

Child Support Report

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COMMISSIONER'S VOICE

Farewell and Best Wishes



The new year is here and with it comes new goals and aspirations for many. You probably remember from previous articles that I don't make formal resolutions. Instead, I reflect on where I've been and how I can continue to make good decisions moving forward. This year's reflection is even more profound as I'm looking back on my tenure at the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). It's remarkable how quickly three and a half years go by. We've accomplished a lot as a child support community since I first arrived to lead the Office of Child Support Enforcement. We've endured new challenges across the nation as well.

I've been honored to serve the country from multiple roles here at ACF. I'm currently the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, where I have broad oversight for accomplishing many of the agency's goals. This includes moving agenda items forward, from economic mobility and pandemic response to primary prevention and more. I'm also the Acting Commissioner of OCSE. In both roles, I've witnessed the unwavering resolve of federal, state, tribal, and local leaders to help the nation's most vulnerable through human services.

The child support program served 14.3 million children in FY2019 with collections totaling \$32.4 billion. It continues to be one of the most cost-effective programs across government with \$5.06 collected for every \$1.00 spent. This would not be possible without the dedication and commitment of child support agencies at all levels. I'm thankful for your collaboration in helping the program grow and thrive.

The past year was truly like no other. None of us could have predicted what we faced in 2020. Our OCSE goals at the start of the year were to continue modernizing state systems; utilizing data analytics; increasing program awareness; and strengthening our federal, state, and tribal partnerships. Remarkably, we've accomplished each of those goals despite the challenges from COVID-19. You have consistently showed resilience during the pandemic, quickly adapting to change while providing services to families. You've fully embraced virtual services and innovations to keep families safe and well.

Let's continue to look ahead with enthusiasm to 2021. Continue to lean on data, research, and promising practices you're developing within your offices. We may face formidable challenges that require us to be innovative, flexible, and resolute again this year. However, I know the program is in good hands.

My chapter at ACF ends January 20. It's been my pleasure working with all of you. Until we meet again, I'll say farewell for now, my friends, and wish you much success in 2021 and beyond.

Scott Lekan

Resources to Help Children Cope With COVID-19 Stress



Just like grown-ups, children are experiencing the daily stress and isolation amid the COVID-19 pandemic, but they may be less likely to cope with it. To help adults and children talk through feelings and encourage positive caregiving strategies, Sesame Street's Caring for Each Other initiative has launched a new series of digital bundles with new animations, articles, and printable activities. Learn healthy strategies for you and your family at SesameStreet.org/caring

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Protect Yourself and Others with a Flu Shot

As many as 45 million people in the U.S. get sick from the flu each season. Getting a flu shot is an important way to help keep you healthy and safe – especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To protect yourself, your family, and your community from the flu this winter, find a flu clinic near you by visiting the [CDC's influenza \(flu\) webpage](https://www.cdc.gov/flu), also available in [Spanish](#).

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SPOTLIGHT

San Diego Increases Engagement with Spanish-Speaking Parents Using Peachjar

Kendrik Eaton, Administrative Analyst II, San Diego Department of Child Support Services

The San Diego Department of Child Support Services seeks to be inclusive to all members of its diverse community. According to the 2018 U.S. Census survey, the percentage of Spanish-speaking single parent households with child(ren) under 18 accounts for 42% of all single parent households in San Diego. However, only 10% of the child support caseload identify Spanish as their primary language. We saw this as an opportunity to re-evaluate our marketing strategy and found opportunities to enhance outreach and engagement with this population. Using digital media, we worked to raise awareness, change expectations, and increase engagement with Spanish-speaking populations within the county.

We began directly communicating with parents of school-aged children via Peachjar, a company that specializes in sending digital flyers to parents of K-12 students and has access to numerous school districts' lists of parent email addresses. This was the first time our office used mass email for outreach beyond case participants.

We created a variety of flyers in both English and Spanish to highlight events, general information, and specific services. By cross-referencing geographic, economic, and population statistics, we identified key areas where the flyers would most likely reach their target audience. We also carefully tailored the language and imagery in each flyer to address the needs of that community in the context of the child support program.

