

# Child Support Report

OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT  
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/css>

Vol. 35 No. 6 June 2013



## Inside This Issue

- Tribal child support programs reach more families 2
- Commissioner's Voice: Health care options for families 3
- Clark County rolls out 'Intervening Early' office-wide 4
- Federal improvements increase collections to families 5
- OCSE, states, IRS collaborate to address offset tax fraud 6
- Worldwide conference in Germany highlights child support 7
- OCSE kicks off Change Makers Series 7
- Is your office father friendly? 8
- OCSE seeks participants for fatherhood network 8
- Making a difference for a Pennsylvania mom 9
- Football pro's documentary shows importance of fathers 9
- Teen connectivity and 24/7 communication 10

## Oneida Nation looks for win-win outcomes

By Michael Hoeft, Paralegal  
*Oneida Nation Child Support Agency*

Staff at the Oneida Nation Child Support Agency is seeing success in reaching win-win outcomes that benefit children and parents.

The tribal agency has been handling child support cases for only five years and recently notched several large lump-sum settlements in arrears cases. The Oneida Nation reservation, outside Green Bay, WI, overlaps parts of Brown and Outagamie counties, which have been transferring child support cases to Oneida. Agency case manager Jenna Skenandore is based in Milwaukee in anticipation of transfers from Milwaukee County, which also has a large Oneida population. Oneida has more than 16,000 enrolled members.

Since starting in 2008 with 482 cases, the agency's caseload grew to 2,549 in 2012. The agency has collected \$8.4 million in child support since 2008. Oneida last year posted a 97 percent paternity establishment rate.

"The settlements we've received recently speak to the great work our staff is doing on behalf of families," said agency director Lisa Schwartz.

In one case, a noncustodial parent owed a mother \$26,000 in arrears and \$27,000 in accumulated interest. The father wanted to refinance his house and business but learned the Oneida agency had placed a lien on his property because of the arrears. Hoping to clear the lien, he called agency intake worker Michelle Rutues with an offer. He would pay the custodial parent \$25,000 for arrears if the custodial parent forgave the interest. Rutues worked with case manager Jamie Loudbear Wayka to get the two parties to enter a stipulation in the Oneida Tribal Judicial System.

By following a formal court process, all parties were protected. The man was able to start over. "And he gets that burden off him," said Rutues.

continued ▶



Oneida staff members, seated (from left): attorney Caroyl Long, director Lisa Schwartz, technical supervisor Lisa Peck. Standing: Michael Hoeft, Sara Frisque, Michelle Rutues, Kathy Lancelle, Delia Smith, Trina Schuyler, Heather Hoepfner, Jamie Loudbear Wayka, Heather Vandenlangenberg, Laura Hock and Nicole VandenHeuvel. (Not pictured: Jenna Skenandore)



Happy  
Father's Day

Subscribe to the  
*Child Support Report*

Sign up at the  
bottom of the  
OCSE homepage



## Making the most of tools

The 15-person agency is becoming skilled in using tools authorized under federal law that aid collection of past-due child support through intercepts, account seizures, and liens on delinquent payers' property. The agency seized several checking accounts and intercepted an Individual Retirement Account for past-due child support. In another case, the agency started the administrative process to suspend a driver's license, which ultimately resulted in a negotiated alternative payment plan. "Our intent was not to take away his license; we just wanted him to be paying," said agency technical supervisor Lisa Peck.

Case managers Heather Vandenlangenberg and Nicole VandenHeuvel intercepted an \$8,000 insurance settlement in a noncustodial parent's personal injury case stemming from a car accident. The parent let the agency know of a possible court settlement. Vandenlangenberg said she found contact information for attorneys and insurance companies through the public access court record website. She kept checking the status of the case and followed up with calls and letters. "I used documents in KIDS [the statewide child support computer system] to send to each party," she said. The process took nearly two years, and her persistence paid off. "Many steps, many phone calls and letters, and keeping up on the case were the biggest things," she said.

All parties benefited in the end, Vandenlangenberg said. The noncustodial parent's debt was significantly reduced "and he can now have a hope that he may get paid in full at some point. When someone sees that much debt to their name they can get overwhelmed and possibly give up on paying at all. The child who was without financial support from one parent for so long now has a large payment to support her needs."

