

KEEPING LINKED

A PUBLICATION OF CFPIC'S FEDERAL LINKAGES PROJECT
LINKAGES: CALWORKS AND CHILD WELFARE COLLABORATION TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES

DECEMBER 2007

LINKAGES GOES TO WASHINGTON

By Stuart Oppenheim, CFPIC Executive Director

An intrepid band of Californians recently descended on Washington, D.C., to participate in the annual TANF Child Welfare Grantees meeting and to show the rest of the country how this work should be done. Representing the Linkages project were the following self-sacrificing individuals (shown left to right in the picture) :

Helen Parrott

San Bernardino County Linkages (New County)

Danna Fabella, CFPIC

Teresa Contreras

CDSS, Family & Children's Services

Paul Harder

Harder + Company

Brenda Castillo

Merced County Linkages (Pioneer County)

Alma Vega

Los Angeles County Linkages (Cohort II County)

Stuart Oppenheim, CFPIC

Not Pictured:

Barry Fisher

CDSS, Family and Children's Services

Teri Ellen

CDSS, Welfare-to-Work

As we move into the second year of the TANF Child Welfare Collaboration grant, it is clear that the work of the 33 Linkages counties is significantly different than that of our fellow grantees. While the other four projects represent small jurisdictions in various locations across the country—Cook Inlet, Alaska; Rockland New York; Jefferson County, Colorado; St. Bernard & Orleans Parishes, Louisiana—we are attempting to demonstrate systemic change across an entire state (not to mention the largest state population—in the country). Although we have been doing this work in California for seven years, we found out that there is still much to learn from those who are trying new strategies to explore how best to establish partnerships between these large, complex systems.

At the Conference, we were asked to share with others the challenges and resolutions that we have identified in California. We offered the following observations:



Challenge: Leadership and staff changes

Resolution: Engaging leaders through statewide presentations, county visits, newsletters

Challenge: New programmatic requirements (DRA, 636 outcomes, etc)

Resolution: Framing Linkages as means of addressing outcome goals of TANF & Child Welfare programs

Challenge: Competing demands

Resolution: Framing Linkages as a foundation strategy that supports both the core programs & other initiatives

Challenge: Sustaining interest and excitement in the initiative

Resolution: Statewide convenings, newsletters, trainings, site visits

Challenge: Inadequate staffing

Resolution: Framing Linkages as a way of eliminating duplication in order to deal with staff shortages

Challenge: Accessing Reliable Administrative Data

Resolution: Working with state agency, CWDA, Harder + Company to identify reliable and accessible data sources, and Working with counties to establish means of gathering reliable Data

Linkages: A Valuable Bridge

By Leslie Ann Hay, MSW

How Linkages Can Advance Other Initiatives

One of the universal challenges of implementing and sustaining Linkages is that collaboration between child welfare and CalWORKs occurs in an ever-changing practice landscape where many other initiatives compete with Linkages for available time, attention and resources. It may be most strategic to follow the old adage: “If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em”. In other words, the success of your county’s Linkages initiative may depend on how well service collaboration between CalWORKs and Child Welfare Services advances *other* priority initiatives, especially those within child welfare.

Linkages includes some key practices that can support fundamental needs of the child welfare services population. When CalWORKs and CWS work together, children and families can benefit in the following ways:

- CalWORKs provides services to help prevent families from entering CWS.
- Coordinating services for “cross-over families”¹ helps increase safety and improve economic self-sufficiency.
- CalWORKs families working on reunification with their children can receive non-cash services to promote safe, timely reunification.
- When families are in Family Maintenance, some families can be found eligible for additional support, including economic assistance such as cash payments, employment services, Medi-Cal or diversion services.
- After children return home, CalWORKs can provide post-reunification services, including child care & other safety plan services to reduce the likelihood of recurrence.
- Transition-age youth who are parents can routinely be assessed for and linked to CalWORKs supportive services to ensure self-sufficiency.

Therefore, the goals of Linkages are aligned with what other high-profile² initiatives are seeking to achieve:

• Prevention • Service Collaboration • Permanency • Self-Sufficiency. Given this commonality, your planning committee can begin to re-frame your Linkages initiative away from being a separate effort that is seen as “one more thing on our plate” and toward being a means to advance other priorities that already have momentum in your county. Your planning committee can use the tips below to help connect Linkages to what matters:

- 1. Analyze the connection** – identify the high-profile initiatives in your county and select the most promising ones for being closely aligned with the goals and target population(s) of Linkages. Understand the approach being used by the other initiative to meet their goals. Then, analyze how the resources, expertise and service coordination techniques available through Linkages can help advance that initiative’s aims.
- 2. Solve an existing problem** – Consider how certain Linkages strategies can solve a key problem for a high-profile initiative. For example, a permanency initiative may be challenged to effectively serve youth emancipating from foster care with children of their own or low-income parents unable to meet their case plan goals because they cannot afford to pay for the substance abuse treatment they need. Talk with the project leaders of the permanency initiative and offer Linkages strategies as a means of serving these families better.
- 3. Make the collaboration visible** – Make sure the success of service collaboration between Child Welfare and CalWORKs is conveyed to those who may not yet be familiar with what Linkages can do for children and families. Use your county website, bulletin board or newsletter to communicate “success stories” about the impact of Linkages on the lives of children and families.

