

Introduction and Project Goals

The State of Tennessee Department of Human Services, Child Support Division (CSD) was awarded a strategic planning grant (#90FD0177) from the U.S. Department of Human Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) in September 2011. The project, titled “Integrating Workforce Strategies with Child Support Services,” was a strategic planning effort designed to engage multiple agencies in a collaborative process to improve financial outcomes for low-income noncustodial parents (NCPs) and their families by developing effective, coordinated workforce programs in four urban settings. The four settings were Chattanooga, Knoxville, Nashville, and Memphis, all sites with prior experience testing collaborative efforts funded by the child support agency and aimed at helping low-income noncustodial parents with barriers to child support payment become employed. The Center for Policy Research (CPR) of Denver, Colorado, was retained to help with project planning, facilitation, and the preparation of project products.

The main collaborating partners for the strategic planning effort were the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the Title IV-D Child Support Program, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) agency, and the Administrative Office of the Courts. In addition, the planning process engaged directors of local child support agencies, career centers, and courts in Memphis, Nashville, Chattanooga, and Knoxville. A number of community and faith-based organizations participated, including programs that serve ex-offenders (Project Return, Connect Ministries), responsible fatherhood programs (New Life, First Things First), financial literacy providers (RISE Foundation), educational institutions (University of Tennessee, Tennessee Technology Centers), transitional jobs providers (Nashville Works, Goodwill Industries), and employers (Tennessee Payroll Association).

The goals of the Workforce and Child Support Collaboration project were to:

- Identify opportunities to improve Tennessee’s current system for providing workforce services for noncustodial parents in the child support caseload using state-

specific data on existing initiatives and child support and workforce performance outcomes;

- Design a targeted action plan that addresses gaps in the current approach (e.g., short-term training initiatives and transitional jobs programs) and ways of sustaining coordinated strategies;
- Develop a detailed guide (the Toolkit on Workforce Programs for Child Support Populations) for child support agencies to follow in their efforts to provide workforce services to low-income unemployed and underemployed noncustodial parents facing barriers to child support payment; and
- Develop a successful proposal to secure a five-year demonstration grant from OCSE to test the effectiveness of using collaborative strategies to provide job-focused services to noncustodial parents using rigorous, random assignment procedures.

Tennessee's collaborative workforce development activities built on several ongoing and past demonstration and evaluation projects the agency has conducted with OCSE funding to address the needs of low-income families in the child support system. They have dealt with parenting time, employment services, family-centered services, prisoner reentry, and services for never-married parents. The collaborative planning project also built on the Handling Obligation Today (H.O.T.) program that Maximus, the privatized child support agency, developed to address the growing problem of unemployment among noncustodial parents in Memphis. Tennessee used the strategic planning grant to assess the strengths and limitations of the collaborative arrangements begun in these projects, identify program gaps and other needs, and determine ways to improve their effectiveness and sustain them. A key outcome of the project was the development of a Toolkit for child support agencies in Tennessee and other states to use as a guide to developing and sustaining future collaborative efforts to assist unemployed and underemployed noncustodial parents with employment. This report describes the planning effort conducted during the grant period and the Toolkit that it yielded.

Background

The Workforce and Child Support Collaboration project builds on literature about programs to improve employment outcomes for vulnerable populations and incorporates the elements of effective workforce programs. Child support is a powerful economic tool for low-income families. Researchers estimate that child support removes approximately one million people from poverty (Sorensen, 2010; Wheaton & Tashi, 2008), and that next to mothers' earnings, it is the second largest income source for poor families. It comprises 30 percent of total family income among families below poverty and 15 percent for families between 100 and 200 percent of poverty (Turetsky, 2005). Child support payment is also associated with positive child well-being outcomes (Knox & Bane, 1994) including gains in children's academic achievement and declines in behavioral problems (Koball & Principe, 2002).

Despite its potential, child support frequently goes unpaid. In 2007, census accounts showed that only 39.6 percent of never-married parents received all the support they were due (Grall, 2009). The Administration for Children and Families projects that its caseload will be increasingly comprised of never-married parents and that 42 percent of its 2009 child support enforcement caseload fell in this category (Lippold & Sorensen, 2013). Many noncustodial parents face barriers to employment that include limited education, limited work histories, mental health and behavioral issues, substance abuse, lack of transportation and criminal backgrounds (Schroeder & Doughty, 2009). Ex-offenders face severe challenges finding a steady job, with two-thirds of 3,000 interviewed employers indicating that they would not knowingly hire a former prisoner (Holzer et al., 2004). Past incarceration reduces subsequent wages by 11 percent, cuts annual employment by nine weeks, and reduces yearly earnings by 40 percent (Pew, 2010).

In addition to the employment barriers they face, noncustodial parents often have child support obligations that are unrealistically high. Sorensen and Oliver (2002) note that in 1999, more than one-quarter of poor fathers who paid child support spent 50 percent or more of their personal income on child support, while only 2 percent of non-poor fathers

spent that much. Without coordination, child support can undermine employment programs and discourage noncustodial parents from participating in the formal labor market. While two-thirds of child support collections come from wage withholding, this is not available for the 25 to 30 percent of noncustodial parents who have limited or no earnings (Sorensen & Oliver, 2002).

For these reasons, there is growing sentiment that child support agencies need to go beyond traditional enforcement activities and to collaborate with employment programs to address the array of problems that many low-income noncustodial parents face in a more comprehensive manner. The earliest program to promote employment and father-engagement among low-income noncustodial parents was Parents' Fair Share, a large-scale, national demonstration project that used random assignment techniques. Conducted in seven states from 1994 to 1996, Parent's Fair Share provided court-ordered employment services to unemployed noncustodial parents who owed arrears to the government. In addition, noncustodial parents were offered case management, peer support services, help with parenting and relationships with the other parent, and referrals for other community services. The evaluation found that child support payments for parents in the experimental group increased by nearly 20 percent, chiefly through the "smoke-out" effect that resulted from the extra outreach and court hearings that sites held for these parents to determine whether they were unemployed and should be mandated to participate in an employment program. Truly unemployed noncustodial parents who received employment services were less apt to experience increases in employment activity or earnings relative to the control group, with the exception of the most disadvantaged: those without a high school diploma and with limited work experience. There was little parent interest in mediation services to improve parental relationships or parent-child contact but considerable enthusiasm for peer support.