The agency also uses contempt proceedings in tribal court to do proactive intensive case management. "It's not purely punitive," Peck said. "Jail time is not the most effective way to get payment. We look at it as a way to negotiate payment plans or refer people to outside resources. When they start paying, it's a win-win. The incentive for them is to stay on track and feel good about supporting their children."

"There's a difference between being unwilling to pay and unable to pay," said Peck. The agency tries to identify barriers. "We have to think of creative ways to get noncustodial parents to meet their obligation."

As a Native sovereign nation, Oneida can craft policies that follow tradition. For example, goods and services—such as providing venison or fixing a car—can be used in lieu of cash if acceptable to both parties. Also, a family can provide noncash support on behalf of the parent. In the past, families lived together in a longhouse and the rest of the family or clan stepped in to help if a parent was unavailable.

## Collaboration and training

The Oneida agency sees more interjurisdictional enforcement actions, court agreements to enforce

orders from another state or tribe. Oneida credits good collaboration with other agencies, tribal and state, for its record in collections.

The Oneida agency offers training to other tribes starting child support programs. The Oneida Nation will host the National Tribal Child Support Association training conference June 23-27 at the Radisson Hotel and Conference Center Green Bay.



## Tribal child support programs reach more families

Did you know that 50 tribes now operate a comprehensive tribal child support program, and 10 more tribes are receiving funding to put a program in place?

In the past year, these eight tribes have transitioned from the start-up phase to comprehensive program status:

- Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association, Inc.
- Lac Courte Oreilles Tribe
- Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation
- Blackfeet Nation
- Fort Belknap Indian Community
- Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Nation
- Standing Rock Sioux Tribe
- Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

These tribes now provide child support services that meet federal requirements to the children and families within the jurisdiction of their Tribal Nation.

Also in the last year, OCSE approved start-up applications for six more tribes: the Ho-Chunk Nation; the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa; the Sac and Fox Tribe of the Mississippi in Iowa (Meskwaki Nation); the Delaware Tribe of Indians; the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes; and the Apache Tribe of Oklahoma. The start-up phase allows time for tribes to develop a culturally appropriate child support program that meets the federal requirements.

In 2011, 42 comprehensive tribal programs distributed over \$30 million in child support obligations. Collections will continue to increase with the addition of new tribal programs.

Both state and tribal child support programs must extend the full range of services to other child support agencies. Even if your state does not have a tribe within its borders, state and tribal child support programs will surely intersect and have occasion to work together. If you are unfamiliar with the tribal child support programs in your state or region, visit the [map on the OCSE website](#) to locate the tribal programs.



Commissioner's Voice

## Health care options for parents

One of the “bubbles” in the child support bubble chart is health care coverage. In identifying family-centered strategies over the last four years, I have highlighted family health care needs. Through our medical support activities, the child support program has long had the responsibility to obtain private health insurance

for the children in our caseload. Now we can play a critical role in providing information to both parents about the range of available health care options—for their children and for themselves.

Later this month, OCSE plans to launch two new fact sheet series to explain child support and health care connections under the Affordable Care Act and to address promising medical child support policies and practices under Title IV-D of the Social Security Act. Watch for them on our website, [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/css](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/css).

Starting Oct. 1, 2013, parents will be able to choose new affordable insurance options through a new Health Insurance Marketplace. There will be one application, called the “Health Insurance Marketplace Application for Health Coverage & Help Paying Costs,” that parents can use to apply for the new Health Insurance Marketplace, Medicaid, the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and tax credits that will help pay for premiums. Parents may choose to use this application online, by phone, by mail, or on paper. In-person counselors and a toll-free phone line will be available to help them through every step of the process.

No matter what state they live in, families can get help as they apply for and choose new insurance options. Some states are setting up a state-based Marketplace; other states will work with the federal government in a State Partnership Marketplace; and the remaining states will have a federally facilitated Marketplace.

