



National Child Support Market Research Survey Launched

by Nicole Darracq, California Child Support Services

In September 2021, the Digital Media Marketing Grant cycles funded by the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) drew to a close, with mixed results across the grantees. While everyone testing digital advertising found that there are successful channels to reach potential non-IV-D case participants, the majority of the contacts did not result in increased case openings—meaning that target audiences saw or heard the ads and many clicked, but very few took the next step and opened a case. The messaging the grantees hoped was compelling was not sufficient to inspire action.

So, how to inspire action? As child support caseloads decline across the nation, what are single parents doing? The average length of a marriage in the United States is 8.2 years, and divorce rates are declining but only because fewer couples marry in the first place.¹ In 2020, 25% of all children in the United States were living in single-parent families, the world's highest rate and three times the worldwide level of 7%.² It is logical to surmise that at least some of these single parents could benefit from child support services, yet they do not open cases.

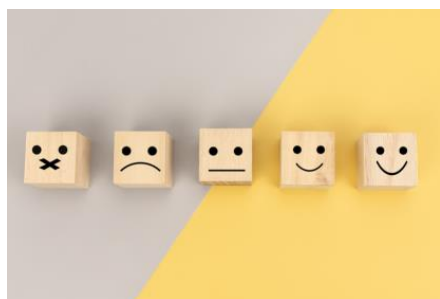
Why aren't more single parents opening child support cases? The NCSEA Public Relations Committee would like to answer that question. Who are these parents? Where are they? Are co-parents working out child support issues for themselves? Is that successful? If not, what do they do then—go without? Why avoid child support services when they are virtually free? Market research performed in 2017 by the California Department of Child Support Services (CA DCSS) and Ogilvy Public Relations discovered that chief among the reasons why parents don't open cases are: lack of knowledge of the services offered; the complexity of the process; and negative perceptions of the program based on the legacy of heavy enforcement. However, those insights were garnered using current case

participants. To reach non-IV-D customers, researchers needed more information. But how would they ask non-IV-D customers what they do and what they want if they aren't walking through the door?

Over the summer, NCSEA Public Relations Committee members Amy Lindholm of Michigan, Bruce Erickson of Minnesota, and Nicole Darracq of California led the effort to develop the National Child Support Market Research Survey, a simple, short, anonymous survey, informed by human-centered design, to learn the following:

- What do you know about child support?
- Where did you learn it?
- Do you have a child support arrangement? With a court? Between the co-parents? How do you pay? (Venmo, check, cash, in-kind supplies, etc.)
- Are you aware of the following services (A,B,C,D, etc.)?
- Do you think you would use these? If not, why not? If yes, which ones?
- What services not currently offered would you find helpful?

Wordsmithing went back and forth for several months, with every committee member weighing in to consider the questions being asked, their tone and sensitivity, and other possible impacts. It's important to note that



the survey is designed for non-case-participants, and the anonymous nature of responses is deliberate to encourage honesty. With the questions decided, the Program Innovation Team at CA DCSS built the survey in both English and Spanish for distribution in a mobile-responsive online software program accessed from a simple hyperlink that can be

shared nationally. Data collected can be exported by state, analyzed by various criteria, and mined for geographic trends, and will also be evaluated in the aggregate to identify themes to inform better, more effective messaging. These insights can also serve to identify and support future program changes that will make child support services more attractive. Along with these primary questions are some intended to identify respondents with experience in the system, and some to elicit demographic information.

A core team of states—California, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Texas, Utah, and Virginia—volunteered to conduct the survey as a unit, standardizing dissemination and promotion to establish an “apples to apples” data set. A professional research team funded through the generosity of Michigan IV-D Director Erin Frisch and her team will analyze the findings. This information will be combined with all the data from the online survey and any paper survey compilations, and analyzed again for trends and standout data points. Results will be shared and with any luck will provide much-improved direction for messaging that will resonate with parents, educate them on the benefits of child support services, and stimulate new case openings. Insights into what our potential customers actually want and need can also inform policy changes at the state and national levels.

Information about the survey was shared with all state directors in late July. Efforts to disseminate the survey and collect information begin on November 1, 2022, and will run through April 30, 2023, to catch the months of the year in which divorce filings are highest.

