

# KEEPING LINKED



## Convening 2024: Linkages Upstream

If you missed the April Convening "*Linkages Upstream: Applying the Prevention Framework*," we want you to know what a great success it was and provide a [link](#) to the PowerPoints and other material shared with attendees. One of the highlights of the convening was the video created

by Orange county called "[A Journey Through the Mutual Client Program](#)" and the opportunity to talk to Jim Boyd, Case Manager. He offered an inspirational talk about his work with the parent on the video, Celine. In addition, Mia Stizzo, CFPIC's Communications Specialist, compiled the brief videos sent to her by Linkages Coordinators answering the question, "[Why Linkages Matters](#)," and added videos she created during the Convening

that asked staff and attendees the same question. The result was a great montage that you can find by clicking on the above link.

The convening was a great success, with attendance of 197 individuals representing 38 Counties, Regional Training Academies, and CDSS staff.

From the Convening Evaluation we learned the following:

- 95% felt that the Convening content was useful and relevant
- 88% agreed that the Key Note, "Race Equity," was informative
- 86% agreed that they were able to network at the reception
- 92% felt that the general session on the Protective Factors was informative and relevant
- 76% felt that the Regional Peer Sharing time was useful
- 91% agreed that they would attend a future Convening

## What's in this Issue:

2024 Convening  
Riverside Success  
Finding "the Hook"  
WIIFM  
Linkages & Racial  
Justice  
CalPrevents  
Evaluation  
Committee Updates  
State Parks Pass  
Office Hours  
2024 Schedule





There were 14 workshops on a variety of topics and the majority of survey respondents found the information relevant and either "Very Useful" or "Useful". When you click here for the Agenda you will find a link for the Workshops that will take you to the PowerPoints and material.

On the last day the Regional Breakouts were facilitated by the Regional Training Academies. Questions were asked of the attendees to determine whether there were areas that the counties wanted to work on together. The following ideas were generated for each of the regions. We will be building our plan for 24/25 by leaning into the ideas and thoughts shared in the evaluation.

**Bay:**

Expand into Prevention, Emergency Response and how we can share information as we build those plans

Joint training and enhanced training systems

Share materials from other counties to provide guidance in program

**Northern / Mountain Valley:**

Need to engage more Community Partners

Linkages Merchandise

Train on how to create a joint case plan/template-behaviorally based

Protective Factors

**Central:**

Policy and implementation sharing

More info on mutual family tracking "SafeSite" Identification, Special Project Codes

Connect Child welfare / W2W

**Southern:**

A Webinar for Overview of Linkages, Staff Buy-in (what's in it for me)

Customizable end piece for each County's protocol.

Regional Meetings monthly/Bi-Monthly thru Coordinators

*"The convening was WONDERFUL! I learned so much and have a better understanding of the Linkages process and how it differs in counties. I have gathered great information to bring back to my team."*

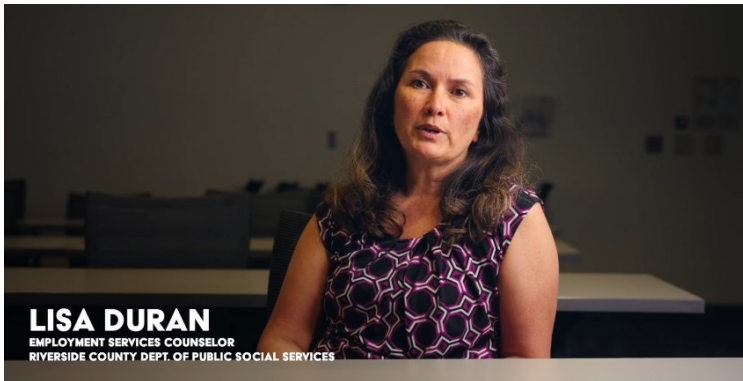
- Convening attendee



## Why Linkages? Riverside County's Success

Riverside county's leadership has stepped up to provide a [video](#) that shares the perspectives of a number of staff who reveal why Linkages matters to them. It is great to hear from the following professionals who discuss the importance to families of the Linkages services that they receive: *Lisa Duran, Employment Services (ES) Counselor; Annette Pinueles, ES Counselor; Jessica Hernandez, Social Services (SS) Practitioner; Vivian Chen, SS Practitioner.*

As Lisa says, "Linkages is in the word". It is about linking two programs, Children Services and CalWORKs/Welfare to Work, to provide an array of services to support the family. Annette tells us it's about "keeping families together" and Jessica and Vivian describe some of the services that can be provided such as: cash assistance, child care, gas for transportation, food, and MediCal. Vivian reminds us "that it is not a cookie cutter" approach, rather it starts with what the family needs, with services to remove barriers, stabilize the family so they can become self-sufficient and so that their children can remain in the home. Annette was able to assist a parent, who initially would not agree to treatment, to accept behavioral health treatment. And, as you might know, behavioral health treatment is quite often part of a Children's Services case plan, required for having the children remain in the home or returned to the home.



