

NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services and Job Service North Dakota

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Contacts: Mike Schwindt, Director of the Child Support Enforcement Division, N.D. Department of Human Services (DHS), 701-328-3582 or mschwindt@nd.gov; Maren Daley, Executive Director of Job Service North Dakota (JSND), 701-328-2836; Heather Steffl, DHS Public Information Officer, 701-328-4933 or hsteffl@nd.gov; or Lelan Bosch, JSND Communications and Marketing Specialist, 701-328-3031

North Dakota to expand its award-winning program that helps parents meet their child support obligations

BISMARCK, N.D. – North Dakota is expanding its nationally recognized Parental Responsibility Initiative for the Development of Employment (PRIDE) program to the Bismarck, Fargo, and Minot regions.

The program, which involves Job Service North Dakota (JSND), the district courts, and the North Dakota Department of Human Services, helps noncustodial parents find employment or better paying jobs so they can meet their child support obligations.

PRIDE was first offered in the Dickinson region beginning in 2005 and expanded to the Grand Forks and Grafton area in 2006. This past year, both the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement and the Council of State Governments recognized North Dakota's PRIDE program with national program innovation awards.

"Our experience with PRIDE shows that families benefit because of the potential for more parental involvement with their children," said Carol K. Olson, executive director for the North Dakota Department of Human Services. "In addition, financial and medical support from both parents improves."

Through the PRIDE program, the courts refer nonpaying parents to a Job Service caseworker for assistance with job searching, training, and job placement. Caseworkers also look for barriers to employment, which may lead to substance abuse, mental health, or vocational rehabilitation referrals. Noncustodial parents can also volunteer to participate in the program without a court order.

Job Service North Dakota Executive Director Maren Daley said, "Job Service employees are an important part of this effective partnership. They work directly with noncustodial parents to help them obtain employment, often locally, which keeps parents close to and involved with their children."

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Mike Schwindt, the Department of Human Services' Child Support Enforcement Division director, said 119 of the 127 parents referred to the PRIDE program found jobs, many within two months of their referral to PRIDE. As a result, the average monthly child support payment for participating families increased 88 percent. In addition, the monthly contempt hearings dropped 55 percent after noncustodial parents were referred to the program.

Schwindt said, in addition to increasing child support collections, PRIDE helps increase parent visitation time with children, while reducing court time and reliance on public assistance such as Food Stamps, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Medicaid.

The human services department uses TANF program funding to pay for the PRIDE program.

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