

AS THE CLOCK TICKS: EXAMINING CROSSOVER SERVICES BETWEEN CHILD WELFARE AND CALWORKS IN CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

Roy Redlich*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study examines the process that Contra Costa County developed to handle cases that “crossover” between child welfare and CalWORKs. Crossover cases are defined here as families that simultaneously have open cases in CalWORKs and child protective services. Sonoma County is interested in looking at models for coordinating services for families in these situations.

I visited Contra Costa County and conducted 20 interviews with staff who were involved in their crossover pilot project. After reviewing the information that was gathered, I developed the following recommendations.

Specialized Caseloads—One of the key considerations in developing a crossover procedure in Sonoma County is whether crossover cases should be assigned to all workers or to only assign crossover cases to specialized workers. There are pros and cons for each of these options. If the Department adopts the “Specialist” approach then it may be helpful to identify likely champions from the staff roster who have worked in both programs. If the Department elects not to take a Specialist approach, it may wish to broaden the definition of crossover cases. Crossover cases could include those families with children receiving Child Welfare services and including adult family members who receive General Assistance, Medi-Cal, or Food Stamps benefits, or receive JTPA/WIA, Cal-Learn, Adult & Aging, or Veteran’s services.

Staff Development—Whether using either a Specialist or non-Specialist approach, staff training will be an important aspect of implementing a crossover procedure. It is recommended that staff receive cross training at implementation, and that this be reinforced with regular follow-up training.

Co-location—Physical proximity of staff repeatedly emerged as an important attribute of the success of the crossover pilot in central Contra Costa County. As the Sonoma County Human Services Department develops a plan for a single agency site, consideration should be given to locating Child Welfare staff and CalWORKs staff near each other. In the meantime, co-location could be achieved by moving some Child Welfare workers into the Sonoma-WORKS office or vice versa.

Automation—There is a need for improved automation systems to identify mutual cases and avoid duplication of services. As design efforts for the new CalWIN system continue, it will be important to build in features that support serving crossover cases in a holistic fashion.

Legislative priorities—Contra Costa is lobbying for legislation that would grant aid to parents who are about to be reunited with their children. This effort should be supported.

AOD Services—It appears that the prevalence of crossovers between Child Welfare and Alcohol and Other Drug Services (AODS) is much greater than

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that between Child Welfare and CalWORKs. Working closely with AODS and involving them in the development of crossover procedures is recommended.

Non-Custodial Parents—It is recommended that parents in Family Reunification cases be offered services through the D.O.L.-funded Welfare-To-Work services for Non-Custodial Parents. This could be used for families that would otherwise be considered to be a crossover case, except they are now eligible for CalWORKs because they have had their children removed. These adults qualify for the Non-Custodial Parent Program and could benefit from the program's employment services and parenting classes.

Evaluation—In developing a local crossover procedure, outcome measures should be identified and tracked which reflect the goals of the local crossover project. One performance measure could be the number of written plans (both Welfare-To-Work and child welfare) that show evidence of collaboration.

The county welfare department must be mindful of the various requirements it places on clients and respectful of the varying timeframes (clocks) which tick for the client. Besides the clocks that tick for CalWORKs participation and Child Welfare there is also a clock for substance abuse treatment, and a clock ticking for child development. The Human Services Department needs to ensure that services are provided in a way that strengthens families without placing undue stress upon them as they are being assisted.

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BACKGROUND

As the clock ticks, workers in the county welfare department make decisions about how to best assist families in need. Families come in contact with the Department through a variety of ways. Sometimes it is because of child endangerment, sometimes it is because of the need for financial assistance, and sometimes it is for other reasons (such as to protect a frail or elderly dependent adult).

