



**NYC** Human Resources  
Administration  
Department of  
Social Services

# Creating a Culture of Cooperation

The Office of Child Support Enforcement's

2008 Annual Report

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# **Creating a Culture of Cooperation**

The Office of Child Support Enforcement's  
**2008 Annual Report**



# creating a culture of cooperation

the office of child support enforcement's 2008 annual report

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Frances Pardus-Abbadessa*

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creating  
a culture of cooperation

To fulfill our mission of helping children receive financial support from both parents, we are working to improve perceptions of the child support program among parents and providers. This involves correcting misconceptions about child support and raising awareness about the importance of meeting societal expectations that both parents will financially and emotionally support their children.

This annual report highlights the progress we made in 2008 towards achieving these goals. In 2009, we aim to build upon these successes to bring us even closer to our ultimate goal of creating an environment where the child support program is known, understood, and embraced.

In the coming year, we need to help custodial parents (CPs), especially those receiving Cash Assistance (CA), understand the long-term benefits and importance of child support—how regular and consistent payments, combined with working and work supports such as Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Food Stamps, can assist them in achieving self-sufficiency and can lift them out of poverty and keep them out. In addition, research confirms what many of us know to be true, which is that children perform better on all social indicators when both parents are involved in their lives. This means that we need to find more ways to connect noncustodial parents (NCPs) to their children. For NCPs with low income, we need to ensure that their orders reflect an actual ability to pay, and educate them on the rules governing child support—a combination that will help them manage their case proactively and avoid the accumulation of arrears. We also need to help young people understand the importance of delaying pregnancy until they are ready to bear the full responsibilities of being a parent.

Toward this end, we created the Division of Parent and Community Engagement in 2008 to coordinate existing programs and develop new ones, for both fathers and mothers, which help raise awareness of and increase compliance with the child support program.

The following pages describe the new initiatives that the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) has undertaken as part of New York City's Human Resources Administration's (HRA) Commissioner Robert Doar's goal of building on the success of welfare reform by connecting men to work and helping them to become more actively involved in the lives of their children.

While looking outward we also focused inward, increasing our attention to automation and its applications, OCSE's procedures and training, and the ways in which we provide service to our customers and can improve upon it. We hope to further increase the total number of cases with child support orders and the amount of support we collect and distribute.

In 2008, we established the highest percentage of cases with a child support order in place in the history of the program - 75.5% - and our collections grew by 8.2%, to \$670,590,732. In fact, we are proud that New York City (NYC) received an award from the New York State (NYS) Office of Temporary and Disability Insurance for our 2008 collections, which exceeded the collections of almost all NYS districts. 95% of this amount is distributed directly to families, the majority of whom are former CA recipients. These facts help illustrate OCSE's positive impact on families and show that child support makes a real difference in the fight against child poverty.

Considering our difficult economic times, we recognize that our expectations for collections in 2009 must be more modest, and that we will need to be more mindful of the financial pressures NCPs are facing. At the same time, as the families we serve rely even more heavily on child support to make ends meet, our services become even more important.

