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of **FACE**
CHILD SUPPORT
in California

CHILD SUPPORT DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION of CALIFORNIA



a coalition of experts collecting billions for california's children

The Child Support Directors Association of California (CSDA) was established in 2001 as a non-profit association to represent the local child support directors of California's 58 counties. The Association supports local child support agencies (LCSA) in their effort to provide children and families with the financial, medical, and emotional support required to be productive and healthy citizens in our society.

a day in the life...

The potential of the individual, the strength of the family, and the prosperity of our communities increases when we improve the lives of children.

On Wednesday, December 2, 2009, the Child Support Directors Association of California captured a day in the life of the California child support program. This report chronicles some of the day to day activities and stories of the families we serve and a snapshot of the work that child support professionals carryout throughout the year.

This report is presented to showcase the child support program and the services provided. You will be better informed about the challenging work embraced by child support professionals each day as you gain insight into the many components of California's Child Support Program.



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.

Every day nearly 7,600 local child support professionals in California work to ensure that children receive the support from their parents by establishing orders and collecting financial and medical support for the children and families of our state. Many of the families served are in difficult financial situations and rely on support for their basic needs. Without it, many families would be forced onto public assistance.

There is sometimes the perception that individuals who owe child support are “bad” people who are avoiding their responsibilities to provide for their children. However, the majority of individuals paying child support do so diligently, knowing it is in the best interest of the child.



statistics

In Federal Fiscal Year 2008 California's Child Support Program collected nearly **\$2.4 billion dollars** and there were **1.6 million open child support cases** in California.

it's for the kids

- On December 2, 2009, a young man came to the **STANISLAUS COUNTY** Department of Child Support Services. He asked the receptionist for an application for services to pay support. He spent the next hour diligently completing the application. The child support staff mentioned how impressed they were with his efforts. He smiled and stated, "It's for my kids."
- A custodial father came into the **NAPA COUNTY** Department of Child Support Services. He recently gained custody of his three young children and had applied for Medi-Cal for them. The child support professional asked if he wanted to pursue child support from the mother. He looked surprised and said "I thought that was for moms only". The worker explained that the mother is required to pay support just as he had faithfully done. The worker filed the action and obtained a stipulation for child support.



Most parents want to support their children, but many need assistance to do so. Whether establishing a child support 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 manner, local child support agencies provide an important public service to parents and children.

There are many opinions and feelings that surround the issue of child support. For more than 30 years the California child support program has worked diligently for the benefit of the state's children.



december 2, 2009

On this date, **1,487 Child Support cases were opened** in California.

the child support program

Child support professionals establish and enforce the responsibility of parents to support their children when they live apart. The program establishes the legal relationship between children and their fathers, collects child support for families, and obtains orders for health insurance. Families receiving public assistance (welfare) must participate in the child support program, while other families may apply for free child support services. Any child is eligible for child support services, regardless of income.

Child support makes a difference by improving the lives of children and their chances for a better future.



Victoria, an emancipated foster care child needed to have her car repaired so she could continue to get to work and attend college. The **SAN MATEO COUNTY** child support agency had been searching for her because they were able to collect child support arrears that were now owed to her. Through the collaboration of the foster care and child support agency, Victoria received \$1,700.



In **ORANGE COUNTY**, a parent and her children had no place to live. Coincidentally, she was notified by Department of Child Support Services that several payments were being held for her in the amount of \$2,900. The parent was able to secure an apartment and pay both the security deposit and first month's rent.

child support makes a difference to children & families

Local child support agencies, operated by county governments, are charged with ensuring that the children and families receive the appropriate financial support to which they are entitled.

On December 2, 2009, California's child support program collected \$9,425,947.38 in child support dollars. Next to a single parents' earnings, child support is the second largest source of compensation for poor families receiving child support.





