

# Child Support Report



OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT  
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## Inside This Issue

- Commissioner's Voice: Child support program engages veteran and military families 3
- Delaware Stand Down collaboration brings services to homeless veterans 4
- Officials could face a judge for failure to comply 5
- Teen pregnancy prevention important to child support program 6
- New Access and Visitation portal eases reporting for state coordinators 7
- Texas law change equals huge collections for children 7
- Tribes and states partner on tax intercept process 8
- Giving PEACE a chance: Illinois parents learn conflict-management skills, go on to help others 9
- OCSE sponsors new Change Makers webinar series 10
- Nez Perce Tribe airs new video 10
- Seventeen states using smartphone apps 11
- Hillary's Story: From thank-you note to powerful video 12

## Leading change in Tennessee

By David A. Sanchez, Assistant Commissioner  
*Tennessee Child Support Program*



David Sanchez continues our series on change management in the child support program

Managing organizational change often conjures up a disturbing vision of herding cats. Planning and managing change to avoid “cat herding” requires five important elements to be firmly in place: vision, skills, incentives, resources, and an action plan. If any of these crucial elements are missing, effective change cannot occur. In addition, it is vital that any change is realistic, measurable and sustainable. An effective leader of change must ask herself or himself, “Who will be affected by this change, and how will they react to it?”

As I began my tenure as Assistant Commissioner of the Child Support Program in Tennessee, I accepted the charge to lead transformational change. As difficult as it might be for a leader who is well-known to the stakeholders to lead change, the task was made more daunting by the fact that the people working for me did not know much about me; my leadership style, personality, expectations, etc.

### Vision to make a positive difference

I began my journey of leading change by bringing all the stakeholders together (service-providers across the state: private vendors, district attorneys, and state staff). Once assembled, I simply told them the truth about how our state was performing compared to other states and territories. I presented the data unemotionally, and intentionally created a “no fault” atmosphere for the discussion.

I made it clear we were simply looking at the current reality in order to move forward. Portraying baseline performance data in this manner was a crucial first step to create a culture of accountability. This set up the cornerstone of the “vision” phase of change—the overarching vision for my division: to make a positive difference in the lives of Tennessee families and children by increasing all federal performance measures.

### Skills to embrace new direction

To increase efficiency, I created a Centralized Services Team that focuses on automated enforcement remedies performed in a centralized manner. To ensure the team functions at a high level, there was a need for skill development. Because employees naturally seek stability and the “known,” it was important to give staff time to develop the skill sets for change. I empowered mid-level managers to create professional development opportunities for staff focused on the task: discover redundancies and inefficiencies across the state; develop automated solutions to centralize redundant services; and implement the needed changes.

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continued



I had to create an environment where members of every team were involved in the process of embracing new direction. I had to provide the proper setting that allowed all staff to synthesize new concepts and align themselves with new processes. This approach allowed staff, including all vendor partners, to feel assured they would have the tools for success.

## **Incentives to attain goals**

People are motivated by tangible goals. I made sure staff had goals for each element of change I envisioned. Once set, we had to create a process for tracking progress. Goals were based on federal performance measures coupled with a motivator, the governor's vision statement: "Tennessee Forward: Performance, Accountability, Efficiency."

There is an old saying, "What gets measured gets done." I used this to further incentivize staff. Not only were performance goals established and tracked, individual and team results in accomplishing our goals were measured and reported. While this is not a unique approach, applying it created some healthy pressure to attain our goals.

I made certain that we acknowledge and celebrate team progress. Recognition can be a powerful motivator for individuals and teams; lack of recognition for effort and success can derail progress. To really capitalize on its motivating power, a purposeful combination of personal and public recognition produces the best results!

## **Resources – repurpose or replace?**

My most valuable resources are the people who report directly to me or to those who report to me. Because people are important components of change, my approach was to "repurpose" personnel for success rather than replace them. While it takes more patience, tolerance, and strategies to move existing staff from their prior reality to a model of higher effectiveness, the "win" of maintaining positive morale and developing loyalty outweighed any potential negative.

Often, organizations have intelligent people in the wrong positions. More often than not, the perceived solution to this dilemma is to replace the people rather than analyze the organizational structure to decide where "misplaced" people would succeed and thrive. I chose the latter model. While this took time and effort that might have been used elsewhere, it was time and effort well spent!