**Frances Pardus-Abbadessa**  
**Deputy Commissioner**  
**Office of Child Support Enforcement**



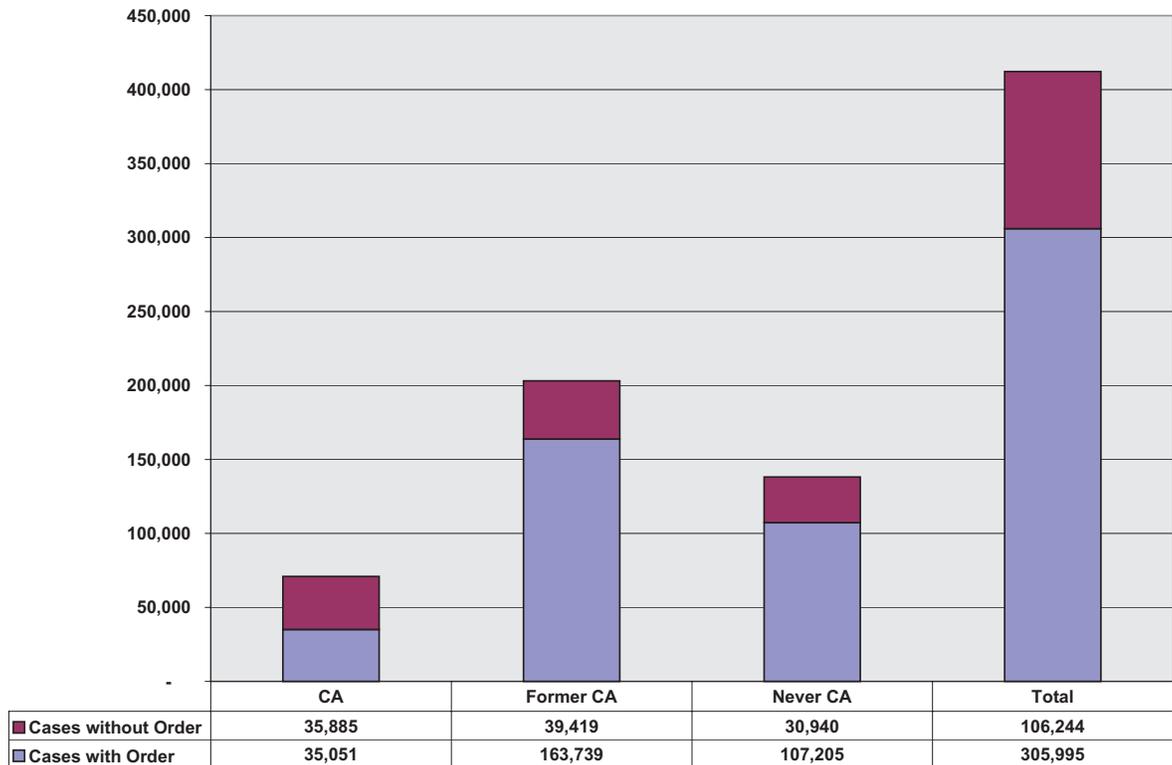
# ocse by the numbers

more dollars to more children

What contributed to our record-setting performance? Our employees' commitment, teamwork, and innovation were key factors. In addition, the last several years have seen the development of better, more effective tools for the enforcement of child support.

## SERVING OUR CONSTITUENTS

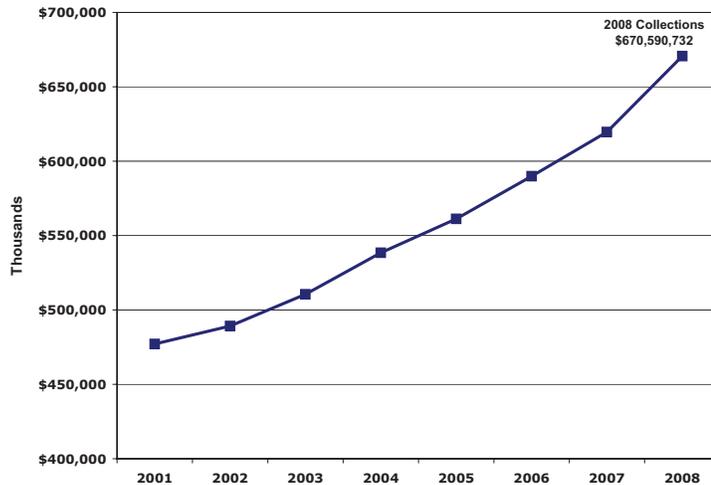
**Chart 1. OCSE Caseload Profile as of December 2008**



Establishing a child support order is needed before child support can be collected on behalf of families. Therefore, a key performance measure in the child support program is the percentage of families for whom we were successful in establishing an order. This chart shows that three-quarters of the families we serve have a child support order in place. It also shows that the largest group of CPs receiving child support services is former CA recipients, which points to the important role that child support plays in helping move families towards self-sufficiency.

