

## ELIMINATING BARRIERS FOR OPTIMUM CORRECTIVE ACTION IN SANTA CLARA

Kim Stepney\*

Since the implementation of Welfare Reform every Social Service Agency has experienced massive changes. Adjustments have been made, and are continuing to be made, by all participants from the staff to clients.

Due to some of these changes, the staff has more responsibilities insuring that cases meet quality control standards. Initially, most errors were not counted because they fell under the "Hold Harmless Period" which ended June 1997. During that period thoughts were focused on implementation rather than how the impact and changes of Welfare Reform would effect our future error rate. Although we were cognizant of the error rate issue, it was only after the initial implementation of Welfare Reform that we were able to direct our full attention to improved corrective action to reduce our error rate. As we focused on evaluating our present corrective action method, many questions came to the forefront in trying to discover where the breakdown in our system was and how we could improve it. Some of these questions included:

1. Does the staff understand the changes brought on by Welfare Reform?
2. Are the EW's thoroughly reviewing each case ?
3. Are the Supervisor's reviewing cases thoroughly?
4. Where are the majority of errors centered?
5. What's working well for us now and can we use

this to improve our current errors?

6. Are there any specific training needs?
7. Are more controls needed to ensure quality control standards are met?

These questions reflect just a few of the issues that we faced.

Santa Clara County provided an opportunity for a fresh look at how to approach Corrective Action.

### OVERVIEW: SANTA CLARA'S ERROR RATE

Santa Clara has had the great fortune of keeping a low error rate. I, first, wondered how are they able to do this? Aren't their eligibility workers generic? What is their great secret? How are they able to keep their sanity through this oversized awakened Giant called Welfare Reform?

I was determined to go Santa Clara and learn the secret and return and share this golden information with San Francisco. I was on a mission to find a solution to reduce the error rate in the San Francisco Department of Human Services.

To fully understand whether or not the Corrective Action Committee efforts have had an impact we must first look at Santa Clara's error rate .

\* Kim Stepney is a Section Manager for the Non-Assistance Food Stamps Program of the San Francisco Department of Human Services.

**ERROR RATE FOR SANTA CLARA**

DATE	AFDC/TANF	NAFS
10/95 - 9/96	2.34%	7.86%
10/96 - 9/97	3.10%	7.73%
10/97 - 12/97	2.59%	9.62%

**STATE TOLERANCE**

DATE	AFDC/TANF	NAFS
FISCAL YEAR 1996	3.89%	9.74%

**FEDERAL TOLERANCE**

DATE	AFDC/TANF	NAFS
FISCAL YEAR 1996	9.32%	9.22%

**BACKGROUND**

Santa Clara had nine (9) district offices. The eligibility workers on staff are generic. Each worker is responsible for three (3) income maintenance programs. The Corrective Action Committee process was unchanged until approximately a year ago. The Agency Corrective Action Committee met on a monthly basis. This meeting was attended by the Director, Program Managers, Quality Control and various program people. During this meeting, the top three (3) errors for the agency were discussed. Discussion eventually led to what could be done to reduce these errors and a strategic action plan was

developed and implemented.

One error that was targeted was processing CA-7's. The Agency Corrective Action Committee decided that the solution to this error could be handled by a targeted Mini-Review. This Mini-Review was developed by Quality Control.

The Monthly Mini-Review was a tool for the line supervisor's to insure that the eligibility workers were processing CA-7's correctly. The eligibility worker's were instructed/trained on the new process in which CA-7's were to be completed.

This Monthly Mini-Review is a four (4) question sheet that supervisor's complete on every four) cased reviewed. These four (4) questions ensure that the CA-7 was not only reviewed by the eligibility worker, but gross income calculated and correctly entered on the budget screen. If there is an error the supervisor can return the case to the eligibility worker with an expected date of return.

It is the responsibility and/or expectations of the eligibility worker to include in the case record a completed **Income Report Record**, complete the **County Use Section of the CA-7**, and attach **calculator tape** to the CA-7 that reflects the gross income amounts.

This particular Mini-Review was so successful that it has become a mandatory monthly process. Could these Mini-Reviews be the secret that I sought to bring to San Francisco?

Some of the other tools that have been used in the district offices are:

- **Needs Assessment Questionnaire**

This questionnaire lists specific subjects in each

income maintenance program. Both eligibility worker and supervisor are asked to assign a number from one to five (1-5) based on what they feel is most needed.

- **Monthly District Newsletter**

This newsletter not only reports the news of the office, but it offers reminders for income maintenance programs.

- **Monthly Cut-Off Schedule**

Each district office processes their own cut-off schedule. This cut-off schedule also lists special considerations for the month.

- **Case Review Checklists**

These checklists can be used by the supervisors when reviewing reinvestigations/recertifications.

