



UNIVERSITY OF
MARYLAND

*Demonstration Grant
Office of Child Support Enforcement
Evaluation Project
Child Support, Child Care and Head Start
Collaboration*

*Final Research Report
April, 2001*

*Elaine A. Anderson, Ph.D.
Department of Family Studies
University of Maryland
College Park, MD*



For more information, contact the author at: 1204 Marie Mount Hall, College Park, MD 20742; Phone: 301-405-4010; Fax: 301-314-9161; Email: ea8@umail.umd.edu

TABLE OF CONTENTS

BACKGROUND.....1

GOALS OF THE EVALUATION.....1

ACHIEVEMENT OF THE PRIMARY OBJECTIVE.....2

 INTERVIEWS WITH HEAD START AND CHILD CARE DIRECTORS.....2

 EXIT INTERVIEWS WITH LOCAL SITE DIRECTORS.....3

 BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED.....4

ACHIEVEMENT OF SECONDARY OBJECTIVES.....8

 OBJECTIVE #1.....8

 OBJECTIVE #2.....10

 OBJECTIVE #3.....12

 OBJECTIVE #4.....15

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS.....18

QUESTIONS TO ASK AND BARRIERS NOT TO FORGET.....19

CONCLUSION.....20

FIGURE 1: COMPONENTS AND OUTCOMES.....21

TABLE 1: PERMANENT COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS.....22

BACKGROUND OF THE EVALUATION

This demonstration project commenced in October 1997 and ended September 2000. The current evaluators did not join the project until January 1999, at which time a contractual grant was awarded. Subsequently, a time-extension was awarded to the evaluators after the expiration date in order to complete all of the evaluation components.



GOALS OF THE EVALUATION

A process evaluation was to be conducted to determine the extent to which the project is implemented in accordance with the proposed project plan. The evaluation focuses on the following project objectives:

Primary Objective:

- To reach out to single parent families who are not receiving TANF or POC and assist them in pursuing child support for their eligible children.

Secondary Objectives:

- To expand the Maryland Head Start Network Collaboration Project Advisory Council by including a representative of the Child Support Enforcement Administration;
- To expand the focus of the Advisory Council's existing Child Care Committee to include Child Support Enforcement and through the Committee, facilitate, develop and implement state-level collaborative activities involving Child Support, Child Care, and Head Start regarding child support;
- To expand the services of an established statewide child care resource and referral service to provide child support enforcement services information; and
- To implement initiatives at local sites that will facilitate collaboration among Child Support, Child Care, and Head Start and address the primary objective.



ACHIEVEMENT OF PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

The primary objective was to identify single parent families who were not receiving TANF or POC and to assist them in pursuing child support for their eligible children. In order to assess whether or not the objective was achieved, Head Start and Child Care directors as well as local site directors were interviewed. Following are the results from those interviews:

Interviews with Head Start and Child Care Directors:

The evaluators attempted a couple strategies to interview parents who had learned about child support through this demonstration project. The original proposal indicated that parents who had received information about child support enforcement from a child care referral service would be called for a telephone interview regarding their contact with the child support office and the outcomes. The evaluator developed an interview schedule to discuss with parents their knowledge about child support and their experiences and the outcomes of the child support application process. However, these interviews were not conducted because the local sites had difficulty tracking those parents who might have been informed about child support and then followed through with their application. Second, the evaluators proposed to conduct 3 focus groups, with parents who had been informed about child support, at the demonstration sites. These focus groups were not successful because child care directors were concerned that participants would not be comfortable answering child support questions with other families present.

Thus, we are reporting on anecdotal information provided to us in the seven interviews conducted with a sample of participating Head Start and child care directors in the target communities, concerning the appropriateness and efficacy of the outreach methods and materials used. The project directors at each of the three demonstration sites were asked to provide the names of Head Start and/or Child Care program directors with whom they had collaborated within the past year. Four individuals were interviewed from the Tri-County Southern Maryland Area, and two each were interviewed from Baltimore City and Anne Arundel County.

Collaboration

The collaborative efforts were reported as setting a direction for "a better way of doing business by having more information available," and that "non-TANF parents were reached by this increased accessibility." Outreach efforts were reportedly effective. Availability of materials and word-of-mouth helped gain more personal contact with parents. Additionally, it was noted that "the trust factor has been increased" due to the collaborative efforts. In the

beginning, the parents were both supportive and apprehensive. Some were eager while others were cautious. The successes were greater than the failures. "The second time around, the information helped to break the ice; although some parents did not get on the bus."

