

**The Administration For Children and Families**  
*Department of Health and Human Services*



**A**  
**Collaboration**  
**to support families**

April 3 - 4, 2003  
Sheraton - Four Points  
Kansas City, Missouri

# **TANF/CSE COORDINATION RESEARCH**

**Prepared for**

**The Administration for Children and Families**

**Region VII**

**Kansas City, Missouri**

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**March 2003**

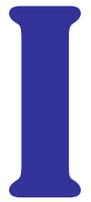
Submitted in accordance with:

Contract No. 233-01-0067

Task Order No. 17

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# **TANF-CHILD SUPPORT COLLABORATION: NATIONAL OVERVIEW**

## Background

While child support services are accessed by families at all income levels, the overlap between families receiving TANF and child support services is significant. This project is built on the understanding that better coordination between TANF and child support at the local level will lead to better overall outcomes for low-income families. The operating philosophy is that collaboration between the two agencies, especially in the early stages of service delivery can serve to prevent a family from needing long-term cash assistance by pursuing prompt receipt of child support payments.

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) established the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, which replaced the Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. PRWORA devolves the operational authority for welfare programs to States, while maintaining policy authority at the Federal level. It affords States great flexibility in designing welfare programs, provided they are “reasonably calculated to accomplish the purposes of TANF.” These purposes are to:

- Provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives;
- End the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage;
- Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and
- Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

As evidenced by TANF’s focus on work and family stability, PRWORA shifted the focus of anti-poverty family policy from income maintenance to family independence and self-sufficiency. Under TANF Reauthorization, the current emphasis on interagency collaboration to support healthy families will only increase, as successes are built upon and collaborative processes improved and expanded.

By broadening the mission of family support programs, PRWORA made possible the sharing of common goals across formerly disparate agencies. Where these agencies might have been conceptualized as having vastly differing missions, today, TANF and child support programs can truly claim to share the goal of helping families to achieve their greatest possible success.

## **The TANF Perspective**

The Office of Family Assistance (OFA) is responsible for managing the TANF program at the Federal level. OFA provides policy guidance, resources, and technical assistance to States and tribal governments operating TANF programs. TANF funds are distributed to States via block grants, which maximize State flexibility in designing programs to meet the needs of TANF clients.

In line with the goals of TANF, OFA is committed to moving families from welfare to self-sufficiency. Resources and technical assistance are committed to helping States and localities develop and operate welfare programs that endeavor to move clients into employment and support family independence. OFA operates programs with the understanding that families must have access to both work and supportive services to be successful. The focus on paternity establishment and child support payments as critical to healthy families is prominent in the existing legislation, and is fully expected to continue to play a significant role after reauthorization. This trend will serve to increase the necessity for collaboration between TANF and child support agencies.

Because of the focus on paternity establishment, and because of the child support cooperation requirement on TANF families, child support has become one of the most important supports available to low-income families. Research has shown that even relatively small child support payments, when regularly received, can have dramatic impacts on reducing the likelihood a family will return to welfare. Further, the establishment of regular, timely, and appropriate child support payments is often the first step to achieving more complete family reunification, where appropriate.

State TANF programs mirror the Federal commitment to healthy families. State TANF programs can best support families onto a pathway to self-sufficiency by collaborating with partners that can provide TANF families with access to employment and supportive services.

For more information on TANF, visit the Office of Family Assistance online at [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa).

## The Child Support Perspective

“The timely receipt of child support is critical for millions of American families and children. The nation’s Child Support Enforcement Program (CSE) is a federal/state/local partnership to help families by promoting family self-sufficiency and child well-being.”<sup>1</sup> The Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) oversees each independently run State child support program. These programs have four main purposes:

- **To locate noncustodial parents** – Child support enforcement officials can use information from highly computerized State and Federal Parent Locator Services (FPLS) to locate parents. Last year, the FPLS processed more than four and a half million cases.
- **To establish paternity** – Legally identifying a child’s father is called paternity establishment. This is the necessary first step for obtaining an order for child support when a child is born out of wedlock. Establishing paternity can also provide a child with access to Social Security benefits, pension and retirement benefits; medical insurance and health information; and important interactions and relationships with both parents.
- **To establish support orders** – States must have guidelines to determine how much a parent should pay for child support. Child support orders can be established by a court or by an administrative hearing process. Provisions for health insurance coverage must be included in the support order.
- **To support enforcement orders** – a parent can be required to pay child support by income withholding. Over 60 percent of all child support is paid by income withholding. Overdue child support can be collected from federal and state income tax refunds. Liens can be placed on property, and the property itself can be sold to pay back child support owed. Unpaid child support can be reported automatically to credit reporting bureaus. Drivers, professional, occupational and recreational licenses can be suspended if the obligated parent is not paying required support. The US State Department will deny a passport to someone who owes more than \$5000 in back child support. Child support agencies have agreements with financial institutions to freeze and seize accounts of those identified as owing back child support.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) provides funding to States to operate their child support enforcement (CSE) programs, and makes grants available to States. Programs supported by these grants include access and visitation programs, and responsible fatherhood initiatives.

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<sup>1</sup>*Child Support Enforcement Program*, US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Support Enforcement

Families receiving TANF benefits are required to cooperate with child support enforcement, unless there is a “good cause” for them not to do so. If the family is determined not to cooperate, and fails to qualify for a “good cause” exception, then the State must reduce the family grant by at least twenty-five percent and may deny the family all assistance under State programs.<sup>2</sup> Any child support payments collected are used to reimburse the State and Federal governments for TANF benefits provided the family.<sup>3</sup> The Federal share is reimbursed first and then the State has the option of retaining the additional collection or sending it to the family. When States send some (or all) of the collection to the family, it is referred to as child support “pass through.” In either case, additional collections (above the amount of the total TANF benefits paid) go to the family.

The Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement believes that all children should also receive nonfinancial support from both parents, where appropriate. By supporting access and visitation programs, as well as responsible fatherhood initiatives, Federal OCSE provides resources, training, and other supports necessary to reconnect noncustodial parents with their families.

Like Federal and State TANF programs, child support agencies are committed to supporting the overall health and well-being of families. By working with TANF agencies in their State and local areas, child support agencies can maximize their outreach efforts to a significant portion of their caseloads. Because TANF-child support cooperation is required on the part of the client, collaboration between the two agencies should improve services to dual-client families.

For more information on the Federal child support provisions, visit the Office of Child Support Enforcement at [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse). To learn more about your State’s child support provisions, and about resources available for programming, visit the interactive State map at [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/extinf.htm](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/extinf.htm).

### **The Value of Collaboration**

TANF (IV-A) and child support (IV-D) agencies at all levels must work together at the program design, development, implementation, and operation stages to ensure the best possible services are delivered to client families. Effective cooperation between TANF and child support programs can lead to:

- **Improved services to families** – by working jointly, States can ensure that the needs of the family are met in the simplest and timeliest manner possible.

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<sup>2</sup> Title 42 US Code, §608(a)(2) and §654(29)

<sup>3</sup> Title 42 US Code Chapter 7, Subchapter IV, Section 651

- **Reduced need for long-term services** –integration of services delivered to families has the best chance of moving them toward self-sufficiency, and reducing the long-term need for public services.
- **Improved cost effectiveness and program efficiency** – collaboration reduces the potential for duplication of services, thereby eliminating redundancies that negatively impact both financial and staff resources.
- **Increased likelihood of prevention** – systemic collaboration can serve to identify families at-risk for long-term TANF dependence and early intervention and services (e.g., diversion payments) might prevent them from needing cash assistance.
- **Improved information and referral** – the missions of the two agencies, while similar, are not identical. Clients will still need to access services provided by each agency. This process will be smoother if caseworkers in both agencies are informed and knowledgeable about the services, processes, and requirements of the other.

The next section of this report details the vision of this project from the perspective of the Administration for Children and Families' Regional Office VII, located in Kansas City, Missouri.

# II

## WHERE WE ARE, WHERE WE WANT TO BE, AND HOW WE CAN GET THERE: A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The Region VII Administration for Children and Families (ACF) staff recognized sometime ago that the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)-child support enforcement (CSE) collaboration is desirable as a “smart” approach to improve services to low-income families. Better communication and information sharing could potentially improve outcomes for greater numbers of families who receive TANF and who have applied for child support.

Since her appointment in 2002 as Commissioner of the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement, Dr. Sherri Z. Heller has emphasized TANF-CSE collaboration in many speeches. The ACF Central Office is supporting such collaboration, and ACF Regional Offices across the country are interested in identifying such efforts to determine why they work, what challenges staff face, and how they can overcome barriers to successful collaboration.

Specifically, both TANF and child support staff in ACF Region VII have expressed an interest in learning more about collaborative efforts around the country. In response, regional staff initiated this research project to investigate promising practices, success and lessons learned, regarding effective TANF-CSE collaboration.

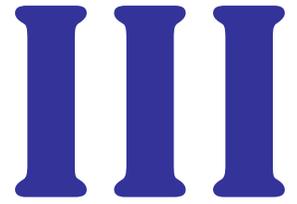
To execute this charge, the research team first conducted an extensive literature review to identify States in which TANF-CSE collaboration has been attempted, and the extent to which these attempts were successful. Unfortunately, extant literature held very little information on TANF-CSE collaboration at the State level.

Following the literature review, the research team conducted a series of initial telephone discussions to identify specific States in which formal or informal TANF-CSE collaboration was in place. The team conducted a second round of discussions to collect detailed information on the range of collaboration activities in ten States. These States are: Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia; Massachusetts; South Carolina, Virginia, Vermont, and Wisconsin.

The information gathered from the literature review and subsequent discussions is synthesized in the remaining sections of this report. The information also served to inform the development of the on-site technical assistance presented in Kansas City. Each respondent State is profiled separately. Following a brief description of the organizational and administrative features of the State, the profile for each State includes the following elements:

- **Background** – provides a brief, context-setting snapshot of the State’s collaborative efforts.
- **Overview of Current System** – describes collaboration in more detail.
- **Collaboration** – highlights certain features of the collaboration.
- **Outcomes** – articulates program, process, and/or service outcomes witnessed as a result of the collaboration.
- **Challenges** – includes any challenges, addressed an on-going, to the successful development, operation, and sustaining of the collaboration.
- **Lessons Learned** – highlights the important features, processes, and/or resources cited as critical to successful collaboration.
- **Type of Collaboration** – describes the level of formality of the collaborative effort.
- **Type of Organization** – defines the agency or organization(s) responsible for managing the collaborative effort.
- **Contact** – either the State respondent(s), or their designee responsible for providing additional information, upon request.

Following the last of the individual State profiles, the volume concludes by presenting Common Themes and Lessons Learned, extracted from the Lessons Learned section for each State. These Common Themes and Lessons Learned, each cited by a minimum of four States serve to illustrate a certain level of commonality across all States, regardless of the extent of their dissimilarity.



