

**NOTES FROM REGION V COLLABORATION CALL
OF AUGUST 18, 2008**

The call started with a discussion of OCSE's PAID initiative. The project to avoid increasing delinquencies began in early 2007. Its purpose is to serve as a way to showcase projects that have proved successful in increasing current collections and decreasing arrears in child support.

We have categorized these practices into five general areas:

- Setting appropriate orders
- Early intervention in cases
- Order review and modification
- Improving locate and enforcement
- Managing existing arrears

Examples of some of these activities were given and we discussed how they contributed to decreasing arrears and increasing current collections.

No one wants to set orders that are unrealistic and that the non custodial parent has no chance of being able to pay. Also, when situations change, prompt review and adjustment of the order keeps arrearages from building up and the current child support owed more in line with the payor's income.

More information can be found on the PAID initiative on the ACF website at www.acf.hhs.gov

Follow the child support links to the OCSE home page.

The second part of the call was a discussion led by Thelzeda Moore of the Indiana Child Support program on Re-entry, Marriage, Child Support, Fatherhood and Head Start.

Keith Smitherman, the Program Coordinator of the Circle City Fatherhood Coalition, spoke on the services his organization provides to fathers who are incarcerated and dealing with paternity issues.

www.ccfatherhood.org

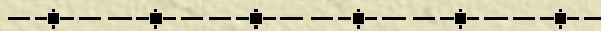
Curt Smith of the Indiana Healthy Marriage Program, discussed their work with the incarcerated.

The attached is a Powerpoint presentation on the work MN does with incarcerated parents given by MN staff at the OCSE Training Conference in Washington in August. We discussed this during the August call.



*Working With Inmates
From Inside the Prison*

**A Minnesota Strategy To
Improve Outcomes**



August 26, 2008

Presenters

✦ **Pat Krauth**, Direct Services Manager,
Department of Human Services

✦ **Lori Lofrano**, Child Support Liaison,
Minnesota Department of Corrections

✦ **Lisa Burkhardtzmeyer**, Supervisor,
Scott County MN

✦ **Susan Reardon**, Supervisor,
Dakota County MN

Overview

We will discuss:

- What we are doing in Minnesota from the state and county levels
- Why we are taking this approach to working with the incarcerated population
- How we are doing things differently
- Impacts and benefits to parents, the child support program, and the corrections community

***Strategies to Help Low
Income Families
(SHLIF)***

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Minnesota Department of **Human Services**

Minnesota

- ✦ **State supervised county administered with 87 counties**
- ✦ **Mainly a judicial state using an expedited process. Magistrates hired by each district hear most child support matters**
- ✦ **Statewide caseload of about 250,000**

Minnesota

(continued)

- ✦ **Approximately \$615 million collected last year**
- ✦ **Current support collection rate is 69%**
- ✦ **Arrears collection rate is 66%**
- ✦ **Order establishment is 82%**

SHLIF Project

Strategies to Help Low Income Families

- ✦ **SHLIF is Minnesota's approach to arrears prevention and management**
- ✦ **The goal of SHLIF is to improve voluntary current support collections and to help low income obligors overcome obstacles to paying support**

SHLIF Project

Strategies to Help Low Income Families (continued)

✦ **The SHLIF Project developed:**

- Multiple tools and strategies to prevent arrears
- Guidelines for the effective management and necessary equitable adjustment of existing arrears
- Collaboration with stakeholders and community partners (including corrections) to obtain feedback in order to develop tools to assist our partners in serving mutual clients

Why Work with Incarcerated Population?

- ✦ **As a component of SHLIF strategy**
- ✦ **Ability to Pay standard**
- ✦ **Barriers – likelihood of collecting arrears after release**
- ✦ **National research**

Why Work with Incarcerated Population?

(continued)

- ✦ **Get the order right and keep the order right**
- ✦ **Proactive / arrears prevention**
- ✦ **Need to engage NCP for results and work toward future voluntary compliance**

What Are We Doing?

- ✦ **Mike Caris from state child support office (CSED) staff has been going to prisons for several years**
- ✦ **Pat is on the Department of Corrections (DOR) Prisoner Re-Entry Steering Committee**
- ✦ **CSED entered into a contract with DOC to place a child support expert in the corrections system**

What Are We Doing?