I based much of my "repurpose" plan on the "TRY change" model (Moran and Brightman, 72). In this model, stakeholders are moved through three phases of change acceptance: Test – Recalibrate – Yes (TRY). The concept is to move from "fear" to "acceptance." The initial reaction to change was naturally one of resistance (Test). Through "Recalibration," we achieved adjustment. Finally, acceptance completed the process in the "Yes" phase.

While the change process is still a work in progress, people are beginning to thrive in new teams; having new

challenges to face has invigorated people. Productivity is high, morale is good, and we are beginning to make dramatic progress in terms of meeting our goals.

## **Action plan sets benchmarks**

Of all the elements of change, this is the most important. Without an action plan, change falls short, has many false starts, and eventually disrupts the change process. While part of my action plan involved "repurposing" people, the people needed a clear direction once they understood my expectations.

Much of the overarching action plan is based on goal achievement. We know we have federal requirements. Meeting those goals was already a "known" to staff. However, meeting federal requirements can either be drudgery or it can be an exciting challenge. My action plan focused on constantly challenging the staff to exceed their personal best. This required drawing together all the prior elements of change: vision, skills, incentives and resources. The staff internalized the vision; they were given opportunities to increase skills; goal setting and goal attainment gave them the cornerstone of incentives while recognition completed the picture; resources were restructured to ensure each person had an opportunity for success.

To achieve buy-in for the action plan, I had to establish short-term "wins" by setting benchmarks along the way. Team members are motivated to continue the steps of a plan if they experience success along the way. Success in meeting benchmarks fostered a value for persistence, a quality I always attempt to instill in all employees. My recognition of progress and achievement was paramount in maintaining a forward direction. My essential function was and is to remove obstacles, create opportunities for constructive feedback to all stakeholders, and provide support for my direct reports.

## **Empower everyone in process**

To achieve successful change, I need to model every day what I expect from others. Moran and Brightman state that "change management is the process of continually renewing the organization's direction, structure and capabilities to serve the ever-changing needs of the marketplace, customers and employees." I cannot lead change from the rear; I need to know where we are going, and then empower everyone else to help get us there.

Change is a process, not an event. Sometimes we can drive in the fast lane of change, other times we have to drive on the shoulder, slow down, even circle back to pick up a few travelers that fell off the bus. But the process of change will not work without all the essential elements of change firmly in place. Missing any step along the way only serves to hijack effective change.



Commissioner's  
Voice

## Child support program engages veteran and military families

May highlights veterans and military families. In addition to [National Military Appreciation Month](#), May hosts [Armed Forces Day](#) (May 18) and of course Memorial Day (the 27th). Also, May 10 is

### [Military Spouse Appreciation Day](#).

As child support workers, we have an obligation to work with families at their most vulnerable. We cannot repay the sacrifice that our service men and women and their families make for our country, but for many reasons, the child support program must pay special and well-deserved attention to military members, veterans, and their families. Here are some of those reasons:

- About 50 percent of active duty members and 70 percent of Reserve and National Guard members are parents. See the OCSE fact sheet "[Military Services and Child Support Partnerships](#)."
- About 6 percent of the national child support caseload involves a veteran or an active military member.
- Military families face extra challenges with multiple deployments and a higher divorce rate than the rest of the population.
- A massive military drawdown by the Pentagon is set to begin this August.
- Military members transitioning to veteran status often face a decrease in pay and a significant risk of unemployment.
- Cases involving veteran parents are more likely to be interstate cases that require more attention.
- Veteran noncustodial parents are likely to have significantly higher arrears—27 percent higher on average. See the OCSE fact sheet "[Child Support Participation in Stand Down Events](#)."

In the coming months, OCSE will work with our partners at state, tribal, and local agencies, many of whom are already leading the way in outreach to military families. We plan to spread the word about their innovative services. We also plan to strengthen communication, systems, and policy links between child support and the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs to support collaborations that add real value at the state and local levels.



## Resources to help you

On [OCSE's Military & Veterans webpage](#), you can find fact sheets and other resources to help you work with veteran and military families. Here are a few:

- [A Handbook for Military Families: Helping You with Child Support](#) – This new handbook answers questions for both custodial and noncustodial parents on topics such as paternity establishment, child support, access and visitation, and child custody. While valuable for military families, the handbook is also useful to child support caseworkers and supervisors, as well as military commanders.
- [Working with the Military on Child Support Matters](#) – Look for an update this summer. We regularly hear from caseworkers that this resource serves as an indispensable desk guide on military issues surrounding a child support case.
- [A Child Support-VA Collaboration Toolkit](#) – Look for our assessment later this year of nine pilot projects across the country that are helping veterans who are homeless. Through a partnership between OCSE, the VA, and the American Bar Association, the pilot projects are helping homeless veterans gain permanent housing through assistance with modifying child support orders and reducing arrears.

