

# **TOWARD A UNIFIED RESPONSE TO WELFARE REFORM: CHILD WELFARE AND CALWORKS LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE SAN MATEO COUNTY EXPERIENCE**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The advent of welfare reform has led to a reorganization of the Human Services Agency (H.S.A.) of San Mateo County based upon a service delivery model they have termed "SUCCESS". The central notion is that the role of County DSS is to aid families in achieving "self-sufficiency", to become independent of aided programs through employment and to that end all programs and services should be available as the family's needs dictate.

To do this efficiently, the model proposes the County co-locate and coordinate. San Mateo has decentralized and regionalized service delivery in local, geographically distinct neighborhoods. Almost all county programs are housed in local "regional offices" and offer the client a single point of entry, "one-stop" intake and assessment for service. And San Mateo offers a truly wide array of services and benefits to the client: H.S.A. encompasses all traditional DSS services, but also includes Mental and Physical Health Services, Housing and Drug and Alcohol services. With one intake assessment all programs and all appropriate services can be brought to bear. The vision of SUCCESS is to eventually integrate CBO's and other services traditionally independent into a seamless "system of care". Once co-located, programs coordinate their efforts by offering the client a single case plan managed by a single case manager who manages across program boundaries.

The dilemma for Santa Cruz County is the traditional separation between programs which have operated in relative isolation of each other. With welfare reform, that luxury no longer exists. Now, as Calworks, now re-named JOB D begins to reform its structure and culture to case manage families off welfare, their roles and functions come into direct conflict with traditional child welfare case management. For the client involved with both systems (Santa Cruz calls these "cross-over" cases), the consequences of non-coordination can be duplicative, contradictory, and impossible to achieve requirements.

The issues for Santa Cruz County are centered around what sort of system should be adopted to accomplish the specific need for enhanced coordination between JOB D and CWS. As Santa Cruz County considers its response to welfare reform and its impact on child welfare clients, San Mateo presents an opportunity to examine a model now in (at least partial) operation which purports to meet the objectives that Santa Cruz has set for itself: enhanced coordination, elimination of duplication, more client sensitive and responsive services, and a single case plan.

In San Mateo coordination occurs within the context of the SUCCESS model. The following is a discussion of the features of SUCCESS which have a direct bearing on this process.

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## **GEOGRAPHICAL CO-LOCATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL CONSOLIDATION**

Calworks and CWS staff share office space at the regional offices. Regional offices contain FM and FR services and 10 day ER response programs only, all under one supervisor. IMR, Court Intake and PP remain centrally located. In contrast, all Calworks functions are fully deployed to each region.

The immediate benefits of this is workers are able to walk over to each other's desk to consult and coordinate. The re-deployment is very new, and workers are clearly still in a feeling out process. IMR or Court Intake cases, since these functions remain centralized, do not have this advantage and workers must rely on phone contact.

IMD and CWS staff share the same regional manager (immediately above the supervisor). Managers were reassigned from their particular program and given oversight responsibility of all programs housed in each regional office. East Palo Alto Regional Manager Maryann Tse, for example, comes from eligibility although unlike her counterparts has had some CPS background.

Of chief value is that any issue needing resolution needs go just one level removed from staff. The potential down side is that the Manager may not have expertise in a given program area, such as CPS, and the potential for a misapplication of service exists. As a means of offsetting this issue, the former CWS director Stuart Oppenheim retains the policy responsibility for all CWS, to which all managers must defer. This construct is true for all former directors of the distinct program areas.

## **SHARED DATA BASE**

San Mateo through its contract with EDS has designed a computerized MIS designed to mirror and complement the systemic goals of SUCCESS. SMART has the potential (it is not yet in operation) to become both a front loading data entry tool to all the various county systems (including CWS/CMS) as well as to become a uniform case management tool. Once implemented this program would enable the Calworks (IESS) worker or designated case manager to operate off of the same "Action Plan" (SMART's case plan feature) and enable the case manager to assign tasks to various providers. This could eventually become the solution to the need for a single case plan which meets the different programs requirements.

One limitation is that SMART cannot currently front load info into CWS/CMS, nor does SMART identify cases in CWS/CMS so the IESS worker can't use the data base to establish whether CPS is involved. CPS will have access to SMART so they will be able to identify cross-over cases. The other limitation is in CWS/CMS requirements that the CPS case plan live exclusively within CWS/CMS.

