

**PROJECT E.S.P. (EMPOWER, SUPPORT, PROTECT):  
A CALWORKS-CHILD WELFARE PARTNERSHIP TO IMPLEMENT  
SERVICE COORDINATION AND DELIVERY IN SONOMA COUNTY**

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Marin County's Department of Health and Human Services has very recently developed a protocol for coordinating case plans and services for families who are served both by CalWORKs and Child Welfare Services (CWS). The protocol for the Marin County linkage project will be put into operation in the near future. To inform the design of the Marin County linkage project, this study reviews the system in place in the Sonoma County Human Services Department—Project E.S.P. (Empower, Support, Protect).

Specifically, the following questions are addressed:

- What is the mission of Project E.S.P.?
- What is the structure of Project E.S.P. and how does it operate?
- Who are the partners in the project and how do they participate?
- Who are the target populations and how are they identified and tracked?
- What is Sonoma County's coordinated case planning model?
- How are CalWORKs and CWS staff trained and supervised for Project E.S.P.?

**FINDINGS**

Sonoma County's Project E.S.P. brought together an extensive group of partners, or stakeholders, to develop a mission and to oversee the linkage project and its implementation. The project uses a

coordinated case planning model in which services are coordinated either informally, through worker-to-worker communication, or formally, through the Project E.S.P. Multi-Disciplinary Team.

Information about the expectations for staff to coordinate services and methods for following protocol were presented during a basic staff orientation and training. An automated mutual client list is used to identify the mutual cases, and to track the cases for supervision purposes.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based upon observations of Project E.S.P. in Sonoma County, the following recommendations are made for the Marin County linkage project:

- That the individuals who developed the Marin County linkage protocol consider whether the process would benefit from the identification of any additional partner agencies, which might be included in the project.
- That the Marin County partner agencies provide a plan for implementation of the Marin County linkage project and oversight of progress made in the execution of that plan.
- That Marin County develops a staff training which will demonstrate the partners' coordination as well as deliver to staff the relevant information regarding the Marin County linkage project.

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- That Marin County evaluates various ways in which an automated client list could be developed in order to assist with the identification and monitoring of mutual cases.
- That the proposed Marin County partner agencies establish procedures to ensure coordinated efforts will be appropriately supervised and establish a plan for provision of continuing supports for staff participating in linkages.
- That the Family Network multi-disciplinary team process be considered for more of the Marin County linkage families.
- That Marin County coordinates methods to measure outcomes relative to the focus of the Marin County Child Welfare System redesign.

## **PROJECT E.S.P. (EMPOWER, SUPPORT, PROTECT): A CALWORKS-CHILD WELFARE PARTNERSHIP TO IMPLEMENT SERVICE COORDINATION AND DELIVERY IN SONOMA COUNTY**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The Marin County Department of Health and Human Services has recently developed a protocol for coordinating case plans and services for families who are served both by CalWORKs and Child Welfare Services (CWS). Once a family is identified as the recipient of services from both programs, the protocol calls for the CalWORKs worker and the CWS worker to communicate regarding the family's needs and difficulties, and to reach a mutual agreement regarding the family's case plans. The workers will then reach agreement regarding which services will be provided by each agency. Workers are encouraged to have joint meetings with families if they believe it will be helpful.

The purpose of this study is to review Sonoma County's Project E.S.P. (Empower, Support, Protect)—a CalWORKs/Child Welfare Partnership Project—in order to provide information and perspective to the Marin County process. The development of Sonoma County's Project E.S.P. was funded by a two year grant in order to implement service coordination and delivery between Employment & Training, and Family, Youth & Children's Services so that families would be better assisted to ensure child safety and financial stability through a partnership with trained, knowledgeable staff.

The Sonoma County project provides information about strategic direction, vision and guiding principles of Sonoma County's Project E.S.P. It provides a step-by-step formula for Sonoma County's develop-

ment of the program. Access to this highly specific information allows for a thorough evaluation of the factors contributing to the success of Project E.S.P. For these reasons, the Sonoma County project provides additional perspectives, which may help inform Marin County processes.

This study investigates six specific questions about Sonoma County's Project E.S.P.:

- What is the mission of Project E.S.P.?
- What is the structure of Project E.S.P. and how does it operate?
- Who are the partners in the project and how do they participate?
- Who are the target populations and how are they identified and tracked?
- What is Sonoma County's coordinated case planning model?
- How are CalWORKs and CWS staff trained and supervised for Project E.S.P.?

