

# KEEPING LINKED

A PUBLICATION OF CFPIC'S FEDERAL LINKAGES PROJECT  
LINKAGES: CALWORKS AND CHILD WELFARE COLLABORATION TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES

SEPTEMBER 2008

## THE VIEW OF THE VIEW FROM THE TOP

By Stuart Oppenheim

A fundamental principle of Linkages from the beginning has been the recognition of the critical role of leadership in moving our work forward. The workgroup that developed the earliest planning documents recognized this essential component and it has been incorporated as a central element in our Planning Guide as we have moved through all stages of implementation.

This year's statewide convening offered us the opportunity to present the perfect embodiment of the importance of leadership to our efforts. As our plans for the Convening developed, the planning committee and Statewide Linkages Oversight Committee agreed that the best way to demonstrate the level of leadership commitment that we have achieved in the history of our project would be a final panel composed of the highest level of state and county leadership. We could not have been more pleased to present to our 200 participants concluding remarks from the CDSS CalWORKs and Family and Children's Services Deputies (Greg Rose and Charr Lee Metsker), the CDSS Director (John Wagner), and the CWDA Executive Director (Frank Mecca). The title and theme of the closing panel was "The View from the Top."

Charr Lee led off the panel by offering her perspective on our work as one of the few people who has been with Linkages since the very beginning. Char Lee was involved with the earliest Linkages planning stages and has attended all of the statewide Convenings and has spoken at most of them. She was able this year to focus on the challenges facing the Welfare to Work and CalWORKs programs and to emphasize how a Linkages approach will help counties address these challenges. The main emphasis of her Division right now is Healthy Families and Self-Sufficient families. As we know, a focus on Work Participation Rates has been essential for the state and the counties. The current challenges are a result of the 2005 Deficit Reduction Act (DRA), which recalibrated the caseload reduction credits--before DRA California was doing fine, but with the recalibration in that Act California is extremely challenged to meet the new federal requirements. In addition to the recalibration of credits, DRA included newly defined work eligible individuals (sanctioned cases, participants in state-only programs, and a 90% work requirement for two-parent families). Work activities were also redefined and work verification plan requirements are also more strick than they previously were. In all, DRA has compelled California to focus attention Work Participation Rates and this should be good news for Linkages counties who can use their cross-program relationships to help families achieve their employment goals.



L-R: John Wagner, Frank Mecca, Greg Rose & Charr Lee Metsker

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**THE VIEW OF THE VIEW FROM THE TOP (continued from Page 1)**

Greg Rose was next on the panel, and he recalled his own work in helping to write the federal grant proposal that resulted in the funding of our federal project. Greg has been a strong supporter of Linkages from the beginning, having also participated in the earliest planning meetings, and was instrumental in obtaining the state match for the federal grant and in envisioning the current configuration of the project through the CDSS and CFPIC partnership. Greg reviewed with us the specific approaches embodied in the federal Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) Program Improvement Plan (PIP). The PIP is providing a strong focus on case planning strategies and the engagement of parents in that planning in addition to expanding the array of services available to assist families. Linkages is an approach that is important to strengthening case planning and the array of services and therefore Greg’s remarks were an important reminder of how our efforts are critical to the achievement of the outcomes that must be addressed in the CFSR/PIP process. In particular, Linkages is one of the specific strategies that has been included in the PIP and we will be contributing information that is necessary for the state to provide to the federal government as an indication of our progress in achieving the objectives of improving the lives of vulnerable children and families.

Frank Mecca followed Charr Lee and Greg by characterizing the environment that we are working in as one in which we must grapple with reduced resources and heightened expectations, one where we are still constrained by inflexible funding streams with no let-up by policy makers who continue to expect that we will manage by outcomes irrespective of the funding situation. Frank expressed his appreciation of approaches such as Linkages that help us avoid duplication of efforts and leverage funding to maximize our efforts on behalf of the families whom we serve. He echoed one of the major messages of Linkages in stating that it is gratifying to him to see that we are moving from picturing Linkages as a program to understanding that it is a set of operating procedures that are, in successful Linkages counties, just the way that we do business.

