

Child Support Report

OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT



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Collaboration with 'Assets' Program Holds Promise to Strengthen Families

Seven state child support programs are embarking on new demonstrations to improve the financial stability of families in their caseload by partnering with grantees of the [Assets for Independence \(AFI\) program](#). The federally funded AFI program enables community-based programs to deliver asset-building strategies to low-income families.

OCSE awarded the seven states with three-year, Section 1115 grants in September. Each state program will develop a partnership with an AFI grantee that results in the child support program's parents receiving financial literacy and other services.

This demonstration represents a critical opportunity to identify promising strategies that strengthen the economic stability of families in the child support program.

The AFI grant program is administered by the Office of Community Services, a sister agency to OCSE within the Administration for Children and Families. AFI grantees provide a range of financial-oriented services to low-income people, including special-purpose, matched savings accounts called Individual Development Accounts. In these accounts, every dollar in savings is matched (from \$1 to \$8) by the AFI program. These accounts can be used to enroll in postsecondary education or training, capitalize a small business, or acquire a first home.

Other services include financial education, debt management, credit counseling and repair, and tax preparation. The Office of Community Services is working with several other agencies within ACF

to encourage links between AFI grantees and other programs.

OCSE anticipates that a number of promising approaches will emerge from this demonstration. States have proposed a variety of referral mechanisms to identify parents who could benefit from these services, including family courts, fatherhood programs, teen health clinics, and child support referrals. Service strategies also vary, with many collaborating with workforce development programs, to provide comprehensive services to these parents. OCSE hopes to learn what's needed

to make these collaborations successful.

For further information, please contact jennifer.burnszynski@acf.hhs.gov. For resources, see the [AFI Resource Center](#).



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



A New Year for Opportunities to Help Families

Each New Year brings us new opportunities to enhance our services to children, parents and families. I am especially looking forward to the opportunity to help families through collaboration with the Assets for Independence program (featured on page 1). This demonstration will help parents in the child support program by offering financial and literacy services, which can in turn help parents to obtain lasting employment and become regular providers of child support.

It's tax season again, and another opportunity to promote the Earned Income Tax Credit program to our child support customers who are low- and middle-income workers. Lifting over 6.6 million people out of poverty last year, including 3.3 million children, the EITC program, run by the IRS, is one of the most effective anti-poverty tools for working families, and the Federal government's largest cash-assistance program. Last year, more than 25 million people received nearly \$58 billion in EITC.

As child support professionals, we have a responsibility to promote awareness about the EITC.

January 28 marks the fifth annual EITC Awareness Day. We also can educate parents about the availability of other tax credits like the Child Tax Credit, another refundable tax credit that puts much needed income into the hands of working parents and families. Find more information on the expanded Tax Credit Outreach Campaign website at <http://www.eitcoutreach.org> or visit <http://www.etc.irs.gov/central/main/> to see if you or someone you know may be eligible.

We can do more to refer parents—both mothers and fathers—to other programs that provide needed assistance. For example, when a parent has a disability or otherwise may be eligible for Social Security title II benefits or Supplemental Security Income (SSI), we can refer them to the Social Security Administration. For more information about title II benefits and SSI benefits, see <http://ssa.gov/>.

My best wishes to all for a happy New Year filled with opportunities to help children and families.

Vicki Turetsky



Child Support Blog

OCSE's new blog is up and running. Share your comments with fellow child support professionals and stakeholders on the monthly Commissioner's Voice column. You can also access the blog through the "Child Support Professionals" tab on the [OCSE website](#).

