

Child Support Report

Vol. 41 No. 3 March 2020

MEDIA MATTERS

Engaging with the Largest Segment in Our Caseload

Crystal Peeler, OCSE

Millennials are now the largest generation of custodial parents in the child support program — accounting for nearly 50% of our caseload. We're taking a deep dive into this generation to learn more about them and discover ways our program can better engage with them and improve their customer experience.

What does research say about Millennials?

This generation is very comfortable with technology. They like businesses that offer self-service or use artificial intelligence to allow them to access services and complete tasks. This generation also values customer service. They're vocal about their experiences and are more likely to write reviews when compared to Boomers. Millennials are more likely to abandon a business because of bad customer experience; however, 89% are also willing to pay 2% more for exceptional customer service.

In general, people are becoming savvy with their online interactions and have adopted new behaviors to improve their experience. For instance, users have learned to look below the fold on a webpage for additional information, and 60% don't look further than the third result when searching online. They expect the search engine will bring up relevant results and give them the information they're looking for right up front.

How can we adapt to meet their needs?

Our customers have high expectations for the service they want to receive. As we open our doors to a new generation of customers, we should look at the ways we're interacting with them and think about how we can live up to their expectations.

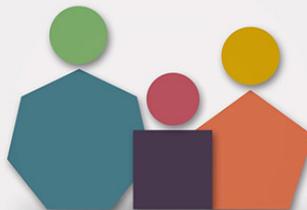
Perhaps it's time we did some user testing to make sure our customers' top tasks are easily attainable. If a new customer visits your state's website today, how easy is it for them to apply for child support or change their order? What about our online content? Are we producing quality information with clear titles, headings, and keywords so search engines will bring up our content in the top three results?

continued

OCSE Partnerships Work

OCSE created a [video](#) to share achievements of its partnerships with federal, state, tribal, and local child support agencies. It highlights the services we offer to child support professionals to promote parental responsibility so children receive reliable support from both parents. [Watch the video](#) to learn about the impact of OCSE partnerships.

For information about training, technical assistance, and other services available to state and tribal child support programs, [read our Menu of Services](#).



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Millennials in the Child Support Program

Millennials are the largest generation of custodial parents in the child support program. How do they differ from other generations?

In the next issue, we'll highlight a *Story Behind the Numbers* brief that examines millennials in the child support program. [Subscribe to our newsletter and stay informed.](#)

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Millennials want real-time interactions when they connect with their brands. Many child support programs have launched social media channels, chat bots, and other methods to interact with customers. OCSE is compiling a list of communication channels that child support agencies use to engage with customers. We're hoping this will help improve communication across the country and also spark ideas or encourage agencies to try methods that have worked for other agencies.

If you recently launched a new communications tool, send us your story so others can learn from your experience: CSR.Editor@acf.hhs.gov.

Easy ways to improve your customer's online experience:

- Use bulleted lists — people are more likely to look at a bulleted list than a list buried in a paragraph
- Avoid walls of text — use clear titles and headers so users can scan and quickly assess if the information is valuable to them
- Select words wisely — lead the sentence with the most important word to grab the user's attention

The information featured in this article was compiled from the following sources:

- [2018 Aspect Consumer Experience Index Survey](#)
- [How People Read on the Web: The Eyetracking Evidence](#)
- [Accordions Are Not Always the Answer for Complex Content on Desktops](#)

PARENTING TIME

Florida Title IV-D Parenting Time Plans

Ann Coffin, Director, Florida Child Support Program

Florida's [IV-D Parenting Time law](#), implemented in January 2017, provides the Child Support Program authority to incorporate a parenting time plan into a final order. Both parents must agree with the plan during administrative establishment or modification actions, or during judicial enforcement actions initiated by the program. Florida establishes most of our child support orders through the administrative process.

Our child support guidelines use a deviation process that can award parents credit to their child support amounts based on the number of overnights the child spends with each parent. Under the new law, parents can also have their agreed-upon plan incorporated into a final order. However, to enforce or modify a parenting time plan, the parent must file an action in circuit court.

