

**Washington State Division of Child Support  
Intergovernmental Improvement Project**



*State of Washington Department of Social and Health Services,  
Economic Services Administration, Division of Child Support*

# Evaluation Report

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# **1 Background**

## **1.1 Grant Purpose**

In 2019, the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, awarded Intergovernmental Case Processing Innovation Demonstration grants to seven states and two tribal child support agencies. These grants provide funding to test innovations that will increase payments on intergovernmental cases and improve case processing procedures for parents. All grant projects must incorporate procedural justice principles, behavioral economics concepts, and enhanced communication strategies to accomplish the project objectives.

The Washington State Division of Child Support (DCS) was the recipient of one of the Intergovernmental Case Processing Innovation Demonstration grants. DCS's goals for the two-year project were to build better relationships with Mexico and Canada, address bottlenecks within international case management, and enhance the services provided to families with parents who live in these countries.

## **1.2 Problem**

DCS has over 320,000 child support cases. The intergovernmental caseload constitutes 16% of the total caseload with 10% initiating cases and 6% responding cases. In 2018, there were 619 open international cases; over half were with Canada. DCS has had very few child support cases with Mexico due to the lack of a state-level reciprocal arrangement. In fact, between January 1 and June 30, 2019, DCS closed 188 child support cases because the noncustodial parent lived in Mexico and there was no way for DCS to proceed.

International cases pose a unique challenge due to the complexity of international law and the limited frequency with which they are encountered. In Washington, Central Services does the initial review of incoming intergovernmental cases, regardless of their source, and sets up cases within the Support Enforcement Management System. Support enforcement officers (case managers) complete the case review and manage the case. Prior to the project, there was no specialization within Central Services or the field offices. Support enforcement officers often had to reach out to the Policy Unit regarding how to process a particular incoming international application. There were no individuals within the local field offices who received specialized training on processing incoming and outgoing international cases. Some staff worked for years without ever receiving an international case and did not feel comfortable processing an international application when they did receive one. Without expert guidance and training, managing these cases is inefficient. DCS applied for the grant to improve: 1) relationships with Canada and Mexico, 2) the management of international cases, and 3) the services provided to families with international child support cases in these countries.

## 2 Interventions

On September 25, 2019, OCSE awarded DSS a demonstration grant for its “Child Support Intergovernmental Case Processing Innovation Demonstration” (project). The project’s vision was to improve the processing of intergovernmental child support cases with Mexico and Canada.

DCS issued a request for proposals and conducted a public procurement process for a qualified and experienced vendor to assist in administering the project. The Center for the Support of Families (CSF), a Division of SLI Government Solutions, was awarded the contract, effective June 1, 2020. CSF subsequently merged with Public Knowledge® (PK), and PK has been the management consultant since January 2021.

During the initial three-month phase of process analysis and training, CSF provided training on intergovernmental laws and case processing with Canada and Mexico, as well as training on procedural justice and behavioral interventions. Initial steps also included critically analyzing current intergovernmental case processing procedures, identifying areas needing improvement, and conducting an envisioning session with the Project Team to agree upon recommendations to address the improvement needs.

The Washington DCS Program Manager, DCS Grant Project Director, DCS Policy and Litigation Manager, designated Central Services staff, designated international liaisons in the field offices, and the PK consultants comprised the Project Team. During the nine-month design and implementation phase, the Project Team agreed upon interventions to address the areas of needed improvement. The project’s interventions include:

- Improving international case management by designating staff in the Central Registry to review incoming cases from Mexico and Canada and by designating a group of “international liaisons” in local offices
- Increasing case processing expertise of Central Services staff and international liaisons through training, project activities, and the development of tools and desk aids
- Improving case processing with Canada by:
  - Developing contact lists for Washington and Canada
  - Establishing bilateral relationships with British Columbia, Ontario, and Alberta — the three Canadian provinces with which Washington shares the most cases
  - Holding periodic meetings between Washington and the three Canadian provinces, which include training on case processing in the jurisdictions
- Improving case processing with Mexico by:
  - Establishing bilateral relationships with selected Mexican states
  - Developing contact lists for those states

- Holding periodic meetings between Washington and those Mexican states, which include training on case processing in the jurisdictions
- Improving communication
- Analyzing policy related to international case processing
- Exploring system enhancements

More detailed information about each intervention is provided below.

## **2.1 Intervention 1: Case Management**

### **2.1.1 Goals**

The goal of this intervention was to improve the processing of international child support cases by designating staff in the Central Registry (known as Central Services in Washington) and local field offices to handle cases from Mexico and Canada.

### **2.1.2 Development**

The Central Services intergovernmental referral processing section has six staff members, including a lead worker and supervisor. Initially, two staff within Central Services agreed to handle all incoming applications from Canada and Mexico. Due to staff departures, the lead worker volunteered to be the representative of the unit for the duration of the grant. Due to the small number of incoming cases from Canada and Mexico, this smaller unit was able to sufficiently handle the process changes as a result of the interventions.

DCS also asked Support Enforcement Officers (SEOs) in the field offices to volunteer for international liaison positions. Eleven SEOs from different geographical regions volunteered and were each assigned approximately 40 cases from Canada and Mexico, in addition to their regular caseload. During the project, one of the liaisons was reassigned and their portion of the specialized caseload was divided between two other liaisons.

### **2.1.3 Description**

Beginning October 28, 2020, when Central Services received an incoming application from Canada or Mexico, it routed the application to the designated international staff person. That person reviewed the application for required forms, requested missing documents, and forwarded the case to the designated international liaison in the appropriate field office.

The Washington Division of Child Support has nine field offices across the state. As part of this project, each office initially had at least one designated international liaison.<sup>1</sup> By November 2020, DCS had assigned existing cases with Canada and Mexico to the designated international

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<sup>1</sup> This was true until January 2021 due to the reassignment of one liaison.

liaisons. The international liaisons conducted full case audits of all of these cases, a labor-intensive process that included evaluating a comprehensive list of topics such as the legal standing of the case, current enforcement actions, debt calculations, emancipation reviews, and extraordinary expenses. The international liaisons were also responsible for handling new cases with Canada and Mexico. This included both incoming and outgoing cases. The international liaisons continue to provide such services.

#### **2.1.4 Outcome Measures**

To measure improved case processing, the project collected quantitative data on the following performance measures for both initiating and responding cases with Canada and Mexico:

- Total cases
- Cases with a payment
- Average number of days from the date referred/received to receive payment
- Average number of days from the date referred/received to establish an order
- Number of cases with order date greater than create/event date
- Number of cases with current support owed
- Amount of current support owed
- Amount of current support collected
- Number of cases with arrears due
- Number of cases with payment on arrears
- Percentage of cases with arrears payment
- Amount of arrears payments
- Amount of arrears owed

Washington provided data on the specified performance measures for two years prior to the project intervention (2018 and 2019) and for January through July 2020. This data represents pre-intervention baseline data. Washington also provided data on the specified performance measures for each month of the project implementation (Aug. 2020 – June 2021).

The project also collected qualitative data by asking the designated Central Service staff and designated international liaisons to complete a survey and participate in an individual interview that included questions related to processing cases with Canada and Mexico and tools and training provided during the project.

#### **2.1.5 Research Questions**

By implementing and evaluating this intervention, the project wanted to determine if designating specialized staff within Central Services and the local field offices resulted in reduced case processing times and improved collections of current support and/or arrears. Through the surveys and interviews, the project also sought input from staff about whether



they thought the specialization resulted in greater expertise and more confident case processing.

## **2.2 Intervention 2: Project Support for International Liaisons**

### **2.2.1 Goals**

In order to increase expertise in processing cases from Canada and Mexico and to provide project support for the international liaisons, the Project Team conducted periodic DCS international liaison assistance conference calls or virtual meetings.

### **2.2.2 Development**

Beginning August 2020, the Washington DCS Grant Project Director held monthly calls with the international liaisons. The calls provided an opportunity for the liaisons to discuss case-specific issues as a group, review project resource materials, and consult with the DCS Policy Unit on intergovernmental topics.

### **2.2.3 Description**

The conference calls with the international liaisons occurred between August 2020 and July 2021. The first two calls focused on issues or questions that arose during the file reviews by the liaisons. Topics included both substantive issues, such as medical support, statute of limitations, permanent disability, and childcare, as well as case management issues such as how to flag cases in the system for certain activities. The goal of these calls was to support the international liaisons through their file reviews. As the project continued, the liaison calls also focused on issues arising in new incoming cases, identification of topics for inter-jurisdictional calls with British Columbia and Ontario, review of project resource materials, and policy consultation.

To further support the international liaisons, DCS established an expedited process for the liaisons to receive policy guidance from the Policy Unit. Prior to the project, if an SEO had a question about working an international case, the SEO would send a “ticket,” which was not prioritized and would be fielded internally within the Policy Unit. During the project, an international liaison with a policy question about a case could contact the Grant Project Director. The Director would complete an initial review of the inquiry to verify that the policy handbook had been followed and all necessary information had been provided, and then would send the inquiry directly to the Policy and Litigation Manager for a prompt response.

### **2.2.4 Outcome Measures**

To measure the effectiveness of the support for the international liaisons, the project employed surveys and interviews.

### 2.2.5 Research Questions

Survey questions asked the liaisons whether the internal liaison calls were useful. Interview questions asked the liaisons to provide one or more examples of a case they were able to work more effectively because of the project.

## 2.3 Intervention 3: Desk Aids for Processing International Cases

### 2.3.1 Goals

The State of Washington relies on two separate internal guidance documents for their case processing activities. The existing guidance provided specifically to Central Services staff on reviewing incoming international applications consists of limited content within the Central Services Intergovernmental Referral Processing Manual. The second guidance document meant for Support Enforcement Officers in field offices is located within Chapter 15: Intergovernmental and UIFSA of the DCS Policy Handbook. The chapter includes information on processing international cases but there is little distinction between the handling of a Hague Child Support Convention application, an application from a foreign reciprocating country like Canada, and an application from a country like Mexico that is neither a Convention country nor a reciprocating country. The Project Team decided to develop desk aids to assist the designated Central Services staff and international liaisons and increase their expertise in working international cases.

### 2.3.2 Development

PK worked with the Washington DCS Grant Project Director and the DCS Policy and Litigation Manager to develop a number of desk aids. Applying behavioral economic principles, they designed the resources in multiple formats to address the varying learning styles of the liaisons and to increase their comfort level in handling the international cases. DCS shared the desk aids with Central Services and the international liaisons on an internal SharePoint site.

### 2.3.3 Description

#### **Flowcharts for Washington Central Services and Field Offices**

In consultation with Washington DCS, PK developed flowcharts to depict steps Central Services should take when reviewing an incoming application from a Hague Convention country, a federal or state foreign reciprocating country, and a country like Mexico that is neither a Convention country nor a foreign reciprocating country. In addition to the flowcharts and an explanation of them, PK developed a PowerPoint that identified required documents for each type of application so that Central Services would have a checklist to assist in their review of incoming international applications.

PK also developed flowcharts to depict steps the local field offices should take when processing an incoming application from other countries. The flowcharts address steps field office staff

should take related to an application for establishment, recognition and enforcement of an order, and modification of an order.

### **Flowchart of British Columbia Processes**

In order to help the international liaisons understand what happens to a Washington outgoing application once it is received by the central authority in British Columbia, PK developed a flowchart that depicts each entity involved in processing the application and their respective responsibilities.

### **Matrix of Required Forms and Supplemental Documents for Outgoing Applications to Canada**

To assist the international liaisons in completing outgoing applications that meet Canadian requirements, PK prepared a matrix of required forms and supplemental documents for outgoing applications to Canada, similar to OCSE's intergovernmental forms matrix.

### **Directions for Outgoing Applications to Canada**

To guide the international liaisons in preparing outgoing applications to Canada, PK developed directions that identify where to send the applications, note supporting documents needed for special requests such as medical support, and summarize how Canada processes locate-only requests, as well as applications for establishment, enforcement, and modification.

### **ISO Request for Support Order Form D with Instructions**

During joint trainings with British Columbia, the Project Team learned that Canadian courts require that an application in a proceeding under the Interjurisdictional Support Order (ISO) Act include a Canadian Form D-Request for Support Order (If Respondent Does Not Provide Financial Information). Courts must have this completed form to establish a default child support order. PK provided Washington DCS with a PDF fillable version of the form along with instructions on how to complete the form.

### **Enforcement of Interest under Orders from Washington and British Columbia**

During joint trainings with British Columbia, it became clear there was confusion on both sides regarding the enforcement of interest on child support arrears under Washington orders and British Columbia orders. As a result, PK—in consultation with the Washington DCS Grant Project Director, DCS Policy and Litigation Manager, and representatives of British Columbia Family Maintenance Enforcement Program (FMEP)—prepared a document summarizing each jurisdiction's policies regarding enforcement of interest.

### **Summary of Canadian Maintenance Enforcement Program's Age of Majority Legislation and Enforcement Policies (as of April 2021)**

To help the international liaisons better understand Canadian child support laws, PK prepared a summary of Canadian legislation governing the age of majority and maintenance enforcement program enforcement policies. The information is current as of April 2021.

### **List of Available International Trainings**

After the project ends, Washington DCS intends to provide ongoing training to staff regarding international case processing. PK identified training on international case processing available through OCSE and national and regional child support organizations to assist Washington in that effort.

### **Guidance and Instructions on the Proper Way to Address and Send Mail to Canada and Mexican States**

Central Services provided initial data on returned international mail. As a result, DCS developed a technical assistance document with instructions on how to complete foreign addresses on outgoing mail. Based on additional feedback from the liaison group, DCS identified challenges with the current address screens in Washington's Support Enforcement Management System (SEMS). DCS SEMS IT staff created an instruction document detailing the correct manner of loading foreign addresses on multiple screens given the current constraints of the support management system.

#### **2.3.4 Outcome Measures**

To measure the usefulness of the desk aids, the project employed surveys and interviews.

#### **2.3.5 Research Questions**

Survey and interview questions asked the liaisons about the effectiveness of each desk aid.

