

El Diario Sin Nombre

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A Holiday Greetings from Secretary-designate Katie Falls

When my son was eight years old, he came to me early one morning and said, "I have good news and bad news, mom." I said, "OK, well let's get the bad news over with – what is it?" He said, "I think our parakeet is dead. He's lying on the bottom of the cage all stiff and won't move." I said, "Oh dear! Well, what's the good news?" To which he replied, "I'm not *sure* he's dead." I looked at him and said, "Honey, there's no good news here."

That story came to mind when I sat down to write this holiday greeting. Is it possible that there really is "no good news" this holiday season? It's easy to think that when we are facing pay cuts through furloughs and working harder than ever because of so many vacancies. On top of it all, this is the time when the demand for our services is the highest ever because friends, families and neighbors are turning to us by the thousands for help. Many of us are also dealing with budget cuts, worrying about the implications of significant reductions on staff and customers.

My thoughts then turned to my own complaints and frustrations this holiday season. It seems like over the past several weeks I have gotten more and more frustrated (and complain a little louder to anyone who will listen) that I can't find the time to do both what I need to do at work and at home. I start the day with a list of errands that I need to do in order to be ready for the holidays, and every day my list just continues to grow, with nothing checked off! While thinking about this, I suddenly remembered a conversation that I had had with a friend years ago when my children were little. She shared a poem with me about how parents should consider the day-to-day chores of taking care of their children a *privilege*; yes, cleaning up messes,

wiping runny noses and rocking and singing your way through many sleepless nights should be considered a privilege. And I suddenly realized that everything I am complaining about during this holiday season represents some privilege or blessing in my life. The fact that I need to do laundry means I have clothes, finding time to go to the grocery store means I have money to buy food, wondering when I am going to do my shopping and get my packages in the mail means that I have a family and friends to send presents to, and cleaning the house for the holidays means that I have a home. It's even true that being furloughed means I have a job and working hard means that someone needs and values my service. For me, all of that is good news and indeed reminds me that I have true blessings in my life.

It is also a privilege for me to be able to write this holiday message to you because it means I am so very fortunate to work along side you in this Department. Every day thousands of New Mexicans benefit from the work you do, and I am both proud and humbled by your work. The work you do is indeed very "good news" for me, the Department and the State!

I hope this holiday season you will stop and reflect on all your blessings, even during this time when it seems hard to find good news. I wish for each-and-every one of you a happy holiday filled with gratitude and joy.

Katie



HSD Secretary-designate, Katie Falls.

Child Support Makes Internal Adjustments as Job Losses Affect Their Customers

Child Support Enforcement Division (CSED) has shown recently that it is nimble enough to make changes to its delivery of services when the needs of its customers are changing. While some agencies batten down the hatches during times of change, hoping to ride out the storm and not upset their established way of doing business, the CSED anticipated how the changing economy could affect its customers and went about making some important changes to meet a new set of customer needs.

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Santa Fe County CSED Director, Michelle Castañeda.

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“In January, during a county directors’ meeting, we really began to think seriously about making some changes because of the slowing economy and the increase in the unemployment rate,” said Stephen Klump, Deputy CSED Director. “We decided that, for starters, our larger offices should begin to make preparations to handle an increase in the request for modifications of support orders because we anticipated that many of the job losses would come from the larger cities, such as Albuquerque.” CSED was right: the CSED call center has seen a 30 percent increase in the number of modification inquires over the prior year in larger cities.

“As with most of CSED’s customers, both custodial and non-custodial parents are not experts in family law matters, so the CSED developed a brochure for people to use to help them understand how to go about modifying a court order for child support,” said Klump.

“We distributed them to all of our offices and to the district courts across the state.”

Then, former CSED Director, Charissa Saavedra talked with news organizations around the state to explain what parents should do if they are paying child support and lose their job. Just days after Saavedra explained how the program works, hundreds of parents seeking modifications of their support payments came into child support offices. CSED legal assistants in many offices had to be reassigned temporarily to alleviate customer waiting times.

