

Child Support Report



OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT Vol. 35 No. 11 November-December 2013
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/css>

Inside This Issue

Updated: OCSE's Military Trainer Guide	2
Commissioner's Voice: Serving three generations of families	3
Honoring Native Americans	4
Regionwide workgroup joins in tribute to Native Americans	4
Tribal reentry program creates a place of hope for a fresh start	5
ANA grant to Nooksack Tribe leads to fathers' involvement with children	6
DC Intake staffs tell why 'interviewing' customers is a good idea	7
Puerto Rico specialist goes above and beyond	9
New Hire reporting requirements	10
Shortening long URLs	11

Top five things to know when working with veterans

By Noelita Lugo, Program Supervisor
Texas Attorney General, Child Support Division

Veteran and military parents often have unique child support situations. Their cases may need extra time, additional procedures, and require child support workers to have a better understanding of laws and policies to handle them. This month's *Child Support Report* presents several articles to help caseworkers navigate the complexities of these cases.

In honor of Veterans Day, the Texas Attorney General's office offers these tips to help caseworkers.

- 1 Consider review and adjustments:** Unemployment rates for young veterans are higher than for civilians. Veterans awaiting disability ratings and benefits struggle to support themselves and may have difficulty holding down employment and paying support. The need is great for out-of-cycle review and adjustment of orders. To learn more, see Chapter 6 of the OCSE "[Working with the Military on Child Support Matters Trainer Guide](http://go.usa.gov/DAMR)" (<http://go.usa.gov/DAMR>).
- 2 Calculate net resources:** Veterans and military members may receive income from multiple sources (outside of military base pay or retirement benefits). Some of these types are exempt from being included as a net resource or may be exempt from child support garnishment. See details in Chapter 6 and the appendix of the [Trainer Guide](#).
- 3 Tailor communications:** Military and veteran parents suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or Traumatic Brain Injuries (PTSD/TBI) may have a compromised ability to communicate effectively. Understanding this and tailoring your communication to these parents often helps. To learn more, see the Department of Veterans Affairs PTSD/TBI website, www.ptsd.va.gov. People who work with veterans and military members may want to start at this section: [National Center for PTSD: Professional Section for Community Providers](http://go.usa.gov/DAJC) (<http://go.usa.gov/DAJC>).

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LEARN MORE...
See an extensive list of military-related resources on the Department of Health and Human Services website [Supporting Military Families](#)

U.S. Coast Guard photo by Seaman Robert Harclerode

4 Refer to ancillary services: Many services are available to veterans, particularly through the Department of Veterans Affairs, but veterans may not know where to start or how to access those programs. Find your local VA veteran centers and learn about employment programs through the [VA website \(www.va.gov\)](http://www.va.gov). The [Veteran Justice Outreach program \(http://go.usa.gov/DAJF\)](http://go.usa.gov/DAJF) can help you with veterans in the justice system. [Military OneSource \(www.militaryonesource.mil\)](http://www.militaryonesource.mil) also has a wealth of information.

5 Network: Find interstate partners and join networking groups such as the OCSE Veteran and Military Liaison Network and online Yammer discussion group (contact [Thom Campbell](#) for details). You can get to know colleagues from across the country who are invested in military and veteran issues and ask them for assistance when a case has stalled.

You can find more information on working with these parents on the [OCSE Military and Veterans website](#).

Updated: OCSE's Military Trainer Guide

By Larry Holtz, OCSE

It's back again! OCSE recently updated and expanded the [OCSE Trainer Guide: Working with the Military on Child Support Matters](#)—a cornerstone of the OCSE website for military-based information.

First produced in 2003, OCSE revised the guide when the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA) replaced the Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act. Reintroduced in 2005, the guide has served as a primary tool to educate over a thousand child support caseworkers, trainers, and supervisors who process cases involving service members. The new version updates language to reflect policy change and adds two training modules.

Just in time

After two decades of conflict, the United States is beginning a drawdown of our military forces both here and abroad. The increase in recently discharged service members, as well as those remaining on active duty and in the reserves and National Guard, is expected to affect child support offices across the country. Child support workers will be dealing with a substantial increase in cases involving one or more members of the armed forces. As the numbers rise, so will the need for a reliable source of information such as this guide.

Guide modules

The trainer guide provides a one-hour introductory lesson that lays out the format of the training when given as a complete course. (Inside the guide, trainer notes appear on one side of the page.) Case managers or officials can present

separately any of the one-hour modules, listed below. In addition, caseworkers can use the guide as a quick desk reference.

