

FROM WHERE YOU ARE
to where you want to be...

**San Bernardino
County Department of
Child Support Services
is committed to
helping our local
families**



Child Support Services

Let us help you get there.

Removing Barriers

Child Support Services enters a new era

BY RAUL CLEMENT

When you hear the term “Child Support Services,” maybe you picture dads being taken to court or thrown in jail for not paying child support. You probably imagine an organization that seeks to punish, rather than one that seeks to help.

Since becoming the Director of the San Bernardino County Department of Child Support Services (DCSS) nearly six years ago, Marie Girulat has worked hard to dispel this notion.

“Many, many years ago we were associated with the District Attorney’s office,” Girulat says. “But that’s not who we are today.”

Instead, she says, the goal of DCSS is to “remove barriers for both parents that may be preventing the payment of child support.”

And how does DCSS help remove those barriers? It starts with informing the community about who they are and what they do. In San Bernardino County, DCSS has looked closely at demographics to see where its services are most needed. Where is there a concentration of single parents? Which communities are underserved? The child support staff have developed relationships with schools, libraries and other public institutions where they can host community outreach events to let parents know about the benefits of DCSS.

Once parents do seek out their services, caseworkers work closely with both the parent paying and the

parent receiving child support to make sure an equitable solution is reached.

“Our ultimate goal is not to send anything to court. If the parents can agree on the child support amount, then they’re more likely to pay and more likely to be involved in their child’s life,” Girulat says.

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Marie Girulat, Director
San Bernardino County DCSS



Sometimes, even if an arrangement seems workable at first, a parent might later struggle to make payments. In that situation, Girulat encourages the parent reach out to DCSS and discuss any changes in circumstances or financial difficulties. A new payment agreement can be made, or DCSS can offer help through any of their numerous partner organizations.

Some of these organizations, like Community Employment Pathways and the San Bernardino County Workforce Development, offer job placement and skills training. Others, like San Bernardino Transition Assistance Department, can help with access to benefits like CalFresh and Medi-Cal. Still others offer education assistance or mental health counseling.

“Usually there’s a specific reason parents aren’t paying child support,” Girulat concludes. “It’s not because they don’t want to. It’s because there’s something that’s preventing them from doing it. So how can we help them get there?”

PHOTO COURTESY OF MARIE GIRULAT



DID YOU KNOW...

If both parents agree to a new payment amount, a modified agreement can be signed and submitted without the need to appear in court.

Reasons a modification might be approved include:

- Laid off or fired from a job
- New or additional job
- Income of either parent increases or decreases
- Custody or visitation changes
- Family size changes
- New disability
- Deployed to active military service

“We understand that things change,” Marie Girulat, Director of San Bernardino County DCSS, says. “Jobs change. Lives change. We want to work with the parent paying support. The goal is not to go to court.”

A Father's Story

A local dad finally formed a relationship with his little girl—and it changed both their lives

BY MATT JOCKS

There was a responsible father locked somewhere inside Jesse Jimenez. It just took a little help to find the key.

After several years, Jesse found his way into the life of his daughter, Emily. The assistance of the San Bernardino County Department of Child Support Services and the open heart and mind of Emily's mother have changed the lives of Jesse and Emily.

"It has made me a whole person," Jesse says. Jesse is brutally honest about the person he used to be. An unplanned pregnancy at a time when Jesse was trying to manage alcohol and drug issues was more than he was ready to handle.

"I was not the most responsible person," he says. "I tried to brush it under the rug and ignore my responsibilities."

"(DCSS staff) were more human. They weren't law enforcement. They weren't the devils I had in my mind."

Jesse Jimenez
Father and DCSS client

The result, from the courts, was not forgiving. "They hit me with the max amount (of child support). And I don't blame them," he says. "Nobody likes to have their checks cut in half."

Getting sober in 2018 was the first step in changing Jesse's life. He then began to look into fixing things with his daughter, and what he found in dealing with Child Support Services surprised him.

"They were more human," he says. "They weren't law enforcement. They weren't the devils I had in my mind."

Working with the office, Jesse was able to have his monthly contribution reduced to a more manageable number. Later, Emily's mother initiated a move to further reduce it. But the financial

improvement wasn't the real reward for Jesse.

His relationship with Emily began with a picnic, arranged by Emily's mother. It was an emotional start to a new chapter in both their lives.

"It was a blessing that she took a liking to me right away," he says. "I thought maybe she would hold a grudge for me not being there. But we hit it off right away.

