

# Keeping Linked



## Springing Into Action: A Warm Welcome from Our New Program Director

Happy Spring! I'd like to introduce myself, my name is Jennifer Marcelli and I am the new Linkages Program Director. I come to CFPIC and the Linkages Program with a passion for improving outcomes in child welfare and supporting prevention programs. I have over 24 years of experience in the field of child welfare, spending the first part of my career as a direct service practitioner, supervisor, manager, and assistant director. I most recently worked as a technical assistance provider gathering, categorizing, analyzing, and sharing child welfare trends, challenges, and promising and evidence-based practices across the nation. I'm very excited to bring these two experiences together to support California counties and their Linkages programs! I know I have some big shoes to fill and feel lucky to come behind Danna Fabella who's leadership has been critical since the inception of this program!



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## Welcome, Tammy!

We are pleased to introduce Tammy, who has joined the Linkages Oversight Committee to provide an important perspective to our work. Her lived experience from being a mutual client served by CalWORKs and Child Welfare has been a missing perspective on the Oversight Committee. In the article below, Tammy talks about the need for proactive strategies that can provide families help when they are in vulnerable states. We agree with her as we strive to implement Linkages 2.0 with a focus on prevention and early intervention. Please pause and read Tammy's journey and insight she offers all of us. Thank you Tammy!

In Her Own Words:

"Having the opportunity to join the Linkages Oversight Committee has been empowering for me as I continue on my path to stability for myself and my family. My participation to serve others who may be struggling is another step on my healing journey. I feel valued for my lived experiences and welcomed to share in a capacity that serves to benefit other families in my community who are at risk of child welfare. Looking back on my experiences receiving mutual services, I realize that our family was suffering in all five areas of protective factors. I wish there had been a way for my family (having recently moved to California with two small kids and no natural support system here) to learn about the ways to reach out and ask for help in educating ourselves proactively.

I am proud of the person I am now because I have grown and been served with information about where to seek out resources, but at the beginning, I didn't even realize the scope of the issue due to my own inculcated beliefs. I know that since the COVID19 pandemic, more families of all walks of life are finding themselves struggling to find resilience and healthy social connections, let alone deal with the emotional impact on processing information to seek out concrete support in times of need. It would help if families knew they are not alone and that the child welfare system actually works to keep families intact and striving for health.

Our community would be healthier as a whole if there were proactive ways for good people in their time of need to understand they are not alone in their vulnerability. I believe messages of health need to begin with children and families in a proactive manner- even just through education of the First 5 California (which, to me, is now not just that commercial I recall seeing as a new mother and never investigated on my own). The message to families should be culturally sensitive and also call out the stigma of vulnerability and needing help to overcome their own specific and sometimes generational unwellness. We are all human beings and we all experience times of need.

I am a better parent because I have this opportunity to reflect on my journey of overcoming great challenges through eventually becoming self-directed, however, my education on this began in a reactive manner. I am still learning how to sustain compassion for myself for past choices and I am still pushing forward, still showing up for myself and my family, and not allowing mistakes to define me but rather, embracing them as catalysts of great personal growth. I am grateful I can help others by sharing and collaborating with larger work being done to improve the health of families and keep them together on a path of living their best lives."

Tammy M.

## Past Linkages Events

"The handouts were very helpful"  
- participant

### Protective Factors Webinar

On 1/22/25, approximately 70 participants from twenty counties attended the Protective Factors webinar. The webinar highlighted how the Protective Factors can mitigate risk factors and how child welfare and CalWORKs staff can use the Protective Factors in their work with families to reduce risk, prevent child maltreatment, and help families build strengths.

The post-event evaluation showed that attendees felt the webinar completely or mostly met their expectations. When asked about the most valuable aspects of the webinar, attendees highlighted the following: learning how other counties are implementing the Protective Factors brochure, receiving a breakdown of the Protective Factors with examples from different counties, and gaining new perspectives.

You can find the PowerPoint presentation and other materials shared during the webinar [HERE](#).

### FR Cash Aid (AB 135) Implementation Peer Sharing

Following the October 2024 webinar on FR Cash Aid policy, the 3/11/25 Peer Sharing event focused on implementation challenges and successes. Approximately 70 participants from twenty counties joined the call, exchanging ideas on how to get staff buy-in, identify families to receive FR Cash Aid, coordinate communication among workers, and manage the process when the six-month FR Cash Aid period ends.

The post-webinar evaluation, completed by about a third of the attendees, revealed that 64% felt the event provided new, helpful information about implementing FR Cash Aid and all the respondents believed they could apply what they learned to support implementation. They identified county sharing as the most valuable part of the webinar, especially the exchange of practices, documents, forms, and the opportunity to listen to one another.

