

Child Support Report



OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT
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Generalist model takes Mecklenburg County toward 'Destination ... Excellence'

By Joan Kennedy, Director
Mecklenburg County Child Support Enforcement
Charlotte, NC

For Mecklenburg County Child Support Enforcement, change management has come with several challenges: a diverse group of staff members with varying levels of child support experience, limited staff training resources, and undocumented business practices, to name a few. In this article, I explain how our urban jurisdiction managed an unfunded mandate for change.

Expectation of change

In 2009, the North Carolina General Assembly directed each of our state's 100 county child support offices, administered by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, to move their operations under their local county government by July 1, 2010.

That decision left many counties with one of three options: to privatize; to consolidate child support within existing social services departments; or, like the larger urban jurisdictions (of which Mecklenburg County is the largest), to create a standalone child support agency. Mecklenburg County chose the latter option and hired me to lead its Child Support Enforcement Department. We opened for business on July 2, 2010.

County leadership gave me three top priorities: transition from a specialized establishment and enforcement model to a "generalist case management model"; create a more efficient and secure files management process and system to support it; and implement a county-operated child support call center.

Although each priority was ambitious, we implemented all three within a year. The most significant change was the transition to the generalist model of case management, where one caseworker performs both establishment and enforcement functions on each assigned case.

continued ▶

"I embrace the practice of a customer having one central point of contact from case establishment through enforcement and case closure, which a generalist model provides, and which in turn enhances the customer service experience."



Joan Kennedy continues our series on change management in the child support program

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Some may question why our county leadership felt so strongly about the generalist case management model. Which model would you choose: the establishment and enforcement model, which assigns two people to handle one case, or the model that develops staff that can perform a majority of the functions in a child support agency? To me, the budgetary implications of the second are clear.

As a leader who has seen successes and improved performance outcomes of the generalist model, I can attest both to its cost-effectiveness and to efficiency. I embrace the practice of a customer having one central point of contact from case establishment through enforcement and case closure, which a generalist model provides, and which in turn enhances the customer service experience. I also embrace the succession planning that is inherent in teaching staff the “total program.” Additionally, the generalist (or “cradle-to-grave”) model also creates a more cost-effective case management approach when faced with limited staff and the constrained budgets that continue to challenge us all.

First things first—planning and design

The first and most critical step on our journey to our aptly named “Destination ... Excellence” project was to plan and design our generalist model transition. The management team, in collaboration with a dedicated Business Process Management consultant, spent significant time designing our transition roadmap. The plan included developing timelines and training curricula, identifying resources, a communications plan, team assignments, and physical layout changes.

As a result, several management team meetings and a few offsite retreats focused on brainstorming, consensus and team building, and developing our supervisors’ skills capacity to ensure they were prepared for and engaged in the change management process.

We strongly believed that the success of the generalist model was contingent upon buy-in among the management team and subsequently our ability to foster and gain staff buy-in. We had to move the newly formed organization much further along and much more rapidly toward a holistic performance and customer-focused culture.

For each phase of the transition plan, we updated staff to ease their concerns and answer questions. We kept our court and other key partners and stakeholders informed. We also gave our leadership team regular progress reports.

Next—training and mentoring

Recognizing that only 50 percent of the new department’s staff had child support case management experience, the next step toward the transition was to identify and solicit additional training. We asked our partners at the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services’ Policy and Training Unit to help our internal trainer to train the new staff on the core case management curriculum.

In the interim, we heavily relied on the veteran staff to mentor, provide case management, and maintain performance on federal incentive goals. As you can imagine, this was a tremendous expectation for our veteran staff. Some frustration and resentment ensued, with the refrain of being “overwhelmed” by the large number of cases they were managing while the new staff were in training. At the time, staff viewed training as a blessing and a curse. The new case managers were receptive, while the veteran staff was somewhat resentful that they were doing all the work and addressing all the customer needs. In addition, we assigned each veteran staff member to mentor a new caseworker.

Ironically, this transition was occurring at the peak of the economic downturn, so service applications were up, and so were customer expectations. I am pleased to say we did not lose a single caseworker during this transition period.

Lessons learned, outcomes

At the end of our first year, we were ready to complete the transition to generalist teams. While some staff resistance and uncertainty did remain, most everyone embraced the process because it was well planned and as transparent as possible. Regular communication, a well-designed plan with documented processes, and clear project milestones were critical to our success.

For the few hiccups we encountered along the way, the leadership team adopted an “Implement Now, Perfect Later” philosophy—and it worked well.

For Mecklenburg County Child Support Enforcement, the generalist model was not negotiable, but rather a fresh start toward significant performance improvement efforts in the program.

