1. INTRODUCTION

The child support community can play an important role in helping this country end homelessness among veterans. In fact, homeless veterans and their service providers say that legal assistance with child support issues is one of their top unmet needs. In 2010, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), through the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and the American Bar Association (ABA) collaborated to address homeless veterans’ child support issues to help remove barriers to housing and employment. They established nine pilot sites in cities across the country. Although the sites used different service delivery models, each included the local child support agency, a legal provider, and either the VA or a veteran service provider. Outcomes included: the elimination of arrears, more realistic arrears payment plans, modification of ongoing support amounts, dismissal of warrants, closure of cases, and reinstatement of driver’s licenses. Some of the less objective outcomes mattered even more to the veterans and the collaboration partners, such as: the reestablishment of relationships with families, a sense of empowerment from having addressed a longstanding legal issue, less anxiety, and increased trust in “the system.”

Other child support agencies have expressed a desire to provide similar outreach to veterans. In response, OCSE has developed this toolkit for working with veterans, especially homeless and at-risk veterans, to help them address outstanding child support issues. The target audience is the child support program. However, the toolkit also includes suggestions for legal providers who want to target services to veterans with child support issues, and for VA partners or partners who are veteran service providers.

The toolkit has several components. One component is practical “how-to” information based on the service models that the pilot sites used. In addition, there are online components: a series of Power Point presentations and sample forms and templates. The toolkit presents lessons learned, promising practices, and information that is helpful for establishing effective collaborations to serve at-risk veterans.