The Affordable Care Act authorizes states to expand Medicaid to adults under age 65 with income of up to 133 percent of the federal poverty level. This is approximately \$15,280 for a single adult in 2013. The Act provides unprecedented federal funding for these states—the federal government will pay for 100 percent of the cost of coverage for newly eligible individuals through 2016, and pay no less than 90 percent of the cost subsequently.

No one plans to get sick or hurt, but most people need medical care at some point. Health insurance helps pay these costs. Help families find out how insurance works—and why it’s so important to have. Go to: [www.healthcare.gov](http://www.healthcare.gov)



Vicki Turetsky



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

## Health disparities in America

June is Men’s Health Month and an opportunity for the child support program to do more to help reduce health disparities. According to the [Men’s Health Network](http://www.menshealthmonth.org), “on average, American men live sicker and die younger than American women.” In 1920, women lived, on average, one year longer than men. Now, men die almost six years earlier than women do. A [facts page](http://www.menshealthmonth.org) on Men’s Health Network shows that men die at higher rates than women from the top 10 causes of death. Learn about National Men’s Health Month, as well as National and International Men’s Health Week (June 10-16) on [www.menshealthmonth.org](http://www.menshealthmonth.org).



# Clark County rolls out 'Intervening Early' office-wide

By Suzi Truby, Senior Management Analyst  
Clark County, Nevada, District Attorney Family Support Division

Through a \$750,000 grant and after a three-year study, one Nevada county instituted an early intervention system that has cut initial case processing time from months down to days.

In September 2009, Clark County, District Attorney Family Support Division (DAFS) and the State of Nevada received the grant to explore the results of early intervention during the child support process. An Early Intervention Team was put together to run the three-year pilot project. The team included a principal investigator, an operations lead, an IT lead, and six early intervention specialists.

The three main goals of the study were to increase:

- **Order establishment:** Increase noncustodial parent involvement to ensure support orders reflect the obligor's payment ability; reduce the time it takes to establish an order; reduce the number of default orders; and increase the number of stipulation/consent orders.
- **Initial payments:** Increase the number of cases making initial payments; reduce the time between order establishment and first payment; and reduce the number of cases with arrears due to missing the first payment.
- **Sustained payment of current obligation:** Increase the number of cases with sustained payment; increase the average amount paid; and reduce the average amount owed in arrears.

After three years of planning, piloting, studying, and collecting data, "Intervening Early" was clearly a success. In June 2012, Clark County began to prepare for the office-wide roll-out of the entire process. The goal was to incorporate the process into "business as usual" thinking when working child support cases.

During the study, the early intervention team decreased in size. Most of the specialists were hired through temporary agencies and moved on to full-time positions in the community. The team of nine was left with three.

Glenn Stewart started as a temporary employee with the office and became a full-time office specialist who employs all early intervention actions on new cases entering the child support system. Mark Gagnon developed the intuitive web application called "IFS" (Intervening for Success) to



Photo of Early Intervention Team (from left): Glenn Stewart (office specialist), Suzi Truby (operational lead), and Mark Gagnon (IT lead)

guide the workflow process and track all early intervention outcomes. As the operational lead, I was responsible for monitoring reports and ensuring the process was being implemented properly. The team of three trained the entire organization on the process before the office-wide roll-out. Group training preceded one-on-one sessions between Stewart and each worker.

The concept of intervening early was a fairly new one for the assigned case managers; once they realized the benefits, case managers began to diligently work their Early Intervention report each day. One case manager new to the process shared the following success story: "Wow....this really does work. I had two noncustodial parents come in for initial service. Each were served, entered into a stipulation order and made their first payment that day."

Before early intervention, these steps could have taken anywhere from three to six months. Now case managers use every opportunity to educate the noncustodial parent about child support and encourage timely payments. These opportunities arise within two days of service, directly after stipulation appointments and court hearings and when child support payments become due.

For more information, contact Suzi Truby at 702-671-9371 or [suzi.truby@clarkcountynv.com](mailto:suzi.truby@clarkcountynv.com).



