

## VOICE

## Promoting Healthy Relationships Among Young Parents



February is Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month. This annual campaign highlights the painful reality that domestic or intimate partner violence often starts during teenage dating experiences and carries over into adult romantic and marital relationships. While almost 4 out of 10 custodial parents in the child support program experience domestic violence, younger parents receiving child support services are even more likely to have experienced some kind of relationship violence.

Young adult parents who are survivors of relationship violence need financial resources to be able to leave and stay out of an abusive relationship. More than two-thirds of those who experience domestic violence stay with or return to an abuser because of financial need. Financial stability and support are at the very heart of our work in child support. We must be attuned to the impact violence has on younger parents in our caseload, and work to ensure their safety as we help them get the financial support they need.

### Preventing dating violence through education

One way that child support agencies can help prevent dating violence is by including information on healthy and unhealthy relationships as part of paternity and child support education in schools and with youth-serving organizations. OCSE recently awarded nine Section 1115 grants to states to educate and motivate young adults to postpone parenthood until after they complete their education, start a career, and have a committed relationship. Grantees are required to include information on relationship violence prevention and provide resources to help those who have experienced dating violence. [Learn about a second funding opportunity to encourage responsible parenting in young adults.](#)

Unfortunately, teen dating violence doesn't just go away after becoming an adult; the violence tends to "grow up" too. Featured in this issue is a deeply moving and personal story of surviving domestic violence as told by one of our state child support colleagues (see page 3).

By taking a multi-generational approach—working to prevent the violence with teens and young adults while ensuring survivors can safely get financial support—we play an essential role in ending relationship violence and the damage it does to families.

*Linda Boyer*

## COVID-19 Vaccine Program: Know the Facts

Since the authorization of COVID-19 vaccines in the U.S., the Office of Minority Health is working to raise awareness about the importance of getting the COVID-19 vaccine, establishing vaccine confidence, and combatting vaccine hesitancy, especially among racial and ethnic minority groups. To learn more about the vaccine program, browse the CDC resource: [8 Things to Know about the U.S. COVID-19 Vaccination Program.](#)



### Inside this issue

- 1 Promoting Healthy Relationships Among Young Parents
- 2 OCSE Pilots Virtual Domestic Violence Training
- 3 A Child Support Worker and Domestic Violence Survivor Tells Her Story
- 4 How Child Support Workers Can Prevent Teen Dating Violence
- 5 VA Programs Help Justice-Involved Veterans
- 6 Digital Marketing Through Facebook, Google, and Mobile Ads
- 7 Helping Noncustodial Parents Find Jobs Amid the Pandemic