(continued)

- ✦ **CSED Policy supports early intervention, timely and proactive modification of support, and equitable adjustment of arrears**
- ✦ **County Programs are being creative and modifying processes in order to get efficient and improved outcomes**

What Are the Benefits?

- ✦ **Reduce the growth of uncollectible arrears**
- ✦ **Improve the current support collection measure**
- ✦ **Base support on real ability to pay**
- ✦ **Improve relationships with participants and improve future engagement by inmates post release**

What Are the Benefits?

(continued)

- ✦ **Improve outcomes for both corrections and IV-D**
- ✦ **Set a reasonable expectation of custodial parents regarding likelihood of collection**

Benefits to the Custodial Parent

✦ **Working with the non-custodial parent may benefit the custodial parent in many ways:**

- Setting reasonable orders increases the likelihood of the custodial parent receiving any current support now or in the future
- Avoiding accumulation of arrearages that according to research are likely to be uncollectible and often cause the non-custodial parent to avoid support entirely

Benefit to the Custodial Parent

(continued)

- Increase the likelihood that the other parent will engage with the joint children and pay current support when released
- Create a potential for WIN – WIN – WIN for the CP, NCP, and IV-D program
- Help families understand that support is based on ability to pay and when incarcerated there is little if any ability

Does this Reward Bad Behavior?

Some have argued that this does reward bad behavior – crime and non-payment of order but...

Does this Reward Bad Behavior?

(continued)

*** Building arrears while an individual is incarcerated and has no ability to pay**

- Does not help kids
- Does not help custodial parents
- Does not help IV-D performance
- Does not encourage NCP engagement and cooperation upon release
- Does not help corrections re-entry efforts
- Does not promote personal responsibility

Paradigm Shift

- ✦ **Past practices and theories regarding the collection of support have changed**
- ✦ **Past practices were not effective. Arrears were growing and current support collections were not**
- ✦ **With increasing budget pressures “business as usual” was not acceptable**

Paradigm Shift

(continued)

- ✦ **Recognize where we have contributed to poor performance by policies that did not work and change those policies**
- ✦ **Expectations for parents and program staff need to be reasonable and equitable**

Collaboration with Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC)

✦ The SHLIF Project objective

- Develop tools for incarcerated obligors and those that serve them
- Meet with community partners including the corrections community -- Corrections focus group

Corrections Focus Group

*** Participants included:**

- Representatives from state corrections and county jails, corrections chaplains, state IV-D project staff and representatives from our county IV-D agencies

Corrections Focus Group (continued)

We asked four questions

- What information do you need to know about child support?
- How do you get your information now?
- What unique child support related issues do you have working with inmates?
- What questions do you get from inmates?

Corrections Focus Group Feedback

- ✦ **They needed to know how to discuss modifications and how to advise inmates**
- ✦ **They need to know what inmates need to do upon release**
- ✦ **They really could use an expert to be available “on-demand” for inmates with questions**

Corrections Focus Group Feedback

(continued)

- ✦ **Inmates lack the resources to do pro-se actions and respond to IV-D communications**
- ✦ **Terms are confusing and directions are not clear**
- ✦ **Staff and inmates need more access to accurate information like brochures and videos on “how to...”**

How We Responded

- ✦ **Developed the position of Child Support Liaison (Lori) and entered into a contract with the DOC to provide child support services within the corrections community**
- ✦ **Created DVDs on general child support and made them available to our community partners**

How We Responded

(continued)

- ✦ **Created a DVD on modifications specifically for incarcerated individuals distributed to all jails and prisons to run as needed and on closed circuit television**
- ✦ **Developed a section of our public Web site specifically regarding incarcerated with FAQs**

How We Responded

(continued)

- ✦ **Developed a section of our public web site with all sorts of information determined by our community partners materials**
- ✦ **Created a “how to” brochure for parents regarding hearings**
- ✦ **Developed a training curriculum for community partners with basic child support information for non child support staff who serve our same population**

