

IV-A/IV-D Collaboration: Working Better Together for Families and Children

***A Report of OCSE IV-A/IV-D Urban
Academies: Collaboration Strategies and
Promising Practices***



**Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Child Support Enforcement**

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I. Introduction

This document highlights some of the common issues and promising practices Child Support Enforcement (IV-D program) and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) (IV-A program) agencies may consider in designing effective strategies to improve collaboration. It summarizes the major strategies discussed at two Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) IV-A/IV-D Urban Academies held in 2004 and 2006.

Why is this collaboration between TANF and child support so important? TANF/child support collaboration is critical to helping parents establish legal paternity for their children, receive program benefits and, for families nearing the end of time-limited TANF benefits, ensure receipt of child support to supplement employment earnings. Collaboration enables the provision of services that children and families rely on to address their daily needs, such as housing, clothing, and food, and helps families progress toward economic self-sufficiency.

Many States and localities are striving to enhance their collaboration efforts and the timing couldn't be better. Child support is becoming a more reliable source of income for children and families and the child support community is continuing to make significant strides in that direction. Since the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), total collections have increased by over 91% -- about \$23 billion in support was collected in 2005 and 91% of those child support collections went to families.

A compilation of research findings, "The Interaction of Child Support and TANF: Evidence from Samples of Current and Former Welfare Recipients" published June 2004, by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, DHHS, supports the fact that child support is important to family self-sufficiency. Research findings indicate:

- Child support receipt increased the likelihood that families left TANF;
- Former TANF families who received child support were less likely to return to welfare; and
- Former TANF families depend on child support payments for a significant source of their income.

The composition of the child support caseload has changed significantly since the passage of PRWORA. As of FY 2005, TANF recipients now make up just 16% of the caseload and the largest group of clients is former TANF families, totaling 46% of the caseload.

Effective TANF/child support collaboration is critical to our clients in the world of time-limited welfare. TANF/Child Support collaboration seeks to help families achieve

economic self-sufficiency by working together. TANF staff are better able to help their clients obtain employment and supplement their earnings with child support.

In addition, this collaboration affects program funding for both the TANF and child support agency. The child support performance incentive system is designed to ensure effective collaboration and the incentive to do so is very real. Most child support performance measures are related to assistance cases. If a State does not meet its required child support performance and data reliability standards, it is subject to a reduction in its TANF grant. Also, each State's child support collection amount, from which performance incentives are calculated, double counts collections in former and current assistance cases. Thus, for TANF or former TANF cases for which child support efforts are unsuccessful, State incentive payments may be affected.

Federal Forums to Help Improve Collaboration

Over the past few years, OCSE and the Federal Office of Family Assistance (OFA) have sponsored several Urban Academies to improve performance. OCSE also held two meetings bringing together representatives of large urban jurisdictions to improve the performance of child support agencies in these jurisdictions. Representatives included staff with direct managerial and operational responsibilities who met to discuss common problems and helpful interventions. At both sessions, these urban sites addressed IV-A and IV-D interface concerns. Recommendations focused on:

- High-level administrative commitment to collaboration between the agencies;
- Regular communication across agencies;
- Cross-training; and
- Improved performance, particularly in sharing information to improve TANF and child support outcomes.

Subsequently, on June 14-15, 2004, OCSE sponsored a IV-A/IV-D Academy for urban sites with large caseloads. Sites participating in this Academy were: Los Angeles County; Philadelphia; New York City; and Harris County, TX (Houston). The purpose of the Academy was to focus on improving IV-A/IV-D collaboration. OCSE asked these urban areas to develop action plans and special initiatives to improve collaboration efforts.

A second IV-A/IV-D Academy was held on April 10-11, 2006, in Chicago, IL. The urban sites participating in this Academy are located in Region V. They included: Cook County, IL (Chicago); Wayne County, MI (Detroit); Marion County, IN (Indianapolis) and Cuyahoga County, OH (Cleveland). As with the 2004 Academy, the purpose was to improve IV-A/IV-D collaboration. Each urban site prepared an action plan and is currently working toward implementation.

