

Child Support Report

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COMMISSIONER'S VOICE

2020 Priorities



A new year offers the chance to look back at accomplishments, look ahead at ways to enhance the child support program and our services to families, and then set new priorities.

Last year, OCSE accomplished several of our priorities. We hosted our first state systems symposium with 40 states and territories. We held a series of trainings about domestic violence and another series on federal reporting. We awarded [intergovernmental case processing grants](#) to seven states and two tribes to test how child support programs can increase payments and improve intergovernmental case processing.

We also supported child support agencies interested in implementing or enhancing their noncustodial parent employment program. We issued policy guidance on the [availability of funding for noncustodial parent work activities](#) and released *Knowledge Works!* to provide training, planning tools, and other resources. Read more about this initiative on page 2.

For 2020, we have four main priorities. We'll focus on providing technical assistance to states that are modernizing their systems, making data-informed decisions, promoting the child support program in a positive way, and strengthening our state and tribal partnerships.

State system modernization

We know that many state automated systems are outdated. For states looking to modernize their systems, we'll offer a series of webinars to exchange information and support states as they navigate the process. We also plan to host another state system symposium in 2021.

Data analytics

Data should inform our decisions. We want to provide data analysis and reports that state child support directors can turn into actionable information to improve program performance. We've been working with the National Council of Child Support Directors (NCCSD) as well as a pilot group of state and regional OCSE representatives to determine the best reporting mechanism, the data that should be included, and which reports are priority.

Program awareness

We'll continue the efforts with the [NCCSD/NCSEA/OCSE Public Relations Committee](#) to develop and promote a more positive image of the child support program so that families have a holistic awareness and understanding of our services.

Federal, state, and tribal partnerships

We plan to roll out more training series, including training specifically requested by tribal child support programs. Financial management training is also on our radar. We'll release a new funding opportunity this spring to leverage the child support program's expertise in developing interventions to educate teens and young adults about the financial, legal, and emotional responsibilities of parenthood. I encourage state and tribal programs to apply. Watch our [Grants webpage](#).

I want to emphasize that the federal office is here to help. By strengthening our partnerships, providing technical assistance and training, and promoting a positive message, we can enhance the program and our services. I look forward to us working closely together to help children and families. Best wishes for a successful 2020!

*Linda Boyer,
Deputy Commissioner*

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Ideas for Improving Employment Programs

Through March 6, 2020, ACF is gathering feedback on how to create a comprehensive, multi-system approach that addresses barriers nonresident parents face to support their children financially and emotionally.

Share your expertise by responding to key questions. Read the [Federal Register notice](#) to learn more.

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IN FOCUS

Knowledge Works! Resources for Child Support-Led Employment Programs

Chad Edinger, OCSE

As many as one-third of noncustodial parents (NCPs) want to pay their support but can't because they are unemployed or underemployed and face significant barriers to getting a job.

OCSE now offers Knowledge Works, a new set of resources that can help you implement or enhance a child support-led NCP employment program.

An NCP employment program can help:

- Increase parental participation in the workforce
- Improve compliance with court-ordered child support payments
- Provide parents a path to financial self-sufficiency

Knowledge Works highlights child support-led NCP employment programs in several jurisdictions, provides access to subject matter experts, offers training, supplies sample documents created by various states, and promotes peer-to-peer learning and knowledge transfer.

OCSE held stakeholder conversations, mainly with state directors, to develop the resources. The resulting product helps child support agencies assess, design, implement, and develop employment programs. The resources are grounded in best practices. And they're based on existing models that allow for customization and address impediments to local innovation.

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Training series

During stakeholder conversations, directors identified 20 potential employment program topics for training. Using the peer-to-peer model, we developed a training series based on identified needs.

In November 2019, federal staff and subject matter experts from the Colorado and Maryland human services departments presented the first Knowledge Works webinar, "Partnering with TANF for Employment Services for Noncustodial Parents." In the upcoming March webinar, federal presenters and experts from Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin will explain recent guidance and state experiences on reinvesting incentive payments and using Section 1115 waivers to fund employment services for noncustodial parents.



Knowledge Works Provides the Answers

How will my state fund an employment program? Are there legislative changes we need to make before we can begin? How will we enroll participants?

