

# Child Support Report



OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT

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## Prisoner Reentry Initiative OCSE Partners with U.S. Departments of Justice and Labor To Help Previous Offenders Find Work

By Elaine Blackman  
OCSE



When OCSE awarded grants to seven state child support agencies last September, it became an important team player with the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and Department of Labor (DOL) in the quest to reduce recidivism.

The OCSE Section 1115 grants went to Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Ohio, Oklahoma and Tennessee—states already operating grant projects funded by the DOJ and DOL Prisoner Reentry Initiative (PRI). The PRI grants help offenders who are newly released from prison find work and access other critical services in their communities. The PRI grantees provide incarcerated individuals with skills in a prison “pre-release setting” to help prepare them for employment.

Under the PRI, the DOL partners with local faith-based and community organizations “because these are the organizations that can best meet needs of incarcerated individuals by helping to connect them not only with employment, but other critical support services such as housing and transportation,” says OCSE’s Karen Anthony.

In 2008, Anthony, and others in the Administration for Children and Families, approached the two departments with the idea of “linking our prisoner reentry work to theirs. We knew we could be a team player by helping to manage child support cases in the prison setting and then following individual cases. By managing the cases, we can ensure child support orders are set appropriately so the parent can realistically meet his or her obligation and the custodial parent can reasonably count on child support as a reliable source of income.”

### Child Support’s Goals

The overarching goal of the child support grantees is to provide child support services to supplement the PRI projects in their states. They also hope to develop business practices and procedures that will stay in place long after

*continued on next page*

### Commissioner’s Chirps



See these brief and timely messages for child support professionals on the OCSE website.

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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Administration for Children and Families  
Office of Child Support Enforcement

the three-year grant funding expires. These might include identifying which inmates have child support matters to address, early in the stages of incarceration.

In addition, a point person from each OCSE regional office participates in the conference calls and planning. “The goal of having a point person in each region is to have more federal staff conversant about incarceration and reentry issues as they coordinate with other agencies,” says Anthony. “These regional staff members are quickly becoming national experts in the child support program community about incarceration and reentry issues.”

## Domestic Violence Factor

Although the PRI grants are designed for nonviolent prisoners, the OCSE grantees are required to develop domestic violence protocols. To help the grantees and

their partners with this aspect of their project, national domestic violence experts Anne Menard (Director, [National Resource Center on Domestic Violence](#)) and Dr. Oliver Williams (Director, [Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community](#), University of Minnesota) presented web-based training to the grantees this March about the role of managing domestic violence risks related to child support, especially in their work with fathers.

Several of the OCSE grantees have developed their domestic violence protocols and will train not only the child support workers, but their partners in DOJ and DOL. Anthony adds, “We are fortunate to have Allison Randall of ACF’s [Family Violence and Prevention Service Program](#) as part of our national team working to help these grantees succeed.”



## The Case for Engaging Incarcerated Parents

*Why should child support agencies develop programs to help incarcerated and recently released noncustodial parents to better meet their family responsibilities?*

- The majority of inmates in state and federal prisons are parents with children under 18, and half of these incarcerated parents have open child support cases. Although the proportion of incarcerated noncustodial parents in state prisons is roughly 3 to 5 percent of the child support caseload at any one point in time, the cumulative impact is much higher. For example, almost 25 percent of Baltimore, MD, cases involve noncustodial parents with a history of current and prior incarceration. (See [The Intersection of Incarceration & Child Support: A Snapshot of Maryland’s Caseload](#).)
- These parents are accessible in prison settings and respond positively to outreach efforts by child support personnel. About half of state child support programs have undertaken at least one collaboration with prisons and jails, often funded initially with OCSE grants.
- Many ex-offenders reentering their communities face limited employment options due to a range of laws, attitudes and other limits within certain occupations.
- Limits on access to public assistance programs for some offenders and to subsidized public housing also inhibit ex-offenders from successfully reintegrating into the community.
- Ex-offenders also tend to have multiple personal barriers to employment, including limited work experience, little education and illiteracy, and substance abuse and mental health problems.
- Ex-offenders with child support obligations also are faced with fines, fees and restitution associated with their offense.
- Providing services to noncustodial parents reentering society can help them overcome some of these barriers and improve their chances of remaining in the community and meeting their child support obligations.

