

# KEEPING LINKED



## Transitions

**Danna Fabella, Linkages Program Director**

Most of you have probably seen the Recruitment Flyer for the Linkages Program Director and, if not, you can view it [here](#). Yes, that is my position and yes, it will mean new leadership for the CalWORKs (TANF) & Child Welfare collaborative. However, it doesn't mean that I am totally leaving CFPIC and the Linkages work. I plan to scale back my time but will continue to support both CFPIC and Linkages.

I began my Linkages journey with CFPIC in 2007, when I left county employment to join the recently formed Child & Family Policy Institute of California (CFPIC) to head up a federal grant for a TANF & Child Welfare demonstration pilot, which CDSS and CFPIC had applied for and received. California, always slightly ahead of the curve, had begun such a project in 2000, under a non-profit called the California Center for Research on Women and Families; this project had been transferred to CFPIC in 2005. With support from the federal grant, and then from CDSS and CWDA, we moved forward with a strategy to engage counties in the development of innovative approaches in coordinating the efforts of CalWORKs and



Danna, facilitating a Linkages meeting in 2009

Child Welfare staff when serving mutual clients. Over the years, we successfully assisted almost thirty counties in developing coordinated case planning strategies that continued in many counties even after the end of statewide funding and support in 2016.

## What's in this Issue:

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- AB 135
- Protective Factors
- New County Orientation
- Upcoming Events



More recently, CFPIC was funded to implement the new Linkages 2.0 Program, which adopts the Prevention Framework of California's Office of Child Abuse Prevention (OCAP) by focusing on Primary Prevention, Secondary Prevention (Early Intervention) and Tertiary Prevention (Intervention) strategies to support families in the prevention of child maltreatment. I was fortunate to renew my Linkages leadership role in becoming the Linkages Program Director role for this newly enhanced Linkages Program.

My public Child Welfare career, from Child Welfare worker to supervisor to program manager to director, had given me an appreciation for prevention work and the role that CalWORKs (TANF) plays in that framework, and this awareness has been enhanced by my years of working at CFPIC. I am certain that Linkages 2.0 has a strong foundation, and I am confident that the new Program Director will continue to enhance and strengthen strategies in all areas of prevention and intervention.

The Linkages leadership transition will begin early in 2025, as we hire a new Director. I will remain with CFPIC to support that transition and provide whatever guidance and coaching I can to ensure that individual's success and the continued success of the Linkages Program.

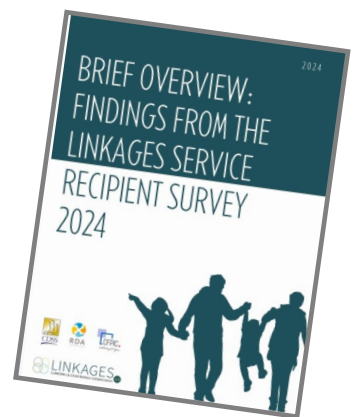
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## Subcommittee Updates

### Evaluation

#### **Linkages Service Recipient Survey: Coordinated Support Is Strengthening Families**

As part of the Linkages Evaluation currently underway, the Linkages Service Recipient Survey was deployed to families in 3 Linkages counties in 2024. The survey captured the voices of families, offering a closer look at both the successes and opportunities for growth and the findings revealed important insights into the impact of coordinated case planning.



#### **Key Findings: Positive Outcomes and Continued Needs**

The survey results highlight the diversity of families served, with many reporting multiple needs, such as financial support, food, housing, and behavioral health services, when they first engaged with Linkages. Most families found their workers to be respectful, supportive, and easily accessible, contributing to positive overall experiences. Importantly, nearly all respondents reported improvements in their parenting skills and family stability, with many feeling that their needs were met. However, some families noted challenges in reaching workers and accessing certain services, particularly around housing and employment.

#### **What's Working Well: Supportive Relationships and Resources**

A major strength of the Linkages program is the strong connection families develop with their CW and CWS workers. Survey participants appreciated the support they received in meeting CalWORKs and Child Welfare case plan requirements. The program has helped families access critical resources for employment, behavioral health, and basic needs, all of which were highly

valued. Many participants also noted improvements in their protective factors, such as better parenting skills, although some still face challenges in coping skills and building strong support networks.

