

PROGRAM COLLABORATION BETWEEN CHILD WELFARE AND CALWORKS: THE SANTA CRUZ COUNTY CROSSOVER APPROACH

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On my first day at BASSC, I met for the first time staff on the SFDHS CalWORKS side of the house. Our belated introduction highlighted for me the separation between CalWORKS and child welfare and consequent lack of integration, in spite of the obvious overlay in client population. This sparked my interest in the need to develop linkages between the two programs and I was therefore excited about the opportunity to examine how Santa Cruz has fostered this interaction.

"Crossover," a systems approach to working with cases mutual to both CPS and CalWORKS, is a work in progress with many facets and layers, a change in agency culture and administration which is likely to extend for several years in efforts to achieve complete standardization and institutionalization. My mentor, Santa Cruz Division Director Mark Lane, has emphasized that "crossover" is not strictly an MDT process. Instead, it encompasses the on-going collaboration of services and support necessary to assist families on the road to self-sufficiency. This perspective is slowly filtering to the Santa Cruz staff. As more staff are impacted by crossover cases and work collaboratively with other programs and agencies, they must increasingly enact this perspective.

Santa Cruz defines those cases receiving both child welfare and CalWORKS (and/or JTPA) services as "crossover" cases. Crossover cases include the following:

- Voluntary or court-mandated family maintenance cases
- minor mothers who reside with their parents, who themselves are CalWORKS clients.
- relative caregivers who are also caring for their own children and are CalWORKS participants

Other families who are potential crossover candidates include those whose children were removed, making them ineligible for CalWORKS, but who are likely to reunify and will thus re-engage in the CalWORKS program. These families would need preparation and planning of supportive services both before and after reunification.

A CULTURAL SHIFT

Santa Cruz identified significant barriers to employment such as mental health issues, domestic abuse, substance abuse, and homelessness; these are typical problems of CPS clients as well. However, the identification of these areas as barriers to employment redefines the CPS perspective of such issues, and opens up avenues of funding via CalWORKS. For example, a client needing childcare in order to attend on-going counseling for mental health issues could get the childcare as well as any psychiatric evaluations needed paid for by CalWORKS, as these issues also impact a client's availability and ability to work. Families in Transition (FIT) staff, a community agency focused on establishing housing for homeless families, described a client who was able to get his car repaired via CalWORKS in order to maintain his job transportation;

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this totaled \$1200. A working car facilitated the client's ability to maintain various appointments for both himself and his children and helped him complete his CPS AND CalWORKS case plans.

Cultural changes have also impacted the CalWORKS staff significantly. The role of an eligibility or ETS worker has transformed from someone who strictly adheres to regulations and procedures to someone who needs case management skills, including awareness of and the ability to respond to those significant barriers described above.

The development of the crossover linkage necessitated not only the kind of philosophical shift described above but nuts and bolts administration and coordination of services. Specific areas which Santa Cruz addressed included identification of cases, confidentiality, and the sharing of information to facilitate service delivery.

I. CASE IDENTIFICATION

To begin addressing crossover issues, Santa Cruz had to identify the crossover cases, not an easy task. CMS systems analyst Sue Clemons was able to obtain a one-time only list of cases receiving CalWORKS and CWS services in September, 1998. To do this, Sue had to:

- 1) obtain a list from the CDS index of all cases with an SI aid type;
- 2) clean up the information to include case numbers;
- 3) obtain a master list of all CWS cases from the Sacramento CMS/CWS office;
- 4) load both lists in the computer program ACCESS;
- 5) cross-query for crossover cases.

Unfortunately, the CMS master list is not something that is provided on a regular basis. Although individual worker caseloads can be generated from CMS, the system does not allow the county to generate a master list of case. Sue was able to obtain one for one point in time only and cannot secure this on an on-going basis. Consequently, the data were limited to a snapshot of information at one particular point in time. Results showed that approximately 23% (142 cases).of children in CWS have a parent or guardian relative involved in CAWORKS.

On an on-going basis, new cases need to be screened at intake in each program to determine crossover status. At CalWORKS, the EWs will screen incoming cases for CPS history. If there is history, cases are referred to the JOBD social worker for further assessment. The JOBD worker is a unique position in Santa Cruz. In addition to the ETS and EWs, **the JOBD** social worker is a CalWORKS staff person whose role is to provide intensive case management services to clients. They have limited access to CMS/CWS to determine if a case is open and call the CPS screener to verify case status and coordinate with CPS CWWs on active crossover cases.