# Our Role in Helping to Reduce Recidivism



Throughout the child support community, we are steadily broadening the range of strategies and tools we use to help ensure that children receive reliable support from their parents. Through federal grant programs and collaboration with the workforce system, corrections departments, courts, veterans programs, TANF, child welfare, domestic violence programs, and many faith- and community-based fatherhood programs around the country, the child support program provides a part of the federal and state funding and technical support for comprehensive services to low-income parents, both mothers and fathers.

Now OCSE is collaborating with the U.S. Labor and Justice Departments on their Prisoner Reentry Initiative grant program to help reduce recidivism, as you see in the article on page 1.

The collaboration grant projects in several states hold huge promise for incarcerated parents who are often burdened with two kinds of debt—child support arrears and criminal justice-related fees and fines. And we know: parents released from prison have a greater chance of successful reintegration into the community if they have stable jobs and positive family ties. Unrealistic child support orders, high payroll withholding levels, and unmanageable debt

can undermine both employment and family relationships by increasing the pressure on reentering parents to quit jobs and reenter the underground economy.

Along with the Prisoner Reentry Initiative grants, the Second Chance Act, signed into law in April 2008, holds promise to improve outcomes for people returning to communities from prisons and jails. This first-of-its-kind legislation authorizes federal grants to government agencies and nonprofit organizations to provide employment assistance, substance abuse treatment, housing assistance, family programming, mentoring, victims support, and other services that can help reduce recidivism.

Having worked on the development of both the Second Chance and Prisoner Reentry initiatives, I am convinced that the child support program needs to set realistic child support orders, reduce child support debt, and partner with other agencies and programs to help parents get back on their feet after release from prison and stay in a regular job because it's in the best interest of their children.

I'm looking forward to the child support community's participation in these initiatives.

*Vicki Turetsky*



## Resources for State and Local Programs

For more information about collaboration of prisoner reentry and child support programs, see OCSE publications [“Incarceration, Reentry and Child Support Issues: National and State Research Overview”](#) and [“Working with Incarcerated and Released Parents: Lessons from OCSE Grants and State Programs.”](#)

For information about the prisoner reentry field, including a fact sheet, newsletter and other resources, see the Department of Justice's [National Reentry Resource Center](#), including the section with resources for state and local programs.

# Collaboration Empowers Ohio's Incarcerated and Reentering Noncustodial Parents



By Elaine Blackman  
OCSE

Helping parents to empower themselves will help to remove barriers that prevent them from paying child support. That's the basic belief behind a collaborative project that the Ohio Office of Child Support began in 2007 with the State Department of Rehabilitation and Correction. The project makes communication between these partners an important strategy to improve outreach to all stakeholders. It has led to more than 900 parents receiving accurate information and referrals about child support, job placement, housing options, legal issues, mental health services, mentoring and education.

Carri Brown, former assistant deputy director of the Ohio Office of Child Support and member of the statewide reentry coalition, explains: "Following release from prison, parents and children face challenges as the family reunites. Parents have to deal with the challenge of finding work and stable housing while also reestablishing a relationship with their children. Making sure parents know about child support procedures and who to call upon when they have questions can only help."

One father who participated in a community "resource fair," for example, learned about the importance of staying in touch with the local child support agency. "Upon his release, he verified information with a member of the collaboration project and contacted the local agency to arrange for payment and a modification. He had never before contacted the agency on his own," says Brown.

As part of the project, seven counties (Butler, Clermont, Delaware, Franklin, Hamilton, Lorain and Lucas) participated in "prison diversion" pilot programs in 2009.

In cases connected with these programs, child support payments increased 98 percent in one year. Statewide, prison commitments based on felony nonpayment of child support dropped about 22 percent in 2009, from 781 to 610.

The collaboration recommended expanding the prison diversion options, and the General Assembly approved the expansion, to be put in place in 2010.

## Prisoner Reentry Project Off the Ground

Building on the foundation of the collaboration project described above, Ohio is set to begin work on a demonstration grant as part of OCSE's collaboration with the DOJ and DOL Prisoner Reentry Initiative (*see page 1*).

