

Invest. Inspire. Innovate.



**Central Sierra Child Support Agency is here
to help parents navigate the process**

A commitment to families



At Central Sierra Child Support Agency, children are our first priority. Studies show that having each parent involved in a child's life improves overall well-being — they are likely to do better in school and have lower dropout and incarceration rates. **Our mission is to support family self-sufficiency.** We believe the best way to do that is to engage with you to provide services that are tailored to your family's needs.

We help with genetic testing, establishing court orders, adjusting child support amounts, and facilitating the collection of payments. These and other services are provided for free and eliminate the need to hire an attorney or pay court filing fees.

We understand that the need for our services comes at a time when families are fragile. Juggling the responsibilities of your children, relationships and finances can be very challenging. Let us take on the difficulties of navigating the complex legal system so you can focus on what matters — your children.

Julie Prado
Executive Director
Central Sierra Child Support Agency
Serving Alpine, Amador, Calaveras & Tuolumne counties



A Friendly Face For Local Families

The Central Sierra Child Support Agency is a positive resource and offers an array of important services

by ELISSA EINHORN

Whether she is dealing with enforcement of a child support order, a modification of support, establishing parentage, or working with another state to maintain contact with a parent who has relocated; Joette Pitcher wants her customers to know she is there to help them.

A Child Support Specialist with the Central Sierra Child Support Agency, Pitcher says, "We understand every family has a unique story. We treat everyone equally and we work with each customer individually. We pride ourselves on providing the best customer service."

This customer service often involves helping people navigate what can be perceived as a complex and adversarial system — but doesn't need to be. Pitcher walks individuals through the process, explaining each step along the way. This means establishing a child support order, genetic testing to determine parentage, being a record keeper of payments and documentation, and explaining what happens if a parent required to pay support does not fulfill the obligation to pay support.

The latter action, she tells parents, puts them at risk of losing their passport and any professional license they hold, including fish and game licenses, driver's licenses, pharmacy licenses — even a license to spray for pests.

"We are here to help facilitate," explains Pitcher, who has been trained in intake, establishment procedures and intergovernmental cases. "There is a misconception that we are advocates for the custodial parent. The reality is, we are a neutral party. We don't advocate for parents. We are here to help parents meet the needs of their children."

Pitcher describes how parents are sometimes fearful of coming to her office, thinking that police might be there or that they might be arrested. To mitigate this perception, CSCSA participates in outreach at community events. This helps to give a realistic picture of her agency and, as she explains, to let

customers know, "we want to be a positive resource, we want to give them tools. We're a friendly face."

With a background in human resources, Pitcher has been with CSCSA for seven years. She understands that people are overwhelmed and sometimes ignore what they are supposed to do because they just don't know where to start.

"My position is emotional at times," she acknowledges, sharing a story about one woman who was able to purchase new winter coats for her children because of Pitcher's assistance. "It helps to know I am making a difference in the lives of children and families in my own community."

We are here to
help parents meet
the needs of their
children.

Joette Pitcher
Child Support Specialist, CSCSA



Child Support Specialist Joette Pitcher strives to give families the best possible service that CSCSA offers.

Photo by Jennifer Raposa

Executive Director of MLJT, Dave Theony, teamed up with CSCSA to provide parents employment opportunities.
Photo by Jennifer Rapp

A Referral Network

Central Sierra's Child Support Agency's partners can offer wrap-around services to families

by ELISSA EINHORN

When shared members of the CSCSA and the Motherlode Workforce Development Boards realized they were working toward the same solution — to gainfully employ Central Sierra Child Support Services customers in the Motherlode service area — the agencies began a formal partnership.

EAGER or "Employment Assessment — Getting Employees Ready," is based on CSCSA's role to enforce parent obligations to pay child support and Motherlode Job Training's role to assist individuals with finding employment in Amador, Calaveras, Tuolumne and Mariposa counties.

"It's a perfect fit," explains MLJT executive director Dave Theony. "They know about child support and we know about jobs. It's a win-win."

MLJT is part of a nationwide network of job development agencies that assist local businesses fill in-demand occupations. In his region, Theony identified such in-demand opportunities as ski resorts, national parks, logging and tourism.

“It’s a perfect fit. They know about child support and we know about jobs. It’s a win-win.”