The same family may be receiving services from both the CalWORKs and child welfare programs. Sometimes, staff, unaware that the agency is serving the same family, places different, and sometimes conflicting demands upon the client. A CalWORKs social worker may tell a client “you need to go out and get a job.” At the same time a child welfare worker may tell the client “you need to stay home and take care of your children.” The client will then have a welfare-to-work plan and a child welfare plan to follow. The cost of failure is high. Clients who fail to meet the responsibilities of their welfare-to-work plan may lose a significant portion of their monthly income. Clients who fail to meet the responsibilities of the child welfare plan may lose their children.

It is with the aim of improving client services that my agency, the Sonoma County Human Services Department, sent me and my colleague, Marion Deeds, to examine promising practices in other counties. A table listing the features of the crossover projects in the two counties that we visited is attached as Exhibit A.

The process for embarking on this internship included:

- Meeting with our agency Director, Dianne Edwards, to discuss the goals of the internship.
- Meeting with workers in Sonoma to get their input on what questions should be asked.
- Receiving an orientation to the internship, including a meeting with the Director of Contra Costa County’s Employment & Human Services Department, John Cullen.
- Meeting with host county facilitators: Lori Larks, Child Welfare Division Manager; and Fran Treas, Workforce Services Division Manager.
- Attending a meeting of Contra Costa managers to discuss expansion of the crossover pilot to the other Districts.
- Developing an interview form and interviewing 20 people in Contra Costa.
- Writing up this case study including findings and recommendations.

GOALS OF THE CROSSOVER PROJECT

The Contra Costa Employment & Human Services Department recognized that better decisions can be made when all aspects of a family’s plan are taken together in a single coordinated fashion.

Contra Costa developed its “Crossover Project” to accomplish these goals:

1. Improve services to families.
2. Eliminate duplication of services.

3. Increase time claimed to CalWORKs funds.
4. Increase knowledge among workers of each other's functions.
5. Increase worker communication between bureaus.

IDENTIFYING CROSSOVER CASES

The first step was to identify mutual cases. They defined a crossover case as a family with an open child welfare case, with at least one adult required to participate in CalWORKs welfare-to-work activities. Not all cases receiving cash assistance through CalWORKs are in welfare-to-work activities. These non-crossover cases include undocumented aliens, non-needy relatives and sanctioned parents. Crossover cases include those child welfare cases in Family Maintenance, Families with children in Family Reunification, Permanency Planning, and Foster Care are also considered crossover cases if at least one child is still in the home.

There are two considerations in identifying the caseload: one is to look at current cases; the other is to look at new cases coming into the welfare system. For identifying crossover cases among the families currently served, Contra Costa developed a program that keys on the interface between the CDS/GIS system used in CalWORKs, and the CMS/CWS system used in child welfare. This produces a report of clients in both systems. However, once the report is run it must be carefully gone over by an Eligibility Worker Supervisor for accuracy. The accuracy of the reports has been increasing steadily.

Many of the cases are eliminated as crossover because, although the family is receiving cash assistance through CalWORKs, there is no requirement to participate in welfare-to-work activities.

One of the workers from Children & Family Services told me that two of her 25 cases were crossover cases, but neither of these cases were identified by the system. The clients told the worker of their involvement in welfare-to-work activities.

After the current crossover caseload has been successfully identified, it is then only necessary to identify the new clients as they enter the welfare system. To accomplish this Contra Costa has set up a system of searching the database of the other system when a new case is established.

HANDLING CONFIDENTIALITY

A form for handling confidentiality was developed which clients are requested to sign at intake. The signed form authorizes the exchange of information between Child Welfare and CalWORKs. All clients sign the release form (not just those known to be crossover). Information about a case is only shared on a need to know basis. A CalWORKs staff person may need to know if the client's child has been placed in protective custody, but the worker does not need (or want) to know why. Only as far as Child Welfare activities impact employment issues is information shared.

