

NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services **600 East Boulevard Avenue – Department 325, Bismarck ND 58505-0250**

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Noncustodial Parental Employment Program Works

BISMARCK, N.D. – A pilot project launched in April 2005 to increase child support collections by addressing the unemployment and underemployment of noncustodial parents in the Dickinson area is working. The project focuses on parents who owe past-due support and relies on referrals from the courts and the Southwest Area Child Support Enforcement Unit.

According to officials from the North Dakota Department of Human Services, the child support enforcement unit, and Job Service North Dakota, who developed the project, both employment and child support compliance increased after participating noncustodial parents received employment-related services.

“This initiative meets the needs of children in so many ways. It can help families overcome poverty, and it provides other benefits because noncustodial parents who regularly support their children often have more frequent and positive contact with them,” said Carol K. Olson, Executive Director of the Department of Human Services.

An analysis completed by Olson’s department, which administers child support enforcement and public assistance services, determined that the average child support payment made by the 31 participants increased from \$63.80 per month at the time of referral to \$202.94 per month just six months afterwards. The non-payment rate dropped to 13 percent.

Job Service provided work assessments, job search assistance, training, job placement follow-up services, and other needed supports. The caseworker also referred some noncustodial parents to local treatment providers, including Badlands Human Service Center, to address substance abuse issues or mental health needs. Human Services provided the funding this biennium through its Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.

Maren Daley, executive director Job Service North Dakota, said the two agencies have a long history of working together. “Human Services contracts with us to provide employment-related services to TANF clients. We have the expertise to serve these families, and are committed to the Dickinson project and a similar effort now underway in the Grand Forks area.”

Noncustodial parents who didn’t cooperate found themselves back in court facing fines or other sanctions. Five were found in contempt, and arrest warrants were issued. Two were subsequently jailed.

In 2005, over 18,000 child support cases in North Dakota had outstanding balances, many in excess of \$5,000. The payment rate for current support is 72 percent in the state.

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