Although they involved fewer participants than Parents' Fair Share and lacked the use of random assignment techniques, Welfare-to-Work, the OCSE Responsible Fatherhood Programs, and Partners for Fragile Families were other early, multi-site projects that targeted

unemployed noncustodial parents and offered employment-oriented services. Like Parents' Fair Share, they yielded mixed findings on effectiveness. For example, while the OCSE Responsible Fatherhood Programs succeeded in promoting employment and increasing client earnings relative to their pre-program work and earning patterns, most noncustodial parents continued to show low earnings following program participation, with the most substantial increases occurring for those entering the programs with the lowest rates of employment and income (Pearson et al., 2003). While child support payments increased following program participation, most still paid less than the full amount due and their arrearages did not drop. And although most fathers in the program (64%) lacked a visitation order and half wanted help getting to see their children more often, relatively few participated in mediation (6%), parent education (17%), or other interventions dealing with parenting or relationships.

More recently, numerous states and local jurisdictions have developed employment programs for nonresident fathers in the child support system, the most carefully evaluated of which are Texas's NCP Choices (Schroeder & Daughy, 2009), Colorado's Parents to Work (Pearson et al., 2011), and New York's Strengthening Families through Stronger Families Initiative (Lippold & Sorensen, 2011). The Department of Labor is currently conducting the Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration, a national demonstration of the effectiveness of transitional jobs for unemployed noncustodial parents. Other relevant OCSE-funded projects are this strategic planning project in Tennessee as well as parallel efforts in Oklahoma, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia; initiatives to provide job-focused services to never-married parents in Massachusetts and Tennessee; and the Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration Project (CSPED), a national demonstration of employment programs for unemployed noncustodial parents in eight states using random assignment techniques that launched in fall 2012.

One clear finding across all demonstration programs is that poorly educated men with limited work experience face challenges gaining employment, meeting their child support obligations, and maintaining relationships with their partners and children (Knox et al.,

2011). Nevertheless, at least some evaluations of these newer generation employment programs find that they result in greater participation in workforce development activities, increased job activity and higher rates of child support payment.

- An evaluation of the Texas NCP Choices program using matched samples found noncustodial parents in the treatment group were employed at 21 percent higher rates, paid their child support 47 percent more often, and paid \$57 per month more, for a 51 percent increase in total collections. Improvements for the treatment group in employment and payment frequency persisted for two to four years after program enrollment. In addition, custodial parents associated with NCP Choices were 21 percent less likely to receive TANF benefits in the first year after program enrollment, and 29 percent less likely two to four years after enrollment. Program outcomes were strengthened by the addition of a fatherhood component.
- An evaluation of Colorado's Parents to Work program using random assignment techniques found that the percentage of child support due that was paid increased significantly from 36.6 to 41.3 percent in the treatment group but was unchanged in the comparison group (28.2% versus 27.5%). Although members of both groups had lower earnings following project enrollment as compared with their pre-program, pre-recession earning levels, treatment group members had significantly higher rates of earnings and less economic decline due to the 2008-2009 economic recession (Pearson et al., 2011). Those who participated more wholeheartedly realized the greatest economic benefit. In addition, treatment group members paid support more regularly and contributed to regional growth in earnings and sales/revenue in significant ways, with the Return on Investment estimated at \$4.37 in earnings growth and \$7.74 in sales/revenue growth.
- An evaluation of the New York Strengthening Families Through Stronger Fathers Initiative that involved a comparison of project participants with matched non-participants found that participants earned 22 percent more and paid 38 percent more in child support (Lippold & Sorensen, 2011).

These results are prompting some jurisdictions to initiate and operate work-oriented programs for unemployed noncustodial parents although OCSE estimates that only 1 to 3 percent of the caseload participates at any given time (OCSE, 2012). Although the precise elements of a “clearly successful program design” have not yet been developed, the literature on these programs (including “newer generation” models) offers some clues about how to serve never-married, low-income parents in an effective manner. Lessons learned from these earlier programs include:

- Since child support agencies can identify the population in need of workforce services and have the data to monitor key project outcomes such as child support payment, child support agencies should take an active role in managing programs that engage noncustodial parents in employment services.
- Since recruitment is challenging, programs should use a variety of referral techniques and sources (including courts) and work with noncustodial parents of all ages and all stages of case processing in the child support system to achieve strong enrollment goals.
- Since child support agencies do not have expertise in the delivery of employment services, they should partner with workforce programs and other agencies that do specialize in providing job readiness services, job training, job development, job placement, and job retention.
- Since noncustodial parents are hard to serve, child support agencies and workforce partners should staff them at appropriate levels with personnel who will be energetic about engaging noncustodial parents, providing intensive services, and communicating with one another.
- Since noncustodial parents face many barriers to employment, programs should provide intensive case management services to ensure that participant needs are identified, that they receive the right mix of services, and that they engage in services and adhere to a service delivery plan.