Case manager stipulating child support with parties

## Federal improvements increase collections to families

By Rebecca Hamil and Angie Tutwiler, OCSE

The three most important things in real estate are location, location, location. For OCSE's collections and enforcement programs, they are collections, collections, collections! The past year's collection numbers demonstrate how these programs help children and families. While OCSE continues to work with states and IRS on the tax offset program (see article on page 7), collections from tax and administrative offset, passport denial, multistate financial institution data match (MSFIDM), and federal insurance match continue to soar.

### Tax and administrative offset

In 2012, offset collections exceeded \$2 billion for the fifth consecutive year, at nearly \$2.2 billion (from 1.6 million offsets). While most were attributable to tax refund offsets, the Administrative Offset program took in \$8.2 million.

One of the most successful tools in the administrative offset program, USDA farm subsidy offsets collected nearly \$1 million in 2012. In Indiana, one family received nearly \$26,000 from one offset. Another family in Nebraska collected over \$13,000, while a family in Tennessee received over \$10,000 from one payment.

Through March this year, collections reached nearly \$130,000, with cumulative collections at \$4.7 million since farm subsidies became eligible for offset in 2009. Tax refund offset collections were more than \$1.16 billion through March, while administrative offset collections were up 3.8 percent over last year at nearly \$2.2 million.

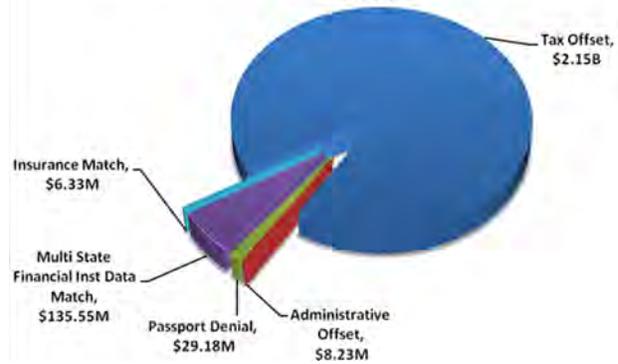
### Passport denial

One of the many benefits of having the passport denial application on the FPLS State Services Portal is that states can easily add lump-sum payments. E-mails, phone calls, and faxes are no longer the only ways to report passport denial success stories; states can do that on the portal, too!

In 2012, states voluntarily reported more than \$29 million in collections (a 7 percent increase over 2011), bringing the total to over \$274 million since the passport denial program started in 1998. Over \$7.3 million has been collected through this March.

One custodial parent who received \$71,000 said the passport denial program was the "only way" she would have received payment because the noncustodial parent had previously refused to pay. Another custodial parent recently called the program "fabulous"—the family received over \$250,000 because the noncustodial parent was going on vacation.

Federal Collections and Enforcement Programs  
2012



### Multistate Financial Institution Data Match

During 2012, 33 states voluntarily reported nearly \$136 million in MSFIDM collections, with five states collecting over \$12 million each. One Maryland agency office collected over \$64,000 from one noncustodial parent for distribution to two families. Since the program started in 1999, cumulative collections are over \$1.3 billion.

OCSE began matching with the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board's (FRTIB) Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) in January 2011. The TSP is a retirement plan offered to federal civilian employees and members of the military. Each quarter, OCSE and FRTIB conduct a match to identify individuals who owe past-due child support and have a TSP account, and send match information to the state through the MSFIDM file. Since the match began, states voluntarily reported \$20.4 million attributable to TSP, with Texas collecting over \$13 million. All but four states now garnish TSP accounts.

### Insurance Match

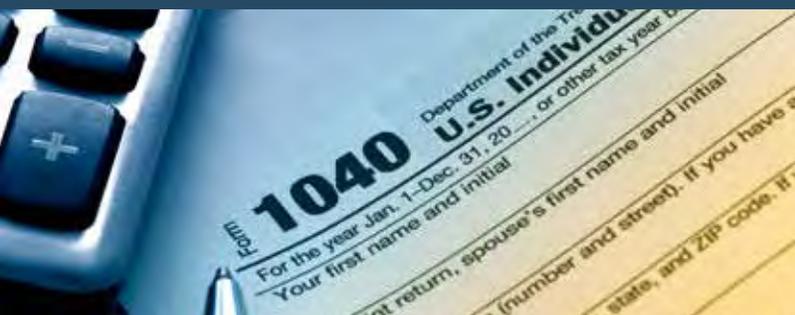
The most recent addition to federal collections and enforcement programs, Insurance Match, also succeeded quickly. Fifty-three states and territories participate in matching with 22 state workers' compensation agencies, 758 insurers and the U.S. Department of Labor. Since it began in 2008, states voluntarily reported \$18 million collected. A Nebraska office recently reported collecting over \$80,000, their largest insurance match collection to date, from a workers' compensation settlement. In Michigan, over \$36,000 was collected and sent to a father and his teenage daughter who had not received a payment since 2009.

