

# Child Support Report

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## COMMISSIONER'S VOICE

### Veterans Outreach



November is upon us and that means we're getting closer to holiday shopping and spending time with family. It also means giving thanks and recognizing occasions like Veterans Day. Did you know that Veterans Day started out as Armistice Day, commemorating the end of World War I? In 1938, Congress designated it a federal holiday to honor veterans of the "war to end all wars." According to the [Department of Defense](#), after World War

II and Korea, the name was changed to Veterans Day and expanded to include all U.S. veterans.

There are veterans working in the child support program here in OCSE as well as in state and local offices across the nation. Thank you for your service to this country. Thank you, too, for your tireless work to help families reach financial independence through the child support program. It's a big reason we're able to keep a steady focus on improving services to veteran and military families within the child support caseload.

### 2019 — a year of learning

Through the [OCSE Veterans and Military Liaison Network](#), we held webinars featuring impactful services across diverse settings. Ohio and Maryland spoke on trauma-informed care and representatives from the HHS [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) explained the work they do to support veterans. California and New Hampshire shared their tips about child support outreach on military bases and in rural communities, and ways to positively transform military and veteran outreach initiatives at the county level.

Experts from philanthropy, state governments, and the nonprofit sector in New York, Maryland, Ohio, and California highlighted ways they promote and sustain meaningful father engagement regardless of a father's physical location or custodial situation. We even included information on ways that states and counties have been creative with implementing their fatherhood initiatives to work with noncustodial dads and prioritize fatherhood engagement as a critical factor in strengthening families. We're interested in highlighting the innovations of more states, counties, and tribes in 2020, so please send us stories about how you're implementing your engagement programs.

*continued*



### How Does HHS Support Military Families?

The Department of Health and Human Services and its operating divisions offer a variety of resources and programs specifically designed to support military families. We provide the list of resources as a handy reference in this newsletter on [page 9](#).

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### Veteran Statistics

According to the Census Bureau's 2018 American Community Survey, the U.S. had 18 million veterans

- 1.7 million were female
- 1.6 million were 18-34 years old
- 4.2 million were 35-54 years old
- 1.2 million reported incomes below the poverty level in the past 12 months

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## OCSE resources

I encourage you to visit the OCSE [Military and Veterans webpage](#). You'll find items that will help you with outreach, like the [Toolkit: Child Support Collaborations to Engage and Assist Veterans](#) and the [Handbook for Military Families](#). You'll find "how-to" information based on proven service models, and tools like PowerPoint presentations, sample forms, and templates. The [National Conference of State Legislatures Military and Veterans Affairs website](#) is another helpful resource with information on topics like military parent custody and visitation.

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs annual [Project CHALENG](#) survey, one of the top ten unmet needs of male and female veterans — going back as far as 2010 — is legal help with child support issues. Join the fight to help us change that reality. The OCSE Veterans and Military Liaison Network is open to all child support professionals. Become a member by emailing us at [OCSE.DPI@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:OCSE.DPI@acf.hhs.gov) or [CSR.Editor@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:CSR.Editor@acf.hhs.gov). Help us expand veterans outreach nationally. Let's continue to give back to the men and women who have nobly sacrificed for the liberties we enjoy in this country.

*James Murray, Senior Advisor  
to the Commissioner*

## Medicare Enrollment Ends Dec. 7

According to the Census Bureau, 7.2 million grandparents are living with their grandchildren. Some are even caregivers to those grandchildren. If you're in this situation, it's important for you to take care of yourself so you can take care of your family. What mix of Medicare benefits and costs works best with your needs and budget? Now's the time to review plan choices for 2020 — like Prescription Drug Plans and Medicare Advantage Plans — to see what's right for you. [Visit the 2020 Medicare Plan website](#) to compare plans. The site is also available in Spanish, [Encuentre un plan de Medicare para 2020](#). Open enrollment ends Saturday, Dec. 7.

## New Report Examines Enforcement Tools

The HHS Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) recently released a child support report, [An Examination of the Use and Effectiveness of Child Support Enforcement Tools in Six States](#).

