

Child Support Report

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Why is social media important to us?

By Kim Danek, OCSE

The OCSE communications office occasionally gets asked why we worry about social media and why we think it's important for the federal office. The long answer is because we want to make sure we are communicating with our clients and partners in the most effective way possible and on the most appropriate channels available. The short answer is that many of our customers and partners use social media.

With so many different social media sites, though, choosing the most appropriate ones is not easy. A search of the term “child support” on a site like Facebook or Twitter will bring up more “hater” than “helpful” accounts. As the federal office, we also interact more with child support professionals, employers, and legal people than with the general public.

To reach the corporate and government child support audience, we use LinkedIn. Think of it a little like Facebook but for the professional world. We post discussions on five child support and welfare-themed organizations in LinkedIn. We consciously pick topics that are professionally newsworthy to the members of those groups. In March, we posted a link to our newest [Story Behind the Numbers](#) fact sheet in each group's discussion forum. We got several “Like” responses within a few days of the post. A few people replied with thoughtful comments. When people ask questions, we try to respond quickly. Recently several people posted a couple of thought-provoking statements on a topic that gave us an idea for a new OCSE blog topic.

The [Commissioner's Voice](#) is the OCSE blog. It is an opportunity to highlight projects or other initiatives and practices that may interest readers. The blog gives its readers a glimpse of the commissioner's views, as well as an opportunity for them to respond in the “comment” area. The blog also serves as a running history of the commissioner's discussions as far back as late 2010.

[Twitter](#) is another social media platform we use. We do not have our own OCSE Twitter feed yet for several reasons; chief among them is that Twitter accounts are like little birds—they take a lot of care and feeding if you really want them to grow into an effective communications tool. ACF (the Administration for Children and

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March 2014 marked the 25th anniversary of the World Wide Web. From one person's idea to advances by many pioneers in media and technology—most of us now depend on the web for our daily communications. The article that begins on this page, and two articles on pages 7 and 8, highlight communication technology in the child support community.

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54 tribes operate comprehensive tribal child support programs. Seven more tribes receive funds to put a program in place.

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Families) runs a Twitter account, [@ACFHHS](#), and we provide messages that may be important to their followers. You will periodically see OCSE-focused tweets there such as, “Learn the basics of applying for #ChildSupport with this graphic in English and Spanish. <http://go.usa.gov/BtMT>.”

Images resonate well with readers. Images are a visual break for your eye in a “wall of words” so to speak. They can also help illustrate difficult concepts and highlight important data. The key is to get the graphics and the messages to work together to communicate effectively. In our first efforts in this area, OCSE developed an infographic and a bilingual storybook. Our storybook, “Let’s Work Together,” is a brief, easy read that explains child support services and why it’s important for parents to work together with the child support office.

Our infographic, “How Do I Apply for Child Support Services,” is a one-page quick guide to help parents apply for child support services. When we post new infographics, look for them on the OCSE website and on the [HHS Infographics](#) feed on Flickr.

These are some of our most frequent social media practices. We would love to know about your official accounts. Please send a link to kim.danek@acf.hhs.gov.

Commissioner Turetsky to Receive Public Service Award

On June 9, OCSE Commissioner Vicki Turetsky will be honored at the 2014 Burton Awards for Legal Achievement. She will receive the Public Service Award from the Burton Foundation in coordination with the Library of Congress. This award is presented to an attorney who has demonstrated the highest level of professionalism and integrity and has been employed in the executive branch of federal government at any time over the last 10 years. The award is based on her overall work, reputation, and ability to teach and inspire. The Burton Awards for Legal Achievement reward major achievements in the law, including literary awards, law school teaching, public service, and law reform. Congratulations to Commissioner Turetsky!



LinkedIn
Social networking with child support colleagues

Commissioner’s Voice
Monthly blog for child support colleagues

Twitter
Microblogging social site for general audience

Flickr
Social sharing of photos for general audience

YouTube
Social sharing of videos for general audience

Chirps
Commissioner’s periodic news briefs for child support colleagues



VOICE BLOG

Employers key in driving child support collections to families

The nation's employers are a key partner in the child support program. Employers conduct core child support functions, which include reporting newly hired employees, implementing child and medical

support orders, and remitting child support payments.

