

## Chapter 23

# Crossover Services Between Child Welfare and Welfare-to-Work Programs

Jonathan Prince  
Michael J. Austin

Human service agencies are exploring new ways of assisting individuals with multiple needs by fostering inter- and intra-agency collaboration in this era of welfare reform implementation. Increased staff collaboration is needed to address the needs of *crossover* consumers who receive both employment services in welfare-to-work programs and family maintenance services in child welfare programs. Without intra-agency collaboration, mothers receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) benefits could lose them at the same time that they could lose their child through foster care placement (Frame, 1999). Carefully planned collaborative case planning and service delivery can address incompatible program requirements.

When jointly coordinated, welfare-to-work services which facilitate economic self-sufficiency and family maintenance services which preserve families can together be viewed as a comprehensive child welfare program. Both services assist children either directly (e.g., cash allocations, child care, foster care) or indirectly (e.g., helping the parent resolve a substance abuse issue and find employment); the term child welfare is frequently used to describe the service system for children who have been abused or neglected by their caretakers. According to Frame (1999),

family welfare and child protection are viewed from a contemporary standpoint as distinct domains of domestic policy in the United States, protecting children from the vicissitudes of the market on the one hand, and protecting them from their families on the other. (p. 709)

Not all welfare-to-work service participants with children are eligible for crossover assistance. Only parents receiving in-home child welfare services

to preserve the family unit (i.e., family maintenance services) qualify for TANF benefits, as parents who have children that are placed outside of the home in foster or group care can no longer receive family-based welfare-to-work services.

This case study examines a pilot project in the Contra Costa County Department of Employment and Human Services (EHS) that addresses the crossover needs of child welfare and welfare-to-work service participants. The case study includes (1) a case vignette of a consumer with service needs related to welfare-to-work and child welfare, (2) a brief review of the relevant literature, (3) the process of crossover service planning, delivery, and funding, and (4) lessons learned in the process. To illustrate crossover assistance from a service delivery perspective, the following case study highlights the experiences of a consumer receiving coordinated care (Frame et al., 1998, p. 12):

In one of her first visits with her child welfare worker, Susan anxiously described her fear of losing her CalWORKs assistance (California's welfare-to-work program) because she could not simultaneously meet the requirements of the child welfare and the welfare-to-work programs, explaining that, in addition to her child welfare obligations, she needed to remain in a job club for six to eight hours every weekday looking for work. Her child welfare worker assured Susan that child welfare and CalWORKs services could be planned and delivered jointly, and later walked down the hall of the human services building to discuss the case with Susan's CalWORKs caseworker. The two staff members agreed that it was a sensitive case—failure to meet child welfare objectives could result in loss of child custody, and failure to meet CalWORKs objectives could result in the loss of primary income.

The two staff members met with Susan to establish a case plan, agreeing that Susan can participate in the job club for four hours every weekday morning and that all child welfare, mental health, and drug treatment services can be scheduled in the afternoons. Furthermore, the CalWORKs division agreed to provide child care assistance while Susan attends to her many out-of-home obligations.

It is apparent from this example that consumers can have multiple, overlapping obligations in human service agencies and that staff members with differing areas of expertise may be unaware of these obligations. Furthermore, intradepartmental staff collaboration can address conflicting consumer obligations through coordinated case planning. Finally, in addition to preventing poor consumer outcomes, communication between intra-agency divisions can prevent inefficient use of resources and duplication or fragmentation of services.

## **BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW**

Very little has been written on child welfare and welfare-to-work cross-over service involvement, yet the literature offers insight in three important areas. They include (1) the potential impact of welfare reform on the child welfare system, (2) the degree to which caseloads overlap, and (3) a strategy for integrating the two service delivery systems into a single system of care. Each area is discussed in turn.

### ***The Impact of Welfare Reform on Children***

The welfare reform legislation of 1996 included the responsibility-based Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program (known as CalWORKs in California). This reform of the welfare system is designed to (1) promote the self-sufficiency of welfare recipients by providing a range of employment services; (2) reduce obstacles to labor-force participation through support services which include child care, transportation, mental health counseling, and substance abuse treatment; and (3) reduce welfare dependency through the use of time limits and the sanctioning of benefits.

