

# Child Support Report

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## COMMISSIONER'S VOICE

### Summer is a Time to Recharge



Summer is conference season in the child support community. I have been enjoying a busy travel schedule that gets me out of the office and closer to where the real work of serving families is being done. Those trips are all business. I rarely see anything other than the airport and the hotel. With numerous invitations, coupled with my goal to spend as much time as possible out in the field, it can be tough to find the time to recharge.

This summer I decided to be purposeful about taking leave and spending time with my family. From a scenic Midwestern road trip to visit my son, to being a tourist here in DC with my sister's family, to hanging around the house with my two daughters home from college. I am enjoying my efforts to keep my priorities in the correct order, and I am encouraging you to make a similar effort for yourselves.

### Focus on yourself

Child support professionals work hard every day for other people and their families. Because the work we do is so important to those we serve, you might feel like work has to come first. We end up putting work ahead of our own families, or even ourselves. While the families we serve are important, so are our own families, children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, (I could go on and on) and let's not forget you.

Americans are known worldwide for not taking their vacation time. And professionals in the social services fields are among those likely to allow their vacation time to go unspent. Yet they need it the most!

Self-care is a health concept just now coming into our consciousness. It focuses on minimizing the 'compassion fatigue' often experienced by those whose profession is to care for others. It's more than just getting enough sleep, eating right, and exercising. Self-care is paying attention to how your work is affecting your physical and mental health, your emotions and stress level, and your relationships with the people in your life outside of work. Self-care is purposeful action to stay healthy — finding a few minutes for humor or friendship during your workday, using your commute to truly leave work behind at the end of the day, relaxing through meditation, observing nature, or listening to music, and taking time away from the demands of the job.

### Make small plans

Vacations may seem hectic to take, but they are a proven source of renewed energy, regained perspective and, yes, even relaxation. Perhaps just the term 'vacation' is our source of stress. It implies suitcases, flights, and expenses. Don't stress yourself out to get away. Think about vacation in smaller or different terms. You can define 'vacation' in whatever way works for you, as long as it gets you away from your regular routine.

*continued*

### Collecting August Awareness Month Photos

Many states and tribes proclaim August as Child Support Awareness Month. If your state, tribal, or local child support agency is holding a recognition event in August, we want to feature it in an upcoming edition of *Child Support Report*. Be sure to let your regional office know about your planned activities. Check out some of the [recognition events from last year](#).

### Inside this issue

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Brody Bigby displays his catch

### Family Time

The Fort Belknap Child Support staff held their 5th successful Responsible Fatherhood Fishing Derby in June.

Read more on page 2.

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Child care can be another hectic aspect of summer, when kids are out of school and need activities or supervision. Spending time with them is one of the best reasons to take leave from work. Even just a few hours each week for a picnic in the park or an afternoon at the pool is a great way to put family ahead of work and to spend time in the moment. Now that my kids are young adults, I really look forward to having them home from college in the summer. I encourage you to take advantage of the summer break and make some memories before those years have flown by.

## Travel local

Take time to focus on your own family, to restore some work-life balance, and to enjoy a diversion from your busy workday. Are there local attractions in your area that you have yet to see? Take a drive on the Lincoln Highway, Route 66, or any rural byway. Read that book, or catch up on your shows. When is the last time you saw a movie in the theater? National and state parks are peaceful and awe-inspiring.

However you choose to recharge, I look forward to receiving your out-of-office reply. Let me leave you with this quote from Maya Angelou.

*“Each person deserves a day away in which no problems are confronted, no solutions searched for. Each of us needs to withdraw from the cares which will not withdraw from us.”*

**Scott Lekan**



Reno Shambo, winner of the derby, proudly displays the day's catch

## Fort Belknap Indian Community Fishing Derby

The [Fort Belknap](#) Child Support Program held its 5th Annual International Responsible Fatherhood Fishing Derby at beautiful Snake Butte, MT, a cultural site for our people. The family-oriented event helps fathers spend time with their children. More than 170 people attended this year's derby. Our partners helped us provide a sack lunch and prizes to all participants.

This fishing derby is one of the events the Child Support Program organizes to promote family activities and strengthening. We get lots of positive feedback from people who tell us how much they enjoy the derby and want us to do it again!

## How Does Child Support Work?

OCSE has a sleek new video that you can use in your 2019 Child Support Awareness Month campaigns! [What is Child Support](#), available in English and [Spanish](#), is a tool your agency can use to give parents a quick glimpse into the program. The video focuses on the services parents use most often so they have an idea of what to expect when they contact their local child support office.

This easy-to-understand, 2-minute video is a great springboard to give parents a general awareness of the program. After all, we get it. Sometimes parents just want to think through their options or learn about us from a distance. This video can help with that. Happy viewing!