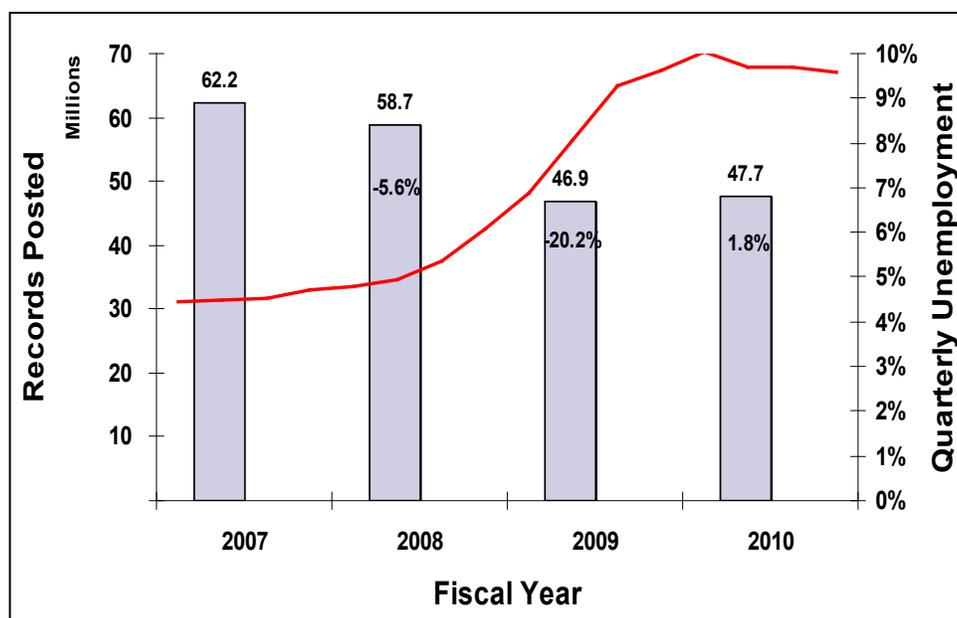
New Hires Showing Signs of Improvement

By Dennis Putze
OCSE

OCSE has been monitoring state submissions to the National Directory of New Hires to determine the impact of the recent recession (December 2007 – June 2009). We saw significant decreases in New Hire submissions during FY 2008 (-6 percent) and 2009 (-20 percent) and dramatic increases in Unemployment Insurance record submissions during FY 2008 (+9 percent) and 2009 (+77 percent). The Quarterly Wage record submissions during this period were more stable with a small increase in FY 2008 (+3

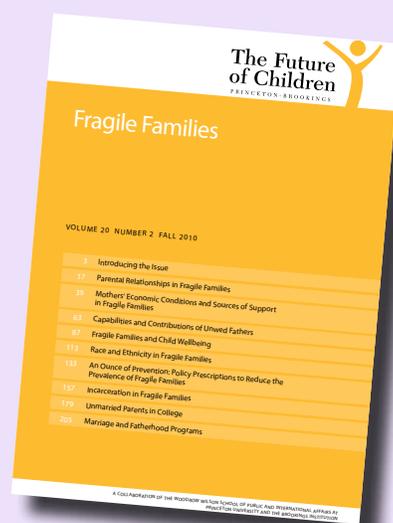
percent), and we not did see a decrease until FY 2009 (-7 percent).

However, in FY 2010, we are seeing signs of improvement as New Hire submissions have stopped dropping. There was a small increase of about 2 percent in New Hire submissions for FY 2010. While the number of Unemployment Insurance records matched continued to increase in FY 2010, the rate of increase (+28 percent) was much smaller than the 2009 increase (+77 percent). Quarterly Wage record submissions remained about the same in FY 2010 as in 2009.



Journal on Fragile Families

The Future of Children, a joint project between Princeton University and the Brookings Institution, recently released the latest volume of its **journal**, which highlights research from the Fragile Families Study. It reports that unwed parents face a host of problems that complicate their ability to get good jobs, form stable families, and perform successfully as parents. The study recommends policies for reducing unwanted pregnancies, improving relationship stability and father involvement, and increasing children's access to such support programs as high-quality health care and early childhood education.



New York City Conference Communicates Child Support's Role in Strengthening Families

By Frances Pardus-Abbadessa
Deputy Commissioner

New York City Office of Child Support Enforcement

How can child support help to strengthen families?

New York City's Office of Child Support Enforcement set out to present the answers to that question when it created a conference to broaden understanding within the social service community about the significant role that child support plays to strengthen families and reduce child poverty.

The office co-sponsored the conference, "Strengthening Families: How Can Child Support Help?" with the City University of New York and Princeton University in October. It drew about 220 attendees from federal, state and local government agencies, universities, nonprofit and community groups, and others involved in ensuring that children receive the financial support of both parents.

Those of us in the child support community understand how the child support program has changed significantly over the years. Initiated to ensure that noncustodial parents repay the government for the welfare grants that supported their families, the child support program has evolved into a powerful anti-poverty program with the vast majority of collections going to single mothers. Even though child support is an effective element in this effort, considerable misinformation, lack of information, and misunderstanding about the program continues among service providers and organizations that work with families and are in a position to help them.

The conference sought to show a more holistic picture of the child support program's work to support families. Our office also strove to continue a dialogue with these programs about how to more fully integrate child support with programs that deliver social services and work with mothers and fathers, so that more children can realize its benefits and receive support from both parents.

