

March 15, 2005

TO: Linkages Grantee Counties

FR: Sarah Boehm, Outcomes Evaluation Project Coordinator
Kate Karpilow, Executive Director

RE: Use of CWS/CMS Special Projects field to track Linkages clients

This memo outlines a standardized protocol for all Linkages counties to use the Special Projects field in the Child Welfare System/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) to track clients who are receiving coordinated services from CalWORKs and Child Welfare Services (a.k.a. "Linkages"). This method was developed with feedback from 12 Linkages counties.

We recommend that you share this document with your CWS/CMS database manager, your AB 636 Coordinator, and other staff involved with evaluation research and outcomes data.

CCRWF would like to know if your county is already using this method to track Linkages clients *or* are planning on doing so. This information will help us in coordinating any cross-county efforts to report data. To inform us of your plans, please complete the simple form below and return it to CCRWF by fax at 510-559-2699 or e-mail at ccrwf@ccrwf.org by **Friday, April 15, 2005**. *Thank you!*

Use of Special Projects in CWS/CMS to Track Linkages Clients

Contact Name: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

- Yes, we are currently using the protocol outlined in this memo.
- No, we are not currently using the protocol outlined in this memo, but we are planning to implement in the future (Estimated start date: _____).
- No, we are not currently using the protocol outlined in this memo, but we are interested in learning more about the approach.
- No, we are not able to implement this protocol in our county at this time and currently have no plans to implement.

I. INTRODUCTION

Shifts in government policies and legislation have increasingly required state and county agencies to assess client outcomes to justify expenditure of program revenues. In California, both federal legislation (AFSA) and state legislation (AB 636) have brought about increased effort to document client outcomes in child welfare. The tools developed to measure child welfare outcomes can also be utilized to measure the client outcomes that result from coordinated services provided through Child Welfare Services (CWS) and CalWORKs.

The Outcomes Evaluation Project (OEP) is an effort of the CalWORKs/Child Welfare Partnership Project (a.k.a. Linkages), based at the California Center for Research on Women and Families (CCRWF). The OEP was launched to help counties document the impacts of coordinated services on client outcomes for Linkages clients. A Work Group of representatives from Linkages counties explored options to document Linkages client outcomes, and if possible, recommend a preferred approach.

In order to produce reports on client outcomes for coordinated services clients, counties first need a method to track clients in their data systems. Based on work underway in several counties, the Work Group endorsed using the Special Projects field in the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) as a method to track Linkages clients. CWS/CMS is the child welfare data system used in every California county.¹ The Special Projects field is an optional field that counties can use to enter a particular code to identify a service that is being provided to a client.²

The Work Group also developed and recommends that Linkages counties use *consistent coding* for Linkages clients in the Special Projects field. Consistent coding of Linkages clients will not only support individual counties identifying and eventually assessing outcomes for Linkages clients, it will also allow researchers to assess outcomes for Linkages clients across counties.

II. TWO SPECIAL PROJECTS CODES

The Work Group recommends that **two codes** be used in the Special Projects field. One code (“Linkages”) can be used to identify clients receiving coordinated services from CWS and CalWORKs. By identifying a client in the Special Projects field of CWS/CMS, cross tabulations can then be done to determine if that client is in Emergency Response (ER), Family Maintenance (FM), Family Reunification (FR), Permanency Planning (PP).

The second code (“AB 429”) can be used to identify AB 429 clients. AB 429 clients have had their children removed from the home and, as a result, have been sanctioned in

¹ The use of Special Projects in CWS/CMS allows for tracking of Linkages clients that have either had a referral or case opened in CWS. It does not allow for tracking CalWORKs clients receiving CWS-type services solely through CalWORKs (e.g., CalWORKs clients assessed as at risk of Child Welfare Services involvement or TANF child-only cases).

² The Special Projects field is also used to enter codes for other purposes, such as identifying a particular characteristic of a client (age group).

CalWORKs. They are no longer receiving cash assistance, but continue to receive CalWORKs services, such as parenting classes. Thus, AB 429 clients are a subset of FR clients; and it is necessary to code them separately in Special Projects in order to separate them out from other FR clients.

Protocols for using Special Projects Codes to Track Linkages Clients

Below are the recommended protocols for using the two Special Projects codes (“Linkages” and “AB 429”) to track Linkages clients in CWS/CMS. For each Special Project code, there is a description of its definition, usage, and format.

Special Project Code: Linkages

The Work Group recommends the following protocol for coding clients receiving coordinated services from CalWORKs and Child Welfare Services.

Definition:

“Linkages” indicates a client is receiving coordinated services between CalWORKs and Child Welfare Services (Emergency Response, Family Maintenance, Family Reunification, or Permanency Planning). This is to be used for all coordinated services clients, except for AB 429 clients.

Usage:

For counties *not currently using* Special Projects to track Linkages clients:
Counties can identify a Linkages client by using “Linkages” or using the more descriptive term “CalWORKs Linkages.”

or

For counties *currently using* Special Projects to track Linkages clients:
Counties can identify Linkages clients by inserting “Linkages” at the beginning, middle, or end of an existing Special Project. As long as the code “Linkages” is in the code name, the client can be identified. For example, a county that is currently using the term “Mutual Clients” to identify coordinated services clients would change the term to include the word “Linkages,” as in “Linkages Mutual Clients” or “Mutual Clients Linkages.”