- Since many noncustodial parents are poorly educated and have limited work experience and criminal backgrounds, programs should be prepared to provide workforce services that are effective with these barriers, including short-term job training, on-the-job training, transitional jobs and subsidized employment, job development, and job placement and retention services.
- Since many noncustodial parents have difficult child support situations including high monthly obligations, high arrears balances, suspended driver's licenses, and other enforcement actions that may discourage their willingness to work and pay child support, programs should pursue "enhanced" child support policies. This might include establishing minimum orders rather than imputing minimum wage, reviewing and adjusting orders to match actual earnings more quickly than is the norm, forgiving some state-owed arrears in exchange for employment and child support payment, suspending some enforcement remedies, and/or assisting with driver's license reinstatement. Since program partners need to track participant behavior and communicate with one another, programs should develop communication systems so that child support staff, workforce personnel, and the court can exchange information about noncustodial parents and take appropriate actions.
- Since many program participants have practical barriers that impede their ability to work, programs should be prepared to provide transportation assistance and explore the use of other financial incentives and work supports.
- Since working, paying child support, and becoming an effective parent may require difficult attitudinal changes, programs should develop opportunities to strengthen noncustodial parent commitment to a variety of pro-social behaviors. This might be done through formal fatherhood classes, peer-support groups, mediation and facilitation services, and other parent education programs.

Tennessee's History of Child Support Demonstrations for Low-Income Parents

The strategic planning grant to integrate workforce strategies with child support services was the sixth demonstration grant Tennessee had been awarded to address barriers to child support payment among low-income and never-married noncustodial parents. Initiated in 2003, these demonstration and evaluation projects have expanded knowledge in Tennessee and the nation as a whole on the characteristics of low-income noncustodial parents, the challenges they face in paying child support, and the interventions that serve to improve their behaviors dealing with work, child support payment, and parenting. The following is a brief description of these prior projects and their chief findings.

Child Support Employment and Parenting Program (CSEPP): Begun in 2003, CSEPP targeted unemployed and underemployed noncustodial parents in Knox County (Knoxville) who were delinquent in their child support payments, had minor children receiving public benefits in the past 24 months, had a current Tennessee child support case, agreed to enter into a personal responsibility contract to pay \$50 per month toward their child support obligation, and were willing to participate in a program designed to increase their employment and earnings. Noncustodial parents who enrolled in CSEPP were assessed by a dedicated project manager who identified their barriers to employment and provided case management services as well as job readiness and job search activities at a career center based at the child support agency. CSEPP participants were required to attend weekly job training, turn in weekly job search logs, and engage in one-on-one intensive case management activities with program staff. An evaluation of a random sample of 75 CSEPP participants showed that child support payments increased 53.3 percent in 24 months after CSEPP enrollment (Tennessee Department of Human Services, 2005).

Tennessee Parenting Project: Conducted from 2005 to 2010 in collaboration with the Administrative Office of the Court, the Tennessee Parenting Project focused on the use of parent coordinators to help parents address problems with access and visitation in three judicial districts: Nashville (20th Judicial District – Davidson County), Chattanooga (11th Judicial District – Hamilton County), and Jackson (26th Judicial District – Madison,

Henderson, and Chester counties). Dedicated personnel (one full-time parenting coordinator and one part-time *pro se* specialist) were placed in the child support office in each jurisdiction to help parents create parenting plans and pursue self-represented legal filings dealing with access and visitation. The 1,591 parents in the treatment group were offered the opportunity to participate in a free, facilitated meeting with the other parent to complete a fill-in-the-blanks parenting plan that spelled out when the children will spend time with each parent. Those who were unable to produce a plan were referred to the *pro se* specialist at the court for help with filing court papers on visitation and/or to attend a free class on how to pursue legal filings on a self-represented basis. The 583 parents in the randomly generated comparison group received printed information about parenting time problems and community resources (Pearson et. al., 2011).

Some key findings from the Tennessee Parenting Project were:

- Most visitation problems can be solved with a brief meeting with both parents (facilitation session) to discuss how the child’s time will be divided using a standard, fill-in-the-blank parenting plan. Nearly all of the 595 parents who participated in facilitation did this in a single session that lasted an average of 40 minutes and a median of 30. Nearly two-thirds (62% and 61%) of the facilitations in the 11th and 20th Judicial Districts resulted in comprehensive parenting plans that were submitted to the court along with existing child support orders. Another fraction of the cases resulted in partial parenting plans (8% and 3%) and/or clarification of a parenting-time schedule (9% and 25%), which were treated as informal agreements between the parents and not filed with the court. When both parents participated in facilitation sessions in the 26th Judicial District, the agreement rate was 95 percent.
- Addressing visitation problems leads to more frequent and regular parent-child contact. The percentage of interviewed parents in the high-level treatment group that reported seeing their children at least monthly in the pre- and post-program time periods rose from 52 to 62 percent. For low-level treatment parents, those seeing

- their children at least monthly only increased from 52 to 58 percent, while the percentage saying that they “never” see their children rose significantly.
- Addressing visitation problems leads to higher child support payments. Average child support payments for parents in the high-level treatment group rose from 54.2 percent to 57.6 percent in the 12 months following program enrollment, a statistically significant increase. In addition, noncustodial parents in the high-level treatment group demonstrated better payment consistency.
 - Nearly all parents (78%) were satisfied with their their experiences with parenting coordinators as compared with 58% who went to court to resolve their visitation problems. Most of those who went to court (75%) wanted help from court personnel to develop a parenting plan. Most surveyed child support workers indicated that it was very (70%) or somewhat (22%) important to have someone able to help parents with access and visitation issues.