# STATE PROFILES

## Arizona

The Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES) was established by the Arizona State Legislature in 1972 by combining the Employment Security Commission, the State Department of Public Welfare, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the State Office of Economic Opportunity, the Apprenticeship Council, and the State Office of Manpower Planning. The State Department of Mental Retardation was added to DES in 1974. The purpose in creating DES was to provide an integration of direct services and reduce duplication of administrative efforts, services, and expenditures. The Department's mission is to promote the well-being and self-sufficiency of individuals and families through the delivery of quality integrated services. The TANF program is administered within the Family Assistance Administration (FAA) and all services related to child support enforcement are provided by the Division of Child Support Enforcement (CSE).

### Background

The FAA provides cash assistance and food stamps to eligible participants, determines eligibility for medical assistance, and refers participants to other departmental and community resources for assistance. Arizona also has implemented an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) system called EDGE to issue cash assistance payments. Participants are able to access benefits from their assigned account by using a debit card called QUEST. The debit card can be used at automated teller machines (ATMs) and point-of-sale (POS) devices located in most stores. Arizona also has established an interstate data system with electronic links between TANF and CSE which ensures child support registration when clients apply for TANF funds or provide updated personal information.

### Overview of Current System

CSE and TANF staff do not collaborate in case management. Separate case workers determine program eligibility, employment and training activity capabilities, and child support service needs. It is estimated that there are fewer than five co-located TANF and CSE offices in the State.

Arizona has instituted the Hospital Paternity Program (HPP) in three hospitals in Phoenix and one in Tucson. The goal of the program is to assist hospitals in completion of notarizing HPP paperwork, when hospital staff are unavailable. Initially a workgroup consisting of TANF, CSE, and hospital representatives met monthly to develop procedures for the program, including how to inform clients of the availability of the services and the internal procedures necessary to implement the services. The workgroup developed a flow chart of processes, included priorities

for TANF staff, held information sessions for hospital staff to review processes and get buy-in, and trained designated TANF and hospital staff together in joint sessions.

Through the HPP, CSE pays for some state TANF staff to be trained as notaries. The TANF staff are then located in hospitals to facilitate the immediate establishment of paternity. This allows new mothers to establish paternity immediately, via completion and notarization of paternity paperwork at any hour. Currently, the HPP is operational in three hospitals in Phoenix and one in Tucson. Arizona's goal is to institute the HPP in every major hospital in the State.

### **Collaboration**

- Client data are available to both TANF and CSE staff through electronic information system links.
- TANF staff are trained as notaries to aid in establishing paternity in four hospitals.
- CSE funds are used to train TANF staff as notaries.

### **Outcomes**

- Child support registration is automatic when clients apply for cash assistance.
- Completion of paternity paperwork has been facilitated.
- Notaries in the four hospitals are always available when hospital staff are unavailable.
- TANF and CSE staff meet monthly to discuss progress and project expansion.

### **Challenges**

- There is limited funding for expansion of the HPP.

### **Lessons Learned**

- Access to electronic client data greatly enhanced service delivery.
- Using CSE funds to support TANF staff in HPP benefits both CSE and TANF.

### **Type of Organization**

State Agency

### **Type of Collaboration**

Formal – data sharing and HPP

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## California

The California Health and Human Services Agency (CHHS) provides citizens who are most at risk or in need with opportunities to enjoy a high quality of life. The CHHS is made up of fifteen departments with the responsibility of administering State and Federal programs for health care, social services, public assistance, rehabilitation, and job training. Under the CHHS, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) houses the CalWORKs TANF program, which provides cash aid and services such as food stamps, housing, utilities, food, and medical care to needy California families. This program serves all 58 counties in California, and is operated locally by county welfare departments. The CDSS is also home to the Department of Child Support Services (DCSS). California's Child Support Enforcement Program (CSEP) is located within DCSS. Created in 1999, the program provides services to assist custodial parents with providing financial support and health insurance for their children. Each of the 58 counties has a Family Support Divisions (FSD) that accommodates local child support enforcement agencies.

### Background

In 2000, the Federal Administration for Children and Families recognized California with the Best Practices in Child Support award for Medical Support, Paternity Establishment/Statewide Paternity Opportunity Program (POP) and Imaging and Data Access.

### Overview of Current System

Upon intake, the TANF client is read the rights and responsibilities for receiving TANF benefits, which includes cooperating with child support requirements. TANF records all of the client's demographic information and then sends CSEP a formal referral along with the gathered information. The process then happens almost immediately: there is a 45-day processing period, during which the client must have made contact with CSEP. Once TANF funds are appropriated, if CSEP tells TANF that the client is not cooperating with the requirements, TANF applies a 25% reduction of the family benefits for the current period. This reduction will continue until the client begins to cooperate. This contact during the referral phase is the only constant contact shared by the agencies. There is no standardized database or access to electronic files. With the exception of a few counties, information is shared via written materials. Because the operations exist at the local level, some counties have a read-only electronic interface.

### Collaboration

- Strong local level collaboration.
- Efforts to locate and reduce challenges.

### **Outcomes**

- Strengthened commitment to intersystem changes.

### **Challenges**

- Lack of electronic interface for all counties produces inconsistencies.
- The transferring of information between agencies is not balanced – it seems to be too fast by one agency, and too slow by the other.
- Counties work one-on-one rather than together; there needs to be more organization between counties and agencies.
- Lack of a single, statewide system for both agencies.
- Assessing if the client is on or off aid (transition problems).
- Timeframes for transitions are too tight without a common database.