Continued on Pg. 3

¹ “Cross-over families” are families who are involved in both CWS and CalWORKs.

² An initiative that has the ear of leadership, seems to be where the time, attention and resources are focused & intends on achieving one or more of the Linkages goals (prevention, service collaboration, permanency & self-sufficiency).

4. Do your own “mini-research” to make the case – Data can be a powerful way of getting attention focused on Linkages. Develop a simple way to gather data on at least a sample of the cases being served using Linkages strategies. The data should track goals important to other high-profile initiatives (e.g., can we prevent out-of-home placement by connecting families with the resources of CalWORKs? Do families have a more satisfactory service experience when their dual case plans are coordinated through Linkages?)

5. Focus on outcomes – Whenever the activities of Linkages can be directly tied to safety, permanency and well-being, it increases the relevance of Linkages to the overall mission of child welfare. While this remains one of the more time-consuming aspects of Linkages evaluation, it may be worth securing a student intern or community volunteer to conduct some case file reviews or follow-up interviews with Linkages cases to see what outcomes have been achieved.

6. Show cost savings – Showing that a program can save money is an instant attention grabber. For example, calculating the amount saved in foster care costs for a family where placement was avoided by bringing CalWORKs resources into the family. If you’re already collecting data on Linkages, consider how that data could be translated into dollars saved as a result of service coordination between Child Welfare and CalWORKs.

Other helpful strategies for sustaining momentum on Linkages in the face of other competing priorities and demands include:

Reinforce the integrative power of Linkages – The increased emphasis of California’s social service system on accountability to outcomes, client-centered interventions and service collaboration reinforce public expectation for programs, like Linkages, that reflect these values. Greater alignment across multiple priorities can come at the moment when those inside and outside the project fully understand how relevant a solid collaboration between CalWORKs and CWS will be to other change initiatives.



Connect milestones and successes of Linkages to goals of other priorities – Demonstrate how achievements within Linkages have contributed to meeting the goals of other priorities. For example, the outcomes of safety and family stability within AB 636 can be furthered through strong service coordination between CalWORKs and CWS.

Linkages also supports the interagency coordination objective of many counties’ System Improvement Plans. Build on Linkages successes as the means by which other priorities can be achieved rather than “re-inventing the wheel”.

Stay focused on what matters most – When resources are scarce and staff is being laid off, no one wants to decide what has to give. Instead, face this dilemma head-on by convening the key decision-makers to agree on the desired results (using AB 636 self-assessment and System Improvement Plan) then decide what few, critical efforts will produce those results most effectively with the available resources. For the major efforts consuming resources, one possible set of questions to help with this decision are:

- How well are client outcomes advanced by this effort?
- Is it aligned with the agency mission?
- How will it satisfy stakeholders?
- What is our level of passion, talent and energy for it?
- Is it the best use of our resources?

Continued on Page 4

Linkages: A Valuable Bridge Continued

Let go of what doesn't matter – Once the priorities have been set, don't go back to business as usual. Use the agency-wide leadership engaged in setting priorities to redirect organizational activity on those few goals and be clear about what activities need to be given up. Find opportunities in your own work and others' to acknowledge specific examples of people letting go and how it has freed up their talent and time toward more meaningful work.

Form alliances across organizational boundaries – Keeping your head down during demanding times and thinking you can “handle it all” will lead to burnout of you and your team. Cultivate networks of allies up, down and across your organization to support the scope of what needs to be accomplished. Remind your superiors about additional demands and what affect they may have on desired results. Re-apply the priority-setting criteria to decide about any new demands, so that a reasonable fit can be maintained.

For more information or to request technical assistance on this issue for your county, please contact Danna Fabella, Linkages Project Director at danna.fabella@cfpic.org

A Journey of Hope: A Linkages Success Story**Jennifer Valencia**
Stanislaus County

Even though Hope's boyfriend, the father of two of her children, worked part time, they had difficulty meeting their expenses. Due to their continued drug use and inability to pay housing expenses they constantly had to move. They would often drop their children off at different relative's houses and then be gone for days. One day a relative got angry and called CPS. This was the beginning of Hope's journey.

Hope was arrested and taken to jail, a CPS case was opened and AOD treatment was suggested for both adults. Hope made several attempts at different treatment programs and tried to keep her family intact. Eventually Hope had to make a decision to separate from her boyfriend who refused to stay clean and failed to attend programs. Hope worked closely with a Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) - overcoming addiction—one of her challenges. She entered the First Step AOD treatment program and engaged in parenting classes, Behavioral Health Services and other supportive programs. First Step allowed her to communicate with other women in similar situations that could help her understand the challenges she was facing. She graduated from the First Step Program and achieved sobriety. Hope's five children were medically fragile and needed severe dental work. Hope's MDT was able to locate a medical provider an hour away to make sure the children got needed services to help improve their quality of life. Hope also was in need of stable housing for a family of six. She was assisted with Section 8 by her social worker and located a home that was comfortable for her family. With the help of bus tickets and childcare from WTW supportive services, she was able to receive the added support she needed.