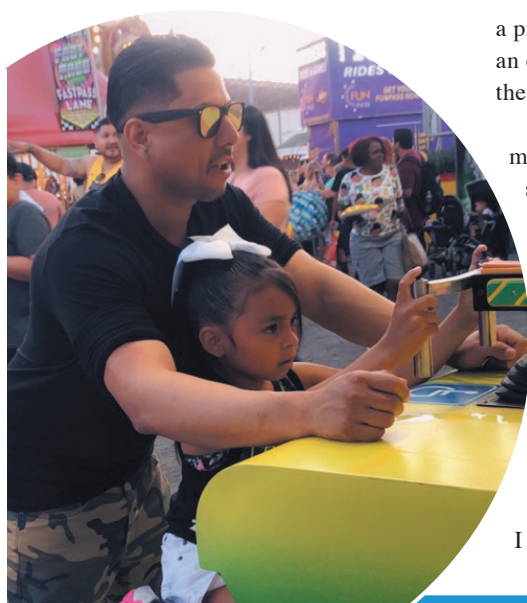
"And I became a dad."

Jesse says Emily is "a real laid-back kid. She likes to draw and write." And Jesse is thankful for a future that now includes watching Emily grow up.

"You know, it's kind of hard to wrap my head around," he says. "But I'm in dad mode now. She is looking up to me and I know I have that responsibility."



Jesse Jimenez and his daughter Emily
PHOTOS COURTESY OF JESSE JIMENEZ



DID YOU KNOW...

If you are in arrears, but talk to us early, we never have to take any kind of enforcement measures.

- Enforcement measures—including tax intercept, or driver's license and passport suspension—do exist and are used as last resorts to ensure parents pay child support. **BUT if you pay in full and on time, none of these measures will ever affect you.**
- And if you have fallen behind, contact DCSS immediately. A caseworker can help you catch up, reduce your debt or modify your child support. **Enforcement measures can be avoided completely OR your caseworker can help get them removed.**

A Mother's Dilemma

A local mom received a child support order she could not pay and just wanted custody of her children

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

In late June 2021, San Bernardino resident Mary Chapman* received a letter that traumatized her. Sent by San Bernardino County's Department of Child Support Services, the letter contained a warning: Mary might soon have to pay almost \$2,000 a month to support her three daughters, then in foster care. The proposed amount, subject to court approval, had been determined by DCSS, after weighing various factors, including Mary's income as a medical professional.

Soon after, the panicked Mary obtained the contact number for Barbara Woloshin, a DCSS child support specialist.

Days later—on July 13—Woloshin's phone rang. The caller was Mary, who said she'd learned of DCSS through a class she attended, likely one of the virtual informational meetings Woloshin did that summer due to COVID restrictions.

"She was very upset," Woloshin recalls of her initial contact with Mary. "She was distressed about the amount being asked of her. ... She told me she was attempting to get her children back."

Mary, who is in her early 40s, had lost custody of her daughters, ranging in age from 9 to 17, weeks before.

The father of the eldest daughter works for a school district. The younger daughters' father is believed to be a truck driver.

Individual child support cases were opened against all three parents by the custodial party, the foster care system.

In her July 13 phone call, Mary described herself as hopeless.

"She didn't know what to do,"

says Woloshin, who became Mary's "unofficial advocate."

Woloshin told Mary she could respond, in writing, by stating her opposition to the proposed child support and expressing her desire for reunification—a legal

step that would help her.

Without ever meeting in person, Mary and Woloshin exchanged numerous e-mails as Mary navigated her case without an attorney.

Recently, the San Bernardino Superior Court tentatively approved the reunification.

Having regained custody of her daughters, Mary awaits a March hearing at which the arrangement is expected to become final, without her owing, or having been subjected to, any court-ordered child support.

The support cases against both dads are ongoing.

Mary provides for her children now, not in child support payments, but living together as a happy family again.

** This is not the client's real name. She approved use of her story, but declined comment and certain details are being omitted to protect her and her family's privacy.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF BARBARA WOLOSHIN



"She was very upset. She was distressed about the amount being asked of her ... She didn't know what to do."

Barbara Woloshin
Child support specialist, San Bernardino County DCSS



DID YOU KNOW...

DCSS can do all the record-keeping and payment arrangements so you can focus on being a parent.

By using DCSS, there is no need to interact with your former partner and never any dispute of when and how much child support was paid.

- **Parents paying child support** can pay online, by mail, by phone or at a local child support office. DCSS keeps track of your payment history, which you can access online through Customer Connect.
- **Parents receiving child support** can register for Direct Deposit (receiving funds directly into your checking or savings account), an Electronic Pay Card (that can be used anywhere Mastercard is accepted) or have a bank check mailed to your home address.

A Mother Doesn't Give Up

With the continued help of DCSS, a college student is finally receiving child support his father owes

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

The joy of giving birth to a beautiful, bouncing baby didn't last long for Rosie. Soon after her son was born in San Bernardino, his father vanished from their lives.

"It's sad to say it, but he abandoned us," Rosie, who asked that her surname not be printed, says recently of S.R., her former boyfriend who fathered her son 21 years ago.

