

Noncustodial Parents: Summaries of Research, Grants and Practices



**Child Access and Visitation – Employment and Training –
Fatherhood – Incarceration and Re-Entry – Projects *In Progress***



Office of Child Support Enforcement
Administration for Children and Families
Department of Health and Human Services

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Disclaimer: The findings from the research and demonstration studies contained within this document do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement nor does this report summarize all of the fatherhood-related grants funded by this Office.

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Foreword

Over the past several years, the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) has funded many grant and research projects that focused on noncustodial parents (NCPs). Within the umbrella of this broad topic, projects focused on fatherhood, employment, incarceration, and child access and visitation. The overriding aim of this body of work has been to achieve the reliability of support payments and NCP involvement with their children.

What have we learned from these efforts and State-funded initiatives? Are there findings and practice advice that can inform us in designing future productive and cost/effective programs for NCPs?

To address these questions, we are pleased to present a summary of OCSE-funded projects and initiatives funded by the States.

It is not always easy to draw firm conclusions from this work. While we have summarized findings and lessons learned from a large number of projects, not all used a rigorous methodology. Further, there was no systematic attempt to build on and learn from prior projects. Each round of grants did not always incorporate findings from previous research as projects often overlapped in time. Despite these limitations, we hope you will find this report useful in looking at your own programs and how you might improve them or test new approaches.

Note that certain activities described in waiver projects and demonstration grants discussed in this report are non-IV-D program activities and, therefore, not eligible for Federal financial participation. Such activities include employment, training, education, fatherhood education and teen parent education activities.

This paper is presented in four sections:

- Fatherhood, Employment and Training;
- Child Access and Visitation;
- Incarceration and Re-Entry; and
- Projects *In Progress*.

The dates shown for State and local agency practices refer either to the grant or non-grant period summarized. Projects contained within this report may or may not have continued beyond the noted end dates.

To report an effective program not included in this report, please contact your Federal OCSE Regional Office, through your State or Tribal Child Support Enforcement Office.

Fatherhood and Employment and Training

OCSE Waiver Demonstration Projects

Partners for Fragile Families (2007)

Federal and State Funds

The goal of the “Partners for Fragile Families” (PFF) waiver demonstration projects was to test how to make lasting changes in the way public agencies and community organizations work with young unmarried parents to increase the likelihood of positive outcomes for children and parents. Never-married fathers (under age 25), who had not yet established paternity and without extensive involvement with the child support system, were served. Client participation in the program was voluntary.

The underlying theory was to target new fathers when they still might have a positive relationship with the mother of their children and the children themselves.

PFF ran from 2000 through 2003. The demonstrations were designed to help fragile families by helping fathers work with mothers in sharing the legal, financial, and emotional responsibilities of parenthood.

The nine sites completing the demonstrations were in:

- Baltimore, Maryland;
- Boston, Massachusetts;
- Denver, Colorado;
- Indianapolis, Indiana;
- Los Angeles, California;
- Minneapolis, Minnesota;
- New York, New York;
- Racine, Wisconsin; and
- West Chester, Pennsylvania.

Objectives were for fathers to:

- establish paternity;
- obtain employment;
- meet their child support responsibilities;
- acquire parenting skills;
- increase involvement and parenting time with children; and
- build stronger relationships with the mothers of their children.

The project offered a large number of services with considerable variation across sites. The key services were:

- structured workshops and case management;
- peer support;
- employment;
- child support; and
- parenting and relationship education.

Each site initially planned to serve between 150 and 300 participants.

Primarily because of problems identifying men who met the eligibility requirements, most projects enrolled fewer participants than planned, ranging from 37 (in New York) to 266 (in Denver). About half of the projects enrolled fewer than 100 participants. In general, the fathers who participated, one-quarter of whom had a support order at program entrance:

- were around 21 years of age;
- had one child;
- were unmarried;
- were primarily African-American (some projects had a significant number of Hispanics);
- were less likely to have a high school diploma or GED (50 percent); and
- were less likely to be working at the time of enrollment (only 30 percent).

Each project received up to \$1 million in Federal IV-D matching funds via Section 1115 waivers. The Ford Foundation and other local foundations provided the non-Federal share. The projects were managed by the National Partnership for Community Leadership (NPCL), the Ford Foundation, and State and Federal staff.

The Urban Institute conducted the evaluation. Four reports were produced:

- Implementation of the Partners for Fragile Families Demonstration Projects
- Voices of Young Fathers: In-Depth Interviews
- Employment and Child Support Outcomes and Trends
- Ten Key Findings from Responsible Fatherhood Initiatives

Findings

- For those who paid child support, the average child support payment was \$1,569 for the first year following enrollment and \$2,296 for the second year after enrollment.
- With the exception of Denver, employment rates for participants before and after the program were largely unchanged after the demonstration.
- On average, about half of the PFF participants worked in a given quarter.
- Average quarterly earnings improved from \$1,501 at enrollment to \$2,470 two years after enrollment.
- The child support order rate for participants increased from 13 percent of the participants at enrollment to 35 percent two years after enrollment.
- Months with a child support payment increased steadily from one year to two years after enrollment, but it was at a low level averaging payments in only 5 months.
- The ethnographic study of 9 selected African-American and Latino father participants from Boston and Indianapolis revealed that:
 - Fathers had one or two young children; multiple children were usually from different parents.
 - Visitation or co-habitation with some of the children was the rule.
 - Many had child support orders from \$40 to \$90 per week.
 - Relations with mothers were poor, especially if there was a new girlfriend or the mother had a live-in boyfriend. Stress began after pregnancy and was somewhat grounded in the father's inability to provide financially for the child.
 - Fathers felt that mothers frequently blocked visitation of children.
 - Fathers felt that they were unable to give consistent financial support.
 - Men were interested in being good fathers.
 - The men felt that the program helped them to focus on the needs of fatherhood—especially patience and responsibility—and stated that the child

- needs two biological parents and that the program improved their focus and understanding of fatherhood.
- Generally, fathers did not envision marrying the mother of their first child though some men indicated optimism about their relationships with the mother of their second child.
 - Consequently, the men explained that they had to be careful in navigating the actual and potential conflicts with the custodial parents (CPs) of their first child.
 - The men developed an understanding and appreciation of the value of child support as a source of predictable, stable support for their children, although there was concern over whether the child would actually get the money or have the money spent on them.
 - Education was at a low level; participants were unemployed or held low-level unstable jobs.
 - Most were raised with single parents although there was some father and step-father presence for some of the time.
 - There was concern that the children needed to be protected against gangs and drugs.
 - All respondents were raised at or near poverty in crime- and drug-filled neighborhoods.
 - Most had a juvenile crime record.

For a copy of these reports, go to:

<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/07/PFF/index.htm>

Maryland

Family Employment and Support Program (2004 - 2006)

Federal OCSE Grant

The “Family Employment and Support Program” (FESP) is a court-supervised project in Baltimore County that assisted NCPs who were behind in their child support payments to obtain full-time employment.

Service providers who assisted with this project included:

- Judges of the Circuit Court for Baltimore County
- Baltimore County Executive
- Family Division of the Circuit Court for Baltimore County
- Baltimore County Office of Child Support
- Attorney General's Office (Towson Office)
- Baltimore County State's Attorney's Office
- Office of the Public Defender Office for Baltimore County
- Circuit Court Clerk's Office
- Baltimore County Sheriff's Office
- Court Administrator's Office
- Criminal Justice Coordinator's Office

Project participants were required to submit employment applications and meet regularly with employment coordinators for job referrals. Assistance was provided to improve interview skills and résumé writing.

A key element of the project was placing it directly under the control of the Court. It was believed from the beginning that if the project goals were to be achieved and have an impact on clients, it was necessary to have the direct leadership of the Judiciary.

Another important element of the project was employment development. The project staff worked within the County to develop the Employment Offender Network (EON). This group was established so that diverse employment programs could share databases for future referrals.

One of the first steps involved consolidating all of the child support dockets under one judge who would apply the same policy to all of the project participants. Professional employment coordinators were hired. Two-month review procedures were established so that progress could be determined with respect to NCPs and their quest for employment.

Another important aspect of the project was the use of Writs of Attachment for parents who refused to participate in the program. Word on the street quickly spread that if parents failed to take the project seriously, the Court would intervene when necessary.

General profile of the parents participating in the program:

- Average age was 37.
- 79 percent of the population was African American, mostly males living with parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles or siblings.
- 86 percent of the participants had criminal backgrounds, mostly drug-related.
- About a third of the population had less than a high school diploma or GED.

Findings

Of the 201 project participants:

- 135 or 67.16 percent became employed and were paying child support.
- The average length of time before employment was obtained was 8.4 weeks.
- The median wage of the parents in the project was \$12.62 per hour, an amount that increased 50 percent over the course of a 22-month period.
- Collections increased from a total of \$200,000 in the first year to a total of \$400,000 the second year.

See also <http://www.baltimorecountymd.gov/Agencies/circuit/family/FESP.html>

Kansas

Reliable Income for Kids Coalition (2005 - 2007)

Federal OCSE Grant

Episcopal Social Services (ESS), Wichita received a Federal OCSE Grant to operate "Reliable Income for Kids Coalition: *Pro Se* and Debt Forgiveness for NCPs" (RIK). RIK tested two interventions for NCPs who were found in contempt of court for not paying child support to see if services provided would affect the payment rate:

- free pro se legal facilitation; and
- a customized system of arrears forgiveness, separately and in tandem.

This project built on ESS's "Support for Children Program" (SCP) which ran from 1995 to 2005 and was designed to increase the amount of child support that reached families. As a court referral program, SCP assisted NCPs to overcome barriers preventing them from paying support. Funding came from funds raised from the community and United Way.

The purpose of *pro se* facilitation was to provide education and empower participants to address and resolve their child support issues. Services consisted of legal education provided through one-on-one meetings with a licensed attorney on contract with the project for up to 2 ½ hours per participant. A variety of subjects were covered and participants were instructed on how to file motions and represent themselves in court on child support modifications, parenting time and custody issues.

The purpose of debt forgiveness was to establish a pattern of compliance and also give the NCP an opportunity to see financial benefit from making payments. Debts were forgiven in steps to provide continuing encouragement to make payments. Participants were allowed to earn partial forgiveness of up to 30 percent of debt owed to the State for in-full and on-time payment of the ordered amount for specified periods of time starting at 3 months of payment earning 5 percent forgiveness.

The RIK partnership, consisting of ESS, the local IV-D agency, the State District Court and Kansas Workforce Development cooperated to manage referrals, payment incentives, and outcomes.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four groups at the time of RIK enrollment. Signed case plans were developed for each participant and progress was tracked.

Additional services included information on:

- cooperative parenting;
- life skills;
- budgeting and money management; and
- Kansas family law.

Participants had access to the ESS job search lab and employment counseling and assistance of a family support case manager to monitor job search activities and assist in removing barriers that may prevent employment.

Findings

Because the goal of the project was to make child support a reliable source of income, it is important to note that all statistics reported for this project (for the total 207 participants), including total collections and rates of payment, were compiled only from the cases of IV-D NCPs who paid their full monthly obligation amount in the month it was due.

- Of the 50 participants who received *pro se* facilitation, 61 percent paid their full child support ordered amount.
- Of the 50 participants who received the opportunity to earn arrears forgiveness, 54 percent paid in full;
- Of the 54 participants who received both the *pro se* facilitation and the arrears forgiveness incentive, 62 percent paid in full; and
- Of the 53 control group participants who received neither *pro se* facilitation nor the arrears forgiveness opportunity, 51 percent paid in full.

Pro se facilitation and legal education process resulted in increased parenting time for the NCP and allowed the NCP to resolve other legal issues.

Of the 104 participants in the two groups eligible for *pro se* facilitation, 54 individuals sought information and met with the facilitator. Of these, 17 filed motions with the court. Three filed motions to modify child support and two qualified for lower payments. Six individuals filed motions to change legal custody and all six motions were granted. Four filed motions to terminate current child support because of custody changes and all four were granted. Three

of the four participants who filed motions for parenting time were granted specific parenting time with their children, while one case was referred for mediation.

In addition:

- 74 percent of participants resumed or commenced paying child support payments within 90 days of enrollment;
- 66 percent of those unemployed upon entering RIK obtained employment within 90 days of enrollment; and
- 46 percent of participants seeking help with visitation problems (19 of 41) reported increased contact with their children.

Lessons Learned

When comparing the payment rates from all four groups, the two groups that received *pro se* facilitation either alone or in combination with arrears forgiveness, had notably higher rates of payment over the control group and the group who received arrears forgiveness only.

The collaborative partnership between the faith-based organization, the local IV-D agency, and an enforcement contractor (in this case a District Court Trustee) showed itself to be a highly effective means of organizing more efficient customer service in the context of an incentives program.