CONTACTS BETWEEN WORKERS

Part of the process in Contra Costa is to be specific about the type of communication that should occur when handling crossover cases and when that communication should happen. Events which should trigger communication between workers include:

- when the case is assigned; before a Welfare-To-Work plan is made;
- before a case plan is finalized;
- at the disposition of a case;

- when a CalWORKs activity begins or ends;
- when preparing to write a court report; when a case closes;
- when a case is sanctioned;
- when a child is removed from the home;
- when there is knowledge of substance abuse problems;
- when the family is at risk of, or becomes homeless; and
- when there is a change in the household composition.

When a worker can't be reached then staff is instructed to follow the written protocol about how to effectively use voice mail. Staff have also been instructed on how to document client contact in the file. This provides a standard for client records which both Child Welfare and CalWORKs can uphold.

Case conferences were often arranged informally. For example, a CalWORKs worker may have arranged to meet a client, and will call the Child Welfare worker to let them know that the client is going to be in the office. Sometimes this will result in a three-way meeting with the client.

If a CalWORKs client is already scheduled for CPS activities, those activities are "grandfathered" in as part of their Welfare-To-Work plan. Where there is a conflict, child welfare plans supercede welfare-to-work plans.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

A "kick-off" meeting was held on June 2, 1999 to let staff know of the new process. This was well organized and appears to have been a large success. The meeting was held in a nice hotel and lunch was provided.

As an ice-breaker a quiz was distributed to all participating staff. A quiz on CalWORKs program information was distributed to Child Welfare staff and a quiz on child welfare facts was given to workers in the Workforce Services Bureau.

Following self-introductions, staff presented a skit that underscored the purpose of the crossover project. In the skit, a person assuming the role of a client receives a call from their Child Welfare worker about upcoming court dates and the schedule for a drug treatment program. The "client" dutifully writes down the appointments on a large wall calendar. Once this call is completed, another call comes in, this time from the client's CalWORKs worker, reinforcing the importance of attending a Job Club workshop during the same time period. All the while the client's children are in the background vying for attention. This skit dramatically enacted the sometimes conflicting demands that the agency can place on clients.

Following the skit, staff received an overview of both CalWORKs and Children's Services. A case scenario was discussed and the crossover procedure was reviewed. Glossaries containing key terms and acronyms were exchanged so that both staff could speak the same language. Organizational charts and telephone directories were distributed to facilitate contact between Bureaus. In addition to this one-time training Contra Costa has arranged for continued "reinforcement training." Child welfare staff have met with Eligibility Workers at their unit meetings.

Part of the cross-training enabled staff to learn what resources were available in the other program to assist the client. In this way a package of services could be put together for each family that made use of the full resources that the agency can bring to

bear. For example a Child Welfare worker may access the mental health or substance abuse treatment services that are available through CalWORKs. Another example: a CalWORKs client may be engaged in vocational training at the community college. CalWORKs will pay for child care needed while in school but doesn't pay for unsupervised study time. The client may be able to receive respite care through Children & Family Services.

IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

Contra Costa received technical assistance from Rebecca Proehl, Ph.D, of the Bay Area Academy, through the Bay Area Social Services Consortium (BASSC). This included a workshop on "Managing Organizational Change."

A staff position, at the Program Analyst level, was dedicated to planning and implementing the crossover project in Contra Costa County. Contra Costa developed a written procedure and related forms. An attractive newsletter was developed to keep staff updated on the crossover project and to encourage Children & Family Services staff to time study to CalWORKs whenever possible. Staff also received desk guides and special time study instructions.

In the central Contra Costa County District (which includes Martinez, Walnut Creek and Concord) the Workforce Services office is located at 30 Muir Road in Martinez. The Children & Family Services office is located next door at 40 Muir Road. There is a interior passage referred to as the "breezeway" which connects the two buildings. In addition to the proximity that this provides, a CalWORKs unit is located within the Children & Family Services office.