To learn more about these programs, contact:

**Federal Offset and Passport Denial:** Rebecca Hamil, 202-205-5612, [rebecca.hamilton@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:rebecca.hamilton@acf.hhs.gov)

**Insurance Match:** Bea Locks, 202-260-5606, [beatrice.locks@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:beatrice.locks@acf.hhs.gov)

**MSFIDM:** Terry Bolger, 443-436-6437, [terry.bolger@ssa.gov](mailto:terry.bolger@ssa.gov)



## OCSE, states, IRS collaborate to address federal offset tax fraud

By Rebecca Hamil and Angie Tutwiler, OCSE

During the past several years, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) saw a significant increase in the number of fraudulent tax returns primarily due to increased identity theft. In a July 2012 report, the U.S. Department of Treasury Inspector General estimated that IRS had already issued \$5.2 billion in potentially fraudulent tax refunds and will issue more than \$21 billion over the next five years.

Even with the additional screening and filters IRS has in place to combat tax fraud, the report states that this problem is likely to continue to grow at a rapid rate. While the news media has highlighted the impact this has on innocent taxpayers and tax collection overall, little attention has been paid to its impact on the Federal Tax Refund Offset program, in particular state child support agencies and the families they serve.

The tax refund offset program is an effective tool for collecting delinquent child support. (*See article on page 6 on federal improvements increasing collections to families.*) Since its inception in 1982, it has collected more than \$35 billion and, on average, offsets of more than \$2 billion annually. However, over the past few years, the surge of perpetrators stealing taxpayers' identities to file false tax returns has affected states' efforts to collect past-due child support through the offset program. This is especially true in states such as Florida and Texas where tax fraud has become an epidemic in certain areas.

Beginning around mid-2011, some states began to express concerns about receiving a larger than expected number of tax refund offsets they suspected as fraudulent. Over the years, a few suspicious offsets were reported to OCSE but never so many at one time. Custodial parents were puzzled, too. They would call the state agency and say, "I don't know where this money came from; my ex has been in jail for the last ten years." Noncustodial parents were calling too, confessing, "that's not my refund, I haven't even filed yet!" States worried about what might happen if they disbursed what looked to be a legitimate offset to a family, only to have IRS discover its error later and take the collection

back. The state would either have to absorb the loss to repay the amount IRS took back or try to recoup the disbursement from the innocent family.

To prevent this risk, some states began to look closer at their tax refund offsets before disbursing to families. For example, they matched refund offsets against noncustodial parents who were incarcerated, deceased, or claimed to have never filed a return, or whose offset was inconsistent with reported income on the W-2. However, for those refund offsets identified as suspicious, states still had a dilemma.

Distribution guidelines require that tax refund offsets be distributed within certain timeframes. If the state disburses the suspicious payment and IRS later discovers it is fraudulent, the noncustodial parent initially gets credit for an offset that doesn't belong to them, and IRS still takes the money back. If the state holds the payment beyond the distribution timeframes, it is out of compliance. Additionally, if the state decides to hold the refund offset indefinitely for fear of disbursing an erroneous payment, will the IRS know to take action, and how long will it take before the collection is adjusted?

### Referral process to help states

To help states with these challenges, OCSE developed a referral process among OCSE, states, and IRS for sending suspicious tax refunds to IRS for investigation. OCSE also provided guidance (in [Dear Colleague Letter 11-17](#)) allowing states to delay distribution on tax refund offsets they suspected were fraudulent.