Without dad in the picture, Rosie—now in her 50s—struggled to support the infant. Besides paying for an apartment, she had to put food on the table—and, among other expenses, also had to hire a babysitter while she worked as a quality controller for a manufacturer of restaurant equipment.

One day Rosie mentioned her crisis to a co-worker, who suggested she contact San Bernardino County's Department of Child Support Services.

Rosie did so, visiting DCSS's Loma Linda office in 2001.

With staff's help, she opened a child support case against S.R., who previously had been a janitor and a talented trumpeter for a Latinx band.

"At first I didn't get any help because DCSS couldn't find him," Rosie says.

Eventually, DCSS located S.R., who agreed to provide child support. But he was unreliable.

"At times, he would make the payments. Other times he wouldn't," Rosie says. "Sometimes he would change jobs, and nothing would be collected."

Over the years, S.R. made only about 25% of the payments, Rosie says. By the time their son graduated from high school, S.R. was more than \$40,000 in arrears with his payments, according to Rosie. At that time, a court intervened, ordering S.R. to provide about \$400 monthly to his son—and S.R.'s payments have since been steady, she says.

The ongoing child support—which will continue until the arrears balance is paid—has helped stabilize the mother and

son's lives. It also helps pay for the young man's education at Cal State San Bernardino, where he is a sophomore.

"My son has forgiven his father. They have met but don't have a relationship," says Rosie, now a community health worker for a local nonprofit.

Rosie has filmed a video testimonial, in Spanish, in which she urges parents seeking child support to contact DCSS for its free help. "We (parents) are the voice of our children. We must fight for them so they have a healthier lifestyle," Rosie states in the powerful four-minute video.



Spanish



English Subtitles

**“We
(parents) are the
voice of our children.
We must fight for
them so they have a
healthier lifestyle.”**

Rosie, custodial parent
San Bernardino County
DCSS client



DID YOU KNOW...

You don't have to deal with your ex-partner—DCSS can.

Arguing over money can be the biggest obstacle to a peaceful and cooperative co-parenting relationship—whether that is directly between you and your ex or via attorneys and the court system. But DCSS staff can work out the financials without the two of you having to meet in person or go to court. Child support staff can help you:

- Open a child support case
- Establish parentage
- Locate a missing parent
- Mediate with both parents to reach an agreed-upon child support amount
- Collect the child support payments, send them to the receiving party and keep track of the accounting
- Enforce the child support order using a variety of collection tools
- Discuss a modification if a change in circumstances occurs with either party
- Case closure when all obligations have been paid in full

Child Support Made Easy

San Bernardino DCSS helps parents pay, receive and communicate about child support

BY KRYSTA SCRIPTER

There's a lot of misconceptions about child support, generally speaking, so we really want to educate our customers and provide them with accurate information. And also [provide] resources so that we can help our customers successfully participate in this situation," says Shannon Fowler, a Supervising Child Support Specialist with DCSS.

Dealing with child support is not an easy process, but that's why the county offers services to parents. DCSS can assist with enforcing court orders, managing payments, or even communicating on behalf of the parent seeking child support.

"Our services are needed when the family has reached a certain point where they're no longer communicating," Fowler says. DCSS can connect parents with the necessary resources they need to deal with issues like unemployment or discussing new support payments.

"Another benefit for our customers is that sometimes they do co-parent successfully until it comes to the financial support, right?" Fowler says. "We can be that person to call and discuss financial aspects of the parenting of their children because that can sometimes be a contention point."

DCSS uses as many digital processes as it can to simplify things for parents, including virtual meetings, text communications and online appointment scheduling. Case managers can also handle documents for court proceedings, a process that Fowler says makes it much simpler for

parents. By letting the agency handle the information-gathering on both sides, Fowler says, parents are less likely to come to court lacking the required materials they need.

"So there's a greater

likelihood that that order will be accurate and accurate orders means orders someone can actually make payments on," Fowler says.

It's not just court orders. With its connections to other agencies, DCSS can help unemployed parents find jobs, navigate financial hardships, and even renegotiate court orders to add childcare and other needed costs. In one instance, DCSS was able to help a previously incarcerated parent find employment and successfully pay child support on a consistent basis. In another case, DCSS assisted a parent in getting a substantial payment from Social Security thanks to their derivative benefits, a benefit they had no idea previously existed.

"If our customers engage with us, we will do everything we can to remove those barriers and really help out their kids, which is really everyone's goal," Fowler says.

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Shannon Fowler
Supervising Child Support Specialist, San Bernardino County DCSS



PHOTO COURTESY OF SHANNON FOWLER



DID YOU KNOW...

