

2009 Innovations Awards Program APPLICATION

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ID # (assigned by CSG): 09-MW-01IA

Please provide the following information, adding space as necessary:

State: **IOWA**

Assign Program Category (applicant): **Health & Human Services - Children & Families**

1. Program Name: **Connections Equal Collections (CEC)**
2. Administering Agency: **Iowa Department of Human Services, Child Support Recovery Unit (CSRU)**
3. Contact Person (Name & Title): **Jeanne Nesbit, Division Administrator**
4. Address: **400 SW 8th Ave, Ste H, Des Moines, IA 50309-4619**
5. Telephone Number: **(515) 242-3243**
6. FAX Number **(515) 281-8854**
7. E-mail Address **jnesbit@dhs.state.ia.us**
8. Web site Address **<https://childsupport.dhs.state.ia.us>**

9. Please provide a two-sentence description of the program.

Utilize early interventions to engage alleged fathers (persons that have not been established as the biological father of the child) and obligors (persons paying child support) in, and inform them about the child support program. The fundamental goals were to shape a trusting relationship and to encourage them to engage in the support establishment process and in problem solving if they encounter difficulty in making their support payments.

10. How long has this program been operational (month and year)? Note: the program must be between 9 months and 5 years old on March 1, 2008 to be considered.

It has been operational since February 2006.

11. Why was the program created? What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address?

Some child support obligors go to great lengths to avoid child support caseworkers hoping that paternity and court order establishment can be delayed if they don't respond to correspondence. Orders are established without making personal contact, and the obligors then seek to avoid compliance with the court order. This program aggressively seeks to make personal contact so that the child support process is explained as well as the opportunities to contest the actions child support proposes to take. The hypothesis we tested was that if we were persistent in seeking out the father and proactively engage them in the establishment of the court order and more thoroughly explain child support law, the more likely it would be that the father would exercise his rights, and ultimately result in establishing a relationship with the Child Support Recovery Unit (CSRU). Collecting timely child support payments are critical to helping families become self-sufficient. Dependable monthly child support income is essential for parents to provide a safe and healthy environment for their children to grow up.

12. Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.

After a successful pilot of the program on a select group of cases, it was implemented into a statewide practice in February 2006. Caseworkers throughout the agency received a 4-hour, remote-access training class that provided them with the tools and skills to successfully engage obligors in their child support cases. Caseworkers then began the CEC process on the cases within the targeted group.

The targeted cases are:

- (i) Cases where a court order is being established for child support.
- (ii) Cases where a new court order for child support had been established and enforcement of the court order is beginning.

In the first set of cases noted above, Early Intervention Contact Points are established so that child support caseworkers can share information about the paternity and support establishment process with the alleged father or obligor, as well as explain and emphasize the importance of returning a financial statement and staying involved in the process of establishing a court order. When scheduling or rescheduling a conference or genetic testing appointment with the obligor, and when a request is made, the caseworker contacts the obligor to convey the Iowa CSRU's willingness to work together, which has subsequently led to an increase in the likelihood of the appointment being kept by the obligor.

Child support staff also contact the obligor when it appears that the order amount will be based on imputed income or the order will likely be established by default*. This provides the obligor with one last opportunity to provide actual income before the court order is established.

(* - A default order is defined as: an order where the worker did not receive any financial information from the obligor AND the worker never spoke with the obligor during the entire court order establishment process.)

Within seven (7) days of the filing of a newly established child support order, the obligor is contacted by the caseworker to share information about the terms and provisions of the order, provide information on where to send payments and the importance of contacting the CSRU when there is a change in their income level, and answer any questions they may have.

In the second set of targeted cases, if a payment is missed in the first month, the obligor is contacted by their caseworker to gain commitment to make up for the missed payment. If a payment was missed in the second month, the obligor is again contacted to see if the CSRU can assist in problem solving to ensure that the

obligor catches up for the missing payments. After a missed payment in the third month, the obligor is again contacted to communicate the consequences of not complying with the child support court order. If the obligor does not acknowledge these proactive, pre-enforcement contacts, the worker begins enforcement measures. Even though enforcement has begun, the worker always remains available for contact from the obligor and is willing to work with the obligor to establish a plan of action to begin making child support payments based on their court order.

13. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

Iowa's child support program has been ranked in the top 10 states for overall performance in the nation for the past several years. Performance is measured in five areas: paternity establishment, court orders established, collection of child support in the month it is due, collection of past due support, and cost effectiveness. With the objective of continually improving performance and customer service, we decided to pioneer a focused effort to work more closely with our customers who pay the support. Although we have always worked closely with persons receiving the child support and their children, the proactive, early intervention approach with our parents paying support was an innovative and creative approach to holistically support the betterment of the children and families we serve.

Our CEC program aims to connect with obligors that have not yet established a pattern of negative behaviors related to the establishment and enforcement of their child support orders. This early-on intervention offers a more proactive, early intervention approach, which is rewarded with more dependable support for their children. In fact, data collected since this program began in February 2006, shows child support collected in the month it is due for CEC cases is 79.4%, while child support collected in the month it is due for cases not in the CEC targeted caseload is 76%. Increasing the collection of child support is very arduous so the 3.4% increase experienced as a result of this CEC process, is very exciting to our program.

