

# **Tehama County County Peer Review Visit Summary**

**April 15, 2010**



**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

**Welfare to Work Division**

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## **Executive Summary**

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### **Introduction**

The County Peer Review (CPR) Program was created for county peers and the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to perform on-site reviews of counties' Welfare-to-Work (WTW) programs to identify and share promising practices, opportunities for improvement, and strategies that could positively impact work participation rates (WPR). Tehama County volunteered to host a CPR in November 2009 to focus attention on areas they felt would be of interest to other service providers and benefit Tehama County's California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program.

### **Tehama County Department of Social Services (TCDSS)**

TCDSS provides services at facilities in Red Bluff and Corning. TCDSS's CalWORKs program in Red Bluff is co-located with other social service programs, including child welfare services (CWS), and has separate workers for CalWORKs employment services and eligibility services.

### **Site Visit General Information**

The Tehama CPR was held November 16 – 19, 2009 in Red Bluff. Major activities consisted of staff interviews, a client focus group, and case file discussions with county staff. Interviews were completed with 12 TCDSS staff, including employment and training workers (ETWs), ETW supervisors, eligibility services workers, a CWS social worker, and a program analyst. The CPR team completed a total of 21 case file discussions with eight ETWs. A client focus group interview was held with nine clients from the WorkForce Crew subsidized public sector employment program.

### **Scope**

The focus areas for this CPR were TCDSS partnerships with community agencies and other services, on-site partners, and sanctions.

### **Promising Practices**

Some of the significant promising practices identified include the following:

- Community and on-site partnerships for mental health, substance abuse, and domestic abuse are helpful with engaging clients in WTW activities (see pages 5-9 for details).
- The WorkForce Crew program is effective at providing clients with work experience skills and transitioning clients to unsubsidized employment (see pages 5, 13, and 15-16).
- Management provides ETWs with a role in writing WTW policies and procedures through a Procedures Committee (see page 11).

### **Opportunities for Improvement**

Some of the areas noted as challenges during the CPR include the following:

- Cross training on areas such as sanctions, assessments, and case components shared among different services may enhance staff knowledge and communication (see pages 8-9 and 11-12 for details).
- Sanction reengagements might improve with home visits and earlier intervention (see pages 9-10 and 14 for details).

#### **Client Focus Group** (see pages 13-16 for details)

Clients shared a variety of comments based on their experiences. Some of the notable opinions include the following:

- The WorkForce Crew program is an excellent opportunity for clients to develop skills and contacts to obtain unsubsidized employment.
- Childcare, transportation, and drug and alcohol issues are clients' primary barriers to participation in WTW activities.
- Sanctions are a motivator for clients to participate because if their grants are cut, they could become homeless.
- Clients are interested in more opportunities to comment on their WTW plans and activities.

#### **Key Recommendations**

- Submit successful strategies for partnerships with community agencies and on-site counselors to the CDSS CalWORKs Best Practices website (see pages 5-9 for details).
- Evaluate expanding meetings and trainings among employment services, eligibility services, and CWS to enhance communication (see pages 8-9 and 11-12 for details).
- Consider restoring and expanding the Intensive Services program for non-compliance and sanction outreach to increase reengagements (see pages 9-10 for details).
  - TCDSS has informed CDSS that the Intensive Services program restarted in February 2010.

#### **Acknowledgements**

CDSS thanks TCDSS Director, Charlene Reid and Deputy Director, Teresa Curiel, for hosting the CPR. CDSS also thanks CalWORKs Program Manager, Barbara Boggio; and Program Analyst, Tara Loucks, for their assistance with the CPR. Lastly, CDSS thanks Butte County Department of Employment and Social Services Senior Case Managers, Erin Lance and Karen Spain, and Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services Employment and Training Supervisor, Jannetje Vrieze, for serving as peer reviewers.

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## County Peer Review: Tehama County Visit Summary

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### Introduction

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The California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) County Peer Review (CPR) program was created as a result of Assembly Bill (AB) 1808 (Chapter 75, Statutes of 2006). The purpose of the program is for county peers and the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to perform on-site reviews of counties' Welfare-to-Work (WTW) programs to identify and share promising practices, opportunities for improvement, and strategies that could positively impact work participation rates (WPR). Tehama County volunteered to host a CPR in November 2009 to focus attention on areas they felt would be of interest to other service providers and benefit Tehama County's CalWORKs program.