- **Contest**

The Corrective Action Committee designed a contest that consists of four (4) questions. Each eligibility worker and supervisor is invited to enter. Answers are tallied and prizes are awarded.

These are just a few of the tools that the Corrective Action Committee has used to maintain a low error rate. These methods coupled with training and a commitment from staff have caused Santa Clara to maintain an error rate within an acceptable tolerance level.

## COMING ATTRACTIONS

Currently, Santa Clara has developed a proposal to redesign its corrective action committee. This committee would be renamed the Agency Performance Improvement Committee (APIC) with district offices renamed Performance Improvement Committee

(PIC).

The purpose of the APIC is to “Focus on developing proactive strategies to measure performance based on outcomes, ensuring accountability and flexibility for all participants, while identifying and eliminating barriers to optimum implementation of Welfare Reform mandates.”<sup>1</sup> The strategy behind APIC is performance based outcomes. The thought is to foresee and develop strategies to measure performance outcomes that eliminate barriers to implementing Welfare Reform. The idea and purpose of this committee was formulated by a task force from January 1997 through March 1997. The proposal for the new APIC was accepted by the previous Director. Although the APIC hasn't been fully implemented, a targeted review has begun. Currently, Quality Control is conducting a Participation Rate Review for CALWORKS. This review will survey not only the types of activities the client is performing, but also whether the activity and hours completed are coded correctly in the case record. (These review findings were not available at development of this paper.)

The APIC is well on the road to success in measuring outcomes. They have identified and developed a process to achieve outcomes. There are eight (8) stages to achieving these successful outcomes. They are:

1. Get Ready
2. Choose the Outcomes you want to measure.
3. Specify Indicators for your Outcomes.
4. Prepare to Collect Data on your Indicators.

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<sup>1</sup>Memo from Susan Chestnut to Manuel Ares, April 21,

5. Try out your Outcome Measurement System.
6. Analyze and Report your Findings.
7. Improve your System.
8. Use your Findings.<sup>2</sup>

Adhering to these stages, along with a commitment from all players should certainly bring about success in eliminating the barriers to Welfare Reform and Corrective Action as well.

Santa Clara has developed a true sense of how to build partnerships within the agency. They have been able to provide the necessary resources to staff as well as to ensure efficiency.

### CHALLENGE

Santa Clara is gearing up for a major challenge. By May 1998 they will decide whether or not to become specialized. Currently, the eligibility workers are generic. Specialization would be by aid type. This would require eligibility workers to be categorized by CALWORKS, Medi-cal and Non-Assistance Food Stamps, and General Assistance.

This change is two fold for Santa Clara. They hope this change will simplify work and allow the eligibility workers and supervisor's to give specific attention to a program or fewer programs.

Santa Clara is hoping that this change will allow for an even lower error rate and will allow for the CALWORKS workers to gear their efforts toward work participation. Initially, it is anticipated that the error rate might climb as workers and supervisor become adjusted to their new duties, but it will

eventually lower due to a sense of stability and confidence in new job duties.

The next challenge will be implementing the redesigned Agency Corrective Action Committee or the Agency Performance Improvement Committee (APIC) (the proposed title). The challenge here will be for district offices to identify a method to achieve outcomes and how to measure the effectiveness of the method.

The good part about this plan is that each district office will be given the autonomy to design a method that will meet the needs of their specific office and their client's needs. These measured outcomes will be publicized agency wide which will allow for sharing information between district offices.

### RECOMMENDATIONS TO SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY

While Santa Clara has been able to provide resources for staff, their strength has been in developing committed partnerships with its staff. San Francisco can use some of the methods I acquired from Santa Clara to eliminate barriers to Corrective Action. These recommendations are:

- Build a more cohesive partnership with Quality Control;
- Include Staff Development in the partnership with the Corrective Action Committee;
- Making staff accountable for their work;
- Four (4) or Six (6) part folders for NAFS;

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<sup>2</sup>“Measuring Program Outcomes: A Practical Approach”, United Way of America, 1996.

- Focused Reviews with input from Corrective Action Committee;
- Supervisor Review Form;
- Incentives for learning, for example crossword puzzle on a targeted area.
- Designate three (3) areas to target per month to review;
- Develop and Implement a system to prevent slip-page; and,
- Introduce and implement Action Resource Cycle as a problem solving tool (see Table 1).<sup>3</sup>

I found that Santa Clara County's secret was a cohesive team. They have committed themselves to building a team within the agency that is committed to eliminating barriers.

Through commitment and implementation of the identified recommendations presented here, San Francisco County can also dramatically decrease its error rate too as we move toward taming the oversized awakened Giant — Welfare Reform.

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<sup>3</sup>Source: Comer Project for Change in Education, 1991.

Attachment A

### Action Research Cycle

