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Using Digital Marketing to Increase Participation in the Child Support Program

Facebook Advertising Intervention Evaluation

Washington State Department of Social and Health Services Division of Child Support

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Evaluation Report Facebook Intervention

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Executive Summary

The Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), Division of Child Support (DCS) is participating in an Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) grant project to explore the impact of using digital marketing to increase child support enrollment and effectively reach families. The project includes three time-bound marketing interventions. This report is a review of the results of DCS' first intervention: sponsored advertising on Facebook to encourage child support applications among custodial parents. The intervention included two versions of Facebook advertisements in targeted zip code areas that ran for eleven weeks between April 16, 2019 and June 28, 2019 and reached 182,162 unique individuals.

DCS selected eight counties to participate in the digital marketing project: Clark, King, Pierce, Snohomish, Spokane, Thurston, Whatcom, and Yakima. We selected these counties based on relatively low uptake rates of DCS services by custodial parents. We further targeted areas within the counties to identify specific zip codes that contained residents most likely in need of child support services, based on the number of single parents relative to DCS uptake rates. We selected residents in 57 zip codes as the target audience for the Facebook advertisements. The advertisements were directed toward women aged 30-45, based on the average age and gender of custodial parents from DCS data, and toward those whose Facebook profile indicated a relationship status as unspecified (unmarried), single, divorced, separated and "it's complicated."

One advertisement included an infographic to highlight the range of services provided by DCS and the other featured a stock photo of a mother and child and focused on increasing family support. Viewers were exposed to only one of the advertisements. Both advertisements encouraged parents to visit the DCS *Apply for Child Support Services* page on the DSHS website by clicking a button within the advertisement.

According to Facebook Ad Manager Metrics, the Facebook advertisements had a reach of 182,162 individuals and 631,532 impressions. The number of impressions refers to the number of times the advertisements appeared on a Facebook feed, whereas reach indicates the number of unique individuals who were exposed to the advertisement. The advertisements resulted in 2,093 click-throughs to the DCS *Apply for Child Support Services* page within the DSHS website, 121 Likes, 20 Comments and 17 Shares. The total budget for the advertisements was \$5,624.87. Table 1 below illustrates each advertisement's metrics.

Table 1: Facebook Metrics									
Ad Version	Impressions	Reach	Clicks	Clicks by Reach	Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Spent	Cost Per Click
Services	145,759	36,469	400	.011	23	1	5	\$1250.36	\$3.55
Application	485,773	145,693	1,693	.012	98	19	12	\$4374.51	\$2.93
Total	631,532	182,162	2,093	.012	121	20	17	\$5,624.87	\$2.96

Both advertisements performed equally well. Google Analytics (which tracks website activity) demonstrated Facebook referral activity that contributed to an overall increase in “sessions” (a session is defined by Google Analytics as a “group of interactions one user takes within a given time frame on a website) from the targeted geographic areas to the *Apply for Child Support Services* page, as compared to a baseline of the same period in the previous year. Sessions from the targeted geographic areas during the intervention period more than doubled from 791 sessions during the baseline period to 2,375 sessions during the intervention period, and 44% (693) of this increase was due to increased Facebook referrals.

According to Google Analytics, the characteristics of visitors to the *Apply for Child Support Services* page through the Facebook advertisement were notably different from visitors from other sources. Ninety-three percent of the Facebook referrals were from new visitors compared to 46% overall. Visitors referred from Facebook viewed an average of 1.3 website pages during a session, compared to 4.8 pages for overall website visitors and the average session duration for Facebook referrals was 31 seconds, as compared to 300 seconds for other referral sources.

We examined the potential impact of the Facebook advertisements on new child support applications using DCS administrative data. We analyzed the data to determine the number and characteristics of new, non-assistance (TANF) child support applications during the intervention period for the targeted zip codes as compared to new child support applications for the same zip code areas during the baseline period of the previous year. The number of new non-assistance applications during the intervention period decreased slightly, from 320 in the baseline to 318 during the intervention period. During the same periods, new non-assistance child support applications for the State of Washington decreased from 5,628 in 2018 to 5,267 in 2019. The 1% decrease of new applications in the intervention area is a lower rate of decrease than the state’s 6% decrease in new applications, which might suggest the Facebook advertisements had a positive impact on new applications in the targeted area.

We considered other activities as potential indicators of new application interest generated by the Facebook ads. We analyzed the application log from DCS Central Services, which records the number of child support applications requested by telephone or in person, for the targeted zip codes during the baseline and intervention periods. In addition, we compared the overall DCS Community Relations Unit (CRU) log of calls (not specific to targeted zip code areas) requesting a non-assistance child support application for the baseline and intervention periods. Both call logs showed a slight increase in activity (from 258 to 263 and 361 to 375 for the Central Services Log and CRU, respectively), but the changes were not significant.

The characteristics of the new applicants in 2019 are similar to those of new applicants in 2018 in terms of gender, age, number of children, presence of an existing case and other characteristics.

We attempted to get direct feedback through an online survey from individuals who visited the *Apply for Child Support Services* page by clicking on one of the Facebook advertisements, but no responses were generated. The invitation to participate in the survey was made through a Facebook remarketing advertisement. Remarketing refers to running advertisements targeted towards past visitors to a site, using a tracking pixel. The advertisement was intended to run after the intervention period ended and was directed to individuals who visited the *Apply for Child Support Services* in the last month of the intervention. It is not clear if the campaign was executed as intended, and if not, if this was the reason for a lack of responses, or if this method of soliciting survey responses was inherently ineffective.

The Facebook advertisements prompted viewers to click on the advertisement, which led to the *Apply for Child Support Services* page. Many of these viewers had not previously visited the *Apply for Child Support Services* page. The rate of response suggests:

- In combination, the messages and design layout of both advertisements were effective in generating the call-to-action response of clicking through to the *Apply for Child Support Services* page on the DSHS website.
- The geographic and demographic methods of targeting the advertisements were effective at reaching individuals who could potentially benefit for child support services
- The advertisements had broad reach (182,162), with relatively low expense.
- The Facebook advertisements were effective in generating the call to action response of clicking on the advertisements from individuals who had not previously visited the *Apply for Child Support Services* page.