COVID-19

### Key Things to Know About COVID-19 Vaccines.



Subscribe to *Child Support Report*. Sign up on the newsletter homepage 

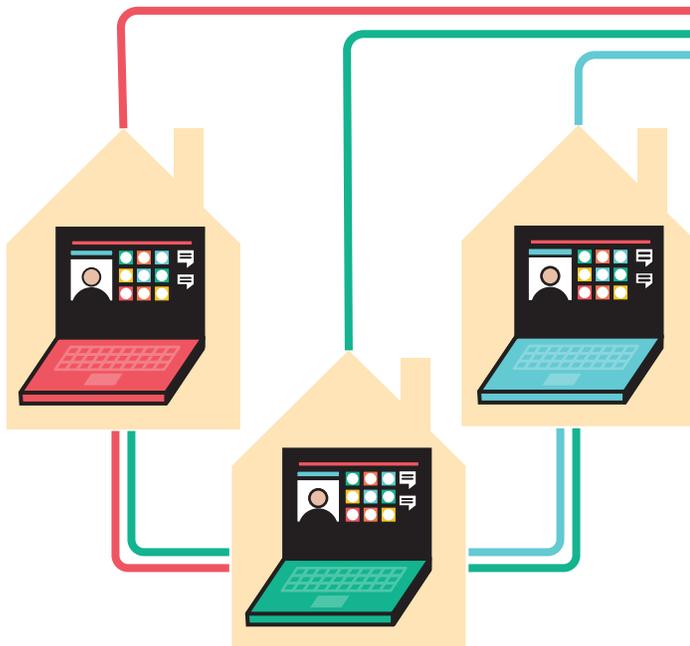
## SPOTLIGHT

# OCSE Pilots Virtual Domestic Violence Training

Jeffrey Stocks, OCSE Program Specialist, Region 7

From unremarkable buildings full of cloth-lined cubicles to makeshift home offices at kitchen tables, it's clear that the pandemic has significantly changed where and how child support professionals do their work. This has created a range of challenges, but also opportunities for innovation. One unique challenge is how to train staff who are spread out over an entire state and cannot attend a training in person. To meet this challenge, OCSE revised its domestic violence training to deliver the information virtually to state and tribal programs.

OCSE has delivered in-person domestic violence training to over 30 state and tribal child support programs over the last 5 years. The trainings were highly effective but required a significant amount of time, energy, and resources from trainers, child support staff, and domestic violence advocates. Many involved in these trainings had to fly or drive long distances. OCSE staff had to be onsite for several days and attendees had to meet in person for up to eight hours a day. Despite the commitment, these in-person sessions were rich professional development experiences because they allowed for group work and encouraged attendees to share ideas.



## Four core concepts of redesigned training

After the pandemic began, a small group of OCSE staff convened to redesign the in-person sessions for virtual delivery. The team determined what was most critical and relevant to help staff better address domestic violence in child support caseloads and how best to deliver the training content virtually.

The training was condensed to four core concepts:

- Why does domestic violence matter to child support?
- What does domestic violence look like in child support cases?
- What is trauma-informed care?
- How can case processing be improved to provide safer access to child support services?

Instead of eight hours in a conference room, the virtual WebEx or Zoom training is spread over four days in 90-minute sessions. Participants are divided into small groups and given assignments to complete between virtual sessions. The training still includes participation from state or local domestic violence advocates.

The time and resource commitment is still significant, but the virtual delivery means greater flexibility and ability to reach more child support workers across the country. The goal and core learning objectives of the training have not changed, and the focus remains on providing safer access to child support services for individuals in violent or controlling relationships.

## 2021 training sessions

OCSE piloted the revised training in Minnesota and Missouri in 2020 and will roll it out to additional states and tribes throughout spring 2021. If you're interested in this training for your state or tribe, please contact your program specialist.

# A Child Support Worker and Domestic Violence Survivor Tells Her Story

Missouri Child Support Worker

I'm a child support worker in Missouri who recently participated in the OCSE-led virtual domestic violence training. I never speak to anyone about my past, but as I went through the training, I decided I needed to tell my story.

## How the abuse started

From the outside, my life looked great. No one would have ever thought I was a domestic violence victim... EVER. At first, my ex-husband was incredibly charming, but then the slow build of isolation and control started. He moved me away from my family and friends and made sure I didn't get too close with anyone that came into our lives.

My ex-husband was very violent with me while I was pregnant. When he accompanied me to my doctor's appointments and the doctor asked routine questions about my safety, it would provoke attacks from him. I cried for a month when I got pregnant with my second child. My birth control failed, and I was terrified. I didn't want to bring another child into a life with him.

I knew the whole time that the violence was wrong. I stayed because I felt that leaving would be worse than staying. I knew he would have visitation if I left, and it terrified me about what he would do to the kids if I wasn't around. More than once, he threatened to take them out of the country. I knew he had the means to do it, and I feared I'd never see them again.

## Leaving was the most dangerous period

The most dangerous time was when I left him. He threatened to kill me, but when he saw that his threats didn't scare me enough to make me stay, he threatened to kill all of us – our children, my family, and then himself.

He started abusing the kids, both emotionally and physically. He told them not to tell anyone or he would hurt me. He told them they would never see me again if they told. It wasn't until he left deep bruises on my son that I was finally able to keep some distance between them.

My ex-husband told me he would kill me before he paid me child support. He said a hit man was cheaper than child support, and I would meet a gruesome, untimely death if I tried to get a penny from him. I had no idea how the child support system worked, or that I could file for child support without a lawyer. I never pursued it.

