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DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SOCIAL SERVICES

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August 18, 2005

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Bryce Yokomizo, Director

SUBJECT: **ACTION PLAN TO REDUCE CalWORKs WELFARE-TO-WORK SANCTIONS**

On April 13, 2005, I informed your Board that DPSS would develop an Action Plan through a collaborative process to reduce sanctions based on the report, "Study of Sanctions Among CalWORKs Participants in the County of Los Angeles: Who, When, and Why?" This memo describes that collaborative process and transmits the resulting Action Plan.

Background

As you will recall, the report "Study of Sanctions Among CalWORKs Participants in the County of Los Angeles: Who, When, and Why?" was conducted in response to the need identified by the Commission for Public Social Services for systemic information on welfare sanctions in Los Angeles County. A few of the key findings in the report which are addressed in the Action Plan are:

- Almost two-thirds of sanctioned Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) participants are sanctioned before participating in any welfare-to-work activity, primarily for failure to attend orientation.
- The most prevalent reasons identified for this failure to participate are lack of adequate transportation and child care and failure to receive notifications in a timely manner.

Planning Process

In response to the study findings, my Department has developed an Action Plan, through a collaborative process involving managers from throughout DPSS and key partners from other County departments, service providers, advocates, and the Commission for Public Social Services. Our goal was to bring together all pertinent groups to think beyond current standard operating procedures and develop creative solutions to the issues identified in the study.

"To Enrich Lives Through Effective And Caring Service"

To begin the process, in March 2005, a cross-cutting group of DPSS managers began meeting to review the preliminary draft of the study and identify potential actions that DPSS could implement in response to the findings. This group became the Internal Workgroup.

In May 2005, a Partners Workgroup was convened with representatives from the Commission for Public Social Services' Committee for Review and Evaluation of CalWORKs (CORE), advocates, service providers and DPSS managers to review the key findings and the suggested actions by the DPSS Internal Workgroup, as well as brainstorm additional solutions. The membership of the Partners Workgroup is set forth on Attachment A.

From May-July, information was regularly exchanged between the Partners Workgroup and the Internal Workgroup. Through this process, a consensus was achieved and the attached Action Plan was developed. The Partners Workgroup will continue discussions on additional items not listed in the Action Plan until a resolution is achieved.

Action Plan

The Action Plan identifies key research findings, the actions DPSS will take to address the issues, the rationale for each proposed action, and the projected time frame for the implementation of each action. Implementation has already begun on some of the actions contained in the Plan. The Action Plan is Attachment B.

The actions outlined in the plan offer a wide variety of solutions. Some actions involve modifications to the process through which DPSS staff interact with participants, while others involve modifications to automated systems. Still other actions focus on increasing access to short-term child care, or additional training, or tools for GAIN staff.

As a package, these actions represent a comprehensive approach to increasing welfare-to-work participation and reducing sanctions. We are committed to embracing and conveying a philosophy in the GAIN Program, which focuses on maximizing participation in welfare-to-work activities, to enable participants to reach their full potential, find employment and become self-sufficient.

Reports to the Board

I will submit an initial progress report on implementation of the Action Plan to your Board in six months and will subsequently provide you with quarterly progress reports.

BY:pa

Enclosures

c: Chief Administrative Officer
County Counsel
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors
Commission for PSS - CORE

**GAIN SANCTION STUDY
PARTNERS' WORKGROUP**

Phil Ansell, Director Bureau of Program and Policy Department of Public Social Services	Vance Martin, Chief Division IV Department of Public Social Services
Yolanda Arias, Directing Attorney Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles	Kate Meiss, Staff Attorney Neighborhood Legal Services
Grace Cainoy, Executive Director Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles	Dan Miller, Director GAIN Division Los Angeles County Office of Education
Lori Cruz, Deputy Director Branch Operations Child Support Services Department	Manuel Moreno, Ph.D., Project Director Service Integration Branch Los Angeles County Chief Administrative Officer
Dolores Daniel, Program Manager Service Area 4 & CalWORKs DPSS Co-Located/GROW Programs Mental Health Department	Christina Nguyen, Chief Information Technology Division Department of Public Social Services
Gail Dershewitz, Chief Research, Evaluation & Quality Assurance Division Department of Public Social Services	Margaret Quinn, Chief CalWORKs Division Department of Public Social Services
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Russ Hibbs, Chief Eligibility Systems Division Department of Public Social Services	Maria Rodriguez, HSA III-in-Charge GAIN Program Division Department of Public Social Services
Leonard Schneiderman, Ph.D Commission for Public Social Services	