Once the Facebook referrals reached the website, however, individuals viewed fewer pages than average and spent little time on the site. Few spent enough time on the site to review the page and/or download the forms necessary to start an application. Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine how and if these new Facebook visitors returned to the site through another source and initiated the application process through download of forms.

The short duration of Facebook-referred visitors' time on the *Apply for Child Support Services* page raises questions that would be helpful to address when planning future marketing efforts:

1. What factors contributed to visitors' quick departure from the site?
2. Does the *Apply for Child Support Services* page provide the information suggested by the advertisements?
3. Is the *Apply for Child Support Services* page user-friendly in terms of content and design?
4. Is there other information that would be helpful to first-time visitors who may be unfamiliar with the child support system?

Based on the information available, it is not possible to assess the Facebook advertisements' impact on the rate of new applications to the intervention areas. There was no increase in the number of new applicants relative to the baseline. While the intervention areas demonstrated a smaller rate of decrease in applications relative to the state as whole, there may have been other factors outside of the Facebook advertisements driving this effect.

It is difficult to understand the influence of digital marketing advertisements on those who apply for services without direct feedback through voluntary surveys or interviews from those individuals. While there are research limitations to this type of information (lack of representation or generalizable results), this feedback could add a “human” dimension to the other data available. Future interventions should include efforts to solicit direct feedback through surveys or interviews, if possible.

Using digital marketing to encourage enrollment in child support services is a largely unexplored strategy for addressing the national trend of decreasing child support caseloads. DCS’ first digital marketing intervention was well executed and created a response from individuals who would benefit from child support services. Subsequent interventions will produce even more knowledge, and together these experiences will help inform the body of general knowledge on the effectiveness of digital marketing for child support services.

Background

The Digital Marketing grant program, sponsored by the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, is a 24-month demonstration project with the goal of researching how digital marketing may help the child support program more effectively reach and serve families. In September 2018, OCSE awarded funds to 14 child support agencies to test digital marketing approaches and partnerships to reach parents that could benefit from child support services, and create or improve two-way digital communication and engagement.

Problem

As of 2016, the population of the State of Washington was just over 7 million. The Economic Services Administration, within the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), serves a client base of over 2.8 million, a little more than 40% of the state's total population. Of these, approximately 1 million receive services from DCS. DCS establishes paternity, locates noncustodial parents, and establishes and enforces child support orders. Services are initiated when a parent applies for TANF or Medicaid or submits an application for child support, when another state or nation requests assistance in collecting child support, or when a court order requires payment through child support services. In State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2017, DCS collected \$675.5 million for 270,241 children from 234,913 distinct noncustodial parents. There were 257,624 distinct custodial parents at the end of the SFY.

Consistent child support payments are an important source of income for many families in the state. Yet each month just over one-half receive full payment of child support due. From February 2017 through January 2018, 56.7% of custodial parents received full payment of child support due. An additional 24% received partial payments, while the remaining 19% of custodial parents received nothing. Without this support, many parents apply for public assistance to provide for their children. DCS is committed to improving child well-being by providing resources and assistance to help individuals and families. If DCS can ensure that information about child support services is easily accessible through a greater range of digital platforms it may lead to an increase in the number of custodial parents applying for DCS services. This could positively influence the number of families receiving child support payments.

According to the 2018 ESA Child Support Briefing Book, the number of children served by DCS decreased from 270,241 in SFY 2017 to 260,060 in SFY 2018 (a decline of 3.8%). The average monthly child support caseload in Washington was 326,923 in state fiscal year 2018, which represents a 2.1% decrease from 334,027 in SFY 2017. Non-assistance child support applications have similarly declined over the past several years, from 13,446 in SFY 2017 to 12,799 in SFY 2018 (a 4.8% decrease), according to DCS Central Services. The decline in applications and caseloads statewide suggests a potential need for additional marketing to parents who could benefit from child support services.

In Washington’s digital marketing grant application to OCSE, the state identified that “the interventions designed for this grant opportunity are based on the belief that DCS will be able to develop a more modern, innovative approach to communication and service delivery through collaboration with experts in fields of digital marketing and social research. These interventions will lead the state toward the goal of increasing the number of non-TANF custodial parents applying for child support services. This, in turn, will lead to an increase in child support collections and improve child support outcomes.”

Several members of DCS leadership were involved in the decision to apply for and undertake use of digital marketing strategies for these purposes. The key decision-makers included Director of DCS, Wally McClure; Grants Administrator, Kirsten Jenicek; and DCS Chief of Communications, Frieda Ray. These decision-makers enlisted subject matter experts such as the DCS Chief of IT, Department of Social & Health Services Communications staff, and the ESA Management Accountability and Performance Statistics (E-MAPS) staff to provide information such as current digital media usage, challenges with digital marketing, and strategic direction. DCS released a Request for Information (RFI) in early 2018, asking contractors to submit information to assist DCS in potential procurement and grant planning. Interested parties submitted proposals for the design of three time-bound digital marketing interventions, outlined a logic model and communication plan for each intervention, and included a detailed project budget. The information gathered from this RFI guided DCS in defining and prioritizing the problem.

Intervention

Goals

The digital marketing project includes three time-bound marketing interventions. This report is a review of the results of DCS’ first intervention: sponsored advertising on Facebook to encourage child support applications from custodial parents. The intervention included two versions of Facebook advertisements in targeted zip code areas that ran for eleven weeks between April 16, 2019 and June 28, 2019 and reached 182,162 unique individuals. This first intervention sought to determine the effectiveness of Facebook social media advertising in promoting child support services and encouraging enrollment. The overall goal of the intervention was to increase the number of child support applications. Specific objectives include enhancing the image of DCS as a useful service provider and increasing child support applications by 2% over a baseline of a comparable period in a previous year. The population targeted for the intervention was residents in eight Washington counties.

Development

DCS selected the Center for Policy Research (CPR) and its subcontractor Spearca Communications as its evaluation/marketing contractor to implement the digital marketing grant. DCS appointed a team of four to work with CPR and Spearca. Together, this team participated in multiple planning meetings to determine the best way to reach the target audiences through the digital marketing interventions. An overview of all three interventions was developed and articulated in communications and evaluation plans. Spearca Communications developed advertising concepts that were honed through feedback from the project team. Two versions of Facebook advertisements were created.