A new CalWORKs outreach unit was established which began conducting home visits in December 1999, on cases referred by a CalWORKs worker when a client is in noncompliance for failure to meet welfare-to-work requirements. Visits are unannounced, usually the client is home. A team of two goes out on visits—one Social Worker and one Community Aide. The Community Aides are former CalWORKs recipients hired under a special program in conjunction with county personnel. They report that often the clients cite a lack of child care as a barrier to participation, however, after working with the case, they often find that underlying issues are revealed having to do with mental health, substance abuse, or domestic violence problems. If the Outreach Worker sees something is amiss, they report it to Child Welfare.

Ongoing oversight of the crossover project is the responsibility of the two Division Directors: Children & Family Services and Workforce Services. In addition, a Crossover Committee was established in January 1999 with only Division Managers. It was then expanded to include first line supervisors and staff. There are now 10 committee members and they meet weekly to continue to identify cases and facilitate cross-communication. The Crossover Committee model the communication between CalWORKs and Child Welfare.

FISCAL ISSUES

Child Welfare staff in Contra Costa are encouraged to claim all time spent on crossover cases to CalWORKs/Welfare-To-Work activities on their time studies. In August and November 1999 totals of 729 and 618 hours respectively were claimed to CalWORKs crossover cases. Individual Living Skills Program staff also time study to CalWORKs. An average of five to seven full-time equivalent

(F.T.E.) positions are claimed to CalWORKs through the crossover project.

It is agreed that CalWORKs can pay for the following services for crossover cases:

- Parenting classes
- Anger management classes
- Substance abuse treatment
- Mental health services
- Domestic violence services
- Necessary supportive services

The above services can be ordered by a Child Welfare worker and count towards the CalWORKs participation requirements.

Contra Costa used some of the CalWORKs single allocation money to fund expansion of children's services including expanding Kinship, Shared Family, Independent Living Skills, and domestic violence services.

REPORTING AND EVALUATION

The Executive Team is to deliver a quarterly report to the Director on the number of crossover cases being served. Formal evaluation through the development of outcome measures will be done after the entire county is using the crossover procedure.

FINDINGS

Contra Costa County Employment & Human Services is roughly twice the size as Sonoma County Human Services Department. With 1,200 agency staff in 4 Districts.

It appears that less than 5% of the CalWORKs caseload is a crossover case, and no more than 10%

of the cases opened at Child Welfare Intake are crossover cases. Many times it is found that the parents in Child Welfare cases are exempt or SSI parents.

Collocation seems to be a big factor in the amount and quality of communication that occurs between workers assigned to a crossover case.

Often a key person in crossover is someone who has worked in both bureaus. It is a lot to ask one person to learn both eligibility and employment services. To have that same worker then also learn about the child welfare system adds to the challenge. With a sufficiently small caseload this may be doable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Specialized Caseloads—One of the key considerations in developing a crossover procedure in Sonoma County would be whether or not to have all of the crossover cases assigned to specialized workers or to a specialized unit of workers. The statistics on the prevalence of crossover cases (less than 10%) point to having these relatively small number of cases assigned to workers who receive specialized training and support. If the Department adopts the "Specialist" approach then it would be logical to identify likely champions from the staff roster who have worked "both sides." If the Department decides that crossover cases should be distributed throughout staff, then the crossover procedure must be made a priority for workers. It must be shown clearly how the crossover procedure will benefit their work.

Expand Crossover Cases—If the Department elects not to take a Specialist approach, it may wish to broaden the definition of crossover cases that is used in Contra Costa. An expanded crossover caseload

could include Cal-Learn cases, and other CalWORKs cases that do not have welfare-to-work requirements. Crossover cases could also include other families that have a child or children receiving Child Welfare services and receive General Assistance, Medi-Cal, Food Stamps, JTPA/WIA, Adult & Aging, or Veteran's Services.