This report focuses on the topics discussed at the two OCSE sponsored IV-A/IV-D Academies. Some of the initiatives that evolved from these forums, as well as some initiatives from other States/localities, are described below.

II. Making It Happen – First Steps

One of the first steps to improving collaboration is to provide a forum for bringing together staff and decision makers from both programs to identify issues and make cross-program improvements. Different approaches are outlined below. Los Angeles used a “bottom-up” approach to engage frontline workers in decisions about how to best improve practices, while Pennsylvania brought together county managers to identify and address key cross-program concerns. In addition, Cuyahoga County held two levels of meetings -- one for the director/deputy director and one for managers and staff. Meetings at these levels are intended to discuss and plan for impending changes that affect both programs.

A key to success is ensuring that there is ample opportunity for managers and staff from both programs to work together to develop specific recommendations and action plans. Costs for meetings can be reduced by holding meetings in State training facilities and minimizing staff travel costs by using a central location. It is important to continue with follow-up meetings and mechanisms to track action plans to completion. Front-line staff members should exchange phone numbers and e-mail addresses so that they can contact each other on cases as needed.

Promising Practices

- **Los Angeles (CA):** In a follow-up to the 2004 Academy, Los Angeles held, with OCSE support, a Blue Ribbon Summit on cross-program collaboration. That Summit, which was held in August 2004, provided an overview for approximately 400 staff from both departments of the rationale for renewed focus on coordination and the outcomes that it can achieve. The Summit itself is a model for soliciting input and support from staff who carry out these programs on a day-to-day basis. The Directors for TANF and Child Support in Los Angeles provided the framework for the Summit, setting priorities and expectations. Key managers led groups of frontline workers in carefully structured exercises. There were about 40 groups of ten front-line professionals who discussed issues and prioritized action steps across agency lines. They created a new team model that blends improved data collection approaches, targeting time-sensitive cases, effective interviewing techniques and cross-training, capacity building and recognition.

The Summit resulted in 16 formal, concrete recommendations for increasing program performance on both sides through closer collaboration. Most of the recommendations have been implemented and some are described in detail throughout various sections of this document.

- **Pennsylvania:** In 2003, the Federal Administration for Children and Families Region III Office brought the County Directors of both programs together to provide

an overview of the programs throughout the State. County Assistance Office Directors were informed about how much child support can accomplish with a name and Social Security number for a noncustodial parent. On the other hand, Child Support Directors were made aware of the tremendous amount of information that must be secured at the time of the initial TANF interview (e.g. medical, child care, transportation, training and food stamp eligibility) in addition to information about the noncustodial parent. Both TANF and Child Support Directors learned that incorrect coding was preventing TANF referrals from reaching the child support office. Finally, all participants agreed that the OCSE "Power of Two" video shown at the meeting provided a very effective explanation of the value of establishing paternity.

The County Directors of Child Support and the County Assistance Office Directors for each county also met separately to develop their own plan for improving cooperation. The diverse plans involved joint training, establishing liaisons, providing staff phone numbers and a focus on the TANF eligibility re-determination process. The primary needs identified from these meetings were (1) training for TANF workers on proper coding concerning the child support referral process and (2) read-only access to child support case information by TANF workers.

To help sustain the momentum, a second set of meetings was held throughout the State in 2004. These meetings focused on systems issues, good cause referrals and employment issues. In all, six Child Support/TANF collaboration meetings were held in central locations in 2003 and five in 2004. Pennsylvania is committed to continuing this partnership through a cooperative agreement between the Bureau of Child Support Enforcement and the local Domestic Relations Offices which supports the continuation of collaboration meetings.

Pennsylvania compared child support performance on IV-A cases before and after the meetings. Data showed an increase in rates of paternity establishment from March 2003 to March 2004 from 66% to 71%, and an increase in rates of support order establishment from 54% to 58%. Pennsylvania analysts believe that much of this increase is due to more effective case management of TANF cases as a result of better cross-program collaboration.