Reaction of Clients

Some of the directors reported that they were "surprised that a lot more parents did not come out and become involved." Consequently it was felt there was a "need to get more information to the parents" and perhaps not all of the goals had been reached. The parent's reception to the child support information also was reported to be mixed, with "fifty per cent of the mothers were all for it, particularly if they had never received child support payments, the other half was jaded from the non-effectiveness and negative results of previous programs." Additionally, "many of the legal guardians were apprehensive because they thought this project could upset the current way things were." However, "having a designated point of contact made things more comfortable...the clients responded well to the availability of materials and services...the project created a non-threatening environment for parents."

Future Initiatives

It was suggested that future collaborative efforts include designing "a feedback mechanism between the parents and the agency must be established, vital information for enhancements will be found that way...the training and information sessions must be on-going and continuous for parents, community, and agency personnel...keep on track and stay supportive for the client." A long-term relationship should be maintained with Child Support Enforcement to "maintain a point of contact and involve them in setting up the annual agenda." Finally, it was suggested the program "formalize the project initiation through the use of a kick-off event, and developing guidelines for program implementation," followed by "continued education of staff personnel and periodic presentations to the parents."



Exit Interviews with Local Site Directors:

Project exit interviews were conducted with the local site coordinators during July and August 2000. These interviews included questions pertaining to: a) the major activities during the life-span of the demonstration grant; b) the success of change pursuant to implementing child support information sessions;

c) unintended consequences from this partnership; d) issues of sustainability, and challenges confronted regarding maintenance of initiatives; e) goals met from a local perspective; and f) lessons learned for future replication or initiatives.



Best Practices and Lessons Learned:

Grant Activities Undertaken.

The 3 sites engaged in a variety of activities to meet the goal of providing potential recipients with information about child support. These activities included:

- **Meetings** -- with Head Start providers, parents, and the Head Start Parent Council, as well as other day care centers; and meeting with representatives of the local child care associations.
- **Mailings** -- material sent to purchase of care recipients, day care providers, and parents through a resource and referral child care network.
- **Media Forms** -- an information booth at the county fair that disseminated frisbees and brochures; a dedicated phone line to receive inquiries; a newsletter that was disseminated to local providers; a video spot that was shown on local public television; and child care topic cards that could be distributed to a variety of venues.

Successful Changes Subsequent to Implementation of the Grant

The site directors reported numbers of recognized successful changes after the demonstration grant had been implemented. These successes interfaced with the following arenas:

- **Awareness** -- Directors felt that not only had the target families increased their awareness of the importance of child support and the avenues for obtaining such support, but likewise many of the child care and Head Start personnel had also increased their levels of awareness about the topic. Sometimes that heightened awareness benefited the providers personally and for others the information was utilized solely to work with the families in their setting.

- **Resources** -- The information about child support simply gave providers an additional new resource to utilize when interacting with the parents. The child support resource also enabled teachers/providers to approach the topic of finances and to offer parents suggestions and information.
- **Empowerment** -- Having an additional bank of information to share with the families also helped the child care providers to feel better about their work and what they could offer the families. The child care providers developed a new series of professional contacts through their interaction with child support.
- **Child Care Options** – Several of the directors felt that the announcements about child support that were introduced in a variety of venues such as through television announcements or county fair information booths also alerted some families to new child care options for their children. In the process of inquiring about child support, a few parents also learned about other child care settings. Thus, this initiative may have “drummed up” some additional child care business.
- **Expanded Services** – Many of the providers as well as target families also realized the additional services that are either provided by social services or can be referred by the agency. Some of the services that were newly discovered related to: transportation issues, employment services, legal assistance, drivers license renewal, rent issues, temporary cash assistance, earned income tax credits, and medical assistance.

The Unintended Consequences of the Partnership

Sometimes an activity will generate consequences that were not foreseen during the stage of development. Those outcomes can be positive as well as negative for the entities involved. The site directors from this demonstration grant identified several unintended consequences worthy of note.

- **Prior Knowledge** -- Many of the target families had been informed previously about child support in their child care centers when they discussed the Purchase of Care (POC) application, thus the additional information about child support supplied through this demonstration grant initiative perhaps did not garner as many new child support applicants as was originally expected.

