

# Linkages: Where do I start?



## A Basic Overview of the Linkages Practice

### PARTICIPANT MANUAL

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## **Learning Objectives**

1. Define the purpose of Linkages
2. Recognize the need for collaboration on linked families
3. Identify historic barriers to working together
4. Identify benefits to clients of Linkages
5. List the opportunities between child welfare and CalWORKs for collaboration when working with linked families
6. Identify the intersections of requirements between CalWORKs and Child Welfare in order to assist the family more efficiently and more effectively



# Agenda



- Introductions
- What is Linkages? What is the vision in your county?
- Establishing the Link between Poverty and Child Maltreatment
- CalWORKs as prevention of risk of child maltreatment; and Child Welfare as anti-poverty, self-sufficiency
- Comparing CalWORKs and Child Welfare relationships with families
- Different perspectives and different mandates
- How can we help each other help linked families?
- Mandates of the programs
- Applied practice and transfer of learning tool

# **Linkages OVERVIEW**

A CalWORKs and Child Welfare collaboration to improve outcomes for families – is one of five demonstration grants funded by the federal Administration of Children and Families in 2006. The practice originated in November 2000 and was formerly known as the CalWORKs/Child Welfare Partnership Project. The goal continues to be the development of a coordinated services approach between Child Welfare and CalWORKs (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families – TANF) services to better serve families and improve safety and economic stability outcomes. The effort began with 13 counties receiving technical assistance and training in 2000, and was joined by 17 more counties in 2005. At this time, a total of 32 California counties have active Linkages programs in operation.

## **Goal**

The goal is to improve outcomes for children and families by providing needed services and supports through improved collaboration.

“*Linkages* is designed to assist families in crisis, particularly those dealing with the stresses and strains of poverty. It helps counties create partnerships across child welfare and CalWorks to reduce bureaucracy, coordinate services for families, and promote better outcomes. *Linkages* puts parenting first.”

Jill Berrick, Ph.D.  
Center for Child and Youth Policy  
University of California Berkeley, School of Social Welfare

## **Why Is Linkages Important?**

Child Welfare Services is charged with keeping children safe from maltreatment and abuse. The welfare program, CalWORKs, is responsible for providing income assistance and employment preparation services to help unemployed parents achieve self-sufficiency.

In most California counties, there is an overlap of children and families who are clients of both systems. For example, nearly half of the children served through the Los Angeles County Department of Child and Family Services have been on CalWORKs at some point during the year.

Historically, there has been little coordination, communication or resource sharing between these two programs, despite the large number of clients in

common.

Research has found that factors such as parental stress from economic hardship can detrimentally affect parenting behaviors and result in neglect and abuse. Several studies have found that parental stressors were significant predictors of child welfare involvement (Shook 1999; Courtney, Piliavin and Power 2001; Paxson & Waldfogel 1999), and that increased poverty rates correspond to a rise in child maltreatment rates (Paxson & Waldfogel, 2001).

***Families with annual incomes below \$15,000, compared to families with annual incomes above \$30,000, are over 22 times more likely to experience some form of maltreatment.***

- Child Welfare serves as an anti-poverty program
- CalWorks assists in preventing and/or mitigating child abuse and neglect
- Not a project or another way to coordinate or restructure, but a way of doing business that fights both poverty and abuse
- Built on an understanding of the interaction between child maltreatment and poverty

In addition to struggling with poverty and the possible or actual removal of their children, parents who are involved in both systems face the complexity of negotiating two bureaucracies with often conflicting requirements, goals and timeframes. Child Welfare and CalWORKs service offices are typically in different locations, adding scheduling and transportation challenges. Clients must negotiate with separate workers for each system—workers who typically do not communicate with each other and who may actually be working to achieve incompatible goals. The overlap between these service populations along with the strong connection between poverty and maltreatment created the impetus for Linkages.

## Facts and Stats

- 2/3 of CalWorks recipients are children:
  - 1/2 of these children are under the age of six
- 1/2 of child welfare cases involve children under the age of six
- Children in families earning less than \$15,000/year are:
  - 16 times more likely to be physically abused
  - 18 times more likely to be sexually abused
  - 44 times more likely to be neglected than children whose families earn at least \$30,000/year
- 55% of calls to child welfare in the U.S. are related to neglect
- Statewide, 60% children in Child Welfare Services have a history of AFDC or TANF aid
- More than half of all foster children come from families eligible for economic assistance
- 70% - 90% of families receiving in-home support services from child welfare also receive some form of public assistance
- More than half of babies in poverty are being raised by mothers who show symptoms of mild to severe depression
- One study shows 50% of unemployed parents feeling depressed or anxious
- In one study, 50% of adults who had been unemployed for six months or longer indicated that their family relationships were feeling “strained”
- Another study indicated that 40% of unemployed adults indicated changes in their children’s behavior
  - 50% describe the recession as creating ‘fundamental changes’ in their lives
  - 50% indicated they’re experiencing more conflicts and arguments with family members