NCPs should be screened in order that program case managers may learn which incentives are likely to be most effective for each individual. For example:

- Pro se checklists indicated 35 percent of NCPs had visitation issues that they considered important legal barriers to payment, and 24 percent desired information on child support guidelines in case they could modify their orders. These NCPs may be best served by directing them immediately upon enrollment to a pro se facilitator.
- Though not originally identified as an evaluation element, the Project Coordinator noticed that not all NCPs were motivated by the prospect of earning arrears forgiveness. Only a few NCPs in the project with debt between \$20,000 and \$52,000 earned any arrears forgiveness, while NCPs with arrears under \$20,000 were much more likely to earn arrears forgiveness.
- The Project Coordinator observed that NCPs in RIK who were earning wages slightly above the minimum wage had high arrears as well as other debts. Through discussions with them and their case manager, the Coordinator concluded that earning partial debt forgiveness was not as meaningful to these NCPs because they could not envision themselves ever paying off their debt.
- More investigation is needed on how debt forgiveness can be more effective for NCPs owing higher balances. Perhaps offering higher percentages of forgiveness or studying how much an NCP owes to the State and how much to the CP would supply the needed motivation.

The Project Coordinator documented many instances in which an NCP received *pro se* facilitation but did not follow through with the filing of any motion to modify a support order or visitation schedule, or to enforce a visitation schedule. ESS highly recommends that future programs offering *pro se* facilitation obtain the cooperation of Judges to waive filing fees to encourage NCPs to participate in the legal process rather than continue to avoid payment as a response to these perceived legal burdens and barriers.

Texas

NCP Choices (2007 - 2008)

State-Funded with TANF Funds

The Office of the Attorney General of Texas (OAG), the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), IV-D courts, and local Workforce development boards entered into a partnership to create a child support-driven employment project, called NCP Choices. The project, which the State funded without an OCSE discretionary grant, was created to address the challenges that low-income NCPs face with respect to finding employment and paying child support.

TWC provided close monitoring and weekly verification by local Workforce staff to assist difficult-to-serve populations. Workforce staff was housed at the courthouse to regularly attend the enforcement hearings. The judicial partners directed NCPs to Workforce staff to immediately set up their first job search appointment. Workforce staff assisted NCPs to reach beyond low-paying dead-end jobs by providing incentives such as transportation assistance, job training, help with resumes, and the opportunity to participate in mock interviews.

The belief was that together IV-D and judicial entities could leverage project compliance in a more effective way than workforce development organizations alone, as noncompliance with court-ordered participation brings about consequences.

The NCP Choices project targeted unemployed, nonpaying child support obligors residing in Bexar, El Paso, Hidalgo, Galveston, Brazoria and Tarrant Counties where children were part of the TANF caseload at the time the project was started. The Texas OAG contracted with Ray Marshall Center at the University of Texas to estimate preliminary impacts of NCP Choices and to determine whether the goals were met.

Findings

Results from the independent third-party evaluation indicated:

- The monthly payment rate for NCP Choices participants was 57 percent higher than that from the comparison group.
- The amounts collected averaged \$60 per month higher for the treatment group.
- Custodial parents associated with NCP Choices participants showed a 10 percent reduction in the rate of TANF receipts subsequent to program entry.
- Although comparison employment rates and wages were not immediately available from the researcher, data from the TWC indicated that between 41 and 81 percent of NCP Choices participants were employed after program entry. The rate of employment varied by site.

Lessons Learned

- Workforce staff worked best when they were physically present in the courtroom during the enforcement docket/compliance hearings.
- Judicial partners must provide swift and certain consequences for non-compliance.
- NCPs should be held to the same job search standards as those of the Custodial Parent Choices program, which requires 30 hours of verified job search per week under the TANF program.

California

JobSource Resource Center (2003 - 2005)

Federal OCSE Grant

"JobSource Resource Center" (JSRC) was a collaboration among:

- Kern County Department of Child Support Services (KCDCSS);
- Employers' Training Resource (ETR);
- Community Action Partnership of Kern;
- Family to Family Mentoring; and
- Love INC of Greater Bakersfield.

The mission was to provide services, support and encouragement to NCPs in their pursuit of sustainable employment. The project's objectives were to:

- increase compliance by NCPs with court-ordered child and medical support and
- ensure child support orders reflect the true earnings of NCPs.

These objectives were achieved by providing employment services and training opportunities through JSRC.

NCPs visited their KCDCSS case manager and completed an assessment survey, which included background questions about the client's education, work experience and level of interest in services available through the program. On an as-needed basis, case managers referred the NCPs to JSRC.

Within JSRC, there were Counselors who navigated NCPs seeking employment through the Employers Training Resource. (Note that employment and training and related case management activities were not eligible for title IV-D program Federal financial participation.)

Findings

- JSRC enrollment increased steadily during the project period due to easy access and the central location of the JSRC facility.
- JSRC recorded 3,030 visitors from October 2003 - September 2004. The total increased to 4,024 from October 2004 - September 2005 (994 or 32.81 percent).
- KCDCSS recorded that 1,502 clients used JSRC from October 2003 - September 2004. The total decreased to 1,334 from October 2004 to September 2005 (168 or 11.19 percent). Seventy-six percent of the 11 percent decline in visits to JSRC by KCDCSS clients was directly related to the decline in case manager referrals.
- The lag between the referral of clients for participation with JSRC and collections was about three months.
- Between 2003 and 2005, the average number of KCDCSS referrals per month was 16. The average number of KCDCSS clients using JSRC was 102.
- KCDCSS changed database systems twice since the start of JSRC. The databases were incompatible, which hindered the collection of comprehensive data and the analysis of data.
- Given average referrals to JSRC of 16 per month and 102 KCDCSS JSRC participants per month, the total effect of JSRC on collections was over \$200,000 per month, about 3.6 percent of all child support collections.
- Information was not provided to demonstrate the project addressing the second objective, which was to ensure child support orders reflected the true earnings of NCPs.

Lessons Learned

- Case manager buy in. Case managers reported that JSRC was a one-dimensional answer to a multi-dimensional problem and that the program was more effective for clients who wanted to find a job and make support payments. The case managers recommended that program managers needed to get case managers excited about the program by providing an incentive - perhaps small prizes for a specific number of clients referred in a month.
- Create a better tracking system. Staff suggested that there should have been a computer program that tracked clients through JSRC. This would have allowed case managers access to the data that supported both clients and case managers in feeling successful about achieving employment goals. Include follow-up procedures on referrals by case managers in the tracking system. Staff also suggested that requiring all JSRC participants to complete the survey created by the evaluation team as part of the new tracking system would have helped.
- Obtain commitment to participate. Providing incentives to clients, based on participation in workshops and other training services provided by JSRC, had some positive effects; perhaps requiring a commitment from participants would have been more effective. Once that commitment was given, attendance at workshops and trainings would become mandatory until the client found employment.
- Assign a case manager to deal with employment issues only. It was a difficult task to keep track of all clients' issues unrelated to employment and make sure that they were taking part in JSRC, if that is what they chose. Having a case manager knowledgeable about employment and employment issues would have allowed clients to have more confidence in the help they were receiving and would have freed up case managers to deal with other issues.
- Outline attainable goals and measurable objectives for your new program.
- Conduct regular surveys and data evaluations to ensure program is meeting established goals.

Pennsylvania

Employment Training Services for Noncustodial Parents (2006 – 2007)

State-Funded

The Crawford County Domestic Relations Section (DRS) developed an effective collaboration with the Commonwealth's Department of Labor and Industry (DLI) to help NCPs who were unable to pay child support because of job dislocation, literacy issues, and other barriers to employment.

The program, which is not a Federal demonstration project, has several components:

- The NCP receives a court order to search for work at Career Link (within DLI).
- Career Link provides the NCP with tools to assist in his or her job search (e.g., attendance at job search workshops, job placement assistance).
- There is a weekly communication process between DRS and Career Link staff.

Career Link staff assists DRS staff to understand how their employment Web site and job referral process work, enabling DRS staff to better manage client job search efforts. Also, DRS obtains copies of sign-in sheets from Career Link for chronically unemployed clients to better assess both how much time the client actually spends in job search and what services the client may need to become employed.

Findings (2006-2007)

- 144 NCPs were ordered to participate in the program.
- 87 NCPs were employed or removed from the program – 77 were employed and 10 were removed.
- 57 NCPs were active participants.
- 80 NCPs would have been scheduled for contempt if not for their participation in the program while only 3 NCPs were actually scheduled for contempt after failure to participate in the program.

As a result of the collaboration, collections between October 2006 and June 2007 totaled \$86,536 for the county. Projected over the Federal Fiscal Year, this one initiative could increase collections by almost 2 percent.

Iowa

Employers Partnering in Child Support (2000 – 2001)

State Funded

The customer service center in Waterloo, known as Employers Partnering in Child Support (EPICS), was a centralized, one-stop service center for employers to obtain answers to child support questions and do business with the Iowa Child Support Program.

In 1996, Federal law (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act) significantly increased the requirements of employers. The Bureau of Collections and the employer community developed a task force comprised of employer representatives and Iowa child support policy staff to learn about employers' concerns and to make recommendations for program improvements.

The chief recommendation of the task force was to provide a mechanism for effective and frequent communication between employers and the child support program. At that time, employers were the source of 71 percent of the approximately \$245 million child support payments collected annually.

It was reasoned that timeliness of collections could be improved by focusing on employer issues. Once registered, an employer could view announcements from the Child Support Recovery Unit, process child support forms online (such as income withholding forms or medical support forms), link to other Internet resources (such as the new hire reporting web site), and report employee terminations and contacts by e-mail. Forms completed on-line could be returned to EPICS electronically. The service center could handle employer inquiries about income withholding and medical support orders for over 80,000 employers in the State of Iowa and from across the nation.

Findings

In calendar year 2000, EPICS located and verified 25,401 new employers of NCPs, and generated 11,284 income withholding orders. Child support collections increased 41 percent with the implementation of EPICS, rising from \$123 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 1998 to \$174 million in FY 2001.

- The percentage of child support collected in the month due rose from 49 percent in Federal FY 1999 to 62 percent in Federal FY 2000.
- EPICS answered 22,383 calls from employers in the first six months of calendar year 2001. One employer who called the center after receiving the outreach booklet/pamphlet wanted to let EPICS know that it was the best source of information

- she had ever received from a child support office. Another employer said, "It used to take 20 minutes to get a question answered and now it takes only a few minutes."
- The task force provided State officials in the Iowa child support program with valuable insights into employers' attitudes regarding their child support responsibilities.

Lessons Learned

- A State-administered centralized organization and structure to work with employers produced better results than a (formerly) decentralized approach.
- Work to line up potential disparate State and local concerns to achieve better results.
- Outreach to employers is crucial so that they know about proposed changes and how such changes will impact them.

California

Enhanced Parental Involvement Collaboration (2004 - 2006)
Federal OCSE Grant

The "Enhanced Parental Involvement Collaboration" (EPIC) was designed to reverse the high rate at which imputed or presumed income was used to establish child support orders in San Francisco. The project set out to test the hypothesis that enhanced customer service and outreach strategies would reduce the order establishment default rate.

The EPIC project goals were to:

- increase the efficiency of the order establishment procedure;
- reduce the number of non-collectable judgments and high arrears orders due to order establishment based on default judgments and imputed income;
- provide better customer service resulting in increased NCP participation in the establishment process; and
- increase the rate of collections and overall support to families.

The project used random assignment of new cases to two groups. The EPIC Team (experimental group) consisted of two experienced child support workers who received specialized training on six alternative establishment intervention methods and on-going cross-training with court staff. The control group consisted of individuals exposed to the standard establishment practices and procedures employed by the IV-D agency.

The study's protocol called for the EPIC Team to take the following steps:

1. send a letter in basic language to NCPs advising them of the child support action filed against them. The letter detailed next steps and provided CSE with contact information;
2. if there was no response to intervention #1, the case worker attempted telephone contact with the NCP to set up a pre-conference where they would discuss basic elements of the establishment/enforcement process;
3. if steps 1 and 2 proved unsuccessful, the next step initiated a customized service-of-process;
4. if the NCP continued to be unresponsive, more telephone and mail correspondence was initiated;
5. a "status conference" meeting between CSE and the NCP was the final outreach effort in the establishment process;

6. the "post judgment default letter" was an effort by the CSE agency to explain the meaning of a default judgment and to offer in-office assistance in modifying the child support order.

Findings

- For the 588 EPIC cases, 399 resulted in judgments (46 were by default, 116 were by court order, and 237 were stipulated).
- For the 581 non-EPIC cases, 439 cases resulted in judgments (284 were by default, 63 were by court order, and 92 were stipulated).

Goal 1: To increase the efficiency of the order establishment procedure.

Findings: Over the duration of the project tracking period (1/1/2006 - 9/30/2006), there was no appreciable difference in the amount of time it took to establish a support order between the control and treatment groups.

Goal 2: To reduce the number of non-collectable judgments and high arrears orders due to order establishment based on default judgments and imputed income.

Findings: Only 11 percent of the EPIC cases resulted in default judgments while 65 percent of the non-EPIC cases resulted in default judgments. Almost all judgments in the EPIC cases were based on income data; nearly 20 percent of the judgments in the non-EPIC cases were based on presumed income.

