

PARTNERING CHILD WELFARE SERVICES AND CALWORKS PROGRAMS TO SERVE COMMON CLIENTS: SANTA CLARA COUNTY

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Executive Summary

Since the implementation of Welfare Reform, Santa Clara County Social Services Agency has developed and implemented innovative approaches to assist families to self-sufficiency. One program partners social workers, and employment technicians working together as a team to serve common customers. This program links services between CalWORKS and Family and Children's Services enhancing communication and coordinating services to common clients.

BACKGROUND

Welfare Reform, with the ticking clocks of timeframes and deadlines, adds an additional urgency for CalWORKS clients. It also requires clients to work or prepare for a job, allowing two years while on cash aid to meet these requirements. At the same time, they may have requirements for a child welfare plan to keep their children: drug treatment, parenting classes, court appearances, and meetings with their social worker.

To address these competing requirements, Santa Clara County convened an interdepartmental work group in 1998, with staff from the Department of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) and the Department of Employment and Benefits Services (DEBS). They developed programs that linked services between the two departments and created a system that would support the coordination of services for mutual clients.

In September 1999, they began co-location of CalWORKs Employment Technicians (ETs) within DFCS to integrate court mandated services with the clients CalWORKs employment plan, creating one unified plan. Also, they established co-location of CalWORKS District Office Social Workers, with employment services staff, and eligibility staff.

LESSONS LEARNED

Santa Clara County has developed a program that results in better decisions for clients when combining their employment and services plans. Since this program began in 1999, they have integrated 106 common cases. This has allowed them the opportunity to improve services to families by:

- Reducing duplicative services
- Reducing competing activities
- Authorizing supportive services
- Enhancing communication between CalWORKs and DFCS staff

It appears that partnering CalWORKs programs and DFCS services to serve common clients has grown into a natural extension of work practices in Santa Clara County. Social Workers and Employment Technicians who staff common cases embrace a "We together" approach to help clients reach self-sufficiency. It was obvious that this partnership addresses the client's needs and

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has offered solutions to deal with these challenges. This strength-based program does the following:

- Assesses the needs of the client
- Sets achievable goals
- Offers new opportunities to reach self sufficiency

In this program clients frequently express that they are relieved that the agency recognizes their competing demands and offers them services and support to complete their required activities.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MONTEREY COUNTY

Monterey County would benefit from implementing a program that partners CalWORKS and Child Welfare Services.

This can be achieved by assigning the CalWORKS Social Workers to intensive case management of clients referred from CWES staff. With priority given to CalWORKS clients who are struggling to comply with their employment plans. In consultation with the CWES staff, the CalWORKS Social Worker would:

- Assess the client's needs and strengths in setting reachable goals.
- Provide access to services needed to reach these goals.
- Offer encouragement to support their progress.

This approach will allow the Social Worker and the CWES Worker an opportunity to address the client's needs and offers them solutions to deal with their challenges.

As a long range goal, Monterey County may want to consider partnering CalWORKS and Family and Children's Services to provide services and support to common clients. This would include allowing court-mandated activities as allowable work activities, minimizing the competing demands between programs for families. This may reduce sanctions, increase participation rates and support families to reach self-reliance.

In conclusion, one key intensive case manager, acting as a life coach would support the client in dealing with their personal and family challenges. Utilizing coaching principles to lend encouragement and counseling support would help the client reach self-sufficiency.

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Since the implementation of Welfare Reform, Santa Clara County Social Services Agency has developed and implemented innovative approaches to assist families to self-sufficiency. One program partners social workers and employment technicians working together as a team to serve common customers. This program links the services between CalWORKS and Family and Children's Services, enhancing communication and coordinating services to common clients.

With this in mind, the primary focus of my analysis was to review and evaluate the partnering of these two departments as follows:

- How staff from different departments work together and share common purpose and vision for their client.
- Screening and assessments that allow preventive services to be offered early on in the process.
- Caseload management and monitoring the participant's progress.

My interest in studying this program was my desire to reduce the number of case manager's one client may encounter. I was interested in the concept of one case manager, coordinating the activities of the client and monitoring their progress, thus allowing the client the support to manage a multitude of requirements and provide opportunities to achieve successful outcomes for their families.