Outcomes

- ✦ **Modifications work to change behavior**
- ✦ **MN arrears growth pace leveled off for first time in quarter ending March 2008 and went down in quarter ending June 2008**
- ✦ **We are streamlining modification process and reducing the amount of time spent**
- ✦ **We are initiating more modifications for incarcerated obligors**

Outcomes

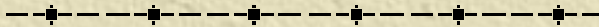
(continued)

- ✦ **We fully expect that our current support collection rate will be impacted as time goes on**
- ✦ **More community partners and parents are engaged with us**



Life on the Inside

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Typical Day



There is no typical day

Benefits to Corrections

- ✦ **Corrections caseworkers have huge caseloads and many factors to deal with**
- ✦ **Most corrections workers do not have much knowledge of child support issues, or the resources to answer questions**
- ✦ **It saves time and frustration for all**
- ✦ **Helps with release planning**

Benefits to being on the “inside”

- ✦ **MN has one correctional facility that is our intake for male offenders. That is where my office is housed**
- ✦ **Routine visits to other correctional facilities including the one woman’s facility**
- ✦ **Eye opening experience**
- ✦ **Able to be a resource and liaison to the people who really need it**

Benefits to being on the “inside”

(continued)

- ✦ **Work closely with Transition staff to deal with any child support issues before release and to engage the offender with his child support case upon release**
- ✦ **Removes some of the security barriers in working with offenders by being a corrections employee**

Barriers

✦ Access to

- a copier
- the phone during business hours
- address information

✦ Money for copies and postage

✦ Security priorities

✦ Transfers



So, What is Working

- ✦ **Getting modification requests to offenders the second day of incarceration, at orientation**
- ✦ **Biweekly Child Support Information classes**
- ✦ **Working closely with, and educating caseworkers and transition coordinators**
- ✦ **Kites – written communication from offenders**

So, What is Working *(continued)*

- ✦ **Setting up phone hearings**
- ✦ **Access to statewide child support system**
 - Looking up contact information
- ✦ **Monthly reports**
- ✦ **Brainstorming**
- ✦ **Improving computer link between
Department of Corrections and Child
Support Enforcement Division**

Things not working so well...

- ✦ **Patience and flexibility**
- ✦ **Providing programming in a secure environment**
- ✦ **Budget and personnel issues**
- ✦ **TIME**

*Process to Simplify
Modifications for
Incarcerated Individuals*

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Why?

✦ **Arrears Prevention**

- To prevent the accumulation of uncollectible arrears and reduce the amount of uncollectible permanently assigned public assistance arrears

✦ **Develop relationships**

- To encourage future participation and voluntary compliance
- To have court order reflect the Non-custodial parents (NCP) ability to pay

How?

✦ **Develop Policy and Procedures**

- Simplify the modification process
 - Keep in mind the barriers that NCPs face in prison (no phone, no envelopes, no access to computers to print off forms, no stamps etc...)
- Develop a simplified Affidavit that the NCP can complete easily and return. Include a self addressed stamped envelope

How?

✦ **Develop Policy and Procedures** (Continued)

- All parties are served the paperwork so Custodial Parents (CP's) have an opportunity to respond
- Proceed without a hearing unless one is requested
 - If a hearing is requested assist with arrangements to have NCP appear by phone

How?

✦ **Identify cases**

- Request Data Warehouse Reports that identify cases with incarcerated NCPs who have current charging
- DOC worker (Lori) or other counties contact us
- Locate worker discovers the NCP is in prison
- Select a worker who can focus on these actions and process them timely