The primary goal of the project, in Franklin County, is to remove barriers that prevent reentering parents from paying current child support, helping them to navigate the child support program and justice system, and improving their family connections through partnerships with public, private and faith-based organizations.

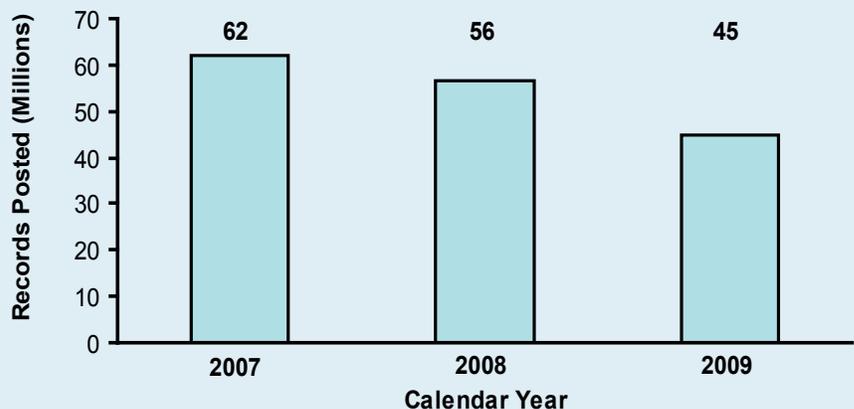
"The project is gaining a lot of energy and support from community partners and government officials," says Brown. "We are eager to increase our connections with the Prisoner Reentry Initiative grantees, too."

The shared vision among project partners is that children of formerly incarcerated parents will have what they need—the emotional and financial support of their parents. These grantees hope to help family members connect with one another by encouraging parents who have gone home, to stay home. The project is expected to last through May 2012.

For more information, please contact [Athena.Riley@jfs.ohio.gov](mailto:Athena.Riley@jfs.ohio.gov) or [DENTK@jfs.ohio.gov](mailto:DENTK@jfs.ohio.gov).

## Annual New Hire Statistics Posted

Since the recession began in December 2007, there has been a dramatic drop in the number of new hires being submitted to the National Directory of New Hires.



# Positive Outcomes for Children

## Pennsylvania Child Support Program Offers 'Paternity Tracking System' to Child Welfare Workers



By John Clark  
*OCSE Region III*

Beginning this July, the Pennsylvania Bureau of Child Support Enforcement will bolster its efforts to provide information that can help to place vulnerable children with family members. The Bureau will offer access to its Paternity Tracking System for at least one employee in each of the state's 67 County Children and Youth (child welfare) agencies.

The system tracks Voluntary Acknowledgement of Paternity forms for children born out-of-wedlock as part of the state's strong voluntary acknowledgement program. The system will provide information on more than 75 percent of all children born out-of-wedlock in the state in the past 15 years.

Child Support Director Daniel Richard explains the state's policy about access to this valuable data: "We are sensitive to the needs of children—that's what our program is all about. To the extent permitted by federal law and regulations, responsible sharing of information about a father who has acknowledged paternity with the local children's services agency looking for him may be the potential new start for an at-risk child to experience positive outcomes in his or her life."

### Information Benefits the Children

Local child support offices already provide child welfare agencies with access to locate information, as needed, once the father is identified. The Berks County Children and Youth Services agency exemplifies the benefits of accessing this information. The agency, assigned to protect children up to 18 from abuse and neglect, has its own locate tools, however, when the tools prove inadequate, particularly in locating noncustodial fathers, it seeks help from its county child support partner.

Linda Faye Epes, Director of Berks County Domestic Relations Section, describes its close relationship with the local child welfare agency. "We make all locate and other resources available to them, such as FPLS and paternity establishment. Our mission, as is theirs, is to ensure the welfare, safety and support for the minor children and families we serve."

Providing access to voluntary acknowledgement and locate information has proven valuable to state and local child welfare agencies. The agencies confront a dilemma when deciding on family care or foster care placement for a child in a situation where the mother, her siblings and parents are unable or refuse to care for the child, and child welfare agencies must resort to locating the father and contacting his immediate family. In many cases, the state and local child welfare agencies cannot identify the father or have lost contact with him and do not have the resources to pursue location.