We are proud to report that in the first year of operation under the generalist model, we have met our performance goals in two of the four incentive categories for the first time in over a decade. Year two performance results were also favorable compared to prior years. With a goal of becoming the number one child support agency in North Carolina, we are well on our way to “Destination ... Excellence.”





Commissioner's Voice

Reaching diverse customers through visual communications

Infographics are everywhere. A staple on websites across the internet, those colorful, poster-like illustrations grab our attention and help us visualize data. They can display facts and figures, research and surveys, ideas and trends, or simply a marathon route. Infographics may be old communications,

but recently they've been paired with social media to engage target audiences.

Just in time for the recent Hispanic Heritage Month (September 15 – October 15), OCSE designed our first infographic in Spanish. Following rave reviews of our storybook, [Child Support Services and You, Let's Work Together](#), our communications team crafted the infographic with parents in mind. [How to Apply for Child Support Services](#) (shown below on this page) describes various ways to apply with a local agency. See the infographic, in both English and Spanish, on the [Families page](#) on our website.

Child support professionals and stakeholders in the program have reason to use compelling communications to reach Hispanic and Latino Americans. Our country now claims nearly 51 million Hispanics, of which 37 percent are foreign-born.

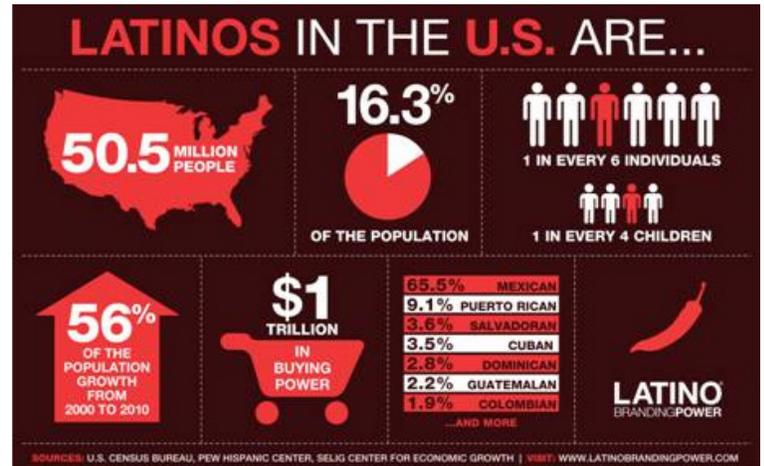
We can learn more about long-term trends in Hispanic population growth from the Census Bureau's infographic [America's Foreign-Born in the Last 50 Years](#). Also based on the Census data is the Pew Research Center's infographic [Hispanics in the U.S.: Origin and Place of Birth](#). An article on the Texas Comptroller's website, [Texas by the Numbers](#), also offers infographics with Census data.

Innovative infographics can spread messages effectively to our diverse caseload and help us share data and other content with all of you. The more we know about our stakeholders and families, the better we can tailor these communications. I hope you will share our storybook and infographics in your jurisdiction. Please let us know your ideas for creating others.

Vicki Turetsky



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



¿CÓMO PUEDO OBTENER SERVICIOS PARA EL CUMPLIMIENTO DEL SUSTENTO DE MENORES?

Si recibe asistencia pública, usted será referido automáticamente al programa para el cumplimiento del sustento de menores y no es necesario solicitar los servicios del programa.



CONTACTE A SU OFICINA DE SUSTENTO DE MENORES

Busque el sitio web de su estado o tribu indígena en el [mapa del programa de sustento de menores](#). Algunas oficinas permiten que se aplique electrónicamente. Si su oficina no acepta aplicaciones electrónicas, o si prefiere aplicar en persona, visite o llame a su oficina local para el cumplimiento del sustento de menores.

El sitio web de su estado o tribu indígena tendrá información para contactar a su oficina local.

Póngase en contacto con su oficina local y dígame que usted desea solicitar servicios del programa para el cumplimiento del sustento de menores.



TRAIGA SU INFORMACIÓN

Su oficina local para el cumplimiento del sustento de menores necesita información acerca de usted y el otro padre del niño (generalmente llamado el padre/madre sin la custodia).

La oficina le dirá qué documentos necesita traer para abrir un caso.

Por favor, manténgase involucrado. Llame a su oficina local para el cumplimiento del sustento de menores si tiene preguntas sobre su caso. [La Guía para el Cumplimiento del Sustento de Menores](#) tiene más información sobre el programa. [El Programa Federal Para el Cumplimiento del Sustento de Menores \(Información en inglés\)](#)



COMPLETE UNA APLICACIÓN

Puede obtener una aplicación en su oficina local para el cumplimiento del sustento de menores.

