

## COMMISSIONER'S VOICE

### OCSE Deepens the Bench



For those of you who are sports fans, this is an exciting time of year with the major league baseball World Series, hockey taking the ice, and football back in full swing for colleges and pros. I enjoy the excitement of the games, the loyalty of the fans, and the amazing talent of the individual players. But when a starting player goes out with an injury, most sports teams have another top pick who is ready and able to get in the game.

#### Importance of versatility

Recognizing that a single subject matter expert cannot meet all the needs of our customers — the states, territories, and tribes we serve — we have become focused on developing organizational depth at many key positions. The complexity of the child support program, the interdependence of the federal-state-territorial-tribal relationship, and the critical services we deliver to families all reinforce the importance of having depth of knowledge and skills. It is essential that more than one person be able to fulfill a given role. High-functioning business teams must be fully capable of handling customer needs with multiple skilled people, thorough information sharing, and ongoing collaboration.

#### Transferring and expanding knowledge

OCSE recently published a list of the numerous services we offer to state and tribal child support programs. The menu of training and technical assistance services is only helpful if there are OCSE resources available to provide them. To strengthen our ability to respond to requests, we've been preparing new trainers for several subject areas. In this issue, we feature several articles on domestic violence training, protocols, and partnerships. This is a growing area of interest across the child support community, and we are preparing to meet that growth with additional resources.

Also in this issue, we feature employment services for noncustodial parents, and as we roll out a new technical assistance toolkit, we will also be expanding our subject matter expertise to support its deployment. Other specialized areas we've focused on to expand knowledge within OCSE are federal reporting, performance, and incentives; tribal

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### OCSE Welcomes New Deputy Commissioner



Linda Boyer is the new deputy commissioner of OCSE. Previously OCSE's director of the division of federal systems, Linda brings 25 years of child support experience to the position. Working in both the public and private sectors, she has led diverse teams and projects to support child support programs at all levels of government. Commissioner Scott Lekan says, "Linda has always delivered high-caliber, senior-level performance. She is adept at formulating strategies to accomplish special initiatives and strategic goals and objectives." Linda looks forward to working with the child support community to enhance and evolve the program.

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#### Domestic Violence Awareness Month

October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Child support agencies must effectively serve parents while keeping families safe. OCSE has tools and resources on its [Family Violence webpage](#). Learn how some child support offices are handling domestic violence issues. Articles start on page 2.

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programs; data analysis; and partnership facilitation. States and tribes have an assigned regional program specialist in OCSE who remains the primary contact for day-to-day operations and the main resource for training and technical assistance services.

### Unforeseen continuity gaps

A breadth of skill and talent also helps us prepare for the unexpected. We plan for natural disasters and for our structures and systems to maintain continuous operations. What about our human capital? Not every team has the resources to staff more than one person to a task. But to ensure key roles have a ready substitute when the unexpected happens, I encourage every team to develop members who can step in with the knowledge, skills, and relationship when the “go-to” person cannot.

### Adopt a sports strategy

How do you deepen the bench within *your* team? Here are some practical planning steps to consider:

- Understand what essential functions your customers need from you. What outcomes must your team always produce without interruption?
- Identify the knowledge and skills required to perform those functions. What are the key competencies that you must develop in order to deliver the needed results?
- Map out a detailed and formalized plan. Who will assume critical tasks and complete them as their own rather than as a back-up?

Like a sports team, training your team members and then periodically practicing the plan will prepare them to confidently perform tasks they may not regularly do. This approach can also be a foundation for succession planning. As OCSE has learned, we can never know when circumstances will create a permanent loss on your team.

### Everyone wins

One of our core assets is a deep bench of talented and committed staff. As the states, territories, and tribes continue to become higher performing, OCSE must keep pace by providing the highest quality tools, technologies, strategies, and service. Improving outcomes for children and families is truly a team effort!

*Scott Lekan*

*Editor’s note: In this article, the authors use the terms “victim” and “survivor” to refer to someone who has experienced domestic violence.*

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

# Child Support and Domestic Violence Services — an Essential Partnership

Lorie Valdez, PJAC Case Manager, and Mattie Collins, Program Specialist, *San Bernardino County Department of Child Support Services*

Every month, employees of San Bernardino County Department of Child Support Services visit [Option House](#), a community-based domestic violence service provider. We conduct child support education and information sessions with survivors of domestic violence; our caseworkers cover everything from establishing paternity to case closure. We discuss topics based on questions from the group and focus on increasing their understanding of the child support program and gaining their trust.

