



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



## NRFC Webinar Series

# *Working with Child Support – Continuing the Conversation*

## Transcript

**April 15, 2015**

**Moderator:**

- Nigel Vann, National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse (NRFC)

**Opening Remarks:**

- Lisa Washington-Thomas, Chief, Self-Sufficiency Branch, Office of Family Assistance, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

**Presenters**

- Barbara Lacina, Acting Director, Division of Program Innovation, Office of Child Support, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- Rhody McCoy, Director, Contra Costa County, Rubicon Programs
- Patty Hunt, Child Support Specialist III, Contra Costa County Department of Child Support Services
- Brad Lambert, Co-Founder and Chief Operations Officer, Connections to Success
- Nicolette Bennett, Attorney II, Kansas Department for Children and Families, Child Support Services

**Operator:** Stand by, we are about to begin. Good day and welcome to the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse “Working with Child Support: Continuing the Conversation” webinar. Today’s webinar is being recorded and I would like to turn the webinar over to Nigel Vann. Please go ahead, sir.

**Nigel Vann:** Thank you very much and as you see from the title and just heard, we’re calling this “Continuing the Conversation: Working with Child Support.” We began it as a Clearinghouse webinar in March 2013 where we looked at some effective strategies for state and federal programs, and it’s a conversation that has been going on for fatherhood programs for a long while now, and it’s a very important one. It’s interesting, actually, compared to the webinar we did a couple of months ago on mental health services, where we talked about the need to form effective partnerships with mental health providers in the community. I think the fatherhood field has had a lot more success to date: forming these partnerships with the child support system, as we’re going to hear today, has really come a long way in being more father-friendly, working with fatherhood programs to really help dads deal with some of these issues. With that said, it’s still very important to talk in the field about the various local, child support policies and procedures and make sure that -- We still hear from programs in the field that not everybody is able to form such effective partnerships locally as we’re going to hear about today.

With that said, for anyone who’s new to our webinar or just [to] remind others, just a few things about how this works. You are hearing the audio through your computer, and the webinar is being recorded. The recording of the

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audio, the slides, the transcript, and all of the presentation materials will be available on our Clearinghouse website in a few weeks. You see on the bottom left of your screen there's a couple of web links there: [Fatherhood.gov](http://Fatherhood.gov) is the Clearinghouse website. We've also highlighted the link to the March 2013 webinar that I mentioned, so if you do want to see that you can click on that and download those materials. In the next box over from that, there's a number of files that you can also click on to download. They're going to be referenced in part of the presentations shortly, and then next to that you see the Q-and-A box. Also above that, there's a chat box. The Q-and-A box is where we ask you to send questions that are specifically for the presenters and the chat box as you can see is heavily used for people to introduce themselves and their information among yourselves during the webinar. If you have a question specifically for the presenters which will be addressed at the end of the webinar, please put those in the Q-and-A box.

We've got an exciting cast of characters for you today who are going to talk about this, but before we get started, let me first invite Lisa Washington-Thomas from the Federal Office of Family Assistance to provide a few words of welcome for us.

Lisa Washington Thomas: Thank you, Nigel. I just want to thank everyone for participating in the webinar. I am very excited about this webinar. I know you say, "Why is she excited about child support?" but I am because what we're going to talk about today are some wonderful partnerships from some stellar programs and how they are actually helping fathers to improve their lives and the lives of their children. What we've heard from many fathers at programs over the years is how important the partnership with child support is, how sometimes fathers are afraid or leery when they receive a child support notice, and they might ignore it instead of actually dealing with the issue, and then it just causes more problems. So what we have this afternoon are several programs who are going to talk about their successful partnerships and how they've helped that. And how not only has that helped the dads and their children, but it has also helped the Child Support Agency so that this is a win-win situation. I'm also happy to be partnering with a new member in the Office of Child Support, Barbara Lacina, who came from our Region VII Office and from the Child Support Agency prior to that. We will be working closer together to provide more of these joint webinars and other TA strategies to help you help our fathers and ultimately help our children. Thank you so much for participating. I'm excited. There is good information that will be shared, and I'll turn this back over to you, Nigel.

Nigel Vann: Thank you very much, Lisa. I'm just going to say a few words about the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse. We do briefly mention this every time we do a webinar, just in case you are new to us. You see the links again to the Clearinghouse. We do a variety of work. We post a lot of information for fatherhood programs, practitioners, for fathers themselves and also for policy makers and researchers. I do want to highlight the toll-free number for our national call center. There's real people on the end of that line who can answer questions from fathers, from practitioners, from mothers. They can actually do mediation between a father and a mother and perhaps most importantly for today's call, they can answer child support questions and if they don't have the specific information -- because as we know it varies from state to state and county to county -- they can actually help connect you to someone who can answer those questions. You also see the email at the bottom there for Lisa and also for Kenneth Braswell, who is the Clearinghouse Project Director, and Patrick Patterson, our Project Manager, so you can get in touch with them directly. You can get in touch with any of our staff at [info@fatherhood.gov](mailto:info@fatherhood.gov).

These are our basic goals today as we had in the announcement that went out. We just want to pursue -- because we know that not everybody has been able to form these effective partnerships, we're going to profile two partnerships today that have been very effective to help local programs and help fathers and their families. It's not always that easy, although I said that child support has evolved and become a lot more father-friendly, but there are still some areas that we hear about where a program says that they haven't actually been able to identify the correct person in their local office to really help them deal with some of these issues. It's so important that all of the staff of our fatherhood program understand how child support works: they can explain the benefits of paternity establishment; they know how to help fathers, or should I say, non-custodial parents. About 90 percent of non-custodial parents are fathers, it's important to help the folk who are owing child support if their situation changes, to be able to help them

understand the process to get their order modified so that their payment is correct, and to help with arrearages when we can. We're going to hear about a lot of these issues today and these are the five folk you're going to be hearing from. I'm going to introduce Barbara Lacina, who Lisa just mentioned, in a minute, and then we're going to have two team presentations. Rhody McCoy from Rubicon, California, and Patty Hunt their local child support partner will be presenting, and they will be followed by Brad Lambert and Nicolette Bennett.

With that, let me introduce Barbara Lacina, and if we could have Barbara's slides up there -- there we go. Barbara has been a child support professional since 1992. She's been with the Federal Office of Child Support since 2010. She worked as a frontline case worker in a state program, and as Lisa mentioned, she came to the Office of Child Support from the position of being a Regional Program Manager in Region VII in Kansas City. I'm suspecting you probably know some of these folk from Kansas, Barbara. Let me pass it over to Barbara, who is going to offer a few words of introduction on behalf of the federal office, and we're also going to hear from Barbara again at the end of the webinar with a few more thoughts. Barbara, the time is yours.

Barbara Lacina: Thank you, Nigel, I appreciate your introduction. Lisa, I appreciate your words as well, and know that the Office of Child Support is very excited about working more closely with the Office of Family Assistance going forward. Your suspicion is right, Nigel, I do know the fabulous folks from Kansas and Missouri who are on the phone with us today as presenters. I will just begin the conversation by saying that the Office of Child Support always appreciates any opportunity when we can talk with an audience about the work of the National Child Support Program. From a federal perspective, we certainly always keep in mind that the work that we do here in the federal office is intended to frame and to support the work that's being done out in the state and local offices and the tribal child support programs. Certainly all of you have had your own individual experiences with child support, and some of those may vary from place to place, but what I want to talk about today is to set a federal perspective from which we can go into the conversations about the exemplary local programs, and to talk about the future going forward.