Target Population

The project team targeted its digital marketing interventions to individuals most likely to benefit from child support services, as indicated by geographic areas with lower uptakes of child support services. The team identified eight counties based on a relatively low uptake of DCS services. Both urban and rural areas are represented by these counties. The percentage of DCS services utilized is based on a June 2018 snapshot reported in the ESA Child Support Briefing Book¹, which indicated that DCS was serving 7.9% of total Washington residents. The selected counties include:

- **Clark:** Urban, 7.7% of population with DCS case
- **King:** Urban, 4.7% of population with DCS case
- **Pierce:** Urban, 10.3% of population with DCS case
- **Snohomish:** Urban/Rural, 6.8% of population with DCS case
- **Spokane:** Urban/Rural, 10.4% of population with DCS case
- **Thurston:** Urban/Rural, 9.5% of population with DCS case
- **Whatcom:** Urban/Rural, 6.2% of population with DCS case
- **Yakima:** Rural, 14.5% of population with DCS case

The project team also narrowed the target audiences based on gender and age. According to the 2018 ESA Child Support Briefing Book², 88.2% of custodial parents served by DCS are women, with a median age of 39.5. This intervention was targeted to reach women between the ages of 30-45.

The team further narrowed the target audience to specific zip codes within the identified counties where the rate of participation in child support services appears to be low relative to the overall number of single parent households, based on the assumption that a lower uptake rate of child support services indicates more potential for enrolling new clients than in other zip codes.

¹ ESA Briefing book. (2018). *Child Support Program SFY 2018*. Washington Division of Social and Health Services

² ESA Briefing book. (2018). *Child Support Program SFY 2018*. Washington Division of Social and Health Services

We identified low participation in DCS services within a zip code by comparing the number of single parent households with children under 18 from the American Community Survey (2017)³ to the number of custodial parents currently served by DCS. DCS provided a data extract on the number of custodial parents in the selected zip codes for comparison purposes. We eliminated zip codes with numbers of DCS' current custodial parents that were higher than single parent households identified in the American Community Survey.

We further refined the target market by limiting the target zip codes to those where the median household incomes are less than \$100,000 per year. In addition, we eliminated zip codes with fewer than 350 single parents. With these filters, we targeted 57 zip codes. This marketing strategy enabled greater advertising penetration to areas where more individuals are likely to be eligible for services (Table 2).

Table 2: Zip Code Targeting Results	
Total Zip Codes in Eight Counties	261
Zip Codes with fewer CPs than single parents	100
Zip Codes with fewer CPs than single parents with median incomes over \$100,000	28
Zip Codes with fewer CPs than single parents with fewer than 350 single parents	15
Final Targeted Zip Codes	57

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are 70,375 single parent families in the targeted zip code areas⁴, and according to DCS, there are 41,581 custodial parents in these zip codes, with a ratio of only 1 DCS custodial parent to every 1.7 single parents. By contrast, the ratio in the targeted *counties* is 1.07 DCS custodial parents for every 1 single parent, illustrating the potential need in the targeted zip code areas (Table 3).

Table 3: Final Targeted Zip Codes							
Zip Code	County	City	Median Household Income	Families with Children	Single Parents	CPs	Difference Single Parents to CPs
98607	Clark	Camas	\$96,842	4,434	904	698	206
98664	Clark	Vancouver	\$57,330	2,155	852	780	72
98683	Clark	Vancouver	\$66,733	4,070	1,352	840	512
98684	Clark	Vancouver	\$63,653	3,287	1,118	1,106	12

³ U.S. Census Bureau (2019). 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. Retrieved from https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_17_5YR_B19126&prodTy pe=table

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau (2019). 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. Retrieved from https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_17_5YR_B19126&prodTy pe=table

Table 3: Final Targeted Zip Codes

Zip Code	County	City	Median Household Income	Families with Children	Single Parents	CPs	Difference Single Parents to CPs
98007	King	Bellevue	\$87,207	3,446	745	362	383
98008	King	Bellevue	\$95,783	3,081	353	261	92
98011	King	Bothell	\$86,490	3,939	851	369	482
98028	King	Kenmore	\$96,277	2,917	537	343	194
98030	King	Kent	\$58,666	4,430	1,525	1,373	152
98034	King	Kirkland	\$93,520	4,916	1,021	750	271
98038	King	Maple Valley	\$99,098	4,874	945	784	161
98055	King	Renton	\$68,638	2,560	800	588	212
98056	King	Renton	\$78,525	4,282	1,390	753	637
98057	King	Renton	\$44,291	1,247	608	531	77
98059	King	Renton	\$97,407	5,129	1,107	668	439
98092	King	Auburn	\$81,211	5,184	1,517	1,428	89
98103	King	Seattle	\$91,740	4,586	911	326	585
98105	King	Seattle	\$56,015	2,812	284	199	85
98106	King	Seattle	\$62,726	2,790	1,167	754	413
98108	King	Seattle	\$55,314	2,386	977	650	327
98118	King	Seattle	\$62,504	4,666	1,504	1,482	22
98119	King	Seattle	\$85,171	1,764	346	122	224
98122	King	Seattle	\$72,018	2,220	782	569	213
98125	King	Seattle	\$61,014	3,880	1,095	611	484
98126	King	Seattle	\$73,698	2,534	726	442	284
98133	King	Seattle	\$60,409	4,400	1,148	912	236
98136	King	Seattle	\$97,673	1,867	454	140	314
98144	King	Seattle	\$71,628	2,675	809	638	171
98146	King	Seattle	\$61,160	2,954	1,232	872	360
98148	King	Seattle	\$53,342	1,386	597	386	211
98155	King	Seattle	\$81,405	3,638	788	606	182
98178	King	Seattle	\$72,478	2,804	1,070	1,019	51
98188	King	Seattle	\$50,231	2,576	805	764	41
98407	Pierce	Tacoma	\$71,059	1,981	685	570	115
98424	Pierce	Tacoma	\$61,607	1,396	500	497	3
98433	Pierce	Tacoma	\$44,409	3,100	423	148	275
98466	Pierce	Tacoma	\$57,200	3,134	1,354	1,243	111
98467	Pierce	University Place	\$61,351	2,079	826	677	149
98012	Snohomish	Bothell	\$93,267	8,471	1,518	1,102	416
98026	Snohomish	Edmonds	\$83,965	3,529	699	653	46
98036	Snohomish	Lynnwood	\$72,573	4,542	1,378	946	432