Staff Development—Whether using either a Specialist or non-Specialist approach, careful attention to staff training will need to be paid. Child Welfare and CalWORKs staff should know about how the other program works. Attention should be paid to the varying timeframes that follow the flow of clients as they receive services. Exhibits B and C illustrate these flow patterns. Child Welfare staff need to be familiar with CalWORKs eligibility, grant amounts, school attendance requirements, and sanctions. The employment focus should not be lost. Induction training for workers should routinely include cross-training.

Co-location—Physical proximity of staff repeatedly emerged as an important attribute of the success of the crossover pilot in central Contra Costa County. As the Human Services Department develops plans for a single agency site, consideration should be given to locating Child Welfare staff and CalWORKs staff near each other. In the meantime, collocation could be achieved by moving some Child Welfare workers into the SonomaWORKS office or vice versa. This partial co-location may be facilitated by adopting the Specialized Caseload approach to handling crossover cases.

Automation—There is a need for improved automation systems to identify mutual cases and avoid duplication of services. Until that occurs it may be simpler and even more accurate to just ask the client if they are involved in the other program. As

design efforts for the new CalWIN system continue, it will be important to build in features that support serving crossover cases in a holistic fashion.

Legislative priorities—Contra Costa is lobbying for legislation that would grant aid to parents who are about to be reunited with their children. Until the law changes clients can be put into a “Catch-22” situation. Parents don't qualify for cash assistance through CalWORKs because there is no eligible child in the home, and at the same time they may not be able to show that the child should be returned to the home because there is no steady source of family income.

AOD Services—There appears to be a strong link between Child Welfare and alcohol or other drug problems. One Child Welfare worker told me she estimated 75% of her clients are known to have AODS problems. It appears that the prevalence of crossovers between Child Welfare and AODS is much greater than that between Child Welfare and CalWORKs.

Fortunately the CalWORKs program provides set-aside funding for substance abuse services. These services are available to not only the CalWORKs participant, but to members of the client's family if their substance abuse issues pose barriers to the client's employability. This could include treatment services for a teenage child of a CalWORKs participant. Close coordination between the Family, Youth, & Children's Services Division with the Department of Health Services Alcohol and Other Drug Services Division is indicated for the many other cases which are in need of services but do not qualify for CalWORKs. Providing substance abuse treatment services to adults in Child Welfare cases may be funded out of the TANF incentive money, which is less restrictive than CalWORKs.

Non-Custodial Parents—It is recommended that links be forged for parents in Family Reunification cases to services through the D.O.L.-funded Welfare-To-Work services for Non-Custodial Parents. This could be used for families that would otherwise be considered to be a crossover case, except they are now ineligible for CalWORKs because they have had their children removed. These adults qualify for the Non-Custodial Parent Program and could benefit from the employment services and parenting classes which that program provides.

Evaluation—In developing a local crossover procedure, outcome measures should be identified and tracked. One performance measure could be the number of written plans (both Welfare-To-Work and child welfare) that show evidence of collaboration.

CONCLUSION

Nancy Young of *Children and Family Futures*, points out that besides the clocks which tick for CalWORKs participation and Child Welfare there are two other clocks to consider. There is a clock for substance abuse treatment. To successfully treat someone who is dependent on and abusing alcohol or other drugs can take a long-term (even life-long intervention). Finally the developmental clock of the child needs to be considered. The first years of a child's life are formative, and children get only one chance to go through them.

The county welfare department must be mindful of the various requirements it places on clients and respectful of the varying timeframes (clocks) which tick for the client. Without coordination, clients could find themselves in the midst of a Draconian dilemma: to lose income or to lose a child.

