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Office of Family Assistance

National
Responsible
Fatherhood Clearinghouse



NRFC Webinar Series

Child Support Awareness Month: A Look at How Child Support Is Evolving

Transcript

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Moderator:

- Nigel Vann, National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse

Presenters:

- James Murray, Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement, Washington DC.
- Kelly Little, Mecklenburg County Child Support, Charlotte, NC.
- Cheri Tillis, Fatherhood Support Program, St. Louis, MO.
- Lisl King Williams, Fatherhood Support Program, St. Louis, MO.

Operator: Good day, everyone, and welcome to the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse webinar. Today's conference is being recorded, and at this time, I would like to turn the conference over to Nigel Vann. Please go ahead, sir.

Nigel Vann: Thank you very much, and good morning, good afternoon to everybody. As you see on the screen, our webinar today is entitled *Child Support Awareness Month: A Look at How Child Support Is Evolving*, and this is a follow-up to previous webinars that we've done on child support. It's also our final webinar of the fiscal year, the federal fiscal year. As those of you who have joined us before know, we provide these on a regular basis as part of a learning community that we invite your contribution in, and we really encourage [unintelligible] learning from these.

I just want to go over some of the basics that you have seen on your screen. In terms of what you're seeing on your screen, you see there's a Chat box on the left, and so that's where we invite you just to talk among yourselves, if you have questions, want to introduce yourselves. If you have a question for the presenters, please use the Ask a Question box in the bottom right-hand corner, and then at the end of the webinar, the presenters will respond to as many of those questions as we have time for. If we don't have time to respond to all the questions, then we will post answers to those after the webinar on the website, www.fatherhood.gov/webinars, and you'll also be able to see the slides, and of course, there'll be a video where you'll be able to actually listen to the webinar again. So all the materials will be there a few weeks after the webinar.

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You can also see there's a box with downloadable resources—that includes bios for the presenters, a resources list and various other resources provided by the Office of Child Support Enforcement [OCSE]. And then there's [*sic*] web links in the Web Links box, including web links for each of the organizations that are presenting today.

So, with that, I will invite Damon Waters from the Office of Family Assistance just to say a few words of welcome, and then we'll move forward. Damon?

Damon Waters: Thanks, Nigel. And welcome and thank you for joining us on today's webinar, *Child Support Awareness Month: A Look at How Child Support Is Evolving*. In recognition of August as Child Support Awareness Month, we have invited federal and local representatives to join us for a discussion of the importance of child support for children, and the importance of providing services that help both custodial and non-custodial parents.

The issue of child support is an important one for all of us who work to strengthen families. To do this work, we must help fathers and their families navigate the child support system. To be a responsible parent means providing for your children, both emotionally and financially—but as we know, life can get hard when parents split up, and children are being raised apart from one or both of their biological parents. The child support system is set up to help families, and ensure that both parents contribute to their child's financial needs. But meeting those financial responsibilities can become a struggle if you don't have steady employment.

Fatherhood programs can help fathers in a variety of ways, including help with co-parenting and employment skills. By working in partnership with child support programs, you can focus on shared goals to strengthen families. As we heard in our March 2013 and April 2015 webinars, child support programs have been evolving at the national and state levels, and moving away from welfare cost-recovery models to family-centered practices that emphasize accurate child support orders and links to services for non-custodial parents who need help obtaining steady employment.

Today we're going to hear more about how fatherhood programs in local child support offices are working together to strengthen families. I hope you find the webinar informative and helpful. We'll be asking two poll questions during the webinar to get an idea of what you do in your programs. This helps our presenters frame their comments to fit your experiences. We will also ask for your feedback about today's conversation at the end of the webinar. Please continue to send any ideas or questions to the Clearinghouse team at info@fatherhood.gov. Again, info@fatherhood.gov. We're particularly interested in feedback about the information we are providing, and any topics that you would like us to cover in future webinars. With that, I'll turn things back over to Nigel.

Nigel Vann: Thank you very much, Damon. And as you see on the screen now, this is just a quick overview of the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse—again, just for those of you who haven't joined us before. We are funded through the Office of Family Assistance, and we provide resources for fathers, fatherhood programs, researchers, policymakers and everybody who's interested in the issue. You see the website there [www.fatherhood.gov], you see a link to our Responsible Fatherhood Toolkit, which has various tips for programs, individuals who are working with fathers, and you also see the link to have a look at the archives of all our previous webinars. Again, you can always contact us at info@fatherhood.gov, as Damon said, and we really encourage fathers and practitioners to use our National Call Center toll-free line [1-877-4DAD411 (1-877-432-3411)], which can be very helpful, particularly if there is an issue between a father and the mother of their child. We can help do mediation—we have trained counselors on the end of that line, and you can also join us via Facebook [www.facebook.com/fatherhoodgov/] or Twitter [[@Fatherhoodgov](https://twitter.com/Fatherhoodgov)] there.

Today's webinar, again, is going to be about child support, which is obviously one of the major issues that fatherhood programs have to help fathers handle, and so it's really important to be able to establish an effective partnership with your local child support office. We're going to hear today about how child support policies have been evolving, and really making the work that you all do to help fathers that little bit easier. So we're going to go over some of the basics of child support, and really zero in on ways in which programs and child support agencies can work together to ensure that fathers get the services they need to help them meet their responsibilities to their children.

Today we're going to hear from James Murray from the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement. We're also going to hear from Kelly Little, representing Mecklenburg County Child Support in Charlotte, North Carolina, and then finally we're going to hear from Cheri Tillis and Lisl King Williams from the Fatherhood Support Program in St. Louis. And a special shout-out here to Cheri and Lisl, because they've stepped in right at the last minute, because our initial presenter had to back out because of another engagement. And so, Cheri and Lisl only agreed to do this less than 48 hours ago, I think. So they're not actually going to have slides, but they are going to be responding to some questions and making a lot of important points for us.

So before we go to James' office, we're just going to have a quick pop-up question. If we can get that answer—and so, if you could just take a minute and just let us know, “Which of these best describes the program or organization that you work for?” It just helps the presenters know who they're actually talking to at some—a little bit like asking you to put your hand up in the room. [pause] It seems that we've got slightly more people on the fatherhood side, but quite a few people saying “Other,” and quite a few people from child support agencies. That's very good to know, so we really can engage in a good partnership conversation here.

So thank you very much for that. And with that, let me briefly introduce James. You can download his full bio and the other presenter bios from the Resource box. Just briefly, James' responsibility is as a Senior Advisor at the Office of Child Support Enforcement. He is focused on developing strategic partnerships and facilitating coalition building to strengthen OCSE's impact in the areas of responsible fatherhood, young parents, men's health, financial literacy, minority outreach and veteran services. Before coming to ACF, James had varied positions in the education and non-profit field, including work with Early Head Start and the National Fatherhood Initiative. So he brings a unique blend of experience in the field to help and to develop these partnerships. So James, the time is yours.

James Murray: Thank you so much, Nigel. I'm really pleased to be with you all this afternoon, and I will do my very best to walk us through sort of a glimpse of the child support program in the time that we have allotted.

