

PROCESS IMPROVEMENT

Child Support Enforcement Structure and Workflow

Department of Social Services, Office of Administration

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James Carney
Glenda Hardin-Miller
Bonita Jones
Sondra Lind
Kenneth Rhoads

Enforcement of child support obligations is challenging as many factors contribute to an individual's payment, or nonpayment, of their support obligation. Staff in Missouri's child support enforcement program sees these challenges daily in their attempts to enforce child support obligations.

Over the years, Missouri's child support program began to struggle in maintaining successful program performance and national ranking. Departmental employees also struggled to maintain accuracy, take timely actions and respond to customer inquiries in the face of growing caseloads and staffing reductions. It was time to take a hard look at the way the work of enforcing child support obligations was approached and to that end; the Enforcement Structure Workflow workgroup was formed.

The group researched other state programs and also researched and analyzed statistical data about the cases in Missouri and identified causes of nonpayment. The group began to realize that the actions to be taken on a case depended greatly on the circumstances of the non-custodial parent, that one-size did not fit all. Eventually, they began to realize that the cases should be categorized according to non-custodial parent circumstances and that certain work activities should be engaged based upon the case category. By stratifying the cases, arrearage balances would also be stratified allowing more intelligent discussion about the arrearage balances and why they exist.

The structure is innovative, brings greater efficiencies, improves services and allows staff to manage their work in a much more productive and focused manner. This group is to be commended for their commitment, hard work and enthusiasm, and engagement in finding a better way of implementing an entirely new structure and workflow for the enforcement of child support obligations.

For additional information on this team's accomplishment please contact Janel Luck at 573-751-4247 or at Janel.R.Luck@dss.mo.gov.



State of Missouri
2007 Governor's Award for Quality and Productivity

NOMINATION FORM

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Department: Social Services

1. Project or team name.

Enforcement Structure and Workflow

2. List the name of all team members, job titles and organization.

Susan Brooke, Child Support Enforcement Supervisor, Family Support Division
Alyson Campbell, Deputy Director, Family Support Division
James Carney, Regional Liaison, Family Support Division
Brenda Edgar, Child Support Specialist, Family Support Division
Steven Hamilton, Supervisor, Family Support Division
Glenda Hardin-Miller, Child Support Specialist, Family Support Division
Paul Horlacher, Child Support Enforcement Supervisor, Family Support Division
Robert Jackson, Office Manager, Family Support Division
Bonita Jones, Training Technician, Family Support Division
Celeste Keilholz, Computer Information Specialist, Information Technology
Steven Kissinger, Child Support Enforcement Supervisor, Family Support Division
Sondra Lind, Office Manager, Family Support Division
Jeffrey McCutcheon, Child Support Enforcement Supervisor, Family Support Division
Brenda Moore, Child Support Enforcement Supervisor, Family Support Division
Kenneth Rhoads, Computer Information Specialist, Information Technology
Vicki Turner, Office Manager, Family Support Division
Jeanine Zumalt, Regional Liaison, Family Support Division

3. Nomination category.

(Check *only one*)

INNOVATION

CUSTOMER SERVICE

PROCESS IMPROVEMENT

TECHNOLOGY IN GOVERNMENT

EFFICIENCY

4. Why did you select this nomination category?

The new structure improves work processes as it allows for focused work activities and better utilization of resources.

II. BACKGROUND

1. When did the team begin?

September, 2004

2. When did the team implement this project?

Pilot - January through June, 2006

Statewide implementation - October through December, 2006

3. How long has the project been implemented?

0 - 3 Months

4 - 6 Months

7 - 9 Months

10 - 12 Months

12 or more

On-going Project

III. RESULTS/ACCOMPLISHMENT

1. What did the team accomplish? (Use specific data and examples to identify accomplishments and whom benefited: i.e. agency, division, department, citizens, individuals, etc. Information must be included for nomination to be considered for GAQP)

Prior to implementation of the new structure, cases were assigned by alpha-split to individual child support enforcement specialists. The specialists were managing caseloads ranging in size from 600 to in excess of 900 cases each. The laws, policies and procedures governing the enforcement of child support obligations is very complex and the specialists were required to know every aspect and nuance of enforcement, regardless of case circumstance. This led to errors in case decisions, backlogged casework and declining program performance.

The team studied the child support cases in which actions are taken to enforce child support obligations. There are approximately 298,000 cases in the enforcement function, which comprises approximately 82% of the total child support program caseload. The objectives of the group included improving collections, improving the percentage of paying cases and developing a structure to stratify cases based upon noncustodial parent circumstances. These objectives, if attained, would result in better outcomes for both custodial and noncustodial parents, more efficient and accurate case processing and better statistical data on where the arrearages exist and the cause of nonpayment of support. In addition, by stratifying cases based upon noncustodial parent circumstances, work efforts and training resources could be focused on activities specific to case circumstances.