I'm particularly excited about our Veteran and Military Liaison Network. The network brings together staff from the state and local child support community to explore ways we can better serve those who have so proudly served us. Its members are connecting with each other and smoothing the way for cases involving veterans and military families. For more information on the network (including how to join) or any other aspect of our work with veteran and military families, please contact Thom Campbell at [thom.campbell@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:thom.campbell@acf.hhs.gov).



Vicki Turetsky

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

## Delaware Stand Down collaboration brings services to homeless veterans

By Liz Byers-Jiron, Executive Director  
*Delaware Veterans' Stand Down*

The Delaware Veterans' Stand Down organization holds an annual statewide outreach day to help as many of the state's 600 homeless veterans as possible. These Stand Down days are collaborative events where many support agencies get together to provide veterans, particularly those who are homeless, with information about available benefits including shelter, employment and support services.

Delaware veterans find themselves without homes for a variety of reasons including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) issues and difficulties finding and holding steady jobs. When a homeless veteran contacts us at the Delaware Veterans Stand Down office we often find that there are more problems than the vet living on the street. If we believe vets have PTSD-like symptoms, we refer them to the Veterans Administration Counseling Center so they can get medical assistance first.

Often getting past this first step helps veterans become more comfortable about asking for other types of assistance. One of the greatest concerns for me is when noncustodial parents wish to see their children but cannot because custodial parents refuse to allow them visitation rights due to outstanding child support payments. In these cases, we reach out to the Delaware Child Support Office for help because they provide outstanding support to veterans.

As the executive director of Delaware Stand Down, I appreciate the collaboration we have with the state office because our alliance helps connect veteran parents to their children. Delaware's child support officials are outstanding. They take the time to understand who a veteran is, how to work with an absent veteran-parent, and how to reunite families!



Over 250 veterans attended the October 2012 Delaware Veterans' Stand Down at a local American Legion post. They asked for information about child support services most frequently.



### One successful outcome

A homeless veteran reached out to the executive director of Delaware Stand Down because he was homeless and unemployed. He had been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and he was behind in his child support payments. The \$90 he got each month to take care of himself was not enough to make ends meet or pay child support so he was stressed and depressed.

Because he was in arrears with his child support, his ex-wife was taking him to court and would not let him see his daughters. Stand Down helped the vet set up a meeting with an official from the Delaware Child Support Office. During the first visit, the state official explained the child support system to the veteran including what to expect when he went to court and the documents he needed.

Child support officials understood that a court appearance might add to the fear of this already overwhelmed PTSD veteran. They contacted their child support attorney before the hearing to let the attorney know the veteran has a disability. This information helped the attorney and court officials understand the veteran's attitude and anxiety during proceedings, which allowed things to go smoothly.

With the help of the Delaware Child Support Office, the process has led to positive outcomes for everyone. This proud veteran, who was treated with compassion, is now employed, makes regular child support payments, sees his children regularly, and has regained a sense of control over his life.



# Officials could face a judge for failure to comply

By Kim Danek, OCSE

Photo courtesy of the Defense Video & Imagery Distribution System website

The Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA), *50 U.S.C. App. § 501, et seq.*, provides important legal protection to active duty servicemembers in situations where court proceedings and financial transactions might affect their civil rights.

The sidebar on the right outlines provisions of the SCRA that generally pertain to child support cases. It is important for child support specialists to understand these provisions because the Veterans Benefits Act of 2010 amended the SCRA to authorize the U.S. Attorney General or private persons to take legal action against anyone who has violated provisions of the SCRA, including a child support worker or office.

Issues involving servicemembers and their families can be complicated legal cases. Officials should seek guidance from their state attorney general's office, a regional federal office, or child support official.

## Useful websites

[Servicemembers Civil Relief Act \(Justice.gov\)](#)

[Applying the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act Bench Card \(OCSE\)](#)

[The Servicemembers Civil Relief Act \(Military OneSource\)](#)

[A Handbook for Military Families \(OCSE\)](#)

## Child support-related provisions

The key sections of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act that judicial or administrative officials should review when working with a member of the military or the member's family are contained in § 521, 522, 524, and 525.