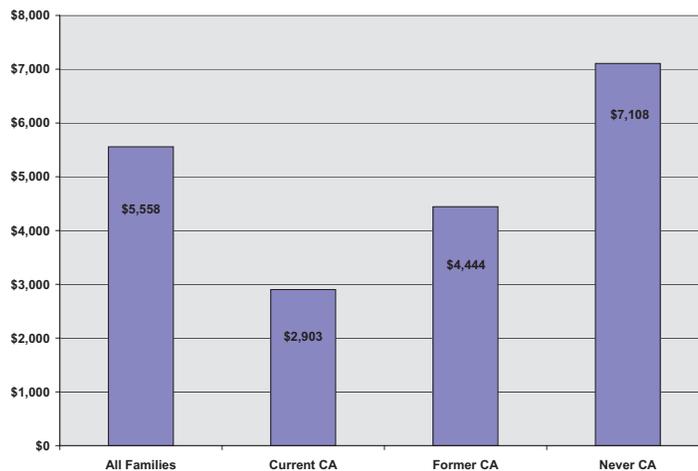
## COLLECTIONS

### Chart 2. Total NYC Collections



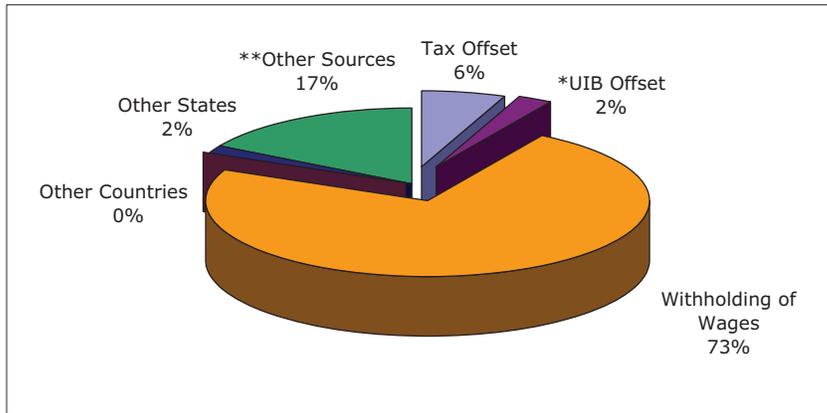
From 2004 to the end of 2007, OCSE's total collections increased at an average rate of 5%. In 2008, however, we achieved an increase of over 8%, which represents 14 consecutive years of increase. Of the \$670 million collected in 2008, **over \$215 million was collected on behalf of former CA families.**

### Chart 3. Average Annual Amount of Support Collected per Family in 2008 (for Families with a Collection)



Child support, when combined with earnings from work and supports such as Food Stamps and EITC, helps keep families out of poverty. The \$4,444 collected for families formerly receiving CA represents 25% of the 2008 Federal Poverty Level for a family of three.

#### Chart 4. Where the Money Comes From

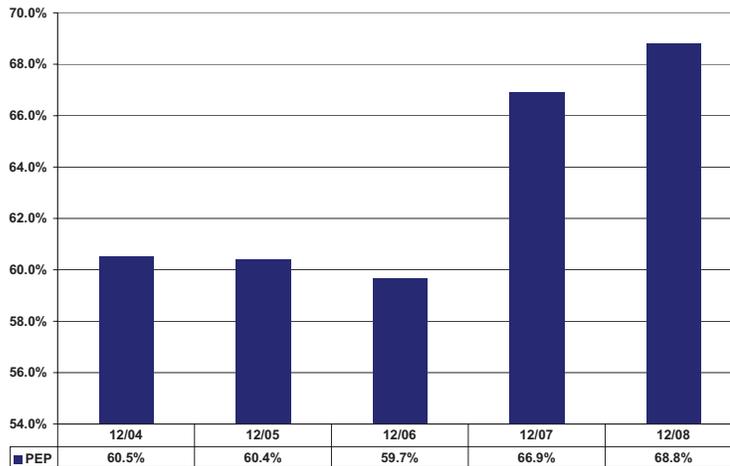


\*UIB Offset represents collections received from Unemployment Insurance Benefits.