During the initial three-month test period, Peachjar distributed eight flyers to parents at nearly 200 schools for a total of 330,987 emails. For each distribution, we evaluated email analytics and new traffic to the website. By using Peachjar, the campaign achieved a 34% email open rate, a figure far exceeding the 21% industry standard for government emails. This impressive open rate may be because emails from schools are more familiar and trusted by parents. The flyers that received the most clicks were ones that included a list of services in plain language. Our website also received a 22% increase in Spanish-speaking visitors over the previous year, and we experienced modest but noteworthy growth of Spanish-speaking case openings and engagement.

Our office plans to continue using Peachjar's unique services, in conjunction with social media and our website, to create and maintain a complementary system of digital outreach.

San Diego Child Support

HOPE for the Holidays

WE HAVE RESOURCES FOR YOU

- BASIC NEEDS
- FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE
- EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

TAKE ADVANTAGE TODAY!

We're Here To Help | www.SanDiegoChildSupport.org

San Diego Child Support

Esperanza para los días Festivos

TENEMOS RECURSOS PARA TI

- NECESIDADES BÁSICAS
- ASISTENCIA FINANCIERA
- OPORTUNIDADES DE EMPLEO

¡APROVECHE HOY!

Estamos Aquí Para Ayudar | www.SanDiegoChildSupport.org

Poverty Simulation Offers Real-Life Perspective

California Child Support Services

Truly understanding poverty is difficult for those who have not experienced it, but it is an important component to providing compassionate customer service to low-income clients. To help staff better understand their constituents who lack financial resources, California's Nevada County Child Support Services has used an illuminating poverty simulation.

Mike Dent, director of Housing and Child Support Services in Nevada County, first participated in a Community Action Poverty Simulation (CAPS) at a Missouri Community Action Network meeting. The CAPS concept requires participants to "live" in simulated poverty to gain insight on the unique and stressful struggles that financially marginalized populations experience daily. Using the CAPS simulation kit, participants role-play the lives of low-income families. Some roles are recipients of public assistance, some are disabled, and others are senior citizens on Social Security. Impressed by its impact, Mike knew he wanted to bring this simulation back to his colleagues.

"We hoped to empower staff to better engage folks in poverty and not be judgmental or intolerant. We want to provide good customer service without bias, frustration, or impatience," said Dent.

In the simulation, Nevada County participants, including supervisors, managers, analysts, and directors, had to secure basic necessities and shelter on a limited budget. Laurel Foster, an administrative services officer for the Nevada County Health and Human Services Agency, felt she understood the significant barriers that those in poverty must overcome. The simulation, however, provided a better perspective that resulted in more empathy and a clearer understanding.

"The simulator...encourages staff collaboration and out-of-the-box thinking to help customers overcome or minimize barriers," Foster said. "This was such a valuable experience that I believe it would be beneficial to have a refresher periodically."

In her first simulation, Foster was assigned the role of a homeless, single mother of a 4-year-old. She had to balance finding transportation to drop off her child at daycare, getting to Social Services, and conducting her banking and grocery shopping. In her second simulation, she played the role of an employer, witnessing fellow county leaders struggle with similar challenges and noticeable frustration when they were fired due to tardiness that was beyond their control.

"There was a lot of feedback about how stressful it is to be living in poverty and on the edge of homelessness," said Dent. "Participants struggled with paying bills, finding



child care, getting to work, and juggling deadlines and commitments."

Local data demonstrates the importance of understanding these kinds of struggles that low-income clients experience. U.S. Census data reveal that 26.5% percent of minor children in Nevada County live below the federal poverty level, and thousands of residents still struggle with basic needs. More than 28% of single-parent households headed by women receive the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and hundreds of families have MediCal as their primary source of health insurance.

Nevada County is not alone in the fight against poverty, and many groups can benefit from a proactive effort to gain a clearer understanding of their customers. Any agency interested in learning more about this simulation can visit the [Community Action Poverty Simulation website](#).

Riverside County Wins Two Awards for Child Support Program

Congratulations to the Riverside County Department of Child Support Services for winning the 2020 National Child Support Enforcement Association (NCSEA) Leadership Award for Program Awareness for its "Coffee Break" podcast. Launched in October 2019, this podcast is a casual way to answer common child support questions and inform the public about statewide services. To date, Coffee Break has over 1,000 downloads in over 14 countries!