Sources:

*Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-3)*  
Judith Warner, NY Times Magazine, Aug. 8, 2010

## **Poverty and Child Welfare Worksheet**

Answer the following questions:

1. Why are these statistics important to your program:  
CalWORKs or Child Welfare?
2. What does the data we just reviewed suggest to you about what families might need from you?
3. What might the information suggest about working together across economic stability programs and child protection programs?
4. How does this apply to your individual role in your program?
5. What are two things you could do to meet the needs of the families represented in the statistics in your role in your program?

# Factors Contributing to Family Economic Vulnerability

Excerpted from Jill Berrick's 9/10 Presentation at Linkages Convening

Most researchers agree that there are three fundamental factors that contribute to a family's economic vulnerability.

1. Number of adults available to support children
2. Number of children in a family to support
3. Parent's Work and Wages

The first relates to the number of adults available to support children. These might be adults living in the home, or non-resident family members who might be available to help support children.

Obviously, the more adults with the means to support children, the more economically secure those children are likely to be. But over the past 50 years, we've seen fundamental changes in the structure of the American family that puts children at greater risk for economic insecurity.

The continuing increase in one-parent families (vs. two) means that fewer adults are available to provide financial support for children.

41% of U.S. children are born to single-parents. Most of these non-marital relationships are neither binding nor lasting. Even among married-parent families, many end in divorce.

Divorce rate in the U.S. is high – 2009 divorce rate: 16.4 per 1,000

Now: whether this is good news or bad news is hotly debated. Many commentators argue that the REASON the divorce rate is down is because it's too expensive to divorce!! So people are living in fractured, difficult relationships for longer, since the economic consequences of setting up two separate households is too challenging.

Some children benefit from child support payments from non-resident parents.

But even with child support payments, most children fall off an economic cliff when their parents separate – largely because the costs of maintaining two households (and in many cases, two families) is too great to continue to afford the same economic lifestyle that prevailed when all of the family members were living under the same roof.

The second factor relating to family economic security relates to the number of children in the family to support. The fewer the children, the easier it is to provide sufficient means to support those children.

The third and final feature is the number of hours parents work in the labor market, and the wages that those hours bring.

Obviously, the higher the wage, the greater economic security, and the more working hours, the greater likelihood of increased income.

Children living with unemployed parents or parents unattached to the labor force are 2x more likely to be abused and 3x more likely to be neglected.

Parents “unattached to the labor market” include parents on TANF, retired, or disabled.

Children in families with <\$15,000 annual incomes are 3x (physical abuse) – 7x (neglect) more likely to be maltreated.



# ***Do poor parents make abusive parents?***

- 76 million children in the U.S.
- About 1.5 million are from low-income families
- About 900,000 children are victims of child maltreatment every year – a fraction of all children, and only a small percent of all low-income children.

Many families involved in child welfare come from low-income families, but the vast majority of low-income families are NOT involved in the child welfare system.



**NO!**

## **Why is it so hard to Parent in Poverty?**



Poverty-related stress

Daily hassles

Inadequate coping skills

Caregiver overloads

Residence in communities with few formal supports

High environmental stressors (e.g., crime)

Parental mental health/depression

Social Support

Substance abuse

Subjective experience of poverty

Assaults to the care giving system

## Factors Associated with Maltreatment

Explaining the Difference between Low-Income families reported for maltreatment vs. Low-income families not reported for maltreatment

<b>Reported for maltreatment:</b>	<b>Not reported for maltreatment</b>
Mental health treatment	None
Substance abuse	
Adult disability	
Lower income	



## **Characteristics Associated with Increased Odds of Child Welfare Events**

- Young children
- Single parent family
- Larger families
- Born with low birth weight
- Late or no prenatal care
- Increased time on aid
- Breaks in aid receipt
- More hardships
- Deeper poverty
- Homelessness
- Substance abuse
- Parental stress
- Prior child welfare contact



Social workers must attend to family material well-being if they hope to witness significant changes in parenting practices.

Thoughtful practice that recognizes the challenges associated with parenting in poverty can reduce stress, hassles, and other associated difficulties that elevate risk.