Goal 3: To provide better customer service resulting in increased NCP participation in the establishment process.

Findings: The alternative outreach strategies for the EPIC cases resulted in more than 70 percent of these cases having NCP participation in the order establishment process, thereby eliminating the need to serve notice. This compares favorably to an NCP participation rate of less than 8 percent for non-EPIC cases. Further, for 79 percent of the non-EPIC cases that received judgments (123 of the total 155 cases), it was only after being served that the NCP became engaged in the establishment process.

Goal 4: To increase the rate of collections and support to families.

Findings: Over the consecutive three-quarter tracking period in 2006, custodial parents (CPs) in the EPIC treatment group received a total of \$52,987.50 more than the CPs in non-EPIC cases. The increase in collections was strongly associated with the customer-friendly approach of the EPIC treatment intervention.

Lessons Learned

- NCPs and CPs must be encouraged by staff to participate throughout the life of a case. The ongoing effort to communicate with the NCP directly was cost-effective and efficient. Results included a decreased default rate, more orders based on income rather than an imputation formula and more timely support orders entering into the child support system. Anticipated long-term benefits are better relationships between CSE and the parents.
- To get better results, use the telephone whenever possible to speak to customers, rather than sending a letter.
- Build and maintain open channels of communication with stakeholders and partners. Communication is especially noteworthy:
 - When staff and partner agencies change the caseload structure from functional to cradle-to-grave.
 - When joining forces with the Sheriff's Department, Public Defender, District Attorney, and Adult Probation to facilitate movement of non-confidential information between shared customers.

- To inform staff and the State office of the results achieved by the demonstration and to propose strategies to roll out the tested procedures and protocol to other jurisdictions within the State, if indicated.

Texas

No Kidding: Straight Talk from Teen Parents (2003 – 2006)

Federal OCSE Grant

This project tested delivery – by teen parents – of the State’s Parenting and Paternity Awareness (PAPA) curriculum in four schools.

The Texas child support agency (Office of the Attorney General) collaborated with Austin-based non-profit YouthLaunch to adapt selected PAPA program content. The State posited that students might be more receptive to the parenting, child support, and paternity message if it came from someone like themselves who could speak first-hand about the challenges a teen faces raising a child. The “No Kidding” teen parents typically presented three 50-minute sessions over the course of three days in school settings.

Of the 3,800 students who received the PAPA education, approximately 387 (Grades 6-12) were evaluated in the “No Kidding” program, which included three sessions:

- Telling Our Stories;
- Paternity; and
- Child Support and Money Matters.

Surveys were administered for the project evaluation. The evaluation component of the project was focused on three measures:

- Increase in knowledge regarding the legal aspects of parenting and paternity;
- Retention of this information based on a defined time period (i.e., short-term post-test and long-term post-test, approximately one to three months after completion of the curriculum); and
- Changes in attitude about the desirability and feasibility of having a baby as a teenager.

Findings

- Teen parents felt they benefited, emotionally and financially, from the opportunity to serve as trained interns and remained optimistic about their own futures. Most anticipated completing their education and developing professional careers before having more children.
- Students increased their knowledge about paternity and parenting (from 35 percent baseline data to 60 percent short-term post-test) after completing the “No Kidding” program. Students also scored high on the knowledge retention scale (3 to 6 months post-test).
- Students gave good ratings to the teen parent interns.
- Total attitude change improved from 77 percent positive scale score before the program intervention to 80 percent at the short-term post-test.

Georgia

Fatherhood Works! (1997 - 2000)

State Funded (TANF and Social Services Block Grant)

The Georgia Department of Human Resources created the Georgia Fatherhood Services Network to operate fatherhood programs throughout the State of Georgia. The Department of Adult and Technical Education is by far the largest contract service provider in the network; it operated 36 technical college campuses throughout the State.

Child Support Enforcement referred NCPs who were unemployed or underemployed to the Georgia Fatherhood Program where they received assessment, development of employability guidelines, life skills training, job readiness training and job placement. Approximately 30 percent of the program's participants received short- and long-term skills training in fields such as carpentry, computer repair, car repair, and welding. The program served approximately 3,000 NCPs a year. Over 10,000 NCPs received at least one service from the program during the demonstration.

A university-based evaluation team conducted research with 250 NCPs at three program sites located in the metro, urban, and rural areas of Georgia. A control group of non-fatherhood participants was used as a comparison group. This was a non-randomized study.

Findings

- Participants had significant gains in employment, ranging from 30 percent to 66 percent. The non-fatherhood participants had no significant gains in employment.
- Participants acquired jobs with wages comparable to employed NCPs in the control group. The Fatherhood Program also experienced a 14-percentage point gain in providing health benefits for children (from 7 percent to 21 percent).

Lessons Learned

- Data collection is extremely important to demonstrate outcomes and program cost.
- Case management and referral sources are essential components of the program because of the frequency of the barriers observed in NCPs. Referral is a valid IV-D expense; case management is not.
- Service providers must have an infrastructure to conduct assessments and training services and make contacts within local communities for job leads.
- Partnerships should be created to allow non-TANF-related individuals to utilize services that are available. An ideal model would add judicial, administrative and self-referrals to the intake process.

Illinois

Noncustodial Parent Services Unit (1994 - present)

State-Funded (includes TANF funds)

The Noncustodial Parent Services Unit (NCPSU) of Cook, St. Clair and Madison Counties, was established in April 1994 to provide a non-adversarial venue for NCPs with children. The program provided qualified NCPs with both employment- and non-employment-related services through direct referrals to private-sector and community-based nonprofit providers.

NCPSU was supported by a combination of State funds and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) dollars. TANF dollars were utilized to provide specified services to qualified NCPs, and State funds were utilized to provide on-the-job training for individuals utilizing the Earnfare program. The Earnfare Program was a State-sponsored training

program for single adults who received Food Stamps, or were eligible to receive food stamps, and other services administratively referred by the court.

The NCPSU partnership was comprised of key members of the local Circuit Court System, including judges, Clerks of the Court, and staff members from the State Attorney's Office, Attorney General's Office, State IV-A Office, State IV-D Office, and local community-based organizations.

Outputs

In 1999, the NCPSU:

- processed 515 referrals for service;
- administered 280 case management services contacts;
- enrolled 571 participants in the Earnfare Program;
- collected 532 pass-through payments to families associated with the Earnfare program;
- processed 159 new participants through the Job Search Program; and
- adjudicated 175 legal action referrals for non-compliance.

Findings

- More than 80 individuals were employed in full-time positions.
- All 80 individuals received wage rates in excess of the minimum wage.
- A withholding order to continue child support was levied for each person employed in full-time positions.
- There were 110 cases closed for changes in case status or for other miscellaneous reasons, and in the non-employment-related service area.
- NCPSU received more than 1,200 inquiries for information regarding NCPSU and child support services.

Lessons Learned

- Utilize a combination of court-ordered and self-referral opportunities for participation.
- Provide extensive case management services from providers and lead agencies.

Missouri

Parents' Fair Share (1999 – 2000)

State Funded

The State of Missouri's "Parents' Fair Share" (PFS) program was operated by the Division of Child Support Enforcement (DCSE). (The following information relates to data and operations as of 1999.) PFS had two goals:

- to increase NCPs abilities to support their children by helping them get good jobs and improve their earning capacity; and
- to increase the number of NCPs who assumed an active, positive role in their children's lives.

Participation in the program was voluntary for the 100 project participants. Program participants were required to be Missouri residents over the age of 18 with active child support cases, and unemployed or underemployed (most were unemployed; few were underemployed).

Child Support Technicians were responsible for enforcement in Missouri. They routinely referred all eligible NCPs in their caseloads to the program. In addition, parents were also ordered into the program by the courts as a condition of probation for failure to pay child support.

About 25 of every 100 parents in the program attended an orientation session. The letter from the PFS case manager indicated that if the parent did not choose to attend, the case would be referred back to the technician for legal action. Of the 25 parents who attended the orientation session, 23 registered to participate in the program. Ninety-five percent of them were unemployed at the time of their enrollment.

There were strong linkages with employment programs in the State that allowed participants to access a variety of services and training options:

- one-stop centers;
- workforce development programs;
- Welfare-to-Work;
- formula and competitive grant projects;
- vocational rehabilitation;
- Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for Occupational Classroom Training; and
- Community Action Agency programs.

The project was also able to pay up to \$3,500 per participant for job training.

Findings

At the end of 1999, the project included 1,608 participating NCPs. From July 1998 through June 1999, \$1,545,043 in child support was paid by program participants. At that time, 980 were employed, 807 fulltime. In November 1999, 1,022 parents in the project made a child support payment, averaging \$196. By the end of February 2000, with 4 months remaining in the State's fiscal year, child support collections totaled \$1,559,057.

Lessons Learned

- Hold meetings between NCPs and program case managers away from child support offices. Cooperation and trust are higher when meetings are held in churches, libraries, city hall.
- Publicize the program to your own child support staff. Since there is reliance on technicians for referrals in this program, they should and must be educated.

Washington State

Devoted Dads (1997 - 2001)

Federal Funded

The Metropolitan Development Council for Pierce County administered a "Devoted Dads" project for 230 low-income noncustodial fathers. Project participants were recruited through public service announcements on radio and television, flyers and brochures, presentations to community groups, and contacts with staff at child support and health services agencies. The project also received referrals from a jail diversion project offering early release options to targeted offenders who participated in services leading to employment and responsible fatherhood experiences.

Findings

During the first three months, evaluators received information on 88 clients. The staff reported that the flow of new clients grew to about 50 per month as jail diversions increased and word-of-mouth spread details about the project's legal seminars, employment assistance, and the assistance offered by the contract attorney. Data regarding employment assistance and placement were not provided in the final project report.

Maryland

Absent Parent Employment Program (1997 - 1999)

State-Funded

The "Absent Parent Employment Program" (APEP) emerged from an idea that surfaced in Harford County after a Circuit Court Judge expressed concern regarding absent parents appearing in his court and not being able to meet their child support obligations due to unemployment. The Judge initiated a discussion with the Maryland State Department of Economic and Employment Development (DEED) to explore what could be done to address the problem.

The Circuit Court Judge who presided over non-support hearings held monthly Child Support Task Force meetings to help strengthen the child support process for all the agencies involved.

An initial NCP visit to the APEP office triggered the following:

- a review and signed acknowledgement of understanding the program's guidelines;
- an assessment of parental skills and experience; and
- a one-on-one discussion of employment barriers and child support concerns.

Each participant was expected to complete at least four employment applications each week and to submit a worksheet detailing the search activities he or she had undertaken during the week.

Unemployed parents were expected to visit the office weekly until they found a job. The APEP office spot checked with employers to verify that unemployed parent applications were actually submitted. Failure to participate as required resulted in the issuance of bench warrants.

Findings

The APEP program was extremely successful in achieving its missions. Eighty percent of the program participants were employed in 1997, 81 percent in 1998, and 86 percent in 1999.

Annual program success translated into significant child support contributions: approximately \$220,000 in 1997, \$250,000 in 1998 and \$214,000 in 1999.

Lessons Learned

- Program design fosters compliance. Over the years the program found that compliance rates increased when bench warrants were used in conjunction with court orders.
- APEP counselors must develop a personal rapport with participants and genuinely work to help them. The counselors acted as liaison with the Bureau of Support Enforcement; they made needed referrals for services offered by other community-based organizations. Counselors reported that many project participants returned

- voluntarily to the program on subsequent dates because they knew they would be welcomed and encouraged in their job search efforts.
- Program effectiveness correlates directly with the level of cooperation among agencies involved. Outstanding inter-agency cooperation contributed to APEP success.

Wisconsin

Children UpFront (1997 - 2000)

Federal OCSE Grant

Goodwill Industries of Milwaukee and Racine administered a demonstration project, referred to as “Children UpFront,” for 87 young, unmarried, and economically disadvantaged parents under the age of 30. The objectives of the project were to:

- reduce conflict between parents;
- increase the children’s time with each of their parents;
- increase the earning potential of parents; and
- encourage voluntary child support and financial contributions from both parents.

The employment resource room at “Children UpFront” contained two computers and a printer that participants used for résumé preparation and letter writing. The resource room was linked to Wisconsin Job Net, which included local and national job listings. The project hired an employment specialist to offer job readiness classes on-site.

Findings

According to the case managers, noncustodial fathers were chiefly interested in employment, continuing education, and housing. Noncustodial mothers, on the other hand, were interested in paternity establishment, child care, parenting plans, and motherhood development programs. There was no additional job training information provided. And, there were no on-the-job training opportunities available in Milwaukee and Racine during the project period.

California

Employment, Access and Visitation Social Services for Noncustodial Parents

(1997 - 2000)

Federal OCSE Grant

San Mateo County’s Family Support Division administered a project for 300 respondents to assess two major components: services to promote contact between NCPs and their children, and employment services to improve economic capacity.

Services to promote contact were associated with the Access and Visitation program’s mediation and supervised visitation services. Employment assistance was directed at NCPs who indicated they were unemployed and consequently unable to pay child support.

