

Child Support Report

Vol. 38 No. 1 January 2016

COMMISSIONER'S VOICE



Reflecting on our accomplishments

The start of a new year is a good time to look back. We have been through a lot of changes in the past seven years. Let's start with some of the sobering ones.

The Economy

The economic downturn affected parent earnings and child support program funding alike. During the height of the recession, support collected through income withholding declined by 3 percent, while support collected from unemployment insurance tripled between 2008 and 2010.

At the same time, the child support program experienced significant decreases in program funding and staffing levels. Our peak funding year was 2008 — before the recession — when program expenditures were \$5.87 billion in nominal dollars. Since then, funding has declined over 3 percent to \$5.69 billion in 2014. Structural labor market changes, increasingly complex families, and reduced program resources have all taken their toll.

Despite the setbacks, our performance has improved slowly but steadily since 2008. In 2014, we collected \$28.2 billion, a 6 percent increase over the \$26.6 billion collected in 2008, even as the caseload declined by almost 4 percent. Our support order establishment rate was almost 85 percent in 2014, compared to 79 percent in 2008. The percent of cases with a collection was 60 percent in 2014, compared to 57 percent in 2008. Our current collections rate was just over 64 percent in 2014, compared to less than 62 percent in 2008.

Doing business in a changing world

There is no question about it: The child support program has been challenged to find new ways to do business to be able to respond to unprecedented changes in our world. During the decade from 1999 through 2008, the child support community engaged in extensive national and regional discussions about the future of the program, examining such issues as:

- The impact of organizational and funding decisions on the program;
- The shift from welfare cost recovery to family distribution policies;
- Strategies for addressing the accumulation of arrears;
- The role of fathers in families;
- The risks of domestic violence;
- Opportunities for tribal services in Native American communities;
- Strengths and limitations of automated enforcement tools; and
- The critical relationship between having a job and paying support.

These state planning and early implementation efforts, along with growing research, laid the groundwork for a more holistic approach to reinforcing noncustodial parents' financial responsibility to their children.

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Parents, see if you qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit!
The QR code on the right will take you to the IRS EITC website.

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Family-centered strategies

Over the past seven years, we've successfully promoted a comprehensive family-centered framework designed to address barriers to employment, respond to changes in family roles, and increase the consistency of support payments. We are asking ourselves case-specific questions such as, "What are the reasons for nonpayment?" and "What would it take to obtain regular payments?" Practice in the field is shifting from a one-size-fits-all, standardized, and highly automated case management process to a more targeted approach that incorporates evidence-based practices framed as "the right tool for the right family every time."

By strategically deploying a combination of early interventions, more thorough investigations, enforcement actions, and targeted services, we can do a better job of obtaining consistent child support for families. We have been working to build evidence about what works to increase support payments through our grant programs including the [Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration](#) (CSPED), [Behavioral Interventions for Child Support Services](#) (BICS), [Parenting Time Opportunities for Children](#) (PTOC) pilot projects, Tribal Innovation Grants (TIG), University Partnership grants, and more.

Tribal child support

Over the past few years, we've also managed a significant increase in tribal child support programs — more than doubling the number since 2009. We currently fund 62 comprehensive and start-up tribal programs. We also developed and launched our award-winning tribal child support system — the [Model Tribal System](#) (MTS) — that is now operational in nine tribes. Although it seems like just yesterday that we launched the system, we have now begun an MTS modernization project to take advantage of the flexibility and modularity offered by today's technology.

Other technological advances

In 2009, we went live with our [Child Support Portal](#). Passport Denial was the first application, followed by Federal Offset Online, Multistate Financial Institution Data Match Online, Locates Online, FCR Query, DoD Entitlements, Query Interstate Cases for Kids (QUICK), Debt Inquiry, eTermination, Employer Search and Electronic Document Exchange (EDE) accompanied by other federal system services such as Electronic Income Withholding Orders (e-IWO) and FAST Levy.