As Nigel said, I'm a Senior Advisor here in the Child Support Enforcement office, and have been here roughly, just about a year. A short time, but really good experience in working on these critical issues. We can start out by just looking at our mission—basically, it's really to increase the reliability of child support that's paid by parents when they live apart from their children. We achieve that mainly through four core strategies: locating parents, establishing paternity, establishing and enforcing child support orders, and also removing barriers to payment. That's done in partnership with state and local offices here with our teams within the federal office.

Just to give you a little bit of information of how we're structured—the Federal Office of Child Support is located here in Washington, D.C., and we're broken out into really ten divisions, one of which I work for, which is the Division of Program Innovation. Within that division, we work to do a few things. We develop and evaluate and refine new strategies, we disseminate information about promising and evidence-based practices, and we also administer programs like access and visitation, child support employment demonstrations, and other grants that, if we have time to touch on, I'll be glad to do today.

We've got our work broken out into really two divisions. The Strategic Initiatives and Partnerships side of the house, which I'm on, is in the Grants and Evaluation side. The significance of those is that the Grants and Evaluation side manages research and demonstration projects, including Section 1115 grants and waivers and special improvement grants. And on the Initiatives and Partnerships side, we really work to conduct strategic outreach with partners. We implement special projects on the regional or national level, and we also build collaborations on the state, federal and local level.

So we talked a lot about the child support program in general. One of the downloads that you have here is really an infographic on the current status of the program, and it sort of illustrates the information on this slide in just a different way. But in general, the program serves one in five children with that across the nation, and both parents. Most recently,

in 2015, Child Support collected \$32 billion annually, and 95 percent of that went directly to families. That helps avoid public assistance costs, and in terms of our allowed return on investment, the child support program collects \$5.26 for every public dollar that is spent.

In our partnership with the state and local levels, there are certain functions that we handle here within the Federal Office—and this list is not an exhaustive list, but is just a quick glimpse of some of those functions that we hold. So we provide policy guidance and training and technical assistance. We also operate the federal enforcement remedies that are available. We also administer the access and visitation program that I talked about, the demonstration grant, and the federal Parent Locator Service, which are important in terms of locating parents to help establish and enforce orders.

In terms of the state and tribal functions, these are just a few that they handle, but on the state and local level, that's where the paternity is established, and that is really important and significant because paternity has to be established in order to for a child support order to be put in place. So there at your local offices is where review and adjustment of order establishment takes place, collection of support takes place, and the monitoring and distribution of those collections.

We talked about sort of the new face of child support, if you will—and under our commissioner, Vicki Turetsky, there have been great strides that have been realized in terms of moving child support from a welfare and cost-recovery model to more of a family-centered practice model. So the program, as you know, or may not know, was established in 1975, and it was really set in place to reimburse benefits that were paid by what was then called AFDC [Aid to Families with Dependent Children], which of course later transitioned into TANF [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families]. Under that old welfare cost-recovery model, when folks think of child support, it's really along some of the lines of the things that are in the left-hand column—assigning and retaining costs, also imputing income—that we'll talk about in a little bit, and so automated and standardized enforcement practices are more rigid than they can be sometimes. And then also, debt as motivation to pay.

Under the family-centered practices model, things have shifted. Previously, there was the model that every case would be treated the same: everyone could get a full-time job, high orders of motivating, and the folks can always come back and amend them if they disagree, and if non-custodial parents don't come up with money, then they go to jail. We don't ask where the money comes from, as long as they pay. But under the family-centered strategy model, it shifts to more thoughtful processes, if you will—things that really bring about more reliable payments, looking more at family distributions. So you're talking about 95 percent of payments going to families, orders being set on actual income, which makes them more accurate, and also services to remove barriers to non-custodial parents being able to pay. And that includes things like using data to select the right tools for the right person at the right time, early intervention to prevent debt buildup, and really changing behavior to encourage payment, so more of a behavior-focused model.

So you'll see and hear a lot about what we affectionately call our bubble chart. In the center, we've got our four core strategies for the Child Support Enforcement Office: establishing paternity, establishing orders, collecting support and locating parents. Under our new strategy, though, each of those other six headings plays a very intricate part in our interface with state and local offices, and families that are served by the child support program. Because what we know doesn't work is imputing standard income, setting default orders, and really just allowing debt to build. What does work is building a case through early engagement and technology, and identifying and addressing reasons for non-payment, as well as looking at a non-custodial parents' ability to pay.

And so, when we talk about family-centered, what does that look like on the ground? It's really engaging both parents. It's really paying as much money as possible to the children and the families, implementing debt management when possible, also addressing co-parenting and parenting time as much as possible, and—I believe another handout you have that's downloadable is our graphic for what we call Jobs, Not Jail—really helping non-custodial parents obtain and maintain gainful employment, not simply be tossed in jail or incarcerated for non-ability to pay.

This work with the fatherhood partners, and partners in the Office of Family Assistance, isn't new to OCSE. It really began back in 1997, and a little bit before with the Access and Visitation Program, on up to today, where we employ some of our demonstration projects here within this office, like behavior interventions, the Child Support Employment Demonstration Program, and Access and Visitation Grant Program. Due to our time limitation, I won't be able to walk in-depth into each of those, but I encourage anyone and everyone to reach out to meet here in this office to begin that discussion, and I will happily provide as much information as possible and really sort of help you understand the programs in their entirety.

When we look at the benefits of paternity establishment for the child support program, and for families and for partners, on the family level, it helps build that sense of identity for the child receiving those benefits, and for the family. It also helps solidify that parental bond, giving the non-custodial parent access, and what we found through research is that steady rightsized, what we call rightsized payments, really help non-custodial parents stay engaged more than they would if they were not paying, or if their child support payments were actually slotted too high. It extends the legal rights of all parties involved, not only the non-custodial parent, but the custodial parent and the child as well. It helps stay connected with that extended family and that extended network, and it gives the child access to the benefits and services that he or she rightly deserves.

In walking through our partnerships with local fatherhood programs, and even other agencies and entities on the ground, there are a lot of benefits that can be realized on both sides. So, from the child support side, one of the benefits of working with direct service programs is that you have access to clients that may need services on our side, or maybe in our base, but we may not have access to. From the child support side, your local and state child support officials have access to the information that will be helpful to you, and to the families and the non-custodial parents that we serve, in understanding the child support program, and being able to navigate the child support program, and build those relationships that help give the family as much support as possible.

In general, there are a few things that we would recommend, or I would recommend initially—and that's really just simply reaching out to your local state child support office, just letting them know who you are. If they have regular meetings that you can attend, or even inviting them to attend your regular meetings or your group sessions, you may be able to have someone come in and just sit and listen to the issues that the parents are facing, listen to some of the questions that they may have in general, and then be able to provide some of those answers. So really having a child support representative or staff person talk to your participants, your staff, providing answers and training and information that you may not have, and really looking to develop those deeper partnerships and relationships. So, referrals move in both ways. So fatherhood programs being able to—Another direction of this program is being able to refer participants to the local office of child support, being able to answer questions that folks have, and really begin to put the assistance in place to help them modify orders, and establish orders when those are necessary.

