

## Non-Custodial Parents

The Non-Custodial Parents initiative establishes a range of programs for low-income, non-custodial parents (NCPs) in order to support their work participation, increase their compliance with child support payments, and encourage positive involvement in their children's lives.

<i>Agency</i>	<i>Start Date</i>	<i>Number Served per year</i>	<i>CEO Budget (City FY 08)</i>	<i>Total Budget (City FY 08)</i>
The Human Resources Administration	April 2007	9,148	\$380,000	\$2,250,000

### ***Problem Statement***

Although many non-custodial parents want to be actively involved in the lives of their children, some face formidable social and economic barriers, such as lack of education, lack of positive role models, and limited earnings. Lack of information and understanding of the child support system combined with a general distrust of government also contributes to the number of low income non-custodial parents who fail to pay their child support.

### ***Research and Evidence***

It is well established that child support plays an important role in assisting low-income custodial parents meet their basic needs and become or remain self-sufficient. It is for many families a valuable and important source of income. Moreover, child support recognizes that every parent has a responsibility to support his or her child.

There are many non-custodial parents who would like to be responsible parents but fall behind in making their child support payments and accumulate large amounts of arrears. The problem with accumulating large arrears for low-income, non-custodial parents in particular is, if large enough, arrears can create disincentives to continue paying child support and to employment in the mainstream economy. There are a variety of reasons why arrears may accumulate. Child support orders, for example, can continue to accumulate while an NCP is incarcerated and has no ability to pay. NCPs may fail to attend a court hearing and may receive a default order when the custodial parent or government can demonstrate to the court that the NCP was properly notified of the court hearing. By failing to appear at the hearing, the NCP misses a critical opportunity to present his or her financial information to the court. Without this information, the court may set the amount of the child support order above the individual's earning capacity. NCPs may lack sufficient knowledge of the child support system to understand that he or she may return to court to modify an order in this case or even in the future, if there is a change in income due to job loss or other factors.

If an NCP fails to pay child support, he or she can be brought back to court to obtain a judgment on their outstanding debt. Interest is charged on judgments, thus further increasing debt. As a result, the order continues to accrue at a level higher than he can afford to pay. Therefore, even though there are

safeguards built into the child support system to set orders at an amount commensurate with the income of non-custodial parents, situations like the ones discussed above can result in the accumulation of arrears. For some NCPs the magnitude of the debt accumulated can create a sense of hopelessness and result in continued nonpayment of child support obligations.

### ***Program Description***

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This initiative establishes several programs to engage non-custodial parents. The *DSS Default Order* Initiative targets non-custodial parents whose families are receiving Cash Assistance and whose child support orders were obtained by a default court order. By working with the Office of Child Support Enforcement, non-custodial parents may receive a reduction in the amount of their child support order without returning to court.

The *Arrears Adjustment* initiative is a pilot program for up to 1,000 low-income NCPs. In exchange for making full current child support payments for at least ten months during the year, as well as successfully completing a parenting program, job training and/or increasing their earnings, the arrears owed will be reduced by 25% at the end of 12 months. Continued participation in the program further reduces the arrears owed by 25% per 12 month period. State approval for this program is still pending, so the final program design may change depending on feedback from the state.

The *Support Through Employment Progress (STEP)/ Community Service* program provides training and assists NCPs in obtaining employment. The program has been expanded to incorporate community service as a tool to use for those non-custodial parents who fail to comply with an employment vendor to obtain employment. If the NCP fails to cooperate with the STEP program, he or she will be required to perform community service with the Department of Sanitation.

The *Parenting Vouchers* program incorporates parenting classes into an overall job training plan. This program is for NCPs who are unemployed, enrolled in HRA's Back to Work vendors, and have a child support obligation. The NCP is referred to a parenting program when he or she establishes a job training plan.

The *Family Court NCP Outreach* program offers early intervention to NCP's just after they have obtained a new child support order. Outreach workers from the Office of Child Support Enforcement inform NCP's about their child support rights and responsibilities. With this early intervention, NCPs may learn how to avoid the accumulation of arrears that could discourage them from paying child support or subject them to various enforcement actions in the future.

The *NCPs on CA/FS/MA/SS* program engages NCPs who are on Cash Assistance (CA), Food Stamps (FS), Medical Assistance (MA) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI). If an NCP is receiving FS or MA and his or her income is below the 'Self Support Reserve' of \$13,783, then he or she is eligible for a \$50 monthly child support order (meaning that the NCP is not required to pay more than \$50 in monthly child support payments). If an NCP is receiving CA, or SSI, then he or she is eligible for a \$25 monthly child support order.

So far, the Office of Child Support Enforcement has reached out to 14,153 NCPs through mailings, phone, and in-person outreach. The number of NCPs actively engaged in program activities to date is significantly lower.

***Target Population***

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The program serves working poor and non-custodial parents citywide.

***Expected Outcomes***

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• **Short-Term:**

- Enroll unemployed, non-custodial parents in job training/placement programs
- Increase child support compliance and payment
- Increase non-custodial parent contact with children

**Long-Term:**

- Increase the work participation and earnings of non-custodial parents
- Increase child support payments
- Increase non-custodial parental contact with children
- Enhance the relationship between non-custodial parents and children