The SCRA applies to active duty U.S. military members, and reservists and National Guardsmen called to active duty for more than 30 days.

The SCRA applies to both court and administrative proceedings. In a default hearing, that is, when a servicemember defendant has not made an appearance in the case, the court or administrative agency may not enter a default judgment until after an attorney has been appointed to represent the servicemember; a stay of at least 90 days *must* be granted.

The servicemember can also apply for a stay, and the application must include: 1) a letter from the servicemember stating why his or her duties prevent an appearance, and when he or she will be available; 2) a letter from the servicemember's commanding officer stating that the current duties prevent an appearance and that leave is not authorized. If the required documentation is provided, a stay of at least 90 days must be granted. A request for stay does not constitute an appearance for jurisdictional purposes and does not constitute a waiver of any substantive or procedural defense.

A servicemember may ask for a continuing stay by submitting the same type of documentation as required for the initial stay; if denied, the court or agency must appoint an attorney to represent the servicemember's interest.

A servicemember may waive his or her SCRA rights. The waiver must be in writing.

A servicemember who cannot appear and does not wish to waive his or her rights can appear through a representative who is an attorney or who possesses the power of attorney.

# Teen pregnancy prevention important to the child support program

By Alzata Ross, OCSE

Every May, OCSE recognizes National Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month. For child support professionals, prevention is all about educating program partners and promoting awareness of the financial, legal and psychological characteristics, consequences, and responsibilities of being a parent. Spreading awareness is particularly important for youth, since teen pregnancy prevention is a focus of preventing the need for child support.

On May 1, hundreds of thousands of teens nationwide participated in the 12th annual National Day to Prevent Teen Pregnancy quiz. Throughout May, teens can visit [StayTeen.org](http://StayTeen.org) to participate in the popular [National Day Quiz](http://NationalDayQuiz.org). It focuses on the importance of avoiding early pregnancy and parenthood and challenges teens to think carefully about what they might do “in the moment.” The message of the quiz is straightforward: Sex has consequences. Last year, more than 700,000 people participated in the quiz, and it effectively helped teens rethink their behaviors. (See sidebar for evaluation details.)

## Birth rates and trends

The U.S. birth rate for teens ages 15-19 declined 8 percent between 2007 and 2010. Overall, this is encouraging; however, the teen birth rate in the U.S. remains higher than in any other industrialized country. Teen childbearing costs taxpayers at least \$10.9 billion in 2008. Most of the costs of teen childbearing are associated with negative consequences for the children of teen mothers, such as increased costs for health care, foster care, incarceration, and lost tax revenue. (See the National Campaign’s [National Birth Rate for Teens](http://NationalBirthRateforTeens.org) and [National Cost of Teen Childbearing](http://NationalCostofTeenChildbearing.org))

[TeenHelp.com](http://TeenHelp.com) reports that despite declines in rates of teen pregnancy in the U.S., about 820,000 teens become pregnant each year. The main rise in the teen pregnancy rate is among girls younger than 15, and close to 25 percent of teen mothers have a second child within two years of the first birth. Of unmarried teen mothers, 80 percent end up on welfare, while sons of teenage mothers have a 13 percent greater chance of ending up in prison compared to their peers. Only one-third of teenage mothers complete high school and receive their diplomas.

Many youth are aware of the consequences of teen sexual activity, but the pressure of fitting in or the naiveté of thinking pregnancy may not happen to them clouds their judgment. Sixty-seven percent of teens who have had sex

wish they had waited (60 percent of boys and 77 percent of girls), and 73 percent feel that being a virgin should not be embarrassing.

Organizations are spreading awareness about teen pregnancy prevention and education in new ways. The Iowa Department of Human Services and Iowa State University collaborated with the Iowa Attorney General to launch a monthly e-newsletter, “[Parenting: It’s a Life](http://Parenting:It’saLife.org),” to more than 300 schools. It contains resources and activities to aid in educating students on responsible decision-making in relation to sexual activity. The video introduces 7th to 12th graders to the responsibilities of being a parent, the concept of child support, how the child support system works, and the legal consequences of not paying child support.

The newsletter offers other resources for teens on topics such as domestic violence and sexual assault, community services, and teen pregnancy data. To register for this e-newsletter, send an email to [kgoudy@iastate.edu](mailto:kgoudy@iastate.edu) with PIAL Newsletter in the subject line.



