

**Senate Bill 1041 Implementation
CalWORKs County Review Session Summary**

Sierra

Visit Date: August 16, 2016

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
Welfare to Work Division
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Sierra County
CalWORKs County Review Session Summary

Introduction

Purpose of Field Monitoring Visit

The purpose of the County Review Session is to obtain information regarding the county's ongoing progress in implementing program changes enacted by Senate Bill (SB) 1041 (Chapter 47, Statutes of 2012) and, Assembly Bill (AB) 74 (Chapter 21, Statutes of 2013).

Scope of Field Monitoring Visit

Specifically, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) will determine the status of SB 1041 program and AB 74 implementation, including but not limited to:

- Welfare to Work (WTW) participation requirements;
- Post WTW 24-Month Time Clock (24-MTC);
- Training methods provided to staff in order to implement SB 1041 changes;
- Data outcomes related to SB 1041 program changes;
- Family Stabilization (FS) Program;
- Expanded Subsidized Employment (ESE); and
- Implementation of Online CalWORKs Appraisal Tool (OCAT).

Goals of Field Monitoring Visit

The CDSS' goals of the Review Session are to ensure that SB 1041 and AB 74 were implemented correctly by each County Welfare Department (CWD), to gather and share promising practices in amongst all CWDs throughout the state, and to determine whether systematic or program issues relating to California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) and the WTW program exist throughout the state. If any issues exist, they will be addressed by the CalWORKs Program Oversight Workgroup.

County Review Session General Information

A County Review Session was performed via conference call on Tuesday, August 16, 2016. The County Review Session team included four staff from the WTW Division, along with Sierra County's Assistant Director and the Integrated Case Worker (ICW) Supervisor. The County Review Session consisted of a kick-off discussion, administrator interview, county case worker interview, and close-out with county staff.

The ICW's conduct Eligibility and CalWORKs responsibilities within the Health and Human Service based agency. The first point of contact for an applicant seeking CalWORKs aid and supportive services will occur with an ICW. Sierra County Health and Human Services has separate offices for Eligibility and WTW, are co-located. Sierra County Health and Human Services is considered to be an "umbrella" based agency that provides an array of services including: CalFRESH assistance, MediCal, mental health, substance abuse and domestic violence counseling. Sierra County Health and Human Services Agency is located in Loyalton, CA which is roughly 40 miles from Truckee and Reno, NV.

Demographic Area and Economy

Based on the 2010 Census data, Sierra County population consist of 3,240 residents. Sierra County is the second-least populous county in California. Sierra County is a “frontier type” of county, which the county name is derived from the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Sierra County has limited options for transportation service and employment, which is why most residents who do have reliable transportation work in either Truckee or Reno, NV. In 2010, Sierra County experienced a spike in unemployment, peaking at approximately 12 percent, but since 2015, the county’s unemployment rate dropped back down to approximately eight percent. Two of the biggest employers within Sierra County reside in either public education or county services positions such as: a social services worker, a mental health or domestic violence counselor, etc.

Implementation Strategies

Sierra County’s implementation strategy for SB 1041 consisted of following CDSS guidelines through SB 1041 related All County Letters (ACLs) and All County Information Notices (ACINs). Sierra County provided training to all staff via unit and impromptu meetings as ACLs and ACINs were being released. Sierra County has indicated clients receive verbal information on utilizing the 24-MTC and will do so when determining the best course of action given their individual circumstances. County staff have developed a very good understanding of the 24-MTC and are very competent in providing explanations on a flow basis when needs of the family are identified.

Some of Sierra County’s Key Successes Included:

- Sierra County Health and Human Services is part of an umbrella agency to provide warm handoffs to other services such as: mental health, domestic abuse, substance abuse counseling, etc, thus allowing for smooth transitions between services
- Sierra County has an Alliance Workforce Development Center, which allows education partners such as Sierra College and Truckee Meadows Community College, to provide online courses to clients.
- Sierra County founded and established a “Red Team” to help prevent high risk clients from becoming sanctioned. This team is composed of a health nurse along with social workers to conduct home visits to clients who are in the non-compliance stage.
- Along with in home child care providers, Sierra County has also fostered a partnership with the Sierra Nevada Children’s Services to provide Stage 1 and Stage 2 child care services.
- Sierra County has a very low turnover rate with staff. Most staff has been with the county for six or more years.