Support Services Highlighted

"The child support program is often seen as an enforcement and collection agency—and it is—but it is also an income support program," said Commissioner Turetsky in her keynote. "Child support is a major source of income for low-income children. One in four children in the nation participate in the child support program, and it is one of the few programs to have regular contact with low-income fathers." The Commissioner highlighted that child support has become a much larger share of the income for single-parent households. "Child support has doubled its effectiveness over the past 10 years, and tripled its effectiveness for the deeply poor."

"In New York City, we are following your charge," confirmed Robert Doar, Commissioner of the

Human Resources Administration, which oversees the child support program. "The things you're talking about are the things we believe in."

The conference rolled out 10-year findings from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing study, which tracked the living situations of unmarried parents, gathering data after 1, 3, 5 and 9 years. (See [Journal on Fragile Families](#) article on page 3.) The study concluded that unmarried parents tend to be younger, less educated and



Commissioner Turetsky, above and with Frances Pardus-Abbadessa, Deputy Commissioner, New York City OCSE.



more likely to be unemployed. It found that 85 percent of unmarried parents were in romantic relationships at the time of the child's birth, and intended to raise the child together. Even in situations where the parents were not romantically linked, the majority of fathers wanted to be involved in their children's lives. However, by year five, these relationships grew more complicated as mothers and fathers moved on to new romantic relationships and started new families, all of which made child support more difficult to enforce.

The audience learned about New York City's child support services, including the "Support Through Employment Program" (STEP), which refers noncustodial parents to employment programs, and has led to child support payments of \$20 million each year.

The New York City office also refers parents to mediation services to settle visitation and co-parenting issues, provides noncustodial parents with a means to have their child support orders modified to more accurately reflect their income without going back to court, and manages a program that encourages teens to delay pregnancy until they are financially stable adults. A new program called "Low-Income Dads" connects low-income fathers with employment, the child support program and their children.

One panel at the conference featured child support's effects on families from the perspective of a child support

program administrator, researcher and community provider. One participant, himself a formerly incarcerated parent, described the culture shift taking place on both the side of the child support agency and the side of provider programs that had previously sought to avoid contact with the formal child support program. Another underscored the importance of child support programs working closely with community-based organizations that can provide credibility in the community and recruit parents to participate in new programs.

Another panel focused on the challenges and benefits of incorporating child support into social service programs. Presenters described the growth in both the services their programs provide and the number of clients they reach, illustrating the demand for more of these types of integrated programs.

Conference Well Received

Conference evaluations showed that 96 percent of attendees learned new information. Some praised the effort to include other stakeholders. As one provider said, "I really thought it admirable that our office invited so many CBOs [community-based organizations]. The open discussion between your agency and the litigant advocates can only help relations." The New York City office plans to hold another policy conference in October 2011.

Problem-Solving Courts Branch Out in Georgia

Judge John Simpson (center), with former Georgia Chief Justice Leah Ward Sears, spoke at a graduation in Georgia's first Problem-Solving Court, in Coweta Judicial Circuit (Carrollton) last year. The state began its second Problem-Solving Court last February, in the courtroom of Superior Court Judge David R. Sweat in the Western Judicial Circuit (Athens). Judge Sweat brought together the Division of Child Support Services, Goodwill, the Georgia Department of Labor, West Georgia Technical College and a variety of social service agencies. The court's coordinator, who is part of the child support division's fatherhood program, meets with participants weekly and ensures they are seeking employment and getting other assistance to overcome barriers—for many, the biggest barrier is remaining drug and alcohol free. For information about the Georgia problem-solving courts, contact Tangler Johnson at 404-657-3861 or tsgray@dhr.state.ga.us.



Oklahoma Claims Success from Automating SSA 'Income Withholding Orders' for Title II Benefits

By Toby Hallows and Jeff Wagner
Oklahoma Child Support Services

In 2008, the Social Security Administration (through LOCSE) agreed to provide data about new claims for Title II benefits to state child support agencies. Oklahoma Child Support Services was eager to have the additional tool to obtain reliable sources of income for children and families with Title II benefits, paid to retirees and disabled people based upon work history.

The Automation Process

Through SSA matches, states for many years have obtained information on obligors who receive benefits. This alone had been valuable information, since before matching with SSA, our child support agency relied on the noncustodial parent's self-reporting receipt of SSA benefits—or even just luck—to know when to send an income withholding order (IWO) to SSA that would result in payments.