Module 1 – a general sketch of the United States military organization

Module 2 – locate resources that apply to cases involving the military

Module 3 – methods and procedures for service of civil process on military personnel

Module 4 – Servicemembers Civil Relief Act

Module 5 – rules and procedures to obtain paternity evidence from military personnel

Module 6 – strategies for establishing paternity and child support orders involving a military member

Module 7 – methods of enforcing financial and medical child support obligations of a military member

Module 8 (New!) – access and visitation, custody, parenting, and family care plans

Module 9 (New!) – collaborations and opportunities to partner with military and veteran organizations

In addition to the presentation material, the appendix contains trainer notes, training aids, handouts, review exercises, and a host of web URLs for more information. For example, the appendix has a sample military Leave and Earnings Statement that explains the information fields, a list of commonly used military acronyms, military rank and grade charts, and sample agency letters. See the [OCSE Trainer Guide \(http://go.usa.gov/W98C\)](http://go.usa.gov/W98C).

OCSE military-related resources

- [A Handbook for Military Families](#)
- [Military Services and Child Support Services](#)
- [Working with the Military as an Employer](#)
- [Child Support Participation in Stand Down Events](#)
- [Employees Called for Active Duty](#)
- [Ending Homelessness Among Veterans: OCSE, VA, ABA Project](#)
- [Veterans in the Child Support Caseload](#)

Serving three generations of families



Commissioner's
Voice

The need for child support is as old as history. Families have always been complicated and diverse. But the way we obtain support for children has to change with every generation, as each faces different challenges, has different values, and has different families. What

changes does the rising generation of parents in our caseload face?

Economic opportunity: We see a widening social divide in economic opportunity: the wage gap is growing. And a widening social divide in family stability: disparities in children's life chances are growing.

Labor market: There are fewer stable jobs for low-skilled workers. Available jobs for low-skilled workers are lower-paying, with few career advancement opportunities and no benefits.

Education and job path for men and women: 20 percent of men in their prime working years are not working. (When I was growing up in the 1950s, 5 percent of men were not working.) Over the past 25 years, we've seen a steep increase in women's employment, but men's employment fell. Although a gender wage gap remains, women's wages have risen and men's have fallen. Men, particularly men of color, are much more likely to have been incarcerated, further reducing their job and family opportunities.

Family structures: Complex families involve multiple partners, multiple parents, and more grandparents and relatives raising children. More children are born outside of marriage. In fact, the majority of all children born to mothers under 30 in this country are born outside of marriage. Same-sex marriage, assisted reproduction, and open adoption are additional facets of modern family life.

Two words, smart phones: The rising generation uses technology to obtain information and connect to others. Among low-income young people, smart phones are the connection to the outside world. This generational shift profoundly impacts how the child support program can successfully interact with young parents.

The new generation

We are entering the third generation of our program. Our basic program infrastructure built in 1975 addressed an earlier generation of parents, the divorce generation. We need to rethink our business model and adapt our program

to the realities of this generation. Our main challenge is to collect the money and encourage employment and reinforce positive family relationships. Fewer resources are the new normal, so we need pragmatic, cost-effective, results-oriented approaches.

All over the country, I see child support agencies step up to the plate to meet the needs of this generation. The basic building blocks for meeting the challenges of today are:

- Focus on the fundamentals (systems, employers, customer service)
- Get the order right (based on real income, not imputed)
- Link to services (including jobs, parenting time, and health care)

I see child support agencies implementing technology innovations, for example:

- Interactive websites and apps
- Streamlined automated workflow
- Data analytics (caseworker-level data, predictive scoring, caseload stratification)
- Continuous review and adjustment
- Document management (document imaging, e-filing)
- OCSE's portal technology, including e-IWO

And I see child support agencies implementing people innovations, for example:

- Building human relationships, including complex case management
- Debt reduction
- Emphasis on parenting
- Employment and wrap-around services
- Judicial problem-solving courts
- Reduced use of expensive contempt hearings
- More focus on encouraging behavioral changes—what the researchers call “behavioral economics”—the ability and willingness to pay, work, and parent.

As we wrap up 2013, I congratulate our state and tribal child support professionals on these accomplishments.

Stay tuned to my next Commissioner's Voice in January 2014, when I'll offer you 10 challenges as we face the third generation of our program!



Vicki Turetsky

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

Reflections from our tribal child support partners

The following three articles honor Native American heritage and tribal child support program efforts in three tribes: Puyallup Tribe, Penobscot Nation, and Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe.

Honoring Native Americans

By Kimberly Reynon-Spisak, Director
and Tallis King George
Puyallup Tribe Child Support Program

November marked Native American Heritage Month, observed by the federal government following an annual presidential proclamation. Many states set a day, a week, or a month with a similar goal. Texas celebrated its first American Indian Heritage Day on Sept. 26, to recognize “... the historic, cultural and social contributions of American Indian communities to the state.”