In such instances, the Pennsylvania Bureau of Child Support Enforcement can help by allowing child welfare to benefit from the information in the voluntary acknowledgement data base and locate resources through the FPLS. All information on new hires, driver's licenses and quarterly wage reports is potentially accessible to the state and local child welfare agency.

Access to voluntary acknowledgement information and FPLS information creates a win-win-win situation:

- Accurate identification and contact information for the father enables the child welfare agency to obtain valuable potential placement resources for the child (the father can also provide information about aunts, uncles and grandparents; they are all potentially important placement options).
- The father can either reunite with the child or perhaps make a fully informed decision about termination of parental rights.
- Most importantly, the child "wins" because he or she can potentially benefit from placement with a loving, caring family member.

Access to paternity and locate information provides better outcomes for children and potential family reunification—a goal shared by both child welfare and child support programs.

For further information, contact John Clark at [john.clark@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:john.clark@acf.hhs.gov) or 215-8614067.

## Resources on Child Welfare Collaboration

- In last summer's edition of the [National Quality Improvement Center newsletter](#), OCSE Commissioner Vicki Turetsky summarized the need for child support and child welfare collaboration: "Our most vulnerable children, those in the child welfare system, need an extra hand to help them thrive in the face of difficult circumstances. Perhaps surprisingly to some, that extra helping hand can come from the child support community."

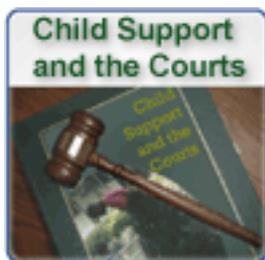


- An HHS study published in 2008, "[More about the Dads: Exploring Associations between Nonresident Father Involvement and Child Welfare Case Outcomes](#)," follows up on a 2006 study about child welfare agencies' efforts to identify, locate and involve nonresident fathers of children in foster care. Initial results in 2008 suggested that engaging the nonresident fathers of children in foster care could potentially improve outcomes for the children.

## New Website: Child Support and the Court

Need help finding practical aids for judicial and child support agency collaboration? Now you can, in the Online Resources section of a new website called [Child Support and the Court](#).

You can also link to the new website from the "courts" tab on the OCSE website. Look for this icon:



At this site, judges, court personnel, child support agencies and community organizations can quickly learn how to establish an effective problem-solving court for child support. In the multimedia section, they can view a new training series presented to the child support community by Judge Kristin H. Ruth that features her evidence-based, problem-solving court model in Wake County, NC.

The Child Support and the Court website was developed by the National Judicial/Child Support Task Force under an OCSE grant project.

For further information, contact Judge Larry R. Holtz, Judicial/Court Liaison, at [lholtz@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:lholtz@acf.hhs.gov).

### Child Support and the Court is a "go-to" resource for:

- Judges, magistrates and other members of the judiciary hearing child support enforcement cases;
- Administrative Office of the Courts personnel supporting a child support docket;
- State and tribal child support directors;
- Child support agency directors and case workers;
- Attorneys representing child support agencies and parents with child support cases; and
- Community-based organizations offering services to parents with child support orders, including employment skills, job placement, education, mediation, access to visitation and substance abuse treatment.

# Hispanic Outreach Hits the Airways in Sedgwick County, Kansas

By **Francesca Montes-Williams and Yeni Telles**  
*Office of the Court Trustee*  
*Sedgwick County, Kansas*

Since March 2009, the Sedgwick County Office of the Court Trustee has opened the lines of communication with Hispanic communities in the Wichita, KS, area by conducting monthly interviews with the Hispanic “Radio Lobo” station.

The interview program came about after our Sedgwick office pursued its first interviews with two local Hispanic radio stations to publicize the annual “amnesty day” event. It took a bit of searching the station websites to find out who to contact and then sending e-mails and leaving phone messages to many of them. After several weeks, when no one answered our e-mails and calls, we contacted the host of the morning show at one of the two stations, Radio Lobo, and he replied within a couple weeks. Finally both stations responded favorably and conducted the interviews—but it was Radio Lobo that showed a continued interest.