“We are seeing more ‘modifications’ request[ed] in this office than we have ever seen before,” said Santa Fe County CSED Director Michelle Castañeda. “We are working the modifications as hard and as fast as we can. On the human side, for us it is very sad to see a non-custodial parent who was paying upwards of \$800 per month in child support come in now seeking a court-ordered modification because he has lost his job,” she said.

There are so many modification requests at her office that Castañeda and her Social Community and Service Coordinator are now working all “enforcement walk-ins,” while the two American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) workers are handling “establishment walk-ins.”

“Some of my staff were very surprised to see me working cases,” said Castañeda. Hey, these are challenging times for everyone, and some managers, like Michelle, are leading by jumping into the fray.

CSED Sets New Highs for Percent of Cases With Court Orders

Fortunately, the CSED was in the enviable position of being able to adjust its organization to meet the demands of new challenges posed by a gloomy economy. One of the most important things they have done over the years – and to be able to do this – was to keep their caseloads to a manageable level by closing cases deemed unworkable and giving caseworkers cases that they can move forward on.

“Because of the hard work done by both caseworkers and attorneys, as a division we’ve gotten better at closing unworkable cases on the front end, instead of having them hang around,” said Deputy CSED Director, Stephen Klump. “For example, we get some Medicaid Only cases through computer interface that are unworkable because the custodial parent doesn’t want child support services. Others cases are unworkable because the custody of the child has changed, the child has emancipated or the non-custodial parent has passed away.”

Eighteen months ago, there were 58,953 cases compared to 58,898 today. What this has done for CSED is to increase the percent of cases with court orders. For example, a year-and-half-ago 65.8 percent of the cases were considered obligated. In September, the percent of cases in this category reached 68.5 percent, an all-time high for the CSED program.

Klump also noted that the economy is causing a sharp increase in the number of TANF cases in CSED and the division is receiving more payments from unemployment compensation.

HSD Raises Money for CF

The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) staff initiated a fundraiser to support Cystic Fibrosis. The “Turkey Trek” was held on Nov. 20 at Plaza San Miguel. The event included a Frito Pie sale, a jewelry raffle and the actual trek to win a turkey.

The OIG, the ASD’s Business Operations Center and the CSED State Disbursement Unit staff donated 17 turkeys, all the food and raffle items and volunteered their time for this cause.

“I just want to thank you for making the first-ever Turkey Trek to cure Cystic Fibrosis a huge success” said Tracy Fine, Special Events Director for Cystic Fibrosis. “You all raised over \$600 and the Frito Pies were amazing.”

The jewelry raffle winner was Sharon Regensberg of OIG and HSD staff, their friends and families won the turkeys.

“Many of the participants of the turkey trek were so excited when they saw they had won a turkey for the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday,” said OIG’s Berna Quintana. “One lucky winner even donated his turkey to a local soup kitchen.”



ASD’s Josephine Estrada, left, is a winner and is presented a turkey by OIG’s Lupita Montoya.



ITD's Mike Ricklin uses a board to record the many ideas from staff on how to improve their customer service.

ITD CSES Team Reorganizes to Better Serve CSED

Information Technology Division (ITD) staff who support the Child Support Enforcement System (CSES) have undergone organizational changes to improve field staff efficiency, meet security objectives and improve services on the Navajo Nation.

For starters, the CSES IT support team members are now co-located within one area at Plaza San Miguel, instead being split between two separate rooms. This change alone has made communications and coordination among all team members much easier.

To help build a stronger, more cohesive unit, staff also completed a team building training seminar presented by Cheryl Thompson, from HSD's Office of Human Resources.

To put ITD staff in the right learning mood Thompson began her seminar by quoting Henry Ford: "Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success."

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ASD Employee Receives Kudos for Doing More

There are people in every organization who work in the background and perform the essential, everyday functions that often go unnoticed until they aren't being done. Administrative Services Division's (ASD) Nancy Takacs is the General Services Bureau's (GSB) Fixed Asset Coordinator, and she is one of those people.