The Puyallup Tribe (in Washington State) has several holidays honoring important tribal figures and events: Chief Leschi Day, Warriors’ Day, Chiefs’ Day, American Indian Day, Memorial Day (recognizing former Council Members), Fishing Recognition Day, and Washington State Native American Day.

The Puyallup Tribe Child Support Program, like tribal child support programs across the continent, honors the children and their families we serve every day. Our mission is a living document. Puyallup tribal law, customs and traditions recognize that both parents support their children as their incomes, resources and abilities allow.

The Puyallup Tribe Child Support Program helps children receive support in a respectful and supportive manner that:

- Protects the sacred citizens of our community, our children
- Encourages and empowers families
- Attains the highest standards in providing child support services
- Exercises and protects the sovereignty of the Puyallup Tribe

Each tribal child support program is unique. The programs reflect the beauty and strengths of each Indian nation’s history, traditions, language, and culture. They also reflect the challenges of each Indian nation’s economy and legal status. Our clients are members of our own families and extended families, as well as our employees. They are valuable and valued. The services we provide to them often extend beyond collections and cannot be measured in “box scores.”

It is no coincidence that Native American Heritage Month is the month in which Thanksgiving falls. This most American of holidays recognizes the generosity and



compassion of the first Americans. It is a wonderful time for the Puyallup Tribe Child Support Program to express our gratitude to the tribal child support community for their support and wisdom. Thank you to our state and federal partners for working with us to support our sacred citizens and their families.

Regionwide workgroup joins in tribute to Native Americans

By Rochelle Phillips, *OCSE Region I*

Native American history came to life at an OCSE Region I intergovernmental workgroup meeting in June. Mali Dana, Assistant Director of the Penobscot Nation Tribal Child Support Program, gave attendees a historical perspective into the struggles and accomplishments of Native Americans over a span of four centuries, from the pre-colonial era to the present day.

Dana reviewed how major historical events—from the shock of initial European contact to subsequent conflict and subjugation, forced tribal relocation, economic dependency on the government, and “forced assimilation” that separated Native children from their families—have led to a multi-generational “historical trauma” (as described by Dr. Maria Yellowhorse Braveheart, PhD). That trauma continues to afflict Native Americans to this day, contributing to high rates of suicide, depression, substance abuse, poverty, and health disparities.

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Following her historical overview, Dana led a session on “stereotypes and misconceptions,” asking attendees to share their stereotypes about Native Americans. The discussion was open, honest and constructive in identifying issues and challenges affecting tribal child support today.

Dana concluded by reminding everyone to avoid assumptions about people, especially minorities, because there is “diversity within diversity.”

She encouraged all to go beyond the Golden Rule and practice Dr. Tony Alessandra’s Platinum Rule: “Treat others the way they want to be treated.” One way to accomplish this is by simply asking. The workgroup attendees’ reactions to Dana’s thought-provoking presentation were unanimously positive.

Contact Awendela (Mali) Dana with any questions at 207-817-3165, ext.2, or awendela.dana@penobscotnation.org.

Tribal reentry program creates a place of hope for a fresh start

Nancy Mathieson, *OCSE Region X*

It’s no surprise that the Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe (at the northern tip of Washington’s Kitsap Peninsula), which has a reputation for innovative programs and solutions, is finding new ways to proactively serve its tribal and community members.

Under the leadership and vision of Community Services Division Director Cheryl Miller, the tribe has implemented a reentry pilot program that provides services to tribal members who have barriers to obtaining employment due to criminal history. While the program offers job training and employment services, Miller and case manager Janel McFeat are quick to point out that it offers much more to its participants. “The program is also about change; building hope and self-worth,” says McFeat.

Hope means more than a hand-out or even a hand-up to McFeat and her program assistant Regina Avery. Program participation includes accountability, clear expectations, and a compassionate, but strict, set of guidelines for success. McFeat, a former parole officer, says this disciplined approach is essential to teaching program participants the skills necessary for a fresh start, which includes becoming a contributing member of the community.

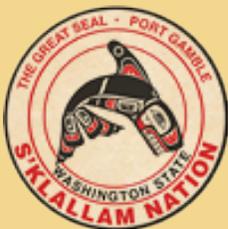
According to Miller, the program’s introduction materials convey her and her team’s enthusiasm best: “It is our belief that the tailored case management and strong relationships we have with our clients have led to our [program’s] great success.”