### **2.4 Intervention 4: Improved Case Processing Between Canada and Washington**

#### **2.4.1 Goals**

Because 97% of Washington's cases with Canada involve the three provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario, the project focused on three activities to improve case processing:

- The development of contact lists for Washington and Canada
- Establishment of bilateral relationships with the three Canadian provinces
- As part of those relationships, periodic meetings between Washington and the three Canadian provinces including training on case processing in the jurisdictions

#### **2.4.2 Development**

A member of the PK team identified the appropriate contact person in each of the selected provinces and drafted an introductory email from the Washington IV-D Director, expressing interest in a cooperative child support relationship. The Director of the Family Maintenance Enforcement Program (FMEP) in British Columbia immediately expressed interest and encouraged the team to work with the manager and staff from the Inter-jurisdictional Support Services (IJSS) team in the Ministry of Attorney General and the IJSS team with the FMEP.

It took a bit more time to engage the province of Ontario. Unlike British Columbia, the province did not have a pre-existing working relationship with Washington. It was helpful to be able to share the foundational work completed with British Columbia with Ontario's Assistant Deputy

Minister responsible for the Family Responsibility Office (the province's maintenance enforcement program). The information gave him an idea of the types of issues that could be addressed through a cooperative relationship. It also assisted him in identifying the appropriate staff in the Ontario program for the project. Managers from three areas in the Ontario Family Responsibility Office (Welcome Centre, IJSS team, and Finance) participated in the discussions with Washington. There was no response from Alberta during the project implementation period.

In order to expedite communication between the international liaisons and the relevant Canadian child support programs, PK worked with contacts in British Columbia to develop a list of relevant contacts in the Maintenance Enforcement Program of each Canadian province and territory, providing names, email addresses, and phone numbers.

### **2.4.3 Description**

Following initial email communications between the Washington IV-D Director and her counterpart in British Columbia, there was agreement that Washington DCS would host an initial collaboration call. During this call, British Columbia caseworkers and managers from FMEP and IJSS provided an overview of the British Columbia processes. IJSS is responsible for handling incoming requests to establish an order; establishing a support order requires filing with the court. FMEP is responsible for enforcement of orders. They addressed questions from the DCS liaisons about some of the issues they had encountered in their case reviews. The calls also identified areas for additional training and the development of resources (enforcement of interest on child support arrears and identification of the age of majority for each province and territory). There were two additional calls with British Columbia. These were cross-training events in which representatives of FMEP and IJSS discussed how British Columbia processes an incoming support application from Washington, and in which representatives of DCS discussed how Washington processes an incoming support application from British Columbia. Once Ontario expressed interest in establishing a similar cooperative relationship with Washington, DCS hosted an initial collaboration call during which both jurisdictions presented information about how they process incoming support applications from the other. The call ended with identification of action items and an expressed desire to continue dialogue after the project ends.

DCS also intends to continue outreach to Alberta about their interest in establishing a collaborative relationship.

### **2.4.4 Outcome Measures**

The project employed surveys of the international liaisons, as well as interviews with the liaisons, Washington DCS Grant Project Director, and DCS Policy and Litigation Manager, to measure the effectiveness of the three activities noted above. Representatives from British Columbia FMEP and IJSS also completed written surveys.

### 2.4.5 Research Questions

Through the survey, international liaisons rated the usefulness of the contact list. Both survey and interview questions focused on whether the joint trainings with British Columbia and Ontario provided new and useful information about processing cases with Canada. They also asked liaisons to rate their current understanding of working cases with Canada compared to their understanding prior to the project, and they asked liaisons to describe whether and how the project has changed how they prepare outgoing applications to Canada.

## 2.5 Intervention 5: Improved Case Processing Between Mexico and Washington

### 2.5.1 Goals

Since there currently is no reciprocal arrangement with Mexico, either at the federal or state level, the ultimate project goal was to develop a cooperative arrangement between Washington and selected Mexican states. The project focused on three activities to accomplish that goal:

- Training on case processing in Mexico
- The identification of specific Mexican states that may be cooperative with developing a bilateral agreement or policy declaration to facilitate case processing
- The development of reciprocal arrangements with the identified Mexico states

There were two additional goals. The first was to identify child support forms that Mexico needs to process a child support case and, if necessary, to develop new bilingual forms. The second goal was to develop guides regarding service of process on noncustodial parents in Mexico, so that Washington could use long-arm jurisdiction to establish child support orders in appropriate cases, even in the absence of reciprocal arrangements.

### 2.5.2 Development

The Washington DCS Grant Project Director completed a data review of cases Washington had closed because Washington does not have a reciprocal arrangement with Mexico. In the vast majority of cases, the system did not identify the Mexican state in which the noncustodial parent resided. As a result, the Project Team identified the Mexican states of Coahuila, Baja California Sur, Nuevo Leon, and Sonora for possible reciprocal arrangements because those states border the southern United States and/or have a history of reciprocal arrangements with other U.S. states. Because of the lack of response from Baja California Sur, outreach shifted to Baja California Norte.

The PK Team consulted the Mexican Central Authority (MCA) and contacts in state delegations of the MCA to identify the agencies in the target Mexican states currently processing Mexico interstate child support applications. PK Team assistants in Mexico personally conducted

outreach efforts by telephone and email to the individual agencies identified to confirm the identity and contact information of the heads of each agency. The PK Team then personally contacted the agency heads to explain the nature of the project and the interest DCS had in exploring the possibility of celebrating informal cooperation arrangements for the direct, reciprocal processing of child support applications between DCS and their agencies. Working with DCS, the PK Team sent draft reciprocal cooperation arrangements (Convenios) for review and comment to the directors of the child support agencies in Coahuila and Nuevo Leon. By July 2021, DCS had approved final drafts that addressed data security requirements and sent them to the directors of Coahuila and Nuevo Leon.

In addition, the PK Team attempted to identify the appropriate person in the Seattle-based Consulate of Mexico to address case processing issues with Washington DCS. DCS is particularly interested in developing a resolution to payment processing issues that meets DCS automated system and data security requirements, generates payments to the appropriate payee, and delivers the payments in a secure and timely manner.

Based on his extensive prior child support work with Mexico, a member of the PK Team identified intergovernmental child support forms acceptable to Mexico and developed two new forms: a bilingual Certificate of Enforceability (of the order to be enforced or modified) and a bilingual Affidavit of Direct Payments and Possession (to preempt the potential defenses addressed by this form). The forms were sent to Coahuila for review and comment. He also developed training on service of process in Mexico under two international conventions and submitted sample forms under those Conventions with instructions on how to complete them.

### **2.5.3 Description**

Although the project was unsuccessful in completing a cooperative relationship with any of the targeted Mexican states, the project did initiate conversations with representatives in Coahuila that generated interest by Coahuila in continued discussions. It is hoped that these conversations will continue after the project ends.

With the new availability of bilingual child support applications and other forms, Washington DCS has the documents needed to initiate outgoing cases to Mexico whenever a policy decision is made to pursue such cases. The information and training provided on service of process will also help Washington DCS correctly request assistance with service of process on a non-resident obligor living in Mexico, should DCS decide to use long-arm jurisdiction. Both of these interventions will last beyond the duration of this project. The PK Team is working with the DCS Policy Unit to draft an English and Spanish summary of Washington State rules on time to respond to a child support action after service and how time is computed. The DCS liaisons will need that information for completion of Convention service forms.

In addition, PK provided two training sessions for the international liaisons that discussed how to complete outgoing forms to Mexico, the Central Authority in Mexico for receipt of applications, and the case flow once Mexico receives an application, and applicable laws. The trainings also included information about applicable international conventions for assistance with service of process should DCS decide to use long-arm jurisdiction.



## **2.5.4 Outcome Measures**

The Project employed surveys of the international liaisons, as well as interviews with the liaisons, Washington DCS Grant Project Director, and DCS Policy and Litigation Manager, to measure the effectiveness of the activities noted above.

## **2.5.5 Research Questions**

Both survey and interview questions asked whether the trainings on processing cases with Mexico provided new and useful information. They also asked liaisons to rate their current understanding of working cases with Mexico compared to their understanding prior to the project.

## **2.6 Intervention 6: Improved Communication**

### **2.6.1 Goals**

When parents live in different jurisdictions, case processing can be more complex and challenging than if both parents live in the same jurisdiction. Timely, meaningful communication between workers in both jurisdictions is critical. During the design phase of the project, DCS staff expressed a desire for better contact information with Mexico and Canada. One goal of the project was to provide the international liaisons with direct email and phone numbers for workers in Canada and Mexico, instead of a generic email contact address. Another goal was to provide a means for workers to communicate about specific cases, which meant exploring the availability of encrypted email between the Washington international liaisons and caseworkers in Canada and Mexico. The Project Team also wanted to explore the ability of Washington caseworkers to access the maintenance enforcement program websites for Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario. If the project was successful in establishing cooperative arrangements with Mexican states, the Project Team wanted to explore whether there were options for electronic communication between the liaisons and workers in those states.

### **2.6.2 Development**

PK provided Washington DCS with a list of relevant contacts in the maintenance enforcement programs of each Canadian province and territory, providing names, email addresses, and phone numbers.

As part of the project, British Columbia agreed to provide Washington DCS with access to the British Columbia FMEP portal. Access to the portal allows Washington caseworkers to view case specific information on cases shared with between the jurisdictions, as well as the ability to send a message directly to a British Columbia caseworker. Access required a login and password. FMEP staff provided a user manual and provided online training for the Washington liaisons.

In turn, with the assistance of British Columbia FMEP IT staff and DCS IT staff, British Columbia FMEP staff were able to access the Washington encrypted email system, significantly improving the ability of caseworkers in both jurisdictions to communicate about cases quickly and securely.

The project timing did not allow the team to fully explore access to Ontario's enforcement website. However, the Ontario participants committed to working with Washington to get the Ontario staff set up to use the Washington secure email system.

As the project was unsuccessful in establishing a cooperative relationship with Alberta, DCS did not change communications practices with Alberta.

### **2.6.3 Description**

The Washington international liaisons received a list of Canadian contacts in the maintenance enforcement program of each Canadian province and territory. That list was current as of April 2021. There are no plans for how to ensure the information remains current. The international liaisons have access to the British Columbia portal and can now communicate through the secure email system with British Columbia caseworkers. This access will continue after the project ends.

### **2.6.4 Outcome Measures**

To measure the effectiveness of the communication interventions, the project employed surveys and interviews.

### **2.6.5 Research Questions**

Survey questions asked the international liaisons about the helpfulness of the contact information for Canadian provinces and territories. There were also a series of questions about their awareness of the British Columbia FMEP website, use of the website during the project, and effectiveness of the website in improving the ability to manage cases. In addition, PK asked the liaisons to rate their ability to communicate with Canadian enforcement workers and to obtain information about a case with Canada using electronic means.

## **2.7 Intervention 7: Analysis of Policy Related to International Case Processing**

### **2.7.1 Goals**

Although Washington DCS has an intergovernmental manual for Central Services staff as well as an intergovernmental chapter in its handbook for field offices, there is not detailed guidance on international case processing. Another project intervention was for PK to review the manuals and provide recommendations for additional clarity and more uniform case processing.

### **2.7.2 Development**

Two members of the PK team with interstate and international expertise reviewed the Central Services intergovernmental manual and intergovernmental chapter of the guide for field offices. With a focus on international case processing, they identified gaps in the policy, recommended clarifications, and provided updated links to federal policy guidance from the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement.

### **2.7.3 Description**

PK recommended revisions to the Central Services and field office manuals in order to provide greater clarity regarding the review and processing of applications from Convention countries, foreign reciprocating countries, and countries such as Mexico that are neither Convention countries nor foreign reciprocating countries. PK reviewed the recommendations with the DCS Grant Project Director and DCS Policy and Litigation Manager. The Policy and Litigation Manager is using the PK recommendations as reference as he updates the DCS Handbook for field staff. Central Services has already incorporated the recommendations of PK for their referral-processing manual.

### **2.7.4 Outcome Measures**

The project interviewed the DCS Grant Project Director and DCS Policy and Litigation Manager about the utility of PK's review of, and comments to, the Central Services and field office manuals.

### **2.7.5 Research Questions**

The interview questions were designed to measure the usefulness of PK's review and comments, and whether the recommendations resulted or will result in any changes to the content of the manuals.

## **2.8 Intervention 8: System Enhancements**

### **2.8.1 Goals**

Recognizing that system enhancements of the current SEMS system can be a lengthy process and may not be an option during this project due to factors beyond the scope or control of the Project Team, there were a few items identified during Phase 1 of the project that would be helpful for the international liaisons as they process and work international cases.

The goal of this intervention was to identify needed revisions to the SEMS system if system enhancements were considered during the project term.

## 2.8.2 Development

During the assessment and envisioning sessions of Phase 1, the Project Team identified revisions to the SEMS system that would improve international case processing.

## 2.8.3 Description

The Project Team identified the following helpful system enhancements:

- System-generated alerts for international cases set according to the timeframes applicable to international cases
- System-generated alerts to reconcile balances and update currency conversion on a periodic basis such as annually or semi-annually
- The generation of a flag that would identify mail requiring additional postage for international mailing
- Sufficient fields that would provide the ability to enter a foreign address correctly on SEMS
- An indicator on international cases that identifies the other country as an FRC, Hague Convention country, or a country that is neither. This would help to ensure cases are worked correctly according to the process for each type of foreign country.

Based on the extremely small population of cases that these enhancements would affect, these enhancements are lower in priority for implementation than other needed system enhancements.

## 2.8.4 Outcome Measures

Although explored, system enhancements were not possible during the life of the project. Therefore, the project did not evaluate this intervention.

## 2.8.5 Research Questions

Because there were no system enhancements, the project did not evaluate this intervention.