Study of Sanctions Among CalWORKs Participants in the County of Los Angeles

Action Plan

<p>I. <u>RESEARCH FINDING:</u> Almost two-thirds of sanctioned GAIN participants are sanctioned when they fail to show up for their Orientation session.</p>
<p>ACTIONS</p>
<p>A. The Home Interview Program (HIP) Eligibility Worker (EW) will interact with applicants during the Intake process in order to explain the Welfare-to-Work (WtW) process including information on their orientation appointment, child care, transportation, good cause, and potential exemptions.</p> <p><i>Providing a participant with one-on-one information on the WtW process during Intake will assist the participant in understanding the program components, participation requirements and the relevance of not participating.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Mid-Term Goal</i></p>
<p>B. Provide at least one designated GAIN Services Worker (GSW), or Contracted Case Manager (CCM) to assist participants with scheduling and rescheduling their Orientation appointment.</p> <p><i>Providing a designated GSW/CCM will enable participants to engage in GAIN by receiving assistance either with scheduling or rescheduling an Orientation appointment for a date which is convenient to them.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Mid-Term Goal</i></p>
<p>C. Eliminate automated recycling of participants through Orientation when they fail to return a completed QR7 on time or have a late redetermination, but subsequently submit the required documentation before termination of the CalWORKs grant actually takes effect.</p> <p><i>Delaying deregistration from GAIN will provide time for the GAIN participant to submit documentation required to retain CalWORKs eligibility, while continuing to participate in GAIN or re-engage in a GAIN activity without having to be processed through GAIN orientation.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Short-Term Goal</i></p>
<p>D. Ensure reported changes on participant's phone/address are updated on LEADER/GEARS as quickly as possible in order for the participant to receive a timely Orientation appointment letter.</p> <p><i>Ensuring address changes are in LEADER/GEARS as quickly as possible will alleviate the problem of participants not receiving their appointment letters timely.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Short-Term Goal</i></p>
<p>E. An automated letter will be sent to the participant in a timely manner giving the participant time to keep the appointment.</p> <p><i>Changing the time frame from seven working days to ten working days prior to the Orientation appointment date will provide the participant with additional time to receive the appointment notice and make the necessary arrangements to attend Orientation.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Short-Term Goal</i></p>

*Note: Goals are defined as follows:

Short-Term	1-4 months
Mid-Term	5-8 months
Long-Term	9+ months

Study of Sanctions Among CalWORKs Participants in the County of Los Angeles

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<p>I. <u>RESEARCH FINDING:</u> Almost two-thirds of sanctioned GAIN participants are sanctioned when they fail to show up for their Orientation session.</p>
<p>ACTIONS</p>
<p>F. Participants who are nearing the end of their exemption period will be contacted by a designated GSW/CCM in each region to discuss the need for further exemption and/or participation in GAIN.</p> <p><i>Providing a designated GSW in each region will enable participants to receive the immediate information they need to participate in Orientation, or receive an appropriate, expeditious exemption.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Short-Term Goal</i></p>
<p>G. Create flexible appointments for those who are working part-time or are students so that they can attend Orientation and Appraisal (OAP). In addition, if attending OAP conflicts with a participant's school schedule and the participant is being approved for a Self-Initiated Program (SIP), OAP may be scheduled at the convenience of the participant or may be bypassed.</p> <p><i>Many participants who want to attend Orientation have conflicts because they are working or are in school; providing flexible appointments will allow them to do so.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Short-Term Goal</i></p>
<p>H. Provide the incentive of having a "Drawing" at OAP. GAIN participants that complete OAP will be entered in a drawing and if selected will win gift certificates.</p> <p><i>Incentives can help motivate participants to attend Orientation and continue in GAIN.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Mid-Term Goal</i></p>
<p>I. Conduct home call to non-compliant GAIN participants to assess for good cause and exemption qualifications in order to resolve compliance problems before a sanction is recommended.</p> <p><i>The purpose of this intervention is to assist participants in resolving issues/barriers related to the non-compliance and re-engage participants in GAIN activities.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Short-Term Goal</i></p>
<p>J. Each GSW/CCM, will telephone each participant assigned to them to remind them of their OAP appointment.</p> <p><i>Calling participants before their OAP appointments will enable GSWs/CCMs to motivate and provide assistance on removing child care and transportation barriers that may preclude attendance at OAP.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Short-Term Goal</i></p>
<p>K. Participants re-entering GAIN that have attended OAP in the last twelve months will receive a specialized letter and individual appointment time instead of the standard group OAP appointment time.</p> <p><i>Individual appointments for re-entering participants will provide GSWs/CCMs with the time needed to provide appropriate attention and services.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Mid-Term Goal</i></p>

Study of Sanctions Among CalWORKs Participants in the County of Los Angeles

Action Plan

- II. RESEARCH FINDING:** Evidence indicates communication issues between CalWORKs and GAIN staff, between LEADER and GEARS, between staff and participants, between participants and systems, which impede GAIN participation and contribute to sanctions.