International enforcement

We continue to advance the ball on international and interstate cooperation, with state-by-state enactment of the Uniform Interstate Family Support Act (UIFSA) 2008, following U.S. signature to The Hague treaty in 2007 and the Senate's advice and consent in 2010. You may remember the story in the [December 2015 Child Support Report](#). The treaty will greatly expand the number of countries that will recognize and enforce U.S. child support orders. Under the [Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014](#), Public Law 113-183, all states must enact the UIFSA amendments as a condition of state plan approval and federal funding. States must adopt UIFSA 2008 in order for the U.S. to ratify the Hague treaty. All but two states have passed the legislation so far, and we expect to ratify the treaty this summer.

Managing change

Retired Oklahoma Child Support Director Gary Dart continues his four-part change management series, "Do healthy families initiatives conflict with performance measures?" This month, he explains how an approach that aims for the best possible outcomes for each case can also "reward" agencies with performance incentives. All of the articles in the change management series will be available on our [Managing Change in the Child Support Program webpage](#) soon.

Also, be sure to read the article "Outreach to federal inmates." South Carolina tells us how it is reaching out to noncustodial parents in prison. We also offer some tips on helping job seekers struggling with digital job searches.

Needless to say, we're off to a running start in 2016! Thank you all for your tenacious work over the past seven years — and over the past 40 years since the child support program was enacted. For four decades, we have never stood still. And families deserve no less from us.

Vicki Turetsky

New data on custodial parents

The U.S. Census Bureau features important data in its new Random Samplings blog, [A Look at Custodial Parents and Child Support in the U.S.](#) This new blog provides information about custodial parents and the child support they receive. For example, the report found that less than half of custodial parents had court documents or other agreements that required that the other parent provide financial support.

Do healthy families initiatives conflict with performance measures?

Gary W. Dart, retired Director, *Oklahoma Child Support Services*

Editor's Note: This is the second article adapted from a four-part Change Management series that explores the impact of Oklahoma's "Healthy Families" principles on the five federal child support program performance indicators. Guest author Gary Dart wrote the original series for the Oklahoma Child Support Services newsletter before his retirement.



As I shared in last month's article, [Do healthy families initiatives conflict with performance measures?](#), some of my staff questioned whether spending time on "Healthy Families" initiatives would hurt our federal performance measures. This series of articles is exploring that issue.

In Oklahoma, we use the term "Healthy Families" to describe the whole body of ideas that will hopefully help increase customer understanding of the program, get their buy-in, make support more dependable, and give children the best chance of growing up with more of their needs met even if they do not live in a two-parent home. In Oklahoma's Child Support Services Strategic Plan, we say these are "outcomes" that we want to create for our customers and our program. So maybe it's better to rephrase the staff's question this way: How do these goals align with the federal child support program performance measures?

Support order establishment

It was fairly easy to explain how we could link our [Current Support performance measure](#) with good "Healthy Families" principles in the previous article. When it comes to our Support Order Establishment measure, it is a little less obvious. This performance measure is the percentage of our cases that have a support order established. It is determined by comparing the number of cases with orders to the total number of open cases. On its face, it looks like this measurement is just a numbers game. Since we are just counting orders, we want to establish as many as possible and one is as good as another, or is it?

Unrealistic orders

Family law practitioners know all too well that an order is not an order is not an order. Before there were guidelines, we marked success by getting child support orders as high as possible. Even I did it when I was in private practice and as a legal aid attorney. But we all learned that many of these orders were no good to the family involved if they were too high for

the noncustodial parent to pay. The advent of guidelines gave hope that support orders would be more uniform, but the reality still was that if noncustodial parents didn't work and get paid, support orders were just papers to frame on the wall. If you believe that an order is an order is an order, then whether it gets paid or drives people underground instead doesn't matter. But we all know now that it does matter.

If reliable, dependable, current support is the best outcome for a child from a broken family, then thinking that any order is just as good as any other is hiding your head in the sand.