Because welfare benefits are no longer an entitlement, welfare-to-work sanctions can be detrimental to the child if parents lose their benefits for not complying with program requirements, and many states will discontinue cash allocations to the children if parents are noncompliant (Frame, 1999). Furthermore, many child welfare professionals have expressed general concern that welfare-to-work programs will increase child foster care entry and length-of-stay rates when parents and extended family members begin to reach their time limits for welfare participation and can no longer provide adequate care for children (Berns and Drake, 1999).

Finally, Frame (1999) cautions that the "surveillance" aspects of public assistance have increased with welfare reform, potentially rekindling the "suitable" and "unsuitable" parent distinction of earlier welfare traditions which led to highly subjective and overly intrusive interventions into family life. Frame quotes a TANF policy from the California Department of Services that states:

You must cooperate with the county, state and federal staff. A county worker can come to your home at any time to check out your facts, including seeing each family member, without calling ahead of time. You may not get benefits or your benefits may be stopped if you do not cooperate.

Because a failure to cooperate could result in benefit loss, there is an increased risk of child welfare involvement if caretaking resources are no longer available (Frame, 1999).

On the other hand, welfare reform can positively affect parents and their children if it promotes employment stability, job advancement, parent sobriety, mental health, and consistent child care and school attendance (Berrick, 1999), and the creative use of TANF funding can help child welfare consumers (Frame, 1999).

### ***Degree of Caseload Overlap***

Although a large number of families in the child welfare system receive welfare-to-work services, percentages vary with location and case-tracking methods. Most locations have an average caseload crossover rate<sup>1</sup> of about 40 to 50 percent, yet rates of about 60 percent have been reported in New York and Riverside County, California, and have approached 80 percent in Arkansas (Riverside County, 1998; Zeller, 1999). These rates decrease when only children are studied. In an archival analysis of 63,768 children in ten California counties, Needell and colleagues (1999) found the following:

- Twenty-seven percent of children who began to receive welfare in 1990 experienced a child maltreatment report within five years.
- Twenty-two percent had a child welfare case investigation within five years.
- Eight percent had child welfare cases opened within five years.
- Three percent entered foster care within five years.

The percentage of crossover involvement decreases dramatically, however, when child welfare participation is defined by ongoing service participation (case opening) or foster care entry.

### ***Integrating Child Welfare and Welfare-to-Work Services in a System of Care***

Most current conceptualizations of child welfare services and welfare-to-work assistance do not reflect an understanding of the overlap between the two programs. Child welfare services have focused on child protection, family preservation, and permanence, while welfare-to-work programs have been concerned primarily with employment, removal of barriers to labor-force participation, and benefit eligibility. However, the El Paso County Department of Human Services in Colorado has bridged this separation by *conceptualizing welfare-to-work assistance as a child welfare prevention program*. The many service needs that are important in preventing child abuse and neglect are addressed in welfare-to-work programs, including income maintenance, employment, housing, nutrition, medical care, substance

abuse, education, training, and child care (Berns and Drake, 1999). The department has integrated the two programs by

- investing \$6.5 million in unspent TANF funds, resulting from a decreased caseload, in child welfare prevention services;
- providing child welfare workers with additional resources and supports through TANF funds;
- implementing a TANF-funded program that provides cash and comprehensive support services to grandparents and other kin who are raising extended family members to preserve the biological family and prevent out-of-home placement;
- offering TANF-supported child care assistance to families in the child welfare system; and
- supporting teen parents who are at risk for child abuse and neglect through teen TANF program services that include home visits, crisis intervention, nurse visitation, parenting instruction, continuing education, job training, and mentoring.