When initiating an administrative action to establish a support order, all of the following stipulations must apply:

- The child must be residing with a parent (not a caregiver).
- All parties must reside in Florida.
- The parent who owes support is not incarcerated.
- And the case does not include a family violence indicator.

If all the conditions are present, the program mails both parents a blank [IV-D Standard Parenting Time Agreement](#). Parents can return an agreed-upon plan any time before the final order is rendered. For judicial enforcement actions, parents receive information in the motion and notice of hearing. It outlines their ability to ask the court to incorporate a parenting time plan at the hearing, even though no plan has been entered to date through an enforcement hearing.

If parents cannot agree on a parenting time plan, the program provides a standard petition to establish a parenting time plan that one parent can file in circuit court without incurring a filing fee. To help explain the process, we deployed a [one-stop shop webpage](#) for parents that includes basic information and downloadable forms as well as important resources and links to self-help centers, legal referral services, and domestic violation assistance.

Costs related to establishing parenting time plans are not a Title IV-D reimbursable cost, so we developed and submitted a cost allocation method to OCSE. The plan was approved, but required new system reports, an annual time-motion study, and state funding with no federal match.

Results

We believe there is a positive correlation between improved payment behavior and the existence of a parenting time plan. Between January 1, 2018, and June 30, 2019, 54% of the administrative establishment activities we initiated resulted in an order. Seventy percent of these were eligible for parenting time; however, only 8% of the orders had parenting time included. While the average monthly support obligation is lower for cases that include parenting time (\$429.60 per month compared to \$447.61), cases with a parenting time plan received 83.5% of payments due during the review period compared to 74.6% in cases without one.

For more information, visit Florida's [Parenting Time Plans webpage](#) or contact Patterson Poulson at patterson.poulson@floridarevenue.com.

COLLABORATION SUCCESSES

Working with the County Veterans Service Office

Maria Lasecki, Child Support Director,
and Joe Aulik, County Veterans Service
Officer, Brown County, WI

Connecting custodial and noncustodial parents to community resources has been an ongoing endeavor for Wisconsin's [Brown County Child Support Agency](#). Our participation in the OCSE [Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration](#) helped us understand the many benefits of maintaining a robust service-based approach. When caseworkers have meaningful discussions with parents about their individual circumstances, barriers, and unmet needs, we understand what they must have so they can fulfill their responsibilities. That information gives us the opportunity to 'connect the dots' and pair eligible individuals with resources available. For veterans, this doesn't come by way of referral, but rather a warm handoff to our [County Veterans Service Office](#) (CVSO) only one floor away!

Gathering data

The first step to any successful collaboration entails a thorough and mutual understanding of what each entity does. Once we had that, both sides knew which parents to refer, for what type of assistance, and precisely where and why those services were important. Many staff, despite having worked in their departments for years, were not aware of the myriad services available through the other office. Introductions, overviews, and information sharing by both agencies provided valuable insight into each office's resources and referral processes.

Advocates for veterans

Our CVSO employees spend 80% of their time completing Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefit applications and advocating on behalf of veterans and their dependents to secure those benefits. Because the VA application process is very complicated, many veterans don't seek the benefits they're entitled to receive. The CVSO staff makes it our mission to connect veterans, their dependents, and survivors to those benefits.

Navigating the Department of Defense (DOD) and the VA can be very complicated, time consuming, and frustrating. In Brown County, the CVSO drafted a mini-guide on resources, links, and instructions needed when someone works on a child support issue with the Defense Finance and Accounting Service and the DOD. It also covers locating parents actively serving in the military,