ACTIONS

- A. Provide additional access to automated CalWORKs eligibility information for GSWs/CCMs.**

By being able to access this eligibility information, GSWs/CCMs will be able to more quickly ascertain the status of a participants case, employment or if other circumstances exist so a sanction should not be recommended.

Long-Term Goal

- B. Improve information to participant by providing the names and tasks of EW and GSW/CCM.**

Providing the names and tasks of the assigned EW and GSW to participants anytime one of the workers is changed will help to eliminate the confusion participants have in knowing whom to report information and whom to call to resolve issues.

Mid-Term Goal

- C. Provide staff with training regarding working together as a team with a common end result as well as customer service training.**

EWs and GSWs have the same common goal: to ensure participants in the WtW program succeed and obtain employment. Working together as a team as well as providing good customer service will facilitate that goal.

Mid- Long-Term Goal – Various Actions

- D. GSWs will be given improved access to EWs. They may contact them at any time, not just during phone hours.**

This will allow better communication which will assist the GSW/CCM in providing appropriate services to participants.

Short term Goal-New procedures

Long-Term Goal- Phone system changes

- E. Schedule meetings between Eligibility and GAIN managers to discuss the ideas already identified by line staff to enhance communication between CalWORKs and GAIN staff. Ensure that line staff has input to this process.**

Engaging CalWORKs eligibility and GAIN managers and staff in identifying ways to enhance communication between CalWORKs eligibility and GAIN/ Contracted staff will result in the most effective set of actions to achieve the goal of enhanced communication.

Short-Term Goal

Study of Sanctions Among CalWORKs Participants in the County of Los Angeles

Action Plan

<p>II. <u>RESEARCH FINDING:</u> Evidence indicates communication issues between CalWORKs and GAIN staff, between LEADER and GEARS, between staff and participants, between participants and systems.</p>
<p>ACTIONS</p>
<p>F. End 1st, 2nd, and 3rd instance financial sanctions, without a GSW review, when DPSS receives a PA 1934, CalWORKs Treatment/Services Verification Form, from a specialized supportive services provider confirming that the participant is actively engaged in a Specialized Supportive Services activity.</p> <p><i>The participant's supportive services need may have contributed to the participant's failure to comply, and the participant may not have felt comfortable disclosing that they were receiving mental health, substance abuse, or domestic violence services to DPSS staff.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Mid-Term Goal</i></p>
<p>G. Develop and train staff on an explicit CalWORKs/GAIN program philosophy which emphasizes active participation in employment, education/training, specialized supportive services and other welfare-to-work activities, (rather than sanctioning), as the key means to achieve the goal of self-sustaining employment.</p> <p><i>Having an explicit program philosophy will help all CalWORKs/GAIN staff and contractors focus their efforts on achieving the goals of the program. The training will include good cause and exemptions as well as prevention of inappropriate sanctions.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Short-Term Goal-Develop philosophy Long-Term Goal- On-going training</i></p>
<p>H. To assure that deregistered, sanctioned GAIN participants are given clear directions, and are properly assisted when they call to "cure" their sanction, a regionalized, centralized GSW will be assigned to assist them and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better instructions will be provided to GSWs/CCMs on how to assist deregistered, sanctioned participants, • All GSWs/CCMs and EWs will have the phone number listing of all of the designated GSWs/CCMs, • More information on how to cure sanctions will be provided on the PA 125, Monthly Notice to GAIN Participants Currently in Sanction Status, along with the phone number of the designated GSW/CCM. <p><i>Participants will be able to "cure" their sanctions expeditiously when additional instructions are provided.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Short-Mid-Term Goal - Various Actions</i></p>
<p>I. Increase interaction between EWs and GSWs/CCMs to facilitate a more coordinated case management system. Pertinent information will be shared in order to provide participants with the most beneficial and appropriate services.</p> <p><i>More frequent interactions between CalWORKs eligibility and GAIN staff will help to enhance communication.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Long-Term Goal</i></p>