The team developed four categories under the new structure as follows:

Category 1 - Cases where the child support is not being paid and there is low potential for collection.

Cases in this category include noncustodial parents who:

- are incarcerated
- receive Temporary Assistance benefits
- receive Supplemental Security Income
- are not located
- are deceased.

This category also includes cases where all administrative and judicial remedies for enforcement have been exhausted.

Category 2 - Cases where the child support is not being paid regularly but enforcement actions are available.

Category 3 - Cases where the noncustodial parent resides outside of Missouri and we need another state's assistance in the enforcement of the child support obligation.

Category 4 - Cases where the noncustodial parent has made a payment for at least three consecutive months.

STATISTICS:

- In January of 2007, 38% of our enforcement cases were in Category 4. As of May 31, 2007, 40% of our cases are in Category 4 - meaning more cases are paying, and paying consistently. Benefit to families and program performance.
- In January, 39% of our enforcement cases were in Category 2. As of May 31, 2007, 36% of our cases are in Category 2, indicating that cases needing enforcement actions are being reviewed and acted upon to collect the child support owed. Benefits families and program performance.
- In January, 43,466 cases were in Category 1 and as of May 31st, 41,757 cases are in Category 1. Since January we have located 1003 noncustodial parents and have been able to complete enforcement actions to collect the child support owed which benefits families. In addition, we have been able to take action to close cases that meet the criteria for closure, which improves program performance.
- Enforcement actions taken increased 11% between January 1 and May 31, 2007. More enforcement results in more collections for families.

- Referrals for judicial enforcement of child support obligations have increased 29% between January 1 and May 31, 2007. Increased legal referrals will lead to court actions to enforce payment of support, leading to improved collections for families.
- Collections for FY07 increased by 5% over FY06 despite a staffing reduction. Increased collections are good for families and program performance.
- Our statewide percentage of paying cases went from 44.2% in FY06 to 45.6% in FY07 which translates to more of our cases are receiving payments.

2. Which of the following describes the benefits of the accomplishment? (Check all that apply and provide an explanation)

- cost reduction time savings
- improved process other: describe

Time savings: Because the cases are categorized, staff can easily identify what types of enforcement actions will be effective on a particular case. And because staff are focused on a particular type of case, they can become experts, allowing them to process cases in a more timely manner.

Improved process: Because cases are categorized based upon noncustodial parent circumstances, staff can focus on work activities related to the case circumstance. Staff are assigned to specific categories rather than having individual caseloads, which allows them to develop expertise in a particular category. This leads to more accurate and thorough case decisions and actions. We can concentrate training efforts specific to staff who are assigned to the categories impacted by new laws, regulations and policies. We now utilize the automated system to assign work and assign cases to the appropriate categories.

Other: The child support program was able to sustain and improve program performance despite a significant staffing reduction. With the new structure, managers can better allocate resources where we will realize the most result.

III. RESULTS/ACCOMPLISHMENT (continued)

3. Explain how the accomplishments of the team are beyond regular duties and responsibilities (150 words or less).

All members of this team devoted significant time, commitment and work effort to this project in addition to keeping up with their regular duties and responsibilities. They were able to step back from their individual workload and opinions on case management to see the bigger picture. They recognized the need for improvement in statewide program performance rather than just concentrating on their own performance. The group was able to accept that change was needed - that the practices of today would not allow us to keep pace with changing policies, increased caseloads, and national performance measures. They knew the importance of staff buy-in and spent time away from their homes and offices visiting with staff to ensure understanding and acceptance of the changes being implemented. This allowed for a smooth and seamless transition to the new structure.

IV. MEASUREMENT/EVALUATION

1. Explain how the team measured and evaluated this project (Describe in detail the process and results).

The team decided to measure the following data elements:

- Category Movement – Gather and report on the total number of cases in each category on a monthly basis. The team recognized that as cases were worked under the new structure, the cases would move from category to category depending upon payment status, available enforcement remedies and noncustodial parent circumstances. To measure this movement, a category identifier was assigned to each case within our automated system. The automated system will move the case to the appropriate category based upon specified criteria identified by the team. The results to date show that cases are moving through the structure as anticipated. The group projected Category 2 cases would decrease and that Category 4 cases would increase as more enforcement actions were processed. This projection is on track. The team also projected that Category 1 cases would decrease as staff worked to locate noncustodial parents and as they worked to close cases with no potential. This projection is also on track.
- Sub-Category Data - Gather information and report on sub-categories within each category as follows:

- Category 1 cases where noncustodial parent is receiving Temporary Assistance; cases where noncustodial parent is receiving Supplemental Security Income; cases where noncustodial parent is incarcerated; cases where noncustodial parent address and employment are unknown; cases where noncustodial parent is deceased and cases where all administrative and judicial enforcement remedies have been exhausted. By tracking this data, staff can easily focus on the cases where the potential to move the case out of Category 1 is the greatest. Also, they can identify cases that may need to be closed (i.e., noncustodial parent deceased) which will result in improvement of percentage of paying cases. Staff working these subcategories appropriately is resulting in improved program performance.
- Category 2 cases where a legal referral to the prosecuting attorney or attorney general for enforcement action has been initiated; cases where an income withholding order has been processed; and cases where a payment has been received in the last 3 months. These are cases that have been enforced but the case does not meet the criteria yet to move to Category 4. By identifying these cases, we are able to project the number of cases that will eventually enter Category 4 and staff can monitor to ensure actions and payments remain in place. In addition, we monitor and track the number of cases needing review for enforcement action within this category which again allows us to project those cases that have the potential to move into Category 4 once enforced.
- Category 3 cases paying and non-paying. This allows staff to identify those cases that require follow up with the other state that is assisting in the enforcement efforts.
- Category 4 cases where the noncustodial parent is paying, but paying less than ordered; cases where the noncustodial parent is paying current support plus a payment on an arrearage balance and cases where the total arrearage will not be paid off in 5 years. With the sub-categories identified, staff are able to determine more easily which cases need follow up actions, which cases have potential for increased collection and which cases have been worked and are in a monitoring mode.
 - Percentage of Paying Cases by office and statewide (one of the team objectives and to assess program improvement). Our percentage of paying cases is increasing.
 - Collections by office and statewide (one of the team objectives and to assess program improvement) Our collections continue to increase.

2. Are the benefits derived from this project: (Check only one.)

Recurring One-time

3. Please explain in 300 to 500 words.

The benefits derived from this project are recurring. Cases will not remain static in the new structure as noncustodial circumstances and case situations can change frequently. Continuing to work the cases under this structure will ensure we remain focused on the cases which need attention and the cases with the best potential for collection. Cases with low potential for collection are identified and continually monitored for changes in circumstances so that staff can be proactive in taking enforcement actions. Cases that meet the criteria to move to Category 4 (paying for three consecutive months) can be proactively monitored to ensure cases remain in this paying category by following up on missed payments, ensuring payment on arrears balances and working towards payments that will pay off the arrearages in 5 years. As cases are worked through the structure, we project a continued increase in Category 4 cases, along with a continued decrease in cases needing action. We project continued increased collections and increased percentage of paying cases in addition to a slower arrearage growth and ultimately a decrease in statewide arrearages. Staff expertise will increase as they continue to focus on a specific category of cases and because of that, we should see improvement in timeliness and accuracy in case actions and decisions. Ultimately we will continue to recognize improvement in staff morale and staff turnover as the job of the specialist is more focused and rewarding.

V. RECOGNITION/AWARDS

1. Has this project ever been nominated for the Governor's Award for Quality and Productivity? If yes, when?

No

2. If yes, for which category was it nominated?

N/A

3. Has this project received any other awards or recognition in the past? If yes, describe.

Not formally, however, it is beginning to receive attention from other states' child support enforcement programs as well as the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement. We have been advised it is being nominated for a national award in the child support enforcement program. Many states are asking for our model and information about our progress.

VI. NOMINATOR'S INFORMATION			
NOMINATING DEPARTMENT			
Name	Signature	Telephone Number	E-Mail Address
Janel Luck	<i>Janel R. Luck</i>	573-751-4247	Janel.R.Luck@dss.mo.gov

VII. DEPARTMENT COORDINATOR INFORMATION			
DEPARTMENT			
Name	Signature	Telephone Number	E-Mail Address
Sylvia Talley	<i>Sylvia Talley</i>	751-3617	Sylvia.D.Talley@dss.mo.gov

VIII. DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR APPROVAL	
DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR'S NAME	DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR'S SIGNATURE*
Deborah E. Scott	<i>Deborah E. Scott</i> 7-17-07

Nomination must be signed ONLY by the Department Director to be eligible for consideration.
Nominations not signed by the Department Director will be returned.



State of Missouri
 2007 Governor's Award for Quality and Productivity
 Nomination Checklist

The Nomination Checklist is for your assistance to ensure that you have completed all parts of the nomination package. Do not include this checklist with nomination packet.

- Ensure names of all team members have been included on your nomination. Once the nomination has been submitted no additional names can be added.
- Ensure all names are spelled correctly. (Verify spelling of all team members names)
- Include the job titles and agency/organization of all team members
- Complete the Executive Summary. Why this project is exceptional, why the citizens of Missouri should be proud of this team, and why the accomplishments are beyond regular responsibilities.