

Child Support Report

Vol. 38 No. 4 May 2016

COMMISSIONER'S VOICE


VOICE | BLOG

Making policies work for families

Moms and dads raising children on their own work hard to keep the rent paid, milk in the refrigerator, and growing children in shoes. It's a struggle to manage on a tight budget. The child support program collected \$28.6 billion for almost 16 million children in 2015. Ninety-five percent of the money collected was paid to families. However, the remaining 5 percent, or \$1.3 billion, was kept by the government to repay cash assistance through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or foster care program funded under title IV-E of the

Social Security Act. That is because families are required to sign over their rights to support when they apply for cash assistance. Even after they stop receiving assistance, the government keeps a share of the support collected.

When that happens, the government, not families, benefits from child support. Cost recovery is not the best use of the money paid by parents for their children. Instead, that money could be going to support children. More money to families means bus fare to get to work, school clothes, diapers, and other necessities. Research finds that family distribution policies remove disincentives for parents to pay support, increase family income, and reduce the need for families to apply for cash assistance in the first place, with little net cost to the government. These policies are family-centered and help parents provide for their children.

It is time to renew the policy dialogue on family distribution. In 2006, the Congress enacted the Deficit Reduction Act providing states with a set of options to pay 100 percent of the money to the children, instead of keeping some of the money to reimburse government costs. In addition, the President's FY 2017 budget proposes to offset some of the revenue loss that states would incur by using child support to support children rather than government budgets. One of the five program goals articulated in the [National Child Support Strategic Plan](#) is to pay collected child support to families. We encourage states to consider adopting family distribution and pass-through options authorized under the Deficit Reduction Act.

Families need more than child support

Child support income alone is not enough, however. Child support programs can help families manage their tight budgets in other ways. Many parents have limited access to resources such as employment, education and training opportunities linked to economic security; and reliable housing, transportation, and quality full-day child care that will allow parents to pursue job opportunities. The stress of living in poverty without access to adequate mental and physical health services and social support can lessen parental sensitivity and emotional support for children. And, in turn, when child development is not fully supported, children may be more challenging to raise, less prepared for school, more likely to drop out, and bound for their own adult life in poverty.

Along with child support, TANF, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and other safety net programs can help provide supplemental income for families. Noncustodial parents also need help. In this issue, we feature New York City's Paycheck Plus, a three-year program testing

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The child support program honors the nation's mothers and children

Mother's Day - May 8

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the expansion of the EITC for workers without dependent children, many who are noncustodial parents. You'll also read about the comprehensive approach Washington state is taking to help parents. The Alternative Solutions Program helps them find jobs and keep them by addressing issues that might impact job stability like transportation and child care. Basic assistance, work-related activities, and child care are key services that support unemployed or underemployed parents with insufficient income, limited jobs skills and other barriers to employment.

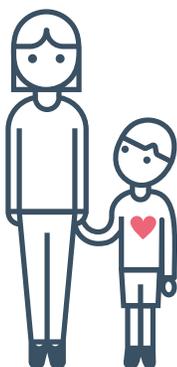
A two-generation approach helps parents and children

Child support agencies can partner with TANF agencies to coordinate across programs for parents and programs for children to provide comprehensive two-generation approaches that work for families. We encourage child support agencies to work with TANF agencies to promote and support whole family approaches such as:

- Linkages between high quality educational services for children and workforce development services for their parents;
- Programmatic efforts to help parents gain the skills, knowledge, and resources to support their child's development;
- Ensuring that families have access to the economic and social supports needed for stability and resilience, and healthy child development; and,
- Helping families build social capital that can support both resilience and upward mobility.

We can do a better job at connecting parents to the services they need for their family such as health care, food assistance, domestic violence intervention services, and other social services. Asset-building and financial management programs are available to both parents in many communities. We need to provide case management tools to child support workers so that they know who to refer and where to refer families for the help they need. Moms and dads can't raise kids on love alone.

Vicki Turetsky



SPOTLIGHT — FINANCIAL CAPABILITY BUILDING

Partnership helps parents build capacity

Ted Thornton, Alternative Solutions Program Manager, Washington State Division of Child Support

Daniel, like so many noncustodial parents we serve, was struggling to overcome obstacles that seemed insurmountable. By the time he found Washington State's Alternative Solutions Program, he had recently been released from jail and was living in a clean and sober home, but he had limited English skills and was still haunted by his child support debt. He felt helpless. We got Daniel into our Alternative Solutions Program and worked with him for several months to reinstate his license, stabilize his housing, and connect him with education options at a local college. We also set up a plan to forgive some of the child support debt Daniel owed to the state.

Comprehensive approach

The Alternative Solutions Program uses a comprehensive approach to support struggling noncustodial parents like Daniel. We understand that not all parents who owe child support earn enough to meet that obligation, so we work with any parent who needs help. The ones who voluntarily participate receive assistance with their child support cases as well as help identifying and removing barriers that prevent them from consistently supporting their families. Once parents have achieved stability, they can work with another arm of the program, the Employment Pipeline, which specializes in creating employment opportunities for clients.

“To end poverty and significantly transform the lives of our clients, we must work with both parents and leverage each other's services in new and unique ways.”

