

THE LINKAGES PROJECT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

**Guidelines for Enhancing Family Participation
through Coordinated Case Planning**





September 2009

Dear County CalWORKs and Child Welfare staff:

Ten years ago the Stuart Foundation funded a fact-finding mission to El Paso County, Colorado, to look into an innovative approach to the coordination of TANF and Child Welfare Services. Representatives of the Foundation, the California Department of Social Services, and a number of counties participated in that visit and were excited to learn about the possibilities presented by this unique approach. Over the next two years, under the leadership of the California Center for Research on Women and Families, a large planning group developed policies, protocols and templates that would guide counties in implementing California's CalWORKs and Child Welfare Partnership, which we now call Linkages. In 2002, seventeen counties began the implementation of Linkages and in 2005 a second Phase of counties began their implementation. With the receipt of a Federal Grant in 2006 and the addition of a third cohort of counties, Linkages is now established in thirty-two California counties.

In 2008, the California Department of Social Services' Outcomes and Accountability Branch highlighted the importance of the Linkages approach by including it in the State's Program Improvement Plan. The most recent Child and Family Services Review had identified the need to strengthen the family engagement process in California and it was recognized that Linkages offers a way to address that need. For this reason, CDSS asked the Linkages team to develop guidelines for Child Welfare and CalWORKs staff that focuses on the engagement of families in the case planning process

An ad hoc committee from the Linkages project, Oversight Committee, and the participating counties came together to review existing practices in the Linkages counties and develop the guidelines, "The Linkages Project and Family Engagement: Enhancing Family Participation through Coordinated Case Planning." We are hoping that counties will review their own existing practices in light of these guidelines with an eye to identifying areas where they might incorporate its elements into their practice. We believe that you will find these helpful in serving the families in your county and in achieving improved outcomes for the vulnerable children and families whom you served.

Our thanks to the following people, who were so instrumental in developing these valuable guidelines:

Danna Fabella, Linkages Project Director, who provided overall guidance for this project

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Representatives from all of the Linkages counties who reviewed and commented on the guidelines over the many months of their development

Sincerely,

Stuart Oppenheim
Executive Director

The Linkages Project and Family Engagement

California's Linkages Initiative

Linkages – a CalWORKs and Child Welfare collaboration to improve outcomes for families – is one of five demonstration grants funded by the federal Administration of Children and Families in 2006. The project originated in November 2000 and was formerly known as the CalWORKs/Child Welfare Partnership Project. The goal continues to be the development of a coordinated services approach between Child Welfare and CalWORKs (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families – TANF) services to better serve families and improve safety and economic stability outcomes. The effort began with 13 counties receiving technical assistance and training in 2000, and was joined by 17 more counties in 2005. At this time, a total of 32 California counties have active Linkages programs in operation.

Family Engagement Overview

Evidence shows¹ that engaged families are more likely to collaborate and cooperate with case plans, choose services or treatments they feel will help them, follow-through with services and make life-long changes. This leads to a higher likelihood of children obtaining permanency, part of the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) vision that “every child in California lives in a safe, stable, permanent home, nurtured by healthy families and strong communities.”

Family engagement begins at the time of initial contact and extends throughout the service relationship with the family. Some examples of successful family engagement include:

- Reaching out to families in ways relevant to the situation and sensitive to the values of their culture.
- Building from the family's strengths, capacities, cultural background and resources to develop creative solutions that address the circumstances interfering with the family's success.
- Fully disclosing information relevant to the family's decision-making in the case.
- Encouraging families to be involved in helping the public agencies and the community develop policies and services that are responsive to families and to be involved in evaluating these service systems.

Families in particularly difficult circumstances – those experiencing extremely low income, emotional fragility and lack of social support – may benefit the most from family engagement strategies. They also may be the most challenging population in which to develop the relationships and commitments necessary for meaningful and successful family participation.

¹ Dawson, K. & Berry, M. (2002). Engaging families in child welfare services: An evidence-based approach to best practice. *Child Welfare*, 81(2), 293-317.

The Role of Linkages in the California Program Improvement Plan (PIP)

The 2009 California Program Improvement Plan (PIP) incorporates significant actions to ensure that the state continues to improve child welfare outcomes for children and families. One area of improvement is increasing participation of families in case planning through various strategies that allow, support and enable a family to be involved as decision-makers in their child's case. In creating the 2009 PIP, California chose to build on successful initiatives that have momentum. One of these is the Linkages initiative. Linkages provides a variety of opportunities for greater engagement of families in defining their strengths and identifying resources to address issues that contribute to family disruption.