### **Looking Ahead: Strengthening Linkages for Even Greater Impact**

While the feedback is overwhelmingly positive, there are clear opportunities for improvement. Recommendations from the survey include creating more consistent channels for feedback from families, sharing best practices among workers, and increasing awareness of available resources. Enhancing support for building coping skills and strengthening social networks can help further empower families to thrive.

### **Conclusion: A Strong Foundation for Continued Growth**

Linkages continues to be a vital tool in connecting families to services and resources, ensuring a holistic, coordinated approach to meeting their needs. Families are benefiting from improved outcomes in areas like employment and behavioral health, yet challenges like housing instability persist. By addressing these gaps and continuing to build on the strengths of coordinated case planning, Linkages has the potential to further transform the lives of California's most vulnerable families, creating lasting positive change for generations to come.

## **Oversight**

The Oversight Committee was developed to provide guidance and perspectives from the State and County Child Welfare and CalWORKs leadership level. Our goal this year is to expand the committee to include Lived experience from families who have been impacted by those two programs, as well as, inclusion of leadership from all the regions in California. Currently the committee is comprised of representatives from the Bay, Northern/Mt Valley and Southern regions, along with our State partners:

- Bay - *Jennifer Valencia, San Mateo,*
- N/Mt V - *Mayle Johnson and Margo Ilonummi, Calaveras*
- Southern - *Sandra Bowen and Michele Wohl, Riverside; Loan English, Orange*
- CDSS - *Cheryl Treadwell, Damien Ladd, Lisa Witchey*

We are asking our Linkages Coordinators to help us by recommending a parent with Lived Experience and by encouraging your leadership (especially in the Central Region) to join the Linkages Oversight Committee. For lived experience we can offer a stipend for attending the Bi-Monthly meetings and when participating on any planning meetings their time allows.

## PEI



### **Introducing Nkechi Kanu: Graduate Student Joining CFPIC and the PEI Committee for a Capstone Project**

We are excited to welcome Nkechi Kanu, a graduate student from the Goldman School of Public Policy at UC Berkeley, who will be joining the CFPIC team from January to May 2025. Nkechi will be working on her Capstone Project, titled *Comprehensive Research and Ideation for a Screening Tool Linking CalWORKs Applicants to Community-based Family Strengthening Services*.

Nkechi's project aligns with the work of the PEI Committee as we search for an innovative screening tool to support families seeking CalWORKs assistance. PEI Committee members in several counties (LA, Placer, Calaveras) have started gathering information about how to best screen families and connect them to services. Nkechi's research will build on that effort with a focus on designing a tool that screens CalWORKs applicants for needs and connects them to family-strengthening services. Nkechi will also explore a self-service option for families to access resources independently.

The project will involve assessing how families will use the tool at the county level, identifying the services that the tool can connect them to, and reviewing existing technology solutions that may be suitable for streamlining the process. Additionally, Nkechi will explore gaps in current tools and propose innovative technological ideas to meet the diverse needs of families, including language accessibility and ease of use.

We look forward to the insights and contributions Nkechi will bring to CFPIC, and we are confident that her work will help make prevention services more accessible to families across California.

## TAY

We are compiling findings from our previous key informant interviews, focus group and review of the literature as we prepare for a **webinar in May 2025**, where we will share the innovative work being done across the state and hear directly from young people about their experiences and challenges as they transition to adult-serving systems.

We are also re-engaging with our **TAY Workgroup** to help guide this process and would love for you to join! If you have ideas, best practices, or insights to contribute, please reach out to **Melissa Connelly** at [melissa.connelly@cfpic.org](mailto:melissa.connelly@cfpic.org). We look forward to collaborating with you as we continue this important work.

Thank you for your ongoing support as we build toward a stronger, more supportive system for transition-aged youth!

## **Linkages 2.0: Expanding to Include Tribal Strategies**

The Linkages 2.0 Collaborative is taking steps to include a specific Tribal Linkages strategy that will build partnerships between Tribes, Tribal TANF, and Child Welfare agencies. CFPIC is forming a working group with Tribal communities, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), County Child Welfare agencies, and Tribal TANF programs to bring the Linkages approach to families receiving Tribal TANF.

The involvement of Native American children in foster care has long-lasting negative effects on children, families, and Tribes. The Tribal Linkages initiative seeks to mitigate these challenges so that more children can remain with their Tribes, families, and communities.