BACKGROUND

Santa Clara County's CalWORKS program is an elaborate and comprehensive network of programs and projects designed to assist and support families toward their path to self-sufficiency.

The CalWORKS Social Work Unit, along with community partners provide an effective system of service to assist families who face challenges. In many cases these families are dealing with alcohol and substance abuse, mental illness, domestic abuse, unemployment, illiteracy, and homelessness.

Welfare Reform, with the ticking clocks of timeframe and deadlines, adds an additional urgency for CalWORKS clients. It also requires clients to work or prepare for a job, only allowing two years while on cash aid to meet these requirements. At the same time, they may have requirements for a child welfare plan to keep their children; drug treatment, parenting classes, court appearances, and meetings with their social workers.

To address these competing requirements, Santa Clara County convened an interdepartmental work group in 1998, with staff from the Department of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) and the Department of Employment and Benefits Services (DEBS). They developed programs that linked services between the two departments and created a system that would support the coordination of services for mutual clients.

In September 1999, they began co-location of CalWORKS Employment Technicians (ETs) within DFCS to integrate court mandated services with the clients CalWORKS employment plan, creating one unified plan.

Also, they established co-location of CalWORKS District Office Social Workers, with employment services staff, and eligibility staff. This provides them an opportunity to assist

clients with addressing various barriers such as domestic abuse, alcohol and drug services, and mental health services.

During my research in Santa Clara County I interviewed a co-location CalWORKs Social Worker in the North County CalWORKs Office. We reviewed and discussed the various approaches used to assist CalWORKs clients. The extensive intervention of the CalWORKs Social Worker has contributed to connecting clients with community services, crisis counseling and other programs to address issues that may be contributing factors in preventing the client from moving forward with their employment plan. In my observation the Social Worker is acting as a life coach who is assessing their needs and offering opportunities to change, while closely monitoring their progress.

COMMON CASES

My case study will focus on the area of CalWORKs and DFCS partnering to serve common cases. The goal of this program is to integrate the requirements of the DFCS court mandated or voluntary services plan, with the CalWORKs Employment Services (CWES) employment plan, to develop a unified plan.

Employment Technicians, co-located at the Technology Drive Office, with DFCS Social Workers, provide the following services:

- Developing and/or modifying the employment plan and integrating the requirements of the DFCS plan.
- Intensive case management of specialized common cases.
- Facilitating service coordination meetings with Social Worker and client.
- Identifying resources available to eligible CalWORKS families.
- Authorizing support and ancillary services to eligible CalWORKs families.
- Monitoring the client's progress.

CASE IDENTIFICATION

A monthly report, "Listing of Common Cases Child Welfare and CWES" is generated and distributed to all CWES District Offices. I observed the process practiced by the colocation Employment Technician to identify common cases. The Employment Technician reviews the list of potential cases and evaluates the data to verify the following:

- Client is active on CWES
- Client is mandated or voluntary DFCS participant
- DFCS participation is expected to last more than 30 days

Confirmation that these requirements exist is established by checking the following data systems: GAIN Information System (GIS), and Case Data System (CDS) to confirm the CalWORKS case is active and client is a mandatory work registrant. When this is confirmed, the next step is to confirm the status of the DFCS case on the automated child welfare system (CMS/CWS).

When all these systems have been screened and the data elements are verified a common case is established. The Employment Technician will request the employment case file be transferred to their caseload. Upon receipt of the case, the Employment Technician will review the case to determine what is needed for the client to meet work requirements. The Employment Technician schedules a meeting with the Social Worker to review and discuss the DFCS case status, court ordered activities, and potential needs of the client. The Employment Technician will evaluate the DFCS court plan to determine what amount of time is spent in DFCS activities and what activities can be counted toward the CWES required hours to meet CalWORKS participation requirements. DFCS case activities that can be counted towards the employment plan include time spent in drug testing, AAfNA meetings, counseling, parenting classes, visitations, court appearances, and drug classes.

The next step is for the Employment Technician and Social Worker to schedule a Service Coordination Meeting with the client to provide information on how the child service and employment plans can be integrated into a unified plan. The client must agree to integrate plans.