EWs are also screening cases for CPS involvement at the time of annual reviews of a case, as CalWORKS clients can become engaged with CPS after entering CalWORKS. A screening procedure at intake was just being implemented on the child welfare side of the house during my time there.

II. CONFIDENTIALITY

The advent of "crossover" led Santa Cruz to reexamine its policies and procedures on confidentiality. To foster the kind of limited information-sharing necessary to assist and support crossover families, Santa Cruz applied to its bench to issue a standing Court order addressing such situations. The Juvenile Court established that CPS and CalWORKS may share agency information regarding case plans and referral history with some restrictions, such as limited CWS/CMS -computer access to JOBD social workers and the application of the "need to know" standard. For example, CalWORKS staff may not need to know the specific details of a sexual molestation, but can know that the family is engaged in counseling to address CPS-related issues.

In addition, the intake process has been standardized to include a Release of Information form stating that information will be shared between specified programs in an effort to coordinate services. The one exception would be involuntary CWS cases, as the Court order addresses this. ETS workers state that on occasion clients may self-report when they are asked to complete informational forms at time of intake, but at that early contact, disclosure is not likely. Relationships and trust are yet to be established.

Santa Cruz has also affirmed that only information which is relevant to the development of a service plan be shared between programs. Based on guidelines for MDTs, as set forth in W&I section 10850, this information is not to be used to penalize or sanction families.

III. CASE STAFFINGS

The Crossover conference, held every other Friday and rotated between the North and South county offices, is a staffing designed to coordinate assessments, case plans, and service plans between CWS and CalWORKS for clients who are active in both programs. For most cases, the CPS case plan can be incorporated into the Welfare to Work ('W2W') plan to meet CalWORKS requirements. This unified plan is less daunting to clients and easier to understand and implement.

Participants sign a sign-in sheet which states that information discussed therein is confidential pursuant to PC 11167.5, W&I 827 and 18965, and the standing order of the Santa Cruz Juvenile Court. Although any staff involved in a particular case can initiate a crossover conference, most at this time are identified at Forum (a child welfare review process at the time of case transfers). Program manager Don Allegri coordinates the schedule and staff notification of cases to be presented are sent to all CalWORKS and CWS staff in order that anyone involved with the case may attend. Attendees can include key collateral agencies. At this time, clients do not attend, although that may be considered down the road. Neither are clients informed that an MDT process will occur.

The presenter completes a face sheet which identifies the family members, staff involved, family issues and strengths, case goals, and recommended activities. This is distributed at the staffing, and recommendations are added at the time of the staffing. For example, at one crossover MDT I attended, the EW was assigned to address childcare issues with the family.

The crossover sessions I attended were very full, with up to 16 or 17 people in the room for a single case. Division Director Mark Lane typically attends in order to ensure communication and coordination across programs and appropriate distribution of responsibility. Some attendees expressed to me their doubt of the necessity for the number of administrative staff at the staffing, and in fact this may not be necessary once the process becomes more stabilized. Actually, Mark did not attend either of the crossover dates I witnessed, but the Program Managers appropriately directed the service coordination. Follow-up is generally done on an informal basis, although on occasion the more difficult cases are presented a second time if issues persist. Documentation of recommendations is not distributed.

Santa Cruz also plans to staff crossover cases in the following situations:

- 1) prior to family reunification
- 2) FM cases in which families use housing vouchers and who are at risk of homelessness
- 3) CWS clients with active W2W plans
- 4) Cases which are particularly difficult
- 5) An ER child welfare investigation which may indicate risk can be resolved via service and monitoring provided by CalWORKS/W2W plan

The CWW is designated as the lead worker in crossover cases. At times the CalWORKS plan is held off due to a "good cause pause" to allow clients time to resolve CPS issues. This does not stop the 5 year clock from ticking, but it can delay the 18 to 24 month time limit. Another option is to incorporate the plans into each other and work them simultaneously. Coordination is particularly important in such cases to ensure completion of the plan without duplicity or conflict. For example, in on such case staffing I attended, the ETS and CWW completed a home visit together to ensure that all necessary tasks could be accomplished.

IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR SAN FRANCISCO

A) Identification of Cases

Identifying those cases active in both Child Welfare

and CalWORKS will not be easy. SFDHS is not likely to get a single master list from Sacramento CMS, as Santa Cruz did, for purposes of obtaining a snapshot of specific crossover cases. Exploration with MIS and CMS staff will be necessary to determine how this can be accomplished without resulting to handcount of individual cases. SFHDS has thousands of children compared to the roughly 600 followed by Santa Cruz, and so the data collection will be more time-consuming. A random sample or an estimate of 75% of FM cases may be more efficient to determine general numbers. SFDHS is considering the possibility of a shadow database to CMS: such a system would make this kind of statistical analysis easier. While this will probably not be implemented early enough to assist with the early data collection necessary for planning, it will be useful in on-going review.