### Making the connection

This work started as part of our [Procedural Justice-Informed Alternatives to Contempt](#) (PJAC) grant project. We asked for a site visit and meeting to establish a partnership with Option House. Prior to receiving the 2016 PJAC grant, we had no formal domestic violence service provider partnerships. One of the grant requirements was to build a working relationship with domestic violence service programs for referrals and ongoing training and support.

While we were touring the Option House facility, there was a group session with victims and survivors. The staff introduced us to the group and invited us to observe the session. One of the facilitators asked if anyone had questions about child support. In a room of 30 survivors, more than 20 hands immediately went up! We had an impromptu question and answer session that could’ve gone on for hours. This began our monthly sessions at Option House.



Randall Gupton, Option House; Lorie Valdez, Child Support; Jessica Barajas, Option House; Maricela Cossio-Apponte, Child Support, and Will Williamson, Child Support

## New perspectives and information

We soon learned that domestic violence victims feel they are also victims of government agencies, which they often refer to as “the system.” Parents say they find government processes confusing, and they misunderstand what agencies like child support and child welfare expect of them. Many have had their children removed by child welfare, so they often see any government agency that deals with children as “the system.” We’ve heard survivors share feelings of unfairness and distrust.

As we share information, we see gratitude and relief. One victim said, “So much misinformation is being shared between us, we are grateful that you come and lay it out straight.” Our monthly sessions clear up many concerns and fears of child support processes.

*“So much misinformation is being shared between us, we are grateful that you come and lay it out straight.”*

## Everyone benefits

This partnership created open communication between our agencies. A staff member from Option House recently called asking, “Can you please help me? I have a gentleman here who is afraid to come to your office.” This level of openness between agencies has helped remove barriers that so many parents experience.

We learned that there is a greater prevalence of domestic violence in our caseload and that victims have many more concerns about child support than we anticipated. We now understand how batterers use power and control to manipulate survivors and how we may have been unknowingly aiding those batterers. We’ve developed skills for talking with a parent who has been traumatized by domestic violence, and are more comfortable having these conversations.

Ultimately, we learned that child support and domestic violence programs should be inseparable partners that work together to help victims and their children reach financial stability to live free from violence.

For more information about domestic violence training and technical assistance, visit the [OCSE Family Violence webpage](#) and contact Michael Hayes at [michael.hayes@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:michael.hayes@acf.hhs.gov).



## Mississippi Program Focuses on Family Violence

David Love, Deputy Director of Program Support, Mississippi Division of Child Support Enforcement

For many years, the [Mississippi Division of Child Support Enforcement](#) only touched upon family violence screening at case intake. Our child support application referenced safety, but only in the context of a good cause determination. If parents didn’t disclose safety concerns at intake, family violence wasn’t generally addressed any further during the life of the case. As of August 2016, only 0.42% of cases were coded as having a family violence issue.

In 2017, we implemented a new statewide family violence screening protocol at the intake stage. It required caseworkers to ask three questions. Is there a protective order? Have there been any domestic violence convictions? Is the applicant worried about his or her physical safety? The new protocol allowed caseworkers to make a finding of family violence without a good cause determination. By August 2018, the number of cases with a family violence indicator had risen to 0.81%.

When the Mississippi child support program became a [Behavioral Interventions for Child Support Services](#) Peer Learning Site in the summer of 2018, we chose to focus on the issue of family violence. As a result, Mississippi made several key changes to the way we treated the issue. First, we acknowledged that family violence can occur and be disclosed at any time during the life of a child support case. We identified statewide system shortcomings and staff training needs. We also recognized that building partnerships with public and private stakeholders was essential.

## Providing more disclosure opportunities

One of our biggest flaws was that Mississippi didn’t formally address family violence outside of the case intake process. We quickly determined that we needed to add safety language to notices we send to both parents during the life of the case. To that end, we revised 18 notices to include information about safety measures our program could provide to make getting child support safer and encourage parents to disclose safety concerns that might be created by the child support process. These notices are generated at the following points:

- Case initiation
- Genetic testing
- Redirections
- Entry of judgments
- Receipt of payments
- Review and modification
- Court hearings
- Change of services

## System enhancements and staff training

The Mississippi system had a family violence indicator field that caseworkers could turn on when there was a disclosure. However, it was easy for staff to ignore since it wasn't a required field. We made the family violence indicator a required field that staff codes with either a "Y" or an "N" to force them to address the issue and reinforce its importance.

