happens when we try to better understand each other so we can work together to improve outcomes across different social services.

Collaboration

One recent accomplishment I'd like to focus on is the work we did alongside the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) in producing twin Information Memoranda (IM) in February. They deal with the use of incentive and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds for noncustodial parents (NCP). OCSE rolled out IM-18-02, [Use of IV-D Incentive Funds for NCP Work Activities](#), and OFA published TANF-ACF-IM-2018-01, [The use of TANF funds to promote employment programs for noncustodial parents](#). OCSE and TANF are really behind the idea of getting parents employed. These memoranda show our commitment to programs that get people to work.

continued



Scott Lekan hosts an NCSEA plenary session with key leaders from the Administration for Children and Families

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Funding Announcement

In January, OCSE posted a forecast for a new grant opportunity, [Using Digital Marketing to Increase Participation in the Child Support Program](#). State and tribal child support agencies will be able to apply once the funding opportunity announcement is released. OCSE expects it to be posted by May 1.

2016 Report to Congress Published

Federal Performance Measures were at an all-time high in FY 2016. Get more national statistics and highlights of the child support programs in states, territories, and tribes in the [annual report to Congress](#).

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The OCSE IM reaffirms that states may ask for exemptions to use federal dollars, via incentive payments, to help fund work activities for noncustodial parents. That could mean more employment programs for noncustodial parents at the state level. As a complement, the OFA IM reminds states that they can use federal TANF Program funds to the same end — employment services for noncustodial parents. Cross-promoting the availability of certain federal funds can help states gauge which options or tools are best for helping their populations. With greater flexibility, states can help parents reach better financial stability to provide more for their children. I would be remiss if I did not thank Acting Assistant Secretary Steven Wagner for his support and the work he's doing in forging relationships with our counterparts at the Department of Labor.

But intra-agency partnerships like this don't happen on their own. They happen only when we look for areas of overlap in the social services we provide and identify ways to improve our effectiveness for the parents we help. That starts when we get on the same page. During the policy forum, Rev. Dr. Michael Oleksa, a leader in the development of cross-cultural education in Alaska, explained that we need to learn to speak the same "language." After we do that, we can reduce duplication of effort and drive efficiency. Making the most of our public resources takes understanding, cooperation, and creativity. We're doing just that here at the federal level, and I encourage our partners at the regional and state levels to think broadly about how you can do this, too. How can you collaborate with others to strengthen the impact you're making in children's and parents' lives?

Scott Lekan

Coming Up

April is Minority Health Month. The next *Child Support Report* will feature information to help child support professionals engage minority parents on health related topics. The National Research Center on Hispanic Children and Families will offer information that community service providers can use to deliver services that are culturally responsive.

The next issue will also feature updates on several OCSE grant programs including the newest, Procedural Justice-Informed Alternatives to Contempt.

Policy Forum Highlights

In my role as commissioner, I get invited to a lot of events. Here are some takeaways from this year's [NCSEA Policy Forum](#) that I wanted to share with the community.

In a plenary on the Future of Child Support Case Management Under the 2016 OCSE Modernization Rule and the Performance Incentive System, we got interesting insight into how Congress is looking at human services programs. Staff Director Anne DeCesaro, Subcommittee on Human Resources, U.S. House Committee on Ways and Means; and Senior Human Service Advisor Ryan Martin, U.S. Senate Committee on Finance, talked about what their committees are looking at to improve incentive measures, case closure, incarceration challenges, and more.

During the Digital Marketing Strategies for Child Support Agencies workshop, we heard about the innovative tactics some states are taking to publicize their services, especially to the younger, more tech-savvy population of parents.

We also heard from David Kilgore, director of the [Riverside County Department of Child Support Services](#), who talked about Adverse Childhood Experiences and shared what his county is doing to maximize the positive effects of child support actions while minimizing the negative effects, creating resiliency-building organizations along the way. In a future issue, David will expand on this concept and explain what that means for child support professionals and how Riverside is trying to build a resilient community.