Our advice to others is to also contact the morning show host since he or she probably has a hand in choosing

guests. The host mentioned to us that by law the station has to publicize community services and these interviews offer an easy way to comply.

Each month we choose the interview topic and gather information to ensure we hit the highlights important to the Hispanic community. It’s vital to listen to the people and talk about what they want to know; there are many things that the Hispanic community is not aware of and many are afraid to contact us in the office. We choose a topic based on concerns in the community and questions we get during a normal day; in some cases people will call the office and suggest a topic. We also ask our local child support office about any news or information that we need to take to the Hispanic community.

We begin our interview on Radio Lobo with that topic and then open up to questions via phone calls on the air and then off the air. We receive at least 10 calls during the interview; most are general questions about child support that we can answer immediately. For others we may give the caller our phone number and ask them to call our office. A normal interview with Radio Lobo lasts 45 minutes to an hour.

In the last year, topics have included modifications (increases and decreases) and bench warrants (how to clear them and how to avoid one). We have also talked about drivers’ license restrictions, UIFSA cases, how to establish child support and the timely hot topics of unemployment and taxes.

In a regular day at the Court Trustee office, our Spanish-speaking team receives four to five calls. On the day of our Radio Lobo interview and through the following week, our office receives 20 to 30 calls from the Hispanic community.

The interview program with Radio Lobo gives us an opportunity to further our mission and goals by reaching out to the Hispanic community and reaffirming that we work for the children.

In addition, the Sedgwick County office plans to explore the [OCSE Hispanic toolkit](#) to help extend our outreach efforts to the Hispanic community.

*For more information, contact the authors at the Office of the Court Trustee, 7th Floor West, Sedgwick County Courthouse, 525 N. Main, Wichita, KS 67203 (316-660-5833).*



**From left: Yeni Telles, Arnolando “El Tigre” Gonzalez and Francesca Montes-Williams**



# Database Portal Helps Kentucky Locate Noncustodial Parents

By Jacob Van der Oort  
*Kentucky Division of Child Support*

In some cases, the task of locating parents who owe child support can be as simple as going online. The Kentucky Division of Child Support and other state and local agencies have turned to a Kentucky-based technology company to provide them with a valuable source of information in their search for noncustodial parents.

Appriss' JusticeXchange is the integrated criminal justice portal to OffenderNet, the nation's largest database of historical and currently incarcerated booking records and photos from thousands of agencies across the country.

The results in Kentucky have been promising. In 2009, the department's Parent Locate section staff located an average of more than 125 absent parents through JusticeXchange each month. The number of located absent parents by means of JusticeXchange actually is a lot larger now that child support staff statewide has gained access to JusticeXchange.

Staff recently reported a match between a noncustodial parent in a Kentucky jail to an Indiana child support case in which more than \$15,000 was owed. Indiana authorities were notified and the offender was extradited across state lines to answer the charges.

Another noncustodial parent was located in a county jail on a charge unrelated to child support. Staff discovered that the individual owed more than \$38,000 in back child support in two cases originating in Maryland.

Krista Hackworth, a Magoffin County, KY, child support specialist, was seeking two individuals who had fallen months behind in their child support payments. Hackworth placed a watch on both and was notified when the two were arrested. "This allowed me to get the needed information on delinquent child support to the judges that would preside over their cases," said Hackworth.

Previously, obtaining booking information was rather cumbersome. Using a mainframe application, workers could only search by name and the system only contained Kentucky data. After searching, the user would see a

screen listing all of the matching names. The caseworker would then have to pick the one that matched their case data to see additional information such as the facility, charges and time to serve. If caseworkers in other states were interested in reviewing an individual incarcerated in Kentucky, they would have to contact the child support division, Department of Corrections or the individual facility where a person was being held.

Now users can access nationwide data from their computer. As the OffenderNet database expands daily, its value is always increasing, allowing staff to obtain correctional data, residential addresses and employment information quickly without a single phone call.

For more information, contact Jacob Van der Oort, supervisor of the Kentucky State Parent Locate Section, at 502-564-2285 xt 4412 or [Jacob.vanderoort@ky.gov](mailto:Jacob.vanderoort@ky.gov).



## Child Support Report



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