# 3 Results and Analysis

## 3.1 Overall Project

The goals of this project were to achieve the following four outcomes on international cases with Mexico and Canada:

- Increase the number of international child support cases
- Increase the average amount of child support collected
- Reduce the average time to establish a child support order

- Reduce the average time to receive a payment

To measure progress towards the four goals, the project analyzed data using standard statistical methods under a pre-test/post-test research design. A randomization of the international caseload with Mexico and Canada was not possible due to the extremely small caseload size, the nature of Washington's relationship with Mexico and/or its individual states, the differences in policies and laws among the Mexican states and Canadian territories, and the goal of this project to build the capacity and expertise of the international liaisons by handling all the cases with Mexico and Canada and not just half. Because of the small international caseload, it was not practical to apply the interventions to a sample of the international caseload. The Project Team applied all interventions to all cases with Canada and Mexico.

Washington DCS provided pre-intervention data from SEMS files for the period from January 2018 to July 2020. The baseline data includes 2018 and 2019 because those years are pre-pandemic. For each month during that time period, DCS provided the data elements listed in Table 1 for initiating and responding cases with Canada and for initiating and responding cases with Mexico:

**Table 1. Data Elements**

<b>Data Elements</b>
<b>Initiating Cases</b>
a. Total Cases
b. Cases with a Payment
c. Average Number of Days from the Date Referred/Received to Receive Payment
d. Average Number of Days from the Date Referred/Received to Establish an Order
e. Number of Cases with Order Date Greater than Create/Event Date
f. Number of Cases with Current Support Owed
g. Amount of Current Support Owed
h. Amount of Current Support Collected
i. Number of Cases with Arrears Due
j. Number of Cases with Payment on Arrears
k. Percentage of Cases with Arrears Payment
l. Amount of Arrears Payments
m. Amount of Arrears Owed
<b>Responding Cases</b>
a. Total Cases
b. Cases with a Payment
c. Average Number of Days from the Date Referred/Received to Receive Payment
d. Average Number of Days from the Date Referred/Received to Establish an Order
e. Number of Cases with Order Date Greater than Create/Event Date
f. Number of Cases with Current Support Owed

Data Elements
g. Amount of Current Support Owed
h. Amount of Current Support Collected
i. Number of Cases with Arrears Due
j. Number of Cases with Payment on Arrears
k. Percentage of Cases with Arrears Payment
l. Amount of Arrears Payments
m. Amount of Arrears Owed

PK compared the baseline data with similar data submitted monthly during the project implementation period from August 2020 through June 2021. Based on that review, the measures were consistent pre- and post-intervention as demonstrated in Figures 1 through 7. Project interventions did not impact the four quantitative performance measures. Data on caseload counts, current collections, and average days to establish an order or receive payment illustrate that lack of impact, either positive or negative.

Figures 1 and 2 depict the baseline and project data on the total number of cases with Canada and Mexico. For most of the baseline period, there was a steady decline in cases with Canada. During the project period Washington data does not show an increase in cases with Canada, which was a performance goal. However, the case count has held steady, and the responding cases are beginning to increase in number. With regard to Mexico, the case count fluctuated during the baseline period. During the project period, the cases have held relatively steady and at a level slightly higher than most of 2019. Figure 2 only depicts responding cases with Mexico. Washington has no initiating cases with Mexico due to the lack of a state reciprocal child support arrangement.

Figure 1. Canada Case Counts

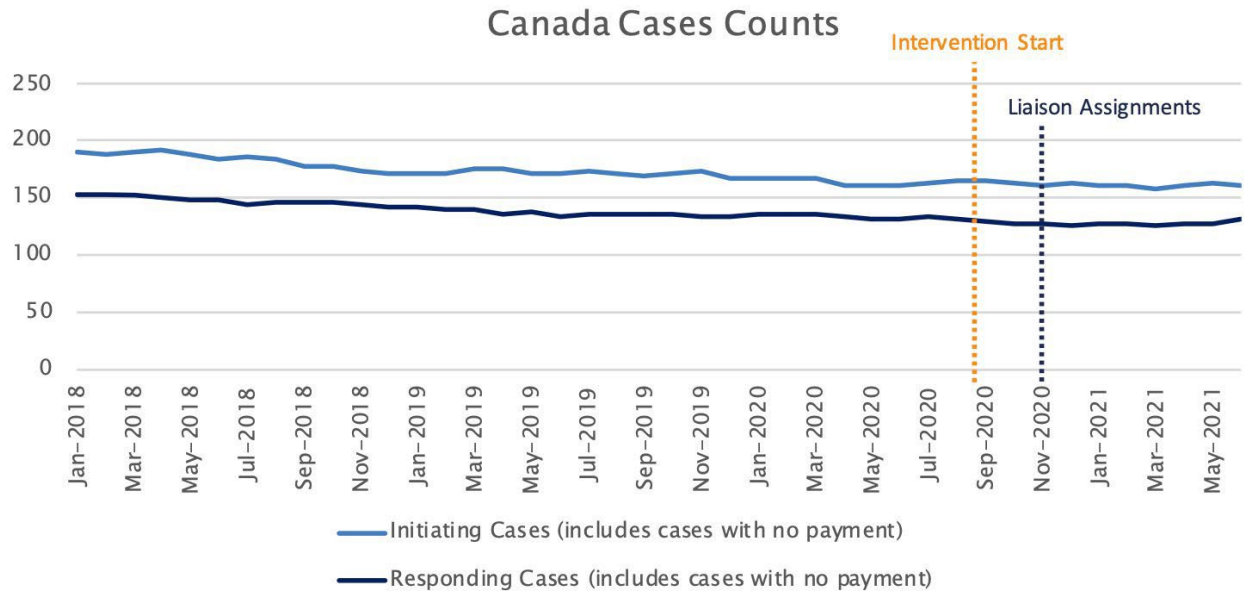


Figure 2. Mexico Case Counts

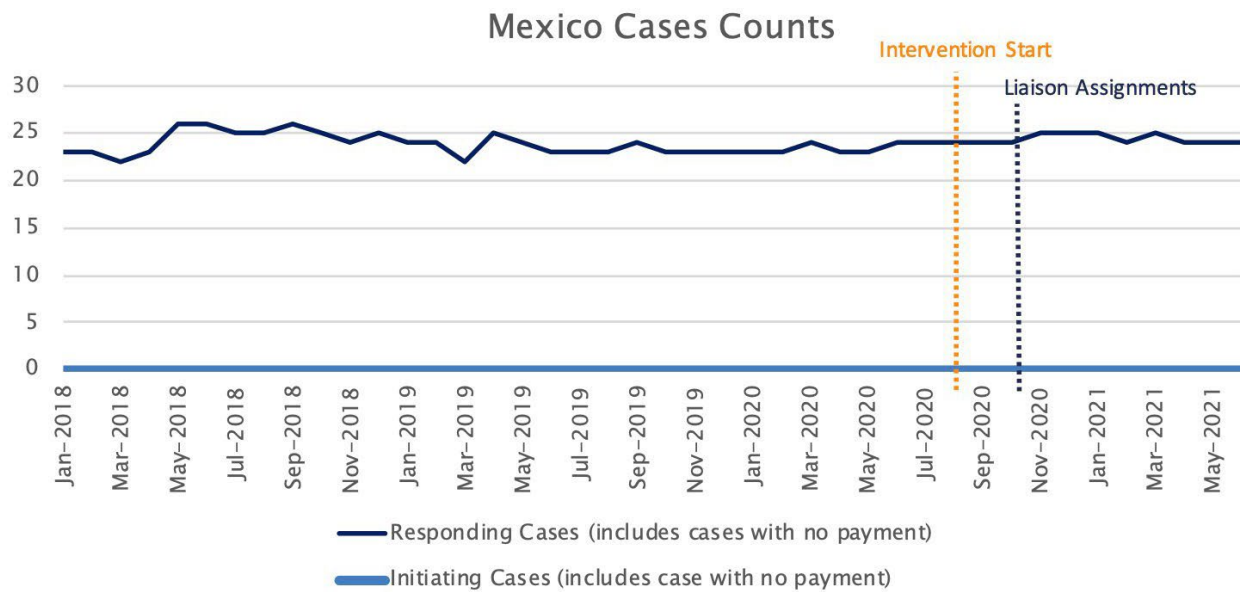
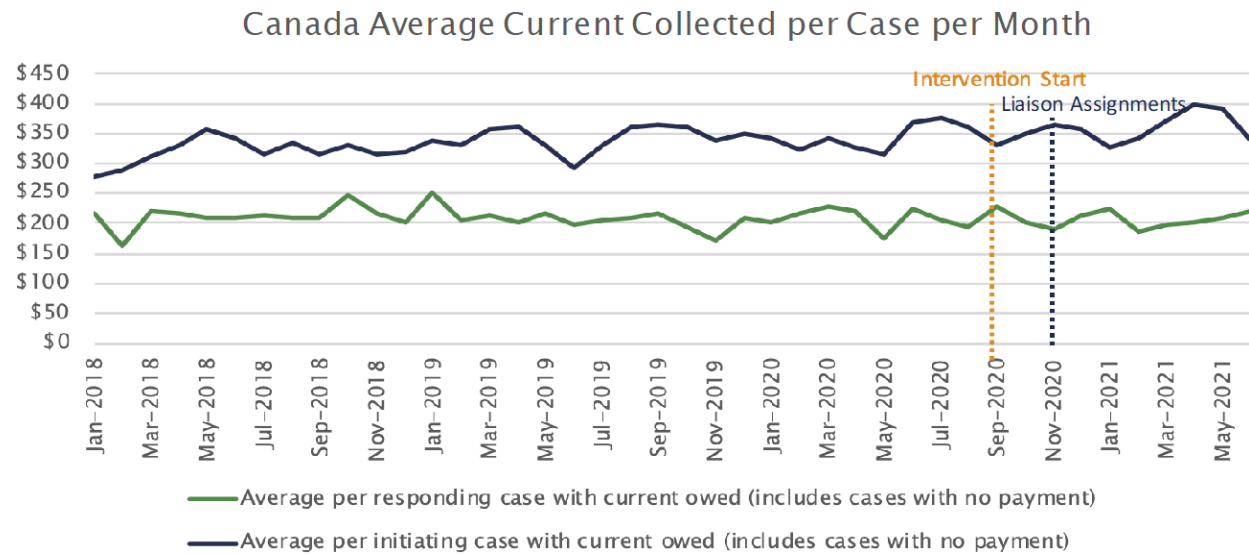
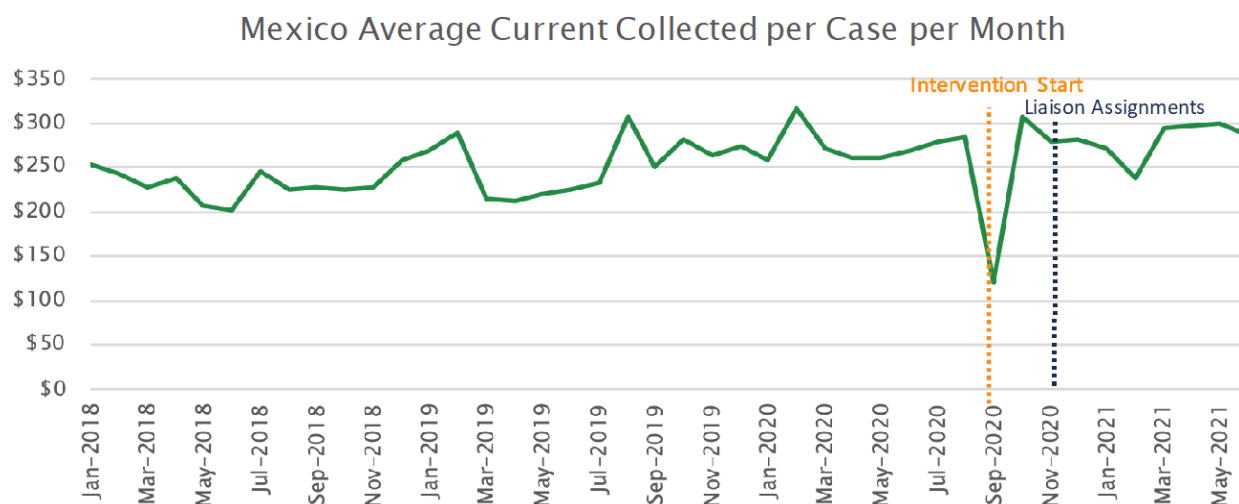


Figure 3 depicts the baseline and project data related to the average current support collected per case per month for initiating and responding cases with Canada. The fluctuation in collections during the pre-implementation period continued during the project implementation period. When Washington was the initiating state, there was a steady increase in the average current collection per case from January through April 2021. However, beginning in April, the average current collection per case began a steady decline. Initiating cases are those worked by the Canadian child support program so the cause for the fluctuation is not known. When Washington was processing cases as the responding jurisdiction, the average collection of current support per case fluctuated during project implementation. During the last four months of project implementation from March through June 2021, there is a slight increase in the average current collection per case.

Figure 4 depicts the baseline and project data related to the average current support collected per case per month for responding cases with Mexico. It only depicts responding cases because Washington has no initiating cases with Mexico. The striking decline in the average current support collected per case in September 2020 was largely due to one responding case with Mexico where collected support was reversed off the case and applied to another case. The liaisons received assigned caseloads in November 2020. From that point forward the fluctuation in the average current support collected per month was similar to the fluctuations in the preceding year. As noted in Figure 3 in relation to responding cases with Canada, there is a similar consistent improvement in average current collections in responding cases with Mexico during March through June 2021. However, overall, the project did not achieve the goal of improving the average current support collected per case with Canada or Mexico during the project implementation period compared to the baseline years.