In sum, the literature on child welfare and welfare-to-work crossover services discusses (1) the impact of TANF sanctions and time limits on adult benefit loss and the associated risk of child welfare involvement if caretaking resources are no longer available, (2) the implications of overlapping caseloads, as most locations have an average caseload crossover rate of about 40 to 50 percent, and (3) a strategy for integrating the two service delivery systems into a single system of care by conceptualizing welfare-to-work assistance as a child welfare prevention program. The next section describes crossover services in Contra Costa County.

### ***CROSSOVER SERVICE PLANNING***

Social services staff recognized the need for crossover service planning soon after the early 1998 implementation of CalWORKs, and to address this need the director formed a crossover team which met several times to define cross-program issues. In an initial training session, the crossover team was oriented by completing a survey to see how much CalWORKs staff knew about child welfare policy and how much child welfare staff knew about CalWORKs policy, as illustrated in Box 23.1.

Administration of these surveys revealed a lack of knowledge on the part of both child welfare and CalWORKs staff. To facilitate greater intradepartmental knowledge and partnership, the crossover team continued to educate each other by distributing a biweekly newsletter discussing cross-program issues and utilized a consultant to identify cross-training needs and recom-



**Box 23.1. Professional Cross-Program Surveys*****Examples of Questions for Child Welfare Staff That Relate to CalWORKs Services***

1. A client who is a domestic violence victim has a three-month exemption before CalWORKs time limits begin. True/False
2. A parent about to reunify with his/her child is able to receive that child's CalWORKs grant for two months prior to the child's return. True/False
3. Lack of immunizations and poor school attendance will affect a family's CalWORKs eligibility. True/False

***Examples of Questions for CalWORKs Staff That Relate to Child Welfare Services***

1. CPS has seventy-two hours to investigate a screened-in report of child abuse and/or neglect. True/False
2. A typical CPS case plan may include
  - (a) a parenting class requirement
  - (b) visitation guidelines
  - (c) a substance abuse treatment and/or requirement
  - (d) instructions for care of the child
  - (e) a, b, and c
3. For children over the age of three, parents have twenty-four months to reunify with their children. True/False

mend strategies for facilitating collaboration. To assist direct service workers, the team then (1) developed examples of collaborative case plans; (2) defined crossover objectives, services, and consumers; (3) defined child welfare assistance, especially court-ordered services, as more pressing than CalWORKs responsibilities, which can be postponed or reduced with less severe consequences; and (4) provided training about assistance offered in both divisions and how to identify and access CalWORKs funds (generally less restrictive than child welfare funding) for serving crossover consumers.

The next step involved the identification of crossover cases. Child welfare and CalWORKs crossover cases are identified by consumer self-report or by the child welfare screening unit clerk who identifies overlapping cases from the management and information system (MIS). The screening unit clerk first identifies all *existing* crossover consumers in the MIS and then identifies *new* cases in child welfare clearances that accompany CalWORKs applications. Once identified, the screening unit clerk alerts staff in both divisions with a "XOVER 1" form. The worker in either division then asks the adult consumer to sign a form authorizing exchange of information among child welfare and CalWORKs staff, in addition to health, mental health, and

substance abuse staff if the consumer is in need of assistance in these areas. Different procedures are followed when a CalWORKs staff member refers directly to the child welfare division if (1) the welfare-to-work consumer is a homeless or unsupervised minor, (2) the children of the consumer are not attending school, or (3) when domestic violence or sexual assault issues are involved.

The team then planned the delivery of crossover services. The first step is for staff to contact the co-worker in the other division, discussing the consumer's program needs and developing a coordinated plan of action. The next step involves the staff in making recommendations to the consumer that child welfare and welfare-to-work activities be integrated in the case plan. A discussion of welfare-to-work activity and self-sufficiency is needed in the case plan to justify the utilization of crossover services, and a meeting with a county judge or counsel may be required for these services to be accepted in a court-approved plan. With consumer consent to release information and CalWORKs staff approval, the child welfare consumer is then referred to employment specialists. This staff person is authorized to issue payment for the approved service with knowledge of the service provider's name, address, phone number, federal identification or social security number, description of the service provided, and the case identification number of the consumer. Finally, both staff members monitor the attendance and progress of consumers receiving crossover services.