The OCSE FY 2012 preliminary data report shows that employers remitted 72 percent of all child support payments, or \$22.9 billion. The FY 2013 preliminary report indicates that employers remitted 74 percent of all child support payments, and employers reported 53.52 million new hires.

Quite simply, we could not collect and disburse more than \$30 billion every year without employers. As child support professionals, we all thank employers for their huge contributions to this program.

In partnership with state child support agencies, OCSE has streamlined processes that help both employers and states gain efficiency in exchanging information and collecting payments. The e-IWO (electronic income withholding order) is the gold standard for transmitting uniform, secure information and reducing costs. Thirty-one states (representing 76.2 percent of the national child support caseload) and 566 employers (representing 6,290 Federal Employer Identification Numbers of parent companies and their subsidiaries) use this electronic process.

Other electronic processes include the Debt Inquiry Service, which allows employers to report upcoming bonus and lump sum payments to many states at once. Forty-seven states and territories and 80 employers use the Debt Inquiry Service. This June we will implement electronic terminations (or eTerm) to allow employers to notify states about employee terminations or let states

know that an individual no longer or never worked for them.

States are piloting initiatives that will streamline more processes. Oklahoma Child Support Services transitions custodial parents who close their child support cases but wish to retain an income withholding by sending a new IWO to the employer for the custodial parent. They are expanding this initiative by adding IWO instructions to the *pro se* section of their website to help parents initiate, amend, or terminate their IWO cases. "Healthy Families" is Oklahoma's new motto, and they are helping to achieve that by assisting *pro se* customers.

Employers do have concerns about some state practices in income withholding. Omitting full Social Security numbers, adding state-specific requirements such as periodic step-downs in amounts, and requiring the full amount of the order each month when the employer's pay cycle is weekly or bi-weekly require extra administrative work from employers. They believe that these requirements move away from a standard form with standard wording and requirements.

We hope to clarify some of these concerns when we publish the revised Income Withholding for Support (IWO) form this May.

To offer a forum for discussions between states and employers on these and other important issues, the OCSE Employer Services team planned an [Employer Symposium](#) for May 22, immediately following the ERICSA (Eastern Regional Interstate Child Support Association) conference. ERICSA will feature an employer track on the final conference day to welcome more interaction. We hope that many states and employers will join us to continue discussing ways to improve our outreach to families and employers.

Vicki Turetsky

Employers remitted 72 percent of all child support payments, \$22.9 billion.

If you have questions about a child support case, please contact your state or tribal agency.

Stanislaus County, CA, gets record collection from Thrift Savings Plan

By Baljit Atwal, Assistant Director
Stanislaus County Department of Child Support Services

Before May 2011, we knew little about the program known as “TSP” (Thrift Savings Plan) or that it would result in a history-making collection for our child support program in Stanislaus County, CA. This story, like many child support stories, begins a long time ago (the dependents are now emancipated) and speaks to the extended processes sometimes needed to collect support for families. At the same time, it illustrates a successful collection of more than \$204,000.

Timeline of courtrooms and legalities

The case opened more than 10 years ago with events that led to the record-breaking TSP collection. Our Stanislaus office first learned of the noncustodial parent’s TSP account in October 2011, with a possible balance of \$40,000. However, because a court placed a temporary stay on our enforcement of arrears due to a bankruptcy issue, we could not take action.

The first trial following the temporary stay decision was held in February 2012, and the court adjudicated that there was no ambiguity in the judgment. Our department objected because the noncustodial parent had not provided required accounting records. The court agreed with our objection and lifted the stay on enforcement of the arrears. However, we still could not take action against the TSP account because bankruptcy was still an issue.

Soon after the first trial, the noncustodial parent filed another motion to set aside the divorce decree. The matter started in front of our department’s commissioner, who granted a stay of enforcement of the arrears pending a new hearing, and set the matter for trial.