Currently, the SMART action plan and CWS/CMS case plan cannot be effectively merged. San Mateo and Santa Clara County are currently working out the interconnectedness issues and hopes to resolve these problems. According to Howard Baker, IS Director, the plan is to replace CWS/CMS with SMART. They will create a "shadow data base" with Boulder that SMART can store data compatibly with CWS/CMS. San Mateo believes SMART is more user friendly without the design and hardware problems of CWS/CMS.

Once this is in place, all staff will be operating off

the same system. Case plans would be uniform as all programs would be operating off of SMART's "action plan". Additionally, this would eliminate duplicative and redundant data entry, saving significant staff time. As CPS opens a case, and the family is already being served in another program, they need only access the SMART file where all client data has already been conveniently entered.

### **THE FAMILY SELF-SUFFICIENCY TEAM (FSST)**

Each client who applies for TANF or Medi-Cal receives a screening assessment (essentially a strength-based tool) and a broad-based evaluation (identifying potential problem areas) done by a Screening and Assessment Specialist (a specially trained EW). Absent special needs or barriers to participate in work first services, clients see no other services but work first. If barriers are identified, clients are referred by eligibility to FSST (Family Self Sufficiency Team) meetings whereby multi-problem and multi-program involved families can be staffed and triaged, resulting in an "action plan" designed to address the identified barriers

FSST "core" membership is multidisciplinary and includes Alcohol and Drug Rehab staff, CPS Supervisor and CPS worker, PHN, Housing Authority, MH, Voc Rehab, a Work First person and their supervisor, the client, and is chaired by the Regional Manager. All of these are H.S.A programs. The Manager can extend invitations to other CBO's, law enforcement and other service providers as needed.

San Mateo FSST currently operates like an employee assistance program (EAP) in that clients only come to the attention of the FSST if a "performance" issue arises. The identification of participa-

tion problems and other barriers to success is done on a reactive (as opposed to a proactive) basis. The process as it currently operates is essentially the following. If a client is at risk of being sanctioned off aid, the IESS worker consults with a supervisor, does a home visit to assess the problem, and via the Regional Manager refers the case for staffing at FSST. The family is scheduled (meetings are weekly) and a packet containing IESS worker assessments is sent to all members, including the client. The IESS worker presents the case. All members with input give it and a discussion follows. The group recommends a particular intervention if issues can be identified, or the group can have the IESS worker seek out additional information and return for further staffing. If the client fails to follow the recommendations, a sanction would then ensue.

The meeting is chaired by the Regional Manager. There are conflicting views on this. Some feel that this should be handled on the supervisor level. Others feel that since this involves people who are not used to working together and the decision making process is not clearly delineated, a person who has ultimate authority is required, particularly since the stakes are so high. Others counter that that FSST members should be able to independently triage cases to come up with agreed upon intervention plans. Sanctions can happen outside of this process. That decision would remain ultimately within Calworks in accordance with their regulations.

The client is invited to the FSST meeting although in the 6 staffings I witnessed, no client came. This practice is reflective of San Mateo's commitment to be client centered in its approach. This is at the core of the thinking in the SUCCESS model, as it has sought to become more responsive to the "customer", and clearly having the "customer" there

helps to fashion a product more suited to their requirements. It would be helpful to do some follow up to determine why the no-shows and address those barriers. In the absence of the client, a client advocate would help to focus the group on adopting a sensitive, helpful stance and guard against the tendency to fall back on regulation and expediency. Maryanne Tse has on her “extended” list legal aid which could serve that function. CPS (the regional supervisor is a permanent member) could serve as long the perceived interests of the child are seen as consistent with those of the parents; although some amount of empowerment by management may be necessary to reinforce the expectation of advocacy. Ultimately in the sessions witnessed some member of the group did come forward with expressions of advocacy, and while no formal role may be designated the group’s purpose in trying to identify barriers and solutions to assist the family has an advocative core.

CPS was represented by the region’s supervisor who had only been able to review screening records. That was unfortunate as two cases were currently open to CPS. The plan calls for the worker to be present. One case involved a family assigned to the Court unit, not housed at the regional office. It was later learned that the group went in a direction with the family which (from CPS’ point of view) was contraindicated and two divergent case plans have ensued. The presence of the worker would have offset that problem, the group could have formulated a plan giving the CPS worker primary case management responsibility.

If there is a currently open CPS case, CPS assumes principal case management responsibility. Also, if there is a Mental Health Case Manager that person is designated at the FSST as the primary case manager. If both CPS and MH are involved, CPS would

again take primary case management responsibility of the family. It should be noted that by Calworks designating a primary case manager outside of their program it does not mean that they stop performing their monitoring function. What this means is that they defer on questions of what constitutes a W2W activity. Once the client ends their involvement, Calworks will resume the primary case management function.