I can relate to other victims – the embarrassment, the guilt, the lack of trust in the system. To this day, I consider myself very lucky because we made it out alive. I was tired

of living in fear. I moved back to my hometown and my family to get us far enough away from him. We've had a lot of therapy and time to heal, but that wasn't possible until he was completely out of our lives and we were out of his reach.

## How child support workers can support survivors

To my friends and colleagues working in local child support offices, know that there are parents just like me working by your side and coming in for services. Survivors need you to learn about domestic violence and understand how hard it is for them to disclose their abuse. We need you to help survivors safely get child support and promote community resources to help them leave abusive relationships. Believe me, it is literally a matter of life and death.



# How Child Support Workers Can Prevent Teen Dating Violence

Mao Yang, Senior Program Specialist, *Division of Family Violence Prevention and Services*

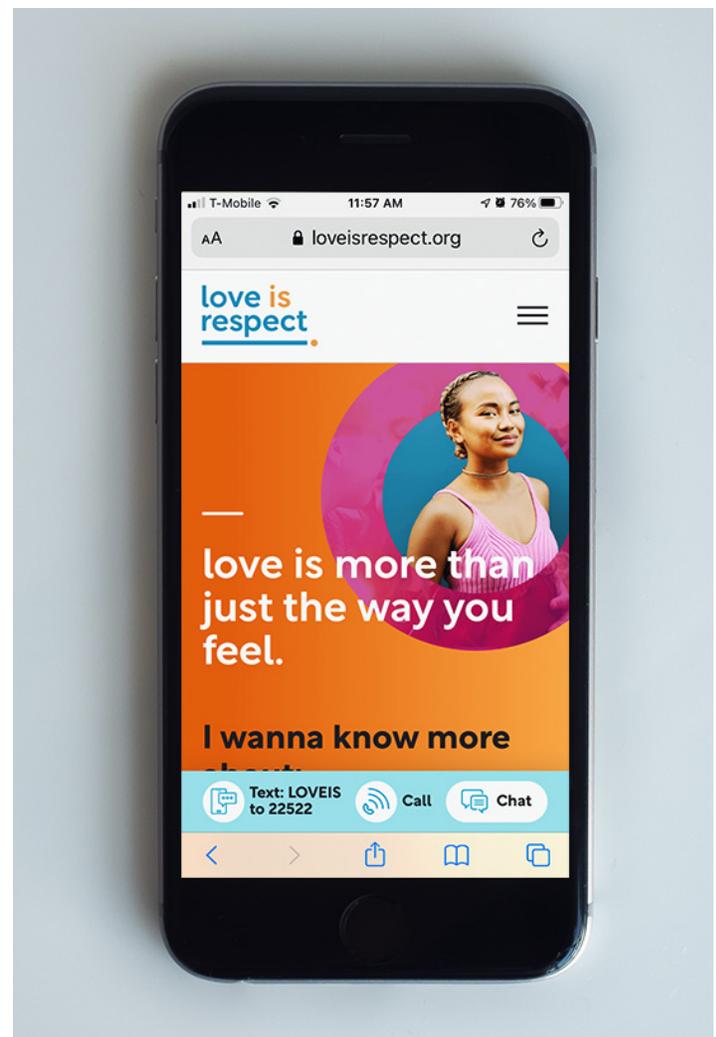
At ACF, the Family and Youth Services Bureau administers the [Family Violence Prevention and Services Act Program \(fact sheet\)](#) to ensure emergency shelter and non-shelter support services. These critical services include victim advocacy, crisis counseling, safety planning, support groups, information and referrals, legal aid, and housing assistance to address domestic violence and dating violence.