Sixty percent of single parent families participate in the child support program. Child support improves the lives of many working families. Only K-12 education serves more children than California's Child Support Program. On December 2, 2009, the child support program issued \$8,475,584.04 in child support payments to families.

december 2, 2009

On this date, the state collected **\$9,425,947 in child support dollars** and the child support program issued **\$8,475,584 in payments** to families.

helping families “find” each other

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


-  In **MARIPOSA COUNTY**, a man was served with court documents alleging he was the father of an 11 year old child. The man immediately contacted the Mariposa County Department of Child Support Services. This was the first time he had heard he had a son. After genetic tests were conducted determining he was the father, he asked to meet with the child. Seeing his son for the first time he said, “He looks just like me when I was 10.” The father agreed to a child support order and is making regular monthly payments.
-  In **TULARE COUNTY** a mother contacted the child support call center. She had lost her job and her unemployment benefits were running out. The mother asked if there was some way the child support worker could contact the father to ask if he would contact their son. The worker followed through with her request resulting in the father and son speaking for over an hour. The father has arranged for the child to visit with him during the holidays.
-  An incarcerated father wrote a letter to the mother of his child in care of the **CONTRA COSTA COUNTY** Department of Child Support Services. He asked for forgiveness and requested to see a picture of his daughter. He had not had any contact with his daughter in over four years. The mother was contacted and agreed for the Department to act as a liaison for the family to communicate and reconnect.
-  After years of unsuccessful attempts, **SACRAMENTO COUNTY** used multiple databases to locate an alleged father. The great-aunt, who raised the child from infancy, was elated. The sixteen year old had never met her father. After calls to several relatives, the father responded equally excited at the opportunity to connect with his daughter and was willing to cooperate with child support. Per his request, his phone number was provided to the great-aunt.

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

establishing paternity

Paternity 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 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 child 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.




IMPERIAL COUNTY Child Support Services received a request for assistance from the Mexican Consulate for a child living in their jurisdiction. The mother and child did not have border crossing privileges. The caseworker met the Mexican Consulate Attorney at the Mexico/US Border to obtain DNA samples from the mother and child. The DNA results confirmed the man was the child's father. Paternity and a child support order were established.



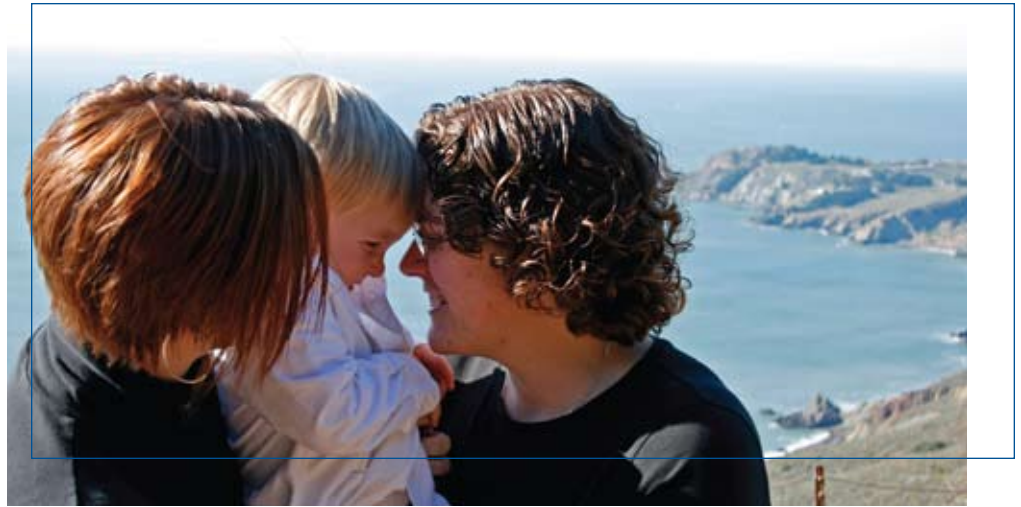
december 2, 2009

On this date **3,439 customers** came into the child support offices, **1,630 non-custodial parents** were located and **362 paternity judgments** were established.

Child support offices often conduct outreach activities in an effort to educate our communities about the importance of parenthood.



