



THE FACE OF
Child Support
IN CALIFORNIA





This publication was created by the Child Support Directors Association to educate the public about the important work performed by California's Child Support Professionals. Child Support Directors Association, 925 L Street, Suite 1402 Sacramento, CA 95814, (916) 446-6700, www.csdaca.org. © 2008

A Day in the Life...

Every day over 8,000 child support professionals in California work to establish orders and collect financial and medical support for the children and families of our state. Many of the families we serve are in difficult financial situations and rely on this support for their basic needs. They each have a story to tell.

Wednesday, November 28, 2007 was another day in the life of the Child Support Program in California. This report chronicles the activities of that day in our life as California's child support professionals. We share with you the moving and inspirational stories of our customers and give you a sense of the workload that we encounter every day.



California's Child Support Program collected nearly \$2.3 billion dollars in 2006, more than any other state in the nation.



What is Child Support?

Parents who do not live with their children are required by federal and state laws and regulation to contribute to their support. They have an obligation to provide financial and medical support for their children.

Child support professionals use numerous enforcement mechanisms to collect child support. Most parents want to support their children, but many need encouraging. Whether establishing an order, modifying an order to better reflect a parent's ability to pay, or making sure the money gets from one parent to the other in a timely way, local child support agencies provide an important public service to parents and children.

Millions of children in California rely on child support payments from their parents. Local child support agencies, operated by county governments, are charged with ensuring that children receive the appropriate financial support. These agencies provide free services to locate non-custodial parents, establish orders for paternity, establish orders for child support and medical support, collect and enforce support orders, and modify support orders. Along with our Federal and State partners, the local agencies are key players in the success of family self-sufficiency programs. In addition, we annually recoup hundreds of millions of dollars for reimbursement of TANF (welfare) expenditures.

What Does Child Support Mean to You?

There are many opinions and feelings about the issue of child support. There is sometimes a misperception that individuals obligated to pay child support are “bad” people who are avoiding their responsibility to provide for their children. You may have had your own experience with child support. However, for more than 30 years the California Child Support Program has worked diligently for the benefit of children.

This report is presented to showcase the California Child Support Program and the services we provide, to inform you about the many components of the Program, and give you insight into the challenging work we embrace each day.

Helping Families “Find” Each Other

Many parents and children who become separated have a need to locate each other at some other point in their lives. In some cases, these parents have never met their children, or have not seen their children for many years. Our local child support agencies can bring parents and children together in a very productive and positive way, both financially and emotionally.

In **El Dorado County** staff received a call from a father asking if they could provide his daughter’s home address. He wanted to establish a relationship with his daughter since she was turning 18, and wanted to give her the opportunity to meet his family. The staff member indicated that the agency is not permitted to give out addresses without consent. However, the father could write a letter to the daughter and send it to the worker, who would then forward it to the girl’s mother. The father sent the letter, likely altering both lives in a positive way.

Wednesday, November 28, 2007
in California

3,392 customers came into
the child support offices.



In 2006, California's Child Support Program met or exceeded each of the federal government's five performance thresholds for the child support program.

A father learned that his wife had left him and moved to California with their child. Speaking to staff in **Santa Clara County**, the father was concerned that he would never see his child again. He could not afford an attorney and did not know what he should do. The child support caseworker informed the father that he could get answers to his questions about custody and visitation at the Family Law Facilitator's office and that the Family Law Facilitator also assists with the preparation and filing of court papers.

In **Tulare County**, a mother visited the local child support office seeking help to establish paternity and support for her young child. The mother had met the child's father during a brief vacation to Mexico. She learned that she was pregnant several months later while attending college in San Diego. The mother could only provide the first name of the father, and basic information about his employment. The caseworker used many locate tools and was able to find the father and establish paternity. The parents are getting better acquainted with each other and discussing the possibility of raising the child together.



Child support staff work collaboratively with other entities to take the extra steps necessary to help families in California.

