



# Overview of the Vermont Office of Child Support

Improving Outcomes for Families



# Vermont Office of Child Support

## ► Our Vision

*Every child has the resources needed to be safe, secure, and stable.*

## ► Our Mission

*The Vermont Office of Child Support promotes the well-being of all families by strengthening their financial safety net. We provide quality services and information to parents, caregivers, and community partners involved in the child support process.*

# Why Child Support?

- ▶ Child support accounts for about half the average income of low-income parents who receive it, lifting many families out of poverty



# A Good Investment

Studies show that receipt of child support -

- Increases economic independence of parents
- Reduces child poverty
- Reduces reliance on public assistance benefits
- Encourages parents to exit and remain off public assistance
- Increases parental involvement of paying parents



# The Vermont Office of Child Support

- ▶ OCS is a state program that is 66% federally funded
- ▶ Statewide presence with 110 full-time employees
  - ▶ Five regional offices, delivering front-line services with an emphasis on helping parents navigate the court system; and Central Office staff that include the Customer Service Unit, Intercept Unit, Registry and Cash Receipts Unit
- ▶ 16,443 cases in FFY 17
- ▶ Collected and disbursed \$42,563,121

# Who Does Vermont OCS Serve?

- ▶ Parents who pay support
- ▶ Parents who receive support
- ▶ Guardians
- ▶ Parents in other states seeking assistance in Vermont Courts





## What Does OCS Do?

Educate	Educate families about parentage and how to establish, enforce, and modify child support
Assist	Assist families to calculate support guidelines, determine and collect money owed, prepare agreements that work for everyone, and compose court filings
Review	Review families' changes in circumstances, striving for realistic orders and consistent payments
Refer	Refer family members to community and State programs, including employment and life skills services

# Improving outcomes by connecting with families


RESOLUTION MEETINGS: AN ALTERNATIVE  
TO THE ADVERSARIAL COURT PROCESS







# Behavioral Interventions for Child Support

- ▶ The federal Office of Child Support Enforcement awarded the Vermont Office of Child Support a grant to study Behavioral Interventions for Child Support;
  - ▶ The purpose of this project is to apply behavioral insights to make small changes in a program's design that can have significant effects on levels of participation and individual choices.
- 



# ASSESSMENT



## **Intervention proposal: Create an in-office resolution meeting process**

- ▶ Vermont wanted to shift from a heavily front-loaded court model to one that reaches out to parents and invites them to the child support office to discuss their case and seek resolution.
- ▶ **Level of resources & expertise needed, number of stakeholders impacted and resources available warranted a rigorous evaluation**
- ▶ This shift represents a dramatic change in the existing process. The Court is a major stakeholder with a major investment in the existing process. Data would be absolutely critical. It would also mean a heavy-lift for existing child support staff. The resources provided in the 1115 grant paved the way for a randomized control trial.



# THE PLAN

- ▶ **Evaluation Objective:**

- ▶ Improve parent engagement and expedite the existing case resolution process that is currently court-focused.

