



By Jan Schultz

The Imperial Republican

Non-custodial parents who are paying child support in Chase County are doing a good job meeting their obligations.

That's according to Mary Becker of North Platte, the Child Support Enforcement Regional Supervisor whose coverage area includes Chase County.

She was in Imperial last Friday and met with Karen Baker, who works with child support enforcement for the county from her desk in the county attorney's office.

"Chase County does a really good job with support. They are meeting all of the federal standards," Becker said.

Becker, who supervises child support enforcement in 43 counties, gathered some statistics for Chase County.

The federal standard for all states is to collect a minimum of 80 percent of current child support due.

Chase County exceeds that standard, currently collecting 81.2 percent since the start of the fiscal year on Oct. 1, 2012.

Another federal standard supervisors like Becker look at from county to county is the establishment of paternity in child support cases when a child is born out of wedlock.

The federal standard is 90 percent. Chase County is at 100 percent. According to Becker, all 53 of the 53 children on which paternity needed to be established was done.

In Chase County, Baker works regularly with 95 child support enforcement cases.

However, there are more than that number active.

Among the duties of Becker's staff out of North Platte are those child support cases where the non-custodial parent lives outside Nebraska. Those cases are not included in the 95 Baker handles.

Baker said she thinks the success of child support enforcement in Chase County deals with being positive.

"It's important to bring up the positives of child support," she said, namely that it is intended for the child.

"It's a give and take," she added.

Both women do not like the stereotype phrase, "deadbeat dads" that has floated around in conversations over the years concerning child support.

In fact, there are many women who are the non-custodial parents. Baker said she could think of five women right off the top of her head who are paying child support to children in Chase County who live with their dads.

County Attorney Arlan Wine also believes fairness is important in working with child support enforcement.

While they have to work within the "legal realities," they work as fair as possible, he said.

As an example, even though the state establishes, through a formula, what the child support payment will be, the county attorney can go in and seek a reduction if legitimate reasons are given, such as losing one's job.

But, they have to let the county attorney's office know.

Baker said they also recognize the important role that employers play in collecting child support payments.

It is now the law that child support payments are to be withdrawn from the non-custodial parent's paycheck right away.

That's not always been the case, Baker noted.

Years ago, the state contacted employers to start taking out the child support from an employee's check only after the parent was 30 days delinquent.

"Now, the employer deduction is automatic," she said.

Chase County child support collected during the first nine months of the 2012-13 fiscal year was \$190,883, according to Becker's figures. That averages out to \$21,209 per month going to children in Chase County.

Statewide, the Child Support Division of Health and Human Services (HHS) collected \$214,195,281 in child support payments during the 2011-12 fiscal year.

It now handles a total of 103,005 child support cases in Nebraska.

Nebraska ranks among the top five states in the nation for success in collecting current child support due.

"This is a combination of a great computer system and great staff," Becker said.

Fund-raiser this fall to help with staff training

Karen Baker of the Chase County office is active in the Nebraska Child Support Enforcement Association, and currently chairs its fund-raising efforts.

Next month, people of the area will have a chance to buy raffle tickets in their statewide fundraiser. Winners will get a weekend getaway at locations throughout Nebraska, including Chase County. Another prize is a Husker Tailgate package. There will be nine winners in all.

Weekend getaways will include two nights lodging, dinner for two at a local restaurant, Chamber Bucks and special events relative to that area such as golf, theatre tickets, etc.

Communities hosting the weekend getaways include Imperial, McCook, Valentine, Ogallala, Kearney, Grand Island, Scottsbluff and North Platte.

Baker said the prizes will range in value from \$300 to \$500 each.

She said the association is a tool for those who work in child support enforcement at all levels to become informed of new laws and changes.

"It's a way of keeping us updated," she said.

Each year the association hosts a training conference, and their fund-raising helps bring in speakers, pay for training materials and fund scholarships.

Raffle tickets will sell for \$1 each, and a purchase gets the buyer a chance at all nine prizes.

They will be sold locally at the county attorney's office and several businesses, Baker said.