Regardless of the steps we took to improve the family violence process, we knew we needed staff buy-in for maximum benefit. Additionally, we needed to dispel their misconceptions about how the family violence issue should be handled. Many believed that a case could not be coded with family violence unless there was documentation.

OCSE provided four training sessions attended by one-third of the field staff. The training dispelled several common misconceptions and answered a critical question. Why is this important? The training provided staff with the tangible benefits of identifying family violence issues for our customers and providing safety-informed responses to those concerns. In addition, it increased the likelihood that they would adopt future family violence initiatives.

## Building stakeholder partnerships

While internal child support system and policy enhancements can provide meaningful protections to victims of family violence, we risk losing the opportunity to provide additional services if we don't have partnerships with other stakeholders. During the OCSE training, representatives from the Mississippi Coalition Against Domestic Violence and several regional shelters talked about their services. We also invited stakeholders from other state agencies to a meeting so we could tell them about the role of Mississippi child support.

These connections have already begun to pay dividends. We're working with our Department of Health to create a Family Violence Coordinator position. The position, which will be funded by both state and federal money, will provide collaboration between state agencies and privately funded community partners.

## Initial results and outlook

Mississippi is still in the process of improving our family violence component. The initial results from recently adopted enhancements are positive, and we have additional system improvements and policy revisions planned. Currently, the number of cases with a family violence indicator has experienced an 85% increase over the last year. Additionally, the number of new cases where family violence was flagged has almost doubled in the same period. While we recognize that more improvement is needed, we're confident that we've laid the foundation to support continual improvement and

long-term success in providing child support services to Mississippians as safely as possible.

For more information about the Mississippi domestic violence improvements, contact David Love at [david.love@mdhs.ms.gov](mailto:david.love@mdhs.ms.gov).

## Model Procedures for Domestic Violence



Financial instability is one of the primary reasons victims of domestic violence stay with or return to abusive partners. Approximately one in three custodial parents have experienced domestic violence with the other party on their case. Many victims who don't have a formal child support order would like one. The core purpose of the child support program — ensuring families receive consistent and reliable support — aligns with victims' ability to establish stable, violence-free homes for themselves and their children. To provide effective child support services to parents affected by domestic violence, child support agencies must have domestic violence expert-informed screening and case management procedures in place.

OCSE has developed domestic violence technical assistance and training resources and provides comprehensive training to child support staff upon request. [Information Memo 19-06](#) provides guidance that addresses challenges that child support staff often face when processing cases that involve victims of domestic violence. OCSE also has a one-page document that provides expert-informed [model screening questions and practices for caseworkers](#).

## PROMISING PRACTICES

# DC Modifying Orders of Prisoners and Veterans

Clive Dorvil, Trial Attorney, *District of Columbia Office of the Attorney General, Child Support Services Division*

In 2006, the District of Columbia Child Support Services Division was awarded an 1115 grant for “Modifying Orders of DC Prisoners.” The District enacted a law that requires judges to inform individuals being sentenced to prison that they have two rights. They can petition the court for a modification of their child support order or fill out a petition for modification during their sentencing hearing. During the two-year grant period, the division received over 300 modifications of orders from prisoners and also modified orders of noncustodial parents who requested modifications at their sentencing hearings.

District Attorney General Karl Racine told the child support staff to focus part of their efforts on incarcerated noncustodial parents to make sure that they were receiving proper services. The Policy, Training and Administrative Affairs section chief assigned the tasks to two attorneys and Staff Assistant Kiesha McCauley-Jackson. McCauley-Jackson has a system-generated list of incarcerated noncustodial parents that have active child support cases, and she uses the list to make motions on the parents’ behalf. The list is cross-referenced with the DC Department of Corrections and the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Since the start of the fiscal year, McCauley-Jackson has filed 94 modification motions for incarcerated parents, totaling almost 1,750 modifications.

