



## A Picture of Linkages: Ten Years of Collaboration<sup>1</sup>

### A DECADE OF DISCOVERY...

It was 2002 when the idea of collaborating between Child Welfare Services and CalWORKs became a reality in California counties. A number of families felt the benefits of less paperwork and coordinated planning; a few counties made inroads with joint trainings and leveraged resources.

Ten years later, Linkages is a stable and established backbone of practice for many of counties around the state. How many families are getting the benefits of Linkages? What infrastructure and staffing best supports a Linkages program? What's needed to sustain and expand Linkages in the years to come? This report hopes to shed light on the answers to these questions with a point-in-time look at 18 current Linkages counties.

Data below was gathered from three inquiries conducted during 2012: Shared Learning Plan surveys distributed at the July 2012 Convening, Affinity Group findings gathered at the Convening and the Linkages Sustainability Profiles completed by counties in early fall. Information from these sources illuminates the current state of Linkages and has been collated into a single, readable document. As you read this report, think of it as a snapshot of Linkages around California in 2012, as the program heads into its second decade.

We are dedicated to ongoing service provision and practice that parallels and enhances Linkages concepts and intent. Linkages is an integral part of our Social Services plan to support families in the community and move them towards self-sufficiency. (Humboldt)

### HOW MANY COUNTIES, HOW MANY FAMILIES?

The number of contacts or inquires from Social Workers, Eligibility Workers and other staff give us a sense that Linkages is known. As we develop the program and philosophy around Linkages we anticipate being able to sense a cultural shift in how we do business. (Shasta)

When Linkages was piloted in 2002, 13 counties stepped forward to pioneer service collaboration between Child Welfare Services and CalWORKS/Welfare to Work. Since then, many counties have joined the organized Linkages work planning efforts; some have subsequently left, continuing their Linkages programming independently, while others chose not to continue a Linkages program on their own. According to Exit Interviews conducted by Harder + Co under the Federal evaluation, counties left for several reasons: their linked caseload was too small for the time that the project

required; they did not have all the "necessary ingredients" (e.g. committed leadership); priorities shifted based on the impact on staff caused by the recession.

---

<sup>1</sup> Produced by Hay Consulting for Child & Family Policy Institute of CA (CFPIC)



## 1. County and Family Statistics

Who were the families being served all this time? How many families have received Linkages services since 2002? Counties have had to be very creative to determine how many Linkages families have been served over the years. CalWORKs/Welfare-to-Work agencies and Child Welfare Agencies each have their own way of tracking who they serve, making it a challenge to confirm the collective count of Linkages families. The table below is an approximation, based on information collected from 18 counties for fiscal year 2011-2012.

County and Family Statistics	
<b>Linkages Counties</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Today, 20 Linkages counties are formally involved with Linkages programming and support (several others conduct Linkages independently)</li> <li>• Just under 40 counties have been involved with organized Linkages since 2002</li> </ul>
<b>Linkages Families</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7,994 families were served in the 2011-2012 fiscal year</li> <li>• The majority of Linkages counties report 1-11% of all CalWORKs families and up to 45% of all CWS families receive Linkages services</li> </ul>

## 2. Types of Linkages Programming

Linkages counties come in all varieties: counties that cover many square miles and those that span few, counties containing a major metropolitan area and those with rural hubs. Within these geographic realities, Linkages as a practice reflects the county environment and culture. Some large counties select a region or an office for Linkages practice implementation and might have specialized workers assigned all the “linked” families.

Families could be served by more than one Linkages protocol; i.e. a potentially eligible CalWORKs family could get a referral to apply to aid through Linkages, thus connecting the parent to Welfare to Work for Family Preservation service coordination. (Los Angeles)