## The National Day Quiz

To evaluate the [National Day Quiz \(www.stayteen.org/quiz\)](http://www.stayteen.org/quiz), the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy conducts a post-quiz survey each year. The 2012 survey shows:

- 85% said the Quiz made them think about what they might do in such situations.
- 63% said the Quiz made the risks of sex and teen pregnancy seem more real to them.
- 58% said they’d talk to their friends about the situations described in the Quiz.
- 58% said the Quiz made them think about things they hadn’t thought about before.
- 58% said they’d learned something new from the Quiz about the consequences of sex.

## New Access and Visitation portal eases reporting for state coordinators

By Laura Papoulakos, OCSE

At the end of every calendar year, state Child Access and Visitation Program (AV) coordinators fulfill federal reporting requirements when they submit their annual reports. Since the program began in 1997, coordinators submitted the reports as hard copies and OCSE manually verified the data—a time-consuming and cumbersome process for all. Last December, state AV coordinators submitted their annual reports online for the first time via the new AV reporting portal.

The online reporting system streamlines the reporting process and ensures a higher quality of reported data. The AV portal is an application on the FPLS (Federal Parent Locator Service), making connectivity for AV coordinators in child support offices seamless. Many states run their AV program through child support offices, so coordinators were already familiar with FPLS when OCSE introduced

the AV reporting application. Though some AV coordinators work in child support offices, the coordinator population is diverse. Some states run the AV program through social services agencies and the courts, so connectivity was often the first and sometimes challenging step in the new reporting process.

Many coordinators say that their greatest challenge was adjusting the data for the file’s successful processing. Automated system validations flag inaccurate data that the state must correct before processing the file. Although data checks are a positive feature of the portal because they help to ensure a higher quality of reported data, these validations can prolong time spent in the portal, which can be frustrating. Though most AV coordinators encountered portal challenges throughout various stages of the reporting process, all AV coordinators persevered!

All in all, the new reporting system, so far, is a huge success! Last year’s reported data is more accurate and consistent than ever before and was submitted in record-breaking time! Throughout the reporting process, OCSE has helped coordinators navigate the portal and adjust reported data. OCSE plans to use their feedback when making portal changes.

## Promising Practices

### Texas law change equals huge collections for children

By Mary Iverson  
Texas Office of the Attorney General

When the Texas Office of the Attorney General (OAG) started its Insurance Intercept Program in 2003, the main goal was to help children and families by using a previously untapped collection mechanism, insurance payouts. Established as a voluntary program for insurance companies to report personal injury and workers’ compensation claims, the first year’s results were a tremendous success with collections of more than \$3.3 million.

Texas realized the potential to increase collections even more, but those changes required legislation. So in 2009 Texas amended its statute to require insurers to report disbursements prior to paying claims, and revised it again in 2011 to include beneficiaries of life insurance policies and annuity payments.

Because of Texas’ efforts, collections from its Insurance Intercept Program have increased significantly every year since 2009.

Texas Fiscal Year	Collections (in millions)
2009	\$ 9.2
2010	\$17.0
2011	\$27.8
2012	\$34.5
2013 (YTD 1/31/2013)	\$15.6

Texas attributes a large part of its success to the Texas Special Collections Unit, the heroes behind the scenes. Because of their dedication and hard work, more than one-third of the insurance payments intercepted are \$5,000 or more per case. (Stay tuned for an upcoming article with more about how Texas’ Special Collections Unit is helping to collect support for children.)

If your state is interested in following Texas’ lead, please contact Mary Iverson, office manager, at [mary.iverson@texasattorneygeneral.gov](mailto:mary.iverson@texasattorneygeneral.gov) or Barry Brooks, managing attorney, at [barry.brooks@texasattorneygeneral.gov](mailto:barry.brooks@texasattorneygeneral.gov) to learn more about the state’s successful program.

# Tribes and states partner on tax intercept process

By Jim Fleming, Director  
Child Support Division, North Dakota Department of Human Services

Child support workers from five jurisdictions braved winter temperatures and met in Bismarck, ND, to share information about effective tribal and state child support program partnering for the federal income tax refund intercept process.

Not long after the meeting, a single offset in a Three Affiliated Tribes' case submitted for offset by the North Dakota child support program resulted in a collection of over \$6,200.