You can find materials from the webinar [HERE](#).



# Why should we do Linkages? One Agency One Team!

San Mateo County is new to Linkages and recognizes when new efforts are launched there is hesitation, questions and need to really understand the mission. San Mateo County did a soft launch in Spring 2024 and learned more buy-in was needed from the staff. Luckily the Linkages convening was right around the corner and San Mateo Leadership attended. This was value time learn best practices, talk to peers and really engage in the tough conversations regarding our teams - who was on board and who we still needed to bring along. Before leaving the convening, the leadership team made commitments to each other that helped pave the way to a re-launch.



San Mateo reviewed and updated policies, localized and trained the new curriculum of Overview and Case Planning, created data matching reports, identified a communication platform, and released a video to demonstrate the leadership's commitment to working together. The summer of 2024 allowed for continued conversation that led to planning in the fall and a relaunch in February. We are continuing our leadership partnership meetings,

reviewing data, and trying to incorporate Linkages as a prevention strategy in our conversations. The leadership team understands the value of Linkages for families, the ability to blend funds and the importance of working together as one agency one team. The key messaging to staff is there is a bigger team for the families and we really want them to understand that artificial barriers that prevent this work have dissolved. San Mateo County believes are strength to launch Linkages is understanding...WE ARE IN THIS TOGETHER!

[Click here to view the video!](#)

## Subcommittee Updates

### Prevention & Early Intervention Subcommittee

The PEI Committee continues to add members and maintain its focus on the following primary objectives:

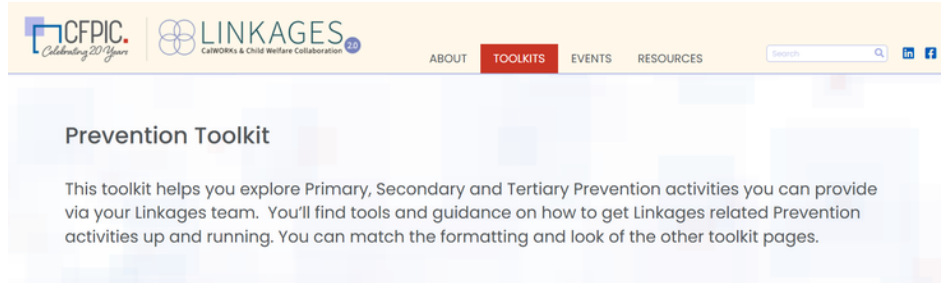
*The Protective Factors Brochure*

The PEI Committee and the Linkages Program are committed to spreading the word about the Protective Factors Brochure and sharing examples of how it is being used across California. Linkages staff have posted on the Linkages Toolkit Webpage (under Primary Prevention) the brochure itself In English and Spanish, as well as the All County Information Notice that was used to distribute it to all counties. In addition, on 1/21/25, a webinar was held to highlight the brochure and its usage; the webinar is available on the Linkages Webinar Webpage. Any additional examples will be posted and can be forwarded to [melissa.connelly@cfpic.org](mailto:melissa.connelly@cfpic.org).



### *Family Needs Screening Tool*

Derek Slama and Nkechi Kanu are continuing to refine the Family Needs Screening Tool that we will eventually share with counties to support them in assisting benefits applicants and recipients identify family need that can be addressed by community services to avoid the need for intervention by Child Welfare. The PEI Committee has been instrumental in the development of the tool and in providing guidance on its potential implementation. A number of focus groups are pending to gather additional input and inform its further development. Please email [nkechi.kanu@cfpic.org](mailto:nkechi.kanu@cfpic.org) if you would like to participate in a focus group.



### *Tools and Processes for Referring Families from Child Welfare to Benefits Programs.*

Linkages 1.0 included examples of tools and processes developed in Los Angeles and San Francisco that are used to make sure that families who are referred to Child Welfare can receive information about potential eligibility for self-sufficiency benefits from the counties' aid programs. These tools and processes are available on the [Linkages Toolkit Webpage](#) (under Secondary Prevention). The PEI Committee is eager to add any additional examples from other counties and will post updates from LA and SF as they are developed. Please send any examples to [melissa.connelly@cfpic.org](mailto:melissa.connelly@cfpic.org)