As part of the process, if IRS determines the referred offset is fraudulent, it notifies OCSE, and the intercept is adjusted from the state's future tax refund offset collections. If IRS determines the offset is not fraudulent or there is not enough information to confirm fraud, IRS notifies OCSE that the offset is not expected to be adjusted. OCSE in turn notifies the referring state of IRS' response.

OCSE continues to meet regularly with IRS to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the tax offset fraud referral process. OCSE is working with IRS to conduct quicker investigations whenever possible, provide speedier responses, and streamline approaches to exchange information among OCSE, states, and IRS.

**For more details about tax refund fraud and its impact on child support, contact the Federal Collections and Enforcement team at 202-401-9389 or e-mail [scollections@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:scollections@acf.hhs.gov).**

### Worldwide conference in Germany highlights child support

By Anne Miller, OCSE

A conference in Germany this March brought together 230 participants from 47 countries to talk about worldwide child support issues. Commissioner Vicki Turetsky, Robert Keith (HHS attorney) and Anne Miller (OCSE) represented OCSE at the “Recovery of Maintenance in the European Union and Worldwide” conference at the University of Heidelberg. The conference was sponsored by the Hague Conference on Private International Law; the German Institute for Youth Human Services and Family Law; the U.S. National Child Support Enforcement Association; and the Universities of Aberdeen, Heidelberg, and Lyon.

The conference focused on these goals:

- Implementation of the Hague Convention on the International Recovery of Child Support and Other Forms of Family Maintenance (the Convention) and the European Union’s new authorizing regulation for the Convention.
- Creation of a global network of child support and family maintenance professionals.
- Sharing of knowledge about child support, family maintenance law, and procedures and enforcement in countries around the world.

Commissioner Turetsky gave a speech on “The USA as an Engine for the Hague Convention 2007,” and Keith

presented on “The Modern History, Evolution, and Projected Future of Paternal Rights and Responsibilities and Child Support Enforcement in the United States: 1975-2025.”

The Convention is in force now that Norway, Albania, and Bosnia-Herzegovina have ratified it. The European Union passed the authorizing regulation in 2011 to implement the Convention, and the 27 member countries of the EU are expected to ratify the Convention in 2013.

In the United States, the Senate gave its advice and consent for the President to ratify the Convention in 2010. Once the Congress passes the implementing legislation for the Convention and all states enact the necessary state legislation to comply with the Convention, the President will be able to sign the instrument of ratification, and the Convention will enter into force for the U.S.

OCSE is working to move the Convention forward in the U.S. so that American families and children can benefit from the Hague Convention.

Conference presentations and information are available on the conference website at [www.heidelberg-conference2013.de/](http://www.heidelberg-conference2013.de/).

*This has been an inspiring and thought-provoking conference. One of the great triumphs of the Hague Treaty is that, despite our varied contexts and backgrounds, we achieved a common set of procedures and united behind a great vision for serving families and children.*

**Commissioner Vicki Turetsky**  
**March 8, 2013**

## OCSE kicks off Change Makers

On May 14, OCSE debuted the Change Makers series of webinars. Each webinar will feature state and tribal presenters with a focus on innovation. This series is about ideas, big and small, that are changing the way we do business in the child support program.

At the first webinar, presenters from Iowa and Washington discussed how they use partnerships and analytic tools to improve program efficiency and performance. They highlighted leveraging research and analytical skills of state universities to shape child support program and policy decisions, such as identifying specific case characteristics that contribute



to establishing paternity; using different variables to set paternity targets for individual offices; and designing rigorous testing methodologies to evaluate the effectiveness of different enforcement tools.

Before each webinar, OCSE will send registration information to state and tribal child support directors. Please feel free to share the registration link in your state and tribal child support newsletters, social media, and other communication vehicles!

If you are a “change maker” and want to share what you are doing in your state or tribe, please contact [childsupportchangemakers@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:childsupportchangemakers@acf.hhs.gov).

# Is your office father friendly?

By Judith Albury, OCSE



Is your program's customer service department "father friendly"? If your answer is yes, what were the results of your last customer service survey? Did the fathers who encountered your program agree?