What I normally would do if I were in a room with folks at a podium, I would ask you to guess what percentage of parents you think are paying their child support in full on time, every month. The last time I did this about a month and a half ago, the guesses were pretty low, although for us that's not unexpected because we think it's part of our responsibility to make sure that everyone knows how well parents are doing when it comes to making their child support payments. Nearly 70 percent of child support payments are made in full, on time every month. What we've come to learn is that the parents who make up that other 30 percent really face some pretty significant barriers to non-payment. The ability to pay is really key to that conversation, so we make a very important distinction between being unwilling to pay and being unable to pay. Within that 30 percent, it's our estimate that the folks that are truly unwilling to pay is a very minute fraction -- that the majority of folks are simply unable and they need some additional support, and they need some additional programming that will bring them to the point of being able to make consistent child support payments. To affirm and to achieve the mission of the Child Support Program, which is to secure reliable child support payment for families, we really feel that our program -- we see ourselves in a unique position. We have communication and the opportunity for contact with both parents, and there are not a lot of other programs that have that same opportunity, particularly federal and state public programs, and we want to take the opportunity to maximize the access that we have to both parents to help them find and keep jobs which will enable them to make their consistent child support payments, but also to have time with their children. We understand that children have a deep, innate need to be connected to both of their parents, and so as those children grow up, the financial responsibility and the emotional support throughout their entire childhoods are the things that will enable those children to develop healthier life skills and styles that will see them through their entire life cycle.

Another piece that is really important, that has just begun to emerge in the last several years, is that there are simply facts and data that we can rely upon to help us to come to the recognition that there are ways that parents can be strengthened in their ability to support their children. Those conventional approaches that the Child Support Enforcement Program has taken over the years for all parents clearly has not shown to be effective, but if we can work on promoting parenthood, helping parents to succeed in the workforce -- If we can do some programmatic

things that don't even necessarily require policy changes, like offering debt compromise if there is a balance that is owed to the state for support payments that were assigned -- or if we can just be more specific and tailored in the way that we manage individual cases, so that we're exercising whatever flexibility is available and we're applying the right tool to the right family at the right time.

We didn't get to this point by happenstance, the Child Support Program is getting ready to acknowledge its 40th anniversary. 1975 is the year that the Federal Child Support Program was established, and that was done for very specific reasons: as a cost-recovery program so that those parents who were receiving public assistance could find their way to self-sufficiency through the financial support of the other parent. Based on that rationale for the creation of the program, based also upon the percentage of parents who were making their child support payments in those first several decades, the way that the program evolved was certainly very enforcement-oriented, so the idea of finding support and retaining payments to recover welfare costs was the basis of the program. There were also some policy and practice methodologies that were established as part of that same framework so that an income was imputed if it couldn't be verified, that every process was very automated and standardized. We were also operating under what we've come to realize was the pretty false notion that folks will pay because they don't want to go into debt, and we see certainly across all realms of the economy, everything from student loans to the housing market to credit cards, that that is just simply not the case, and it's certainly not true in child support either.

Incarceration as a consequence of non-payment was something that was common, certainly still exists today, and focusing on financial support only. Now, today's Child Support Program, from the federal perspective and in terms of policy updates, best practices and general encouragement around the way that state and local child support programs are operated, includes more of a family-centered approach that focuses on reliable payments to families as opposed to recovering welfare costs for the government, ensuring, too, that the majority of payments can get distributed to families which today that figure is around 95 percent. About 95 percent of the 28 billion dollars in child support payments that gets collected every year actually do go out to families. We're also using an accurate reflection of someone's income in order to set their support amount so that it is payable for them; segmenting the cases into recognizing the folks who have some barriers and addressing those barriers, as opposed to applying automated standardized enforcement to everyone; thinking about debt prevention and debt compromise as a way to motivate payment, as opposed to the debt itself motivating payment; and then also services that can support the removal of barriers such as job services -- and we'll hear a little bit more about that from a couple of our presenters today; and then thinking about the emotional as well the financial support, so really focusing on involvement of parents with their children.

On the next slide, I'll just really quickly run through a few of the things that are the historical record of the Federal Office of Child Support's involvement in fatherhood initiatives going back to the mid-'90s, when President Clinton signed into law the Personal Responsibilities and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act. Ever since then, there has been an annual appropriation to each state -- it's not a large amount and so we recognize it doesn't serve a lot of families, but there is funding that goes out annually to states for services that will support non-custodial parents having access and parenting time with their children. Many of you as fatherhood practitioners may be familiar with the Partners for Fragile Families Grants that were done in the early 2000s. The fatherhood and co-parenting grants that followed were actually my first personal experience working as a child support administrator with implementing a partnership between child support and a local fatherhood program, and I've been committed to that ever since. Re-entry, asset building, employment and parenting time are all things that the Federal Office of Child Support has supported in terms of granting money. And then more recently, really getting back to that research idea of testing demonstrations that will provide us with an evidence base for making policy and/or sharing best practices in the absence of policy.

I'll just wrap really quickly by showing you this chart that we've been using for a couple of years now, but it seems that every time we talk to some different audience, there are folks who haven't seen it yet, so this is just kind of a standard visual model for the Federal Office of Child Support perspective about how many different domains of

family support really intersect with our Child Support Program. Nigel, I'll turn it back over to you at this point for introductions of one of our programs that will be speaking about their specific work. Thank you.

Nigel Vann: Okay, thank you very much, Barbara, and we'll look forward to hearing from you again shortly. I just wanted to echo a few of the things that Barbara said today. You know, I actually got started in this work back in 1988 when I got hired to manage a program in Maryland that was started by a couple of local judges, one of whom was Judge David Gray Ross. He and his counterpart in one of the other counties was seeing dads who couldn't pay child support. They were putting them in jail and they said to the state, "We need some employment programs for these fathers," and I actually got hired to manage that program and then as many of you know, I'm sure, Judge Ross actually went on to head the Federal Child Support System, and I remember he put up something over his door, it was along the lines of "It's about the children" or "Put the children first" and it's really very heartening to see Vicki Turetsky and her staff carrying on that work, and now we've, a lot of us in the field have really seen that these partnerships are a very effective way of helping families. It's not about helping the dads, it's not about helping the moms: it's about helping the family and the kids. And it was very heartening, Barbara, to hear about 95 percent of the payments are now going directly to families, because I know that was always a bone of contention for some adversarial parents if their funds were just going to offset the welfare things.

