



LCDJFS E-Newsletter

Fall 2006

A newsletter from the Lorain County Department of Job & Family Services

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Joining Forces

Sue Goins
Social Service Administrator

Joining Forces, a school/Job and Family Services collaborative, was initiated in Lorain County in 1988. The "seeds" of Joining Forces were planted on a national level when two major systems,



the Departments of Education and Human Services, started meeting together and realized that they had similar goals.

Both departments were interested in keeping children in school and providing quality education so that these children would grow up, become employed, and develop into productive members of society.

The leaders of these two systems then began urging the states to develop programs to combine the forces of the systems to meet their mutual goals. Eventually, this directive trickled down to the county departments. It was an idea that was very attractive to our own director, Ms. Golski. But the questions were, "Are Lorain County schools interested?" and if so, "What services are needed?"

School systems were polled and not only were they interested, they also had clear ideas as to what was needed. Two goals were identified: to improve children's school performance (either academically or behaviorally), and to help families support their children in school and build on family strengths. The school staff felt that the children targeted should be in danger of failing, unusually aggressive or withdrawn, somewhat neglected, or in crisis. Unanimously, they agreed that Joining Forces should be a preventative program with elementary-aged children as a first priority. The cost of the program was to be shared between the Department of Job and Family Services and the schools.



Lorain County Department of Job and Family Services piloted Joining Forces in their first school in the fall of 1989. Since then, the program has continued to expand, and we have served a variety of districts and grade levels. Currently, there are 11 social services workers in the Lorain City Schools and the Lorain County Joint Vocational School. In Lorain City, there is a close collaboration with Project Grad. The Joining Forces workers use a three-pronged strategy in working with children and families:

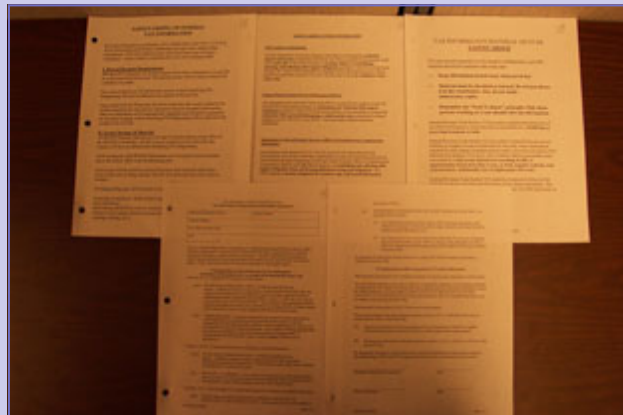
- Case Management—assess family needs, link and coordinate available services, monitor services and provide follow up.
- Parent Education—teaching and advocating good parenting skills.
- Liaison to School System.

Joining Forces has been recognized on both a state and national level for the innovative and quality services which we provide. Lorain County Department of Job and Family Services is very proud of this unit and the work they perform.

Safeguarding FTI

Dolores Ack
Child Support Administrator

In recent years an increasing amount of information has been shared with both the CRISE and SETS computer systems through the interface of data systems of various federal and state government agencies. Such agencies include the Social Security Administration, Ohio Bureau of Employment Services, National Parent Locator Service, New Hire system, the Internal Revenue Service(IRS) and the Ohio Department of Taxation (ODT). All of this information must be protected from unlawful disclosure, particularly Federal Tax Information (FTI) from the IRS and Ohio Department of Taxation (ODT) information. FTI is any information received through these interfaces.



As a condition for receiving FTI, the Office of Child Support (OCS) must show, to the satisfaction of the IRS, the ability of the state and counties to protect the confidentiality of that information. OCS has thus embarked on a series of safeguarding measures to ensure compliance with federal requirements and has applied the same standards to ODT information. The state also requires annual training of CDJFS staff and contract staff. The safeguards include the following:

Secure record keeping

- Printing of FTI is permitted, but it is discouraged.
- If FTI is printed, it must be secured in a labeled section of a labeled folder and in a locked, labeled cabinet when not in use or no longer needed
- Unless IM maintains the same safeguarding measures, no SETS screen containing FTI can be printed or placed in the IM file.
- Screen prints and other FTI must be placed in the slotted locked shredding boxes in each area. They cannot be thrown in the insecure waste boxes in cubicles.