Every February, the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act Program promotes *Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month (TDVAM)*, a national effort to raise awareness about teen dating violence and efforts to stop dating abuse before it starts. As child support enforcement staff encounter young parents experiencing abuse, you have a unique opportunity to prevent future abuse. In your work with parents seeking child support, you can:

- Learn to recognize signs of dating violence, such as in-person stalking, online harassment, incessant phone calls, demeaning text messages, dangerous threats, and more. With increased knowledge and practice, you can become well-versed in having critical conversations to address dating violence.
- Attend free virtual learning opportunities provided by the [Domestic Violence Resource Network](#).
- Provide universal education on dating and domestic violence to everyone applying for child support. Promote resources (palm cards, brochures, posters, etc.) or online materials from [loveisrespect](#), [Futures Without Violence](#), or local domestic violence programs. Discuss the signs of an abusive relationship and ask if they know how to find support or resources.
- Refer survivors to immediate support if they disclose abuse. Youth can text “loveis” to 22522, call 1-866-331-9474, or chat with a live person at [loveisrespect.org](#), the national teen dating abuse hotline.
- Offer to make a warm referral to the local domestic violence program for shelter, crisis counseling, peer support, advocacy, or children’s services. It’s okay if a survivor doesn’t need help immediately. At the very least, they will know that there is help when they need it. To identify your local program, contact your [state domestic violence coalition](#).

- Participate in TDVAM to increase awareness of dating violence within your agency. For national TDVAM 2021, [loveisrespect](#) presents [Know Your Worth](#), featuring prevention tools and projects that promote healthy relationships.
- Coordinate a day in February to “Wear Orange” to show solidarity with young people and have conversations around healthy relationships. You may encourage staff to wear orange—the official color for dating violence prevention and awareness—and ask them, “What does wearing orange or healthy relationships mean to you?” This event could be held during an all staff virtual meeting or training, or staff could post pictures on social media with the hashtags #Orange4Love and #TDVAM2021.

Learning about teen dating violence, providing universal education and referrals, and participating in TDVAM are just some of the steps you can take to stop dating violence. One step at a time, you can make a difference in the lives of young people experiencing abuse.



## COORDINATION POINTS

# VA Programs Help Justice-Involved Veterans

Monica Diaz, Executive Director, Homeless Programs Office, Veterans Health Administration, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) oversees a wide range of programs and resources to help veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, including those who are under criminal justice supervision. In the final article of our four-part series, we focus on Veterans Treatment Courts and Veterans Justice Programs (VJP). VJP is composed of two programs that serve veterans involved with the criminal justice system, from contact with law enforcement to release from prison, jail, and other correctional facilities: [Health Care for Re-entry Veterans](#) (HCRV) and [Veterans Justice Outreach](#) (VJO).

## Health Care for Re-Entry Veterans

The HCRV program works to prevent homelessness and promote success among formerly incarcerated veterans by helping them reintegrate into their community, access VA benefits, and avoid future incarceration. It has served more than 9,700 veterans between 2018 and 2019. Each regional [Veterans Integrated Service Network](#) has an HCRV specialist who provides outreach and assessment services to incarcerated veterans. The HCRV program also provides short-term case management to veterans as they return to their communities.

## Veterans Justice Outreach

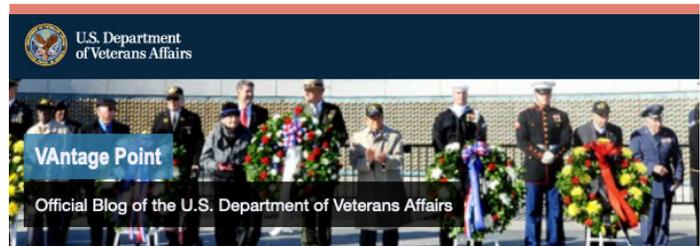
The VJO program identifies veterans earlier in the criminal justice process (including those who may participate in Veterans Treatment Courts) to provide them with access to VA services as soon as possible. Serving more than 48,600 veterans between 2018 and 2019, VJO specialists assess the needs of justice-involved veterans and link them to the appropriate VA treatment services. In Veterans Treatment Courts, VJO specialists work one-on-one with participants to connect them with the appropriate VA programs and services to support their growth and recovery.

Veterans who receive VA disability compensation and who are incarcerated for long periods of time can also apply to the Veterans Benefits Administration to have their income apportioned to their spouse or children.