And after the forum, I joined the new child support directors for a financial management training session. The Annual Report Data Technical Overview presentation showed how performing day-to-day operations affects state performance measures and incentives.

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE

Parenting In Partnership

Amethyst Roberson, Director of Social Services, *Fathers' Support Center St. Louis*

In 2016, nearly 250,000 Missouri children called [St. Louis County](#) home, but 15% of them lived in poverty and many received TANF. The [Fathers' Support Center](#) assists these children by helping their moms and dads become better parents. The center launched a new Parenting In Partnership (PIP) program to provide a cohesive, comprehensive, and holistic array of services regardless of the nature of the relationship between the two parents. PIP — a three-year project funded by the Missouri Department of Social Services, the [Area Resources for Community and Human Services](#) organization, and Mission and Ministry Inc. — is trying to improve the lives of children.

The center's goal for PIP is to foster strong parenting partnerships between custodial and noncustodial parents by stabilizing the families through employment, child support payments, and housing. The program provides direct services such as parenting education, financial literacy, and employment placement. The staff also invites both parents to participate in a family bonding activity and receive mediation services.

When needed, PIP refers parents to counseling, group mentoring, support groups, and other community-based support service programs. Therapists work together as an interdisciplinary team that provides group and individual interventions to both parents. They address issues from trauma-informed and holistic perspectives.

Community assistance

PIP has succeeded because of its partners. Together, the University of Missouri Extension Nutrition Program and the City of St. Louis Department of Health teach the clients how to be healthier. Monumental Baptist Church produces parent mentors. The Division of Family Services offers daycare service assistance for clients interested in participating in the program. Additionally, a [Dress for Success Midwest](#) traveling boutique provides business attire for the mothers. The clothing helps the moms look more professional during their job searches and boosts their confidence and self-esteem. PIP is also forming a new relationship with Community Women against Hardship to provide safe housing opportunities for mothers and their children.

Statistics prove success

Since November 2016, 45 mothers and 154 fathers have graduated from the program. Data shows that they are more confident in their parenting abilities and feel more equipped to build positive relationships with their children.

- 85% of mothers and 91% of fathers demonstrated a learned parenting technique through role-play or through a family bonding activity
- 84% of mothers and 76% of fathers increased their knowledge of healthy relationship habits and techniques to prevent domestic violence and child abuse
- 82% of mothers and 95% of fathers demonstrated increased job readiness

Unfortunately, the center finds it difficult to recruit more couples for the project because one of the parents often has an individual challenge that prohibits successful co-parenting. These include domestic violence, unemployment, mental health issues, substance abuse problems, and a lack of healthy coping strategies.

Its greatest success is that the women and men understand their role as a parent and the significance of their child having a relationship with both parents.

For more information about the Parenting in Partnership program, visit the [Fathers' Support Center](#) website or contact Amethyst Roberson at 314-333-4170.



Students taking part in the Parenting in Partnership program



PROMISING PRACTICES

Modification Project Gives Nebraska Inmates Hope

Michael Tatten, Attorney/Project Manager,
Child Support Services of Nebraska

Incarcerated parents have enough problems to overcome without adding unpayable monthly child support obligations and large arrears balances. While doing outreach at local correctional facilities, I've met with a number of inmates who've told me that their child support orders and corresponding arrearages create a huge barrier when they finally leave jail. Some have even told me that they feel like they have no hope of paying their arrears when they get out. Many times, they said this led them to commit another crime and they wind up right back in jail.

In some states, such as California, caseworkers can suspend the accrual of monthly support when an individual becomes incarcerated, but Nebraska statutes specifically state that child support offices can't review or file a complaint to modify child support for incarcerated parents.

We've started to see more and more inmates who have successfully reduced their monthly child support significantly, sometimes to \$0 per month.

To help these parents out, staff from three local organizations — the Legal Aid office in Omaha, the Child Support Services project in Omaha, and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services — collaborated on an inmate modification handbook and video project. We created the set to help incarcerated parents understand how to lower their monthly child support obligation while they are in jail.