DAVE THEONY
Executive Director
Motherlode Job Training

Lisa Edwards, MLJT program manager, explains a referral from a CSCSA caseworker triggers a meeting between a parent and MLJT to determine the parent's needs and goals. Some people go straight to MLJT's job board to see what's immediately available; others might be eligible for an on-the-job training program; and others can apply for a vocational program that sets a career path in motion.

"They want to think about their future, but they also have to make rent," Edwards says, adding that in some cases

a person's driver's or professional license is taken away as a result of not paying support and that further determines the next course of action.

Other services provided to customers include help completing job applications and preparing resumes, as well as mock interviews, advice about dressing appropriately and generally being interview-ready. MLJT stays connected to the CSCSA caseworker and provides progress reports and updates.

The partnership has shown success: for example, a woman who was behind on child support now works full-time at a local hotel, which, as Theony points out, also helps to boost the area economy — an added value of EAGER.

"We have taken two agencies who have a similar motivation to get people to gainful employment," he says. "It is a benefit to the community and to children who will have income to pay for their needs."



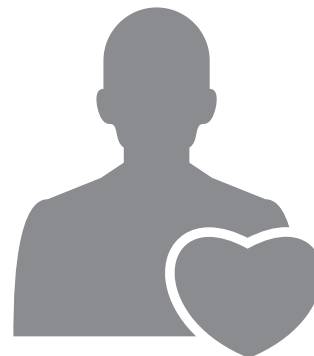
Caregiver services

Caretakers of children who are not the parents can receive financial support. here's how:



Referrals

If a child resides with a relative or friend, that caregiver may be eligible for public assistance. Once eligibility is determined, a case will automatically open with CSCSA. CSCSA will work with the caregiver and parents to secure support for the child.



Caregiver Support

If a grandparent, sibling or other caregiver has legal guardianship of a child, they are entitled to support from both parents. Caregivers can request CSCSA open a case by phone, online or in person. CSCSA will work with the caregiver and both parents to secure support for the child.

A Nudge in the Right Direction

CSCSA helps a custodial father get the financial support he needs

by ELISSA EINHORN

In 1996, Todd Cooper had custody of his daughter and son, who were then 7 and 5 years old. He raised the kids alone, with no help from his children's mother, and then remarried in 1998. It was then he decided to contact his ex-wife.

"I asked my ex-wife to send \$100 a month and I wouldn't go to court," Cooper explains. "I wanted to solve this on my own."

Although she agreed to send money, months passed and nothing showed up. Cooper again reached out and this time, asked for \$50 each month. Again, months passed and no money arrived.

Cooper says, "I was just trying to do the right thing." But he had his own responsibilities to provide food, clothing, housing and everything his kids needed for school. He decided to pursue the matter through the court, which determined he was eligible for \$300 each month.

Still, there was the matter of collection. To help make that happen, he entered the doors of Central Sierra Child Support Agency.

"They are wonderful people," Cooper says of the CSCSA staff. "They did a great job. When they were able to find her, I would receive a little money, but then she would move around,

jumping from state to state."

Living in Sonora, Cooper worked for many years at MRL Industries, a company that makes heating elements and processes microchips. After his new wife gave birth to twins in 2000, a boy and a girl, the babies were often ill so Cooper took a year off to care for them. Admitting to frustration, Cooper says that during that time, the extra money from his ex-wife "really would've helped."

Cooper stayed in touch with CSCSA, inquiring if they had located his ex-wife and the pattern continued. His ex-wife would be found, she would pay a bit of money, and then disappear again — until 2016, when she came to