During a recent event to celebrate just a few of the program’s success stories, Miller and members of her team spoke of proud celebrations and displayed hand-beaded personal mementos made for program graduates to honor their completing the program curriculum and obtaining employment. At the Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe, success is clearly more than an individual achievement; it is celebrated by all.

Even though the reentry pilot just launched this January, it has a waiting list of tribal members who would like to participate. Funding for 2014 is uncertain, but Miller and her team are optimistic that they will be able to keep the energy and momentum of this pilot alive and continue to positively impact the lives of individuals and their families.

For more information, contact Cheryl Miller at 360-297-9624 or cmiller@pgst.nsn.us.

**Port Gamble S’Klallam
Community Services Division
Director Cheryl Miller (seated)
with (from left) Sandra Starnes,
Tribal Case Management
Officer; Janel McFeat, Case
Manager; and Maria Huynh,
Child Support Manager**



ANA grant to Nooksack Tribe leads to fathers' involvement with children

By Michelle Sauve

Administration for Native Americans

HHS Administration for Children and Families

Recently the Administration for Native Americans funded a fatherhood project for the Nooksack Indian Tribe, under a Healthy Marriage Initiative grant. The Nooksack Tribe operates a child support program, and child support was part of the educational curriculum for fathers who participated in the project.

Assessing the needs

In 2009, some 1,179 Nooksack tribal members (61 percent) were 30 years old or younger. According to 2006 Nooksack tribal TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) records, over 70 percent of tribal children grow up without a father in the house for at least 2 years. Youth living without their fathers face social issues, such as poverty, low educational attainment, substance abuse, criminal behavior, suicide, and premarital pregnancy at higher rates than those with fathers present.

Through community needs assessments, the tribe identified violence prevention, educational support, job training, parenting and life skills classes, cultural reunification, and parent-child activities as critical for family improvement. Tribal planners therefore developed this project to provide these services and foster greater involvement of Nooksack fathers in their children's lives.

Three project objectives

The first objective was to help fathers address their individual needs and overcome obstacles that limit their potential as responsible parents. In the first year, project staff met with staff from several tribal departments, securing their participation as facilitators in eight weekly workshops. Workshop topics included domestic violence awareness, child support, Native fatherhood, financial management, child safety, drug and alcohol prevention, and communication skills.

During the course of the project, staff augmented the curriculum with trainings on communicating with children, conflict resolution, leadership, child discipline, life skills, and personal empowerment. Project staff also hosted monthly family-fun nights with an average of 40 adults and 75 children, father/child nights, outdoor movie nights, a back-to-school breakfast, and several other events, each of which were attended by fathers, their children, and other family members.

WHAT ARE ANA GRANTS?

The Administration for Native Americans (ANA), in the HHS Administration for Children and Families, offers discretionary grants, training, and technical assistance to Native American communities for projects that increase the ability for governments to be self-determining, communities to be culturally and linguistically vibrant, and individuals to be healthy and economically self-sufficient.



The second objective was to identify early parental communication breakdowns and promote cooperation on matters impacting children. To accomplish this, the project team held "Positive Indian Parenting" (PIP) and "Why Child Support?" classes. Staff encountered challenges with this objective due to staff turnover, a lack of partners to facilitate workshops, and scheduling conflicts, but 52 parents attended PIP sessions and 29 parents attended child support workshops. Additionally, 39 mothers and fathers participated in discussion groups, and 44 individuals representing 38 families reported improvement in parenting skills and communication on children's issues.

The third objective was to provide services to help fathers address barriers limiting employment. In the first year, participants took classes from a project partner in resume writing, interviewing, job search techniques, and portfolio building. Throughout the life of the project, caseworkers also provided classes, career counseling, and personal assistance to participants who were applying for employment, preparing for job interviews, getting GEDs or pursuing higher education, and receiving treatment for substance abuse or mental health issues.

Feedback and results

Both fathers and mothers who participated in workshops or met with caseworkers learned a great deal about the meaning of responsible and positive parenting, healthy

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communication and cooperation with present and former partners, what it means to provide child support, and what it means to be a role model.

As a result of this project, 16 fathers applied for employment, 23 fathers and 14 mothers received job-specific training, 2 fathers and 1 mother received a GED or pursued higher education, and 18 fathers and 4 mothers gained full or part-time employment. Furthermore, 6 fathers and 6 mothers received treatment for substance abuse or mental health issues, and 58 meetings were held between participants and case managers to address personal issues.

The project coordinator said, “Many Nooksack children have a more stable father presence in the home, and this project has led to better relationships and less domestic abuse. Hopefully it will enable children to grow into healthy, stable adults.”

WHO FUNDS THE GRANTS?