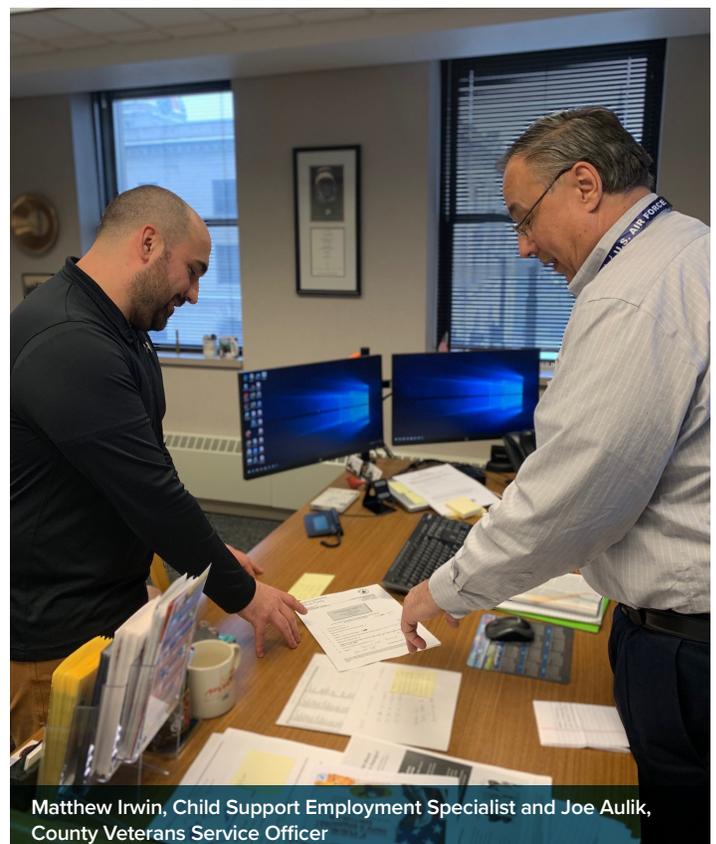
garnishing military retired pay, and apportioning VA disability compensation. The guide includes references to the laws and VA manuals that govern these issues. Our ultimate goal is to make sure active duty service members and veterans have what they need to take care of their family obligations.

Awareness training

Each year, the CVSO staff educate child support caseworkers on the VA benefits available to veterans and their dependents. We encourage them to refer their customers to the CVSO office. Over 50% of veterans and their dependents are unaware of available benefits, which means lost opportunities to improve their lives. Veterans are often eligible for VA healthcare, disability compensation, or educational opportunities. This can improve the quality of their lives and sometimes provide additional income for them to meet their family obligations.

Collaboration and cooperation between veterans service offices and child support agencies better serves the veteran community and their families at the county level. [Thirty-five states have CVSOs](#) and collaborating with them to fulfill the child support mission is one more tool in your toolbox.

For more information, contact Maria Lasecki at maria.lasecki@browncountywi.gov or Joe Aulik at bc.veterans@browncountywi.gov.



Matthew Irwin, Child Support Employment Specialist and Joe Aulik, County Veterans Service Officer

TECH FOCUS

Child Support Takes a Coffee Break

Nicole Windom-Hurd, Assistant Director,
Department of Child Support Services,
Riverside County, California

With people consuming more content through audiobooks and podcasts, we wanted to help write the narrative that informs our customers about child support programs and services. The Riverside County (RivCo) Department of Child Support Services [Coffee Break podcast](#) helps educate the public about services available from local child support agencies, both within our state of California and nationwide.

Developing the concept

RivCo child support Director Kimberly Britt, who enjoys listening to podcasts, conceived the idea of a child support podcast to inform the public about the variety of services and programs we offer. “Child support is such a unique case-by-case topic. It is essential to provide the best platform to discuss those topics while delivering content through the services our customers are using to consume media.”



Chief Attorney Bruce Wagner and Deputy Director of Programs and Operations Nathan Hartel co-host Coffee Break. By having decades of child support experience between them, they can discuss complex scenarios while sharing an informed, in-depth perspective. But we knew that wasn't enough. They also had to find the right tone. While there is a need to create a lighter, more intimate and friendly approach, Wagner and Hartel recognize that their tone should match the gravity of the issues that customers must address.

Identifying the appropriate audience was our most challenging obstacle because each child support case can involve a variety of subjects and topics. We narrowed our

focus to four primary audiences — existing child support customers, the public who may need child support services, counties and government agencies, and RivCo child support employees.