Family Ties: Family Ties was created in Nashville pursuant to a 2009 OCSE grant in support of the Prisoner Reentry Initiative (PRI), which aims to reduce recidivism by helping returning offenders find work and access other critical services in their communities. Family Ties provided child support assistance to ex-offenders in the Nashville area who seek reentry services at Project Return, Inc., a non-profit community-based reentry program. As part of this project, Project Return hired a liaison to screen for and address child support issues among its client base. Noncustodial parents with a child support case or problem were offered case-specific information on their child support situation and a variety of relevant services that included reinstatement of driver’s licenses and obtaining deferrals in the initiation of enforcement actions. The liaison coordinated with workers at the child support agency in Davidson County and with magistrates at the Davidson County Juvenile Court who established a “problem-solving court” to provide more responsive actions to project participants (Davis et al., 2013b). Key findings on an evaluation of participants enrolled in Family Ties include:

- Significant improvements in child support payment, with the average number of months of payment rising from 4.2 during the six months prior to enrollment to 7.8 and 9.0 in the six, 12, and 24 months following enrollment, and the percentage of owed child support that was actually paid rising from 11 to 28 percent.
- More significant payment improvements for participants who received help with order modification, reinstatement of driver's licenses, correction of case errors and other concrete forms of assistance, rather than just getting information about their child support case with the average number of months of payment for the two groups in the six months following enrollment standing at 4.2 and 3.2 months, respectively.
- Lower rates of return to prison for participants, which were 16 percent, as compared with 35 to 42 percent reported by the Tennessee Department of Corrections, with the lowest rates of return for employed participants and/or those who received certain services suggestive of employment such as help with résumés, tools, work clothes, and transportation (9% versus 18%).
- High rates of user satisfaction, with 53 percent of participants rating Family Ties as "excellent" and 28 percent as "good," and 80 percent to 90 percent characterizing all child support services that they received as "excellent" or "good."

Parent Support Program: Awarded in 2009, Tennessee's Parent Support Program (PSP) was conducted in collaboration with the Administrative Office of the Court and built on the Tennessee Parenting Project by adding employment-focused services to parenting time services offered to low-income, unemployed and underemployed and never-married parents in three judicial districts: the 11th (Chattanooga), 20th (Nashville), and 26th Judicial Districts (Chester, Henderson and Madison counties and the city of Jackson). From January 2010 through March 2013, 1,016 noncustodial parents (approximately 90% unemployed) enrolled in PSP across the three project sites (Davis, et. al., 2013a).. Key findings from the project evaluation included:

- PSP participants interviewed at three and six months following enrollment reported receiving a variety of employment-focused job services. For example, 88 percent reported getting help with job listings and postings, 60 percent reported getting job leads and counseling from PSP staff members, and 49 percent reported participating in job fairs and hiring events.
- The percentage of participants making a child support payment following program enrollment rose from 43 to 48 percent in the 11th Judicial District (JD), 37 to 38 percent in the 20th JD, and 52 to 62 percent in the 26th JD. The percentage of child support due that was paid prior to and following enrollment in PSP rose significantly, from 33 percent to 36 percent. Those who received help with access and visitation paid 45 percent of their child support obligation, as compared with 32 percent for those who did not receive help with parenting time—a difference that was statistically significant.
- A pilot project testing the effectiveness of providing short-term, paid job training in generating longer-term employment and regular child support payments was conducted with 54 noncustodial parents in the 11th Judicial District (Chattanooga) and the 20th Judicial District (Nashville) (Goodwill Pilot). At the end of the Goodwill Pilot, 45 percent had dropped out and the remaining 24 percent had either completed job training and secured full time employment or were still actively participating in job training and job search (22%).
- The incidence of verified employment for participants in the Goodwill Pilot rose from 2 percent at enrollment to 38 percent, while the incidence of an active income assignment rose from 28 to 40 percent.
- The percentage of participants in the Goodwill Pilot who paid nothing toward their current child support obligation dropped from 33 to 20 percent in the six months following enrollment, while the median number of months in which participants made a child support payment rose from one to two.

Building Assets for Fathers and Families (BAFF): BAFF began in September 2010 and

involved a partnership with the RISE Foundation to provide financial literacy and savings opportunities and services for noncustodial parents in Shelby County (Memphis). Maximus, the local child support agency in Memphis, recruited low-income noncustodial parents who were enrolled in financial literacy classes and counseling sessions conducted by the RISE Foundation. Project staff members educated parents about money management, spending plans, credit ratings, and banks. The classes also explained how the child support system works and interested parents were invited to get more help with child support, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and other relevant benefit programs. Parents who completed a four-hour financial literacy class and opened a savings account received a \$50 gift certificate (with savings accounts up to \$200 protected from bank attachments for non-payment of support). Eligible parents were also encouraged to open an Individual Development Account (IDA), which is “matched” to help build savings for allowed purchases. During the two-year enrollment period, BAFF enrolled over 1,000 noncustodial parent participants. Over 200 participants met with staff for follow-up counseling sessions on various financial matters. In addition, over 100 participants opened savings accounts and two opened IDAs. CPR will completed the final evaluation report for BAFF in August 2014.

Tennessee used the collaborations formed in the course of conducting these demonstrations to develop the partnerships for its strategic planning effort on workforce services. It also used the implementation experiences and evaluation findings in its prior OCSE projects to identify best practices in integrating workforce and child support services. These are discussed in the following section on the strategic planning process.

The Strategic Planning Process

To assess and improve Tennessee’s system of providing workforce services to noncustodial parents, Tennessee Department of Human Services, Child Support Division and the project evaluator, Center for Policy Research (CPR), engaged key partner agencies across the state in a strategic planning process. The goal was to assess current policies and procedures at the various agencies toward low-income noncustodial parents, and to devise a

plan to better address the barriers to employment that they face and improve employment and child support payment outcomes. The strategic planning process included:

- Formation of a statewide advisory board;
- Conduct of a state-level kick-off meeting with advisory board members;
- Identification of regional planning sites and formation of regional planning teams;
- Conduct of regional planning meetings at local child support offices within each region;
- Development of a Toolkit for child support agencies to use to guide the creation of future workforce and child support collaborations;
- Conduct of a final advisory board meeting to review the strategic planning process and the Toolkit; and
- Conduct of a webinar with child support agencies throughout Tennessee to present the Toolkit and encourage the generation of local workforce and child support collaborations.