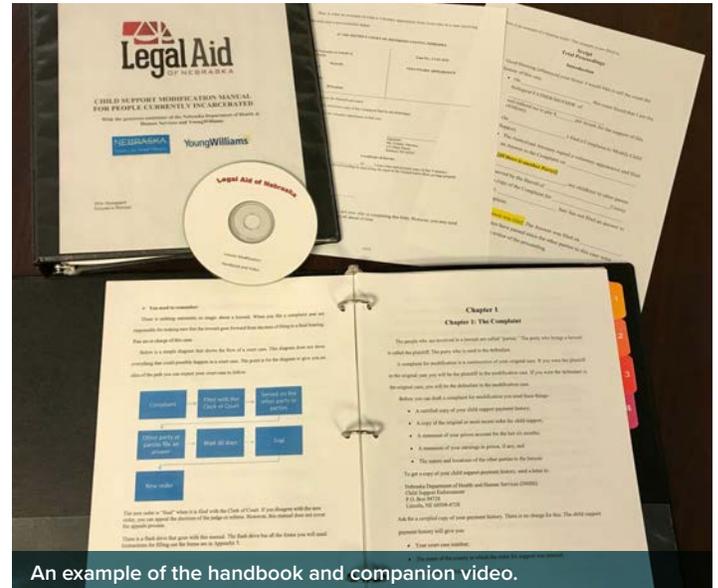
The handbook and companion video give inmates step-by-step instructions so they can file the modification paperwork themselves since neither Legal Aid nor the child support office can file it for them. The set explains how to file the modification complaint, how to serve all named parties, how to schedule the court date, and what to do and say at the final hearing. We included numerous fill-in-the-blank legal forms that inmates can use to write in their case information and file with the court. The packet also has scripts for the inmate to use when addressing the court. Everything was created and approved by attorneys who practice in the child support field on a daily basis.

For the past ten months, we've been piloting the inmate modification handbook and video at the state-run Omaha Correctional Center. Inmates can go to the prison library where they can read the handbook while they view the

companion video on the library computers. Our goal is to make sets available to parents at all Nebraska Department of Corrections facilities this spring.

We've started to see more and more inmates who have successfully reduced their monthly child support significantly, sometimes to \$0 per month. We look forward to providing many more parents the tools to get their orders modified once the inmate modification handbook and video roll out to the rest of the facilities.

For information on this project, contact Michael Tatten at Michael.Tatten@nebraska.gov.



An example of the handbook and companion video.

The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) tracks child support and family law legislation thanks to a partnership with OCSE. The NCSL dedicates a specific section of its website to [Child Support and Incarceration](#).

The section contains Bureau of Justice statistics such as, "On average, an incarcerated parent with a child support order has the potential to leave prison with nearly \$20,000 in child support debt, having entered the system with around half that amount owed." The page also features a map showing which states allow for order modification based on incarceration.

[NCSL is a bipartisan legislative research organization](#) that serves legislators and staff in all 50 states and the territories. For more information about the child support project, visit the [child support and family law database](#) or contact Meghan McCann at meghan.mccann@ncsl.org.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Alaska Teen Outreach — Think About It

Jessie Archibald, Tribal Child Support
Unit Manager-Attorney, *Central Council of
Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska*

Alaska's massive size, approximately one-fifth the size of the lower 48 states, makes outreach difficult. The state [Child Support Services Division](#) and the Tribal Child Support Unit of the [Central Council of Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska](#) began collaborating on a teen outreach program in 2014.

Geographic challenges

Tlingit & Haida is the federally recognized tribal government for Alaska's Tlingit & Haida population. The child support unit provides services to its citizens in most Southeast Alaska villages and communities. These villages and communities are spread over 43,200 square miles within the Alaska panhandle. The region encompasses a 525-mile strip of coastline and interior waterways bordered by Canada on the north, south, and east, and the Gulf of Alaska on the west. There is no road system linking Southeast Alaska communities; therefore, travelers must use airplane, boat, or ferry.

