

- **Partners Provided Key Services.** Local child support offices partnered with other organizations in their community to provide employment assistance and parenting education. These services were paid for by the grant, but they were provided by partner organizations.
- **Domestic Violence Plans.** Project sites were required to partner with domestic violence experts in the community and develop a domestic violence plan. They were also required to screen participants for domestic violence, make appropriate referrals to partners, and provide safeguards for custodial parents.

Characteristics of CSPED Participants

CSPED targeted noncustodial parents who were behind in their child support payments because they were unemployed or underemployed. As a result, it served a highly disadvantaged population.

- **CSPED participants faced significant barriers to employment.** Nearly 70% of participants had a criminal record. Nearly 70% had at most a high school education. At enrollment, 56% were working, but their median earnings in the past month were \$500, significantly below the poverty threshold for a single person.
- **Child support orders were high relative to their earnings.** The median child support order at enrollment for participants was \$325 per month, yet 44% had no earnings in the past 30 days. Almost one-third (31%) of participants had earnings, but their order exceeded 50% of their earnings.
- **CSPED participants had complex families.** The majority of participants had children with more than one partner, yet only one-third of them lived with any of their biological children. Regarding their nonresident children, 80% of participants said they did not see them as much as they wanted. The most common reason given by participants for not spending as much time with their nonresident children as they wanted was that the custodial parent prevented it.

Enrollment, Referral Sources, and Recruitment Strategies

Enrollment into the evaluation occurred during the second through fourth years. Grantees successfully enrolled over 10,000 individuals during this period, reaching 85% of OCSE's enrollment goal. To ensure a rigorous evaluation, enrollees were randomly assigned to either receive CSPED services or to receive regular services, with half of enrollees assigned to each condition.

- **The most important referral source for CSPED was child support staff.** While grantees used a range of sources to generate referrals, ultimately, the most important referral source was staff within the child support agency. Through their existing interactions with and knowledge of the noncustodial parents in the caseload, child support staff were well positioned to discuss the benefits of CSPED with potential participants. All grantees received court referrals to varying degrees, and two grantees relied heavily on court-based referrals.

- **Recruitment strategies evolved over time.** Reaching OCSE's enrollment target was a challenge. Most grantees had expected to recruit participants through a single source, such as court-ordered referrals or child support staff referrals. Over time, grantees replicated effective strategies from one another and ended up using a range of recruitment strategies. The relative use of different strategies varied across programs, reflecting their community and legal environment.

Program Structure, Partnerships, and Staffing

The CSPED model determined the program structure. Child support agencies were responsible for leading the project. Child support agencies partnered with other local agencies to provide employment and parenting services. Each program's leadership and program structure remained consistent throughout.

- **Child support agencies provided consistent leadership throughout, which facilitated project cohesion.** All child support agencies designated a project lead who was a local child support director or a manager. These individuals provided strong leadership throughout the project and played a critical role in championing CSPED within their child support agency.
- **Cross-agency programs, such as CSPED, require strong partnerships and effective communication strategies.** CSPED's approach to service delivery required strong relationships with partners to recruit participants, coordinate services, and keep participants engaged. Promising coordination strategies included frequent meetings and informal communication, co-location of services, in-person participant handoffs, clear assignment of roles and responsibilities, and team-based case management.
- **Program staffing levels did not always keep up with growing caseloads, participant needs, and staff turnover.** Both child support and employment case managers struggled at times to provide services of the intensity required to meet participants' complex needs, particularly as caseloads grew. Staff turnover was high, especially among partner agencies, which created gaps in service availability and institutional knowledge. Promising strategies to address staffing levels included hiring new or leveraging existing staff, cross-training staff to temporarily fill multiple roles, and sharing case management responsibilities.

Service Delivery and Engagement Strategies

Nearly all CSPED participants (95%) received case management, employment services, and enhanced child support services. Parenting services were not universally received, with only 69% of participants receiving them. Based on information gathered during the demonstration, participants received an average of 22 hours of services. Half of these hours were spent receiving employment services.

- **Participant engagement was a challenge.** Just as participants faced barriers to employment, they also faced barriers to program participation, including transportation, housing instability, family responsibilities, and health issues. Grantees developed a broad range of strategies to promote engagement, including guided referrals to partners, front-loading services, reminder calls, incentives, and transportation assistance.

- **CSPED programs had a difficult time getting participants to attend parenting classes.** Engagement challenges were even greater for parenting providers, in part, because of the employment focus of CSPED. Though parenting classes were a required component of CSPED, when participants had conflicts between parenting classes and work-related activities, programs and participants prioritized work-related activities.

Cultural Change

Many grantees indicated CSPED led to a cultural shift in their child support agency. For caseworkers, CSPED represented a distinct change from their previous focus on using enforcement actions to secure child support payments. This was true both for the staff directly providing CSPED services and for the staff that was asked to refer parents. Implementing this new approach often resulted in a philosophical shift among caseworkers to a more customer-centered approach. If child support leadership backed this cultural shift, the entire office sometimes underwent a cultural shift as staff saw the benefit of referring customers to CSPED.

Going Forward

Regardless of the challenges they faced, CSPED grantees uniformly believed that the CSPED model helped participants become employed and make their child support payments. Although the grants have ended, all sites have identified funding to sustain their child support-led employment programs and are committed to sharing their experience with other child support agencies.