The guidelines outlined in this document describe how Linkages can help accomplish the PIP strategy of increased use of family engagement strategies in case planning. Also discussed are general approaches, specific mechanisms, and examples from within Linkages that enable and support family engagement. Counties currently implementing Linkages will recognize the extent to which they practice family engagement and perhaps discover additional opportunities. Counties not currently using Linkages may decide to incorporate these elements as a way of meeting the family engagement requirements in the PIP.

Outcomes of successful family engagement strategies include greater commitment to the change process, improved self-esteem as the family is respected and valued, increased sense of empowerment and more comprehensive understanding of the information and processes involved in case planning. These outcomes for the family relate to the broader results that Linkages is striving to accomplish through tighter coordination between CalWORKs and Child Welfare Services:

- More families achieve economic self-sufficiency through increased work participation and earning capacity.
- More children are able to remain safely with their families with no further risk of harm through a more responsive, timely and coordinated array of service options.

Family Engagement and the Linkages Initiative

Linkages provides a framework for coordinated case planning between CalWORKs and Child Welfare Services (CWS) for families who are involved in both public systems. Families are engaged through a variety of joint meetings, services and communications. Staff from both CalWORKs and CWS work together toward the same goal: ensuring child safety while promoting family economic stability. Within Linkages, a number of family engagement strategies are employed in this coordinated effort. Examples include:

- Dedicating staff to coordinate their efforts as a 'team' centered on engaging families to address both their child safety and economic self-sufficiency needs.
- Collaboratively developing coordinated case plans that serve, support and involve families, including streamlining duplicate or redundant services offered
- Reaching "hard to engage" families by helping them access resources for meeting complex and/or specialized needs (such as TANF-funded mental health, substance abuse, and domestic violence services; child care; employment workshops, job search and work experience; clinical assessments; vocational assessments; English as a second language classes; secondary education or vocational training, etc.) while CWS provides incentives to participate in these services.
- Teaming up CWS and CalWORKs workers to create additional outreach opportunities to better address sanctions, homelessness or exemption issues. Proactive resolution of these barriers can strengthen parents' engagement in case planning, participation in services and work activities, and follow-through on case plan goals.

Key Approaches to Family Engagement Used in the Linkages Project

Linkages incorporates many strategies to involve families as experts in creating more successful futures. Many counties have expanded upon two key approaches highlighted in the PIP as effective for family engagement:

1. TEAM DECISION MAKING (TDMs) is a process where the family, community and child welfare agency collaborate to make decisions about the child's safety and placement. *How does Linkages enhance family engagement in the TDM process?*

- **Assistance for Parents:** CalWORKs staff participating in the TDM can help address the parent's support needs, including lifting sanctions and providing access to specialized treatment services (mental health, substance abuse and domestic violence) to which the parent may be eligible due to their CalWORKs status.
- **Assistance for Relative Caregivers:** CalWORKs staff can arrange for expedited CalWORKs cash assistance benefits for relative caregivers when a decision to place the child with relatives is agreed to at the TDM meeting.

2. FAMILY PARTICIPATION IN CASE PLANNING is a case planning process that actively engages families in defining their strengths and identifying resources that will address the problems which resulted in the disruption of their family. *How does Linkages enhance family participation in case planning?*

- **Linkages focuses on benefits for both parents and their children:** Involvement in the child welfare system can sometimes result in parents feeling alienated or isolated by the events that

by both agencies and ensuring access to services from one agency that may not be available through the other.

resulted in child welfare services becoming involved in their lives. CalWORKs case managers can help re-engage the parent by focusing on economic self-sufficiency and building employment skills while helping parents overcome the challenges that are contributing to the family's current instability.

- **Coordinated Case Planning on Mutual Cases:** When a family has an open child welfare case and is also participating in a welfare-to-work plan, Linkages can help coordinate expectations, services, supports and timelines so that families can be more successful in meeting both sets of goals, and prevent families from being hindered by inadvertent conflicts between the requirements in the two plans.
- **Shared Ongoing Monitoring:** When the plan has been developed jointly with child welfare and CalWORKs, the family feels heard by both case workers and is more receptive to communicating with their team about obstacles, adjustments or accomplishments along the way.
- **Key Milestones Are Valued by Both Programs:** When the planning team pays equal attention to both the immediate crisis of family instability and the longer-term objective of economic self-sufficiency, the family is more likely to embrace a sense of their own future. Whether the parent learns a new job skill or discovers a new way to safely discipline their child, both their workers celebrate these gains as important milestones in their road to self-sufficiency. Likewise, if either worker observes the family deviating from their desired path, the team can be brought together to re-engage the family.

Foundational Guidelines

These fundamental principles are essential for effective family engagement practice when Child Welfare Services and CalWORKs are working together to meet families' needs.

