

COLLABORATION STRATEGIES

The goal of IV-A/IV-D collaboration is to empower families to achieve self-sufficiency through a TANF-Child Support interface. When clients talk to local TANF and CSE staff, clients should hear the common message that they need work and child support. Both agencies must send this message clearly and reinforce it in all client interactions.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES

State and local TANF and CSE agencies can lend clarity to this message of work and child support in the way the agencies are organized and operate. There are several organizational approaches which States may wish to consider; these include:

- Co-locating CSE and TANF staffs within a proximate office area under the same roof: Co-location offers advantages at two different levels, i.e., administrative and client service delivery. At the administrative level, the proximity of the two staffs helps to promote inter-program cooperation. Co-location of services at the client level assures TANF applicants/recipients that they have access to the resources of the child support program.

Two examples: In Virginia, the Division of Child Support Enforcement (DCSE) has co-located CSE staff with local social services agencies in sixteen of the state's largest urban areas. These staff are part of the interviewing process with new TANF applicants and participate in pre-determination reviews. The effect is that local TANF caseworkers and child support workers work as a team to inform clients of available resources for their self-sufficiency plans. TANF clients learn the importance of cooperating with DCSE to pursue child support as a significant addition to their income.

In Kenosha County, Wisconsin, the Job Center program offers an example of broader agency co-location, which has been a particularly apt model since welfare reform. Not only do TANF and Child Support staff work side-by-side, but they are joined by other human services components such as the Workforce Investment Board (WIB), job service, adult and vocational education, child care, and counseling, to form a single unified delivery system.

- “Teaming” CSE and TANF workers, each responsible for different programs, but serving the same caseload: Some States used this approach successfully in the past to team staffs of AFDC, JOBS and other employment-related programs. The approach could be adapted to team CSE and TANF staffs to promote an inter-program and holistic perspective. In the Virginia example above, TANF and CSE workers function as a team.

- Creating coordinator positions to facilitate IV-A/IV-D linkages: These coordinators aid in the process of acclimating workers to changes as they see their unit joining with other units to promote self-sufficiency for families. Coordinators also serve as points of contact when cross-program problems arise and can even help with differences of vocabulary.
- Using IV-A/IV-D Information systems technologies, including videoconferencing, to facilitate the management of TANF/CSE cases:

Virginia DCSE is piloting a video teleconferencing project in several smaller, more remote areas of the State, which will enable Child Support staff to participate in the client interviewing process with the local social services staff. The effect will be the same as co-location without requiring full time placement of specialists at local agencies where client volume does not support such an arrangement.

PROGRAM STRATEGIES

Several states are, or have been, engaged in collaborative activities which admirably illustrate a strategic TANF-CSE interface. They include:

- Athens County, Ohio, Community Work Experience (CWEP) assigns client participants to the local IV-D office where they are trained to investigate child support cases and to assist in the documentation required to establish paternity. Dual results have ensued. Legal paternity establishments increased significantly, and many CWEP participants secured unsubsidized jobs in the local IV-D office as a result of their training as CSE investigators.
- In Maryland, under a “Child Support First” initiative, the IV-D agency must be included in the initial TANF application process. This initiative focuses on the parents’ primary responsibility and has succeeded in diverting cases from cash assistance. The TANF-CSE teamwork has an up-front focus so the client does not fall through the cracks. Services that support employment and self-sufficiency are made available at the initial interview.
- In Anne Arundel County, Maryland, the Child Support Initiative program fosters interagency collaboration to provide education, job training, job search activities, drug addiction treatment, and a basic stipend to unemployed but motivated noncustodial parents. Data show that participants demonstrated consistent employment resulting in dependable child support payments.

- Many states have piloted Parents' Fair Share Projects which require unemployed, noncustodial parents (usually fathers), whose children receive public assistance, to participate in employment-related services when they are unable to meet their child support obligations. States were encouraged to establish linkages among the agencies involved in Parents' Fair Share, including the welfare and child support agencies. Preliminary findings show these programs increase child support by providing work-related services. Some State examples include:
- Florida operates a pilot program for noncustodial parents in two counties which provides participants with on-the-job training, job search activities, and responsible parent training. Also, in Duval County, the Parents' Fair Share program provides comprehensive services to noncustodial parents.
- The Minnesota Fatherhood Program assists noncustodial parents to overcome barriers to employment so their children can receive financial and emotional support from both parents. The program offers on-the-job training, job search, basic education, peer support, mediation services, community work experience, conflict resolution and parenting skills.