The **VENTURA COUNTY** Department of Child Support Services outreach team met with students enrolled in the Minor Parent Program and the Life Skills class at a local high school. The minor parent program provides child care, counseling, and hands on guidance with child rearing while the parents complete their education. The Life Skills class focuses on life skills needed after high school. The outreach team provided information about child support services, the cost of raising a child and the minimum wage child support obligation. The team also facilitated lively discussions regarding child support.



december 2, 2009

On this date there were
1,370 child support orders
generated and **618 medical**
support orders issued.

establishing a child support order

Providing 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 responsibility for raising 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.


- A father contacted the **BUTTE COUNTY** Department of Child Support Services after receiving legal documents. The father explained he had four other children in his home. The caseworker reviewed his financial records and calculated a child support amount allowing him to provide for all of his children.
- A non-custodial mother was in court in **INYO COUNTY** on a motion ordering her to seek work. During her court appearance, she was advised that a default judgment entered earlier in the year ordered her to pay support. She informed child support that her actual earnings were less than those used to establish the order. Because the judgment was entered less than six months prior, a new judgment was entered based on her actual earnings.

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

63.9 percent of all child support in California 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. California issues approximately 7,000 wage assignments daily.



A custodial parent opened a case in **SAN BENITO COUNTY** in July 2009. The mother was unemployed and on the brink of losing her house. The monthly child support obligation was \$3,990. The non-custodial parent, a Doctor and a shareholder in a surgery center, owed back child support in excess of \$78,000. The child support attorney researched the relationship between the non-custodial parent and the surgery center and found that a wage withholding order could be issued. In the past 5 months child support has collected and distributed over \$69,800 in support to the custodial parent for her child.

Successful implementation of a wage assignment is contingent upon an employer's awareness and responsiveness to child support regulations. Cooperation between employers and child support agencies is essential in supporting family self-sufficiency.



In **DEL NORTE COUNTY**, an employer consistently withheld child support from an employee but failed to send the payments to the California State Disbursement Unit. As a result of the noncompliant employer, the Del Norte case manager negotiated a stay of wage assignment so that the non-custodial parent could pay personally to ensure that his children receive timely support.



December 2, 2009

On this date there were **6,941 wage assignments** issued and **2,167 cases** heard in court.

When successful, wage assignments are the most consistent way to ensure timely payments.



CREDIT REPORTING

Failure to pay child support can negatively affect a parent's credit rating and credit reports can be used to establish a parent's capacity to make child support payments.

In **SAN MATEO COUNTY**, a recently divorced couple contacted the child support agency to assist with the establishment of a child support order. Both parents claimed to have no income and the tax records they provided showed negative income. The agency advised both parents they would review their credit reports and discovered mom had monthly expenses of \$9,000 and father was making monthly mortgage payments on a 2.9 million dollar loan. The county was successful in establishing that their incomes were at least equal to these expenses for setting a child support order.

PASSPORT DENIAL

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

The **SIERRA NEVADA COUNTY** Department of Child Support Services was contacted by a non-custodial parent who had an overseas job offer. While preparing to relocate overseas the father was surprised that his passport had been suspended. Child support staff worked to secure the payment of \$50,000 in past due support for the release of his passport.

A father who owed \$7,800 in arrears visited the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, China to have more pages added to his passport. He was surprised when his request was denied because of his past due child support. **HUMBOLDT COUNTY** child support worked with both parents to negotiate a full payment and release 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 **SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY**, a mother called requesting assistance. The father was selling his home and the title company indicated they did not find an active lien recorded against the property. The child support worker verified the property had been sold and confirmed with the County Recorder that a lien was in fact active. The father filed a court motion which was denied and the mother was awarded \$36,884 from the sale of the home.

Families are pleased to learn that child support obligations are enforceable until paid in full, and that past due support can be collected through the proceeds of an inheritance.

In **SANTA CLARA COUNTY**, child support staff were contacted by the custodial parent to advise them that the non-custodial parent was scheduled to receive a payment from the sale of his deceased parent's home. Child support staff were able to secure \$80,938 in past due support.

An escrow company in **SAN DIEGO COUNTY** contacted Child Support Services to secure a release of lien on the non-custodial parent's home. The escrow officer indicated that no proceeds could be provided from the sale to satisfy the child support lien since the home was in foreclosure. Child support staff worked with the escrow company and negotiated an agreement for over \$20,000 to complete the sale.