- **Previous Application** --The site directors recognized that many of the welfare reform initiatives that had commenced even before the reform was initially implemented had targeted this same group of families, thus they may have already captured many of those who would be applying for child support assistance.
- **Confidentiality** --The child care providers were not comfortable sharing the names of the parents who had inquired about child support with the site directors, therefore conducting follow-up interviews with these parents was not achieved.
- **Comfort Levels** --The child care providers also reported that parents were not comfortable talking about child support issues in the context of a group of other parents, further making follow-up interventions difficult.

Sustainability and Maintenance of Initiatives

Demonstration grants are funded for a limited period of time. Therefore, if there is any intention of continuing many of the new activities after the life of the grant, issues of sustainability must be addressed during the implementation of the grant. Site directors were asked to identify any strategies they would suggest or they had undertaken to be able to sustain the new activities commenced under this grant.

- **Consider Cost** -- Directors indicated sustainability was maximized when they selected activities whose major cost was upfront during the life of the grant. For example, a major cost of creating the "hot topic" cards was the time to develop the materials, design the card, and get the original material printed. Sustainability of continuing to use these cards is easier because the primary cost that must continue to be covered is postage. It is easier to convince potential funders to provide monies for mailings if the product already is produced and has been marketed.
- **Produce Easily Modified Models** -- The Directors suggest producing a model containing the child support material to be given to the families that will withstand changes over time. It is inevitable that new information will need to be added to or deleted from the original material you produce, therefore try to choose a format that is easy to modify when for example your telephone number changes. Minimizing the need to make major changes in a model will maximize sustainability over time.

- **Incorporate into Outreach** -- If you already have an existing set of activities with a budget line that you can incorporate your new actions under, such as outreach, you will be more likely to maintain new initiatives. In other words, if you can argue that new activities from the demonstration grant compliment, support and enhance existing activities, these new activities can more easily be incorporated into current program and budget lines and thus continue.

Goals Met from a Local Perspective

Each local site was asked to assess how well they achieved the goals of facilitating collaboration among Child Support, Child Care, and Head Start as well as reaching out to single parent families who are not receiving TANF or POC and assisting them in pursuing child support for their eligible children.

- **Coordinated Initiatives** – Working with an individual child care center or Head Start program has worked well, but the process of coordinating 3 or more agencies or entities is more challenging; thus, more work on refining that collaborative process should occur.
- **Developed New Relationships** -- The site directors felt they had developed new relationships with individuals in the participating agencies, however it was felt that more models of how collaboration could be developed should be coming from the state departments.
- **Created New Father Image** -- The activities of this demonstration grant allowed the site directors the opportunity to discuss a variety of child support enforcement perspectives with families. For example, the consequences of drivers license suspensions and the implications for getting to work and subsequently making child support payments on time might be able to be addressed. Further, some of the media images of the “dead beat” dad versus the “dead broke” dad could also begin to be presented. Addressing the role of the father may be occurring for the first time with many of these families. Thus, these activities provided an opportunity for highlighting the role of the father in the home. Specifically, information about child-rearing practices, child development, discipline and engaging children in activities with the father, such as homework and recreation, can be addressed.
- **Utilized Child Care Resource and Referral** -- Through the increased implementation of the “Locate” program in Maryland, a local child care resource and referral service, it was felt that the local sites maximized their possibilities of reaching the target population of single parent non-TANF or POC families.

Future Replication and Initiatives

The site directors were asked if they had any suggestions for consideration in any replication of this demonstration project. Lessons learned from this demonstration could be instrumental in the development of future initiatives. The directors had the following administrative recommendations:

- **Monitoring Finances** -- When selecting a site for the demonstration project that might include activities in more than one county, it was recommended that one partner in the award be designated as the primary entity to monitor and handle finances.
- **Minimize Paperwork** -- It was suggested that rather than writing quarterly reports, the individual sites simply be required to submit activity logs. It was felt that having to submit both reports and logs were duplicative and inefficient and time-consuming.
- **Track Child Support Referrals** – It was suggested that all Child Support Enforcement offices keep track of the sources of their family referrals. This tracking information might be useful in the development of and prioritizing for future information initiatives. A targeted emphasis could help determine more accurately where to put resources.



ACHIEVEMENT OF SECONDARY OBJECTIVES

Objective #1: To Expand the Maryland Head Start Network Collaboration Project Advisory Council by including a representative of the Child Support Administration.

