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Hamilton County Receives Recognition for its Efforts to Collect Child Support

Cincinnati (Sept. 19, 2007) Hamilton County's Child Support Enforcement Agency will receive two state awards tomorrow for its innovative efforts to ensure children receive child support.

The Ohio Child Support Director's Association will present two Best Practices awards to the county at its annual convention Thursday for two programs it deems innovative, efficient and effective. The county is being recognized for its REAL Dads program, which helps young dads find employment and stay connected to their children, and it's Early Intervention Program for Incarcerated Obligor, which works with inmates before they are released to help them meet their child support obligations.

"What is great about these programs is that they are about more than making the parent pay up," said Jeff Startzman, assistant director of the Child Support Enforcement Agency, a division of the Department of Job and Family Services. "We're also helping people become better fathers and more productive members of society."

The awards are chosen from Best Practices submissions throughout the state. This is the third year in a row Hamilton County has been recognized for its various innovative efforts.

The REAL Dads program, operated in conjunction with Lighthouse Youth Services and Messer Construction Co., assigns a Life Coach to mentor and work with each father on ways to stay connected to their children and become a better father, including providing support – both financial and emotional. The CSEA works directly with the fathers and Life Coaches to modify or take other actions on the child support orders to place the father in the best position to succeed. The program also lines up the fathers with a job so they can meet their child support obligations, as well as attain a sense of self-worth through hard work.

The Early Intervention Program for Incarcerated Obligor works with mothers and father who are about to be released from prison and have child support obligations in Hamilton County. The more the department communicates and educates the obligors while they are incarcerated, the more comfortable they will feel working with the CSEA when they are released. This includes sending them information while still incarcerated and even going to prisons to communicate directly.

"Many obligors have expressed their gratitude for the information," Startzman said. "Some inmates have written letters requesting additional information, which again allows for another opportunity to relay the message of the importance to contact our office upon their release."

The Child Support Enforcement Agency handles about 95,000 cases right now. Last year, it collected \$155 million for families that might not otherwise have had the financial support necessary to pay for such items as food, medical care, child care, school clothes and school supplies. Many of the children who do not receive child support turn to public assistance, with taxpayers providing financial support.

The agency uses a variety of tools to help collect child support, including Most Wanted Posters, suspending driver's licenses, suspending professional licenses, garnishing wages, freezing and seizing funds from bank accounts and intercepting tax refunds.

About Hamilton County's Department of Job and Family Services

The Department of Job and Family Services administers federal, state and local programs for those in need. The Department helps with local child protection, adult protection, child care, tuberculosis control, child support enforcement, workforce development, cash assistance, food stamp disbursement and Medicaid coverage. Servicing Hamilton County since 1947, the Department helps hundreds of thousands of residents each year. The Department of Job and Family Services is accredited by the Council on Accreditation, an international, independent, not-for-profit child and family service accrediting organization.