### **Tehama County Department of Social Services:**

#### Overview

Tehama County Department of Social Services (TCDSS) provides services at locations in Red Bluff and Corning and has separate caseworkers for CalWORKs employment and eligibility. Caseworkers in Employment Services are called employment training workers (ETWs). The TCDSS CalWORKs program is co-located with Child Welfare Services (CWS), Food Stamps, Medi-Cal, and Adult Services. Counselors from mental health services, substance abuse services, and domestic abuse services are also located on-site.

For the purpose of this Visit Summary, "staff" refers to any combination of ETWs, CWS workers, eligibility services workers, and/or supervisors.

#### CalWORKs Case Flow

After eligibility services staff grants cash aid, the cases go to an office assistant who then sends the cases to the employment services supervisors to assign an ETW and to send notices for orientation, which is held weekly on Wednesday mornings. After the supervisor assigns an ETW and schedules an orientation, each case goes back to the office assistant for the client case file to be put together. Orientation ends with setting individual appointments for appraisal. If the county previously granted the case in the last 18 months, clients do not need to attend orientation again.

#### Job Club

After clients complete appraisal with their ETWs, clients are assigned to the job club class. Job club in Tehama County is called WorkForce Academy and is performed by TCDSS's Work Investment Board partner, Job Training Center (JTC). TCDSS conducts assessments after job search when clients do not obtain unsubsidized employment with sufficient hours to meet the minimum hours of participation or after appraisal if the ETW determines that participation in job search will not be beneficial. ETWs conduct assessments in five appointments that involve significant client participation. The

assessment includes a career exploration inventory, the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), career screening, career goal research, and reviewing the assessment report.

#### Community Action Agency (CAA)

At the time of the CPR, TCDSS's employment services program manager also oversaw the Community Action Agency. CAA services include the Senior Nutrition Program for Tehama County, and a client referral service. Also at the time of the CPR, CAA was working on expanding its ability to help community members with emergency food and shelter, job training, and violence prevention programs.

#### **Site Visit General Information:**

The CPR was performed in Tehama County November 16 – 19, 2009 at the TCDSS office in Red Bluff. The CPR team included two Senior Employment Case Managers from Butte County, an Employment and Training Supervisor from Humboldt County, and an analyst from CDSS.

The CPR activities consisted of the following:

- Kick-off meeting
- Staff interviews – Interviews were completed with TCDSS staff including ETWs, supervisors, eligibility services workers, a CWS social worker, and a program analyst.
- Case file discussions – The CPR team completed a total of 21 case file discussions with eight ETWs.
- Client focus group – The client focus group interview was held with nine clients from the WorkForce Crew subsidized public sector employment program in order to obtain a representation of clients' feedback regarding their WTW experiences.
- The CPR team visited the Job Training Center (JTC) and the WorkForce Crew subsidized public employment workshop with employment services staff.
- Close-out meeting

Most of the case file information was reviewed in hard copy form, while some case file information was obtained from the Interim Statewide Automated Welfare System (ISAWS). Tehama County converted to the Consortium-IV (C-IV) system in June 2010.

Additionally, CPR team members held debriefings each day. The CPR team debriefings were opportunities to discuss trends, practices, and general observations noted during the days' activities in preparation for the close-out meeting and the development of this Visit Summary.

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#### **Scope**

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TCDSS management developed the scope with assistance from CDSS in order to focus attention on areas they felt would benefit TCDSS's CalWORKs program and be of interest to other service providers. The scope consisted of three focus areas:

- Partnering with community agencies and other services for WTW activities

- Serving WTW clients with on-site partners (counselors, CWS)
- Improving sanction reengagements

Each focus area is discussed below with observations obtained by the CPR team from the staff interviews and case file discussions. General observations not related to the focus areas, but which are significant and unique, are also discussed below. Each set of observations is followed by recommendations from the CPR team.