With that said, I will now introduce our first program presentation. We have Rhody McCoy, as you can see on the screen, who is the Director of Economic Empowerment and for Rubicon Programs in Contra Costa County. Rhody has been with Rubicon since March 2010. He initially started as the Program Manager for re-entry, and is now responsible for program management and development which includes evaluating programs, approving new initiatives to increase new opportunities for under-served populations, and achievement of contract goals and objectives. I actually first got to go to Rubicon in the early days of this century when they were part of the Fathers at Work presentation on the program. And he's going to be joined by his child support partner, Patty Hunt from Contra Costa County Department of Child Support Services, and I do want to highlight the Child Support Services there. This is something they've done state-wide in California, and I know that quite a few child support offices now referring to themselves as "child support services" rather than "child support enforcement," which I think carries a big message. Patty has worked with the Title IV D program (the child support program) for 27 years, and I just did the math on that quickly, Patty, so I think that's 1988 which is the same year I got started in this. Patty is currently assigned to the Public Service Unit where she assists customers with some of the more complex child support issues, and she has been the main liaison for Rubicon and the PAPAS program working both with the staff, making sure that they understand the issues, and the clients.

With that, I'm going to pass it over to Rhody and Patty to tell us about the great work they're doing there.

Patty Hunt: Good morning.

Rhody McCoy: Good morning, this is Rhody from Rubicon Programs. We're glad to be able to discuss with you this morning the important relationship between the Department of Child Support and Rubicon Programs. Before I go into that, I'd really like to thank Nigel, Lisa and Barbara, not only for helping to put this important webinar on, but also for the work that you've done in this field. I was able to learn a lot, Barbara, from your presentation this morning about the history, and as we all know, history can be a great teacher, and that's what we've used to be able to provide what we feel is effective programming, especially in our relationship with the Department of Child Support. Back in 2000, Rubicon and Department of Child Support worked on a fathers program, and they gave us basically the foundation where we started to be able to understand each other, our commonalities, and goals and objectives. More recently, the Department of Child Support partnered with Rubicon on our PAPAS Program, which is [the] Office of Family Assistance Responsible Fatherhood Program for re-entry individuals, and obviously we work with fathers in transition. We all know people returning and transitioning face many barriers -- a lot of them internal and quite a few of them are external as well.

Our relationship with the Department of Child Support has really helped us to be able to help the individuals in our programs navigate the external barriers, debunking the myths of child support. Just to give you some of the barriers that fathers typically face when they're returning from incarceration: substance abuse, unemployed, and as we know, a lot of them are estranged from their family. On the flip side of that, many of the individuals have an extreme amount of resilience. They are driven, they are motivated, and the majority of them are extremely smart, and provided with the right information would be able to make wise choices and decisions. A lot of fathers have a myth about Department of Child Support, and Patty will go more into how it's evolved and how they've changed and their methodology, but the relationship between Rubicon and the Department of Child Support creates a platform where we can talk to the individuals about the importance of child support; working with them; services that they provide; and how it could actually help the family. Once we begin to talk to men and mothers about their children, they listen. They pay attention. So with the right information that's culturally competent -- delivered, people listen, and they pay attention. Again, that's what the relationship between the Department of Child Support, here in Contra Costa County, and Rubicon is able to do. We can talk about our perceptions, we can talk about what body of knowledge we have, about the population we serve, and we can listen to each other to understand how to nuance the program and how to do the service delivery where it's actually impactful for the men and women that are listening. I'm going to turn this over to Patty to talk a little bit about the Contra Costa Department of Child Support.

**Patty Hunt:** Good morning. This is Patty Hunt from Department of Child Support Services, Contra Costa County. When I started with the program, we were the Family Support Office under the Contra Costa County District Attorney's Office. The attorneys that went to court for the child support issues were prosecutors, so the tone they took was prosecutorial which made the fathers scared. One of the examples is if somebody came out of court and said I can't afford the child support, I'm going to have to go live under the bridge, the response they'd get was, "Make sure it's a covered bridge." The response now under the State Office of Child Support -- every agency is separate although we do have a state-wide system -- if somebody tells us they can't afford the child support, the response now is, "What can we do to help you?" We have taken away the myth that people should be scared. People come into our office now voluntarily. We have people in there all day long, and one of the things we hear is, "I was so scared to come here, but you've helped me so much I don't fear it any longer," and that's been a big change. Rubicon clients come into the office and meet with workers and their issues are resolved to the best that we can do it, whether we've referred them to another agency [or] we send them back to Rubicon -- we try and help as much as we can. We have taken away the barrier of being under the District Attorney, and they now understand that we are the Department of Child Support Services. And you did mention that the word "enforcement" is not in our title, and it's not. We provide services.

**Rhody McCoy:** Thanks, Patty. Moving back a slide here. In order to be effective, communication is really important for the Department of Child Support and all of our frontline staff -- I think Nigel mentioned that it's really imperative that staff understand how child support works, so that individual relationships are being developed. They can either address the fears that individuals have as they come up, and we can also be able to present to them and motivate them to become involved in their child's life in a very important way, financially, and spending time with them as well. We've put together communication apparatuses so that we can stay on top of individuals' progress. We can talk about their challenges. We have monthly outcome meetings and quarterly meetings where we talk about individuals and what is going on with them. We actually love to celebrate all of the great achievements our participants make -- it's motivating to the staff. It allows us to go back and talk to the participant and continue to give them that important pat on the back. We also talk about program design issues. One of the things that we worked on is Rubicon has incorporated the Department of Child Support in our workshops. They come out every time, monthly to the workshops, and put together a fabulous program, and it really debunks all the myths; it captivates individuals' attention and it creates a space for them to begin to want to have child support involved with their relationships. A lot of men have either their driver's license suspended or they have all these arrears, they're afraid to get in touch because they're afraid of the consequences. They don't know that Child Support will work with them where they are -- not to be too punitive, but they want to give them a chance to succeed: we'll release driver's licenses as long as the

individual is participating in the program; they'll stop child payments if there isn't any income coming in; and we allow this to give an individual the space to transition, to stabilize, and then he can start to contribute to his family.

So, data and outcome, it's really important that we share this information both ways with the Department of Child Support. They tell us who is progressing, who isn't progressing and we also update the Department of Child Support, so if they have other issues, if they have outstanding issues in other counties, whatever the challenge that they might be having, the Department of Child Support is willing to understand and to listen to any of those challenges, and sometimes the participants in our program just aren't the best people to relay that information.

Patty, do you want to talk about some of the other aspects of the presentations or the outcome meetings?

Patty Hunt: When a staff member from the Department of Child Support Services comes to Rubicon to make the monthly presentation, you then meet with individuals who have child support issues. Of course, you can't answer specific questions on specific cases without looking at the case, so he takes the names and contact information and brings it back to me, and I can then review the case and I contact the worker individually and I speak with the worker about their issues. Many of these fathers have cases in multiple counties and multiple cases, so if other counties need to be contacted, I will do that for them, as well as giving them information on their cases in other counties. If other counties have questions, I have material that I forward to the other counties so they can review what the Rubicon and PAPAS programs are all about.

Rhody McCoy: Do you want to talk about the value of the partnership?

