



# **Milwaukee County Child Support Enforcement**

## **Connect vs. Contempt**

**Lisa Marks**

[Lmarks@milwcnty.com](mailto:Lmarks@milwcnty.com)

# Background

- State's largest caseload – 135,000 cases
- High poverty levels:
  - County-wide 18% live below poverty
  - City is the 7<sup>th</sup> poorest in the nation
  - Low graduation rates, high unemployment
  - High rate of teen pregnancy

# Continued....

- Collection rate/dollars flat
- Improved performance necessary
- Loss of local & federal funding
- High costs, annual cost of judicial action for civil contempt: \$2.6 million
- Non-appearance rate for civil actions at 64%

- Child Support 101- Small groups = learn what your customers need
- Fatherhood Breakfast = go outside normal business environment
- Special Offers = sell services
- Prison Project = early engagement for re-entry, reduce uncollectible debts
- Fatherhood Summit = outside environment, large scale service (2,600 served in 1 ½ days)

Annual cost \$135,799

# Improved Performance (Percentages)

## ■ 2003

Paternity- 92.03

Order Establishment - 73.16

Collection - 52.19

Arrears Collection - 44.47

## ■ 2008

Paternity - 90.58

Order Establishment -75.67

Collection -56.85

Arrears Collection -45.92

# Collection Dollars

- 2003 - \$118,004,809
- 2004 - \$118,067,914
- 2005 - \$119,426,991
- 2006 - \$118,374,219
- 2007 - \$117,610,469
- 2008 - \$124,390,183

# Effects

- Positive view of Child Support
  - remove punitive, emphasize assistance
- Active participation in their case
- Requests for additional services
- Increased payment levels / decreased costs

# Summit Fathers (Random 100)

## ■ Pre-summit

- Regular payers: 27%
- Sporadic payers: 13%
- Non-payers: 60%

## ■ 2009 post –summit

- Regular payers: 49%
- Sporadic payers: 7 %
- Paid case in full: 5%
- Non-payers: 39%

# SWOT

## ■ *Strengths*

- relationship with advocates
- political will
- staff

## ■ *Weaknesses*

- funding
- lack of jobs
- attitude

## ■ *Opportunities*

- community-based programs
- willing participants
- change
- active fathers

## ■ *Threats*

- bureaucratic process
- lack of ability to deal
- trust

# What the partners say:

- The trust built is priceless
- Men felt like the system cares about them
- Men have acted as messengers about the service provided
- Men become better payers because they are more willing to deal with the system
- It is a lot like basketball

# What the Dads say:

- “I feel like I finally got some help”
  - “I got what I need for taking care of my business”
  - “ I learned that I don’t owe much for rears”
  - “My plan to stay current wit my child support payments”
  - “I know where to go when I have a problem”
  - “I have a lot of clarity now toward child support. I will tell other fathers to take the time out, and come down and see how to settle their support. You guys are great & very clear.... God Bless You”
- \* Comments obtained from Planning Council review of Summit Activities and Child Support 101



## ■ Why this works?

- Fathers are involved with their children
- Relationship with advocates & the community
- Trust built over time
- Open and approachable staff

## ■ Can this be duplicated?

## ■ Costs?

## ■ Biggest Challenge?

# Lessons Learned

- ✓ Business practices can work
- ✓ Think outside the box
- ✓ Why this works - “More bees with honey”
- ✓ Listen to your consumer
- ✓ Punitive measures in place
- ✓ Change belief systems
- ✓ Child Support is everywhere

# Other contacts:

- Mr. Albert Holmes –  
Milwaukee Fatherhood Collaborative  
(Service Providers)  
[xtrackchamp@hotmail.com](mailto:xtrackchamp@hotmail.com)
- Mr. Terrence Ray  
Milwaukee Fatherhood Initiative  
[Terrence.Ray@milwaukee.gov](mailto:Terrence.Ray@milwaukee.gov)