Collaborative tactics

The Employment Pipeline is a cross-divisional program providing training and employment opportunities for noncustodial and custodial parents in the Washington child support system, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and TANF. To help parents stay employed, employer navigators provide follow up assistance such as resolving issues with transportation and childcare that might otherwise jeopardize their

job. The program also partners with local community colleges and community-based organizations that prepare parents for specific jobs that are available through selected and participating employers.

Although it was not included in the initial vision of the program, Alternative Solutions is also able to provide statewide training to partners and staff, deliver outreach to parents in jails and prisons, develop bridge programs with our TANF counterparts, and fulfill roles within various grants and demonstrations associated with the Division of Child Support (DCS).

One such grant is the Resources to Initiate Successful Employment (RISE) project that offers work-based learning and comprehensive case management. It is part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture SNAP Employment and Training program. Our public assistance partner, the Community Services Division, allows Alternative Solutions to serve noncustodial parents while they participate in RISE employment and training activities.

Effective alliance

Our staffs believe in continuing the cooperation between the child support and TANF programs. “Both DCS and our SNAP and TANF programs have shared clients and resources, with a shared goal of family self-sufficiency,” said Washington State TANF Director Babs Roberts. “To end poverty and significantly transform the lives of our clients, we must work with both parents and leverage each other’s services in new and unique ways.”

We already see the payoff from these collaborative efforts. Not long after Daniel exited our program, he sent us the following letter. “I was feeling overwhelmed with child support,” he said. “By working with (Alternative Solutions), I not only got the help I needed, but my broken relationship with my wife was restored. My children now have a dad and my family is free to move ahead... This could not have happened without the care and compassion I received.”

Daniel is just one of 1,750 parents served by the Alternative Solutions/Employment Pipeline alliance in the last 18 months. We made more than 1,100 referrals to service providers and 300 parents found employment while working with the programs.

Washington State Child Support Director Wally McClure summarized his vision and intentions this way: “We know that for every success story like Daniel, there are thousands more parents that need our help. Washington State will continue to pursue every opportunity to transform the lives of those we serve. Alternative Solutions will help us lead that charge.”

For more information, contact the Alternative Solutions Program at 360-664-5028.

Paycheck Plus — New York City testing tax credit program

Jean-Marie Callan, Senior Program & Policy Advisor, NYC Center for Economic Opportunity

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is one of the nation’s most successful antipoverty policies, providing benefits to 27 million families and individuals during the 2014 tax season. But its benefits go mostly to workers who have dependent children in their tax household. A single worker with two children could get up to a maximum credit of \$5,548 on a 2015 tax return. If that worker has no dependent children to report, the maximum the taxpayer could receive is only \$503. Workers without dependent children make up a sizable portion of the low-wage workforce struggling to get by, and many are noncustodial parents.



There is substantial bipartisan support for expanding the EITC for workers without dependent children. Notably, President Obama and House Speaker Paul Ryan have put forth very similar proposals to increase the credit. New York City’s Paycheck Plus program is testing that idea. The three-year program has offered 3,000 low-income individuals without dependents an earnings bonus at tax time that simulates a more generous EITC.

The evaluation aims to provide credible evidence on the likely effects of a more generous EITC for workers without dependent children.

Participants were selected through a lottery and offered a bonus of up to \$2,000 a year when they file taxes in 2015, 2016, and 2017. Individuals were eligible for the lottery if they:

- Filed their taxes as single, with no dependent children;
- Earned less than \$30,000 in the previous year;
- Were between the ages of 21 and 64;
- Had a Social Security Number; and
- Lived in New York City.

MDRC, a social policy research firm, is evaluating the program. Researchers are tracking employment rates and other outcomes over time and comparing them to a control group of 3,000 individuals who were also selected via lottery but will not receive the bonuses. Control group members remain eligible for benefits under the current EITC system and receive incentives for participation in the study. The evaluation aims to provide credible evidence on the likely effects of a more generous EITC for workers without dependent children.

We hope to find answers to some of the following questions. How many people will claim the bonus at tax time and how much will they receive? Will participants who are offered the bonus increase their employment or reduce their involvement in the criminal justice system? How many of the people who claim the bonus are parents who owe child support and how much of their bonus is intercepted to pay down their child support arrears? If participants are parents who owe child support, will they increase the amount of child support that they pay?

About 12 percent of Paycheck Plus study participants are noncustodial parents in the New York child support program. Among this group, about one-third received a bonus, which averaged about \$1,300. Half of the parents who received bonuses had part or all of their bonus intercepted to pay down child support arrears. Although some of them were disappointed that their bonuses were intercepted, some were also happy to be able to pay down debt. For example, one participant reported:

“[Paycheck Plus] gave me \$480... and that went towards my child support arrears. So, that’s a great benefit. I’ve been used to receiving a letter in the mail saying, ‘You owe this, you owe this, you owe this.’ Just last month, I get a letter in the mail. It says, ‘You owe zero in arrears.’ I thought, are you kidding me? I got emotional over that.”

In 2017, MDRC will release a report on the program’s effects on income, poverty, and employment during the first two program years. They will also analyze whether the differences between noncustodial parents and the larger study group are statistically significant, and what impact the program had on child support payments and arrears.