Too, for us on the child support side, it's always helpful to have as many partners and friends—to share the message as we can, letting everyone know that it's not the same old office of child support. That we're really in a mode of desiring to connect with you as much as possible on a deeper, more thoughtful level, and also helping us to build relationships to more fully implement our parent-focused and family-focused innovations. And some of the ways that you may be able to do that is, one, through our office. So here on the federal level, we're broken out into ten regional offices across the country. Each regional office is responsible for a cluster of states. If you are having problems connecting with your local child support officials, or if you just don't know where to start, always reach out to us, and feel free just to ask us questions. We are always grateful—I'm always more than willing to help introduce partners on the ground and help facilitate the discussion, and make sure that everyone is receiving the level of support that you need.

With that, I think that's really all of my time, and Nigel, I'll turn it back over to you.

Nigel Vann: Okay, well, thank you very much, James. That was very helpful. I know people often get confused as to how child support works together from the federal to the state level. I can certainly testify on a number of fronts—James

said a couple of times, it's not the same old child support office. When I first got involved in this work in the late '80s, I actually got hired to manage a program in Maryland because two local judges were seeing guys in their court who couldn't pay their child support, and the judges said, you know, it doesn't make any sense to send these guys to jail; we want to send them to a program that can help them. So the state came up with a program that's still going on today, actually, that provides employment assistance for guys in those situations, and as James said, that message is now coming out loud and clear from the federal level, and also, in a lot of cases, at the local level, but not all the local levels yet. James has also been very helpful in connecting some programs that I've referred to him, who were having a hard time finding out how to get in touch with their local office, so I certainly endorse James as someone who can help with that, if you need that kind of help.

I just wonder, James, if you could perhaps add just a note to please give folk a sense of how child support policies may vary from state to state, in terms of how the orders are set, and those kind of things?

Nigel Vann: Are you on mute, James?

James Murray: Nigel, sorry. I was on mute, sorry. Do you want me to do that now, or would you want me to wait till the end?

Nigel Vann: If you can just say that quickly, or we can come back to it, if you prefer, but...

James Murray: Yeah, so certainly—As Nigel said, they vary from state to state, and that's where the relationship with your local child support official becomes important, especially if you have a case that's, say, maybe an interstate case, where you may have a non-custodial parent that's got children in various states. There are a lot of intricacies to that, and really unique points that—it's really best to have a knowledgeable official walk you through. We've got a lot resources on our web page—one of the downloads that you have also is our guide on how to modify a child support order. That guide, though, is just the basic information, to help you get a sense of what steps are included in that process and know more about the process in general. We always recommend connecting, calling, talking with, sitting down with your local officials to be able to walk through the specific nature of each case individually.

Nigel Vann: Perfect. Thanks, James. Yeah, and again, I'll echo James in terms of the resources that you've got there. He mentioned the changing child support order one, and the "Jobs, Not Jails." The General Resources list, I think it's the second that you'll see in that box there—that's got a number of links in it, including the four links that James has provided. One of those actually takes you to a map of the states. You can click on your state, and it then gives you a link to get some state-specific information which can always be helpful.

So, Enzo, if we can have the second poll question, we're just going to ask you to respond to this question here, and we're just wondering if you could indicate, "Which of the following best describes the relationship in your area between the fatherhood program [and] the child support program? Would you say it's excellent, very good, good, developing, exploratory, no current relationship or not sure?"

It looks like we're pretty much across the board, although quite a few folk are indicating either "not sure" or "no current relationship." Not a lot of "excellents," so that certainly speaks to the need to be continuing these kind of conversations. I see a few more people indicating "very good" and "good."

So again, I thank you for that, and I think that will help actually, our next presenter, Kelly Little, to frame his remarks a little bit, and I'm just going to briefly introduce Kelly. Let me say up front that, Kelly was having some issues connecting, so we hope that he's with us, but I'll just say a few words about him, and again, you can see his brief bio.

Kelly is the Program Supervisor and Responsible Parent Leader for the Mecklenburg County Child Support Enforcement, Responsible Fatherhood, and Mom as Gateway [MAGI] initiatives. He's got over 19 years of public administration

experience, his work has really helped to shift the paradigm of child support service in North Carolina, and he's indicated that the approach has really galvanized support and credibility within what was a previously skeptical community. We certainly see that across the country, that the perception of child support has not really kept up with the fact that it is evolving, so it really is a case of finding ways to let communities know more about the more friendly child support, if you like. So Kelly's got a lot of experience in this, and he going to be able to talk about what they've done now locally. He's also, as you'll see in his bio, a 25-year veteran of the United States Army and Army National Guard, so he's served in a lot of different ways here. So Kelly, how is your phone line working, and are you online to see your slides, or are you having to work from your hard copy?

Kelly Little: I'm working from my hard copy. I've got the copy that Enzo sent me, so I think I'm okay.

Nigel Vann: Okay, great. So we will move to your second slide, then? Oops—I just lost it. Are you moving it, Enzo? Let's see—we're just getting your slides ready. You're now on the slide that says "Holistic Service Delivery," so the time is yours, sir. Thank you very much.

Kelly Little: All right, thank you. So, I'm going to start off with the Holistic Service Delivery. The reason why we went to this model is simply because exactly some of the things James just spoke about the traditional perception of child support—which was, you walk inside one of our offices, we grab you by your ankles and flip you upside down and shake all the money out [of] your pockets. That's no longer the perception of child support in Mecklenburg County. We operate from the standpoint of emotional, physical and financial domains to help move families to self-sufficiency, and to strengthen the family unit.

We looked at things from shooting for a high-performance goal. How we achieved that excellence in terms of our culture is by building capacity within the staff first. Then that permeates into the customers that we serve. The ownership to transform the culture of child support started with the decision to recognize who our most valuable resource was, which was our children. I'll let you all sit with that for a second, because that's very vital and important.

Then we began to look at, how do we shift that culture? Can we do it with a progressive vision that was championed by our director, and a team of males which started with roughly three people, evolved to 10 people—and current day, we have over 23 males in our office who represent the Responsible Fatherhood Initiative. However, it's the entire office who actually helps to support that on the back end. And then, we also believe in true communication and clear expectations. And what you see at the bottom is a moniker for our brands which identify our responsible fatherhood program within our office.

Nigel Vann: Okay, we've been having a slight problem with the slides, Kelly. So now, the slide you want to be on is the bubble slide, with your two bubbles?

Kelly Little: Yes, sir.

Nigel Vann: Okay, so that's where we want to be, Enzo, so let's keep it there. Okay, thanks.

Kelly Little: All right—so, on this slide, James went over all the various different domains in which child support in the federal office has set guidance for how our local offices could leverage these specific areas to bring families to become strengthened. So on our local level, some of the relationships that we established because of our unique positioning, to address mom and dad on the front end to benefit and significantly increase outcomes for children on the back end, was established first with our Department of Social Services, where we have partnered on many relationships—one around employment opportunities, one around co-locating someone to help address leveraging co-parenting throughout both organizations, because we serve both customers. We also have partnered with our health department, because our health department offers what's called Triple-P, Positive Parenting Programs, which also helps us to help bring families into healthy relationships for the benefit of children. Additionally, we work with our community

support services area, who provides services around veteran services, which is a unique population who historically have had difficulty coming into our office because of previous strategies and techniques that were employed in the past.