Patty Hunt: Yeah -- Second Chances. When somebody comes into the office, one of the big things we find is education so we try to educate them about how their arrears accrued under the court order and what they can do to alleviate the arrears -- whether it's a compromise of arrears program or other programs that may be available to them, including going to court. If they are in the program, once I receive the referral, we release the driver's license if the case is in our county. And that's released without any payments coming in because we want to try and remove the barrier. The current child support may still be accruing, but we would not require payments to be coming in at that point. If the case is in another county, I would go ahead and contact the other county and request that they release the driver's license. That license remains released as long as the father continues participation in the Rubicon or PAPAS program. If modification is necessary, we try and do a stipulation between the parties. If that's not possible, we invite the father to come into the office. We have a Family Law Facilitator in our office Monday through Friday who meets with people, assists them in filing their own motions to modify the child support, so the only thing the father has to do is take that motion to the courthouse to have it filed and then bring it back to us. The Family Law Facilitator also advises them on the types of motion, whether it be an emergency motion or a regular motion. If a modification of arrears payment is needed, we can usually go ahead and take care of that in the office and set the payment to something they can afford. If paternity is an issue and we have a court order that orders paternity testing, we will do the genetic testing at no cost, and we've gone as far as if they can't make the paternity genetic testing appointment date, we have staff who can get the swab during business hours so they really can come in any time our office is open and have that done.

Rhody McCoy: Good. All right, so I hope what's being heard is that Rubicon and Department of Child Support have a very flexible relationship where we're able to be client-centered and meet the needs of the individuals. The Department of Child Support has done a great job of just being -- perceiving needs and have been compassionate and understanding and allowing Rubicon to actually explain the individual's situation."

I'm going to go to this slide here and talk about some of the outcomes. This might not seem like a tremendous number of outcomes, but if we look at the return on investment that 22 parents established new custody rights, what that really looks like in the lives of the individuals. 61 people have maintained payments. 37 established

new visitation rights. And not only are the fathers being able to engage in their families with their children for the first time, but they have self-esteem because they're contributing with their families and it gives them -- it's just a motivating factor. It's critical to somebody that's returning from incarceration. We release driver's licenses as soon as they enroll into the program and make a commitment to do all the things we ask them. Last number: 171 participants completing parenting classes and increased their parenting skills.

I don't know which is the cart before the horse, but a lot of people, once they go into the parenting class, they look at themselves differently. They see their relationship with their child differently. And the things that child support is talking about, like contributing, being a partner of a child's life financially, it begins to have a new importance in their lives. It creates a new place, and they know it's something they really need to do. I might have talked about it earlier, but the majority of the individuals that come see us, upwards of 99 percent of them, they are able to make the right decisions if they're given the right information if it's in a way that they can actually listen to and understand it, because it's years and years of myths and fears that we're really fighting against.

I think that's it. Patty, anything else you'd like to mention?

Patty Hunt: As we take down the barriers, the fathers have direct phone numbers to call. They can call me direct. They can call one of the managers in the office direct. We find that they are making these phone calls when they become employed and they're letting us know where they're working and when they started so we can get the money coming in as soon as possible. And if you noticed, we received 27 modifications. That was a total of 50 orders, so there were people who had multiple orders that their order was modified so 27 people received modifications on 50 child support orders.

Rhody McCoy: Nice.

Patty Hunt: Yes. It's quite a partnership. We're finding a lot of success. It's very nice when the fathers call and say, "Hey, I'm working. What we can do?" instead of us having to go out and find them. A lot of these people haven't had contact with us for years because of fear or because of other barriers that are in their way. The barriers are coming down, they're calling us, they're coming in to see us. They want to get their issues resolved, they want to pay the child support, they want to pay the arrears, they want to be involved with the children and the families once again, and they feel good paying the child support because they know that we're there to help them. We're not going to say, "We can't help you." The term now is, "How can I help you?" "What can I do for you to make you want to come back and you pay your child support every month?" And it is working.

Rhody McCoy: Nice, great. Thanks, Patty.

Patty Hunt: You're welcome. Thank you, Rhody.

Rhody McCoy: Nigel, we're going to turn it back over to you.

Nigel Vann: Okay. Thank you very much, Rhody and Patty. At the beginning Lisa said this is going to be an exciting webinar, and to me it's exciting to hear a child support professional talking about these kinds of successes, particularly when it's clear that the message to the community is clearly about "What can we do to help you?" and then the fathers are responding so positively. And also it's about the co-parenting relationship. It's not just about paying the money. So if there is time at the end Patty, I may come back and ask you a little bit about in terms of tips for other programs in terms of how you create this kind of atmosphere, because you have obviously taken great strides there.

With that, let me move us to a new presentation which is going to be from Brad Lambert, who is the Co-Founder and Chief Operations Officer at Connections to Success. They actually straddle Kansas and Missouri, and they're based in Kansas City and few other places, but Brad you can tell us all about it. Brad and his wife, Kathy, co-founded Connections to Success back in 1998 when they left the corporate world with a passion to help underserved families achieve a high quality of life and through their leadership and a holistic, rehabilitative approach, they help people structure and move from poverty to economic stability, and they've worked with thousands of families over the last 17 years. Interestingly, I just noticed this as well, some interesting numbers here -- Our second presenter who is Nicolette Bennett, and she is an attorney with Kansas Department for Children and Family Support Services in Topeka, Kansas -- so again that word Child Support Services -- and she's in her 17th year working for the state of Kansas and Child Support Services. She has experience as a caseworker attorney and supervising attorney, presently works in the central office of Child Support Services overseeing the Fatherhood Grant Program. Let me turn it to Brad and Nicolette.

Brad Lambert: Thank you, Nigel. Good afternoon and good morning, everybody. I'm Brad Lambert with Connections to Success, and I'm joined by Nicolette Bennett from the Kansas Department for Children and Families. We are happy to share with you today about a unique partnership between our organizations and empowering low-income, non-custodial dads and employment, responsible parenting, and healthy relationships. I'd like to begin with a brief overview of our project, a little bit about the men we serve, our program model and then the origins of our partnership with DCF.

Connections to Success is one of the Responsible Fatherhood Grantees funded by the Department of Health and Human Services that serves the greater Kansas City metropolitan area. While we currently serve areas within both states of Kansas and Missouri, our primary focus has been in Wyandotte County, Kansas, which contains the second highest number of low-income, non-custodial dads having at least one active child support case in the state. Included on your screen is a downloadable file that profiles the men enrolled in our project, and if any of you would like to open that, please do. I just want to share with you a few of the more significant demographics of our fathers. First off, the average age is around 35; 65 percent have a high school diploma or equivalent; 82 percent have earned between zero and 500 dollars in the 30 days prior to enrolling in our program; 56 percent have reported living in unstable housing; 69 percent have previously been convicted of a crime; 37 percent are currently on either federal or state parole; and finally 51 percent have children with multiple mothers. I want to thank Mathematica for compiling this profile as part of the impact study currently underway with our project.

Our program is an integrated cohort design where our core curriculum is delivered in workshops generally consisting of 10 to 15 participants. This three-week workshop covers a variety of topics including personal and professional development, job readiness, healthy relationships, cognitive social behavior changes and builds on the strength of each participant. Following completion, each participant continues engagement with job developers, life transformation coaches, and mentors in carrying out their individual life plans.