In **San Diego County**, a desperate father contacted the local child support office to request a copy of the POP (Paternity Opportunity Program) declaration as evidence of paternity for his infant twins. The father was a victim of domestic violence and the mother was going to be released from jail in 48 hours. If the father failed to gain temporary emergency custody of the children, they would be placed in foster care. Since the twins were only three weeks old, the POP declaration was not yet filed with the State. Child support staff worked with the hospital, the California Department of Child Support Services and others to get the POP declaration filed that day and a copy provided to the father. The father was successful in gaining custody of the children.

Sometimes, families do not “find” each other, and the financial and emotional challenges of broken families continue, despite the best efforts of everyone involved.

In **Plumas County**, a mother appeared in court as a witness on an Order to Show Cause for Contempt filed against the father for his failure to pay support. The mother carried a letter in her pocket written by her daughter and addressed to the father. The little girl had no other way to communicate with her father since she did not have any contact with him. The father did not appear in court that day, and the little girl’s letter remained in her mother’s pocket after the hearing.

**Wednesday, November 28, 2007
in California**

**Our staff answered 31,445
telephone calls.**



In 2006, there were 1.7 million open child support cases in California.

Establishing Paternity

Paternity in the Child Support Program means fatherhood. The child's paternity must be established prior to a court ordering child support and medical support. Genetic testing is generally accepted as proof of fatherhood, and is available through local child support agencies in California, at no cost to the participants.

Unmarried parents can also establish paternity by signing a voluntary Declaration of Paternity. This form can be completed at the hospital after the child is born or by the parents after they leave the hospital.

The benefits of establishing paternity extend far beyond financial support. Proof of paternity is generally required for a person to be eligible for Social Security and Veteran's benefits from a parent. Paternity establishment also grants children the right to medical and life insurance coverage from their parents, to inheritance rights, and to access medical record histories about their parents.

In **Solano County**, it was a family affair to establish paternity for a 15 month old baby boy. The mother, father, and two grandmothers met with the child support caseworker to resolve the issue of paternity. The father agreed to parentage after he received the genetic test results. The parents agreed to a paternity judgment, health insurance order and child support order.

A twenty year old single mother visited the **Alpine County** office of child support so that she and her eight month old son could participate in genetic testing to determine paternity. The caseworker collected a sample of cells from the insides of their cheeks using a cotton swab and sent the sample by priority carrier to the genetic testing company. The alleged father resides in the state of Washington and for convenience was tested at his local child support office. The young mother and the alleged father await the results of the test.

In **Stanislaus County**, a young married couple visited the local child support agency with their newborn infant. The child was conceived during a six month period when the couple was separated and the husband's aunt refused to acknowledge the child. This caused many issues within the close-knit extended family. Genetic tests confirmed that the husband was the father. The father and mother were given a copy of the court order and genetic test results to share with family members.

A custodial parent in **Glenn County** requested child support services for her ten year old child. The custodial parent could not provide definitive information about the father. Child support staff used the paternity questionnaire and automated locate tools to discover the name and address of a potential father. Genetic testing confirmed paternity.



Wednesday, November 28, 2007
in California

1,485 child support customers
were seen by our partners,
the Family Law Facilitators.

Establishing a Child Support Order

Trying to provide for basic necessities such as food, clothing and shelter is a financial challenge for many families. Child support helps by ensuring that both parents share the financial and medical responsibility for their children.

Child support is a legal obligation that is recognized by the courts, and is enforceable through local child support offices in California. The amount of a child support order is the result of a mathematical calculation specified by statute. This calculation factors both parent's income, as well as other items including the amount of visitation and childcare costs.

In **Marin County**, a single mother visited the local support office distraught about her case. Her ex-husband informed her that she was not entitled to support and that no one could collect from him because her existing divorce order was "no good." Child support staff helped the mother complete an application for services and took the necessary actions to modify the divorce order that included calculating past due support from the father's bonus income.