After the Indian Health Service, the HHS Administration for Children and Families (ACF) provides the second largest amount of funding to Native Americans throughout the Nation and the territories of Guam, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands. From a budget of almost \$50 billion, ACF awards an average \$647 million to Native Americans from various programs, including Head Start, Child Care, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, Child Support, and the Administration for Native Americans.

See the [ACF Tribal Initiatives website](#) and the [ANA webinars page](#) to learn more.

Promising Practices

D.C. Intake staffs tell why ‘interviewing’ customers is a good idea

By Justin Latus, Policy Analyst
District of Columbia Child Support Services Division

In the District of Columbia, the Child Support Services Division has changed how it “attacks” a new case so it can get an order established in court as soon as possible. The staff that handles this initial part of the process—the Intake 1 and 2 units—is processing cases more quickly and efficiently to get them ready for court. Their referrals to the attorneys are more complete, enabling greater success in obtaining orders.

In July and August this year, 87 percent and 86 percent of the new cases, respectively, moved to the next status within federal timeframes. (In August, Legal Services Litigation returned only 7 percent of the cases because of an error.)

Staff member Delores Ragland knows the importance of working hard and fast. “We’ve got to push through the cases,” says Ragland. “If I get five cases in a day, I process those five cases.” Ragland responds to interstate requests to register orders with D.C. for pursuing enforcement, or to submit a petition to establish paternity or support because

the noncustodial parent lives in the District. If she is missing information from the other state, she calls or emails the state until she gets what she needs. “I do not want to sit on [these cases],” says Ragland. “This is called case management.”

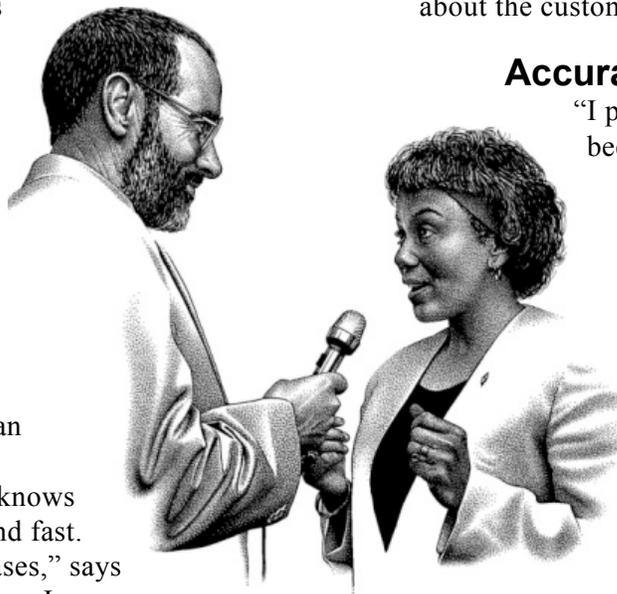
One improvement to D.C.’s case processing: staff members interview all customers by phone or in person. What do they think about this improvement? I interviewed intake managers and staff to find out what they have to say about the customer interview process.

Accurate, credible information

“I prefer that [the customers] come in because you get more information,” says Juana Wright-Massie.

Natasha McClellan says, “The goal is to provide the attorneys with the most accurate information when they go to court.” Previously, D.C. used information that the Economic Security Administration got when individuals applied for TANF. Some of the information was out-of-date or not accurate.

Chris Hart-Wright tells why the D.C. started interviewing all customers, explaining that: “A [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, TANF] worker does not have the same vested interest in interviewing for child support information.” Bringing customers in would give child



STAFF OPINIONS

COUNT—Lisa Baton (left) enjoys case management; Annette Matthews sees three changes that have aided case processing; and Judith Collister is excited to be part of the changes taking place in the Intake 1 and 2 units.



support staff that opportunity to get the information they really need.

Relying on the information gathered at the TANF application process meant the child support agency had an incomplete set of facts on cases. Applicants for TANF benefits, for example, were checking that the father was “unknown” just to get through the application faster, even when the child had a different last name. (Someone was claiming to be the father of the child if a different name was listed on the birth certificate, so “unknown” was not the correct response!)

Jerome Bizzell says, “We’re getting more case-specific information now. We have more information on the noncustodial parent—where he works, where he lives. It helps us locate him and make the case ready for court.”

It took some persuasion to get staff on board with what seemed at first like a pretty daunting addition to everyone’s workload. Hart-Wright says, “We got a lot of resistance from staff, with concerns that it would bog them down, that customers didn’t care enough and wouldn’t come in.”

Stephanie Perry adds, “Staff thought we’d have a packed waiting room full of customers to be interviewed. However, it’s turned out to be manageable. It’s been flowing well.”