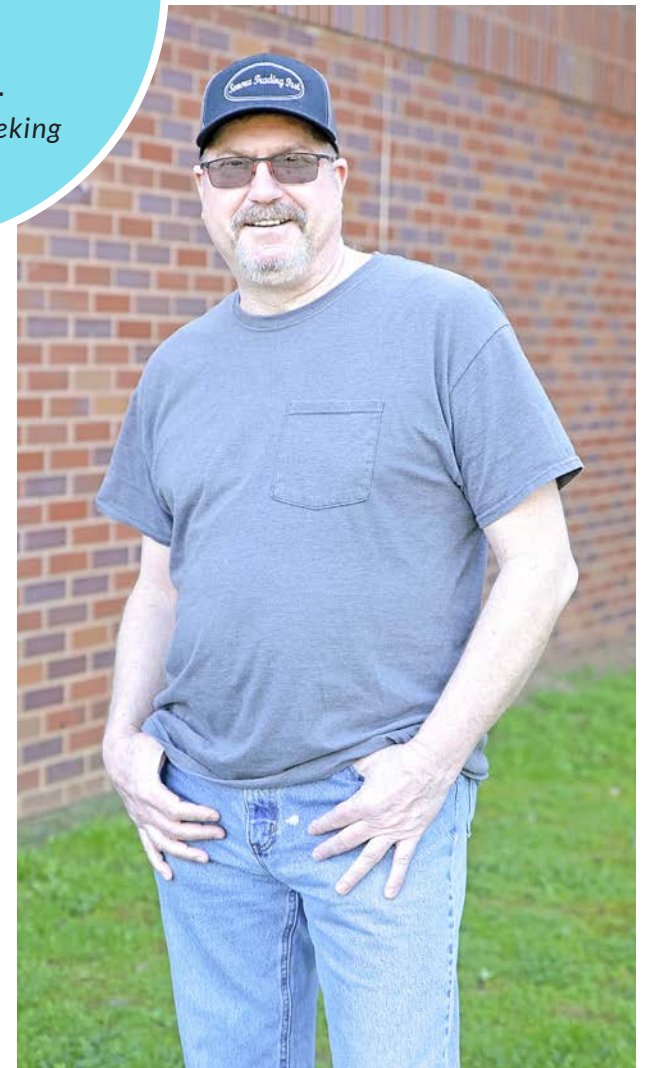
the conclusion that she would pay the support she owed her children's father.

"She has kept up," Cooper says. "She wants to clear her debt and not see her arrears keep climbing."

Because of what they went through, Cooper's older children "have a bitter taste" about their mother, but not Cooper. "This is an ugly world," he says. "You don't know what she was going through. Be patient and let the child support agency work for you because it is really out of your hands."

"I was just trying to do the right thing."

to DD Cooper
Custodial Parent Seeking Support



As the father of two young children, Todd Cooper found the help he needed to support them by connecting with CSCSA.

Photo by Jennifer Rapp

CSCSA Resources



Establishing Legal Parentage

The Parentage Opportunity Program is voluntary and is free of charge. **to be eligible, you must be either:**

- ✓ An unmarried birth parent and the only possible genetic father, or
- ✓ Two people, married or unmarried, who had their child through assisted reproduction using sperm and/or egg donation, except if any donation was from their spouse.



Applying for Child Support Services

A child support services case can be opened by **either parent or a legal guardian, whether or not a child support order exists.** Apply online or in person.



Modifying a Support Order

A child support order is eligible for review every three years. However, a case can be reviewed for modification sooner with **substantial change in circumstance.** Either party may request a review and the support amount may increase or decrease depending on the facts presented.

A New Start

Father gets a second chance with help from CSCSA caseworkers

by GAIL ALLYN SHORT

Sonora resident Steven Milner's journey to reconciling his child support payments is as long and winding as the roadways he travels every day.

Milner, a truck driver and account manager for a local carbon monoxide distribution firm, is paying back child support for his now-adult daughter, a child from a previous relationship.

He never had a problem paying child support, he says. But his experience with child support enforcement in the past left him feeling angry and disrespected.

But today, with assistance from Central Sierra Child Support Agency caseworkers, Milner's life is now back on track.

"I don't feel anger when I pay child support because I haven't been treated badly," he says. "They haven't been rude. They haven't been disrespectful or uncooperative. They've actually made it, for what it is, a good experience."

Milner's child support journey began more than 30 years ago after he and his then-girlfriend broke up.

"We had lived together for a couple of years and dated a year before that," Milner recalled. "She became pregnant and then later we separated."

A few years later, Milner found himself in prison for evading an arrest. Not long afterward, CSCSA caseworkers visited the prison as part of a pre-release program. A caseworker talked to

him about his child support arrears and what could be done.

Upon his release, Milner contacted CSCSA and began working with them.

Later, a judge approved a monthly payment plan for Milner to pay \$100 a month in child support. By that time, he owed around \$37,000, he says.

