

Colorado Model Office Project

EVALUATION OF THE GENERATION OF AUTOMATED STATUS LETTERS

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INTRODUCTION

The location of noncustodial parents remains one of the chief obstacles to the collection of child support. Custodial parents often hear relevant information that does not get conveyed to the child support enforcement agency. Similarly, many noncustodial parents phone and write to the child support agency to ask about the status of their child support case.

It was decided that the child support program needed a more routine way of communicating with custodial parents and that the case specific approach currently in use was not adequate to provide the regular exchanges of information required by custodial parents and child support enforcement agencies.

In order to facilitate more regular contact with custodial parents, the child support administrator in Mesa County designed an automated method of generating letters to custodial parents. "Status" letters are intended to apprise custodial parents that the agency needs more information about the noncustodial parent before it can establish or enforce a child support order. It is hoped that status letters will stimulate custodial parents to phone the agency with additional information about noncustodial parents. Alternatively, it is hoped that status letters will produce case closings among custodial parents who have retained private attorneys for child support collections or who no longer wish the child support agency to assist with their cases. Finally, it is hoped that the status letters will result in other actions that lead to case closings and other "clean-up" measures.

METHOD

The first step in the process of generating status letters on the Automated Child Support Enforcement System (ACSES) involved writing "business rules." These rules clarify the steps to be accomplished and the intended outcome of the proposed modification to ACSES. A copy of the business rules for the automated generation of status letters appears as Appendix A to this report.

The next step involved the development of letters to custodial parents. For intrastate child support cases, the letter was sent to the custodial parent residing in Colorado. For interstate child support cases, the letter was sent to the child support agency in the state in which the custodial parent was a resident. Sample letters to custodial parents in intra- and interstate child support cases appear as Appendix B to this report.

RESULTS

Status letters were sent to 616 custodial parents in Mesa County child support cases needing location information. There was no response to the letters in about 70 percent of letters sent to custodial parents in both intrastate and interstate cases. Among the 30 percent with responses (180 responses), more than half resulted in new information and/or information leading to a case closing. In 68 cases, or 11 percent of the 616 mailed a status letter, the mailing led to new location information. In 47 cases, or 8 percent of the 616 mailed a status letter, the mailing led to a case closure. Thus, as a result of the mailing, new information and/or case closings were produced in 19 percent of the targeted cases (see Table 1).

	Interstate	Intrastate	Total
Total number of letters sent	124	492	616
No Response	73% (90)	70% (346)	70% (436)
Responded with new location information	13% (16)	11% (52)	11% (68)
Responded and case closed	2.4% (3)	9% (44)	7.6% (47)
Responded but no new information	12% (15)	1.6% (8)	3.7% (23)
Other	0	8.5% (42)	6.8% (42)

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of this intervention, ACSES has been programmed to generate automated status letters on a quarterly basis in all Colorado counties. County child support administrators view this as a cost-effective way of communicating with custodial parents on a regular basis and creating a flow information between custodial parents and child support agencies. They anticipate that regular mailings will reduce the need for custodial parents to phone the agency to check on their child support cases. They also hope that regular mailings will generate new location leads on a timely basis and/or streamline the child support caseload by inducing case closings.