This study examines the implementation of enforcement tools in six states and how enforcement practices vary. Key highlights:

- States reported that automatic income withholding and tax refund intercepts are the most effective tools for collecting child support.
- States reported that the effectiveness of enforcement tools is determined largely by noncustodial parents' willingness and ability to pay support.
- States value employment services as a way to increase ability to pay, but these services require other sources of funding and are costly to sustain.
- Administrative procedures and automated data systems can improve the efficiency of enforcement practice.
- Predictive analytics shows promise for improving the effectiveness of enforcement tools.
- Among study states, there is no clear relationship between how states use enforcement tools and their child support collection rates.

For information on other studies, visit the [ASPE Child Support webpage](#).

## Help for Your Noncustodial Parent Employment Program

OCSE launched a collection of resources and extensive technical assistance called [Knowledge Works!](#) to help child support agencies assess, design, implement, and enhance a child support-led employment program for noncustodial parents.

## Case Aides — Family Helpers, Self-Developers

Sunshine Parker, Human Services Director,  
Public Health and Human Services,  
Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians



The Family Safety Program began in 2015 when we took over the administration of child welfare and adult protective services for all tribal trust lands from North Carolina. The tribal trust lands of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, what we call the Qualla Boundary, cover nearly 85 square miles over five counties on the western tip of the state.

The Family Safety Program's mission is to have healthy, safe, intact Cherokee families. We achieve that by integrating behavioral health services with child welfare and bringing services to families. We knew that one of the struggles for the program would be reaching families who reside on trust lands that are as much as two hours away from the main program office.

By 2017, the Family Safety Program had served almost 2,400 individuals through child and adult protective services and 116 children through its foster care services. The program was having trouble getting parents and children to their appointments, court dates, and other services. Given these numbers and our struggle to provide the proactive services the program strives for, the Family Safety Program added staff members called case aides.

In late 2017 and early 2018, the Family Safety Program hired three case aides. They perform several tasks:

- Provide transportation both inside and outside the Qualla Boundary for children and families under the Family Safety Program
- Supervise parental and family visitation
- Monitor visitation time and decide to terminate visits if necessary
- Make immediate oral visitation reports and follow up with written reports
- Provide routine clerical support to professional staff including filing and gathering documentation for client files
- Assist with data entry and monthly report completion

To date, the case aides have provided transportation support to over 300 clients, delivered dozens of food boxes, completed over 20 hospital visits, and helped file and update vital information to a new database system. The case aides have become a vital tool in the success of providing proactive services to families instead of referring the families to appointments they may not be able to attend.

*The case aides have become a vital tool in the success of providing proactive services to families*

Perhaps the program's greatest accomplishment is that one case aide completed a bachelor's degree in social work and moved into an investigator role in child protective services. The other two case aides are pursuing four-year degrees so they can move into social work positions within the agency. Adding case aides has not only proven beneficial to the families we serve, but also to the program itself as the case aides can learn the ins and outs of the program, complete their degrees, and move up into frontline roles for the agency.

For information about our case aides program, contact Sunshine Parker at [barbpark@nc-chokeee.com](mailto:barbpark@nc-chokeee.com).



## GRANTS AND WAIVERS

# Cherokee Nation Builds Awareness and Connections through Digital Grant

Kara Whitworth, Director, and Marisa Walton, Special Projects Officer, *Cherokee Nation Office of Child Support Services*

Cherokee Nation Office of Child Support Services (CNOCSS) in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, maintains over 2,300 cases and collects approximately \$4 million annually. Our staff works to honor the rich history, diverse culture, and contributions of the largest federally recognized tribe of approximately 375,000 citizens. Established in 2007, CNOCSS is dedicated to strengthening individuals and families by helping them strive towards a bright future.

Many tribal families in rural communities and remote areas share barriers such as access to information and support services. To help solve the challenge, CNOCSS is working to bridge communication gaps and increase program awareness.

As one of the 2019 federal grantees [testing digital marketing to increase participation in the child support program](#), we've been able to focus specifically on three initiatives.

- Website: We developed a [user-friendly web platform](#) to enhance awareness.
- Informational videos: These [videos](#) provide Cherokee communities with child support program information, highlight the families we've served, and explain how CNOCSS has specifically assisted them.
- Text Messaging: We're working on improving two-way communication with existing clients through texting.

