

## PARTNERING WITH CHILD WELFARE TO SERVE CALWORKS CLIENTS

**Ada Lillie\***

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

#### INTRODUCTION

Four years ago, Santa Clara County Social Services Agency, unlike some of its neighboring counties, recognized the need to do more for the people they serve and developed its Department of Family and Children Services and CalWORKs partnership.

This very comprehensive and innovative partnership was created to improve communication and coordination between its Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) and the Department of Employment and Benefit Services (DEBS) to improve services to common clients. The clients that were known to both programs were often faced with the potential of losing the custody of their child(ren) or their cash grant due to conflicting program requirements.

Because the organizational structures of Alameda County Social Services and Santa Clara County Social Services are seemingly similar, I decided to have Santa Clara County as the site for my case study. At about the same time, I discovered that Alameda County Social Services Agency had been awarded a two-year grant to implement strategies to integrate child welfare and public assistance programs in California, and could possibly benefit from learning about the steps Santa Clara County used to develop its partnership. These factors led me to make the following areas my focus of study for Alameda County Social Services:

- Phase I – The need for the partnership,
- Phase II - The benefits of the partnership, and
- Phase III -The impact of implementation of the partnership.

#### FINDINGS

Santa Clara County formed an interdepartmental work group to identify ways that DFCS and DEBS could collaborate more effectively to improve services to families common to both departments. Recommendations made by this work group were approved for implementation by the Agency Executive Management Team.

Based on recommendations made by the work group, staff from DEBS was co-located within the DFCS office. Tasks were assigned to these specialized workers to assist DFCS staff as follows:

- Integrate court mandated or voluntary DFCS services with the CalWORKs self-sufficiency plan into one unified plan that would meet the requirements of both programs.
- Participate in family case conferences and act as a resource person to identify resources available to CalWORKs families.
- Work closely with the Emergency Response, Voluntary Family Maintenance, and Dependency Investigation Social Workers to establish CalWORKs eligibility when a family is referred to the intake and investigation part of the child welfare system.

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- Assist with scheduling and/or doing CalWORKs orientations for DFCS clients who have not attended the orientation.

These and other recommendations were made to avoid duplication of services within departments as well as to avoid assigning conflicting program requirements to clients being served in both departments.

## CHALLENGES

Although Santa Clara County identified more than 200 common collaboration cases during its pilot stage to justify the need to increase and expand its partnership, the timeline for the expansion has been continuously delayed. Even the passage of Assembly Bill 429, which provides for the continuation of CalWORKs services, under specified circumstances, when a child has been removed from the home and is receiving out-of-home care, has not been a significant help in speeding up the expansion.

Several factors were identified as challenges to the implementation of the partnership, both during its pilot stages and through the expansion plans.

Challenges included:

- Applying a strengths-based focus within a punitive system.
- Coordinating a collaboration effort takes time and much effort.
- Creating one physical common case plan document.
- Training all DFCS staff on CalWORKs benefits and employment services.
- Working with a new CalWIN system not equipped to generate the common case listing.
- Receiving continued support, communication, and direction from the Executive Leaders.
- Not having a tool for measuring outcomes.

## IMPLICATIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALAMEDA COUNTY

Alameda County could benefit from reviewing Santa Clara County's partnership model. Most, if not all, of Santa Clara County's action steps could be adopted in Alameda County because of the similarities in the organizational structures of the agencies. Despite the absence of strong evidence to support positive outcomes for the partnership, Alameda County should not take a defeatist attitude toward implementation.

I recommend that Alameda County Social Services Agency move forward on partnering the Children and Family Services Department with CalWORKs Employment Services to better serve those common client cases. I recommend that the following ideas be considered:

- Create a vision and mission statement to endorse a CalWORKs and Children and Family Services partnership.
- Identify target populations to be served based on available resources, beginning with existing common CalWORKS/CFS cases and expanding to other populations as funding allows.
- Reclassify employment counselors, selected for the partnership, to manage both CalWORKs eligibility and employment services. This would eliminate the third case manager!
- Assign job developers and career development specialists to work exclusively with this population to enhance the chances of these families reaching self-sufficiency.
- Guarantee staff, managers included, the training and tools needed to deal with this change in services delivery.
- Assess and develop a training curriculum that includes the varying needs and knowledge levels of staff offering topics like, teamwork, case

collaboration, conflict resolution and joint case planning.

- Provide extensive cross training for the partnership staff.
- Continuously communicate and reinforce the vision of the partnership to agency staff and community partners.
- Continuously assess and evaluate the partnership strengths as it progresses.