On November 28, a father visited the office in **Contra Costa County** to question why his employer received a notice requiring medical coverage for his children. The mother did not request child support, but she was receiving Medi-Cal. The mother and father reconciled in August 2007. She is now pregnant with their second child and they have separated a second time. Even though the mother did not request support, the father decided to open a case to establish paternity and support to meet the needs of his children.

In **Placer County**, efforts to locate an out-of-state father were proving to be unsuccessful, despite confirmation that he resided in New York. The New York child support department was equally unsuccessful at locating the father. In February 2006 local support agency staff filed a Summons and Complaint against the father, and obtained a support judgment just prior to the child's eighteenth birthday in February 2007. Less than a year later, they collected \$81,517 from the father for past due support.



Enforcing Child Support Orders

The California Child Support Program has an array of tools and services designed to make the collection of child support efficient and effective.

Wage Withholding – Over 60 percent of California’s child support is collected through wage assignments. Employers are required, through court orders, to withhold child support from a non-custodial parent’s wages. Local child support agencies issue thousands of wage assignments every month to employers in California, other states and other countries. For example, **Los Angeles County** issues nearly 19,000 wage assignments every month.

In **Santa Cruz County**, staff worked diligently to locate a father who is a seasonal worker. Once staff located him, the man volunteered his full contact information, including his home address and the name of his employer. The child support worker mailed a wage assignment to the current employer so that child support is deducted from his future paychecks.

Credit Reporting – Failure to pay child support can negatively affect a parent’s credit rating.

In **Mariposa County**, a mother contacted the child support agency to report that even though she had paid her accounts in full six months ago, open accounts were still showing on her credit report. Staff verified the case was closed and paid in full and was able to correct the problem and have the mother’s credit report cleared within 48 hours.

Passport Denial – The renewal or issuance of a passport is subject to denial when a parent owes past due child support.

A father who owed \$5,800 in arrears and was ten months delinquent in his support payments was extremely surprised when his passport was seized while traveling in Australia. He was not allowed to fly to New Zealand for a movie shoot. The professional actor was given a starring role in a major motion picture and was upset that his career might be ruined because the **Monterey County** child support staff could not release his passport. Production of the film was delayed until he paid the entire balance and the passport was released.

In **Los Angeles County**, child support staff worked tirelessly to negotiate and resolve a case involving a significant amount of past due support. The father is a businessman who needed his passport to travel. He made a payment of \$850,000 in order to secure the renewal of his passport.

Real Estate Property Liens – Proceeds from the sale of property are collected through liens filed against parents who owe child support.

In **Los Angeles County**, a father applied to compromise his arrears, based upon his assertion that he had minimal income and no significant assets. The caseworker processing the application discovered during her review of the case that the father owned a home with a significant amount of equity. A real property lien was previously recorded against the property because of the child support judgment. The father decided that it was best to resolve his child support debt, and he refinanced his home to pay his arrears balance of \$59,000.

When a non-custodial mother in the **City and County of San Francisco** attempted to refinance her property, the title company issued a demand to the local child support agency because a real property lien had been recorded against her home. Child Support staff provided information regarding the arrearage, and the escrow company issued a \$21,782 payment from the proceeds of the refinance. A check was mailed to the custodial grandmother for the full amount of the past due child support.

By statute child support obligations are enforceable until paid in full, and the past due support can be collected through the proceeds of an inheritance.

In **Lassen County**, child support staff searched diligently for assets and other income to satisfy a father's past due child support debt. With no payment in more than two years, the custodial parent had given up hope of ever receiving the money owed to her. Staff had filed a lien in a nearby county where the father's parents owned a home. After the death of his parents, the father was surprised to learn that the home that he had inherited was now the subject of a real property lien. A demand was issued to the escrow company and prior to the sale of the home, payment was made to satisfy the entire amount of past due support.

License Suspension – Issuance and renewal of professional and driver's licenses can be denied for parents whose child support accounts are delinquent. Professional licenses include medical, realtor, sporting and attorney licenses, among others.