The first two initiatives are already available to tribal communities. We look forward to developing the third intervention and determining how this may influence regular communication with program participants. Native American Heritage month is the beginning of heightened awareness by all of us, but CNOCSS works 365 days a year to raise awareness!

For more information, visit the [Cherokee Nation Office of Child Support Services website](#).

## The Cherokee Nation



Kara Whitworth  
Director of Child Support Services, Cherokee Nation





Commissioner Scott Lekan and James Murray from OCSE (front row, far right) with Mecklenburg County government leaders and employees who attended the June 2019 For Men By Men, Noncustodial Parent Orientation.

## PROMISING PRACTICES

# Mecklenburg County Child Support Services Successfully Employs Men

Rodney Adams, Director, *Department of Community Resources*; Fonda Clifton, Assistant Director, and Linda Rhyne-McKinley, Management Analyst, *Child Support Services, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina*

History has placed a misdirected emphasis on noncustodial dads as willfully refusing to support their children. At Mecklenburg County Child Support Services, we realized that most noncustodial parents want to pay and support their children, but they often have barriers obstructing them. We are constantly analyzing these barriers and seeking ways to help by using strategies such as holding noncustodial parent orientations and reviewing support orders to ensure they are right-sized and enforced. Yet, our most challenging strategy was in hiring men. When a man walked through the doors of Child Support Services, we would internally ask, “How can we positively impact this man’s life and offer services in an equitable and respectful environment?”

## Men beget men!

Asking these internal questions led to an enlightening vision; attract males with the presence of other males. Our successful effort to recruit and retain men in child support employment also developed into an initiative called For Men By Men, the Noncustodial Parent Orientation. The quarterly orientation is organized and facilitated by the men in our office.

They offer noncustodial dads the opportunity to meet in a supportive environment, hear information about the child support program, and receive free family law advice from our legal partners in matters such as custody and visitation.

The initiative started about eight years ago when we realized that we needed to address the stress and frustration of male noncustodial parents. We broadened the required traditional work experience so we could consider applicants that did not necessarily have a background in social work, case management, or customer service. This is the pillar of our success in hiring and retaining men. Men relate to other men, plain and simple.

## Successful outcome

Today, we have grown from five to 30 male employees, which is nearly a quarter of our 127 full-time staff. This has strengthened interpersonal relationships with our male customers. In the past, noncustodial dads said they felt intimidated by the mostly female-dominated field. Many would come into the office with preconceived notions.

However, as the community became aware of our new approach — from enforcement to father engagement — through our orientations, the perception and participation of our noncustodial dads changed. They no longer feel defenseless because they can come into the office knowing we have male staff who understand their viewpoint.

For more information, visit the [Mecklenburg County Child Support Enforcement website](http://Mecklenburg County Child Support Enforcement website), call 704-432-9300, or contact Linda Rhyne McKinley at [linda.rhyne-mckinley@mecklenburgcountync.gov](mailto:linda.rhyne-mckinley@mecklenburgcountync.gov).

# From Caseworker to CEO — What I Learned in Child Support

Kelly Little, CEO, *Urban Institute for Strengthening Families*

I didn't start my career in the Mecklenburg County, NC, child support office; I was transferred into it when I returned from a military deployment. I wasn't pleased at first, but the radical shift was a diamond in the rough because it helped me fuse all my strengths together to create the comprehensive "Me." This self-growth led me to developing a new organization to help fathers move forward.

## A new perspective

This shift allowed me to witness and experience the interaction of fatherhood, relationships, parenting, and emotions. I also saw the lack of communication between many parents, and had the chance to assess service institutions charged with elevating the human condition. By seeing our interactions with fathers through a new lens, I was able to strategically integrate fatherhood resources into a holistic network. I revitalized partnerships and galvanized a skeptical community while increasing overall bandwidth to empower people.

Child support transformed my view of success as the embracing of different perspectives and cultures. I saw that we needed systems and institutions to join together to create transformational impact and address the root cause of issues, not surface-level problems.