Algunas oficinas permiten que se aplique electrónicamente.

Llene la aplicación. Siga las instrucciones que aparecen en el formulario para someterla a la oficina para el cumplimiento del sustento de menores. (Es posible que tenga que pagar un costo para recibir servicios).

HOW DO I APPLY FOR CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES?

If you receive public assistance, you are automatically referred to child support. You do not need to apply for child support services.



CONTACT YOUR CHILD SUPPORT OFFICE

Find your state or tribal website on the [child support contact map](#). Your state may allow you to apply online. If not, or you prefer to apply in person, visit or call your local child support office.

Your state or tribal website will have contact information for your local child support office.

Contact your local office and tell them you want to apply for child support services.



GATHER YOUR INFORMATION

Your local child support office needs information about you and the child's other parent (usually called the noncustodial parent).

The office will let you know what documents you need to gather to open a case.



COMPLETE AN APPLICATION

You can get an application from your local child support office. Some offices let you apply online.

Complete the application and follow the instructions on how to submit it to the child support office. (You may have to pay an application fee.)

Please stay involved. Call your child support office if you have questions about your case. Take a look at our [Child Support Handbook](#) for more information about the program. [Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement](#)

See the Spanish and English versions of this infographic on the [Families page](#) of the OCSE website (or click on the photos above).

Washington's Special Collection Team boasts creative opportunities

By David Johnson, *OCSE Region X*

What single collection action provided nearly \$600,000 in regular child support payments to Washington State families over the past 24 years? The 1989 Exxon Valdez oil tanker spill lawsuit settlement! The last payments from this class action lawsuit were paid in September 2013. The lawsuit provided consistent child support payments for some families all these years.

Unique collection efforts like this sometimes generate the only payments a family will ever see. The Washington Special Collection Team is a shining example of how a centralized, specialized team effort can achieve long-term results more efficiently than individual efforts of caseworkers across a state taking similar actions one case at a time. This team of hotshots in Olympia, WA, always has its radar up for unique collection opportunities to pursue.

Team manager Chuck Donnelly says, "All our staff statewide are critical to the success of these efforts. We encourage everyone to be on the lookout for class action lawsuits or group insurance settlements they learn about in their local newspaper, or even bonuses they learn are being paid out by employers. This allows our centralized Special Collection Team to coordinate a data match and get a piece of it for child support cases statewide."

Another recent example of the team's success came in July when the claims administrator of the National Mortgage Settlement received a check for over \$230,000. This single payment resulted in child support payments to 260 different cases in Washington. It appears that only a few states use

a statewide, coordinated approach to data matching and intercepting funds that parents who owe arrears are in line to receive.

California also has pursued intercepts of National Mortgage Settlement payouts. California received \$1.8 million in collections on nearly 3,100 cases.

An obvious question arises: Should OCSE take on data matching or collection coordination at the national level for large lawsuit settlements like these? The answer is one of limited legal authority. OCSE lacks statutory authority to use the Federal Case Registry for national matching with these entities—often private, third-party administrators and companies that handle claims paperwork and settlement distributions in lawsuits.

What does it take besides a little creative thinking and old-fashioned legwork to affect these types of intercepts? Donnelly indicates it often takes several back-and-forth conversations with the lawsuit administrator before they realize the benefit of working cooperatively with the child support program to implement a formal data match to identify potential obligors and coordinate intercept notices.

The Washington Special Collection Team also serves as the centralized, statewide point for handling lottery intercepts, since time is of the essence in getting those handled before the winner receives payment. And, the team serves as the hub for passport reinstatements, so there is more consistent and fair treatment of these situations. The team also serves as a good testing ground for new locate tools that surface. The latest two private vendor tools the team has examined are CLEAR, an online compilation of public and proprietary records to aid in investigations, and JBRS (Jail Booking Reporting System), a system that notifies you when an individual you are tracking is booked into a local jail or state correctional facility.

If you would like more information about Washington's Special Collection Team or their unique locate and collection techniques, call Chuck Donnelly at 360-664-5067.

AWARENESS EVENT REACHES OHIO'S SUMMIT—On Aug. 16 and 17, Summit County, Ohio, Child Support Enforcement Agency marked Child Support Awareness Month by offering a range of child support services at the Job Center in Akron. Seventy-nine volunteers from child support and partner organizations assisted 343 parents. The child support agency collected \$3,849, resolved 61 (civil and criminal) warrants, and reinstated 101 driver's licenses. Another 46 parents attended workforce orientation, 27 received free genetic testing, 92 applied for order modifications—and the list goes on. Forty-three percent of attendees (146) were unemployed. For more information, contact Athena.Riley@jfs.ohio.gov. Read about other Awareness Month activities in the [September 2013 Child Support Report](#).



