

Keeping Linked



Back to the Future: Linkages and Transforming CalWORKs

CFPIC has been proud to partner with CDSS and CWDA to support the rollout of Transforming CalWORKs. As California moves into this new chapter, it's worth looking back at how decades of policy shifts have brought us to today—and how our long-standing Linkages work laid the foundation for this moment.

A Brief Look Back

In 1962, federal policy combined financial assistance and social services, allowing families to work with a single social worker for both needs. Concerns soon emerged about the power imbalance this created, leading to a federal mandate in 1972 to separate income maintenance from social services. Although that mandate was lifted in 1976, most states—including California—continued to keep the two systems apart.

The Shift Toward Supportive Services

The landscape changed again in 1996 with the creation of TANF. States were given broad flexibility to design programs that supported family stability, employment, and self-sufficiency. California used this opportunity to rebuild supportive services within CalWORKs and, inspired by work in Colorado, launched the Linkages program to strengthen coordination between CalWORKs and Child Welfare.

For more than 20 years, Linkages has emphasized the importance of aligning services so families don't have to navigate complex systems alone.

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Evolving to Meet Families' Needs

Both CalWORKs and Linkages have continued to grow. CalWORKs added Family Stabilization and Home Visiting, while Linkages 2.0 expanded its focus from coordinating Welfare-to-Work and Child Welfare cases to connecting families with prevention and early intervention supports in their communities.

A New Era of Reform

In 2025, California passed SB 119 and SB 146—historic reforms that center family voice and choice, reduce administrative burden, and improve access to services. As ACL 25-78 notes, these changes aim to support long-term employment, stability, and overall family well-being.

Coming Full Circle

Looking across six decades of policy evolution, we can see a clear arc: from separating services, to rebuilding them, to now fully embracing a holistic approach. California's current direction reflects what Linkages has demonstrated for years—families thrive when systems work together, offer meaningful support, and recognize that success requires far more than financial assistance alone.

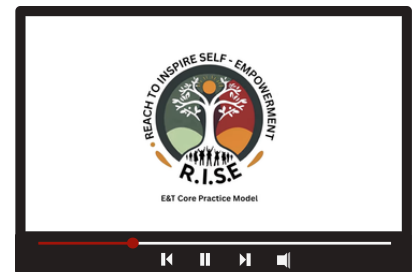
Sonoma E&T Launches RISE: A New Practice Model Centered on Empowerment and Connection

As we move into the new year, Sonoma Employment & Training (E&T) is excited to share progress on a major office-wide initiative designed to strengthen how they serve the community and how they support one another as colleagues. Over the past several months, Sonoma has been working diligently to implement a new practice model that reflects our shared values, elevates best practices, and enhances the client experience from the moment someone walks through the doors.

To help introduce this effort, Sonoma created a short video for staff that explains the purpose behind the practice model and why this work matters. You can view it [here](#):

Introducing RISE: Reach to Inspire Self-Empowerment

One of the most meaningful aspects of this initiative is that it has been shaped collaboratively by staff across multiple programs. Through planning sessions, discussions, and feedback loops, the team selected a county-specific name for the model: RISE – Reach to Inspire Self-Empowerment. This name reflects Sonoma's commitment to supporting clients in building confidence, skills, and pathways toward long-term success.



A Unified Approach to Service

The practice model is not limited to client-facing interactions. It represents a holistic approach to how Sonoma works - how they greet clients, communicate across teams, and how they create a welcoming, respectful environment for everyone. By aligning practices and expectations, they aim to strengthen consistency, collaboration, and the overall quality of services provided throughout E&T.

Centering Staff and Client Voice

Staff input has been essential at every stage of planning, and that collaboration will continue as the model evolves. In addition, Sonoma is committed to grounding this work in the lived experiences of the people they serve. Through the Cal-OAR process, they will be gathering client voice to ensure the model reflects real needs and real outcomes. Sonoma has also begun outreach to parent advocates to deepen their understanding of community perspectives.

Looking Ahead

The implementation of RISE marks an important step in our ongoing efforts to strengthen service delivery and workplace culture. We are grateful to the planning team and to all staff who have contributed ideas, feedback, and enthusiasm. Together, we are building a model that supports empowerment—both for clients and for one another.



Linkages Collaborative: Fall 2025 Highlights

This fall, the Linkages community came together for two energizing virtual sessions focused on shared learning, implementation support, and continued growth across the Collaborative.



Harvesting Wisdom: A World Cafe of Shared Insights

October 23, 2025 | 90 minutes

In October, participants joined an interactive World Café–style session designed to spark dialogue and collective problem-solving around Linkages Implementation Strategies. Professionals and leaders from across systems shared stories, explored best practices, and co-created solutions to strengthen implementation efforts. The session

generated a rich collection of insights that will help guide ongoing work across the Collaborative.