Findings

Few project participants took advantage of the employment assistance option. Project staff concluded that offers of employment services had the perceived effect of identifying previously undisclosed employment among the targeted client population, and therefore that feature of the project’s design acted as a disincentive to client participation.

New Hampshire

Phoenix Project (1997 - 2000)

Federal OCSE Grant

Merrimack, Belknap, and Hillsborough Counties administered the “Phoenix Project” providing employment services for 70 low-income NCPs who had child support orders and were delinquent in their child support payments. About half of the project participants were noncustodial mothers. The job component relied on existing community resources, such as job service centers, to conduct vocational assessments and to help project participants with job readiness and résumé preparation. Community job centers were also used to find employment and jobs with higher pay and better benefits.

Findings

Case managers worked with each project participant to facilitate his or her child support situation. They tracked project participants, attended meetings and court hearings, and assisted with arrearage relief, job referrals, employment, paternity establishment, and court ordered modifications. Attempts to hold parenting and peer-support group classes were unsuccessful.

The project did not improve employment and job placement for NCPs in the three counties. No employment or placement data were presented in the final report.

OCSE-Commissioned Study

Minority Families and Child Support: Data Analysis (2007)

This study compared the participation of minorities in the Child Support Enforcement program in recent years using a Census Bureau national survey: "Current Population Survey-Child Support Supplement." The data were combined over the years to achieve sufficient sample sizes. This study also analyzed data from Princeton University's "Fragile Family and Child Wellbeing Study" of 2000 urban unwed mothers in the third year after an unwed birth. Findings indicate that paternity establishment rates are comparable at 85 percent for unwed Whites, 80 percent for unwed African Americans, and 77 percent for unwed Hispanics.

The compliance or proportion of an order paid by unwed fragile families approximated aggregate national levels (57 percent). The proportion of the child support order paid was comparable for unwed Whites and Hispanics at 54 percent. Unwed African Americans, however, only paid 39 percent of the amount due; this was only partially explained by socioeconomic factors.

Findings

In general, child support participation by minorities lags significantly behind Whites.

- Comparable pooled data from 1994 to 2002 show that child support orders were established for:
 - 66 percent of eligible Whites;
 - 43 percent of African Americans;
 - 43 percent of Hispanics;
 - 51 percent of Native Americans; and
 - 46 percent of Asian Americans.
- The data were segregated to determine the child support order rates for unwed NCPs:
 - 44 percent for unwed Whites;

- 38 percent for unwed African Americans; and
 - 32 percent for unwed Hispanics.
- In terms of NCP child support compliance/payment:
 - Whites paid 62 percent of the amount owed;
 - African Americans paid 44 percent;
 - Hispanics paid 53 percent;
 - Native Americans paid 52 percent; and
 - Asian Americans paid 58 percent.

Analysis shows that the critical variable for these differences was the high rate of unmarried births and separations as opposed to divorced or remarried status by minorities.

Recommendations

Accelerate establishment of orders for all minority groups, but note should be taken of the differences among groups in developing strategies, as follows:

- Efforts to improve marriage rates for never-married parents and establish close paternal connections through marriage education and/or access and visitation should be taken. These may encourage better compliance over time.
- All minority groups need assistance to improve income stability of fathers as controls for economic factors did make a difference. Such programs hold little promise unless they include more intensive, better managed, and more effective employment services. Also, given the effects of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) on employment gains of less educated women, work supports and incentives targeting less-educated men may also be helpful. These could come in the form of earnings supplements, conditional on child support compliance, and increases in the child support pass-through.
- Compliance in terms of percent of orders paid is especially problematic to African Americans and Hispanics (Native Americans were not measured) and may mean that orders are too high for these low-wage earners due to imputed income to minimum orders as indicated by other studies.
- Efforts to maintain in-hospital paternity programs are critical.
- Child support efforts to establish orders for more of those with paternity established are critical.
- Efforts to increase orders among Hispanic fathers and compliance among Black fathers will have to become more nuanced. Reducing cultural barriers that may discourage Hispanic (or foreign-born) mothers from utilizing child support services may be key to the first objective.

For a copy of this report, go to:

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pol/DCL/2007/dcl-07-43.htm>

Child Access and Visitation Program

Child Access and Visitation

The "Grants to States for Access and Visitation" Program (42 U.S.C. 669b) was authorized by Congress through passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. The program goal is to enable States to establish and administer programs to support and facilitate NCPs' access to and visitation of their children.

States may use grant funds to develop programs and provide services such as:

- Mediation
- Development of parenting plans
- Education
- Counseling
- Visitation enforcement (including monitored and supervised visitation, and neutral drop-off and pick-up)
- Development of guidelines for visitation and alternative custody arrangements.

There is a growing body of evidence supporting the premise that an NCP who has increased access to his or her child(ren) will be more likely to comply with a support order. This finding is particularly dramatic for fathers who were unmarried to the CP at the time of the child's birth.

Keep in mind that:

- State child support caseloads have changed from a predominantly divorced population to a majority of unmarried (non-TANF) parents.
- Unwed NCPs are less likely than divorced fathers to have a legal custody or visitation order which allows them formal parenting time rights to their children. The gatekeeper CP (usually the mother) ends up determining the level of father involvement in the life of the child.
- Given that the national out-of-wedlock birth rate is at an all time high – combined with the lack of an NCP "on-ramp" to services designed to help them obtain a legal parenting time order – there is a risk that a greater number of unwed fathers will fail to fulfill their financial and emotional responsibilities to their children.

This section presents a summary of two reports funded as contracts and four demonstration projects dealing with the Access and Visitation program.

OCSE-Commissioned Evaluation

Child Access and Visitation Programs: Participant Outcomes (2006)

This study was commissioned by OCSE to assess the impact of the Access and Visitation (AV) program on increasing NCPs' access to and visitation with their children. The study also evaluated, to the extent possible, other tangible or intangible outcome measures such as:

- Changes in parenting time;
- Changes in child behavior;
- Changes in parental relationships;
- Changes in child support payment patterns – parent reports;
- Changes in child support payment patterns – child support records; and
- Changes in household formation and marriage.

Programs in three different States were selected for each of the three major program types:

- Mediation: Missouri, Rhode Island, and Utah;
- Parent Education: Arizona, Colorado, and New Jersey;
- Supervised Visitation: California, Hawaii, and Pennsylvania.

A 10-minute telephone interview was administered to program participants an average of 17 months following service delivery:

- Interviews were completed with 391 NCPs and 579 CPs;
- Attempts were made to reach 4,109 participants for a response rate of 24 percent; and
- The refusal rate was 7 percent and a phone disconnection or wrong number rate was 41 percent.

The study also included a review of child support records for 173 program participants in Arizona, Missouri, and Pennsylvania for 12 months prior to and 12 months following program participation.

Findings

- Among NCPs who entered the programs paying less than everything they owed, most paid more child support in the 12 months following program participation, with official child support records showing increases of 64 percent in mediation programs, 93 percent in parent education programs, and 53 percent in supervised visitation programs.
- The child support compliance rate (child support paid/child support owed) for never-married parents increased significantly from an average of 59 percent in the 12 months prior to services to 79 percent in the 12 months following the receipt of services. The compliance rate for divorced parents was 74 percent before services were provided and did not increase significantly following service delivery.
- Twelve months after service delivery, increases were: 32 percent after mediation; 41 percent after parent education; and 45 percent after supervised visitation.
- Many reported that visitation stayed the same or declined.
- Custodial parents reported that the behavior for the youngest child had improved in the 12 months after services delivery for 27 percent of the mediation cases, 26 percent of the parent education cases, and 41 percent of the supervised visitation cases.
- In the 12 months after service delivery, approximately 25 percent of CPs and NCPs, respectively, reported that their relationship with the other parent had improved, with only slight differences by program type. A majority reported that the relationship quality had stayed the same; some reported a decline.

- Since marriage and household formation were not stressed in any of the programs, and most program participants had already decided to divorce or not marry, few participants reported that they began to live together (1-5 percent), married or remarried (2-6 percent).
- Approximately 70 percent of CPs and NCPs who participated in mediation reported reaching an agreement on the issues of visitation or custody.
- Nearly all parents who participated in parent education rated these programs as “very” or “somewhat” useful. Ninety percent of parents who participated in supervised visitation characterized it as a safe place to conduct visits.
- Child Support agencies should refer NCPs to State Access and Visitation programs.

Access and Visitation programs should:

- Focus on serving never-married parents since they show significantly better child support payment outcomes following delivery.
- Incorporate information on basic child support into the curriculum and include a discussion on the consequences of a CP’s geographic move on the relationship between the NCP and his child.
- Be prepared to offer resources to parents with domestic violence histories.
- Mandate participation in mediation for high-conflict parenting dispute cases.
- When selecting programs to fund, AV programs should consider the population they want to serve and the intensity of services they need. Mediation, parent education and supervised visitation programs are equally effective in promoting positive outcomes in parent-child contact, child behavior and parental relationships. Although gains in some areas are greater for users of supervised visitation programs, the families who enter these programs generally have the lowest levels of contact and the highest rates of distress. Education, mediation and supervised visitation programs serve parents with low, medium and high levels of conflict, respectively, and parents who report low, moderate and high levels of parental conflict prior to their participation in AV programs perform equally well on most outcome measures. When selecting programs to fund, states should consider the population they want to serve and the intensity of services they need.

For a copy of the report, go to:

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pol/DCL/2007/dcl-07-15a.pdf>

Colorado

Parenting Time Project (2004 – 2007)

Federal OCSE Grant

The “Colorado Parenting Time Project: Integration of Access and Visitation and Child Support,” was designed to assess whether providing child access information and services to parents in the child support caseload – with visitation problems – would result in increased parenting time for NCPs and the subsequent payment of child support.

This project was implemented in child support agencies in El Paso and Jefferson Counties. Between the two sites, 716 cases were identified that involved parents who reported child access and visitation problems during May 2005 through December 2006.

Clients in both sites were assigned to either a high-level or low-level treatment group:

- High-Level Treatment Group: parents were referred to a CSE-based worker for facilitation and filing agreements with the court (free of charge); clients could also be referred to the Office of Dispute Resolution for mediation services and/or parent education classes.

- Low-Level Treatment Group: parents were either handed or mailed information about how to file a motion for a parenting time order which included a list of various community resources to help parents with access problems.

Findings

- Child support payments increased for NCPs participating in both low and high-level treatment groups (6, 12, and 18 months post program enrollment).
- Parental relationships and NCP-Child Contact improved over time and were significantly better for both treatment groups.
- Clients who were part of the high-level treatment group reported substantial improvements in co-parenting relationships and NCPs experienced increased contact with their children as a result of mediation and the development of parenting plans.
- Over two-thirds of the parents who were part of the low-level treatment group reported that the printed information on access was helpful in establishing visits between the NCP and his/her children.
- Only 23 percent reported calling any of the referral resources included in the written materials. This is significant since it appears to back the findings of other studies which indicate that fathers are more likely to be responsive to one-on-one contact with service providers and less likely to follow-up on service referrals contained in information materials.
- Client opinion of child support agencies improved significantly among parents who participated in the high-level treatment group (mediation and parenting plans) compared to those who were part of the low-level treatment group (written materials and referrals).
- Better methods are needed to compel CPs to participate in interventions to address parenting-time problems.
- NCPs (particularly unwed fathers) need assistance in gaining access to the courts and help with filing pro se actions that would enable them to gain legal parenting time rights with their children. Unlike the child support agency, a court is able to require parents to participate in mediation – if a motion is filed by the NCP – with the hope that they would reach agreement on a parenting plan. If not, the family court judge would make the decision for them.

Florida

Impact of Mediation on Non-Compliant NCPs (2004 – 2007)

Federal OCSE Grant

In a collaboration between Florida Child Support Enforcement and the Eleventh Judicial Circuit Court (Miami-Dade County), the goal of “Impact of Mediation on Non-Compliant NCPs Who Indicate Reason for Non-Payment Relates to Access and Visitation” was to obtain mutual agreement between parents that allowed for an increase in NCP involvement in their children’s lives and an increase in NCP compliance with child support orders.

The project required that the child support agency refer cases to a court-connected mediator to speed the process of helping parents reach agreement on a parenting time order that, in turn, would become a court order. Cases excluded from the project involved couples whose life situation was compounded by divorce, domestic violence, dependency (child welfare), or interstate matters.

The project focused on cases where:

- the NCP had been notified to appear at court because of non-compliance with child support orders;
- the CP or NCP petitioned for support order modification due to a change in circumstance; and
- the support payments would increase if the NCP were granted access and visitation through mediation.

A total of 640 cases from the Child Support Enforcement Division (370 enforcement and 270 establishment cases) were initially identified as potential demonstration cases and randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. For enforcement cases, the NCPs had to volunteer information and articulate (without prompting from the court) that the reason for non-payment was a result of not having access to their children.