Secure Storage of FTI and ODT

- When not in use, case files containing FTI must be retained in labeled locked file cabinets.
- IRS/ODT Coordinator's records are to be retained in locked file cabinets in a room with a locked door.
- Case files containing FTI must be retained in a locked file room with limited access and a locked perimeter.

Restricted access to FTI & ODT

- SETS screen prints containing FTI may only be given to the obligor, obligee, caretaker or caretaker agency. Screen prints should not be placed in the case record, since there is an electronic record to refer to.
- A signed release must be obtained to release FTI information to third parties such as attorneys, the Housing Authority, Lending Institutions, etc.
- **Need to Know Principle** -Only individuals who have a business reason to access a case and have signed a JFS 07014 security agreement may have access to SETS and FTI information.
- A password protected screensaver must be used when working on the computer to safeguard information during a short absence; workers must log off at lunch and the end of the day.
- Contractors may only use FTI for location, establishment and enforcement of orders.
- FTI should not be transmitted via email, as it is not secure.
- If FTI must be faxed, a "trusted" employee must be at the transmitting and receiving end.

Safeguards for Other Information

- OBES benefit information, FPLS (Federal Parent Locator Service), and ODT information can be used only to the extent necessary in **establishing and collecting child support obligations. Use the disclosure guidelines for IRS.**

Reporting Requirements

- Upon discovery of possible improper inspection or disclosure of FTI by any person, the individual making the observation or receiving information should contact Andrew Perkins, OCS Safeguard Coordinator 614-466-3966
- Unauthorized Disclosure or Inspection include both Criminal and Civil Penalties
 - Criminal Penalties Include 5 years in Prison and \$5,000 in fines including the cost of prosecution on each count
 - Civil Penalties could result in taxpayer bringing suit for civil and/or punitive damages for each count
- OCS shall conduct Internal Inspections of all CSEA's and contractors at least every 3 years.

Disposal of FTI

- Federal Tax Information cannot just be thrown away or hand shredded.
- Federal Tax Information must be destroyed by shredding to 5/16 of an inch or less.
- **Destruction must be logged and witnessed by a CSEA employee.**

Confidentiality / Public Record Laws

Marian Slovak and Natalio Rodriquez
Program Administrators

Job and Family Service staff, and any other staff with access to CRISE, are to exercise care in safeguarding information regarding our clientele.

Federal and state laws govern the release of any information about our public assistance applicants and recipients. In addition, all records and information must be maintained in a secure manner. Safeguarding procedures for the income eligibility verification system (IEVS) and the federal tax refund offset program (FTROP or TOP) are necessary to ensure the confidential relationship between the taxpayer and IRS. Unauthorized disclosure of federal tax information is a crime that may be punishable by a \$5000 fine, five years imprisonment, or both.

All staff and supervisors are to adhere to the following procedures to be in compliance with federal and state laws.

1. Case records in worker offices are to be kept in locked file cabinets when not in use. At no time is it acceptable to leave records or confidential information open and in view when out of the office.
2. **All information received is confidential.** ORC 5101.27 addresses confidentiality criteria for state programs including OWF, DA, and PRC. Federal rule 42 CFR S431.302 addresses Medicaid confidential and restricts release of information to purposes directly connected with the administration of the Medicaid program. Food Stamp rule 5101:4-1-13 addresses disclosure of Food Stamp information.