### **Lessons Learned**

- Opening the lines of communication is necessary.
- Equal dedication is needed from both agencies.
- Need one system that includes an electronic interface.
- Need co-location of office and staff.

### **Type of Organization**

Varies by county; operations exist at the county level.

### **Type of Collaboration**

Formal referral process from CalWORKs to DCSS; informal collaboration process.

### **Contact**

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## Colorado

The Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) is the second largest agency in the Colorado State Government, with a \$1.9 billion budget. CDHS oversees 64 county departments of social and human services, the State's public mental health system, statewide services for people with developmental disabilities, the juvenile corrections system, and all State and veterans' nursing homes. CDHS employs more than 5,000 individuals and thousands of community-based service providers. The department is organized into three primary service areas – Administrative Services, Adult Services, and Children, Youth and Family Service. Within Adult Services, the Office of Self Sufficiency administers both child support enforcement (CSE) and TANF services.

### Background

In El Paso County, the CDHS staff have adopted a uniquely holistic approach to integrating intake and case management activities for multiple programs including TANF, child welfare, child care, domestic violence, mental health, and substance abuse. CSE offices are co-located with TANF offices even though all CSE services are contracted to a private company – Policy Studies, Inc. The county's TANF and CSE staff also collaborate on the Parent Opportunity Program, which facilitates employment for non-custodial parents.

### Overview of Current System

TANF and CSE collaborate in case management although not to the degree that they would like. Both staff work closely with budgeting and planning to support families as they move to self sufficiency. Once CSE workers receive an application, they are required to process the request within 30 days. Information sharing is greatly facilitated as CSE and TANF staff are co-located in the same offices. TANF staff also work closely with families to ensure that sanctions are the result of specific behavior and not the result of problems with the system (e.g., correspondence sent to an incorrect home address stored in the computer system). The current information systems (TANF and CSE) are not linked and their inability to interface is problematic to staff and requires diligence to ensure that data are updated manually.

The Parent Opportunity Program (POP) provides non-custodial parents with an opportunity to gain employment and get involved in the lives of their children. POP is an extension of a federally-funded program that centered on fathers. The federally-funded program has ended but El Paso County continues to operate POP with local funding. Through collaboration with DHS, the Workforce Center, CSE, and TANF, POP provides remedial education, mediation with custodial parents, training (when appropriate), and substance abuse counseling (when needed).

### **Collaboration**

- TANF and CSE staff are co-located in offices with the Workforce Center and other DHS service staff.
- CSE staff are available on site, everyday to talk with clients.
- TANF and CSE staff share limited client information electronically, when possible.
- TANF and CSE staff collaborate in case management.

### **Outcomes**

- CSE has much higher visibility than in the past. (CSE staff participate in a range of community activities and events, such as street fairs, to “put a positive face on child support.”)
- “CSE has become a positive partner in the support of children.”
- CSE and TANF collaboration has facilitated other collaborative efforts including the Parent Opportunity Program and the CSE-child welfare information sharing.
- CSE and TANF collaboration has facilitated partnerships with more than 90 community partners and 12 organizations including mental health providers and Goodwill Industries.

### **Challenges**

- Dated computer information systems that do not facilitate information sharing.
- Different funding streams that provide barriers to maintaining positive relationships.
- Child support efforts have a negative public image.

### **Lessons Learned**

- “Collaboration makes life simpler.”
- Multiple funding streams need not lead to insurmountable barriers.

### **Type of Organization**

State Agency

### **Type of Collaboration**

Formal – co-located in same office

### **Contact**

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III. State Profiles

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## Florida

Florida's Department of Children and Families (DCF) is dedicated to working in partnership with local communities to ensure safety, well-being, and self-sufficiency for those served. The DCF is home to the Health Agency's Division of Economic Self-Sufficiency, which provides assistance to low income families through food stamps, Medicaid, and TANF programs. Florida's Department of Revenue (DOR) has a mission to innovate, pioneer change, and promote excellence, and is home to Florida's Child Support Enforcement (CSE) program, which is charged with the responsibility of helping assure that children in Florida are supported by both parents.

### Background

In 2000, Florida received the Federal Administration for Children and Families Best Practices in Child Support Award for Automatic Case Closure Process & Early Cooperation Requirement for TANF Eligibility. Florida also conducted the Court Child Support Process Improvement Project that was created by the Office of the State Courts Administrator and the Department of Revenue. This identified ways to better meet the needs of Florida's children and families through more timely and efficient establishment of child support orders. The project was intended to provide valuable and descriptive information about the establishment process for child support orders. A multidisciplinary workgroup assessed case processing time frames and made recommendations for improvement. The assessment was conducted in eight of Florida's 67 counties and included both case file data collection and surveys. Case reviews were completed on 1,120 cases and survey responses were received from 225 key process partners.

### Overview of Current System

Although CSE is not involved in the TANF application process, TANF and CSE share an "up-front cooperation." Once the Federal cooperation requirements are met for CSE, TANF is notified through an integrated automated system, and the client begins receiving TANF benefits. Both agencies share and have access to the client's file, and if a change is made from one agency, an automatic alert is sent to the partner agency. Although there is no formal collaborative case management between the agencies, there is significant office interaction. Because of the integrated computer system, families scheduled for termination from TANF do not have a lapse in the time that child support payments are reinstated. There is a 48-month lifetime for TANF benefits, with the exception of occasional exemptions determined by the Workforce Innovation Department.

