

NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services
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New Noncustodial Parental Employment Program Launched in GF Region

BISMARCK, N.D. – A pilot project to increase child support collections by addressing the unemployment and underemployment of noncustodial parents has expanded to the Grand Forks region. The effort involves the North Dakota Department of Human Services, the Grand Forks Regional Child Support Enforcement Unit, and Job Service North Dakota, and is modeled after an initiative launched last spring in Dickinson, N.D., which is producing positive results.

“Our goal is to increase parental support and to help raise families out of poverty,” said attorney Diane Hausmann, the administrator of the regional child support enforcement office.

Job Service is providing employment-related services such as work assessments, job search assistance, training, job placement follow-up services, and other needed supports. If appropriate, the caseworker refers noncustodial parents to local treatment providers, including Northeast Human Service Center, to address substance abuse issues or mental health needs. Workforce incentive funds are paying for the Job Service caseworker.

Keith Reitmeier, area director of Job Service North Dakota in Grand Forks, said the two agencies have a long history of partnering. “Job Service is involved in the Dickinson project and also has a contract with Human Services to provide employment-related services to people who receive economic assistance benefits. We have the expertise to serve these families,” he said.

To participate, noncustodial parents must be overdue in their child support obligations. The courts and the regional child support enforcement unit refer parents to the program. Participants referred by the courts must cooperate with the program or face legal sanctions.

The pilot project in Dickinson increased the average child support payment made by participants from \$63.80 per month at the time of referral to \$202.94 a month six months afterwards. The non-payment rate also declined to 13 percent.

Officials hope to achieve similar results in Grand Forks, Pembina, and Walsh counties, but also believe the benefits extend beyond financial stability. Noncustodial parents who regularly provide support often have more frequent and better quality contact with their children, according to Mike Schwindt, director of the state Child Support Enforcement Division.

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

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