

BEST PRACTICES SUBMITTAL FORM
OCDA Fall Conference 2007

County: Hamilton
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Best Practice: Early Intervention: Incarceration Caseload

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@odjfs.state.oh.us

With one eye on incentives and the other on helping families, we understand that the incarcerated case load has an impact not only on current and future child support collections, but on real people – the obligors trying to put their lives together again and the children who have done without because of their incarceration. In an effort to minimize this impact, incarcerated obligors’ cases are housed with one worker for tracking and monitoring purposes. The case type is noted as NDNA, if appropriate so as not to have a negative impact on our incentives.

When it is determined the obligor is incarcerated an initial prison letter is sent along with the Frequently Asked Questions sheet. A wage withholding is also sent to the Bureau of Prisons. The word spread quickly about the inmates resulting in phone calls from the case managers on behalf of the obligor. The case managers have requested additional information about our practices and procedures. At times specific inmate information is being requested to assist the obligor. Upon receipt of the release of information a phone call is made to the case manager. I have already heard from several released inmates which gives me hope that the proactive work I am doing while the obligor is in prison will make a difference once they are released.

A database was designed to track all incarcerated obligors in Hamilton County’s caseload. It contains the case number, absent parent’s name and date of birth, case type, the emancipation date of the youngest child, the release date or projected and first parole hearing date. As we have identified the need exists to educate prison staff and inmates on how the child support system operates, informational and educational flyers were created to keep the inmates abreast of changes and procedures that affect them.

The data base has multiple uses as follows:

- 1) Monthly query is run to identify obligors that will be released from prison within the next three months. Upon retrieval of such information, a letter is sent to the obligor informing them that we have not forgotten about them and informing them that we want to proactively work with them to begin paying support sooner than later upon their release. A month before their release a packet is sent which includes call center contact information, a list of agencies that will work with felons to help them get employment, and a list of employers in our area who will hire felons, where to pay their child support until there is a wage withholding started, order modification information and process, tax offset program, license

suspension and FIDM criteria. The case remains in this specialized caseload for ninety days after discharge to monitor and work with the obligor to resume child support payments.

- 2) Queried for obligors that meet the criteria to be referred for possible recruitment and enrollment into the fatherhood initiative program.
- 3) Queried for initiating special letter project/mailings with informational and educational flyers that address topics regarding frequently asked questions from inmates and/or changes in law/processes/regulations that may affect their support order.

The process has resulted in three-hundred forty six (346) wage withholdings being sent to the prisons, which equates to 41% of the prison caseload receiving small payments. Prior to the implementation of this project, there was a 28% payment rate on these cases.

We understand that the more we communicate, inform, and/or educate the obligors while they are incarcerated, the more comfortable they may feel working with us when they are released. To start developing this relationship, staff has attended London Correctional Institution's Re-Entry Day Initiative/Job Fair Day to educate and field questions. The frequently asked questions sheet has opened the door up for two-way communication and has afforded the worker the opportunity to develop a rapport with many inmates. The Frequently Asked Questions sheet is revised as needed based on communication with the incarcerated obligors. They have expressed their gratitude for the information. Some inmates have written letters requesting additional information which again allows for another opportunity to relay the message of the importance to contact our office upon their release.

- Attachments:
1. Initial Prison Letter
 2. Frequently Asked Questions
 3. 90-day release letter
 3. 30- day release letter
 4. 60-days after release