At one point, Milner found himself charged with drunk driving and lost his driver's license.

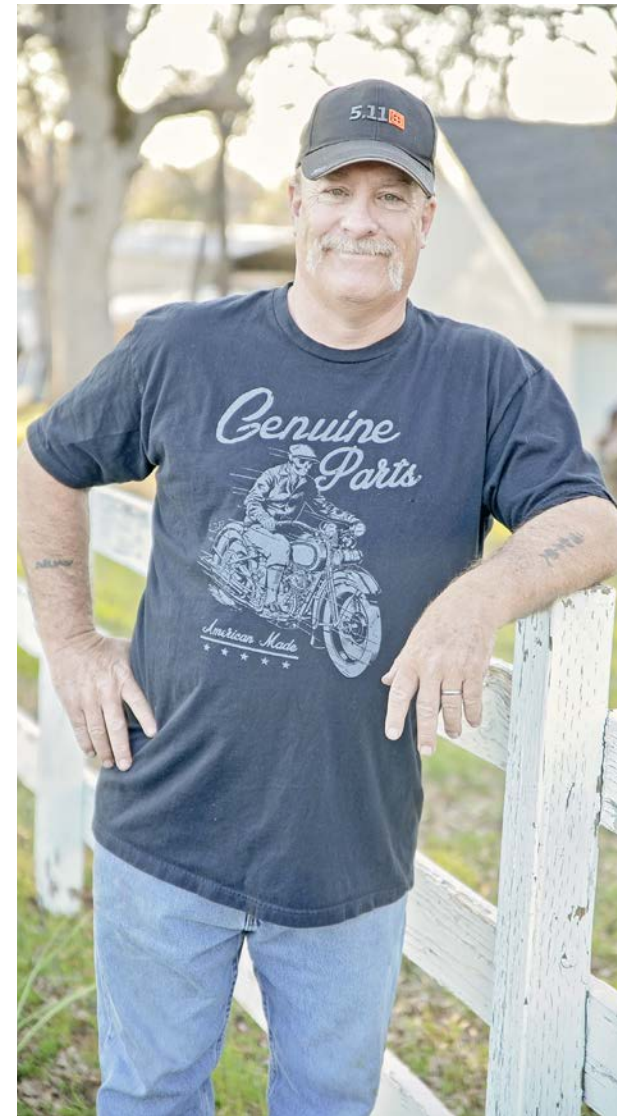
"I went and completed DUI school and then went to CSCSA and asked what I could do to get my license back because I couldn't afford that, and they found a way," he recalls. "They said if you bring us \$5 to \$10 a month, with \$20 now, we'll release your license. We can do that. Well, they did, and I haven't been without a job since."

Fast-forward to today and Milner says he has upped his payments to \$125 a month. He pays out-of-pocket to meet the payment deadline because of his employer's payment schedule.

"If it wasn't for CSCSA and the job I have now, I wouldn't be buying a house," says Milner, who is now married. "CSCSA has been awesome. They've treated me great. They've been respectful. They've been polite. They've been very nice, and the main thing is that they found a way so I could have my driver's license back. ... I appreciate what CSCSA did."

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anger when I
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Steven Milner
noncustodial Parent Paying
Support



CSCSA caseworkers helped Steven Milner get his license back so he could secure a reliable job in trucking.
Photo by JENNIFER RAPOLZA

How We Help

Central Sierra Child Support Agency offers a host of resources to help those under an order to pay child support.



The Child Support Guideline Calculator

While a family court judge will make the final determination on the monthly child support payment amount, it is possible to **estimate payments ahead of time using the Child Support Guideline Calculator** at www.childsupport.ca.gov/calculate-child-support.



Child Support Order Modifications

If a payor cannot pay due to a job loss, illness or other circumstances, he or she can contact CSCSA to request a payment modification. A CSCSA caseworker will review the case and **help both parties come to a new agreement without going to court**. If, however, the parties cannot agree to the new terms, CSCSA will request a judge review the case and make a final ruling.



Referrals to Community Resources

If a child support payor becomes unemployed, CSCSA can **make a referral to local job training and job placement services** and other community resources.