So what we've done is, we went out to the VA facilities, we talked with some of the veterans out there, and helped build a relationship that has helped them to become comfortable with coming into our office now. If you look at the chart, child support stands out, and the only reason it stands out is because we have an opportunity that other service areas don't have an opportunity, because we have both customers on the front end. And just so you all know, in Mecklenburg County, we operate from what's called a Consolidated Human Services Department, which actually support[s] many of the transformational practices that we have been employing.

Nigel Vann: You got it, you got it, Kelly.

Kelly Little: All right, thank you. So, from this perspective, I ask you: What does strengthening families look like for you all? For us, based on what we saw, but also and more importantly, based on the feedback that was provided by our customers and surveys, we knew that we had to establish a program where we'd educate fathers, which is what we're considering the Responsible Fatherhood Initiative. Additionally, we knew that we had to provide something to moms as well. And the reason why we say that is because it's no different than a man and woman, walking into a relationship preparing for marriage. So if you address one, you have to address both to have a resolution for the problems that manifest.

Next, positive parenting program collaboration with our Health Department and our Department of Social Services, is to help support that healthy relationship I was just talking about.

Community outreach is critical because, in order to increase capacity, we have to educate the community so that they understand that child support can actually be a benefit for them, in terms of building these alliances, in terms of breaking down these barriers, in terms of helping to address whatever issues or challenges they may have around relationships between the two parents—but ultimately, obtain rightsized order, obtaining visitation, which we can't directly foster, but we can help them navigate that process to get the assistance that they need.

And then next, collaborating with our local department of social service, youth and family services, our community resources division, and all the other areas that I spoke about earlier. What this does, this helps us to monitor our performance, and improve our performance.

Next slide, please.

As we can see here, I just wanted to give you a quick visual of what our responsible fatherhood team looks like, how we differentiate ourselves when we go to different workshops and when we're interacting with our customers, so that they understand and realize that we're very proud to be providing this service around responsible fatherhood, and how it helps to put a safe [unintelligible] or image with the changing of the practices that's being employed by child support.

Now, strengthening families. One of the things that our Responsible Fatherhood Initiative provides is four non-custodial parent orientations a year. At those non-custodial parent orientations, we educate fathers on specific challenges that they may face. We record and collect any challenges or barriers that they communicate with us. We assist our customers [to] obtain employment, soft skills. We link them to other services in the community. We talk about the Triple-P program which helps them orient themselves and understand the importance around healthy relationships. Once again, we leverage the parenting skills from the Triple-P—the Positive Parenting Program,—and then again, the non-custodial parent orientation is offered quarterly. And through that, we bring local judges, we bring attorneys. We have employment folks that actually come to that orientation. We listen to our customers, and many of the challenges that they may be uncomfortable to express when they walked in our office historically. We [have] now created a safe space. Now, how do we get to that safe space?

Well, one of the things we did, we did a father-friendly checklist, and that father-friendly checklist gave us the state of our organizational position as it related to how customers saw us from the non-custodial parent side. And so we made some changes. We put a picture of our Responsible Fatherhood Program with our director, so immediately, when you get off the elevator, you see that picture, and you see pictures of fathers interacting with their children all around our office, to impress upon them the importance of engaging fathers since birth. And lastly, we talk to them about expungement clinics that will help those who may have been incarcerated and are having difficulty trying to get employment, and then we help them navigate that situation.

Okay, we'll take a second to read this. This was extremely, very critical for us, because this was feedback from one of our non-custodial parent orientations, but this was off-site. And this is what the customer said:

"I just wanted to write and thank you once again for the great assistance. It is amazing that I learned and accomplished more in an hour with you then [sic] in three years with everyone else. I really appreciate it, and wish I had met with you originally. Thanks for the common courtesy, professionalism and education you provided. Unfortunately, not everyone gives those core fundamentals of business. I cannot express how drastic of a change in service I experienced with you rather than the previous times when I was treated unfairly, prejudged, and more. Once again, thank you, thank you, thank you."

And this is to our responsible fatherhood contingency for some of the outstanding work that was done with this particular individual.

On this slide, we're going to talk about [the] Mom as Gateway Initiative. Now, the Mom as Gateway, not "Gatekeeper Initiative," is around protective instincts. We all know that parents have to be gatekeepers in some instances. That's very critical. However, what's important as we're talking about co-parenting and healthy relationships is to be a gateway—because outcomes improve when both parents are involved and engaged. In regards to beliefs of fathers' involvement in their children's lives, all the empirical data—not my beliefs, or what I think, or I thought I feel, but all the empirical data—supports how, when you involve and engage fathers in the lives of children, outcomes around employment, education, avoiding substance abuse, [and] avoiding being incarcerated, all increase. So this is critical. Studies show that mothers' perceptions greatly influence a father's involvement. Therefore, mothers are a key factor to getting fathers involved, and when both parents can effectively co-parent, their children benefit greatly. Through this program, which we call MAGI, we work with mothers who are child support customers using the National Fatherhood Initiative's curriculum to explore those areas I just discussed.

Next slide, please.

Now, in terms of outreach and reciprocity, these are organizations who we collaborate with in our community. We physically go out to the Empowerment Center where numerous non-custodial parents may have been afraid to come into our office. I walk out there, we speak with them, we provide educational scenarios—we explain to them the intricacies around intergovernmental issues. We go out to the elementary schools and discuss the importance of healthy parenting, as well as discussing many of the challenges or barriers that they may have as it relates to some other issues. We go to the Men's Empowerment Coalition and meet with them at least twice a month around typical issues that's impacting and plaguing the community. Where our local police department is involved, we've learned grassroots best practices from organizations like the Center for Urban Families. We help folks who are having issues with housing, and come to their facility and work with them. And then we work with our local universities—Johnson C. Smith, UNC-Charlotte and Queens College—to actually help interns come out and help us facilitate and navigate things from a social sciences perspective.

Once again—our Expungement Clinics, as I alluded to earlier—we don't have the capacity in our office to address visitation and custody, but one of our major collaborations is with the Child Service Center. Now we've even placed a case

manager in their office to help us assist with the capacity that we're sending to that office, to get them help they need around modifications, that visitation issue as well as custody issues.

Now, one of the bigger things that we've really been able to make an impact on here lately is addressing one of the biggest barriers for fathers, which is getting employed. That goes back to those who are underemployed and those who may have been previously incarcerated. We work with our local Department of Social Services to actually address this challenge and this barrier around able-bodied adults without dependents. Some of the community partners that we use is the Charlotte Works, our Urban League, North Carolina Works, Goodwill Industries, and we just [got] into a relationship with Chef Ron at the Community Culinary School of Charlotte, to actually help some of those young men who may have been incarcerated, but are on a right track to getting resolution so they can get employed.

