



Georgia Fatherhood Program

The Georgia Fatherhood Program, created by the Office of Child Support Services (OCSS) in 1997, works with non-custodial parents who owe child support through OCSS but are unable to pay. Georgia's Fatherhood Program is the largest state-operated fatherhood program in the country. Over 2,500 non-custodial parents received services through the program during the past year. Gainful, stable employment enables these parents to provide regular financial support for their children. Fatherhood Program participants paid \$18.7 million in child support during FY 2005.

Georgia recognized early on that many non-custodial parents wanted to pay their court-ordered child support, but lacked the economic capacity to do so. OCSS has partnered with other government and community agencies to develop a comprehensive network of services for this group.

The Fatherhood Program:

- Generally takes three to six months to complete.
- Serves both fathers and mothers who are non-custodial parents.
- Participants are required to work at least 20 hours per week while enrolled in the program.
- Participants are required to pay child support during this time.
- Upon completion of the program, participants receive assistance in obtaining full-time employment, earning a wage that they can live on and pay their child support.

Since 2001, the Fatherhood Program:

- Served 15,000 non-custodial parents
- Helped 2,700 participants receive a GED
- Helped 750 participants receive a vocational certificate
- Helped 9,300 participants obtain employment

The Georgia Fatherhood Program is implemented by the Fatherhood Services Network, sponsored by the Department of Human Resources' Office of Child Support Services. The Network includes:

- Georgia Department of Human Resources
- Child Access and Visitation Program
- Voluntary Paternity Acknowledgement Program
- Georgia Family Connections Partnership
- OCSS, which contracts with:
 - Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education
 - Georgia Department of Labor
 - DeKalb County Fatherhood Initiative Network

Taxpayer Savings:

- Decreased Medicaid cost. Non-custodial parents are required to obtain medical

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- insurance through their employer if available at a reasonable cost.
- Decreased enforcement costs. Employer withholding of support payments eliminates the need for enforcement action.
- Decreased incarceration costs. Because Judges now have a sentencing alternative to jail, taxpayers save the estimated \$40.00 per day cost of housing an inmate.
- Decreased need for custodial parents to depend on TANF and other government services.

Employer and Community Benefits:

- Increased employment benefits the local economy.
- Reduction in the rate of repeat pregnancies by young participants.
- Local employers are finding new sources of skilled labor, which is often in short supply.

Judicial Support:

- Judges now have an alternative to jail for parents who are unable to pay their child support.

Barriers facing many participants include:

- Lack of high school diploma
- Criminal record
- No transportation
- No driver's license
- Alcohol and substance abuse problems
- Mental health issues

Looking to the future and overcoming the barriers:

OCSS realizes that addressing these barriers is critical to expanding the success of the program to more low-income fathers. The office is working to establish new partnerships with the Division of Public Health; the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Addictive Diseases; Family Connections; and community-based groups to address the many barriers facing fathers and families. Communities across the state already have services in place that can help fathers and families right where they live. Many people believe that the family is the strength of the community, and Georgia's communities deserve strong fathers to continue to establish Georgia as a leader and role model for the nation.

For information about the Georgia Fatherhood Program, contact Brigid Burns at the Valdosta, Georgia, Child Support Services Office, (229) 333-7867.