Recently, the OCSE Region 3 staff organized a visit to two federal correctional facilities in West Virginia so staff could speak directly to inmates about their child support cases. The facilities are unique because they have large veteran populations that need child support services. They often don’t have identifiable “home states” because of prior military moves, so order modifications are often problematic.

McCauley-Jackson joined OCSE’s Carnell Lofton, along with child support workers Tony George of West Virginia, Anita Harpold of Maryland, and Clive Dorvil of the District (all pictured above right). When asked why this trip to the correctional facilities was so important, McCauley-Jackson said, “All of the men in my immediate family are ex-military so I find pride in assisting this population.” She added, “I’ve filed many motions for incarcerated noncustodial parents in these facilities and I wanted to meet the parents and answer any questions that they may have.”

For more information, contact Clive Dorvil at [clive.dorvil@dc.gov](mailto:clive.dorvil@dc.gov) or 202-442-7091.



Tony George (WV), Clive Dorvil (CSSD), Anita Harpold (MD), Keisha McCauley-Jackson (CSSD), and Carnell Lofton (Federal Office) at FCI Hazelton.

## Addressing the Needs of Children of Incarcerated Parents

Witnessing the arrest of a parent can be traumatic for a child. Savannah, a youth who witnessed the arrest of her father, described her experience during a webinar about [Children of Incarcerated Parents](#). She explained how upsetting the experience was for her and how she would constantly replay the incident in her head until her dad came home a year later. Her story also highlights what happened during the arrest that helped her cope with the situation, such as being able to hug her father before he was taken away.

Officials could have done other things to decrease the trauma during the incident, such as allowing Savannah’s mother to take her out of the house. The webinar describes research on the negative impacts associated with witnessing a parent’s arrest. The International Association of Chiefs of Police developed a [Model Policy on Safeguarding Children of Arrested Parents](#) that local police departments are starting to use to decrease these impacts.

The webinar and other resources are available at [Children of Incarcerated Parents](#), a microsite on [youth.gov](#) that’s geared toward adults working with children of incarcerated parents. The Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs — a collaboration of over 20 federal departments and agencies that support youth-focused programs and services — sponsored the website. It includes helpful information and resources on a wide variety of areas relevant to this population, such as [child support questions for incarcerated parents](#). There’s also a tip sheet on [planning for your child’s visit](#).

*The youth.gov staff hope these resources will be useful for your work with justice-involved parents. You can subscribe to their e-newsletter at the bottom of the [youth.gov homepage](#).*

youth.GOV

## GRANTS AND WAIVERS

# OCSE Awards Intergovernmental Case Processing Grants

In September, OCSE awarded \$1.39 million in Section 1115 grants for Intergovernmental Case Processing Innovation to California, Colorado, Fort Belknap Indian Community, Indiana, The Klamath Tribes, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Virginia, and Washington. These grants will test how child support agencies increase payments and improve case processing efficiency and customer service on intergovernmental cases.

For details on the individual awards, read the [Sept. 30 press release](#).

## Families Forward Demonstration

John Langrock, OCSE

The [Families Forward Demonstration](#) is an OCSE waiver project that builds on the recently concluded [National Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration](#). The national demonstration tested relatively large programs that focused mainly on helping noncustodial parents find jobs. Families Forward is testing smaller programs that place a greater emphasis on skill-building activities to help parents qualify for higher-paying jobs with career advancement potential.

The Families Forward project is a public-private partnership funded by [federal Section 1115 waivers](#) approved for four states — New York, Michigan, Ohio, and Washington. They each received private funding from the [W.K. Kellogg Foundation](#) to meet their state cost-sharing requirement. By requesting a waiver from the requirement to fund the state share with public dollars, the private investment becomes eligible for [Federal Financial Participation](#). This significantly increases the amount of money they have available for demonstration activities.

Under the Families Forward program model approach, each site performs a statewide occupational analysis to determine which job sectors are in high demand and offer advancement opportunities. The industry classifications and job sectors identified include commercial driving certification, construction, hotel hospitality, IT support, cyber security, medical secretary, industrial machinery mechanics, welding, carpentry, and manufacturing



production technician. All of these fields require varying levels of skill development and training, have the potential for career progression, and typically provide starting salaries above minimum wage.