If reliable, dependable, current support is the best outcome for a child from a broken family, then thinking that any order is just as good as any other is hiding your head in the sand. Unrealistic orders lead to support that doesn't get paid, which leads to arrearages that accumulate, which requires more time chasing obligors. We expend resources trying remedy after remedy to get noncustodial parents to do what they should have done in the first place. For some cases, this is an inevitable, never-ending process. For others, we have another approach.

Setting orders using default calculations rather than basing numbers on individualized circumstances of the parties is like shooting in the dark and hoping you'll hit something. Customer defaults may get you another hash mark on the wall, but they don't always get you orders that customers feel ownership of, believe are fair, or feel they can afford. Periodically increasing the size of an order based on a mathematical formula may be easy, but it doesn't get you compliance if it doesn't sync with the parties' needs or abilities to pay. If caseworkers don't intervene promptly when circumstances change, we may still have orders that count for this performance measure, but are out of touch with reality. This has the potential to lead to more arrearages, enforcement hearings, and family adversity. Who does this benefit?

Realistic orders

We have to make our support orders realistic and enforceable, avoid defaults, and act quickly when things change to ensure orders will get paid so children will receive reliable support in their critical early years. If we live by the following mandates, we may not establish more orders, but the ones created may be more honored and less trouble for us to work in the future.

- Make sure due process is scrupulously followed;
- Involve the parties in negotiated settlements when possible;
- Try to educate the parents by demystifying the process for them as we go;
- Work to avoid defaults when possible;

(continued)

- Remain open to and mindful of individualized factors; and
- Let both parents know that we want both of them to succeed for their child.

Oklahoma’s “Healthy Families” project is all about outcomes, and the best possible outcome is regular, reliable, and dependable support for children. Making orders “right-sized” just means that we want them to be realistic and affordable. We have to look at each case separately. Sometimes a case involves a single order. At other times, we have to collaborate with other offices so that all the families can fairly share the maximum amount that an obligor can afford to pay under the law. We strive to make individualized decisions based on the particular circumstances of the parties because it’s our best way to help parents succeed. When they succeed, we all succeed and our performance measures will reflect that success.

Tune in next month for my thoughts on applying “Healthy Families” principles to Paternity Establishment.

For information on this series of articles, contact Jeff Wagner, Communications Director, OK Child Support Services program, jeff.wagner@okdhs.org.



Members of the Montgomery County DHR child support management team.

Putting together the pieces

Sharonda Pettaway, Asst. Director for Financial Assistance Programs, Montgomery County Department of Human Resources

In the Alabama Department of Human Resources, we work hard to achieve maximum results by using all available resources. We strive to put together various pieces to produce the best outcomes for those who need us. The Montgomery County Department of Human Resources has taken a “back to basics” approach to improving relationships and outcomes within its child support program. Our new administration, with its new vision, sparked new opportunities to improve relationships among community partners, refine the department’s services, and — most importantly — improve outcomes for the children and families we serve.

To improve our child support system, we took a practical look at our core values — those lasting beliefs or ideals shared by an organization that help gauge what is good or bad and desirable and undesirable.

- Integrity: Act in a manner that merits the trust of our clients, stakeholders, and fellow employees.
- Respect: Every individual has worth and potential and deserves to be treated with dignity.
- Commitment: Provide the highest quality services and support to our clients.
- Accountability: We are responsible for the policies, standards, and decisions that frame our service to our clients.

Then we listened to our constituents to determine whether our daily practices reflected our core values. We sponsored a forum with the district attorney’s office so parents affected by the child support system could share ways we could improve the county’s child support program.

We educated custodial and noncustodial parents and other stakeholders on the process and partnership between the department, the district attorney’s office, and the court system and how these pieces work together to provide child support services. The forum allowed our customers to give feedback on ways to improve our services.

We wanted to get our customer’s perception of our service delivery. Because of the forum, we implemented immediate changes. For example, we applied a specialized approach to service delivery that allowed us to produce better outcomes in target areas.

We improved our communications and our working relationship with the district attorney’s office by sharing our ideas for change and using all resources to our best advantage. These pieces hold us accountable to ensure our core values are reflected in our daily practice.