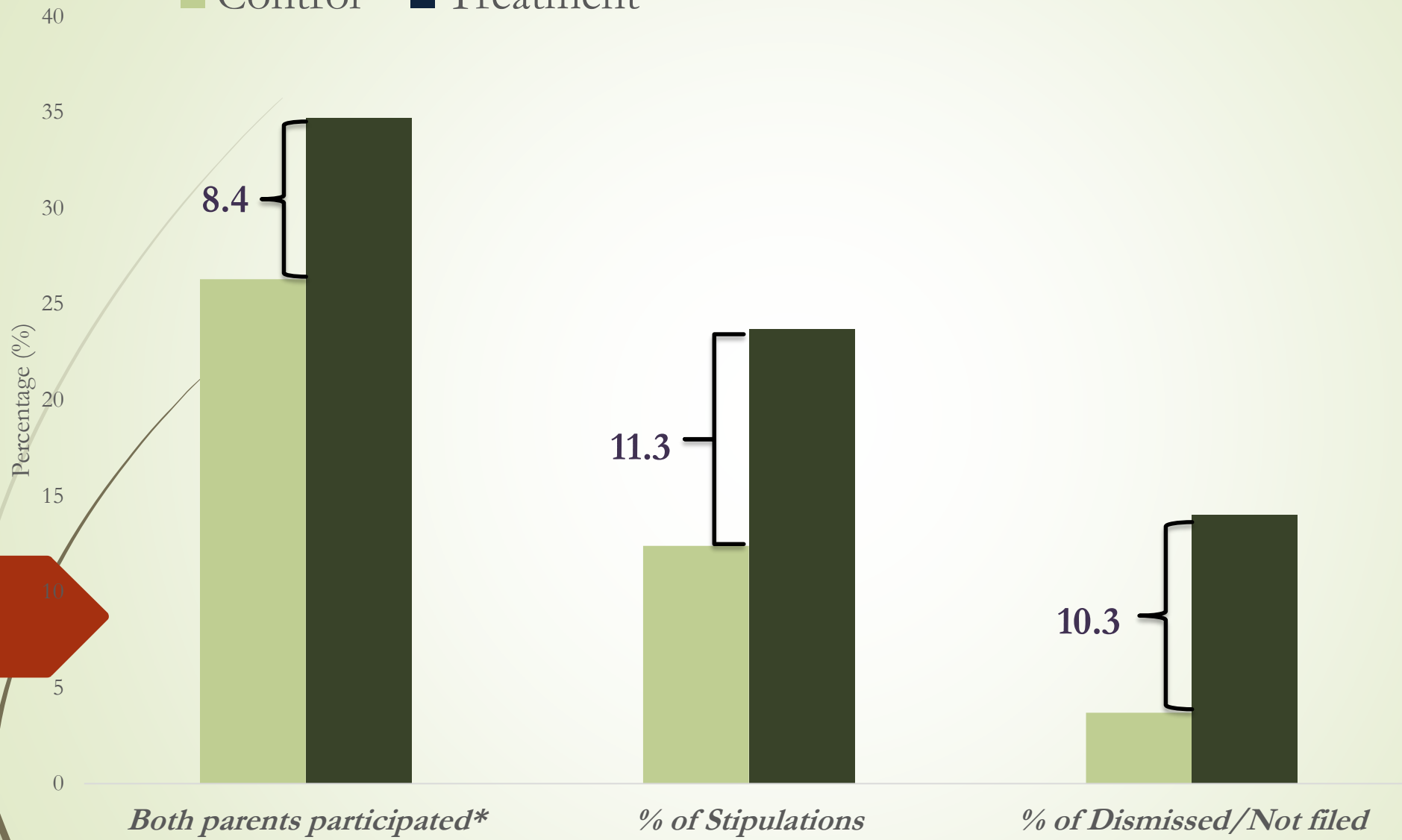
- ▶ **Specific Questions:**

- ▶ Can we deliver swifter service to parents by meeting with them in the child support office before filing an action with the court?
- ▶ Can we reduce the number of meetings and delays to receive a child support order?
- ▶ If we improve communication with both parents with early contact, new letters and phone calls, will we build better relationships with parents, and how will that impact performance outcomes?

- ▶ **Data sources and measurable outcomes:**

- ▶ Meeting participation rates, number of days from case opening to obtaining an order

Control Treatment



Integrating BICS:  
Embedding  
efficiencies through  
front-end customer  
contact, and other  
behaviorally-  
informed  
communication  
practices