But I think that what Lisa says about the impact on staff in Linkages is very important. She describes a time when she was in the lobby and a customer heard her voice and came over to her. The parent was shining, radiant, smiling and wanted Lisa to know that her family is doing well and that her children are thriving. As Lisa says, Linkages has been wonderful for families but, also, the staff in Linkages feel wonderful about what they do and how they are able to help families. [Click Here](#) to view the Riverside video.

## What's in it for Me? Andrea Lewis, Linkages Project Associate

From my experience...

Great Leadership creates a diverse planning and implementation team by bringing different perspectives and ideas to the table and allowing time for big-picture strategic thinking. Getting full commitment from key people in both the CalWORKs and Child Welfare Divisions is essential. By creating joint Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles developed through encouraging open and free discussion, regardless of each person's position within the organization, will guide the work and create buy-in. Being a Linkages Champion at the Leadership level requires collaboration, commitment and adaptability.

Welfare to Work (WTW) Staff can participate in the planning and provide front-line experience and expertise regarding the processes and procedures that are currently in place. They understand the big picture and what they can do to facilitate the change leadership is focused on. WTW Staff will

gain additional Knowledge, Skills and Abilities, expand their networking capabilities which provides more promotional opportunities while doing something “different” with the same families they already serve. As a Linkages Champion, it is so rewarding to see a parent reunited with their children or a family kept intact, due to the case management, resources, and supports the Linkages Team provides.

CalWORKs Eligibility staff will begin to assist their families through Linkages Liaisons who can assist with gathering verifications or making customer contact as needed, freeing up their time to continue with their caseload processing while building Agency trust through the Linkages collaboration.

Child Welfare staff will have additional resources available to them that can “lighten the workload” as the Linkages Liaison will be in constant communication with the family as needed and documenting for the social worker reports. Journaling, adding case notes and providing the resources and referrals that families need without increasing the work of the Child Welfare worker.

Parents benefit from the advocacy, case management, resources and referrals provided by both CalWORKs and Child Welfare programs. The parent walks away stronger, motivated, self-reliant and self-sufficient. The parent can trust that the “System” can assist them as they navigate through and out of the child welfare system.

Families can remain intact, or children can be returned safely home sooner and with supports and services in place, recidivism can be reduced.

The Community benefits by having more self-sufficient families that can contribute to the holistic society that we are attempting to create.

It takes a Village.

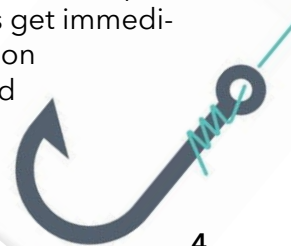


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## Finding “the Hook” for Linkages

**Danna Fabella, Linkages Project Director**

A few years ago, a former colleague and I held a webinar for Linkages Coordinators on the topic of getting buy-in at the upper levels (Executive Management) for their Linkages project. It was a topic of importance then as it is now. We have often heard from Coordinators the challenges of getting attention for Linkages, since it isn’t always as compelling as other, more pressing, issues in Human Services. Those other issues get immediate and high-level attention. So what do you do to get attention and focus on what is a “best practice” and provides the framework for a child welfare and CalWORKs collaboration from primary to tertiary intervention strategies? What we talked about in that webinar was “finding the hook.”



And what we meant is this: **Find out what is important to your Leadership and then “hook” Linkages into that work.** For example, in child welfare, all the counties were eligible to receive funding for Comprehensive Prevention Planning. It is an opportunity for Coordinators to find out how Linkages can fit into that framework. Counties have been looking at CalWORKs as an entry-way for many vulnerable families needing concrete supports. We know from the work at Chapin Hall, [which was shared with us at our 2022 Convening](#), that:

- **60%** of substantiated child protective services responses nationally involve **neglect only**.....and provision of economic and concrete supports is associated with decreased risk for both neglect and physical abuse
- **85%** of families investigated by child protective services **earn below 200% of the poverty level**

These facts make a good case for including CalWORKs/Linkages in a county’s Comprehensive Prevention Plan.