Our partnership with the Kansas Department for Children and Families began with the development of an MOU [(Memorandum of Understanding)] that was included in our application for funding. A copy of that MOU is actually on your screen under files if you care to look at it. The MOU clearly defines roles and responsibilities of each agency and how we will collectively contribute to the success of the program. In addition to the activities included in the MOU, it was decided that Connections would be the first agency to pilot a newly designed state-owned child support arrears adjustment program aimed at incentivizing men to come forward, engage in this program, and achieve positive results.

I want to take this opportunity to recognize Trisha Thomas, who is the Director of Child Support Services in Kansas, along with Secretary Phyllis Gilmore for their innovation and creativity in designing and implementing this program and the success that it's having.

To further explain about Child Support Services and how we work together, I now want to introduce Nicolette Bennett with Kansas Child Support Services to continue our presentation. Nicolette?

Nicolette Bennett: Thank you, Brad. Just a little information for the statewide data in Kansas on non-custodial fathers. We have over 116,000 non-custodial dads for over 139,000 children, so obviously we're talking about a huge number, but this particular program really focuses on the gentlemen that have had multiple barriers to being able to be economically self-sufficient to provide support for their children. Typically from the child support world, we'd probably consider many of these cases uncollectable if it weren't for this particular program using the state-owed arrears as performance incentives. There is a hand-out for that and I'll cover some of that material briefly now.

What happens is when a child obviously doesn't reside with their parents and receives either TANF, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or has been in the state's custody -- and that would be foster care or if the child had been a juvenile offender -- then our agency is required to establish a child support order, if a child support order does not already exist. We're looking at that if there is one absent parent or that child is in custody, then it becomes two absent parents. Otherwise, if the child is with one parent, we're pursuing the other. If the child is with a relative, we could be pursuing both.

In this particular instance, we do occasionally seek reimbursement for moneys paid out for the child or the TANF or state custody, but we typically try to reduce that so we're not starting someone off with a large arrearage. In years past, we had also obtained some birthing expenses. In Kansas, each month that support that is not paid becomes a judgment owed. So again, whether it was a judgement that was obtained at the beginning or it's a monthly amount of support that wasn't paid, those are all going to be considered judgements past due support. What we have done with this particular program is tried to incentivize some of the fathers that we're working with. These particular incentives do reach beyond fathers, but obviously the program with Connections to Success focuses on fathers.

Jumping to the bottom of that handout: it's the class work. The course that Connections to Success has is a very comprehensive course that covers employment, fatherhood, relationships, financials, the budgeting, domestic violence -- there's a lot of different aspects that it covers. Because it's such a comprehensive program, to incent someone to get started, we will adjust off \$50 an hour for the first 15 hours of participation -- and the math on that is actually \$750, if you look at the little hand-out I think it says \$725 -- then an additional \$25 an hour for thereafter for a maximum total of 65 hours which would be \$2,000. Many of the courses go beyond 65 hours, but we're looking at that as an incentive to get someone to get involved in one of these programs because there are so many benefits that the person gets out of it. We have learned through experience that the draw is not often leading with fatherhood or relationships or the financial side, it's really about employment. Many of the gentlemen that we are working with believe "If I can just get a job or a higher paying job, then everything will be fine. That will fix everything." Once they get into the program, that incentive, that first 15 hours, they're looking at \$750 adjustment, so typically by the second day, they're already invested in the course and they're going to continue to participating. We want to reward that participation. All of what we're talking about when it's state-owed is money that is only assigned to the state. We're not talking about making adjustments for any moneys that are owed to families. But many of the gentlemen that we're working with typically have children that have received TANF, so they're typically is a judgment to the state.

We have a number of courses offered across our state, some various classes that are bit less comprehensive, they're kind of some of the components of the class, we have approved for this type of adjustment as well. If someone happens to have a course they're interested in, we're typically looking for something like the curriculum: how many hours, what's involved, how much participation is there for someone to get more out of

this. Again, it's an incentive to assist the person getting themselves in a better position to take care of themselves as well as their family.

Something somewhat unique that we have is a child support savings initiative. It's a college 529 savings account. For someone to participate in that, they need to submit an application and pay current monthly support and at least a dollar towards past-due support, or if there isn't any current support owed -- we're just talking about a judgement -- pay at least a dollar toward past-due support. Those moneys have to be paid into our state disbursement unit, and what we will do is that for each dollar that is put into that 529 savings account, we would adjust two dollars off of state-assigned arrears. That's not limited to the \$2,000 limitation of the other courses. In addition to that special college savings plan, we obviously also look at educational certification -- whether that's higher education, some type of vocational training, something that's going to enable someone to get a higher paying job so that they can put themselves in a better position. We typically ask for a copy of the diploma or a certificate, and we're looking at the person's case and we can make an adjustment on their child support case. The theory behind all of this is getting someone to improve their situation.

Then, how I got involved with the Connections to Success program, is that I had the opportunity to present to the fathers, and what we learned from that is that we need to first establish trust. So I come in and I give about an hour presentation about child support services. As an attorney, I'm not providing legal advice, but information about the legal process that many of the men we work with are not familiar with. One of the biggest challenges is, I think, sometimes terminology. We often times use words that or acronyms that often don't make sense to the people that we're working with. I start at the very beginning: how cases come to our agency. I learned that much of what we do is a mystery to many people -- what's a "mandatory program" versus someone being able to apply when they haven't received assistance -- that there are services that a non-custodial father can apply for, typically paternity and modification. I cover the presumptions of paternity when we can and cannot perform DNA testing prior to a court order. I've actually even drawn DNA samples from some of the gentlemen in this program. I go through the legal process. Kansas is a judicial state, and unfortunately, our process is not glamorous like it is on television, so I'm often dispelling some of the myths and misunderstandings. I discuss how we obtain orders, and then I also go through how we enforce them. I discuss emancipation, cover a little bit of inter-governmental cases -- Wyandotte County is in northeast Kansas, so it borders Missouri and there are a lot of cases we have that go back and forth between the two states.

Kansas statutes do not permit our agency attorneys from handling custody and visitation issues, but those are obviously topics that a lot of these gentlemen are interested in. I'm at least covering terminology: residential custody versus physical; if they're shared or sole custody; what, and how, a father can go about obtaining visitation or obtaining custody if need be. I often refer the gentlemen to our legal services unit, provide them with toll-free numbers for our Kansas Bar Association Referral Service, again trying to provide that information to be able to help them figure out what it is that they can do and what they need to. I usually present during the second week of the three week course, so by that time the fathers are freely communicating among themselves and often when questions are asked during that presentation, it's often very specific about their individual case. So I cover that with generic information and then we'll often meet with the fathers after the class to get more details or to discuss their personal particular details.

But it really is an open dialogue, and it's getting that open line of communication that in the past has been very adversarial. We use different terminology, and really for me to fully work a child support case, and work with the father, I really need to have a solid understanding of that person's individual situation. Then only once I've got that can I start thinking outside the box and figure out what can be done. I provide a direct phone number for the fathers to call me to discuss their case. We do have a call-center, but often what I've found is that a lot of the gentlemen aren't sure what it is that they need to ask, or perhaps they call and they're asking for something, but the words they use, or the terms they use, get misunderstood, so sometimes there's been some frustration.