### **Focus Area 1: Partnerships—Community Agencies and Other Services**

Observations:

ETWs expressed their great admiration for their Work Investment Board partner, JTC. JTC is the employer of record for TCDSS's WorkForce Crew program and provides TCDSS's job club. JTC also offers job search resources and workshops on résumés, career exploration, financial aid, and job training. ETWs stated that they have a great relationship with JTC staff, and they can communicate directly with JTC as needed. TCDSS's Employment Services Job Placement Specialist and JTC make an effective team in helping clients to achieve success in their job search efforts.

During the time of the CPR, TCDSS had two ongoing WorkForce Crews: one was full-time with ten slots and one was part-time with five slots. Clients can remain in the WorkForce Crew program for a maximum of six months. The full-time WorkForce Crew is made up of clients who are considered work-ready, and these clients work on many off-site projects, such as construction and landscaping. The part-time WorkForce Crew is for clients with mental health and/or substance abuse challenges who need more mentoring to become fully work-ready. Clients work on-site at JTC or at TCDSS and perform clerical duties such as filing and setting up new-client packets. Some staff suggested that TCDSS might want to consider allocating more money to expand the WorkForce Crews program because it is so successful.

TCDSS staff described other partners as outstanding education services in the community, which include the following:

- Shasta College
- eScholar Academy
- Corning Adult Education
- Survival 101
- Strategies for Success

#### Shasta College

Several staff members emphasized that Shasta College is a great partner, and the CalWORKs liaison at Shasta College is a great resource for TCDSS employment services. Shasta College's main campus is in Redding, which is in Shasta County just to the north of Tehama County. Shasta College also has a second, smaller campus in Red Bluff. The Red Bluff campus provides services that are much closer for many TCDSS WTW clients. Shasta College provides monthly printouts on TCDSS

employment services clients so that the ETWs can more easily monitor the clients' participation and progress in their activities at Shasta College, including work-study.

Several ETWs also discussed how Shasta College is able to place clients into work-study positions within a few days when positions are available. Clients are eligible for work-study if they are enrolled in at least one unit and have completed at least two weeks of class or after they attend two class sessions of Workplace Success. The Workplace Success series of courses provides essential skills that help students with finding employment and developing job advancement skills for a variety of careers, including retail, health, and office administration.

#### eScholar Academy and Corning Adult Education

Staff stated that eScholar Academy is an excellent service that provides on-line courses for General Education Development (GED), high school diploma, English as a Second Language (ESL), and basic skills. The Corning Adult Education program provides educational services similar to those offered by eScholar Academy but in a traditional classroom setting.

#### Survival 101 and Strategies for Success

According to some ETWs, Survival 101 and Strategies for Success classes at the Red Bluff and Corning facilities are very beneficial activities because the classes assist clients with managing aspects of daily life, such as parenting, health, employer expectations, goal setting, and dressing for success.

In addition to community partners, TCDSS's WTW program provides activities in partnership with other services:

- KeyTrain, a computer-based, distance learning program
- Senior Center, a senior recreation and meal program provided by the City of Red Bluff where WTW clients can be placed in work experience (WEX)
- JumpStart, a summer youth job program run by JTC

#### KeyTrain

Several ETWs stated that they like KeyTrain, a computer-based program to teach applied mathematics, reading for information, and how to locate information. KeyTrain was TCDSS's Technical Assistance Academy pilot program, which ran through June 2010. Others described KeyTrain as an excellent activity for remotely located clients, for mental health clients, and for clients who cannot leave their homes for reasons such as transportation limitations or a lack of childcare. It was also noted that KeyTrain works well for clients who need reengagement activities, additional participation hours, or bridging activities.

On the other hand, some ETWs expressed concern about clients fulfilling their hours when assigned to KeyTrain, since KeyTrain is unsupervised and self-paced. In addition to accessing KeyTrain from home, clients can access KeyTrain at the Red Bluff and Corning TCDSS offices, eScholar Academy, Corning Adult Education, or anywhere they have internet access and permission.