- **Cuyahoga County (OH):** An integral part of Cuyahoga County's action plan for IV-A/IV-D collaboration calls for routine meetings at all levels of IV-A and IV-D staff. The purpose of these meetings is to improve communications and establish and maintain effective plans for collaboration. To further improve cross-program staff communication, the County developed, and is in the process of implementing, a new tool. It's a IV-D fact sheet which will be given to the IV-A worker on the day of the client's appointment. This will provide the IV-A worker with current child support information so the data in both systems will match and reduce referral errors. The fact sheet summarizes both parents' demographic information as it appears in the child support system. The IV-A/IV-D fact sheet was implemented in a pilot program in mid-August 2006. While it is too early to determine the impact on the systems

interface, it has received rave reviews from the IV-A workers who are receiving information that helps them prepare for their interviews and reduce the occurrence of client fraud.

III. Data Quality and Exchange

State/local agencies that share information, especially using automated tools and access, can greatly facilitate coordination. Access to necessary data reduces duplication, and improves the quality and accuracy of information and client referral services. Technical as well as non-technical issues can affect the quality of data. Several States have incorporated technical solutions for improving data quality.

Getting input from IV-A and IV-D program staff as well as technical staff is key to developing effective automated interfaces and data exchanges. Thus, it's important that program and technical staff work closely together. Some methods related to improved automated interface are: regularly scheduled meetings between IVA-/IV-D program and technical staffs; use of a single vendor to design/upgrade both systems; regular use of focus groups from both programs; and designating program liaisons at local offices to provide user feedback to centralized technical staff.

Promising Practices

- **Rhode Island:** Rhode Island has developed a monthly report of potentially duplicate cases. The report identifies cases involving noncustodial parents who have more than one Social Security number associated with the same custodial parent, who have last names that are phonetically the same, who have first initials that are equal and who are the same sex. The cases are merged and corrections are made as needed. The system also automatically pops up a potential match screen when the name and other identifying information potentially match with someone already in the system. The State's integrated system, INRHODES, was designed with online help for data fields. The help system provides information about the data field, and also about available codes, if applicable.

INRHODES produces a IV-D screen for every TANF case with an established child support order. The automated screen shows the caseworker the amount of the child support order; what percentage of the cash assistance grant this represents; and whether or not the payments have been made regularly within the previous three months. Caseworkers can show parents that work plus child support equal their best option for maintaining self-sufficiency.

In addition, Rhode Island's TANF office is in the process of installing scanning equipment in every local office to scan birth certificates, divorce decrees and marriage certificates to assist child support in gathering pertinent information. The

scanned documents will be available to view on INRHODES, which is shared by other agencies.

- **Nebraska:** Nebraska's IV-A System, N-FOCUS, assists TANF workers in determining if the applicant already exists in the system. This eliminates duplication of effort by both the child support caseworker and TANF intake worker. In addition, N-FOCUS includes an interactive screen that allows TANF staff to directly enter or update the applicant's information.

Another initiative Nebraska is undertaking is enhancement of its IV-A to IV-D referral process. One new feature will include a pop-up window for the noncustodial parent's address that is triggered when the noncustodial parent is added to N-FOCUS. Data entry is not mandatory at this step but is expected to increase awareness that this information is needed. Another feature to be added is a text field where pertinent information such as other alleged fathers can be added to alert the IV-D worker. Other potential enhancements to N-FOCUS will facilitate the TANF worker's ability to collect and record information. These include modifications to the sequence of screens or sequence in which data is collected on an individual screen.

N-FOCUS creates comparison reports that identify active TANF cases without a IV-D referral to ensure that there is a corresponding referral for each applicable TANF case. An alert is sent to the TANF worker as a reminder if the IV-D referral has not been sent.

IV. Cross-Program Training

Another effort to facilitate improved IV-A and IV-D collaboration is providing cross-program training on the mission and goals of each agency. States/localities use cross-program training to ensure that workers from each agency understand the importance of collecting and entering critical information, and flagging important information. Training includes topics such as: Why is this information important? How will this impact our services? How will this impact my job? The training also highlights barriers and possible solutions to data collection. Some training sessions discuss information on the data interface. Effective training ultimately should enable staff to better assist their clients and reduce errors.

