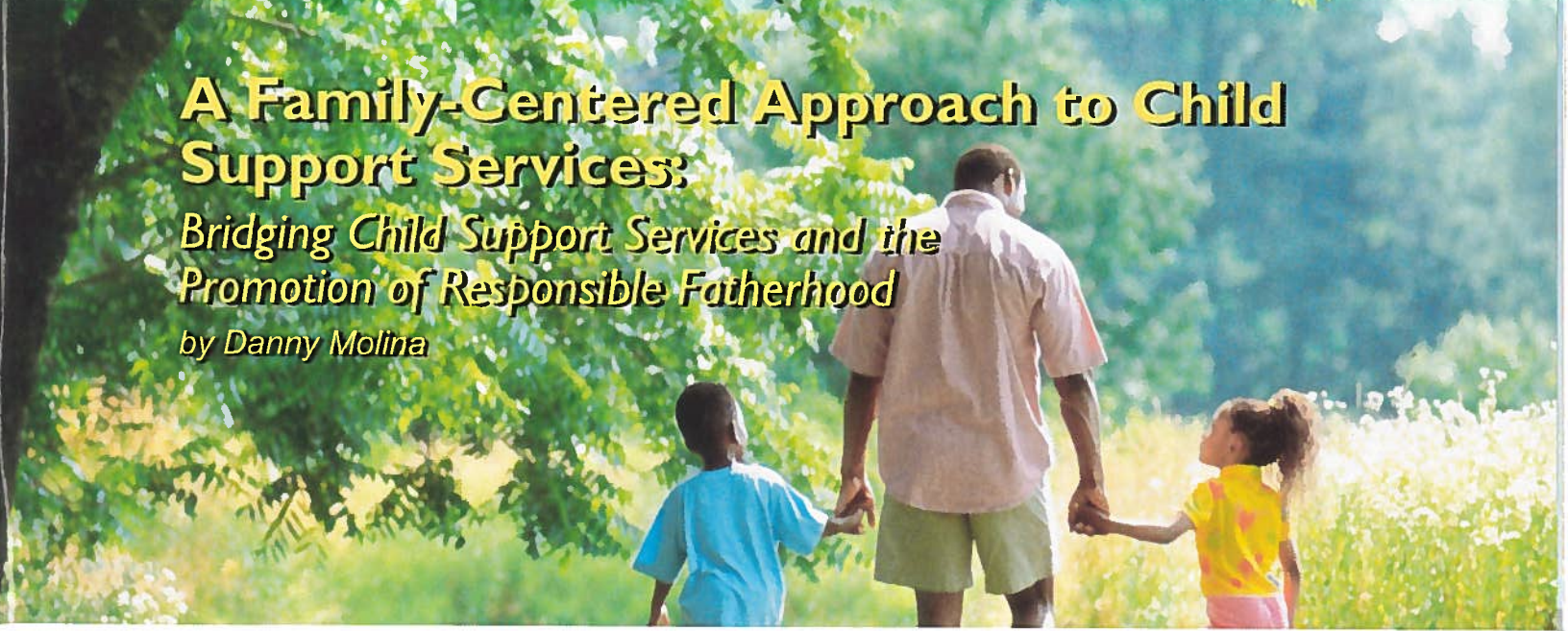


A Family-Centered Approach to Child Support Services?

Bridging Child Support Services and the Promotion of Responsible Fatherhood

by Danny Molina



In a time of economic challenges and limited resources, “collaboration” has become the buzz word among those in the social services field. Creative and innovative partnerships are forming to work together in a focused and efficient way to promote the health and well-being of children and the economic stability and self-sufficiency of families. One noteworthy partnership is that of the California Department of Child Support Services (CDCSS) and community-based organizations working directly with families.

In the past, child support agents were known as “enforcers” who worked to collect child support from non-custodial fathers by any and all means. Courts threatened fathers with wage garnishments, suspended licenses, and jail time. This approach ignored the root cause of why some fathers did not contribute financially to their children and families and that many of those fathers lacked the financial resources to pay the mandated child support.

A Family-Centered Approach

In efforts to address this issue and promote family economic stability, many local child support service agencies are employing a more holistic, family-centered approach. In addition to providing their core services of locating parents, establishing paternity, ascertaining financial and medical support orders, and collecting support, CDCSS also has focused efforts on providing a multitude of responsive services to aid fathers in paying their child support. Case management can be offered for both custodial and non-custodial parents and can include:

- Employment training services
- Specialized services for formerly incarcerated parents
- Educational services (high school diploma or GED)
- Immediate driver’s license release
- Reductions and modifications of past due child support balances
- Linkages to supportive services in the community

The connection between child support services and the promotion of responsible fatherhood efforts makes sense since Child Support Services is one of the few departments that systematically reaches fathers. Several local child support agencies are partnering with community-based organizations to assist fathers in accessing and utilizing beneficial services in their communities.

In Ventura County, the Department of Child Support Services (DCSS) is partnering with a local community-based organization, *Interface Children & Family Services’ DADS* (Dads and their Allies Dedicated to Success) Project. The DADS project assists fathers referred from DCSS in identifying their strengths and accessing resources they need to

be stable, financially responsible, and successful fathers. Through this partnership, participating fathers receive a comprehensive assessment that examines 20 indicators such as health, economic stability, parenting, child development, and safety. The Project offers empowerment planning to help fathers define their goals, as well as ongoing economic coaching, crisis referrals and resources for stabilization.

In a recent Child Support Report published by the Office of Child Support Enforcement, OCSE Commissioner Vicki Turetsky said, “We have a long way to go, but our collaborative work at every level of government and with community organizations strengthens our message that **child support services are here to help parents, children, and families.**” Partnerships such as that of the CDCSS and community-based organizations are examples of how we can effectively and successfully provide support services. To learn more about the innovative ways the California Department of Child Support Services is working with non-custodial fathers and their families, visit www.childsup.ca.gov/.