Now, by also receiving the pending claim information, the child support agency can immediately send SSA an IWO to put in place so that when future benefits are approved for the claimant, the agency will not only begin to receive monthly garnishment payments right away, but will potentially be eligible for a portion of any retroactive lump-sum payment due to the beneficiary.

As a result of receiving information from SSA's pending file, our child support agency determined how best to use the data and the benefits this effort would provide to families. When our agency started to receive the expanded Title II benefit information, one of our first steps was to forge a relationship with the local SSA office. The child support agency worked with an SSA liaison to develop the best approach for distributing IWOs to all 19 SSA offices in the state rather than send the IWOs to one central office.

When our child support agency began receiving pending claims information, we continued to work with the SSA

liaison to ensure that local SSA offices contacted us before distributing lump-sum payments to the beneficiary so that we did not miss child support monies that could help reduce the debt owed to those families. Ongoing communication between Oklahoma Child Support Services and SSA continues to improve the income withholding process.

With a thoroughly automated process in place, our agency uses information from SSA to send IWOs on all noncustodial parents identified as receiving benefits, as well as those who applied for Title II benefits.

Results Exceeding Expectations

Results have already shown a better-than-expected return on investment. The original estimate showed collections from SSA would double in the first year of using the pending claims information to send IWOs to SSA. Previous SSA collections were estimated at \$3 million per year. Projections based on actual collections (following use of pending claims information) show collections will exceed \$8 million in the first year alone.

In addition, collections through lump-sum payments have significantly increased. The seven SSA payment centers contact Oklahoma Child Support Services when a beneficiary will receive a lump-sum payment. The child support office averages more than \$50,000 collections each month from lump-sum payments that largely pay off arrears.

While the collection amounts are significant and impressive, the most important result of this effort is the benefit to families with children. This project not only has shown increased collections, but many more families are receiving income from SSA—nearly doubling the number of children who benefit.

Oklahoma Child Support Services shares information about its effective use of automation and successful collaboration with SSA at national conferences and teleconferences.

Contact Toby.Hallows@okdhs.org for more information.



My Internship at OCSE

The Connection Between SSA Disability Benefits and Child Support Orders

By **Shabnam Lotfi**
Student

Last summer I had the privilege of serving as a summer intern in OCSE in Washington, DC. As a third-year law student from the University of Wisconsin Law School, I was excited to apply my legal education to a real-life legal issue.

On the first day of my job, my supervisor gave me the assignment: to research and analyze the interplay between Social Security disability benefits and child support orders. My supervisor asked, “When a child receives Social Security dependency benefits as a result of a noncustodial parent’s disability, does the noncustodial parent receive credit on his child support record for those benefits?” Initially I thought to myself, no problem. ... I’ll read Title II of the Social Security Act, the states’ child support laws, and most recent cases. I’ll have this question answered in no time. Little did I know just how complex this simple issue could be!

Roadblocks and Complexities

The first roadblock I came across dealt with semantics and acronyms. I spent hours reading Title II only to realize that the words “dependency benefits” were not in it. As it turned out, different agencies and states referred to these benefits under different names. Most states and child support agencies refer to the benefits as dependency benefits, or auxiliary benefits. The Social Security Act, however, refers to the benefits as Child’s Insurance. This was important to know. I realized how much I had to pay close attention and be careful with my research. Otherwise, I could easily make mistakes by misinterpreting the statutes and case law.

My next challenge dealt with timing. I learned that sometimes a noncustodial parent is requesting the court to factor the Child’s Insurance benefits into his/her child support calculation. And at other times, the noncustodial parent is requesting the court to credit his/her child

support record for Child’s Insurance benefits already received by the custodial parent. As a matter of law, these are two separate issues.

With respect to the first issue, my research showed much more uniformity among the states. Forty-six states, including the District of Columbia, grant a noncustodial parent some sort of credit on his/her child support obligation for CI benefits received by the custodial parent as a result of his/her disability. New York remains the only state that, as a matter of law, does not allow any credit for CI benefits. The remaining states—New Mexico, Oregon, South Carolina and Arkansas—do not have any law affirmatively approving or denying

credit to a child support order. Rather they find the issue to be within the court’s discretion to decide on a case-by-case basis. The important point to remember here is that this credit is given at the time the child support order is being created.