**Figure 3. Canada All Cases: Average Current Support Collected Per Case per Month****Figure 4. Mexico Responding Cases: Average Current Support Collected Per Case per Month**

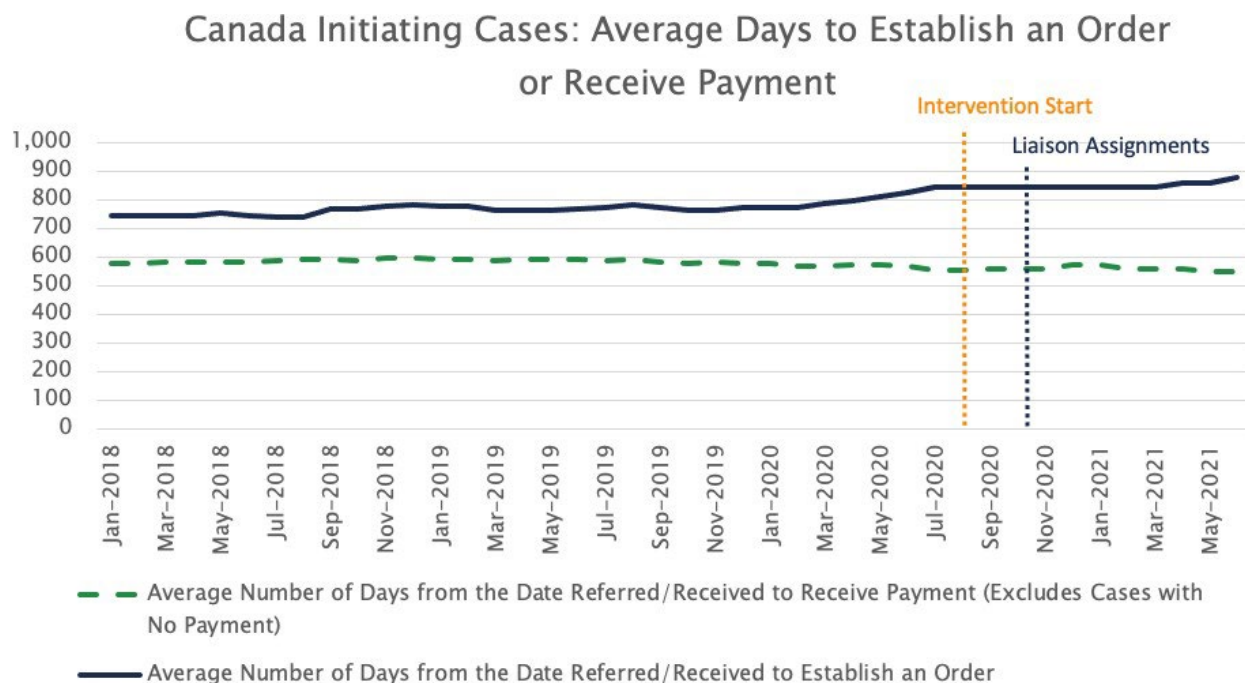
One of the main factors contributing to the interventions' lack of impact on the four quantitative performance measures is the short implementation period of the project. It is unknown whether the slight increase in responding cases with Canada and Mexico, noticed from March through June 2021, will continue. It is also unknown whether the trend toward improved collection of current support noted in the last four months of implementation would continue if the project was extended. The other main factor is the small number of new cases during the project period. Because of the small caseload with Canada and Mexico, where there was a change in a particular month, it was usually attributable to one case. For example, as

depicted in Figure 4, the sharp decline in the average current support collected per case with Mexico in September 2020 was largely due to one responding case with Mexico where collected support was reversed off the case.

The data also reflect only responding cases with Mexico. That is because Washington was not able to establish a cooperative arrangement with Mexico during the project implementation period. Without such an arrangement, Washington's policy is to not to initiate an intergovernmental case with Mexico; Washington will close the case unless there is an avenue for proceeding domestically with a long-arm action.

Figures 5 through 7 depict the average days to establish an order and to receive a payment in cases with Canada and Mexico. Figure 5 reflects the average days to establish an order or receive payments in cases that Washington initiated with Canada. It therefore reflects case processing time in Canada. During the project period, there was a slight increase in the time it took for Canada to establish a support order. This was during COVID, when court hearings were delayed in Canada. However, the project was not able to identify the extent to which COVID may have caused the increase in establishment time frames. The average time to receive a support payment from Canada slightly improved during the project implementation.

**Figure 5. Canada Initiating Cases: Average Days to Establish an Order or Receive Payment**



In responding cases, where Washington was processing the case, Figure 6 shows that the average number of days to establish an order had begun to decrease in March 2020, prior to project implementation. From November 2020, when the liaisons received their assigned cases,

through June 2021, the time frame for establishing an order remained relatively constant. The average number of days to receive payment also held constant; there was no change from pre-implementation to post-implementation.

**Figure 6. Canada Responding Cases: Average Days to Establish an Order or Receive Payment**

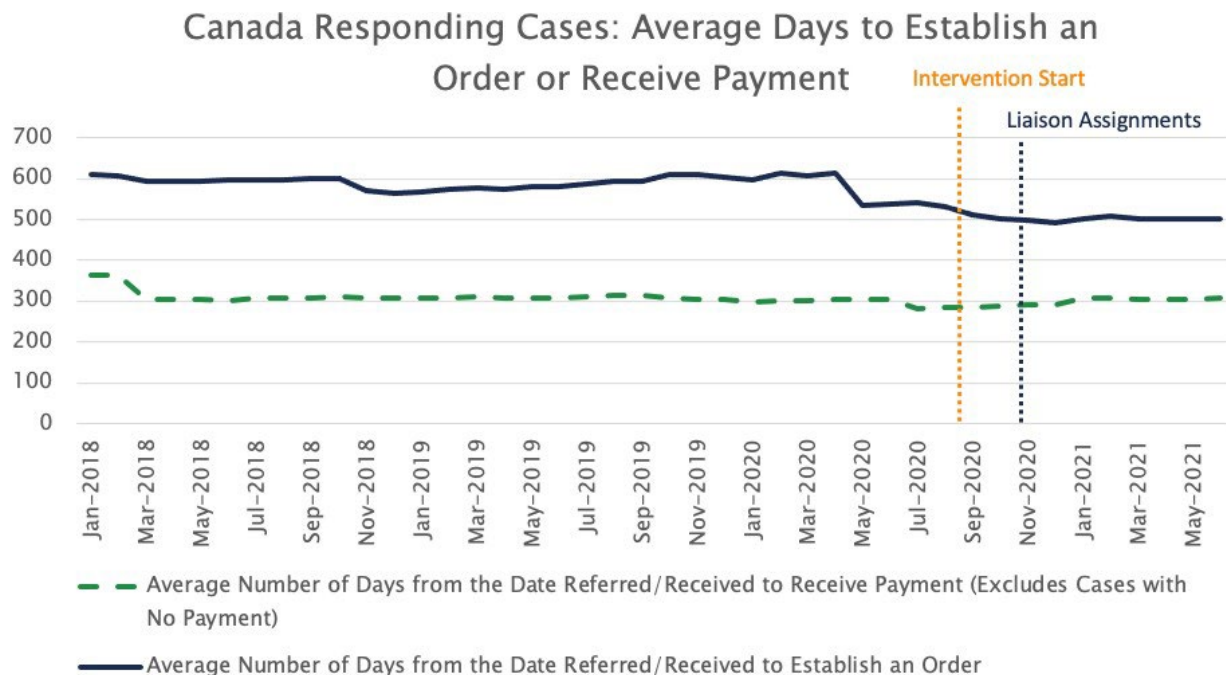
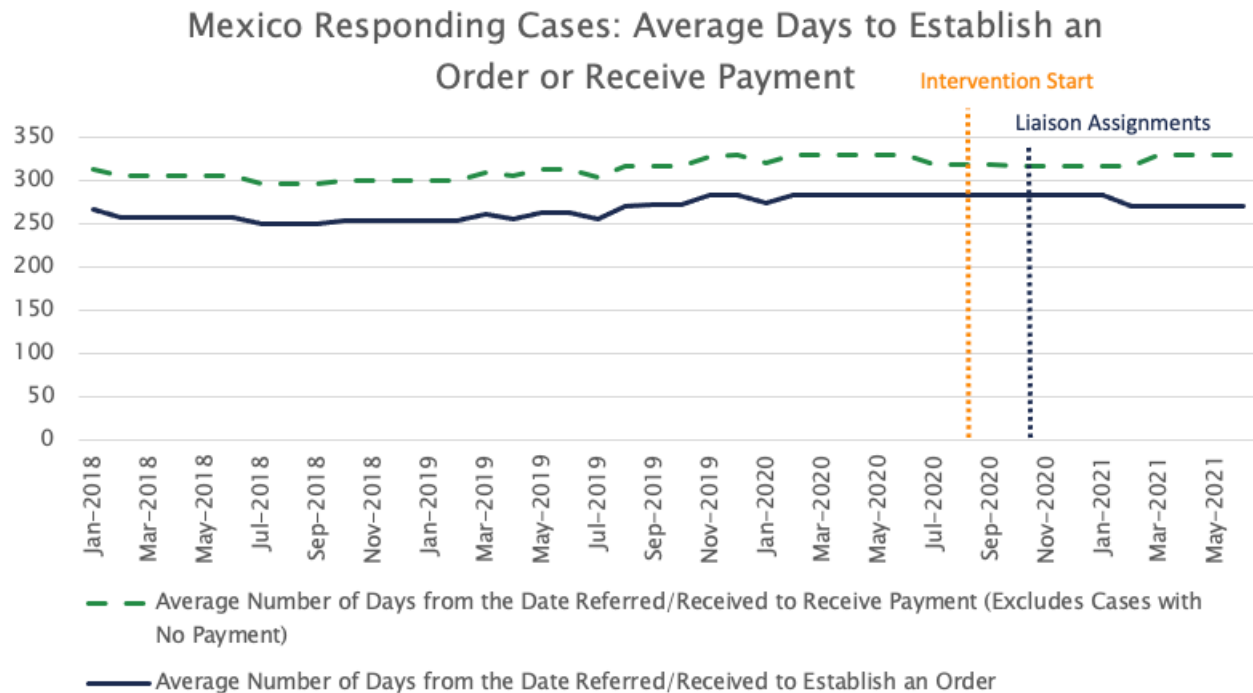


Figure 7 focuses on time frames when Washington was the responding state on cases initiated by Mexico. There is no figure related to initiating cases with Mexico. In the absence of a cooperative arrangement, Washington did not initiate any cases to Mexico during the project period. Although the average time frame for establishing an order slightly decreased from the implementation date over the course of the project, the increase was not an improvement over the time frame from June 2018 to June 2019 – the year prior to the project initiation. The average time frame for receipt of a payment held steady during the first six months of project implementation. Data shows that the average number of days from the date the referral was received to when payment was received was 319 in August and September 2020 and then consistently 317 days after that. In March 2021, the average number of days jumped to 330. This is another example of how one case can have a dramatic impact on the measures. Upon investigation, it was discovered that the large increase in time frames was due to the addition of one new order. The father's name was not listed on the Mexican birth certificate. Therefore, Washington referred the case for genetic testing. Due to the COVID-19 situation in Mexico, it took approximately 10 months from the time the case was set up to the time the custodial parent and child were able to provide samples to Washington. Once that case was added, the average time increased based on the amount of time from case creation to order entry.

**Figure 7. Mexico Responding Cases: Average Days to Establish an Order or Receive Payment**

Because Washington State establishes and enforces the majority of child support orders through an administrative process, Project managers stated that the closure of courts due to COVID-19 did not have a major impact on case processing in Washington. It is not known to what extent the pandemic may have impacted case processing in Canada. However, COVID-19 had a major impact on Washington's ability to establish a reciprocal cooperative arrangement with Mexican States. Such arrangements are usually predicated on relationships developed over time through in-person meetings. The pandemic negatively impacted the ability of the Project Team to travel to selected Mexican States and meet with governmental representatives, since the government offices were closed and representatives were working from home. Although the project coordinated a virtual meeting with representatives of Coahuila who expressed an interest in exploring a cooperative relationship, formalization of that arrangement did not occur during the life of the project.

In addition to improvement in quantitative outcome measures, Washington DCS had qualitative project goals. These goals included improvement in management of international cases with Canada and Mexico, increased staff confidence in the handling of these cases, improved relationships with Canadian provinces and Mexican States, better communication with Canada and Mexico, and more comprehensive written policies and procedures governing international child support cases. To measure the success of the project in meeting these goals, the project employed surveys and interviews.

PK used Survey Monkey to administer surveys about the project interventions. There was a 100% response rate from the 10 international liaisons who worked cases throughout the project, however some survey participants did not respond to every question in the survey. The Central Services staff person also completed the survey. This person provided assistance in international case processing but did not carry an international caseload, so their experiences may have differed from those who had the full intervention experience. Representatives of British Columbia also agreed to complete a series of questions about project activities between their staff and Washington DCS. Seven representatives completed the survey designed for British Columbia. In addition, the Washington DCS Grant Project Director and the Policy and Litigation Manager completed a survey with questions directed to management. The responses to the surveys were confidential; there was no way to associate a response with a respondent.

PK also conducted individual interviews with each of the 11 DCS international liaisons who worked cases during the project,<sup>2</sup> the one designated Central Services staff, the DCS Grant Project Director, and the DCS Policy and Litigation Manager. These interviews focused on a set of questions that allowed for more expansive responses about the project. Each interview lasted 15 to 30 minutes. PK recorded the interviews for the sole purpose of preparing a summary of the interview findings.

As discussed below, based on responses to the survey and interview questions, the project was extremely successful in meeting all of the additional project goals with the exception of those related to a relationship with Mexico.

## **3.2 Intervention 1: Case Management**

The results of the surveys and interviews indicate that designating specialized staff within Central Services and the local field offices led to greater expertise and more confident international case processing.

