



Child Support Matters!



Let Stanislaus County Department of Child Support Services
help you navigate through the child support program—and
start a bright new future for you and your family

Focused on Families

Find out how you can get help in a caring environment that puts you and your children first

BY ELISSA EINHORN



While most parents who walk through the doors of the Stanislaus County Department of Child Support Services' office are assigned a caseworker, that caseworker is part of a much larger universe whose sole aim is to see your family thrive.

"We have a strong staff of 141 innovative, goals-focused, dedicated and caring individuals who assist families in more than 27,000 cases that impact the lives of children in our community," Baljit Atwal, Director of Stanislaus County DCSS, proudly says. "We are here to help parents navigate the child support process and to refer them to additional community resources to help remove barriers that prevent a parent from providing both financial and emotional support to their child—for example, homelessness, domestic violence or visitation issues. We also have developed partnerships with many local agencies that provide crucial services for families, such as parenting classes, skills assessments and job-seeking services."

While no case is typical, on a daily basis Stanislaus County DCSS staff establish parentage, locate absent parents, establish and enforce orders for child and medical support, and

collect payments. Atwal points out that some parents might have challenges paying support if they lost their job or experienced a reduction in income. In these cases, Stanislaus County DCSS can assist them through the process with modifications or reducing past due child support debt.

"We are here to help parents support their child or children and to promote family self-sufficiency. We value and understand the role of both parents in a child's life."

Baljit Atwal
Director of Stanislaus
County DCSS



"The child support program is a critical part of the efforts to fight poverty with financial and medical support essential to a child's success

and well-being," the Director explains. "In 2019, Stanislaus County DCSS collected more than \$55 million, 75% of which went directly to families. We impact the self-sufficiency of families in our community by working with parents to pay consistent support."

Atwal acknowledges that the process can be overwhelming for parents. This makes it that much more important for Stanislaus County DCSS to remain neutral and focused on achieving a resolution in the best interest of the child. Shattering common misconceptions, she says her agency provides services without the need to hire an attorney, pay court filing fees or navigate through the legal system. A parent or legal guardian can open a child support case regardless of income level. Often these services will be free, or at a minimal annual cost, if certain criteria are met. Stanislaus County DCSS handles the paperwork and keeps track of the accounting on cases as well.

"We are here to help parents support their child or children and to promote family self-sufficiency," she says. "We value and understand the role of both parents in a child's life."

Did you know...?



Regardless of your income, using Stanislaus County Department of Child Support Services eliminates most court fees and the need for an attorney, saving you hundreds or even thousands of dollars.



DCSS can help parents negotiate, file and modify a support order if they lost a job or are experiencing a financial hardship.



Caseworkers are neutral parties with the goal of achieving a resolution in the best interest of the child.



DCSS can help you regain your driver's license or passport and—in some cases—reduce your past due child support.



Research shows children who grow up in financially stable homes do better in school, are more likely to go to college and have happier, healthier adult lives.

Easier Than You Think

Navigating child support services can feel intimidating, but for this father of two, it was liberating

BY KRYSTA SCRIPTER

Victor, 34, who pays child support for his two teenage daughters, says he avoided getting involved with child support services because he thought it would be complicated or difficult. But working with Stanislaus County Department of Child Support Services has given him peace of mind.

"I should have just done this from the beginning," he says. "I sleep better at night. It's just less stressful."

Victor, who lives in Hughson, California, works in the air conditioning industry. Before working with SCDCSS, Victor paid

"Every time I receive a letter, or if there was a balance or there's something going on, I would just call them and leave a voicemail, they would get back to me right away," he adds.

Victor no longer has to see his children's mother to pay child support because the California State Disbursement Unit (SDU) processes all child support payments. SCDCSS also assists in providing options and education about child support to both parents, with a focus on the child's needs.

Working with Stanislaus County has not only made it easier than ever before for Victor to navigate through the child support program, but it also ensures his children are being taken care of—and growing up in a more peaceful, stable environment.

It's a process Victor recommends to any parent facing child support issues: "Do it. For them to do it, it's a lot easier and less stressful. They'll help you, they'll walk you through it."

"I should have just done this from the beginning."