These are just a few of the questions to consider when setting up an employment services program for NCPs. Knowledge Works has two helpful documents, the [Guide for Employment Services Implementation and Program Planning](#) and accompanying [checklist](#), that will break down major decisions into actionable steps based on best practices from programs that have successfully launched initiatives. The guide covers these topics:

- Funding: What are your options for funding?
- Policy and Legislative: Do you need new legislation, exemptions from laws and procedures, or other policy changes to run the program?
- Program Design/Staffing: Will you operate statewide? Should you create a pilot first? How will you allocate resources?
- Outreach and Engagement: When and how will you enroll targeted NCPs into the program?
- Partnerships: Who are key stakeholders you need to engage for success? What other partnerships will you need?
- Service Delivery: What are the enhanced services you want to provide, how will you develop these, and who will provide them?
- Program Evaluation: How will you measure the impact of the program?

Check out the [Planning Tools, Policy Resources, and Funding Guidance webpage](#) to find other useful tools.

Existing program models

The best programs must have an effective way to identify, recruit, and enroll NCPs who need employment services. These are the three primary models:

Mandatory: Child support agencies partner with courts to implement mandatory enrollment of NCPs into their employment services program. Child support caseworkers and attorneys identify parents that are pending contempt of court or show cause hearings and request that the court order the parent to participate.

Voluntary: Using specified criteria during case reviews, caseworkers identify parents who meet enrollment criteria. Then they either contact the parent to offer enrollment or refer them to program staff for outreach and recruitment.

Comprehensive: A “no wrong door” approach that includes identifying and recruiting participants for voluntary enrollment and requesting court-ordered mandatory enrollment.

Tools, resources, and funding

Knowledge Works includes a [Planning Guide and a Checklist](#) to help child support programs implement or enhance an employment program. It also provides policy resources on allowable funding sources and strategies. (See the sidebar on page 2.)

Programs have three options using federal funds to pay for employment services, two of which are OCSE-sponsored:

- [Section 1115 Waivers](#): Under Section 1115 of the Social Security Act, in certain circumstances, OCSE can waive specific program and funding requirements so a state or tribal child support agency can conduct activities that would not otherwise be allowable.
- [Exemption to Reinvest Child Support Incentive Payments](#): The federal government provides incentive payments to states that perform well on a range of measures. Section 458(f) of the Social Security Act allows states to use their incentive payments for activities approved by the HHS secretary.
- A third partnership option allows programs to use TANF funds for noncustodial employment services; see [TANF-ACF-IM-2018-01](#) for details.

The [What Works](#) section of the webpage includes evaluation reports, program summaries, and highlights of lessons learned. You can find sample documents produced by other state child support agencies that may help you increase your efficiency when you launch your own programs. We can help you develop and operate a child support-led employment program or connect you

to experts in other jurisdictions if you email a request to our [OCSE subject matter experts](#).

Future improvements

Soon, the webpage will also include a map of states and territories that operate child support-led employment programs. Each entry will have key operational details and contact information. Look for additional sample documents, resources tailored for tribes, and registration information for upcoming training webinars. And remember: don't recreate the wheel! Your counterpart on the other side of the country might have the solution you're looking for.

Knowledge Works was originally developed by Chad Edinger and Michael Hayes from OCSE, Lauren Antelo from the HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, and ACF Regional Administrator Nikki Hatch. Be sure to bookmark the [Knowledge Works Employment Programs webpage](#) so you can check for updates.

Don't Recreate the Wheel!

Through Knowledge Works, you can find expertise to help you develop your child support-led employment programs. We can help connect you to experts in other jurisdictions. Contact the [OCSE Subject Matter Experts](#) today!

The screenshot shows the OCSE Knowledge Works webpage. The header includes the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services logo, the Administration for Children & Families logo, and the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) logo. The main navigation menu includes About, Parents, Child Support Professionals (selected), Employers, Partners, Policy, Data, Grants, and Library. A search bar is located in the top right corner. The main content area features the title "Knowledge Works! Resources for Child Support-Led Employment Services" and a "Listen" button. Below the title, there is a message: "If you are a child support agency interested in implementing or enhancing a noncustodial parent employment program, OCSE can help." The page lists five resource categories, each with an icon and a brief description: 1. Existing Program Models: Get overviews of the three approaches to identify, recruit, and enroll program participants. 2. Planning Tools, Policy Resources, and Funding Guidance: Download and Use a Guide and Checklist for Employment Services Implementation and Program Planning. Access recent guidance identifying allowable federal funding sources and strategies, and read overviews of federal funding approaches. 3. What Works: Find resources that show "What Works," including evaluation reports, program summaries, and highlights of lessons learned during implementation. The Evaluation Continuum provides guidance on how to measure results and review evidence to determine program improvement. 4. Sample Documents, Forms, and Templates: Don't recreate the wheel! These sample documents from other states can help you with design, partnership development, and program operation. 5. Get Help With Noncustodial Parent Employment Programs: We can help child support professionals develop and operate a child support-led employment program or connect you to experts in other jurisdictions. Send a request to our OCSE Subject Matter Experts.