John Wagner, Director of the California Department of Social Services sent a letter to County Welfare Directors urging them to support their staff in attending our convening and to support their work in linking families across Child Welfare and CalWORKs.

Frank also commented that it is significant that Linkages is talking about being an approach to dealing with poverty rather than speaking about specific programmatic elements that it might address. He noted that state and federal policy have not directly addressed the question of poverty and that there is no state or federal mandate to reduce poverty. He suggested that we can lead the way by continuing to emphasize that the goal of our work is the reduction of poverty and that Linkages might be pointing the way towards the necessity of embodying into our policy work an approach to dealing with poverty rather than simply tinkering with the specific program elements that may or may not address this goal.

Our two days together culminated in the presentation by the Director of the California Department of Social Services. John Wagner had sent a letter to County Welfare Directors urging them to support their staff in attending our convening and to support their work in linking families across Child Welfare and CalWORKs. John expressed his commitment to programs like Linkages that are seeking to develop evidence of their effectiveness through scientific research. He also cited his own strong commitment to ensuring that state programs are coordinated and build strong partnerships and that Linkages is an example of the best kind of collaboration that is helping to build strong and healthy families. John told us about the State Interagency Team and the Child Welfare Council and how his work with those two bodies is enhanced by the state’s strong approach to partnerships through programs such as Linkages. Director Wagner is clearly paying attention to the work that we are doing and his commitment to our efforts reflects the great work that we

are doing with CDSS staff to help institutionalize our progress so that we can use the remaining years of our federal grant to make sure that Linkages becomes the fundamental way that business is done in Child Welfare and CalWORKs throughout California.

## California's Program Improvement Plan

Submitted by:  
**California Department of Social Services  
Outcome and Accountability Bureau**



**CDSS**

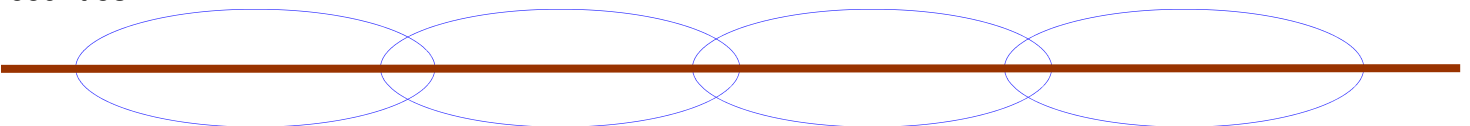
CALIFORNIA  
DEPARTMENT OF  
SOCIAL SERVICES

Once again, CDSS is enlisting help from the Linkages Project (Linkages) by including Linkages in the Program Improvement Plan (PIP). The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) has been working in partnership with Child and Family Policy Institute of California (CFPIC) and the County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA) for a number of years to improve outcomes for children and families who receive services from both the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and child welfare programs. In 2005 a grant was obtained from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to further facilitate integration of services offered by CalWORKS and Child Welfare Services. This grant provided resources to counties already operating Linkages programs and to support the expansion of the initiative to new counties. To date, 34 counties are participating in Linkages.

Families already enrolled or referred to child welfare programs may need additional assistance in order to preserve the family. Among many areas of assistance, these families may be in need of food, housing, medical, utilities, transportation (bus passes, car insurance and registration, car repairs, gasoline), clothing, and child care. Where appropriate, assistance to become employment ready or seek employment is also provided. This may include obtaining copies of their birth certificates and/or social security cards. Without the additional help, the pressure on the family increases the relationship between poverty and child maltreatment.

The PIP is the final step in the process of the federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) which included a statewide assessment, onsite reviews and stakeholder interviews, and then developed in response to the 2008 Federal California CFSR Final Report.

The philosophies and policies of the Linkages project are reflected in the current PIP. For example, a Linkages Project is included to provide guidelines, trainings along with surveys and reports to the counties to increase participatory case planning by engaging families in developing their own case plans. Guidelines and information gathering about current practices will be shared through Linkages' semi-annual project meetings between CalWORKS and Child Welfare. In addition, these meetings will provide an opportunity to keep informed about best practices and share tools across counties.