For more information on the NYC Paycheck Plus program, contact CEOREports@cityhall.nyc.gov.

NYC Paycheck Plus funding and operations

Funding

Paycheck Plus is funded by New York City’s Center for Economic Opportunity and the Robin Hood Foundation. The program is being implemented in partnership with the NYC Human Resources Administration Office of Child Support Enforcement. The project is also partially funded by the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement through a Section 1115 waiver coordinated by the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance to study noncustodial parent participation and impacts.

Operations

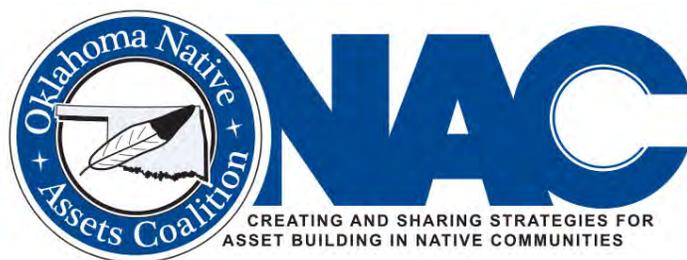
To run the project, MDRC partnered with the Food Bank for New York City (FBNYC), which runs the largest network of Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites in the city. Paycheck Plus participants can receive VITA’s help in filling out their returns; others choose to bring in their completed returns. In both cases, staff members review the completed returns, and then give them to FBNYC to process bonus payments for those who qualify. For the 2015 tax season, 46 percent of participants in the Paycheck Plus group received a bonus, which averaged about \$1,400.



New children's savings plan in the Cherokee Nation

Gretchen Tressler, OCSE

When it comes to saving for your child's education, every little bit helps. That is common knowledge; but in reality, it can be hard to follow through with a savings plan. A new program gives qualifying parents in the Cherokee Nation a different approach. iSave participants can contribute either to a standard savings account or to a 529 College Savings Plan for their children.



Growing the savings

Supported by a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Oklahoma Native Assets Coalition (ONAC) is working with six tribal partners throughout Oklahoma to fund children's savings accounts. The Cherokee Nation Office of Child Support Services — the first partner to launch the program — is focusing on parents who recently established Cherokee Nation Tribal Court child support orders and have children younger than 8 years old. Enrollment is limited and parents must meet specific criteria. Once enrolled, ONAC deposits \$100.00 into the new iSave account to get the investment started.

Both parents can contribute to the child's account. The custodial parent also can invite other family members and friends to help sock away the savings. Parents who choose to invest their contributions in the 529 account can deduct the amount from their year-end Oklahoma income taxes.

Promoting co-parenting through tribal cooperation

Collaboration is at the root of iSave. Parents must work together to prepare their children for a bright educational future. If the child support office determines that a child is eligible for the program, both parents have to approve their child's enrollment. Likewise, if a noncustodial parent wants to count the savings contributions as in-kind support for child support owed, both parents must agree.

In this way, the child support office hopes to encourage parents to do more than save. Cherokee Nation iSave Program Coordinator Christina Bowlin says, "What ONAC is looking to do here is promote the idea of co-parenting and stress the importance of building a sound financial foundation for children for years to come. And Child Support Services, without a doubt, backs this philosophy. We are doing everything that we can to ensure the parents and children that come into our program walk away with a positive and holistic experience."

Working together to make child support a better experience for everyone involved is smart. The iSave program makes it possible to do that while building a strong foundation for their children's education.

For more information regarding the iSave program, contact Christina Bowlin at 918-453-5444.



Planning Guide video series introduction

In March 2015, ACF published [Building Financial Capability: A Planning Guide for Integrated Services](#) (the Guide). The Guide is an interactive resource to help community-based organizations develop a plan for integrating financial capability services into existing programs such as housing, job training, or Head Start.

In January, ACF produced a series of five short training videos that provide instructions, tips, and examples for using the tools and resources in the Guide to begin integrating financial capability services or to improve or expand existing efforts. [In this first video](#), Jeannie Chaffin, director of the Office of Community Services, and Kate Griffin, vice president for programs at the Corporation for Enterprise Development, describe the importance of financial capability integration and introduce the Guide.

If you have questions or feedback, email PlanningGuide@cfed.org.

Employment project critical to small Colorado county

Dena Pisciotte, Communications Manager,
Colorado Department of Human Services, Office of
Economic Security

When you are homeless and living in your car in a strange town, paying your child support seems like an incredibly daunting task and the least of your worries. Chris Maestas, a father of three, had little contact with his children and faced a child support system that aimed to punish him rather than help him. A new program implemented in Colorado is working to change that.

Testing a new approach

CO-PEP, the Colorado Parent Employment Project, serves populations with barriers to employment, such as being homeless, having a criminal record, or being chronically unemployed. The program aims to provide a supportive approach, including employment training, job search assistance, and help with resumes and interviewing. It also offers parent education. CO-PEP can provide bus passes, work clothing, and job-specific tools. Staff can also help get driver's licenses reinstated when they have been suspended for failure to pay child support.

CO-PEP is a \$2.3 million, five-year grant shared by five Colorado counties. Program enrollees participate voluntarily as part of a random controlled study.