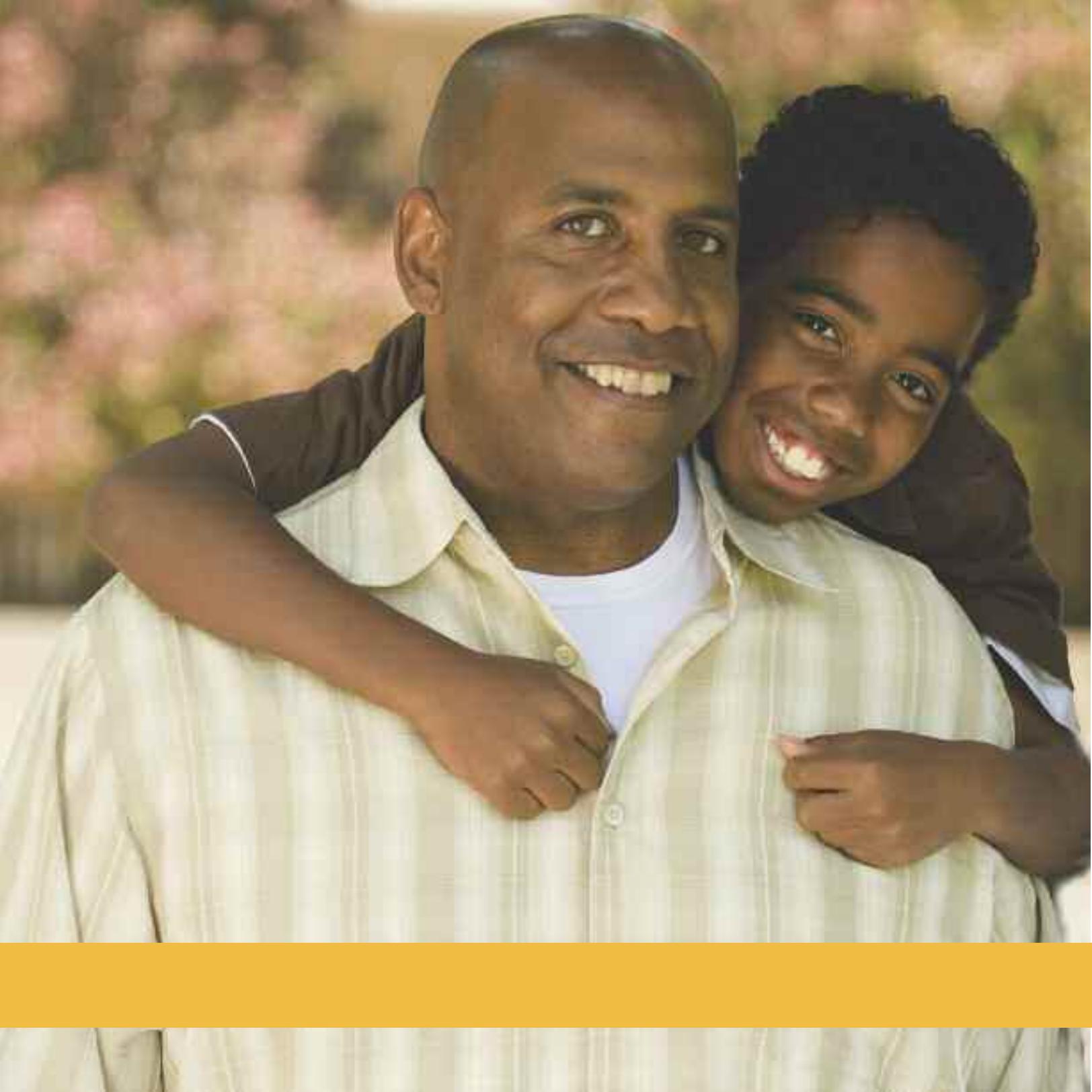
\*\* Other Sources include direct payments from the NCP, funds seized from bank accounts and other financial holdings, and payments made in response to passport suspensions, among others.

In 2008, as in previous years, OCSE's largest percentage of collections was received from employer wage withholdings. This continues to be the most effective approach in collecting child support and, most importantly, provides CPs with regular and consistent payments.