### *CalWORKs Child Only Families*

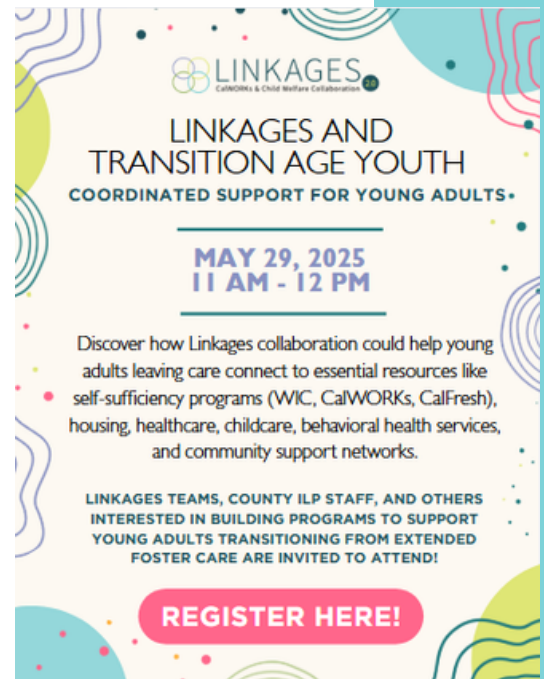
Although no additional work has been done to update the CalWORKs Child-Only Research Project work on the [CFPIC Other Projects Webpage](#), the PEI Committee continues to keep this on its agenda in order to seize any opportunities that might arise to do so.

Anyone interested in joining the committee's work can contact [stuart.oppenheim@cfpic.org](mailto:stuart.oppenheim@cfpic.org)



## TAY Subcommittee Update

The TAY Subcommittee is working to produce a webinar exploring how Linkages coordination can help make sure young adults have someone they can count on after they exit care to help them access county Self-Sufficiency services (WIC, General Assistance, CalWORKs and CalFresh); housing supports; Medi-Cal or other healthcare supports; social connections within the community including FRCs, parent support groups, and other community-based supports; childcare and other services that support expecting and new parents; behavioral health and SUD services outside the foster care system; and support for educational attainment. The webinar will feature examples of programs supporting young adults after they exit care and we will also hear about lived experiences of transition. The webinar will be on 5/29/25 at 11:00 am.



## Evaluation Committee

RDA, our contractor for the Linkages Coordinated Case Planning (CCP) evaluation, is in the process of obtaining data and the case review information from CDSS Research, Automation, Data and Research (RADD) that Riverside and Orange provided as part of their participation in the evaluation. We are in the last phase of the three-year evaluation project with data analyses to be completed and the Cumulative Report finalized that will also include Case Studies. RDA will hold a presentation to stakeholders when completed; Linkages Coordinators and teams, CWDA committees and others who express interest.

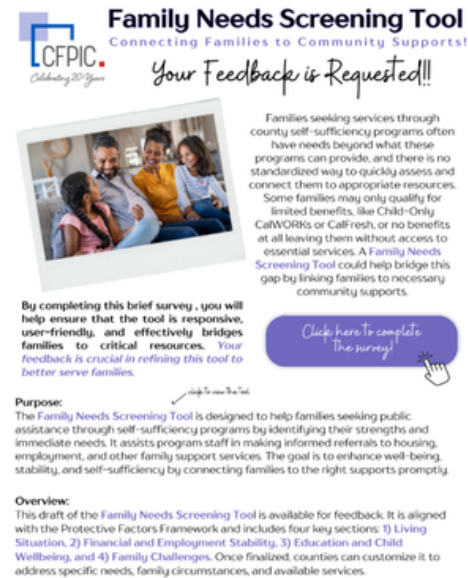


We look forward to seeing the outcomes and consider any recommendations that are generated because of the evaluation. We are in debt to Orange and Riverside for their dedication to Linkages and for allowing staff time to complete the case reviews that will help us understand how CCP supports families.

## Voices in Action: Oversight Committee Welcomes New Members and Advances Screening Tool

There was good participation at the 3/25/25 Oversight Committee meeting. Attending from the counties: Jennifer Valencia (San Mateo), Sandra Bowlan (Riverside); Margo Ilonummi (Calaveras); Mayle Johnson (Calaveras) Loan English (Orange); and from CDSS Lisa Witchey; Damian Ladd; Joseph Sapp; Carolyn Spain and Tracy Urban.

We were pleased to welcome Tammy to the committee – she brings an important perspective of lived experience and hopes her work with the committee will give her the opportunity to help others who have been in her situation. Tammy received warm greetings and lots of fun emojis to usher her into her committee membership role. And, on that note, we are still seeking additional committee members with lived experience and would love to have other regions (North, Bay and Central) included. Please contact Andrea Lewis ([andrea.lewis@CFPIC.org](mailto:andrea.lewis@CFPIC.org)) if you have a committee member recommendation.



**Family Needs Screening Tool**  
Connecting Families to Community Supports!

*Your Feedback is Requested!!!*

Families seeking services through county self-sufficiency programs often have needs beyond what these programs can provide, and there is no standardized way to quickly assess and connect them to appropriate resources. Some families may only qualify for limited benefits, like Child-Only CalWORKs or CalFresh, or no benefits at all leaving them without access to essential services. A Family Needs Screening Tool could help bridge this gap by linking families to necessary community supports.