The crossover team developed outcome measures of success and encouraged child welfare staff to claim welfare-to-work activities, when appropriate, on employee quarterly time studies that are used to secure CalWORKs funding. The service criteria for such claims include the following:

1. communicating with a client, supervisor, co-workers, employment services personnel, or other concerned professionals about CalWORKs;
2. reading about CalWORKs;
3. attending CalWORKs meetings and training;
4. preparing, maintaining, and monitoring an integrated crossover case plan; and
5. evaluating, monitoring, and reviewing case plans from other divisions that directly or indirectly promote employment (including CalWORKs, substance abuse, mental health, and domestic violence).

### ***CROSSOVER SERVICE DELIVERY***

In April 1999, the delivery of crossover services began after several months of planning. Previously, direct service staff from both CalWORKs

and child welfare divisions within the agency had been surprised to learn that a consumer was a service recipient in the other division. This sometimes led to a revision of the separate case plans and a redetermination of benefit eligibility.<sup>2</sup> It became clear that if these crossover cases could be identified during the intake process, it would facilitate collaborative case planning at the start of service delivery. A child welfare consumer flow-chart, redesigned to illustrate where welfare-to-work crossover services are delivered, is shown in Figure 23.1.

In addition to providing services jointly in the areas noted in Figure 23.1, it became evident that cross-program partnership is especially important

1. at the opening, assignment, reassignment, review, closing, or sanctioning of a case;
2. during assessments of financial hardships in areas such as housing, child care, or transportation;
3. during a period of noncompliance with case plans;
4. when the consumer is experiencing difficulty relating to child abuse, domestic violence, substance abuse, or mental health problems or cannot access appropriate child care or housing; and
5. upon the removal, return, or birth of a child, or when a parent or significant other leaves or returns to the home or goes to prison.

It became apparent that effective crossover service delivery can help consumers to retain family members and benefits. Child welfare staff can prevent overpayment or underpayment to the family by notifying CalWORKs staff about changes in household composition, such as when children have been removed or returned to the home. Furthermore, it soon became evident that efficient crossover assistance can reduce service duplication and improve communications between divisions.

### ***CROSSOVER SERVICE FUNDING***

Although current Contra Costa County CalWORKs and child welfare funding does not overlap,<sup>3</sup> by claiming welfare-to-work activity on quarterly time studies child welfare staff can collectively demonstrate the need for additional staff to deliver welfare-to-work services that promote employment, such as the following:

- substance abuse treatment, including assessments and evaluations;
- transportation for any consumer attending a welfare-to-work activity;
- child care for any consumer attending a welfare-to-work activity;



- parenting classes and child-parent enrichment programs that address the issues of working parents;
- inpatient or outpatient health or mental health services, including assessments and evaluations;
- anger-management classes that address issues of anger in the workplace; and
- domestic violence services for the batterer.<sup>4</sup>

County TANF funding is granted in capped block payments, yet in order to access these funds counties must first spend their own local share in what is termed "Maintenance of Effort" (MOE). Only after the local MOE is reached can counties receive federal and state government funding. By contrast, child welfare funding is consumer driven in that counties are reimbursed according to the average caseload costs per employee. For example, family maintenance workers in Contra Costa County assist about thirty-five families per month, and federal and state reimbursement is determined by calculating worker salary, supplies, administrative support, and other expenses needed to manage this caseload.

Compared to open-ended reimbursement, counties generally have more difficulty functioning financially within the limits of capped grants, yet as a result of decreased caseloads, TANF funding is currently more available than child welfare funding. For this reason crossover funding is currently unilateral, involving one-way transfers from CalWORKs to child welfare. However this may not always be the case, as TANF funding can easily decrease as a result of an increase in the TANF caseload during the next recession or a legislative decision to reduce underutilized block payments.