#### Chart 5. Paternity Establishment Percentage (PEP)



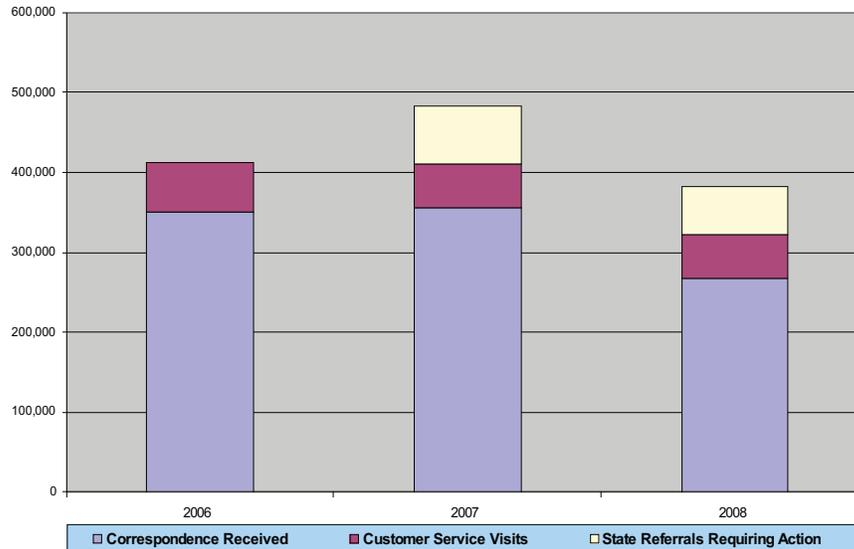
For children born out of wedlock, paternity can be legally established either by a father's acknowledgment or through family court. The paternity establishment rate at the end of 2008 was at an all-time high of 68.8%, which represents a 13.7% increase



since the end of 2004. This upturn is attributed to improvements in process and teamwork between our staff and the state's. Establishing paternity is important because it affords children inheritance rights such as military allowance and social security, and gives fathers the right to ask for visitation or custody and have their names on the child's birth certificate.

## CUSTOMER SERVICE

**Chart 6. Serving Our Customers**



	2006	2007	2008	% Change
Correspondence Received	351,442	355,713	268,729	-24.5%
Customer Service Visits	61,168	55,381	54,133	-2.3%
State Referrals Requiring Action	N/A	72,285	59,482	-17.7%
TOTAL	412,610	483,379	382,344	-20.9%

Chart 6 displays a downward trend in correspondence, customer service visits, and referrals for case action from the NYS child support help line. This trend is attributed to better-educated customers, more effective handling of cases by OCSE staff and by the state telephone help line, and NYS processing certain categories of mail that had been processed previously by OCSE.



# fostering

parent and community engagement



Every child should be able to count on both parents for love and support. This is true even when both parents do not live together or were never married to each other. It's best for parents to be involved in their children's lives from birth, but it's never too late to become a responsible and caring parent, which includes providing emotional and financial support.

OCSE ensures that NCPs provide financial support for their children. Our services to CPs include establishing paternity, obtaining child support and medical support orders from family court, collecting and distributing child support payments, and enforcing child support orders.

The initiatives discussed below are intended to help OCSE become more flexible and responsive to the needs of NCPs. This is important in and of itself, but we expect that these initiatives will also lead to increased compliance with child support orders and collections for families.

### **A Changed and Expanded Division**

The Division of Parent and Community Engagement was created in June 2008 to coordinate existing OCSE programs and develop new ones for parents that raise awareness of and increase compliance with the child support program. It has three branches: Parent Resources, Customer Services, and Teen Pregnancy Prevention. Included under Parent Resources are Employment Services, which connects NCPs to employment services, either voluntarily or through the family court; and the Outreach Unit, which establishes connections to the community, government agencies, and parents in order to increase understanding of the child support program.

## **Expansion of Employment Services: Employment Opportunity Program (EOP)**

In June 2008, OCSE created a new employment services program for unemployed and underemployed NCPs called the Employment Opportunity Program (EOP). This program allows NCPs who have a child support order payable through OCSE to access job search help and parenting classes through 14 HRA back-to-work employment vendors. While similar to our Support Through Employment Program (STEP) in services and structure, EOP participation can be initiated by the NCP and is not mandated by the court.

## **STEP Success**

Since its implementation in 2002, 13,746 NCPs have been referred into STEP for employment services. In CY08, 2,548 NCPs were referred. NCPs obtain jobs that pay an average of \$10 an hour, and have an average work week of 34 hours. Approximately \$1.3 million per month (\$15.6 million per year) is collected from NCPs who were referred into STEP since the inception of the program, whether or not they enrolled. We expect STEP participation to expand in 2009, as more NCPs will be in need of the job services we provide through our vendor partners.