Case participants often assume that they have a right to a driver's or other license. The State of California has determined that a license is a privilege that one can keep by obeying state laws, including timely payment of a child support, medical support or spousal support obligation.



**Wednesday, November 28, 2007
in California**

**1,467 new child support
orders were generated.**

A father with a case in **Los Angeles County** worked out-of-state as a commercial truck driver. After picking up a load of goods in Arizona he drove into California toward his final destination. He was shocked and surprised when a routine stop at a weigh station resulted in a citation for driving with a suspended license. The father was not allowed to proceed further with his loaded truck until he addressed his delinquent child support accounts.

A concerned father visited the **Mendocino County** child support office to find out why his driver's license had been suspended. He held a job and was making payments through a wage assignment. The man's questions were answered by the child support caseworker who pointed out that although he was now making monthly payments, at the time of the license submission payments were not being received. The caseworker reached an agreement with the father to release the driver's license after he made a 5% payment toward his arrearage.

Full Collection Program – When a parent's child support account reflects an arrear of \$100 or more and is more than 60 days past due, the local child support office must alert the California Department of Child Support Services of the delinquency. The State can take funds from bank accounts, tax returns, royalties, commissions, rental income or dividends from the non-custodial parent to satisfy a child support obligation.

Alameda County received an application from a mother with two teenaged sons. The father had never made a payment toward his child support order. Thinking he could avoid his obligation, the father had returned to India to work for a local affiliate of a large U.S. software corporation. Since the United States has no reciprocity with India, the local employer refused to honor the wage assignment. Tenacious child support staff discovered that the father owned several stock accounts in the United States. At the request of the local child support agency, the State Full Collection Program levied the stock accounts. The custodial parent received over \$90,000 as a result of the levy.

Income Tax Intercepts – A non-custodial parent's federal and state tax refunds are subject to intercept when a child support account is delinquent.

On November 28, 2007 the **Orange County** Department of Child Support Services processed an income tax intercept in the amount of \$2,398. The funds were then placed into the custodial parent's bank account by direct deposit.

Benefits Intercepts – Workers' Compensation, disability and unemployment benefits are subject to intercept when a parent's child support account is past due.

Amador County staff were puzzled when asked by a custodial parent why she had not received any payments toward her case for several years. While researching the location of the father, staff determined that he had spent time in both Arizona and Michigan. Neither state had been successful in collecting payments from this father. A persistent caseworker decided to contact the Social Security Administration and learned that the father was receiving monthly social security benefits. A wage assignment was issued and the mother is receiving regular monthly payments for the first time in five years.

In some cases it takes a combination of enforcement tools to effectively collect child support.

A non-custodial parent spent eight years avoiding his obligation to support his three children who lived in Canada. After the local support agency in Canada requested enforcement services from **Sutter County**, things began to change. Within two days, Sutter County staff filed legal paperwork to set a hearing regarding the non-custodial parent's income and assets. Staff filed a lien in a case in which the non-custodial parent had a financial interest, and requested the court to distribute his share to his child support case. The entire \$19,795 in past due arrears was sent to the custodial parent and children in Canada.

Criminal Prosecution – A non-custodial parent can be prosecuted for willfully failing to provide the necessities of life for the child or for ignoring the terms of a court order.

Butte County child support staff and the U.S. Attorney's Office in the State of Virginia worked together on a complex interstate case against a father who owed thousands of dollars in past due child support. The father was sentenced to 16 months in prison for attempting to defraud a local child support agency. The U.S. Attorney stated that the prison sentence was due in large part to the testimony of the child support staff from the Butte County office. The father is now paying his support.

In 2006, 80 percent of our open child support cases had an established court order.



Wednesday, November 28, 2007
in California

1,346 new support cases
were opened.



When Circumstances Change

For every story about a family that involves past due support or a less than perfect payment history, there is a story about mothers and fathers who are willing to work together to ensure that support is accurately reflected by their financial situation.