Acknowledgments

The CDSS thanks the Sierra County Department of Health and Human Services Agency for working with CDSS in the scheduling of the teleconference session. The CDSS appreciates the open collaboration with CWD staff to ensure the continued success of the CalWORKs program.

Background and Data

Sierra at-a-glance

Total Caseload.....	24
(Source: CalWORKs Cash Grant Caseload Movement Report [CA 237 CW] Line Item 8a- August 2016)	
WTW Enrollees.....	14
(Source: CalWORKs WTW Monthly Activity Report [WTW 25/25A] Line Item 1- August 2016)	
Mandatory Participants (enrollees + sanctioned + non-compliance)	15
(Source: CalWORKs WTW Monthly Activity Report [WTW 25/25A] Line Item 1, 3A, and 31- August 2016)	
Reengagement Plan Received.....	Yes
Beginning Date of Reengagement	January 2013
Consortium System.....	C-IV

Data/Statistics Available at Time of Field Monitoring Visit:

- Clients who had more than 24 months left on their CalWORKs 48-month time limit as of January 1, 2013, that have had their comprehensive discussion totaled: **6**
- Clients who had less than or equal to 24 months left on their CalWORKs 48-month time limit as of January 1, 2013, that have had their comprehensive discussion totaled: **4**
- Sanctions that were cured as a result of SB 1041 totaled: **5**
- Former short-term young child exempt clients (Assembly Bill [AB] X4 4) that have been reengaged totaled: **2**
- WTW plans that have changed as a result of SB 1041 implementation totaled: **County did not keep statistics on this item.**
- Clients that have used the new once in a lifetime young child exemption totaled: **County did not keep statistics on this item.**

Summary of Documents provided by Sierra County during County Review Session:

- Sierra County Health and Human Services Organizational Chart: Documents display staff members within the Sierra County Office (Social Services, Behavioral Health, Public Health, and Administrative).
- AB 74 County Welfare FS Plan: The FS plan describes Sierra County FS plan. (Ex: How clients will be informed of the program, how clients will be able to request participation, how Sierra County will determine eligibility for clients, etc.)

County Administrator and Caseworker Dialogue

The CDSS County Review Team used updated county administrator and caseworker interview tools following those released in ACIN I-42-13 regarding SB 1041 implementation. Also, those released on OCAT, ACL 15-09 and ACL 15-43. These tools were provided to Sierra County in advance of the County Review Process Teleconference Call. The interview panel consisted of four CDSS staff and three Modoc County staff. The interviews were conducted by one team of four CDSS staff members, and one single CDSS staff member interviewing one Sierra County administrative worker and two caseworkers.

WTW 24-Month Time Clock Implementation and New WTW Participation Requirements

Transitioning Clients

[Less than and more than 24 months left on their CalWORKs 48-month time limit as of January 1, 2013]

- As of January 1, 2013, Sierra County had six clients with more than 24 months left on their CalWORKs 48-month time limit that had their comprehensive discussion. Additionally, the county had four clients with less than or equal to 24 months left on their CalWORKs 48-month time limit that had their comprehensive discussion.

Clients who failed to attend SB 1041 appointments

- Sierra County follows the non-compliance process as outlined in CalWORKs regulations. The county utilizes a 'red team' established to help prevent high risk clients from becoming sanctioned. This team is composed of a health nurse along with case workers to conduct home visits to work as a team to determine and resolve client issues or barriers in order to get them engaged.

New Young Child Exemption

- At the time of the session, Sierra County had no data to report on clients utilizing the New Young Child Exemption.

Post WTW 24-Month Time Clock

- Sierra County does not have a 20 percent target for WTW 24-MTC extensions at this time. During the time of the County Review Session, no clients in Sierra County had exhausted their WTW 24-MTC since implementation of SB 1041; therefore, no extensions have been granted.

Family Stabilization (FS)

- FS is designated to help clients and families who have barriers that prevent employment or participation in activities. Sierra County identifies clients who are in need of FS based on situations such as: homelessness, lack of safety due to domestic violence, substance abuse, and mental behavioral needs.

Sierra County indicated that only one FS plan has been created for a family in crisis and was used to prevent homelessness. The county's biggest challenge with FS is to keep the client engaged when substance abuse treatment is not successful.

