



CSAC Challenge Awards 2021

Entry category:

- Issue area: **Health & Human Services** (child support)
- Population: **Rural**

Executive Summary

Overview: Our fatherhood outreach initiative improves outreach to non-custodial Lassen County fathers. Additionally, it has sparked regional and nationwide discussions about the value of child support.

Challenge: Non-custodial parents (frequently fathers) in Lassen County, around California, and across the United States report low levels of understanding and trust and high levels of suspicion and even fear of county Child Support Service departments. Most non-custodial fathers have been ordered to participate in child support through the court system or custody arrangements. Unfortunately, few fathers voluntarily open their own child support cases, even though doing so has been proven to improve short- and long-term parent-child relationships, to reduce childhood poverty, and to increase childhood success on other metrics like education and health. To avoid paying child support, some fathers work at unreported jobs or avoid opening bank accounts to keep their wages from being transferred, even though such practices increase their likelihood of experiencing poverty and having legal action taken against them. Despite many efforts to reach fathers where they are, child support departments continue to struggle to build trust with -- and therefore reduce voluntary service uptake -- from non-custodial fathers.

Solution: Lassen County DCSS created and implemented a fatherhood outreach initiative to build trust with non-custodial fathers, provide education about services, and develop a sense of the value of child support.

Innovation: The multi-pronged, ongoing Fatherhood Initiative includes a variety of outreach and education components, many of which are based online. At the center of the initiative is the [“Brandon’s Story,”](#) a 6-minute social media video featuring a local father who opened his own child support case and eventually became a case manager for our department. This simple but effective video has sparked wide-ranging discussions locally, statewide and nationally.

Results: In Lassen County, fathers often express surprise at being treated respectfully throughout the case process; they report that they would have opened cases themselves and/or would have cooperated earlier had they realized the experience would be pleasant and helpful. Brandon’s perceptive, intelligent take on child support programs and how they can be improved earned him an invitation to moderate a fatherhood panel presentation at the National Child Support Directors Association (NCSEA) Policy Forum in January 2021. His superb performance there, connecting with two national fatherhood outreach experts and linking their commentary back to the experiences of everyday dads paying child support, delivered a thoughtful and high-impact discussion on the crucial roles that fathers play in their children’s lives and in the success of our program. His skills connecting with an audience were also on display as the child support specialist focused on fathers in the Child Support 101 webinars created by California as part of their federal Digital Media Marketing Grant activities. His Facebook video ad for the webinars racked up thousands of views a day, far surpassing any previous digital outreach effort on any topic.

Replicability: This program is highly replicable across county Child Support Departments, and the Child Support Directors’ Association has already shared components of the program to help other departments implement their own initiatives.

Optional Video Submission: [“Brandon’s Story” social media video](#)

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