Coordination Points

Arizona staff members on the case: Grace Medrano (enforcement officer), Janean Gonzalez (enforcement officer), Stephanie Roncal (debt officer), and Amanda Valenciano (intergovernmental officer)



Teamwork pays off in Arizona inheritance case

By Marjorie Cook
Outreach & Community Initiatives Administrator
Arizona Division of Child Support Services

In a case that opened in 1992, the Arizona Division of Child Support Services (DCSS) had sporadic contact and payments from the noncustodial parent. The division received the last payment of \$5 in May 2012. Then in March 2013, the custodial parent notified DCSS that the noncustodial parent might come into an inheritance.

Janean Gonzalez took on the case and immediately started “working the phones.” She called the noncustodial parent and got a \$200 payment (but no other information). She conferred with the Arizona Assistant Attorney General and called law offices and the Clerk of the Court in Washington State (location of the deceased’s estate) to determine if there was a probate case.

After identifying probate information, Gonzalez worked with the DCSS Debt and Intergovernmental units to issue a limited assistance request to the Washington child support agency. Washington in turn issued a limited wage assignment to the estate attorneys.

After a considerable waiting period, DCSS received confirmation that the probate attorneys delivered a check to the Washington agency. Washington child support officer Scott Cooks was the key person who worked this limited Administrative Enforcement of Interstate case from Arizona. As soon as Arizona received the money from Washington, DCSS presented the custodial parent with \$129,263.86.

Gonzalez later received the note at the right from the custodial parent (names deleted to protect the family’s confidentiality).

Dear Janean,

I want to say thank you from the bottom of my heart [for] all of your hard work and the work of your team. You have made my dream come true. I was a single mom at the age of 17 with a beautiful daughter whose father did not pay child support, and if I did not have my parents to help me along the way, we would have been living in a very poor area of town. Lord knows what would have happened to us or how my daughter would have turned out. My parents and I struggled to pay our bills and make sure [the child] had everything she needed. She did not always have everything she wanted, but she had a roof over her head and food in her mouth. I have always prayed and would dream about what would happen if I received all of the child support owed to me.

For the first time in my life I am not just scraping by. I have all my bills payed and still have some money to go out to eat. I am going to be able to help my parents and [the child] out financially and not have to ask for the money back. I will be able to have something to leave my children when I’m gone. I will get my first paycheck this Friday since getting the child support money, and I am relieved that I will pay my regular household bills and still have enough money that I don’t have to worry about how much I have left for gas. [The child] will be 21 years old tomorrow and I can afford to take her out to a nice restaurant and not worry that I can’t pay this bill or that bill this week because of it.

Thank you so much for doing your job and doing it so well. You are one of God’s angels here on Earth and I will never forget to count you in my blessings every day.

Sincerely,
[Custodial Parent]

Child support court opens in Porter County, Indiana

By Laura Bernacki Stafford, Child Support Director/
Deputy Prosecuting Attorney
Porter County, Indiana Prosecutor's Office

Jennifer S. Thuma
Legislative Liaison & Communications Director
Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council

On Jan. 7, 2013, Porter County in northwest Indiana opened a specialized Title IV-D Court. Its purpose: to increase efficiency, lessen strain on resources, and decrease costs—with the ultimate goal of better serving children in the program.

The court's opening followed 18 months of planning and hard work. The Porter County Prosecutor's Office and other planners faced many decisions, including the facility's location, funding, procedures, and key partners.

The planning group first chose space in the Juvenile Services building, and the county commissioners helped with building funds to ensure timely remodeling. Next, the Porter County Council agreed to fund the project (including equipment and salaries) through reimbursements from the program. They also used County Incentive Funds from the child support program for start-up equipment. Finally, the group developed relationships with Porter County Clerk of Courts, the departments in the Juvenile Services building, and the other courts, and they determined procedures.

Going up – collections, efficiency, service

The objective and goal of this project is to increase collections through a specialized court structure. While it is a little early to provide complete metrics to measure the court's success, collections have increased from last year based on performance measures.



Specialized child support courts are not new in Texas. In 1987, the state set up 10 courts; now 41 child support courts handle only Title IV-D cases. Learn more about these courts on the Texas Specialty Court Programs website.