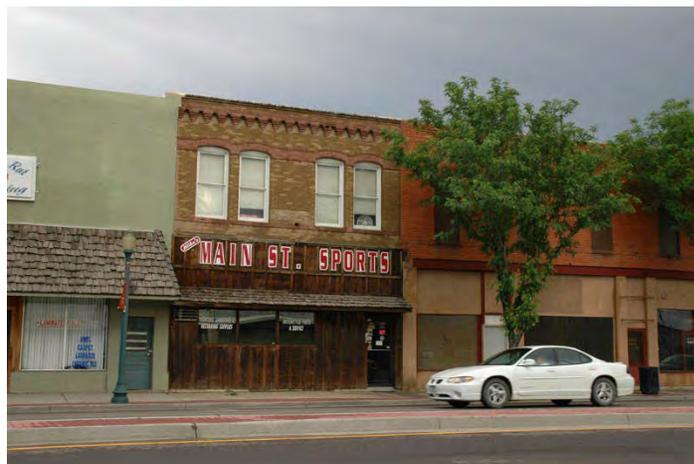
Helping a father in crisis

Maestas had little contact with his three children, two of whom were in Colorado. One day, he got a call from the mother's boyfriend telling him to come and pick up his kids because their mother had left. When he arrived, his children were gone. "If I had an opportunity to do right just this one time, I'd really try," Maestas said, as he set out to find his daughters.

Maestas settled in Prowers County, CO, and struggled to survive by doing odd jobs. By chance, he saw a CO-PEP poster and decided to call. He has been in the program for more than 16 months now and is a manager at a local wireless cell phone provider store. He not only found his

two daughters, but has also reestablished and strengthened his relationship with them.

Anthony LaTour, the Prowers County CO-PEP Case Manager, who assisted Maestas, said that his case does not have to be a unique situation. "I think more positive outcomes in child support services would occur if intensive case management services were standard practice. Chris worked extremely hard to get to where he is today, to provide a better quality of life for his children and family," LaTour said.



A bleak economy

Prowers County is in the far southeast section of Colorado's eastern plains where the population decreases each year and job prospects are few. Poverty is a serious problem, and a noncustodial parent with employment barriers has few, if any, options to get ahead.

According to the 2010 census, the per capita income in this county of about 12,500 was \$14,150. About 15 percent of families and nearly 20 percent of the total population lived below the poverty line. Almost 30 percent of children lived in poverty. CO-PEP has been a beacon of possibility to noncustodial parents who face an uphill climb in rural Colorado.

Promising outcomes

Statewide collections have increased, although it is still early to tell whether CO-PEP is a factor. Grant Manager Dan Welch says, "We see these five counties are doing better but we can't say it's because of CO-PEP. A better short-term connection can be made with the program's employment numbers, he said. In Prowers County, six months after enrollment, 76 percent of the parents are employed and 12 months after enrollment, 88 percent still have jobs. However, all five counties are reporting an increase in collections that some attribute to the grant," he said.

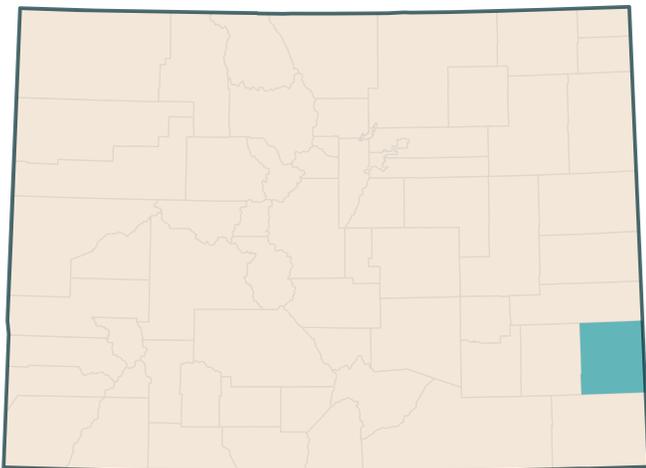
"It would be great if we had proof that the way we used to do it worked," said Lynn Johnson, executive director of the Jefferson County Department of Human Services, which is another CO-PEP location. "But when you look at my



numbers, you look at Arapahoe County's numbers, when you look at numbers of other child support efforts that are doing it the new way; we're bringing in the money. So, if the intent is to punish the dad, then the old way works. If the intent is to get the money and have the dad establish a good relationship with the kids so they can co-parent, our way works."

Prowers County parents who are enrolled in CO-PEP made a 21 percent increase in child support payments. Six months prior to enrollment, 49 percent were paying versus 70 percent six months after enrollment. "If (noncustodial) parents paid their full monthly child support obligation, it would result in an increase of approximately \$10 million per month (to Colorado children)," said Larry Desbien, director of the Colorado's Division of Child Support Services. "The money could lift thousands of children out of poverty."

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Success one dad at a time

Chris is no longer living in his car, has a fulltime job, and sees his daughters regularly. Thanks to the El Paso County Child Support program, Chris also has less debt. Because El Paso County originally established the child support order, mediators there helped him work with both mothers on his past due child support. One has forgiven \$30,000 in back debt; the other has forgiven nearly \$9,000 on her case. Chris believes the mothers cooperated because of the mediation services provided by the county's child support staff and CO-PEP. For Chris, the CO-PEP program has helped him put his life back on track.