Get more information from the Division of Customer Communications at [ocsecommunications@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:ocsecommunications@acf.hhs.gov).



## GRANTS

# Increasing Awareness of Services through Digital Marketing

OCSE awarded \$2.2 million in grants through a two-year demonstration called [Using Digital Marketing to Increase Participation in the Child Support Program](#). The following two articles from California grantees are the first in a series featuring 14 grantees that are testing approaches and analyzing data to see if digital marketing can help child support programs reach and serve families more effectively.

For general information, visit the [OCSE Digital Marketing grant webpage](#), or contact OCSE project officers Vernae Martin at [vernae.martin@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:vernae.martin@acf.hhs.gov) or Michelle Jadczyk at [michelle.jadczyk@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:michelle.jadczyk@acf.hhs.gov).

## California Focuses their Site on Service

Outreach and Media Response Team, Office of Communication and Public Affairs, California Department of Child Support Services

The outreach team at [California Child Support Services](#) knew that their website needed an overhaul. Crowded, text-heavy, and hard to navigate, it was built in an outdated programming language and contained more than 150 webpages with hundreds of attachments.

As part of their successful application for the [OCSE Digital Marketing grant](#), the team proposed building a small, standalone site for grant activities using a customized WordPress platform launched by the California Department of Technology in 2015. After reviewing the plan during the grant feasibility stage, the child support director challenged the outreach team to overhaul the entire website in just two short months.

Grant Project Manager Nicole Darracq and Public Information Officer Chad Reed had to inventory all 150 webpages so they knew the extent of the overhaul. To make informed decisions, they worked closely with teams from Systems Support, Enterprise Architecture, Website Administration, and Web Publishing, and used analytics from existing site traffic. Darracq and Reed discarded outdated information, moved old records to internal resource applications, and shifted the new site's focus toward being a resource for information-seeking parents with or without an existing case.

Market research from a previous branding project helped with the new site's design. The team replaced images of children, parents, and caseworkers with emotionally neutral California landscapes, which added intimacy by being instantly recognizable to locals. They simplified the language and redesigned navigation for new visitors who might not yet know if they are a custodial or noncustodial party. Today, parents see a simple infographic of the child support case process right on the home page. Each icon links to a more detailed description of that step and often includes an informational video. Acronyms were removed

wherever possible. The site became mobile-friendly, instantly adapting layout and navigation for viewing on mobile devices, and translatable into over 100 languages using the Google Translate plug-in with an appropriate disclaimer.

At the same time, the department's Innovation Design team began to rebuild [Customer Connect](#), California's online case management platform, to improve its performance and add mobile views. According to the Pew Research Center, over one in five Americans access the internet ONLY on smartphones, with percentages higher in the under-40 age bracket. The redesigned Customer Connect went live just hours before the new 45-page website was released in May.

"It was a massive job," says Dana Simas, child support assistant director and head of the Office of Communications and Public Affairs, which now manages the ongoing maintenance of the website. "To rebuild something like that in 13 weeks took committed collaboration with our IT teams. We're all proud to have created something that demonstrates the best practices of a customer-service focused agency."

For information about the California Department of Child Support Services grant work, contact Nicole Darracq in the Office of Communication and Public Affairs, [nicole.darracq@dcss.ca.gov](mailto:nicole.darracq@dcss.ca.gov).



# Orange County Uses Innovative Approach to Reach Parents

Vernae Martin, OCSE

The Orange County Department of Child Support Services knew that a significant number of its custodial parents delayed or wouldn't even attempt to open a child support case because they didn't know what services were available. Using digital marketing approaches, the staff intends to increase parents' awareness of child support services so families can improve their financial well-being and provide positive outcomes for their children.

Orange County is using its federal grant funding to jump-start an innovative digital media campaign so every parent who could benefit from child and medical support establishment, enforcement, or order modification, is aware of the services available. Their primary approach is through visual and audio advertising running on streaming media platforms in specific Orange County ZIP codes where underserved populations reside.



The grantee placed the first round of radio advertisements on streaming music platforms between December 2018 and March 2019 to educate the target audience about the services they offer and how easy it is to apply. The ads included a 30-second audio clip and a visual banner.

The banner provided a web

address users could click on. This allowed the staff to track access to the campaign webpage. The audio explained what services were available when a parent opened a case. The overarching message of these ads is that [Orange County Child Support Services](#) collaborates with parents to help provide for their children.

Throughout the campaign's run, Orange County collected qualitative and quantitative data from various sources such as surveys, child support caseloads, demographics, ad clicks, and website analytics. The staff will use the data to evaluate the effectiveness of digital media tools to reach the intended population.

The county is applying the outcomes of this initial ad placement during the second test, which is running now, and will use them in its third run starting in October. At the conclusion of the two-year demonstration, they'll submit their project methodologies and the results of a comprehensive evaluation to OCSE, and share the findings with child support agencies who may also want to use the approach to reach more families in their service areas.

