



Child Support  
Services

Illinois Department of  
Healthcare and Family Services

**IDES**  
ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF  
EMPLOYMENT SECURITY



# Employment Partnership Initiative **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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Pursuant to the requirements of P.A. 103-0356, codified at 20 ILCS 1005/1005-130(c), the Department of Healthcare and Family Services, in collaboration with both the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES), and the Department of Central Management Services (CMS), is pleased to submit the enclosed report detailing the progress of our employment partnership initiative for parents owing child support arrearages.

This effort reflects a deliberate shift in how Child Support Services engages with families, moving from enforcement-first to opportunity-first. We recognized from the outset that this would be a slow grow, particularly given not only our history as a collector of debt, but also the complexity of the cases we service. We knew, however, that meaningful change requires patience, persistence, and partnership.

With support from IDES and CMS, we are building new pathways for parents by connecting them to employment, training, and greater stability. Child Support Services is uniquely positioned to serve as a conduit to these resources because of our long-term relationships with families and ability to sustain engagement over time.

Child Support Services, IDES, and CMS remain committed to demonstrating the value of this partnership initiative through meaningful outcomes, whether that is helping parents secure stable employment, reducing child support arrearages, or strengthening family well-being. We will continue to monitor progress, share lessons learned, and refine our approach to ensure this partnership delivers on its promise: to transform Child Support Services into a trusted bridge to opportunity and stability for Illinois families.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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*“ This event was amazing. I have a better understanding of how I can apply for state jobs as well as other jobs available within the state. ”*

*- Workshop Attendee*

## Summary

In accordance with P.A. 103-356, the Department of Healthcare and Family Services respectfully submits this report to the Illinois General Assembly detailing the progress of our employment partnership initiative for parents owing child support arrearages.

This initiative was launched with full recognition that success would be gradual. Child Support Services (CSS) historically has operated within a punitive framework. We understood that building trust, particularly with parents facing the most significant barriers to employment, would require time, consistency, and a reimagined approach.

Through strategic collaboration with the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) and Central Management Services (CMS), we have begun to position CSS not just as an enforcement tool, but as a conduit to opportunity. Our program's long-term engagement with both parents and children uniquely equips us to quickly identify needs, sustain support over time, and connect families to employment, training, and stability.

This report outlines the steps taken to operationalize the partnership. While the work is ongoing, our commitment is clear: to measure success not only by job placements and arrearage reduction, but also by renewed trust, strengthened family stability, and transformed systems.

## Strategic Partners

P.A. 103-356 brought together CSS, IDES, and CMS to deliver coordinated support:

- CSS facilitated outreach, hosted workshops, and ensured follow-up with accessible materials and resource links.
- IDES offered employment readiness, resume coaching, access to job training programs, and employment opportunities.
- CMS provided personalized guidance on state employment, including Success Factors navigation and specialized support for veterans and individuals with disabilities.

These partnerships exemplify how government agencies can work in concert to meet families where they are and improve lives.

## Engagement & Outreach

A central goal of the pilot was to demonstrate that respectful, accessible communication with parents produces stronger engagement and more meaningful outcomes. The pilot adopted a multi-channel strategy that combined workshops, digital outreach, and individualized communication, ensuring parents statewide had both broad access to information and direct opportunities for support.

### Workshops

Workshops were a cornerstone of the pilot, designed to be parent-centered in both format and content.

- 20+ sessions were held virtually and in person across Illinois.
- Sessions were scheduled with parent availability in mind, including daytime and evening options to accommodate work and childcare demands.
- Content focused on practical guidance, such as job readiness, pathways to employment, and available support services.

Parents described the sessions as “motivating,” “clear,” and “helpful” in navigating employment opportunities. These findings underscore that workshops, when intentionally designed and scheduled, can meaningfully improve how parents connect with employment and support resources.

### Digital Outreach

The pilot’s digital strategy was aimed at broad and consistent statewide communication.

- **650,000+ emails distributed** with a 32.9% open rate, surpassing public-sector benchmarks.
- **400,000+ SMS text messages delivered** directly to parents’ phones, ensuring timely access to resources and reminders.
- **25,684 Facebook views and 12,548 organic reaches** generated through targeted social media posts.

By leveraging multiple digital platforms, the pilot extended visibility of services well beyond in-person workshops and provided parents with frequent, accessible points of contact.

## Direct, Personalized Communication

Recognizing that some parents require more individualized assistance, the pilot also invested in direct communication.

- **800+ unemployed parents** were engaged through one-on-one phone calls and emails.

These interactions created space for parents to share their needs, ask questions, and receive customized guidance. Staff offered encouragement, connected parents to employment opportunities, and built confidence in navigating state resources.

This personalized approach proved critical in reinforcing trust and addressing barriers that mass communication could not fully resolve.

## Policy Implications

The success of these engagement strategies highlights the importance of combining digital outreach with personalized parent support. By balancing broad communication with one-on-one connection, the pilot demonstrated that respectful engagement not only increases program participation but also strengthens families' trust in public systems.

## Relationship-Centered Service

The pilot reframed CSS as a connector, not just a collector. This deliberate shift moved the agency beyond the historical focus on enforcement and collections and toward proactively building trust-based relationships with parents and families.

## Follow-Up Protocols

The pilot implemented structured follow-up protocols to ensure every participant left with clear next steps. Parents received workshop materials, staff contact information, and individualized guidance to encourage continuity of support after each interaction.

## Parent Voices

Parents' perspectives were elevated throughout the pilot. Feedback opportunities were incorporated into workshops and digital outreach efforts, ensuring parent insights helped shape the design and delivery of the workshops and our services as a whole.

## Staff Culture

The pilot also fostered a cultural shift within CSS staff. Training and program design emphasized empathy, accessibility, and early intervention. Staff were encouraged to

prioritize proactive support and early education, equipping parents with resources before challenges escalated into enforcement actions.

This relationship-centered model represents a significant departure from traditional collection-focused narratives. By positioning CSS as a trusted partner, the pilot established new opportunities for collaboration, guidance, and shared responsibility between families and government.

## **Legislative Impact and Next Steps**

The outcomes of the pilot demonstrate that a relationship-centered, multi-channel service model is both effective and scalable. To sustain this progress, the following policy and program considerations are recommended:

### **Scalability**

CSS has the infrastructure, staff training, and partner relationships necessary to expand the pilot statewide. Scaling up will allow more families to benefit from early intervention, employment connections, and individualized support.

### **Policy Alignment**

This new approach aligns directly with broader goals surrounding workforce development, family stability, and service delivery. By working with parents as partners, CSS strengthens family economic outcomes while advancing state priorities for workforce participation and child well-being.

### **Future Vision**

CSS will continue to modernize its outreach and service delivery, ensuring parents are met where they are — whether through digital channels, community partnerships, or direct communication. The agency remains committed to centering parent voices, collaborating across agencies, and using innovative strategies to build stronger, more stable families across Illinois.



# MARKETING SNAPSHOT

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*“They not only provided useful links to resources, but also explained how to use them and gave examples.”*

*- Workshop Attendee*




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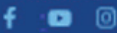
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**“It (this workshop) has given me every opportunity and resource, including a mock interview to get a job with the state.”**  
-- Workshop Attendee

**Virtual Career Workshop**  
Wednesday, June 25, 2025 at 2:00pm

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