The Three Affiliated Tribes and the State of North Dakota have a long history of working together for effective child support. As early as 1986, an agreement was in place for tribal child support work. Unfortunately, the agreement was discontinued for many years until the Three Affiliated Tribes started its own IV-D child support program. Since that time, the Three Affiliated Tribes and the North Dakota Department of Human Services have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with several addenda for specific services, including federal income tax refund offset and access to the state's automated system.

In addition, the tribe and the state have offered joint presentations at national conferences on working together to provide effective services for tribal children. Because of improved collaboration on federal offset and other services

with the tribes and tribal courts in North Dakota, the number of North Dakota child support cases that cannot proceed for lack of jurisdiction has dropped in half in just the last five years, from 10 percent of the caseload to less than 5 percent.

The meeting was held at the request of the Eastern Shoshone Tribe in Wyoming to discuss the steps for a tribe and state to work together to submit tribal cases for offset. The Northern Arapaho Tribe and the State of Wyoming joined the meeting as well to discuss how each program can help complete the offset process.

The meeting started with a discussion among the five jurisdictions and the North Dakota Governor's cabinet member for Tribal Affairs about the status of federal legislation to provide direct access for tribes to federal offsets. From there, representatives of the Three Affiliated Tribes and the Child Support Division of the North Dakota Department of Human Services described each step of the offset process, from notice to the obligor, to final disbursement to the tribe and payment of the offset fee. Meeting participants came away with clear action steps for implementing a similar, effective process in Wyoming.

Partnerships between tribal and state child support programs are truly an example of the whole being greater than the sum of the parts. Acting alone, each jurisdiction has a limited ability to establish and enforce child support obligations, but together, the jurisdictions can ensure that a case does not slip through the cracks, and tribal children receive the support they deserve.

*For more information on tribal and state collaboration on child support services in North Dakota, contact Jim Fleming at 701-328-3582 or [jfleming@nd.gov](mailto:jfleming@nd.gov).*



Standing (from left): Tori Dihle, Dorothy Packineau, Ellen Otterman, Nelson Frank Ute, Esq. Robert Hitchcock (Bob), Mindy Albrecht, Scott Davis, Becki Schulz, Kim C. Lambert, Kimberly Sue Ferris, Brenda Lyttle, Andrea Blackburn, Bill Woods, and Jim Fleming. Seated (from left): Pam Nemeth, Lee Bjerklie, Paulette Warren, and Carmen Thomas.

# Giving PEACE a chance: Illinois parents learn conflict-management skills, go on to help others

By Geraldine Franco, *OCSE Region V*

At the DuPage County Family Center in Wheaton, IL, custodial and noncustodial parents are learning conflict-management skills in a court-ordered program called PEACE. You could say that the co-parenting couples are making peace with one another. The Family Center considers the program a success each time two “high-conflict” parents, who could not mention the other’s name when they entered the program, remain civil to each other in the group sessions, gain insight into the effects of their conflict on their children, and can go on to peer-coach other high-conflict co-parents.

In 2009, Sheila Murphy-Russell, director of the DuPage County Family Center, and Penny J. Paradowski, Mediation Program manager, created the PEACE program with the vision to teach parents healthy conflict-management skills and to educate both parents about the importance of active conflict-free involvement in their children’s lives.

## How the program works

The Circuit Court of DuPage County refers high-conflict parents to the PEACE program after parents have sought assistance from the court to resolve conflicts outside of the court system. The court order indicates that parents cannot file new pleadings or initiate litigation for the duration of the PEACE program. Participants engage in two-hour sessions over eight weeks. While housed in the DuPage County Family Center, the program accepts referrals from other circuit courts, including the Circuit Court of Cook County, which includes Chicago.

Over the past four years, the PEACE program has run 13 eight-week sessions. One of its goals is to teach parents to communicate effectively and minimize conflict. The program achieves its goals through four main objectives:

- Emphasize the importance of parents giving children permission to love both parents.
- Educate parents about the effects of ongoing conflict on their children.
- Provide parents with communication and conflict management skills and strategies.
- Encourage conflict resolution outside of the court.

The program uses lectures, group discussion, role-playing, skills training, peer coaching, and supervised practice to teach parents communication and conflict-management skills. High-conflict co-parents acquire skills to resolve conflict amicably to ultimately protect children from the negative effects of ongoing parental conflict.

Program participants sign a contract agreeing to fully participate in the program, refer to their former partner as a co-parent, respect fellow group members, and not initiate or file any new motions or pleadings in court during the program.