Now, typically, when we talk about innovation, we talk about thinking outside the box. But what our employees need to do is, is to realize that there is no box. So what we adopted in our agency is the Banning the Box model. Nothing exists, so we see full 360 degrees. And by doing so, we're able to help not only our non-custodial parents navigate those challenges, but we're able to eradicate barriers which exist for them. This year alone, we collected over \$50 million. We're the only agency in North Carolina to ever collect that amount. Our focus on fathers has helped change the perception of the office to a father-friendly organization. This re-branding, if you will, has demonstrated our commitment to co-parenting, and following the lead of our federal office into being one of the most innovative programs across the country. If you all will, go ahead and click on it, so you all can see the video.

Nigel Vann: Yeah, we're just waiting for that to come up, Kelly. It's coming.

Kelly Little: Okay. This video culminates why we do what we do for children.

Nigel Vann: Yeah, we're still waiting for it to pop up and work. Did you want to say a word about it while we wait for it?

Kelly Little: I will. So, essentially, what this video is, it's a 38-second clip on a young man who was getting in trouble at home. Mom was a single-parent mother, and they brought a Marine drill instructor to the show, and he was fussing at him like he would be fussing at a recruit, explaining to him that his behavior is going to send him to a place where he's going to have somebody in his face telling him what to do, and he will have to deal with him for over six weeks. "Is that what you want?"

And the young man says, "Yes."

And so the drill instructor was struck for words, didn't know what to say, and he asked him why.

And he said, "Because I don't have a father." So this is essentially why we ensure that we try to engage fathers, because when fathers are not involved in our children's lives, children write their own stories.

Nigel Vann: It doesn't actually seem to be working, but I think you did a great job of talking about it. No, it is going now, okay.

[Video inaudible]

Nigel Vann: Well, thank you very much for that, Kelly. I think it's fantastic to hear what you're doing there as part of a child support agency. It was the times when you were talking, I was thinking I was listening to a fatherhood practitioner, rather than a child support program. And so, certainly that's a model for everybody to talk to. I know a lot of people are going to say, well, our child support office isn't doing that, but one thing that we can do is share these kind of stories, and encourage everybody else to do things like this. So thank you very much for that.

Kelly Little: Nigel?

Nigel Vann: I'm sorry—you want to say something else, Kelly?

Kelly Little: I just wanted to say, not only am I speaking to our local office, but our state office has been supportive of these orientations in pushing fatherhood around North Carolina. So I wanted to definitely make sure I talked about that as well.

Nigel Vann: Absolutely, yeah. And, you know, I did meet a colleague of yours at the National Child Support Enforcement Association conference earlier this year, and was very impressed with what he was sharing. So I think that, the more you guys are present at those kinds of events and sharing this, the better.

Kelly Little: Thank you.

Nigel Vann: No, thank you for what you're doing.

So now we're going to move to our final portion here before we go to the Q&A. And again, I really want to thank Cheri Tillis and Lisl King Williams for stepping up at the last minute for us here. And as you see, Cheri is the Executive Vice President of the Fathers' Support Center in St. Louis. She's been there since 2003, and she leads Programming Development and Operations there. She oversees their current Office of Family Assistance grant. We had Halbert Sullivan, the founder of the organization, on with our first webinar of the fiscal year, actually, so it's quite fitting that we are also featuring the Fathers' Support Center at the end of the fiscal year. It's the first time we have featured them, although they are a long-standing fatherhood program. And then, Lisl King Williams, as you see, is the Director of Legal Services. She has been with the Fathers' Support Center since 2009. She's been practicing law since 1981; she was a Municipal Court Judge in the city of St. Louis for 10 years; and she was recently appointed by the Missouri Supreme Court to serve as a member of the 2016 Child Support Guidelines Review Subcommittee of the Family Court. And so, we have a lot of experience here with the issue.

The next slide, as you see, is just a quick overview of the Fathers' Support Center. I actually pulled this from their website because, as I said, they haven't had time to put slides together. As you see, the organization's been around since 1997, served more than 13,000 fathers and families. They've had fathers complete the program who, in the last year, paid a combined \$273,000 annually to directly support their children, which really goes in line with what Kelly was just saying about, the more you help fathers, the more it becomes a win-win for the fathers, the fatherhood programs, and child support. So I will turn now to Cheri and Lisl. Is there anything else that you'd like to add, just about the organization, Cheri, before we move to the next slide with some questions?

Cheri Tillis: Oh, well, I guess I could add, if anybody wanted more information, they could feel free to visit our website at www.fatherssupportcenter.org, and you could learn more about the programs that we provide for the families that we serve here in St. Louis.

Nigel Vann: Great, okay. And that is available in the Web Link[s] box, for anybody who wants to do that. You can just click on who's the last one in that Web Link box. So now, what you're seeing on your screen now is just some general questions, and so what we thought we'd do here before we go to the general Q&A portion, I'm just going to ask a few of these questions for Cheri and Lisl to respond to, and we'll just have a little bit of a conversation here, and then we'll open it up and bring James and Kelly back into the conversation to address some of the questions that have been coming in. So, just to kick us off, Cheri and/or Lisl, if you would like to just sort of talk about some of the typical child support issues that dads face as they come into your program.

Cheri Tillis: So I guess we'll start with, most of the fathers that we serve are usually affected because of their impoverished situations that they've lived in prior to coming to our program. We are serving St. Louis City and County;

however, most of the gentlemen we serve have had scattered employment histories and/or no work histories, and so they found themselves, in cases where they have arrears, or they have non-support orders against them, they've had warrants issued for their arrest, or may have also served some jail time, and had a Class D felony connected with their non-payment of support. Usually they come to the agency because they have heard word-of-mouth of the work that we do as far as our responsible fatherhood and parenting skills, as well as employment placement services. But as you heard earlier, we were blessed to add a legal clinic to our array of services in 2009. So they are now also receiving assistance through our legal clinic, which helps them to navigate the child support system and family court.

Lisl K. Williams: Yeah, typically what we see in the legal clinic is, our clients don't understand why they have to pay child support, and they don't have access to their children. They certainly don't understand the legal ramifications of child support, how it is instituted, how it is calculated, and a lot of them will say, "I can't afford this amount of money," or they will say, "I take care of my children, so why is it that I have to pay child support?" And that's kind of a typical situation that you hear. Occasionally—well, I shouldn't say occasionally—somewhat frequently, we will hear that "I'm not their father. I'm not the biological father, I never had any genetic testing. I don't understand what's going on."

Nigel Vann: Yeah, I know. I've heard the same—it can certainly be an issue. Along those lines, how do you talk with dads up front about paternity establishment? James gave us a little bit about that at the beginning. I know a lot of dads are wary about going ahead and establishing paternity, because they know it's linked to child support. Can you say just a little bit more about how you handle that, and how you have those kind of conversations?