Hope was tired of the drug life and had never given up on her dream to be a nurse like her sister and sister-in-law. As soon as Certified Nursing Assistant training was available, her WTW Family Service Specialist sent a referral for her. WTW assisted with supportive services for uniforms, equipment, books, bus tickets and child care. She is currently working on getting her GED and as soon as she completes this process, she has two job offers waiting for her. Hope sometimes struggles to juggle five children and their schedules but manages to complete her classes with positive progress reports.



Hope has a tremendous MDT that is supporting her: CPS, Public Health, WTW, BHS, Housing Authority, First Step Residential Treatment, Clean and Sober living and Vocational Training. The MDT is committed to Hope and recognizes that time is important for her so they work closely to make sure they do not have competing priorities. This allows the MDT to see one only priority which is Hope and making sure she gets all the support she needs to be successful with providing for her children.

WASHINGTON DC TRIP CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

As we have learned over the past year, many of the Pioneer and Cohort II counties are challenging themselves to re-establish the excitement and enthusiasm that they initially brought to this initiative. Hearing from the other federal grantees about the ways that they are bringing a new focus to their collaborations will help us think of new ways that we might explore re-energizing the Linkages program in those areas where it has lost some momentum. And for the new counties, there is a wider range of peers to look to for mentoring beyond the other California counties as they bring Linkages into their own unique communities.

At the conference, we also had the opportunity to discuss our accomplishments of the past year and were pleased to be able to provide a long list of achievements by the statewide project. More exciting, however, were the presentations by our county partners from Merced, Los Angeles, and San Bernardino. Brenda Castillo, Alma Vega, and Helen Parrott did a tremendous job in describing for the federal grant officers and our fellow grantees the great work that each of them is doing as a representative of their Linkages Cohort. Each of them gave a ground-level view of what it means to do the work that all of the counties have undertaken to improve the lives of children and families through establishing an effective partnership between CalWORKS and Child Welfare.

Aside from sharing the work of the various projects, the most compelling aspect of the grantees meeting may have been learning about, and thinking about, the establishment of parent partner programs. Our grant cluster met on the first day with representatives of other grant clusters and heard about Contra Costa's exemplary parent partner program. We are convinced that this is a strategy that would serve us well in Linkages, especially with our TANF families who are struggling to achieve self-sufficiency. Danna will be following up with the Linkages

counties to determine the level of interest in exploring and learning more about parent partner programs; her work in bringing this program to Contra Costa ideally suits her for developing this resource for the Linkages counties.

The grantees meeting closed with a discussion regarding what was missing and what we would like to see at next year's meeting. There were a number of thoughts about upcoming programs, but the California team was adamant in asserting that more attention needs to be paid to the TANF program from the federal side. We learned that there are a number of TANF Tribal grants that we would like to learn more about. They are housed under the federal Office of Financial Assistance (OFA). We asked that OFA be given a much more prominent place in future meetings for our grant cluster. We noted during our presentation that the TANF outcomes are as important as the Child Welfare outcomes in our evaluation strategy, and that we truly believe that collaboration means giving equal weight to both programs.

We could not have been more delighted with the range of participation from our California partners—from CDSS, representative counties of each Cohort, and our excellent evaluator, Paul Harder. We will post on-line the PowerPoint that we presented and any other electronic materials from the meeting that we are able to attain.

Thanks again to all those who gave of themselves to brave the cross-country trip and to, coincidentally, have a chance to experience the nation's Capitol for a few days (some for the very first time!).



UPDATES...UPDATES...UPDATES...UPDATES

Linkages Intranet

Training for County Linkages Coordinators has been scheduled for the month of December. Most of you have signed up for the training, but if you have not, please contact Danna Fabella as soon as possible. There are a few slots in some of the later training dates that might be able to accommodate you.

After you have been trained, you will be able to use the Linkage Intranet which has been designed to support county-to-county sharing. We are hoping that you will use the Discussion Board frequently and that you will share your ideas, questions, and solutions to issues with one another. There is also a Work Plan/Milestone section that should support you in your tracking and monitoring of your Linkage plan.

Fall Convening

Check out the CFPIC website at www.cfpic.org. Under the Linkages tab you will find the 2007 Fall Convening and will be able to download the PowerPoints and other material from the Keynote, Panel and the Workshops. The Planning Committee will be meeting to review the evaluations by the participants. Overall, the evaluations were positive with the Keynote and the Workshops receiving high evaluations. We will be using your feedback to develop our next Convening and will be reviewing the Facilitated Discussions and recommendations with the Statewide Linkages Oversight Committee to consider some of the suggestions. The Facilitated Discussion are also on the CFPIC website for you to review some of the suggestions for the counties.

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Linkages is a strategic effort by thirty-three California’s counties to improve coordination between CalWORKS and Child Welfare through development of county specific work plans and leadership. The initiative is supported by CFPIC through trainings, convenings, peer support and technical assistance. These supports initially received private foundation funding and are currently funded through a Federal Grant and the California Department of Social Services.