While the FSST is currently reactive in problem identification, there are plans to broaden it’s focus by developing lists of clients who are involved with probation, Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol treatment, and CPS and scheduling them for staffing at the FSST. In this way it is hoped that problems can be anticipated before they develop.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

A critical element to SUCCESS is the ability to freely exchange client information for the purposes of developing a coordinated response to the family’s need.

In San Mateo, a work group was convened to examine issues of confidentiality. The work group reached the following conclusions which San Mateo County Counsel has reviewed and approved.

Within the H.S.A. information can be shared across H.S.A. program boundaries in so far as it directly relates to the administration public social services. The group found that several programs operated under the misinterpretation that their records were confidential when in fact they were merely restricted in their use. That is that information is restricted for the purposes of administering public social services and in so far as programs are administering services in a coordinated fashion (as SUCCESS

does) that information can be freely shared for that purpose. (W&I code section 10850.a: "...all applications and records... shall be confidential, and shall not be open to examination for any purpose not directly connected with the administration of such program....") Another way to judge this is by the "need to know" standard. During an FSST, the IESS worker may not need to know the details of an incident of sexual molestation, but would need to know that the family needs to be engaged in therapy to resolve CPS mandated issues

This allows H.S.A. employees and programs to convene meetings without the need of a release, to freely share information to develop a coordinated action plan which can be used outside the meeting itself. Currently Santa Cruz County is hamstrung by an interpretation of the Multidisciplinary Team (W&I 10850.3) requirement that the information shared not leave the meeting itself. That's an interpretation of the code which may be in error, as there appears to be no reference in the section to any prohibition use of information outside of the meeting. It should be noted that other Counties don't see this particular element of confidentiality as an issue. Santa Cruz County Counsel has given a contradictory response to this issue in the past. All in all this may not be as big an obstacle as first thought.

Another conclusion is that the "umbrella" of H.S.A. extends to contractors with the County, allowing them as well to engage in the free exchange of information. The benefit here is that CBO's would be able to come to the table. Beyond these entities (such as law enforcement, probation), a release is required.

Confidentiality becomes increasingly critical as SMART takes on its role as the main data base and

case management vehicle for SUCCESS. Ultimately, San Mateo plans to bring the various CBO's on line, giving them full access to the client's personal and historical data, assessment information and their "action plan". The benefit to service provision and coordination are clear, but it would not be possible without the confidentiality policy. SMART requires each user to "click-on" agreement to a confidentiality statement prior to proceeding to the data base.

It should be noted that despite this interpretation, San Mateo still requires each participant to sign a release of information. Failure to do so constitutes a refusal to participate in the SUCCESS program and the application is denied. So far no one has refused to sign. It is unclear what would happen legally if they did. Legal Aid might challenge that denial and if successful it could pose significant systemic problems. SMART would have to have ways to block access to specific clients by specific programs. The FSST could not function as intended and it would leave the IESS worker to work in relative isolation from consultation and potentially vital information.

## **CULTURAL CHANGE**

The existence of Welfare Reform has clearly complicated the lives of San Mateo County CPS social workers. Current policy is that if a client is being completely sanctioned off aid a CPS referral will ensue. The traditional role of CPS is to only investigate situations in which there is a specific allegation of neglect or abuse. It has been presented by management that the children are at risk of homelessness and lack of resources. CPS staff counters that this is assuming the family doesn't have access to other resources, such as family, shelter and charitable services. The extent to which CPS becomes involved when families are sanctioned remains

under discussion.

Of some concern is the increased workload which would ensue for CPS. And, the additional expectation for coordination with yet another program entity will impact workload. One possible benefit, too early to evaluate, is the existence of another case management group which could prevent the need for CPS on-going services and possibly result in the reduction of referrals and investigation.

At the FSST, it is the IESS worker who presents their assessment of the family's psycho-social issues. San Mateo put all their Calworks eligibility staff through an intensive and lengthy training process, involving case management skills and interview and assessment skills. Regional Manager Maryann Tse observes that she sees improvement in their assessment abilities as they gain experience. The IESS workers have been highly trained to gather specific and non-personal information and to interpret regulations. The culture change has significant repercussions for the type of job IESS workers must now perform, who must quickly acquire social work skills. They must fight the tendency to "go by the book" and sanction without doing an in-depth assessment. In one case staffed a client was up for failing to cooperate with the paternity inquiry requirement, after having signed an agreement she would do so. This single mother had disclosed domestic violence in the worker's assessment but the worker did try to clarify with the client if the legitimate fear of the father was keeping her from cooperating, a fact which could exclude her from grant sanction. But the group caught it, which argues for the value of the FSST as a training tool.