1 Include the family in all matters pertaining to their future.

Nothing contributes more to a family's already low sense of efficacy or empowerment than having all of their decisions made for them. Even when the necessities of protecting child safety limit the options available, Linkages teams have found that starting the conversation by asking the family what they want to accomplish and helping them understand the options that are available to them increases both buy-in and follow-through.

COUNTY EXAMPLE, p. 9

2 Value and reinforce a collaborative service philosophy.

Under the pressure of so many deadlines and client needs, it is easy for both CalWORKs and CWS workers to want to skip the extra work that collaboration seems to present. By practicing collaborative skills, and experiencing the benefits that sharing the load with another can provide, staff from both agencies are able to overcome their initial resistance to working together. This spirit of collaboration is also aligned with the best practice principle of encouraging families to connect with and utilize the resources within their own community long after their involvement in the formal system has ended.

PRACTICE TIP: An important skill is bringing families with you into the collaboration process. Once you have developed a relationship with a parent, how do you introduce them to new members of the team or new resource providers? Do you help present them more as partners or as clients? One of the ways we sense the amount of respect other people have for us is in the way they introduce us to new groups. What does the way you introduce families to new social workers or resource providers convey?

3 Share a strength-based, family-centered approach to practice across both service systems.

The shift from a deficit-based to a strength-based approach is much easier to embrace in theory than it is to express in practice. Not only do old habits sometimes stand in the way, the systems that these workers operate in have many deficit-driven mandates. Families can't access many of the services that are available unless there is something wrong. However, it is critical that staff find ways to look

beyond the problems to the persons they are serving. One of the first steps in this process is taking the time to hear stories about times when family members used strengths and coping skills to get through other difficult times. By tapping into what are often remarkable histories of resiliency in the face of major obstacles, not only do the CWS and CalWORKs staff discover more options to build upon, the families also see themselves as being valued by the people who are trying to help them.

PRACTICE TIP: Each county and almost every worker seems to develop their own strategies for increasing family participation. For example, consider coming into each meeting with a set of questions to encourage family engagement. Some examples are:

- If you were in my position, what would you say would be the most important thing for us to work on at this time?
- What do you think your family needs most right now?
- When you were in tough situations like this before, what helped you make things better?
- Pretend it's 6 months from now, and things are finally going better for your family. Imagine it's a regular day when things are going well. Tell me how that would look. Walk me through the day. What happens first thing in the morning? Then what?

4 Establish basic knowledge about the mission and services of the "other" program across caseworkers, supervisors and managers.

An important step in the process of building a collaborative team is the process of getting to know one another's systems. Staff at the caseworker, supervisor and managerial levels will benefit from spending time in one another's offices, learning about one another's paperwork requirements, exploring the differences in the culture and mandates that shape the ways the two offices operate, and gaining a deeper understanding of the resources that are, and are not available through each office.

COUNTY EXAMPLE, p. 9

Families involved in both child welfare and CalWORKs have unique needs and important strengths that can inform how to approach case planning from a family-centered, strength-based perspective.

Identifying Mutual Clients

Families involved in both child welfare and CalWORKs have unique needs and important strengths that can inform how to approach case planning from a family-centered, strength-based perspective.

5 Determine whether a family is involved in the other program at the time of intake.

At the point of intake, there is an opportunity to learn what other systems the family may be working with. Knowledge about whether or not a family is involved with CalWORKs at the point of initial engagement by an Emergency Response worker can help determine what other benefits may be available to the family, should there be a need to open a child welfare case. Likewise, knowing whether a family has a child welfare plan in place when they are about to begin a welfare-to-work plan is an important part of helping a parent balance the multiple expectations they must meet. Recognizing the family's involvement in both service systems becomes an important consideration for the case planning team in addressing concurrent goals the family is trying to achieve as well as tapping into the array of resources and supports that may be available to help the family stabilize their situation and promote economic self-sufficiency.

There are numerous ways that counties use to identify mutual clients. In some counties, there are automated systems solutions that match databases from CalWORKs and Child Welfare. In other counties, the intake worker on one or both sides is able to search for involvement with the other program. Where these solutions are not available, Linkages teams have found other ways to identify point-of-contact individuals in each program who can quickly access current participation data and relay it back to the requesting worker.

6 Collaborate with CalWORKs to inform safety planning meetings for mutual clients.

The resources available through CalWORKs can sometimes make the difference between keeping children safely at home and placing them in out-of-home care. Experts from CalWORKs who know what welfare-to-work services are available to the family can be invited to a Team Decision or Safety Planning meeting and can address other issues that may pose barriers to their success (lifting sanctions, managing exemptions). This kind of expertise helps engage the parent in ways that demonstrate how CalWORKs can play a role in supporting the parents' needs while they work toward creating a safer and more stable environment for their children.