Simple, Easy Ways to Pay Child Support

If you have an employer, by law, your child support payments are made through wage assignments. But if you are self-employed or if the wage assignment has not yet been processed, here are some quick and easy ways to pay:



Online

Visit the California State Disbursement Unit (SDU) website at www.childsupport.ca.gov/state-disbursement-unit and select "Make a Payment" to pay by credit card or checking or savings account. You may also pay through PayPal.

Phone

Call **1-866-901-3212** and choose Option 1 to pay by credit card or personal checking or savings account.

Mail

To pay by check or money order, mail payments to: CA SDU
P.O. Box 989067
West Sacramento, CA
95798-9067

PayNearMe

Go to www.PayNearMe.com/California to create a code. You can then pay with cash at 7-Eleven, Family Dollar, and ACE Cash Express stores when you present your code to the cashier.

MoneyGram

Find a MoneyGram location at www.moneygram.com or call 1-800-926-9400.

In Person

You can pay in person or via a touch-pay kiosk at any county child support office during business hours. Visit the website at www.centralsierrachildsupportagency.com for locations.



A Smooth Process

A local employer assists workers paying child support

by GAIL ALLYN SHORT

Dodge Ridge Ski Resort is a family-owned business near Pinecrest, 30 miles east of Sonoma. Open since 1950, the destination spot has some 150,000 visitors a year who come to glide down the snowy slopes or stay at the campground.

More than 200 seasonal employees work at Dodge Ridge in positions including ski and snowboarding instructors, chairlift operators, ski patrol, sales, and food and beverage, says Katie Fromm, Dodge Ridge's human resources director. About 20 people work at the resort full-time year-round.

At any given time, Dodge Ridge has a few employees under court orders to pay child support, Fromm says. But she credits Central Sierra Child Support Agency for helping her HR office fulfill its obligation to conduct wage assignments for their employees' monthly child support payments.

When an order for child support comes to their office, says Fromm, the human resources office carefully reviews it and takes care to complete all of the required documents from the state and to begin wage attachment. And, if they ever have questions about the process, they contact CSCSA for help.

"CSCSA has been very responsive with any question that we might have," says Fromm. "Everyone we've ever worked

with there has helped us learn and helped our employees learn and feel supported."

"I think we've been successful with [child support] orders because we value our role in the process," she says. "We're always seeking to do better and to partner with our employees and CSCSA to make the process as seamless as possible."

While most employees know ahead of time that a child support order is coming to the HR office, says Fromm, the department takes care to send a note to the employees to inform them of the wage assignment just in case.

Upon notification of the child support order, she says employees frequently have questions such as, "When will the wage assignment start?" or "How much money will be deducted from my paycheck?"

"We have an open-door culture here," says Fromm. "So we always have an HR or payroll representative available to assist our employees or talk about it. We try our best to help them understand the forms that they've received, and we ask them to be involved throughout the life of the order and to keep in contact with us."

And, as with any employee-related matter, Fromm says her department keeps every child support case confidential. "Often, it's just a big learning experience for the employee," she says. "So it's our goal to treat them with the utmost respect."

CSCSA
has been very
responsive with
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KATIE FROMM,
HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTOR
Dodge Ridge Ski Resort

Frequently Asked Questions

CSCSA caseworker Michelle Milan collects child support with empathy and fairness

by GAIL ALLYN SHORT

Can you tell us a little about yourself?

I was born and raised in Orange County, and I've worked for CSCSA for five years.

What do you do as a child support specialist?

I enforce child support. If you have a child support order that we're enforcing in our office, I'm the one who helps collect the payments and get monies to the families.

What made you choose a career in child support?

I didn't choose it. It chose me. I applied to be a court clerk in Orange County, but didn't get it. So I applied for other government jobs to get my foot in so I could get to where I wanted to go. I applied for this job and sure enough, I got it. So I kind of landed here.

How do you enforce child support?

We enforce in a number of ways, but mainly we enforce through wage assignments. When people don't pay, it's more than just about child support. It's sometimes a mental barrier or they are struggling through whatever their feelings are about child support. But I take pleasure in helping people to want to pay.

How do you do that?

By working through those barriers and just listening to what they have to say. That helps to influence them because both sides may feel they haven't been heard. My primary focus is to be a fair caseworker and be unbiased and nonjudgmental.

How are you able to remain neutral?