During the course of the program, participants learn how to define relationships and interpersonal conflict; effective communication skills between co-parents; the effects of parental conflict on children; how to keep parent issues from becoming legal issues; and healthy conflict management. Participants have homework assignments so they can implement what they learn during the session at home. One of these involves identifying positive characteristics that a parent sees in his or her children, which are from the other parent. This assignment can be challenging and very effective because parents are asked to focus on positive characteristics of their co-parent that they see emulated by their child.

One of the most successful parts of the program is peer

continued ▶

coaching. During peer coaching sessions, each parent has an opportunity to act as both the coach and the coached. The participants identify several issues that repeatedly cause conflict with their co-parent. The coach listens to the co-parents and helps them clearly define the issues and explore possible resolutions. According to the director, many participants receive a wake-up call when they facilitate peer coaching sessions since the coaches often hear problems similar to their own and, in an objective manner, help other high conflict co-parents resolve their issues. This process helps parents learn to identify high-conflict areas in their co-parenting relationship and emotionally disengage so that they can objectively resolve their conflicts without engaging in destructive behaviors that ultimately affect the children.

## Positive feedback

Many participants report that the program gave them a better understanding of the negative effects of parental conflict on their children and new tools and strategies to manage future conflict with their co-parent.

Parents have contacted the Family Center after the program and reported that their participation in PEACE led them to disengage from the fight and effectively resolve long-standing disputes on their own. On a couple of occasions, families reported that extended years of litigation concerning their children were terminated and parents vowed to apply the conflict management tools they learned in the PEACE program rather than rely on the court system to parent their children.

The PEACE program's goal is to help parents use the skills they acquire to reduce conflict for the sake of their children and give their children permission to love both parents. Ultimately, noncustodial parents who have positive relationships with the custodial parents are more likely to make regular child support payments, have better family relationships, and interact more with their children.

*For more information, contact Sheila Murphy-Russell at [sheila.murphyrussell@dupageco.org](mailto:sheila.murphyrussell@dupageco.org).*

## Media Matters



## OCSE sponsors new webinar series

On May 14, OCSE will debut The Change Makers Series—a forum to discuss ideas that are changing the way we do business. Each webinar will feature presentations by state and tribal partners with a focus on innovation. This series is about the ideas, big and small, that are changing the way we do business in the child support program.

In the first webinar, representatives from Iowa and Washington will share how they use the Geographic Information System analytic tool to improve program efficiency and performance. [Please register early](#). For more information, e-mail [childsupportchangemakers@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:childsupportchangemakers@acf.hhs.gov).

Feel free to share the registration link in your state and tribal child support newsletters, social media, and other news vehicles!

## Nez Perce Tribe airs new video



**The Nez Perce child support program produced its second PSA video, now on YouTube. In just 31 seconds, “Raising a child takes more” exemplifies the importance of child support for children and families. It helps the program promote positive messages to the community. A local station will broadcast the PSA through June.**

# Smart phone apps developed for states

By Miles Jackson, OCSE

Revised on June 6, 2013

Smart phones and apps are sweeping across the world in countless forms, from gaming and banking to social media and news; there is an app for just about everything. Now commercial developers are creating apps to help custodial and noncustodial parents calculate their monthly and annual support payments. Although these apps are not yet interactive, predominantly state-by-state calculators, the reviews are stellar.

Companies have developed child support smart phone applications for 17 states including Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas.

The core service of each app is a child support calculator that, depending on the state, helps to calculate monthly child support payments for noncustodial and custodial parents. The calculators include variables such as an obligor's monthly salary, the number of children, and the number of support orders between the custodial and noncustodial parent.

The apps are not managed directly from state or local child support offices, but rather by a group of various family law contractors that often coordinate directly with states to maintain current child support law (2013 Federal Tax Act), which assures calculation accuracy for all parents.

Each app is available in the [App Store](#), and all are free except in Massachusetts, Michigan, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas (where apps cost \$.99 to \$9.99). Online reviews avow user-satisfaction, with an average 4.9 out of 5 stars. The apps are available for smart phones and tablets, such as the Android, iPhone, iPad and Kindle. These apps are no doubt useful for parents, but they could offer other features. A look at apps developed by official government agencies, such as ones sponsored by the National Institutes of Health, demonstrates innovative and hands-on approaches between the federal agency and their customer base. Child support apps may well be more dynamic and accomplish much more by complementing the child support calculator with some other very basic features.