Table 3: Final Targeted Zip Codes							
Zip Code	County	City	Median Household Income	Families with Children	Single Parents	CPs	Difference Single Parents to CPs
98037	Snohomish	Lynnwood	\$68,715	3,172	978	697	281
98043	Snohomish	Mountlake Terrace	\$69,727	2,374	1,002	565	437
98087	Snohomish	Lynnwood	\$73,739	4,599	1,517	961	556
98204	Snohomish	Everett	\$48,881	4,916	1,985	1,721	264
98205	Snohomish	Everett	\$85,300	1,703	410	6	404
98208	Snohomish	Everett	\$82,957	6,908	2,021	1,753	268
99016	Spokane	Greenacres	\$58,454	1,625	514	495	19
99019	Spokane	Liberty Lake	\$75,027	1,549	433	267	166
99203	Spokane	Spokane	\$73,363	2,512	601	370	231
99218	Spokane	Spokane	\$45,735	1,709	622	570	52
98502	Thurston	Olympia	\$62,689	3,256	1,097	1,084	13
98503	Thurston	Lacey	\$61,336	4,427	1,735	1,683	52
98225	Whatcom	Bellingham	\$41,536	3,180	1,119	886	233
98226	Whatcom	Bellingham	\$61,658	4,282	1,391	1,071	320
98229	Whatcom	Bellingham	\$60,197	3,236	752	720	32
98930	Yakima	Grandview	\$46,188	2,084	789	770	19

We further targeted the advertisements to reach those with a Facebook relationship status of unspecified (unmarried), single, divorced, separated, and “it’s complicated.”

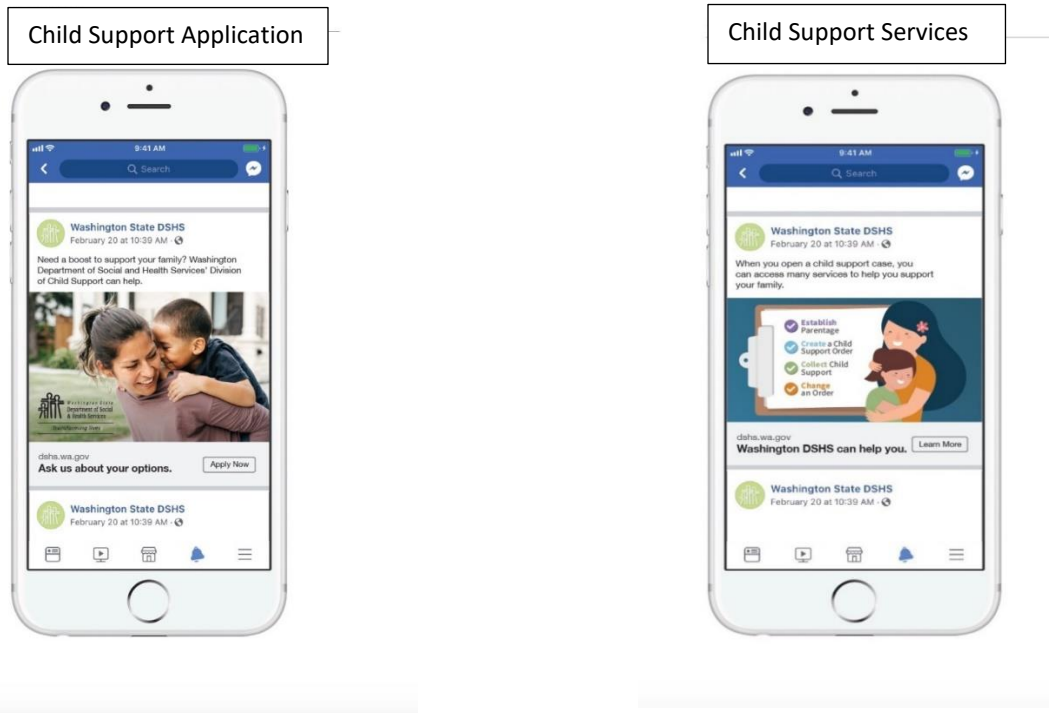
Timeline and Intervention Description

We ran sponsored ads through the DSHS Facebook page for this intervention. Including these paid ads in Facebook news feeds allowed us to reach people not currently following the DSHS Facebook page. Through Facebook, sponsored ads can be demographically targeted to reach individuals geographically (county/zip code), by age, gender, relationship status, and interests/likes.

This intervention tested two creative messages, based on research findings from a 2017 communications audit of the California Department of Child Support Services’ marketing materials. Ogilvy, a public relations firm, conducted the audit and held focus groups with parents who had child support orders. Feedback from the report and focus groups revealed that many parents have feelings of failure and shame related to child support. The focus groups further revealed that parents prefer to receive straightforward information about child support services, and that, often, messages related to parent education and engagement have negative connotations. Recognizing this feedback, DCS ensured that the messaging used in the Facebook advertisements was informational, with a positive and approachable tone.

The first Facebook message was a direct call to action encouraging people to apply for child support services (“Child Support Application”). The second message presented DCS as a family-focused agency that provides a range of child support services. It served as a “*did you know*” message to engage Washington residents in the various services provided by DCS (“Child Support Services”). DCS used an icon/infographic image for this ad, versus the stock photo used in the other application. The advertisements utilized in the Facebook intervention are below (Illustration 1):

Illustration 1: Advertisement Mock-Ups



The advertisements ran on Facebook within the selected zip codes from April 16, 2019 to June 28, 2019. The targeted zip codes were separated into nine county groups. Due to its large size, King County was divided into two groups. One of the two advertisements was assigned to each group and appeared an average of 3.5 times on individual Facebook feeds throughout the intervention period. The zip code groups and the advertisement version that appeared in Facebook are in Table 4.

