

News: Child Support Federal Grant Matchmaking Expands Access to Justice by Promoting Strategic Collaborations (OCSE 2016)



The Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) continues to be a driving force in ATJ through a variety of funding strategies that support innovations benefiting self-represented litigants (SRLs) including:

- [IV-D reimbursements](#)
- Formula Access and Visitation Grants
- Domestic Violence Guidance Grants
- \$1.6 million RFP to support reform of child support contempt procedures

While the use of IV-D reimbursements by courts and legal aid to support self-help services for qualified cases is generally well known, the agency's focus on building collaborations and finding innovative uses for significant grants or more limited formula funds is less known.

In what is an extremely exciting development, ATJ commissions, courts and local legal help organizations will be necessary collaborators for the successful applicants of the \$1.6 million funding opportunity that will fund five-year projects in nine states supporting procedural justice innovations around contempt proceedings. And with respect to the smaller formula access and visitation grants, OCSE seeks innovation and collaboration.

Access and visitation funds are traditionally used for supervised visitation or mediation programs. These funds are often depleted quickly, only serving a small number of the parents in need. In an effort to support more sustained and broader help for parents, OCSE actively supports collaborative efforts such as the creation of attorney staffed hotlines. The first project of this kind was in Texas, where Legal Aid of Northwest Texas, partners with the Texas Office of the Attorney General to run an attorney staffed [Access and Visitation Hotline](#). Hotline attorneys aim to facilitate establishment of agreed-upon orders, reduce parental conflict and misunderstandings, ensure that orders are "right-sized," prevent default orders, and promote positive co-parenting.

Buoyed by the success in Texas, the Indiana child support agency recently created a statewide Indiana Parenting Time Helpline with access and visitation funds. Also staffed by attorneys, the Helpline is open to all and has served parents, police departments, DV advocates, and other agencies seeking information on visitation orders, language, safety planning and more. The Helpline also houses a legal resource database that includes local resources for parenting time (i.e. mediators, pro-bono, visitation centers, etc.) covering all 92 counties. This database has been designed to permit hotline attorneys to mouse over a state map to easily find the resources callers need in real-time.

Linda Nearing, the Assistant Deputy Director for Indiana Child Support, said that they've, "been amazed - there's been absolutely no negative feedback from the public or from the county prosecutors who run the county agencies." All feedback has been positive, even when she did a tour of the state speaking with prosecution

offices.

Michael Hayes, Senior Programs Manager at OCSE in the Division of Program Innovation describes his role as matchmaker between state agencies and legal service providers, DV shelters, human services organizations and courts. Hayes remarked that the Indiana Parenting Time Helpline’s team has, “an ideal mix of previous legal experience for staffing the line: one attorney has an extensive background in family law, another with education law, another who was a IVD county prosecutor, and a staffer who previously managed the state’s 211 call center, which has helped them bring in 211 resources for their resource database.” He also noted that, “the parenting time calendars produced by the Helpline received the attention of the Indiana Supreme Court, which approached the state IVD agency and asked for their expertise and support for developing an online parenting time calculator/calendar mobile app.” Both Nearing and Hayes note the Helpline’s results have far exceeded their expectations.

More information about OCSE initiatives is maintained in [SRLN Brief: OCSE Guidance on Collaborative Child Support Activities \(SRLN 2016\)](#), including links to technical resources. You may also contact Michael Hayes, Senior Programs Manager at OCSE in the Division of Program Innovation at Michael.Hayes@acf.hhs.gov.

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