Native American and Alaskan Native populations experience higher rates of poverty than other racial groups. According to 2021 Census data, nearly 30% of Native American and Alaskan Native families live in poverty (compared to 15.3% across all racial and ethnic groups). Poverty is a major risk factor for child maltreatment, and the additional stressors it creates—such as material hardship, parenting challenges, and adverse environmental conditions—further increase the risk of involvement in the child welfare system.

In California, Native American children are disproportionately represented in foster care. In 2023, they were 4.5 times more likely to experience foster care placement compared to white children. This disproportionality is influenced by poverty, but also by historical and systemic biases. Coordinating supports, like those available through Tribal TANF, can help address these inequities and reduce the likelihood of foster care entry.

Tribal Linkages holds the potential to improve outcomes for Native American children by strengthening coordination across systems and reducing disproportionate child welfare involvement.

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### **Success Story: Nevada County**

We are pleased to share the following article submitted by Jennifer Loper, Linkages Coordinator, CalWORKs, Nevada County. One of the main topics that the Linkages Regional meetings focused on was worker and leadership “buy-in” and many attendees expressed the opinion that it is more than just training. To that end, Nevada county Social Services is seeking to change the culture of their workforce by incorporating the H.E.A.R.T.S. values into all aspects of their work. We think this type of approach supports Linkages “buy-in” - which incorporates all the HEART values.



## Social Services H.E.A.R.T.S! Values:

Heart Centered | Excellence | Adaptability | Responsibility | Teamwork | Service | Fun!

## Cultivating a Values-Based Culture: From Hiring to Celebrating Success

### Hiring and Onboarding:

Our organization has embarked on a journey to improve our culture and work life satisfaction by mindfully defining our values and using those to direct us in every aspect of our operations. This begins with the hiring and onboarding process. Our interview questions don't just center around skills-based inquiries, but also highlight our culture with values-based inquiries. Our training team incorporates a values discussion into the onboarding process and our leadership team joins the onboarding process to welcome and engage new staff members, modeling the type of culture we foster every day. Our director also meets with each new staff member for a one-on-one meeting within their first couple of weeks. This allows our new hires to begin building relationships at all levels. Our staff also created a recruitment video showcasing our values and culture which has drawn quality applicants and positive feedback.



### Incorporating Values in Daily Operations:

Our values are also a focal point in our daily supervision and performance evaluations, linking accomplishments and areas for growth to our core values, which, in turns, ensures that our performance evaluations are measurable and equitable. Utilizing our core values as a guide, we can ensure that all challenging discussions are conducted with curiosity and grace, allowing for each party to have a say. It also provides tangible goals to be worked on for future evaluations. We recognize exceptional service delivery by aligning them with our goals and ensuring that everyone is acknowledged and appreciated.

### Decision Making:

When faced with policy development or procedural changes, we ensure to view them through the lens of our values. We use our values to ensure that critical policy decisions are made by being adaptable and focused on providing excellent service and support for the staff through rapid changes.

### Celebrating Successes:

We have implemented various initiatives to celebrate successes aligned with our values, such as "Wednesday Wonders" emails, values spotlights in division newsletters and meetings, annual department gatherings, and gratitude sharing sessions. These platforms highlight and recognize instances where staff members have demonstrated our core values through their actions.

## Celebrating Results:

Our shift towards a values-based culture has yielded positive outcomes, including a decrease in our vacancy rate from 7% to 2% over the past few years. Through strategic management practices and data-driven decision-making, we have been able to add 7 new full-time equivalent positions and several new temp and limited term positions. The recruitment video showcasing our culture and values has received overwhelming positive feedback, solidifying the impact of our values-driven approach. Here is a peek at the [video!](#)



## Morale Boost and Improved Team Dynamics:

As a result of our values-driven initiatives, morale among our teams has experienced a significant uplift. Leadership teams are more effective, ideas are welcomed, and communication has become more open and constructive. In the Eligibility and Employment Team, meetings and team chats are filled with gratitude and support, fostering a culture of understanding and collaboration.

**In conclusion, our focus on embedding values throughout our organization has not only enhanced our recruitment and onboarding processes but has also led to improved team dynamics, increased employee morale, and a more cohesive organizational culture. By aligning our actions with our core values, we continue to drive positive change and achieve meaningful outcomes.**

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## AB135 Webinar: Family Reunification Cash Aid

On October 22, 2024, the CFPIC Linkages team and CDSS co-hosted the Statewide AB 135 Webinar in preparation for the January 1, 2025, launch of CalWORKs Family Reunification Cash Aid. We were excited to have 433 participants, including 12 non-Linkages counties in the session.