## PARTNERING WITH CHILD WELFARE TO SERVE CALWORKS CLIENTS

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### INTRODUCTION

During the fall of 1999, when many California counties were still struggling with implementation issues of welfare reform, the County of Santa Clara Social Services Agency developed its Department of Family and Children Services and CalWORKs partnership.

This partnership was created to improve communication and coordination between the Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) and the Department of Employment and Benefit Services (DEBS) and to improve services to common clients. The clients that were known to both programs were often faced with the potential of losing the custody of their child(ren) or their cash grant due to conflicting program requirements.

Not only are the demographics of Santa Clara County and Alameda County similar but also the Social Services Agencies' organizational structures are also remarkably similar. Because of these similarities I decided to make Santa Clara County my county of study to assist Alameda County in its development of its Children and Family Services and CalWORKs partnership.

I decided to make the following areas my focus of study for Alameda County Social Services:

- Phase I - The need for the partnership,
- Phase II - The benefits of the partnership, and
- Phase III -The impact of implementation of the partnership.

### BACKGROUND

#### The Need for the Partnership: PHASE I

In December of 1998, an interdepartmental work group was formed in Santa Clara County Social Services to identify ways that the Department of Family and Children Services and the Department of Employment and Benefit Services could collaborate more effectively. This work group was charged with the task of developing pilot projects and making recommendations for implementation to the Executive Management Team.

One of the recommendations approved by the Executive Management Team was to assist DFCS and DEBS to collaborate on common cases. It was recommended that employment technicians (ETs) be co-located within the DFCS office where staff from both departments would assist in integrating court mandated or voluntary DFCS services with the CalWORKs self-sufficiency plan, into one unified plan. The common plan included the time the mutual client spends participating in DFCS court ordered activities, such as drug testing, AA meetings, counseling, parenting classes, family visitation, and court appearances, and counted toward the CalWORKs participation requirements.

CalWORKs support services, such as childcare, domestic violence, expungement, transportation, vocational training and ancillary expenses are available, if needed, for any DFCS activity that is part of the integrated plan.

Those ET's assigned to the DFCS Social Worker Unit would manage a specialized caseload of DFCS/DEBS common cases and would work in

partnership with the DFCS social workers in developing and/or modifying the employment plan, which would meet the requirements of both DEBS and DFCS. The ET's would participate in family care conferencing as needed and act as a resource person. They would have full knowledge of DEBS resources and would function as a DEBS "generalist."

Another recommendation approved by the Executive Management Team was the co-location of CalWORKs District Office social workers. These social workers would serve as resource persons to link CalWORKs families with various CalWORKs programs such as Domestic Abuse, Alcohol and Drug Services, Family Conferencing, Cal-Learn, etc.

The pilot partnership project members agreed that the specialized ET's would provide the following services:

- Work in partnership with the continuing DFCS social workers in developing and/or modifying the employment plan, which would meet the requirements of both DFCS and CalWORKs.
- Manage a specialized caseload of DFCS/DEBS common cases.
- Provide one-to-one DEBS orientations, as needed.
- Broker services between DFCS and CalWORKs for clients already registered in DEBS.
- Participate in family case conferences as needed and act as a resource person.
- Work closely with the Emergency Response, Dependency Investigation and Voluntary Family Maintenance social workers to establish CalWORKs eligibility when a family is referred to the intake and investigation part of the child welfare system.
- Identify resources available to eligible

CalWORKs families.

- Assist with the scheduling of the DFCS clients, who are eligible for CalWORKs and have not attended the orientation.

## **Partnership Benefits: PHASE II**

The goal of coordinating CalWORKs and the Child Welfare Departments is to utilize and increase the amount and type of resources available to help families achieve economic stability and child safety. Prior to the start of the partnership in Santa Clara County, this goal was broken across the two departments. For the Department of Family and Children Services child safety had always been their sole focus, and helping families achieve economic stability had been the focus of the Department of Employment and Benefit Services. For the partnership's success, staff across departments would need to endorse the benefits of the collaboration.

The message that CalWORKs services and resources could serve as a primary prevention program for DFCS and that services, like screening, assessments, and income support, could prevent the stresses of poverty that may lead to child abuse had to be delivered to DFCS staff. At the same time, the message for DEBS staff was that DFCS could serve as an anti-poverty program, so that families working to establish safe and secure environments for their children would be offered services to assist them in these goals.<sup>1</sup>

To deliver the benefits to staff and other partners of the collaboration, Santa Clara County developed a partnership bulletin that outlined the "what and why's" of the partnership and conveyed those important messages in the following manner:

**First to the DFCS Social Workers:**

- Social workers would have a broader range of resources to access for clients. CalWORKs eligible clients are eligible for the following services:
- Benefits - cash aid, food stamps, and medical.
- Employment services - resume preparation, job search, etc.
- Support services - child care, transportation, housing assistance, counseling, clothing, tattoo removal, expungement, career services, and vehicle repair.
- These resources are paid for by CalWORKs and are free to the client.
- The client will receive integrated and consistent services.
- The case plan will be easier to monitor.
- The court will look upon CalWORKs involvement favorably.
- Knowledge that being on CalWORKS benefits the DFCS clients because of the free services available to them from CalWORKs to help remove barriers to work.
- Knowledge that their clients would no longer be torn between meeting the goals of one department or the other.
- Knowledge that clients receiving cash aid would have help with improving their work skills and support services, which would more likely improve their self-esteem, help to achieve self-sufficiency and become better parents.

Indications were that the DEBS staff appeared to be more willing and ready for the change in service delivery and offered less resistance than the DFCS department; therefore, it was absolutely necessary to convince the DFCS staff of these benefits to them. The bulletin did just that by focusing, highlighting and selling the strong points of the collaboration efforts to get staff from DFCS to buy into the partnership.

**Implementation: PHASE III**

During the pilot phase of the project, 200 common collaboration cases were identified, thereby justifying the need to increase the number of CalWORKs staff to work on the collaboration. Plans to expand the project began in mid-2002 by appointing four department leads to identify the activities needed to expand and develop the needed procedures to solidify the DFCS/CalWORKs partnership. Two leads were chosen from DFCS and two from DEBS.

This expansion workgroup developed two main objectives as well as designed the procedures necessary to carry out the tasks to meet each objective. The two objectives and main task of each were:

**Objective #1:** Develop a system of referral and accountability for all common DFCS/CalWORKs cases.

**Task:** Design procedures and develop forms to identify all CalWORKs cases entering the DFCS system.

**Objective #2:** Design and implement the clean up of "buried" common DFCS/CalWORKs cases in continuing units not yet linked to CalWORKs.

**Task:** Design procedures to identify and link all current common DFCS/CalWORKs cases in each DFCS Family Maintenance (FM) and Family Reunification (FR) unit.

This expansion workgroup, affectionately known within Santa Clara County Social Services Agency as the "4 Musketeers", has been busy for the last year ironing out the kinks of the expansion plans. Workgroup members have logged in countless hours of planning sessions among themselves, and other

work groups to develop the necessary procedures to expand the partnership only to learn that yet another meeting is needed before moving forward. Topics like CalWIN compatibility, DFCS flow chart, developing coordinated case plans, union issues, necessary training, analyzing common case listings and other county models for dependency investigation timeline for going to court are just a few of the planning issues discussed.

Many partnership presentations and updates have been made to the DEBS/ DFCS staff, Drug & Dependency Court partners and other community partners in an effort to speed up the expansion.

### CHALLENGES

Although a very comprehensive program has been developed in Santa Clara County to integrate plans when a client has open cases in both DFCS and CalWORKs, the timeline for the partnership expansion has been continuously delayed. Even with passage of Assembly Bill 429, which provides for continuation of CalWORKs services, under specified circumstances, when a child has been removed from the home and is receiving out-of-home care, has not been a significant help in speeding up the expansion.

The partnership members identified the following challenges while implementing the pilot project and while planning the expansion of the partnership:

- Applying a strengths-based focus within a punitive system.
- Not having a system for identifying CalWORKs/ DFCS cases at eligibility.
- Creating one physical common case plan document.
- Training all DFCS staff on CalWORKs benefits and employment services.

- Developing and strengthening the partnership systems wide.
- Not having a new CalWIN system equipped to generate the common case listing.
- Coordinating this collaboration effort which takes time and effort
- Not having a tool for measuring outcomes.

In addition to the challenges listed above, the project leads also revealed their frustrations with the delay of the project's expansion plans. It appears difficult for some partnership team members not to see the delay as a lack of priority and commitment, seemingly from some agency leaders. However, it was acknowledged that the agency had undergone organizational structure changes during the five years of the partnership's existence and this has affected the expansion. Two agency director changes and at least two DFCS director changes have occurred also. Each change represented a somewhat "starting over" of the partnership to get the new leader informed of the partnership and to gain their support and endorsement.

Currently, Santa Clara County Social Services, like Alameda County Social Services, is undergoing organizational reconfiguration and unless the agency understands that despite this reconfiguration, there needs to be more focus on whether the family's basic needs they serve are being met to ensure child safety, little, if any, progress will be made regarding expansion.