A few months after these proceedings, the automatic stay associated with the bankruptcy was removed. After our department’s attorney discussed initiating action against the TSP account with the custodial parent’s attorney, our counsel agreed to table the matter pending settlement talks between the parties. Because there was no longer a stay on enforcement, our department issued an income withholding order, including a payment plan on arrears, against the noncustodial parent’s wages. In

response, the noncustodial parent’s attorney immediately filed a request with the court seeking another stay on enforcement.

After the second hearing, the court saw that the noncustodial parent had the funds available in his TSP account to satisfy his obligation. He wanted to borrow funds from the TSP account to pay his attorney costs. The court believed that if he had access to his TSP account to pay his attorney, then he could also use these same funds to pay his child support debt. Unfortunately, we still couldn’t go after the money. The court once again stayed enforcement of the arrears pending its decision, but it also restrained the noncustodial parent from taking any action on the TSP account at the same time.

Ten months later and after many discovery proceedings and depositions, the matter finally went back to trial. The parties agreed on the amount of arrears owed and a payment plan. The court lifted the stay on enforcement and to any assets of the noncustodial parent including his TSP account. A copy of this release of the stay on enforcement was transmitted to TSP and the California Department of Child Support Services (DCSS), where our department requested immediate action to collect the arrears owed.

Teamwork and success

With the cooperation of both TSP and California DCSS, we received \$204,532.66 on March 3, and sent it to the custodial parent. This is the largest single collection in the county department’s history thanks to collaboration of everyone in the department who touched the case—at least 30 staff members in the last 12 months.

The department’s vision is to put children first, and each person involved with this case—whether they were working on legal, accounting, or clerical tasks; doing casework, answering the phones, or performing in any other capacity—rose to the occasion.

Largest Lump Sum Collection

Through the federal Multistate Financial Institution Data Match (MSFIDM) program, the federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board matched with a Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) account and seized Stanislaus County’s record collection—\$204,532.66. The TSP is a tax-deferred, long-term retirement savings and investment plan administered to federal civilian employees and members of the military. It is the largest, defined-contribution plan in the world, and, in the fourth quarter of 2013, produced more than 36,000 matches in the MSFIDM program.

Texas Special Collections Unit leads growth in collections

**By Mary Iverson, Manager
Special Collections Unit
Texas Child Support Division**

Texas child support collections have increased dramatically thanks to improved information technology, new procedures, hard work, and our centralized Special Collections Unit (SCU). Since the unit began in 2001, Texas has collected more than \$530 million in child support.

Child support agencies count on numerous systems and processes to help caseworkers find noncustodial parents who are behind in their child support. With a state as large as Texas, leaders found it most productive to centralize the enforcement unit that takes action against an obligor's assets, such as finance, insurance claims, retirement accounts, real property, lump sums from employers and the Social Security Administration, specialized liens on probates and inheritance, and all other lump sum liens.

Texas set up the SCU in 2001 to build consistency, establish a single point of contact, and resolve disputes. The SCU works with 83 field offices, serving 254 counties.

Improvements for external customers

When a child support office gets information from a financial institution about a parent having an account, the caseworker sends the information to someone in the central unit for processing. That person works with the financial institution to coordinate processing. The unit confirms and retains contact and location information and collaborates on document exchanges.

Attorneys representing noncustodial parents quickly learn the information the SCU needs to resolve a child support lien to make agreements more consistent. Individual obligors speak with SCU staff members who understand the case, so the staff members can help the parent get the account resolved as quickly as possible. If an issue needs involvement of a local office, the SCU staff alerts that unit and monitors to assure a timely resolution. Having one point of contact is especially helpful when the obligor has multiple cases, often in different local units.

Internal improvements

The collections staff uses internal and external technology to the greatest extent possible. Multistate Financial Institution Data Match and state Financial Institution Data Match (FIDM) matches enter the agency's system after a basic filtering. To ensure the

arrears are correct and nothing changed to prevent the lien, the local office assigned to the case receives notice of the match and makes a system assessment before referring the case to the SCU. The SCU reviews the case again before sending it to the vendor for actual processing of the Notice of Lien. On average, local offices refer more than 1,000 cases to the SCU each month.

When the SCU takes a FIDM action, an automated system message advises the assigned caseworker to refer any contact by the obligor to the SCU. This process ensures the SCU gets the information and then notifies the worker periodically for updates, or begins the levy process on financial institution accounts.