By completing this brief survey, you will help ensure that the tool is responsive, user-friendly, and effectively bridges families to critical resources. Your feedback is crucial in refining this tool to better serve families.

[Click here to complete the survey!](#)

**Purpose:**  
The Family Needs Screening Tool is designed to help families seeking public assistance through self-sufficiency programs by identifying their strengths and immediate needs. It assists program staff in making informed referrals to housing, employment, and other family support services. The goal is to enhance well-being, stability, and self-sufficiency by connecting families to the right supports promptly.

**Overview:**  
This draft of the Family Needs Screening Tool is available for feedback. It is aligned with the Protective Factors Framework and includes four key sections: 1) Living Situation, 2) Financial and Employment Stability, 3) Education and Child Wellbeing, and 4) Family Challenges. Once finalized, counties can customize it to address specific needs, family circumstances, and available services.

The Linkages Team provided updates on the webinars and activities since the committee last met and they are summarized in Recent Linkages Events in this newsletter. Derek Slama, Prevention Program Director at CFPIC and Nkechi Kanu, Intern from the Goldman School of Public Policy at UC Berkeley were guests at the meeting. They provided information about the Screening Tool the Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) committee developed this past year. Derek explained that he had completed a Screening Landscape Review ([found here](#)) and when nothing felt exactly like what we are looking for, the PEI started creating our own screening tool. Nkechi was engaged to assist in the development of the tool. As part of the tool development, Focus Groups with staff in county and community-based organizations are planned to provide input on the tool developed to date. Comments from the committee about a screening tool included making sure that it was not long and would not take too long to complete. The group also felt it was important to make

sure that if a “need” was identified the family could be connected to relevant resources or services. We also identified the need to have a parent focus group and Lisa Witchey, CDSS FEED Branch mentioned a Parent Advisory Group they have created and felt they would be open to using their meeting in May as a focus group.

The next meeting will be in two months, and we would love to have a Child Welfare or CalWORKs/TANF leader from the central region that would be interested in joining the Oversight Committee. Please contact [Danna.Fabella@CFPIC.org](mailto:Danna.Fabella@CFPIC.org) if interested.

## Open Office Hours for Implementation Support

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.](#)



## Join us on CalPrevents

To join the Linkages Space on CalPrevents, please send an email to Andrea Lewis at [andrea.lewis@cfpic.org](mailto:andrea.lewis@cfpic.org). The Linkages Space offers an online community for Linkages coordinators and teams to share insights, network, and learn from each other. If you are a member of CalPrevents, we invite you to join us and connect with your peers.



# Upcoming Events

## Looking Ahead: Exciting Updates from CFPIC Linkages

As we move forward together, the CFPIC Linkages team is thrilled to announce a series of valuable events and initiatives designed to empower coordinators and strengthen Linkages efforts across organizations.

### April: New Coordinators Webinar

On 4/8/25, we will host a new coordinators webinar, providing key insights into your Linkages role and sharing strategies to champion Linkages within your organization. This is a prime opportunity to deepen your understanding and refine your approach.

### May: May Regionals – A Time to Collaborate and Innovate. [REGISTER NOW!](#)

The much-anticipated May Regionals are just around the corner! [Register here!](#) Planning is well underway. These in-person sessions will feature topics inspired by survey feedback.

This gathering will offer a valuable space for networking and peer sharing. A heartfelt thank-you goes out to everyone who contributed to the survey and those assisting in the planning process. If you're interested in joining the planning team, please reach out to [andrea.lewis@cfpic.org](mailto:andrea.lewis@cfpic.org).

### May: TAY Subcommittee Findings Webinar

May will also feature a special webinar unveiling the results and best practices from the TAY subcommittee findings. Keep an eye out for a flyer with details—it promises to be an enlightening session.

### June: Work Plan Workshop

As we conclude the 2024-2025 fiscal year, we're excited to offer a Work Plan Workshop in June. This workshop will guide participants in creating comprehensive work plans based on their Linkages strategies, with a focus on sustaining these plans through effective promotion and addressing attrition.

With such a robust lineup, there's plenty to look forward to in the months ahead. Let's make the most of these opportunities to connect, collaborate, and champion Linkages in our communities!

## Questions? Ideas for future newsletters? Contact us!



**Melissa Connelly**

Senior Associate

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



**Jennifer Marcelli**

Program Director

[jennifer.marcelli@cfpic.org](mailto:jennifer.marcelli@cfpic.org)



**Andrea Lewis**

Program Associate

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



**Danna Fabella**

Senior Consultant

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