## **Benefits to Participants/Families of Linkages Collaboration**

**Given the overlap of issues shared between CalWORKs Participants and Child Welfare Families, what are the benefits to the linked families?**



## Comparing CalWORKs and Child Welfare

<b>CalWORKs</b>	<b>Child Welfare</b>
Understanding CalWORKs Primer	Understanding the Child Welfare System in California Primer
<p>The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is basically an employment services program with time-limited cash assistance for families as the parents move from welfare to work. The program also provides assistance to eligible children living with relatives or children living with a parent not eligible to receive assistance. With some exceptions, recipients receive a lifetime total of five years of support.</p>	<p>The child welfare system is made up of multiple federal, state, and county agencies, juvenile courts, and private social service agencies, all of which share the goals of providing for the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and their families. Both federal and state laws establish the legal framework that governs the roles and responsibilities of agencies and organizations for children that enter and leave the child welfare system.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Voluntary Client</li> <li>▪ Identified client = adult</li> <li>▪ Basic needs-driven</li> <li>▪ Requires child in home</li> <li>▪ Rules-based</li> <li>▪ Little knowledge of child welfare</li> <li>▪ CalWIN cannot “talk” to CWS/CMS</li> <li>▪ Work Plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Involuntary entry (most)</li> <li>▪ Identified client = child</li> <li>▪ Safety-driven</li> <li>▪ May remove child</li> <li>▪ Discretionary</li> <li>▪ Little knowledge of CalWORKs</li> <li>▪ CWS/CMS cannot talk to CalWIN</li> <li>▪ Case plan</li> </ul>

## **Survey Says...**

Three States participated in a survey to examine differences:

1. North Carolina Division of Human Services
2. California Dept. of Human Services (9 co's)
3. El Paso County Dept. of Human Services, CO

### **Why do TANF & Workforce workers overlook needs/condition of children?**

- Program mandates are aimed at adults in household
- Workers feel they are not trained in the area of children's issues
- Feel they are already overburdened and do not have time to add anything to their intake or case management activities

### **Why do Child Welfare workers resist considering poverty issues in their cases?**

- Psychological distancing/defending
- Children are removed due to abuse and risk, not socio-economic
- Lack of education/training
- Not stressed in professional education
- Not stressed in child-welfare specific training
- Not asked about/investigated by the court, or in supervision

## **Why do TANF & Workforce workers resist coordinated case management?**

**NOTE!!** Nationally, TANF & Workforce workers are more interested in and cooperative with these initiatives than their CW counterparts

- Fear that Child Welfare workers will view them and utilize them as clerks
- Fear that TANF components/requirements will be secondary to Child Welfare
- Do not make the connection between child welfare issues and barriers to self-sufficiency
- Do not realize that it will reduce the amount of work required

## **Why do Child Welfare workers resist coordinated case management?**

- Attitude that they are more professional and capable than their counterparts
- Afraid their autonomy on a case will be challenged
- Feel they are already overburdened and do not have time to confer and collaborate with counterparts
- Do not make the connection between poverty and child neglect/abuse
- Do not realize that it will reduce the amount of work required

## **Why do families need Child Welfare and TANF/Workforce to collaborate?**

- Shared information results in more reasonable and non-conflicting plans
- Each program has resources the family needs
- So the agency has a holistic and comprehensive view of the families' needs, resources, strengths, and deficits

- In order to achieve economic self-sufficiency and family reunification in the shortest feasible time frame
- So plans & referrals do not compete or conflict

## **Why do social services agencies need their TANF/Workforce and Child Welfare divisions to collaborate?**

- Better use of resources: staff, time, money
- To operationalize the concepts of “client-centered”, “family-focused”, “strengths-based”, “system of care”, “competent services”, and “we care”

See Benefits and Barriers Document at [cfpic.org](http://cfpic.org)

## Strategies for Success

- Information exchange
- Integration of different timeframes into the overall family picture
- Honest dialogue and open communication pathways
- Trust
- Respect
- Working together toward goals of both programs
- Focus on clients and goals of the initiative
- Staff development
- Diversity of thought
- Deconstruction of silos
- Shared case planning
- Collaboration

## Where Can We Intersect/Crossover?

- Identification
- Service
- Planning
- Work with parents
- Meeting the needs of children
- Counseling
- Referrals
- Bound by mandates
- Bound by timeframes

## Next Steps Action Planning

What have you learned today about linked families?

What have you learned today about working together?

What are three steps you can take to help assure the success of the Linkages Collaboration?

1.

2.

3.

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