Table 4: Facebook Advertisement Groups		
County/Group	Zip Codes Included	Advertisement Version Applied
Clark	98607, 98664, 98683, 98684	Child Support Application
King 1	98007, 98008, 98011, 98028, 98030, 98034, 98038, 98055, 98056, 98057, 98059, 98092, 98103, 98105	Child Support Application
King 2	98106, 98108, 98118, 98119, 98122, 98125, 98126, 98133, 98136, 98144, 98146, 98148, 98155, 98178, 98188	Child Support Application
Pierce	98407, 98424, 98433, 98466, 98467	Child Support Application
Snohomish	98012, 98026, 98036, 98037, 98043, 98087, 98204, 98205, 98208	Child Support Application
Spokane	99016, 99019, 99203, 99218	Child Support Services
Thurston	98502, 98503	Child Support Application
Whatcom	98225, 98226, 98229	Child Support Services
Yakima	98930	Child Support Application

DSHS communications staff set up the two Facebook groups to run through the DSHS Facebook account. DSHS staff made an error in setting up the groups, resulting in the Child Support Services message appearing in only two county groupings instead of four groupings as intended.

Outcome Measures

Evaluation for the Facebook intervention included two components:

- Analysis and comparison of digital media metrics (Facebook Ad Manager and Google Analytics) and a comparison to a baseline of the same period during the same calendar period in the previous year, when available.
- Comparison of DCS administrative data on application and related activities from individuals in the targeted zip codes during the intervention to a baseline of data from the same calendar period in the previous year for the same zip codes.

The digital media metrics included:

Facebook (April 16, 2019 to June 28, 2019):

- Number of impressions
- Number of individuals reached
- Number of clicks-throughs on the advertisements (to the *Apply for Child Support Services* page)
- Number of likes
- Number and content of comments

Google Analytics (Baseline period: April 15, 2018 to June 30, 2018; Intervention period: April 15, 2019 to June 30, 2019):

- Number of sessions, new users, and time spent on the *Apply for Child Support Services* page by referral source, location, device, and gender.

Administrative Data (Baseline period: April 15, 2019 to June 30, 2018; Intervention period: April 15, 2019 to June 30, 2019) included:

- New child support cases initiated including events, custodial parent age, gender, city, zip code, county, relationship to child, order date, type, and amount.
- Central Service Application log and the Community Relations Unit log of requests for applications.

Research Question

The research question for this evaluation is: ***What is the relationship between advertisements on Facebook and applications to child support?***

Results

Facebook Results

Sample Size: According to Facebook Ad Manager Metrics, the Facebook advertisements had a reach of 182,162 individuals and 631,532 impressions. The number of impressions refers to the number of times the advertisements appeared on a Facebook feed, whereas reach indicates the number of unique individuals who were exposed to the advertisement. The advertisements resulted in 2,093 click-throughs to the DCS *Apply for Child Support Services* page within the DSHS website, 121 Likes, 20 Comments and 17 Shares. The total budget for the advertisements was \$5,624.87. Table 5 below illustrates each advertisement’s metrics

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Application	485,773	145,693	1,693	.012	98	19	12	\$4374.51	\$2.93
Total	631,532	182,162	2,093	.012	121	20	17	\$5,624.87	\$2.96

Facebook advertisement metrics were provided for each week for every county group. The primary metric of interest is the number of clicks on the advertisement that leads the viewer to the DCS *Apply for Child Support Services* page. The sample sizes of advertising groups described above were not equal, so we adjusted the click-through rate based on the reach of each group. Table 6 compares the performance of each advertisement, and the N refers to the number of weekly county groups to which the advertisements were directed. The ‘Application’ ad ran to seven county groups over eleven weeks; however, for the first few weeks, before we split King County into two groups because of its large size, it ran to only six counties. The ‘Services’ ad ran to two counties over eleven weeks.

Table 6: Advertisement Comparisons			
Advertisement Version	N	Mean Click-Throughs by Reach	Std. Deviation
Services	22	.0111	.00342
Application	74	.0119	.00385

There was no significant difference in the mean of click-through rates as adjusted by reach, indicating both advertisements performed equally well.

Table 7 shows the rate of click-throughs by reach for each county grouping.

Table 7: Rate of Click-Throughs by Location			
County	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Clark	.0120	11	.00466
King 1	.0110	10	.00225
King 2	.0111	9	.00197
Pierce	.0114	11	.00394
Snohomish	.0109	11	.00303
Spokane	.0104	11	.00163
Thurston	.0118	11	.00383
Whatcom	.0118	11	.00456
Yakima	.0148	11	.00527
Total	.0117	96	.00376

There was no statistically significant difference between the mean click-throughs by the county groupings, with each county group performing similarly to the others. There was no significant difference between the advertisements in the number of likes, shares or comments.

Sixteen individuals made twenty comments in response to the advertisements, all of which appeared to have been made during the first week of advertising. Given the reach of 182,162, this rate of comments was small.

The most common topic (8 comments) was that the system does not work “That’s funny. I applied for child support over a year ago & still nothing lol. It really isn’t funny, but hey.” Three of the comments appeared to be related to DSHS but not DCS. Four comments were unclear as to meaning or were unrelated. One comment “tagged” a name of someone else to direct another’s attention to the ad, and three comments were direct responses to another comment. Overall, 10 of the 13 comments related to DCS were negative in tone while three were more positive or provided advice.

Unfortunately, representatives of DSHS did not respond to the comments, which was a missed opportunity to attempt to correct misconceptions or assist individuals with a negative experience with DCS. Future efforts to utilize an open social media platform like Facebook should include a strategy and plan for response to comments.

Google Analytics Results

Google Analytics is a tracking feature that compiles multiple metrics related to website activity. We compiled activity data on the *Apply for Child Support Services* page for the baseline period of April 15, 2018 to June 30, 2018 and the intervention period of April 15, 2019 to June 30, 2019. The data compiled was based on the *Apply for Child Support Services* page as a landing page. A landing page is where a visitor begins interaction with a page after a referral from a search engine, an advertisement like the Facebook advertisements or by directly navigating to a specific page.

Google Analytics does not gather information based on zip code, but it does by city, so we used the cities of the targeted zip codes as proxies of the zip codes, and when possible, filtered activity on the *Apply for Child Support Services* page to include only the relevant cities. Not all data extract methods from Google Analytics include location information. Data available on Google Analytics are limited by several factors, including:

- Google Analytics tracking relies on the user having Java, images, and cookies enabled
- Users can exit before Google Analytics code loads
- Google Analytics uses sampled data

Because of these limitations, it is not possible to align the metrics available through Facebook Ad Manager with Google Analytics. However, Google Analytics is a useful tool for gathering information on activity trends of websites and individual pages within a website.