### ***NEXT STEPS***

Staff have identified several next steps in crossover service planning and delivery, including the following:

- providing for crossover needs in other areas, such as housing and dental work;
- determining permissible CalWORKs funds that are to be used for crossover services by clarifying federal, state, and local laws and budgets;
- dedicating several staff to crossover consumer caseloads and hiring a permanent manager of crossover services;
- helping staff to know with whom to communicate in the other division once crossover cases are identified; and

- considering locating crossover service delivery, planning, and administration at neighborhood-based service integration team sites that offer CalWORKs, substance abuse, mental health, youth, probation, and school services.

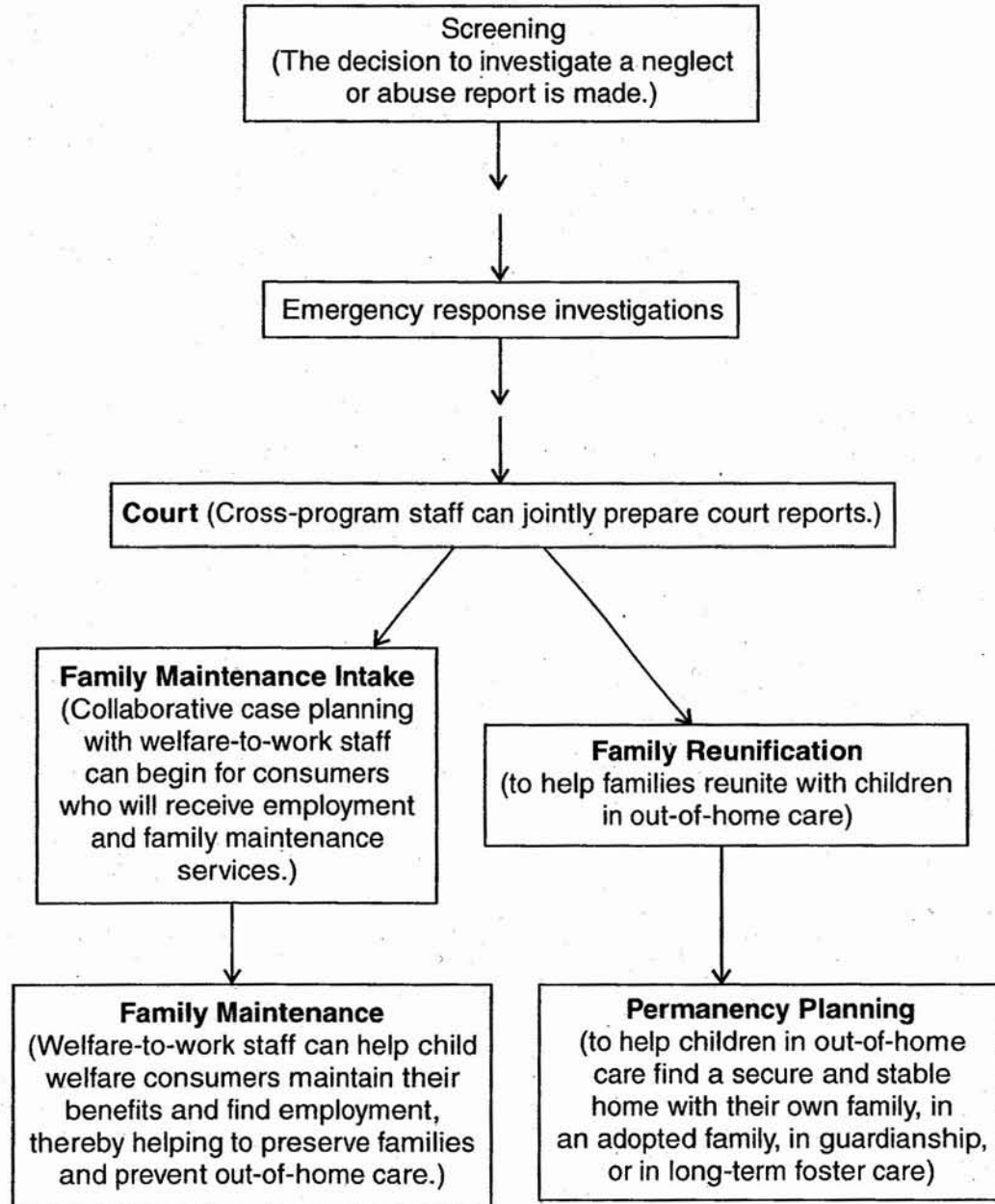


FIGURE 23.1. Welfare-to-Work Crossover Service Delivery in the Child Welfare System

Note: Crossover service delivery areas are typed in bold.