LICENSE SUSPENSION

Issuance and renewal of professional and driver licenses can be denied for parents whose child support accounts are delinquent. Professional licenses include medical, teaching, contractors, sporting and attorney licenses, among others.

Case participants often assume that they have a right to a driver or other license. 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.

A custodial mother of 3 children applied for services in **MARIN COUNTY** because she was unsuccessful in obtaining child support on her own. Child support suspended the non-custodial parent's contractor license and driver license. Additionally, his bank account was levied. One month later, the non-custodial parent agreed to a State Licensing Release Agreement contingent upon him paying a lump sum of nearly \$5,000. Payment was received on December 2, 2009.

FINANCIAL INSTITUTION DATA MATCH PROGRAM

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

SHASTA COUNTY received an application for services from a mother with one child. The father owed a child support debt of \$123,283. Child support staff were able to locate an investment account held by the father and collected \$26,217. The funds were electronically deposited into the mother's account.

In **MARIN COUNTY**, a father contacted the local child support agency because his bank account had been seized in the amount of \$52,046. The mother and child reside in Sweden. He alleged there was a pending court hearing in Sweden to eliminate his arrears. Marin County contacted the Swedish authorities who indicated there was no court action pending. Marin County forwarded the payment to the mother.

After a lot of hard work and excellent collaboration with the custodial parent and one of the children, the **MONTEREY COUNTY** Department of Child Support Services was able to levy on a delinquent father's bank account and collected \$24,823. The mother was thankful, and stated that now she would be able to help her children with college expenses.



INCOME TAX INTERCEPTS

A non-custodial parent's federal and state tax refunds are subject to intercepts when a child support account is delinquent.

Child support staff in **SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY** met with a custodial parent who stated that in 19 years she never received regular child support but occasionally would receive tax intercept money. A review of the case and a few follow up phone calls to the non-custodial parent provided the child support professional with sufficient information to prepare a contempt filing. After some negotiation, the non-custodial parent agreed to a settlement with the custodial parent for \$30,000.



BENEFITS INTERCEPTS

Social Security, workers' compensation, disability, and unemployment benefits are subject to intercept when a parent's child support account is past due.

During a case opening interview in **SOLANO COUNTY**, the mother asked child support staff how the father could possibly help because he received Social Security benefits. After confirming that the father was receiving Social Security benefits, the mother was referred to the Social Security office where she found the child was eligible to receive derivative benefits from the father's benefit. The child was granted monthly benefits and was entitled to retroactive benefits dating back to 2007. The custodial parent stated she would have never known about the Social Security benefits without the help of her child support case manager.

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

A case worker in **GLENN COUNTY** noticed that one of her cases had recently received a \$250 IRS tax offset payment. The case manager discovered the non-custodial parent was receiving retirement benefits. A wage withholding order was sent to Social Security. As of November child support is collecting \$600 in monthly payments on this historically delinquent case.

ORDERS TO SEEK EMPLOYMENT

If a parent claims that he or she cannot pay child support due to unemployment, a court may require the parent to seek work and provide proof of places the parent has applied for employment.



A child support worker in **TUOLUMNE COUNTY**, visiting her insurance company, was helped by a non-custodial parent who recognized her from when he appeared in court. He said that he would have never applied for work at an insurance company had it not been for his work search order. He said even though he has a \$300 a month wage garnishment, he's happy that he has the ability to support his child and that Child Support Services and the court pushed in the direction he needed.



In **MONO COUNTY**, a non-custodial parent appeared in court on contempt charges for failure to seek work. He provided evidence to the court that although he had a medical condition which affected his ability to work, he had secured employment.

For thousands of chronically noncompliant parents, simply ordering payment is not enough. Some parents have so many other problems that complying with a child support order is difficult.



The **SAN FRANCISCO** Department of Child Support Services in collaboration with other local agencies created the Non-custodial parent Employment and Training program (NET) to assist parents with multiple barriers to paying child support, including unemployment, lack of education, parenting challenges and anger management issues.