People have told me time and time again that I'm fair and that I listen. I'm here to help people manage their way through the child support system, and I try to educate people and help them to help themselves.

What is the biggest misconception that people have about CSCSA?

Some feel that we're out to take all of their money. But we can only take so much by law ... We offer multiple payment options, and we try to make it as easy as possible to pay no matter where you live.

What is your advice for someone who gets a Summons and Complaint for child support?

Don't ignore it. They should contact child support and ask questions about the paperwork if they don't understand or have questions like, 'What does this mean and how will it impact me if I don't respond?'

“My primary focus is to be a fair caseworker and be unbiased and nonjudgmental.”

MICHELLE MILAN
CSCSA Caseworker

What if a parent who owes child support cannot pay?

If you're no longer able to pay for a reason beyond your control — such as a job layoff or an illness — talk to your caseworker right away. If you request a modification, we can help provide the court with information that would help them make a determination as to what the child support should be. But if you wait too long and you have a high balance, we cannot retroactively modify the child support.

Is it possible for arrears in child support to be forgiven?

Yes. There is a program offered by the state to compromise or reduce debt. If you have arrears in child support, you might qualify for a reduction in the amount owed.

What is the most rewarding thing about your job?

To see people come around and know that they were not paying for many years, and now, not only are they paying, but they've increased their payments or are paying double or they have their driver's license back or they've become sober. Those are the success stories.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

I've found that the more I keep myself busy, the better. I volunteer at Preston Castle doing landscaping.



Agency Services



Establish medical
support orders



Collect child &
spousal support



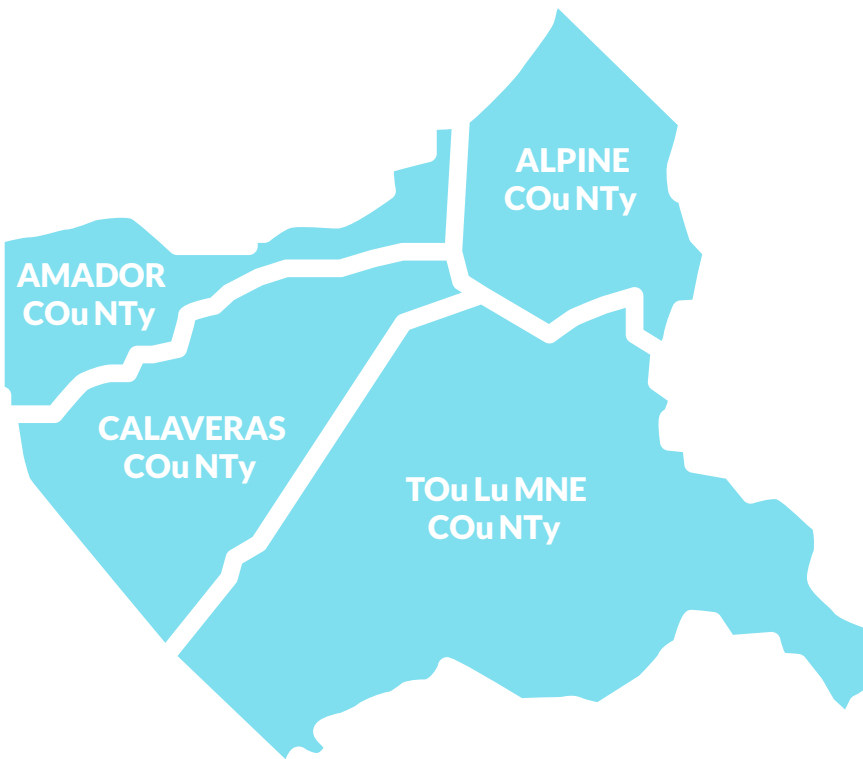
Enforce health
coverage



Establish
parentage



Establish child
support orders



Central Sierra Child Support Agency

Serving Alpine, Amador, Calaveras and Tuolumne counties

Our goal is to **support** family self-sufficiency and to advocate for the well-being of children in our communities by delivering **child support** services in the best and most effective ways possible.

Contact us today, we can help!



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From left to right; Carey Martin, Gina Bachtelle, Marlene Brawner, Liane Peck, Julie Prado, Robin Decker, Dalaine Heagle, Reesa Miller, Veronica Roberts, Leslie Homuth