### **3.2.1 Survey Results**

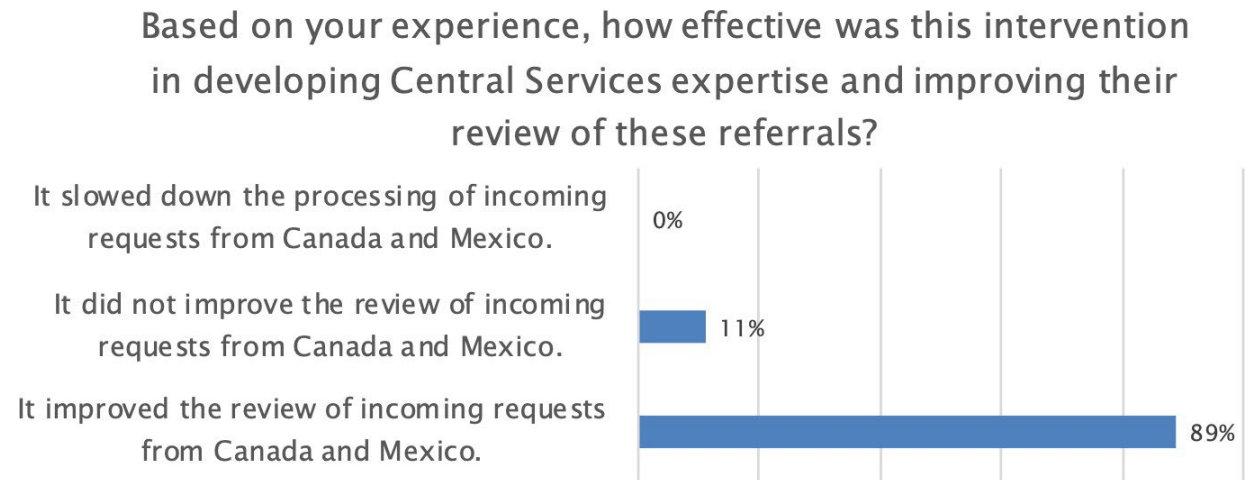
In response to a survey question about the effectiveness of designating someone within Central Services to review all incoming cases from Canada and Washington, eight of nine respondents thought the designation improved case reviews. See Figure 8.

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<sup>2</sup> One of the initial 11 liaisons accepted a different assignment during the project. That person did not complete the survey but did participate in the project interviews.

**Figure 8. Central Services Intervention Effectiveness**

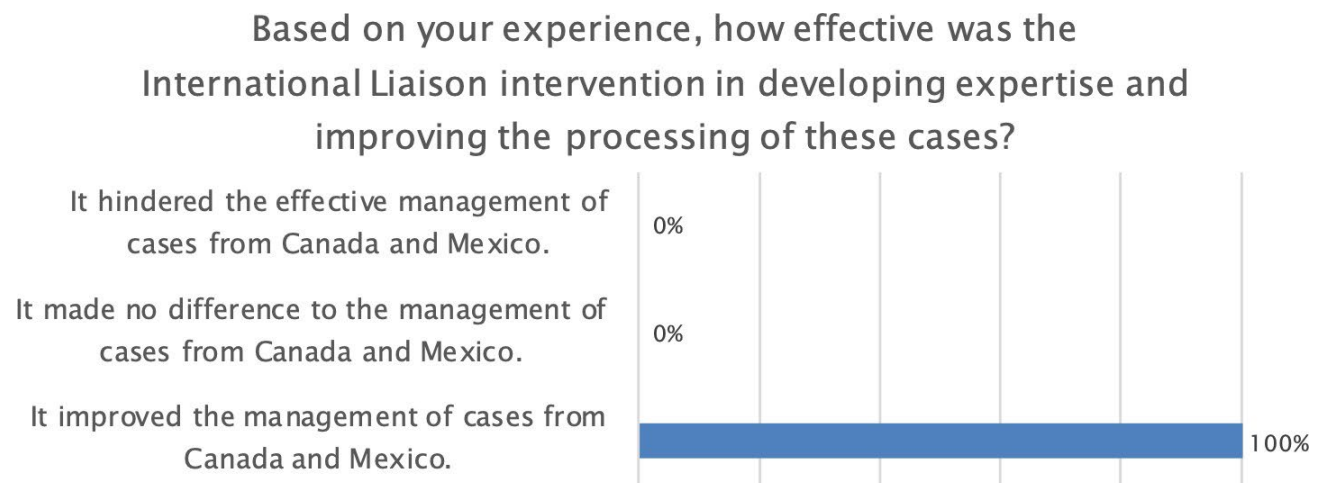
Note: There were 9 DCS responses to this survey question.



In response to a survey question asking about the effectiveness of designating international liaisons, 100% of the 11 respondents said it had improved their management of cases from Canada and Mexico. See Figure 9.

**Figure 9. International Liaison Intervention Effectiveness**

Note: There were 11 DCS responses to this survey question.



### 3.2.2 Interview Responses

During the interviews, PK asked the liaisons what they perceived as the biggest challenges before the project in processing cases with Canada and Mexico. Many of them noted they had

had very little, if any, prior experience processing cases with Canada and Mexico. They identified communication issues and lack of understanding of the processes involved in an international case as their biggest challenges. The liaisons unanimously agreed that there was considerable improvement in both areas as a result of the project interventions. They expressed a marked increase in confidence in handling cases with Canada and improved knowledge about Mexico. Because Washington does not yet have agreements with any Mexican States, they do not yet feel as confident in handling cases with Mexico.

All the interviewees—the one designated Central Services staff, the 11 international liaisons, and the two DCS project managers—felt the designation of specialized staff in the field offices and in Central Services had been valuable. The Central Services staff reported that designating staff in both Central Services and the field offices to handle incoming international cases made it easier to manage cases. Prior to the project, the biggest challenges to the Central Services review and processing of incoming cases from Canada was knowing what information was needed for specific types of cases and where the cases needed to go. With the designated staff, the process was more streamlined. Central Services knows whom to contact within the field offices if they receive a question about case status.

All but one of the international liaisons also supported continued specialization. During their intensive review of cases at the beginning of the project, the liaisons discovered many errors in the case files. The most common errors were related to currency conversion and service of the correct documents. The liaisons cited the lack of training and specific information most SEOs have received on international case processing as the probable reason for these errors. Because of the specialized training the international liaisons received during the project, they were able to identify the errors and correct them. For example, a liaison discovered that a case had been entered on the Washington system in Canadian dollars, not U.S. dollars, and the liaison was able to use the information learned during the project to set up the case correctly. Because of the labor-intensive process of the case audits, many of the international liaisons expressed concern that errors would continue to happen if Canadian and Mexican cases were again dispersed across all Washington caseworkers.

In the opinion of interviewees, having designated liaisons resulted in increased understanding of the processes involved, improved communication, and better customer service to custodial and noncustodial parents and to the other agencies involved in the cases. One liaison noted that Washington does not have many international cases. If cases are dispersed statewide, processing is not going to be standard, as demonstrated by the case audits. This liaison felt that specialization would result in greater standardization in case processing as well as the ability to provide a contact point for caseworkers in other jurisdictions. Another liaison expressed preference for a specialized team over designated individuals in order to ensure knowledge is not dependent on one person, who may get reassigned or leave.

A small number of the liaisons stated they believed that all SEOs should be able to handle these international cases if they had the appropriate tools, resources, and training. However, they expressed concern about the agency's ability to provide the level of training to all SEOs that this project had provided to the international liaisons.

The one liaison who did not support specialization still thought Washington should have subject matter experts in each field office. That liaison's concern about specialization was related to potential union concerns.

Project management also supported the continuation of designated international liaisons, either in each field office or in a specialized team.

### 3.3 Intervention 2: Project Support for International Liaisons

Based on the responses to the survey and evaluation questions, the international liaisons found the internal liaison calls very supportive and informative.

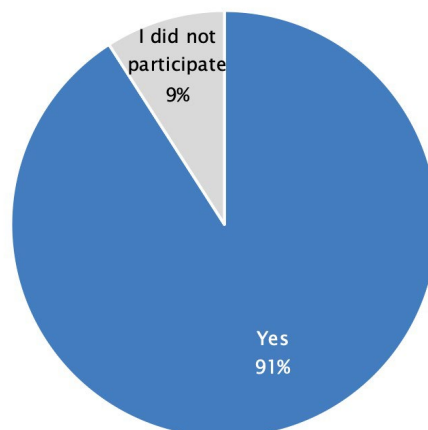
#### 3.3.1 Survey Results

As noted in Figure 10, all the survey respondents who participated in the liaison calls found them useful.

**Figure 10. Usefulness of Internal Liaison Calls**

Note: There were 11 DCS responses to this survey question.

Did you find the internal liaison calls useful?



#### 3.3.2 Interview Responses

During the interviews, the liaisons expanded on why they found the monthly liaison calls so helpful. They provided an opportunity to talk about issues the liaisons were encountering in cases and to share potential solutions. They were also a forum to learn more about project activities and to review desk aids and other resources that were developed during the project. One liaison reported having never been in a workgroup where everyone was on the same page; they were all moving in the same direction, focused on the long-term goal, and there was no strife. Several liaisons expressed appreciation for the expedited process to receive policy guidance. It was helpful having a direct point of contact for hard questions rather than waiting



for a response to an email sent to the Policy Unit's general address. Receiving a response quickly allowed them to provide better customer service. All felt their level of understanding of the processes in both Canada and Mexico had increased substantially.

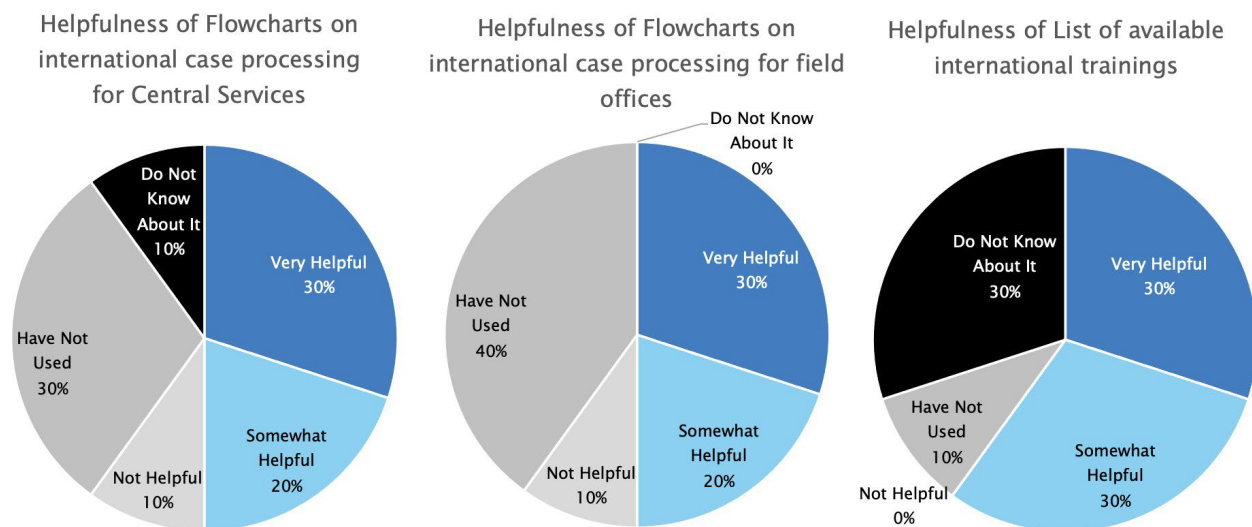
### 3.4 Intervention 3: Desk Aids for Processing International Cases

The survey asked questions about the helpfulness of flowcharts developed for Central Services and the field offices, the list of available international trainings, and resources developed for working cases with Canada and Mexico. Results are in Figures 11, 12, and 13. Interview questions provided an opportunity for respondents to provide more extensive comments.

#### 3.4.1 Survey Results

**Figure 11. Helpfulness of Flowcharts and Training List**

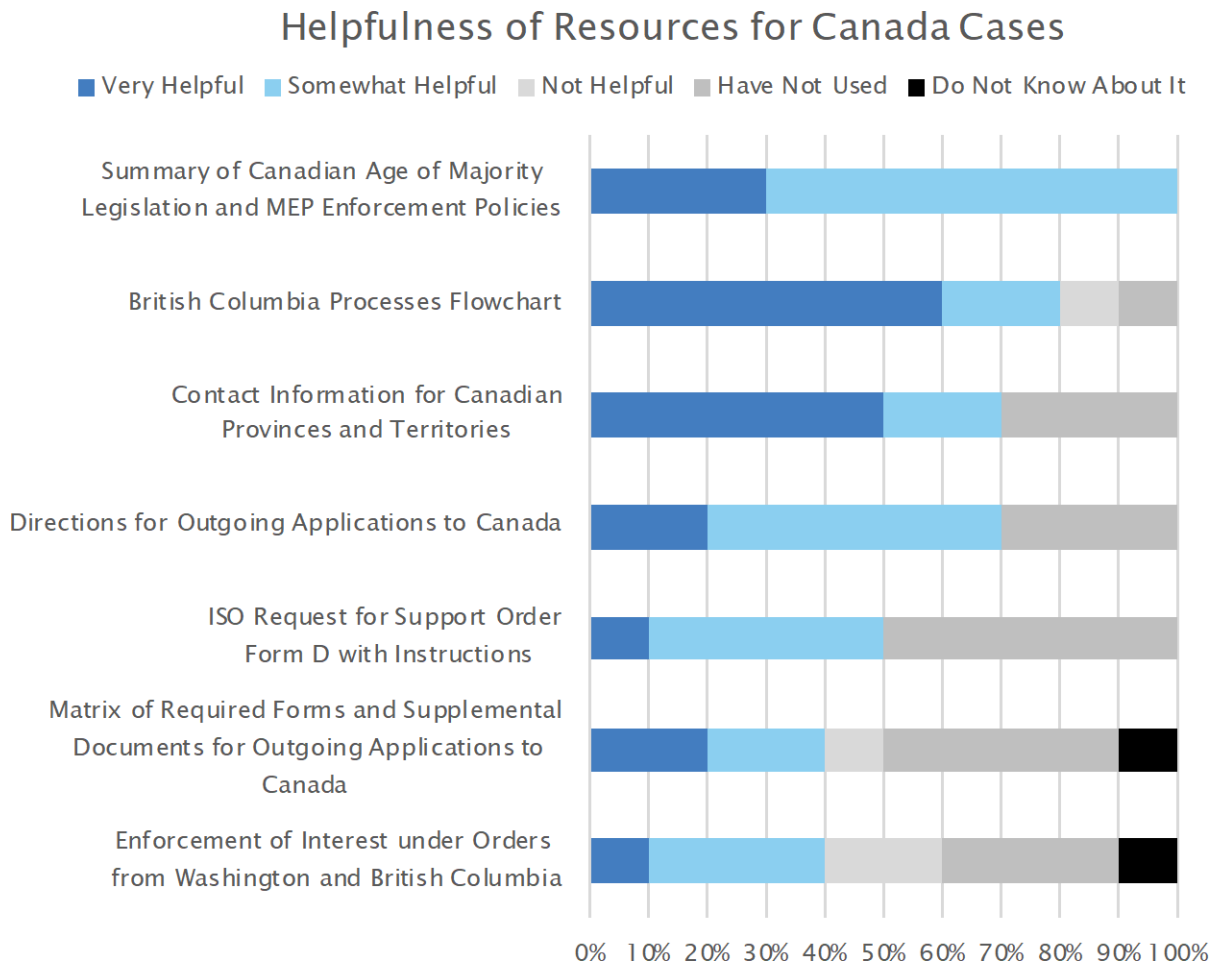
Note: There were 10 DCS responses to this survey question.