Staff also uses the OCSE Notice of Lien form for most of the processing. By using its system-wide, document-generating application, the SCU rapidly and easily produces agreements, releases, and other documents to resolve the collection action. This system retains the basic case data to easily process additional or revised documents.

Establishing an SCU allowed Texas to add new programs easily to the duties and responsibilities of the SCU staff, such as: insurance intercept, real property, Qualified Domestic Relations Order, employer lump sum, SSA lump sum, state debt set-off, Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend, Texas Department of Corrections prisoner accounts, and annuity-royalties – specialized liens.

The program had notable success with the Thrift Savings Plan; using the TSP form and procedures has led to significant collections—\$17 million to date.

The customer service experience

A toll-free phone service screens callers to determine whether they are an obligor or asset holder. If they need to speak with a Spanish-speaking staff member, the service places them into the appropriate queue. Generic e-mail addresses ensure one of the several staff members who receive the notification will respond.

Customers can use a toll-free fax number to minimize expenses for sending documents or agreements. Staff can give their direct phone number, and each staff member has a fax number.

By innovating quickly and using in-house and outside resources, the Texas SCU serves as a successful example of how innovative collection techniques can help a state meet its performance goals.

For more information, please contact Mary Iverson at 512-433-4632.

Voluntary mediation increases parenting time in Lucas County, Ohio

By Michelle Niedermier
Lucas County, Ohio, Department of
Job and Family Services
Division of Child Support

Free mediation sessions in Lucas County, Ohio, are helping some noncustodial parents spend more time with their children while encouraging them to pay child support. The sessions are the focus of a partnership between the Division of Child Support and the Juvenile Court to establish Parenting Time Orders (PTO), which is funded by the federal Access and Visitation grant awarded to Lucas County in October 2012.

The voluntary mediation sessions take place five days a week at the Lucas County Child Support Enforcement Association (CSEA). Both parents receive information on the mediation program in their mailed hearing notices. Parents can schedule mediation immediately following hearings or at a later date. When the court develops a PTO, it becomes legally binding with signatures, and Juvenile Court Judges “journalize” the plan. Noncustodial parents express that it is very convenient to conduct the mediation sessions at the association’s location and the process is less intimidating than a day in court.

Domestic violence component

Domestic violence training is mandatory for all staff working at Lucas County CSEA. Based on this training, CSEA staff carefully reviews case file information for issues such as Family Violence Indicators or good cause waivers of cooperation, both of which would indicate an established domestic violence situation. Before referring clients to mediation, CSEA staff interviews both parents to define any issues that may not be documented in the case file that could preclude their participation in the program. Based on the information in the referral packets, the mediators use their experience and training when determining which families would benefit from continuing with the mediation process.

Also, Lucas County CSEA is planning to partner with a local community agency that will provide an onsite domestic violence prevention expert. This person will be available to work with domestic violence victims to



develop safety plans, make referrals to support groups, and navigate any necessary legal proceedings.

Ensuring the safety of staff, clients, and visitors at Lucas County CSEA is imperative. A sheriff’s deputy is stationed in the area during all hours of mediation services. All parties are scanned with a handheld metal detector before entering the facility, and panic buttons are located in every room used for mediation. Two rooms are available for the parties if there is a predetermined need to have them separate, or if things become contentious during mediation.

Findings to date

The partners have found that mediation services are more critical for unwed parents because families going through a divorce or dissolution in Lucas County must participate in co-parenting classes. Additionally, in Ohio, if parents are not married at the time of the birth of the child, the noncustodial parent must petition the court for a PTO, which can

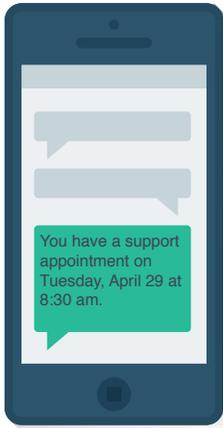
be very expensive.

The mediation process to establish the PTO alleviates the potential monetary barrier to a mutually agreed upon parenting plan. The plans may also determine which parent is able to claim the child on their taxes, and establish how the parents should communicate about important decisions concerning their child’s health care and education. Although parties agree to create the PTO, occasionally the staff may link parents to a community partner to obtain supervision during parenting time.

