Experimental Tests of Efforts to Improve Child Support Collections in Washington State

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The Challenge

• Automated methods responsible for most collections in WA... What about the rest?

• Hard to collect cases
  – Fewer automated methods
  – Labor intensive
  – Population challenges
    • Limited/sporadic employment
    • More transient – locate is time intensive

• What works for these cases?
How to improve enforcement?

• Research is limited at operational level
• 1115 enhances research capacity support policy relevant solutions
• Collaborative team: MEF Associates, University of Washington, and WA Division of Child Support
• Be opportunistic and strategic
Role of Research

• Experimental design to test enforcement interventions
• Companion non-experimental analysis of compliance
• Research accompanies new resources and innovative ideas
  – Rigorous tests that are policy relevant
  – Low cost design
  – Informing broader policy/practitioner community
Two experiments

• Collection from arrears only cases with only state owed debt
  – Specific appropriation
  – Specialized collections unit
  – Intensive locate and outreach

• Sending statements
  – Varied approach across states
  – Seeking to increase consistency and amount of payments from a less stable population
Arrears Only - TANF 16

- Target population
  - Just under 4,000 NCPs in sample
  - Randomly assigned: TANF 16 or business as usual
  - Baseline characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Attribute</th>
<th>Total Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cases per NCP</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent male</td>
<td>75.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average age</td>
<td>41.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of cases with more than 1 child on order</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrears balance at baseline per NCP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Mean</em></td>
<td>$6,152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Median</em></td>
<td>$2,497</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Arrears Only - TANF 16

• Timeframe
  – Initial random assignment, Fall 2012
  – Additional random assignment, Summer 2013
  – Track outcomes through Spring 2014

• Key outcomes
  – Amount and consistency of payment
  – Arrears reduction
  – Use of available enforcement actions
  – Debt forgiveness and case closure
Arrears Only - TANF 16

• Early Implementation Lessons
  – Training staff for new functions
  – Front end (locate) work is labor intensive
  – Professionalization opportunity
Monthly Statements

• Target population
  – New NCPs
  – Known addresses, not incarcerated
  – No employer when order is established
  – Children won’t age out before experiment ends

• Randomization
  – Sample builds over several months
  – 2,000 NCPs total (50-50 treatment/control)
Monthly Statements

- Sample characteristics

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cases per NCP</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent male</td>
<td>63.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average age</td>
<td>31.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent of cases with more than 1 child on order</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monthly current order amount per NCP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>$274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>$190</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Monthly Statements

• Key outcomes
  – Quarterly collections per NCP
  – Non compliance and arrears accumulation
  – Cost effectiveness

• Implementation notes
  – IT changes
  – Staff training
  – Potential benefit of added contact
Benefits to programs

• Research helps answer policy relevant questions
  – Relevance to state operations, funders, other IV-D programs
• Easy to understand experimental results
• Limited customer service implications
• Low cost
  – Limited new services
  – Uses existing administrative data
Contact Information

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