*For information about the Orange County Department of Child Support Services grant study, contact Jolie Sheppick at [jshippick@css.ocgov.com](mailto:jshippick@css.ocgov.com).*



Working Parents are  
Paying Parents.

## Section 1115 Waivers Available for Employment Programs

Working parents are paying parents. [OCSE Information Memo 19-04](#) reminds child support agencies that waivers are available to fund activities like noncustodial parent employment programs. OCSE encourages state and tribal child support agencies to apply for a waiver to create employment services for unemployed or underemployed noncustodial parents struggling to make support payments.

Approved waivers give your child support agency the ability to develop work activities for noncustodial parents. This helps improve the financial well-being of children by increasing reliable child support payments.

Read more in [IM-19-04](#) and in [Grants and Waivers Foster Program Innovation](#), part of [A Look Inside OCSE](#).

## Procedural Justice Study Brief

On June 13, OCSE published an introductory study brief in the Procedural Justice-Informed Alternatives to Contempt (PJAC) grant project. [A New Response to Child Support Noncompliance](#) is the first of 14 briefs that are being released through 2022. Two upcoming briefs will detail the training PJAC caseworkers received and will review outreach and engagement strategies. For more information about the publications, contact Sharon Henderson at [sharon.henderson@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:sharon.henderson@acf.hhs.gov).

## PROMISING PRACTICES

# Telecommuting Comes to Riverside County Child Support Services

Leon Hunt, Regional Manager, *Department of Child Support Services, Riverside County, CA*

In 2016, work-life balance became a renewed focus at [Riverside County](#). During a departmental Supervisor Academy event, attendees developed the concept of telecommuting and formed a group to determine whether it would work. After deciding it was a viable option, they escalated their Caseworker Telecommuting Program proposal to the executive team for a final vetting.

## Pilot phase

We chose six caseworkers to test the process. They received department laptops configured to allow them to connect virtually to their work desktops. After minor process adjustments, production actually increased during telecommuting days. Leaders decided to establish an office-wide policy allowing telecommuting to qualified staff. We issued an official departmental policy that aligned with all applicable state and local guidelines, and implemented the final telecommuting program department-wide in June 2018.

## Maintaining standards

Ultimately, we want to meet the needs of the children in our caseloads by using a knowledgeable approach that combines efficiency, diversity, innovation, and high performance. Telecommuting increases productivity, allows staff flexibility, reduces absenteeism and demands on office space, eases traffic and parking congestion, and enhances our ability to attract and retain employees.

For their part, employees must meet established performance measures to be able to telecommute. They must demonstrate the following:

- Work independently and communicate well
- Establish priorities to maximize efficiency
- Organize effectively
- Knowledgeable about state and county policies and procedures
- Proficient with technology-related job requirements
- Maintain good customer service to both internal and external customers
- Show adaptability and flexibility to changing routines
- Consistently meet all performance standards

The employees' functions and responsibilities determine



what job tasks they can perform at home and how often. For example, they must be able to work without case files or hard copy documents to participate. They also have to be available by phone, email, or Instant Messenger during working hours. We maintain real-time, electronic work production statistics that supervisors can review any time during the workday. Ongoing analysis continues to show an increase in staff production with no negative impacts on work performance.

## Innovation awards

The Caseworker Telecommuting Program has received significant notice. In May, Riverside County chose it as a [RivCo Innovates Award Winner](#). The program recognizes ideas that promote a culture of innovation that helps deliver outstanding service for its customers and outcomes for its communities at the lowest cost possible to taxpayers. The telecommuting program also received an [award for innovation](#) from the Southern California Chapter of the American Society for Public Administration in July for developing a new and creative approach to providing public services.

With 36 staff telecommuting now, 25 of whom are caseworkers, Riverside County has demonstrated that telecommuting is an effective and innovative way to deliver child support services and allow staff to have the work-life balance that is so important.

For more information, contact Leon Hunt at [lhunt@rivco.org](mailto:lhunt@rivco.org).



## Medicaid Referrals: Effective with the Right Policy

Karen Hebert, Director, *Bureau of Child Support Services, New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services*

Government needs to focus significantly on efficiency, which sometimes means we miss the mark on being effective. The New Hampshire child support program has worked for years to create efficiencies in medical support, particularly since it provides little return on investment. Many states have stopped accepting referrals from their Medicaid programs because the reasons for the referrals are not entirely clear, and referrals often lack sufficient information for caseworkers to process a IV-D case.