In **Riverside County**, a father filed a motion with the court to modify his support order. He was hopeful that his current order of \$1,600 per month would be reduced to \$600 per month. He had a second family and additional minor children to support. The custodial parent appeared in court and agreed to reduce the monthly payment to \$400. She stated that since her children were now grown, she could manage with much less money. The child support attorney was surprised to learn that the mother had been returning half of her monthly payment to the father, since she felt he needed the money more than she did to care for his young children.

Information about the services we provide can be a valuable tool for young people making decisions as their life changes.

In **San Joaquin County**, child support staff accepted an invitation to speak with high school students involved with, or at risk of becoming involved with gangs. They gave a presentation describing the services provided by child support agencies, and held a frank and open discussion about parenthood, responsibility and good citizenship.

Unexpected Encounters

While reviewing a case for past due child support owed to **Sacramento County**, the child support caseworker determined that the County had been fully reimbursed for expended welfare funds and that excess child support monies were owed to the custodial parent. The custodial parent was the 75 year old grandmother of the child. The child was now an adult and the grandmother lives on her small social security pension. She had never received any child support payments. She was thrilled to receive a call from the caseworker advising her that she would receive a check for \$25,885.

A less than compliant father in **Trinity County** was found to be working as a manager in the local sandwich shop. He was unable to continue asserting unemployment as a reason for not making his support payments. He could not deny that it was his picture posted inside the shop, above the plaque titled “Manager”.

In **Kern County**, two non-custodial fathers were observed sitting in the “meet and confer” waiting room before their child support hearings. The two men were discussing their child support obligations. One of the fathers indicated that he was unemployed and he did not understand how he could be obligated to pay support if he did not have a job. The other non-custodial parent explained about the job search program available through the Kern County child support agency. He also stated that he was employed as a head driller for a local drilling company and his employer was looking for drilling hands. He provided the unemployed father his contact information and told the man to give him a call the next day to set up an employment interview.

In **Fresno County**, a mother had moved and did not notify the child support agency of her new address. They received a \$10,000 payment and the caseworker contacted her employer by phone and fax to get the new address. The employer was reluctant to verify that the mother worked there, but after announcing that she had “good news to share”, the employer allowed the caseworker to speak with the mother who gladly provided her new address.

In 2006, paternity was established for 90 percent of our child support cases.



**631 medical support orders
for children were ordered.**

Thankful Families

A mother and father visited the local child support agency in **Siskiyou County** to advise staff that they had reconciled. The children were grown, and the parents were struggling financially. The mother wanted to forgive the unassigned arrears and she was told by the staff that she could request her portion of the case be closed. Based upon the financial situation of the couple, the caseworker determined that the father may qualify to compromise the assigned arrears. The couple appreciated that the caseworker was willing to provide an option that could ease their financial strain.

After a lengthy effort to establish paternity and support for a mother in **Shasta County**, child support staff received a heartfelt note of gratitude. The mother's note explained that after the father met his eight year old daughter, he introduced her for the first time to her six year old brother. The mother wrote:

"I would like to thank all of you for your hard work. Without you I don't believe my daughter would have met her father or little brother...Thank you."

In **Orange County**, a custodial parent was thrilled to receive a phone call from a caseworker in the local child support agency. The caseworker enthusiastically told the mother that a large lump sum payment of \$37,625 was recently collected from a levy against the father's bank account.

At the end of an interview with his caseworker in **San Bernardino County**, a non-custodial parent mentioned that he wanted to contact his son. The caseworker told the father that she would forward his request to the custodial parent. The local support office received a letter from the father who wrote:

"My son contacted me. I cannot tell you how that made me feel. I have not spoken to him for almost 10 years. I am supposed to take him to dinner on Sunday. He was happy to speak with me and he sounded great. Anyhow I wanted to say thank you for your help. I will remember you for this. Everybody needs a little angel and you are mine. Thank you for treating me like a human being. You were a professional and kind to me, Thank you."