WTW clients test on the skills they learn in KeyTrain in a supplemental program called WorkKeys. Clients can earn bronze, silver, gold, and platinum certificates on WorkKeys depending on what levels of each KeyTrain component they test on successfully. TCDSS's Employment Services Job Placement Specialist has been working on communicating the value of the certificates to local employers so that employers will know what the certificates represent when clients apply for jobs and present their WorkKeys certificates. Employment services staff monitors clients who earn certificates on WorkKeys and who become employed in order to determine how effective KeyTrain and WorkKeys are in helping clients to obtain employment.

### Senior Center

Employment services staff discussed the WEX placements with the Senior Center. The City of Red Bluff funds the Senior Center, which provides recreation and meals for seniors. The Senior Center provides WEX for up to five WTW clients at one time to serve meals and clean up the dining area. ETWs can place WTW clients in this WEX program with as little as 24 hours notice when there is an opening available.

### JumpStart

Some ETWs stated that JTC's summer youth program, JumpStart, was an excellent training program to develop work skills. WTW clients ages 17 to 24 and other eligible low-income Tehama residents in the same age bracket were placed in minimum wage jobs for eight weeks during the summer of 2009. Although most employment in this program ended after eight weeks, some participants were offered permanent jobs. Clients told their ETWs that it was a great employment opportunity, and some clients who thought they would dislike the work actually enjoyed it.

### Recommendations:

- Submit the partnership strategy to the CalWORKs Best Practices website as a promising practice: <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/calworks/bestpractices.htm>
- Consider Temporary Emergency Contingency Funds (TANF) Emergency Contingency Funds (ECF), if this funding is reinstated, as a funding source to accommodate more clients and hire more staff for both of the WorkForce Crews.
- Look into adding an incentive for achieving the platinum level of WorkKeys certification, such as a gift card for necessities, to increase client participation.

## **Focus Area 2: Partnerships—On-Site**

### Observations:

All staff that participated in interviews, case file discussions, or the kick-off and close-out meetings stated that having co-located services at TCDSS is an excellent practice. Co-located services include mental health, substance abuse, domestic abuse, adult services, and CWS. Alternatives to Violence (ATV) is the name of the domestic abuse counseling service. All interviewed staff mentioned the mental health, substance abuse, and ATV counselors as being excellent resources and that coordinating activities is



easier with partners on-site because the ETWs can communicate easily with the counselors and help their clients to progress toward self-sufficiency more efficiently.

On-site partners provide advocacy and transportation for clients for various appointments, including appointments at TCDSS, doctor visits, court appearances, and more. Some ETWs mentioned they feel like their on-site partners are part of employment services. They also indicated that the ATV counselor is great for crisis management, as the ATV counselor is also a paralegal and can help clients with restraining orders, child custody orders, and other legal paperwork. ETWs shared that the ATV counselor has a good working relationship with Tehama County judges.

Some ETWs noted one challenge is that mental health reports are not coming in to employment services consistently from Tehama County Behavioral Health Services. TCDSS previously received these reports on a monthly basis, but at the time of the CPR, the reports had been coming in less frequently and regularly. When TCDSS receives the reports, they go to a program analyst to document the received date, and the analyst distributes the reports to ETWs for review.

TCDSS has a linkages program to coordinate CWS and WTW cases called Tehama Linkages Commitment (TLC). Some staff noted that it is easy and comfortable for CWS and employment services to communicate with one another at any time, but they also suggested having more structured and consistent coordination of the elements of client cases that both CWS and employment services share, such as activity placements and supportive services.

Some staff suggested employment services and CWS have formal meetings more often concerning client cases and meet as soon as possible when a client case becomes shared by CWS and employment services. They added that when employment services and CWS have separate client plans and workers from each service come together to coordinate the cases, the plans are very similar. However, there was some confusion expressed at the time of the CPR about who was responsible for arranging for supportive services: does CWS decide based on the needs of the child welfare case or should employment services take the lead? A TCDSS staff recommendation for strengthening TLC is that it would be ideal if the ETW, the CWS social worker, and the client(s) could always get together when the coordinated case plan is first being developed.