The Maryland Head Start Network Collaboration Project Advisory Council added a representative from Child Support Enforcement Administration during the first year of the project. This individual became a permanent member of the Advisory Council. The representative attended Advisory Council meetings and was engaged in the Child Care Committee activities. The organizational chart of the Advisory Council was changed to reflect this new member position.

About two years into the demonstration project award time-line, the Child Care Committee was interviewed by the evaluators to discuss changes that may have ensued subsequent to the addition of this new representative and additional

information learned from the collaboration. The Committee identified several issues that must be continually considered in order to successfully have an institutional collaborative relationship along with program activity:

- **The importance of continuing to get the information out about child support.** Continued consideration of alternative places to make contact with parents about child support must be discussed. Developing partnerships with various groups such as recreational centers and their basketball leagues or the night court games, or interfacing with corporate groups such as Foote Locker may be new alternatives to be reviewed.
- **The sensitive nature of child support.** The issue of money raises a level of pride and discomfort. There still is a lot of individual reluctance about asking people about their child support situation as well as informing them about child support. Recognizing the positive benefits, resources and strengths that could come to children and families from sharing such information can help to alleviate some of the uneasiness about addressing the topic.
- **The fact that providing child support information and assistance is an on-going educational opportunity.** Family life circumstances change. Child support may not be relevant to a given family during one year of contact, but the following year the parents may separate. Likewise, regular payment of child support may be made, but unemployment may change a parent's ability to make their payments. Thus, having regular educational sessions offered to families can be useful.

In addition to hearing about the numerous activities of the Committee, the following unintended consequences were also identified during the interview:

- Although Head Start directors now know about the importance of child support and getting information to parents, there may need to be additional assistance considered to help parents follow through on their child support application. Currently, the Family Service Coordinators (FSC) within Head Start may not have the expertise or the time to provide such assistance. Thus, Head Start needs to consider this issue further in discussing their training agenda for FSCs.

- Head Start also recognized that many fathers are involved with their programs and increasingly Male Involvement Groups are being instituted in Head Start. Fathers acknowledged that they too needed information about child support and their rights, because information solely may be going to the custodial mother.

Although these unintended consequences were discussed in relation to Head Start, it also seems worthy for their consideration in other child care settings.



Objective #2: To expand the focus of the Advisory Council's existing Child Care Committee to include Child Support Enforcement and through the Committee, facilitate, develop, and implement state-level collaborative activities involving Child Support, Child Care, and Head Start regarding child support.

In order to expand the focus of the Advisory Council to include Child Support Enforcement, and thus facilitate better statewide initiatives regarding child support, the following kinds of activities were undertaken at the Advisory Council level:

Outreach and Information Sharing

The goal of this activity area was to inform other groups about child support. Some of those groups might be entities such as the Child Care Center Association, Family Child Care Association, Family Resource Center, local county offices, and Head Start. This information sharing could occur in the form of presentations, newsletter articles, or other media opportunities.

- The Advisory Council hosted a conference on the "Best Collaborative Practices in Early Childhood Programs." There were 250 participants at the meeting, many of whom were in the child care and child support professions.
- Members of the Council presented collaborative workshops at the annual statewide Male Involvement Conferences hosted by the Maryland Committee for Children and the Department of Human Resources, Office of Child Support Enforcement Administration. The workshops were offered in collaboration with representatives of the Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers Program and focused on how different agencies and programs can collaborate to help children, while strengthening the agency by pooling resources and sharing contacts.

- Members of the Advisory Council also gave presentations about child support and the collaborative efforts at the Maryland Head Start Association annual spring training conferences.
- Advisory Council Members met with advocacy groups around the state such as "Friends of Family" to inform them about the relationship between child support and child care.
- The legislative committee of the Joint Committee on Children, Youth and Families held hearings in Annapolis and advocacy groups were invited to share issues. The importance of the relationship between child support, child care and self-sufficiency was presented.
- A representative from Child Support Enforcement Administration met with the Maryland Father's Practitioners Network to inform the service providers about child support and father's rights and responsibilities.
- Southern Maryland produced a video on the importance of child support in the lives of children. The Subcommittee will be attempting to generalize their information with the state in order to disseminate this video more widely.
- Additional entities that were targeted with information about child support by members of the Child Care Subcommittee were the Community Capacity Building Subcommittee, registration materials for the public schools (Pre-K and Kindergarten), Healthy Families sites, and the Adolescent Pregnancy Councils.