The webinar covered the history of Linkages and discussed policy changes related to AB 429 and AB 135. Presentations from CalWORKs, Welfare to Work, and Child Welfare CDSS representatives provided an overview of ACL 23-94. Key topics included eligibility criteria, a breakdown of the Temporary Absence Period, "Good Cause" clarifications, and comparisons between the CWS Case Plan and the WTW 2. We also reviewed how to create or update the CWS Case Plan using CMS/CWS screens and the CWFR Recommendation. Best practices were shared,

Implementing the CalWORKs Family Reunification (AB135) Policy Change

Presented by CDSS & CFPIC  
October 22, 2024



and while some questions were answered live, others were added to a retro board. CDSS will use this to develop an FAQ document, which will be released before the January 2025 implementation.

Click [HERE](#) to get the Recording, click [HERE](#) to go to the CFPIC Linkages Website for all of the materials and PPT related to the webinar.

We appreciated those who took the time to share feedback after the event. We got some great reviews and constructive feedback that we will use to plan future events:

- **98.36%** of respondents found the webinar helpful and informative.
- **93.34%** felt the information met their needs for implementing CWFR.
- **95.08%** of participants felt confident in applying what they learned to support their county's implementation.

Participants also shared what they plan to explore with their teams:

- The Temporary Absence Period
- CalWORKs eligibility within Linkages communication and collaboration
- Discussing Linkages collaboration with management
- The differences between the Child Welfare Case Plan and WTW 2

The most helpful parts of the webinar included:

- The Q&A sessions and retro board
- Clarifications on aid differences for parents vs. foster care payments
- Instructions on completing fields in the CWS/CMS system
- Real-life examples

For future webinars, participants suggested:

- More time for processing and asking questions
- Smaller, more focused sessions
- Reality-based scenarios to aid in learning transfer
- A follow-up session after the January 2025 implementation

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## 2024 Winter Regional Meetings

### CFPIC Hosted Four Regional Peer Sharing Meetings in December 2024

In December 2024, CFPIC hosted four virtual regional meetings—Northern/Mountain Valley, Central, Bay Area, and Southern—bringing together Linkages counties for peer sharing and collaborative discussions. Each region had its own planning committee to help shape the agenda. We were thrilled to see 40 counties participate, with a total of 184 attendees, resulting in robust conversations and idea sharing. Materials including PowerPoints and shared resources are available on the Linkages website and CalPrevents.



## Northern/Mountain Valley Region - December 3rd: Building Leadership and Staff Buy-In

The Northern/Mountain Valley Regional meeting focused on building leadership champions and creating staff buy-in, emphasizing more than just training and co-creating case plans. We appreciate the contributions of planning committee members: *Coleen Ridlon, Vanesa Cardenas, Nelly Ramos, Timothy Nugent, Maria flores, Luz Flores, Lisa Heredia, Lisa Matheson, Laura Monoz, Denise Ochoa, Aranza Ambriz, Jennifer Loper, Bertha Perez and Dawn Carinim -RTA, Presentations included:*



- **Nevada:** Shared their Release of Information (ROI) Universal form and discussed how they build champions through training and other processes.
- **Humboldt:** Explained how they gained staff buy-in and collaborated with CWS and CW/WTW to create the WTW 2 plan using the CWS case plan.
- **Lake:** Discussed their coordinated case planning structure, shared their Linkages Referral Eligibility form, and outlined the process for connecting families with resources.

## Southern Region - December 4th: Strategies for Developing Linkages Champions

The Southern Regional meeting focused on developing Linkages champions, leadership, staff training, and leveraging resources. Special thanks to the planning committee members: *Gloria Rojas-Jakini, Rafaela Vargas, Ariadna Cervantes-Lopez, Erika Pena, Felix Minjarez, Colette Crawford, Lisa Duran, Maithanh Nguyen, Jacqueline Jimenez and Jenna Nevitt, RTA.* Notable presentations included:

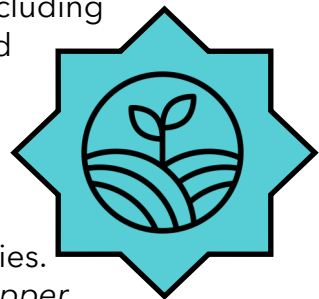
- **Orange and Imperial Counties:** Shared insights into their staff training efforts.
- **Riverside:** Felix Minjarez discussed how they leverage resources, including research, IT tools (SharePoint), and creating a resource hub for staff and communities.