In **San Benito County**, after receiving information that the non-custodial parent might be the beneficiary of a trust, the local child support attorney traveled to Santa Clara County to obtain a copy of the trust and probate file. The attorney was surprised to learn that the trustee was the non-custodial parent's uncle. After sending legal documents to the trustee, the non-custodial parent unexpectedly visited the local support office and gave the staff a cashier's check for \$17,187, the entire amount of past due support.





Wednesday, November 28, 2007
in California

Our staff located 3,118
non-custodial parents
through the use of
automated systems and tools.

Customer Service

Parents are often looking for answers, and are pleased that a member of the child support agency is willing to listen to their questions and provide information about alternatives and options to resolve their problem.

In **Kern County**, a custodial parent contacted the local child support agency because she had not received any payments within the previous 45 days. The mother indicated she had been having difficulty receiving her mail. A Call Center agent reviewed the payment history and determined there had been three payments mailed to the mother within the last 10 days. The mother confirmed that she had not received the payments. The agent explained that there was a process to make a claim for the lost checks. The agent took the steps necessary to initiate the mother's claim. The Call Center agent also explained the electronic payment card option because the mother did not have a bank account. The mother was excited about this suggestion because she did not know we offered this option for receiving payments. The Call Center agent directed the custodial parent to the proper website to apply for an Electronic Payment Card.

Sonoma County child support staff assisted a mother and father to resolve a long standing issue of past due arrears. The coordinated effort resulted in the mother forgiving most of the past due child support in return for assistance from the paternal grandfather to purchase a new home for the mother and child.

At the **Sierra Nevada Regional Department**, a father visited the local child support office and described an ongoing issue he was trying to resolve. He asked the office to provide assistance. After discussing the situation with a caseworker, he stated that he appreciated the time spent answering his questions and that he had a much better understanding of the child support process.

Santa Barbara County received a call from a mother reporting that her support payment had been forwarded to her from an old address. The caseworker noticed that the address they were using was received from an interface with another agency. The worker entered the correct address into the new statewide child support system and also advised the mother to update her address with the other agency.

**Paternity establishments
were determined for 383
children.**

Statewide Child Support Automation: A New Era in California Child Support

California is implementing a new single statewide computer system to assist in the administration of California's Child Support Program. The new system provides local child support agencies and the state with the necessary tools to manage and track child support cases statewide—increasing the program's capacity to deliver uniform, high quality services to families. As counties continue to convert to the new system, statewide service options are available to families receiving support, parents making payments, and to employers submitting payments. Services include:

- Web (www.childsup.ca.gov) and toll-free call center access to child support information (866.901.3212)
- Direct deposit services for families receiving support payments
- Instant access to support dollars through electronic payment cards, similar to ATM or debit cards, which can be used at ATM machines as well as retail outlets
- Scheduling support payments via electronic transfer from a checking or savings account.
- Making payments using a credit card over a secure internet connection
- Employers sending child support wage withholding payments to only one location, and the ability to submit payments electronically





Total child support collections sent to families on November 28, 2007 was \$16,569,708

Changing Lives One Family at a Time

A **Marin County** parent expressed the significant impact the Child Support Program had upon the life of his family.

“All of the hard work has finally paid off. I really appreciate your help when I began this process. It made a big difference in my outlook, giving me the confidence that it would be possible for me to succeed in getting all of my child support paid. I felt as if you cared that I was a person who was trying to do the right thing-not just another number. It has been a long time coming, seven years since I started working on clearing all of my arrears. My two oldest children are emancipated and I paid the last arrears payment for them in June. I have had custody of my youngest child for almost two years and I have also paid the last arrears payment for him in June.

I have been clean and sober and employed in the same job for seven years. I am now the kitchen supervisor, and since I am no longer paying off arrears, I will be starting to pay into a retirement account and my employer will match some of the funds. This is a great accomplishment for me and I might not have been able to do it without your help and support from the beginning. The family law facilitator has also been a big help in guiding me through the process. Thank you very much.”

We are California’s Child Support Professionals

This is our job. This is our life.

This is the privilege we embrace every day.



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