For information, contact Sharonda Pettaway at sharonda.pettaway@dhr.alabama.gov.

PROMISING PRACTICES

Outreach to federal inmates

**Stephen Yarborough, Assistant Director,
South Carolina Child Support Services**

Inmates at the Edgefield Federal Correctional Institution attended a seminar in December 2015 on child support, custody, and visitation issues. The re-entry coordinator invited experts from the Child Support Services Division of the South Carolina Department of Social Services, the U.S. Department of Probation and Parole, the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition, and the Clerk of Court of Edgefield County, SC, to participate.

A probation and parole officer kicked off the seminar with the question, “What do you need to do to prepare for re-entry?” At first, the inmates were reserved, but once the panel members gave brief overviews of their roles, the inmates’ questions were constant. For about four hours, the group gave information to about 100 inmates, all of whom are scheduled for release over the next year and a half. Participation on the part of the inmates was voluntary and that was reflected in the inmates’ attentiveness and attitudes.

Our child support program has addressed state and federal inmates nearing release about a dozen times. What made this visit different was the multi-disciplinary approach involving individuals from child support, fatherhood, the judiciary, and federal probation and parole officials. For example, the Clerk of Court of Edgefield County and the fatherhood representatives took the lead on answering most of the questions about visitation and custody. We answered questions about child support including how support is calculated. Does it accumulate while the noncustodial parent is incarcerated? When can a paternity test be administered?

This approach allowed us to pass along complete and accurate information in a single session instead of covering just one fairly narrow aspect of an issue. Two of the over-arching messages we conveyed were that good information from reliable sources is critical, and addressing child support issues early avoids complications with your child support case. We addressed several real world issues during the discussion. I was even able to go back to the office and solve several individual issues right away.

In hopes of bringing this same sort of training to younger inmates, child support staff is also attending meetings with the Youthful Offender Program. This program has inmates who will be younger than 26 years old at their release. We hope we can help them find employment as quickly as possible upon release because

many of them have child support obligations. We also provide relationship skills, economic stability, and fatherhood training through our partnership with the South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families.

Incarceration is disruptive — to the individuals involved, to the economic well-being of the families in question, and to the impressions formed and retained by all involved. Over the past two years, we have taken concrete steps to augment our awareness of the issues our customers and families face. These encounters help us improve as an agency and give inmates solid knowledge of ways to work toward a successful child support solution.

For more information, visit the [South Carolina Child Support Services Division website](#).



Inmates at the Edgefield Federal Correctional Institution attend a seminar on child support, custody, and visitation issues.



Edgefield Federal Correctional Institution staff and members of the panel including Stephen Yarborough of the Child Support Services Division (back row, center).

Correction

The author of the article “NYC child support focuses on helping young families” in the [December 2015 issue](#) was incorrectly identified. The article was written by Francis Pardus-Abbadessa. We apologize for the error.

Planning for an active shooter in the workplace

Jeffrey Sypolt, Chief of Occupational Safety & Health, HHS

Active shooter events are happening more frequently and the news coverage can be frightening. They have occurred in schools, malls, office buildings, and even churches and hospitals. The latest tragedy in California raises many questions such as, can we prepare for an active shooter event?

Active shooter events can take place at a work place. There are widely recognized safety and security procedures that both public and private sector agencies use to minimize the risk of worker casualties. Well-trained workers can save lives.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) "[Active Shooter: How To Respond](#)" guide says you must be ready to deal with an active shooter situation because the event will probably be over before law enforcement arrives. These types of events are generally over within 10 to 15 minutes.

In today's world, active shooter response training should be part of a comprehensive workplace violence prevention program. Training for such events is available from many sources. Internet-based and free online training can raise employees' security awareness IQ and offer basic straightforward planning steps.

Planning is key

Dwight D. Eisenhower said, "In preparing for battle, I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable."

Besides having a plan, you must be familiar with your plan, willing to enact it, and have the proper resources for it to work.