When I left county child support, I established the [Urban Institute for Strengthening Families](#). My goal was to build

an eco-system of visionaries willing to wage war on the status quo by redefining the perception, roles, and support given to fathers.

## Employment services add value

Historically, we know many people involved in human services had negative perceptions of the importance and roles of fathers. Many people thought of them as dead beats rather than dads who were dead broke and in need of employment support. Emerging global interest in father research is strengthening the fatherhood movement, and scientific studies confirm the significant physical, emotional, and overall impact that fathers provide to their children's development.

At the institute, we realize diverse sectors of the community offer strategic opportunities to serve fathers and families, but they can't do it alone. The employment sector is a critical component that allows agencies to provide fathers another way to increase their self-esteem and self-confidence. It also provides essential skills that reduce barriers while creating a pipeline to economic mobility. Working with diverse professionals — law enforcement, social and community services, child support, and health professions — has cultivated an environment of trust, synergy, and inclusiveness that has helped us empower families.

We must continue to build a fatherhood culture that's flexible, vibrant, and innovative, and helps families assess, diagnose, and solve problems voluntarily. People parent differently; let's ensure that fathers are present and have a presence.

For information, visit the [Urban Institute for Strengthening Families website](#) or contact Kelly Little at 704-658-5520.



A community of men working together in a safe space to promote, discuss, and uplift the institution of fatherhood (Kelly Little at front center).

## Men Get More Than Trims at Local Barbershops

Tracie Tillman, Executive Liaison, IV-D Child Support Division, LaPorte County, IN

The focus of the LaPorte County, Indiana, Barbershop Talk initiative is to open up a safe space for males in the community to voice their opinions, experiences, and concerns regarding child support. While they're waiting for a cut and shave, we talk to them about the importance of child support and the services we provide at the LaPorte County IV-D Child Support Division. We even update dads on changes in laws and procedures that affect a parent who has been court ordered to pay child support or needs to establish paternity and a child support order.

### Cutting to the chase

I often hear there is a disconnection between our office and male parents. They feel they have limited involvement or input with the child support program. Many of the non-participants gather their own facts based on hearsay. I want to remove the negative stigma about child support by providing information supported by facts. The child support division and the Commission on the Social Status for African-American Males co-host The Barbershop Talk Initiative to collaborate and break down barriers with men in the community who feel disconnected.

I held the first talk in August at Marvelous Cuts Barbershop. I set up a display table that provides various literature regarding our services, child support calendars, and other resources. During the second series in September, held at Kuttin Up Beauty and Barbershop, parent and program participant Jamal Taylor said, "The full spectrum of child support should be considered, not just the financial side. And offer more parenting programs."