## Fall Convening: Because, It just Makes Sense

Danna Fabella, Linkages Project Director

The Fall Convening held in Sacramento on September 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> was attended by over 200 people, primarily staff from thirty-one of our Linkages counties, as well as staff from the California Department of Social Services from the Office of Child Abuse Prevention, Child Welfare Policy, CalWORKs, Welfare to Work, and Outcomes and Accountability. According to the evaluations that were turned in at the end of the conference it was a huge success. The overall rating was 4.36 on a rating scale of 1 to 5. Some of the comments were:

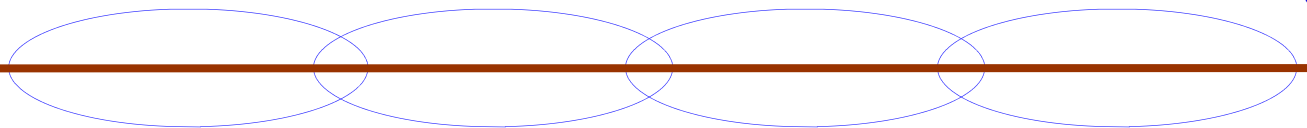
### Two strong overall themes emerged from the written comments for the convening:

1. Workshop list was excellent - people wished they had been able to attend more than two. Suggestions included adding another day and starting earlier on the first day.
2. Workshop Rooms were cold! (a surprise for Sacramento in September—we let the hotel know they can save some money and turn down the air conditioner!)

### A sample of the other comments:

- The Parent Response Panel was POWERFUL!
- The keynote to the workshops—information provided was very helpful and useful.
- I truly appreciated the noticeably greater focus on the CalWORKS/Welfare to work side of the house....a true Linkages conference
- Dr. Slack was very powerful and informative
- Would like more roundtable discussions
- Presenters need to give more information on how they achieved successes and what they tried that didn't work
- A very strong final panel—very impressive.
- Clear and concise schedule of events.
- Good networking opportunity!
- This was a very well organized convention and ignited renewed passion and energy for the work we do.

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## Fall Convening: Because, It just Makes Sense

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Kristen Shook Slack, PhD from University of Wisconsin opened the Convening with a presentation she called, *The Elephant in the Room: Poverty's Role in Child Maltreatment*. She started with the following key points:

- Low-income families are over-represented in CPS and out-of-home care populations;
- In National Incidence Studies (NIS-1-2-3), strong inverse correlation with income;
- Child maltreatment report rates are greatest in communities with high poverty rates and high unemployment rates;



Kristen Shook Slack, PhD

She presented the following from TANF studies:

- Strong correlation between welfare assistance and child protection caseloads
- Loss of welfare income while unemployed increases odds of CPS reports;
- Employment reduces odds of CPS reports
- Welfare sanctions increase odds of CPS reports, but not substantiations
- States with “welfare-reform-like” policies have higher rates of substantiated CPS reports
- Child recipients of TANF are more likely to have substantiated CPS reports while receiving welfare than after leaving welfare
- In an experimental evaluation, welfare reform policies are associated with an increase in substantiated neglect reports

But, she also cautioned with the following remarks:

- Need to keep in mind that:
  - Most low-income parents do not maltreat their children
  - Research suggests class and race bias in Child Protective Service (CPS) reporting
  - Studies of higher-income families who become poor have shown that parenting/ caretaking abilities decline under economic pressure

She suggested the following for Child Protective Service workers:

- Parenting interventions may not work if economic context is in chaos
- Inventory economic hardships during service assessment phase (in CPS as well as prevention programs)
  - Acknowledge that economic hardships affect parenting
  - Listen for sources of economic stress and probe to understand how such stress affects caregiving capacities
  - When identified, consider how they translate into risks for children in question
  - When identified, probe about the degree of control caregiver has over each hardship

She also mentioned that one of the ways to address these issues is to do “cross systems” work that includes strategies such as:

- Co-location
- Shared workers
- Simultaneous assessment of parenting and economic needs
- Point people in the different disciplines
- Data-sharing
- Teaming

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## Fall Convening: Because, It just Makes Sense

Continued from page 5

It sounded much like the “cross system” work that we do in Linkages and really helped us to think more about the human cost of not doing this type of collaborative work.