CPR's qualitative evaluation of the strategic planning process documented the process of assembling the statewide advisory board and regional planning teams, convening planning meetings, discussing various plan components, generating a collaborative plan, and finalizing a Toolkit to guide architects of future workforce programs for child support populations. Among the types of research questions addressed in the qualitative evaluation are:

- What partners were engaged in the planning process and why?
- What was the status of employment programming for noncustodial parents in Tennessee at the start of the planning process?
- What additions, changes, and modifications to baseline programming did the advisory board and the regional planning teams develop? What roles were delineated for child support agencies, workforce programs, courts, educational establishments, community and faith-based organizations, and other partners?

- What input did various participants and stakeholders provide during the strategic planning process? What other services/resources were identified to address barriers to employment and child support payment among low-income noncustodial parents?
- What lessons were learned about the design and delivery of effective employment services to low-income noncustodial parents in the child support program?

To answer the questions above, CPR engaged key stakeholders in the planning process, detailed below.

Advisory Board Meeting

In February 2012, DHS and CPR convened the advisory board for a full-day meeting. It was attended by representatives of key partner agencies to discuss the strategic planning process, identify gaps in current services to noncustodial parents, and develop a strategy for addressing these gaps. State level personnel that served on the advisory board were drawn from the following agencies:

- Department of Human Services, Child Support Division;
- Department of Human Services, Vocational Rehabilitation;
- Department of Human Services, Family Assistance Division;
- Department of Labor and Workforce, Workforce Development;
- Department of Labor and Workforce, Marketing and Communications;
- Department of Corrections, Rehabilitative Services Department;
- Administrative Office of the Courts;
- Davidson County Juvenile Courts;
- Tennessee Board of Regents;
- Tennessee Technology Centers;
- Goodwill Industries; and
- Community-based organizations for responsible fatherhood and prisoner reentry.

The advisory board meeting was held at the Administrative Office of the Courts in Nashville. The agenda covered five major topics: a summary of the strategic planning

initiative; an overview of the current state of employment and jobs in Tennessee; key elements of a successful workforce and child support collaboration; upcoming funding opportunities and opportunities for sustaining workforce-child support collaborations; and next steps in the strategic planning process. The advisory board meeting focused on four Tennessee jurisdictions that have pursued a number of workforce-child support collaborations in past OCSE-funded demonstration projects: Chattanooga, Knoxville, Nashville, and Memphis.

Putting Tennessee's jobs picture in context was an important first step in the planning effort, and a representative from the Department of Labor and Workforce Development helped the planning group accomplish this task. The presenter noted that:

- Unemployment benefits in Tennessee fall below the national average, with an average benefit level of \$125 per week and a maximum of \$275.
- Unemployment in Tennessee was higher than the national average before the Great Recession, and recovery continues to lag. Of the four sites focused on in this project, Memphis has the highest rate of unemployment, with a rate of 8.8 percent in December 2011.
- Across the state, career centers operated by the Department of Labor and Workforce Development assisted 678,000 in 2011, with only 5 percent (40,000 individuals) receiving the most intensive Workforce Investment Act (WIA) services.
- Like the rest of the nation, the economic recovery in Tennessee has been largely “jobless” and the rate of anticipated job growth continues to fall below levels experienced in pre-recession years.
- Job growth is anticipated in areas that require a high level of skill: automotive industries, government, transportation, construction, and health care.
- Through the Workforce Employers Outreach Committee, Tennessee is working with employers to meet the demands for future job growth. Most job opportunities for low-skilled NCPs will be in the service sector.

CPR presented elements of a successful workforce and child support collaboration to the group based on Tennessee’s past experiences and research and demonstration activity in other states. The elements that were highlighted include:

- Organizing a multi-agency effort; targeting low-income noncustodial parents in the child support system;
- Creating coordinated workforce programs;
- Engaging child support, workforce programs, courts, and community-based organizations in a planning effort;
- Identifying client needs and service gaps;
- Developing a targeted action plan;
- Developing a communication plan for partner agencies;
- Developing a data system to evaluate programs; and
- Determining how to sustain targeted workforce services for noncustodial parents after funded grant initiatives end.

The presentation generated discussion on how to effectively integrate an employment program with child support services across Tennessee. The main topic areas considered and highlighted as requiring further discussion in the project deliverable—a Toolkit to guide the development of future programs—include:

- Child support referral process;
- Workforce staffing and case management;
- Employment-oriented services, including job placement and retention;
- Short-term training opportunities;
- Child support services and incentives;
- Court referral and monitoring;
- Job development with supportive employers;
- Transitional jobs, internships, and on-the-job training opportunities;
- Communication among partner agencies;
- Fatherhood services and peer support;

- Additional Support Services; and
- Evaluating Program Outcomes.

At the time of the advisory board meeting, Tennessee had several effective workforce-child support collaborations in operation and in the second part of the day, attention focused on how to strengthen those efforts. The following suggestions were made:

- Strengthen existing passive and mandatory formats for recruiting and enrolling eligible noncustodial parents in workforce programs by using one-stop service formats and co-location of workforce and child support personnel.
- Provide intensive, one-on-one case management to engage and retain noncustodial parents enrolled in programs, identify their employment barriers, develop a responsive service plan, and ensure that they receive program services.
- Generate right-sized orders and explore the feasibility of providing child support incentives that are currently prohibited, including modifications of orders during incarceration and debt compromise opportunities so that child support does not discourage noncustodial parents from engaging in legitimate employment.
- Extend the problem-solving court to other jurisdictions and explore the possibility of combining flexibility for noncustodial parents who comply with employment programs, with accountability for those who do not cooperate.
- Network with employers, identify felon-friendly employers, and cultivate relationships with those willing to work with noncustodial parents who have limited education and work experience.
- Collaborate with the Tennessee Technology Centers (TEC), which will set up training programs that meet the specific needs of targeted employers. TEC placement rates are the highest in the state, and TEC tries to steer clients to appropriate job training programs.