Current Linkages Programs		
<b>Family Maintenance / CalWORKs</b>	Coordinated services for CWS families with open cases in CalWORKs.	<sup>2</sup> ED, FR, HUM, IMP, KRN, LA, MAD, MER, SLO, SB, SC, SHAS, SISK, SON, STAN, THE, TRI, TUL, YOLO
<b>Family Reunification / CalWORKs</b>	Coordinated services for CWS families involved in reunification who also have open cases in CalWORKs.	ED, FR, HUM, IMP, KRN, LA, MAD, MER, SLO, SB, SC, SHAS, SISK, STAN, THE, TRI, YOLO
<b>Emergency Response / CalWORKs</b>	Establishing Linkages services with families at the front end who also have open CalWORKs cases.	FR, LA, MAD, MER, SLO, SC, SHAS, SISK, TRI
<b>Sanctioned</b>	Coordinated services for sanctioned CalWORKS adults who also have open CWS cases.	FR, HUM, IMP, LA (soon), MAD, MER, TEH
<b>Differential Response</b>	Utilize the partnership with CalWORKs as a prevention strategy for DR families	SLO, SC, SHAS (soon)
<b>Exempt</b>	Coordinated services for families deemed exempt by CalWORKS who also have open CWS cases.	HUM, MAD
<b>Homeless</b>	Coordinated services for homeless CalWORKs families who also have open cases in CWS.	LA
<b>Transition Age Youth</b>	Coordinated services for youth transitioning toward independent living	MER

**WHAT DOES LINKAGES LOOK LIKE?**

How exactly are current Linkages counties organizing their service coordination? Variation abounds, depending on the size and demographics of the county, the nature of the populations being served and other county specifics. Three main themes characterize the array of collaborative structures currently operating across Linkages programs: targeted strategies for identifying mutual or shared clients (families eligible for Linkages); structured case coordination processes; and staffing modifications to promote collaboration.

Common cases are identified at Court, CalWORKS orientation, Dependency/Intake phase and in the Continuing phase. (Santa Clara)

<sup>2</sup> See table of county abbreviations on p. 14



### 3. Targeted Client Identification

How and when a county identifies families as eligible for Linkages differs greatly. Many counties focus on the front end; when a referral comes in, the family is checked for their status with the other agency. Other counties check only once a case has been opened. Several counties use jointly created match lists to help generate a regular inventory of mutual clients. A few counties do several or all of these things.

Targeted Client Identification		
<b>Early &amp; immediate</b>	Most counties conduct their Client ID early, at the time of intake or referral. This can happen whichever agency the family enters: CWS, CalWORKs or WtW	ED, FR, KRN, LA, MAD, MER, SB, SC, SHA, SISK, SON, TEH, YOLO
<b>After case opening</b>	Some counties check for Linkages eligibility once the case has already been opened at either CWS or CalWORKS.	IMP, LA, SC, SON, TEH, TUL
<b>Match lists</b>	A few counties have developed match lists from caseload reports or other data and develop their coordinated services from that point on.	LA, TRI, SON, SC
<b>Repeated</b>	A few counties identify clients throughout the lifetime of a case: at court, at CalWORKs orientation, at case transfer, etc.	LA, SC, TEH, SON

### 4. Coordination Process

We coordinate our cases through our bi-monthly Linkages meetings, and on an on-going basis through the day to day relationship of the WTW Case Manager and the CPS Social Worker. (El Dorado)

The variety of coordination processes is as diverse as the counties themselves. Most counties have created some sort of common gathering location or process, through meetings, check-ins or other deliberate venues. Many counties clearly identify who Linkages partners are and how they'll work together on cases. In some instances, it's the supervision that's partnered. As Linkages grows in counties and across the state, there will likely be many more approaches to the collaborative process. Notice that some counties use more than one of the processes below.



Coordination Process		
<b>Multi-Disciplinary Meetings</b>	Many counties bring partners together for service coordination using specific collaboration meetings, locations or appointments	ED, FR, IMP, KRN, LA, MAD, SB, SC, SLO, SHAS, SISK, SON, TEH, TRI, TUL, YOLO
<b>Coordination Partners</b>	Clearly identified coordination partners is key to many counties collaboration process	FR, LA, MAD, MER, SHAS, SISK, SON, TEH, SC
<b>Partnered Oversight</b>	Many counties use partnerships between the agencies to jointly oversee Linkages cases	FR, KRN, LA, MAD, MER, SISK, TUL
<b>Liaison-Based Coordination</b>	Several cases conduct their coordination through designated liaisons	IMP, KRN, LA, SHAS, SISK, TUL
<b>Collective Staffing for All Cases</b>	Collective staffing for all Linkages cases	ED, TRI, YOLO
<b>Automated Coordination</b>	Some counties use information from data systems to promote coordination	KRN, LA, SLO