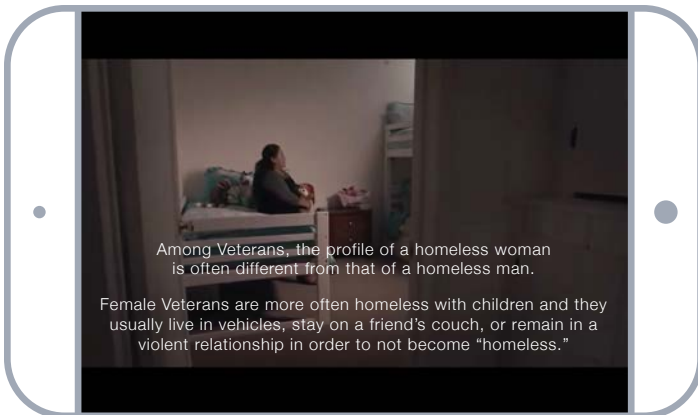
Riverside County also recently won Outstanding Child Support Program from the California Child Support Directors Association. The Association recognized Riverside County specifically for its change in work culture and performance, emphasizing employee engagement and focusing on work-life balance. Keep up the great work!

COORDINATION POINTS

VA's HUD-VASH Program Places Veteran Families into Stable Housing

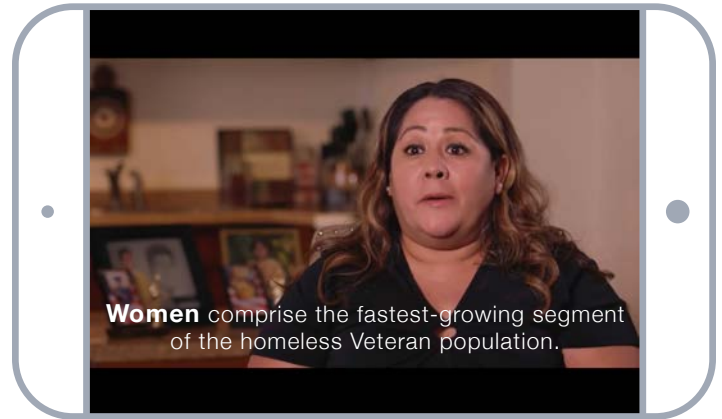
Monica Diaz, Executive Director, Homeless Programs Office, Veterans Health Administration, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

This article is the second installment in our four-part series on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) programs for veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This month, we highlight the [Housing and Urban Development - VA Supportive Housing \(HUD-VASH\)](#) program. This collaborative program combines HUD housing vouchers with VA supportive services, providing veterans and their families with the necessary tools to permanently exit homelessness. Of VA's continuum of care programs, HUD-VASH enrolls the largest percentage of veterans in need of housing, with nearly 85,000 vouchers in use at the end of fiscal year 2020.



HUD provides rental assistance vouchers to veterans who are eligible for VA health care services and are experiencing homelessness. Once stable housing is secured, the program connects veterans and their families with VA case managers who help them access resources such as health care, mental health treatment, counseling services, child care assistance, and more. Case managers work with veterans and their families to align their housing plan with their goals, resource needs, and opportunities for their children, including helping families locate housing near the children's school or child care center.

Since 2010, HUD-VASH has helped more than 200,000 veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness with case management, supportive services, and permanent supportive housing. After completing military service, Kimberly Carrillo was facing homelessness with her three kids. Thanks to help from the HUD-VASH program and community partners, she began receiving support and assistance, eventually entering stable housing with her children. [Hear Kimberly's full story by watching this video.](#)