Based on the survey results depicted in Figure 11, at least one-third of the respondents had not used the case processing flowcharts. One person was aware of them but did not find them helpful. The flowcharts were designed to document case processing, so would be most helpful should an issue arise regarding next steps. The majority of respondents found the flowcharts very or somewhat helpful. Three of the 10 respondents were not aware of the list of available international trainings. Washington may want to highlight the list again, since this is training workers can take at any time. Sixty percent of respondents found the list very or somewhat helpful.

**Figure 12. Helpfulness of Resources for Canada Cases**

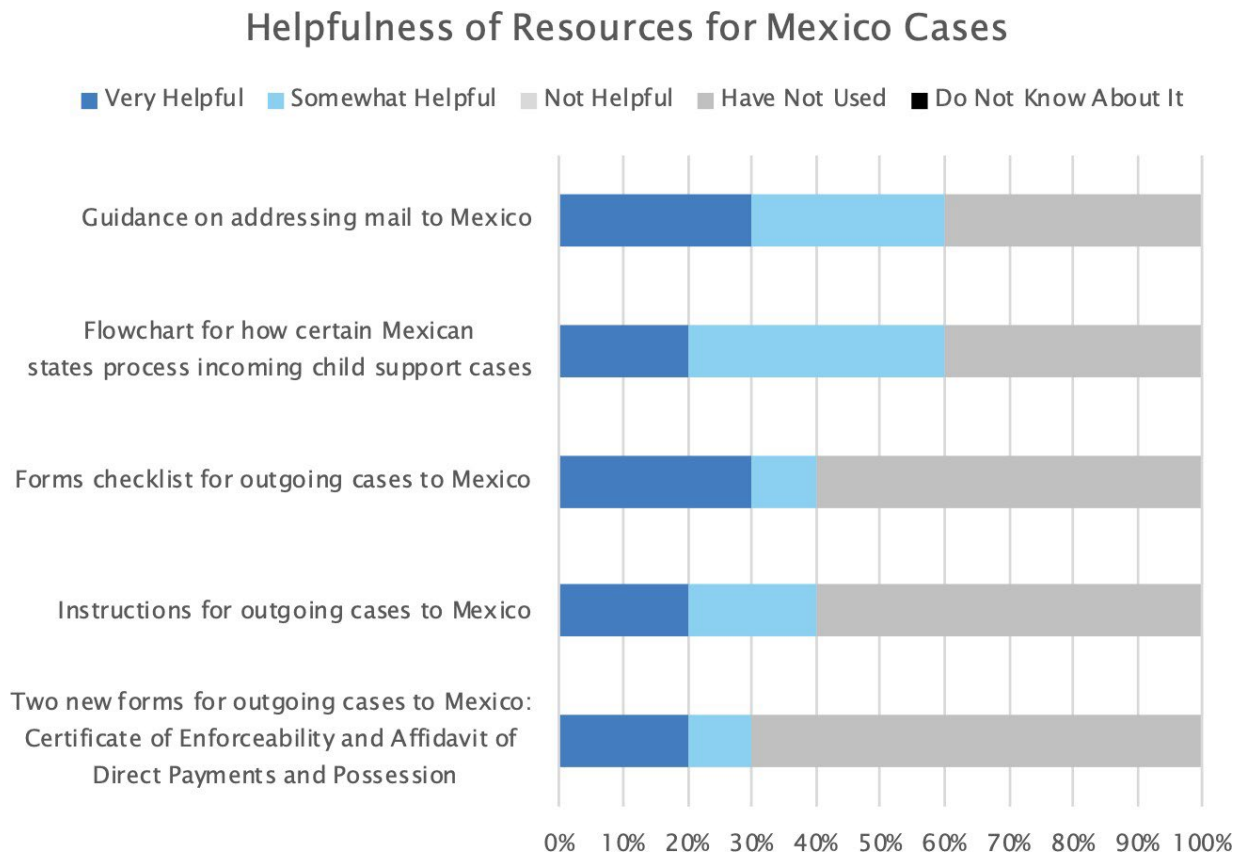
Note: There were 10 DCS responses to this survey question.



As depicted in Figure 12, the desk aid that the international liaisons identified in the survey as most helpful was the summary of Canadian legislation regarding the age of majority as well as the summary of enforcement policies. Eighty percent of the international liaisons also found the flowchart related to British Columbia case processing very or somewhat helpful. Fifty percent of respondents did not find the instructions for the ISO Request for Support Order Form D helpful. Because there were no follow up questions on the survey, it is unknown whether that was because the instructions were unclear, those respondents were comfortable completing the form without additional help, or those respondents had not submitted an establishment case to Canada that would have required use of the form.

**Figure 13. Helpfulness of Resources for Mexico Cases**

Note: There were 10 DCS responses to this survey question.



As depicted in Figure 13, the international liaisons found the guidance on addressing mail to Mexico and the flowchart on case processing with Mexico the most useful resources. The majority of survey respondents indicated they had not used the forms checklist for outgoing cases, the new forms for outgoing cases, and the instructions for outgoing cases to Mexico. That is understandable since Washington State did not initiate any cases to Mexico during the project.

### 3.4.2 Interview Responses

During the interviews, in response to a general question about the usefulness of the desk aids developed by PK, all 14 interviewees stated the desk aids that PK had developed were helpful. When asked which desk aids were most useful, they singled out the flowchart about how British Columbia processes an incoming application from Washington and the forms matrix for outgoing cases to Canada as particularly helpful. This slightly differs from the survey results, which had indicated the flowchart and the summary of legislation and enforcement policies as most useful. The interviewees also appreciated having tools available in varying formats. Depending on their own learning styles, some preferred the flowcharts and forms matrix, while

others preferred the step-by-step instructions on how to initiate a case to Canada. A number of interviewees said that having the written materials and other resources available in one place was extremely useful; they observed that instructions about international case processing in the current DCS Policy Handbook were “all over the place.” Comments like “it is great to know what will happen next, what to expect, and to whom to direct questions” were heard many times during the interviews.

The results also indicate that the most useful desk aids were those that could be immediately used in case processing. For that reason, interviewees did not view the desk aids developed for case processing with Mexico as helpful as ones developed for case processing with Canada. A number of interviewees said the forms matrix for outgoing cases to Mexico, instructions for outgoing applications to Mexico, and flowcharts about how a Mexican state processes an incoming application from Washington were informative. However, one interviewee noted, “it was a lot of information without cases to apply it to. The SEO’s job is very hands on, and they learn by doing, more so than by reading.” The interviewees said they learned a great deal but wish they would have had at least sample cases to work. Unlike the Canada desk aids and training, which could be applied immediately, understanding the information about Mexico was more difficult.

### **3.5 Intervention 4: Improved Case Processing Between Canada and Washington**

The project was successful in establishing a reciprocal cooperative arrangement with British Columbia that resulted in joint trainings, improved communication about cases, and relationship building. Because of the practical success of that arrangement, Ontario expressed interest in exploring a relationship with Washington DCS. Those conversations occurred toward the end of the project implementation period. There was one collaboration call between Washington DCS international liaisons and representatives of the Ontario Family Responsibility Office. This successful collaboration led to interest in continued conversations. We hope that the positive response from British Columbia and Ontario will be useful to encourage Alberta or other Canadian provinces and territories to develop cooperative relationships with DCS.

Washington DCS participants in the survey and interviews stated that case processing between Canada and Washington had improved as a result of the project. Just as important, British Columbia respondents to a more limited survey expressed a similar opinion. More detail is provided below.

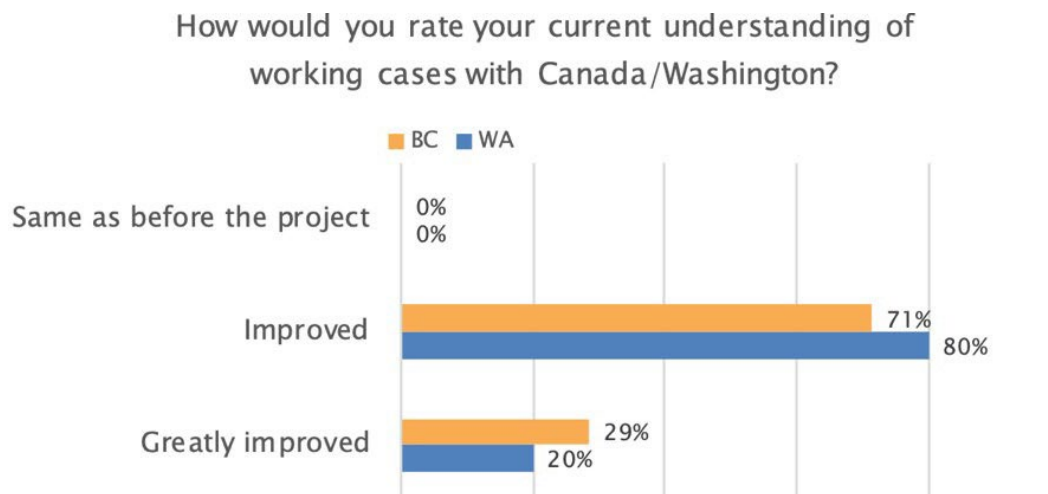
#### **3.5.1 Survey Results**

Public Knowledge developed a project survey for DCS project participants and a more limited survey for representatives of the British Columbia Family Maintenance Enforcement Program. Both surveys included questions about improvement in case processing between the two jurisdictions. Ten caseworkers in Washington and seven child support representatives in British Columbia responded to a survey question asking them to rate their understanding of working

cases with each other. As reflected in Figure 14, their answers were similar and indicate that their current understanding was improved or greatly improved from their understanding prior to the project's implementation.

**Figure 14. Current Understanding of Working Cases between Washington and Canada**

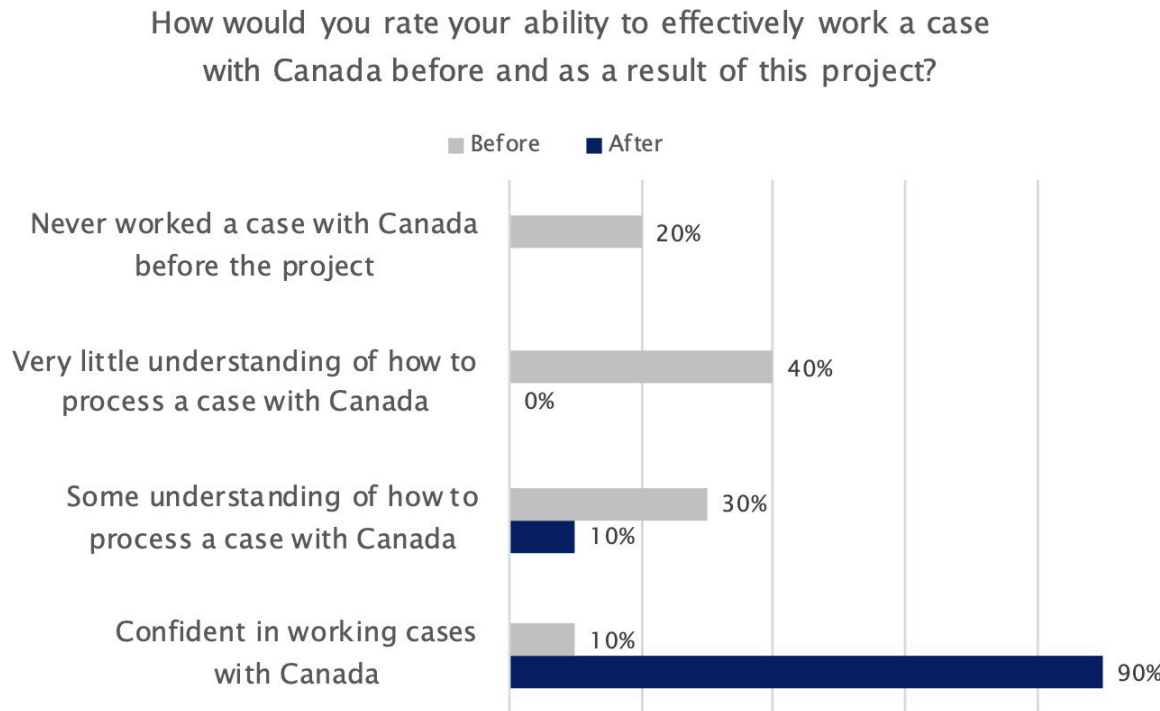
Note: There were 10 DCS and 7 BC responses to this survey question.



As indicated in Figure 15, 90% of the DCS respondents stated that as a result of the project, they were confident in processing cases with Canada.