- The experimental group was referred to the family court for an expedited mediation hearing (no filing fees incurred) for resolution of parenting disputes over NCP parenting time.
- Participants in the control group received standard information materials and routine services through the court, such as referrals to a “Self-Help” Program Office where they could obtain forms and instructions on how to petition for a parenting time order for which they would have to pay filing fees. Another option was client referral to the Florida Bar Attorney Referral service where they could receive the name of a low-cost attorney.

Evaluators contacted NCPs in both the experimental and control groups 90 days after services were provided.

Findings

- Experimental group participants: 64.6 percent of the 65 cases reached a mediated parenting time agreement; among the child support establishment cases, 86.8 percent of the 79 cases were able to agree upon a mediated parenting-time agreement.
- Control group participants (self-help information or referral to low-cost attorney): none of the enforcement cases (51 NCPs) were found to have filed for a family court hearing to request a parenting time order; only 6.8 percent of the establishment cases (4 out of 59 NCPs) filed for a parenting time order.
- Compliance with child support orders was relatively high for both the experimental and control groups subsequent to contact with this court-connected program.

Georgia

Integration of Access and Visitation of Child Support (2004 – 2007)

Federal OCSE Grant

The project provided enhanced child access services – via the State’s Access and Visitation Grant Program (federally funded) – to a targeted group of primarily unwed NCPs who refused to pay child support on the basis that they did not have parenting time rights or visitation with their children. The direct service provider was Families First of Georgia.

Participants included 135 NCPs who were randomly assigned to a control group (71 participants) or experimental group (64 participants).

Control group participants were mailed information on how to file a motion for a visitation order and referred to community services.

Experimental group participants received more hours of various services than the control group. Each NCP received 5 months of child access services based on group assignment. Services included:

- group parenting education;
- individual education and counseling;
- supervised visitation; and
- mediation and development of parenting plans.

Focus groups were also conducted with participants.

Findings

Data were tracked for participants in both the control and experimental groups for 6 months prior to intervention through 6 months post-intervention.

- Child support payments increased:
 - for the control group, from 63 percent prior to the project to 77 percent post project.
 - for the experimental group, from 73 percent prior to the project to 96 percent post project.
- NCPs in the experimental group completed more visitations with their children than the control group which may partially explain the greater increase in child support payments. Another explanation is that participants in the experimental group also had an increased number of face-to-face contacts with the service providers (i.e., parent education sessions) compared to the control group.

Lessons Learned

- Face-to-face services need continued support as these types of programs result in greater visitation.
- Mediation should be mandatory or introduced earlier in the program (from the NCP Focus Groups).
- Overwhelmingly, fathers across both groups felt positively about the program and considered mediation, structured visitation, and legal knowledge about parenting time rights and procedures most helpful in addressing the barriers to child access and visitation.
- These themes emerged from the focus groups with NCPs in terms of perceived barriers to child access and visitation:
 - Mothers controlled an NCP's access to his child(ren). If they have a cooperative parenting relationship, an NCP does not have many problems with visitation. If the father and mother have a high conflict relationship, the NCP is never sure when he can see his child.
 - NCPs believed that custody laws resided on the side of mothers and did not support a father's rights or that fathers essentially had no rights.
 - Parents were unable to have civil discussions on parenting issues and had parenting disputes over how their child would be raised.
 - Some NCPs believed that the child was beyond the age for them to influence values and behavior.
 - Another father figure's presence may have complicated the biological father's role in the life of his child.
 - Fathers were concerned about the impact of their children growing up in households with only one biological parent.
 - Fathers were concerned about what their absence might mean for their children – sons, in particular.
 - In situations where the father had little to no contact with his child, a transition period was considered important – most likely through structured or facilitated

- visitation – until both father and child would feel comfortable with each other; this was a necessary step toward establishment of a permanent visitation schedule.
- For some fathers, obtaining custody was considered the only way they might consistently see their children but the costs associated with obtaining a court order were financially prohibitive.
 - Some of the CP mothers did not show up to join the NCP. This was believed to be the result of the voluntary nature of the program. As one father put it, “we can’t make the mother come.”

Texas

Ensuring Access, Encouraging Support (2004 – 2007)

Federal OCSE Grant

The goal of “Ensuring Access, Encouraging Support: Testing Approaches to the Integration of Access and Visitation Services with Child Support Case Processing” was to promote the payment of child support by offering NCPs in Harris County a variety of services aimed at resolving their access and visitation problems and promoting parent-child contact. Many NCPs had encountered difficulty getting to see their children and claimed that was the reason for non-payment of child support. By offering parents a variety of materials and free services aimed at addressing access problems and enforcing visitation orders, the Texas agency hoped to eliminate these problems as causes of nonpayment and increase payments.

In a collaboration between the Texas Division for Families and Children (Office of the Attorney General) and the Harris County Domestic Relations Office (HCDRO), approximately 875 NCPs with a court order that included a visitation provision were identified and assigned to either high-level or low-level treatment groups.

- The high-level treatment group consisted of 646 NCPs who received an initial telephone call to collect information about their family situation and a description of their parenting dispute over child access. They also were offered the opportunity for direct contact and follow-up through the HCDRO.
- The low-level treatment group consisted of 229 NCPs who received the same initial telephone call but, in lieu of a contact with the court, were mailed a resource package. The package contained information on child access and visitation and parent education materials.

Fixed-choice, close-ended follow-up questionnaires were administered by professional telephone interviewers beginning six months after project intake to NCPs in both groups.

Findings

- Parents in the high-level treatment group were significantly more likely to increase their payment of child support, with the biggest gains from those who participated in attorney consultations and parent conferences (e.g., mediation). Payments increased from 73 percent to 86 percent for high-level participants and from 75 percent to 78 percent for low-level participants.
- None of the NCP increases in child support payment were due to enforcement actions.
- NCPs who participated in attorney consultations and parent conferences in the high-level treatment group were significantly more likely to report increased parenting time with their children.
 - 45 percent of participants saw an increase in parent-child contact compared to 15 percent of non-participants.

- 40 percent of participants enjoyed “regular and scheduled” post-program visitation compared to 20 percent of non-participants.
- 39 percent of participants were less likely to report that visitation “never” occurred compared to 62 percent of non-participants.
- NCPs who participated in attorney consultations and parent conferences were significantly more likely to report improvements in their relationships with the other parent. Parents who received services at the HCDRO were significantly more apt to report cooperative relationships with the other parent following program participation (48 percent versus 29 percent).
- 53 percent of participants gave the program credit for helping improve their parenting relationships.
- Parents who met with attorneys were either very (46 percent) or somewhat (31 percent) satisfied with the experience.
- Three-quarters of interviewed NCPs that participated in a parent conference reported reaching an agreement with the other parent. Nearly half said they were “very satisfied” and another 21 percent said they were “somewhat satisfied” with the experience.
- Parents of both the high-level and low-level treatment groups felt that the information materials were helpful. However, participants in the high-level group were more apt to report that the materials were “very helpful” (42 percent) than were the non-participants (30 percent), most likely because the high-level group actually met with someone to discuss the information.
- NCPs reported a variety of long-standing and entrenched problems with visitation, and that these problems had been going on for an average of 24 months. They included not being allowed to see the children, disagreements about what the visitation order says and not knowing where the children live.

Lessons Learned

- Over half of the NCPs involved in the high-level treatment group had a criminal record. Effective service delivery approaches will need to take this and the unique circumstances of this population into account.
- Identifying and serving NCPs with visitation problems is no simple task. Mass mailings do not work. Face-to-face contact is far more effective.

OCSE-Commissioned Report

A Collaboration and Strategic Planning Guide for States: Child Access and Visitation Grant Programs (2006)

OCSE commissioned a report that would assist States in planning for the most effective use and expenditure of Access and Visitation (AV) grant funds. The Guide encourages States to re-evaluate their AV program and funding priorities by equipping them with:

- Tools (needs and service assessment instruments);
- A process for soliciting the input of and establishing partnerships with other key players (e.g., judges, State and family court representatives, child support and faith- and community-based agencies); and
- A format for convening AV-related program planning meetings.

In addition, this report was intended to assist States to:

- Maximize the utilization of existing AV grant funds;
- Plan for the use of new AV grant funds anticipated in pending Federal legislation;
- Avoid duplication of and gaps in services;

- Promote collaboration among child support enforcement, courts, public agencies, and faith- and community-based organizations to augment services;
- Target the populations most in need of services; and
- Explore all funding mechanisms and opportunities for supplementing AV services.

Three States (Texas, Colorado and Tennessee) participated by serving as models for developing a planning process. All three had court and child support leaders who were genuinely interested in examining the current status of their AV programs and assessing where to go in the future.

For a copy of this report, go to:

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pol/DCL/2007/dcl-07-07a.pdf>

Incarcerated Parents

Incarceration

This section examines OCSE's four grants that addressed child support enforcement issues and a contracted report which summarized grants and other child support agency incarceration projects.

OCSE funded grants to explore effective methods of working with incarcerated and recently released parents for several reasons:

- As of 2007, the number of incarcerated adults in the U.S. was at an all-time high (1.5 million) and over half were parents of minor age children;
- While a parent is incarcerated, he or she is unable or less likely to provide financial support for the children;
- Depending on State law or judicial procedure, child support obligations may accrue during a parent's incarceration;
- Many parents – upon release – face large child support arrearages;
- Parents with a criminal record have a more difficult time securing employment; and
- Children are emotionally and financially impacted as the result of a parent's incarceration.

OCSE-Commissioned Report

Working with Incarcerated and Released Noncustodial Parents (2006)

OCSE commissioned two reports to review grant findings and other program practices. They were:

- "Working with Incarcerated and Released Parents: Lessons from OCSE Grants and State Programs"
- "Incarceration, Reentry and Child Support Issues: National and State Research Overview"

Findings

There had been growing awareness of the need to provide services to parents behind bars and upon release. The majority of inmates in State and Federal prisons were parents with children under the age of 18, and many of them have formal child support obligations and/or a need to establish paternity.

The reports underscored additional key reasons why child support agencies should be providing services to incarcerated/released NCPs:

- Large numbers of parents in the child support caseload have a criminal background;

- More than 650,000 people are released from State and Federal prisons each year;
- These parents are accessible in prison settings and respond positively to outreach efforts by child support personnel;
- Research shows that incarcerated NCPs often enter prison with monthly obligations and arrears but few understand that they must notify the child support agency to request a modification;
- The growth in child support arrears exceeded \$107 billion in FY 2005. While there was no national study showing the portion of arrears held by incarcerated/released NCPs, State studies (Colorado and Massachusetts) suggested it was substantial (about 16 to 18 percent); and
- Children of incarcerated/released parents are more likely to become recipients of public assistance and are vulnerable to a variety of negative outcomes including a greater likelihood of:
 - Failing in school;
 - Exhibiting behavioral problems; and
 - Becoming involved with the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

“Working with Incarcerated and Released Parents: Lessons from OCSE Grants and State Programs,” examines the findings of 10 demonstration projects funded by OCSE in 9 States and jurisdictions that addressed issues related to incarceration and child support. Some of the projects focused on the process of working with incarcerated parents and the barriers and opportunities for child support outreach. Other projects were more outcome-oriented.

Included in this report are valuable promising practices and program implementation tips.

“Incarceration, Reentry and Child Support Issues: National and State Research Overview,” presents a synopsis of key reentry research from many sources including the Bureau of Justice Statistics, Urban Institute and the Vera Institute of Justice. It also provides a national overview of several collaborative efforts that address the array of problems of incarceration and reentry for families and children.

For a copy of these reports, go to:

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pol/DCL/2006/dcl-06-31.htm>

Colorado

Work and Family Center (1999 - 2001)
Federal OCSE Grant

“The Work and Family Center” (WFC) of Denver was administered as a collaboration project involving the:

- Colorado Division of Child Support Enforcement (CSE), Denver County CSE unit;
- Division of Community Reintegration of the Colorado Department of Corrections;
- Colorado Judicial Department;
- Rose Foundation Center;
- Mayor's Office of Employment and Training;
- AFL/CIO; and
- Real Life Ministries.

The project provided approximately 900 paroled obligors with employment assistance in an attempt to connect or reconnect both mothers and fathers with their children.

The objectives were:

- reduce recidivism by increasing employment and earnings;
- promote family reintegration and contact; and
- improve family well-being by enhancing the payment of child support, and facilitating parent-child contact where appropriate.

Findings

- Over 77 percent of the paroled obligors expressed a desire for help with child support. Child support workers made significant changes or modifications to 52 percent of the Denver County cases and 25 percent of non-Denver cases.
- Forty-nine percent of the parolees requested and received assistance with employment. The employment counselors referred 40 of the first 63 participants served to employers and 17 of those were placed in jobs – which resulted in a placement rate of 43 percent.
- Participants were also interested in such services as transportation, housing, work tools, clothing, getting to see their children, and food. Many of the services needed were difficult to provide primarily because 80 percent of participants were not eligible for welfare-to-work programs.