Institutionalized Policy Change

Following are examples of the procedural and policy changes that have occurred between the collaborative agencies as a result of the demonstration grant:

- The Advisory Council holds monthly collaboration meetings with the Governor's Office for Children, Youth, and Families.
- The Maryland child care resource and referral service is now expanded to all 19 child care networks in the state. The state supports training, technical assistance and public education regarding child support.

- The intake forms used by the statewide Maryland contracted child care resource and referral service, "LOCATE" have been changed to ask questions about child support need and use, alert clients about child support and the application process, and follow-up with inquiries about the outcome of the contact.
- Annually, Head Start checks their family names against Child Support Enforcement Services' database to be able to follow-up with child support information to families.
- Annually, Head Start provides training to center staff. Child support information has become institutionalized in those yearly training initiatives and is now distributed by many of the Head Start grantees throughout the state.
- Child support is part of the strategic plan for the Department of Human Resources/Child Care Administration.

Institutionalized Policy Changes

- Made connections with Governor's office.
- Incorporated child support in strategic plan of state Child Care Administration.
- Developed statewide child support information through child care referral service.
- Annually provided Head Start families in Child Support database with information.
- Provided annual child support training to Head Start staff.



Objective #3: To expand the services of an established statewide child care resource and referral service to provide child support enforcement services information.

At the outset of this grant, Maryland already had the Maryland Child Care Resource Network, a childcare resource and referral network, that was operative in three areas of the state (Western Maryland, Prince Georges County and Baltimore City). This resource and referral was called "LOCATE". During the time period of this demonstration grant, the goal was to expand the child care resource and referral network to include the other 10 child care networks in the

state. The resource and referral contract with "LOCATE" was expanded to include all 13 child care network sites during the grant award. This service now maintains a statewide database on all licensed providers, whose names are provided to them from the Child Care Association. Additionally, each resource and referral site commenced to ask questions of potential clients regarding child support eligibility and receipt. The network also began to share information to all eligible recipients regarding the importance of child support and the process by which they should proceed in order to inquire further and apply for child support. Finally, the network conducted a follow-up with the clients to inquire about their successes in obtaining child support.

Following is an example of the script utilized by the child care resource and referral employees when they talked initially with potential clients over the phone:

"LOCATE is trying to identify parents who might be eligible for financial support for their children. Are you receiving any child support payments? Yes, No, Refused to Answer. If no, do you think you should be receiving child support payments? Yes, No, Refused to Answer. If yes, I will send you an informational pamphlet outlining how to get help through Child Support Services in Maryland. If yes, is it court ordered child support? Yes, No, Refused to Answer."

Following is an example of the script utilized by the child care resource and referral employees in their follow-up with families.

"Recently LOCATE Child Care mailed an informational pamphlet to you entitled *Child Support Services in Maryland—How to Get Help*. Please take a few moments to answer the following questions. Did you contact a Child Support Enforcement Agency? What was the result of the contact? (Please check all that apply). I have not been able to get an appointment with the agency; I have made an appointment with the agency; I have had a meeting with the agency; I am not eligible for child support; or I am eligible for child support and am in the process of filing legal papers."

Impact

Through discussions with the single mothers who contacted the resource and referral service the following **qualitative data** were collected:

- Single mothers expressed reservations about receiving child support because they were concerned about losing their child care subsidy;
- Individuals were reluctant to ask a government system for child support because of negative experiences they had previously had with other government systems;

- There was a misnomer by some that they had to meet certain income levels in order to be eligible for child support;
- Some did not understand there were people in Child Support Enforcement who could actually help them apply for child support; and
- Some mothers did not want their child(ren) to have access to the father and felt if they applied for child support they would have to let the dad see their child(ren) and have visitation rights.

Consequently, when LOCATE began to incorporate child support questions into their routine assessment, they also had to train their counselors on the implementation of this material. Trainings consisted not only of learning how to ask the child support questions, but also being prepared with information to respond to immediate questions the clients may have for them about child support. Counselors sometimes needed to adjust their own perspectives on child support in order to recognize aside from a financial issue that addressing child support might enhance the care of the children.