Lucas County’s decision to provide mediation services through the federal Access and Visitation grant has proven to be very beneficial in both increasing parenting time and the payment of child support orders. The program has led to a rise in parenting time for nearly 200 children during the first year.

National studies show that the level of parental involvement in children’s lives increases the likelihood that noncustodial parents will comply with their child support orders. An analysis of child support payments made by noncustodial parents who established a PTO through the mediation program showed a significant improvement in the amount paid after they began to increase time spent with their children.

For more information, contact Michelle Niedermier, Contract Administrator, at 419-213-8871 or niedem@odjfs.state.oh.us.



The 411 on PA TXT Pennsylvania text message program delivers!

By Edward Heston, Business Analyst
Pennsylvania Bureau of Child Support Enforcement

In what may be one of the fastest cultural shifts in history, text messaging has become a preferred tool for meeting the lifestyles and needs of today's consumer. People have changed their ideal method of communicating to texting because it is faster, less structured, and shorter.

Meeting the challenge

To respond to the needs of a mobile society, and burdened by higher costs of land-line telephone systems, the Pennsylvania Bureau of Child Support Enforcement carefully weighed the advantages of moving into texting.

One of our objectives was to integrate Short Message Service (commonly referred to as SMS) technology into our existing system without redesigning our current notification process. To maximize our technical framework to implement text messaging, we modified the system we had used to process e-mail reminders so that it produced text messages. Our outdated interactive voice response calling system provided the database link for the text program. We updated the client communication preference pages on our public facing website to include text as a notification option. We also modified mainframe batching processes to generate scheduling information to issue a text instead of a telephone call.

The updated system also helped us develop a new avenue of enforcement communication for our local offices that we called the text message project. It allows us to group clients together and send a text to address a specific child support issue. For example, we can use the client database to generate a project group of clients with similar bench warrant issues. The text program issues a text to that project group instructing each to respond to the local office.

Outreach and training

Our text message project was a large cultural shift. We wanted to prevent any negative impacts so our client outreach started months before we sent our first text. Our plan included maintaining a high level of visibility by making the most of our information sharing with our clients and business partners. We used multiple communication efforts to let people know the text program was on its way.

We issued e-mails to our members, placed a banner message on the Pennsylvania child support website, and updated specific forms and cover sheets to notify our members about the text program. We also provided prerecorded inbound telephone greetings for appropriate customer service offices. Six weeks before the implementation date, we used an outbound calling campaign.

We emphasized that staff members needed to collect mobile numbers and text message preferences with every client contact, then update their system information. We also reminded everyone who had contact with our clients to start talking about text messaging and mobile numbers.

Message types and initial results

Pennsylvania's text message program offers five types of messages:

- Missed payment reminders
- Scheduled event reminders
- Early intervention messages
- Notices that money is being held due to an incorrect address
- Agency-defined, specific text message projects to targeted groups

Initial data proves that text messages deliver immediate relevant communications to our members and provide improved technical performance over previous technology.

Our previous automated calling system success rate fluctuated around 68 percent, partly because it often took three calls to reach the intended client. Almost immediately after implementing the text program, the bureau's success rate for text messages delivered was nearly 100 percent, and we were reaching over 30 percent more clients. In other words, for every 100,000 text reminders, 31,800 would have been missed by the previous system.

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■ This article continues our series on change management in the child support program.

Advice for others

Here are three key things to think about when looking at text programs:

Automate – Integrate automated systems with current databases. Staff does not send text messages individually because they are system generated, reducing costs and improving efficiency.

Outreach – Let everyone know what is coming. Telling clients and interagency stakeholders in advance will reduce technical errors, reinforce positive outcomes, and prevent negative perceptions.

Understand – Communication has changed. Your agency’s decision is not whether to respond—but when to respond.

State child support director Daniel Richard reinforces our getting on board with this new communication tool. “Success in the Pennsylvania child support program comes from making the best use of automation to get the most collections for families; setting realistic, collectible orders; and embracing new technologies to foster efficiency that drives performance.