San Mateo is culturally in transition as workers and programs adjust to new, heightened expectations of coordination. IESS and CWS social workers are still

in a feeling out process and not surprisingly misunderstandings have arisen. Regional Managers and supervisors are aware of this, and there appears to be a healthy airing and discussion of the issues as they arise.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR SANTA CRUZ COUNTY: RESOLUTION OF CONFIDENTIALITY WILL GREATLY AID OUR CROSS-OVER PROCESS**

As indicated above, the coordination problems between "in-house" programs may not be as problematic as once thought. This will need to be reviewed by County Counsel and reconciled with provisions of the standing order. Once the San Mateo material is obtained, issues around the inclusion of personnel from outside HRA in Cross-over meetings can be addressed.

In the meantime, HRA can establish a policy and procedure on the procurement of releases of information from clients. JOBID is currently using a version which should be reviewed for its comprehensiveness. With a release in place confidentiality issues can be put to bed, at least for the period (not to exceed a year) authorized.

### **NEED TO BRING OTHER PLAYERS TO THE MEETING**

The FSST has a broad representation of service providers which exceeds HRA's. The advantage was the increased availability of information about families from which more accurate assessments can emerge. Also interventions can be more efficiently planned across programs.

The concept of an extended core group consisting of

members who can be invited on an as needed basis could work for HRA. This could include CMH, Probation, PHN, Drug and Alcohol Treatment Providers, Parents Center, Women's Crisis/Defensa, etc. HRA should consider broadening the meeting beyond the CWS-JOBD focus to include all services providers and issues.

### **NEED FOR CALWORKS TO DEFER ON CPS ISSUES**

This is an issue needing a policy decision around what issues should be prioritized as it relates to the case plan. Issues of child safety and client safety should get precedence over job-specific activities. W2W ("welfare-to-work") time constraints need to be taken into account and the case manager should be mindful of their implications for the family. But a clear policy which governs the decision-making process at the Cross-over meetings should be outlined as clearly as possible for the participants.

The policy should also delineate the process for identifying the case manager. In situations of cross-over, CPS should be designated the case manager.

### **CULTURE CHANGE ISSUES SHOULD BE ADDRESSED FOR CPS SOCIAL WORKERS**

This has been addressed already at HRA on several fronts. W2W flyers have been circulated, at least one formal presentation on welfare reform was offered to staff, and social workers have been educated by way of participation at cross-over meetings. By now the average social worker has some idea that welfare reform is coming, that it involves mandated activities which could conflict with their case plans.

Few however have a clear concept of the practice

issues around the need to consider work issues in case management and planning. Few have thought about the ethical issues of considering income and work as a factor in risk assessment. This is a process which will need to be initiated by management. Management could (1) develop policy and position papers and present it to staff or (2) convene professional staff to discuss and present recommendations to management on these issues.

### **FSST AS A MODEL FOR HRA CROSSOVER MEETINGS**

HRA needs to begin to systematize and proceduralize in the following areas:

1. Identifying cases for discussion. Should all crossover cases be discussed or only those where participation issues arise?
2. How will cases be scheduled for discussion?
3. How and under what parameters should the group operate. Will the group be chaired by a facilitator and decide matters by consensus or will a manager be designated and make final decisions?
4. What matters should the group be empowered to decide. Will discussions be focused on service issues or will they also include whether a sanction should be applied?
5. Who will be the members of the group? Should there be permanent members and invitees?
6. Should clients be invited to meetings?

## **A SINGLE CASE PLAN**

As part of the culture change for CPS, the welfare reform timelines need to be included in CPS assessments and considered in case plan activities. This will require a commitment by both program's staff to a process of working out a single case plan, either via worker to worker consult or through crossover meetings.

It appears that CPS will soon be using CWS/CMS for all reports and case plans. The coordination process could be aided by giving the JOBD social work staff secondary assignment access to cases which have been identified as crossover. This will allow them to read CPS case plans and adjust their requirements as indicated. It will also assist them in monitoring participation by crossover clients.

Another option is to consider joining in the San Mateo/Santa Clara effort on SMART implementation. This could solve the divergent case plan problem as all programs (JTPA, IMD, CPS, FIT and others) could easily access and consult the existent family plan. It would also ensure that coordination would take place as the Agency would recognize only the one case plan. Modifying the plan to suit one program's goals would presumably require authorization and approval from the programs already serving the family.