Many of the supports and services developed in CalWORKs to address barriers to employment are often the same supports and services needed to address child maltreatment. Linkages Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) strategies focus on identifying these families and providing services to address their needs. A few of these services are behavioral health and substance abuse services, Family Stabilization, Intensive Case Management, and Home Visiting.

For families already in the child welfare system (CWS), supports that include coordinated case planning between the CalWORKs and the CWS staff and leveraging resources can fit into the county’s required System Improvement Plan (SIP).

Tulare provides a good example of how Linkages fits into its Child Welfare System Improvement Plan (SIP), which focuses on improving performance on the Federal Measures □ Re-Entry to Foster Care and Recurrence of Maltreatment.

Tulare County’s SIP describes how the county’s Child Welfare Services and TulareWORKs created a joint policy and implemented a Linkages program that involves the development of the creation of a Coordinated Case Plan jointly developed by TulareWORKs and Child Welfare Services (CWS) staff to assist the family in overcoming barriers to self-sufficiency and eliminating safety and risk threats to the child. CWS and TulareWORKs are committed to strengthening the program and improving the number of families served. By increasing the number of families engaging in **Linkages** services, the county anticipates a positive impact on the **Recurrence of Maltreatment** and **Re-Entry to Foster Care rates**.

As you think about the “hook” for Linkages in your county - the questions for you are:

- What is the focus of my Leadership at this time?
- How might Linkages fit into that work?
- What information should I gather to make the case?

Use the CalPrevents Discussion Board to share ideas with one another about how you might “hook” Linkages into your agency’s priorities.



## Linkages & Racial Justice



How wonderful to have celebrated Juneteenth as a Federal Holiday commemorating the ending of slavery in the United States; some call it “America’s second independence Day.” Following that holiday, we celebrated the 4<sup>th</sup> of July commemorating freedom and independence for us as a country. That being said, it is important to pause and reflect on the countless people of color who have been impacted by governmental policies that have resulted in an “abundance of harm,” and that the freedom and protections that are written in the Declaration of Independence that have not been experienced by all.

Child Protective Services has often been understood as contributing to these inequities by creating mass surveillance of families of color via mandated reporting laws that may result in harm. The Child Welfare System’s stated goal is to protect children, but data show that there are also negative impacts on children in the system. Many believe that the disproportionate representation and disparate outcomes for children of color in the Child Welfare System are due to internal and external systemic racism. And we know that poverty and economic hardship put families at increased risk of Child Welfare involvement. Due to systemic inequities, families of color are more likely to experience economic hardship, and this may contribute to involvement in Child Welfare.

As a result of these factors, some critics have proposed the abolition of the Child Welfare system, and others have discussed a more conservative approach through amending laws that have exacerbated the inequitable impact on families of color.

One avenue for addressing these issues is the move towards prevention and early intervention and “community supporting” vs “mandated reporting.” This trend is understood by many as an important step towards racial justice and one that promises increased freedom and independence for those negatively impacted by governmental policies.



We believe that Linkages offers a complementary avenue to address inequities in the system because it embodies a racial equity approach to empowering disadvantaged families by challenging power structures and creating changes in social services policies and practice. Linkages is about collaboration between CalWORKs and Child Welfare with the goal of providing economic and concrete supports to families in, or at risk of, being involved in Child Welfare, which in turn should lead to increased child and family well-being.

In our society, inequities in access to income, health care, and education result in disparate outcomes for families of color. While we cannot directly fix those underlying issues, we can advocate and vote for politicians that care. We can also focus on what is directly under our control, including how we treat each of the families that we serve--with care and attention, bringing services, supports and opportunities to help them thrive. Linkages is about the collaborative practice that brings the best of both programs to promote self-sufficiency and well-being for safe and nurturing families and is one way that we, as professionals can help bring more equity to those whom we serve.

In honor of Juneteenth, we are grateful to Linkages teams for the work you do every day to help individual families and build systems that address historic inequities!

# CalPrevents

On May 9, 2024 the CFPIC Linkages Team introduced the Linkages Space on CalPrevents. This space offers Peer Sharing opportunities and Members from the Linkages collaborative can engage in interactive discussions through the "Conversation Board." Invitations to the site and reminders have been distributed via email. In order for this site to be effective and for members to hear from one another it is important to verify your notification settings so that you can be alerted to conversations you might want to join.