14. What were the program's start-up costs? (Provide details about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.)

No costs were incurred for equipment purchases or upgrades as this process is done with the same equipment as is used for all of our case monitoring and processing. We did incur costs during the pilot for project management, training and travel, which included consultation staff (Policy Studies Inc.) and is broken down as shown below:

Federal 1115 Grant Budget Items	Amount
State Items:	
State Contract Management	\$3,575
Contract Administration Charges	\$1,425
Contracted Consultation Service Items:	
Project Team (Policy Studies Inc)	\$81,000
In-state Travel for Training Delivery	\$5,000
Team Travel to Iowa	\$4,500
Research and Training for Trainers	\$2,000
Printing and Training Materials	\$2,000
TOTAL	\$100,000

15. What are the program's annual operational costs?

No annual operational costs are incurred.

16. How is the program funded?

Originally, with funding from a federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) 1115 grant, the pilot "Making Connections, Improving Collections" was implemented and upon successful conclusion of the pilot, the project was introduced statewide as the Connections Equals Collections program. The project did not require additional funding to operate statewide.

17. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations? If YES, please indicate the citation number.

No legislation, executive order or regulation was required in order to implement this program.

18. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

The work performed on the CEC targeted cases is done on the same computer mainframe system as all the cases worked by the Iowa Child Support Recovery Unit so no special equipment was needed to begin using this CEC process on our cases. Data gathering and monitoring also runs within the current software system as is used for all of our cases so no extra or special equipment is needed.

19. To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator's name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address.

We believe that we were the only state to establish this type of proactive, early intervention relationship with all new customers across the state.

The innovator of this project is:

Carol Eaton, Bureau Chief
Bureau of Collections / CSRU
400 SW 8th St, Suite H
Des Moines, IA 50309
(515) 281-5767
ceaton@dhs.state.ia.us

20. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?

The most similar program that we are aware of is a 17-month pilot by the Nebraska Child Support agency, which used a select group of customer call center staff to call the obligors in order to improve customer satisfaction, increase collections and identify problems and resolve questions/issues before they became problematic. It too was a federal OCSE 1115 grant and began roughly at the same time, or shortly after the Iowa pilot grant began.

21. Has the program been fully implemented? If NO, what actions remain to be taken?

Yes.

22. Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program’s effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s]. Provide tangible examples.

The Iowa *Connections Equals Collections* process is proving to be a successful component of our overall case management practices. We have gathered data to examine the level of impact the new CEC process had on the target caseload in comparison to cases that were handled in the previous manner. With this data, we are able to see exciting results. Some examples of this success are:

Item	Non-CEC cases	CEC target case group
Paternity orders established with the obligor participating in the process.	29.7%	72.2%
Rate of alleged fathers appearing in court to participate in the establishment of their orders for paternity.	23.6%	65.8%
Child Support orders established with obligors participating in the process.	24.2%	64.9%
Rate of obligors appearing in court to participate in the establishment of their orders for child support.	20.5%	58.9%
Case participants who returned financial information in order to calculate the child support obligation based on actual income.	28.4%	41.0%
Iowa’s rate of growth in collections received in the month due on cases in the targeted case group due to CEC early intervention process.	3.40%	
National Average rate of growth in collections received in the month due from Federal Fiscal Year 2006 to 2007 (most recent audited data).	1.52%	

Not only do we see the success of this process in the data we collect, but we also see it in our customer relationships as well. Some feedback we have received from customers in our CEC target caseload because of our proactive outreach to customers:

Direct Customer Quotes:

- “Thank you for your patience and professionalism in answering my questions. You have been very courteous and I do really appreciate it.”

- “Thank you so much for all the work you have done for me and my son. Words cannot express how grateful I am. I feel that you honestly care and that is such a blessing to me to know you are watching out for us.”
- “With your help, my husband is finally coming out on top. All of your work is appreciated!” (This is from the current wife of an obligor ordered to pay child support.)

Anecdotal Comments:

- A customer complimented their caseworker during a phone call for their quality customer service in keeping in touch with them. The customer complimented the caseworker for the way his caseworker was keeping in contact with him. The customer then informed the caseworker of their current financial circumstances and strategized with the caseworker on how to continue to make progress on his child support case.
- Persons who have been contacted by a caseworker and encouraged to obtain genetic testing to determine paternity, often thank the worker for looking out for their best interests. Workers have said that most people they contact are very unfamiliar with the court order establishment process and many comment on how they appreciate being informed of their options and responsibilities.
- Caseworkers receive thanks from customers for their patience and professionalism in answering the customer’s questions, and the handling of their cases. Customers sometimes make a point of contacting the caseworker’s supervisor to pass along the compliment of the employee’s exemplary service.

23. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

The pilot for this process was initiated in 2004 and involved only 14 of the 23 offices and a targeted caseload of 3,893 cases. In February 2006, this process was expanded to all of our offices statewide and now has a targeted caseload of 11,080 cases. This number continues to grow as approximately 3,500 new cases are opened, new orders are entered each year, and they become part of the CEC caseload.

24. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

We believe the fundamental goals and objectives of this process is flexible enough to fit into any state’s child support program. The base concept of this program’s early-on contact with customers can also be integrated into other programs to instill a holistic approach to providing enhanced customer service.