**Figure 15. Ability to Effectively Work a Case with Canada**

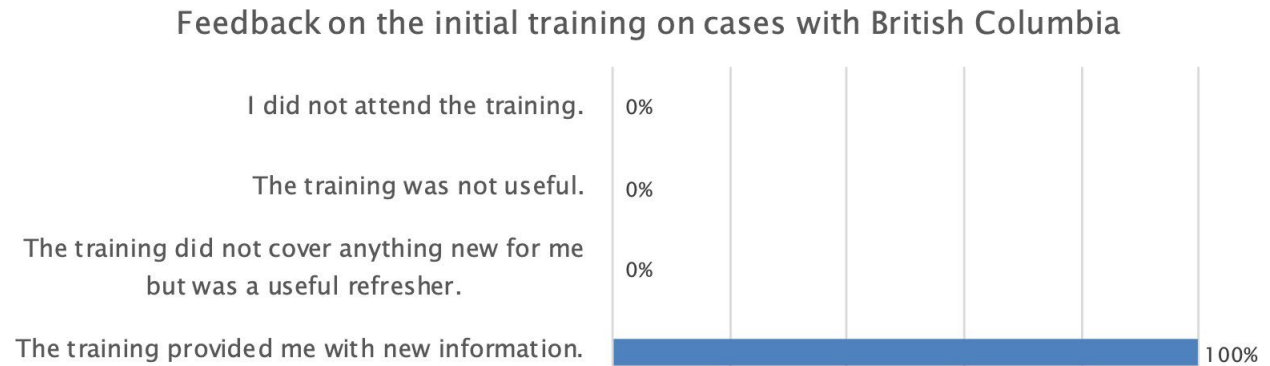
Note: There were 10 DCS responses each for the before and after survey questions on this topic.



The survey also asked Washington DCS respondents about the trainings related to processing cases with Canada. As reflected in Figure 16, all of the respondents stated that the initial training with British Columbia provided new information. Figure 17 shows that all of the respondents stated that the two subsequent training sessions with British Columbia provided useful refresher information or new information. Of those who attended the discussion with representatives from Ontario's Family Responsibility Office, which was scheduled based on the availability of Ontario staff, all stated that the meeting provided useful refresher information or new information. See Figure 18. The high attendance at these training sessions is indicative of the liaisons' commitment to learning more about case processing with Canada and the value of the information presented.

**Figure 16. Feedback on Initial Training with British Columbia**

Note: There were 10 DCS responses to this survey question.

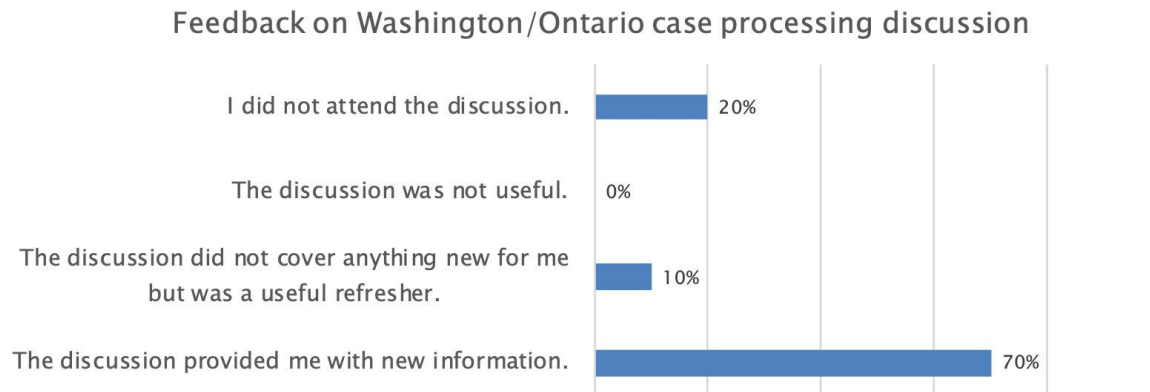
**Figure 17. Feedback on Training with British Columbia FMEP and IJSS**

Note: There were 10 DCS responses to this survey question.



**Figure 18. Feedback on Washington and Ontario Case Processing Discussion**

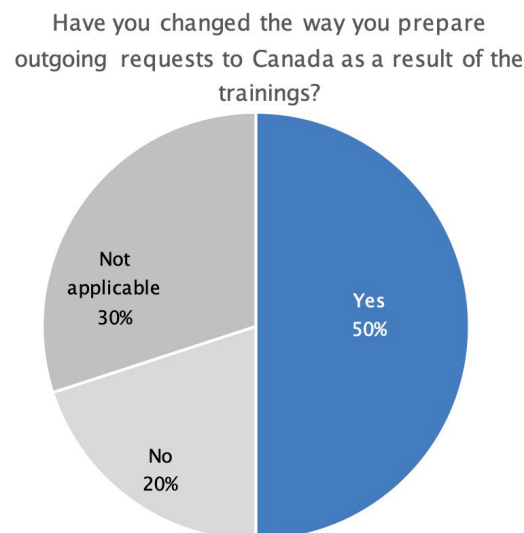
Note: There were 10 DCS responses to this survey question.



Another indication of the impact of the training sessions is the survey result regarding case preparation. Based on Figure 19, half of the liaisons reported changes to how they prepare outgoing cases as a result of information presented during the trainings.

**Figure 19. Impact of Trainings on Outgoing Requests**

Note: There were 10 DCS responses to this survey question.



### 3.5.2 Interview Responses

During the interviews, PK asked DCS liaisons a number of questions related to processing cases with Canada. Several noted the value of the contact list for the maintenance enforcement



programs in each of the Canadian provinces and territories. One liaison noted that if they did not have a direct phone number, they were able to get in touch with the right person through someone else. Another noted that when referring a case, “it is great to know what will happen next, what to expect, and to whom to direct questions.” Since two agencies in British Columbia are involved with processing child support cases, prior to the project it was unclear whom should be contacted.

The project was most successful in establishing a cooperative relationship with British Columbia. As part of that relationship, there were three collaborative training sessions between Washington DCS and representatives of the British Columbia FMEP and IJSS. In the last month of project implementation, there was also a collaborative session with Washington DCS and representatives of the Ontario Family Responsibility Office. Interview responses indicate that project participants greatly valued the joint training sessions and felt their understanding of case processing had greatly improved. Some of the adjectives staff used to describe the sessions with British Columbia were “so illuminating,” “invaluable,” “amazing,” “fantastic,” “so informative,” “very beneficial,” and “absolutely excellent.”

As indicated in Section 3.2.2, many of the liaisons had very little, if any, experience processing cases with Canada before the project. The liaisons unanimously agreed that both communication and their understanding of how to work a case with Canada saw considerable improvement as a result of the project and these joint sessions. They expressed a marked increase in confidence in handling cases with Canada. They now understand what forms and supporting documents to include when preparing a case to send to Canada, the process in Canada once the case is received, and how to reach the appropriate contact when a question arises. The liaisons viewed the joint sessions with the British Columbia and Ontario child support programs as a great way to begin to forge relationships.

When asked to provide examples of cases they were able to work more effectively as a result of the project, all the liaisons could immediately do so. Examples include the following:

- Entering the correct U.S. dollar amount on the Washington case management system
- Serving the respondent with the correct documents
- Understanding the differences in how long Canada and Washington enforce childcare expenses. Washington had registered a Washington order in Canada for enforcement. Washington’s policy is to enforce daycare until one of the parties asks for a review. In contrast, Canada stops charging daycare expenses when the child reaches a certain age. The two jurisdictions were having a miscommunication and misunderstanding about the ongoing support amount, which included the childcare expenses. In order to conduct a review of the order, the Washington process requires service on the obligor. Washington did not have a good address for serving the obligor in Canada so they could not proceed with the review process. Even though Canada could not provide the obligor’s address because of privacy and confidentiality restrictions, they were able to serve him so the review in Washington could proceed. Without that further collaboration and understanding of each other’s processes, they would probably be deadlocked and Washington would still be charging daycare.

- Another liaison was able to process an incoming application from British Columbia before the hard copy documents even arrived in the office. Central Services scans incoming applications, so the liaison had access to them. The liaison was able to access the British Columbia website, get in touch with the British Columbia caseworker, and get the documents out for service the same day. The liaison knew exactly what needed to happen, where the documents needed to go, and what to include. The liaison was also able to provide the British Columbia caseworker information on what to expect and the details of Washington’s administrative process. It was a one-day process on what was a fairly complicated case.
- Understanding that for some provinces, when Washington sends an application to request establishment of a support order, DCS needs to send a separate application for enforcement. Prior to the project, the liaison had thought the province was simply being uncooperative.
- Understanding balance discrepancies related to how different Canadian provinces convert the amount due into Canadian dollars

### **3.6 Intervention 5: Improved Case Processing Between Mexico and Washington**

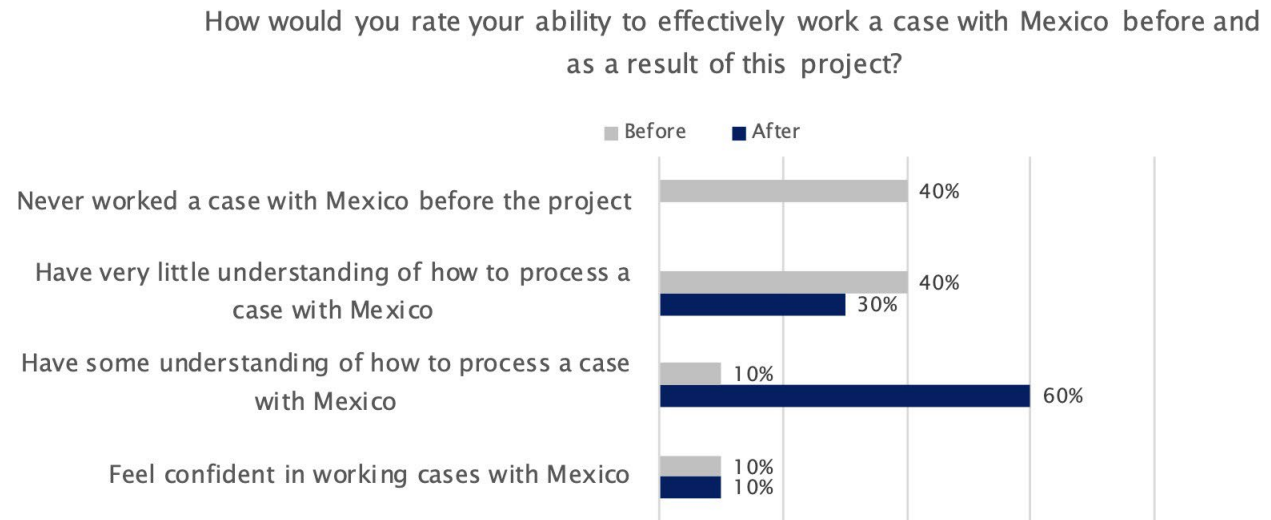
All Washington DCS respondents to the survey and interview questions stated that their understanding of case processing with Mexico had improved as a result of the project. However, some of the liaisons also felt a bit overwhelmed by the information since it was presented in a “vacuum.” Without a cooperative arrangement with Mexico, there were no outgoing cases to Mexico. Unlike processing cases with Canada, the liaisons did not have an opportunity to apply the information they had learned.

#### **3.6.1 Survey Results**

The survey asked liaisons to rate their ability to work cases with Mexico. A high percentage of the liaisons had never worked a case with Mexico before the project. As a result of the project, 70% of the liaisons who responded to the survey said they had some understanding of how to process a case with Mexico or felt confident in working cases with Mexico. See Figure 20. This was a dramatic increase from 20% of liaisons who said they had some understanding or felt confident prior to the project.

**Figure 20. Ability to Effectively Work a Case with Mexico**

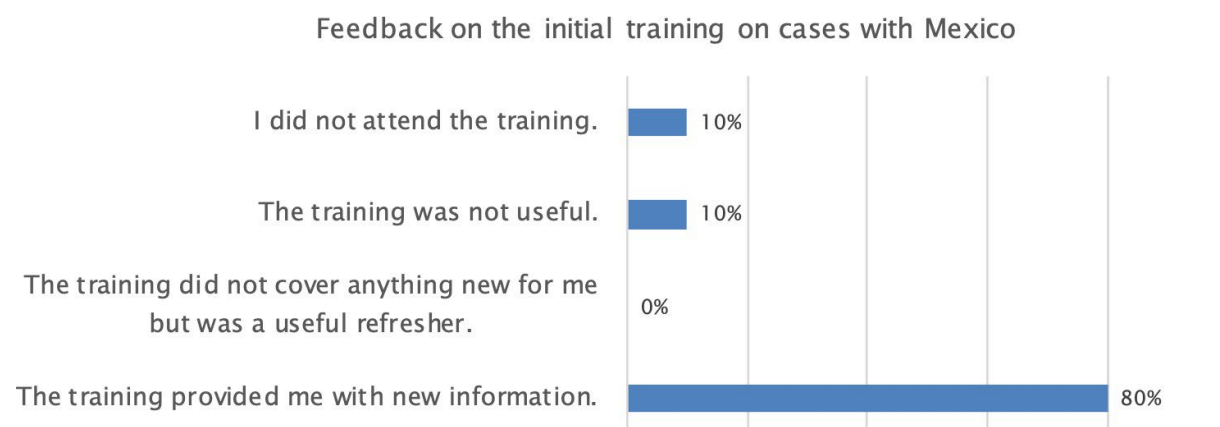
Note: There were 10 DCS responses each for the before and after survey questions on this topic.



The survey also asked respondents about the two trainings related to processing cases with Mexico. Although the majority of the respondents found the trainings useful, the results were not as positive as those related to the Canadian trainings. See Figures 21 and 22. As expanded upon during the interviews, the results are reflective of the liaisons' inability to apply the information more than the quality of the training.