However, when a noncustodial parent requests credit for CI benefits that have already been received by the custodial parent, the law takes on a slightly different perspective. Typically this happens when the Social Security Administration sends a lump-sum payment that is retroactive; meaning that the payment covers past months’ benefits. This made for a more complex issue. On the one hand, it wasn’t the noncustodial parent’s fault how Social Security processes its applications. On the other hand, the courts strive to be sensitive to balancing the needs of both parties. Few states have any laws that govern on this issue. As a result, while most state courts do provide some credit for lump-sum payments, they tend to vary in the degree and circumstances for which they allow the credit.

Appreciation

As the summer went by, I found myself learning more and more about just how complicated a simple issue can be. I learned that courts are often faced with having to balance multiple and conflicting goals in their decision-making process. Ultimately this gave me a greater appreciation for our legal system.



Shabnam Lotfi

Wisconsin and Iowa Open Up Border Project

By Ike Anyanike

*Intergovernmental Central Registry Lead
Wisconsin Bureau of Child Support*



Ike Anyanike

Thirty-three child support professionals, including Wisconsin and Iowa child support program directors, gathered in Lancaster, WI, for an inaugural meeting of the states' mutual border project. They focused on intergovernmental child support

program collaboration across state lines

to boost performance and provide timely and efficient services for the families and children of both states.

Wisconsin director Susan Pfeiffer and her Iowa counterpart, Carol Eaton, explained the purpose for creating the project: to promote understanding of each state's policies and practices to better manage our common cases. It is also geared towards preparing staff members in the border counties as program resource persons for other local child support offices within their respective states.

Both directors highlighted the distinctively administrative nature of the Iowa program and the judicial orientation of the Wisconsin program. This disparate outlook set the stage for the need for mutual understanding between both states.

Though the child support program is national with an overarching code of federal regulations, other legislation, and state-adopted versions of the Uniform Interstate Family Support Act, each state has its respective statutes that govern the program within its borders. Better understanding of those distinctions by other states speed up all child support enforcement processes to better serve customers with interstate cases.

Drawing on experiences from partnering with neighboring states, Mary Tilton of the Wisconsin program and Kris Baker-Ellis, director of Rock County child support program, reported on the successful Wisconsin/Minnesota and the Wisconsin/Illinois border projects that have been running strong for some years. (See article about the latter in the [July 2010 issue](#), page 4.)



Verda Nemo (left), Grant County, WI, Child Support Agency director, presents a plant to Carol Eaton, director of the Iowa Child Support Program, to commemorate the Border Project partnership.



The policy and intergovernmental lead staff participants—myself and Jim Murray of Wisconsin, and Tonya Cunningham and Melinda Denney of Iowa—led discussions on the program policies and procedures of both states and areas of common interest and divergence, aimed at creating an effective bridge so field workers will appreciate that no one state is right or wrong, but that both states have different approaches to achieving common goals and providing quick and efficient services to the families.

The procedure discussion elicited lots of “a-ha” moments as everyone realized that sometimes obstacles are created by jargons each state uses to describe the same activity.

It is towards this understanding that Wisconsin strives to establish these unique border projects with its neighboring states, as these states tend to share the larger bulk of intergovernmental child support cases. The ultimate goal is effective collaboration for a more efficient service delivery to the children and families we serve and to help program participants better understand what is going on with their case.

The palpable enthusiasm in this inaugural meeting, hosted by Grant County child support director Verda Nemo and her staff, bodes well for the children and families of Wisconsin and Iowa that rely on child support services.

Contact Ike Anyanike at Ike.Anyanike@wisconsin.gov for more information.

Popular Publications in Texas and New York Help to Guide Dads

By Michael Hayes
Child Support Division
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and

Monique Rabideau
Division of Child Support Enforcement
New York Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance

It's pretty common for new parents to ask, "Where's the manual for this baby?" One doesn't have to look hard at the bookstore to find a long list of how-to manuals on parenting; however, most of the authors make broad assumptions about the economic capacity, education level, readiness to parent, relationship between parents, and (quite frequently) gender of the parents who read their manuals. A young, low-income man who has just found out his girlfriend is pregnant, well, let's just say that he's not the target demographic for most of the commercial parenting books.

In the last decade, we've seen an overwhelming amount of research on fragile and forming families and father involvement. There is no longer any debate over whether unmarried fathers are present in the lives of their children (they are) or whether unmarried mothers and fathers want Dad to help raise their children (they do). We know that when positive and responsible father involvement begins has an affect on how long it lasts, and the earlier it begins the better. This makes the prenatal period an ideal time for intervention.

From a child support enforcement perspective, the strong correlation between emotional ties and financial support provides an argument in favor of child support programs taking steps to strengthen father-child relationships from pregnancy onward.