Counties have come up with different solutions to figuring out how to have a CalWORKs staff person available for these meetings. One option – when there are enough TDM meetings taking place to justify it – is to have one or more liaison CalWORKs staff co-located at the CWS office. A

second option is to treat coverage at TDM meetings as an on-call resource so that there is usually someone available who can attend the meeting. The best option when a family has an active involvement with a CalWORKs staff person is to schedule the TDM meeting to accommodate both the needs of the family and the availability of the CalWORKs staff person.

PRACTICE TIP: Although making better use of automation and shared data systems is the large scale solution to identifying mutual clients, sometimes a personal touch can be just as helpful. In some counties, a co-located CalWORKs specialist has his or her desk near where the TDM facilitators are located. If a question about CalWORKs involvement comes up during or in preparing for a TDM meeting, the CalWORKs specialist can confer with staff, answer any immediate questions, and recommend potential service coordination opportunities, if appropriate.

7 Adhere to standard confidentiality requirements.

In many counties, the sharing of information between CalWORKs and Child Welfare case managers is permitted under their counties' interpretations of confidentiality provisions such as Welfare and Institutions Code §10850 (sharing information in the administration of public welfare) and §18964 (sharing information among the members of a multi-disciplinary team). However, the most effective method of authorizing the sharing of information is through the process of obtaining a signed release of information from the family. Securing the family's permission for sharing information related to meeting their service needs across child welfare and CalWORKs is an essential part of establishing the trust and respect needed for meaningful engagement.

There are two elements to addressing this need. The first is technical. Because CWS and CalWORKs have different release forms with different requirements, representatives from the two offices need to sit down together with all the forms in front of them and come up with a shared information release policy or an integrated form that meets the highest level of requirements from the two agencies. The second is practice-related. It is so easy to treat information release as a nuisance to get through. Staff need to take the time to help families understand what they are signing. Doing this shows respect to the family. It also provides an opportunity for case workers to demonstrate another perspective on how the systems work by explaining the nature of the release.

8 Conduct ongoing screening for a family's participation in or potential eligibility for CalWORKs throughout their involvement with Child Welfare Services.

A family's economic circumstances can change at any time, which may open up the possibility of CalWORKs eligibility and thus the opportunity for service coordination and expansion of the resources available to help stabilize the family. Several decision points in the course of a family's involvement with child welfare services create natural opportunities to consider how the benefits of CalWORKs may help provide an essential safety net for the family.

COUNTY EXAMPLE, p. 9

The more CWS workers experience the benefits of working hand in hand with CalWORKs staff, the more they are likely to pay attention to a family's ongoing economic circumstances so that if they appear eligible for CalWORKs, the CWS worker can help them with the application process. Especially in times of economic downturn, a CWS

worker may begin working with a family that is not eligible for CalWORKs, but as a result of job loss, becomes eligible during the time of their CWS involvement.

Increasing CWS staff awareness of basic eligibility criteria for CalWORKs benefits strengthens the way in which child welfare agencies can be responsive to a family's needs. Several counties have created a straightforward screening tool or set of simple questions that engage families in identifying their potential eligibility for CalWORKs benefits. This approach can be used flexibly at any point when the threat of poverty appears to be influencing the safety and stability of families – at the time of referral, during on-going case management or at case closure. Such techniques require minimal training of child welfare staff, yet are important opportunities for connecting families with benefits to which they may not realize they are entitled. Many counties have also trained CalWORKs staff to act quickly when a family has been pre-screened and referred to apply for CalWORKs or other TANF benefits by their child welfare colleagues, thus expediting the intake and approval process for families involved in both systems.

Assessment

Understanding the family's needs, strengths, circumstances and history through the lens of their involvement in CalWORKs can often shed new light on both the realities and opportunities in their lives. This not only engages the family in a more comprehensive way, but also helps determine the most appropriate service response.

9 Explore family's strengths, needs and goals in context of CalWORKs and child welfare.

The family's current circumstances can be better understood through joint assessments that identify common barriers (e.g., substance abuse, mental health, domestic violence) to achieving child safety and self-sufficiency. CalWORKs workers engage with parents around building employment and economic self-sufficiency competencies. This can surface important strengths, needs and goals that CWS workers can encourage a parent to integrate into their child welfare plan. Likewise, sharing assessment information about parenting and safety progress translates to a more stable foundation for the parent to focus on employment goals.