## **Arrears Credit Program (ACP)**

Initiated in September 2008, this three-year pilot targets up to 1,000 low-income NCPs with high arrears. The NCPs work with one of six employment service vendors who recruit and support them throughout the program. In exchange for obtaining employment and paying their current child support obligations, OCSE reduces the arrears

that participating NCPs owe the government as reimbursement for CA paid to their family. OCSE removes the additional monthly amount collected towards arrears while they are in the program. Provided they pay their current child support orders for the full three years of the program, the NCPs are eligible for an adjustment in their arrears of up to \$30,000 per child support case, and may also earn an additional \$5,000 in credits for completing both an approved parenting and a skills training class.

## **Riker's Island Initiative**

In 2007, OCSE and the Department of Corrections partnered to work with both NCPs and CPs transitioning out of jail and into the community to educate them about child support. Since late 2008, OCSE has established a weekly presence on Riker's Island. Our workers sit with individual inmates to discuss their cases one-on-one, and also offer workshops on child support for inmates and staff.

## **NYC DADS Website**

As part of a citywide campaign that celebrates the important role fathers play in the lives of their children, the HRA Office of Public Information and Communications created NYC DADS. This citywide initiative maintains a website, conducts a public-awareness ad campaign using posters and video clips, and hosts events in the five boroughs to encourage dads with limited financial resources to spend quality time with their children. In 2008, these included a basketball clinic, a Father's Day picnic, a New York Liberty basketball game, a Staten Island Yankees' game, a New York Historical Society Founding Father's Spring Event, and a Halloween party. The site also provides information on supportive services and work programs offered by local community organizations.

## Family Court NCP Outreach Initiative

Since December 2007, OCSE staff in Manhattan Family Court meets with NCPs immediately after they obtain a new support order. These staff members review the order with the NCP and offer information about the rules governing child support. The purpose is to help NCPs become proactive in managing their child support account and ensure that they understand their child support responsibilities and the consequences of non-compliance. To date, 710 NCPs have received this service. The hope is that it will prevent the accumulation of arrears and lead to consistent payment of child support.

The overwhelming majority of NCPs who have met with a family court staff member have found the program helpful, and 85% of them made a payment. In February 2009, the service was expanded to the Brooklyn Family Court.

## NYS NCP Earned Income Tax Credit

The NCP EITC program is a New York State tax credit for low-to-moderate-income working people. In 2008, OCSE mailed letters to approximately 66,000 NCPs to notify them of their potential eligibility for the credit. Since NCPs can file retroactively to 2006, the initiative also helps by providing them with completed amended tax returns for previous years.

## Conferences

As part of expanding our efforts at outreach and education on the importance of child support, NYC OCSE sponsored several conferences in 2008. Highlights included:

- A two-day conference co-sponsored with the City University of New York (CUNY) Graduate Center: “A Collaboration of Minds: Helping Low-Income Non-custodial Parents Fulfill Their Child Support Obligations.” It was organized to stimulate ideas from a diverse range of professionals on improving the child support process and encouraging more positive engagement with NCPs. It was attended by family court representatives, social services providers, and members of the religious and academic communities.
- A symposium with hospital representatives to discuss ways of increasing paternity establishment rates.
- A conference with members of the Hispanic community regarding existing OCSE projects to serve Spanish-speaking clients, and new initiatives that need to be developed.
- A workshop with employers to educate them on their legal responsibilities in relation to deducting and sending child support payments, and how to forward payments in the most effective way.

Managers from OCSE also attended conferences sponsored by different organizations—sometimes participating in panel discussions and workshops to learn more about how other jurisdictions pursue child support so that we could further improve our own program. These included the National Child Support Enforcement Association’s annual training conference in San Francisco, the Administration for Children & Family Services 18th National Child Support Enforcement Training Conference, and the NYS Public Welfare Association’s winter and summer conferences in Albany and Saratoga.