In working with them individually, I can cover what's needed in their course and then gradually transition them over, so instead of calling me, to be able to provide updates through our call-center. It's not uncommon for me to receive a call a couple weeks after the presentation. The information sunk in, the father has more specific questions, and then we're working together to figure out what can be done.

The adjustment that's made is filed through court, and there's a letter called a legal document that is provided to the gentlemen when we've been able to make an adjustment off of their state-assigned arrears. It's kind of at that point where I've said some things -- they've heard me, they think they get it, but you know, you really hadn't had that relationship with trust, so have I really done what they heard me say I would do? And when they get that letter they know that's a step, and these are all steps to work together to build a more solid relationship.

Most of what we do, we need to have information and it needs to be accurate, and only when we open the line of communication are we able to get the other side of the story, the other facts that we need. I've learned so much from these gentlemen, something as simple as changing a term. Instead of asking how I can help, which often puts the father in a weaker, defensive position, I learned to use the term "assist" -- how can I assist you? I've learned that we cannot make that assumption, that just because this gentleman has a second or third child support order, "Oh well this gentleman knows all about the process and everything I do and I don't really need to explain everything." Well, in most cases, it wasn't explained the first, second or sometimes even the third time around, and a lot of people have questions.

So it's important for us to open the line of communication, to build that trust and discuss what the person's situation is to fully understand it and then figure out how we can be creative about what it is that we do. Now Brad's going to talk a little bit more about what makes it work.

**Brad Lambert:** Thank you, Nicolette. This slide really represents a few key success factors in our relationship. As I shared earlier regarding our MOU, data collection and sharing are important components to measuring progress. This involves a constant back-and-forth of sharing information, including many things such as class attendance, employment status, amount of arrears adjustment, new child support paid, just to name a few. This information is invaluable in project implementation and also important in calculating our project return on investment, which we'll share with you in a minute.

Communication and problem solving have been essential. I think it is safe to say that partnering with a large government agency can be complicated. There are many players in the game, and getting people to feel and operate as one team takes time and patience. From the outset, we both realized that neither could be successful without the other. I would say that this type of inter-dependence has really become healthy. This project and relationship were new to both parties, allowing us to think more creatively, try new approaches, and seize the opportunity we were given to create something new and different.

Now, as I mentioned earlier, our project serves both Kansas and Missouri. While our Missouri partners have been very helpful and supportive of our efforts, Missouri does not currently offer any type of state-owed arrears adjustment as an incentives for project participation, similar to Kansas. In hopes of changing this, efforts are now underway, in passing legislation during this session, to adopt similar policies which will potentially impact over 300,000 low-income, non-custodial fathers throughout Missouri in the years to come. We hope to know in a few weeks the outcome of this proposed legislation.

This next slide may not be very legible and it's included as a file that you can open, if you choose. The two important numbers I want to focus on really have to do with child support arrears and child support payments made. Before I do that I just want to thank OFA for including Connections in the program return on investment model offered at St. Wall Street that trains organizations in understanding the value of our work, and how to

monetize outcomes that demonstrate true economic impact. If you look at the child support arrears that have been discharged, you see it's somewhere around \$211,000. But compare that to the new child support payments that have been made, which are in excess of \$900,000. I think this metric alone demonstrates that so many dads out there want to do the right thing, work a job and support their family; they've just never been given a fair opportunity to succeed. That's really what we're about. I think this also supports what Barbara said earlier, that dads are not as much unwilling as they are unable, and I think this demonstrates that given the opportunities, given the tools, given the hope, given the supports, they will become able and they do want to achieve positive things for themselves and their families.

The early success of our project as demonstrated by this ROI [(Return of Investment)] has caused conversations regarding how we might scale and replicate throughout the state. This past year we began a program whereby Connections is engaged in providing training and technical assistance to four separate agencies throughout the state to serve low-income, non-custodial dads utilizing a similar service delivery model that we've developed in Wyandotte County. All four agencies are now enrolling participants and about to begin year two of their service. Nicolette, would you just real quick say a couple words about the four agencies and how they are distinguished from each other?

Nicolette Bennett: Absolutely. We have grantees that are handling this program for us with very diversified backgrounds. One focuses on mental health, one has a lot of experience with substance abuse, another has a lot of experience working with people to improve their employment situation, and we also have a grantee that is a faith-based organization. They're spread out in Kansas: one is in Dodge City, one is in Salina in Saline County, one is in Topeka and one is in Wichita. These particular grantees have already worked with at least 100 fathers and we're looking at least 75 to 100,000 dollars [in] additional state-assigned arrears being adjusted off, and it's because of the success we've seen with Connections to Success that we knew these services are needed. It's a matter of figuring out how to provide services to engage the fathers, assist them to remove some of the barriers that they have, so that they can be self-sufficient and pay child support as well as have solid relationships with their children and their families.

Brad Lambert: I believe our take away for you today supports the theme of this webinar of "Working with Child Support." As a service provider in this area, I believe we have a great opportunity to shape the landscape of child support for the next generation. Research is clear that children do better when both parents are engaged in their lives. And moving towards a family-centered model ensures that all needs are addressed and each individual is empowered with the tools and resources needed to succeed. This includes such things as reliable support to children, realistic child support orders, early interventions with parents, and links to necessary community services. Our potential here for collective impact working together is huge. Thank you very much for your time and we look forward to your questions a bit later. I'll now turn it back to Nigel.

Nigel Vann: Thank you very much, Brad. That was a great summary there Brad about the impact of this work and I particularly liked that you went along Barbara's comment about the difference between dads being unwilling and unable, which took me back to the terms we started using back in the 1990s -- I think it was either Ron Mincy or Elaine Sorenson who first talked about the difference between "dead-beat" dads, who were, and still are to a certain extent, but back then were certainly stigmatized in the media. I think it was Elaine Sorenson's data that showed that it was only maybe half of the fathers who don't pay child support who are doing so because they choose not to. The majority of fathers are not dead-beat, they're dead broke, and it's that kind of language that I think has helped build these partnerships. That's one way that fatherhood programs can reach out to child support people and talk and come to a common understanding. We certainly appreciate the work that you're doing there, Barbara, and I'm just going to turn it back to you to respond to what you've heard so far.

Barbara Lacina: Thank you again, Nigel, and I do appreciate the opportunity for some closing remarks. One of the things that I'd like to do at this point is just to ask for those of you in the audience to consider partnering with us

at least on a conversational level. I'd ask that you just start to share the message that you've heard today with the parents with whom you work directly -- that the child support program and its practices are evolving. The mission hasn't changed, we're still approaching our work from the perspective of securing reliable support for families, but what's different is that we recognize that rather than approaching that mission from the perspective solely of expectation as opposed to approaching that mission from the perspective of facilitation. We believe we're in a position to actually assist parents with strengthening their families through income, through work, through job services, through training and education, and certainly through support of their relationships, and not diminishing those relationships by the work that we do.

