

INTEGRATED SERVICES IN SAN MATEO COUNTY

Dorothy Hicks*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The need for public human service agencies to integrate services is well established. People come to human service agencies with a complex set of needs that no one program can fulfill. At the same time, different programs have different philosophies, goals, service structures and terminologies that often create challenges when trying to integrate services. As a result people come into a human service agency a “whole person” but are “broken into pieces” by the agency in order to serve him/her.

While many agencies recognize the need for integrated services, few have made significant progress in this area on a broad scale. This paper provides an overview of San Mateo County’s efforts towards service integration. This includes their efforts towards, regionalization, matrix management, and an examination of their one-stops, intake practices, Family Self-Sufficiency Teams, information systems and collaboration with community partners.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALAMEDA COUNTY

Alameda County may wish to take the following into account when considering options related to service integration:

- Assessment at intake;
- Family Self-Sufficiency Teams and
- Information System changes (SMART)

Assessment at Intake.

In the past, San Mateo County had separate intake processes for each program. Currently there is a common intake process. Staff is trained in multiple programs, and a comprehensive screening and assessment tool is used to determine what services are needed.

Family Self-Sufficiency Teams.

These are multi-disciplinary teams that include agency staff as well as service providers. The teams meet to review cases and recommend services and benefits. Having this level of interaction prevents the duplication of services and is less frustrating for clients.

Information System Development.

San Mateo County uses the SMART system to provide a linkage between county staff and agency partners. This is a great tool for sharing information and facilitating communication between all parties involved in the client’s case.

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CHALLENGES OF SERVICE INTEGRATION

Service integration may be well established in theory but has not become an operational reality. Some agencies have made great progress towards service integration despite changing political, economic, demographic and technological conditions. One-stop shops have emerged, joint planning has been initiated, co-location of two or more service agency's staff has been implemented, standard initial screening tools and eligibility processes have been established, and the merging of data systems is occurring in many agencies. As a result there have been successes, but for the most part there have not been many broadly implemented system changes.

WHY HAS SERVICE INTEGRATION BEEN SO ELUSIVE?

Why is service integration so elusive? Some believe it is because we are trying to get integrated service performance from a system that was designed years ago for standardized production under very different economic, social, technological and political times. There is no standard customer; each needs different things in different combinations at different times and for different reasons. Service integration requires that we become flexible, performance-based, integrated organizations.

CREATING AN INTEGRATED ORGANIZATION

Creating a highly efficient integrated organization requires specific leadership work at all levels of the

organization. Leadership functions that must be performed at all levels include: setting direction, setting boundaries, and creating alignment.

Setting Direction

Setting Direction involves a set of tasks that clearly defines what business we are in, who we serve, what they need and how we will know if we have served them successfully. This work is done, in varying degrees, by everyone in the organization. One of the most critical tasks in this function is to develop a clear vision and mission.

Setting Boundaries

Setting boundaries involves tasks that establish how we will operate and treat each other. Service integration requires that communication flows freely, teams are used, decision-making is dispersed throughout the system, goals are jointly established, and team members have personal sense of efficacy.

Creating Alignment

This leadership function is critical to successful service integration because as changes in the way work is done are made, organizational components must be realigned to support these changes. *Creating alignment* tasks involves aligning organizational support functions such as human resources, procurement, budget, and information technology, with the new way of doing business. These tasks also involve aligning work processes and communication strategies to achieve the vision more easily. When components are misaligned the

systems spend energy fighting itself.

The “Bottom Line” for Successful Service Integration

Service integration is the ultimate change for human service agencies. It will become a broad based reality only when the leadership work is done at all levels. We will not wake up tomorrow to find that service integration has happened. Service integration “gets done” in the day to day operations of the agency. Leadership development must be viewed as a critical component because “*leadership for high performance*” is the bottom line in making service integration a reality.

SERVICE INTEGRATION IN SAN MATEO COUNTY

Summary

Over the last decade San Mateo County has used various strategies to integrate services including: co-locating staff, developing common intake processes, creating multi-disciplinary teams to review and manage cases, and reorganizing to bring multiple programs under a unified structure. San Mateo has incorporated these strategies and more to create Peninsula Works, an innovative and responsive service delivery system.