# improving

services to custodial parents



One of OCSE's most important goals is reaching out to our poorest and most vulnerable clients about the importance and long-term benefits of child support. When combined with other work supports, child support helps families stay out of poverty and provides long-term benefits to children and to their parents. In 2008, OCSE therefore stepped up efforts to reach out to CPs.

### **Families in Shelters: PATH Initiative**

In 2007, OCSE partnered with the NYC Department of Homeless Services and HRA's Family Independence Administration (FIA) to assist single-parent families entering or residing in the shelter system to obtain child support and become self-sufficient. In addition, staff is out-stationed at the Bronx and Brooklyn shelter hubs and at the Prevention and Assistance to Temporary Housing (PATH) facility, which is the sole entry point for the shelter system in New York City.

Since the initiative began in February 2008, 1,189 families have been interviewed at PATH, and 37% were referred to court. For families residing in a shelter, the percentage with child support orders increased from 17% (1,803) to 22% (2,398) between May 2007 and December 2008.

### **NYS Electronic Petition-Filing (E-filing) Pilot**

We made great progress this past year in filing petitions electronically for CPs seeking a new child

support order. Petitions are now filed electronically by OCSE staff stationed in the family court of each NYC borough for all CPs who are legally married to the NCP and do not receive CA. We are moving toward e-filing for all child support petitions. In CY 2008, we filed 5,066 petitions.

This creates a significant advantage for the CP because it eliminates an additional interview and reduces, by as much as half, the amount of time needed to spend in court to file the petition. Now, when OCSE staff interviews the CP, we are able to complete the petition online in our computer system and interface electronically with the court's system to immediately provide a hearing date and all necessary papers, including copies of the petition and summons.

### **CPs Receiving Cash Assistance**

Based on New York State legislation passed in 2008, New York families who receive CA are now entitled to the first \$100 in child support collected per month—double the previous allowance. The increase offers an incentive for CA recipients to provide more detailed information about their children's NCP, which should lead to more support orders. In addition, this will also encourage NCPs to pay their child support because more money will go directly to the families.





## NOTEWORTHY ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN ENFORCING CHILD SUPPORT ORDERS

While we are doing a great deal to reach out to low-income NCPs and help them connect to employment and to their children so that we can improve compliance with the child support program, we remain committed to making certain that NCPs who have the means to pay, but may be willfully avoiding this responsibility, fulfill their obligation to their children. A few of these efforts are particularly worth noting:

### Special Collections

We are pleased to report that diligent enforcement efforts resulted in some major collections during 2008, all of which were paid directly to the clients:

- A lump sum settlement of \$39,295 from Worker's Compensation
- A lump sum of \$153,000 through the passport revocation process
- More than \$37,700 in a property execution case
- Over \$59,550 from one respondent's Personal Injury Claim (PIC) Settlement
- More than \$29,827 from another respondent's PIC
- A \$99,708 bank levy payment

The following case illustrates our commitment to locate NCPs who are not paying their child support:

In the spring of 2008, an NCP was reported by *New York's Daily News* to have set sail in 2007 on a 1,000-day sea voyage. At that time, he owed \$10,000 in child support arrears. Midway through the trip, he ran short of supplies and funds, and appealed to sponsors advertising on his website. On the day of his fundraiser, a child support representative and two New York State Department of Taxation and Finance agents converged upon the party and recovered nearly \$1,000 in cash. We continued to follow up with other enforcement strategies, and this NCP has now paid his obligation in full.

A photograph of a man with a mustache, wearing a red polo shirt, smiling and holding a young boy in a green polo shirt. They are outdoors in a park-like setting with trees and a playground in the background. The man is holding the boy from behind, and both are smiling at the camera.

selected

internal improvements

## Staff Hiring and Development

- During 2008 we filled a significant number of vacancies, including a number of key management positions. We are hopeful that filling these positions with highly qualified individuals will lead to even greater success at OCSE.
- Our partnership with the City University of New York's School of Professional Studies (CUNY-SPS), which was formed to create a comprehensive new training program for our employees, is off to a strong start. We anticipate that the first courses will be ready in spring 2009, and we have a great expectation that this initiative will help our staff perform their jobs even more effectively.
- A two-day retreat was held at West Point in May for senior child support managers. The goal was to refine our vision of where we want OCSE to be in the future and to examine our management styles so that we can readily identify meaningful improvements and accept them when they are identified by others.