#### Recommendations:

- Submit the strategy for on-site mental health, substance abuse, and domestic abuse counselors to the CalWORKs Best Practices website as a promising practice.
- Arrange a meeting among TCDSS staff and Tehama County Behavioral Health Services management to discuss how to ensure that the delivery of mental health reports to Tehama County's CalWORKs program is consistent.

- Create a workgroup made up of employment services and CWS staff to develop a communication model and a matrix for determining supportive services.
- Add teambuilding activities to the monthly TLC meetings between employment services and CWS to improve rapport and enhance communication.

### **Focus Area 3: Sanctions**

#### **Observations:**

ETWs discussed the Intensive Services program, which was employment services' sanction outreach and home visit program facilitated by two ETWs who specialized in sanctions. Some ETWs stated that the loss of the Intensive Services for sanctions was reducing employment services' ability to re-engage non-participating clients and that it had been an important and successful program. Intensive Services often motivated clients to come into the office to meet with their ETWs to discuss curing their sanctions without having to conduct a home visit. This is because clients would sometimes agree to come in to meet with their ETWs as soon as they found out that an ETW was going to come to their home.

ETWs stated that when the Intensive Services specialists completed sanction home visits, they were often able to get compliance plans signed. It was also mentioned that home visits were time well spent because they are effective for determining what services clients need, so that clients can start participating again. Some staff estimated the effectiveness of Intensive Services ranged from 30 percent to 50 percent reengagement for sanctioned clients when the program was active prior to the time of the CPR.

ETWs stated that when clients go into non-compliance, the ETWs call clients multiple times and encourage them to come in to the TCDSS office to sign a compliance plan. Often, however, the clients cannot be reached by phone or the clients do not come into the office to sign their compliance plan. At some point, the ETWs move on and give their attention to participating clients. On the other hand, some ETWs also explained that when they are able to reach non-compliant clients by phone—as opposed to getting no answer or leaving messages—the ETWs are able to talk to the clients about priorities such as the clients' children, career goals, and income levels to try to encourage participation.

ETW supervisors handle calls with clients who have been on sanction for three months, give clients information regarding how the curing process works, and discuss what the clients need to do to cure their sanctions. After the supervisors discuss sanctions with the clients, the supervisors refer the cases back to ETWs to follow-up.

The sanction case files that ETWs discussed with the CPR team demonstrated the ETWs' in-depth familiarity with their cases. They recognize the issues that contribute to clients' non-compliance, e.g., lack of emotional maturity, stress, changes in routine, minor health problems (clients' own or family members'), dealing with partners' lack of support, or poor interpersonal skills.

## Recommendations:

- Reinstatement of Intensive Services to accelerate and increase client reengagements.
  - TCDSS has informed CDSS that the Intensive Services program was restarted in February 2010.
- Employment services may want to consider having all ETWs participate in Intensive Services.
  - Clients will know the worker who is calling as well as handling their compliance plan.
  - ETWs will have more familiarity with the clients.
  - Clients may be more willing to discuss the reasons they stopped participating and resolve any barriers so they can reengage quickly.
- Apply Intensive Services earlier in the non-compliance process, such as when clients go into non-compliance or when they first enter sanction, as clients may be more willing and able to reengage faster when they are in the earlier stages of the sanction process.
- Assign activities for clients to develop coping skills when ETWs recognize the recurrence of a problem that has been a barrier to clients' participation in the past.
- Consider having clients talk to their own ETWs, rather than supervisors, if all ETWs participate in Intensive Services.
  - Clients may be more willing to talk to an ETW they are familiar with regarding their cases.
  - ETWs can immediately schedule home visits, so the clients may feel more motivated to reengage.

## General Observations (Significant and Unique):

### Short-term changes: Assembly Bill (AB) X4 4, WTW Exemptions

During the time of the CPR, a few ETWs expressed some concern regarding how short term changes to CalWORKs would affect some clients' participation. They specified that the short-term changes might slow the efforts of many clients who were engaged and participating. All County Letter (ACL) 09-46 provides more information about short-term changes.