You'll find that there are, although I would submit to you fewer these days, some state or local child support offices who remain very committed to an enforcement approach. I would also submit that that is changing almost on a daily basis, and that more and more child support agencies are recognizing the value of implementing parent-focused practices, and that they are working diligently to establish trust to build relationships with parents to provide them with individualized case management that is specific to their needs and the conditions of their case. That they emphasize as much as the financial responsibility. That parenting is important, and to support parents in any way they can to have parenting time with their children when it's safe to do so. And that employment and wrap-around services are key pieces of that set of services, and that's why child support agencies are welcoming more and more the opportunities to partner with other agencies, other service providers, so that we can support and enrich our own efforts by those partnerships with folks who can provide services that the child support agency is unable to directly provide.

And so, in working with child support programs, the tips I would leave you with today are to reach out: start by reaching out to your local child support office and see if you can get an opportunity to have a conversation with folks there -- a manager, an administrator, a supervisor. There are a lot of child support agencies that have a specialized case manager whose responsibility it is to really pursue and develop partnerships, and you might find that when reach out. And also you could offer a reverse invitation for the child support folks to come and speak to your staff and/or other stakeholders or partners that you have to provide some additional education about the child support program. Further, there are child support programs that have, as Nicolette mentioned, a really direct role in the programming that's delivered to parents themselves, and so a child support professional presence at a class meeting, a workshop, a peer-support group meeting is always helpful as well.

One of the things I would point out here is that the Federal Office of Child Support has regional offices in 10 cities around the country, and for those of you who aren't familiar where those regional offices are located, we can provide that information as a follow-up to this webinar. That's another place where I would encourage you to reach out, particularly for things like general child support program education for your staff, or maybe even for a group of parents that you serve. Beyond that initial discussion and discovery of what each of you are doing in terms of accomplishing your own organizational missions, see if there are ways that that partnership can result in direct referrals to your programs from child support case workers, that there could be specific actions that could be taken on cases of individuals that you're serving; if, for example, they are in need of a modification or any other host of services that the child support agency could provide.

I hope that you take away some encouragement from the partnerships that have been shared with you here today from California and Kansas, and there are a lot of other really exemplary local programs and partnerships happening nationwide. We'll look forward to any questions that any of you have for us here in the federal office. You're welcome to reach out directly to us by phone or by email and hopefully we can provide additional information whenever and wherever it's needed. Nigel? Thank you.

Nigel Vann: Thank you very much, Barbara. I would really like to underline and encourage you to follow up with Barbara's offer there of getting in touch with her, because I know that we do hear from some programs where it's not as easy to form these links with their local partnerships. We've got just a few questions here that we'll go

to, and then we'll come back and do some poll questions, and then after that I'll ask each of the presenters to leave us with a final thought.

I see that there has been one comment posted on the chat box stressing the importance of educating case workers either with child protective service skills, or this could also be child support to understand these kinds of outside resources, so that they can establish relationships with their clients and make referrals, which leads me to one of the questions that has been asked and so I'm going to ask this one to Brad and Rhody. Could you just speak a little bit to how fathers are recruited into your program? Are any of these dads court-ordered? What do you do to actually get them involved with the program?

Rhody McCoy: Want to go first, Brad?

Brad Lambert: Sure. Well, we recruit from a whole variety of ways from actual street recruiting -- going out to barber shops, riding city buses. We do get a lot of referrals through our partnership with Child Support Services; we get referrals through probation and parole, through other support agencies; and we have walk-ins. I would say any and all areas where we can attract an audience is really what we're trying to do. And one thing that always gives me a warm feeling is how many of our new participants actually come from referrals from past participants, so word of mouth is always a big plus.

Rhody McCoy: So I'll pick up where you ended off, Brad. Word of mouth is a very valuable tool for recruiting and people walking in and inquiring about our program, but we intentionally started pre-release. We start pre-release in the West Contra County Detention Facility and a few of the other detention facilities in Contra Costa County. We also do outreach at San Quentin State Penitentiary as well. A unique component to our program is we work with men that are in treatment programs, substance abuse programs, so they have their opportunity to begin planning what their next steps are going to be when they leave the treatment facility, so we look at that as quasi-pre-release type of outreach as well. We run parenting classes, in the treatment centers, and we begin to talk to the men about the child support and interacting with their family differently. We also have relationships where probation from the county sends to us paroles, all state paroles, as well as a lot of the other partner organizations, community-based organizations that we work with in the county. It's a huge herculean effort by, not just by Rubicon, but all the re-entry stakeholders in the Bay Area.

Nigel Vann: Thank you very much. One key question which someone has actually asked as well here is, "How do we talk to fathers about the benefits of paternity establishment and having their name on the birth certificate?" I'm wondering if either Brad or Rhody or one of the child support partners -- could you just talk briefly about, how do you explain that to dads? I know there are times when dads are hesitant to establish paternity because they see it as being directly connected to child support, but as we know, if you don't, you lose all your rights to step up as needed for that child. How do you have that conversation with dads?

Rhody McCoy: One of the elements of that conversation is that we look at the individual's own history: what was his upbringing, was his father present and working, involved in his life? And not too surprisingly, but unfortunately, a lot of the men didn't have an active father in their life. And we talk to them about how that impacted them: how it impacted their self-esteem, how they saw themselves, and how they longed for that relationship. And don't they want the opportunity to do things differently? And a lot of them even mention that they promised themselves that they would never be like their father. I hate to be stereotypical in this, but that's one of the things that we really do pay a lot of attention to is what was the individual's experience, and actually honor his own experience and let him determine how he wants to change his life and impact his children. That's the other thing and also being a contributor and being in control of that relationship as much as possible is important, and if the Department of Child Support doesn't formally engage in the relationship, then a lot of times the father is at the whim of the custodial parent and we also talk about how uncomfortable and how problematic that can be if the relationship goes sour, if there are some misgivings, or if people aren't communicating properly. So child

support services actually helps to provide the conduit between the families to keep it fair for both parties; that's some of the language we use in explaining it.

Nigel Vann: Anything to add to that, Brad?

Brad Lambert: I don't have anything to add. Do you, Nicolette?

Nicolette Bennett: That's it.

Nigel Vann: So here's sort of a general question for each of the program partners, and again, thinking about how can other people do what you're doing. Who initiated the partnership in terms of the Connections to Success partnership? Was that the Connections to Success Program, or was that the Child Support Office? How did that work?

Brad Lambert: Well, I think when we first looked at the Responsible Fatherhood solicitation and began to put together a strategy, we knew right away that to be successful, we would need to be engaged and in close partnership with our local child support services. I think at that point is when we began having discussions, and from there we generated the MOU, and we actually sought their input in our applications. We began early on, before we were ever awarded the grant.

Nigel Vann: Moving [back to] Patty. Were you involved when this relationship was first formed? Can you speak to that a little bit?

Patty Hunt: I was involved when PAPAS was first being formed, I was invited to come aboard and be the liaison for our office, so I've been involved in that. I was briefly involved with Rubicon prior, when we started to get the referrals, and decided how we were going to work each of the cases and what we were going to do for each of the fathers. We put a plan in place, and that's when I became involved.

[Speaking simultaneously]

Nigel Vann: I'm sorry, go ahead.

Rhody McCoy: No, you go ahead. Go.

Nigel Vann: Well, I was just going to ask if you have any specific tips. If I'm a fatherhood practitioner and I'm trying to start this conversation with my local child support agency, what kind of things should I be talking about? How should I initiate that conversation?