- Practice so you are familiar with your plan. Review it frequently. Make a recurring calendar entry on your smartphone or computer that reminds you to review your plan regularly.
- Own your plan, commit to it, and act deliberately.
- Resource your plan, meaning personally invest time and effort to learn about your facility (exits, Shelter-in-Place locations, assembly areas). Employers should ensure that their facilities are equipped with proper life safety systems, intercoms, or other alarms or communication systems.
- Make sure to revise your plan when changes occur in your workspace such as floor plan changes or new furniture installation.
- Commit your plan to memory if possible, and make sure copies of the plan are readily available.
- In the end, the success of your plan will depend on how well you planned and practiced it. Commit to your plan and be willing to enact it when necessary. It could make the difference in saving your life or the lives of others.

Communication

Cellphones can assist you during an active shooter event or hurt you by giving away your hiding location. During an active shooter event do the following:

- Silence your cellphone ringer;
- Dial 911 only when it is safe; and
- Remain silent after you call 911 if the attacker is near, mute the volume, and leave the line open so the police can hear.

Three Primary Steps

RUN

If you can safely get to the exit and evacuate the building, do so. If you can take others with you, that's better, but don't delay. If others choose to stay, don't let that slow your evacuation. **The most important characteristic about your first actions is that you need to be deliberate.**

Don't worry about getting your possessions or calling loved ones. Just get out. As you leave the building, warn others who may be trying to enter. Also remember that the police will be entering the building, so keep your hands visible and follow their instructions.

HIDE

If evacuation is not possible, find a place to hide where the active shooter is less likely to find you. **Remain quiet and motionless in your hiding place.** Don't type on your phone or computer keyboard; don't peek to see if the shooter is nearby. Talking on the phone, crying, or making any noise can give away your hiding place. If possible, plan places to hide where a person walking by your office or cubicle would not be able to see you. Consider hiding behind furniture which may offer protection if shots are fired. If your hiding place has a door with a lock, secure the door and turn off the lights.

FIGHT

As a last resort, if the active shooter finds your location, be ready to fight for your life. Acting aggressively and throwing items at the person can disrupt the attacker. This is not the time to remain quiet. Yell at and challenge the attacker with any items you can use for self-defense. **Commit to your actions because your life depends on it.**

Useful resources

- [FEMA Active Shooter: What You Can Do](#)
- [Options for Consideration: Active Shooter Training](#)
- [Run! Hide! Fight!](#)

RECOGNITION MONTH

Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month

Mao Yang, *ACF Family Violence Prevention and Services Division*

Teen dating violence is physical, sexual, psychological, or emotional violence within a current or past dating relationship.

Exceeding rates of other types of youth violence, teen dating violence is a huge problem for young people in the U.S., affecting nearly one in three girls. One in 10 high school students reported being purposefully hit, slapped, or physically hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend. The effects of teen dating violence can be harmful, putting victims at higher risk for substance abuse, eating disorders, risky sexual behavior, and further domestic violence.

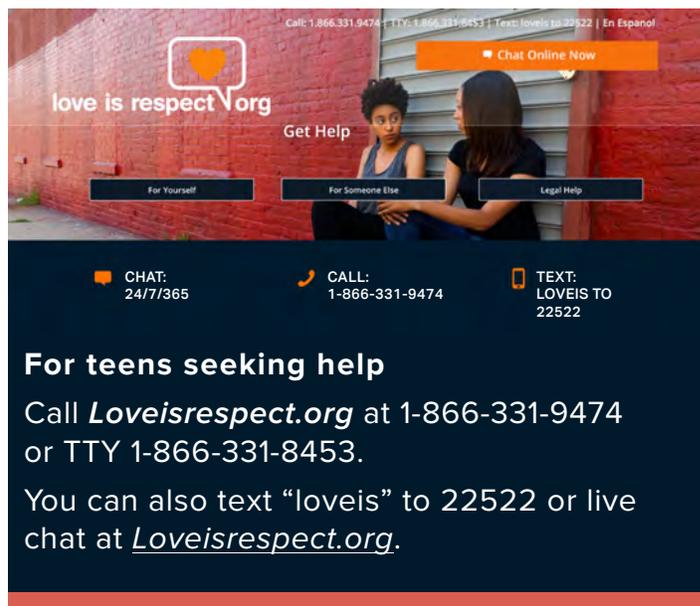
Promoting healthy and positive relationships can change lives. Staggering statistics illustrate that we all need to do more to create safe environments for young people to discuss their experiences, to raise awareness about the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline, and promote comprehensive community-based services.