Evaluating Linkages 2.0

November 19, 2025 | 60 minutes

In November, the CFPIC Linkages team presented key findings from the Linkages 2.0 Evaluation. The webinar highlighted outcomes related to early identification of families in need and offered a look at emerging strategies and opportunities for improvement. The session also set the stage for future evaluation efforts, supporting continued learning and innovation.

Together, these fall events underscored the strength of the Linkages Collaborative: a community committed to learning, adapting, and improving outcomes for families. As we move into the next phase of our work, the insights gathered and the evaluation findings shared will serve as a foundation for continued progress and collective impact. Both Sessions can be found by visiting the [CFPIC Linkages website Events page](#).

Committee Updates

Oversight Committee

In October, the Committee heard a presentation on the Linkages 2.0 Evaluation and had an opportunity to provide feedback and thoughts on next steps. In December, the Committee had an opportunity to review and discuss the Evaluation Case Review Tool from the Linkages 2.0 Evaluation and share their thoughts on future use. We also discussed the BHSA Integrated Spending Plan and what Linkages team know about/our involved with. Both of these topics will continue to be an area of discussion for the Oversight Committee.

We also used time in December to hear what the Committee identified as the top 3 barriers and/or challenges for the CFPIC Linkages team to focus on in 2026. Some of those topics were:

- Marketing the program - Program Access and Awareness
- Continued work on building collaboration
- Consistent, timely collaboration and communication between Children's and WTW
- Communication tools since systems do not talk. Keeping the momentum.
- Strategies to increase referrals.
- Leadership training on the impact of Linkages
- Developing tools to assist with tracking and communication between Child Welfare and WTW

PEI Committee

CFPIC, in partnership with the Linkages PEI Committee, continues to explore implementation opportunities and best practices for the Family Needs Screening Tool and have begun piloting the Family Needs Screening Tool with Napa and Placer counties. The Screening Tool helps identify families' strengths and needs early, connect them to community supports, and facilitate follow-up and warm handoffs to community-based services beyond what self-sufficiency programs may provide directly.

Napa County launched its pilot in October 2025 and completed it in early December, engaging more than 30 families in one office. Placer County implemented the Screening Tool across two offices from November through December 2025, reaching more than 40 families, and plans to continue offering the tool in January 2026. In January, CFPIC plans to further explore outcomes from the pilot with these counties and anticipates sharing a brief findings report in the coming months.

On December 3, 2025, CFPIC presented the Family Needs Screening Tool at the Statewide CalWORKs Training Academy hosted by the California Department of Social Services. Three additional counties have since expressed interest, and CFPIC is currently exploring implementation opportunities.

Counties interested in piloting the Family Needs Screening Tool are encouraged to contact Derek Slama, CFPIC Prevention Program Director (derek.slama@cfpic.org). We would welcome the opportunity to explore implementation with your county!

Take A Moment Videos

We have completed two more videos in our Take A Moment Series:

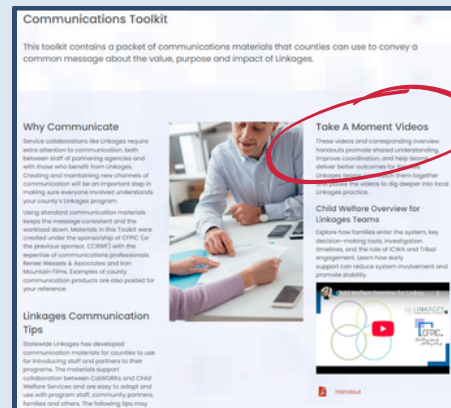
Child Welfare Overview for Linkages Teams Part 2: Placement, Permanency and the Role of Linkages

This session continues our look at California's child welfare system, focusing on placement, permanency, and how Linkages supports families navigating the system. As with other videos, please note that California's child welfare system is county-administered. Practices may vary across counties.

Welfare to Work Overview for Linkages Teams

Get a clear picture of Welfare to Work requirements, services, and how it supports families during child welfare involvement—including housing aid, employment support, and additional support resources and programs.

These videos can be found within the Communications Toolkit on the Linkages website



Open Office Hours for Implementation Support

Do you have questions related to Linkages? Are you working on your 2026 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.



To join the Linkages Space on CalPrevents, please send an email to Andrea Lewis at 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

2026 Statewide Convening

Linkages: Building Bridges for Families

[Register Here](#)

April 28 - 29 | Hilton Arden West | Sacramento, CA

Collective Growth: New Year Peer Forum

[Register Here](#)

January 22 | 11 AM - 12:15 PM

Linkages - Invisible No More: Elevating California's Child-Only CalWORKs Families

[Register Here](#)

February 19 | 1:30 - 2:30 PM

2026 Statewide Prevention Meeting: Prevention in Action

[Register Here](#)

March 18 - 19 | 9 AM - 4 PM

Featuring TWO Linkages-
related workshops!

Questions? Ideas for future newsletters? Contact us!



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