Lessons Learned

- Consider management, reporting structure, supervision and administrative project funding based on collaboration.
- Expect ex-offender projects to address many unmet needs.
- Consider alternative sources of services for parents who are not welfare-to-work or TANF-eligible.
- Consider housing and access to transportation for ex-offenders to be special project issues.
- It is important to secure jobs that pay well, have benefits, and the potential for wage growth.
- Child support programs must grapple with the issue of arrearage repayment policies. The amounts past due and owed by ex-offenders can exceed what they can realistically pay. Requests for too much at once may contribute to recidivism.

Pennsylvania

Support Children through Learning and Employment (2005 - 2007)

Federal OCSE Grant

Goodwill Industries of Pittsburgh (Allegheny County) customized child support strategies for incarcerated NCPs with child support obligations and significant child support arrearages. The project featured an innovative pre-release and post-release case management model designed to facilitate child support education, referrals, and enrollment in relevant Workforce Investment and job readiness activities that existed both inside and outside of the county correctional institutions.

To develop the service delivery model, Goodwill Industries worked in collaboration with the:

- Allegheny County Family Division (CSE);
- Allegheny County Jail Collaborative;
 - Allegheny County Department of Human Services;
 - Allegheny County Jail;

- Allegheny County Health Department; and
- University of Pittsburgh.

Findings

Goal 1: Screen 240 low-income and culturally diverse NCPs for project enrollment in the first three quarters of the project period and enroll 75 who had a child support obligation and/or were not scheduled to be incarcerated for a long period.

Results: The project screened 347 individuals and enrolled 76 parents by the end of the 3rd quarter and added 5 more in the 5th quarter. Overall, 81 parents were enrolled.

Goal 2: Increase child support collections. Prior to enrollment, 57 (70 percent) of the participants did not pay child support and 24 (30 percent) were partial payers of child support.

Results: Forty-four of the non-payers of child support made at least one child support payment by the conclusion of the project. This was a 78 percent payment rate which significantly exceeded the 40 percent goal. Twenty-three of the 24 partial payers increased the amount of child support paid. For this group, the total amount collected pre-enrollment was \$18,892 compared to \$32,419 post-enrollment. This was a 72 percent increase in the rate of child support collections, 52 percentage points higher than the initial project goal of 20 percent. At the end of the project, the total additional child support payment by all the participants was \$49,103. This total increase occurred from October 2005 to April 2007.

Goal 3: Increase health insurance coverage for children through wage-attachable employment.

Results: Wage attachable employment was achieved for 63 (78 percent) of the participants. However, only 1 of these participants had an employer who provided health care benefits. The large number of positions that did not provide health benefits is due in part to the types of jobs attained and, to a larger extent, the change in the economic structure of the Pittsburgh area where more employers were hiring temporary or contracted workers. Furthermore, 9 participants were unable to achieve wage attachable employment because they were employed in, or terminated from, non-taxable jobs and were not paying child support.

Goal 4: Utilize multi-media technology to provide the target population with an assessment of barriers in the areas of basic needs, housing, wellness, employment and training and with child support and custody presentations regarding obligations, options and rights related to child support and custody issues.

Results: In the first quarter of the grant, the team created a PowerPoint presentation titled "Child Support and Custody - Questions and Answers for Incarcerated or Recently Incarcerated Individuals." This PowerPoint was presented at conferences and to individuals in the Allegheny County Jail, and was provided to other States working with incarcerated/previously incarcerated obligors. To request a copy of the PowerPoint presentation, contact Michael Olack from Goodwill Industries OLACK@goodwillpitt.org.

Goal 5: Enhance the current service delivery system.

Results: The project initiated a participant recruitment process at the Allegheny County Jail and Goodwill Community Corrections Center. In conjunction with the Allegheny County Family Division, Project Support Children through Learning and Employment (SCALE) received preliminary approval on an arrears forgiveness component from the Pennsylvania State Bureau of Child Support Enforcement. The project also worked with the Allegheny County Family Division on the design and implementation of an early release program and began referrals for released inmates who had been placed in employment on an as-needed basis to the Fathers Collaborative Law Clinic for child support modifications, mediations and visitation matters.

Lessons Learned

- Behavioral change is critical to the success of participants. The participants had to learn how to deal with frustration. For example, if a government employee does not treat the NCP with respect or fairness, NCPs are encouraged to contact the supervisor rather than "put a brick through the window."
- Developing a program to ensure that previously incarcerated obligors will meet their child support obligations is possible. For example, 96 percent of all partial payers increased the amount of child support paid after participation in the project.
- Incarcerated obligors are eager to participate in the program. This project exceeded the goal for project participation.
- Health care is very difficult to obtain for the type of employment obtained by the study participants.

The project has ended and the lessons learned are being incorporated into other projects managed by Goodwill Industries of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Michigan

Audio and Video Teleconferencing for Incarcerated Parents (2004 – 2005)
Federal OCSE Grant

The Michigan Supreme Court's "Prisoner Support Adjustment Project," funded with a Federal demonstration grant, studied prisoners' use of review and modification processes and tested the effectiveness of using audio and video technology to allow prisoners access to Michigan child support proceedings. The Michigan Office of Child Support (OCS) provided monthly data-match reports on child support cases and prisoner records. The Department of Corrections (DOC) coordinated prisoner appearances by electronic means. Local circuit courts supplied facilities, equipment, and staff to fulfill support modification and judicial duties.

In addition to quickly identifying prisoner cases, modifying orders during imprisonment and implementing prospective support orders that were effective upon the prisoners' release, the project also sought to overcome procedural barriers. Using administrative processes to review cases and holding electronic-appearance hearings only when a party objected to a proposed outcome (which happened in fewer than 3 percent of the cases) permitted faster modifications and reduced the number of support modification hearings.

Upon request, prisoners were able to receive free legal representation to modify support obligations with assistance from two Michigan law schools. Prisoners requested free legal representation in 838 cases. Supervised by a licensed attorney, law students gained valuable experience preparing cases and representing clients. The project also developed user-friendly materials for inmates to request modification of their support obligations without hiring an attorney.

Findings

Statewide, support orders were modified in 3,370 prisoner-related cases and support amounts were reduced, on average, from \$220 per month to \$19 per month. For one year, these modifications should prevent the accumulation of over \$8 million in uncollectible past-due support and surcharges.

In the pilot counties, 367 hearings were conducted with the prisoner appearing via telephone conferencing or interactive video technology. The DOC estimated that it saved at least \$170

per hearing and a total of \$60,000 when prisoners “attended” without the need for transport and escorts.

Missouri

Incarcerated Fathers Collaboration Project (2001 – 2003)

Federal OCSE Grant

The goal of this project, administered by the Missouri Family Support Division (FSD), was to provide incarcerated fathers with access to comprehensive resources and support to foster their roles as parents, resulting in their ability to provide emotional and financial support for their children upon release. Objectives were:

- Improve access to parenting information and referral for incarcerated fathers;
- Increase parenting education and support for incarcerated fathers;
- Improve short-term and long-term visitation experiences of eligible incarcerated fathers and their children; and
- Increase the capacity of incarcerated fathers to provide financial support for their children.

The establishment of a Steering Committee comprised of over 20 stakeholders (community-based, non-profit organizations, and State agencies) was key to the project.

Participants were selected from inmates in two medium security State prisons in Missouri: Western Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center in St. Joseph and Central Missouri Correctional Center in Jefferson City.

Experimental group participants were:

- over the age of 18 years;
- the father of a minor child;
- eligible for release within 18 months of implementation of the study; and
- not classified as having substance abuse or mental health issues.

Comparison group participants met the same eligibility requirements except that they were incarcerated at two other medium security prisons: Western Missouri Correctional Center in Cameron and Tipton Correction Center in Tipton.

Pre- and post-surveys were used in collecting data for the program evaluation.

The ten program components and services available to incarcerated fathers in the experimental group were:

- Site Coordinators documented and coordinated multiple interventions conducted by different organizations for Fathers for Life;
- Proud Parents described the Fathers for Life program and discussed the incarcerated father’s rights, relationship with the child and communication with the child’s mother in a 2-hour group session;
- Long Distance Dads aimed to provide parenting information and support for incarcerated fathers in a series of 12 weekly small group sessions led by Missouri Department of Corrections staff and peer facilitators;
- Parent’s Fair Share provided fathers with information and advance preparation for employment or training upon release;
- Parents as Teachers group and individual sessions taught inmates with young children how to interact effectively with them long distance and during visits;

- Relationship Enrichment Skills Training provided couples with methods for communicating effectively through coaching by a marriage enrichment couple during a 3-hour session;
- Mediation Achieving Results for Children (M.A.R.C.H.) provided an incarcerated father and the mother of their children a 2-hour session with a trained mediator who helped them resolve parenting issues and create a parenting plan;
- Parenting Corners added library resources on parenting, child development, marriage, and healthy family relationships; brochures and computer programs with parenting information and resources; and individualized professional parenting guidance through the ParentLink helpline;
- Transportation of children and mothers was provided by Missouri Area United Methodist Church volunteers for visitation, mediation, or relationship skills training; and
- Visiting Area Improvements enhanced indoor and outdoor visitation areas with environmental planning and appropriate equipment, toys, and furniture to foster healthy father-child interactions during visits.

The project evaluation was built upon the hypothesis that the provision of individualized, multi-faceted services would improve the capacity of incarcerated fathers to effectively parent their children.

Findings

Fathers who participated in the program were:

- Excited about being a parent;
- Empowered to make a difference in their children's lives;
- Knowledgeable about parenting resources available to them;
- Able to focus on the needs of the child while becoming more aware of their responsibilities;
- Bonding with other inmates who are fathers, often for the first time;
- Telling other inmates about their relationships with their children;
- Benefitting from higher self-esteem;
- Increasing the likelihood of employment after release;
- Better equipped in interacting with their children;
- Beginning to reflect on their lives and the changes they need to make; and
- Beginning to recognize that being a father is not a one-time thing, that parenting is a life-long learning experience.

Children and families said:

- Fathers were spending more time with their children during visits;
- Fathers were communicating with their children in new ways, e.g., playing games and exchanging pictures;
- Children were enjoying a stronger bond with their fathers;
- Families were learning new ways to interact;
- Effective communication is occurring between both parents, whether they are together or not; and
- More families are building long-term stability with the possibility of staying together.

OCSE-Funded Projects in Progress

OCSE has funded additional research and grant activities to further study issues related to NCPs. In this section, we summarize one research project and 25 discretionary grants in progress.

Final reports for grants are due 90 days after the project end-date. A summary of each report will be posted on the OCSE Web site under the hyperlink to "OCSE Discretionary Grants Information."

Colorado

***Avoiding and Managing Child Support Arrears for Incarcerated Obligor* (2008 – 2011)**

Federal OCSE Grant

Under this grant, the Colorado Division of Child Support Enforcement (CDCSE) and local child support units in Denver and Larimer Counties will:

- automatically modify orders for incarcerated obligors;
- compromise arrears and promote payment in cases with continuing obligations; and
- compromise arrears and close cases when State debt is all that is owed and there are no current support obligations.

The project will be guided by an inter-agency advisory board consisting of State and local level child support administrators and line workers, the evaluator, a Department of Corrections representative and other relevant stakeholders.

CDCSE will develop and implement a streamlined review and adjustment procedure for incarcerated obligors sentenced to two years or more that will result in rapid establishment of minimum orders of \$50 per month unless the parties object. CDCSE units will implement programs to identify cases with proven uncollectible arrears balances owed to the State and continuing obligations and develop payment terms and compromise policies designed to promote payment of current child support. CDCSE units will also implement programs to target cases with arrears-only obligations and will develop procedures to determine and accept lump sum payments and other write-off arrangements aimed at discharging uncollectible debt and closing cases.

Tennessee

Statewide Clearinghouse of Information and Wrap-Around IV-D Case Management Services for Offenders and Ex-Offenders (2008 – 2011)

Federal OCSE Grant

Under this grant, Tennessee's Child Support Division (CSD) will provide wrap-around IV-D case management services to inmates entering and exiting the Morgan County Regional Correctional Facility (MCRCF) in East Tennessee and improve information exchange and communication between CSD and the Tennessee Department of Correction (TDOC).

The project has three key components: front-end child support services to offenders entering the MCRCF; back-end services to ex-offenders leaving the MCRCF; and a statewide clearinghouse for information exchange between TDOC and CSD. CSD will employ two full-time "TDOC/CSD Liaisons" for Judicial Districts 4, 5, and 6 to work directly with MCRCF staff and offenders on the following: provide statewide information clearinghouse services; implement a telephonic hearing process in the MCRCF; and develop and deliver training and written materials.

The evaluation will be conducted by the University of Tennessee, College of Social Work, Office of Research and Public Service. The college will act as a third-party independent evaluator while conducting a process and outcome evaluation study assessing both components (correctional facility wrap-around services and statewide clearinghouse project).