### Staff and Management

Staff that participated in interviews and case file discussions expressed their high regard for employment services. Comments from staff members received during the CPR include the following:

- We are very fortunate to have the staff we do.
- We have a really good team, and we work well together.
- People like coming to work, and they love their jobs.
- The supervisors and management select people who are a good fit and work well together.
- Employment services staff has very good communication.
- We have low turnover in this department.

- ETWs are excellent at their jobs.

All of the ETWs who were interviewed noted that they have great supervisors in employment services and that they can go to their supervisors to talk about their cases and their work in general. Some ETWs also noted that if they go to different supervisors for assistance, there is a strong consistency regarding the information provided.

Another strength of TCDSS's CalWORKs program noted by some staff is that the ETWs have a role in writing policies and procedures. Employment services has a Procedures Committee made up of lead ETWs, an analyst, supervisors, and a manager that meets for two hours every two weeks. Additionally, the supervisors have an open door for ETWs to discuss policies and procedures.

#### Employment Services and Eligibility Services

Some staff noted that having separate workers for eligibility services and employment services allows for more one-on-one time and two sources of support for each WTW client. However, some staff also expressed a concern that having separate workers for employment and eligibility sometimes leads to case files not being current because clients may share updated information (address, phone, members of household, employment status, income, etc.) with employment services or eligibility services but not with both services.

Some staff suggested that combined meetings and trainings between eligibility services and employment services would be helpful in structuring their shared cases to keep case files current for both services. Another suggestion was for employment services and eligibility services to share trainings on non-compliance and sanction, specifically the timelines associated with those processes.

#### Assessments

While some ETWs noted that the assessment process is effective, others stated that sometimes assessments are not completed thoroughly. They stated that if assessments are not thorough, WTW plans might not be as effective as they could be if the ETWs completed the assessments correctly. Some ETWs expressed a need for more training on correctly completing all five steps of assessments. It was also stated that the five-part assessment process can be cumbersome due to the amount of time clients need to complete their assignments for the assessment and issues with scheduling the clients for the assessment appointments.

Most ETWs noted that the assessment process fully involves the client, and they try to get the clients to "buy in" to their WTW plans because ETWs want clients to take ownership of their WTW plans.

#### Training

Staff described training at TCDSS as ranging from insufficient to excellent. Other comments about training included that UC Davis trainings are mostly helpful, and training is good but not standardized within TCDSS. Some staff described the bulk of

training as “chair side,” which is training performed one-on-one at staff’s work areas. They also mentioned that a new training manual was in development at the time of the CPR.

### CalWORKs Clients

- Some ETWs mentioned how clients often have a sense of urgency when they first apply for aid and that sense of urgency can dissipate as the clients wait to be connected with WTW services, which generally takes a month.
- Staff discussed the importance of having transportation aides for CalWORKs clients because the transportation aides are great for getting clients to activities. That support helps to keep clients on track and maintain the clients’ commitment.
- Employment services has had some success getting clients to use the incentive vouchers they receive for completing components of their WTW plans for necessities such as utility bills.

### JumpStart for Eligible Applicants

ETWs discussed the TCDSS JumpStart program, which is different from the summer youth program of the same name operated by JTC. The TCDSS JumpStart program was for eligible cash-aid applicants to learn about the WTW program, WTW requirements, and any possible exemptions prior to beginning WTW activities. Some ETWs stated that the JumpStart program was effective and that they missed it.

### Recommendations:

- Encourage clients who are exempted due to short-term changes to continue to participate voluntarily as long as funding for needed supportive services is available for exempt volunteer WTW clients.
- Submit the Procedures Committee strategy to the CalWORKs Best Practices website as a promising practice.
- Evaluate having refresher trainings with the employment services staff and implement the new training manual, as this could potentially help standardize the skills and knowledge among ETWs.
- Consider scheduling meetings between employment services and eligibility services, perhaps quarterly, to discuss issues that impact both services.
- Use meetings to discuss how to structure communication between the services regarding cases (e.g., face-to-face, mini-staffings, etc.) so that case file information remains current and correct for both employment and eligibility services.
- Provide training for eligibility services workers on noncompliance and sanctions, including the timelines for imposing and curing sanctions. This training can provide eligibility services with a vital resource, specifically at redetermination meetings with clients.
- Look into offering orientation to clients prior to granting cash aid on a voluntary basis in order to expedite clients’ entry into WTW activities. Engaging clients earlier may encourage better participation habits.