The Human Services Agency (HSA) of San Mateo County is an organization that includes a wide range of human service programs in a single administrative unit. Income support programs, employment and training programs, youth and family services, housing programs, vocational rehabilitation services, and alcohol and drug services are the responsibility of a single director. HSA has developed and implemented management and staff

processes that are designed to facilitate the delivery of services. These processes include:

- **Regionalization**—HSA offices are located throughout the county. Staff and managers in these offices have flexibility to implement policies in ways that meet local needs.
- **Matrix Management**—Managers have dual responsibilities. They are responsible for office operations within a region and for policy in areas of specialization. For example, one regional director is responsible for operation of offices within his/her region and for policies and processes agency-wide related to youth and family services.
- **True One-Stop Access to Services.** Clients in San Mateo County can access a broad range of programs at a single location.
- **Common Intake Process**—The county has implemented a common intake process in which staff trained in multiple programs use a comprehensive screening and assessment tool to determine client needs.
- **Family Self-Sufficiency Teams**—Multi-disciplinary teams that include staff as well as service providers meet weekly to review cases and recommend appropriate services and benefits.
- **Information Systems support**—HSA has developed and implemented a common case management and client tracking system (SMART) that is accessible to all staff. The system is linked to a data warehouse that provides information for management decision-making.

Collaboration with Community Partners

HSA works closely with 17 Family Resource Centers and 7 Core Service Agencies that offer a range of services to families, all of which are connected to HSA via the SMART system.

Background

Created in 1992, San Mateo County's Human Services Agency combined Income Maintenance, Youth and Family Services, Employment, Job Training and Development, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Housing Services and Alcohol and Drug Services in an effort to provide comprehensive services to customers. While other counties may incorporate some of these programs, combining Housing Services and Drug and Alcohol Services is unusual.

Demographics

San Mateo County is a somewhat "well-to-do" county south of San Francisco. The population of approximately 707,161 is about average for counties in California.¹ The percentages of persons and children living below the poverty line are substantially less than state averages.

A vital issue for county administrators is the cost of living in the county, particularly the costs of housing and childcare. The county has determined that a family of three needs an annual income of more than \$70,000 to get by without government assistance.² Furthermore, located in Silicon Valley, many of the training programs offered focused on high technology jobs. The recent economic downturn, however, has had a significant impact on this sector making the transition from minimum wage jobs to higher paying jobs more difficult.

SERVICE INTEGRATION IN SAN MATEO COUNTY

Integration of human service programs in San Mateo County has been a decade long effort that involves a number of strategies that include:

- Organizational changes
- Staff Development
- Changes in client processes
- Improvements in working relationships with community partners
- Information systems development and
- Creation of the Peninsula Works one-stop offices.

Organizational Changes

In 1992, after conducting focus groups with stakeholders, the County Board of Supervisors and the County Manager came to the decision that in order to best meet the needs of the residents, a single agency should be created that would include multiple programs under the authority of a single director. The Human Service Agency, which has approximately 700 employees, includes income maintenance programs, youth and family services, employment, job training and development programs, vocational rehabilitation services, housing services and alcohol and drug services.

Regionalization

In 1997, HSA adopted a structure in which residents are served by local offices grouped in three regions each with a regional director. Each local office has an office manager (called a regional manager).

Although countywide policies, procedures, and state-mandated requirements affect the operation of each program, regional offices have flexibility regarding policy implementation and operational processes. The county is not homogenous; different areas have different needs. The regional structure allows for variation and matrix management ensures that policies take into account the need for such variation.

Matrix Management

One of the more unique features of the management structure in San Mateo County is matrix management. Upper-level managers, including regional directors, have operational as well as programmatic responsibilities. For example, the Director of the Southern Region is responsible for the operation of several offices, including a large one-stop in Redwood City and a smaller office in East Palo Alto. He is also responsible for county-wide adolescent services, the Children's Receiving Home and out-of-home services, as well as coordinating policy for the county's Self-Sufficiency Teams and the SMART system (both described below).

Managers below the regional director level also have dual responsibilities. For example, the manager of the Daly City Peninsula Works One-Stop also shares responsibility for county-wide policies regarding the operation of one-stops. This management approach can be confusing. Managers often wear several hats and the lines of authority and responsibilities are not always clear. The system is working, however, with positive benefits. Because managers have both operational and programmatic responsibilities, they are sensitive to operational effects of policies, both within and beyond the programs for which they are responsible. They understand how policies in one program can affect other programs.

