**N E W S R E L E A S E**

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**Lassen County Department of Child Support Services earns national achievement award for**

**“Building a Meaningful Relationship”**

**WASHINGTON, D.C. – Lassen County Department of Child Support Services – “Building a Meaningful Relationship”** has been recognized with an Achievement Award from the National Association of Counties (NACo). The awards honor innovative, effective county government programs that enhance services for residents.

NACo recognized “Building a Meaningful Relationship”, award category Criminal Justice and Public Safety. Some information about the program - In January 2013, Herlong Federal Correctional Institution (FCI) reached out to Lassen County DCSS to discuss collaboration within their re-entry programs. The Outreach Project was developed, with the goal of providing awareness of the child support program with a strong emphasis being placed on inmates addressing their child support cases prior to release from incarceration.

There was no budget for this project, just the time and energy of all Team members. On May 22, 2013, our first Outreach seminar was held for California based prisoners, intergovernmental prisoners, those prisoners based in the Camp, and with the Herlong FCI staff. Our return visit for our one-on-one meetings with the inmates was August 26, 2013. During the seminars the inmates were able to complete a Case Assistance Form. Lassen County child support staff researched every inmate’s case based on the information provided. For most LCSA’s, this was the first verification they had that an inmate was incarcerated in a federal prison and were able to obtain release dates for these participants. Staff met one-on-one with each inmate to provide the results of the research done on their case.

In summary, the inmates are now taking interest in their children, making payments on their cases, having frequent contacts with their LCSA prior to and after release. By encouraging information exchange with the inmates and their LCSA’s over $433,900.00 has been zeroed out either by case closure, initiated either by the Custodial Party or the LCSA, or participation in Compromise of Arrears Program.

They understand paying child support is a way to show they care for their children. All involved in the collaboration hope that inmates will leave incarceration prepared to engage in their child support case and actively participate in their children’s lives.

County Administrative Officer, Richard Egan, Lassen County, California, said, “Lassen County is very proud of Ms. Cote and her team at the Department of Child Support Services, and their national recognition from the National Association of Counties.  They have designed, developed, and implemented an innovative partnership with the Federal Prison System to integrate inmate parents into the County system, which helps them fulfill their responsibilities as parents. I expect this innovative model to be used nationwide.”

NACo President Riki Hokama, council member, Maui County, Hawaii, said, “The National Association of Counties applauds county governments that are embracing innovative and more effective ways to serve their constituents. The Achievement Awards recognize counties’ outstanding efforts to strengthen services and deliver results for residents across the country.”

Nationally, awards are given in 21 different categories that reflect the vast, comprehensive services counties provide. The categories include children and youth, criminal justice, county administration, environmental protection, information technology, health, civic engagement and many more.

The awards will be presented at NACo’s 2015 Annual Conference and Exposition July 10–13 in Mecklenburg County, N.C.

Started in 1970, NACo’s annual Achievement Award Program is designed to recognize innovative county government programs. Each nominee is judged on its own merits and not against other applications received.

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*The National Association of Counties (NACo) unites America’s 3,069 county governments.  Founded in 1935, NACo brings county officials together to advocate with a collective voice on national policy, exchange ideas and build new leadership skills, pursue transformational county solutions, enrich the public’s understanding of county government and exercise exemplary leadership in public service.  Learn more at* [*www.naco.org*](http://www.naco.org)