### **LESSONS LEARNED**

Contra Costa County staff members have learned several major lessons from crossover service planning, delivery, and funding. In relation to funding, it will be difficult to maintain CalWORKs crossover funding to child welfare consumers when welfare-to-work funds become less available in the next recession. For instance, when a higher unemployment rate expands welfare caseloads, it will become more difficult to obtain incentive funds for facilitating the self-sufficiency of consumers, and less CalWORKs funding will be available to cross over to the child welfare division. CalWORKs administrators are currently concerned that child welfare staff may rely too heavily on TANF funding that will not be as easily accessible in the future.

In relation to service delivery, it has been difficult to maintain consumer confidentiality, despite having obtained consumer consent to release information, especially relating to highly sensitive child welfare issues. As a result, many surveyed CalWORKs staff reported feeling that Child Protective Services staff did not want to release important client data. The three most important lessons, however, include the following:

1. The early identification of crossover cases is not as straightforward a process as it at first may seem, and staff are still trying to decide why, for example, in March 2000 the child welfare division identified 170 crossover cases while CalWORKs identified 475 cases. These numbers should be the same, as a crossover consumer is by definition receiving services in both divisions.
2. It is a challenge for staff to find additional time to collaborate while maintaining ongoing job responsibilities, and a gradual reduction in staff interest occurs if crossover planning is not steadily reinforced by management. This loss of project momentum reduces coordinated case-planning efforts.
3. It is apparent that consumers can have multiple, overlapping obligations in human service agencies and that staff members with differing areas of expertise may be unaware of these obligations. Intradepartmental staff collaboration can address conflicting consumer obligations through coordinated case planning, and communication between intra-agency divisions can prevent inefficient use of resources and duplication or fragmentation of services.

Effective crossover service delivery can help consumers to retain family members and benefits, and child welfare staff can prevent overpayment or underpayment to the family by notifying CalWORKs staff about changes in household composition, such as when children have been removed or re-

turned to the home. Furthermore, efficient crossover assistance can improve communication between divisions. Finally, child welfare staff can collectively utilize CalWORKs funds for services that promote employment, including health services, substance abuse treatment, mental health services, transportation, child care, and parenting classes.

### NOTES

1. Caseload crossover refers to the cross-sectional estimation of the number of individuals on both child welfare and welfare-to-work caseloads.

2. Benefits may have to be discontinued if, for example, the only child of a parent participating in CalWORKs is removed from the home because of abuse or neglect.

3. The federal and state CalWORKs allocations for fiscal year 1999-2000 total \$25,117,811. Of this amount, about 23 percent is for eligibility administration, 36 percent is for employment services, 39 percent is for child care, and the remaining 2 percent is for case management. Contra Costa County must first spend \$4,126,052 (the Maintenance of Effort) before receiving state and federal funding. Child welfare funding is allocated by categories that include eligibility determination, training, court services, case management, emergency assistance, staff development, and group home visits. Child welfare allocations for fiscal year 1999-2000 total \$24,993,568. Of this amount, the federal government contributes about 40 percent, the state government 40 percent, and the county government 20 percent. Each child welfare staff member has a workload standard, or a specified number of consumers that can be assisted each month within service categories. Currently, emergency response staff are funded for 320 consumers, family maintenance staff for thirty-five consumers, family reunification staff for twenty-seven consumers, and permanent placement staff for fifty-four consumers per month. When caseload standards are reduced, the amount of funding remains constant and staff members are given additional time to work with each consumer. Unused funds in one category are shifted as needed, and the county employs additional staff that are not federally or state funded.

4. Victims of domestic violence are exempt from CalWORKs program requirements and related services.

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