## Systems Initiatives

In 2008, we implemented major advances in our technical capabilities to better serve OCSE constituents:

- Access to an enormous database of state information, both financial and non-financial, which we now receive in a format that permits systematic, automated analysis. This new data improves our ability to assess our policies and operations and to strategically improve our performance.
- Partnership with HRA's Management Information Systems Division has resulted in the redesign of two mission-critical systems that improve OCSE's ability to locate NCPs and bring them to court, establish and enforce orders, and close cases of CPs who no longer wish to receive child support services.
- Partnership with HRA's Management Information Systems Division has resulted in the redesign of nearly one-third of our management and case action reports, which have been placed online for staff to access via the OCSE web. These reports provide outcome data that will allow us to more strategically and effectively manage OCSE's resources.



# the year

ahead-2009



This year, NYC OCSE faces serious challenges. Foremost among these is the downturn in the economy. Now that many families face increased financial hardship, our primary mission to help children receive financial support from both parents becomes even more critical. But we also need to keep in mind the effect that this downturn will have on NCPs, and we need to focus on assisting them in fulfilling their financial obligations.

Understanding the stress that our families may be facing, and doing everything we can to help both parents during this difficult financial time, will be one of our primary goals in 2009. We hope that it will result in our continued success in assisting the children we serve.

In these tough times, even a little bit of money is important. We will therefore build upon the relationships and partnerships we formed during 2008; continue to reach out to NCPs and CPs to provide them with high-quality customer service; and greatly expand our connection with religious and immigrant communities, fellow city agencies, and others who work with families, to help educate them on the importance and benefits of child support. We are also undertaking some specific new initiatives:

- **Engaging Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers in the Lives of Their Children and Increasing Compliance with Child Support** is a demonstration program that targets neighborhoods in Central Brooklyn and the South Bronx where rates of non-compliance with child support are high. The program seeks to connect NCPs to their children, to the CP, and to the formal child support program through a work-first approach, with wraparound services including

financial counseling, parenting classes, relationship counseling, and mediation. We expect that vendors will begin delivering services by the fall of 2009.

- A **Teen Pregnancy Prevention** program is being implemented jointly by OCSE and the Department of Education. Through interactive workshops, teen parents present high-school students with the challenges and responsibilities involved in being a young parent. By sharing their personal stories and discussing the role of child support, these teen parents emphasize the importance of delaying parenthood. The program is being implemented in five public high schools beginning in May, 2009.
- The **Modify DSS Order (MDO)** targets low-income NCPs whose orders are payable to the government as reimbursement for cash assistance provided to their families, and whose incomes are below \$14,620. This amount—135% of the US Dept. of Health and Human Services poverty income guidelines amount for a single-person household—is defined by the NYS Child Support Standards Act as the level below which an NCPs ability to pay child support is severely restricted. NCPs are offered the opportunity to lower their child support order through stipulation, without returning to court. In certain circumstances, OCSE will also review and reduce the arrears owed to the NYC government.

In addition to implementing these and other innovative programs, we are constantly working to improve OCSE's operations through advances in technology. We are therefore delighted to announce major technological initiatives that enable us to serve our clients more efficiently:

- An **Electronic Imaging Project** for scanning and storing case files has been created to streamline the sharing of documents among OCSE's various units. It minimizes waiting time for supporting documents and allows OCSE units to make better decisions more quickly.
- An **Expanded Data Exchange** has been initiated between OCSE and FIA. In 2008, FIA staff was given access to child support information during the CA application process. In 2009, we plan to expand our partnership with FIA by providing its staff with child support data when they meet with families to re-certify CA cases. This module is intended to provide FIA staff an opportunity to discuss child support more fully with their clients as it relates to becoming self-sufficient, and ensure that all appropriate families are referred to OCSE for child support services.

Through these and our other initiatives, we continue to build upon the hard work, innovative programs, and outstanding progress we made in 2007. We now look forward to 2009 and the opportunity to contribute even more to the families and children we serve.



**Michael R. Bloomberg**  
Mayor

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**Human Resources  
Administration**  
Department of  
Social Services

**Robert Doar**  
Commissioner

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