Lisl K. Williams: Well, the legal clinic provides a legal presentation at the beginning of each class, which gives our clients a general overview, which starts with paternity establishment—what that means, how child support is calculated in the state of Missouri, what child support can do and cannot do. And we explain to them the Child Support Office has no jurisdiction to address any issues concerning access to your children or co-parenting. All they deal with is money, and legally speaking, you can have to pay money, i.e. child support, and have no visitation whatsoever with your children. So it's really just a matter of education, and I try to talk to my audience. I realize that I am not talking to necessarily highly educated individuals who are not lawyers. I have a presentation that I present in layman's terms, and I kind of make it kind of funny with them, and things like that to capture their attention, just to make sure that they understand this entire process.

You will find that there are a lot of gentlemen who say, "I have a child, but I'm not on the child's birth certificate." There are a lot of myths running through the community with respect to paternity establishment and child support. Typically, they do not understand that if mom applies for TANF services, how that will automatically open up a child support order, and why is that the case? And I explain, that comes from federal regulations that the state has to comply with. We try to really educate them on what's going on, and then we follow up throughout the six-week program and a year [of] follow-up of individual appointments with one of the attorneys in the office to deal with their specific situation. You will find in classes, particularly among men—a lot of times, they don't want to acknowledge, "I don't understand." So when we come in one on one with the legal clinic in private, we can get more information, and they will ask more questions.

Nigel Vann: Thank you, yeah. I know it is a very tough issue. But you know, I think the bottom line that I've heard in talking to a lot of guys about this is that, if you don't have that legal status as a father, you don't have the right to put your hand up, if you like, if there is any kind of problem in the child's current living situation. If you wanted to be able to step in and say look, I can take responsibility here, or if the mother or the caretaker wanted to take the child out of state for any reason, you wouldn't have a say in that.

So it is important to do that, but obviously, it's also important that any child support order that you do have is established accurately so you could pay it—and that is really where child support is evolving, particularly at the federal level, but also at a lot of the state levels to make sure that those payments are set so they can be paid. Can you say just a little bit better how you work with that for your legal clinic, in terms of the relationship that you have with the local child support office?

Lisl K. Williams: Yes. We are able to contact case managers directly in the Family Support Division, which is the local child support office, to help with our clients who will get the issues directed to the appropriate case manager in the system. Now, Missouri does have a call center, like a 1-866 number that clients can call, and we will make that call with the client here in the office to get some basic information like when the order was established, are they still enforcing it, how much is it per month, are there any driver's license holds—things of that nature, the various enforcement efforts that they're taking. And then based upon that, we will make a legal recommendation to the client—this is what we need to do. And we may very well end up sending an email to a contact within the Family Support Division to provide direct assistance to the client.

We also will help them prepare the necessary legal paperwork to get a court ordered parenting plan which, here in Missouri, depending upon the number of overnight visitations that are granted by the courts, could have the impact of decreasing your child support, because they take into consideration the costs of the non-custodial parent having overnight custody of the child. And the way child support is calculated in Missouri, they look at both the incomes of both parents—the custodial parent and the non-custodial parent.

And although we cannot, under the terms of some of our grants, be the actual attorney of record on the case, we've been extremely successful with working with the client, putting together what are called *pro se* documents—that means you don't have a lawyer, you're representing yourself—getting those documents filed with the court. We have even gone with them to court—we just can't speak to the judge on their behalf. And a lot of times, if the mother has obtained private counsel, private counsel will talk to us to work out some sort of agreed-to or consent parenting plan, which they then present to the court for the judge's signature.

Also, in the legal clinic, it's a comprehensive intake—although we specialize in these domestic relations things, we will talk to them about any legal issue that they are having, and we have relationships with other agencies, other attorneys that we can make a referral. For example, we don't do bankruptcy. Someone is in a potential bankruptcy, I can get on the phone and call other lawyers that I know, and refer them to someone else for assistance.

Nigel Vann: Great, yeah. And I'm sure a lot of people are thinking, wow, this is a pretty Cadillac-type program, where you've got this full legal clinic, you've got legal staff on board, you've got a child support office that's being friendly and helping, they have case managers you can pick the phone up and talk to. I'm wondering, Cheri, could you say just a little bit about how the Fathers' Support Center got started with this relationship back in the late '90s? I know that's before you got there, but just in terms of how this has evolved. Because I'm sure at the beginning, you did not have this kind of relationship, right?

Cheri Tillis: Sure, sure. Back in 1996, Mr. Halbert Sullivan, who is our founding CEO, he worked with the state of Missouri to develop the Fatherhood Initiative for the state. As the result of his work, he was able to keep a close relationship with the then director of Child Support Enforcement, Theresa Kaiser. At the same time the state was implementing its Parents Fair Share program that I know a lot of people on the call are probably aware of. As Parents Fair Share developed, it was an arm that Child Support was providing to help to reduce some of the child support payments, and providing training and assistance. At that same time, well, in '97, '98 and '99, when the program was in its early stages, that was one of the ways that we actually helped with recruitment, because we were partnered closely with Parents Fair Share.

The participants that were going through our parenting program were able to get reduced payments and/or training and transportation assistance. Since then, Fathers' Support Center and Mr. Sullivan have maintained that relationship with child support offices, so it kind of grew and morphed into what we have today, whereas we're actually on the letter that goes out from the office for paternity. At the bottom, they have our Fathers' Support Center contact information, and if they need more assistance with parenting, they ought to call us or come by the office. We also are able to go to our local child support offices and recruit for our programs, because a lot of our guys are going there to do their paternity establishment and things of that nature.

We also invite them in with each of our class cycles to do a presentation, so that from our side, from the legal clinic side, as well as from Child Support Enforcement, as well as establishing-paternity side, that they are getting firsthand information, so they can understand how to effectively navigate the system.

Nigel Vann: Thank you. Let me just ask you one more question before we sort of go to the general Q&A and bring James and Kelly back into the conversation. I'm just wondering what general advice you might have for fatherhood programs in other localities who have not yet been able to establish a very good work relationship with their child support office. You got any specific tips you would offer for them?

Cheri Tillis: Well, I think what's been important with us is that we don't view child support enforcement as the enemy. I know that some of our clients, it's very emotional, and they get very upset because of how they may have been treated in the past, or what types of situations they found themselves in, but we quickly let them know that child support isn't the enemy. And so, I think that that has helped, because as Kelly said earlier, we keep the child at the center of the programs that we provide. If we're both working towards improving the life of a child, then we want for Fathers' Support Center and Child Support Enforcement to work together to help the parents so they then can help the child.

And for us, this approach has worked because the child-centered approach, we want the non-participating father, or that father that hasn't been able to visit, or struggles with paying child support, to get to the point where he's comfortable with paying his child support, as well as having visitation with his children, and knowing how to effectively parent them. So the first thing I think that could be done is just having that—set up that initial meeting and talking with the child support office to let them know what types of services that the program is offering, and how that can complement what they're doing, and then invite them to come in and present to the participants that they're serving, so they can get the information firsthand. We do that in our Child Support Symposium which we hold for each one of the sessions, and our class facilitators and our staff are there, and we let them ask questions so that that relationship can be established.

Nigel Vann: Okay, well, thank you. Anything to add, Lisl?