“To be recognized as a valuable program to our clients, we must make sure child support is a consistent, reliable source of income. We use technology to do what it can in as many cases as possible.”

MEDIA MATTERS

Old school “app” in high tech times

By Michael Ginns, OCSE Region I

Over the last 10 years, we have seen an explosion in the growth of cell phone technology along with tablets, iPads, and other mobile devices. People can simultaneously connect and disconnect to the world around them. It is one of the great ironies we face as we develop organizationally and on personnel levels.

“We have convinced ourselves that this is all more advanced, more expedient, more productive,” writes Dan Palotta for the Harvard Business Review. How much connectivity do we need or want? Is there an application we can develop to make our jobs more efficient and less redundant but still allow us to keep our interpersonal skills sharp?

Before cellphone technology became so prevalent in our lives and before apps became part of our lexicon, the old fashioned phone call was the tool of choice for our work. It was the art of conversation often leading to a successful client or colleague engagement. Similar to my colleagues around the country, I receive inquiries from various segments of the child support community through different modes of communication.

Many inquiries are simple enough to answer in a quick e-mail, but often they have a number of issues that we may not be able to address easily—certainly not in an e-mail exchange. Furthermore, we can misinterpret or assume a tone in an email that can lead to a series of miscommunications and unfair judgments.



We may be tempted to avoid picking up the phone because we want to avoid an unpleasant interaction—it is human nature to avoid unpleasant experiences—but sometimes we need to confront a situation to avoid having the issues linger.

Weighing the benefits and drawbacks

Without a doubt, technology substantially benefits us in many ways. The systems created and enhanced by PRWORA (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act) along with more recent innovations such as QUICK (Query Interstate Cases for Kids), the federal insurance match program, the state services portal, and many others, help make the child support program work better and smarter for child support agencies and the families we serve.

By allowing our systems to do a great deal of the work in data matching, freezing and seizing, intercepting, etc., we are freed up to engage on a more personal level with each other and our clients to develop relationships and solutions outside of the internet.

However, as Harvard Business Review blogger Anthony Tjan points out: As digital communication accelerates the pace at which people form and broaden relationships, it is also decreasing the rate at which people are willing to resolve issues professionally and directly in-person.

We sometimes forget there are still many folks who reside in the “digital divide”—an economic inequality between groups, broadly construed in terms of access to, use of, or knowledge of information and communication technology. They are not constantly craning their necks to check out their smartphones or savvy enough to include attachments or research how to improve their situations on the internet.

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According to Pew Internet and American Life Project, 15 percent of American adults do not use the internet or e-mail at all, and another 9 percent use the internet but not at home. The reasons for this vary by personal relevance, affordability, frustration, and physical lack of availability, among other reasons.

How is this relevant to OCSE?

According to a 2013 [Urban Institute Report](#), custodial parents who participate in the child support program are much more likely to be poor, never married, under age 30, and have limited education than custodial parents outside the program. Factoring in noncustodial parents, many of whom are unemployed, underemployed or among the working poor, many of our customers most likely are “digital divide” members.

Though they may have Internet access or a cell phone, their actual availability to technology and abilities to effectively use this technology may be limited.

I am not advocating a technology-free program, nor am I downplaying the significant roles and benefits that e-mail, e-government, and apps continue to bring to our citizens. E-communication is adept at providing simple and quick information such as payment and court

date information. This article is more of a cautionary tale for us to remember that e-mail, text messages, and 140-character tweets could possibly add more confusion to the complex circumstances that many child support program families endure daily.

A telephone conversation can be just as vital a tool as all of the electronic enhancements developed in recent years. Unknowingly it trains us to listen and ask appropriate follow-up questions. We become more readily available to empathize with clients and understand what we may be able to do for them.

So next time you have a complex case inquiry or question, rather than spending the time to type up a long narrative or forward a long e-mail string expecting the recipient to digest it all, think about the old telephone commercials that encourage us to reach out and touch someone. You may be surprised at the difference it makes!



COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Reality U: High school financial literacy program lets youngsters take a look at their future

By Roberta Coons, *OCSE Region VIII*

This March, Kansas high school students participated in a role-playing game of sorts called [Reality U](#) to learn what their lives could be like at age 26. Produced by [Communities in Schools in Mid-America](#), Reality U serves as a high school dropout prevention program to give students an opportunity to appreciate the possible connection between their current academic performance and their future success in the workforce and life. Reality U empowers the students to take control of their lives by providing them with information about income, debt, credit, and the cost of raising a family.

Developing a life scenario

The students at the March event filled out a “lifestyle survey” as they imagined their lives at age 26. They recorded the profession they envisioned, whether they

were married, the size of their family, whether they thought they would rent or own a home, their shopping habits, and so on.

The system used their current GPA information and career choice to project a salary and credit score. The staff took half of the students who wanted to be married at age 26 and had them role play as being divorced instead. Some were designated as custodial parents who received child support while others were noncustodial parents who had to manage their monthly budget to pay support.

Right before the event, students received their individualized lifestyle scenarios, sometimes with a few life-changing twists. They also got a blank checkbook register with their monthly salary written at the top. They visited 14 booths that represented different necessities in life (*see the list on the next page*). Students had to visit each booth to “purchase” all they needed for themselves and their families to survive.

Booth volunteers

Kansas Deputy Child Support Director Melissa Johnson and I ran a booth at the event, along with other volunteers from the local area—community college teachers and students, retired teachers, bankers, and

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other professionals from the Alliance of Economic Inclusion of greater Kansas City. Event staff instructed us on how to run the booths and gave us lists of goods and services the students could “purchase.” We helped students navigate through the system by offering suggestions on the best ways to spend their monthly salary. Our goal was to get them to “focus on *needs* more than *wants*.”

Personal observations

I was especially interested in some of the students’ situations. One student role-played a “noncustodial parent with five children.” The first booth he visited was the shopping center where he purchased two pairs of expensive, brand-name shoes for each child. When he came to get health insurance and I told him the cost, he said, “Oh no! My kids are going to have to wear [less expensive] shoes!” He experienced a shocking taste of reality.

I noticed a well-to-do married couple with high GPAs. The “wife” said, “You wanted them two kids. You can watch ‘em and I don’t cook so you better have money in that budget for a nanny and eating out.” The “husband” was going around asking people if they wanted a job.

A boy who appeared to be the class clown was a fast-food worker who kept saying, “I have to live on the street. I have no money for housing or even a bus pass.”

While working at the shopping center booth, Deputy Director Johnson noticed that students consistently ruled out haircuts; a haircut was an optional item, and there simply wasn’t enough funds to cover everything. Students at the communications booth had to quickly consider whether a smartphone, cable and Wi-Fi was necessary for their family. Some students considered military service as an option when they learned it would offer reduced costs for housing, clothing and groceries.



Students at Reality U visit these booths:

Banking: savings, certificates of deposit and IRA accounts; student loan repayment plans

Child Care: center and in-home daycare; babysitting

Housing: homes for sale; apartments for rent; prices include insurance and taxes

Utilities: gas/electric, trash, and water/sewer

Communications: land-line phones, cell phones, Internet, cable services

Transportation: cars, trucks, SUVs, gas scooter, and bus passes

Insurance: vehicle and life insurance

Medical Center: medical insurance and care

Supermarket: groceries

Shopping Center: clothing, haircuts, health and beauty items

Entertainment: dining out, movies, vacations, and sports

Charitable Giving: donations to the community

Chance: roll of dice to determine fate—life is full of surprises

SOS: financial counseling for students who have difficulty purchasing all they need

LA County in the news

Dr. Steven Golightly, director of the Los Angeles County Child Support Services Department, gives advice on facing child support obligations in a recent [interview on local television](#).

The department opened a new office in Pomona, CA, dubbed “our office of the future” by Dr. Golightly because it features enhanced lobby and interview areas for clients.



Taking child support statistics a step further

By John Clark,
OCSE Region III



Have you ever thought about different ways to look at child support program statistics? I came up with six new computations to supplement, and not replace, statistics we use in the program. With one exception, the numbers for these calculations are readily available from reports provided by the states (in OCSE forms 34A, 157, and 396A).