District of Columbia

Modifying Orders for DC Prisoners (2006 – 2009)

Federal OCSE Grant

The District of Columbia enacted a law that requires judges to inform individuals being sentenced to prison that they have the right to petition the court for a modification of their child support order. It also requires that the court give individuals the opportunity to fill out a petition for modification during their sentencing hearing. This grant will enable the Child Support Services Division (CSSD) to reach as many obligors going to prison as possible. CSSD will also use this grant to develop and implement a method of identifying obligors already in prison who have a current support order and offering them assistance in completing and processing petitions for modification if circumstances warrant. In this way, CSSD hopes to eliminate the backlog of cases involving inmates that need an order modification.

This grant will benefit CSSD by allowing it to increase its services to this hard-to-serve population and improve its performance. It will also serve to strengthen ties to the District criminal justice agencies and the broader community. Ultimately, it is hoped that this project will improve ex-prisoners' chances of successfully re-integrating in their communities once they are released from prison and make it easier for them to pay child support.

Maryland

Project Fresh Start for Incarcerated Parents (2006 – 2009)

Federal OCSE Grant

The Maryland Department of Human Resources, Child Support Enforcement Agency (DHR/CSEA) has established relationships with Maryland correctional institutions in an effort

to address the child support needs of the incarcerated NCP population. The Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services and DHR/CSEA recently sponsored a study that illustrates the need for a comprehensive approach to serving the child support needs of this population.

The Maryland DHR/CSEA proposes to establish a program to aggressively and proactively review and, if appropriate, modify child support orders for the NCPs and, when released, assist them in obtaining employment. Project Fresh Start will be established in Prince George's County.

North Dakota

Child Support/Child Welfare Collaboration (2006 – 2009)

Federal OCSE Grant

This project focuses on developing and implementing automation and business practices that support four objectives:

- expedited referral of child welfare cases to the child support agency for establishment and enforcement services;
- use of child support locate tools to find NCPs and parental kin for child welfare cases;
- development of a unified message from both agencies to strengthen the father's role in families; and
- reduction of arrears among reunified families.

The expected outcomes in the shared caseload are increases in the number of cases with orders, the amount of current support paid, and cases with private healthcare coverage. The Child Welfare agency should realize positive changes in its performance measures and child outcomes should improve by locating absent fathers and increasing child-father contact.

Hawaii

Kauka'i Ka 'Ohana (2005 – 2009)

Federal OCSE Grant

The Hawaii Department of Attorney General, Child Support Enforcement Agency proposes to develop an innovative project, "Kauka'i Ka 'Ohana" (Strength in Families), that will form a collaborative approach between the IV-D and TANF agencies. The goal is to reach unwed parents prior to the establishment of a child support order to educate them on their parental responsibilities and the importance of marriage, and to assist them in making better choices and a parenting plan for their child.

The project will include two major components: specialized case managers co-located in the TANF agency and community outreach and education. The project will be in Honolulu County and will include a rigorous process and impact analysis, including random assignment of cases to the specialized case managers.

Maryland

Baltimore Healthy Marriage Project for Unwed Parents (2005 – 2008)

Federal OCSE Grant

Maryland's Community Services Administration and Child Support Enforcement Administration have partnered with the Center for Fathers, Families, and Workforce Development (CFFWD) in Baltimore to implement a project that is intended to strengthen the relationships of low-income, unwed parents. This will be accomplished through the provision of eight-week training seminars for unwed parents with young children and based upon a culturally-appropriate curriculum developed by CFFWD entitled "Examining Relationships and Marriages with Fragile Families." Approximately 120 unwed mothers and fathers have been targeted for participation in the healthy relationship training per year.

This project will be evaluated on the extent to which it was able to achieve the following outcomes:

- enhanced parents' interpersonal skills;
- likelihood that parents maintained a positive opinion of the training and its applicability to their well-being;
- greater likelihood that unwed couples will stay together;
- less involvement of parents with the TANF and Child Support programs;
- increase in paternities established; and
- increased likelihood that both parents will be able to financially and emotionally provide for their children.

Tennessee

Developing Amicable Family Relationships Among Unmarried Parents (2005 – 2009)

Federal OCSE Grant

The grantee will work with the Administrative Office of the Court to identify unmarried parents with access and visitation (AV) concerns and provide them with the necessary services to enhance parental relationships and parent-child contact, and avoid adversarial proceedings. A parenting specialist (PS) will be placed in each of three child support offices in Nashville, Chattanooga, and the Jackson/Lexington/Henderson area, representing both urban and rural judicial districts. Unmarried parents with AV issues will be identified and randomly assigned to either a low-level treatment (receive a packet of information and referrals) or a high-level treatment (in-depth needs assessment, case management, educational programs facilitated by PS, and other service referrals). A random assignment outcome evaluation will compare payment activity, paternity acknowledgement, established child support orders, and enforcement actions across the two treatment groups.

Texas

Strong Start-Stable Families (2005 – 2008)

Federal OCSE Grant

The Division for Families and Children of the Texas Office of the Attorney General (OAG) initiated "Strong Start - Stable Families" (SSSF) to provide a menu of family stabilization services and referrals to young unmarried parents immediately prior to and following birth in conjunction with regular prenatal and postpartum clinic visits and services. The goal is to lay the foundation for a stable family and marriage, promote the long-term financial security of children born out-of-wedlock, and reduce adversarial child support proceedings.

The interventions will include: education on paternity establishment, child support, and preparation for parenting; and services and referrals on healthy/stable relationships, marriage preparation and healthy marriage skills, child health and well-being, family economic security, the prevention of family violence, and team-parenting.

Parents will be randomly assigned to a:

- high-level treatment group which will receive assessment, case management, and the full array of interventions including home visiting services, as appropriate;
- low-level treatment group which will receive printed family development information and access to free healthy relationship/marriage skills educational groups, and referrals to additional family support services in the community; or
- control group which will receive no services beyond those usually accorded at prenatal and postpartum visits.

The three groups will be tracked and compared for evidence of family and financial security, paternity establishment, incidences of relationship violence, marriage, cohabitation, earnings, enrollment in public benefit programs, involvement in the child welfare system, agreed child support orders, and child support payment.

The SSSF Project will be housed in the Baylor College of Medicine Teen Health Clinics. Other project partners include the Houston Healthy Marriage Coalition, Gulf Coast Workforce Development Board, Greater Houston Collaborative for Children, Texas Council on Family Violence, and the Texas Health and Human Services Commission.

Washington State

Bright Start (2005 – 2009)

Federal OCSE Grant

The grantee proposes to strengthen and expand Washington State's pioneering and nationally-replicated work in voluntary paternity establishment. The project, "Bright Start: Offering Unwed Parents Non-Adversarial Solutions to Improve Outcomes for Their Children," is designed to implement four demonstration projects in 10 of the State's field offices. The selected offices will enter into a cooperative agreement to test the provision of strengthened voluntary paternity services and new accompanying services (genetic testing and marriage education or dispute resolution services) in hospitals involving both IV-D and non-IV-D families. The overall objective is to foster an increase in paternities and reduce the need for future adversarial actions in child support matters.

California

It (Pregnancy) Didn't Happen to Me (2008 – 2011)

Federal OCSE Grant

Kern County Department of Child Support Services (KCDCSS) will develop a peer-to-peer presentation distributed by multi-media targeted for young adults and teen parent age groups. KCDCSS expects to improve its performance in the key child support measures of collections, paternity and support order establishment.

The project will include an advisory board of key partners including participating unwed young adult and teen parents, staff from the Kern High School District (KHSD), Kern County Department of Public Health (KCDPH) and the KCDCSS. The board will provide the voice, set the direction and be instrumental in the approach and validation of the testing and approval of materials and the methods of communicating that child support should be a

reliable source of income. These young adults and teens will first ensure that the Project's title sets the "theme" and sets the course for the project that will address the entire child support process of establishment, enforcement and parental responsibilities.

The KHSD Career Resource Department (primary youth services provider) will provide access to and training of unwed young adult and teen parents on the advisory group to facilitate training of their peers on the establishment and enforcement services made available through the KCDCSS. Also, it will provide the staff for training of participating unwed teen parents and the bridge to further develop the involvement and partnership with the local high schools and their video production programs.

Colorado

Good to Know (2008 – 2010)

Federal OCSE Grant

The Denver Department of Human Services (DDHS) Child Support Enforcement Division (CSED) initiated Project "Good to Know" (GTK). CSED will determine effective marketing communications strategies to increase child support collections among the teen and twenty-something population.

The project will target approximately 1,000 unwed teen and twenty-something parents in the Denver County CSE system. GTK will:

- educate young unwed parents on the importance of establishing paternity and child support; and
- identify ways in which other government agencies and community-based organizations can strengthen these efforts.

GTK will conduct market research to determine best communications practices (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, MySpace) to engage the target population, including user-generated media and cellular-based communications.

In addition, GTK will hold multiple focus groups of unwed parents (male and female) in these age groups to assist in designing and marketing paternity and related child support materials covering the entire child support process. Materials will be culturally and linguistically sensitive. GTK will design and conduct a pilot testing strategy before finalizing products.

Goals are to:

- Increase awareness among 80 percent of project participants through creative, effective communications (web-based media, pod casts and cellular communications/text messaging); and
- Identify ways in which other government agencies and community-based organizations can strengthen these efforts (feedback from focus groups and pilot testing).

The Urban Institute

NY State Noncustodial EITC: Can it Increase Compliance? (2008 – 2011)

Federal OCSE Grant

The primary objective of this project is to ascertain whether New York's (NY) new Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) for NCPs increases child support compliance.

In 2005, NY enacted the "Strengthening Families through Stronger Fathers Initiative" which consists of two approaches to address the problem of child support non-compliance among low-income NCPs. First, NY funded 5 pilot sites to provide employment and other services to these NCPs. Second, NY provided a State refundable tax credit for NCPs who pay their entire current support for a year and have low earnings. The EITC would be up to a maximum of \$1,030 credit. By enacting an EITC for low-income NCPs, NY is attempting to increase child support collections by subsidizing the payment of child support which should further encourage NCPs to pay child support.

The primary input for the Urban Institute analysis will be Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) case-level administrative data (without personal identifiers) for the child support eligible population. OTDA will also give Urban Institute the same type of information for all NCPs who have a current support order. Urban will use a multivariate statistical analysis. The NY EITC legislation sunsets at the end of 2012 and NY will need to decide whether or not to continue this policy. This analysis should also inform others, including jurisdictions considering this type of legislation.

The Urban Institute is currently under contract with NY to evaluate the "Strengthening Families through Stronger Fathers Initiative" and to conduct a process evaluation of the NCP EITC program. The grant will be used to conduct a difference-in-difference analysis that will enable them to further isolate the impact of NCP EITC. The treatment group will consist of those who are just barely eligible for NCP EITC, while the comparison group will consist of those who just miss being eligible for NCP EITC. The second difference will consist of examining the child support payment behavior of the treatment and comparison groups before and after the NCP EITC was enacted.

Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), Raleigh, North Carolina
Problem-Solving Court Education and Expansion (2008 – 2011)
Federal OCSE Grant

This project will:

- expand data analysis for the substance abuse treatment component of North Carolina 10th Judicial District's (Wake County District Court) child support problem-solving court;
- obtain statistical analysis services, including cost-benefit analysis, to assess the impact of the substance abuse treatment program on the collection rate of child support payments; and
- build upon the previous study of court sanctions in Wake County and add a cost comparison.

In addition the project will:

- deploy innovative, sustainable methods to educate judicial child support communities nationwide and encourage expanded use of problem-solving techniques;
- research and develop a "How To" manual for initiating child support problem-solving court practices;
- create a workshop for approximately 10 new or experienced judges from across the nation who are responsible for hearing child support cases;
- develop a webcast series to support judges' learning and communicating problem-solving court techniques and benefits to a wider audience; and
- initiate a "Think Tank" website to showcase collaborative problem-solving techniques, innovative child support practices, training materials, success stories and other key judicial child support resources. Trained judges will be invited to join the Think Tank's Board of Advisors.

Center for Policy Research (CPR)

Healthy Babies-Healthy Relationships: A Project to Promote Financial and Medical Security for Children of Unwed Parents (2006 – 2010)

Federal OCSE Grant

The grantee will collaborate with three medical institutions and two child support agencies to present information about paternity, child support, and healthy relationships to fragile families and other targeted, low-income, unmarried populations in trusted medical settings.

The participating medical institutions will combine information on relationships, paternity, and child support with other educational material presented in "CenteringPregnancy," an established group prenatal care program. The clinics are key providers of prenatal care for unmarried, low-income, minority parents in San Francisco and St. Louis. All three clinics maintain contact with parents after the birth of their babies offering the opportunity for effective long-term follow-up. They are also experimenting with group pediatric care formats using "CenteringParenting," which will provide another vehicle for delivering the "child support message."

The child support agencies that serve these cities and targeted populations will participate by helping to train prenatal care staff about paternity and child support, making relevant presentations to parents at appropriate program sessions, and providing services to interested families.

The cross-site intervention will be subject to an evaluation aimed at documenting the impact of the enhanced "CenteringPregnancy" program on rates of paternity establishment, the use of the formal child support system, patterns of cohabitation and marriage, and the development of stable relationships that offer financial and medical security for vulnerable children.