Nancy has worked as a temporary ASD employee for many years helping with fixed assets and the auctioning off of unneeded assets. She was finally hired fulltime this year to help HSD staff, statewide, understand and abide by the requirements associated with asset control.

"Nancy has a huge job," said Sandy Mackey, her supervisor. "It requires excellent people and organizational skills, which Nancy certainly brings to the table."

Considering the scope of responsibility associated with asset control for the whole department – amounting up to millions of dollars in property – you would believe that this would be her only job assignment. Well, you would be wrong in making that assumption! This is because on any given day you may be with Nancy as she diligently explains the requirements associated with asset control; then, the next day, you might see her driving the central office mail van making the rounds for the GSB's postal driver. Then, later in the week, you may place a call to the central office warehouse to order supplies, and, sure enough, you're here her pleasant voice answering the phone to help you place your order.

"Nancy is not only fully cross-trained to cover and help with the diverse requirements of the HSD Business Operations Center (BOC) that includes copying, mail, inserting and other warehouse functions, she is also in the process of developing procedural manuals to guide staff in providing backup for all of these vital functions in case there is a staff shortage due to illnesses, like the flu," said Mackey. "Oh," she added, "Nancy also helps out with fleet management. When I asked Nancy how she does it all? Her quick, smiling reply was 'I love to be busy, and I love to help'."

Paula Maglione, GSB Bureau Chief impresses on her staff that all of their jobs are important to the department. "For people in the HSD to serve clients their supplies must be provided on time, checks and documents must be printed and the mail must go out," she said.

"Of course, all of the hard-working staff in the GSB take their jobs seriously but when someone cannot be at work it's great to know that Nancy is ready and willing to do what ever is necessary to keep the ball rolling in support of HSD staff statewide because they, in turn, provide essential support to our hundreds-of-thousands of customers," said Mackey.

"It takes a very unique set of skills to maintain a working knowledge of the diverse functions that Nancy supports, we are so fortunate to have her with us," said Mackey. "I even sleep better at night knowing that Nancy is here when we need her."



Nancy Takacs does it all in GSB.

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“I loved watching this thoughtful group of people working on skills to achieve success together,” said Thompson. “Staff began their teamwork session with a potluck consisting of a variety of diverse cultural dishes and treats.”

“It was an excellent opportunity to bring everyone together and explore new ways for working together productively, while making ITD a great place to work,” said Robert Preissler, ITD’s CSES Bureau Chief.

To carry the theme of *team* forward, staff decided to participate in a contest to name the two conference rooms where the CSES staff now work. The winning names – drum roll please – were the Red Room and the Green Room, submitted by the Engineering Compliance Bureau. (One room names entry that almost won was the Geek Room and the Nerd Room.)

The new ITD CSES team of 23 people includes the CSES Bureau under Robert Preissler, the Engineering’s Compliance Bureau, under Mike Ricklin and the CSES IT Project Manager, Laura Beltemacchi.

Some of the projects they are now working on to improve the department’s child support enforcement efforts include Deficit Reduction Act federal mandates, adding new Navajo Nation offices to the system, eCSE security upgrades and the CSES Arrearage Interest Calculation Correction.

Santa Fe OHR Staff Helps County Offices

The HSD Office of Human Resources (OHR) is helping ISD/CSED field offices who work with the public every day. The OHR has six people helping the Santa Fe County ISD and CSED offices and two more people helping out at the Albuquerque ISD offices.

“I enjoy my job in human resources, yet I do not mind helping out at ISD because at this time we do need to be helping each other out,” said OHR’s Joanne Portillo. “I believe that teamwork with a positive attitude is good for the department’s morale.”

OHR’s Martha Perez agrees, “Working with ISD staff is great; they are friendly people who really do appreciate our helping them.”

Perez, who is nearing retirement from HSD, has never worked in an ISD office before. Portillo, however, worked as a clerk in an ISD office in Pampa, Texas, 17-years ago.



OHR’s Patricia Gurule and Martha Perez go through case files at the Santa Fe ISD office.



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