COUNTY EXAMPLE, p. 9

"In addition to assessing child safety, we're looking at self sufficiency of the family and how work participation can help parents increase their confidence and self-esteem and have healthier interpersonal relationships."

Stanislaus County, Case Study Site Visit

PRACTICE TIP: A practical and easy to use tool for engaging families around strengths instead of deficits is the creation of "strengths resumes." These inventories are helpful on both the CalWORKs and the CWS side. The point is to not only catch clients doing something good, but to record it. As the family makes progress, the resumes of the family as a whole and of each family member grow. Here are examples of some entries from a family strengths resume:

- On February 12, Cindy (the mother) held it together all day while dealing with two sick, crying children, demonstrating patience, perseverance and compassion. These qualities not only show that she is a better parent, but will also help make her an outstanding employee.
- On March 1, Bob (the father) listened politely the whole time his supervisor was yelling at him for a mistake that he had made. He not only kept his cool, but he earned extra respect by saying to the supervisor, "You're right, we make it or break it as a team. I'll do my best to make sure it doesn't happen again." Being able to deal with conflict in a proactive way is a key employment skill, and can make things better at home as well.

10 Review CalWORKs status factors (e.g., sanctions, timed out, exempt) that may impact the parent's ability to engage in service activities.

The promise of additional benefits, services and supports available through CalWORKs can re-engage the parent in cooperating with needed service activities. Economic issues and failure to meet certain requirements for income assistance may pose significant barriers to a parent's ability to participate in their child welfare case plan. Through communication, coordination and joint review of the family's situation by the Linkages team, many of these administrative barriers can be lifted.

For example, a mother's efforts to meet the expectations of her child welfare plan may be deemed "good cause" for lifting welfare-to-work or income assistance sanctions. Likewise, while a mother of an infant may be exempt from participating in welfare-to-work activities, the Linkages team can encourage her to "volunteer" to participate, limit her activities to those that are part of her child

welfare case plan and gain access to the services and supports offered through the welfare-to-work program. This kind of coordination not only helps families achieve safety and stability for their children more quickly, but also establishes a more realistic pathway toward self-sufficiency that is better aligned with the family's current challenges and needs.

11 Help families prioritize child safety and economic self-sufficiency needs to focus service planning efforts.

While the immediate crisis of child safety may temporarily reduce the family's focus on working toward economic self-sufficiency, the continued stress of poverty can contribute to an increased risk of maltreatment. A coordinated assessment process can surface those issues and needs that may be compromising both the family's ability to safely care for their children and to secure and maintain employment.

COUNTY EXAMPLE, p. 9

Coordinated Case Planning

Even though CalWORKs and CWS have different requirements for the case plans that they must produce, coordinating these plans can prevent conflicts, reduce redundancy, and take maximum advantage of the resources and supports available through both agencies.

12 Coordinate child welfare case plans and welfare-to-work plans to improve a family's chances for success.

Streamlining case plan activities, eliminating redundancy, accessing available resources from TANF and CWS and jointly monitoring progress creates a more realistic, responsive and coordinated plan – one that families can embrace.

COUNTY EXAMPLE, p. 9

Coordinated case planning puts all of the principles outlined above into action. Ideally, a coordinated case plan reflects the three-way partnership that is the foundation for Linkages: the family, CWS and CalWORKs. If someone holds the coordinated plan up, all three should say, "This is our plan."

One of the most important elements of coordinated case planning is the sharing of resources. CalWORKs/Welfare-to-Work supportive services that are available to assist Child Welfare families include child care, transportation, job training or secondary education and behavioral health or substance abuse treatment services. In addition, the activities that are required in the Child Welfare case plan can often count towards work participation requirements in CalWORKs.

Counties implementing coordinated case planning have found that while this coordination takes more effort, it also produces far greater benefits. Most of the participating counties report that they use a process of parallel plan development because of the differences in timing, context and content for each plan. However, some county workers then create a short document, usually only a page or two, with the family that contains the key coordinated case plan elements. The point is to make it short enough that they can put it up on the refrigerator.

"I used to see more children being detained, and now I see social workers providing more services and keeping families together. For example, with everybody working together, a mom with four children was able to get housing, make appointments, and reunify with her children... If Linkages was not working, she would not have been able to do it."

Los Angeles County, Case Study Site Visit

13 Transform existing case planning meetings into coordinated case planning sessions.

Families involved in multiple systems feel an increased burden to meet the expectations of various planning forums in which they must participate. By consolidating some of these meetings into Coordinated Case Planning sessions, family and staff time are used more efficiently toward achievement of a common goal.