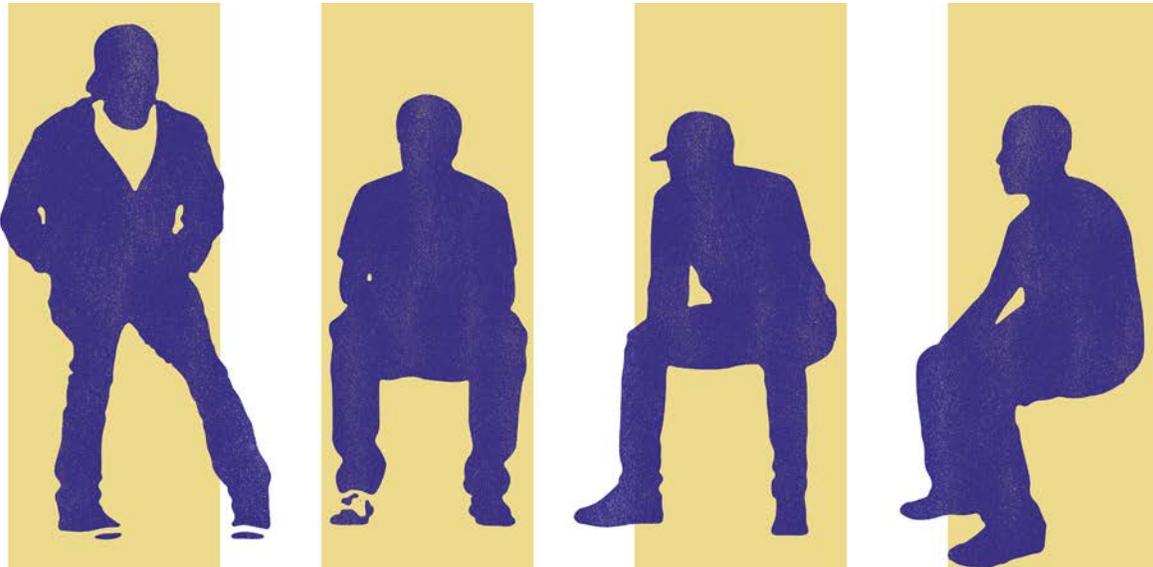
## Reaching our biggest audience

Many members of our child support caseload reside within the boundaries of the county's largest municipality. According to the CensusReporter.org, Michigan City has a population of over 31,000. Our division has nearly 5,000 active cases. Based on a report from the Indiana Child Support Resource Database, approximately 30% of our caseload has a noncustodial parent residing within the city. If you include both the custodial and noncustodial parent, the percentage would increase to 51%.

In Michigan City, 53% of the population is at subsistence level or below. Many parents with a child support order struggle to meet their obligation or cannot pay. Support orders were once based on both parents' weekly gross incomes or imputed at minimum wage if unemployed. Failing to take into account their actual means to pay has caused families to suffer financial hardship. Omitting support does not overlook that it takes both parents to contribute financial support for a child. During our Barbershop Talks, we let them know the child support staff can assist by getting the right size order. We tell them a parent does that by requesting a review of the current child support order or through an administrative case review — especially when their financial circumstances change!

County Prosecuting Attorney John Lake, the Michigan City Commission on the Social Status of African-American Males, and I are trying to bring the community together to support our kids. And we feel it starts with discussions like the Barbershop Talks!

For more information, contact Tracie Tillman at [tillman@laportecounty.org](mailto:tillman@laportecounty.org) or call 219-874-5611 ext. 7823.



## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

# Onboarding and Retaining Good Child Support Employees

Jeff Isaacson, Trainer and Curriculum Developer, and Graham Button, Training Program Coordinator, *Child Support Training and Outreach Project, Professional Development Program*

As unemployment rates go down and experienced employees retire taking their knowledge and skills with them, it's becoming more challenging to hire, train, and retain new child support workers. New York has developed a partnership with the Professional Development Program (PDP) of Rockefeller College at the University at Albany and the Research Foundation for State University of New York to train child support workers throughout the state.

But before we could start, we first had to establish what constitutes a good child support worker.

PDP conducted an extensive needs assessment to determine the skills a local child support worker must have to perform their tasks:

- Legal familiarity to deal with the court process
- Navigating financial information and accounting
- Operating within the office culture and effectively using computer programs
- Positive customer service

Many child support workers in New York come to the job with limited experience and knowledge of the program. With 58 local social service districts throughout the state, they may hire new workers on any day.

To address this challenge effectively, PDP established a plan to train new workers from the first day they are hired using multiple platforms. We developed on-demand videos and desk-aids to introduce workers to the child support program and train them on discrete job functions. PDP also offers a variety of monthly webinars related to job tasks, such as how to use the basic features of New York's child support computer system.

We also offer onsite courses for more complex subjects, including the three-day Child Support 101 training, which is offered approximately six times per year throughout the state. This training gives workers an excellent overview of program functions, while simultaneously focusing on the job tasks they will likely encounter. The focus is not to load participants with information but to inspire them to want to learn more.

We strive to have participants look at current processes through fresh eyes and solicit suggestions to improve their local practices. They are also encouraged to network with workers from other local districts to compare practices.

This interaction gives new workers the ability to acquire more than just knowledge. They also develop a connection to the child support workforce and motivate each other along their journeys as child support professionals.

After new workers complete this training, they are strongly encouraged to take advantage of more specialized courses.

The approach with this plan is that you must crawl before you can walk, and walk before you can run. By using multiple platforms with on-demand resources and trainer-led courses held regularly, new workers can learn at their own pace and continue to learn throughout their careers with more specialized courses. Professional development must be an ongoing process, and our training program supports worker growth through continual training and resource development.