Commissioner Lisa Moser and staff
of the Porter County Title IV-D Court

In the third quarter of 2012, arrears collections were at 68 percent; in the same quarter of 2013, these collections stand at 71 percent. Current support collections increased from 62 percent in 2012, to 65 percent in 2013. The biggest improvement so far has been in order establishment: up from 82 percent in 2012, to 92 percent in 2013.

Additionally, the Title IV-D Court is efficient with staff doing all work electronically. The commissioner views the files from the bench on her computer and the court generates orders immediately. This important change saves time and money and cuts down on cumbersome paper files needing numerous people to handle.

While the project was a significant undertaking, it was well worth it. The new court employs part-time Commissioner Lisa Moser to hear cases, a full-time court reporter, and a part-time secretary. The court operates Monday through Thursday weekly. The Porter County child support office has about 4,500 cases and employs 3 attorneys, 11 full-time staff, and 1 part-time staff member. The new court allowed the child support office to grow by adding one attorney and one full-time staff member to better serve the program.

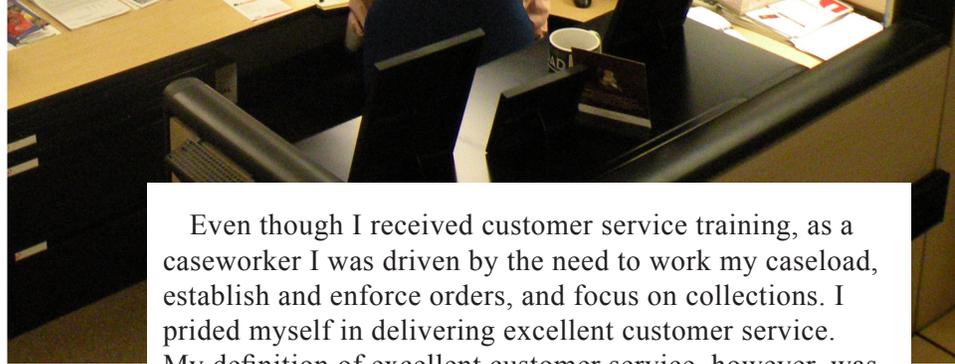
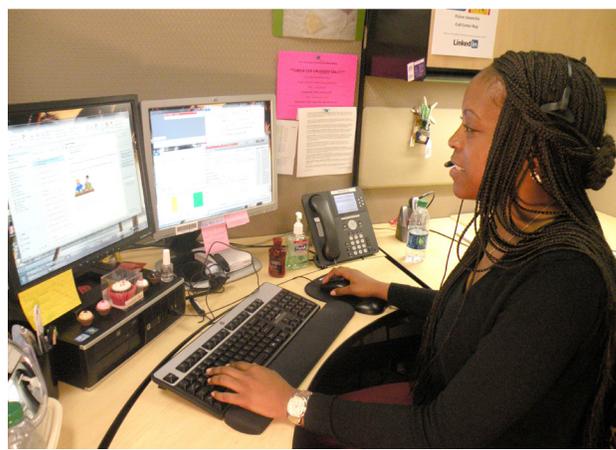
Porter County is on track to achieve the ultimate goals of improving efficiency to increase the number of child support orders and to provide better service to the community. Most of all, the court is providing better service to the most important individuals—the children for whom the program is meant to serve.

For more information, see the [Porter County Child Support](#) website.

Staffing call centers – the customer service dilemma

By Ignacio J. Guerrero, Deputy Director Alameda County, California Department of Child Support Services

Scenes from the Alameda County call center



Even though I received customer service training, as a caseworker I was driven by the need to work my caseload, establish and enforce orders, and focus on collections. I prided myself in delivering excellent customer service. My definition of excellent customer service, however, was guided by my own life experiences. We've all been on the other side of a great customer service experience, and unfortunately, also a horrible one. The bad ones sure do linger, don't they?

Is it better to staff the call center with child support professionals and train them in customer service skills or to recruit and hire customer service professionals and teach them child support?

Sounds a bit like the chicken and the egg question, right? The answer may lie in whether or not you believe some people are born for customer service. Is delivering high-quality customer service a learned skill or is it a naturally inherent skill that some are predisposed to possess? I recently answered an online survey asking this question, and the majority of respondents overwhelmingly said that a true customer service professional is born with this skill set.

Successfully managing a child support call center involves many issues—one of the most challenging focuses on how best to staff and train the unit. I believe we are all born with the potential to provide excellent customer service; some have just had this aptitude more fully developed and nurtured through their personal and professional life experiences.