Each of the participating agencies should hold onto their roles and responsibilities at these meetings. By working together, not only the families, but also the CWS and CalWORKs representatives can form a clearer idea of the goals and values that everyone holds in common. Especially when a family’s goal, the CWS goal and the CalWORKs goal in a particular area or life domain are fairly closely aligned, coordinated case planning meetings offer an opportunity to simplify the expectations for a family by integrating the three perspectives into one shared mission. Services to meet that objective can then be developed in partnership.

The central goal of both CWS and CalWORKs is competency development. Attending a parenting class helps build skills in both arenas: during the classes parents learn skills they can use to take better care of their children, but they also learn how to be on time, take notes and apply what’s being taught in one environment (class) to their role in another environment (home) – all valuable skills for work readiness.

14 Be flexible about using other mechanisms for coordination beyond formal multi-disciplinary team meetings.

Communication in team meetings is only a fraction of what it takes to be effective in addressing family needs. Often the best work is done through more informal exchanges once the basic plan has been put into place. For example, some teams have set up email exchanges to keep everyone up to date. Others use subcommittees that work together on specific tasks and then report back to the larger group. Some teams that include both family members and workers that are comfortable with texting use that medium to get important information shared. One of the keys when assessing a family’s strengths, culture and preferences is to look at how that family communicates and to build the team’s coordination system around that model.

COUNTY EXAMPLE, p. 9

PRACTICE TIP: The synergy that families experience through Linkages can come from simple, yet powerful coordination efforts. For example, a parent spent time volunteering in her child’s school. On the CWS side, she picked up valuable parenting skills and saw herself doing well with her child. On the CalWORKs side, the hours spent at the school were counted as welfare-to-work activities.

CASE PLAN COORDINATION A matter of degree

One simple way that some workers have created a coordinated case planning document is by making four columns with the following headings:

- “What we hope to accomplish”
(the shared goals of the three partners)
- “What the family will do to help accomplish it”
- “What CWS will do”
- “What CalWORKs will do”

Usually this document is set up for one or two short-term goals and actions so that the family is clear about what will be going on this month, when it will happen, why it is taking place and who will be doing what.

Another even simpler method for coordinated case planning that can be done in any county is to just exchange the individual case plans, so that the CWS worker knows what the CalWORKs worker is doing, and vice versa – and so that the family isn’t caught in between. Then if there are contradictions, or if families are suddenly expected to be in two places at once, those issues can be quickly resolved. This also helps both CalWORKs and CWS avoid duplication and redundancy in their services. It also helps confirm that expectations are compatible across the two plans.

A few counties have developed an integrated form that meets the requirements of both CWS and CalWORKs, so that there can really be one plan per family.

Support and Monitoring

The role of case managers in both CalWORKs and CWS involves a combination of encouragement, support, monitoring and intervention. The system-related responsibilities of these workers do not change when they work in teams. However, they are able to more effectively balance these responsibilities when they are operating collaboratively.

15 Utilize court ordered case plans to motivate client participation in welfare-to-work activities.

The juvenile court plays an important role in focusing the parents' attention on the changes in their lives that are needed to keep their children safe and their family stable. When the court understands that child welfare services and CalWORKs are working together to help the family succeed, then judges can reinforce the expectation of parental participation in welfare-to-work services as a means of meeting their child welfare goals. This not only influences positive safety, permanency and well-being outcomes, but can also increase work participation rates.

COUNTY EXAMPLE, p. 9

16 Use the structure of CalWORKs to guide and direct family members toward more productive use of their time and talents.

One of the benefits of including a CalWORKs perspective in the coordinated action plan is that it provides a "get down to business" concreteness to the effort. Sometimes the CWS elements are more abstract – such as learning how to be a more nurturing parent. In contrast, the CalWORKs tasks tend to be more clearly defined – this is how you prepare a job application and this is where you file it. Parents can gain a rapid sense of accomplishment by checking off some of the small steps of the CalWORKs plan, and use that increase in self-confidence to help them tackle the more complex tasks in their CWS plan.

Transition and After Care

Providing enough ongoing support to ensure that the efforts supported by the coordinated plans are sustained following formal system involvement is essential to long-term success.

17 Help the family to connect with a community network of services and support prior to ending system involvement.

The connections that CalWORKs and CWS establish and maintain with community-based organizations, specialized service providers and family support resources are key benefits that a family gains through its experience with Linkages. Although the family may have been introduced to these resources as a result of their system involvement, parents often develop the confidence to utilize these community resources on their own following case closure. Having a positive service experience while they are supported by their Linkages team can help parents become more likely to recognize later on when it's time to seek out appropriate services and supports to keep their family strong. This is where collaboration with CalWORKs to help families become self-sufficient can actually become a protective factor against future risk of maltreatment during the stressful times that families inevitably face.