If you rather not be notified then we suggest you visit weekly for updates and conversations.

To know more about CalPrevents Linkages Space click here and you will go to the [Webinar PowerPoint](#) we provided in May.

If you have not received an invitation but would like to join, kindly contact [Andrea.Lewis@cfpic.org](mailto:Andrea.Lewis@cfpic.org) for support.



## CFPIC Evaluation: Process Highlights

We are excited to share an update on the Linkages 2.0 Process & Outcomes evaluation!

Many county representatives attended an evaluation workshop at the April 2024 Linkages Convening where [RDA Consulting, SPC \(RDA\)](#) presented on key themes from the qualitative data collected in 2023. This qualitative data included interviews and focus groups with leadership and frontline staff from the three counties participating in the evaluation.

Building upon the key themes shared in RDA's presentation, workshop participants asked for strategies and solutions from other counties for how to improve their Linkages implementation. Counties shared insight into how reporting from current data systems could be customized to better identify mutually involved families, how they leverage program resources and funding across agencies, and how they address staffing and case-load challenges.

For those that were not able to attend the workshop, you can find the [full presentation and handouts here](#). In this edition of Keeping Linked, we're also including a brief recap of some of the key themes from the process evaluation:

### What is at the core of Linkages programming?

Across counties, workers saw similar purpose and goals in serving mutually enrolled clients and **differentially addressing families' context** through secondary and tertiary prevention. Overall, counties described the **importance of addressing the underlying causes of system involvement** and **to promote family wellbeing and togetherness**. Through the interviews and focus groups, counties highlighted how coordinated case

planning is essential to meeting these key aims by reducing barriers for accessing services, resolving challenges for workers and mutually involved families, and leveraging resources from both CalWORKs and Child Welfare.

### **What factors that shape implementation and contribute to success or challenges?**

**Structures and processes that are integrated and embedded** across agency workflows, rather than ad-hoc or up to individual workers to remember, are essential when implementing coordinated case planning for mutually involved families.

#### **Supportive Factors:**

CENTRALIZED DATA ACCESS TO IDENTIFY MUTUAL CLIENTS

DESIGNATED ROLES FOR CLIENT IDENTIFICATION

DESIGNATED ROLES FOR COORDINATED CASE PLANNING

CO-LOCATION

VENUES FOR COORDINATED CASE PLANNING

#### **Limiting Factors:**

HIGH CASELOADS & LIMITED STAFF CAPACITY

HIGH STAFF TURNOVER

LIMITED STAFF AWARENESS OF LINKAGES, RESULTING IN FEWER REFERRALS OR LESS FREQUENT COORDINATED CASE PLANNING

LACK OF INTEGRATED AND SYNCHRONIZED DATA SYSTEMS

STRICT CALWORKS ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

LIMITED CHILD WELFARE FUNDING AND RESOURCES

INCONSISTENT PRIORITIZATION OF LINKAGES BY LEADERSHIP

### **What are key pillars of support?**

There are a few “pillars” that underly all aspects of implementation and holistically support the key factors highlighted above as well as helping address common challenges. These pillars include:

- **Leadership prioritization:** Leadership investment and dedication to the Linkages model promotes implementation and integration of the program.
- **Widespread communication and awareness:** Intentional and periodic training and information-sharing efforts that promote awareness about Linkages across leadership and staff increases program uptake for workers and families.
- **Addressing turnover challenges:** Focusing on staff retention efforts and robust training will lower common challenges that arise.

### **What are preliminary impacts that counties have identified for agency workers?**

Participants in the process evaluation focus groups and interviews shared a few areas where they see immediate positive impacts through Linkages coordinated case planning.





## What are preliminary impacts that counties have identified for mutually involved families?

Ultimately, the purpose of integrating and embedding processes and structures that improve implementation is to promote family well-being and togetherness.

### Linkages appears to be meeting family needs and lowering barriers by...

- **Addressing the underlying causes of a child welfare referral:** By connecting families to basic needs resources from both agencies, coordinated case planning can address *underlying barriers and prevent further involvement in the Child Welfare System*.
- **Supporting system navigation & streamlining referrals:** Workers provide a “one stop shop” to support families with system navigation.
- **Avoiding duplicative program requirements:** Coordinated case planning helps reduce the burdens that families experience that result from being involved with both agencies.