- Consider adding job club as a voluntary activity prior to granting cash aid if voluntary orientation is successful.
- Restore eligibility services' JumpStart program to help keep eligible clients connected with the CalWORKs program as they wait to begin WTW activities.
  - TCDSS has informed CDSS that the Jumpstart program was restarted in February 2010.
- Review the five parts of the assessment process to see which parts have the greatest importance for the creation of the WTW plan and which parts can be streamlined to make the assessment process more efficient.
- Consider implementing a mentoring program and having ETWs with the strongest assessment skills mentor those ETWs whose assessments could benefit from additional guidance.

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## **Client Focus Group**

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The focus group was conducted with nine clients who are in the WorkForce Crew program. The clients appeared comfortable and expressed themselves confidently to the peer review team. Those clients who did not respond when questions were directed at the whole group still responded by raising their hands when the CPR team asked the group how many agreed with a comment from other clients. Also, all of the clients responded readily when the CPR team asked for personal opinions from individual clients.

Observations:

### WorkForce Crew Program and JTC

All of the clients in the focus group provided positive comments about the WorkForce Crew subsidized public sector program and JTC, which is the employer of record for the WorkForce Crew program. They added that the WorkForce Crew program helps them to improve their self-esteem because they have a reason for getting up in the morning, and they have a job to go to. The clients also mentioned that having a regular routine is a positive experience for them.

The WorkForce Crew program helps clients to establish themselves in the community of Tehama County. The clients explained that the benefit of establishing themselves in the community is that they are more likely to have references and contacts to obtain unsubsidized employment when their six months in the WorkForce Crew is completed. Also, three participants in the WorkForce Crew client focus group noted that they had recently been hired for jobs because of the experience and skills they developed while on the WorkForce Crew. Two of the clients obtained jobs at Head Start (one for clerical work and the other for maintenance work) and the third obtained a job at an agency serving developmentally disabled adults.

All of the clients agreed that JTC is a great resource, and most noted they use it regularly because the staff is helpful, there are computers available for job searching, and there are many different kinds of job listings posted. They also agreed that

WorkForce Academy (job club), which is performed by JTC, is very helpful and the instructor is excellent.

### Supportive Services

Several clients stated that supportive services, primarily childcare and transportation, are good motivators to help them participate. They added that supportive services are crucial for participation, and that the most important supportive service is childcare. All of the clients stated that they receive supportive services for transportation, and most receive this supportive service in the form of mileage reimbursement. Some clients also noted that they were not aware of the availability of the childcare supportive service until after they had started participating in WTW.

### WTW Orientations

Several of the clients stated that WTW orientations could be improved and offered the following comments:

- There are too many people at each orientation, and the room is crowded, which makes the setting uncomfortable and harder for clients to pay attention.
- Spouses and partners may need to be separated during the WTW orientation because some couples are arguing during the orientation, which disrupts the class.
- There should be afternoon as well as morning sessions to make it easier for clients to attend due to clients' schedules and availability.
- Provide more notice before scheduling clients to an orientation to ensure that clients can arrange their personal schedules to be able to attend.
- There is too much information provided during orientation to try to remember all of it.

### Sanctions and WTW Participation

Some clients stated they had been in noncompliance or sanction in the past. They also stated that money was the most important motivator to come into compliance or cure a sanction because if their grant is cut, then they might not be able to pay their rent, and they could become homeless. One client described sanctions as a necessary evil because when clients lose some of their grant, they are more motivated to participate.

One client stated that past non-participation was due to having an activity that was unpleasant. Several clients agreed that being assigned to an activity that the clients can feel positively about is a motivator to participate. The only activity that some clients identified as not motivating them to participate was the Survival 101 class, which they felt was not relevant to assisting them with their goal of obtaining employment. TCDSS informed CDSS that the Survival 101 class is intended to teach clients life skills for areas that the clients are currently struggling with, such as parenting, health, employer expectations, goal setting, and dressing for success.