Many people in the child support arena debate whether programs should be father friendly since they offer services to both mothers and fathers. Some staff may not believe they are responsible for serving fathers (more often, noncustodial parents); they work for the mothers collecting their money.

In our daily lives, when we have a question about our phone bill or see a discrepancy on our credit card bill, who do we call? Whether it is the local telephone company, the grocery store, or the gas company, we expect quality customer service. Is there any reason that our child support customers should not expect the same?

All customers want good, friendly service; they want an atmosphere that is inviting, accepting, and free of judgment. You might ask fathers who visit your office if they believe your program is father friendly, and you might be surprised by the responses. Recently, I asked five fathers and five staff members in community-based organizations' fatherhood programs in New York to give suggestions for their local child support customer service office. The responses were much the same:

- Staff need fatherhood sensitivity training.
- The environment needs to be welcoming to fathers so they feel like customers, not intruders.
- Staff need listening skills training and should work on being patient with fathers.

Raheem Brooks, coordinator for LaGuardia Community College Fatherhood Program (Long Island, NYC), said it best: "Too often fathers feel that they are merely a check and they don't matter. These are fathers who want to support their families and they are all seeking clarity and direction with respect to their child support case."

If you have the resources in your child support program, you may want to create a survey for your fathers, and then ask 10 random fathers to rate your program's father-friendly factors. While you do that, review the following

four markers claimed by most fatherhood programs to be the litmus test for a father-friendly program:

- Look at your waiting room; does it have space where men can feel comfortable?
- How many men do you have on your staff? How many are responsible giving services to customers?
- Do you provide fatherhood sensitivity training for your staff? (Notice the difference in the way staff approach males versus females.)
- How many local fatherhood programs are your partners? Do you have information about these partners in your waiting area? Let the community help you; they can become your best advocates.

Through these simple changes, you can be on your way to becoming father friendly. Remember, this is an ongoing progress and you can continuously review to improve.

For more information, contact [judith.albury@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:judith.albury@acf.hhs.gov).

## Time for a check-up?

The **Father Friendly Check-Up** is a free tool from the National Fatherhood Initiative that can help you successfully engage dads and strengthen families in your community. It helps you analyze your physical environment, location, staff attitudes, and more.

## OCSE seeks participants for fatherhood network

No other government social service program has the same wide-ranging interaction with fathers as the child support program. That's why OCSE is exploring the idea of forming a network of child support staff to discuss ideas and innovations on working with fathers.

A child support fatherhood network would offer a forum where staff from different jurisdictions could learn from each other, share promising practices, discuss collective experiences, share resources, and resolve challenges.

If you work with fatherhood groups, or if you simply have an interest in learning more about fatherhood outreach and programs, please e-mail Thom Campbell at [thom.campbell@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:thom.campbell@acf.hhs.gov) to learn more.



### Making a difference for a Pennsylvania mom

*An attorney in Delaware County, PA, sent this letter to the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement:*

As a child support program attorney in Delaware County, I am often confronted with families in need. One such family came across my court list several years ago. I was pleased to have been able to work with our Domestic Relations Department to help them, and make a difference in their lives.

Mom had a child months after her long-time boyfriend passed away from a sudden, fatal illness. At the time her boyfriend passed away she was unaware that she was expecting. After his passing his family asked her to leave his residence, where she had been residing for 7 years, and

to return all items belonging to him, to them. She was left without a car, a home and a way to support her infant.

She went to the Social Security Administration to file for survivor benefits for her daughter. Without having paternity established she was told she would be unable to collect those benefits on behalf of her daughter. A friend told her to go to Domestic Relations.

On behalf of the child a Petition was filed with the Court requesting that Father's relatives assist in establishing paternity of the child. An order was subsequently entered requiring several relatives to appear for genetic testing.

Equipped with the results of the genetic testing, Mom was instructed to go back to the Social Security Administration where she was able to successfully file for survivor benefits. She was also advised to seek the assistance of counsel so that her child could share in the estate of her father. She did so and is now able to provide for her child.