### 2018 implementation and goals

The New York and Michigan sites moved into full study operations in April 2018. Ohio and Washington started outreach and recruitment activities in late 2018. New York Families Forward targets noncustodial parents in all five of the New York City boroughs: Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and Staten Island. Michigan targets noncustodial parents in Calhoun and Jackson counties. The Ohio demo operates within Cuyahoga and Franklin counties, while Washington runs in the Tri-Cities area within Benton and Franklin counties.

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## Timeline and Evaluation Requirements

The 4-year Families Forward Demonstration waiver project runs through September 2021, with sites planning to evaluate the project based on participants enrolled as of Dec. 31, 2019. The typical length for occupational skills training ranges from two to six months, depending on job sector requirements and the individual's responsiveness. Staff will continue to provide participants with employment services and responsive child support practices for up to one year after they complete job training.

[MDRC](#) is conducting the evaluation and providing technical assistance to sites. MDRC's final report will describe program development and implementation, participation rates, and outcome levels. Evaluation data points will include participation and job placement data from each Families Forward provider, child support administrative records, and Unemployment Insurance wage records. The expected number of Family Forward participants is 882.

Child support offices lead their Families Forward Demonstration projects using a systematic approach. The agencies handle the initial recruitment effort. To varying degrees, they outsource the screening and enrollment functions, job skills training, supportive services, and financial education aspects of the program. Each state has carefully forged partnerships with local nonprofits, government job training, and employment providers.

The overarching goal is to connect parents to occupational skills and training that will make them eligible for higher-paying jobs in their local labor markets. Families Forward also provides noncustodial parents with job development services that will help them get and retain employment, and potentially advance in their field. Parents can also take part in financial capacity-building services to help them better manage their money as well as their debt.

A key feature of the Families Forward program design is providing responsive child support practices to participating parents. By doing so, staff try to facilitate engagement and remove barriers to participation in employment and training-related activities. Examples of practices and processes implemented by local child support agencies include enhanced case management services, removal of certain enforcement actions, modifications to align orders to current earnings, and consideration for debt compromise plans.

## Outreach and engagement challenges

The program sites face two common challenges. Recruitment is difficult, so the sites are experimenting with outreach efforts using their own administrative data as well as social media platforms. Washington and Ohio in particular, are experimenting more heavily with digital media. As of Sept. 30, New York City has enrolled 363 participants into the study. Of these, 223 have been accepted for skills training.

Keeping participants engaged throughout the demonstration is the other major challenge. Sites are using a mix of strategies to promote engagement, including responsive child support practices, enhanced case management approaches, participation incentives, and work supports such as transportation.

Overall, for parents who stick with the program, there has been good news. For example, one participant in New York who completed the hospitality training program was featured in a [New York Times article](#) as someone who took advantage of this opportunity. Through study, training, and work support, the noncustodial father of four has lifted himself out of dead-end fast-food jobs. He now qualifies for more rewarding, higher-paying jobs in the hospitality sector and is focused and committed to making a better life for himself and his family.

For more information, visit the [Families Forward Project Overview](#) webpage.

## Virgin Islands Trains All Staff

The U.S. Virgin Islands Paternity & Child Support Division hosted its first All Staff Training in St. Thomas September 26-27. With the support of Yolanda Glover-Kennard from New Jersey's Rutgers Training Institute, employees participated in training that included team building, conflict resolution, and total customer service. During one session, staff took a work-styles inventory to help them adjust their approaches according to the other person's approach. The survey results overwhelming indicated that the training was beneficial. The employees have begun to implement what they've learned.



U.S. Virgin Islands Attorney General Denise George (black suit, first row) with attendees and trainers.

## Coming Next Month

In November, we'll celebrate veterans and Native Americans. The issue will feature articles about the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians' child support case aides and the Cherokee Nation's digital marketing grant progress.

We'll share what's happening in the [Veterans and Military Liaison Network](#) and tools for caseworkers with veteran and military families in their caseload.

# Child Support-Led Employment Programs Have Positive Effects

Elaine Sorensen, OCSE

Child support-led employment programs can generate positive effects for both parents and child support offices according to final analysis of an OCSE study. From 2012 to 2018, OCSE sponsored an eight-state [Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration](#) (CSPED), to test child support-led employment programs. It targeted noncustodial parents who were not consistently paying child support due to unemployment or underemployment.

