

2018 CSAC Challenge Award
Orange County Child Support Services (OC CSS): Teen Parent Program

Overview – The Teen Parent Program performs specialized outreach to minor parents that focuses on education and long term parental success beyond child support.

Challenge – Our teen parent caseload at Orange County Child Support Services (OC CSS) is small as a percentage for our overall caseload; however, supporting this fragile population between the ages of 14 and 18 is significant. According to our research, education levels are the primary barrier to the payment of child support. Making minor parents choose between education and work to pay child support is not the answer. As a more effective alternative, we identified an opportunity to support these parents prior to establishing orders for child support in hopes of creating long-standing success. Our program seeks to not only ensure a relationship between parent and child, but also sustainable child support and success in the future by offering tailored resources and addressing barriers early on.

Innovative Solution – OC CSS created a specialized team and implemented the Teen Parent Program to form early relationships of trust and to address the unique needs of this fragile population by initiating contact, educating, offering resources and engaging teen parents early in the process. The team provides one-on-one specialized service and education by getting to know the family and their needs. Through community partnerships our team is equipped to offer our young customers resources for continuing education or certification programs which may lead to potential employment. In addition to education, our Teen Parent Program identifies financial and social needs then links young parents with available resources such as food and housing.

This innovative approach of creating a support system for teen parents prior to reaching the age of majority (18 years) has allowed us the opportunity to ensure we set reasonable orders once they reach the age of majority, which in turn sets the tone for sustainability. Our goal is to partner with our local courts to create a Teen Parent Court Program where this fragile population

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will receive specialized service throughout the court process which involves our specialized team, their parent/guardian and specialized court support staff. The partnership with the court will provide the opportunity to address their specific circumstances and the needs of the family to establish an order that is appropriate for the circumstances of the case.

Originality – The Teen Parent Program consists of a team of child support experts and attorneys dedicated to providing specialized service well beyond child support services and at each stage of the child support process, with the goal of ensuring lasting success of the family.

Results – The program was implemented in November 2016 with only 16 cases, and has since increased to 64; 29 cases were resolved as a result of the parents reaching the age of majority. Of the 29 cases, ten cases were resolved through the setting of reasonable monthly child support court orders and eleven had child support amounts set to zero based on the circumstances of the case. The program also provides our young customers guidance in taking on adult responsibilities. Recently, a customer of our program expressed gratitude for the assistance and reported that he and the child's mother are now communicating as co-parents and that he now has regular visitation with his child.

Our innovative approach in assisting this fragile population of teen parents with resources beyond child support is consistent with our core values and supports our vision of partnering with parents to achieve family self-sufficiency. The project has had a positive impact in the delivery of services to the public with the early engagement of teen parents and their new families.

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