As a caseworker, I remember my assignment to rotate into our child support call center regularly to take my fair share of customer calls. I didn't look forward to this, not because I didn't enjoy helping customers, but because my priority was my caseload. I felt the pressure and stress of making sure that my caseload was current and that I was working the files (yes, I said "files"; I think I just dated myself...) sitting on my desk.

Managing change in the call center

As a past manager for the San Mateo County Department of Child Support Services, I led an effort to improve our call center. We decided to change our staffing and training approach to target, recruit, and hire career customer service professionals to answer our child support calls. We made a conscious decision to hire the best, most naturally skilled, customer service staff and focus on teaching them the child support program.

The results were remarkable! I distinctly remember watching and listening to these new hires answer calls and provide a lot of the same information I would during my shift in the call center, yet with a much more natural and skillful manner that communicated sincere customer care, responsiveness, and the ultimate in service. Wow, was I impressed! When I came to work in Alameda County as deputy director, I was pleased to see that the department implemented this same approach through the vision of our director, Matt Brega.

New hires come to the Alameda County call center with experience in retail, banking, and front-desk work, and with rich experiences from all different types of call centers.

They have a natural desire to serve the public, see it as a challenge to defuse difficult situations, and turn that customer experience around for the better. The folks we recruit want to be on the other end of a difficult customer service call and take it as a personal challenge to ensure every caller receives the best customer service experience possible. They possess both the necessary mindset and, more importantly, the passion to do the job right. Now, this isn't to say that child support professionals can't be taught how to provide excellent customer service, however focusing on staffing the unit with career customer service staff maximizes the customer service experience for all involved.

In a child support call center, it takes a certain kind of person to sit at a desk for 8 hours a day and answer challenging phone calls, yet maintain the resiliency to provide each caller with a sincere, genuine, and caring response.

Commitment to customer service

So, back to the chicken and the egg question. From my experience, hiring career customer service staff into your child support call center and teaching them about the child support program provides the best of both worlds. The key is to make it a priority to continue to provide ongoing customer service training to all your child support program staff.

After all, even if you believe some people are born for customer service—and others maybe not so much—as child support professionals, we have a duty to deliver excellent customer service and promote these ideals among staff. We can debate the chicken and the egg question, but not the child support program's commitment to exceptional customer service!

Community Connections

'We have a duty' How do you deliver *servicios al consumidor* to Spanish-speakers?

By Judith Albury
and
Kesha Rodriguez
OCSE Region II

Servicios al consumidor, or customer service, should be *igual* (the same) regardless of the customer's language; yet relating to all customers in the same way can present a challenge in the child support program. Success depends on the worker's cultural sensitivity when serving the Hispanic community. However, cultural expectations vary.

We asked child support workers in Region II (New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands) how they serve Spanish-speaking customers, as they are not strangers to working with this population. Puerto Rico's primary language is Spanish, and workers there can give us all lessons on cultural awareness for their customers. Most interesting is that their responses to our questions reflected those from all other states and territories in the region.



At ASUME, the Puerto Rico child support agency, workers and clients meet for the intake process and an in-depth discussion of a case.



The common responses to the question on how to serve effectively the Hispanic community centered on patience, speaking slowly and clearly, developing relationships with local businesses and community-service agencies, and offering printed information and materials in Spanish.

When an individual walks into the United Nations and says they are from Spain, someone directs them to a Spanish speaker. When the person walks into your office and says they are from Spain, the Dominican Republic, or Puerto Rico, what happens? Do you expect that the customer should speak English? Or do you ask the customer what language would be most comfortable for him or her?

New Jersey’s advice is to ensure that we address all of the customers’ needs, which includes sharing all information in the language they find most comfortable. It is not up to the worker to determine that language; it is up to the customer. Remember, information about child support is important and complex, and the customer must understand it.

New Jersey’s website offers documents and other materials in Spanish. In New York, workers emphasize developing relationships with employers, employment service programs, and other community-based organizations that provide services to the Hispanic community. Workers in these organizations have a level of trust with customers that many child support programs are striving to develop. All Region II child support programs have staff members who speak Spanish to assist customers.

The staff at Puerto Rico’s ASUME (*Administración para el Sustento de Menores*) child support agency speak Spanish as their primary language. When we asked how they effectively serve the Hispanic and Latino communities, they responded:

- Remember that English is most likely not the customers’ first language.
- Ensure that staff is culturally sensitive to the needs of Hispanic and Latino customers.
- The PR agency’s staff finds it equally difficult to understand an accent or drawl of a mainland child support agency staff member.
- When making a system and customer service enhancement, keep in mind that staff may still need to be available to translate during interviews and to assist in completing documents, which is customary when filing on the Islands.