Once the initial identification has been done, ongoing review of cases will need to occur on both sides of the house. Annual screenings at CalWORKS for CPS involvement could parallel a

similar review at the time of case plan renewals on the FCS side, and/or at the time of case transfer.

Procedures will also be necessary to identify new cases at the time of entry into CalWORKS/FCS. Early screening will be important for obtaining all appropriate information in developing achievable service plans and determining the full extent of resources available to clients. Finally, screening should extend to relative placements; this will tie into the need for discussion on fiscal impact and permanency planning options for caretakers.

B) Cultural Shift

With the advent of Welfare Reform, CalWORKS staff have experienced tremendous changes in their roles and responsibilities. Their traditional purview of staying within strict guidelines has expanded to address those issues and resources which must be surmounted or supported to assure client self-sufficiency. As the two programs develop linkages to address these issues in crossover cases, CalWORKS staff will need to form a collaboration with CWWs as well as various collaterals.

Similarly, FCS staff must begin to work more consistently and collaboratively with CalWORKS staff investigating cases and developing appropriate comprehensive plans that can coexist with CalWORKS requirements. CWWs will need to recognize issues such as substance abuse and domestic violence as barriers to successful employment and draw on resources that CalWORKS may have available to address these. Further, CWS needs to consider a family's financial situation in their casework as the time limitations have tremendous implications for case planning.

SFDHS does not have the role distinctions of CalWORKS staff that Santa Cruz does in terms of ETS worker, EW, and **JOB**D social worker; instead, one person performs all functions. Consequently, there is no natural or obvious link, such as the **JOB**D social worker, to CWS. Some CalWORKS units do have staff who came over from the CWS side, and have acted as a liaison for their unit and the programs; however, this is not a formal or consistent process throughout the programs. SFDHS may want to consider establishing a formal connection, perhaps by designating particular caseloads or staff as "crossover" specialists.

C) Confidentiality

Sharing information across programs is critical to developing comprehensive, workable case plans. SFDHS should review its current policies and procedures to determine if they are adequate to encourage reasonable sharing of information on a "need to know" basis. Releases of information are at this point required to initiate contact and should become a standard part of the intake process. However, SFDHS may want to consider establishing a directive authorizing programs to communicate in certain (court-ordered) cases. Santa Cruz issued a court order to establish this and our city attorney is currently exploring this option.

D) Crossover MDTs

In Santa Cruz, formal MDTs are limited to the more difficult cases while informal communication occurs as needed on other cases. It will be necessary to foster both levels of dialogue and steer away from the perception that crossover is restricted to MDTs rather than being a comprehensive approach to service delivery.

At the same time, staffings are extremely helpful in more difficult cases. Plans developed at the MDTs should be disseminated to all key players. Inclusion of the family - as well as collateral partners such as Probation - should also be considered. As in Santa Cruz, MDTs should be used to enhance services rather than using information in a way that can negatively impact the client. Families at the least should know the programs are working together.

It will be important to monitor those cases presented at an MDT to determine how effective they actually are. There are many MDT or administrative review processes already established in SFDHS FCS, and it may be most efficient to include CalWORKS staff in those on-going reviews rather than set up a whole new process for crossover cases. MDTs should also occur early in the life of a case (pre-dispo) to ensure the best possible program coordination and to incorporate recommendations into a CPS court report as appropriate. Other issues to be considered include: identification of a facilitator, recorder, and other participants; types of cases to be staffed; tracking of outcome and results.

E) Single Case Plan

Given court mandates and child welfare issues, the CWW should take the lead on crossover cases. Diversion of CalWORKS case plans pending completion or stabilization of a CPS plan, or simultaneous work on the plans, will need to be addressed by staff. A single case plan which can be relevant to both programs would be the ideal, particularly in more complicated cases.

F) Training/Policy and Procedures

In April, SFDHS hosted a joint "101" crossover training for both CalWORKS and FCS staff. This served as a kick-off to further development of linkages between the two programs and has received many kudos from attendees. Staff input and ideas as a result of this training should be carefully considered in any planning process, and line staff should be included on any committees that may result. Staff training should encompass fiscal and time limitations and service implications of crossover cases as they affect families - including parents about to reunify with their children and relative placements. Permanency planning with relatives and resources available in each program are also possible subject matters. Training will also need to be offered on resulting policy and procedures, such as the process for identifying cases in another program.