Exhibit A

Side-by-side Comparison of Features in County Crossover Projects

Feature	Santa Cruz County	Contra Costa County
Goals of the crossover project	1) To better serve clients 2) Avoid gaps and duplication in services	1) to better serve clients 2) avoid duplication 3) Maximize use of CalWORKs funds
Defining “crossover” cases	A family with an open child welfare case that includes an adult who receives TANF.	A family with an open child welfare case that includes an adult who is required to participate in welfare-to-work activities.
Identifying mutual clients in the current caseload	State HWDC generates a quarterly ad hoc report from CWS/CMS, which is compared to a CDS/GIS report. Name, DOB and SSN are matched. Systems support staff review list for accuracy.	An ad hoc report was developed which looks at the interface field between the two automated systems – CDS/GIS and CMS/CWS. This report lists clients who are open in both systems. A staff person takes the list and checks each name for accuracy.
Identifying new clients as they enter the welfare system	Child Welfare and CalWORKS staff search any new case in either program. If an active case is found, the worker name and phone number is noted on the bottom of search form. Worker and supervisor are notified that a “crossover” exists. NOTE: In child welfare, when the screeners are preparing to “assess out” a referral for CPS, they search for any aid case, and contact eligibility worker or case manager for any information about the family before making the final decision.	A file search is done by intake clerical at both ends (child welfare and CalWORKs). The case is flagged by inserting a brightly colored form that has the name and phone number of the other worker.
Handling confidentiality	At intake clients are requested to sign a consent form for the exchange of information. In child welfare dependency cases, the judge issues a standing order for the sharing of information at the multi-disciplinary team if it becomes necessary.	At intake clients are requested to sign a consent form for the exchange of information
Formalizing communication between workers	When a worker receives a crossover case, a call is placed to the other worker. Written instructions are provided on when to make subsequent contacts, how to use voice mail, and how to document case narratives. Santa Cruz’s written policy includes criteria for elevating a case to the Multi-disciplinary case conference, and scheduling the conference. Program managers share a quarterly list of identified “dual” clients to the supervisors, who review whether contacts were made.	When a worker receives a crossover case, a call is placed to the other worker. Written instructions are provided on when to make subsequent contacts, how to use voice mail, and how to document case narratives.

Feature	Santa Cruz County	Contra Costa County
Use of a Multi-Disciplinary Team model	<p>MDT meets twice monthly, once in north county (Santa Cruz) and once in south county (Watsonville). Any case manager involved with case can request the case be discussed at the MDT. Child welfare services manager is responsible for scheduling the cases and notifying involved staff.</p> <p>Participants can include eligibility staff, employment and training staff, social workers, CalWORKS mental health and drug and alcohol counselors, and staff from CBO's such as Families in Transition.</p>	A formal multi-disciplinary team model is not used for crossover cases in Contra Costa.
Collocating staff	<p>Santa Cruz is exploring the possibility of collocating a CalWORKS Employment and Training Specialist (ETS) with child welfare workers in the north county office. Currently staff are not co-located.</p> <p>In Watsonville, child welfare and CalWORKS staff are in different suites of the same office building.</p>	Some Workforce Services staff are located in the Child Welfare building. The Workforce Services building is next door to Child Welfare and connected by an interior "breezeway."
Pilot or countywide	Countywide	Currently the crossover project is being piloted in the central Contra Costa district.
Staff development	Child welfare trainers have made presentations to CalWORKS staff, and vice versa, to share information about the workings of each program.	A half-day "kick off" meeting was conducted on June 9, 1999.
Project oversight	Management oversight of the project is the responsibility of the two Division Directors for Child Welfare and Workforce Services. A steering committee meets regularly to review the operation and make and needed changes.	Management oversight of the project is the responsibility of the two Division Directors for Child Welfare and Workforce Services. An ongoing committee meets monthly to review the operation and make and needed changes.
Implementation timeframes	Santa Cruz began crossover in 1998. The program was fully implemented in May 1999.	Crossover began in May 1999
Other features	In the Watsonville office, the supervisor for child welfare services Emergency Response has developed an informal weekly meeting with supervisors and workers from CalWORKS and Medi-Cal, to review ER referrals that have active aid cases.	Contra Costa County received technical assistance from the Bay Area Social Services Consortium (BASSC) to help plan their crossover project.