Records are only to be accessed on a "need to know" basis. Staff are only permitted to access file information for those cases they have been assigned. Likewise, there are several confidential sites, such as TALX, which are only to be used in determining eligibility for

assistance programs. It is unethical to access any information that does not pertain to one's own work responsibilities or to utilize systems for one's own personal gain. Breaching confidentiality is a serious matter which will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

3. Staff may release information to the following individuals:
 - the recipient
 - the authorized representative
 - the parent or guardian of the recipient
 - the attorney of the recipient if the attorney has written authorization from the recipient
 - case numbers or billing numbers may be released to medical providers including pharmacies
 - Social Security Administration for routine use in determining benefits for Social Security awards or class clarifications
 - Public Children Service Agencies (Children Services) to report known or suspected instances of child abuse or neglect, and to share JOBS case plans.
 - information may also be released to other state or federally assisted programs for purposes directly connected with the administration of public assistance **with the client's signed written consent** (ex. - Metro Housing, Sect. VIII, Community Action for HEAP, etc.)

All other requests for information from outside parties are to be forwarded to the Investigative Supervisor or Program Administrators for resolution. As a protection for staff, under no circumstances are any line staff to respond to inquiries from parties other than those listed above.

The Investigative Supervisor and Program Administrators are responsible to determine if other information may be released in accordance with federal and state statutes. Information may be released to law enforcement officials according to the following rules:

1. **5101.28 - information regarding OWF, DA, MA G, and PRC** applicants / recipients may be released to law enforcement agencies acting within the scope of the law enforcement agencies' official duties.
2. **Food Stamp rule 5101:4-1-13 (A)(4)(b)** -information may be released to local, state or federal law enforcement officials upon their written request for the purpose of **investigating an alleged violation of the Food Stamp Act or regulations**. In addition the address, social security number, and if available a photograph of the AG member may be shared if the member **is fleeing to avoid prosecution** or custody for a crime, or attempt to commit a crime that is a felony (or in New Jersey a high misdemeanor), or is **violating a condition of probation or parole** imposed by a federal or state law.
3. Medicaid federal rule 42 CFR S431.302 - allows access to Medicaid information only to those directly connected with the administration of the program which includes conducting or assisting an **investigation, prosecution, or civil or criminal proceeding related to the administration of Medicaid**.

All requests for information from law enforcement officials will be handled by the investigation supervisor or program administrator.

Program Administrators are responsible to respond to inquiries from other parties as allowed by governing rules. All requests for information from elected officials, the County Ombudsman, or the media are to be referred to program administrators to resolve.

1. **State and Federal Elected Officials** - a signed release from the client is always needed before any information, other than general regulations, can be released.

2. **Local Elected Officials** - per the legal opinion from ODJFS Office of Legal Services - the Board of County Commissioners is not involved in the day-to-day operation of the agency which is vested in the CDJFS director. The agency may only share access to records for the purpose of administration of the programs. Since the Commissioners delegate authority for running the CDJFS to the director, they may only access information if release is authorized under sections 5101.26, 5101.27 or 5101.30 of the Revised Code. **5101.27 (D) allows release of information if the recipient gives voluntary, written consent.** Therefore, information will be released upon receipt of a request with a signed, written release from the client.
3. **County Ombudsman** - information may be released in accordance with established Release of Information protocols.
 - **OWF, DA, MA G, and PRC** - release of information is governed by rule 5101:1-1-03 (B) (1) and (3). The County Ombudsman serves as a contractor bound by the state department's rules and disclosure of information laws. Information may be shared with the Ombudsman without a signed release. With a signed, written release the Ombudsman may share this information with the Board of Commissioners.
 - **Food Stamp** rule 5101:4-1-13 (A)(4)(c) - a signed release from the recipient is required prior to the release of any information. The statement is to include to whom the information is to be released, what information is to be released, and the period of time the release is intended to cover.
 - **Medicaid** federal rule 42 CFR s431.300 and 42 CFR s431.302 allows eligibility information to be shared only with those directly connected with the administration of the Medicaid program. **Providing service for recipients** is defined as one purpose directly connected with the administration of the program. Per an opinion received from the ODJFS Office of Legal Services on 9/6/02, resolving a Medicaid issue for a recipient is directly for the purpose of the administration of the program. Federal Rule 42 CFR s431.306 requires permission from the subject before release of information may occur - therefore a signed, written release from the client is needed.