Multiple Teams

Matrix management requires a great deal of interaction between programs. There are multiple teams in HSA both at the management and staff levels. An executive team that includes the agency director, the regional directors, and other agency executive directors meet every two weeks to discuss issues including barriers to integration and possible solu-

tions. Other teams include an Operational Team and a Policy Team.

Culture Change

The county has developed a staff of approximately fifty Screening and Assessment Specialist located in the one-stop offices who are responsible for client intake for most of HSA's programs (Child Welfare is done separately). Other operational staff are also cross-trained. Staff receive training in multiple programs. The change in culture from programs focused on eligibility determination to a more integrated approach focused on providing holistic, client-centered services began in the mid 1990s with the adoption of the SUCCESS model (Shared Understanding to Change the Community to Enable Self-Sufficiency). Managers take their responsibility to support the changes seriously and do so through a combination of formal and informal team building activities, such as regular cross-program staff meetings and parties that recognize accomplishments and birthdays. Staff that might not otherwise interact becomes familiar with one another. This interaction reinforces an atmosphere of cooperation and shared mission.

Changes in Client Processes

Previously there were separate intake processes for each program. During the 1990s the county implemented a common intake process that incorporates a comprehensive family-focused screening and assessment tool that emphasizes client strengths. Screening and Assessment Specialist (SAS) meet one-on-one with clients at intake, using information provided by clients as well as a more comprehensive multiple needs assessment tool to determine client needs. The initial assessment is an in-depth review of client needs that can take up to one-half

day. If the client has immediate needs the SAS completes and begins processing all necessary paperwork. The SAS refers cases with broader needs to an Income and Employment Services Specialist (IESS); cases with minimal needs (e.g. Food Stamp only cases) are referred to an Eligibility Technician for case processing. Cases referred to an IESS receive a Broad-Based evaluation and ongoing case management services; clients with employment and training needs are referred to an Employment Services Specialist who provides appropriate services such as a week-long workshop focused on employment. Family Self-Sufficiency Teams (FSST) review incoming cases.

Family Self-Sufficiency Teams

Family Self-Sufficiency Teams are multi-disciplinary teams of professionals from various county and county-based organizations that assist individuals or families obtain resources and referrals necessary for self-sufficiency. Four of these teams, (located in the One-Stop offices) meet weekly. Team members include county and agency partners such as: intake and eligibility staff, child welfare and employment and training staff, staff representing services such as counseling and therapy services, drug and alcohol services, mental health services, domestic violence treatment, and emergency cash and housing resources.

Cases from intake with multiple needs, on-going cases in danger of being sanctioned, cases that are active in both income support and child welfare systems and other problematic cases are submitted to the FSST for review. Families are invited to participate when their case is discussed; approximately 50 percent choose to do so. At these meetings, cases are presented, short and long-term goals are formulated and a service plan is created. Follow-up meetings

with the family are scheduled to assess progress. The benefits of this process include the development of a common case plan that covers multiple programs, elimination of duplicative services, and the opportunity for client buy-in and cooperation.

Relationships with Community Partners

HSA has developed a broad network of connections with community partners, including providers of services and stakeholders with an interest in improving services for county residents. For example, the county facilitated the development of the Peninsula Community Foundation, which includes local school districts, cities, non-profit and community-based organizations, that has become a major voice in seeking improvements in services and service delivery processes. HSA works closely and contracts for services with a network of 17 school-based family resource centers throughout the county and seven core service agencies. The latter provides services such as emergency food and assistance with citizenship issues. The family resource centers and core service agencies are linked to county processes through the county's multi-program information system, SMART.

Information Systems

County programs remain supported by older main-frame based "legacy" systems, however, HSA has made significant progress developing systems that link county staff and service providers across multiple programs.

SMART

The SMART system (Service Management Access to Resource Tracking), is a case management and client tracking system.

The first functions of the system became operational in 1998. Examples of system functions include: household management, with demographic information on clients, service needs, case narrative, and the name of the assigned worker; workflow management, with worker to-do lists; and service management, with information on programs and services, screening for eligibility, action plans, and program participation tracking.