For more information on the CO-PEP program in Prowers County, contact Anthony LaTour at 719-336-7486, extension 182 or alatour@prowerscounty.net.



Chris Maestas on his CO-PEP experience

The idea of fatherhood for many is filled with happiness, confidence and is the greatest reward life can offer. That joy, however, can at times diminish and you fall into a black abyss of depression, fear, and hopelessness. I say this because I am a prime example for both ends of the spectrum.

My children's births were the happiest and most anticipated events for me personally. Knowing that I would have these lives to protect and provide for gave me an overwhelming feeling of happiness and the idea of an unconditional love, especially for me who stemmed from a broken home. Due to an inability to resolve issues with the moms, I was forced out of their lives and child support became a financial disaster. There was no light at the end of the tunnel.

I lost my focus, I was no longer a dad; it became a monthly bill, a hit on credit, and the loss of a driver's license. The hole widened, and the more I pulled from the surface the more it would collapse on me. CO-PEP changed that. I knew I had a purpose. The reconnection with my children inspired me to share my story, as I know many fathers feel the same way I did.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Referrals help Indiana parents get assistance

Amy Colgan Clark, Supervising Deputy Prosecuting Attorney — Child Support, Monroe County Prosecutor's Office, Indiana

Over the past several months, the Child Support Program of the Monroe County Prosecutor's Office has focused on building community partnerships to help remove barriers facing many noncustodial parents. We found that many of the noncustodial parents in our caseload were failing to pay their child support even though they wanted to provide for their children. They were legitimately unable to find work or had other barriers that prevented them from fulfilling their obligations.

To address these issues, we partnered with WorkOne, an Indiana agency that provides employment services, career counseling, education, and training to unemployed or underemployed individuals. The two offices signed a Memorandum of Understanding that allows us to refer unemployed noncustodial parents to WorkOne through the child support court.

As part of a court order, WorkOne caseworkers develop an employment plan with noncustodial parents. The plan might include adult education classes, specific skills training, resume building, application oversight, and more. If the noncustodial parent follows the plan and shows genuine efforts to find a job, the state agrees to defer pursuing traditional judicial sanctions. Because of this, parents can avoid jail time while they look for work.

The child support office is also partnering with Centerstone, one of the nation's largest not-for-profit providers of community-based behavioral health care. Similar to our agreement with WorkOne, we can refer noncustodial parents to Centerstone for mental health and addiction issues. As long as the participant complies with Centerstone's directives and treatment plan, the state does not pursue traditional judicial sanctions.

These programs help us partner with community-based organizations to achieve positive outcomes for Monroe County families. We are already seeing encouraging signs that our partnerships are creating opportunities for employment and improving parent well-being. And no one can possibly argue against the fact that spending time with their child instead of being in jail promotes a better situation for both parents and children.

For more information, contact Amy Colgan Clark at acolgan@co.monroe.in.us.

Forging new paths through the parenting time process

Elizabeth J. Oyer, Ph.D., Director, EvalSolutions Inc.

A team in Monroe County, Indiana, is using OCSE [Parenting Time Opportunities for Children](#) (PTOC) grant funding to create a better experience for single, never-married parents receiving child support services. Our goal is to improve protections for families around issues of violence while increasing access to parenting time for both parents. Our team includes the Monroe County Circuit Court, the county and state child support offices, and three community organizations — the Middle Way House, the Indiana University Family and Children Mediation Clinic, and Family Solutions.

We've made changes at every stage of the process to address safety...

Our team walked through the complete parenting time and child support processes, from applying for service to the court issuing a Parenting Time Order. This forced us to consider all of the steps within the system to find possible changes to improve safety.

We've made changes at every stage of the process to address safety in three ways:

Education

By providing staff training — locally and across the state — we created opportunities for court and child support staff to learn about family violence.

Action

We screen parents using a short version of the Mediation Clinic's interview tool. Based on the results, we provide our suggestions to the court so it can decide the best path for each family to take to develop a parenting time agreement. There are three paths.

- If there is no history of violence and the parents seem to agree — or are close to agreeing — they will generally go through the typical child support and parenting time hearings to create the official order. The judge might add mediation if there is any doubt that the parents are ready to make an agreement.
- If information shows a moderate history of violence (or if parents did not attend the screening), they meet with a mediator to draft a parenting agreement for the court's approval. In some cases, the mediator may learn there is a history of violence and then stop the mediation before they reach an agreement.

- Finally, if information shows heavy violence, an investigator completes a home study for the court. In some cases, the investigator will still work with the parents to make a parenting time agreement for the court's approval. We provide safety measures such as supervised visitation and monitored exchange services to these families.

All three paths end in a court-approved order, but the order might include some version of the agreement presented or it may not include any parenting time.

Support

In this new parenting time process, we created several opportunities to give families information or provide them with services. Soon custodial parents who complete a child support application will be able to request a private meeting at the child support office. They will learn about the local domestic violence program, their privacy options, and the methods for opting out of child support collection when there are safety concerns.