Before the tribal program opened, the state child support division was the only agency serving the state from its offices in Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau. The state child support tribal liaison in Anchorage traveled twice a year to various communities to present a program called Think About It to local high school students.

Teen outreach

The Think About It program includes a short video and an interactive discussion that encourages high school students to consider how the life choices they make now can affect them when they get older. Part of the discussion focuses on potential child support issues they may face if they have a child at a young age. The [Think About It video](#), produced by the Department of Child Support Services in [Kern County, California](#), engages students by presenting real life scenarios with a focus on child support.

Starting in late 2014, the Tlingit & Haida staff joined the state liaison during local Juneau high school classes to answer students' questions about tribal child support orders. When the state discontinued its Think About It outreach program in the southeast region in 2016, the tribal child support staff offered to continue the program where it could. The state and tribal staffs worked together to develop a presentation that would represent both Alaska and tribal child support information.

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Almost no Alaska panhandle communities other than Hyder, Skagway and Haines have outside road connections – aircraft and boats are the major means of transport.



In 2013, Alaska had the 12th highest pregnancy rate of the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

It costs \$250,000 to raise a child to age 18. This does not include expenses for sports, cell phones, family vacations, or video games. Because of the cost of living in Alaska, the total is closer to \$330,000.

A monthly child support payment will not be enough to raise a child. Alaska's average monthly child support payment is \$363. Let's see if that will pay for the baby's necessities:

- \$1,000 – daycare
- \$108 – Formula (four cans)
- \$35 – Diapers (140 count)
- \$20 – Baby wipes

These expenses total \$1,163, which leaves a parent \$800 short every month for the baby's necessities, not including important things like rent, household bills, personal hygiene items, clothes, and gas for the car.

The state provided a copy of the video and referred local Juneau high schools to the Tlingit & Haida staff for scheduling. Since spring 2016, Tlingit & Haida's child support staff has presented the teen outreach program to 20 classes and over 450 students in 3 different high schools.

"Many students are not made aware of the responsibilities of financially caring for children until they have them," said Juneau Douglas High School teacher Kelly McCormick. "This presentation helps high school students better understand the complex legal obligations of child support and how they affect both their present and their future families."

"The Think About It program is a powerful presentation that leads to great dialogue between students and instructors," said Julie Herman, a Thunder Mountain High School teacher. "It is a program I would like to see continue in Juneau."

For more information on the Tlingit & Haida Think About It outreach program, contact Jessie Archibald at jarchibald@ccthita-nsn.gov.

Fatherhood Announcements Win Award

A set of three public service announcements were named Best in Show at the Adcraft Club of Detroit's advertising awards ceremony in December 2017. The [National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse](#), the Ad Council, and the Department of Health and Human Services, launched the PSAs to remind fathers "it only takes a moment to make a moment."

The campaign uses the #MakeAMoment hashtag. These PSAs inspire and support all fathers in their commitment to responsible fatherhood. They communicate that a father's presence is essential to his child's well-being.

Here are links to the winning PSA series:

[Rain](#), [Crawl](#), and [Beatbox](#).



IN FOCUS

Making Work Pay this Tax Season

Barbara Lacina and Gretchen Lehman, OCSE

Most parents in the child support caseload want to work so they can be self-sufficient, and most who owe support strive to make consistent payments to support their children. The national child support program is one of several human service programs that promotes work as a key to achieving our mission to serve children and families. Work requirements and incentives can strengthen our efforts by providing parents with positive reinforcement when they find and keep a job.

The federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is a refundable tax credit that provides a work incentive for low- to moderate-income families. Like child support, the EITC helps parents support their children. In 2017, the average amount of EITC that eligible workers and families received nationwide was about [\\$2,445 according to IRS statistics](#).

The EITC is only an effective work incentive when parents know about it. According to the IRS, veterans, Native Americans, rural residents, and people with disabilities often overlook the EITC. Custodians other than a parent — such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, or cousins — may also qualify for the EITC.