Lessons for Staff Child Care Referral Service Trainings

Client Questions:

- Relationship between child support and child care subsidy
- One's income and receipt of child support
- Child support and visitation rights
- Reassurance because of previous negative government experiences

Administrative Issues:

- Child Support Enforcement helps in child support application
- Counselors address their own perspectives on child support

During the three-year grant period the following **quantitative data** were collected. LOCATE provided child support information in the 3 sites to a total of 1,314 parents who called the centers for referrals. Follow-up information was collected from 534 parents. The following information was obtained:

- 276 parents contacted the Child Support Enforcement Agency for further information or to set up an appointment;
- 99 of these parents were eligible for assistance and were in the process of filing legal papers;

- 33 parents had meetings but their eligibility had not yet been determined by the time follow-up contact was made;
- 113 parents had appointments scheduled; and
- 11 parents had been unable to get appointments with the agency.



Objective #4: To implement initiatives at local sites that will facilitate collaboration among Child Support, Child Care, and Head Start and address the primary objective.

The local sites implemented a number of activities in order to enhance the collaborative efforts between Child Support, Child Care and Head Start. Following is a description and discussion of many of these collaborative activities. Maryland had 3 primary sites where this demonstration grant was implemented. Therefore, local initiatives will be presented for each individual site. There were three local sites included in this demonstration grant: Anne Arundel County, Baltimore City, and Tri-County Area of Southern Maryland (St. Mary's, Charles, and Calvert Counties). These three sites were selected because they represent different types of communities. Anne Arundel County is a suburban county with about 13 percent of the female-headed households with children under five in poverty; Baltimore City is a large and poor city with over half of the female-headed households with children under five in poverty; and the Tri-County Area of Southern Maryland is a predominantly rural area where the female-headed households with children under five in poverty ranged from 18.5 percent to 39.1 percent.

Local Site Initiatives

All of the local sites targeted their activities to reach out to single parent families who are not receiving TANF or POC. The goal was to assist these families in pursuing child support for their eligible children.

Evaluation activities involved each of the demonstration project sites including: Anne Arundel County, Baltimore City, and Tri-County Area of Southern Maryland (Calvert County, Charles County, and St. Mary's County). The measures utilized for this demonstration grant were predominantly those for a process evaluation.

Anne Arundel County

Initiative: Develop and distribute materials regarding child support for providers to use with parents in various child care settings. Develop a quick reference card for parents in need of child support information. Develop material to be mailed to parents requesting child support assistance. Insert article on child support annually in the Child Care Coordinator Newsletter. Have special programs manager attend the county's two professional association meetings annually to discuss child support.

Activities: One of the major activities developed and implemented in Anne Arundel county was "Hot Topic" cards. These cards pertained to a variety of child care topics including child support information. The child support "hot topic" card identified how child support enforcement services could help the parents. Further, the card told where to get help, the process to follow, and the cost. The cards were mailed to parents who called the child care resource and referral service. Additionally, the cards were made available at any county child care event and activity including meetings of child care provider associations. The hot topic cards also were mailed to family day care homes and private centers on an as needed basis. Finally, the county prepared child support information specifically for the providers in order to help them recognize the importance of child support for parents and for themselves as a provider, but also to help them talk to their parents about child support and other financial issues.

Impact: It is estimated that over 7,150 individuals were informed about child support from these "hot topic" cards or from child care provider contacts during the course of the 3-year demonstration project. Additionally, another 1,350 individuals were informed annually of the child support collaboration and the importance of child support through a county newsletter.



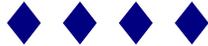
Baltimore City

Initiative: Delivery of one training program per quarter to educate child care/early education personnel about issues related to child support and available resources. Have staff in the Head Start centers operated by the Resource Center attend the first training delivered annually.

Activities: Baltimore City engaged in several activities to target prospective non-TANF or POC parents about child support. First, they contracted with a private contractor, in conjunction with staff of Baltimore City Child Care

Resource Center, to conduct workshops for child care and Head Start providers about child support. Multiple workshops were provided over the 3-years of the project. Second, Baltimore City included information about the collaboration demonstration grant and child support in their newsletter. Finally, they worked with their resource and referral service to have them institutionalize a process to inquire about parents' child support needs and to provide them information about child support benefits and the process one must implement to obtain support.

Impact: It is estimated that over 1,225 individuals were informed about child support from numerous workshops presented or brochures handed out, and an additional 1,500 individuals were informed quarterly about child support through the Baltimore City Child Care Association newsletter during the course of the 3-year demonstration project.



