



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Family Assistance



NRCF Webinar Series

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

Response to Questions

August 17, 2016

Moderator:

- Nigel Vann, National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse (NRCF).

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.

This document addresses questions presented, but not addressed, during this NRCF Webinar. For questions addressed during the webinar, please refer to the Webinar Transcript. For more information contact NRCF via email at info@fatherhood.gov.

Submitted Questions:

What is the Office of Child Support Enforcement-proposed rule change, and perhaps what that actually entails.

James Murray: 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.

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: There is no funding. What we have to do is in addition to our job. Everybody has volunteered. We do the non-custodial parent orientation engagement as 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

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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.

How can we change the paradigm from dad equals child support provider to dad equals co-parent with equal parenting time?

James Murray: The 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. 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 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.

Cheri Tillis: 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, 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.

Kelly Little: We are 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 opportunities exist themselves, which alleviates us from 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.

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?

James Murray: It's a tough question, and it varies on the individual case. It's not simply yes or no answer, it may be more philosophical.