SERVICE COORDINATION MEETING

A Service Coordination meeting with the Social Worker, Employment Technician, and client is held to review program requirements. It is essential for the client to give input and buy-in to complete a successful integrated plan. This meeting focuses on identifying the strengths of the client, and explaining what the client needs to do. This includes:

- CWES participation requirements, including hours, and maintaining satisfactory progress
- Timelimits (24 month clock) and clarify how much time they have left
- Exemptions from CWES
- Good cause
- Advantages of integrating the DFCS plan and employment plan
- Supportive services

If the client agrees to a unified plan they are given an appointment to meet with an Employment Services Assessor to evaluate their employment skills and identify training and educational needs. When this is completed the unified plan is finalized, including the court required activities with employment activities. Once this has occurred and the client signs the employment plan they are eligible to receive supportive services. Supportive services (child care and transportation) and other ancillary expenses can be authorized for DFCS activities that become part of the unified plan. These unified plans are closely monitored by the Employment Technician to ensure that the client is meeting the participation requirements for the unified plan. In addition, they authorize the supportive services payments.

CASE MANAGEMENT

Intensive case management by the Employment Technician is essential and the main success of this program. The Employment Technician coaches the client step-by-step, cheering their successes, encouraging them during low points, offering alternative solutions, and providing

resources to meet their needs. The Employment Technician is the connector to all service providers, keeping them informed of the client's progress.

I interviewed several Social Workers who indicated that the co-location Employment Technician's support greatly assisted several of their clients in meeting their DFCS plan. Success stories were shared with me, which described difficult situations of individuals who previously did not comply with meeting the requirements of their service plan. With the intervention of the Social Worker and the Employment Technician this intensive case management approach contributed to the success of the client. One Social Worker reported that coaching of the Employment Technician encouraged the client to participate in required activities. In addition, having the supportive services available made it possible for the client to obtain transportation and child care to comply with the required activities.

DRUG COURT

A highlight of my visit to Santa Clara County was observing Drug Court. Judge Edwards, who is nationally renowned for his work with families and children in juvenile court, facilitated a precourt brown-bag lunch meeting to discuss the 40 or more cases on the calendar. Present were Social Workers, Drug Treatment Counselors, Mental Health Counselors, Domestic Violence Counselors, Attorneys for the children, Attorneys for the parents, and Attorneys for the Social Workers.

In observing Drug Court from the pre-court briefing to the actual court appearances, I was afforded the opportunity to connect with the client, who relayed the reality of their real life situations and struggles with competing demands to comply with court mandates. In hearing their stories, it became apparent to me how difficult it is for the client to juggle their court ordered drug testing, court appearances, counseling, child visitation, AA/NA meetings, and other court required activities. Hearing these testimonials gave me a better understanding of the challenges that clients face and how difficult it is for them to keep appointments and follow-through on requirements imposed on them. It requires the client to be highly organized and extremely motivated to comply with these mandates, while dealing with their recovery.

During the court proceedings, Judge Edwards provides encouragement and support to the client as he hears them provide a report of their progress. He questions the counselors, social workers, and attorneys to clarify issues raised by his discussion with the client. Judge Edwards praises the clients for clean drug tests and regular attendance at 12step meetings, he reaffirms their requirement to continue with their court mandated treatment program. The purpose of my visit to Drug Court was to accompany the co-location lead Employment Technician who participates in Drug Court to assist the client who may be required to apply for CalWORKS benefits. The Employment Technician meets with the client and explains the CalWORKS program requirements and the application process. They inform the client what they need to do and they follow-up with them in two to three days to ensure they have applied for benefits. They will continue to monitor their progress and report to Drug Court on the status of their CalWORKS application. Often, this will become a CalWORKS and DFCS common case and require continued case management to monitor their CalWORKS employment plan.

LESSONS LEARNED

Santa Clara County has developed a program that results in better decisions for clients when their employment and services plans are combined. Since this program began in 1999, they have integrated services and plans for about 106 common cases. This has allowed them the opportunity to improve services to families by:

- Reducing duplicate services
- Reducing competing activities and deadlines
- Authorizing supportive services
- Enhancing communication between CalWORKS and DFCS staff

It appears that partnering CalWORKs and DFCS to serve common clients has grown into a natural extension of work practices in Santa Clara County.