By interviewing customers face-to-face, staff can get accurate phone numbers and information on where to find the noncustodial parent. Customers who come in also complete affidavits in support of establishing paternity, which the attorneys use in court. Staff refers fewer cases to the locate unit to find one or both parents.

Staff prepares cases more quickly, and those who were leery of the new process are finding that they are meeting their monthly targets for getting cases ready for court more easily. And now the attorneys have better information when they appear before the judge in court to obtain a child support order.

“We’ve increased our credibility with the court,” notes Child Support Division Director Benidia Rice. With better address information, noncustodial parents are more easily served with papers directing them to appear in court and are more likely to show up at the hearing.

Accordingly, cases are less likely to be dismissed due to failure of the noncustodial parent to show, and D.C. is more likely to be able to establish a child support order.

Enhancements boost efficiency

Joseph Courtney notes that Intake 1 and 2 have been “working more efficiently,” a common theme among the staff. Courtney notes two changes in the process that help. First, he says “areas in [D.C.’s automated system] have been enhanced to better help Intake process cases.” He likes the new Graphical User Interface (GUI) screens that make it easier to move around within a case. Second, management has encouraged staff to use sanction codes more frequently when customers do not cooperate. As a result, customers are “more likely to comply with us and give us the information we need to make the case court-ready,” says Courtney.

Perry agrees: “Customers are coming in for their interviews.”

Lisa Baton concurs that increased use of sanctions has made a difference. “They’re coming in” for their appointments, she says. She also likes the current procedures of assigning cases to workers. “If something happens, it comes back and I can see what happened to it.”

When asked about the functioning of her unit, Amparo Nunez praised assigning cases by alphabet. “It works for me,” reported Nunez. It helps her be more targeted in working her task list and as a result she is able to process cases more quickly than before.

Annette Matthews sees three changes making a difference. First, the Unwed Births System (UBS) that staff use to find Certification of Parentage Judgments (CPJs) and Acknowledgements of Paternity (AOP) now allows searches by date of birth and mother’s name in addition to the child’s name. Staff find what they need more easily, eliminating the need to wait for the custodial parent to bring in the birth certificate or AOP.

Second, staff sends the appointment letter to the customer as soon as they get the referral. This takes the case off their task list, helps them meet their timeframes, and enables them to focus on other tasks at hand.

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Third, points out Matthews, staff now sends out one-page appointment letters rather than 13 to 15-page outreach packages. The letter is easy to read, lists exact documents the customer must bring, and includes the caseworker's name and phone number.

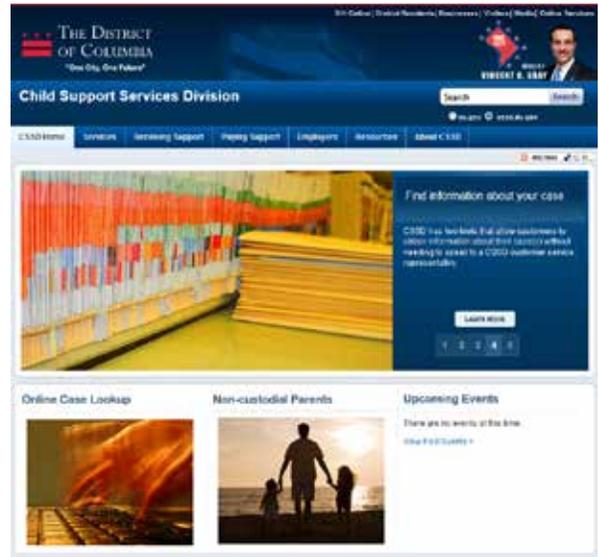
The appointment letter also very clearly states that TANF customers who fail to keep their appointment will have their benefits stopped, and that non-TANF customers who don't show will have their cases closed. When customers come in for interviews, intake staff help them fill out all the paperwork that was previously included in the outreach package, including the affidavit in support of paternity, which the support enforcement specialist can then notarize.

Team approach

Several staff noted that management has been able to pull together staff in Intake 1 and 2 units to enhance productivity. Judith Collister says, "Team supervisors are working together so there is no division between 1 and 2. We're working toward the same goal and focusing on the same objectives." She adds that management "brought us together as one team and motivated us and made some changes to help us work smarter." Collister is "excited to be part of it."

Wright-Massie echoes the sentiment that staff are working well together. She especially notices better communication between staff who primarily work interstate cases and those

who work local cases. "We're working a lot better now. A lot smarter," says Wright-Massie. If a customer comes in and is interviewed by a staff member who works local cases, and the staff learns that the case is interstate, the staff person finds an interstate expert to interview the customer then and there. Previously, a customer had to come back for a later appointment. "We've come a long way."



