

OVERVIEW

What is Linkages? Linkages is an approach to social service work that promotes collaboration between CalWORKs and Child Welfare Services. Supported by state and federal government, Linkages got underway in California in 2000 with funding from philanthropy. Our goal is to improve outcomes for children and families by providing needed services and supports through improved collaboration.

How many counties are involved in Linkages? There are more than 30 counties implementing Linkages strategies.

Why Is Linkages Important? Child Welfare Services is charged with keeping children safe from maltreatment and abuse. The welfare program, CalWORKs, is responsible for providing income assistance and employment preparation services to help unemployed parents achieve self-sufficiency. In most California counties, there is an overlap of children and families who are clients of both systems. For example, nearly half of the children served through the Los Angeles County Department of Child and Family Services have been on CalWORKs at some point during the year. Historically, there has been little coordination, communication or resource sharing between these two programs, despite the large number of clients in common.

Families with annual incomes below \$15,000, compared to families with annual incomes above \$30,000, are over 22 times more likely to experience some form of maltreatment.

Research has found that factors such as parental stress from economic hardship can detrimentally affect parenting behaviors and result in neglect and abuse. Several studies have found that parental stressors were significant predictors of child welfare involvement (Shook 1999; Courtney, Piliavin and Power 2001; Paxson & Waldfogel 1999), and that increased poverty rates correspond to a rise in child maltreatment rates (Paxson & Waldfogel, 2001).

In addition to struggling with poverty and the possible or actual removal of their children, parents who are involved in both systems face the complexity of negotiating two bureaucracies with often conflicting requirements, goals and timeframes. Child Welfare and CalWORKs service offices are typically in different locations, adding scheduling and transportation challenges. Clients must negotiate with separate workers for each system—workers who typically do not communicate with each other and who may actually be working to achieve incompatible goals. The overlap between these service populations along with the strong connection between poverty and maltreatment created the impetus for Linkages.