Social Workers and Employment Technicians who staff common cases embrace a "We together" approach that helps clients reach self-sufficiency. It is obvious that this partnership addresses the client's needs and offers solutions to deal with challenges. This strength-based program does the following:

- Assesses the needs of the client
- Sets achievable goals
- Offers new opportunities to reach self-sufficiency.

The Social Workers I spoke with reported that in this program the client often expresses they are relieved that the agency recognizes their competing demands and offers them services and support to complete their required activities.

The client reports that they hear a consistent message from the agency of what they need to do and how much time they have to do it.

It is obvious that the staff who deliver the services to the common case clients are proud of their accomplishments. More important, they are proud of their clients and their achievements. When I interviewed staff I asked them what advice they would give my county to implement this program. Unanimously the message was, "Do it, it works!"

IMPLICATIONS FOR MONTEREY COUNTY

Monterey County would benefit from implementing programs that partner CalWORKs and Child Welfare Services. I recommend Monterey County evaluate the assignment of our CalWORKs Social Workers, who are currently assigned to work with families who have been sanctioned from the CalWORKs program for non-compliance with their employment plan.

The CalWORKs Social Workers can be assigned intensive case management of cases referred from CWES staff, focusing on the clients who are struggling to comply with their employment

plans. The practices of the CalWORKS social worker would be similar to those identified in the Santa Clara County co-location of CalWORKs Social Worker in the district office setting.

The CalWORKs Social Workers in this capacity would complete a more in-depth assessment with the client to explore why they have been unsuccessful in their employment plan. This would include:

- Evaluating whether the client may need mental health, substance abuse, or medical evaluation referrals.
- Working closely with the CWES staff they could discuss exemptions from participation or contribute to the development or modification of the employment plan.
- Monitoring the client's progress with supportive phone calls, follow-up visits, and setting new goals when appropriate.

To assist clients, who continue to face personal or family challenges, it would be beneficial for the department to use the service coordination model. The CalWORKs Social Worker would facilitate the meeting that would include the CWES Worker and other service providers involved with the client. At this meeting the client would provide input to achieve their employment plan. This meeting would be designed to focus on the client's strengths and what they need to do to meet the employment program requirements. The CWES Worker would develop or revise the employment plan based on the outcome of the meeting and input from the CalWORKs Social Worker.

The CalWORKs Social Worker, along with the CWES Worker, will monitor the progress of the client, encouraging them when they need assistance, cheering them on when they reach milestones, and preparing them to set new goals.

As a long range goal the department may want to consider partnering CalWORKs and Family and Children's Services to provide services and support to common clients. This would include allowing Child Welfare Service court mandated activities as allowable work activities, as well as minimizing competing demands between programs for families. This may reduce sanctions, increase employment participation rates and support families to become more self-reliant.

In conclusion, we may not be able to eliminate the various case workers and service providers a client may need. However, we can consider one key intensive case manager who will act as a life coach. They would use coaching principles to help lend encouragement and counseling support to the client, as well as provide them with the knowledge to link to the existing services, thus meeting the goal of moving them forward to reach self-sufficiency.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Evaluate a CalWORKs Social Work program that provides intensive case management for CWES referred clients:

- Establish an interdepartmental team to evaluate a program and develop a strategy for implementation..

- Develop a marketing campaign to promote the program and build partnerships between divisions.
- Share the implementation plan with all staff involved to obtain their input before finalizing the plan.
- Develop goals and written procedures
- Develop strategy for implementation and evaluation plan.
- Develop clear reporting lines and responsibilities.
- Create SW 101, CWES 101 and CaIWORKs 101 courses to raise awareness of the program requirements and practices between departments.
- Monitor progress and celebrate successes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Santa Clara County for giving me the opportunity to do my internship in their county. I was very impressed with the staff and their passion for the work they do with the families in their programs. I want to recognize Allette Lundberg and Lisle Cohen who created the vision for partnering CalWORKS and DFCS common cases and continue to provide the leadership and support to continue the program. And a special thanks goes to Denise Boland, my project facilitator, for providing me with information and support throughout my project. I want to recognize the CalWORKS Social Work Unit who guided me during my case study and provided me with the information and stories to complete my research.

I would like to thank Monterey County for giving me the opportunity to participate in the BASSC program. It has been an honor to be part of such an elite program. I have gained new insight and new approaches to carry out my job duties and deliver services to the families in our community.