SMART currently operates separately from the eligibility systems (creating the need for “dual data” entries by county staff). It is a tool that connects workers across programs. An exception is the child welfare program. County staff are required to use a state developed system. A unique feature of SMART is the connection with private service providers. School-based Family Resource Centers and the county’s network of core service providers have access to the system. This allows both county staff and service providers to determine where clients are in the system, what needs have been identified, what benefits and services clients are receiving and the worker (s) who are involved in the case. County and service providers are also able to update the case to record any additional actions taken.

The SMART System does have its drawbacks. There are limitations related to the amount and types of information collected. Then there is the need to enter information into other systems, and the system is not used 100 percent of the time by all workers. Nevertheless, it is an important tool that supports integration; linking workers across programs and county and service providers.

One-Stop Offices

San Mateo County has embraced the one-stop concept in a “big way”. Although there is variation in

available services and in office size, the philosophy is the same at each location—that a person can come into any office, be treated with respect, and be given the service they need. Services are provided by: HSA, the State Employment Development Department, and Partner Agencies. Services include: Financial Assistance, Housing, Alcohol and Drug, Mental Health, Children and Family, Legal Aid, and a myriad of employment related services.

Success Factors

A number of factors have been instrumental in HAS’s successful implementation of the strategies mentioned thus far. Some of the more critical factors are:

A Single Government Structure

This inclusiveness reduces bureaucratic delays and competition between programs. It facilitates information sharing, eliminates confusion for clients, and enhances a common vision and culture.

County Resources

San Mateo is a relatively prosperous county. The county provides funding to fill the gaps between program fund initiatives that cannot be funded through state and federal programs and provide matching funds for programs which require matching.

Strong Leadership

Executive management and other managers act as spokespersons for the agency’s vision and initiatives. They are veteran human service personnel who understand programs and the strategies necessary to integrate services. They have created and reinforced a culture that is client-focused and responsive.

LESSONS LEARNED

San Mateo County has made notable progress in reworking processes and service delivery systems. There are three things that were, and are, being done in San Mateo that are crucial to the county's success: the (1) creation of an expectation of collaboration, (2) community involvement, and (3) teamwork.

Creating an Expectation of Collaboration

Managers continually reinforced the message that the agency is about more than employment. It is about helping families become self-sufficient and stable. Managers work to change agency culture, encouraging staff to participate. Managers make their expectations known and have found that staff who are not comfortable with the client-service focus do not remain with the agency. Customer satisfaction surveys conducted regularly by the county show a high level of approval of the services and treatment received.

Community Involvement

The creation of the Peninsula Community Foundation and the inclusion of non-traditional partners, such as the school system, in planning and implementing service strategies, has broadened the network of service providers and increased community involvement.

Working Together

Bringing staff from multiple programs and partner agencies together formally through co-location and team staffing and informally through staff parties has helped to create an atmosphere of cooperation and trust. Communication is facilitated when everyone involved in a case is located in one place. Co-location of a broad range of programs has the added benefit of removing the stigma of the welfare office. Because so many employment-related ser-

vices are located with other human services, the atmosphere of the office is different—it becomes an “employment office” and not a “welfare office”.

CONCLUSION

San Mateo County has made a commitment to service integration and to providing a responsive, client-centered service delivery system. By implementing strategies such as: one-stops, developing a common intake process, an assessment process, team staffing, matrix management, and a strong information system, San Mateo has one of the most integrated service delivery systems in the state.

The system, however, is not perfect. The system to link staff and provide management information is fairly new and is experiencing a normal period of implementation problems. The child welfare system is not as closely connected with the other programs as it could be, nor has the housing program been fully integrated. Despite these concerns, San Mateo County has created a service delivery system that is noteworthy.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ALAMEDA COUNTY

There are three concepts used by San Mateo County that Alameda County may wish to consider:

- Assessment at intake;
- Information system that promotes communication between the county and community partners and
- Family Self-Sufficiency Teams.

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REFERENCES

Multiple Strategies with a Single Goal, Mark Ragan, Rockefeller Institute

Endnotes

1 Information provided by San Mateo County

2 Information provided by San Mateo County