



CalWORKs Project Group

“Overcoming Mental Health, Domestic Violence and Alcohol and Other Drug Barriers to Employment”

Help Connections, Volume 7

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Project Collaborative

- California Institute for Mental Health
- Children and Family Futures
- Family Violence Prevention Fund

Joint CalWORKs Committee

- California Mental Health Directors Association
- County Welfare Directors Association
- County Alcohol and Drug Program Administrators Association of California

Visit our web-site for more help with CalWORKs implementation:

www.cimh.org

- ◆ **Q & A (Ask your question – we’ll locate an expert to answer it!)**
- ◆ **Project products and updates**
- ◆ **Hot tips and Help line**
- ◆ **Other resources and information**
- ◆ **Previous editions of “Help Connections”**

The California Institute for Mental Health, Children and Family Futures, Inc. and the Family Violence Prevention Fund are conducting a welfare reform study and technical assistance project. The focus is on identifying and overcoming barriers to employment that are due to mental health, alcohol and other drug, or domestic violence (MH/AOD/DV) issues. Information on the project is available at the California Institute for Mental Health website: www.cimh.org. This is the seventh in a series of “Help Connection” issue papers offering concrete suggestions for social service, employment, mental health, alcohol and other drug and domestic violence programs.

Project staff make periodic site visits to each of six study counties. During these site visits we hear about issues counties are identifying and also about how they are dealing with them. Some of these issues are documented here, as well as some promising approaches to dealing with them successfully. They are not offered as definitive solutions, but as ideas that might be helpful for other counties. **If you have questions or would like to obtain more information about any of these proposed approaches and where they may be operational, please e-mail the CalWORKs Project at CalWORKs@cimh.org.**

The focus of this issue of “Help Connections” is on what some counties are doing to reduce the number of CalWORKs participants who are non-compliant or sanctioned. The information in this Help Connection comes from State Department of Social Services data, federal General Accounting Office and Office of Inspector General studies, and interviews and site visits to programs in California counties.

Issue 1: Many CalWORKs Participants are Non-Compliant or Sanctioned

Roughly 20% of the CalWORKs adult population is non-compliant or sanctioned.

On average, for the month of December 2000, 7% of the CalWORKs participants were officially non-compliant and another 13% were sanctioned. The percentages of CalWORKs participants who are non-compliant and sanctioned vary considerably by county depending on how the county handles the sanctioning process.

The major reasons participants are being sanctioned include the following:

- CalWORKs program deficiencies, e.g. unclear information, misunderstandings, misinterpretation of rules and regulations
- Participant fears, e.g. fear of failure, low self-esteem
- Willful noncompliance, e.g. being willing to take the reduction in cash assistance

Sanctioning is an issue of concern throughout the country. Unlike California, which has only a partial sanction (i.e., a portion of the family’s cash aid is eliminated) some states take away the entire grant for the whole family. Because of the potential hardships this might cause there have been a number of studies that have followed what happens to TANF recipients when they are sanctioned off of aid or leave the program for any other reason.

In these studies from other states, some of which have full family sanctions, about one-third of those participants who are sanctioned cure the sanctions and return to aid. Studies of TANF recipients who leave the program for any reason (called “leavers”) have shown the following about those who have left aid because of a sanction:

- State studies show a range from 15% to 53% of the sanctioned clients working
 - Many of those who have been sanctioned rely on family and friends for assistance
 - Some sanctioned participants undergo substantial hardships after being sanctioned. The GAO study reported a range from 3 to 12% being homeless or lacking food. Other studies reported by the Urban Institute show 27% in one state having trouble providing enough food and 18% having their utilities cut off. In another state 32% had problems with utilities, and 34% had trouble paying rent.
-

persons being granted an exemption either because of a disability or having to care for someone else with a disability. And roughly nine percent have been referred for either an AOD, MH, and/or DV assessment. Contact: Brian Clark (909) 891-3844

Answers to Often-asked Questions

1) *Are there many referrals to Fraud Investigation and Child Protective Services?*

Each county handles this differently, but most have oriented their efforts towards finding solutions to the problems that are keeping a participant from engaging in welfare-to-work activities. Workers are mandated reporters and so there are occasional referrals to CPS, but the percentage is very low as is the percentage referred for investigation of fraud.

2) *How can the program provide services to participants that are sanctioned?*

Providing services to participants who are non-compliant but not yet sanctioned is clearly allowable under CalWORKs. In fact, the policy is encouraged. Anything that prevents a sanction is beneficial for the participant, the county, and the state.

Current CalWORKs legislation and regulations allow services to sanctioned individuals only if they are funded through incentive funds, not through the single allocation or the AOD/MH allocations. A number of counties are providing outreach services to sanctioned populations through these other sources of funds. The CalWORKs Project is recommending legislation that will explicitly allow the use of the CalWORKs AOD and MH funds in attempts to re-engage sanctioned participants.

3) *What can be done about the participants who go on and off sanctions repeatedly as if they are “gaming” the system?*

Assigning these cases to a team that maintains contact with the participant over an extended period of time might help to stabilize the situation.

4) *Don't CalWORKs participants resent home visits as intrusions on their privacy?*

Despite some initial worries about this, the counties that are using home visits have found that the participants for the most part like the home visits and feel more comfortable talking about personal issues in their own homes than in the welfare office. It is important, however, to schedule visits when it is convenient for the participant, to clearly tell the participant the purpose and potential consequences of the visit, and to not be any more intrusive than necessary. It is also critical that visits NOT be made if

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there is an indication or suspicion of domestic violence unless a DV specialist has been contacted and agrees that a visit will not further endanger the participant and/or the DV specialist agrees to participate in the visit.

5) *Aren't these programs very expensive? Why should we devote so many resources to persons who are resistant to our help?*

You can design your program to fit any level of budget. Some of the programs consist of multiple staff who remain engaged with the person over a fairly long time period while others, like San Bernardino, consist of a single home visit. It is also in the county's interest to reduce the number of sanctions since they count against the county in meeting its work participation rates.

As the above information indicates, sometimes the person has been sanctioned for reasons other than willful refusal to participate. Identifying reasons for an inability to participate and providing appropriate services to overcome these barriers is consistent with the purpose of CalWORKs.

Visit our website: www.cimh.org and go to the Welfare Reform page. You will find all the back issues of Help Connections available for download there, as well as other publications of the CalWORKs Project and announcements of upcoming events.