### 5. Staffing Modifications

Counties have been very creative in rearranging, organizing or assigning staff in order to support the collaborative opportunities and challenges of Linkages. Most staffing modifications are designed to encourage and enable communications between CWS and CalWORKs in order to create easier coordination among the resources of each. As the table below shows, some counties utilize more than one of the principal staffing modifications.

Employment social workers appear in court ready to testify regarding the parents' level of compliance with the Linkages service plan. (Kern)

Staffing Modifications		
<b>Co-location</b>	Co-location takes on several forms: CalWORKs staff positioned in CWS offices, CWS staff in CalWORKs offices, a joint space for Linkages workers or other modifications to enable easy communications and resource sharing.	FR, IMP, LA, MAD, MER, SLO, SB, SC, SHAS, SON, STAN, TUL



<b>Specialized workers</b>	Many counties have created specialized Linkages workers on both the CalWORKS and CWS sides, usually by assigning specific workers Linkages cases and training.	KRN, LA, MAD, MER, SHAS, SISK, SON, YOLO
<b>Designated clerical staff</b>	Several counties designate specific Linkages duties to clerical staff, from identifying new cases to documenting case transfers.	IMP, KRN, MAD, SB, SHAS, SLO, SC

**WHAT SUPPORTS LINKAGES PRACTICE?**

If it takes a village to raise a child, then it takes county support to keep a Linkages program fortified, growing and sustainable. Internal supports that counties indicate are keys to their healthy programming include committed leadership, frequent communications, integrated training and well-defined evaluation. Interestingly, these are the same areas in which counties would like improvements and increased attention.

**6. Engaged Leadership**

Leadership consistently supports Linkages—even during challenging times of staff reductions in CalWORKs. (Fresno)

Leadership is a key element in the success of Linkages. Counties report that an engaged, committed and responsive leadership is the foundation to the survival of their Linkages program. A supportive Linkages leadership looks different in different counties; although some shared qualities are apparent—such as holding Linkages as a priority.

<b>Engaged Leadership</b>		
<b>Linkages as a priority</b>	Linkages staff experience consistent support and encouragement from leadership about Linkages programming	ED, FR, KRN, MAD, MER, SB, SHAS, SISK, SON, TEH, TRI, TUL
<b>Meeting participation</b>	Leadership is a presence in regular Linkages meetings	HUM, MAD, SHAS, TRI, YOLO
<b>Providing supports</b>	Linkages staff are able to request and receive staffing, facilities or other provisions supporting Linkages.	IMP, KRN, LA, SB, SC, SON
<b>Role modeling</b>	Leadership demonstrate their commitment to and support of partnering by modeling collaboration	IMP, LA, SC



## 7. Keeping Linkages Visible

Communicating about Linkages is a key way to market the philosophy and value of coordinating services for mutual clients. Most counties focus on spreading the word among staff in both programs. While it was clear from responses that many counties would like to improve their communication range and techniques, the following examples give a sense of what’s being done now.

A quarterly newsletter is distributed to leadership and staff highlighting a family success story with staff support. Contact info for Linkages staff is included. (Tulare)

Keeping Linkages Visible		
<b>Linkages reports or presentations to staff/groups</b>	Most counties keep Linkages visible through reports or presentations about Linkages cases in various staffings/mtgs	FR, HUM, IMP, KRN, LA, MAD, MER, SB, SHAS, SC, SISK, SLO, TRI, YOLO
<b>Linkages handouts / flyers</b>	Some counties use flyers, handouts, posters or other hard copy materials to spread the word about Linkages	KRN, MER, SC, SISK, SLO, TEH
<b>Linkages newsletters</b>	Several counties create Linkages specific newsletters or insert Linkages information in an agency-wide newsletter	LA, SHAS, TEH, TUL
<b>Clear communication routes</b>	Establishing clear routes for distributing information about Linkages helps some counties with communications	HUM, IMP, LA, MAD, SLO
<b>Team-Building Events</b>	Conducting Linkages-focused team-building events can raise awareness and interest	LA, SLO