### **Collaboration**

- Interagency team meeting for two hours every quarter to share legislation concepts, future planning and goals, problems, and strategies
- Agencies alternate in the hosting and planning of quarterly meetings
- An automated interactive computer system that allows immediate access to clients files.

### **Outcomes**

- Reduced human error and promoting systems efficiency
- Enhanced coordination and communication among agencies and agency headquarters
- Improved professional working relationships and client relationships
- Reduced cost

### **Challenges**

- Splitting the TANF and CSE offices has posed problems in communication and goals
- Lack of co-location

### **Lessons Learned**

- Cross-training is great where it is possible
- More collaboration is needed at the directing level
- Interagency meetings strengthen communication
- Advanced automated systems make the process a very smooth one
- Co-location of offices and staff is necessary

### **Type of Organization**

Most TANF and CSE offices are not co-located  
Operated at the local level

### **Type of Collaboration**

Formalized through an automated system

### **Contact**

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III. State Profiles

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## Georgia

The Department of Human Resources (DHR) is the Georgia State agency responsible for the delivery of health and social services. DHR is one of the largest agencies in Georgia State government and provides services through regulatory inspection, direct services, and financial assistance programs. The department is comprised of four divisions and six offices. The divisions include Aging Services, Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Addictive Diseases, Public Health, and Family and Children Services. The Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) is responsible for programs including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), food stamp benefits, and social services to assist low-income families or families in crisis. The Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) is one of the six organizational offices within DHR. OCSE assists custodial parents in a wide range of activities including locating non-custodial parents, establishing paternity, and collecting and distributing support payments.

### Background

In 1999, the State of Georgia installed new computer systems for both DFCS/TANF (Success System) and OCSE (Stars System). As staff began working on the new systems, their frustration grew and clients became increasingly dissatisfied in the way their cases were being handled. Clients complained that they were “getting the run around” when they wanted to apply for TANF and child support, or when they had a problem related to financial assistance. Clients believed that they were being referred back and forth between CSE and TANF without resolution of their problems. While two supervisors (one from OCSE and the other from DFCS) in the Camilla, Georgia service area were on the telephone addressing a client complaint, they began discussing the idea of a joint meeting where both OCSE and DFCS staff could learn about both computer systems and how the systems could interface to support the needs of both programs.

In October 1999, OCSE and DFCS staff from the DHR Camilla service area, including Baker, Mitchell, Decatur, Grady, and Calhoun Counties, attended a joint training session that focused on the Success and Stars computer systems. The two supervisors who organized the training session viewed the meeting as an opportunity to learn and ultimately enable staff to better assist low-income clients by promptly processing eligibility applications.

The new computer systems, Success and Stars, interfaced differently than the previous computer systems. As a result it changed the way CSE and DFCS staff reviewed their TANF cases when inquiries were made regarding gap payments. The supervisors who organized the training

developed handouts focusing on Gap Payment Information, preparation and submission of standard state forms associated with gap changes, charts for grant/gap information, and examples of Success and Stars computer screens. At the conclusion of the training session, both DFCS and CSE staff agreed that the training session and the exchange of information would have a positive impact on their ability to respond to computer system interface challenges, as well as distribution issues. Participants also decided to form an alliance and to continue meeting on a quarterly basis.

### **Overview of Current System**

In the Camilla service area, TANF and CSE applications are handled in the same local county offices. As a result of collaboration activities initiated in 1999, a formal relationship continues to enhance services provided by TANF and CSE staff. While CSE is not involved in the approval or disapproval of TANF applications, applicant information is available to both OCSE and TANF electronically and from internal referrals. Custodial parents cooperate by applying for both TANF and child support at the same time. The CSE office has the ability and the relationship with DFCS staff to interrupt TANF benefits to insure parental compliance with child support requirements.

### **Collaboration**

- The goal of collaboration for both the local OCSE and TANF staff is to share information and address problems so that better services can be provided to low-income families.
- Much of the information sharing occurs during quarterly meetings where both groups of staff convene to freely discuss their concerns, problems, and accomplishments.
- After receiving contributions from both groups of staff, the OCSE Supervisor and her counterpart in DFCS develop agendas for the meetings.
- While the meetings serve as an open forum for discussion, they are structured to facilitate joint problem solving of specific cases.

### **Outcomes**

- Better resolution of interface and distribution issues and more efficient follow-up on internal and external inquiries.
- Improved professional working relationships.
- Development of a network between agencies.
- Improved customer service skills among staff.
- Revised and improved policy and training materials at the State and local levels.
- Designation of a liaisons to serve as the points of contact for OCSE and DFCS staff in need of assistance in resolving client issues.

### **Challenges**

When asked about challenges or barriers, the interviewee responded, “We didn’t really face any challenges because the DFCS supervisor and I were on the same page in terms of process and goals.”

### **Lessons Learned**

- Sharing information and feedback on a one-on-one level works well to resolve problems and solidify positive working relationships.
- Blaming the other organization is destructive and “gets in the way” of moving forward and resolving issues and concerns.

### **Type of Organization**

District Office within State Child Support Enforcement Agency

### **Type of Collaboration**

Informal Process

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## Massachusetts

In the State of Massachusetts, child support services and financial assistance to low income families are seated in different governmental agencies. The Child Support Enforcement Division (CSED) is located in the Department of Revenue. The Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) is located in the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA), formerly known as the Department of Public Welfare. The mission of the Child Support Enforcement Division is “to protect the economic well-being of children by enforcing the financial responsibilities of parenthood.” CSED establishes paternity and child support orders, collects child support, and requests adjustments to child support orders (through the courts) when circumstances change. Services are available to all adults and one need not receive public assistance for CSED to aid in child support enforcement or collections.

The Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance is the State agency responsible for administering public assistance programs for needy citizens. The DTA serves nearly 364,000 families and individuals across the State. In addition, DTA emphasizes temporary assistance and recipients are encouraged to participate in education, training, and job search activities which will lead to increased responsibility and self-sufficiency. In addition to TAFDC, DTA administers Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children, Food Stamp Benefits, Emergency Assistance, and Supplemental Security Income.

### Background

In 1986, the child support enforcement (CSE) offices were moved out of the TANF agency to the Department of Revenue. On occasion, joint interviewing does take place at certain TANF offices. Since the separation of offices, communication and interaction has been frequent and on-going primarily because of the need to share information. Representatives meet monthly to discuss mutual concerns and problems. The collaboration between TANF and CSE staff is a formalized process, and both staff view each other as partners.

### Overview of Current System

On the local level, the TANF office requests that applicants sign an “Assignment of Right” form and collects information on the identity and whereabouts of the non-custodial parent. The process is a formal part of the application interview and CSE receives and acts upon information gathered and submitted by TANF. Both TANF and CSE share information and have limited access to the other’s data system. All key and essential data are shared between both agencies. For example, CSE is notified daily by an electronic interface of closed TANF cases. The primary job of transitioning able-bodied custodial parents from welfare to work rests with the TANF agency. The CSE and TANF agencies, however, engage in team case management on a case-

by-case basis. The TANF agency does not provide education, training, job search, or placement opportunities to non-custodial parents. Parents in need of such services are referred to the State's Career Placement Centers. A process is currently in place to handle changes in case status from public assistance to non-public assistance cases.

### **Collaboration**

- CSED is notified daily by an electronic interface of closed TANF cases.
- CSED and TANF staff, at the state and local level, meet monthly to resolve problems and discuss concerns. Collaboration is state-mandated.
- CSED/TANF teams jointly case manage selected cases.
- Staff from both programs have limited access to the other's data system.

### **Outcomes**

- More accurate information on non-custodial parents results in better paternity establishment, more court orders for support, and greater child support collections.
- Routine communications between TANF and CSE staff resulting in better service to low-income families.

### **Challenges**

- Information gathering about clients accuracy and updating of information.

### **Lessons Learned**

- More accurate and useful information on the identity and whereabouts of the non-custodial parent can be collected when TANF and CSE agencies work closely together.
- More accurate information on non-custodial parents results in better paternity establishment, more court orders for support and greater child support collections.
- Both TANF and CSE staff must work together to ensure that management information systems allow for information sharing.

### **Type of Organization**

State Child Support and TANF Agencies

### **Type of Collaboration**

Formal State mandated collaboration

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## South Carolina

South Carolina's Department of Social Services (DSS) is guided by a mission to ensure the safety and health of children and adults who cannot protect themselves, to help parents and caregivers provide nurturing homes, and to help people in need of financial assistance to reach the highest level of social and economic self-sufficiency. Under the DSS, the Division of Economic Services has programs providing financial assistance in the form of TANF, food stamps, EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer), food programs, and programs to help individuals prepare for work. The Child Support Enforcement Division (CSED) is also located under the DSS. The CSED helps custodial and noncustodial parents in the establishment of paternity, and the establishment and enforcement of court ordered child support.

### Background

In 2000, the Federal Administration for Children and Families awarded South Carolina the Best Practices in Child Support award for the Diligent Search Project, Collaboration with Child Welfare. While operating the "First Things First" curriculum, South Carolina initiated a pilot project called Visitation Involvement Parenting (VIP), in which the CSED provides mediation services for parents. This training serves to establish a plan for access and visitation that ensures the child will have the benefit of both parents taking an active role in his or her life. The VIP Program also provides employment and training services for the non-custodial parent so that he/she can adequately provide financial support for the child. VIP also offers instruction to both parents on how to request help from the Family Court to enforce the visitation order.

### Overview of Current System

Both the CSED and the TANF agencies have always operated under the same department (DSS) and therefore answer to the same entity. When a client is approved for TANF, CSED is notified electronically and is sent the TANF client's file. There is then an individual review done by CSED that is separate from TANF's review. CSED receives all of the initial information from TANF, however there is no shared database, and no plans for one in the future. The agencies send any requested information to each other when needed, although there is no direct access to client information from the partner agency.

### Collaboration

- Open communication through regular e-mails, conversations, and "the freedom to pick up the phone and just ask for help."
- Regular conferences to reinforce objectives.

### **Outcomes**

- Shared goals of both agencies.
- Improved professional working relationships.
- Enhanced understanding of partner agency's operations.
- Enhanced coordination and communication among agencies.

### **Challenges**

- Lack of common database or automated interface system.
- Lack of co-location at the local level.

### **Lessons Learned**

- Open communication such as regular e-mails and conversation helps to bridge the gap between the offices.
- Offices need to recognize shared goals.

### **Type of Organization**

Co-location at the directing level, but not at the local level.

### **Type of Collaboration**

Informal through regular actions and conferences.

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## Vermont

Vermont's Agency of Human Services (AHS) is comprised of various departments with the goal of improving the health and well-being of Vermonters, and promoting their ability to meet basic needs. The Department of Prevention, Assistance, Transition, and Health Access (PATH), which was formerly known as the Department of Social Welfare (DSW), operates under AHS. PATH's mission is to help the citizens of Vermont find a path to a better life by administering State and Federal programs such as Medicaid, Food Stamps, and Reach Up to assist eligible Vermonters in need. Reach Up is the name of the TANF program that helps families with children by providing services that support work, cash assistance for basic necessities, and health insurance.