Agencies should not assume that the other program staff understand why their information is needed and how it is used. When staff are more aware of the needs of the other agency and the resulting benefits to the clients, they are more likely to provide the information. Also, cross-program training should be more than a one-time event – it should be provided to new staff and to all staff as new procedures or system changes warrant. After the training, it is important for IV-A and IV-D staff to be able to communicate regularly with each other by e-mail or phone.

Promising Practices

- **Pennsylvania:** In addition to proper coding instruction, TANF workers wanted to know how to access the PA child support automated system (PACSES). Jim Fee, the PACSES team member in Pennsylvania, provided the training to IV-A staff throughout the State to improve data access and exchange. Many TANF workers had no idea what happened to their referral once it was sent to child support. Also, a regular line of e-mail communication between TANF and child support was established.

The results have been very impressive. Since January, 2002, Pennsylvania has reduced the number of IV-D cases that were coded incorrectly by IV-A workers by over 55% Statewide. In counties which offered the individual training, the reduction in coding errors was 74%.

- **Ohio:** The State provides “big picture” collaboration training to new staff in IV-A and IV-D in three-hour sessions. The training highlights the State’s vision for working together and attempts to orient new staff early in their tenure. Detailed training on the Statewide automated system interface between the programs is included. Data screens from each program are displayed and the impact of data entry in one system is demonstrated in the other program’s automated system. Workers are informed as to how the information is used by each program and the impact on program outcomes and performance. In addition, Ohio conducted an annual refresher course for existing staff in December 2006. The training sessions focused on IV-A and IV-D policies as well as the shared database system. Also, local training efforts will be held following the State training for both agencies to correct errors that are being commonly made.

V. Client Education and Case Management

Through such processes as home visits, re-determination and co-location, TANF parents can more easily be educated on the importance of child support to their families. Such mechanisms can also reinforce staff commitment to program interface and improve information sharing.

Re-determination is an ideal time to review the status of a TANF case to establish whether any additional child support action should be taken. It is also a key opportunity to educate TANF parents on the importance of child support to family self-sufficiency.

Promising Practices

- **Milwaukee County (WI):** Milwaukee County practices co-location at each of its five TANF/cash assistance sites where private vendors handle these cases. Child care, food stamps, and medical assistance are processed at another site, operated by the

Milwaukee County Department of Human Services (DHS). There is a Child Support paralegal at each one of the cash assistance sites to expedite case processing. Additionally, Milwaukee County has co-located two staff at DHS. One staff member interviews custodial parents applying for benefits and one staff member interviews noncustodial parents who apply for food stamps. When noncustodial parents apply for food stamps, the interview includes an assessment of their child support status. A case review can be performed to determine if the order is appropriate for the client's current circumstances. As long as the noncustodial parent is cooperating with the food stamp employability plan, the Department will not bring the case before the court for enforcement.

Finally, a IV-A employee is stationed in the Milwaukee County IV-D office. To ensure data matches, this individual assists in cleaning up bad data between the IV-A and the IV-D data system. This is extremely helpful in eliminating the revolving duplicate cases and clarifying the noncustodial parent's status (e.g., when the custodial parent states that the noncustodial parent is out of the home to the IV-A worker but back in the home when he or she is before the court). Over the course of Milwaukee's co-location implementation, paternity and support order establishment rates have improved dramatically -- paternity establishment rates increased from about 59% in 1999 to 93% in 2005, and support order establishment rates increased from about 60% to 78% in 2005.

- **Marion County (IN):** In September 2005, the Child Support Division of the Marion County Prosecutor's Office implemented an agreement to place two full-time workers in one of the IV-A agency's local offices. The prime objectives were to complete IV-D interviews while TANF recipients were in the local office, speed case processing, improve the accuracy of data obtained, and boost recipient compliance. The co-location also eliminated the need for the recipients to travel downtown for their initial interviews.