## 8. Linkages Trainings

Like communications, Linkages training is an area where many counties expressed an interest in improvement. Almost no two counties organize their Linkages training in the same way: timing varies from when staff first join Linkages to an ongoing basis; techniques range from one-on-one trainings to classroom groups to training during established meetings. Several counties do not yet have

Staff Development incorporates the Linkages philosophy throughout all the Agency’s induction trainings. (Merced)

Training is done one-on-one once staff have been identified to work in the Linkages/ Crossover program. (Yolo)

organized Linkages training. Several counties have found the project sponsored Shared Learning Webinars a useful supplement to the training they hold with staff.



## 9. Integrated Evaluation

Information about Linkages evaluation practices is limited, as very few counties at this point have established mechanisms in place. Since the end of the Federal Demonstration Grant in 2011, counties have not been required to collect data about Linkages—however, they are encouraged counties to continue local evaluation (results of the Federal Linkages Demonstration Evaluation can be found at [www.cfpic.org](http://www.cfpic.org)). About half of current Linkages counties reported having no evaluation procedures. The other half reported being in the process of constructing a mechanism or procedure for evaluation. One county incorporates Linkages goals to staff performance evaluations. Thus, the topic of evaluation—in terms of outcome measures, automated client identification or data collection—has its biggest presence in the Goals and Support section below.

We currently have a Linkages Case Study Workgroup in one of our offices. Another office is studying the entire process of Linkages to test our current policies and procedures. (San Luis Obispo)

## 10. Best Practices

Every open Linkages case is discussed at our monthly meetings to share information and identify barriers that may need to be addressed so the family can be successful. The collaboration between all the workers involved has been a crucial piece to the success of our Linkages program. (Madera)

Through the surveys and recent discussions among Linkages counties, we’ve gathered a collection of practices of which counties are proud: the ones where they see excellent results or hear from families that the services have made a difference in their lives. While the list below isn’t exhaustive, it gives a good taste of what’s going well with Linkages and how much variety there is among the counties.

<b>Practices That Work: Linkages Counties Best Practices</b>
<b>Promoting Collaboration</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>TDMs (SLO)</li> <li>TANF Structured Decision-Making (SLO)</li> <li>Centralizing Linkages services with designated staff in WtW offices (LA)</li> <li>Regional Linkages Single Point of Contact (SB)</li> <li>Clearly delineated Linkages roles (IMP, MER)</li> <li>Establishing Linkages liaisons/coordinators at the line office level (LA)</li> <li>All workers involved with the family attend staffings (MAD)</li> <li>Data review meetings (SC)</li> <li>Coordination of services in plans of both agencies (FR, MER, SISK, YOLO)</li> <li>Full-time SW who coordinates CWS &amp; W2W staff (SISK)</li> <li>Frequent distribution of open and pending Linkages cases (FR, MAD)</li> </ul>



<b>Promoting Collaboration, con't</b>
Co-case management (FR, MER, TUL) Invite ETC to CWS meetings like TDM (SON)
<b>Engaging &amp; Supporting Families</b>
Coordination logistics (e.g. providing transportation to families) (IMP, KRN) Family to family mentoring (KRN) Early client ID (FR, SC) Network & safety planning programs: e.g. S.A.F.E., Signs of Safety (SLO, SHAS) Engaging families in CCP meetings (SC) Open door policy (TRI)
<b>Increasing Access to Services</b>
Curing sanctions, thus increasing services (FR, MER, HUM) Resource Support Team (SB) Utilizing and partnering with community resources (SISK) Differential Response (FR, SLO) Expansion of available services, e.g. MH, A&D (SISK)
<b>Visible Leadership</b>
Leadership strategies (LA) Reinforcing Linkages as how we do business (FR, MER, TUL)
<b>Strong Training Component</b>
Delivery of Linkages program training as needed (SISK)
Linkages philosophy is incorporated in all induction trainings, policies & procedures (MER)

**WHAT WILL SUSTAIN LINKAGES?**

All counties have goals for their Linkages program—about practice, collaboration and support. There are counties that feel strongly enough about the benefits of Linkages that they would like to see Linkages mandated across the State. Some counties simply have goals to serve a few more families or partner better with other departments. Alongside these goals are requests for desired supports that would make attaining these goals more likely.