Helping Wyoming Parents Overcome Job Barriers

Kristie Arneson, IV-D Director, and
Laura VanBuskirk, Project Manager,
Wyoming Child Support Program

In Wyoming, like many states, we know we have a population of noncustodial parents who are willing but aren't able to pay child support. This month we're launching a new child support employment program targeted to parents who want to be responsible but face barriers getting jobs.

Wyoming has strong relationships with other state child support programs — and our TANF program is under the purview of the Wyoming Department of Family Services. Still, we knew that developing this new program would require outside partners and strategic planning to reach our goal.

Our program model uses the “no wrong door” approach to recruit parents who owe support...Whatever door our customers come through, the goal is to increase compliance by removing employment barriers.

Finding tools and advice

Thanks to the help of Knowledge Works and especially the subject matter expertise of OCSE program specialist Chad Edinger, we created the Work Initiative Network (WIN), and have pilot programs ready to go in Cheyenne, Gillette, and Lander to give us a mix of urban and rural populations.

We received both the [Planning Guide and the Checklist](#) to document all the steps for a successful launch. The electronic versions are centrally located with other documents on the Knowledge Works website. That means there's no searching through emails, files, or other drives for that critical source. Knowledge Works also referred us to our peers in North Dakota because their child support program has been providing employment related services for over 10 years. Having OCSE support our program made it easier to learn best practices from other states and agencies so we could successfully customize services to our clients.

Finding money and parents

WIN will get funding through TANF dollars and will partner with the Wyoming Department of Workforce Services. Our offices will provide case management services with a focus on child support, and Workforce

Services will cover employment readiness and placement.

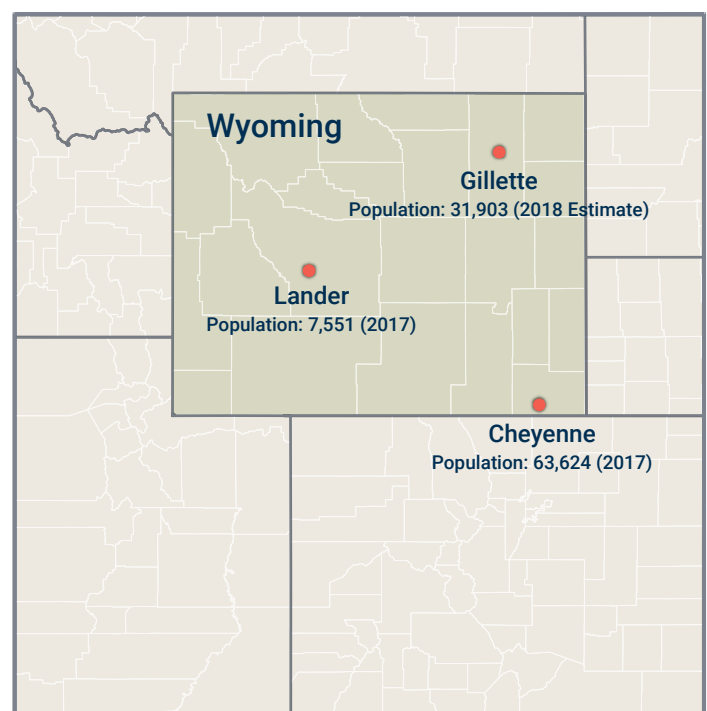
Our program model uses the “no wrong door” approach to recruit parents who owe support and are in various stages of the child support process. We will recruit parents who've received a first notice about a driver's license suspension and those facing show cause hearings. Whatever door our customers come through, the goal is to increase compliance by removing employment barriers (such as lack of job skills) and finding incentives (like arrear adjustments) for success.

Adapting to change

A cornerstone of our Wyoming child support program is a paradigm shift that creates a consumer-centric approach to address the individual barriers that affect compliance. Our staff has been trained in motivational interviewing techniques for engaging parents and addressing their individual needs. Both the child support and workforce services staff will receive training and ongoing coaching on providing intensive case management services to an impoverished population with barriers.

Many child support professionals in Wyoming appreciate the cultural shift. We asked attendees at a state conference what they found frustrating in their work. They overwhelmingly responded that they didn't have the necessary tools to help parents who owe support, including those with employment issues. WIN will provide the tools and benefit not only the child support program, but more importantly, our state and our Wyoming families.

For more information about the program, contact Laura VanBuskirk at laura.vanbuskirk@wyo.gov.



COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Co-Parenting Services and the Child Support Program

Frances Pardus-Abbadessa, Executive Deputy Commissioner, NYC Office of Child Support Services

In October 2019, over 200 adults gathered to see how we could make the lives of New York City children better. During the NYC Human Resources Administration's Office of Child Support Services Policy Conference, we explored the importance of two-parent involvement in generating long-term positive outcomes for children, and we considered the child support program's role in facilitating co-parenting. One of the nation's leading poverty researchers, Dr. Kathryn Edin from Princeton University's Bendheim-Thoman Center for Research on Child Well-Being delivered the forward-looking keynote on reimagining child support as a family-building institution.

I relayed that more than half of all children will live apart from one parent by the time they reach 18, according to a 2018 report from the U.S. Partnership on Mobility from Poverty. It is the well-being of these children — the ones who live apart from one of their parents — that is the central concern of the child support program.

Benefits of engaged parents

A substantial and compelling body of research says that children do better when they're supported by both parents, whether they live together or not. These children are more likely to stay in school, and less likely to be involved in the criminal justice system or use drugs. When fathers are engaged with their children, their kids experience less delinquency, aggression, anxiety, depression, and behavioral problems. As policy makers and practitioners, we cannot ignore this research.

Child support programs across the nation are realizing the importance of co-parenting, which includes initiating parenting plans, participating in parent education and mediation, and working out parenting time agreements. At the conference, subject matter experts described two models that have been working a long time in Minnesota and Illinois, and one recently launched in Florida.

Proven models

Judge Bruce Peterson of the Hennepin County Co-Parent Court in Minneapolis and his colleague Rose McCullough, NorthPoint family service manager for the Hennepin County co-parent program, shared their experiences of integrating parenting services — including co-parenting workshops, social service case management, and a comprehensive Parenting Plan agreement — with child support establishment.



Sheila Murphy-Russell, director of the DuPage County Family Center just west of Chicago, described their on-the-spot co-parenting services where staff offer the parents mediation, parent education, conflict management, and supervised parenting time. It all began in a Parentage Court in 1998.

Patterson Poulson, the case and order establishment process manager in the Florida Child Support Program, explained the state legislation implemented in January 2018, “to encourage frequent contact between a child and each parent to optimize the development of a close and continuing relationship.” Eligible parents statewide are notified that they can enter into a parenting time plan during the establishment or modification of an order.

Moving forward

The NYC Office of Child Support Services will be establishing a working group to brainstorm and explore the topic of co-parenting in greater depth. The benefits of finding effective ways to support co-parenting are too great to ignore, and we shouldn't pass up the opportunity to have a true two-generational impact in breaking the cycle of poverty. Collectively, we are up to the task.

For more information about the New York City co-parenting workgroup, email ocssinfo@dfa.state.ny.us and put “Co-Parenting Workgroup” in the subject line.

A substantial and compelling body of research says that children do better when they're supported by both parents, whether they live together or not.

From Volunteer to Child Support Director

Charles R. Smith, CEO, *Charles R. Smith Consulting*



In a world of dwindling government budgets, child support programs across the nation are challenged to continue to meet the needs of families but with smaller staffs. The high staff-to-case ratios have led offices to develop a more holistic family focus and use successful innovations such as predictive analytics and case segmentation. However, nothing beats having more people on hand to shoulder the load.

According to the [Corporation for National and Community Service](#), over 77 million adults in America volunteered in 2018, which translates into \$167 billion in economic value. Support programs should look to interns and volunteers to bridge your workload gaps and bolster your performance. I'm particularly fond of using interns and volunteers because that was my gateway into the child support program.

Getting my start

Before my last semester at Texas Tech, I spoke with my uncle about attending law school after graduation. He recommended that I volunteer at the Texas Office of the Attorney General Child Support Division in Lubbock to get a feel for legal work and to strengthen my resume. So I signed up to volunteer 20 hours a week during the fall semester.

The work the staff was doing was eye-opening. After assessing my skills, abilities, and interests, they put me in the legal section and assigned me two tasks: obtaining paternity affidavits from custodial parents and typing legal pleadings and after-court notes. Within a few weeks, the staff was treating me like a regular employee. They even invited me to join them for breaks and lunch. As a former athlete, there was nothing better than being part of a team and accomplishing goals.

Have a solid plan

Because a successful intern or volunteer program should do more than bring bodies through the door, they took a few minutes to gauge my interests and strengths so they could match them up to their corresponding needs. If a program can accomplish this task, they will create long-term volunteers and a strong internship program. Your program's best selling point is to have interns and volunteers who can serve as ambassadors.