Compilation of data from Google Analytics on the number of sessions (what a user does on a website during a visit) on the *Apply for Child Support Services* page during the baseline and intervention periods illustrates that the overall number of sessions on the DCS *Apply for Child Support Services* page grew threefold, from 791 sessions during the baseline period to 2,375 sessions during the intervention period (Table 8). **It is important to note that Google Analytics extract results vary based on the extract parameters and are intended to provide sample data instead of exact data.**

Number of Sessions	Baseline	Intervention	Increase in Sessions
	791	2,375	1,584

Google Analytics tracks the source of sessions or referring entity. For example, a search on Google for the *Apply for Child Support Services* page is considered a “Google” source. A “Direct” source refers to visits that went directly to a site without a referring entity. Here are the sources of sessions during the baseline and intervention periods, filtered by location to reflect the targeted area (Table 9):

Period	Google	Direct	Bing	Facebook	Yahoo	Other	Total
Baseline	657	100	19	4	2	9	791
Intervention	1,218	329	82	697	22	27	2,375
Change in Sessions	561	229	63	693	20	18	1,584
Contribution to Overall Change	35%	14%	4%	44%	1%	1%	

Google was the largest source of sessions in both the baseline and intervention periods and the increase in the number of sessions that originated with Google accounts for 35% of the overall increase in the *Apply for Child Support Services* website. The largest contributor to the increase in overall sessions to the *Apply for Child Support Services* website is directly attributed to the referrals generated by the Facebook advertisements. Forty-four percent of the increase in sessions from the baseline to the intervention period was due to referrals from the Facebook advertisements.

For a referral to come from Facebook, a link to a website must be included. The only Facebook activity with a link to the *Apply for Child Support Services* website during this period was the intervention advertisements. During the baseline period, there were four referrals from Facebook to the *Apply for Child Support Services* website, accounting for less than 1% of all the referrals (791). Information is not available on the nature of the Facebook activity that prompted the referrals during the baseline period. The Facebook advertisements during the intervention period prompted 697 referrals, accounting for 29% of all referral sources to the site. This increase in referrals is a 174-fold increase in referrals from Facebook.

Google Analytics also provides information on the behavior viewers engage in once they arrive at a website, including the number of pages viewed and the duration of a session. In a comparison of the top five referral sources to the *Apply for Child Support Services* page during the intervention period, the characteristics of the viewers that came to the site through the Facebook advertisements and their behavior was notably different than other sources (Table 10). Ninety-three percent of the viewers referred by the Facebook advertisements were primarily new users, as compared to an average of 46% of the other sources. The Facebook viewers viewed an average of only 1.31 pages, compared to 4.79 pages for the viewers referred

by other sources. The most striking difference between Facebook referrals and others is in the average session duration. Facebook viewers stayed with the session for only 30 seconds, while the average for other sources was 300 seconds. While the Facebook advertisements were effective in driving new users to the *Apply for Child Support Services* webpage, these viewers left the page almost immediately.

Table 10: Characteristics Behavior for Intervention Period Sessions by Source					
Source	Sessions	% New Users	New Users	Pages per Session	Avg. Session Duration
Google	1,218	38.87%	531	2.97	218.80
Direct	329	60.98%	200	1.95	157.34
Bing	82	29.27%	24	4.46	220.77
Yahoo	22	36.84%	14	10.23	787.07
Other	27	30.43%	7	2.11	40.44
Total	1,678	46.24%	776	4.79	299.51
Facebook	697	92.68%	646	1.31	30.79

It is possible the Facebook-referred viewers returned to the *Apply for Child Support Services* page through another source with engagement more similar to the other sources, but this information is not readily available.

Google Analytics provides information on the type of device viewers used to visit the *Apply for Child Support Services* page (Table 11).

Table 11: Device Use for Website Viewers				
Device	Baseline		Intervention	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Desktop	217	29%	490	21%
Mobile	525	70%	1,798	77%
Tablet	7	1%	48	2%
Total	749		2,336	

In both the baseline and intervention periods, over 70% of viewers visited the *Apply for Child Support Services* page on their mobile devices, with the percentage growing to 77% during the intervention period. The change itself is not significant, but it is important to note the volume of visitors utilizing mobile devices to ensure the DSHS website continues to be mobile friendly.

The number of pageviews—or instances of being loaded or reloaded—of the *Apply for Child Support Services* page provides relevant information to the overall digital marketing project. The planning and preparation for the project included a basic scan and review of the DCS website by Spearca Communications. DCS’s website is a part of a larger site for DSHS’s Economic Services Administration (ESA) programs. DCS’ main page and additional pages were

organized to include a clickable list of child support and ESA topics on the right, text in the middle section, and boxes with quick links and a sign up for newsletter on the right side. Individuals interested in application information could click on the Apply for Child Support Services link on the right-hand list to get to the application page. Spearca Communications recommended adding a prominent “Apply for Child Support” box to the DCS main page and all the other pages within the DCS website. This recommendation was applied in March 2019, prior to the start of the first intervention on April 1.

Previous discussion of Google Analytics data reported information on the number of sessions with the *Apply to Child Support Services* page as the landing page, which represents a single visit to a website. Another available metric is the number of pageviews, which represents each time a page is loaded by a user. A session typically involves many pageviews.

Adding a prominent Apply for Child Support button to the DCS main page would not immediately influence the number of landing page sessions, but it could influence the number of pageviews to the *Apply for Child Support Services* page. A comparison of the overall pageviews of the *Apply for Child Support Services* page from the baseline to the intervention period, illustrates a substantial change in the number of pageviews (Table 12).

Table 12: Apply for Child Support Services Pageviews		
	Month	Apply for Child Support Services Page Views
Baseline	April	2,477
	May	2,995
	June	2,190
	Total Baseline	7,662
Intervention	April	6,134
	May	6,611
	June	6,145
	Total Intervention	18,890
Difference Intervention to Baseline		11,228
% Difference		146.54%

There were over 11,000 more views to *the Apply for Child Support Services* page during the intervention period than in the baseline period. As was previously noted, overall visits and use of the website increased a great deal from the baseline to intervention period, which could account for some of this increase. To further illustrate the influence of the addition of the Apply for Child Support button, the number of pageviews was compared for the month preceding the change (February) and the first full month (April) the change was in effect (Table 13).