States not in the core team are encouraged to participate as well. There are many ways to get a survey like this into the hands of the general public; however, distributing it to existing case participants, although easiest, is not the best route. Case participants are not “the general public,” and this survey seeks to learn about those who are not using child support services. Those who are using our services possess first-hand program knowledge and will provide responses regarding program awareness that will skew the data (although even with this audience, the results could be eye-opening).

A good place to start is customers of health and human services agencies that serve economically disadvantaged customers without referral to child support, such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Affordable Care Act insurance exchanges, early child development programs, and many non-governmental anti-poverty organizations who can share the link with their customer base. Parentage or paternity establishment partners can help too by distributing the link to their customers. Services like PeachJar can provide the link to teachers and students, email and address lists can be purchased through market research companies for mass mailings of e-flyers and postcards, a vendor can assist, and local universities or community college systems may be

able to partner with a IV-D program. Utility companies may be willing to insert a flyer with a QR code into their monthly billing statements. Banks, local businesses, and grocery stores may allow posters to be displayed. When possible, the “official sender” should be a trusted source or NCSEA rather than the child support agency itself to encourage better response rates and support more candid answers. The target audience is single parents, ages 18-45, with children under 18. States should include income level criteria appropriate for their area to target the populations possibly in need of financial assistance.

A toolkit with suggestions on how to disseminate the survey, as well as promotional materials in both English and Spanish for social media and digital advertising—including postcards; social media posts formatted for Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram; flyers; and digital advertising artwork and copy—is available from Public Relations committee members. NCSEA encourages all states and stakeholders to participate in collecting this crucial information.



In addition to those mentioned above, kudos for this potentially

groundbreaking effort are due to all Public Relations committee members: NCSEA Executive Director Ann Marie Ruskin; Kimberly Curtis, Tanya Johnson, James Murray, and Crystal Peeler with the Administration for Children and Families; Trisha Thomas, Statewide Director of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services' Office of Community-Based Care Transition; Annette Quintero, Director of Communication and Program Innovation with the Texas Office of the Attorney General; James Fleming, North Dakota IV-D Director; Kristie Arneson, Wyoming IV-D Director; Kimberly Butzner, Program Communications and Education Manager at the Oregon Department of Justice; Christine Towles, Bureau Chief of Illinois Child Support Services, Administrative Operations; Lori Bengston of Young Williams; Alisha Griffin of Alisha Griffin Wks; and Wally McClure with Ravenwings Consulting.

For more information about the National Child Support Market Research survey, how to use and promote it, and how findings will be shared, please contact [Nicole Darracq](#) or [Amy Lindholm](#).

*Raised in Sacramento, California, **Nicole Darracq** graduated Phi Beta Kappa and Summa Cum Laude from the University of California at Davis. She began her career at Beringer Vineyards in California's Napa Valley, directing marketing and sales efforts for several smaller wineries. She joined state service at the Delta Protection Commission, assisting with creating the Delta Regional Foundation, whose work resulted in Congress designating the Delta as California's first National Heritage Area. She moved to California Child Support Services to lead the Department's rebranding project and was appointed Assistant Director in the Office of Communications and Public Affairs in 2019. Her accomplishments include expanding digital outreach, implementing behavioral science, extending social media services to local child support agencies statewide, and introducing website and social media metrics to inform strategic planning.*

¹ [Number, Timing, and Duration of Marriages and Divorces: 2016 \(census.gov\)](https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2016/marriage-divorce/2016-marriage-divorce.html)

² [U.S. has world's highest rate of children living in single-parent households | Pew Research Center](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/23/u-s-has-worlds-highest-rate-of-children-living-in-single-parent-households/)



REGISTRATION NOW OPEN!

This year's theme of **Engagement - Delivering Quality Services with a Passion for Helping Families** - focuses on doing what we in the child support program do well with passion, while being mindful of the impact and ramifications of our decision-making. We will explore the important balance of not losing focus on child support's historical foundation of the services provided, while embracing innovations and program evolution.

In-person and virtual participation options available.

Read about our dynamic and relevant sessions [here](#).