When clients were asked if there were any things that got in the way of them participating in their WTW plan, most of the clients responded by saying that lack of

childcare or transportation and substance abuse were the primary issues that prevented participation.

When clients were asked if they felt they received enough motivation from their ETWs to participate, all of the clients answered, “Yes.” Several clients agreed that it is their responsibility to make the CalWORKs program work for themselves; furthermore, all of the clients agreed that their ETWs could not have done more to help them participate than the services and assistance already provided. They added that the incentives they receive (vouchers of varying dollar amounts) have to be earned; the clients appreciate that they do not “just get them” without completing an activity related to their WTW plans.

### ETWs

Most of the clients stated that the ETWs are good and caring people. These clients added that the ETWs have a genuine interest in seeing the clients succeed and that the ETWs see their work as more than just a job. Once clients were connected with an ETW, the ETWs moved quickly to get the clients into their WTW activities.

Several of the clients asked that ETWs consider clients’ interests more to make the best matches for their WTW activities and WTW plans. They said that being matched with activities that are a better fit and connection for clients could increase the likelihood of the client participating and ultimately obtaining a job.

### Enhancing the WTW Program

All nine clients in the focus group were asked individually if they could change anything about the WTW program, what those changes would be. Responses include the following:

- Have the county provide a class to train ETWs to be more sensitive, not stereotype clients, and instead see clients as people.
- Encourage management to have more performance evaluations on ETWs because some ETWs are difficult to interact with and may benefit from additional training.
- WorkForce Crew needs to feel more like a job because sometimes it feels like being on a detention work crew. There is a lack of a sense of personal freedoms such as being able to make calls during breaks, and there are often no restrooms at the worksites.
- Provide more education choices for clients at Shasta College. Avoid placing clients in educational programs for jobs they really do not like.
  - TCDSS informed the CPR team that clients are allowed to choose the classes they want at Shasta College.
- It would be easier to attend orientations if they were held in smaller towns and in other outlying areas (e.g., Corning facility).
  - TCDSS informed the CPR team that orientations are held in Corning and transportation from outlying areas to TCDSS is provided as needed.
- Please keep the mileage reimbursement amount at the current level.



- Client comments also included, “Keep child care supportive services,” “The program is working great as-is,” and “I want a job and to get off aid.”

#### Recommendations:

- Consider holding workshops to ensure ETWs maintain positive interaction with clients, even during challenging times and when the subjects for the clients may be negative (e.g., non-compliance).
- Provide clients with more assurance and formal structure for giving feedback on their WTW plans.
  - ETWs may want to consistently emphasize that the clients have ownership of their WTW plans, and the clients’ ideas and comments are important to the assessment process and development of the WTW plan.
  - Concurrently, ETWs can remind the clients that the availability of activities and the likelihood of a plan leading to self-supporting employment need to be the main considerations in developing WTW plans.
- Enhance the WTW orientation by considering several ideas.
  - Have smaller groups and schedule orientation twice a week, once in the morning and once in the afternoon.
  - Consider the possibility of smaller orientation groups by having the ETWs perform their own orientations for clients who are assigned to them.
  - Restate key information from orientation for clients at their appraisal or assessment appointments in order to help ensure clients do not miss important information, such as the availability of childcare or transportation supportive services.
  - Make the WTW orientation environment more appealing and positive for clients when they attend WTW orientations, such as highlighting client success stories on the walls.
  - Consider scheduling spouses and partners’ WTW orientations separately so that they do not bring their personal issues into the orientation and distract other clients.
  - Consider setting ground rules if separating spouses and partners is not possible. When clients attending the WTW orientations become disruptive, they will be told to depart and attend another orientation.
- Encourage JTC, the subsidized public employment partner, to remind WorkForce Crew clients that making or receiving phone calls at the worksites can interfere with the clients’ work duties and the success of the WorkForce Crew program.
  - TCDSS informed the CPR team that family members and others can call JTC, and JTC can contact the WorkForce Crew supervisor if there is an emergency.
- Provide a portable restroom using the WorkForce Crew truck and trailer to transport it to work sites.

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## **Acknowledgements**

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