Victor
Father paying support

his children's mother by handing her a check every month. He also paid for his daughters' sports fees and other activities. This wasn't always ideal, however. Victor and the mother of his children experienced challenges when communicating and tracking payments made directly to her. SCDCSS was able to assist by being the neutral party and assisting with tracking all payments.

"That's the best thing that could've happened to me because... they handle it all," he says. "I just deal with them directly."

He also says SCDCSS is extremely helpful anytime he has any questions about his child support orders.



More Ways To Pay

Stanislaus County offers several voluntary payment options for eligible parents.

● Electronic Payment

Paying parents can set up automatic payment withdrawals from their bank accounts or credit cards using a PIN number from the California State Disbursement Unit (SDU).

Go to www.stancodcss.org to create an account.

● Cash Payments Through PayNearMe

PayNearMe is a payment platform available at 7-Eleven, Family Dollar and Ace Cash Express locations in Stanislaus County. Parents will need a PayNearMe barcode to use this service, which can be obtained on its website (paynearme.com), along with a list of nearby locations.

● Pay by MoneyGram

Parents can also use MoneyGram locations to pay child support orders and fees. Parents will need to bring the following information:

- state agency payee name from SDU
- receive code 14630
- case number and/or participant ID

● By Mail

Parents can send a check or money order to California State Disbursement Unit, PO Box 989067, West Sacramento, CA 95798-9067.

● By Phone

Pay by phone by dialing 1-866-901-3212 (select option 1).

Help Navigating the System

A Turlock woman receives life-changing child support now, thanks to the guidance of the SCDCCS

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

It's never too late to connect with caring agencies that help needy people, according to Olga.

The 56-year-old mother of nine, who now lives in Turlock, recently says it wasn't until 2006 that she learned there was such a thing as legally required child support—something she needed then, but which she is finally receiving through the intervention of child support case workers from Stanislaus County's Department of Child Support Services.

Decades ago, Olga became romantically involved with an older man in San Jose. Her suitor—Pablo, a pseudonym—fathered four children with her before the couple married in 2001. They later had four more children, for a total of eight, now ages 16 to 26. Olga and Pablo divorced in 2017.

During their relationship, Olga recalls, her children often went hungry because Pablo did not properly support their five girls and three boys. Pablo had money-making enterprises, she says, including rental properties.

Her own earnings, mainly from selling homemade tamales, were meager.

About 2010, after the family moved to Merced County, Olga successfully applied for Medi-Cal for her children, plus food stamps.

In that county, child support case workers interviewed Olga. She revealed that Pablo

wasn't paying support, so a child-support petition was filed on her behalf in Merced Superior Court.

"That's when I first heard about (legally required) child-support," says the Mexico-born Olga, a longtime U.S. resident.

But Pablo ignored a court summons, she says.

Last year, after Olga moved to Turlock, her case transferred to Stanislaus Superior Court. SCDCCS child support case workers stepped in and steered her to the Social Security Administration.

At Modesto's Social Security Office, Olga presented her marriage certificate and one of Pablo's old paycheck stubs bearing his Social Security number.

In February, Olga began receiving \$1,149 monthly from Pablo's retirement benefits to support the only child still living with her, a 16-year-old boy. The payments will continue until he's 18.

Both no longer lack food or clothes.

"Without the guidance of SCDCCS, I would be getting nothing," Olga says. "I am grateful."



"Without the guidance of SCDCCS, I would be getting nothing. I am grateful."

Olga
Mother receiving support

How to Get Support

Stanislaus County Department of Child Support Services offers several services for parents and guardians looking to receive support for their children.



Locate Parents

Stanislaus County DCSS will check local records and find parents based on home address and work locations. If the parent cannot be found locally, DCSS will search their Social Security Number in other state agencies.



Establish Parentage

Most child support cases need to establish parentage before support payments can begin, either through marriage, legal declaration or genetic testing. Establishing parentage early in a child's life ensures they are taken care of appropriately.



Establish and Enforce Orders

The county will work with parents to create a support order based on both parents' ability to pay, the amount of time a child spends with each parent, and the child's financial needs. There are several options for payment, including automatic and voluntary payments.