Tackling difficult content

The podcast team recognized that many people have misunderstandings about the child support program, who we serve, what caseworkers and managers can and can't do to assist parents, and the reasons behind it all. Rather than tiptoeing around those issues, we wanted to face them head-on and use the podcast format as an opportunity to clarify misunderstandings. The first season has six episodes featuring:

- Facts and myths
- The child support process
- Legal pitfalls and how to avoid them
- Our impact on our community
- Future programs and services
- Interview with the director

Leading the way

Listeners with mobile devices can find Season 1 of Coffee Break by searching for “RivCoDCSS” on any podcast client. Episodes are also available on the [Coffee Break website](#). According to one podcast ranking service, Coffee Break is the #1 most listened to podcast about child support programs and services.

RivCo child support is the first local child support agency that we know of to create a podcast that educates and informs the public about the programs and services we offer. We have listeners throughout the United States and around the world. “We have some great things in store next season,” according to Coffee Break Producer Marquese Howard. “We'll have live interviews with customers, questions and answers directly with a lawyer, and we may even pop up at a conference near you! The first episode of Season 2 will debut by March 2020.”

For more information about the podcast, contact Marquese Howard at 951-955-4150 or email MDHoward@RivCo.org.



What to Know About Tip Income and Wage Withholding

William Dunn, Director of Government Relations, *American Payroll Association*

Average waiters might carry home much more in tips than they earn in wages. A question facing child support enforcement agencies and employers paying tipped employees is whether those tips are subject to withholding for child support or any other garnishment. Since tips are income, a child support agency might say yes. But since tips are not wages, an employer might say no. The answer lies somewhere between.

Allowable wage threshold

Federal labor law and many state labor laws allow employers to pay tipped employees a subminimum wage. State minimum wages for tipped and nontipped employees vary widely, while the federal minimum hourly wage is \$7.25 for regular nonexempt employees and \$2.13 for tipped employees. Although the employer may pay the employee a subminimum wage, the employee remains entitled to the regular minimum wage, and this is where the controversy lies in garnishing those tips.

Tip credit

The difference between the standard minimum wage and the minimum wage for tipped employees is known as the tip credit. An employer paying a tipped employee an hourly wage of \$2.13 may apply up to \$5.12 of the employee's hourly tips toward the regular minimum wage. If a waiter has a bad shift and makes little in tips, the employer might need to increase the cash wages it pays to ensure that the employee is paid at least \$7.25 an hour for all hours worked.

Department of Labor [Fact Sheet #30](#) says, "For tipped employees, the cash wages paid directly by the employer and the amount of any tip credit claimed by the employer under federal or state law are earnings for the purposes of the wage garnishment law." However, any tips received above the applicable minimum wage are not considered earnings and are not subject to garnishment.

Employees must report their tips to their employers. The fact sheet guidance means that, regardless of knowing how much tip income an employee received in a week, it should only consider the tip income that applies to the tip credit when calculating disposable income. Therefore, tipped employees earning a subminimum wage would be garnished as though they were earning the regular applicable minimum wage.

Puerto Rico and seven states — Alaska, California, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington — do not allow for a tip credit. In those areas, all tips are free from wage garnishment.

For more information, refer to [Fact Sheet #30: The Federal Wage Garnishment Law, Consumer Credit Protection Act's Title III \(CCPA\)](#).

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Increasing Awareness of Services through Digital Marketing

OCSE awarded \$2.2 million to 14 grantees through a two-year demonstration called [Using Digital Marketing to Increase Participation in the Child Support Program](#). The following article continues our series featuring grantees testing approaches and analyzing data to see if digital marketing can help child support programs reach and serve families more effectively.

For general information, contact Melody Morales at melody.morales@acf.hhs.gov.

Sacramento County's Paid Social Media Ads

Alix Haik-Bruno, Program Manager,
Department of Child Support Services,
Sacramento County, California

Like many other child support agencies across the country, the Department of Child Support Services in Sacramento County, California, is experiencing a decline in parents opening new cases. We're not sure if the trend is because parents don't know about our services or if other factors are keeping them from opening a case. Our first step to fix this situation is to make sure that all potential applicants know who we are and what services we provide so they can at least consider opening a case.