The co-location has been successful. In addition to meeting the prime objectives, several other benefits occurred. The attitude and cooperation of IV-A caseworkers are greatly improved. IV-D also provided training for all local IV-A sites. Because of this initial training, most IV-A workers now understand and support the objectives of the IV-D program. This has made the work of IV-D easier, more efficient, and more effective. In addition, a IV-A liaison was also placed in the IV-D office. Although this placement only recently occurred, the benefits have been immediate and substantial. The IV-A liaison is able to access and share important case information in "real" time, greatly reducing processing time when IV-A information is necessary but not available to IV-D.

- **Los Angeles County (CA):** Los Angeles has revamped its County's Home Interview Program to incorporate child support guidance/outreach when IV-A staff interview public assistance applicants in their homes. It has also developed a new tool to highlight the importance of child support during the IV-A re-determination process.

- **Philadelphia (PA):** Philadelphia has successfully implemented co-location in two County Assistance Offices. The results are impressive. On average, child support is obtaining Social Security numbers on 83% of the alleged noncustodial parents in TANF cases and dates of birth on 91% of these parents.

VI. Targeting TANF Cases

With time-limited welfare, it is essential that agencies work together to target cases leaving welfare to help ensure families have the best chance of moving toward self-sufficiency. Child support is an important source of income, and along with earnings, greatly reduces the likelihood of former TANF families returning to welfare rolls.

It is important that agencies establish specific protocols and time frames to ensure that both agencies can respond effectively to TANF families nearing their time limit. Electronic data matches and reports can be used effectively to identify TANF clients nearing the end of their eligibility and/or TANF clients whose TANF cases could be closed with reliable receipt of child support. While specific results are not yet available, a number of sites, as described below, have implemented or designed strategies that focus on generating child support for those TANF recipients that are nearing their term limit.

Promising Practices

- **Kansas:** The Kansas Every Effort Campaign is designed to ensure that families leaving assistance at the end of the 60-month time limit have had every opportunity to obtain gainful employment and access resources, and that they are aware of community and agency supports that remain available to them. The campaign includes a caseworker protocol to ensure that all assessments have been completed, that all treatment recommendations have been followed, that multiple placements were attempted and intensive case management was offered for those capable of working, and that all resources have been explored. At every stage in the protocol process a cross agency team that may include Child Support Enforcement, Rehabilitation Services, Children and Family Services, and Economic and Employment Services is involved.
- **Philadelphia (PA)** conducted a meeting of IV-A and IV-D partners. They decided to focus on child support cases for families that (1) had a child support order; (2) did not receive any payment for more than one year; and (3) would soon reach their five-year TANF eligibility limit. From this collaborative effort, Philadelphia focused enforcement action on more than 200 delinquent obligors.
- **Cuyahoga (OH):** Ohio is developing a “TANF Time Limits Pilot Project” that will contain a comprehensive case plan for those recipients nearing the end of their

TANF time limits. For example, cases in which paternity and support have not been established will be directed to the IV-D agency for an immediate interview. A listing of those clients approaching their time limits will be produced by the TANF agency and compared to the IV-D caseload to determine needed actions. Initial tests of this project have indicated that the data is relatively easy to access and can be matched against child support data using automated solutions.

VII. Conclusion

In recent years, many sites have made great strides in improving their collaboration efforts. Although described sites have implemented a variety of methods, there are many common strategies being used to develop and improve cross-program coordination between TANF and child support. Particularly key is focusing on enhancing communication at all levels of management, across program staffs, and between program systems to ensure that the best possible services are provided to TANF families. The benefit of collaboration is critical to reducing the need for long-term services for these families. It is also crucial to agencies in reducing errors and inefficiencies and improving performance. It is hoped that the strategies presented will serve as a model for other States and localities as they adapt and improve collaboration efforts.

VIII. Contact Information

Urban Site	Agency	Contact Information
Los Angeles County, CA	IV-D	Steven Golightly, Chief Deputy Director L.A. County Child Support Services 5770 S. Eastern Avenue Commerce, CA 90040 (323) 889-3400 sgolight@childsupport.co.la.ca.us
Los Angeles County, CA	IV-A	Lisa Nuñez, Chief Deputy Director L.A. County Department of Public Social Services 12820 Crossroads Parkway South City of Industry, CA 91746 (562) 908-8309 lnunez@ladpss.org
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