**11. County Goals**

Goal: Promote communication of meaningful information among partners that will create successful service plans for achieving family well-being & self-sufficiency. (Imperial)

A clear picture of what Linkages could become in the future can be drawn from the goals counties are hoping to achieve. By far the most frequently cited goal category is data tracking



and evaluation, with goals about tracking families, identifying clients or establishing measurable goals. Note that counties sometimes had more than one goal in a given category, as indicated by the numbers shown in parentheses.

Goal: to have a newsletter and brochure to be able to provide to clients, workers, and community partners. Annual get-together/trainings between the divisions is another goal. (Sonoma)

County Linkages Goals		
<b>Improve Data Tracking &amp; Evaluation</b>	Develop measurable goals, mechanisms for data collection and client identification systems	ED, FR, IMP, KRN, LA, MAD (x2), SC (x2), SHAS, SISK, SON, TEH, TUL (x2)
<b>Improve CCP Protocols</b>	Improve Linkages services by increasing collaboration, promoting communication, refining collaborative protocols, etc.	FR (x2), HUM, IMP (x2), KRN, MER, SC, SISK, SON, TRI
<b>Develop / Expand Linkages Training</b>	Integrate Linkages training into core training, increase the efficiency and frequency of Linkages training, etc.	ED, LA, SB (x2), SC, SHAS, SISK, STAN, TEH, TUL (x2)
<b>Expand Linkages</b>	Add service coordination for additional populations of mutual clients who would benefit from Linkages	FR, HUM, SB, SHAS, SON
<b>Improve Marketing and Staff Awareness</b>	Spread the word about Linkages internally to staff and externally to partners.	ED, KRN, LA, SISK, TEH
<b>Improve Family Engagement</b>	Work from the front end to more effectively gain the trust, input and commitment of families.	HUM, IMP (x2), SC (x2), SHAS, TRI
<b>Establish a Shared Vision</b>	Come to common ground about the role of Linkages across partners, agencies and programs.	SB, SON (x2), STAN, TUL
<b>Increase Leadership Support</b>	Improve the commitment, support and resources from leadership at different levels	KRN, LA
<b>Improve Sharing Resources</b>	Look into possible funding partnerships with other departments, agencies or community partners	FR, MAD



## 12. Supports for Goal Achievement

What will it take for counties to accomplish these goals? The array of supports identified by counties map directly to their goals and gives some concrete suggestions to the possibility of sustaining Linkages in the long-term. For example, support for data collection and client identification was by far the most requested item, directly matching that task as a high frequency goal among the counties.

Through CA Linkages, request support from CDSS to ensure Linkages is on the “radar” in the different State level forums where redesign of CWS/CMS is being discussed. (Los Angeles)

One concrete method for delivery of Linkages support was mentioned by several counties: peer-to-peer support by sharing among counties. Requests for specific supports were numerous and reflect the wide variety of settings, populations and maturity of current Linkages counties. Supports are listed from most frequently chosen by counties to least frequently.

Requested County Supports	
<b>Get support around tracking outcomes, identifying families and developing measurable goals and evaluation</b>	FR, HUM, LA, MAD, SC, SISK, SON, TEH, TUL (10)
<b>Get support from other Linkages counties</b>	MAD, SC, SHAS, SON, TEH,
<b>Support around Linkages training</b>	SB, SISK, TEH, TUL
<b>Support for establishing or improving CCP Protocols</b>	HUM, IMP, SC, SON
<b>Establishing Linkages on a budget</b>	ED
<b>Sharing resources</b>	MAD
<b>Advocacy for Linkages with leadership or at State level</b>	FR, SON
<b>Support for communications and marketing</b>	SHAS, SON

### WHAT’S AHEAD FOR LINKAGES?

The information contained in this report has been used to help shape a work plan for Linkages—both for the immediate future and on a longer term basis. Counties contributed many excellent ideas and reflections about what can be done to improve their specific program or Linkages statewide; these have been viewed as recommendations for continuing to strengthen Linkages in the coming years.