Tri-County Southern Maryland

Initiative: Have child support staff speak periodically at Head Start and child care provider meetings with parents and staff regarding child support enforcement services. Have Child Support Enforcement personnel be available to attend evening meetings at Head Start and child care centers. Design and distribute pamphlets about child support services. Develop and distribute other public awareness tools. Have Child Support Enforcement continue to work with Head Start to develop programs that promote the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children and share this experience with local sites and Statewide Advisory Council.

Activities: Multiple activities and strategies were implemented in these counties again with the non-TANF or POC client in mind. Presentations about the importance of child support and the procedures families should follow to apply for child support were made to child care and Head Start centers. Family day care home providers were also mailed information about the importance of child support and the application process. Additionally, announcements were developed regarding child support using several venues. Brochures were designed that could be handed out, frisbees also were designed announcing child support and who to contact for further information, and a public television announcement was produced about child support. The brochures were given out in many different child care settings or were mailed to interested individuals including family day care home providers. The brochures had a designated phone number listed where individuals could call to specifically ask questions about child support. Both the brochures and Frisbees were handed out at a

variety of other activities families attended such as the county fair. The public television announcement was run on the local network.

Impact: It is estimated that at least 5,200 individuals were contacted about child support through the distribution of brochures, and frisbees, and workshops or presentations. Additionally, the public television announcement ran approximately 300 30-second spots during the 3-year demonstration project.

Types of Child Support Information Activities:

- **“Hot topics” cards**
- **Newsletter articles**
- **Workshops/Presentations**
- **Child care referral services**
- **Mailings**
- **Brochures**
- **Frisbees**
- **Public Television Announcements**



ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Following are additional recommendations that grew out of the activities with this demonstration project:

- Child support information can be a resource for personnel to use in their work/life initiatives. Therefore, it is recommended to send child support information to all employees.
- Yearly mailings about child support, before the holidays, should occur to all POC recipients.
- Utilizing email, particularly when informing child care centers about child support, could become increasingly more important, and enhance efficiency.
- Child Support Enforcement should also continue to partner with other agencies. For example, the Maryland Child Health Program is one important vehicle where information such as child support could be

shared on a regular basis with families. Additionally, clients who apply for Food Stamps could be asked if they pay child care and then simultaneously be given information about POC and child support.

- Mass mailings from the Child Care Administration to all day care providers on at least a bi-annual if not quarterly basis could enhance sustainability of the demonstration grant goals.
- Child Support Enforcement could work more closely with businesses to offer assistance informing employees about POC, earned income tax credits, filing taxes, and child support benefits and application. Additionally, articles could be put in the Chamber of Commerce newsletters informing them about assistance they may receive from social services.
- Future audiences who should be targeted with child support information are the different cultural groups, e.g. the growing Hispanic population. Any materials produced should also be translated into other languages.



QUESTIONS TO ASK AND BARRIERS NOT TO FORGET

- Receipt of child support payments can push a family income high enough so they no longer will be eligible for POC vouchers. What kind of disincentive does this hold for applying for child support, given that POC vouchers are reliable and come monthly?
- Further, what mechanism is in place so that those who are awarded child support don't experience gaps in or denial of their child care services until such payment is made, because their POC vouchers may have at least temporarily been discontinued?
- Some families' are reluctant to access the child support system because they have had previous negative experiences with government agencies. What assurances have been built in to this process that might help to alleviate this concern?
- Some child care providers or other professionals may not feel comfortable asking families questions about their child support eligibility because they consider such questioning to be an invasion of

privacy. What training has been provided to professionals to heighten the importance of child support?

- Child care or Head Start staff may have had a tainted personal experience with child support. What training has been offered to staff to help them be more objective, and therefore not unduly influence the attitudes of other child care staff or the parents because of their own situation?



CONCLUSION

This demonstration project attempted to expand the accessibility of child support to non-TANF or POC families by increasing information to potential recipients about the importance of child support and what it is, coupled with information about applying for child support. This goal was achieved through numerous activities such as: meetings, mailings, and various media forms implemented by the local participating sites. The impact of these activities is presented. Further, a child care resource and referral network was expanded to include all of the child care networks located in the State of Maryland. Lessons learned, barriers not to forget, and additional recommendations are provided in the report. (See Figure 1, page 21, for a visual presentation of the components and outcomes of the demonstration project).