- Explore legal services available through JusticeforallTN.com, a website of the Access to Justice Committee that has resources for lawyers interested in starting a pro bono legal clinic and identifies legal and non-legal social services providers throughout the state.
- Develop ways to fund GED testing fees for noncustodial parents in workforce programs.
- Develop a standardized curriculum on work ethics, life skills, parenting, and responsibility and make it available to noncustodial parents enrolled in workforce-child support collaborations.
- Engage agencies, such as Goodwill, to help clients with rap sheet scrubbing.
- Map and publicize short-term training opportunities dealing with building trades, forklifting, welding, and other industry sectors that are available for noncustodial parents.
- Develop a standardized curriculum on child support and provide a child support case manager at Career Centers and other workforce programs to explain child support and help clients understand their child support situation and options.
- Create opportunities for noncustodial parents to engage in peer support activities.
- Use case management, classes, and peer support sessions to help noncustodial parents develop more positive approaches to workforce training, internships, jobs, and child support payment.
- Avoid the simultaneous imposition of a variety of automatic enforcement remedies for nonpayment of child support that may discourage legitimate employment.
- Adequately staff workforce programs so that noncustodial parents get personal help with understanding their orders, the modification process, and how they can pursue access and visitation.

- Outreach to employers about workforce-child support collaborations and secure their willingness to hire noncustodial parents.
- Establish relationships with state and local agencies that provide mental health services to address the needs of noncustodial parents in workforce programs.
- Outreach about workforce-child support collaborations and conduct presentations with various employer (Society for Human Resource Managers) and judicial (Juvenile Court Conference) audiences to sensitize them to noncustodial parents and their issues.
- Pursue various funding opportunities to enable existing workforce-child support collaborations to continue to operate, improve, and be expanded to new settings.

Advisory board participants heard about upcoming funding opportunities and the potential use of various funding streams to support collaboration between child support and workforce agencies. The advisory board urged pursuit of potential grant opportunities with OCSE dealing with employment services for noncustodial parents.

The advisory board also authorized the conduct of regional planning sessions in Chattanooga, Knoxville, Nashville, and Memphis to develop workforce programs for child support populations.

Finally, the advisory board approved the development of a Toolkit detailing the process of establishing a workforce-child support collaboration to stimulate program replications in Tennessee jurisdictions that were not directly involved with the strategic planning process. The advisory board meeting wrapped up with a list of next steps and a promise to reconvene at the end of the planning process to review the Toolkit produced from the strategic planning effort.

Regional Planning Meetings

Following the advisory board meeting, DHS and CPR conducted regional planning meetings in the four sites targeted for project implementation: Chattanooga, Knoxville,

Nashville, and Memphis. At each site, meetings were convened with key community and regional partners to assess the strengths and limitations of the existing arrangements to provide workforce services to noncustodial parents, identify program gaps, and determine ways to improve collaboration. Each day-long meeting was held at the local child support office and was attended by all regional and community partners. All regional planning meetings were co-facilitated by David Teasdale, the grant program manager for the State Department of Human Services, Child Support Division, and Lanae Davis, research associate at the Center for Policy Research. Each regional planning meeting followed the same agenda, described below. This section provides details on each of the four regional planning meetings.

Knoxville

The first regional planning meeting was held in Knoxville on May 8, 2012. The meeting brought together key partners in the Knoxville area. Held at the local child support office managed by Young Williams, the child support director at Young Williams attended along with the area child support coordinator from the Department of Human Services. Workforce was represented by the area manager of the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, a representative from the Department of Vocational and Rehabilitation Services, and the vice president of Goodwill Industries Employment Training and Rehabilitation Services. The director of the Tennessee Technology Center in Knoxville, which provides job training programs, also participated. Program staff from the CSEPP program attended and provided an overview of their program operations. Several community based partner agencies were in attendance. They included Focus Ministries, which provides responsible fatherhood programming; a community advocate that works with low-income populations based at the University of Tennessee; and a representative from the CAC Workforce Connections program.

The Knoxville planning meeting focused on augmenting and sustaining the existing CSEPP program in Knoxville. As previously noted, CSEPP was created in 2003 as part of an OCSE-funded demonstration project and has continued to operate with funding from the

Tennessee Department of Human Services. Agency representatives agreed on the following next steps to address gaps in the CSEPP program:

- Creation of a jobs program allowing individuals to work for the State of Tennessee and pay off child support for completing work activities. This idea is based on a previous program run through the Department of Corrections.
- Additional funding to provide a better infrastructure for collaboration between agencies, such as a database or other online data tracking tool, co-located case managers, or other communication method.
- A practical referral/tracking system for clients to be monitored between agencies.
- Parenting time support for both noncustodial and custodial parents.

Chattanooga

The Chattanooga Regional Planning meeting was held on May 9, 2012, at the Maximus child support office.. Attendees included the director of the Maximus Child Support Office in Chattanooga, the DHS area coordinator, and the coordinator of the Parent Support Program (PSP) located in the Maximus Child Support Office. Workforce representatives included the area director of the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the director of the Tennessee Career Center in Chattanooga, the director of Employment Services at the AIM Center for Mental Health, the assistant director of the Southeast Tennessee Development District, and a representative from the TANF Workforce program operated by Policy Studies Inc. Also in attendance were the director of the Tennessee Technology Center in Chattanooga, the fathering coordinator from First Things First, the vice president of Mission Services at Goodwill Industries Chattanooga, and the executive director of Hope for the Inner-City, a nonprofit organization that provides supportive services to ex-offenders. Court representatives included a local juvenile court magistrate and a clerk who handle child support matters.