For additional information, contact jens.feck@acf.hhs.gov, kesha.rodriguez@acf.hhs.gov, or judith.albury@acf.hhs.gov.

An individual’s immigration status is sensitive and often leads to mistrust, fear, or failure to obtain child support services. The fact that child support does not ask questions about an individual’s immigration status is not enough. We need to acknowledge that services are not driven by one’s immigration status. Acknowledging this will not only increase customer cooperation, but will build an even greater sense of trust between child support and the Hispanic and Latino communities.

Child support agencies should produce materials in Spanish (and other languages if needed). They should ensure that if they do not have printed material, they make the information available through their automated systems so that customers can get answers to all of their questions in their language of choice.

While the ideal situation is to have Hispanic or Latino customers speak with a culturally aware, Spanish-speaking representative, all Region II child support agencies agree there are options available to those struggling to meet the language barrier, such as:

- Calling Translation Service Lines to get a translator during the interview.
- Having a translator sit in on interviews and calls.
- Seeking translation services through local community-based organizations, colleges, or churches.

The Virgin Islands’ child support director summed it up best when she said, “As the agency responsible for the best interest of the child, we have a duty to make sure that customers are comfortable and relaxed during an interview or visit.” *¿No debería ser esto nuestra meta?* (Shouldn’t this be our goal?)

Media Matters

Georgia broadcasts to Hispanic community

An initiative to engage Hispanics’ awareness of child support services in Georgia has taken to the airwaves. On Aug. 9, three employees from the Gwinnett County Central Division of Child Support Services—Ineabel Santiago, Elizabeth Schriber, and Charles Shrake—participated on a panel of “*Leyes Continadas*,” a public broadcast program delivering current events to the Hispanic community.

The panelists discussed seeking child support services without fear of legal ramifications (citizenship status is not a requirement to obtain the services). They also discussed the intake and establishment processes and enforcement remedies to encourage noncustodial parents to pay their support.

The interview will air on Sunday, Oct. 27, at 10 a.m. on WPBA 30, or at 10:30 am during *Telemundo*.



Elizabeth Schriber, Charles Shrake, and Ineabel Santiago

For more information about the Georgia Hispanic Outreach Initiative, or to get online resources, please contact Isaac Williams II at 404-463-1733 or ilwilliams@dhr.state.ga.us.

Programs recognized for domestic violence response

By Adrienne Noti, OCSE

Every victim of domestic violence experiences violence in a unique way. Professionals who assist victims of domestic violence have been developing new policies that respond to families in individual ways. Many of these programs have recently received national attention for reducing risk to families.

First responders play an important role in keeping families safe and preventing future violence. For example, a July 25, 2013, *New York Times* story titled “[Police Take on Family Violence to Avert Death](#)” detailed how many police departments have created ways to reduce and prevent domestic violence homicide. This proactive approach in New York City includes increasing the number of dedicated domestic violence police officers, implementing record-keeping procedures, and mandating new evidence collection policies.

In another example, a March 2013, White House fact sheet, “[The Obama Administration’s Commitment To Reducing Domestic Violence Homicides](#),” praises the Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center in Newburyport, MA, which has a team of law enforcement and domestic violence providers that identifies high-risk victims and provides specific interventions. The fact sheet reports, “Since 2005, the team has intervened in over 106 high-risk cases and has had no domestic violence homicides.”



At the heart of many innovations is a greater understanding of the need for domestic violence screening and appropriate danger assessment. The Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center has a methodology based on four guiding principles:

- 1) risk assessments help determine which offenders are dangerous;
- 2) close monitoring of dangerous offenders will be continuous and coordinated;
- 3) information will change rapidly in high-risk cases; and
- 4) clear channels of communication will exist across all disciplines.

Suzanne Dubus, CEO of the Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center, explains, “The

risk assessment then forms the basis for the individualized intervention plan, which is developed collaboratively and with significant participation from the victim. Both the risk assessment and the intervention plan are updated as the situation unfolds. Through the use of risk assessments, the traditionally incident-driven criminal justice system has been challenged to widen the lens through which domestic violence cases are viewed. The assessments help reveal the batterer’s history and pattern of behaviors and allow for considering distinct acts of violence in context. By tracking lethality factors and violent behavior patterns, homicides and re-assaults are prevented.” (See the White House Champions of Change blog “[Working to Predict and Prevent Domestic Violence](#).”)

It is important for the child support community to learn about local resources and innovations to work with families who have experienced violence. To find out about a statewide or local domestic violence coalition, check out the many resources in the [Family and Youth Services Bureau](#) section of the Administration for Children and Families website.