	Pageviews	DCS Sessions	Apply Sessions
February	3,635	16,000	393
April	6,134	14,000	662
Difference April to February	2,499	-2,000	269
% Difference	68.75%	-12.50%	68.45%

Like the comparison of the intervention to the baseline periods, this comparison also indicates strong gains in pageviews (2,499, 69%) after the Apply for Child Support button was added to the DCS webpages. This increase in pageviews was an unintended outcome, unrelated to the Facebook intervention itself and was a result of preparations to launch the intervention. Nevertheless, the result of adding the Apply for Child Support button is worth noting and suggests changes to enhance the navigational and user-friendly tools on the overall child support website can have positive impact.

Administrative Data

As indicated in the description of the problem, the statewide child support caseload decreased by 2.1% from 2017 to 2018. To assess the impact of the Facebook advertisements on new non-assistance child support cases during the intervention period, it is important to consider the overall rates of participation and application within DCS to establish some context. DCS provided data to inform this context (Table 14).

	April 15, 2018 – March 31, 2019 (Full Baseline Period, 4 Qtrs.)	April 15, 2019 – June 30, 2019 (Intervention Period)	Change	Percentage Change
Custodial Parents (CP)	258,527	236,073	-22,454	-8.69%
Children	400,176	363,915	-36,261	-9.06%
Custodial Parents in Select Counties	158,598	138,420	-20,178	-12.72%
Children in Select Counties	248,707	216,805	-31,902	-12.83%

The number of custodial parents and children within the statewide child support system decreased in the intervention period from the 11.5-month period preceding, as did the number of custodial parents and children in the counties selected for intervention. Similarly, the number of new or re-opened non-assistance applications decreased from the baseline to the intervention period from 5,628 to 5,262, a 6% decrease (Table 15).

	Baseline Period April 15, 2018 – June 30, 2018	Intervention Period April 15, 2019 – June 30, 2019	Change from Baseline to Intervention Period	Percentage Change
Non-Assistance Cases opened	5,628	5,262	-366	-6%

DCS provided detailed administrative data for analysis on new child support applicants for the baseline and intervention periods. The data stripped personal identifiers and included information on case events, demographics of the custodial parents and children, and information on activities and orders. The data included information on new and re-opened child support applications within the eight targeted counties.

CPR’s analysis focused on non-assistance custodial parents from the 57 zip codes targeted by the Facebook intervention. The data were further filtered to remove cases where the request to open a case came from a source other than the custodial or non-custodial parent, to better isolate new cases initiated by parents from those initiated by the court or other institutional systems. During the baseline period, parents within the targeted zip codes completed 320 new or re-opened non-assistance applications. During the intervention period, parents completed 318 new or re-opened non-assistance applications, which is a slight decrease of 1% and is not statistically significant.

We compared new applicants during the baseline and intervention periods and found them similar in characteristics. While there are differences, none are statistically significant (Table 16).

Item	Baseline Period April 15, 2019 – June 30, 2018	Intervention Period April 15, 2019 – June 30, 2019	% Change
New Applications	320	318	-1%
Application Request Made by Custodial Parent	306	308	1%
Female Applicants	285	282	-1%
Male Applicants	37	39	5%
Former Assistance	39	37	-5%
Domestic Violence Indicator	40	54	35%
Mean Age	35	35	0%
Existing Case	126	114	-10%
Date of Marriage Indicated	211	221	5%
Number of Children per case	1.6	1.4	-13%
Custodial Parent Primary Language English	279	278	0%

The Facebook intervention sought to increase applications by 2% over the baseline period, which would have been an increase of 6 new applicants, but this was not achieved, as the number of new applicants decreased by 2. However, given the context and recent larger rates of declining enrollments and caseloads across the state and within the selected counties as whole, the slight decrease in new applicants within the targeted zip codes takes on different meaning. It is possible the Facebook advertisements prompt applications that might not otherwise have been made. If this were the case, the rate of decline in applications in the targeted zip codes would have been less than in other areas. Since the rate of decline in applications in the targeted zip codes was less than other areas of the state, there is potential that the Facebook advertisements played a role, but this cannot be clearly determined. Unfortunately, it is not possible to conclude what impact the Facebook advertisements had on new applications, based on the information available. Direct feedback from the new applicants could provide additional insight on whether the Facebook advertisements played a role in initiating an application.

One intended outcome of this intervention was to enhance the image of DCS as a useful service provider and the planned assessment for this outcome was a survey to individuals who saw and responded to the advertisement and/or individuals from the targeted areas who initiated an application. We sought to solicit feedback from individuals who saw the advertisement and visited the *Apply for Child Support Services* page through a Facebook remarketing advertisement launched after the intervention concluded. Remarketing refers to running advertisements targeted towards past visitors to a site, using a tracking pixel. The advertisement asked for feedback and offered a small incentive for completing a survey. Unfortunately, there were no responses. The launch of the advertisement was delayed and it is unclear if it was executed successfully. Efforts are currently underway to explore other options for utilizing DCS research and development to administer a survey to new applicants from this intervention period and other avenues to solicit direct feedback for future interventions.

Individuals who wish to initiate an application for child support complete application materials that are available for download on the *Apply for Child Support Services* page. Potential applicants can also contact DCS through two contact points to request an application by mail. We wondered if the Facebook advertisements might generate interest that led to an increase the number of telephone requests, so our evaluation of this intervention also included a review of the application request logs. DCS Central Services maintains a log of applications mailed and provided information on this activity for the baseline and intervention periods. DCS Community Relations Unit (CRU) also receives telephone requests for applications and maintains a log of calls. DCS Central Services provided data by zip code while CRU’s data was statewide (Table 17).

Table 17: Application Request Log Comparisons			
	Baseline Period April 15, 2018 – June 30, 2018	Intervention Period April 15, 2019 – June 30, 2019	Difference
Central Services Log (Targeted Zip Codes)	258	263	5
CRU Log (Statewide)	361	375	14

Both application requests logs received slightly more requests during the intervention periods than the baseline periods, but the change is not statistically significant. Given the downward trend in new child support applications overall, it is a positive sign that the number of requests for applications has remained steady with slight increases, but it is not known what role, if any, the Facebook advertisements played in the rate of application requests.