Vermont's Office of Child Support (OCS) is also located within the AHS. The mission of the OCS is to improve children's economic security by obtaining child support obligations and payments.

### Background

Vermont requires direct deposit of child support payments and therefore has an extremely successful rate of distribution. Recently, Vermont launched a Customer Feedback Initiative to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs, and developed a document imaging system which allows all workers direct access to electronic paperwork to process child support cases and assist parents. The OCS staff has offered five workshops around the State to address questions of non-custodial parents. Vermont also offers a comprehensive "Parent Handbook" through the Internet.

### Overview of Current System

Clients who apply for Reach Up must fill out forms for OCS in order to receive the Reach Up funds. Upon filling out the forms, the roles of OCS are explained by the Reach Up caseworker, who forwards the forms to OCS. OCS then contacts the Reach Up client and sets an appointment with a child support caseworker. Once Reach Up has granted approval to the client to receive assistance, the client is entered into a common database, and both agencies have equal access to the files. The database was established in the 1990s when the two offices were united, and built into the database is an electronic messaging system allowing them the instant-message each other.

### Collaboration Includes

- Information exchange—data and information are shared between the Reach Up and OCS case workers and supervisors
- Solid history of working together before the agencies were separated

- Providing training and education of partner agency's work to promote connection

### **Outcomes**

- Resolved interface and distribution issues
- Improved professional working relationships
- Enhanced understanding of partner agency's operations
- Eliminated human error and promoting systemic efficiency
- Enhanced coordination and communication among agencies
- Reduced cost

### **Challenges**

- Because the two offices have not always been independent of each other, there is a solid history of working together; no distinctive challenges were identified

### **Lessons Learned**

- Integrated computer system is the key to collaboration by providing a higher level of communication, connectivity, and efficiency
- Agencies share the ultimate common goal, even if they have differing ways of approaching the goal
- Open communication is a must
- Staff and offices should be co-located to maximize collaboration

### **Type of Organization**

- At the directing level, the offices are co-located; at the local level, not all of the offices are co-located (Reach Up has 12 district offices, and OCS has 5 main regional offices and 8 satellite offices)

### **Type of Collaboration**

- Informal in that each office has its separate duties, yet formalized because of a common database shared with equal access

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## Virginia

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) is the State agency responsible for the administration of a wide range of programs including child support enforcement and TANF. VDSS employs more than 1,500 individuals and has an annual budget in excess of \$1.6 billion. Services are provided in 121 localities throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. The mission of the VDSS is, “people helping people lead safe and productive lives.” VDSS is organized into nine divisions including the Division of Benefit Programs where the TANF program is housed, and the Division of Child Support Enforcement. In addition to administering TANF, the Division of Benefits Programs is responsible for the management and implementation of food stamps and Medicaid. The Division of Child Support Enforcement (CSE) employs more than 900 individuals both in the central office and in local social service offices throughout the State.

### Background

CSE and TANF staff are co-located in the Manassas District Office. Program staff are responsible for coordinating service delivery in five northern Virginia communities, including Prince William County, Fauquier County, Rappahannock County, Manassas Park, and the City of Manassas. The Manassas District Office is one of two co-located sites in the State. CSE staff in the Manassas District Office have positive working relationships with their counterparts in the other service areas (TANF and Foster Care) and tend to talk more freely and frequently than staff in single-service delivery sites.

### Overview of Current System

The process is both formal and informal. All cases are created in automated systems. Because the services are co-located, TANF staff talk directly to the CSE staff before clients leave the facility, or when they are updating records. Select information on all TANF recipients and CSE clients is also available through automated systems to the other staff. Co-location also has enhanced positive working relationships with Foster Care and the Career Centers staff.

### Collaboration

CSE and TANF staff are co-located in the Manassas District Office. Before clients leave the office or update their files, staff exchange information and refer clients for immediate service, when appropriate. Automated systems facilitate information sharing as staff from both areas have access to limited information on clients. In one State demonstration site, CSE staff use video equipment to conduct CSE and TANF interviews in congested and rural areas of the State.

### **Outcomes**

- Excellent working relationships between TANF and CSE staff.
- Expanded information sharing on clients and other services and opportunities throughout the District service area.
- Limited collaborative case management and problem solving.
- Very few problems when families are terminated from TANF and awaiting child support payments.

### **Challenges**

- Negative opinions (both from legislature and some central office staff) about co-locating offices.
- Retention of clients.
- More challenges for TANF staff because of changes in responsibilities and roles.
- Developing and implementing creative strategies to move families to self sufficiency.
- General concern that TANF will “swallow-up” CSE because of the difference in program size.

### **Lessons Learned**

- “Collaboration is imperative in doing the job right.”
- Staff must view “customer service as the key to the program.”
- Local staff must know services in the community to maximize their assistance to clients.
- Promoting better relationships increases the ability to serve the public.

### **Type of Organization**

Local site of the State social service agency (District Office)

### **Type of Collaboration**

Formal co-located service site

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## Wisconsin

The Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) is a State agency charged with building and strengthening Wisconsin's workforce. The department's primary responsibilities include providing job services, and training and employment assistance to people looking for work. At the same time, it works with employers to fill current job openings. The Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS), operating under the DWD, develops and maintains employment-focused programs. These programs enable employers to hire and retain the workforce they need, and also to provide individuals and families with services that enable them to achieve financial well being as members of Wisconsin's workforce. Wisconsin's TANF program runs under the DWS, and provides funding for more than 40 programs, such as Wisconsin Works (W-2), child care, transportation, education and training, and others designed to assist low income families. Additionally, the Child Support Agency (CSA) operates under DWS, and contributes to the well-being of children through the establishment of paternity and the establishment and enforcement of court-ordered child support and medical support obligations.