During my time as a volunteer, I fell in love with a program I never knew existed, and I was adopted into an office family I didn't know I needed. After graduation, I put

Finding Volunteer Opportunities

Kim Danek, *OCSE*

A vice president of human resources at a Fortune 100 company once told me that, sadly, it's generally easier to get a job when you have a job. Volunteer opportunities can help parents keep resumes current and show that they are learning new tasks or maintaining proficiency in critical skills.

Faith-based or community services, health care facilities, and local community centers often need volunteers. The duties may not be glamorous, but such tasks can show adaptability and willingness to do what's necessary to accomplish a job. Local librarians may be able to help patrons search the internet for local opportunities. Some community colleges and chambers of commerce keep databases of volunteer opportunities as well.

If those searches don't produce results, look to a national database. The Points of Light Foundation, which came from a vision in George H.W. Bush's 1989 inaugural address, is an organization that equips and connects nonprofits so they can offer people ways to take action to make their communities better. The foundation can help individuals [search for volunteer opportunities](#) by location and interest.

law school on hold and started as a child support officer in January 1989. Because of the great experience I had as a child support division volunteer, I stayed with the program for 26 years eventually rising to the position of the state child support director. I also served in leadership roles with two child support associations.

I urge every program to create an intern or volunteer program. If we truly want to improve the perception of the child support program, let's tap into the millions of people ready to help make a difference and who will spread the word about the positive impacts of our work for families.

For more information about the internship program, send an email to crs@charlesrsmithconsulting.com.

GRANTS

New Phrase Spurs More Parents to Apply for Support

Jeff Obst, former Strategic Initiatives Director, *Indiana Child Support Bureau*



As reported in my article *Changing Just One Word Can Make a Big Difference* in the September 2019 *Child Support Report*, Indiana has been experimenting with how words affect behavior. Could the office drive more participation in its child support program by changing terminology? The team started with a single word, “apply.” By changing the word apply to “enroll,” they saw significant impacts to web traffic clicking through to the online application. This confirmed the team’s belief that words have a direct correlation to the way people perceive Indiana’s services, and it impacts their behavior.

Testing more terms

After the first success, the team continued to test a wide range of new words hoping to find the ones that would motivate citizens to take the first steps towards participating in Indiana’s Child Support program. They tested several terms including *Getting Started*, *Register*, *Sign Me Up*, and *Open a Case*. The impact of these words were even more pronounced. With these new words, the number of website visitors that clicked through to the online application was nearly double the number using the word “enroll”!

The biggest improvement came when they used the phrase *Getting Started*. This simple phrase increased the click-through rate by 115%. The team believes this phrase resonated the most with website visitors because it best matched their interest and had a noncommittal feel. They have a need, and they are looking for a place to start. *Getting Started* gave them a big road sign to the beginning of their journey.

Applying lessons learned

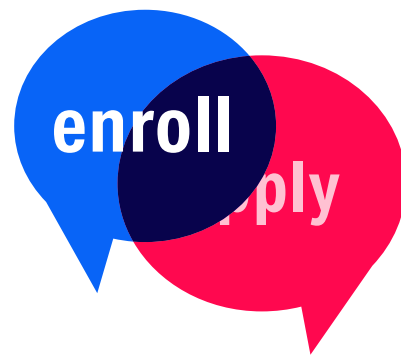
Based on the surveys during the planning phase, one of the biggest challenges in Indiana is program awareness. The largest intervention will involve running digital ad campaigns in participating counties. They want digital ads to be based on the results of early interventions so they’ll feature a call to action using words that worked best in early interventions.

Campaigns will also be broken into multiple groups and test various components of the digital ads such as the image, the tagline, and the message. Using a random control trial evaluation method, the team hopes to determine which combinations of components work best for Indiana citizens, and whether they need to use different digital ad campaigns

across geographical areas or demographics. Once they find the best performing digital ad campaigns, they can use them statewide to drive more awareness of the program.

Additionally, the team is planning do a deeper dive into their website terminology. They’ll start with randomized A/B testing of the Application page to remove the word “apply” entirely and replace it with variations of the phrase *Getting started with services*. Some visitors will see *Getting started with Child Support services*, while others will see *Getting started with IV-D services*. The team hopes to determine whether terminology such as IV-D is confusing to Indianans. They’re excited about working with OCSE to conduct this research.

If you’d like to follow Indiana’s progress or have questions about their processes, email CSBDigitalResearch@dcs.in.gov.



Child Support Report

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