We've accepted referrals from the NH Medicaid program for several years and we've learned valuable lessons about impacts of that decision. Our arrangement was based on what we thought we knew — that every Medicaid family should be referred to child support — so the NH Medicaid program made referrals obligatory. Unfortunately, we did not sufficiently collaborate with Medicaid and our eligibility partners, nor did we consider the needs of families, or our own capacity to review all of the Medicaid cases. The outcome has been parents opting out of health care coverage and child support income, and it has taken a toll on already-overtaxed staffs in both programs. After years of trying to be more efficient and make sense of conflicting instructions in our state program, peeling back the layers of the onion to see where we could improve the process has been worthwhile.

### Effective referral programs

There are key ingredients your agency should consider before building a referral system: your partnership with the state Medicaid program, a solid understanding of key Medicaid regulations, and your purpose for the referrals.

Our child support program is housed in the NH Department of Health and Human Services. About 18 months ago, the department refreshed the structure and systems to achieve greater integration of services, build systems that focus on customer needs, increase family and individual capacity, and prevent child maltreatment. The improvements have brought clarity to the purposes of Medicaid referrals through a customer-centric lens: (1) seek child support as an important source of income; (2) find affordable and accessible health care coverage for children and parents; and (3) establish legal paternity or parentage for the family.

Child support has program specific purposes we must consider regarding Medicaid referrals: (1) collections for Medicaid Never Assistance cases; (2) greater potential for

incentive awards; (3) a source of a viable caseload to offset declining IV-D caseloads; and (4) potential increase to paternity establishment for federal reporting on Statewide Paternity Establishment Percentage scores. We think the first item is relevant because, in addition to child support being an important source of income for families receiving Medicaid, we believe that states and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) want to recover medical assistance expenditures.

### Considering possible effects

Once you determine the important purposes of Medicaid referrals for your organization (and ultimately a cooperative agreement with Medicaid) you must consider potential impacts. For the last decade, we've allowed parent-recipients of Medicaid who are required to cooperate with the child support program but do not want our services, to opt out of establishing and enforcing child support obligations. When we only establish and enforce medical support, these parents with incomes low enough to be eligible for Medicaid are forfeiting a potentially significant source of income. It is important to realize that collections for parents who choose to establish and enforce child support account for one-third of NH's caseload distributions. What would that look like for families...for collections...for performance, if we take away that option and require all parents from Medicaid referrals to seek child support as a source of income? Many of our noted purposes for Medicaid referrals would be served by this. When we peeled back another layer of the onion, however, we discovered a problem.

*How do we resolve the conflict between fostering economic stability and independent choices of government support?*

### Parents opt out

New Hampshire's Medicaid program requires parents to cooperate with child support. Medicaid applicants who didn't want child support services, even just medical support, were withdrawing themselves from Medicaid at an alarming rate. It disturbed us deeply to see that parents who were eligible for Medicaid were going without health care coverage. How do we resolve the conflict between fostering economic stability and independent choices of government support? Is an all-or-nothing policy the right thing? How does this make us effective?

*continued*

Trying to do the right thing in government sometimes comes with other considerations that we cannot overlook. Here are some of the questions we have yet to fully answer.

- If we are to develop policy for Medicaid referrals from which we will establish and enforce child and medical support, do we have sufficient capacity to support the outcomes we seek?
- Do we have sufficient resources for case processing and management?
- Will we need to enhance our system, including electronic interfaces?
- How will cost-effectiveness be impacted?
- Will we need to revise our Medicaid State Plan changes (which will require CMS approval)?
- Do we have a strong enough relationship and partnership with the state Medicaid program to develop an effective joint policy?
- Will Medicaid guarantee sufficient information to process a child support case?

We need additional information and appropriate data to help each other and our federal partners determine the right policies that will enable us to be effective. In the child support program, we owe it to ourselves to continue this conversation, and we owe it to families who need health care coverage, to be effective and do the right thing.

For more information, contact Karen Hebert at [karen.hebert@dhhs.nh.gov](mailto:karen.hebert@dhhs.nh.gov), or 603-223-4822.

## Child Support Report

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## 2018 Preliminary Data Available

In June, OCSE published the fiscal year **2018 Preliminary Data Report**. The report provides data from all state child support programs on collections, expenditures, paternities, orders established, and other program statistics. The data represents a preliminary assessment of progress toward meeting goals and objectives.

A few highlights from the report:

- Total distributed IV-D child support collections were \$28.6 billion
- 96% of the distributed collections went directly to families
- The program served 14.7 million children
- The cost-effectiveness rate is \$5.14 for every \$1 spent

The information in this report does not take into account the 2018 data reliability audits. Tribal data is not included in the preliminary data.

For more information, contact the Division of Performance and Statistical Analysis at [DPSAsupport@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:DPSAsupport@acf.hhs.gov).

## 2018—More Money for Families

The national child support program collected just over \$32 billion in fiscal year 2018 and 96% of that went to families. Our infographic, **2018 Child Support: More Money for Families**, shows the latest statistics for collections, caseload, and cost-effectiveness.