Law in Brief

The Defense of Marriage Act, Windsor, and financial support for children of same-sex parents

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The United States Supreme Court struck down an integral part of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) this summer in *United States v. Windsor* (133 S.Ct. 2675, June 26, 2013). The majority found that DOMA’s limitation on the federal definition of marriage had an anti-gay discriminatory purpose that violated the equal protection guarantee of the Fifth Amendment. But what does *Windsor* mean for the children born to a same-sex marriage?

DOMA and Windsor

Hawaii was the first state to question whether same-sex couples could be denied the right to marry under equal protection principles. But before any state acted to legalize same-sex marriage, Congress enacted DOMA in 1996.

DOMA contained two operative provisions. Section 2 permitted a state to refuse to recognize same-sex marriages performed under the laws of another state. Section 3 defined the word “marriage” for federal purposes as a legal union between man and woman only, and the word “spouse” as a person of opposite sex who is a husband or wife.

Pursuant to Section 3, the Internal Revenue Service could not recognize legal marriages for federal estate tax purposes where the marital exemption would shield the surviving spouse from taxes upon inheriting the decedent’s estate. When the Internal Revenue Service refused to refund

\$363,053 in estate taxes to Edith Windsor following the death of Windsor’s legal spouse, Thea Spyer, Windsor filed a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of Section 3 in the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York (*Windsor*; 133 S.Ct. at 2683). The Attorney General announced that the Department of Justice would not defend DOMA in the case. In a letter to Speaker John Boehner, the Attorney General advised that he and the President have “concluded that classifications based on sexual orientation warrant heightened scrutiny and that, as applied to same-sex couples legally married under state law, Section 3 of DOMA is unconstitutional.”

Windsor prevailed at every step of the litigation: the District Court, the Court of Appeals for the Second District, and the United States Supreme Court. In the majority opinion authored by Justice Kennedy, the United States Supreme Court recognized the “new insight” and evolving public acceptance of same-sex marriage, with New York and other states acting “to enlarge the definition of marriage to correct what its citizens and elected representatives perceived to be an injustice that they had not earlier known or understood.”

These laws gave lawful conduct a legal status that reflected “the community’s considered perspective on the historical roots of the institution of marriage and its evolving understanding of the meaning of equality.”

The Court found that DOMA undermined these state-sanctioned marriages, thereby demeaning those same-sex couples “whose moral and sexual choices the Constitution protects.” It also “humiliates” their children, making it difficult for these children to “understand the integrity and closeness of their own family and its concord with other families in their community and in their daily lives.”

In conclusion, DOMA violated the Fifth Amendment, “for no legitimate purpose overcomes the purpose and effect to disparage and to injure those whom the State, by its marriage laws, sought to protect in personhood and dignity.”

In dissent, Justice Scalia prophesized that the majority’s rationale for declaring Section 3 of DOMA unconstitutional would serve to strike down in the near future state laws denying same-sex couples marital status. Scalia warned “it is just a matter of listening and waiting for the other shoe.”

Financial support for children

Today, 13 states plus the District of Columbia allow same-sex partners to marry. Children born to these marriages enjoy the same rights as children born to opposite-sex married couples, including the marital presumption of parentage. As long as the parents live in a state that recognizes same-sex marriage, children can rely on financial support from both parents even if they separate or divorce.

But *Windsor* did not address what happens to the children if the parents move to a state that does not recognize same-sex marriage. Section 2 of DOMA, which is still in effect, provides the following.

No State, territory, or possession of the United States, or Indian tribe, shall be required to give effect to any public act, record, or judicial proceeding of any other State, territory, possession, or tribe respecting a relationship between persons of the same sex that is treated as a marriage under the laws of such other State, territory, possession, or tribe, or a right or claim arising from such relationship.

If a state refuses to give effect to a legal marriage pursuant to Section 2, does the attendant marital presumption of parentage that established both partners as parents of their children still exist?

While the federal Full Faith and Credit for Child Support Orders statute requires states to recognize support orders entered in other states, it does not address recognition of another state’s parentage laws. The Uniform Interstate Family Support Act, however, does—Section 315 states: “A party whose parentage of a child has been previously determined . . . pursuant to law may not plead nonparentage as a defense to a proceeding under this Act.”

I believe it is in the best interest of children to have the financial support of both parents when a marriage ends. The effect of divorce on children is devastating enough, and belated non-parentage claims would harm these children even more. The law should be interpreted to protect these children and afford them the financial support of both parents, regardless of the state’s law on same-sex marriage.

(The authors opinion doesn’t necessarily represent official views of the federal government.)

Child Support Report

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