- 1 Everyone wants to know the value they receive for the dollars spent. OCSE accurately measures this item by assessing cost effectiveness (\$5.19 in 2012). However, state and local officials are usually interested in the value provided to the families in their state for the state and local dollars spent on their program.

Total Distributed Collections/Net State Expenditure (State Expenditure-Federal Incentive Spent) = Child Support Collections for each State Dollar Spent.

For FY 2012, states collected an average \$15.31 for every dollar they spent on the child support program.

- 2 State social service agencies are facing a major challenge to avoid layoffs and hiring freezes due to budget cutbacks. This measure examines the amount of support collected for each child support employee.

Total Distributed Collections/Total Full Time Employees = Total Child Support Collections per Full Time Employee.

For FY 2012, states obtained an average \$507,963 in child support collections for each full time employee.

- 3 A handy measure of how well a program is working all enforceable cases is the average collection per case. However, a more accurate picture of state performance would exclude zero orders (e.g., many states are setting temporary zero orders for incarcerated noncustodial parents). This measure excludes these zero orders.

Total Open Cases with Non Zero Charging Support Orders (Total Open Cases with Charging Support Orders-Total Open Cases with Orders Established for Zero Cash Support)/Total Distributed Collections = Average Collection per Case with Charging Support Order.

Using this computation for FY 2012, the national average collection per case was \$2,380.

- 4 Child support saves federal, state, and local governments in two ways: cost recovery and cost avoidance. Cost recovery includes reimbursement for TANF, Medicaid, etc. Cost avoidance is difficult to measure. However, using data from Laura Wheaton's Urban Institute national cost avoidance study commissioned by OCSE, we estimate that national cost avoidance is equal to 12.6% of distributed collections. This includes federal and state costs avoided by the child support program. Other cost avoidance studies are examining California (16% of distributed collections) and Washington (16.5%).

Cost Avoidance + Cost Recovery = Total Government Savings.

The total government savings for 2012 was more than \$5 billion.

- 5 In any decision about funding, officials carefully consider both the cost and taxpayer savings of particular social service programs. This computation builds on the fourth calculation explained above.

Total Government Savings (Cost Avoidance + Cost Recovery)/Total State Expenditure (State Expenditure-Federal Incentives Spent) = Government Savings for each State and Local Dollar Invested.

For 2012, the national average was \$2.79 in total government savings for each state dollar expended.

(continued)

- 6 As indicated in the third computation, states are examining the value provided for each full time position. This measure may help states make this determination.

Total Government Savings (Cost Avoidance + Cost Recovery)/Total Full Time Employees = Government Savings per Full Time Employee.

The national average in government savings for each state and local employee was \$92,657 in FY 2012.

A summary of the results using readily available data for FY 2012 submitted on forms OCSE-34A, OCSE-96A, and OCSE-157 with the addition of the cost avoidance calculation:

- States collected \$15.31 in child support payments for every dollar they spent on the program.
- States obtained child support collections of \$507,963 for every full time employee.
- The national average collection per case was about \$2,380.
- The total government savings (cost recovery plus cost avoidance) for 2012 was \$5,056,199,587.
- The child support program saves government an average of \$2.79 for every state and local dollar invested.
- The national average in government savings for each state and local employee is \$92,657.

For more information, please contact John Clark at john.clark@acf.hhs.gov or Dennis Putze at dennis.putze@acf.hhs.gov.

Tribal grantee meeting

The Administration for Children and Families will sponsor a tribal grantee meeting, June 17-19, following the Tribal Consultation on June 16. Call the ACF Administration for Native Americans help desk for information at 877-922-9262.



OCSE FY 2011 Annual Report

OCSE published its [FY 2011 Annual Report to Congress](#). In FY 2011, the national child support program focused on family-centered services and advances in automation technology. Here are a few highlights from the report:

- The national program collected more than \$31 billion in child support.
- State child support programs collected \$27.3 billion for 17.3 million children.
- Growth in tribal child support programs led to \$40 million of the total collected.
- State child support disbursement units collected another \$3.9 billion in non-IV-D program child support payments.

The report explains it all and displays performance data for each state, territory and tribe that operates a child support program.

Child Support Report

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