### Background

In 2000, the Administration for Children and Families awarded Wisconsin the Best Practices in Child Support award for the Milwaukee County Child Support Agency. Wisconsin has standard child support enforcement provisions, and operates "Paternity Establishment Through Hospitals" (PATH), a program which trains people on the importance of paternity establishment, and encourages paternity establishment at the time of birth.

### Overview of Current System

Wisconsin's system of child support and welfare is very unique. While other States divert child support payments once TANF funds are being received, in Wisconsin, the entire amount of child support monies are paid to CSA by the noncustodial parent and then handed over directly to the TANF recipient. Although TANF does not assist in the filing of child support orders, there is an automatic referral sent to CSA when a child in a TANF family needs paternity established, or the child has an absent parent. This information is sent through a read-only interface system shared by the agencies. Also upon intake, the TANF client receives a CSA manual and instruction, and it is explained to the client that in order to receive TANF funds, he or she must comply with the requirements of CSA.

### **Collaboration**

- Automated interface system that sends information back and forth among the agencies.
- Shared common objective with different tasks to fulfill the goal.
- Cross-training sessions conducted during the automated system training.

### **Outcomes**

- Resolved interface and distribution issues.
- Improved professional working relationships.
- Enhanced understanding of partner agency's operations.
- Reduced human error and promoting systems efficiency.
- Enhanced coordination and communication among agencies.
- Improved professional working relationships and client relationships.

### **Challenges**

- The complexity of developing a good automated interface.
- The different culture approach from the local agency level by TANF and CSA because of differing objectives.
- Lack of a full understanding of each other's programs.

### **Lessons Learned**

- Cross-training needs to happen to keep offices informed.
- Automated system is significant to promoting collaboration.
- Open communication is necessary for a true collaboration.

### **Type of Organization**

CSA office is generally located in the County building, and the TANF offices are located in job centers that help locate job services.

### **Type of Collaboration**

Formalized only because of their automated electronic interface.

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III. State Profiles

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# IV

## COMMON THEMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The purpose of this section is to extract common themes and lessons learned from the States surveyed for this report. Several States have promising and/or well-developed collaborations between TANF and child support agencies in place. The ten States highlighted in this manual have developed various models for their collaborations – some have co-located staff, joint training, and shared data while others rely on more informal methods. Despite these different methods, however, States did report certain lessons in common. Table 1 includes the Common Themes and Lessons Learned reported by State respondents.

**TABLE I: COMMON THEMES AND LESSONS LEARNED<sup>4</sup>**

	AZ	CA	CO	FL	GA	MA	SC	VA	VT	WI
Integrated/Automated computer systems	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
Open communication protocols	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Co-location of offices and staff		✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	
Cross-agency education/training	✓			✓	✓					✓
Recognition of shared goals	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
Formal collaboration processes	✓		✓		✓	✓				

As illustrated in the table, several themes and lessons were held in common by at least four of the respondent States. These common themes and lessons learned are important because they illustrate how even States disparate in size and structure have realized the same fundamental lessons about collaboration. These lessons can serve to inform the development and operation of collaborations between TANF and child support agencies in other States as well.

**Integrated/Automated Computer Systems**

Seven of the respondent States specifically articulated the value of quality management information systems which integrate and automate access to necessary client data. While the systems described by the States vary, the impact they have made was universally noted by those States currently using shared databases.

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<sup>4</sup> Common themes and lessons learned are those specifically articulated by at least four of the ten respondent States.

### **Open Communication Protocols**

Every State, save one, specifically mentioned the value of open communication protocols – the sense that they can simply pick up the telephone and ask for assistance from their partner agency. This type of collaboration allows both agencies to work together effectively, even in the absence of formal rules and regulations regarding working together.

### **Co-location of Offices and Staff**

Perhaps one step better than the telephone, is being able to walk down the hall to get an answer to a pressing question. The value of co-locating staff in the same office was cited by five States as an important part of their TANF-CS collaboration. While the initial co-location of staff may be labor, time, and resource intensive, the resultant ease and efficiency is invaluable.

### **Cross-agency Education and Training**

Four States have benefited from cross-agency education and training initiatives. These States cited the need for TANF and child support staff to develop an improved sense of the mission, goals, and protocols of the partner agency before true collaboration was really possible. Through this training, staff from each agency gained insight into the strengths and challenges of their new partners, and were able to develop strategies to overcome the shared challenges by drawing on newly-shared strengths.

### **Recognition of Shared Goals**

A critical aspect to a true collaboration is an understanding that, ultimately, both TANF and child support agencies are in the same business – that of helping families to succeed. The value of recognizing shared goals was specifically cited by six States.

### **Formal Collaboration Processes**

While some States were pleased with informal collaborations, four States particularly noted the value of formal collaborative processes – guidelines regarding how, when, and why to share data, and case management and closure protocols, for example. This type of collaboration should not, however, be seen as mutually exclusive with less formal concepts like open communication. Rather, taken together, a set of formal collaboration guidelines and a sense of mutual access might be the most effective of all of the collaboration models available.

Taken together, these common themes and lessons learned can inform the planning, implementation, and operating of collaboration between TANF and child support programs at the State level.