We then heard from two parents; **Paula McDowell** from Stanislaus and **Kelley Blanton** from Fresno who was joined by **James Hackett**, Supervisor in Employment Services who responded to questions developed around the issues of poverty and maltreatment that Dr. Slack presented. Both parents agreed about how difficult it is to even “think straight” when you are worried about finances. They needed staff in our agencies to recognize this stress and help them address these issues if we expect them to meet other requirements in child welfare and welfare to work plans. They both were able to talk about how their county’s Linkages program helped them in a variety of areas and both are working and have their children at home with them.

There were over fourteen workshops covering the following topics; AB 429, Engaging Families in Case Planning, Drug Court and Linkages, CalWORKs Payment Systems, CalWORKs 101, Child Welfare 101, Work Participation Rates, Effective Supervision in a Coordinated Environment, Managing Organizational Change, Local Evaluation, Developing Parent Leaders, and CalWORKs Structure Decision Making for preventive services. While all the Workshops received excellent evaluations, those that shared their Linkages Practices seemed to really resonate with the attendees. Many thanks to those counties that shared their local work; Contra Costa, Fresno, Merced, Orange, Santa Barbara, Santa Clara, San Luis Obispo, San Bernardino, Stanislaus, Tulare, Tehama and Ventura. And our closing Panel (see article page 1), helped us to understand the priorities of our State Department of Social Services and the role that County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA) plays in advocating for counties so that they can better serve vulnerable families. But more importantly, it helped us understand how important Linkages is as a strategy to better serve our families and how positively it is seen by the very top social services administrator in California, **Director John Wagner**.

And lastly, I was compelled, given all the hype around the Olympics and the Political Conventions that just occurred, to develop our own slogan for Linkages. But I have to first tell you the story behind it.

On a recent airplane trip, I was chatting with my neighbor in the next seat. And, you know how people just seem to ask the question, “What is it that you do?”. I paused a moment, wanting to frame our work accurately, but summed it up by saying “ I am statewide project director for a grant given to our state to promote collaboration between the public assistance worker and the child welfare worker on mutual cases”. I noticed that while I was further describing this work, his eyes narrowed, and then he said, “You mean someone pays you to make people collaborate?” And this was followed very closely by, “Who pays for this grant?” As he took out his pen to write it down, I reluctantly said, “The Administration on Children Services under the Health and Human Services Agency in Washington.” So, I thought a lot about that reaction in the weeks prior to our Convening. And went back to that man’s unstated comment, “We should be collaborating because, to not coordinate just really makes no sense”. So my mantra to all of us when we think we have just too much to do and not enough time to coordinate with our colleagues, well, we do it,

**“Because, it just makes sense”.**

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Contra Costa County



Kern County



Jan Viss & Teresa Contreras



One Tired Pup!

Merced County



Stanislaus County



UPDATES...UPDATES...UPDATES...UPDATES

**Work Plans:** If you have not submitted your Work Plan for 2008/2009 please let us know if there is any way we can assist you at the Project. We really do need these to be in compliance with our Federal Grant.

**Articles:** Please check the Linkages Intranet for the articles on Sanctions and Child Welfare and Poverty and Maltreatment that were mentioned by Kristen Shook Slack, PhD who presented at the Fall Convening. You will find them under the Documents, State/Federal Information, and then click on the Fall Convening.

**CWDA Annual Conference:** CFPIC, Tehama and Los Angeles County will be presenting on Linkages at the Annual Conference. Think of ways in your own county to put the spotlight on Linkages.

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Child & Family Policy Institute of California

**The Child and Family Policy Institute of California (CFPIC)** is a private non-profit organization incorporated in 2004 as a 501 (c) 3 entity under the auspices of the County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA). The purpose of the CFPIC is to “advance the development of sound public policy and promote program excellence in county Human Services Agencies through research, education, training and technical assistance.”

**Linkages** is a strategic effort by thirty-three California’s counties to improve coordination between CalWORKS and Child Welfare through development of county specific work plans and leadership. The initiative is supported by CFPIC through trainings, convenings, peer support and technical assistance. These supports initially received private foundation funding and are currently funded through a Federal Grant and the California Department of Social Services.