Community Connections

Puerto Rico specialist goes above and beyond

By Jens Feck, *OCSE Region II*

A complicated White House inquiry passed Alba L. Alvarez's desk last month as she was busy as usual answering customer inquiries in her Puerto Rico child support office.

As acting director of ASUME's Central Registry—ASUME is the Spanish acronym for the Administration for Child Support—Alvarez is known to many intergovernmental child support workers in most of ASUME's 53 partner jurisdictions.

Alvarez has worked with intergovernmental cases since 2003 and serves as ASUME's lead point of contact for public inquiries since her assignment to the agency's Central Registry in October 2010. She has a reputation for doing her best to respond promptly to public inquiries and routinely provides information sufficient to resolve the inquiry in her first email exchange.

The White House inquiry came with limited documentation, was difficult to understand, and appeared to

involve an ASUME customer. Within a day of receiving the inquiry, Alvarez contacted family members of the noncustodial parent residing in New York, and through them received contact information of other family members in Puerto Rico, eventually locating the parent who recently moved to the island Commonwealth.

Alvarez then verified that the case was serviced exclusively by New York State, the noncustodial parent's sole income was a \$302 Social Security check (which was subject to an income withholding order), and New York City had already attempted to contact the parent to determine his eligibility under the city's Arrears Settlement Project.



Alba L. Alvarez has worked with intergovernmental cases since 2003 and on the Central Registry since October 2010.

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The following day, New York City's Office of Child Support Enforcement established communications with the noncustodial parent, decided to terminate the withholding order temporarily, and initiated the exchange of documentation to determine if the parent potentially qualified for a compromise of arrears assigned to the state.

The Arrears Settlement Project allows the New York City agency to compromise arrears permanently assigned to the government when the agency determines such a settlement is in the best interests of both parents. Settlements are based on determinations that future collections are unlikely because the noncustodial parent is unable to generate nonexempt income or because the length of time it would take to recoup arrears is unrealistic or unreasonable. The city's current focus is on cases where the noncustodial parent is over the age of 55 and the dependent child is over 21. Arrears in cases identified as potentially eligible exceed \$143 million.

The agency already has contacted and encouraged thousands of parents to apply for settlement determinations.

Alvarez's thoughtful and eager response to the inquiry reflects her dedication. Her beyond-the-call-of-duty assistance in this case (one that was not even part of ASUME's 230,000-plus caseload) and New York City's Arrears Settlement Project are fitting examples of how our new family-centered philosophies and initiatives make the child support program one that has the best interests of all family members at heart.

Alvarez translates that philosophy into a personal perspective: "I love my job. I'm pleased to be able to help, not only with child support matters but also to promote healthy family relations."

Tech Talk

New Hire reporting requirements

By Lynnetta Thompson, OCSE

Small and medium-sized businesses rely on their local communities for support just as those communities need local businesses to supply jobs. However, these businesses often provide more without knowing they are doing so. By reporting new employees in a timely manner, businesses can help children in their communities and across the country have financial stability. While this connection might not be obvious, a few statistics give perspective.

In the United States, 1 in 4 children receive services through state and tribal child support programs. These programs collected more than \$31 billion in child support payments in fiscal 2012, and employers provided 70 percent of those payments through income withholding. See [FY 2012 Preliminary Report \(http://go.usa.gov/DeXd\)](http://go.usa.gov/DeXd).

New hire reporting is one of the best ways employers help child support agencies locate noncustodial parents and enforce child support orders.

When employers report new hires to their State Directory of New Hires, the state can verify eligibility for needs-based programs, reduce improper payments, and monitor Unemployment Insurance compliance. For example, states check the information against their public assistance programs to make sure that newly hired employees have stopped receiving benefits such as welfare, food stamps, and unemployment insurance.

Child support offices match the new hire data with their child support cases to locate parents, establish new orders, and enforce existing orders. For the 30 percent of child

support cases where parents do not live in the same state as their children, the National Directory of New Hires gives states the ability to check across state lines to locate parents.

The reporting process is neither time-consuming nor complicated. Most states only require information that new employees already provide on the W-4 forms (see below). Within 20 days of a new employee's first day of work, the employer must report the information to their State Directory of New Hires. Employers can submit data in one of three ways—first-class mail, magnetic tape, or electronically. Some states also allow employers to fax, email, phone, or submit via a website. Employers can find a link to their state's website on the OCSE [state map \(http://go.usa.gov/DeQR\)](http://go.usa.gov/DeQR).