Expanded Subsidized Employment

- At the time of the County Review Session, Sierra County stated they do not currently have an ESE program, due to Sierra County's small amount of businesses and geographic location.

Child Care Services

- Sierra County has fostered and maintained a partnership with the Sierra Nevada Children Services to assist clients with Stage 1 and Stage 2 child care. The Sierra Nevada Children Services is a private non-profit child care resource and referral agency that assists families in need and early childhood professionals. At the time of the County Review Session, the county indicated there has been no a significant increase or decreases for utilizing child care services over the past five years.

Clients are given a list of local subsidized child care providers from their caseworkers. After obtaining a list of child care providers, clients then have the opportunity to interview the providers and choose one that best fits their schedule and location within the county. Sierra County indicated only a few families use child care services as most clients do not have transportation or at least one parent will stay home with the children.

OCAT Implementation

- Implementation of OCAT began by interviewing new participants, while existing participants were added to OCAT at renewal or change of existing WTW Plans. OCAT has been used to see what strengths and barriers might exist to better develop a new WTW plan. The county plans to have OCAT fully implemented in January 2017.

At the time of the County Review Session, ICWs indicated they have experienced some challenges with OCAT. ICWs feel the OCAT questions take away from developing chemistry with the client and come off very stern for a first time interaction and therefore make it difficult to have personal relationships. Sierra County has suggested that OCAT questions can be revised to create a smoother approach with client interactions.

Conclusion

Successes

- Sierra County has maintained a very low turnover rate, as most staff members are well established in their current positions. Sierra County staffs have been employed at the county for over six years. When new staff is needed, most new hires comes from outside of the county. Due to the number of year's staff members have of experience, Sierra County Health and Human Services Agency has established longevity within the county.

- Sierra County established a “Red Team” to help with high risk clients by conducting home visits. This “Red Team” is composed of a health nurse (the health nurse is on hand for clients who need counseling services, mental health services, etc.) and caseworkers. When clients become non-compliant and have been flagged as high risk, this team will get together to attempt to engage the client. Red Team works collaboratively to determine and resolve client issues or barriers in order to get them back engaged.
- Sierra County continues to maintain relationships with educational partners such as Sierra College, Truckee Meadows Community College and Feather River College (located in Plumas County). Sierra College and Truckee Meadows Community College provide online courses to clients in Sierra County. Clients can take these online courses at the Alliance Workforce Development Center, which is located 17 minutes away from the Sierra County Health & Human Services Agency.
- Sierra County Health and Human Services is part of an umbrella agency which is associated with Sierra Safe and Child Welfare. These agencies provide mental health behavioral services, domestic violence counseling services and substance abuse services and are part of a “warm handoff” when ICWs recognize the needs of clients during the first interview.

Challenges

- Sierra County has been thriving despite the size and population of the county; however the challenges of being a small county are evident. The county has no public transit service, making transportation scarce without a vehicle. Affordable housing is limited and the CalWORKs Housing Support Program is not currently available in Sierra County. Given Sierra County’s geographic location, the county has limited employment opportunities, which are primarily government and local school districts.
- Sierra County has indicated there are limited resources for clients with Learning Disabilities. Other than the online courses, the nearest college, which is Feather River College, is in Plumas County, approximately an hour away from Sierra County.

Key Recommendations

- As of August 2016, Sierra County is still in the process of finalizing the OCAT. Sierra County needs to continue to complete implementation of the OCAT and take full advantage of the information and recommendations provided by this tool. Since employment opportunities are limited, Sierra County is encouraged to implement an ESE Program. The ESE Program can help create employment opportunities for CalWORKs clients by assisting employers with creating or expanding job openings, even for small businesses. The subsidies are an encouragement to employers to consider hiring CalWORKs clients.

- Sierra County should continue to promote carpooling within the county, since transportation is so scarce. Possibly creating a car pooling program or initiative can encourage other residents to get involved. Sierra County is highly encouraged to promote the FS program to clients. FS funds are a great option to provide outside or additional services in assisting clients with barriers such as, substance abuse. The CDSS will continue to provide support and technical assistance when possible to any reference materials that may further benefit the county in their SB 1041 implementation efforts.
- Reach out to similar and neighboring counties to facilitate promising practices and resources that may assistance Sierra County with program challenges unique to small counties.

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