### **BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT SONOMA COUNTY**

Sonoma County stretches from the coast through the wine-country valleys to the Mayacamas Mountains. The population is approximately 475,000, with a majority of these residents (68%) living within the city limits of the nine Sonoma County cities. Unemployment rates for Sonoma County in the previous four years have maintained a level around 2% lower than the California average unemployment rate. In 2003, the Sonoma County unemployment rate was 4.9%. New employment opportunities have

recently been created primarily in manufacturing and government industries, professional and business services, and educational and health services. Small businesses (establishments with fewer than 50 workers) account for more than 49% of Sonoma County's private sector employment. Sonoma also offers employment in the wine industry, agricultural and dairy production, high technology companies, and tourism. Relative to the national averages, housing costs in Sonoma are expensive compared to family income.

### **SONOMA COUNTY'S PROJECT E.S.P.**

Prior to Project E.S.P., Sonoma County had made efforts to coordinate services for families served both by CalWORKs and Child Welfare Services. A child welfare worker had been out-stationed at the CalWORKs office and this continues under Project E.S.P. There were also plans to convene a multi-disciplinary team. As a result of continued interest in coordination of services, a Sonoma County Manager, Roy Redlich, took an internship with the Bay Area Social Services Consortium and studied crossover services in Santa Cruz and Contra Costa Counties. From these beginnings, Project E.S.P. emerged.

Partners were identified to oversee the linkage project in Sonoma County. In Sonoma County Human Services the partners are Child Welfare, CalWORKs, the Workforce Investment Act, and Fiscal. Other partner agencies are County Mental Health, Alcohol and Drug Services, Santa Rosa Junior College, and Goodwill Industries. From the partner agencies the Implementation Team comprised the following perspectives:

- Mental Health Counselor
- Public Health Nurse
- Mid-level Manager
- Social Worker

- Employment & Training Counselor
- Employment & Training Specialist
- Learning Disability Evaluator
- Alcohol & Other Drug Counselor
- Domestic Violence Prevention Educator
- College Counselor
- First-line Supervisor
- Division Director

The Implementation Team developed the Project E.S.P. mission: "To provide efficient, integrated, client-centered services for families in order to strengthen them. Through team commitment to mutual respect, communication, and integrity we will strive for innovative excellent services that alleviate suffering."

After reviewing various models from other counties, the Project E.S.P. Implementation Team selected a coordinated case planning model for the project. In this model, services for clients are coordinated either informally through worker-to-worker communication or formally through the Project E.S.P. Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT).

The MDT is comprised of staff from the Employment & Training and the Family, Youth & Children's Services Divisions as well as community partners including the County's Alcohol and other Drug Services and Mental Health Services Divisions, the Santa Rosa Junior College, and Goodwill's LEAP program (serving clients with learning disabilities). The members of the MDT all sit on the Implementation Team and comprise about half of its membership.

The MDT representatives currently meet twice a month to confer on cases. Also in attendance are workers directly involved with the case scheduled for presentation. The case is presented, assessed,

and a follow-up meeting is scheduled, usually a month later. Anyone can make a referral to the MDT. Cases referred are usually clients served by both CalWORKs and Child Welfare, but referrals can also be cases that are in need of services and/or at risk of child abuse involvement or economic insecurity.

If services are not coordinated through the MDT, workers are expected to informally coordinate services for mutual clients by talking to each other about the case.

Expectations for coordinating services on mutual cases (and the tools for doing so) were given to staff during Project E.S.P. basic orientation training in 2003. Over 200 staff were trained in small groups, at one of seven half-day orientations. Division Directors and Executive Sponsors opened each orientation session with a discussion about why the project was important and how it would benefit staff and the families with whom they worked. The training included a review of the written protocol for coordinating services on mutual cases and a "day in the life of a worker." Specifics about case coordination and the MDT, intra-office communication, and project values were presented. Project E.S.P. has subsequently developed an advanced training and a new employee training.

The four groups making up the Project E.S.P. target population are as follows:

1. All CalWORKs cases referred to the MDT.
2. All mutual cases (CalWORKs & CWS).
3. Mutual cases in the CalWORKs "child only" caseloads.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Child only" cases are those which fit into one of the following three criteria: 1) those cases in which the parents are non-citizens, 2) those relative family foster placements who apply for non-needy cash assistance, and 3) those cases in which the parent is classified as "incapacitated."