- San Bernardino County Department of Child Support Services offers a streamlined application process to make it easy to get your child support payments—you can open a case online at www.childsupport.ca.gov.
- You'll need the full name, address, phone number, and employment information of the other parent, as well as any other medical or financial documentation of any other government-related aid you may have received on behalf of your children.
- The county can usually locate the other parent, but the more information you have, the quicker the process will be. If you have a divorce order or other court order, bring those too.
- You can apply online, or you can download a copy of the paper application to mail in. For any questions, call the Department of Child Support Services at **866-901-3212**.

Q&A

Find out why DCSS staff are committed to helping families like yours

BY MATT JOCKS

Amir Rhynes has sat on the other side of the desk. Having once navigated the unknown waters of dealing with DCSS as a non-custodial parent, Rhynes now works as a child support specialist with San Bernardino County.

Q: What do you see as your mission?

A: I am looking to engage and educate. I was like a lot of fathers who tried to steer as clear from this as much as I could. Everything I thought about it, I got second-hand. Like a lot of things, people are afraid of the unknown. I want to take away that bogey-man aspect of it, let them know this process is not one-sided. It does consider both parents. Once a child support order is established, it's going to go on with or without you. It's a lot better to participate and we can help you navigate it.

“There are no robots working here. We have a lot of automated systems available but we are real people who have a desire to assist families.”

Amir Rhynes
Child Support Specialist
San Bernardino County DCSS



PHOTO COURTESY OF AMIR RHYNES

I have not met a dad who does not have a desire to provide for their child. With a lot of men, it comes down to pride. There's a certain feeling of defeat that comes with not being able to provide. We want to address those feelings. When I came looking for this job, I didn't know if I'd be kicking doors down and getting dads out of their home. It was a pleasant surprise for me to learn about all the resources we have in place to assist parents. (But we're fighting an uphill battle. It's not just a year or two of bad press, it's generational fears. And maybe at one time, child support services was more punitive. But that's not this child support. I don't know that child support. I was passionate about this before I even came here. I called myself the barber-shop therapist because I liked to have those conversations. I will tell



someone I work for child support services. Some people don't like to broadcast that. But I want to...open the line of communication.

Q: Let's talk about specific situations. What about parents who are in arrears?

A: The first thing is for them to reach out and contact a case manager. We need to find out how much you owe, how much interest is being charged and are there any programs available that can reduce the amount. The state has done a wonderful job of rolling out programs that can reduce state-owed arrears. I always want to stress consistency. 'We know you haven't been paying. What can we do to get some kind of regular payment going?'

Q: How about parents whose circumstances have changed?

A: Either parent can request their amount to be reviewed and adjusted. It may not just be cash flow. Maybe someone says, 'Me and my ex are on great terms now and the custody and visitation have changed.' There could be a change in employment or a change in household size. If you had one child and now you have three, that has to be considered. The child support amount is not the sword in the stone. It's not set in stone for the rest of your life.

Q: Can the office help locate absent parents?

A: We have ancillary systems that can assist in locating them...and to start collecting payments.

Q: How do you deal with custody and visitation issues?

A: We do not directly involve ourselves in that but we can provide a resource list and point them to a family law facilitator...to get the resources they need to get in front of a judge.

Q: Do you offer virtual meetings?

A: We encourage parents to use the virtual feature and that is something we expect to roll out permanently. (It) may be a San Bernardino County case but one of the parents may be in Texas. We want to be able to speak face-to-face no matter what the circumstances are. It benefits us. There are things that are unsaid but are communicated through body language.

Q: Are some surprised by the flexibility that's available in their situation?

A: They are. It's just a matter of communicating, letting them know this is what we can do. There are no robots working here. We have a lot of automated systems available but we are real people who have a desire to assist families.



Reach out now—let DCSS make navigating the child support process EASY

San Bernardino County Department of Child Support Services:

Works with parents and legally-acknowledged guardians to ensure children and families receive court-ordered financial and medical support. Child support services are available to the general public through a network of 52 county and regional child support agencies.

Services offered by the Child Support Program:

- Opening a Case
- Locating Absent Parents
- Establishing Parentage
- Genetic Testing
- Obtaining a Court Order
- Enforcing Support Orders
- Enforcing Medical Support
- Modifying Child Support Orders

Contact Information:

Department of Child Support Services | County of San Bernardino | (866) 901-3212
sbchildsupport.com | Email us directly: child.support-mbx@hss.sbcounty.gov
Submit case-specific questions online at: childsupport.ca.gov/customerconnect/

DCSS Partners:

- Children's Network Father's Engagement Program www.facebook.com/iefathers/909-383-9677
- Workforce Development Board, San Bernardino County, wp.sbcounty.gov/workforce
- San Bernardino Valley College, www.valleycollege.edu/
- Connect IE (database of community resources) connectie.org



Child Support Services