At the violence screening, parents receive a package of information on a variety of local services including services for family violence cases. We display the same information throughout the public spaces in the court and in the child support offices. In the near future, parents will be able to watch videos about the child support court process while they are in the waiting area. Additionally, families have access to monitored exchange services provided by Family Solutions.

Partnership and coordination

The final result is a parenting time system that expands staff knowledge, offers flexible action plans in cases of family violence, and increases services to families in need.

For more information, contact Commissioner Bret Raper at braper@co.monroe.in.us or Dr. Elizabeth Oyer at eyer@evalsolutions.com.

The final result is a parenting time system that expands staff knowledge, offers flexible action plans in cases of family violence, and increases services to families in need.

IN FOCUS

Unemployed in today's job market

Gretchen Tressler, OCSE

Consistent child support payments depend on the economic stability of the noncustodial parent. Most parents who owe child support have little or no reported earnings. Lower income parents and those with prior incarceration may lack a high school degree, the right job skills, a driver's license, and access to reliable transportation or affordable childcare. These and other limitations make it harder to find work let alone job search assistance.

The child support community can help minimize barriers to employment by learning more about job seekers and the current job market. Knowing more helps you connect the dots. If you can help parents understand the bigger picture, you might encourage them to think more creatively or carefully about their prospects.

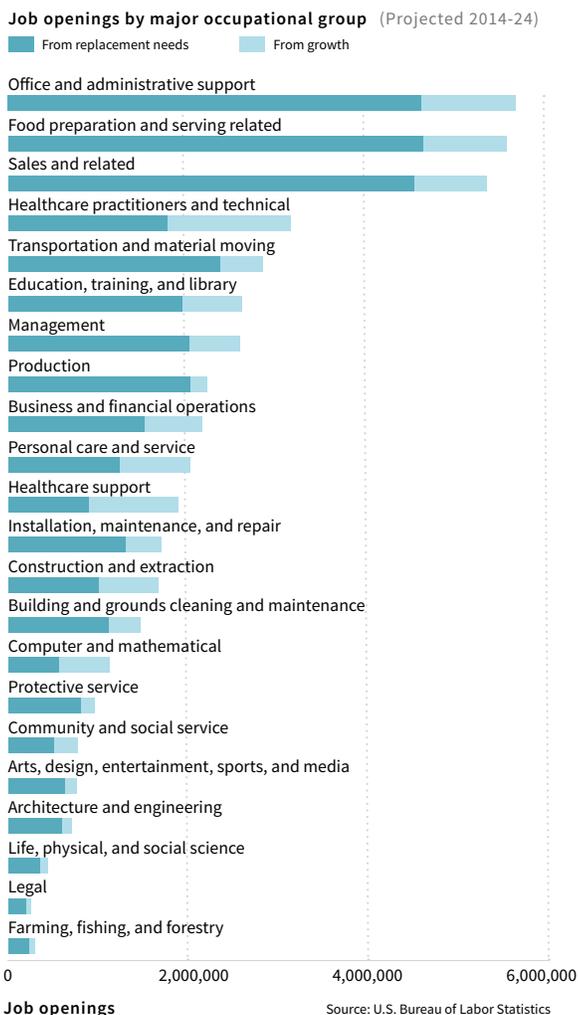
Snapshot of the unemployed

Many economists are celebrating what seems to be [a declining jobless rate](#). But their data doesn't give the whole picture. [Adding in incarcerated individuals of working age between 25 and 54](#), the unemployment rate looms larger. Even then, the numbers don't convey how hard the situation really is for some job seekers. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the longer you go without a job, the harder it is to find one. In this [2014 study](#), most unemployed had been without work for 27 weeks or longer. African Americans and Asian Americans were more likely than other groups to experience long-term unemployment. BLS also showed that men and adults 55 or older were more likely to be jobless, compared to women and younger Americans. Education had only a minor effect on unemployment.

For some, poverty is another consequence of joblessness. In a [Center for American Progress \(CAP\)](#) analysis of American households, CAP estimates that 35 percent of Americans experienced short-term poverty between 2009 and 2012. Looking at those who fell below the poverty line for two or more months, the research showed that temporary economic hardship is fairly commonplace. That's important to note because for those receiving state assistance benefits, the times are changing. Some states have new eligibility limits including [capping unemployment benefits](#) below the 26-week norm.

Many factors affect the American job seeker's prospects. Child support offices need to understand the complications to help parents improve their chances for employment. Jobs enable parents to make child support payments, avoid poverty, and gain more control in their lives.

continued



Trends affecting job seekers

The good news is that, generally, job creation is still on the rise after the Recession. Some industries are steadily gaining jobs, like occupations in healthcare support, personal care, and computers. Parents pursuing jobs in those industries may be more likely to improve their employment chances.

Both the [O*Net Bright Outlook](#) and the [BLS Career Outlook](#) websites share positive projections for job growth in the next few years. BLS gives job seekers a forecast by education level, starting with the high school diploma. It also has graphs that show the portion of job openings that are due to replacement needs versus actual growth. This information gives those considering a career change an idea about jobs where their long-term potential could be more secure.

Thinking ahead

Job readiness starts with knowledge. It is crucial for job seekers to know more about the odds and the opportunities they are facing.

Check out future editions of the Child Support Report for a look at ways to promote job readiness and increase outreach to job seekers.