The cooperation of so many contributed to this story's successful outcome. Many went above the call of duty to make this happen, and were happy to do so. It remains my motivation to continue to assist people, even when it is difficult. Just last month I was stopped in a grocery store by a stranger who happened to be Mom's sister. She cried and told me what a difference we had made in her sister's life and the life of her daughter! It made my day.

Thank you for allowing me to share my story.

## Media Matters

### Football pro's documentary shows importance of fathers

Children learn by example, so how do boys learn to be good fathers when their example is absent? Some are able to overcome this barrier by learning from other strong adult men in their lives (for example, teachers, coaches, or clergy); others find programs to help them.

OCSE displays a fact sheet on the website called [Engagement of Fathers from Birth](#) with several examples of state child support programs helping fathers understand their roles and overcome the barriers they may face in becoming a good parent.

Some men have no examples or programs to help them. Their roads take many turns. Some turn to a life of crime; others do not go very far from home. Statistics show that many become absentee fathers themselves. It is a cycle that can continue for many generations.

Baltimore Ravens linebacker Ray Lewis coped with growing up in an absent-father home by turning his anger into a stellar pro football career. Lewis' defining moment with his absentee father came when he found out how many



### Ray Lewis in a screenshot from the documentary video

generations of fathers were absent from his family tree. To see the story of how Lewis eventually reconnected with his father, watch this [ESPN E-60 segment on YouTube](#).

The documentary chronicles Lewis' experience that led him to start an organization to help children.

**Kim Danek, OCSE**



## Teen connectivity and 24/7 communication

By Kim Danek, OCSE

Teens today are the most internet-connected generation ever with 95 percent logging onto the internet at least once a day through their computers, phones, tablets, and combinations of the three. This information is helpful for state and tribal child support professionals who strive to reach out to all segments of their customer population. Teens make up a portion of parents in the child support caseloads, and teens and kids will be the next generation of parents.

The Pew Research Center and the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University published a study in March called “Teens and Technology 2013” that gives insight into their connectivity trends. Almost 75 percent of teens surveyed call themselves “mobile internet users” compared to 55 percent of adults who say the same thing about themselves. Of those mobile-user teens, 25 percent access the internet mostly from their cell phones. That is 10 percent more than adults.

Between home and school computers, laptops, tablets, and cell and smart phones, teens can be connected to the internet and their friends nearly 24 hours a day.

The Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) produced a three-part series called “[This Emotional Life](#)” that explores different topics around American mental health issues. PBS still maintains an associated website with blogs on a variety of mental health concerns, including one on teens’ connectivity, called “[Teens Sleeping with Cell Phones: A Clear and Present Danger](#).”

In it, Dr. Suzanne Phillips explains that teens are not just sleeping with their phones under their pillow because they are using the devices to wake up in the morning. She says, “for the most part the phone is on all night to connect with peers.” Many teens feel that they constantly need to be accessible to one another. If they try to text each other and get no response, or it takes a while to hear from their friends, Phillips says they often feel it is a sign of anger or rejection on the other person’s part. This feeling of being “on call” can cause further anxiousness, desperation, and even sleep deprivation.

## How adults can help

Cell phone texting has become the preferred method of teen communication. It can lead to feelings of euphoria and potentially to texting addiction in extreme cases because texting activates the pleasure centers in the brain just as heroin does, according to the blog.

Phillips says teens need other ways to make them feel good, such as supportive environments from both their parents and peers that boost the child’s self-esteem. She suggests discussions with teens about limiting their texting by self-regulation before resorting to policing methods such as shutting off cell phones or limiting data availability. Talk with them about cell phone and texting limits just like you would for limits on video game time or curfew times on the weekends. Adults have to understand that teens have grown up with the internet as an integral part of their life, but it does not have to be their entire life. Texting, like everything, should be done with moderation.

*Funding for “This Emotional Life” is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and Public Television Viewers. Additional funding provided by the University of Phoenix and the HHS Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.*

## 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.

George H. Sheldon  
Acting Assistant Secretary for Children and Families

Vicki Turetsky  
Commissioner, OCSE

Gabrielle Pagin  
Director, Division of Consumer Services

Elaine Blackman  
Editor  
[elaine.blackman@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:elaine.blackman@acf.hhs.gov)