An interactive chat room, or contact information for state and local child support agencies, could significantly increase app use. Customers might also like to use the app as a medium to set up court dates and find out basic information on their cases or support payments. The [AIDS.gov](#) app offers an FAQ. A child support FAQ could include information on paternity establishment; establishing and modifying orders; arrears management; military and veteran resources; state Access and Visitation services; family violence resources;



a map for the OCSE Intergovernmental Reference Guide; and the list goes on. The state child support calculator apps can serve as an entrance into the world of applications, with exciting opportunities for state and local agencies across the country. For information on official state mobile apps, visit the National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO) web page, <http://www.nascio.org/apps/>.

## LA County spearheads interactive child support phone app project

LA county Child Support Services Department (CSSD) is heading a workgroup to develop an application that will enable child support clients statewide to access child support information on their mobile phones.

Half of the 4.5 million calls that come into the child support call centers statewide are for case information that customers can access through this technology. Capitalizing on push notifications to alert participants of activity on their case in real time will be a better and easier way for customers to receive information about their child support cases. This also has the added benefit of freeing up child support staff for other essential case work functions to assist families and children.

On Jan. 15, CSSD hosted a two-day planning meeting to discuss the phone application. Staff from CSSD, the California Department of Child Support Services (DCSS) and 11 local child support agencies gave 70 pages of input for the phone application. The result was a great design that is simple to use, informative, and ready for development.

With the design completed, CSSD is engaged with DCSS to turn concept into reality. Essential to the success of the app will be integration of the child support case data with the statewide child support enforcement system, while at the same time, maintaining the security of the information on mobile devices. Because it is foremost in everyone's minds, they are holding discussions with officials at the state level to ensure that personal data will be protected. Hopefully, this vision of the future will come to live over the next year.

## Hillary's Story: From thank-you note to powerful video

By Elaine Blackman, OCSE



In a screenshot from the video, caseworker Eileen Brown poses with Hillary and her children. See [Hillary's Story on YouTube](#).

One mom started it all last August when she wrote a thank-you letter to Joan Kennedy, director of the Mecklenburg County, NC, Child Support Enforcement Department.

“My caseworker is Eileen Brown and she honestly saved me from myself during this ongoing and emotion-filled process,” wrote Hillary, mother of two. Hillary expressed her gratitude after years of taking care of the kids on her own and seeking support—under the shadow of a breast cancer diagnosis and treatment.

Director Kennedy first shared Hillary’s letter with a few others, including Social Services Manager Tana Calloway. “We knew we needed to share Hillary’s message of gratitude, hope and friendship,” says Calloway. They thought about the local news media, but decided on a video. “A news item comes and goes quickly,” she adds, “but when you create a video, many more can see it—and we knew this message was powerful.”

Calloway manages outreach projects and orchestrates videos. She sought help from Gary Black, a Public Information Specialist in the Mecklenburg County Public Information Department experienced in producing educational videos for all the departments, including child support. Black took two weeks for the shoot, including a session to finalize a script with Hillary, who narrates throughout the video. Hillary also shared family photos for the making of the video.

“He captured her emotions,” says Calloway, who portrays the product as “much more than a video; it’s a digital story.”

She explains that Black wanted to present the video through Hillary’s eyes. Kennedy and Calloway never questioned Black’s artistic and creative motives, and were confident with his vision right from the start.

Calloway has shared the video with the North Carolina State Office of Child Support Enforcement to show this fall as a lead-in to a customer service workshop at the state conference. Kennedy hopes others will benefit from it as well.

Kennedy explains: “The experience with Hillary just confirmed what we know and practice daily; that is, that good customer service can make all the difference in the lives of our customers; that there are unsung caseworker heroes like Eileen in every office, but they don’t often get the recognition they deserve; and that there are Hillarys in all our offices. This video tells that story in a powerful way so that all can see the impact we have on the lives of children and families everywhere.”

At the department-wide staff meeting last December, Kennedy presented Eileen Brown with an award for exceptional customer service. Then Calloway spoke out: “Probably 90 percent of you have a Hillary in your caseload. We really don’t know who’s on the other side of that desk or the challenges they may be going through. Each day you have the opportunity to touch people’s lives in a very special way. Thank you.”

Calloway sums up the experience: “The beauty of it is that she took the time to say thank you.”

### Child Support Report

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