Lisl K. Williams: No. You know, conversation is the best thing, and certainly, I think that agencies need to follow up on this whole parenting issue. I think it was Kelly had mentioned that moms should be the gateway, as opposed to the gatekeeper. We do have a Women's Program here at the agency, and that's one of the things that I focus on in the presentation to them about the importance of the father in the child's life, and to kind of move beyond the personal issues between mom and dad, to be able to effectively co-parent for the benefit of the child. As Cheri said, that becomes a win-win situation for everyone, because when dad is involved, he's definitely more likely to provide financial support and emotional support to the child, and the state, of course, is collecting more child support.

Nigel Vann: Yeah, yeah, yeah. You know, one of the things I always think is that, in terms of sort of a practitioner point of view, you can only work within the system as it is. So you've got to help guys really vent their frustrations because obviously there are frustrations out there. So vent those frustrations, and then work within the confines of whatever the local system is as best you can, continue to keep the focus on the child in the conversation with the parents and with the Child Support Office, and just really keep striving to get to this win-win situation that we see is possible. It's just a case of how do we get there.

So let me invite James and Kelly back in now. We've got a few questions coming in, and I see there's been quite a lot of chat behind the Chat box. I haven't been able to follow all of that, but I will ask a few of these questions, and the ones we don't get to, again, we'll post some responses to.

James, this first question is for you, and it's asking if you could talk about the status of the OCSE-proposed rule change, and perhaps just explain for the audience what that actually entails.

James Murray: Sure. Thanks, Nigel. Can you hear me okay?

Nigel Vann: Yes, yeah.

James Murray: Okay. So basically, well, it's actually a rule now—it was a proposed rule, but it was really an effort to make the program more flexible, more effective and more efficient. It would be done really through recognizing the strength of, say, existing state enforcement programs, advancements in technology, and really helping them improve collection rates and move towards more of an electronic communication—so really bringing the program into more modernized times. In terms of the status of it, we're right now awaiting for it to be published. I don't want to put a time and date out there—I'll just say as soon as possible. You know, it is government, and things take a little bit longer than anticipated, and we hoped it would have been out and published already, but it's just going to take a little bit more time. But it looks like it'll be here pretty soon.

Nigel Vann: Okay—well, thanks for that update, yeah. I had a question for you, Kelly—for the person that's wondering, where do you get the funding for your fantastic fatherhood program? How have you been able to make this happen within the child support structure?

Kelly Little: So, there is no funding. What we have to do is, we do this in addition to our job. So everybody has volunteered—we do the non-custodial parent orientation engagement, and as I stated, it's an organizational thing. Although, we have the 23 males who are helping to address certain things, tracking, doing stuff half the time for me, you have other case managers who are helping us to facilitate these challenges and change the culture within our organization. So anybody is an ambassador for responsible fatherhood and mother engagement in our office.

We're in a process to try to get reimbursement by filling out the waiver that we have to submit to the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement. So we do everything from our NCP orientation model, where we're just providing some of the basic things, and then doing the extra stuff on our own.

Nigel Vann: Okay—yeah, so again, a great model, and we just need others to do the same, yeah? We've had a few questions talking about co-parenting and equal parenting time. First, if I could start with James on this, but I'll open this up to everyone to respond to. We have one question that's saying, "How can we change the paradigm from dad equals child support provider to dad equals co-parent with equal parenting time?" So perhaps, James, you could talk a little bit about what OCSE is talking about in terms of parenting time now?

James Murray: Thanks, Nigel. I'll say that paradigm shift has already begun. I just really can't talk enough about the sort of dedicated level of staff that are within the child support program. So you heard from Kelly, and I say there are a lot more folks that are there and working to really sort of move these things in that positive direction. It just takes time for us to build a relationship that we're talking about now, really spread the word and then work together to increase the knowledge about what each side needs, and how we do this move thoughtfully.

From our end, we've got what we call parenting time grants in place here under the Division of Program Innovation, and we are in the evaluation phase of those now, the pulling together of the lessons learned. As soon as we've got that information available, we'll disseminate it and spread it out there for the field. But to answer the question, that shift is already taking place. So what we're doing now in this webinar is really part of that process. And as much as we can engage each other and share information, it'll help us move it along a lot more quickly.

Nigel Vann: I appreciate it, James. Cheri, have you got anything you'd like to add about how you address co-parenting and parenting time?

Cheri Tillis: It's really—right now, it's a state issue, and the state of Missouri is the one that has control over co-parenting time through the courts. I think it would be helpful if we as a state could get some legislation that would allow that to occur at the administrative level, when the child support is calculated—particularly when mom and dad are in agreement that this is how we want to do that, to allow that to be an agreed-to parenting plan. As it exists in Missouri,

like I said earlier, child support does not have jurisdiction to address co-parenting. All they can do is give you an order to pay child support, and you have to file a petition in the court to get a co-parenting plan.

I can say, at least here in Missouri, the whole issue of co-parenting has evolved from this every-other-weekend visitation, where you see more and more young fathers getting 50-50 custody in some form or fashion. It's not necessarily week-on, week-off, but at the end of the day, they have the child half the time, or in equal periods of time, like the mother does. And that has been an evolution in the whole issue of co-parenting, but I can only speak with respect to the state of Missouri.

Nigel Vann: Sure. How about Mecklenburg County? Kelly, how do you talk about it there?

Kelly Little: So, let me interject one thing first, Nigel. I have Napoleon Williams III, a good friend of mine who operates out of St. Louis, Missouri, as well. He's going to provide some examples as well.

Napoleon Williams III: So specifically, what are we talking about?

Kelly Little: They're talking about parenting time.

Napoleon Williams III: The parenting time?

Kelly Little: Yes.

Napoleon Williams III: Okay. So essentially, first and foremost, hi, everyone. I hear some familiar names on the line—James, Nigel, Cheri and Lisl, all good friends of mine, so great to hear you guys have this discussion.

Nigel Vann: Who's speaking? Could you just let the audience know, please?

Napoleon Williams III: It's Napoleon Williams III, and we're Connections to Success out of St. Louis, Missouri.

Nigel Vann: Hey, Napoleon—thanks. Go ahead.

Napoleon Williams III: Yeah. So, I would just like to reiterate some of the things that Cheri and Lisl are sharing. I've actually been listening in for about the last ten minutes, and those relationships that they spoke about regarding our child support in Missouri have been some very beneficial ones, and we really are very appreciative of the work Fathers' Support Center has done in trying to outline a great pathway for us to come in behind the work that they've done, in terms of those relationships.

What we found is that many of the strategies that have been able to be implemented have come out of regulatory processes, as opposed to having to go the legislative way. So specifically, with the parenting time process, we found that they are more willing now to push forward on their co-parenting model with the dad, for the most part, of who we're dealing with—that connection as well, in pushing more for the engagement of that dad with the child, as opposed to looking at the order of enforcement. They're providing more support with us in connecting with the actual custodial parent to ensure that not only is the order being met, but that there's an opportunity for us to utilize their resources at child support to ensure that that connectivity is happening with the dad and the child. So we're very appreciative of the work that Fathers' Support has done with that, and I just wanted to reiterate that for the group.