As a child support professional, you have a great opportunity to talk to parents about the EITC during your general case activities and communications. You can also spread the word by placing information in the lobby or waiting room. Child support agencies can get resources and learn more about the [EITC and other refundable credits](#) on the IRS website. Families can find out if they qualify by using the service's [EITC Assistant](#).

Most families receive the EITC through their federal tax refund. The [Federal Tax Refund Offset Program](#) also ensures that children in the child support program are getting the financial support they need. According to OCSE's [report to Congress for FY 2016](#), the program collected \$1.7 billion that year through federal tax refund offsets. States also collected more than \$200 million through state tax refund offsets.

Finally, families in our caseload only benefit from the EITC or the Federal Tax Refund Offset Program when parents file their taxes. You can help them avoid scams and fees by providing information on [free tax preparation help](#) that is available both online and through volunteer organizations across the nation. Every dollar counts for the children that we serve.

Safeguarding Sensitive Data in Shared Work Spaces

Crystal Lynn, Compliance Analyst, Security Team, *Indiana Department of Child Services*

Occasionally, Indiana child support professionals share office space with staff who work for other government offices. In these situations, we remind child support staff to make sure they protect federal tax information (FTI) and other sensitive child support data when they use it. Our security department recently provided these guidelines to local child support leaders and staff who work in shared offices.

Office set-up

- Request a separate workspace or office area for child support staff whenever possible.
- Store FTI and other sensitive paperwork in locking file cabinets, or in a lockable cage or room that is only accessible to child support staff.
- Ensure there are two barriers between non-child support staff and sensitive data at all times.
- Maintain access logs to document all outside visitors, not just child support visitors.

Training

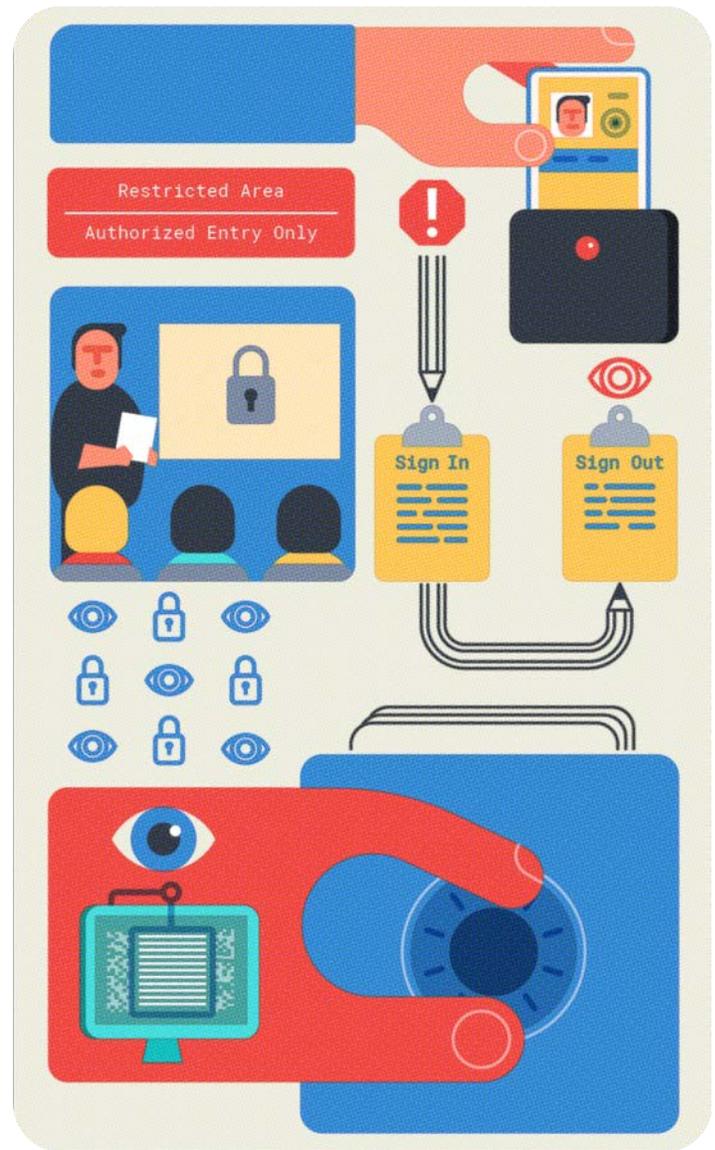
In mixed-staff environments, breaches may occur and should be reported to the appropriate office as quickly as possible. To minimize the impact of such incidents, provide information security training to every staff member so that if outside staff accidentally see sensitive child support FTI, they will know it is confidential.