Locally, D.O.M.E. is the acronym we use to distinguish our Digital Outreach and Media Engagement activities from our other outreach or community engagement efforts. We're testing the delivery of video ads that encourage prospective applicants to submit an application. Sacramento is primarily interested in reaching parents who are not cash-aid recipients but receive other types of assistance such as food stamps, Medicaid, or health insurance subsidies through the health insurance marketplace.

D.O.M.E. uses digital marketing platforms such as social media and e-mail to deliver our video ad message to prospective custodial parents who are unaware of our services or undecided about pursuing a child support case in Sacramento County. We'll have three road tests, with two built upon the lessons learned from the prior test because we're using the Learn, Innovate, Improve, or LI2 process, which was created with the support of ACF's Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (see sidebar). To help us understand this LI2 framework and ensure that other agencies can use our tests and findings, Sacramento contracted with MEF Associates to conduct the technical assistance and evaluation aspect of the project.

Summer of 2019

At the start of our first road test, we conducted a small focus group with mothers in our target population to understand their stories. Our notes helped us create storyboards and taglines for a [30-second ad](#) that would resonate with other parents going through similar situations. A local videographer with experience creating similar ads helped us produce the video.

continued



One of our team members played the role of a busy mother tackling her morning routine. The video conveys the message that we understand life can be hectic for parents, but they can rely on us to help them navigate the child support program. Finally, we allocated the same budget to Facebook and YouTube so we could compare how the ad would perform on each platform individually and determine whether it would increase the application submission rate for our agency overall.

Viewership was high

We had nearly 642,000 impressions and almost 184,000 views across both platforms using a combined monthly cost of \$6,000. The budget was more than sufficient to cover our target population in Sacramento County. Unlike traditional marketing methods, digital platforms allow you to narrow down your audience, resulting in a more efficient use of the budget.

One of the main lessons we learned from our first road test, though, is that viewership does not necessarily translate into action. If your ultimate objective is for your audience to take action (like submitting an application), viewing a video ad is not sufficient.

During the test, YouTube achieved significantly more views than Facebook, but it received fewer clicks leading to the online application because the positioning of the URL was not as conspicuous on YouTube as it was on Facebook. Facebook frames their ads with a call to action such as “Apply now” or “Learn more” and that seems to have engaged viewers more effectively, resulting in more clicks.

Note that YouTube and Facebook have different filters for selecting the viewers you want to expose your message to. Facebook has more control in ensuring that the filters are being met while YouTube will have a higher number of “unknowns.” For our purpose, Facebook seemed more precise.

Future tests

We’ll use feedback received through the social media platforms about the content of the video ad and other questions associated with the child support program to inform and design the next versions.

During our next phase, we’ll deliver the second version of our video ad by e-mail through a partnership with the Sacramento County Department of Human Assistance. For our third road test, we’ll also partner with local agencies, but we’ll go back to social media for delivery and use organic posts to reach our partners’ existing followers.

For more information about Sacramento’s D.O.M.E. Project, contact [Alix Haik-Bruno](mailto:haik-brunoa@saccounty.net) at haik-brunoa@saccounty.net.

Learn, Innovate, and Improve to Enhance Programs

Victoria Kabak, Research Analyst, *ACF Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation*

The “Learn, Innovate, Improve” (LI2) framework is a systematic, research-based approach to program improvement. It embeds analytic methods into an organization’s process to design, implement, and repeat test program changes. The process involves a series of evidence-informed activities that others can duplicate and are supported by collaboration between practitioners and applied researchers. LI2 brings social science theory, research evidence, and practice wisdom together to create innovations that are practical, effective, scalable, and sustainable.

LI2 Phases:

- Learn: practitioners clarify their reasons for seeking change and the specific problem or problems they are trying to solve
- Innovate: participants work to identify and prioritize potential solutions to the problems defined during the learning phase
- Improve: participants assess their program changes through one or more “road tests” or other evaluation methods

For more information, read the overview brief [Learn, Innovate, Improve \(LI2\): Enhancing Programs and Improving Lives](#) published by OPRE.

Child Support Report

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