Promoting healthy and positive relationships can change lives.

The Family Violence Prevention and Services (FVPS) Program within the Family and Youth Services Bureau funds the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#). Along with [Break the Cycle](#), a site for young people between 12 and 24 promoting healthy relationships, the Hotline supports the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline called [Love Is Respect](#). Every February for Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month, FVPS coordinates activities to raise awareness of teen dating violence prevention and intervention efforts. To learn more about teen dating violence and find more awareness activities, visit [teendvmonth.org](#), and [vetoviolence.cdc.gov](#).

If you are a child support agency looking for more resources for individuals and families experiencing domestic violence, please check out our program's [network of domestic violence resources online](#). FVPS and OCSE have also launched a Domestic Violence and Child Support Liaisons Network.

For more information, contact info@nrcdv.org.



Call: 1-866-331-9474 | TTY: 1-866-331-8453 | Text: loveis to 22522 | En Español

love is respect.org

Get Help

Chat Online Now

For Yourself For Someone Else Legal Help

CHAT: 24/7/365 CALL: 1-866-331-9474 TEXT: LOVEIS TO 22522

For teens seeking help

Call [Loveisrespect.org](#) at 1-866-331-9474 or TTY 1-866-331-8453.

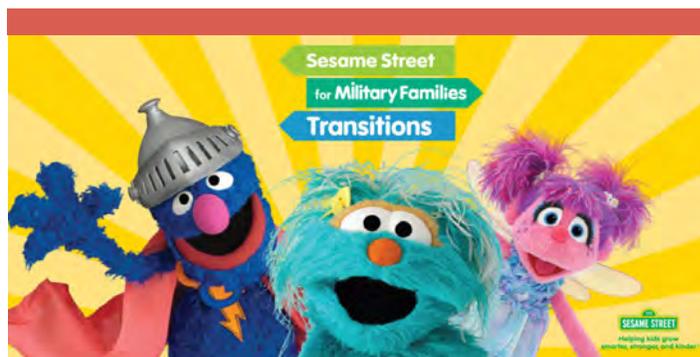
You can also text “loveis” to 22522 or live chat at [Loveisrespect.org](#).

DOL/VETS funding for “Stand Down” events

The Department of Labor’s (DOL) [Veterans’ Employment and Training Service](#) (VETS) supports local [Stand Down events](#) to help homeless veterans find meaningful civilian employment. A Stand Down is a local community event where organizations come together to provide homeless veterans with a wide variety of services and incentives that often include housing referrals, healthcare checkups, and employment opportunities.

DOL provides Stand Down funding in the form of non-competitive grants that are awarded on a first-come, first-served basis while the funding lasts. VETS anticipate that approximately \$600,000 will be available to award approximately 70 grants in Federal Fiscal Year 2016, which ends September 30, 2016. Awards will be made for a maximum of \$10,000 per multi-day event or \$7,000 per one-day event. VETS are accepting applications for grant awards to fund 2016 Stand Down events.

For information on applying, visit [VETS Stand Down](#).



Sesame Workshop offers a new toolkit, [Sesame Street for Military Families: Transitions](#), to help military families transition to veteran families.

Digital tools for job seekers

Gretchen Tressler, OCSE

Asking parents to put away their smartphones during an appointment? That could be hard. Helping parents learn to use their smartphones for their job search? Many would appreciate it.