PROMISING PRACTICES

Benefits of integrating Access and Visitation services

Michael Hayes, OCSE

If you work in a child support agency that never hears complaints from parents about visitation problems, feel free to skip ahead to the next article! If you're more like the rest of us child support professionals who regularly hear from parents about visitation problems, then please read on!

Currently, child support agencies in 27 states and two territories administer the [Access and Visitation \(AV\) grant program](#). Three additional states are currently transitioning their AV grant administration from another state office to the child support agency.

Benefits of integrating AV grant services

Child support already deals with parenting time; 36 states include a parenting time adjustment in their child support guidelines. Workers in all jurisdictions hear complaints about visitation from parents. By using AV grant funds to support accurate parenting time calculation adjustments and responding quickly to visitation complaints, your office will improve its customer service. You also communicate to parents that your office really does care about their family.

The AV grant is a great, untapped resource for the child support program (see below). Instead of telling parents that the staff can't do anything, the agency can use the AV grant to help parents in the program in a range of ways, including:

- Providing parenting time educational resources directly to parents;
- Offering alternative dispute resolution or legal education; and
- Helping parents establish parenting time orders.

Even when the child support agency isn't directly administering the grant, child support staff can make referrals to AV grant services if they know the providers and their services, and who is eligible for services.

continued

How untapped?

In FY 2015, more than 98,000 parents received AV funded services, but less than a third of those parents were child support agency referrals. In 28 states, child support agencies made no AV referrals and in additional eight states, fewer than 10 referrals came from the agency.

Congress encourages this direction. In [Public Law 113-183](#), Congress directed states to consider using the AV grant to help fund establishment of parenting time orders in the child support establishment process. Congress calls it a “double win,” leading to better child outcomes and more financial support.

Why administrative responsibility makes sense

When the child support agency administers the AV grant, it gives the child support program greater ability to develop services and resources that help families in the child support caseload. In addition, those services can be developed and delivered internally or procured through contracts with local courts and nonprofit organizations. As one state child support administrator recently said after her state moved AV grant administration into the child support program: “I thought it was going to just be a big administrative and reporting hassle with no benefit to us. But now that we’ve shaped the AV program to be a resource for parents with child support cases, I wish we’d done this years and years ago!”

For more information, please contact Michael Hayes, AV grant manager, at Michael.Hayes@acf.hhs.gov.

MAKE THE CONNECTION
www.MakeTheConnection.net

May is Mental Health Awareness Month. It is an important opportunity to continue the dialogue about mental health and wellness and to reduce the negative perceptions associated with seeking treatment. The success of our efforts depends on your support. Visit MakeTheConnection/StepForward to download materials you can use to show support for veterans. The Make the Connection website is a free, confidential VA resource where Veterans and their loved ones can privately explore such topics as health, wellness, and everyday life events and experiences.

SPOTLIGHT — SUPPORTING VETERAN AND MILITARY FAMILIES

Breaking the cycle of Veteran homelessness

Dr. Carma Heitzmann, Director, *Department of Veterans Affairs Homeless Veteran Community Employment Services*

Child support debt can be a major burden for anyone, but it’s especially hard for our homeless Veterans. Breaking the cycle of homelessness and unemployment is the key to removing this burden. Connecting Veteran parents with the help they need to support their children is an investment in the lives of the children we serve. One early intervention aims to empower Veterans through employment services and community support. For Veterans who are at risk of becoming homeless or have recently been homeless, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers Homeless Veteran Community Employment Services (HVCES).

HVCES, launched in mid-2014, uses Community Employment Coordinators to develop and provide services for homeless Veterans. The coordinators, as part of the VA’s Homeless Program team, lead efforts in helping homeless and at-risk Veterans find employment. To do this, they work closely with programs, such as VA’s Compensated Work Therapy program, and non-VA programs, such as Department of Labor grantees, local community and faith-based organizations, and employers. Together with their partners, the coordinators also find work to fill gaps in employment services for homeless Veterans.

By early 2016, program staff were in place at almost every VA medical center location across the country. Using a team-based approach, HVCES seeks to improve Veterans’ lives through stable housing and meaningful employment. This will also give them a chance to thrive in their local communities.

By assisting at-risk individuals, HVCES is helping Veteran parents play a more active role in their children’s lives.

For questions about the HVCES program, contact Dr. Carma Heitzmann, Director, Homeless Veteran Community Employment Services at Carma.Heitzmann@va.gov.

Useful resources

- [VA’s Homeless Veteran Community Employment Services](#)
- [Identifying and Meeting the Needs of Homeless Veterans: The CHALENG Process](#)
- [Child Support: Military & Veterans](#)

Photo courtesy of Flickr user James Lee



Child support resources for military and veteran families

In 2013, there were just over 100,000 active duty military, 90,000 reservists, and more than 535,000 veterans in the child support caseload. Because of the unique circumstances facing these families, many child support agencies have initiated outreach programs or established collaborations with other government agencies and service providers to better address the child support issues of service members and veterans. Our OCSE website has a number of resources that you can use to help military and veteran families in your caseload.