Immediate work spaces

- Keep sensitive FTI information off desktops and other furniture, and out of in-and-out baskets.
- Lock up FTI when staff are not using it.
- Limit the amount of FTI and confidential information staff have on their desks to only what they are currently working on.
- Store FTI and other confidential information out of sight when non-child support staff are in child support areas.
- Have supervisors walk through work areas periodically to make sure staff are following clean desk practices.

Computer terminals

- Provide computer monitor privacy filters for staff sitting in shared areas to protect information on computer screens.
- Position computer monitors so non-child support staff cannot see the screens.



Fax machines

Incoming faxes could cause problems for shared offices when staff from several divisions use the same fax machines. Some offices have obtained dedicated equipment and put them in the child support areas of the office. If that is not possible, shared offices can:

- Place a shared fax machine in a secure central location that does not receive much traffic.
- Allow only designated child support staff to access incoming faxes.

A version of this story originally appeared in the January 2018 edition of The Beacon, a quarterly publication of the Indiana Child Support Program. The security team published the article to help child support staff prepare for an upcoming IRS audit. Indiana has given OCSE permission to reprint it here with adjustments to add clarity for our broader audience. For questions regarding Indiana's security procedures, email CSBSecurity@dcs.in.gov.

Safeguarding Personally Identifiable Information

Danny Markley, OCSE

As we read in Crystal Lynn's article, Safeguarding Sensitive Data in Shared Work Spaces, child support workers can access many types of sensitive and personally identifiable information (PII). Safeguarding this information is becoming more challenging in today's cyber world. Advances in technology, communications, and exchange methods can result in more data compromises to child support information.

Hackers get the most news coverage, but insiders generally cause the most security incidents. Although these breaches might not be intentional, the consequences can have lasting effects on your agency's integrity and reputation.

You protect sensitive client information when you follow simple rules like these:

- Place case files in locked containers when you are away from your work area, especially at the end of your business day.
- Verify fax numbers and contact the recipient before transmitting documents.
- Review documents before you mail them to make sure you haven't included another client's information.
- Place PII or other sensitive case information in encrypted email attachments.
- Destroy documents using a crosscut shredder.
- Account for all your case files, laptops, and other items when you leave court.
- Avoid taking hard copies of client information out of your office unless it is clearly necessary.
- Secure laptops and case files in your car trunk so they're not in plain sight if you have to leave them in your vehicle for a short period.
- Ensure you only store client information and PII on laptops with full disk encryption.
- Confirm that your workstations are scanned regularly for viruses, spyware, and other threats.
- Lock your computers and laptops when you leave the area.
- Log off your workstation completely at the end of the day.

We must protect child support information by preventing unauthorized access and potential data breaches.

Editor's note: a version of this article appeared in the [August 2015 Child Support Report](#). Contact Danny Markley at danny.markley@acf.hhs.gov if you have questions or need help safeguarding child support information properly.

What is Personally Identifiable Information?

PII is any type of information that someone can use to identify, contact, or locate an individual. Some examples of PII:

- Name
- Social Security number
- Home address
- Date of birth
- Phone number
- Email address
- Personal account number
- Driver's license number
- Fingerprint
- Photographic identifiers

Child Support Report

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