Barbara Lacina: I would contact and talk about the enforcement actions that child support agencies take, and how some of those can be alleviated while the father is in the program, as well as talking about modifying orders. There are a lot of orders out there that fathers cannot afford, and they can be modified. I would start there.

Nigel Vann: Okay.

Rhody McCoy: I would just follow and up and say that an organization connected with the Department of Child Support if they ask for help -- we'd like to know more information, we'd like staff trained, we understand the importance, can you come out and help us? -- kind of hard to say no to a request like that, and that works both ways because of common values.

Nigel Vann: Yes, absolutely. Anybody else have anything else to add on that?

[Speaking simultaneously]

Nigel Vann: Okay, go ahead Barbara.

Barbara Lacina: Oh sorry, I was just going to quickly add that I do think the child support conversation can quickly be taken up around the emphasis on being a partner to procuring reliable support for families, and so I would just encourage folks to keep that in mind in those conversations, and emphasize that there's no intent for folks to be relieved of their obligations to support their families financially, but that there are ways that partnerships can actually help the child support agency meet their goal as well.

Nigel Vann: Great, okay. Just before we go to the poll questions, Barbara, there was a question in the chat box asking to what extent the Federal Child Support Office can support or encourage programs like the arrears offset like they're doing in Kansas. Is that something you can just talk to briefly?

Barbara Lacina: I can speak to that briefly, and that encouragement really is out there. The federal office has been messaging to state and local child support offices for some time now that the consideration of debt compromise, particularly when it's paired with or as an incentive to making consistent, regular, monthly child support payments, is an important thing for states to consider. There is, at this point, not a policy base for that particular practice. However, we are actively sharing the outcomes and results that states have accomplished through their use of that practice, and on the OCSE website there is also a map -- although I will concede that it probably needs to be updated by now -- there is an interactive map that indicates areas where those kinds of debt-compromise programs are available.

Nigel Vann: Very good, thank you. Okay. So we're going to do our poll questions real quickly, and then I'll come back to each of the presenters for a final thought. I'm particularly interested to hear, perhaps from Patty and Nicolette, on the types of things that dads respond to. You've both made some points about the real value of the presentations that you do.

I see people have started responding. Our first poll question is up on the screen, so if you could just tell us your response to, "I have a better understanding of ways to develop enhanced relationships between fatherhood and child support programs." I'll just give you a few more seconds on that and then we'll move to the next question.

[Pause]

This is all part of good program evaluation, as Brad was talking about with their program; you have to show the impact of what you do. So let's move to the second poll question. The second poll question is: "I received useful information that will help me provide fathers with accurate information about child support." [Repeats]

[Pause]

I'll give you another second on that, I see people are still clicking.

[Pause]

And while people are clicking on that, let me just go back to the presenters then for those final thoughts. Anybody like to go first?

Patty Hunt: I'll go first. This is Patty. Our partnership with Rubicon is bringing fathers into our office that we have had no contact with for years. When they're coming in and wanting modifications, we provide paperwork; sometimes they can't fill it out. Rubicon provides assistance in filling out that paperwork. They also are getting information from Rubicon regarding their case. I send Rubicon a synopsis of the case; they go over the case with the father, if there's any questions, they come back to us. The partnership is bringing not only them into [the office, but it's] bringing encouragement that there is hope. They do want to now support their families, they do keep us informed of their employment. If the wage assignments are too high, we can work with them on a more individual basis.

Nigel Vann: Great, it's great to see you changing the [unintelligible] pattern.

Patty Hunt: Yes, it's really bringing down the barriers.

[Speaking simultaneously]

Rhody McCoy: Go ahead.

Patty Hunt: No, I'm good.

Brad Lambert: This is Brad Lambert. I guess I would close by saying that I believe we are in a period of dramatic change in child support services, and the level of discussion has really risen not only at the federal level, but it's trickling down to the states and communities. As I always like to say in talking to our people here, we're at the right place at the right time to really be part of collective impact in systemic change, and that's very exciting to us. We're excited about the future and continuing this work, building more partnerships and really seeing the needle move. So thank you again, and we appreciate this opportunity.

Nigel Vann: Thank you, Brad. Nicolette?

Nicolette Bennett: I just wanted to end with, you know, it's a change of mindset, and when I got involved in this a little more than four years ago, as an attorney, there's an order. Why are we working with someone to not pay what's owed? But when I took the blinders that I had on, when I took them off and recognized, we're trying to work with families, and we're trying to change things and make it easier to have that positive outcome. So it does take creative thinking. It takes a willingness and ability to put the negative, older thought processes away to look towards a positive future. I saw one of the comments or questions someone asked, "How do we reach these people? How many do you send out?" Well, unfortunately in child support, we don't have a lot of good mailing addresses, so it really takes creative thinking -- thinking outside the box -- but where there's a will, there's a way. We've worked with hundreds of people, we know that this works. If anyone has other questions, our information is provided, please feel free to contact us, obviously outside of the webinar.

Nigel Vann: And I did want to emphasize that you can get in touch with any of the presenters or us at [info@fatherhood.gov](mailto:info@fatherhood.gov). I know we haven't answered all of the questions, we will post as many answers to those

as we can after the webinar. Again, the materials will be up in a few weeks. You'll have the slides, you'll have the audio, you'll have the transcript and so if you'll just bear with me, I know we're over time, but just a quick opportunity for one final word from Rhody and then Barbara.

Rhody McCoy: My final word is that the community that we work in has [unintelligible] historical, tremendous amount trauma, and as I said before, we're a conduit so we can listen to those voices and hear their concerns, give them new information so they make the right decisions, and it's just really important. We owe a lot of gratitude to the Department of Child Support, that they've made these changes and understand the complexities of these individual situations. It takes some on an individual basis and sometimes allows us to be the voice in between, so there can be a real understanding and appreciation of each other's role. Things don't always happen as quickly as possible, but we're on the right path like Brad said, things are evolving and we're moving forward, and we're enthused.

Nigel Vann: That's great, Rhody. And yeah, it really is the role -- I think to everybody on this call, it's plain, it's that middle person who makes all this possible, and again with the Office of Child Support Enforcement, we really do appreciate the lead that you guys have taken, Barbara, so let me give you the final word.

Barbara Lacina: Thank you, Nigel. I will just say that the final word is that we are all working for families and children. If we can work in cooperation, as opposed to confrontation, and if we can have the courage to trust each other, we believe that we really can accomplish the best possible outcomes for children and their parents, and that their lives will be changed in infinitely positive ways. Please reach out to us if you have questions or need more information, here in the central office or any of our regional offices, and at your local and state child support levels.

Nigel Vann: Thank you very much, I think that's a great reminder that the work that we're all involved in, either as a fatherhood practitioner or as a child support professional or other family services, it is all about what's good for the children and improving child well-being. I applaud everyone on the webinar for the work you do, and I look forward to seeing you at the next one. Thank you very much everybody, have a good day!

Barbara Lacina: Thank you.

Rhody McCoy: Bye-bye.

Nigel Vann: If the presenters could stay on the line --

Operator: Ladies and gentlemen, this does conclude our webinar for today. Thank you for your participation.