The top priority areas for program improvement identified by agency partners at the meeting were:

- Creating a one-stop approach in the delivery of workforce services to child support populations to avoid clients needing to report to multiple locations to obtain assistance with child support and jobs;
- Changing Tennessee laws and child support policies to allow agencies and courts to deviate from the child support guidelines when establishing and modifying orders for unemployed and underemployed noncustodial parents and to forgive state-owed child support arrears for low-income parents who participate in programs, obtain employment, and pay child support;
- Creating an environment where local employers come to the Department of Labor and Workforce Development and the child support agency for their hiring needs;
- Creating a list of employers willing to hire individuals with barriers, including ex-offenders;
- Creating a program offering subsidized employment and/or transitional jobs for noncustodial parents who have weak job skills and limited work history; and
- Providing transportation assistance and other supportive services to noncustodial parents enrolled in workforce programs to improve their level of participation and their rates of success.

Memphis

The third regional meeting held was in Memphis on May 23, 2012. Attendees at the meeting were the director of the local Maximus child support office, the DHS area coordinator, and the local coordinator of the Parent Support Program. Workforce representatives included the area manager of the Department of Labor and Workforce Development and the manager of Memphis Special Projects Unit. Additional participants included representatives of the WIN Career Center and the Mid-South Seedco agency. Community partners in attendance were the director of Student Services at the Tennessee Technology Center in Memphis, the director of the Fatherhood Program for the Shelby County Division of Corrections, and representatives of the RISE Foundation and the

OCSE-funded BAFF project. Priority issues in the creation and improvement of workforce programs for noncustodial parents that were identified by agency partners were:

- Developing a system to identify and refer noncustodial parents to workforce programs;
- Designing a system to share data and foster communication between child support and employment programs;
- Creating a transitional jobs program for noncustodial parents who lack workforce skills and have limited workforce experience;
- Identifying and engaging employers who might hire noncustodial parents with barriers;
- Training case managers so that they are more aware of how to make appropriate referrals to various agencies for workforce, training, and work support services;
- Engaging workforce personnel who are knowledgeable about minimum requirements for various jobs and can match program participants with opportunities; and
- Developing more holistic services for noncustodial parents so that they are better able to succeed in workforce programs.

Nashville

The final regional planning meeting was held in Nashville on June 26, 2012. Project partners in attendance included: the director of marketing and communication for the Department of Labor and Workforce, along with the directors of the Nashville Career Centers. The assistant commissioner of the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation attended, as well as the employment specialist at the Tennessee State Board of Probation and Parole and representatives of the Tennessee Department of Corrections. Representatives from local community organizations included Goodwill Industries, Project Return, Urban League, and New Life Program. The program manager from the Administrative Office of the Courts and the Davidson County Juvenile Court magistrate participated in the meeting, as did representatives from CSEPP and the Parent Support Program in Nashville.

Priorities identified in this final meeting included:

- Establishing a system to refer noncustodial parents to workforce programs in a seamless fashion and improving communication between child support and workforce agencies;
- Developing jobs for noncustodial parents and finding employers that are willing to hire individuals who face severe barriers to employment, including criminal backgrounds;
- Expanding the role of the problem-solving court in referring, enrolling, and engaging noncustodial parents in employment program through the use of review hearings, incentives, and sanctions; and
- Expanding the steps that the child support agency can take to support work programs by offering incentives and delayed enforcement actions for participating noncustodial parents.

Development of the CSPED Proposal

The next step in the planning process was the development of Tennessee's proposal to participate in the OCSE-funded National Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration Project (CSPED). Tennessee DHS, in conjunction with CPR, used key partnerships, issues, outcomes, and lessons learned during the planning effort to formulate an effective CSPED grant proposal. The proposal was developed in July 2012 and funded in September 2012. Building on the planning effort conducted in connection with the Integrating Workforce Strategies with Child Support Services project, the proposal presented a detailed collaborative plan to provide enhanced workforce services to unemployed noncustodial parents in the child support system in three sites: Chattanooga, Nashville, and Memphis. All three sites were the locations for regional planning meetings held for the strategic planning project. Knoxville was not chosen as a CSPED site due to the long tenure of CSEPP in that location, the requirement to use random assignment methods, and funding constraints.

The five-year CSPED award allows Tennessee to provide comprehensive employment services to low-income underemployed and unemployed noncustodial parents in the child support system. As one of eight states in the CSPED project, Tennessee will help OCSE to determine whether having child support programs assist noncustodial parents to overcome employment barriers leads to the consistent payment of child support. Positive demonstration project outcomes may lead to changes in rules regarding allowable child support costs that would enable child support agencies to invest in workforce services and replicate workforce-child support collaborations in other Tennessee jurisdictions and nationally.

To develop Tennessee’s successful proposal, Tennessee DHS activated the network of partners it had developed during the strategic planning process and capitalized on the understanding and goals that had been articulated by each partner agency during state and regional meetings. Because the planning process had focused on diagnosing how to improve employment-focused services for noncustodial parents, the partner agencies were primed to collaborate on the CSPED proposal. State and local partner agencies in the three jurisdictions were excited about the prospect of putting their ideas to work and competing for the opportunity to engage in a rigorous, cross-site evaluation. They agreed with OCSE that an effective collaborative project needed to be managed at the child support agency but involve a strong workforce partner, utilize dedicated and specialized case management and workforce personnel, involve the delivery of intensive case management and employment services, extend a variety of child support enhancements, and utilize key work supports including transportation assistance. The following are key features of the Tennessee CSPED project:

- Recruiting potentially eligible NCPs at all stages of case processing at child support agencies and referring them to the CSPED case manager for possible enrollment in CSPED;
- Enrolling 1,500 eligible unemployed, or underemployed noncustodial parents, half of whom will be randomly assigned to a high-level treatment group known as “extra

- services” and half to a comparison group receiving normal services that will be known as “regular services”;
- Providing intensive case management services to the “extra services” group to engage them in employment services, reduce attrition, and produce desired employment and child support outcomes;
 - Providing effective employment-oriented services to the enhanced treatment group to generate and retain full-time employment outcomes;
 - Providing child support enhancements to the enhanced treatment group to support employment and the regular payment of child support;
 - Providing fatherhood services to the extra services group using an OCSE-approved curriculum as well as peer support opportunities to build motivation for employment and child support payment;
 - Providing work-related resources and services to the extra services group including transportation assistance, work clothes, tools, and relevant fees;
 - Protecting custodial parents and their children in the extra services group by following a domestic violence plan;
 - Providing incentives to the extra services group to encourage the major project objectives of employment and regular payment of child support; and
 - Collecting information on members of the extra services group on the services they receive and recording it appropriately in a data management system to facilitate the conduct of a rigorous evaluation.