Seven New Hire reporting data elements

- Employee name
- Employee address
- Social Security number
- Date of hire (first day of pay for work)
- Company name
- Company address
- Federal employer identification number (FEIN)

Some states may require additional data; please check with yours.

Shortening long URLs

By Kim Danek, OCSE

If you have ever tried to show long URLs (Uniform Resource Locators—think web addresses) in any correspondence or informational materials, you know how annoying they can be because they take up so much precious space. This is true especially in a Tweet; 140 characters is not much to get your point across.

Here's an example: We published a story in the September Child Support Report (CSR) titled "Domestic violence survivors don't have to give up social media." The URL for that issue, www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/programs/css/csr1309_final.pdf, is a whopping 66 characters! So how do you Tweet something when the URL uses up almost half of the characters? You use a URL shortening program.

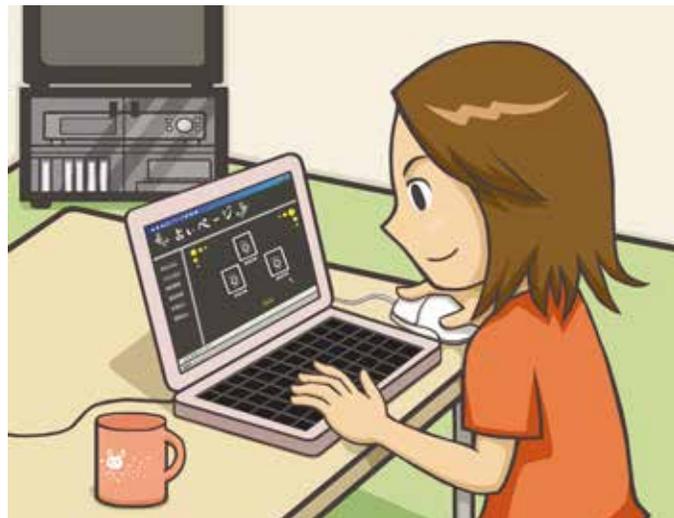
Bitly (www.bit.ly) and Google URL Shortener (www.google.com/urlshortener) are two common commercial sites where you can input a long URL have it shortened into something Twitter friendly. For our CSR example above, Google shortens it by 44 characters to <http://goo.gl/FdZXre>. Bitly will do the same thing, but the difference is that it takes **.gov** and **.mil** URLs and converts them into **1.U.S.A.gov** addresses. So the potential reader knows that the URL is probably taking them to an official government or military site.

Using our domestic violence article example, as a Bitly-generated URL, it comes out to be <http://1.usa.gov/14ZKY2O>. Unfortunately, with commercial sites like this, people can't really be sure of the validity of the shortened URL. This is where [Go.USA.gov](http://www.go.usa.gov) comes in.

HowTo.gov is a resource I go to often. According to the About Us page (www.howto.gov/about-us), HowTo.gov helps government communicators like me "deliver a better customer experience to citizens." The site provides a wealth of helpful information on web content, social media, mobile computing, and more.

One of the tools it offers is [Go.USA.gov](http://www.go.usa.gov), an official government URL shortening service. Because the U.S. General Services Administration provides this service, people who click on one of these links can be sure that they will go to an official government page.

Now we can write a Tweet for our CSR like "Domestic



violence survivors: Learn how to use social media safely in the Sept. Child Support Report: <http://go.usa.gov/DEse>." We can get our point across in our Tweet because our shortened Go.USA.gov URL uses only one-third of the characters of the full URL, and people who follow the link will know it doesn't contain any malicious code.

State child support agencies can use Go.USA.gov as well! To maintain the safety of the URLs, you must register to use this service. As long as you have an official government email address such as one ending in **.mil**, **.gov**, **.fed.us**, or **.state.XX.us**, you can register and start shortening your web addresses for Tweets, brochures, or whatever you need. Check out the other great content at www.howto.gov!

Child Support Report

Child Support Report is published monthly by the Office of Child Support Enforcement. We welcome articles and high-quality digital photos to consider for publication. We reserve the right to edit for style, content and length, or not accept an article. OCSE does not endorse the practices or individuals in this newsletter. You may reprint an article in its entirety (or contact the author or editor for permission to excerpt); please identify *Child Support Report* as the source.

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Networking women

Did you know that three-quarters (74%) of women online use social networking sites? Among internet users, women are significantly more likely than men to use Facebook, Pinterest, and Instagram. Roughly the same proportion of men and women use Twitter and Tumblr. For more facts on gender and social media, visit the Pew Research Center's [It's a Woman's \(Social Media\) World](http://www.pewresearch.org/social-media).