Nigel Vann: Well, thank you very much, yeah. Go ahead, Kelly.

Kelly Little: So one of the things that we try to do is—of course, we're a judiciary state; however, we've been working on what's called a dual notice process in doing settlement conferences. And so, trying to address these issues

and challenges administratively by working with both customers when they come in the office, and providing our staff with some upcoming training around mediation that helps them resolve those issues, when the opportunity exists themselves [*sic*], which alleviates us flooding the courts and going through the process. So if you build that relationship up front, then many of the issues and challenges can be resolved between the two parents without making it a legal matter, if that makes sense.

Nigel Vann: Absolutely. And you know, I think it's really good to be just sort of watching the language that we use as well, so that talking about parenting time is much more friendly than talking about visitation or access. I think we have to think about that—and even saying “custodial” and “non-custodial,” I prefer to say either “residential” or “non-residential,” so we're not talking about the child as an object.

Kelly Little: Exactly.

Nigel Vann: So let me pose one more quick question for James, and then we do have to do our evaluation questions—and I'm going to come back to everybody and just give you a chance to offer a final thought, a final takeaway that you'd like to leave people with. And again, for those questions that we haven't gotten to, we will ask the presenters to respond in writing, and we'll post those on the website.

But there was an early question that came up, James, that I want to try and summarize, because it's a long question—but it's talking about a research study at the University of Wisconsin that found that mothers who receive \$118 more in monthly child support were ten percent less likely to be the target of a [unintelligible] report of child maltreatment. So the question is, from a policy perspective, wouldn't it make sense to allow parents to keep their welfare payment, as well as the totality of the child support award? Because that would reap savings on the child welfare side of the ledger as well. Could you just respond to that briefly, in terms of current child support policies?

James Murray: Thanks, Nigel—so I want to make sure I understand the question. The question is asking, basically, if a family receives TANF, should they not be required...

Nigel Vann: Well, should you be able to keep your total TANF payment plus the child support payment?

James Murray: Okay, and the question is, is that agreeable from the child support side?

Nigel Vann: Yes.

James Murray: I mean, it's a tough question, and it varies on the individual case. That would be—that's a tough one to answer. I mean, it's not simply yes or no—I mean, it may be more philosophical.

Nigel Vann: Okay, sure. Well, maybe we can sort of think about it a bit more, and get something in writing, then. Okay—so then, let's pause for a minute, and Enzo, if you could pull up the evaluation questions, and then I'll come back to everybody for a final word.

You see there's [*sic*] three questions to respond to, and you can strongly agree, agree, neither agree, disagree, or strongly disagree for each of these. I'll just give you a few minutes to do that, and then, again, for presenters, you can just sort of think about a final thought that you would like to leave people with. In fact, while they're doing that, Kelly, there's a couple of people who have asked if you could perhaps just say a little bit more on the Mom as Gateway Initiative—could you just do that very briefly? In terms of the impact that that's had on the fathers and mothers that you work with?

Kelly Little: So, this is a new initiative that we're rolling out through the National Fatherhood Initiative. The impact right now has been tremendous in the office first, but any time we pilot a specific initiative or program, we first look at the implications in our office, and so our body posture and the way we communicate non-verbally is just as important as

the way we communicate verbally. So exposing the employees to this information, and how it impacts children on the back end, has caused our staff to rethink about the way they communicate, and how they look at our customers that come in the office, which ultimately permeates to the interaction between staff expressing what the data and empirical information says around engaging moms and educating them.

So, we're just in the beginning phases, but in many instances, it's had a profound effect. Right now, I don't have enough data to just specifically speak to a lot of data, but just in terms of anecdotal information, and the model within which—like Minnesota actually used it at one point in time. It's been extremely effective, and it was published in the SROI Report, which is the Social Return on Investment Report.

Nigel Vann: Great, okay. Yeah, now it even makes perfect sense—we can't just be talking to dads, we can't just be talking to mothers. We've got to talk to both of them, right? I'm going to ask one more.

[voices overlap]

Kelly Little: So the analogy that I use when we're talking about this is, if we spend all our time working with fathers, and we think of mathematics and algebra—what you do on the left side, you have to do on the right side. Otherwise, your solution won't come out to be effective.

Nigel Vann: Absolutely.

Kelly Little: Same thing with both of the parents.

Nigel Vann: Absolutely, yeah. No, I heard another presentation recently, if you're talking about math, if any of the numbers are zero, your result is going to be zero if you're trying to multiply things, right? So, yeah.

Kelly Little: Exactly.

Nigel Vann: Yeah, yeah. Okay, so let me start with James—and James, a final thought.

James Murray: A final thought, Nigel, I would say for everyone is, just from the child support side, we're eager and ready to partner on all levels. So as much as we can connect with folks locally, we look forward to doing that. And don't hesitate to reach out.

Nigel Vann: Great, thank you. And Cheri and Lisl, let me say we don't have Lisl's email address on there. I apologize for that, but it is just williams@fatherssupport.org, and I'm sure you can also get in touch with her through Cheri. So, final thoughts, Cheri and Lisl?

Lisl K. Williams: I think everyone needs to understand, from the federal government to state government, the judiciary, the domestic relations bar, child support enforcement, that the most important thing we do is the end game of ensuring that our children are raised properly in a cohesive family relationship. And if we focus on getting to that end game, it makes everything better. Because when children are raised in a dysfunctional family, we see it on the criminal side at the end of the day, and that's a lose-lose situation for everybody.

Nigel Vann: Cheri?

Cheri Tillis: I mean, I echo that. My final thing would be, just always keep the child at the center, because at the end of the day, that's who we are looking to improve outcomes for. And so, when you take that into account, you have to have an appreciation for the role that the mother and the father play on the successful rearing of that child.

Nigel Vann: Thank you, okay. And Kelly, you get the final word then.

Kelly Little: Okay, so, all great points. So what I'll say is, in order to be able to be successful, we have to be cognizant of where we're at as an organization, and what supports our customers—customers being, the child being the center, for both custodial and non-custodial parents. What are their needs? And we need to be able to partner with organizations that allow us to meet the needs of all customers so we strengthen families.

Nigel Vann: Well, thank you very much. And just one more response to that last question that I asked James—we also have to remember that any pass-through and disregard of the child support payments, that those are largely state issues. So again, as with a lot of this stuff, it really is a case of understanding that the state policies and procedures and regulations, they're often tied up in state legislation. And to learn more about that, just to be speaking with your local and state people to get more of that.

So I thank you for your time. We will, as I said, respond to unanswered questions. Let me give a quick shout-out to some of the people I see who have been chatting away here—David Pontisso, who has done a lot of great work with child support before retiring; Matt Cruz, who used to help us with these webinars; and Allison Hyra, who's also been with ICF, and a lot of other folk out there that we all know are doing great work. So, keep it up, and we'll see you on the next webinar next fiscal year. Thank you very much, everybody. And the presenters, you can stay on the line if you want to.

Operator: And that concludes today's webinar. Thank you for your participation, and you may now disconnect.