OCSE designed CSPED to help noncustodial parents become employed and more financially and emotionally involved in their children's lives. Core services consisted of enhanced case management, child support and employment services, and parenting classes.

The eight CSPED states selected 18 locations to implement demonstrations. Each CSPED program was led by the local child support office who, in turn, partnered with local agencies to provide the employment services and parenting classes. Enrollment lasted for three years, during which time 10,000 noncustodial parents were enrolled into the demonstration using random assignment. Half received CSPED services and half did not. A look at CSPED participants reveals the following:

- Nearly 70% of CSPED participants had criminal justice involvement.
- Over 70% were unemployed or earning less than \$500 per month at enrollment.
- Nearly 70% had a high school education or less.

Despite these barriers, CSPED increased participants' likelihood of working by 3% and increased their earnings by 4%.

## Improving child support outcomes

Income withholding is the most reliable source of child support payments. CSPED aimed to strengthen income withholding by helping parents find work and ensuring employment partners communicate new hires to the child support office. CSPED increased the likelihood of having an income withholding order and increased the likelihood of paying child support through income withholding.

The majority of parents in CSPED had support orders that exceeded their ability to pay. To address this issue, the case managers were instructed to review parents' child support orders upon program entry and initiate modifications when appropriate. Parents receiving CSPED services were more likely to have their orders modified and their order amounts reduced by an average 5%.

Officials anticipated that CSPED participants would owe large child support arrears balances at program entry, and most CSPED programs offered arrears compromise programs to help reduce arrears. CSPED successfully reduced the amount of arrears owed by participants by 4%. Nonetheless, parents receiving services still owed an average of slightly more than \$20,100 in arrears at the end of the second year of the study. Parents who didn't receive CSPED services owed even more, averaging \$20,900.

## Improved responsibility and engagement

CSPED also increased parents' sense of financial and emotional responsibility for their children. They were more likely to indicate it was important for parents who live apart from their children to financially support them and be involved in their lives. They also increased the amount of contact they had with their nonresident children by 8%.

Satisfaction with the child support program was low among parents not receiving CSPED services, at 46%. But satisfaction among participating parents rose to 68% — a major accomplishment.

## Benefits offset costs

The net cost of CSPED was \$2,200 per participant, but the net benefit was \$3,300 per participant over 10 years. Benefits included higher child support payments, higher earnings, and lower child support enforcement costs. Most of the money went to custodial parents and their children.

*For more information about the demonstration and results, visit the [CSPED webpage](#) or contact Elaine Sorensen at [elaine.sorensen@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:elaine.sorensen@acf.hhs.gov).*

## Need Help with Noncustodial Parent Employment Programs?

OCSE launched a collection of resources and extensive technical assistance called [Knowledge Works!](#) This collection is designed to help child support agencies assess, design, implement, and enhance a child support-led employment program for noncustodial parents.



**Knowledge  
WORKS!**

## Ohio CSPED Success Story — Thelma and David

Mary Ann Abel, Communications Administrator,  
Stark County Job and Family Services

Ask Thelma and David what is important, and they will tell you being good parents to their blended family of five children is very important. They will also list their jobs, being debt-free, regularly adding to their savings account, and their recent move from subsidized housing to a rental home.

Married six years, Thelma and David are happy, hardworking, and planning for their future as they enjoy their success. What makes their story remarkable is how it came to be.

Thelma's childhood was traumatic. Her parents were addicted to alcohol and her father died of the disease when she was 15. Her mother, abusive and unable to work, was at times homeless. Thelma was often on her own. She was 17 and pregnant when placed in foster care. Following her child's birth, she depended on others for his care. At 20, she was married and had a daughter. The marriage ended, her ex-husband took custody of their child, and Thelma struggled to hold a job so that she could pay child support.

David, who worked, was paying child support for two children and sharing custody of a third. David and Thelma met and, soon after, married. Within weeks, David was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Surgery and a difficult recovery followed. He couldn't work.

While Thelma never had difficulty finding a job, she did have trouble keeping one because she didn't want to be tied down with work. It wasn't long until David and Thelma's downward spiral was out of control. In a pattern like that of her parents, Thelma was drinking. She and David couldn't pay the bills or child support, and they faced bouts of homelessness. Things were a mess.