The digital demographic

More Americans are turning to their smartphones, tablets, and laptops to find new work opportunities. Many people feel tech-savvy enough to believe their online job search skills can get them the results they need, but some are not able to use the Internet to their best advantage. The Pew Research Center has devoted several articles to digital job searching. The reports say the digital job seekers who face the most challenges online fall into two categories:

- People who are already unemployed, and
- People most likely to try to use the Internet, either on their desktops or smartphones, for job search-related tasks.

These smartphone users are not only looking for jobs online; they are also filling out applications, creating resumes, and more. They also tend to be in lower income brackets and have less education.

A savvy solution

What can child support offices do to help economically disadvantaged parents improve their electronic job searches?

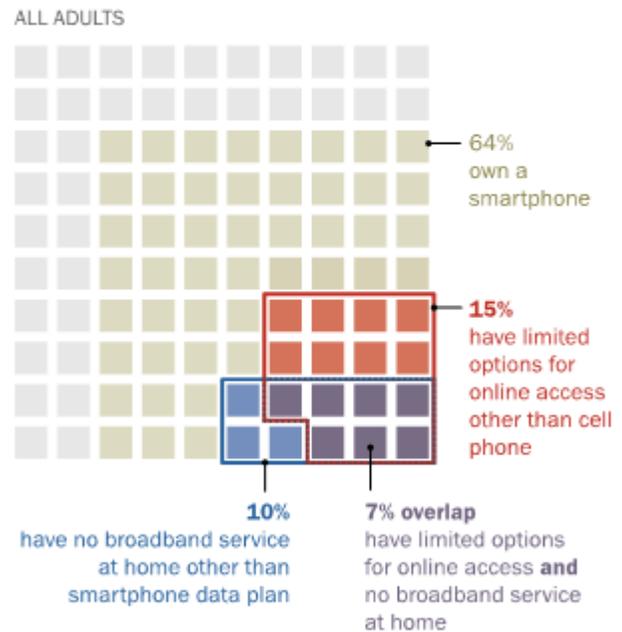
For starters, provide computer terminals where parents can check out [CareerOneStop](#) (COS), the Department of Labor’s flagship employment and career assistance site, which partners with the American Job Center Network. Under the Job Search tab, job seekers can browse open positions compiled from four different job board sites. They can also search for positions on [US.jobs](#), [America’s Job Exchange](#), [CareerBuilder](#) or [Indeed](#), all within the COS page — and no pop-ups!

COS provides both a [mobile app](#) and a mobile site for smartphone users. Veterans can also find helpful information on these platforms.

Watch for more digital job search tips in the next Child Support Report.

The “Smartphone-Dependent” Population: 7% of Americans Rely Heavily on a Smartphone for Online Access

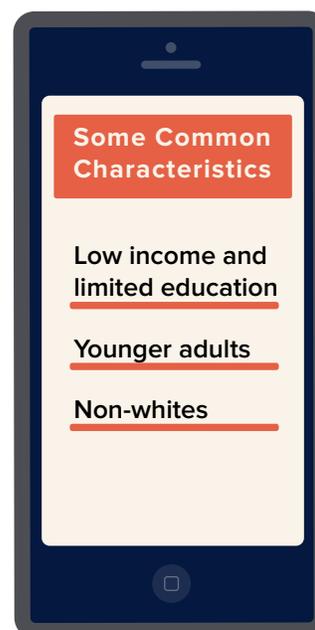
% of U.S. adults who have a smartphone, but lack other broadband internet service at home, and/or have limited options for going online other than their cell phone



Pew Research Center American Trends Panel survey, October 3-27 2014.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Are your customers “smartphone-dependent?”



The “smartphone-dependent” are more likely to use their phones to search for jobs and employment resources.

Social media outreach: Know your restrictions

Kim Danek, OCSE



When your office starts exploring new social media platforms, do some research first. It is easy to get in trouble doing outreach on the web. When OCSE wanted to expand, we checked our parent organization (HHS) [web guidelines](#) first. Social media is designed to facilitate open dialog with customers, consumers, and partner organizations, but federal government agencies follow certain strict restrictions. We needed to see what we are allowed to do and what we must avoid.