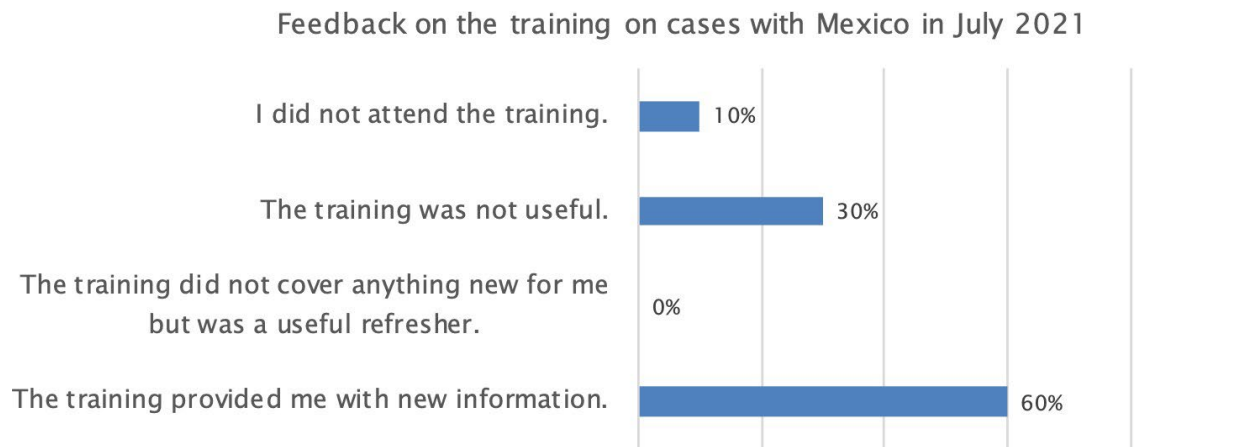
**Figure 21. Feedback on Initial Training with Mexico**

Note: There were 10 DCS responses to this survey question.



**Figure 22. Feedback on July 2021 Training with Mexico**

Note: There were 10 DCS responses to this survey question.



### 3.6.2 Interview Responses

During the interviews, a PK team member asked DCS respondents a number of questions related to processing cases with Mexico. All of the international liaisons and the Central Registry representative interviewed said they had gained new and useful information about processing cases with Mexico. However, several of the liaisons commented that there was lots of information provided but no place to apply it. They thought the information would be helpful later, should Washington begin sending outgoing applications to Mexico. Several liaisons noted specific examples of how their understanding of working with Mexico had improved. One liaison found the trainings most useful in understanding what to expect when the obligor starts paying. This liaison had looked at the disbursement history in an existing case where Washington is the responding jurisdiction and realized the custodial parent in Mexico was not cashing the checks or doing so infrequently. Now the liaison has a good understanding of Washington's process of sending the checks through the Consulate, the time involved, and the difficulty the custodial parent has in converting U.S. checks to Mexican pesos. Another said that learning about the differences between Mexican and U.S. law and that Mexican States do not have a child support program similar to the U.S. has helped increase the liaison's patience in working cases from Mexico. They no longer feel that the Consulate or Mexico is just being uncooperative. Another liaison commented that "it is exciting to have some options for working the cases rather than just shutting them down."

## 3.7 Intervention 6: Improved Communication

The project had overwhelming success in improving communications between Washington DCS and British Columbia. As noted earlier, the contact list for individuals within the support enforcement programs in Canadian provinces and territories is a very useful resource for the liaisons. The list includes direct email addresses as well as phone numbers. The survey and

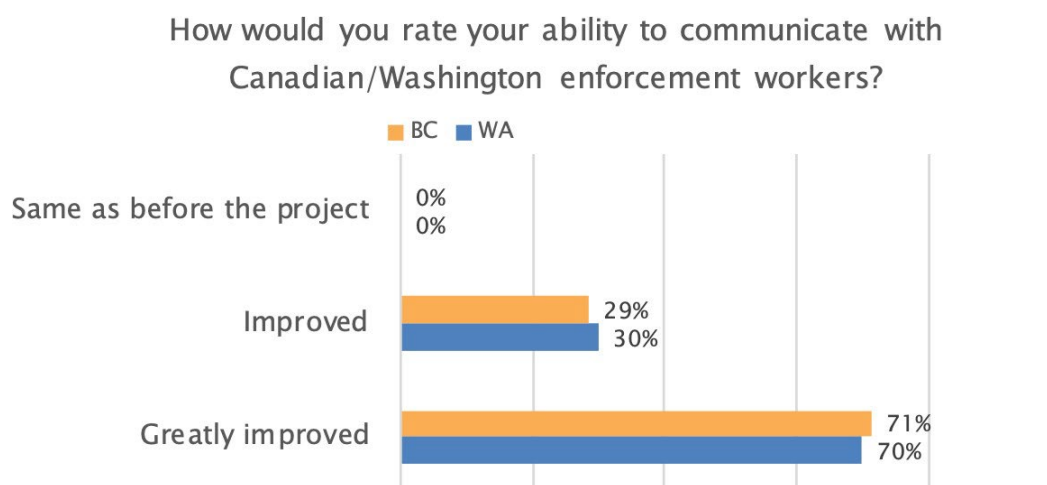
interview results indicate that the most useful communication resource was access to the website for the British Columbia Family Maintenance Enforcement Program.

### 3.7.1 Survey Results

Both DCS liaisons and representatives of the British Columbia Family Maintenance Enforcement Program completed survey questions about communication with each other. As reported in Figure 23, all 10 DCS respondents and seven FMEP respondents felt the project had improved or greatly improved communication. The results were consistent between the two jurisdictions.

**Figure 23. Ability to Communicate between Washington and Canada**

Note: There were 10 DCS and 7 BC responses to this survey question.

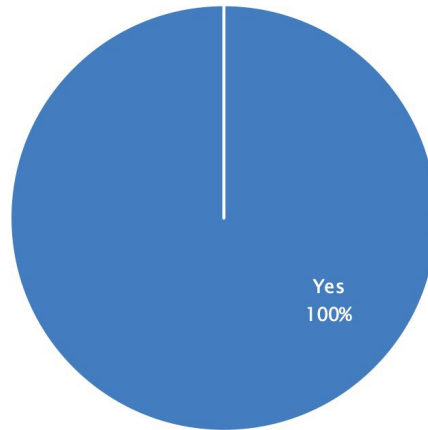


The DCS liaisons also answered questions about the British Columbia website operated by the Family Maintenance Enforcement Program. Ninety percent of the liaisons surveyed indicated they had used the British Columbia website for case information since the training. Of those, 100% indicated the website was helpful in case processing. See Figure 24.

**Figure 24. Helpfulness of FMEP Website**

Note: There were 9 DCS responses to this survey question.

If you have accessed the FMEP website,  
did it help you in your case  
management?

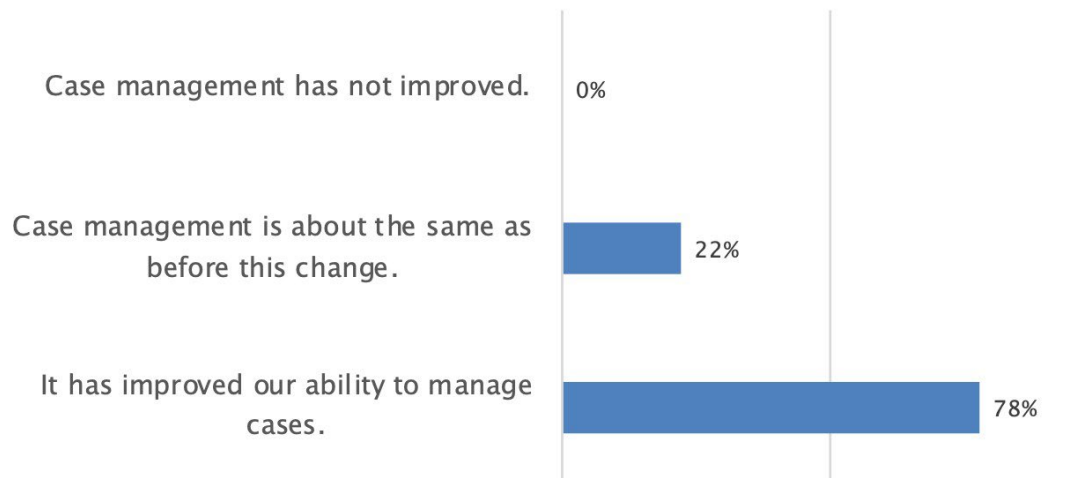


Additionally, as noted in Figure 25, over 75% indicated that their ability to manage cases has improved because the British Columbia caseworkers can now access secure email from Washington due to the project.

**Figure 25. Helpfulness of Secure email**

Note: There were 9 DCS responses to this survey question.

BC FMEP caseworkers now have access to secure email with WA.  
Has this made a difference to your case processing?



### 3.7.2 Interview Responses

Interviewees cited communication as the greatest challenge in working cases with Canada prior to the project. Through the project, liaisons gained access to the British Columbia portal. One liaison enthusiastically noted, “Now it is easier to work with B.C. than with many of the U.S. states.” Another liaison described the portal as their “new favorite friend.” Most liaisons were not aware of the website before the project, and now many use it every day. They said it had greatly facilitated communication by providing information as well as direct contact information for the assigned British Columbia caseworker. They also appreciated British Columbia’s prompt responses to questions, noting that often a response arrives the same day a question is asked. One liaison, who did not know the British Columbia portal existed before the grant, stated that “if nothing else comes from the grant that alone makes this project valuable.”

## 3.8 Intervention 7: Analysis of Policy Related to International Case Processing

### 3.8.1 Interview Responses

There were no survey questions for the designated Central Services staff and international liaisons related to PK’s policy analysis because PK did that work in conjunction with the DCS Grant Project Director and DCS Policy and Litigation Manager. However, during their interviews, several liaisons noted that the project desk aids were helpful because everything was collected into one document whereas information in the DCS Policy Handbook was spread out among many sections. This is consistent with observations PK had made during its review of the DCS Policy Handbook.

During their interviews, the DCS Grant Project Director and DCS Policy and Litigation Manager answered questions about the usefulness of PK’s review and comments to the Central Services manual and DCS Policy Handbook. They indicated that recommendations provided by PK were invaluable and will be great resources while DCS works on updating the DCS Policy Handbook. They stated the feedback was very clearly outlined, and the specific information and associated citations will make the updates and edits “100% more effective.” They also stated that the other resources/desk aids PK had developed will be helpful as they are updating the Handbook.

## 4 Lessons Learned and Next Steps

### 4.1 Lessons Learned

There were a number of key takeaways from the evaluation of this project.

Recommendations for other child support agencies include the following:

- The selection of the agency project manager for an improvement grant is critical. It was clear from comments by the Washington Project Team that the DCS grant project

director was highly respected. They thought she was passionate about the project, organized, supportive, and excellent at team building. One team member stated that it was a very cohesive group, and they believed that the DCS grant project director's effective leadership and energy really contributed to that.

- It is important to be as transparent as possible at the onset of a project about the impact of the project on participants' workloads, especially if you are seeking staff volunteers.
- Agencies should attempt to quantify case processing activities in terms of a metric (for example, how long does it take to prepare an outgoing application for establishment) in order to better measure pre-implementation performance and post-implementation performance. By comparing the metrics, the state agency will have additional objective data about the impact of project interventions on case processing.
- Because international cases are a small percentage of most agencies' child support caseload, staff may lack the knowledge to appropriately process them. Designating staff to handle international cases or to be agency subject matter experts, and providing these individuals with training and supportive resources, leads to greater confidence in case processing.
- It is important to use a variety of formats to meet individuals' varying learning styles when developing desk aids. Some people learn best from numbered instructions and checklists, others like to read narrative information, and others are more visual and retain information best if it is presented in flowcharts.
- Development of state child support reciprocal arrangements with countries that are not parties to The Hague Child Support Convention or foreign reciprocating countries takes time. Relationship building is important, and more easily accomplished in person than during a pandemic!
- Keep in mind that such reciprocal arrangements do not need to detail all the operational steps of how cases will be processed. The main elements the arrangements need to address are the jurisdictions' agreement to provide specified child support services and to follow applicable law related to child support as well as confidentiality and security. Over time, the two jurisdictions will work out the operational details.
- Agencies wishing to establish a state child support reciprocal arrangement with another country should have the document proposing respective responsibilities/expectations under such an arrangement reviewed by the agency's legal department as well as IT department. They can address issues such as what provisions are needed related to privacy and security as well as who has signature authority.
- Improved communication between caseworkers in international cases can result in quicker resolution of issues.



Key takeaways for Washington DCS include the following:

- It is important for project team members to have a detailed understanding of the time and effort that will be required. For similar projects in the future, we recommend a standardized approach to account for any additional workload on team members.
- A positive takeaway was that all the project team members — the designated central services staff as well as the international liaisons — appreciated the opportunity to participate in the project. Several commented that a project like this allows them to see a “bigger picture” than they might see while working their normal caseload.
- There may be value to surveying the general population of field staff to determine if they felt specialization was helpful.
- By designating staff to process cases with Canada and Mexico, the agency was able to support these specialized individuals with additional, focused training and desk aids.
- Additional training, desk aids, and the opportunity to ask other team members about problem issues in a supportive environment resulted in greater confidence by staff in handling cases with Canada and Mexico.
- DCS was not aware of the extent of case processing oversights on international cases until the liaisons conducted a case review and were able to apply their new knowledge to identify errors and correct them.
- Improving communication is key to effective case management, particularly when working international cases, due to challenges such as different time zones, language barriers, and differences in legal systems. Steps as simple as the international liaisons gaining access to British Columbia Family Maintenance Enforcement Program portal and British Columbia workers sending messages through Washington’s encrypted email system made a huge positive difference in case processing.
- Establishing child support cooperation arrangements is a process that takes time and requires the development of personal relationships.
- Establishing an arrangement with targeted Mexican States was more complex than anticipated because of COVID-19 and political elections in three of the four targeted Mexican States. Language was also a barrier.
- International child support has changed significantly in the last 10 years. A comprehensive review and reorganization of the international case processing section of the Washington State DCS Policy Handbook was needed.

## 4.2 Next Steps

The results of the Intergovernmental Case Processing interventions have provided valuable insights into areas DCS could continue to use to support Intergovernmental efforts. Areas of focus center on supporting field staff by updating and clarifying policy, expanding

communication options with other jurisdictions and reviewing elements of the current support management system for potential increased efficiencies. Next steps will include:

- Recommending each field office identify permanent international liaisons that will serve as a subject matter expert.
- Incorporating suggested edits into the DCS Policy Handbook.
- Making the international technical assistance documents produced during the project available to all staff.
- Identifying appropriate contacts in the Seattle Mexican Consulate in order to further communications.
- Setting up recurring collaborative calls with BC.
- Continuing talks with the Mexican states of Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, Sonora, and Baja Norte.
- Continuing to work with DCS IT to incorporate proposed system enhancements in future upgrades to the system.