CUSTOMER and EMPLOYER OUTREACH



# Collaborating with government and community partners

Work 4 Kids

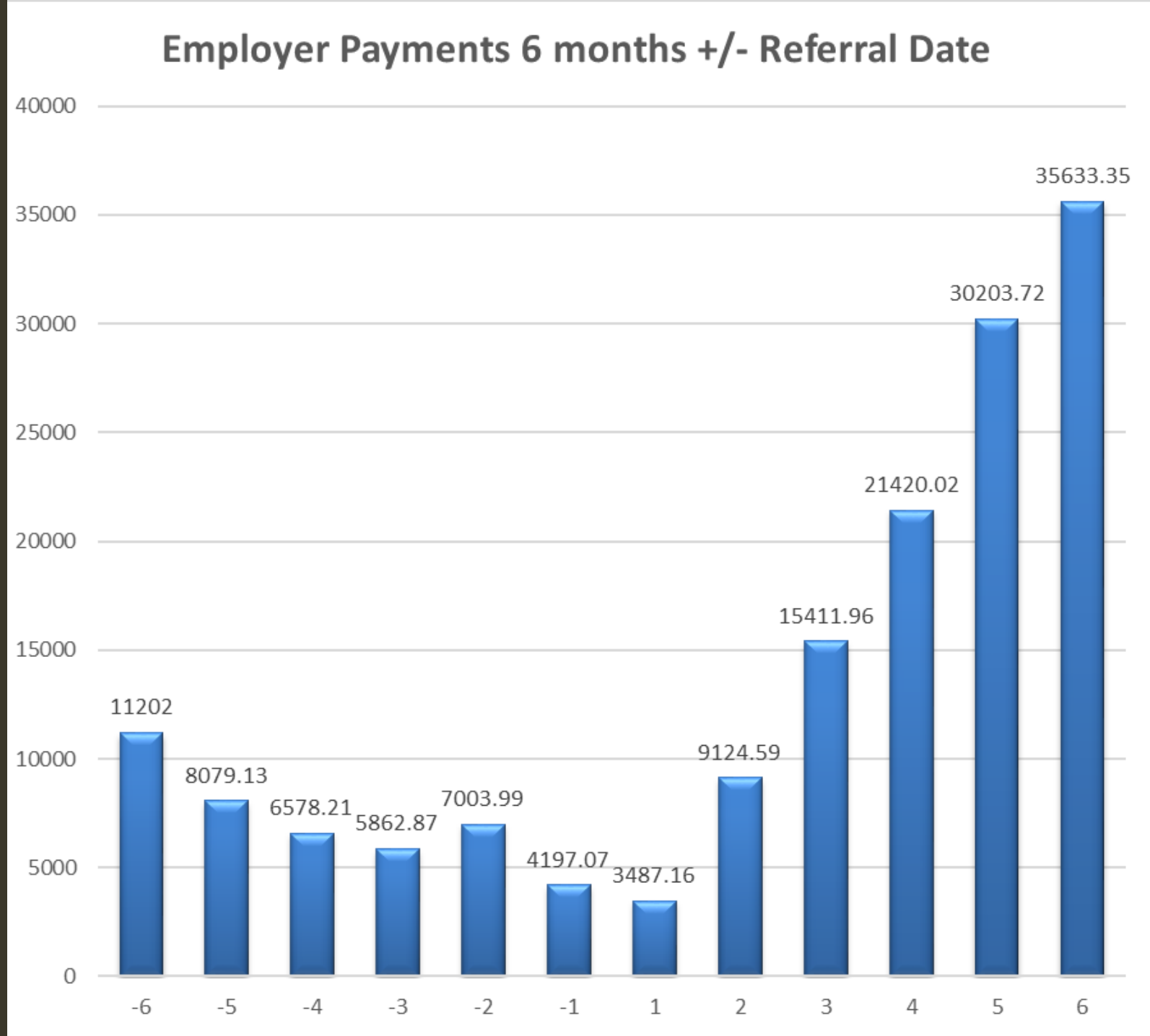
Working Fields

Department of Corrections

Domestic Violence Advocates



# Outcomes for Work 4 Kids



# Safely Pursuing Child Support

- ▶ OCS has a Domestic Violence team that partners with local advocates to formulate policies and tools to ensure that custodial parents safely pursue child support
- ▶ The child support application, along with other notices, are designed to highlight family violence concerns
- ▶ Vermont OCS designed the “Yellow Light” tool that has been recognized and enthusiastically endorsed by the federal Office of Child Support; it is characterized as a model for other states





# Working with the Department of Corrections to “right-size” orders

- The Office of Child Support interfaces with the DOC’s system to determine whether a paying parent will be incarcerated over 90 days;
- OCS files an action with the court to reduce a court-ordered obligation to avoid the accrual of crushing debt;