Exhibit B

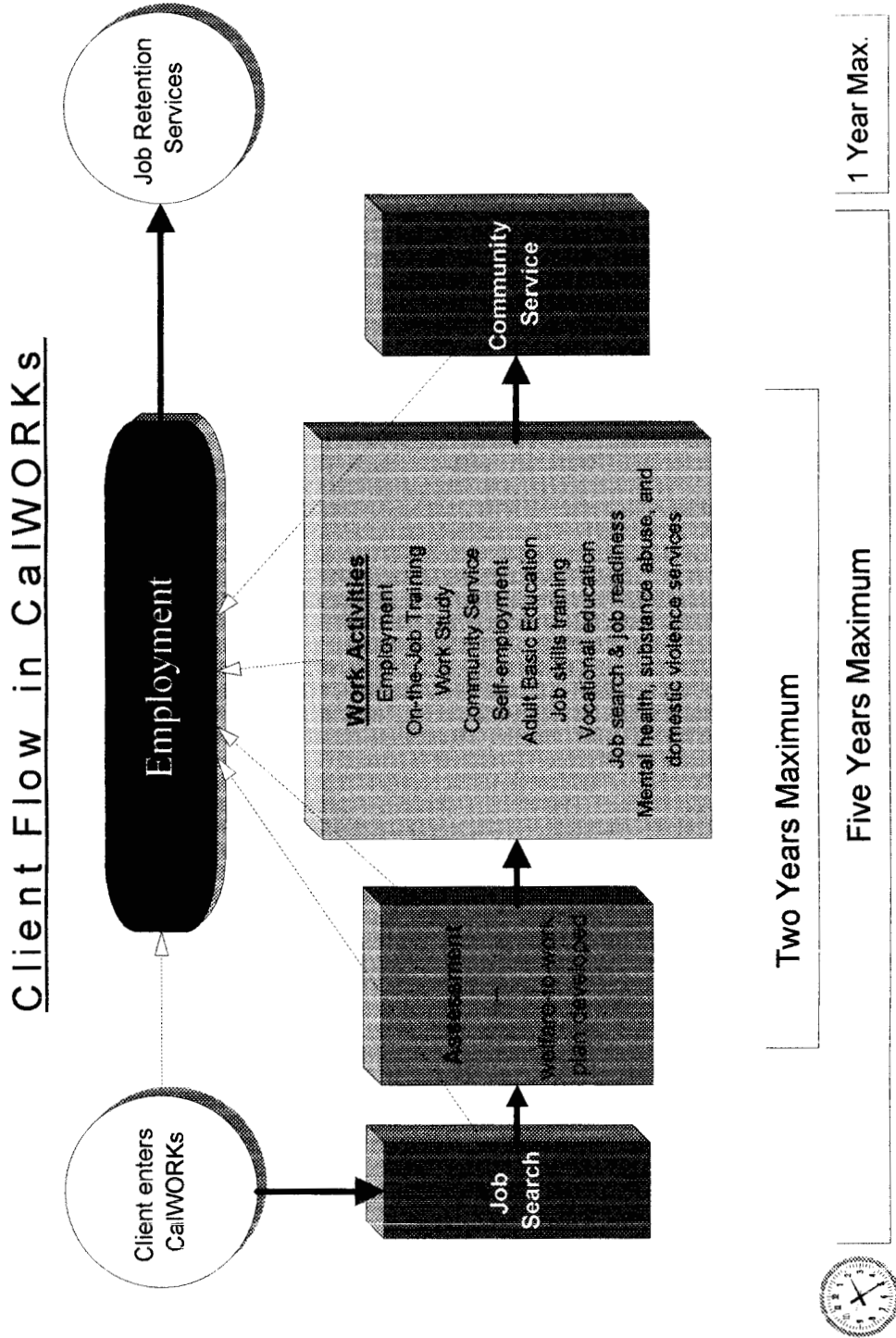


Exhibit C