18 Manage the possibility of one of the plans continuing for a time after the other has concluded.

Through the coordinated relationships that are established between CalWORKs and child welfare case managers on mutual cases, notification of key milestones in the life of the case become a natural part of ongoing communication. One of these milestones is when the family's involvement in either their child welfare case or the CalWORKs case is about to come to an end. Closure activities for a family involved with Linkages include transition planning related to how after care or follow-on support needs can best be met for the family.

This closure coordination is especially critical if the family is still eligible for benefits, support or assistance from one program and not the other. For example the parent may have reached their 60-month time limit for CalWORKs eligibility, but are still involved with child welfare services. Likewise, the child welfare case may be ready to close, but the parent still qualifies to continue with a welfare-to-work plan.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD: Examples Of Linkages Strategies For Specific Family Engagement Guidelines

Foundational Guidelines

1. Include the family in all matters pertaining to their future.

Many counties use team decision-making as a way of including the family in all matters pertaining to their future. At a particular TDM meeting in Alameda County, the Linkages Liaison and family were both present. This helped the client come to an understanding about why she was sanctioned in CalWORKs and led to her meeting with a welfare-to-work counselor to focus on reversing the sanction. The client was involved in each step of determining ways to help her become more self-sufficient and keep her child at home. Similarly, in Orange County, a TDM is held anytime a removal is considered, within two days of reporting to the CWS registry. The family is included as well as CalWORKs, even if the family is not currently a CalWORKs case. A strength-based approach is used: the family brings their supports; supportive services are brought to the table to help determine family strengths and needs. Instead of feeling like there's been a back room deal, the family participates in the decision-making process with both agencies.

4. Establish basic knowledge about the mission and services of the "other" program across caseworkers, supervisors and managers.

Families are ultimately the ones who benefit from cross-training among workers at both CWS and CalWORKs. CWS and CalWORKs Directors in Sonoma have cross-trained among themselves and have received additional training through UC Davis' Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice. The Resource Center also offers basic program orientation and case coordination training for CalWORKs and Child Welfare staff which Sonoma County staff received. CalWORKs staff have shown an explanatory video of its programs to CWS staff. At a minimum, each group comes to recognize each other's job titles and duties. As the cross-training continues, staff begin to understand the parameters of the other's program, such as the criteria for CWS intervention and basic eligibility criteria for CalWORKs benefits – which lead to more effective delivery of services to families. Sonoma County has found that clients have started experiencing CalWORKs as a prevention strategy for child safety and family stability.

Identifying Mutual Clients

8. Conduct ongoing screening for family's participation in or potential eligibility for CalWORKs throughout their involvement with Child Welfare Services.

Families involved in CWS often go through frequent changes to their status in terms of income level, employment, housing and support systems. By regularly conducting screening for a family's eligibility for CalWORKs benefits, CWS is able to respond to a family's needs even as their situation changes. Contra Costa County has developed a form used in conjunction with their families' changes in program status. At each change in program status, clerical staff does a clearance check on the family to determine whether they are a potential Linkages case. The clerk in the screening unit initiates the first clearance and flags the folder if it is potentially a Linkages case. If the referral becomes a case, another clearance is done as the case leaves the Emergency Response Unit. Any time the case is transferred, another clearance is done to identify other status changes (e.g., family has applied for CalWORKs or children have been removed from the home). Families identified as potentially eligible for CalWORKs are identified with a bright colored form in their file, so any assigned worker will know that this is a Linkages case and may benefit from service coordination.

Assessment

9. Explore family's strengths, needs and goals in context of CalWORKs and child welfare.

A recent experience in Los Angeles County illustrates the importance of assessing the family's strengths and needs in joint case planning. A mother involved with the county's child welfare department (DCFS) due to substance abuse issues was referred to the county's welfare-to-work program (GAIN) administered by the county's public assistance department (DPSS). Because the mother was receiving family preservation services through DCFS, she was assigned a specialized GAIN caseworker who is trained to coordinate services with DCFS when families are involved in both programs (FP GSW*). At first the mother was hostile and very apprehensive about the role of welfare-to-work. Eventually, as the FP GSW kept in close contact, the mother grew to understand the importance of building her capacity for employment.

She received a referral to a DPSS contracted substance abuse provider, as well as child care and transportation, all of which allowed the mother to participate in her assigned activities. The mother complied with both DCFS and DPSS requirements, feeling supported by both agencies. She completed her substance abuse program and met her welfare-to-work employment and educational goals, and now lives with her son, successfully employed in her career.