## Central Region - December 5th: Linkages & Prevention

The Central Regional meeting focused on Linkages and prevention strategies. Thanks to the planning committee members for their hard work: *Brandi Hopper, Lisa Diego, Alison Hendrix, Christopher Aguirre, Cynthia Mjrcio, Valerie Rangle, Melissa Thompson, Mary Switalski, Tiffany Simmer, Jose Lozano, William Forige, Cristal Amigon, Leann Eddy, Julie Kadis, Chris Martinez, Annette Morris and Donna Lutz, RTA.*

Presentations highlighted:

- **Calaveras and Kern:** Shared their preventative work and "out-of-the-box" thinking. Calaveras' guiding principle, "If we cannot remove, then what DO we do?", inspired resourcefulness. Kern emphasized their "one team, no seam" approach, using a community response guide to assist referrals.



## Bay Area Region - December 10th: Coordinated Case Planning & Staff Buy-In

The Bay Area Regional meeting focused on coordinated case planning and training for staff buy-in. Special thanks to the planning committee members: *Devon Shaw, Victor Ly, Kelly Sullivan, and Gumaro Garay-RTA.*



Key highlights included:

- **Santa Clara:** Discussed their offsite work plan meeting to build camaraderie and complete work plan items.
- **Contra Costa:** Shared their bi-monthly meetings and preparation for AB 135.
- **Marin and San Francisco:** Shared how they use monthly reports to identify mutual families and their system access for better coordination

### Feedback and Future Planning

We received great feedback from attendees. A remarkable 97.23% of respondents reported that the webinars provided new and inspirational information. Some of the most helpful topics included AB 135 overviews, business processes, and preventative frameworks.

Attendees expressed interest in the following for future events:

- In-person meetings
- Recording regional meetings
- Additional polls to increase participation

### Regional Meeting Preferences for 2025

We asked for input on planning for the 2025 Regionals, with mixed preferences for virtual and in-person formats. The results were as follows:

- 55.56% preferred in-person
- 31.94% preferred virtual
- 12.50% were open to either format

We will be planning for both options and will keep you updated on future opportunities for peer sharing in Spring 2025.

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## Open Office Hours for TA

Do you have questions related to Linkages? 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.

### Feedback from Participants:

"The regional meeting was excellent!!"

"Well organized and resourceful!"

"Very informative!"

"The recap on AB 135 was great!"

"I appreciate these meetings—always something new or a great reminder!"

Thank you to everyone who participated and shared valuable insights. We look forward to seeing you in 2025!



# New County Orientation

The AB 135 Webinar reached a number of counties that are not participating in the Linkages Collaborative and we used the opportunity to reach out to those counties and invite them to a New County Orientation Webinar on November 19th. We had 26 participants from seven (7) counties that attended, along with Gloria Jakini-Rojas, Linkage Coordinator from LA, who shared her perspective on the role of a Linkages Coordinator. We strongly believe with the implementation of the FR Cash Aid (AB 135) that all counties should be part of the Linkages Learning Community and will continue to outreach to the county leadership in those counties and invite their participation. Additionally, the Linkages 2.0 prevention framework is aligned with the prevention work that the state and county Child Welfare agencies have begun to launch and feel that Linkages should be “linked” to that work.

We will be working on this expansion in 2025.

## Let's Get Together: Upcoming Events

### Protective Factors Webinar

January 21, 2025 | 11 am - 12 pm

[Register Here!](#)

### 2025 Statewide Prevention Convening

February 26-27, 2025

[Register Here!](#)

TBD:

**AB135 Troubleshooting** (Feb/March 2025), **Spring Regional Meetings** (May 2025), **TAY Webinar** (May 2025)

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



**Danna Fabella**

**Linkages Program Director**

[danna.fabella@cfpic.org](mailto:danna.fabella@cfpic.org)



**Melissa Connelly**

**Associate Director**

[melissa.connelly@cfpic.org](mailto:melissa.connelly@cfpic.org)



**Andrea Lewis**

**Linkages Program Associate**

[andrea.lewis@cfpic.org](mailto:andrea.lewis@cfpic.org)