Another strong message from Santa Clara County's partnership team was that without the continued support, communication and direction from the DFCS/DEBS executive leaders, the partnership's growth and expansion would have remained stymied.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR ALAMEDA COUNTY**

What does all this mean to Alameda County Social Services Agency? It means that Alameda County Social Services Agency leaders must be fully informed and committed to such a large undertaking before beginning a coordination of CalWORKs and Child Welfare Services. They must understand the requirements of such an effort. Coordination efforts must be a priority. The agency leaders must be willing to spend time, brain power, and possibly even political capital to establish a vision, create a common mission and re-tool administrative and service delivery systems to achieve desired outcomes.<sup>2</sup> It is absolutely vital that senior management, in both Children and Family Services and Employment Services, support and endorse the coordination effort to implement the partnership.

Long before any commitments are made, a thorough discussion between the Executive Management Team must occur to clearly address why Alameda County should take on this enormous endeavor. Will the fact that Alameda County is one of 10 California counties awarded a two-year grant to implement strategies to integrate child welfare and public assistance programs in California and the Assembly Bill 429 mandate be enough?

Alameda County could benefit from reviewing Santa Clara County's partnership model. Close attention should be paid to the challenges Santa Clara County faced during its pilot years as well the frustration they now face with their expansion plans. Many, if not all, of Santa Clara County's best practices could be adopted in Alameda County because of the similarities in organizational structures of the agencies. Modifications to Santa Clara County's partnership model could be made, if nec-

essary, to accommodate any possible political, geographic and demographic culture differences identified between the two agencies. For example, in Alameda County the employment worker is known as the employment counselor (EC) not the employment technician as in Santa Clara County. Also Alameda County's Children and Family Services (CFS) workers are classified as child welfare workers not social workers. Social workers in Alameda County have the same job description as the CalWORKs social worker in Santa Clara County.

Once a decision has been made to implement integration services of the Employment Services and the Children & Family Services Departments in Alameda County, protocols for this new service delivery system will need to be developed with roles and responsibilities clearly defined and shared throughout the agency.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

I recommend that Alameda County Social Services Agency move forward on partnering the Children and Family Services Department with CalWORKs Employment Services Department to better serve those common client cases. I recommend that the following ideas be considered:

- Create a vision and mission statement to endorse a CalWORKs and Children and Family Services partnership.
- Establish a timeline for implementation of the partnership.
- Identify target populations to be served based on available resources, beginning with existing common CalWORKs/CFS cases and expanding to other populations as funding allows.
- Reclassify Employment Counselors, selected for the partnership, to manage both CalWORKs eligibility and employment services. This would

eliminate the third case manager!

- Relocate the reclassified EC to the CFS work area.
- Assign job developers and career development specialists to work exclusively with this targeted population to enhance the chances of these families to reach self-sufficiency.
- Assign, if not relocate, a social worker as a reference person to the EC for instructions on mental health, domestic abuse and drug & alcohol issues.
- Establish a reasonable and manageable case-load standard for these specialized workers. Allow room for volunteer participation for those common cases that may be exempt from employment services requirements but could benefit from the services in their quest for self-sufficiency.
- Guarantee staff, managers included, the training and tools they will need to deal with change in service delivery.
- Assess and develop a training curriculum that includes varying needs and knowledge levels of staff offering topics like teamwork, case management collaboration, conflict resolution and joint case planning.
- Provide extensive cross-training for the partnership staff making sure to train line staff and management staff together. Basic overview training should be offered across departments.
- Continuously communicate/reinforce the vision of the partnership to agency staff.
- Continuously assess and evaluate the partnership as it progresses.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to Alette Lundeberg, Elizabeth Hunt, Marsha Earle and Sarah Lopez for their hospitality while visiting their agency. Their willingness to share their frustrations with me about the expansion delays was appreciated. I commend them for all their hard work, dedication, and steadfast commitment to see the partnership become the success it has become. “Thank you all” again for allowing me the freedom to examine “your baby”! I also would like to thank Patricia Phillips and Karen Crawford for their help in understanding the crucial roles they play in the partnership. Finally, I would like acknowledge my agency director, Chet Hewitt, and Alameda County’s executive team members for allowing me the opportunity to participate in BASSC. I must also thank Rita Hayes, the Agency’s liaison for getting me on track. Special thanks also goes to Jon Pettigrew for the CFS overview. Lastly, thanks go to my immediate supervisor, Millicent Miles, for the wonderful recommendation and my division director, Chris Czapla, for her support and guidance throughout the internship.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Karpilow, K., & Orrante, L. (2002). [Planning Guide to Coordinate CalWORKs and Child Welfare Services]. *California Center for Research on Women & Families*, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Karpilow, K., & Orrante, L. (2002). [Planning Guide to Coordinate CalWORKs and Child Welfare Services]. *California Center for Research on Women & Families*, p. 4.