If you are looking for information, the [OCSE Military & Veterans webpage](#) is the best place to start because it identifies resources available to three different audiences: families, employers, and state agencies. OCSE developed many of the resources listed. Other links take you to external agencies or organizations such as the Department of Labor, the Department of Defense, and Military OneSource.

Here are some of our most requested resources for military members, veterans, and their families grouped by audience.

For Families

[A Handbook for Military Families: Helping You with Child Support](#) — This document supplements military parenting resources by providing information that a service member, or the spouse or former spouse, might need regarding paternity establishment; parenting time agreements; child custody; and child support establishment, enforcement, and modification. Each chapter ends with questions and answers from the perspective of each parent. Child support agencies may want to feature a link to the handbook on their own state child support, military, and veterans websites.

You can also talk to leaders at local military installations about the handbook. The legal, administrative, and welfare offices on base will find the handbook useful because it can help them respond to child support questions. First line supervisors and military commanders may also find this a handy addition to a leadership toolkit.

[State by State - How to Change a Child Support Order](#) — This resource provides general guidance on what each state requires when someone wants to change a child support order.

For employers

This section provides a link to the Labor department's Veterans' Employment and Training Service website that will give you information on how to help veterans transition to civilian life and find jobs. Another link takes you to the Defense Manpower Data Center website where a child support agency can verify someone's military service. It also offers information for employers about child support in general.

For state child support agencies

OCSE has four [fact sheets](#) that focus on service members, veterans, and child support.

- [Veterans in the Child Support Caseload](#) — Focuses on veterans who are noncustodial parents and how the child support program can help them.
- [Military Services and Child Support Partnerships](#) — Provides information on how the child support program can work with military and veterans organizations to help parents.
- [Ending Homelessness Among Veterans: The OCSE-VA-ABA Collaboration Project](#) — Explains how this partnership helps homeless veterans address their child support obligations so they can gain permanent housing.
- [Child Support Participation in Stand Down Events](#) — Describes how child support agencies have participated in Veteran Stand Down events.

Training

OCSE [Trainer's Guide for Working with the Military on Child Support Matters](#) — A two-day curriculum targeted for child support workers who process cases involving military members. Nine modules address core child support functions, with a focus on the military, as well as military-unique topics such as the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act. Trainers can tailor the contents for local use.

Veteran/Military Liaison Network (VMLN)

This is an OCSE-run network of child support professionals who agree to act as liaisons for their states and tribes on military and veteran child support issues. It is open to all tribal and state child support staff. The group holds quarterly conference calls where presenters discuss a military or veteran topic relevant to child support.

OCSE also hosts a Yammer social networking site so VMLN participants can discuss military and veteran child support issues. Yammer gives state and tribal child support staff a forum to discuss interstate case processing and share information members may find helpful.

If you work with military and veteran parents, consider joining the network! Send an email to james.murray@acf.hhs.gov to find out more.

Policy guidance

Periodically, OCSE issues guidance that relates to service members and veterans. For example, in March 2012, OCSE posted information on [income withholding and veterans benefits](#), which supplemented [Policy Interpretation Question 09-01](#) on garnishment of federal payments. [Dear Colleague Letter 13-25](#) discusses how child support agencies can assist veterans in their caseloads and identifies promising practices.

Federal Parent Locator Service

The Federal Parent Locator Service provides child support agencies with information about a veteran's or service member's address and income. If your state uses the State Services Portal, you also have access to DoD entitlement data for active members and reservists. This data helps you make sure that support orders are right-sized, and it eliminates expensive processing costs related to subpoenas.

Additional resources

A study revealed that veterans who owed child support were often in debt to the state — with interest — for public assistance provided to children who are now adults. [State Child Support Agencies With Debt Compromise Policies](#) identifies state child support agencies with arrears management programs.

For more information, visit the [OCSE Military & Veterans webpage](#).

DOL Veterans' Employment and Training Service

The DOL [Veterans' Employment and Training Service](#) (VETS) site provides a range of services to help with employment-related issues. It has specific information for transitioning service members, women veterans, employers hiring veterans, service providers, and veterans and families.

Visitors will find a list of regional and state sites they can go to for personal help in their locations. VETS also offers a toolkit for employers called America's Heroes at Work — Veterans Hiring Toolkit. You can also find information on the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) if you experience a service-related problem with a civilian employer.



On June 20, 2011, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on an important child support case, [Turner v. Rogers](#). Look for coverage in the June CSR.

Military OneSource offers parenting tips and connections to support services through its Safe and Sound campaign.



Child neglect is a scary term most parents would rather not think about. The reality is that child neglect is more common than many people realize — even among military families. Parenting can be especially tough for military families who may be away from their support systems, go through deployments with only one parent at home, or are managing a divorce miles apart from their spouses and children. Raising kids can be complicated, but keeping them [Safe and Sound](#) doesn't have to be.

Child support caseworkers can point military parents to the tools and resources available through Safe and Sound, such as [childproofing checklists](#) and information on state and installation guidelines or laws they need for supervising their kids. They can also find support, whether they're looking for parenting programs on the installation or childcare resources in their community. Please direct your military families to [Safe and Sound](#) today, or give them the Military OneSource phone number, 800-342-9647. They'll find tips and resources to help them avoid neglectful situations and be the best parents they can be for their military kids.

Child Support Report

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

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