Fortunately, David's health improved, and he was cleared to work. His child support caseworker told him that, because he was behind in his child support payments, he qualified to participate in the [Right Path for Fathers program](#). Funded through a federal grant, the program helps long-term unemployed noncustodial parents in need of skills to compete for employment. The intensive, month-long, five-days-a-week program reviews job readiness skills and focuses on parenting skills and the importance of being active in their children's lives.

David wanted to work. He registered for the Right Path program expecting to polish his resume and refresh his

interviewing skills. What David didn't expect was the care and concern of his instructors, how much he would learn, and how much he would enjoy the program. David was focused and enthusiastic, and took all the information to heart. He obtained a job with a local cellphone company and has been promoted to a store manager position.

Upon graduating, David encouraged Thelma to participate. She, too, loved the program and responsibility it instilled. She still uses the parenting workbook she received. Thelma was the only mom in her graduating class. She is now a licensed insurance agent where she loves her job and has been recognized for her work.



David and Thelma are busy now with their new jobs, but they always make sure to spend quality time with their children. And because they are so appreciative of the opportunities they have been given, they give back by volunteering at Anchor House in Alliance that provided them shelter when they were homeless. David was recently named to the Anchor House board of directors.

David and Thelma are proud of what they have accomplished and grateful for the Right Path program and the second chance it gave them.

*Editor's Note: This article was adapted from a story originally published in the [Stark County Job and Family Services 2018 Annual Report](#). CSPED provided funding for Stark County's [Right Path for Fathers program](#).*

# New Hampshire Uses Access and Visitation Funds

Sarah Chappelow, Access and Visitation Coordinator, NH Bureau of Child Support Services

The New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services' Bureau of Child Support Services uses federal [Access and Visitation \(AV\) funding](#) to increase parents' access to parenting time with their children. Low-income, never-married parents were the primary focus for our AV services. Historically, we've contracted with local service providers for mediation and supervised visitation.

The mediation and supervised visitation services have demonstrated their usefulness, but without a funding increase in 20 years, we decided it was time to take a step back. We needed to assess the parenting time needs of New Hampshire parents to make sure we were creating the biggest impact possible with our limited AV funds.

## What areas need improvement?

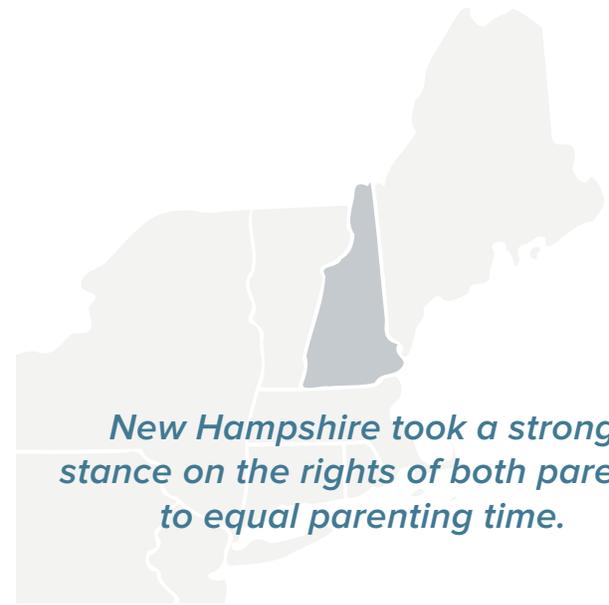
We had three overarching questions to answer:

- What are the greatest visitation needs of the parents in our caseload who don't have primary residential custody? We didn't know if we were meeting their needs or whether other services would help them gain access and visitation time with their children.
- What parenting time resources are already available to pro se parents in our state, and how can we connect our parents to them? There is no clearinghouse for legal, domestic and family violence, and parenting time resources in New Hampshire. Staff reported receiving questions about parenting time, but didn't know where to find information or what to share with parents. We also didn't know what other funding sources were available that would work well with the AV funding.
- What gaps in service exist, and how can we help address them? It was not clear what services non-primary residential parents needed that were not currently offered or available statewide.

## Connecting the dots

We contracted with the Center for Policy Research to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment. Center staff evaluated the AV landscape through interviews, data review, focus groups, and surveys. The Center also tapped into the knowledge of our staff, legal assistance agency personnel, domestic violence advocates, court employees, and court-contracted mediators and referees.