Health Care for Re-entry Veterans Services and Resources

VJO specialists go the extra mile to make sure that justice-involved veterans receive the assistance and support they have earned and that veterans are fully supported in improving their lives following incarceration. Veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness can contact the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans for help at 877-4AID-VET (877-424-3838).



## Veteran treatment courts go online

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, free legal clinics are no longer operating at VA facilities. However, many non-VA legal providers are still offering legal services to veterans by phone or email. To learn more, check out this [VA blog post](#) or view a [full list of VJO specialists](#).

## GRANTS

OCSE awarded \$2.2 million to 14 grantees through a two-year demonstration called [Using Digital Marketing to Increase Participation in the Child Support Program](#). The following article continues our series featuring grantees testing approaches and analyzing data to see if digital marketing can help child support programs reach and serve families more effectively. For general information, contact OCSE project officers Michelle Jadcak at [Michelle.Jadcak@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:Michelle.Jadcak@acf.hhs.gov) or Melody Morales at [Melody.Morales@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:Melody.Morales@acf.hhs.gov).

# Digital Marketing Through Facebook, Google, and Mobile Ads

Amy Price, Communications Representative,  
Michigan Office of Child Support

Changes to TANF eligibility requirements mean that many families in Michigan are no longer referred into the child support program as assistance recipients and may not be aware of what child support services are available to them. The OCSE digital marketing grant allowed the Michigan Office of Child Support to increase our outreach efforts to those families via digital marketing channels. It also allowed us to test multiple messages and channels to maximize the impact of future digital marketing activities.

## Digital marketing interventions

According to data from the [Pew Research Center](#), the customers we wanted to reach often use mobile devices as their primary way to access the internet. Therefore, we structured our digital marketing efforts into three rounds of interventions using three different channels: mobile ads placed in apps and browsers, Facebook paid ads, and Google paid search ads.

Our primary target audience was low-income, never-married, single mothers ages 18 to 44. We selected six

counties in both urban and rural areas that had a mix of demographics and a lower percentage of child support cases.

Building on child support messaging research by an advertising, marketing, and public relations agency in California, we tested three different child support messaging strategies. The first, “Happy Families,” is the current messaging Michigan uses for child support. The second, “Helpful Services,” focuses on services we provide to busy parents. The third, “Value & Services,” focuses on the practical value of having child support.

## Initial results and more information

Initial results did not show a significant difference between the first two messaging strategies. For the three channels, mobile ads had the largest number of impressions (the number of times the ad was viewed). However, users who came to the dedicated landing page and proceeded to our application portal all came through Google paid search ads. While some counties experienced significant increases in online applications through the first two intervention periods, we did not reach our goal of an overall 5% increase.

The final intervention was planned for April through May 2020. Due to the pandemic, this round was postponed until October through November 2020. To learn more about this grant and its final results, contact Amy Price at [pricea1@michigan.gov](mailto:pricea1@michigan.gov).

Creative A



Impressions	129,650
Clicks	556
Social Engagements	45

Creative B



Impressions	167,975
Clicks	775
Social Engagements	43

## GETTING TO WORK

# Helping Noncustodial Parents Find Jobs Amid the Pandemic

Nicole Cousler, NPEP Coordinator,  
Talbot County, Maryland

The Noncustodial Parent Employment Program (NPEP) in Talbot County, Maryland, assists unemployed or underemployed noncustodial parents in making regular child support payments by helping them secure employment. These three success stories demonstrate the determination of noncustodial parents who found success with NPEP amid the pandemic.

