

BEST PRACTICES SUBMITTAL FORM
OCDA Fall Conference 2007

County: Butler County Child Support Enforcement Agency
Submitted By: Raymond C. Pater, III
Best Practice: Felony Non-Support Court

Please Explain Your “Best Practice Procedure” And Summarize The Results Which Have Been Achieved Through This Process:

Please E-Mail Your Submittal Summary to Rob Pierson, Stark County CSEA via GroupWise or piersr01@odifs.state.oh.us

On March 5, 2007, the Butler County Court of Common Pleas began their third Specialty Court, Felony Non-Support Court (FNS Court). The FNS Court joined the already established Court-Directed Addiction Treatment Program (C.D.A.T. or Drug Court), and the Substance Abuse and Mentally Ill (SAMI Court). The FNS Court was first under the direction of the Honorable Matthew Crehan, and is now overseen by the Honorable Noah Powers. The FNS Court is designed to bridge partnerships between numerous Butler County service agencies, with the goal of rehabilitating the child support offender by dealing with the root problems that are many times the cause of not paying support: psychological issues, drug and alcohol addiction, and/or lack of education.

The Butler County Prosecutor’s Office averages approximately twenty (20) individuals being indicted each month for felony non-support. These FNS cases are randomly assigned to the seven (7) Butler County Common Pleas Court Judges. Once these cases have been adjudicated, the assigned Common Pleas Judge will send those individuals who have been convicted of felony non-support, and placed on community control (probation), to the FNS Court.

The FNS Court convenes each Tuesday morning at 10:00 a.m. However, at 9:00 a.m., Judge Powers, an Assistant Prosecutor, a representative from the Butler County CSEA, three CSEA Adult Probation Officers, the Specialty Courts Program Director, and counselors from Community

Behavioral Health (CBH), meet to discuss the individuals on the docket for that day and what is the best course of action for each person. The CBH Counselors coordinate a whole range of services for the FNS offender, including, but not limited to, mental health counseling, alcohol and/or drug dependency programs, continuing education programs, guidance on finding employment (job resumes, interviewing, how to dress for job), and transportation, if needed. CBH is certified by the Ohio Department of Mental Health (ODMH) and accredited by the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO). Additionally, CBH provides the Fatherhood Initiative Program. The Fatherhood Initiative is a twelve (12) week evidence-based curriculum utilizing a combination of lectures, handouts, and group processes designed to help fathers recognize and face the responsibilities of parenthood. The goal of the Fatherhood Program is to challenge participants who have previously failed to meet their responsibilities to learn what it means to be an effective parent and positive role-model to their children. Sessions are held weekly on Thursday evenings from 7:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m.

The CSEA Adult Probation Officers are assigned to only FNS cases. They have no other criminal cases in their caseload. They are educated in child support law, and know the Butler County CSEA policies and procedures. Moreover, they have been trained on the SETS system and have an excellent knowledge of the system. The Probation Officers carefully monitor the progress of each individual on the FNS docket, making recommendations to the Court, and at times, recommending to the Court that a FNS offender be sent to jail and/or prison because that individual is not cooperating and taking advantage of the myriad opportunities that have been presented to him or her.

Finally, the Court actively encourages those offenders who are making progress, and makes sure that the offenders who are not following their case plan are held accountable and punished. Those individuals who cannot find a job, but are sincerely trying, are given community service while continuing to seek employment. Those who refuse to cooperate with the program are eventually

incarcerated.

Through the Butler County Felony Non-Support Court, we hope to make a productive and fruitful impact on the lives of the children in the county. By eliminating the barriers to employment of the parents who don't pay support, we are confident that many will begin paying on a timely and consistent basis, greatly improving the lives of the children that they helped bring into this world.