One of the Center's key findings was that never-married parents in the child support system were largely invisible outside of the child support program. New Hampshire took a strong stance on the rights of both parents to equal



*New Hampshire took a strong stance on the rights of both parents to equal parenting time.*

parenting time when it required that parenting time be determined in all divorce proceedings. Never-married parents can access the courts to ask for parenting time, but very few do. The Center assessed the barriers preventing never-married parents from initiating and following through on the process of establishing parenting time, and made recommendations on strategies to overcome these barriers.

For example, one barrier identified was a lack of connection between parents in the child support program and existing resources provided to pro se litigants by both the New Hampshire Judicial Branch's Self-Help Center and Legal Aid's Legal Information and Referral Services.

## Planning and collaboration

The needs assessment underscored the value of ongoing communication and collaboration between the child support program and legal, judicial, and family-service stakeholders and partners. Without that collaboration, we cannot fully understand or address the parenting time needs of families in our program. This process strengthened our partnership with the New Hampshire Judicial Branch and set a course for new and improved collaborations with other community stakeholders. Communication and collaboration will improve access to services and service delivery for parents.

We're also engaging families and stakeholders to identify and prioritize short- and long-term actions to improve parenting time outcomes for families. The Center's analysis gave us critical insights into steps we can take to improve our program's performance, ensuring we effectively meet parents' need for access to and time with their children.

*Thanks to Anne Byrne, a research associate at the Center for Policy Research who helped write this article. For more information, contact Sarah Chappelow at [sarah.chappelow@dhhs.nh.gov](mailto:sarah.chappelow@dhhs.nh.gov).*

The Office of Child Support Enforcement provides more services than people generally see. This column highlights tasks that federal child support staff handle. To read previous articles, visit [A Look Inside OCSE](#) on our website.

## A LOOK INSIDE OCSE

# Requesting Research Matching Agreements

Data Access Team, OCSE

Most state child support programs use [Federal Parent Locator Service](#) (FPLS) data to locate parents, establish paternity and child support orders, and enforce those orders. However, other programs request FPLS information for additional uses. OCSE reviews these requests to determine if they meet the criteria required under the Social Security Act.

The majority of the requests we receive are for information in the [National Directory of New Hires](#) (NDNH) because it contains the most current wage and employment information. These requests challenge us to balance our duty to safeguard the information with our authority to share the information in accordance with federal law.

Congress has long recognized that federal agencies should have access to the best data reasonably available. In order to provide this kind of access and still protect individuals' privacy, Congress requires that OCSE collect, use, and share data only in accordance with its authorized purpose. One such purpose allows state and federal agencies to request NDNH data to determine an individual's eligibility for benefits or to investigate fraud, waste, and abuse. But the majority of requests for NDNH data come from federal or state agencies that want to determine the effectiveness of their programs through evaluations or research. The research authority that allows this is contained in §453(j)(5) of the Social Security Act.

## Research purposes

Evidence-based decision-making depends on reliable, high-quality information. Our primary goal is to provide data to agencies while protecting the privacy and confidentiality of NDNH records, so we remove personal identifiers for research requests.

The Data Access Team supports federal and state agencies that have legal authority to access information in the NDNH. Under this legal authority, NDNH data must be used for research purposes that will likely contribute to the work of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or child support programs.

## Lifting children out of poverty

Child support and TANF provide a wide range of benefits and support many activities that target eliminating the

effects of child poverty. The requesting agencies must show that the information they seek will improve these programs. For example, they must provide information that will improve services for those in poverty, discover tools to help care for children, or assist individuals with employment opportunities. In fact, many of the research requests are from programs developed by the Department of Health and Human Services for families served by the TANF and child support programs.

## Employment and other programs

Other requests come from employment programs that provide work-related skills training and opportunities to individuals who receive or are eligible for services provided by the TANF and child support programs. The Department of Labor's research projects are related to developing job programs and determining best practices that will provide individuals with the skills they need for gainful employment. OCSE has also received research requests from agencies such as the Office of Policy and Research Evaluation, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Approximately 30 approved research projects currently have access to the NDNH.

For more information about research matches, contact Maureen Henriksen at [maureen.henriksen@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:maureen.henriksen@acf.hhs.gov).

## Child Support Report

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