A non-custodial parent, recently released from prison, came to the **SAN FRANCISCO** child support office owing over \$24,000 in child support arrears. She was very motivated and excited about addressing her child support case and other issues. Within one month of entering the NET Program, she started making regular monthly payments, signed up to attend motherhood workshops, met with an employment specialist, received help with her resume and learned interviewing techniques. Today this parent has almost completed the course requirements to take the GED exam, has maintained her employment and monthly child support payments and has regular visitation with her son.

COMPROMISE OF ARREARS PROGRAM (COAP)

The Compromise of Arrears Program can have a profound effect on the lives of the participants, as well as their families.

Under certain circumstances, the law allows for the child support agency and the parent owing support to enter into a compromise agreement to payoff accumulated arrears owed to the state.

Angela is a victim of severe domestic violence that left her both physically and cognitively damaged resulting in her children being placed in foster care. Angela, feeling that her life was hopeless, ended up incarcerated. Ultimately she found a safe relationship, started working and paying on her child support arrears. After a work-related injury, her payments fell behind. Angela reached out to the **EL DORADO** Department of Child Support Services and through COAP her license was released and an arrears balance of over \$126,000 was reduced to \$12,600. Angela speaks of COAP as the program that saved her life and provided the opportunity for her to conquer her past and move on.

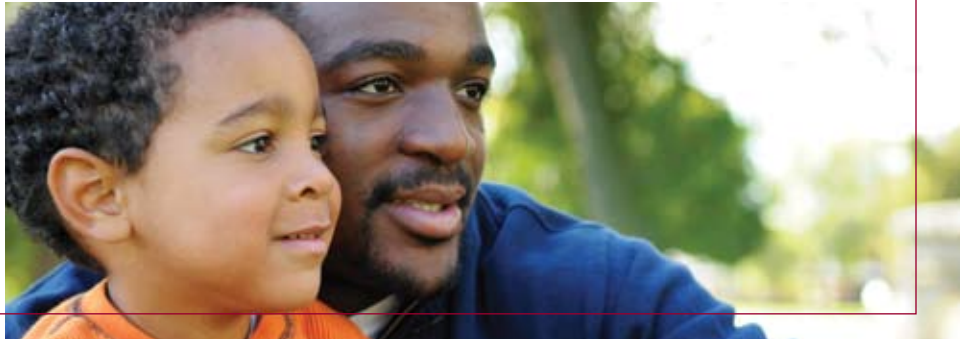
Child support staff reach out to parents willing to work together during tough times.

Gregory and Tina, parents of Matthew, divorced shortly after Matthew's birth. Between 1993 and 2007, Tina tried to collect support on her own but was not successful. In late 2007, Tina came to the **LOS ANGELES COUNTY** Child Support office and requested assistance in collecting Matthew's support.

The office calculated Gregory's unpaid support to be \$132,391 including interest. Los Angeles County immediately notified Gregory of the unpaid support and that it was his obligation to pay the entire amount. Gregory disputed the amount due and filed a court motion to determine arrears. After several attempts at a settlement, Gregory and Tina agreed to compromise the arrears at \$65,000.

On December 2, Los Angeles County staff received the settlement agreement. With a check in the amount of \$65,000, Tina has support to help Matthew who had his 18th birthday this year, and Gregory has completely paid off his child support debt.





customer service

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



A custodial parent notified the **RIVERSIDE COUNTY** Department of Child Support Services that the non-custodial parent had a pending lawsuit against his homeowner's insurance. The legal staff filed a lien against the lawsuit and received a settlement of \$20,642.62 that was sent to the custodial parent.




A **SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY** child support professional received a letter from a non-custodial parent requesting an audit of his child support case. The case was complex and confusing involving multiple child support agencies in different states. After much effort and coordination between multi-state agencies, the child support professional completed a thorough audit of the account resulting in a significantly lower balance than originally shown.




SANTA BARBARA COUNTY was contacted by a distraught grandfather. His wife had just died and he didn't know how to get their child support payments transferred into his name. They had custody of their four grandchildren since 1997 and he didn't know how to handle the paperwork. Child support professionals researched the original court orders and determined that the payments could be changed to the 81-year-old grandfather without additional paperwork or a court hearing.

when circumstances change


For every story about a family involving 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 based upon their financial situation.