4. Unemployed/ underemployed adults active to Child Welfare Services referred to Employment & Training services.

The mutual cases are identified in two ways. Clerical support staff at child welfare does a manual search for all cases opened in either the Child Welfare System or in CalWORKs. Mutual cases are identified, flagged, and the workers are notified. In addition, an automated "mutual client list" report is run every other month. This report uses a Microsoft Access database to match common data elements (such as social security number, name, and date of birth) from DDS/GIS and Child Welfare Services/Case Management System extracts. The mutual client list is reviewed and the appropriate workers are notified.

The mutual client list is also used to track the cases for supervision purposes. Using the mutual client list, a manager at CalWORKs can pull case files and review them to determine whether the records document the extent to which services have been coordinated. If the case file shows no documentation of service coordination, then the manager talks to the worker about the case.

### **PROJECT E.S.P. AND CHILD WELFARE REDESIGN**

It is expected that Project E.S.P. will help Sonoma County improve key outcome measures as required under the New Initiatives in Child Welfare and California's Program Improvement Plan. One of the target groups in Project E.S.P. is clients referred to the MDT—these are CalWORKs participants who are struggling to meet their welfare-to-work participation requirements and are either involved with CWS or are at risk of CWS involvement. If they are not involved with CWS, the service plan devised by

the MDT is expected to have the effect of preventing that family from entering the Child Welfare System. Coordinated services may contribute to a decreased likelihood of maltreatment recurrence due to an improved ability of the parent to follow the case plan, decreased stress in meeting agency expectations (a likely consequence of CalWORKs providing for child care), and improved capacity for assessment of child safety and risk. Coordinated services may contribute to children being safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate, and to children having more permanency and stability in their living situations. Project E.S.P.'s MDT may assist in the identification and approval of relative caretakers and provide additional support to the child-only cases. Case coordination will result in a broader array of services available to the family, helping to ensure that the children's needs will be met.

### LESSONS LEARNED FOR MARIN COUNTY

This review of Sonoma County's Project E.S.P. has provided Marin County with extensive information which will be useful in the further development of coordinated efforts between CalWORKs and Child Welfare.

Sonoma County brought together an extensive group of partners to oversee the linkage project in Sonoma County. Marin County stakeholders have recently developed a protocol for similar linkages. **It is recommended that the individuals who developed the initial protocol for Marin County consider whether the process would benefit from the identification of any additional partner agencies, which might be included in the Marin linkage project.**

Sonoma County identified an Implementation Team to oversee Project E.S.P. **It is recommended that the Marin County partner agencies provide a plan for implementation of the Marin linkages project and oversight of progress made in the execution of that plan.**

Sonoma County established a formalized "roll out" of Project E.S.P. including staff training. The training was a collaborative effort organized by the Implementation Team. It included a basic orientation and it covered expectations, procedures, benefits of linkage, and improved understanding for staff who will be participating in linkages. **It is recommended that training of staff in Marin County be developed to demonstrate the partners' coordination within the training itself, as well as to deliver to staff the relevant information regarding the Marin linkage project.**

Sonoma County has developed an automated mutual client list to assist in identifying mutual cases and to support supervision of the coordinated efforts. **It is recommended that Marin County evaluate various ways in which an automated client list could be developed in order to assist with the identification and monitoring of mutual cases.**

Project E.S.P. provides a plan for monitoring, training, and supervision of staff to ensure coordination is sustained. **It is recommended that the proposed Marin County partner agencies overseeing the linkage implementation also establish procedures to ensure coordinated efforts will be appropriately supervised. It is recommended that a plan be developed for provision of continuing supports for staff participating in linkages.**

Project E.S.P. uses a standing multi-disciplinary team to formally coordinate the linkage with many cases. Marin County uses the Family Network (a multi-disciplinary family-conferencing format) for families referred by CWS. Some of these families have invited their CalWORKs workers to participate in their Family Network meetings. **It is recommended that the Family Network process be considered for more of the Marin County linkage families.**

**It is further recommended that the proposed Marin County partner agencies overseeing the linkage implementation also coordinate methods to measure outcomes relative to the focus of the Marin County Child Welfare System redesign.**

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