Format:

“Linkages” with a capital ‘L’ and an ‘s’ at the end. Special Projects codes cannot be more than 30 characters in length.

Special Project Code: AB 429

The Work Group recommends the following process for coding AB 429 clients.

Definition:

“AB 429” indicates a child whose parents are receiving CalWORKs services while the child is removed from the home (Refer to All County Letter No. 02-36, dated May 9, 2002, for a complete description of AB 429). “AB 429” should be used as a mutually exclusive category from the “Linkages” Special Project code.

Usage:

For counties *not currently using* Special Projects to track Linkages clients:

Counties can identify an AB 429 client by using “AB 429” as the Special Project code.

or

For counties *currently using* Special Projects to track Linkages clients:

Counties can identify an AB 429 client by inserting the word “AB 429” at the beginning, middle, or end of an existing Special Project. As long as the code “AB 429” is in the code name, the client can be identified.

Format:

“AB 429” with all capital letters and a space between ‘AB’ and ‘429’. Special Projects codes cannot be more than 30 characters in length.

A few important notes regarding the application of these Special Projects codes:

- These codes are intended to track clients in both CWS and CalWORKs who are receiving *Linkages services*. The codes should *not* be used to identify clients who are in both systems (often referred to as mutual clients) – unless they are receiving Linkages services. This is an important distinction in that the codes allow mutual clients receiving coordinated services to be distinguished from those that are not, and eventual comparison of their respective outcomes.
- The “Linkages” Special Project is for *all* clients receiving coordinated services between CalWORKs and CWS, except for AB 429 clients. The code, “AB 429”, is to be used to indicate a client receiving AB 429 services. In order to show a complete list of coordinated services clients, a county would need to combine both “Linkages” and “AB 429” client data sets.
- Each county has defined and implemented coordinated services in their own way. Because of this, counties do not need to meet any specific criteria or operational guidelines to use the “Linkages” or “AB 429” Special Projects codes. Counties can apply these codes at their own discretion as long as they meet the definitions described above.

Implementing the Special Projects Code Protocols

Implementing the Special Projects codes will require counties to properly train and monitor staff who are performing the data entry. Below is some additional guidance to ensure successful implementation of the protocols.

For those counties *not currently using* Special Projects to track Linkages clients:

- It may take a month or two to properly train staff to implement this practice. It may also be a good idea for counties to assess the quality of the data collection a month or so after implementation to ensure clients are being tracked consistently.
- When implementing the new coding protocol, counties should develop a process to ensure that all Linkages clients, both new and existing, are coded by the scheduled start date.

For counties *currently using* Special Projects to track Linkages clients:

- For new Linkages clients, counties may start using this method as soon as they are able to change their Linkages Special Projects to include “Linkages” and “AB 429.”
- For past Linkages clients, counties have the option of changing their Special Projects codes to include “Linkages” or “AB 429.” (Counties can request that CWS/CMS have IBM developers write code to replace previously entered Special Projects. Please note that there may be a fee associated with this request.)

Quality Assurance/Training

While the Special Projects field is the most accessible means of identifying and tracking Linkages clients in CWS/CMS, there is still the potential for data entry errors to occur that would reduce the data quality. Each county may need to provide staff training and implement quality assurance measures to ensure that staff are consistently entering the correct Special Project for Linkages clients.

Some key training topics are:

- The “Linkages” Special Project code must be used in both the Case and Referral tables when a client moves from Emergency Response (in the Referral table) to Family Maintenance or Family Reunification (in the Case table).
- “Linkages” and “AB 429” Special Project codes are mutually exclusive categories. For example, if a client is in Family Maintenance and CalWORKs they are assigned a “Linkages” Special Project. If the child is then removed from his/her home and becomes an AB 429 client, then the “Linkages” Special Project is end dated and an “AB 429” Special Project is start dated. The “AB 429” Special Project must be end dated upon reunification of the child(ren) with the parents. If the child then becomes a Family Maintenance case, then a “Linkages” Special Project is start dated once again.

Training and technical assistance are available through the CalWORKs/Child Welfare Partnership Project to assist with developing and implementing outcomes evaluation of your Linkages clients.

Please send any questions or comments to ccrwf@ccrwf.org.

Track one more thing... and a lot more information

Merced County adds one more piece of data to their tracking of Linkages clients and achieves additional quality assurance *and* another way to analyze their outcomes data!

When a Linkages client is identified in Special Projects, Merced County workers also enter a code to identify who the Eligibility Worker (EW) or Employment and Training Worker (ETW) is who provides services. Thus, Linkages clients can not only be identified through their Special Projects codes, but also by sorting for clients that have Eligibility or Employment & Training Workers, which offers analysts a valuable way to cross-check their data to be sure that all Linkages clients have been identified.

In addition, by entering a code for the EW or ETW, it is then possible to sort data by an individual worker to review the outcomes they have achieved for all of their clients.

How is this accomplished technically?

For Linkages clients, EWs and ETWs can be assigned worker numbers in CWS/CMS. The workers can then be listed as secondary assignments for Linkages clients. The workers can also be assigned to a “Linkages” unit number to allow another means of querying Linkages clients.

Note: In order to assign the workers as secondary assignments, they must have CWS/CMS user ids. Since there is a statewide ceiling to the number of user ids issued, a county that has a significant number of EWs and ETWs may choose to assign generic staff positions as a secondary assignment (e.g., “Eligibility Worker” and “Employment and Training Worker”) and then enter the actual worker name in the “Comments” field.