Since the Ombudsman may not be aware what program a client may be receiving, it is recommended the Ombudsman always secures a written release to avoid delays in response. Additionally, with signed release the information may be shared with the Board of County Commissioners.
4. **Media** - Specific cases may never be discussed, only general rules and regulations.

License Suspension Amnesty A Success!

Dolores Ack
CSEA Administrator

Lorain County CSEA collected \$114,653.17, more than double the amount collected last year (\$50,108.65), through the license suspension amnesty program. 435 children received support from 302 parents whose driver's licenses had been blocked or suspended due to non-payment of their child support obligations.

This is the second year the agency has provided an amnesty program as part of Child Support Awareness Month activities. A follow-up study of last year's group of delinquent parents revealed that the group paid an average of 18.82% of their obligation in the 6 months before amnesty and 69.52%



in the 6 months following, a significant change in behavior. Many counties have replicated the program this year in hopes of increasing collections for children. There were some significant payments made to custodial parents. One obligor living in Hawaii paid \$18,985, all his arrears, as well as the current month's support. Another paid \$10,000.00 to a grateful custodial parent. Many also provided names of employers so that regular payments could be withheld from future pay checks. One mother who had been driving her obligor son to work every day for a year was happy to bring him in to make a payment so he could drive legally again and continue payments through wage withholding. Another mother made a payment for her son who was to be released from prison and would then be able to drive to job interviews. Some obligors were referred for job search at the Lorain County Employment NetWork. Money was sent in by obligors residing in other states since many states now check a database for suspended licenses prior to issuing their own licenses.

During the amnesty period, individuals who had licenses suspended by the CSEA made payment of one month's obligation plus one dollar to release the suspension. This reduction of the usual amount of 3 months' payment provided the obligor "a break". A warning letter was sent to the obligor giving the opportunity to comply with the CSEA prior to suspension. Some obligors stated they were happy to have the opportunity to get their licenses back so they could legally drive during their job search; and they could get a fresh start. While the one month's payment released the suspension, the full arrears amount is still owed, and the obligor must still make regular monthly payments or suffer other consequences of non-payment, including referral to the County Prosecutor for contempt of a court order or for felony non-support.

Background Information

Over 30,000 children in Lorain County depend on the responsible behavior of mothers or fathers who are ordered to pay child support and provide medical coverage. Parents who fail to pay their child support obligations and are in default are subject to various enforcement techniques, including suspension of automobile license, professional and recreational licenses.

Lorain County CSEA administers more than 30,000 active support cases (as of 8/31/06). Of the 30,278 support cases, 87.22% are non-public assistance cases and 12.78% are public assistance cases. The agency routinely collects over \$ 50 million annually utilizing a number of enforcement methods, including income withholding, interception of federal and state tax returns, suspension of professional and drivers licenses, liens on property, and seizure of bank and financial accounts.

The CSEA also offers many services, including establishment of paternity, establishment of and enforcement of medical and child support orders, review and modification of support orders and location of non residential parents. The agency routinely works with the Sheriff's Office, Prosecutor's Office, Domestic Relations and Juvenile Courts to enforce support orders.

The purpose of the child support program is to provide children with the opportunity for a better life. Working with both parents to establish and enforce support orders is essential in helping children receive the financial and medical support they deserve. The program also strives to benefit tax payers by defraying the cost of public assistance by helping families become and remain self sufficient. Next to public education, no other social service program affects more children than the child support enforcement program.

Contact LCJFS

42485 North Ridge Road
Elyria, OH 44035—1057
Phone: 440-323-5726
Fax: 440-323-3422
TTY/TDD: 440-284-4125
Child Support Office: 440-284-4401



Hours of Operation:
7:00—4:30 Mon, Wed, Thur, Fri
7:30—6:30 Tues