Creation of the Toolkit on Workforce Programs for Child Support Populations

The final aspect of the strategic planning project involved the creation of the Toolkit on Workforce Programs for Child Support Populations, developed for child support and workforce agencies to use to guide the development of effective collaborations to employ noncustodial parents. Building on insights gained in meetings of the statewide advisory

board and the regional planning groups convened in Nashville, Chattanooga, Knoxville, and Memphis, as well as the process of developing Tennessee’s successful CSPED proposal, the Toolkit provides a step-by-step guide to establishing a workforce program with unemployed or underemployed low-income noncustodial parents in the child support system.

The Toolkit is organized around eleven main issues and provides detailed information on key topics to address and consider when establishing a program. The main audience for the Toolkit is administrators of child support agencies that are interested in developing an effective workforce program for low-income noncustodial parents in their caseload. The Toolkit provides the rationale for creating employment programs for noncustodial parents and the benefits they may be expected to yield based on prior research. It discusses the pros and cons of targeted various noncustodial parent populations. Next, it considers the critical elements of referral, enrollment, and retention; the vital role of case managers; and the components of effective workforce programs. Each section of the Toolkit presents lessons learned from jurisdictions that have tested various strategies, as well as materials that may be helpful. Whenever possible, selected resources are presented for more detailed information on each topic.

The Toolkit includes eleven sections that address key topics that must be considered when developing a workforce program for noncustodial parents. It includes issues to consider and decisions that will need to be made, ideas from other programs, and examples of how workforce and child support programs have collaborated. The Toolkit sections are:

- Partners and Program Design;
- Special Role of Case Management;
- Referral, Enrollment and Retention;
- Information Management;
- Employment Services;
- Child Support Services;
- The Role of the Court;
- Domestic Violence Considerations;

- Fatherhood Services;
- Additional Support Services; and
- Evaluating Program Outcomes.

CPR and Tennessee DHS will present the Toolkit to child support agencies across the State of Tennessee by webinar in winter 2014. The Toolkit on Workforce Programs for Child Support Populations will be available on CPR's website at www.centerforpolicyresearch.org in winter 2014.

Summary and Outcomes

Integrating Workforce Strategies with Child Support Services was a strategic planning project undertaken by the Tennessee Department of Human Services in 2011 pursuant to an award by OCSE. The purpose of the project was to engage multiple agencies in a collaborative process to improve financial outcomes for low-income noncustodial parents and their families by developing, enhancing, and maintaining effective, coordinated workforce programs in four urban settings: Chattanooga, Knoxville, Nashville, and Memphis. All four sites had prior experience testing collaborative efforts funded by the child support agency and aimed at finding employment for low-income noncustodial parents with barriers to child support payment. All four sites were interested in improving the status of their collaborative efforts and in finding a way to sustain their work beyond the expiration of short-term grants.

The planning effort began with the formation of an advisory board that included members from key state agencies, including the Department of Labor and Workforce, the Title IV-D Child Support Program, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) agency, and the Administrative Office of the Courts. The advisory board met and mapped out a planning effort with key issues to be addressed during the two-year process.

Following the meeting of the advisory board, regional planning teams were assembled in the four targeted locations and planning meetings at the local level were held to formulate a strategy for enhancing and providing employment services to unemployed

noncustodial parents at the local child support agency. The regional planning effort engaged directors of local child support agencies, career centers, and courts in Memphis, Nashville, Chattanooga, and Knoxville. Community and faith-based organizations that provide services to the target population were also included.

Once the planning meetings were completed, Tennessee DHS developed a proposal to participate in the CSPED project that OCSE was launching. Tennessee's proposal built on the collaborations, thinking, planning, and commitments developed during the strategic planning process. OCSE selected Tennessee as one of eight states to be included in the national CSPED project and it was launched in October 2012. Simultaneously, CPR, Tennessee's evaluator for the strategic planning grant, developed a Toolkit that incorporated key lessons from the planning and CSPED process in Tennessee. The target audience for the Toolkit is child support agencies who seek guidance in the creation of effective workforce programs for noncustodial parents facing barriers to employment and child support payment.

Tennessee's strategic planning effort to integrate workforce strategies with child support services led to the following long-term outcomes:

- Tennessee DHS hired a full-time grant manager to oversee family-centered programming efforts at the state level and to facilitate the extension of programs dealing with family-centered services across the state. The Family Centered Services manager chosen for the position understands the barriers to payment that many noncustodial parents face. He also has a keen understanding of the child support system, having spent many years working in child support operations at the local level. Over the past four years, he has worked in several of the OCSE-funded demonstration project that Tennessee has conducted, serving as the child support liaison in the Family Ties Program, supervisor for the Parent Support Program, and grant manager for the Integrating Workforce Strategies with Child Support Services Project.

- Tennessee used the new collaborative relationships and enthusiasm forged during the regional planning process to orchestrate the development of a successful application to participate in CSPED: the Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration. Three of the strategic planning sites (Chattanooga, Nashville, and Memphis) are serving as CSPED sites.
- CPR, the evaluator for Tennessee’s strategic planning effort, created the Toolkit on Workforce Programs for Child Support Populations that is a final product of the strategic planning project. The Toolkit is meant to assist jurisdictions both within and outside of Tennessee in developing new workforce and child support collaborations. The Toolkit will be presented to directors of local child support agencies within Tennessee at a webinar to be held during winter 2014. It will also be posted on CPR’s website and made available for national distribution and use.

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