Q&A

with Caseworker Samantha Torres

Learn why Stanislaus County DCSS is a
place you can turn to for help

BY ELISSA EINHORN



**"I always think
the child is the
ultimate reason of
why we are here."**

Samantha Torres
Stanislaus County DCSS Caseworker

? How do you make a difference in people's lives?

A: I go the extra mile for each case. I don't just answer questions. I look for ways to find out what a parent's needs are and how to help them meet their goals. I assist and meet parents at court.

? What are the frequently asked questions you hear from parents?

A: There are a lot of questions about the child support process. I take the time to educate customers on a step-by-step process on what will happen in court, what a court order is, and what to expect next to simplify the process.

? What is a myth associated with child support?

A: A lot of people don't know about state programs that reduce arrears significantly. They are under the impression that they will never be able to pay. However, there is light at the end of the tunnel.

? What are some examples of people you have helped?

A: I recently assisted a customer who had no food, no housing. I guided her in the right direction. I also had a gentleman with two child support cases. I reached out to (one) mom and she agreed to zero out the balance on (that) case. It's not about collecting support and being the bad guy. It's about assisting people. I always try to find other ways to solve the problem. That's what I thrive on.

? How do caseworkers remain parent-neutral when working with a person paying support and person receiving support?

A: We start with the guidelines to show the proposed amount. There are a lot of negotiation skills. What is the fair amount? It's not going from \$800 to \$200, but maybe \$800 to \$600. Once you get an agreement, it feels good on both ends. We are in the middle, making sure the parent gets what they want and that a parent can pay support. With every case, the children are in the middle. I think about them first. I always think the child is the ultimate reason of why we are here.

? What do you want your clients to know about you in terms of your role?

A: We have to abide by the law and enforce the law, but I am very passionate. I learn not to take things personally. A lot of customers, they know nothing will change, but they need to vent. I give them advice about how to move forward and I tell them, "I am not against you." I try to explain the reason we are doing the things we are doing. They can trust me and rely on me. They can call anytime to discuss their case. I'd rather someone call than not because I want to be that source of information to get them through the process.

Find out more at

www.stancodcss.org

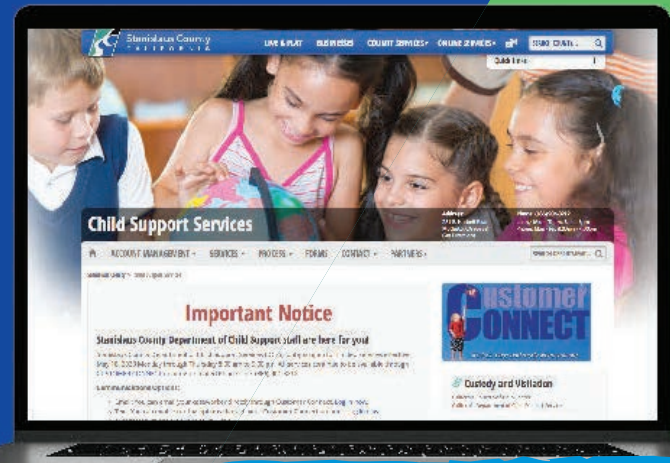
<https://childsupport.ca.gov/customer-connect>

Reach Out for Help Today

We ensure that children come first by helping both parents assume responsibility for providing a financially and emotionally stable environment. To that end, we also recognize the value of improved relationships between parents and strive to help that occur.

Services are available at little to no cost and include:

- Establishing parentage
- Locating a child's parents for the purpose of establishing or enforcing child support
- Establishing, modifying and enforcing any court order to pay child support
- Collecting child support, if there is a valid child support order, and spousal support payments
- Establishing and enforcing medical support, including dental and vision care



www.stancodcss.org



The mission of the Stanislaus County Department of Child Support Services is to promote the well-being of children by locating parents, establishing parentage, and obtaining and enforcing orders, while providing an excellent level of service that our customers deserve.



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LOBBY: MON - THURS, 7 A.M. - 6 P.M.
PHONE: MON - FRI, 8 A.M. - 4 P.M.



WWW.STANCODCSS.ORG/
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