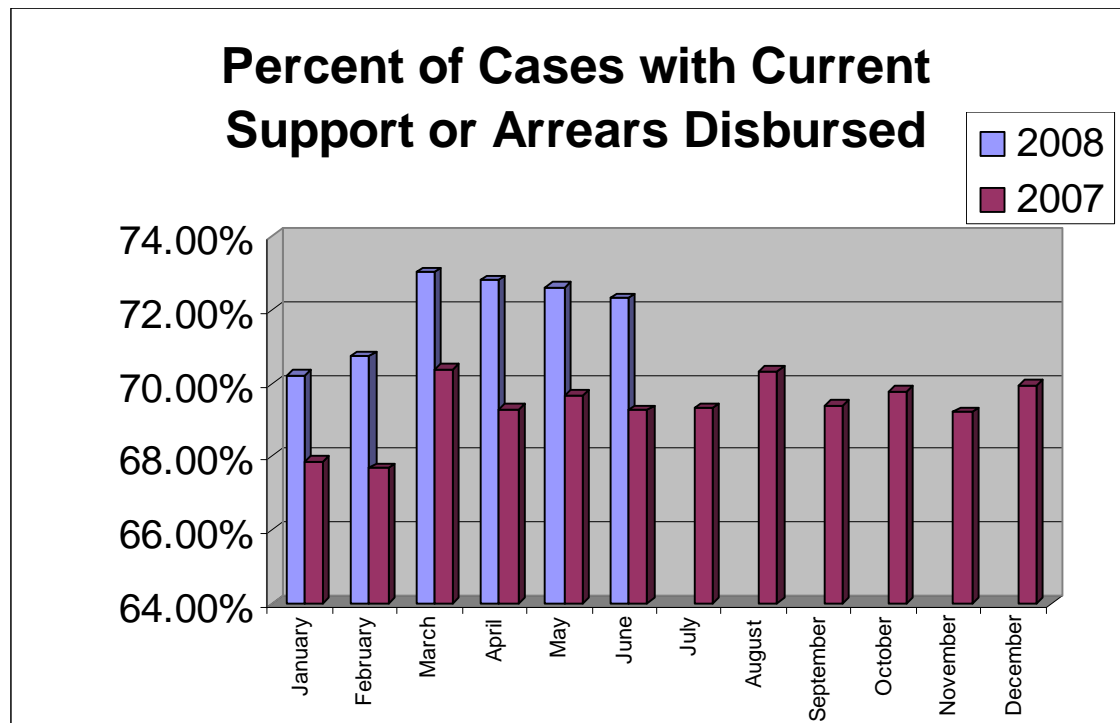
How?

✦ **Monitor Cases**

- After modification the cases are put into a monitor only caseload assigned to a case aide
- Worklists are completed so case aide can monitor and verify when the NCP is released
- After release the case is given back to the Child Support Officer to review NCP's current situation and set a hearing. Support is then based on the NCP's current ability to pay

Results

✦ Increase in the percentage of overall collections



Results

(continued)

- ✦ **46 cases have been modified saving \$14,134.00 per month from being added onto arrears which would have been uncollectible**
- ✦ **Payments on these cases prior to incarceration were \$6,851.32**
- ✦ **Payment on these same cases from 1/1/2008 to 6/30/2008 were \$17,119.83**

Desired Outcomes

Case Example #2

NCP incarcerated off and on since March 2000 to August 2007. Support was reduced to zero while incarcerated. Upon release in August 2007 support was set at appropriate amount. Since June 2007 NCP has paid \$4,331 and has not missed a payment.

Desired Outcomes

✦ **Getting money to Children**

- Increase in payments when released

✦ **Enthusiastic and Refreshed Staff**

- After initial resistance, staff now feel as if they are being pro-active as opposed to reactive. They are helping to get money to children due to setting realistic orders upon release

Desired Outcomes

✦ Enthusiastic and Refreshed Staff (continued)

- There has been increased voluntary compliance with the NCPs because we have assisted them when they need it
- We have seen an increase in NCPs initiating contact with our office. They tend to call letting us know their situation



Quiet Time Jail Visits

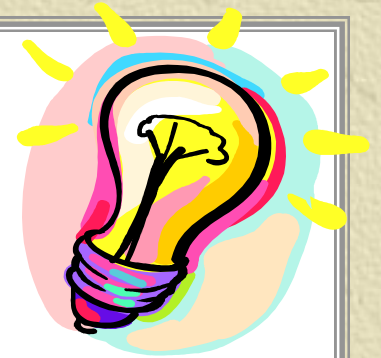
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In the Beginning