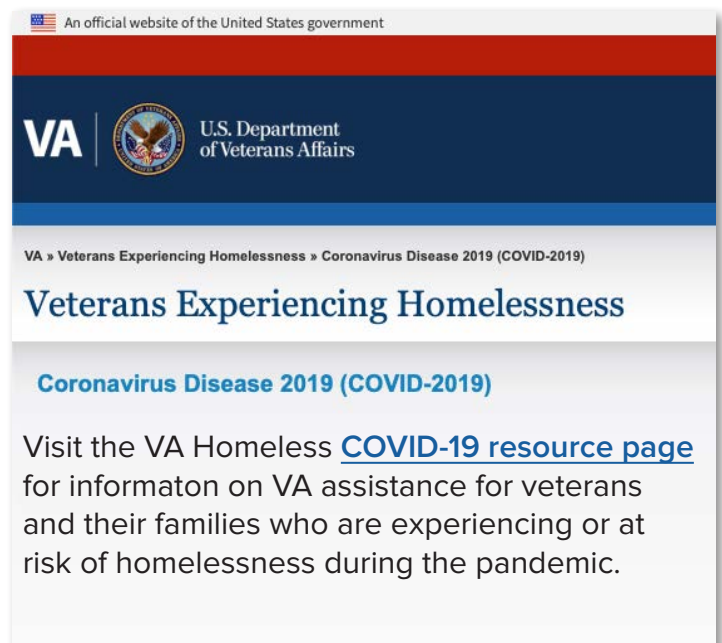


Left and above - Screens from the Veterans Administration HUD-VASH program YouTube video: Gender Sensitive Homelessness Services that Address the Unique Needs of Women Veterans.

In July, VA allocated \$700 million from the [Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security \(CARES\) Act](#) to enhance its emergency relief response and expand program resources for veterans and their families experiencing or at risk of homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic. \$602 million of this funding has been allocated to the Supportive Services for Veteran Families program and, through close collaboration and integration with the HUD-VASH program, has helped place veterans and their families into safe housing as quickly as possible.

The VA and HUD partnership gives veterans and their families the resources they need to exit homelessness while providing them with the tools and support to help them maintain safe and stable housing. HUD-VASH, along with VA's other programs for homeless or at-risk veterans, continues working toward the ultimate goal of ending veteran homelessness across the nation.

In the next Child Support Report, we'll provide details about [VA Programs for Justice-Involved Veterans](#) and the child support resources these programs offer.



GETTING TO WORK

Army Vet Finds Work Through Washington's Families Forward Program

Jorji Knickrehm, former Grants Project Manager, *Washington State Department of Social and Health Services*

Families Forward Washington (FFW) is a program within the Washington State DSHS Division of Child Support that provides a unique mix of employment-focused and child support case management services. Recently, Kevin, a 39-year-old Army veteran, found success with the program after deciding he wanted to pursue a truck-driving career.

When the truck-driving trainer heard that Kevin was a parent with a child support case, the trainer referred him to Families Forward – a great example of a 'reverse referral' that effectively identified an appropriate noncustodial parent for the program. At intake, FFW partner Goodwill of Greater Washington discovered that Kevin had been involved in the contempt process for the past six years. He had been struggling to find permanent employment because he didn't have any post-high school job training or certification. In FFW, Kevin saw a way to create a better future for himself and his children.

FFW's career counselor at Goodwill provided case management and job placement assistance, while the Division of Child Support's FFW enforcement officer provided child support assistance. Kevin got his commercial driver's license after five weeks of training and secured a permanent job as a flatbed truck driver. Kevin started making child support payments on his current and back support, and a few months later prosecutors released him from contempt. The Child Support Division is inspired by Kevin's hard work and proud to have been able to help him and his family.

Check out [MDRC's new blog](#) to learn more about the Families Forward Washington program.

In Practice: Lessons for and from Practitioners



TRIBAL MATTERS

Umatilla Tribe Adapts to Continue Helping Families During Pandemic

Erin N. Biencourt, Child Support Manager, *Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation*

Despite challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic, child support programs nationwide continue to serve families in several ways. Learn how the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation is adapting to support families during the pandemic.

How is the Umatilla child support program adapting to the impact of COVID-19?

Our office has been closed to the public since mid-March, so most of our staff have been working from home. We sent letters to all clients asking them to notify us of employment changes and encouraging them to seek modifications. For interjurisdictional cases, we made sure clients had the appropriate contact information.

How has the pandemic-related office closure affected your ability to collect child support?

Our collections dropped significantly with the closure of the tribe's largest employer, Wildhorse Resort and Casino. Tribal dividends are another large source of collections, and this source has also decreased. The Casino reopened in June, and we have seen our collections slowly start to increase. Through it all, we have continued our essential functions, including payment processing.