## Linkages Committee Updates

### TAY

We now have 37 responses to our Linkages and Transition Age Youth [survey](#) but it is not too late if you would like to share what happens in your county to support young adults after they transition out of extended foster care! We are learning that practices vary widely from county to county and there is a clear interest in learning more about best practices happening across the state to help young adults access services after they leave care.

As a next step, we are reaching out to counties to identify county teams who are interested in sharing their best practices in a statewide webinar. Are you interested in sharing? Please reach out to Melissa Connelly ([melissa.connelly@cfpic.org](mailto:melissa.connelly@cfpic.org)) or Andrea Lewis ([andrea.lewis@cfpic.org](mailto:andrea.lewis@cfpic.org))!

### PEI

CFPIC and the Linkages Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) Subcommittee have continued compiling and analyzing screening tools offered across the nation that can inform a strength and needs screening tool to be utilized in California. Many families seeking public benefits present with varying needs beyond what self-sufficiency programs are designed to provide. Therefore, the Subcommittee is currently tasked with identifying user-friendly tools that may be feasible and impactful to implement throughout self-sufficiency offices in California to better connect families seamlessly with supports in their community. CFPIC and the Subcommittee are currently identifying which tools may be applicable to the varying needs throughout California and have decided to focus efforts on the specific domains that would be necessary for identifying family strengths, interests, and identified needs. The team envisions a tool that is simple, culturally responsive, self-completed, and that provides concrete action steps for the family. The Subcommittee will be discussing and prioritizing the varying domains in their next meeting and continuing discussions of implementation strategies that allow for ease in utilization, while taking into consideration the complexity of local service availability and system integration.

We need your feedback! Below you can access the list of tools and share any feedback you may have on ensuring we consider tools that meet California’s unique needs and vision for prevention!

[Screening Tool Analysis](#)

[Screening Tool Feedback Form](#)

## FAST-LC

The FAST-LC (Families are Stronger Together Learning Collaborative) has been an amazing opportunity to come together with teams from 8 states and 2 Tribes to share ideas and learn from each other about the important role TANF can play in preventing child maltreatment. Our California team has made some exciting strides that will inform future Linkages efforts.

Last fall, we set out to consult with Tribes to better understand how a Linkages approach might work with Tribal TANF. Over the last 9 months, we have engaged with Tribal TANF administrators, Native Sisters Circle (a service provider working with Tribal families), and the Office of Tribal Affairs. In the coming months we hope to move forward in conversation with several Tribes to share information about Linkages and hear their thoughts about the ways Linkages could be helpful to them. We'd also love to hear from you about how you work with Tribes in your county to support Tribal families - we will be adding this topic to TA agendas so we can learn more about the work you are doing in this area.

We also identified screening tools as a focus area for the FAST-LC and we will continue to explore key domains for screening and how we can link families to prevention services to avoid child welfare involvement. The Linkages PEI Subcommittee will carry this work forward after the FAST LC ends.

Are you interested in learning more or contributing to sustaining the work we started with the FAST-LC? Reach out to Melissa Connelly ([melissa.connelly@CFPIC.org](mailto:melissa.connelly@CFPIC.org)) and get involved!

## Free Access to State Parks and Beaches for CalWORKs Recipients

Recipients of California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) benefits are eligible for free access to state parks and beaches through the Golden Bear Pass program. [Sign up for a 2024 pass](#). Tribal TANF recipients may apply for a pass through their local Tribal TANF administrator.

## Open Office Hours for TA

Do you have questions related to Linkages? Are you working on your 2024 Work Plan? Would you like to connect with your peers? Would you like to provide an update related to your Linkages Collaboration in your County?

The CFPIC Linkages Team would love to hear from you!! We have Open Office Hours created for your convenience! [Click here](#) to schedule your TA/ Guidance Session now.



## Let's Get Together: Upcoming Events

We are building our schedule of webinars and peer sharing events for fiscal year 24/25 and we need your input!

If you have not already, please go to the [LINKAGES Survey](#) to share your thoughts. We are hoping to prioritize among the topics you identified in your regional breakouts at the convening to provide quarterly events that answer your questions and offer peer sharing opportunities. We'll also be bringing you a webinar on AB135 implementation later this year.

Please check out the survey and share your opinion - the deadline to complete the survey is **July 12th, 2024.**

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If you have any suggestions or contributions for the next newsletter, let us know!



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