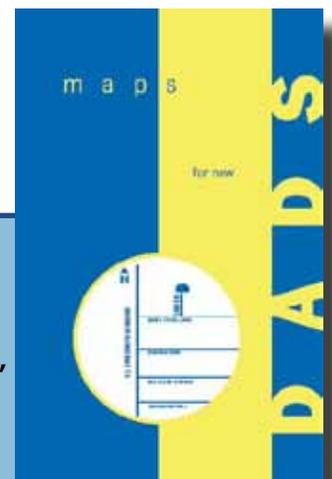
With all this in mind, Texas created "Maps for New Dads" and New York created "Driver's Manual for New Dads," both to give men a resource for understanding and actualizing their role as a new father.

Maps for New Dads

The 50-page booklet is adapted from a research-based curriculum of the same name, published by Healthy Families San Angelo (www.hfsatx.com). In a conversational style, it addresses special concerns of new and expecting dads. "Maps for New Dads" walks fathers through the process of understanding how they feel about becoming a dad, imagining what kind of dad they hope to be, and figuring out what it takes to be the dad their child deserves.

The first half of the guide covers dad's role and concerns during the prenatal period. The second half is full of instruction and information about caring for a new baby. A consistent emphasis on the legal and financial responsibilities of parenting is woven throughout the guide. Key topics include: prenatal growth and development; prenatal visits—what are they, why are they so important and why Dad should go; understanding and supporting Mom during pregnancy and after delivery; the impact of healthy marriage on children; the importance of father involvement; bonding with your baby; caring for your new baby—feeding, sleeping, diapering, crying, safety (and more!); making dadhood legal; and living like a dad.

A PDF version of the Texas manual "Maps for New Dads" is available to download at https://www.oag.state.tx.us/cs/publications_cs.shtml.



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The free guide is available in English and Spanish. Copies are distributed through child support offices, hospitals, WIC centers, schools, Head Start programs, and fatherhood programs statewide. The success of “Maps for New Dads” is most easily measured in the consistent demand for the resource and positive response from parents.

A Driver’s Manual for New Dads

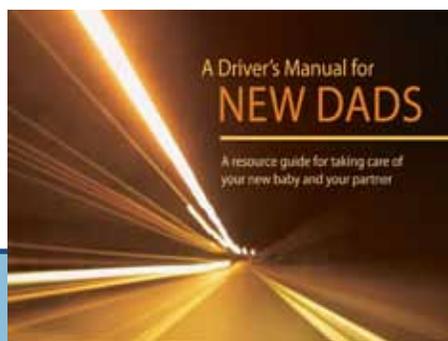
Inspired by Texas’ “Maps for New Dads,” as well as a general lack of resources available to young fathers, New York created the “A Driver’s Manual for New Dads: A Resource Guide for Taking Care of Your New Baby and Your Partner.”

The 24-page manual resembles the state’s Department of Motor Vehicles driver’s manual and uses driving-related references to help young dads prepare for the road ahead.

The manual offers insight into the world of fatherhood from the time a young man learns he will become a father until the child is born and beyond, with practical tips and strategies to help throughout the journey. It also strives to help men understand what their partner is going through and how the baby is developing. It promotes prenatal visits, supporting their partner and basic care of their newborn, and lists state resources for new dads.

The publication is a proven favorite among New York hospitals, which order thousands of copies annually for new parents. It is also popular with other service providers and agencies whose clients include young parents and new born children.

The free manual is available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Russian, Haitian Creole and Korean.



A PDF version of New York’s “A Driver’s Manual for New Dads” is available to download at <https://newyorkchildsupport.com/publications.html>.

Trends in Grandparenting, Marriage and Family



A [Pew Research Center analysis](#) of U.S. Census Bureau data, released in fall 2010, reports that 1 in 10 children in the United States lives with a grandparent. This share increased slowly and steadily over the past decade before rising sharply from 2007 to 2008, the first year of the recession.

About 41 percent of those children who live with a grandparent(s) are also being raised primarily by that grandparent, according to the Census data. This figure—2.9 million children—rose slowly throughout the decade and it, too, spiked from 2007 to 2008; a 6-percent increase.

Another recent [Pew analysis](#) shows the new “marriage gap” in the United States is increasingly aligned with a growing income gap. However, “even as marriage shrinks, family—in all its emerging varieties—remains resilient. The survey finds that Americans have an expansive definition of what constitutes a family. And the vast majority of adults consider their own family to be the most important, most satisfying element of their lives.”

Child Support Report



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