How has the pandemic affected your ability to communicate with your customers?

With our offices closed, all clients must have an appointment to meet with staff. We are reaching out to clients who lack access to reliable phone or internet service. We have expanded our text and email communication and are looking into automated office systems. We are also working to digitize all our files.

What are the biggest hurdles facing the program?

We track all our cases through Excel spreadsheets and paper files, which is certainly a challenge when teleworking. Our program is also entirely judicial, so we're very reliant on our court. We recently started holding telephonic hearings again, but there is still a backlog of cases.

How is your staff adjusting to teleworking?

Each member of our small staff of five has risen to the challenge and continues to support our clients to the best of their ability. We check in via text and Zoom to vent, share positivity, and encourage each other to take personal/self-care time. We had to adjust and be flexible, but after ten months of teleworking, we're getting the hang of it.

PROCESS IMPROVEMENT

A Conversation About Collaboration in Child Support

Alice P. Jacobsohn, Esq., Government Relations, American Payroll Association

Collaboration occurs when people explore ideas to find a solution and rely on each other to create a vision that extends beyond the limits of one individual. Two issues have engaged leaders from state child support enforcement agencies, payroll professionals with the American Payroll Association (APA), and OCSE's Employer Services team — collecting child support from independent contractors and improving compliance with new hire reporting. Discussions about these two issues are ongoing and part of the Employer Collaborative Workgroup established by the National Council of Child Support Directors (NCCSD) and supported by OCSE and APA.

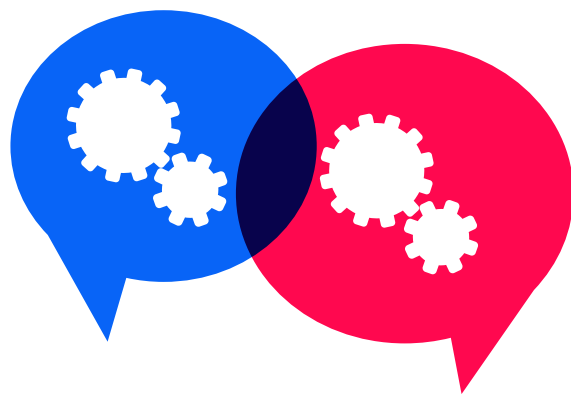
Collecting from independent contractors

The conversation about collecting child support from independent contractors is an exercise in collaboration to better serve children and families. The problem is in determining the best process. As more states pass specific laws on new hire reporting and withholding for child support from independent contractors, employers must adapt procedures to ensure compliance. Contractors are generally paid through employers' accounts payable departments, which are not prepared to manage new hire reporting or withholding for child support. Payroll departments cannot easily process these contractors because systems are designed to consider employee withholding for taxes, benefits, and child support, which are generally not provided to independent contractors.

Other challenges for all stakeholders include determining potential future growth of the gig economy and identifying child support participants who earn income as independent contractors. Defining gig workers is inconsistent. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics suggests that in 2017 the U.S. gig economy had 55 million participants. According to Gallop, 36% of U.S. workers earn income in part or full as gig workers. Upwork Global estimates that by 2027 there will be 86.5 million freelancers. Edison Research says that for 53% of gig workers age 18-34, work in the gig economy is their primary source of income. With OCSE's estimate that millennials account for nearly 50% of the child support caseload, collaboration on child support for independent contractors becomes even more critical.

Improving new hire reporting

Employers are required to report new hires. However, during NCCSD's 2019 Employer Symposium, state child support directors said that new hire reporting rates remain low.



One possible solution is to simplify new hire reporting to allow employers to report through OCSE's Child Support Portal. Expanding the portal to allow employers to report all new hires to one central location would require federal legislation. Payroll professionals said if states agree to standard reporting data elements reported to one portal, employers might better understand them, which would increase compliance.

Another solution is to improve the National Directory of New Hires by adding a centralized national employer table using a standard format. This might reduce the burden on resources because states could avoid duplicating efforts for the same employer.

Collaboration is the key to success as we move forward to address a changing workforce and seek answers to child support questions. In the words of writer and poet Ryunosuke Satoro, "Individually we are one drop; but together we are an ocean."

Child Support Report

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