* *Note: GAIN stands for Greater Avenues to Independence and is Los Angeles County's Welfare-to-Work program. FP GSW stands for Family Preservation GAIN Services Worker.*

11. Help families prioritize child safety and economic self-sufficiency needs to focus service planning efforts.

One aspect of coordinated case planning is helping families prioritize the focus of their service planning efforts. In Del Norte County, a family was struggling because of unstable housing and a car that needed repairs. Coordinated case planning shifted the priority of their focus from fixing the car to paying a large and outstanding power bill. Case workers gave the family vouchers for transportation, which enabled the family to postpone the car repair and secure a stable housing situation first.

Coordinated Case Planning

12. Coordinate child welfare case plans and welfare-to-work plans to improve a family's chances for success.

Tulare County has developed a family-friendly coordinated case plan process. Not only is the family present and actively involved in the case planning meeting, but the documentation that emerges is a simple, holistic picture of what the family needs to accomplish. A coordinated case plan is developed that blends the child welfare and economic assistance goals into a single set of objectives. Guided by the family, the Linkages team chooses from a combined array of family support and economic self-sufficiency services, everything from parenting classes to resolving sanctions. This comprehensive service plan helps the family fulfill their parenting role more effectively while at the same time working their way toward economic self-sufficiency.

14. Be flexible about using other mechanisms for coordination beyond formal multi-disciplinary team meetings.

One method of coordinating case planning begins with a pre-staffing meeting occurring before the joint meetings with the family. San Francisco County targets cases that have been open less than six months. Pre-staffing meetings are coordinated by the Linkages Coordinator and attended by the assigned CalWORKs and child welfare case workers, at a minimum. Roles and responsibilities are discussed and clarified as are family strengths and needs, with the goal of smooth transitioning for the family from the TDM meeting to the Linkages case coordination meeting. Through this staff preparation, families experience a shift in perspective from agency enforcement to support by both CWS and CalWORKs, allowing resources of both agencies to be more acceptable and effective.

Support and Monitoring

15. Utilize court ordered case plans to motivate client participation in welfare-to-work activities.

Families often have negative feelings about their CWS social worker. Having a child removed is demoralizing and frightening; the worker responsible for removing a child often carries the brunt of parent's frustration. Social workers can struggle to keep the elements of family engagement present in work characterized by compliance-based or adversarial actions that must be taken to protect child safety. Santa Clara County has addressed this conflict by utilizing court-ordered case plans to motivate clients to participate in welfare-to-work activities. In one case, as part of coordinated case planning with CalWORKs, the social worker utilized the drug court process to help the parent understand that by addressing her addiction problem, she could continue to receive support through CalWORKs and avoid sanction. This long-term commitment to the parent's well-being on the part of her Linkages team conveyed a sense of care and sensitivity to the client. As the CWS social worker and CalWORKs Employment Specialist helped the mom secure a job – even with a criminal record – she shifted from animosity toward the social worker to appreciating both the worker and the system. Now employed, reunited and stable, mom feels she and her child would not have survived without this kind of assistance.

Linkages and Family Engagement Guidelines

Foundational Guidelines

1. Include the family in all matters pertaining to their future.
2. Value and reinforce a collaborative service philosophy.
3. Share a strength-based, family-centered approach to practice across both service systems.
4. Establish basic knowledge about the mission and services of the “other” program across caseworkers, supervisors and managers.

Identifying Mutual Clients

5. Determine whether a family is involved in the other program at the time of intake.
6. Collaborate with CalWORKs to inform safety planning meetings for mutual clients.
7. Adhere to standard confidentiality requirements.
8. Conduct ongoing screening for a family’s participation in or potential eligibility for CalWORKs throughout their involvement with Child Welfare Services.

Assessment

9. Explore family’s strengths, needs and goals in context of CalWORKs and child welfare.
10. Review CalWORKs status factors (e.g., sanctions, timed out, exempt) that may impact the parent’s ability to engage in service activities.
11. Help families prioritize child safety and economic self-sufficiency needs to focus service planning efforts.

Coordinated Case Planning

12. Coordinate child welfare case plans and welfare-to-work plans to improve a family’s chances for success.
13. Transform existing case planning meetings into coordinated case planning sessions.
14. Be flexible about using other mechanisms for coordination beyond formal multi-disciplinary team meetings.

Support and Monitoring

15. Utilize court ordered case plans to motivate client participation in welfare-to-work activities.
16. Use the structure of CalWORKs to guide and direct family members toward more productive use of their time and talents.

Transition and After Care

17. Help the family to connect with a community network of services and support prior to ending system involvement.
18. Manage the possibility of one of the plans continuing for a time after the other has concluded.