Based on the findings of this report, reflections on the Linkages activities of 2012 and results of the November 2012 Linkages Work Planning Retreat, the following goals project-level have been set for Linkages for 2013:

Linkages Goals 2013
Deliver Shared Learning agenda relevant for counties
Expand new counties participation in Linkages
Support existing counties to strengthen their Linkages programs
Prepare for transition to ongoing oversight of Linkages statewide

The next year and a half—through 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter 2014—will see the Linkages Coordinators taking on more responsibilities in Linkages networking activities. Several Shared Learning activities and communication tools between counties have been scheduled for 2013, including:

- **Shared Learning Webinars:** A continuation of the successful topical webinars from 2012, conducted on a quarterly basis. Guest speakers and county representatives will present on topics geared toward long-term sustainability of Linkages on the local level.
- **Peer Inquiry Calls (PICs):** A conference call gathering of Linkages peers for consultation, brainstorming and solution generating around a particular Linkages topic. Topics are drawn by Linkages Coordinators from frequently cited areas of concern or requests for support found in the Sustainability Report.
- **Linkages Coordinators Affinity Calls:** Quarterly conference calls with Linkages Coordinators as a way gather to gather with peers in same Linkages role. Calls will gather success stories, problem solve solutions, set priorities, guide shared learning activities anticipate sustainability needs.
- **Quarterly Newsletter: “Keeping Linked”** – This newsletter will include a special section for Linkages Toolkit updates as well as success stories, county highlights and Statewide Linkages developments.
- **Linkages July Convening:** Continuation of successful annual Linkages gathering. 2013 will include additional input and session coordination by Linkages Coordinators.
- **New Linkages County Support:** Special check-ins, visits and activities by Linkages Director and project staff to monitor and support new Linkages counties over their first six months.

Finally, the specifics of this report fall within the greater environment in which Statewide Linkages is practiced. Sustaining Linkages over the next several years requires being both cognizant of the social services atmosphere in California and responsive to changes already underway. In conclusion, here are several topics to explore in the terrain ahead.



### The Terrain Ahead

Realignment provides more flexibility & control over funds utilized for both Child Welfare Services & CalWORKs at the county level. This has implications for the need to raise awareness among the counties about the visibility and value of Linkages as an integral strategy for their operations. Otherwise, realignment opportunities may go to other priority efforts.

Many counties have been severely impacted by the economic downturn over the last 4 years and their social service operations have been significantly cut. This creates many demands for where new or more flexible resources could be applied. The benefits of Linkages need to be understood by decision-makers who are in charge of resource allocation.

How Linkages is incorporated into the statewide Child Welfare practice model will set the tone for the value of Linkages as a Child Welfare Services strategy throughout the state.

Changing rules for CalWORKs, including reduced lifetime time on aid, eligibility requirements for welfare-to-work, definition of exempt populations—all of these have been implemented as cost-savings measures. These changes reduce the available window of time when families are mutual to both programs, therefore narrowing the opportunity for collaboration to occur.

There's an opportunity to improve the data tracking and automation support for Linkages with the enhancements/improvements to CWS/CMS planned for 2013-2015.

By establishing service collaboration as a cornerstone of child welfare practice, then when CWS/CMS is redesigned, the requirement for the new system to support collaborative practice can be built into the functional requirements for this key data system.

--

**Table of County Abbreviations:** 2011-2012 Participating Linkages Counties

El Dorado	ELD	Merced	MER	Sonoma	SON
Fresno	FR	Orange	OR	Stanislaus	STAN
Humboldt	HUM	San Luis Obispo	SLO	Tehama	THE
Imperial	IMP	Santa Barbara	SB	Trinity	TRI
Kern	KRN	Santa Clara	SC	Tulare	TUL
Los Angeles	LA	Shasta	SHAS	Yolo	YO
Madera	MAD	Siskiyou	SISK		