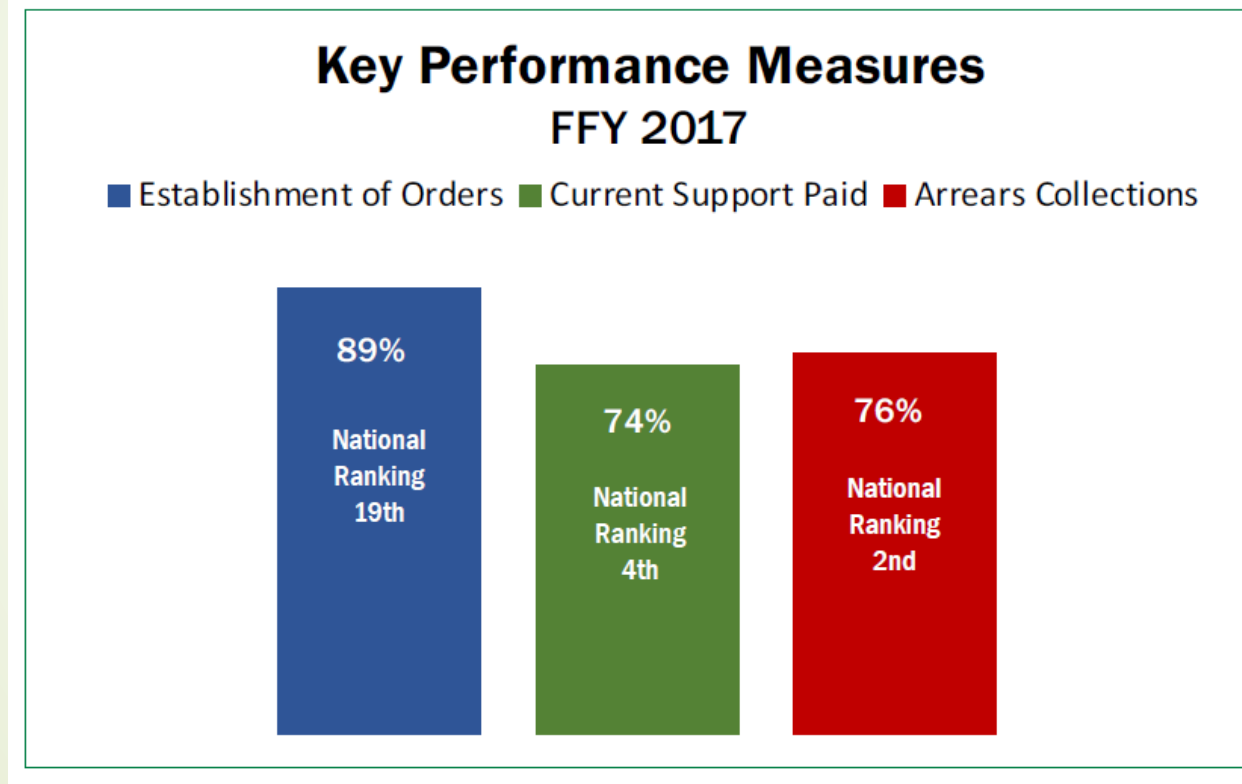
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## Working Fields: Assisting Parents in Recovery

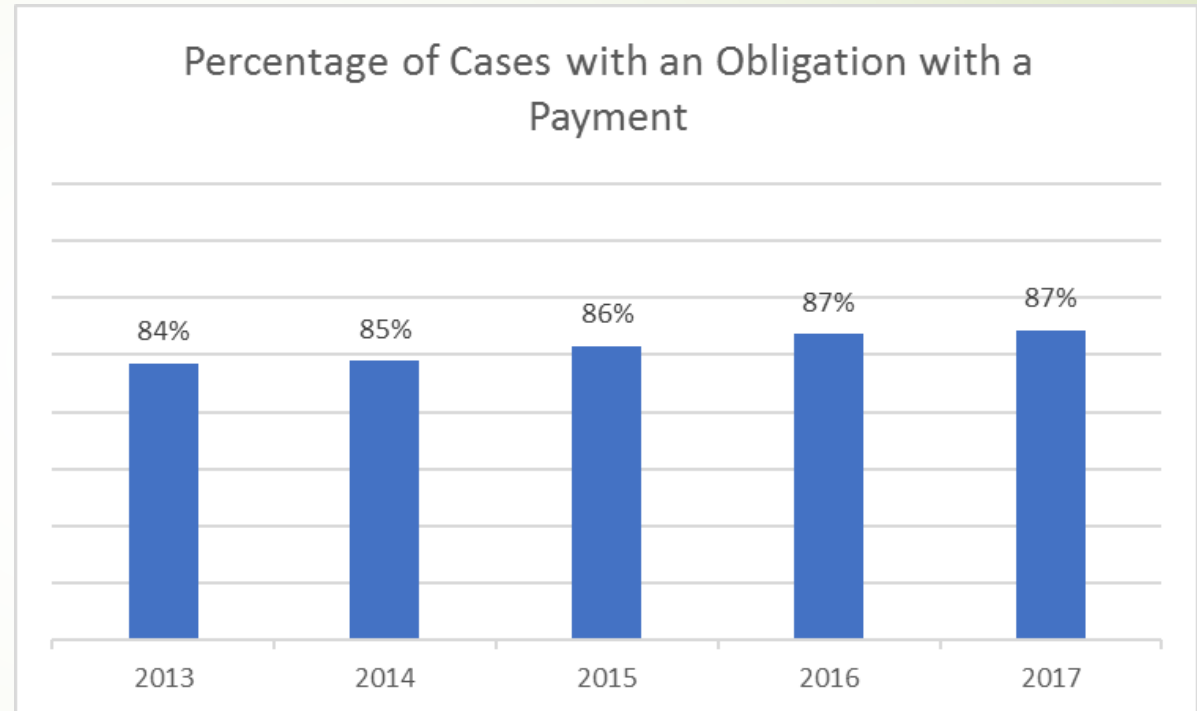
- ▶ OCS refers parents in recovery to Working Fields; a pilot project in Chittenden, Franklin and Rutland counties



# Federal Performance Measures



# Percentage of Cases with Payments





Questions?

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