### Mr. Batson

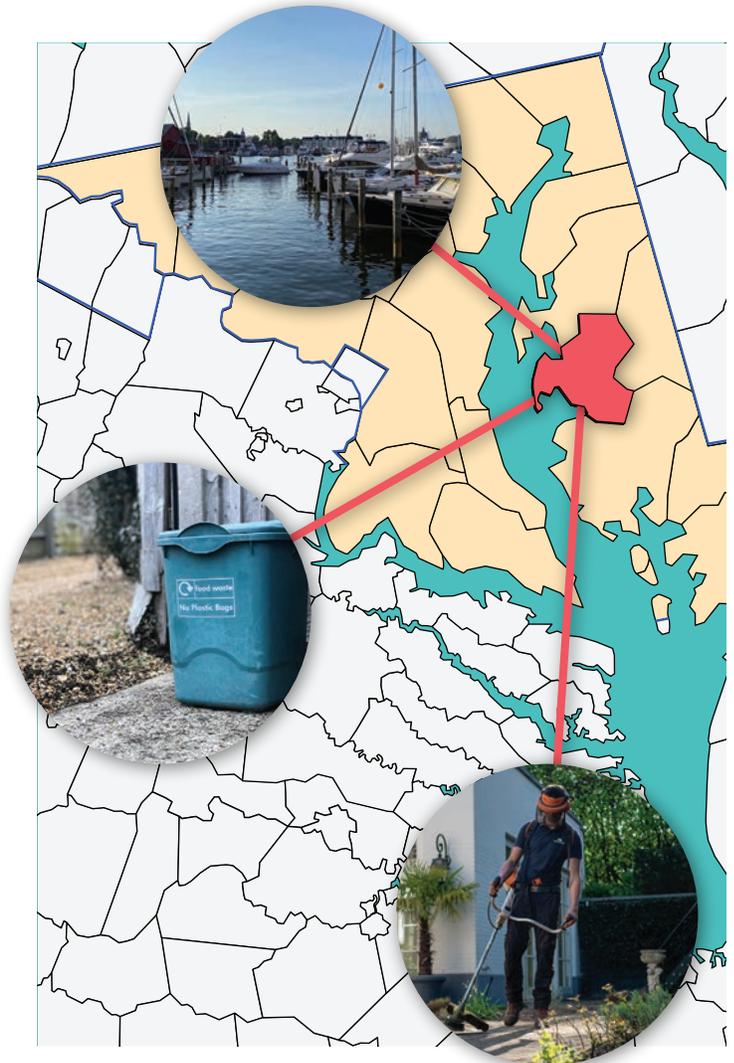
Since 2018, Mr. Batson had been employed with Crystal Steel and making regular child support payments. In March 2020, he lost his job and enrolled in NPEP to help get back on his feet. Due to Mr. Batson's criminal background, he often got discouraged when employers didn't hire him. Mr. Batson was starting to lose hope when we came across a local landscaping company looking to hire. We sent the information to Mr. Batson and, with his permission, emailed the company to share his contact information. The company called Mr. Batson that same afternoon and set up an interview with him the next morning. He was hired on the spot!

### Mr. Turner

Mr. Turner was employed by a local staffing agency, but after the pandemic hit, his assignments dried up. Mr. Turner enrolled in NPEP, and he informed us that he had 20 years' experience in welding and would like to become a truck driver. He immediately started applying for Workforce Investment Board funding for the Commercial Driver's License (CDL) course and was also actively looking for employment. We sent Mr. Turner weekly job listings from Chesapeake College, and he quickly secured a job at a yacht yard in St. Michaels, Maryland. We are still hopeful that Mr. Turner will be able to attend an upcoming CDL course to fulfill his dream of becoming a truck driver.

### Mr. Hayman

Mr. Hayman was in and out of the NPEP program for many years. We were working with him prior to the COVID-19 pandemic but stopped hearing from him after the shutdown. When he reached out in July 2020, we made sure to re-enroll him in the program and quickly found him an opportunity at Chesapeake Waste. In the midst of the pandemic, we were able to help Mr. Hayman secure a steady job.



## Child Support Report

*Child Support Report* is published monthly by the Office of Child Support Enforcement. We welcome articles and high-quality digital photos to consider for publication. We reserve the right to edit for style, content and length, or not accept an article. OCSE does not endorse the practices or individuals in this newsletter. You may reprint an article in its entirety (or contact the author or editor for permission to excerpt); please identify *Child Support Report* as the source.

Ben Goldhaber  
Acting Assistant Secretary for Children and Families

Linda Boyer  
Acting Commissioner, OCSE

Crystal Peeler  
Acting Director,  
Division of Customer  
Communications

Andrew Phifer  
Editor  
CSR.Editor@acf.hhs.gov