The team approach used in New York — a partnership between the state office, local districts, a nonprofit, and a university — can be duplicated and implemented in other settings to ensure skilled child support workers are available to help children and families receive the economic support they deserve.

For more information, contact Jeff Isaacson at [jeff.isaacson@otda.ny.gov](mailto:jeff.isaacson@otda.ny.gov) or Graham Button at [graham.button@otda.ny.gov](mailto:graham.button@otda.ny.gov).

## Child Support Report

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Lynn Johnson  
Assistant Secretary for Children and Families

Scott Lekan  
Commissioner, OCSE

Shawyn Drain  
Director,  
Division of Customer  
Communications

Kim Danek  
Editor  
[CSR.Editor@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:CSR.Editor@acf.hhs.gov)



## How Does HHS Support Military Families?

The Department of Health and Human Services and its operating divisions offer a variety of resources and programs specifically designed to support military families.

### Children and Families

- [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#): This network improves access to care, treatment, and service for children and adolescents exposed to traumatic events. It includes the Military Family Resource Area and Knowledge Bank, an online database of information about the problems facing military families and children.
- [Military Families Considering Adoption](#): The Administration for Children and Families Child Welfare Information Gateway answers questions about adoption of children by military personnel and their families. It includes a listing of adoption agencies able to place U.S. citizens living abroad, information on the adoption reimbursement program for active duty members of the military services, and a bulletin explaining the benefits of adoption by military families.
- [Child Support Enforcement for the Military and Veterans](#): This program ensures that children can count on reliable support from their parents. Military families face unique challenges because of deployments or other lengthy separations. Now, state child support programs intervene earlier and respond quicker to parents' changing circumstances so that support orders remain reasonable and fair.

### Health

- [MedlinePlus for Veterans and Military Health](#): This NIH website serves as a resource center for veterans seeking information on health issues suffered as a result of wartime.
- [Find Federally Qualified Health Centers](#) available in most cities and many rural areas. HHS's Health Resources and Services Administration funds health centers that deliver comprehensive, high-quality preventive and primary health care, which may include oral health, behavioral health, and substance abuse services, to patients regardless of their insurance status or ability to pay.
- [How to Help Veterans & Their Families](#) (HRSA): Learn how you can help veterans locate community health care facilities.
- [Veterans' Health Activities](#) (CDC): Find information on Vietnam and Gulf War health-related studies.
- [Active Duty and Veteran Women's Health](#) (WomensHealth.gov): Find information and resources for women veterans.

### Jobs

- [Veteran Employment Program Offices](#) (FEDShireVETS): Find a list of Federal agencies and their Veteran Employment Program contacts.
- [Special Appointing Authorities for Veterans](#) (FEDShireVETS): Find guidelines for Special Hiring Authorities for Veterans.
- [HHS Careers Help Desk Contacts](#): If you have issues related to a specific vacancy announcement, or you have trouble logging into HHS Careers, please contact the individuals listed in the vacancy announcement or the appropriate helpdesk listed on the Help Desk Contacts page for assistance.

### Substance Abuse and Mental Health

- [Military Families Page](#): This page is designed to help military families and veterans deal with behavioral health issues associated with military service. SAMHSA offers support through technical assistance for state, territory, and tribal behavioral health systems serving service members, veterans, and their families.
- [Veterans Crisis Line](#): Veterans in emotional crisis have free, 24/7 access to trained counselors. Veterans can call the Lifeline number, 1-800-273- TALK (8255), and press "1" to be routed to the veterans Suicide Prevention Hotline.
- [Women Veterans and Mental Health](#) (WomensHealth.gov): Find information and resources on the mental health needs of women veterans.
- [HealthFinder.gov for Veterans and Military Health](#): This page includes A to Z searchable information from Suicide Prevention to Frequently Asked Questions about PTSD.
- [Help for Service Members, Veterans and Their Families](#): Current and former service members may face different mental health issues than the general public.

*This information is also located on the webpage, [How Does HHS Support Military Families?](#)*