Outcomes for parental relationships include reduced couple conflict, increased parental contact and involvement, and a better understanding of healthy relationships.

CPR will help publicize the project results to child support and prenatal care audiences throughout the nation and work with the Centering Pregnancy and Parenting Association to incorporate the "child support message" in the standard curriculum used in Centering programs. The project furthers the child support mission by creating effective collaborations between child support agencies and prenatal care programs that use sustained group education formats with fragile families before and after the birth of their babies.

Louisiana Christian Community Council

Fill the Gap Program (2006 – 2008)

Federal OCSE Grant

The Christian Community Council (CCC) of Albany, Louisiana, operates a community outreach program that works with NCPs who have not been meeting their child support obligations. The grant will enable the "Fill the Gap Program" to expand services, implement more effective management, and increase their staff; it will also enable them to develop an online, secure database, program website, and program manual. This will allow the project to be duplicated in other Regions.

Partners include the local IV-D agency and the 21st Judicial District Court who work with project participants in a 10-week program to help them gain a better understanding of CSE and court system policies, procedures, and expectations, find full-time employment, build

positive relationships with their children and the CP or guardian, and begin meeting their child support obligation voluntarily and consistently.

The "Fill the Gap Program" has been in operation since 2003 and has steadily grown. In 2005 it served 44 participants, and showed 75 percent of participants having made a child support payment in the previous six months of program participation. The project will utilize pre-/post-data collection to evaluate participants' confidence level in dealing with CSE and the court, willingness to meet child support obligations, employment status and place of employment, NCP contact with children, and perceptions of the program's effectiveness.

The Child and Family Resource Council, Kent County, Michigan
Encouraging Family Foundations (2006 – 2010)
Federal OCSE Grant

Encouraging Family Foundations (EFF) is a voluntary education and support program providing parenting and other life skills to single parents living in Kent County, Michigan, who have a child two years old or younger.

Parents who are pregnant may volunteer to attend before the birth of their child and the program encourages the attendance of the biological father or any partner of the single parent who will be contributing significantly to raising the child.

This grant will enable EFF to expand their provision of parenting and life skills information sessions, promote healthy relationships, and link participants to community resources. It will also enable EFF to promote and provide mediation services for their target audience with the aim of improving children's financial and medical security, minimizing the need for adversarial proceedings, and minimizing the need to take formal or punitive actions to collect support.

The proposed evaluation has a 4-pronged approach consisting of: collection of program data; a pre-mediation participant questionnaire; a follow-up participant phone survey; and trend analysis of child support data.

Family Service Association of San Antonio
Por Los Niños (2006 – 2010)
Federal OCSE Grant

This project is a partnership between Family Service Association of San Antonio, Inc., Metropolitan Methodist Hospital, the Division for Families and Children of the Office of the Attorney General of Texas (OAG), and the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio School of Nursing.

The project goal is to improve child support performance and outcomes for children and families by improving parenting and co-parenting skills, and encouraging healthy marriage.

Estimating a recruitment of 300 low-income, unwed, pregnant couples a year, the project will test strategies of collaborative interventions designed to enhance the knowledge and understanding of unmarried, new parents concerning the importance and legal significance of paternity establishment, the legal rights and responsibilities they have as parents, and the value of family stability and healthy marriage to the well-being of their children. The project's evaluative design employs random assignment. All recruited couples will receive information, brochures, and videos from OAG regarding child support and healthy marriage.

The experimental group of 150 of the recruited couples will also receive evidence-based curriculum education services via the "Parents as Teachers" parent education curriculum addressing pre- and early post-natal care, and the "Caring for My Family" co-parenting curriculum for post-natal care 3 to 8 months after the child's birth.

The evaluation will measure and compare results for the couples in terms of financial and medical care child outcomes, understanding of the child support system and available community services, and the marriage rate.

Alabama Children's Trust Fund

Family Connections in Alabama (2005 – 2008)

Federal OCSE Grant

To promote desirable child support outcomes and better the chances for Alabama children's healthy development, the Alabama Children's Trust Fund (CTF), in partnership with the Alabama Child Support Enforcement Division (CSED), Alabama A & M University's Family Life Center in Huntsville (FLC), Auburn University, and the Alabama Healthy Marriage Initiative (AHMI), will support the further development of the "Family Connections in Alabama" (FCA) Special Improvement Project.

This project will target African-American and Latino non-married parents who are IV-D clients whose youngest child is age 2 or younger.

The FCA project is utilizing the Family Life Center to target Huntsville (Madison County), Alabama due to the high need for improvement in child support outcomes in Madison County, the strong interest of the child support staff in the county in this project, and the capacity of the FLC to successfully implement the project design.

The project will build on lessons learned from previous work in the State of Alabama around issues related to healthy marriages, family stability, and greater child well-being.

An innovative, multi-pronged recruitment and retention strategy will be utilized. Male/female teams and couple mentors from within the target communities will manage the program participation and delivery of the child support services information and marriage education (ME) services. Child support workers will provide educational sessions on child support services and will partner with project personnel to track objective measures of child support outcomes.

In the first year, 48 participants are expected to complete the program; 96 new participants are expected to complete the program in each of the following two years.

ME services include the newly-developed, research-based "Loving Couples, Loving Children" (LCLC) curriculum, appropriate for an ethnically diverse fragile family population and available in English and in Spanish. The Alabama Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ACADV) will provide training and continued support in the domestic violence protocol to be used in the project to ensure a "do no harm" policy.

The primary goals are to create effective delivery of child support enforcement services and healthy marriage education services. A rigorous evaluation, involving a comparison group, will be used to examine the implementation process and project success in meeting the primary goals. The grantee expects that lessons learned will inform their efforts to develop a model program for Alabama and other States that serve to eliminate barriers that make it harder for ethnic and culturally diverse populations to seek child support assistance, establish paternity, and form and sustain healthy marriages and families.

South Baton Rouge Christian Children's Foundation

Marriages That Matter for Ethnic and Culturally Diverse Populations (2005 – 2008)

Federal OCSE Grant

The South Baton Rouge Christian Children's Foundation is collaborating with Refined By Fire Ministries, Inc., Dixon Correctional Institute and the Louisiana Department of Support Enforcement Services to provide healthy marriage education and child support services to underserved ethnically diverse unwed, CPs and NCPs.

The target audience is 90-120 inmates in the Dixon Correctional re-entry program who have less than a year before release.

The project goal is to ensure that the children of these prisoners receive the support necessary for healthy development by strengthening the relationship between their parents and increasing the emotional and financial involvement of CPs and NCPs in the lives of their children.

The program addresses barriers for unwed parents such as a lack of knowledge of:

- the importance of family stability, marriage and child support to child well-being;
- how to develop healthy relationship and parenting skills and access to programs that promote family formation; and
- child support requirements including obligations that do not stop when a parent becomes incarcerated.

To address this lack of knowledge, the project will focus on educating the inmates on the importance of family stability, marriage and child support and how this intervention affects:

- child wellbeing;
- increasing the co-parenting skills of inmates before and after release; and
- assisting the inmate in establishing a relationship with the CSE agency and taking responsibility for child support payments so that their families have a chance for healthy involvement after the inmate is released.

Michigan State University

Together We Can: Creating a Healthy Future for Our Family (2005 – 2008)

Federal OCSE Grant

This demonstration project will develop and test an educational intervention on healthy marriage formation targeting unmarried African American and Latino families in Pontiac and Saginaw Counties, Michigan.

CSE education will be integrated as a key theme throughout the project. Educational materials will be developed that reflect CSE goals and policies in consultation with Michigan CSE staff and the Friends of the Court (FOC).

An experimental design using a program and comparison group will assess program impact and effects. An important project hypothesis is that exposure to a culturally sensitive protocol will yield increases in the targeted knowledge, attitude, skills and relationship quality, i.e., key marital readiness indicators. The project anticipates recruiting 75 participants from each of the two project counties, and from each of the two control sites (two counties with similar demographics) for a total of 150 in the program group and 150 in the comparison group. Objective measures of child support payment rates, paternity establishment and marriage rates will be tracked among both groups and compared.

Fathers' Support Center in St. Louis

Healthy Relationship Skills for Fragile Families (2005 – 2008)

Federal OCSE Grant

The project goal is to ensure that the best interests of children remain central to their parents' lives by teaching parents essential parenting and relationship skills and expectations concerning child support responsibility and providing legal and emotional support to children.

The Fathers' Support Center will work with the St. Louis Healthy Marriage Coalition to train instructors in the Family Wellness curriculum and offer the program to underserved ethnic and culturally diverse never-married, divorced, or separated parents in specified St. Louis zip codes.

The project will train 40 Family Wellness instructors in Year 1 and 40 in Year 2. It will serve 210 families in Year 1, 285 in Year 2, and 430 families in Year 3. Sessions will last one hour per week for 4 to 6 weeks. Workshops will be offered quarterly in each year. Participants will be recruited from various sources (i.e., TANF, child support, and job training programs, and churches). Transportation stipends and child care will be provided.

The project evaluator will conduct a process study that tracks recruitment and referrals, the demographic characteristics of participants, and customer satisfaction, and an outcomes study that assesses whether the program meets these goals:

- 80 percent of clients referred complete Family Wellness;
- 80 percent of parents improve their commitment to meet financial obligations to children;
- 60 percent improve their ability to parent;
- 60 percent improve their relationship with the other parent; and
- 60 percent of NCPs improve personal responsibility in one of four areas (employment, formal/informal child support, time spent talking with the CP about child(ren), time spent with child).

The process study data will come from customer satisfaction surveys; the outcome study will use pre- and post-surveys of participants and attendance logs.

Families Under Urban and Social Attack, Inc., Austin, Texas

Healthy Parents, Healthy Families, Healthy Children (2005 - 2008)

The grantee proposes to provide African-American CPs and NCPs, age 18 and over, services that will enable them to strengthen the family unit and create a healthy, stable family.

The proposed project design is based on the Strengthening Families' findings generated from studies conducted of programs that focus on strengthening the relationship between unwed parents and helping those who are interested to prepare to enter and maintain a healthy marriage. The proposed program will address factors that affect couples and their children and consist of three components:

- assessment;
- marriage education; and
- relationship skills and support services to enhance marriage ability.

On an annual basis, the program will be available to 100 participants for up to six months.

It is anticipated that parent relationships will improve and that child support payments will increase by 10 percent from enrollment to program completion. Participants will access services that will enable them to improve their lives and that of their families, resulting in an overall improvement in child well-being.

“Families Under Urban and Social Attack” will collaborate with community resources, including the Texas Office of the Attorney General, Child Support Division, to ensure that the target population is reached and the appropriate services are delivered.

Texas Office of the Attorney General, Child Support Division

New Parent Outreach Project (2005 - 2008)

Federal OCSE Grant

This project is designed to enhance the knowledge and understanding of unmarried, new parents concerning the importance and legal significance of paternity establishment, the legal rights and responsibilities they have as parents, and the value of family stability and healthy marriage to the well-being of their children.

The project will be conducted at two local pilot sites through intensive face-to-face contact and on a statewide basis through the mailing of information to all parents who have executed an Acknowledgment of Paternity (AOP) during the fiscal year.

The Office of the Attorney General (OAG), Child Support Division (CSD) will capitalize on the "magic moment" of birth by mailing the new parents identified on an AOP a packet of information describing the benefits children receive from a stable family environment, the importance of father involvement, and the range of public agency services available to them as new parents.

In addition to the statewide outreach efforts, the OAG proposes to contract with hospitals to conduct personal outreach to new or expectant unmarried parents at two local hospital sites by using hospital staff and trained volunteers. Through this personal outreach, new parents will be informed of their legal responsibilities to support their child, of the resources available to them to fulfill those responsibilities, and of the value of marriage and stable families for child well-being.

The value of healthy marriage and parental responsibility outreach will be determined by measuring:

- the number of paternities established by parents receiving project services as compared to a similar sample of parents receiving no services; and
- the number of parents receiving program services who request additional healthy marriage information, the number of parents expressing satisfaction with program materials emphasizing healthy marriage and paternity establishment, and the timing of child support cases opened among parents receiving services as compared to parents receiving no program services.

OCSE-Commissioned Study

Addressing the Child Support, Fatherhood and Healthy Marriage Research Gap: A Multiple Source Study (2007 – 2009)

The purpose of this study is to help policymakers assess current and future policy overlaps and/or research gaps among three Federal programs administered by the Administration for Children and Families:

- child support;
- responsible fatherhood ; and
- healthy marriage.

To accomplish this objective, researchers will analyze the policies guiding these programs, identify and compare program goals and target populations, and assess their individual or combined impact on:

- child support;
- family formation; and
- NCP involvement in the lives of their children.

A second objective of this study involves a separate analysis of the following two primary data sets to glean information on the impact of father involvement and child support on family formation and multiple partner fertility:

- Princeton-Columbia Fragile Family and Child Well-Being Survey; and
- National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health.

The findings will be discussed in context as to what bearing they might have on current Federal program policies related to child support, responsible fatherhood, and healthy marriage.