Surveys, lobbying and other restrictions

Before developing a campaign, know your restrictions. For example, the federal government may not engage in lobbying or propaganda to motivate the public to support a specific cause. Check with your agency's legal counsel about any legal prohibitions or limitations that may affect your social media campaign.

OCSE received a Congressional mandate in late 2014 to provide a report to Congress that included public input. We had to be very careful about asking the public for information because there are specific rules that regulate federal government surveys. The [Paperwork Reduction Act \(PRA\) Guide](#) and the General Services Administration's [DigitalGov Resources](#) webpage have useful information. Rather than try to get a survey approved, we launched the [My Child Support Story](#) campaign to ask people to tell us about their child support experiences. It was very successful and lived within the guidelines.



One of the twitter graphics used in OCSE's *My Child Support Story* campaign.

Proofread and double check

Sometimes you just have to use the rules of common sense. It can be very easy to get in trouble over a social media post that someone has failed to fact check, proofread, or send to someone for a second opinion. Social media should be engaging, informative, and, when appropriate, entertaining. Humor can really engage audiences, like the first Tweet the CIA posted. It became a viral sensation. Not all messages are appropriate, however.



The first Tweet posted to the CIA Twitter account.

Many companies have found out the hard way that their posts were inappropriate, offensive, or factually incorrect. During the 2014 World Cup tournament, a company tweeted an image of an animal to represent one of the losing teams. Unfortunately, no one checked to see that the animal was not native to the featured team's country. The Search Engine Journal devoted a story to this and other missteps in its May 2015 article, [What We Learned From These 15 Epic Social Media Fails](#).

Develop a strategy

An agency needs a plan for its social media just like it needs a plan for other normal operations. Before your organization jumps onto a social media platform, make sure your plan is solid. Find out if your organization has social media guidelines. If not, check with agencies similar to yours. If you cannot find information at your local or state level, [DigitalGov](#) is available.

TAX SEASON

Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)

The OCSE [Income Tax Credit for Low-Income Individuals and Families](#) webpage outlines how valuable the Earned Income Tax Credit can be for the families in our caseload with the lowest income levels. Unfortunately, many families do not know what the EITC is or how to apply for it. Parents can receive up to \$6,242 when they file tax returns. Caseworkers can help spread the word about this valuable benefit, but might need more information themselves.

The IRS has made that easy with its [EITC Central](#) website. It provides key messages in English and Spanish that offices can use in their communications campaigns. For example, agencies can go to the [EITC statistics page](#) to learn how many people in their area claimed EITC in the previous tax year and the amount of money refunded through the credit. The site also provides a link to the [Brookings Institute EITC interactive database](#) that offers downloadable ZIP code-level tax return information.

The [Social Network and EITC](#) webpage offers social media messages that offices can use on their own feeds. The IRS even offers [Tried and True Tips](#) that can help an office start or add to its EITC marketing campaign.

The next edition of the Child Support Report will have more valuable information on the EITC.

Changes to military and veteran health benefits

If you have military families and veterans in your caseload, you may find the following information helpful. The TRICARE Beneficiary Publications Office has recently updated several products.

- [Costs and Fees Sheet](#) — reflects the Fiscal Year 2016 TRICARE Pharmacy Program and Standard hospitalization costs
- [Active Duty Family Members with Special Needs Briefing](#)
- [Separating from Active Duty Briefing](#)
- [TRICARE For Life Handbook](#) — rebranded for the new TRICARE For Life contractor

You can download more publications from the [TRICARE Smart site](#).



Helping dads be merry

In December, Virginia child support offices helped Santa provide presents for children. In Virginia Beach, child support workers bought, collected, and wrapped gifts that were available to selected noncustodial fathers. When Kareem Pitt, a father of five, received the wrapped presents for his children, he stated, “I credit this program for getting back on track in life.”

Child Support Report

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