The Idea



✦ Sending staff at a local level to local jail

- Initially in 2000 just workforce center staff conducted jail visits
- However, with so many child support related questions, they suggested child support conduct their own visit
- Began with the staff that handled Parents Fair Share n/k/a Dakota County Parents Initiative (DCPI)

The Visit

- ✦ **Two volunteer staff now attend (and one guard)**
- ✦ **Staff are led down a series of locked doors to the cellblock where they will be conducting their session. They set up a table for their handouts, typically with the assistance of inmates**

The Visit

(continued)

- ✦ **Cellblock contains an average of 30-50 inmates in primarily for drugs or DUI's**
- ✦ **Inmates are polite and respectful**

The BIG Questions

- ✦ **Does my support end because I am in here?**
- ✦ **Can my support be stopped retro?**
- ✦ **How do I get a review?**
- ✦ **How can I get my driver's license back?**
- ✦ **Who IS my worker and how do I get in touch with them?**

The BIG Questions

(continued)

- ✦ **If I go to see my worker will I be arrested for contempt?**
- ✦ **Do I have a case?**

Support “Inside”

- ✦ **Staff encourages inmates to keep in contact with worker and read their mail**
- ✦ **Inmates informed about Dakota County’s quarterly Law Clinic & Orientation**
- ✦ **Inmates informed about DCPI and given DCPI’s 800# for questions**
- ✦ **Inmates asked to write additional questions on the back of their handout for release of information**

Support “Inside”

(continued)

Child Support handouts made available

- Non-custodial Parent’s FAQs
- Child Support – Incarcerated Parents FAQs
- 10 way to Be a Better Dad
- Fathers First brochure
- Informed Consent of Release of Private or Confidential Information: Child Support Inmate Initiative

Modifications while Inside

✦ **Child Support Specialist locates non-custodial parent in prison – case put on “Incarcerated” list**

- One Child Support Officer assigned to this list, also handles review hearings once parent is released from prison.

NOTE: Review hearings to set support upon NCP's release from jail is a priority

Modifications while Inside (continued)

- ✦ **Non-custodial parent requests a review – case put on “Review & Adjust” list**
 - Two Child Support Officers assigned to this list, but also handle other review requests

and Support “Outside”

- ✦ **Setting support based on NCP’s ability to pay**
- ✦ **Quarterly Law Clinic and Orientations**
- ✦ **Monthly MN Families Investment Program Workshops which is our TANF program**
- ✦ **DCPI working with eligible participants on Child Support Case Management and Employment Counseling**

The 4 Es of the IV-D

- ✦ **ENGAGE** – open lines of communication
- ✦ **ENCOURAGE** – future participation and voluntary compliance
- ✦ **EDUCATE** – keep in contact with your worker, read your mail, report for court, order does not stop while in jail
- ✦ **ESTABLISH** – relationships

Outcomes from 2007

- ✦ **Average 10 incarcerated cases set to zero charging each month**
- ✦ **Average current charging per case was \$248.77**
- ✦ **Cases also reviewed for SHLIF**
 - During March-July 2008, Dakota County SHLIF'd 41 cases for a total of \$242,525.06

Outcomes from 2007

(continued)

- ✦ **In 2007, 75% of the 113 participants in DCPI had a criminal record**
- ✦ **After being involved in the DCPI program,**

Note - Only 43% of the court-ordered participants made any type of payment and only 29% are currently paying their support

Positive Results for Parents and Children

- ✦ **NCP in prison 2004-2007 with non public assistance arrears of over \$21,000**
 - Support stopped while in prison, NCP released October 2007 and support set based on ability to pay – payments of current + 20% for the last 9 months

Positive Results for Parents and Children

(continued)

- ✦ **Closing speaker at 2008 MN Job Seekers Conference was a former DCPI participant with serious felony and misdemeanor charge**
 - He talked about the importance of good customer service and helping people when they are down. The title of his discussion was “People on their Knees”

Goals

- ✦ **To reduce the one year criteria for modifications for non-custodial parents (Fall 2008)**
- ✦ **Increased collections in 2008 and to *get payments on cases where there have never been any payments before!***



Questions?



Thank You!

**Pat Krauth
Lori Lofrano
Lisa Burkhartzmeyer
Sue Reardon**