Lessons Learned

DCS' first intervention in its digital marketing project was successfully launched and was effective at prompting website visits from individuals who were new to the *Apply for Child Support Services* page of the DSHS website. The Facebook advertisements reached 182,162 unique individuals and encouraged 2,093 responses to the call-to-action click-through to the *Apply for Child Support Services* page. The two versions of the advertisements performed equally well. The Facebook-referred website visits were responsible for 44% of the overall increase in visits to the *Apply for Child Support Services* page from the baseline to the intervention period. Ninety-three percent of the Facebook-referred website visitors were new visitors to the site, suggesting the efforts to target the advertisements to areas with lower uptake of DCS services succeeded in reaching individuals new and potentially in need of child support services. Unfortunately, the Facebook-referred website visitors did not stay on the site very long or visit many pages during their initial visit.

It is not clear if the Facebook advertisements contributed to new or re-opened non-assistance child support applications. Three hundred and eighteen new or re-opened applications were initiated during the intervention period from the targeted zip code areas, which was slightly less than the 320 new or reopened applications during the baseline period. While the number of new applications did not meet the objective of a 2% increase in applications, the rate of the decline (1%) was less than what the state experienced during the same period (6%). The analysis of results did not provide a clear answer to the research question: ***What is the relationship between advertisements on Facebook and applications to child support?***

Additional information in the form of direct feedback from new applicants and individuals who responded to the advertisements could help to understand the role of the Facebook advertisements in generating new child support applications. An attempt to solicit feedback from individuals who responded to the advertisement was unsuccessful, but there are continuing efforts to explore options for soliciting direct feedback for this and future digital marketing interventions.

Next Steps

The next planned digital marketing intervention involves email marketing to parents of school-age children through the Peachjar platform, which is a school-based communications system employed by many school districts in Washington.

The results of the Facebook intervention provide useful information to apply to the next intervention, which is articulated below. In addition, the results raise questions about the engagement of newly solicited visitors with the *Apply for Child Support Services* webpage. Information gleaned from the results of the Facebook intervention includes:

1. DCS chose a marketing strategy that tested two combinations of messages and graphics as opposed to a single message with two different graphics or a single graphic with two different messages. While the latter approach may have produced information on the relative value of a specific graphic or message, the approach taken by DCS informs a more general strategy. Both Facebook advertisements generated large and comparable responses to the calls for action (clicking on the advertisement to visit the *Apply for Child Support Services* webpage), which suggests the combinations of messaging and graphic presentation were effective in prompting the desired response. Future interventions should use similar combinations of messaging and graphics, as appropriate to the medium of advertising.
2. The targeting strategy of advertising to zip codes where the uptake of child support services is relatively low appeared to be effective in reaching individuals who could benefit from services and who are new to the child support system. If this population remains the focus of future digital marketing interventions, similar targeting efforts should be applied.
3. The Facebook advertisements were effective in driving visitors to the *Apply for Child Support Services* webpage, contributing to an overall increase in visitors to the site. These results suggest that social media is effective at increasing website activity, particularly for new visitors. Seventy-seven percent of the visitors to the site from the targeted areas during the intervention period used mobile devices, reinforcing the importance of mobile-friendly website platforms.
4. Once the Facebook-referred visitors reached the *Apply for Child Support Services* webpage, their engagement with the site was considerably shorter and less interactive than the engagement of visitors referred by other sources. The short duration of Facebook-referred visitors' time on the *Apply for Child Support Services* page raises questions that should be addressed when planning future marketing efforts:
 - What factors contributed to visitors' quick departure from the site?
 - Does the *Apply for Child Support Services* page provide the information suggested by the advertisements?
 - Is the *Apply for Child Support Services* page user-friendly in terms of content and design?
 - Is there other information that would be helpful to first-time visitors who may be unfamiliar with the child support system?
5. While the desired outcome of the digital marketing project overall is to increase new and re-opened child support applications, this would be inherently more difficult to achieve within an overall trend of declining enrollments and overall child support caseloads. Proposed outcomes for the next two interventions should be adjusted to address this dynamic.

6. Based on the information available, it is not possible to determine the impact the Facebook advertisements had on new and re-opened child support applications. There were slightly fewer new cases during the intervention than the baseline period, but the rate of decline in the targeted area was much less than that experienced by the state during the same period. This might suggest the Facebook advertisements had a positive impact, but without other data such as direct feedback from the applicants, it is difficult to make this determination.
7. Efforts to solicit feedback from individuals who responded to the call-to-action in the Facebook advertisements were unsuccessful. Direct feedback from individuals who responded to the digital marketing intervention and/or applied for services is inherently challenging to solicit, but efforts to do so should be continued in future interventions, as the feedback could provide information valuable to future efforts.

The Washington State Division of Child Support's first digital marketing intervention was well executed and produced useful results that can be applied to the next two digital marketing interventions. Given the very brief nature of time spent on the site by Facebook referred visitors, DCS took steps to make its *Apply for Child Support Services* webpage more user-friendly in hopes this would increase time spent on the page. The webpage now more simply outlines the steps involved in applying for child support. In addition, the word "apply" has been replaced with the word "enroll" based on language testing results done by another state that was shared through the OCSE Learning Community of Digital Marketing projects.

The next intervention will utilize email marketing through the Peachjar platform, a communications tool used by many schools throughout the country. Service organizations can distribute flyers through Peachjar as part of regular email communications with parents in participating schools. Since the Facebook advertisements produced strong results in generating responses to the advertisement's call to action, DCS will produce three different flyers, using similar combinations of graphics and messages as in the Facebook intervention. The zip code targeting established for the first intervention will be applied to the second intervention, with some adjustments based on schools in the targeted area's Peachjar participation.

Continued efforts will be made to explore options for gathering direct feedback from new child support applicants in the targeted areas. This includes working with DCS' Research and Development department to conduct surveys or phone interviews with new applicants, based on protocol developed by the project's evaluator.

The Facebook intervention demonstrated the potential of digital marketing to solicit a call-to-action response from viewers, but the impact of this on new child support applications is not yet clear. Fortunately, two more interventions will enable DCS to gather more information on the potential and impact of digital marketing to encourage new child support applications and enhancing DCS' image as a helpful service provider.