A non-custodial parent, who had been deployed by the military, contacted **ALAMEDA COUNTY** Department of Child Support Services requesting to have an adjustment to his child support interest rate retroactive to his deployment date. The child support professional reviewing the case worked through several procedures and phone calls to assist the non-custodial parent with his request. In recognition of her efforts, the service member submitted the child support professional for special commendation. A pin and a special certificate from the U.S. Army stated in part, “America has always called upon the Army to do the hard jobs, and its soldiers answer the call to duty. Deployments have increased in frequency and length in order to maintain our commitments to freedom, our way of life and the American family. This commendation symbolizes the partnership between our Army, its soldiers, their families and our communities – a partnership as old as the nation itself.”



In **SONOMA COUNTY**, both parents were present in court on a motion for contempt. The father owed in excess of \$5,000 in child support. Since the father was now employed, the mother agreed to waive past due support if the father agreed to increase his child support from \$386 per month to \$450. The contempt was dropped and the new order terms established. The father is now making his monthly payments.



A non-custodial parent with a case at the **CENTRAL SIERRA REGIONAL** Department of Child Support Services appeared in court on a motion to seek employment. He owed over \$30,000 in child support arrears. His financial situation had significantly changed since the order was entered. The custodial parent was in court and agreed to waive all arrears owing to her. A Stipulation and Order Waiving Arrears was printed and signed by both parties in court.



december 2, 2009

On this date, **477 child support order modifications** were granted.

unexpected encounters

Participants in child support cases can be surprised by the people they meet or the phone calls they receive from others who take extra steps to make a difference in the life of a stranger.



SISKIYOU-MODOC REGIONAL Department of Child Support Services staff routinely match the names of inmates from the Sheriff's booking log against the child support database. On this day they located a non-custodial mother who had evaded them for three years and owed in excess of \$46,000 in child support for her six children. Child support followed-up with the Sheriff's Department and discovered that she had on her person \$11,300 at the time she was booked. Child support prepared the necessary documents to have these funds seized, satisfying a portion of her debt.



A non-custodial parent was waiting to receive a cash inheritance from the sale of his parent's estate. He was notified by the escrow officer of a property lien established by the **RIVERSIDE COUNTY** Department of Child Support Services. He contacted his caseworker making two payments for a total of \$89,302, which were forwarded to the custodial parent.

statewide child support automation:

One Program, One System, One Purpose

By the end of 2008, all of California's 58 Counties converted to the new Child Support Enforcement (CSE) system and achieved federal certification. The Child Support Directors Association of California in conjunction with California's Department of Child Support Services continuously explores new ways of leveraging technology to improve the delivery of services and increase program performance and efficiency.

On December 2, 2009, 79% of all child support payments to families were disbursed electronically. It is estimated that by using electronic disbursements rather than paper checks, over 1,800 trees were saved this year. Electronic disbursements increased an additional 32% this year saving over \$1,000,000 in postage expense.

On December 2, 2009, California's Child Support Program scanned 14,760 documents representing over 60,000 pages. In addition, over 14,000 calls were answered statewide using the centralized customer service line, and over 13,000 individuals used the new Customer Connect self-service system to obtain information and update their case.

thankful families

An **ALAMEDA COUNTY** custodial parent sent the following note to her child support worker. She wrote:

“I want to take a moment to thank you for all the time and effort you put into my case. Would you please see that my caseworker receives a BIG HUG from me and my daughter? The money we now receive has already made a huge difference in our lives and has much relieved my elderly parents who have been helping us along for 11 years. You have my gratitude for everything you helped me overcome during this process.”

While shopping at the mall, a **SUTTER COUNTY** child support professional was approached by the wife of one of her non-custodial parents who recognized her saying:

“I’m grateful for the help you provided on my husband’s case. It has been a difficult time in our lives and you helped us.”



The potential of the individual, the strength of the family, and the prosperity of our communities increase when we improve the lives of children. This is our mission.



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Note: Most statistics used in this publication reflect activities on or about December 2, 2009.