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<p>II. <u>RESEARCH FINDING:</u> Evidence indicates communication issues between CalWORKs and GAIN staff, between LEADER and GEARS, between staff and participants, between participants and systems.</p>
<p>J. Identify current key CalWORKs and GAIN documents that are not specifically mandated as written by the State. Contract with a readability expert to review the forms as well as future forms, for clarity and appropriate grade level.</p> <p><i>Participants indicated that they were unclear about why they were sanctioned and how to cure a sanction. Providing clearer information will reduce this problem.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Long-Term Goal</i></p>
<p>K. Modify and implement distribution of the WTW 26, Good Cause Determination Guidelines, and the WTW 27, Request for Good Cause Determination. The WTW 26, which provides information on “good cause,” will be sent to non-compliant participants before they are sanctioned and the WTW 27, which provides information on how they can request “good cause” to cure a sanction, will be sent to sanctioned participants.</p> <p><i>Participants are not always aware they have may have “good cause” for not participating in GAIN, or how “good cause” can be applied to curing their sanction.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Mid-Term Goal</i></p>
<p>L. DPSS and the Los Angeles Office of Education (LACOE) will develop a pilot to call participants prior to Job Club to remind them to attend.</p> <p><i>LACOE staff may be able to motivate participants to attend Job Club by personally calling them.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Short-Term Goal</i></p>
<p>M. Translate all GAIN forms sent to GAIN participants into the threshold languages.</p> <p><i>Translating all forms will ensure participants receive information in notices that are in their native language which will facilitate comprehension.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Long-Term Goal</i></p>
<p>N. Provide Welfare-to-Work brochure to participants that do not receive a visit from the HIP worker.</p> <p><i>Participants that are employed or exempted from GAIN will not receive a visit from the HIP worker but may benefit from the information in the Welfare-to-Work brochure.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Mid-Term Goal</i></p>

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III. RESEARCH FINDING: Use of services, such as child care and transportation, reduces the risk of being sanctioned by 40 percent.

ACTIONS

- A. Facilitate use of child care and transportation services by providing information during the Intake process. The HIP worker will provide information and will assist the participant with accessing child care and transportation.**

Providing information and assisting the participant with child care and transportation during the intake process will help the participant prepare for Orientation.

Mid-Term Goal

- B. Provide participants with access to Child Care Coordinators in each CalWORKs District office prior to Orientation in order to find out how to access child care.**

Providing an additional resource on how to access child care before Orientation will help to ensure participants are able to make child care arrangements for Orientation.

Mid-Term Goal

- C. Develop a pilot, where DPSS will purchase child care slots at DPSS employee child care centers that are in close proximity to GAIN Regional offices, for use by children of GAIN participants during OAP appointments.**

Having pre-arranged child care slots available will assist participants that are not able to find one-day child care for orientation.

Mid-Term Goal

- D. Develop a pilot which will provide money for a one-day bus pass (\$3.00), for transportation in advance of the OAP appointment. The money can be used for gas in lieu of a bus pass, if appropriate.**

Providing participants with money for transportation before Orientation will reduce transportation as a barrier to attending Orientation.

Long-Term Goal

- E. DPSS will work with the Resource and Referral Agencies to develop a system to identify and provide referrals to GAIN participants for licensed child care providers that are willing to provide one-day or very short-term child care if they have a vacant space.**

Identifying providers that can provide short-term child care will assist participants with child care arrangements for OAP and other short-term WtW activities.

Mid-Term Goal

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IV. <u>RESEARCH FINDING:</u> Sanction rates vary substantially among GSWs/CCMs, indicating an inconsistent approach to case management.
ACTION
<p>A. Produce reports that identify number of sanctions by GSW.</p> <p><i>Identifying staff with higher sanction rates than the average for GSWs/CCMs will allow managers to focus on determining if issues exist for specific staff.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Short-Term Goal</i></p>
V. <u>RESEARCH FINDING:</u> Some participants are not happy with components of the GAIN flow, particularly Orientation and Job Club.
ACTIONS
<p>A. Improve Orientation process by providing more information to participants about GAIN and GAIN services that are available. Materials will be updated with new program requirements.</p> <p><i>Giving participants more information that is potentially beneficial to them will encourage Orientation attendance and increase satisfaction.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Short-Mid-Term Goal- Various Actions</i></p>
<p>B. Identify more participants who would not benefit from Job Club and allow them to bypass the process to do vocational training or other welfare-to-work activities. This may include limited English proficient participants and participants who have previously attended Job Club.</p> <p><i>By evaluating participants on a more case-by-case basis for Job Club and allowing those who would not benefit from Job Club to bypass the process, GSWs/CCMs can increase participant satisfaction.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Mid- Term Goal</i></p>
VI. <u>RESEARCH FINDING:</u> Participants who complete Job Club and subsequently receive training and participants in Self-Initiated Programs (SIPs) are less likely to be sanctioned than participants who only complete Job Club.
ACTIONS
<p>A. Increase numbers of participants referred pre- and post-assessment to vocational training, paid work experience and education.</p> <p><i>Individuals that obtain higher level of skills or education are more likely to earn a better wage and less likely to be sanctioned.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Long-Term Goal</i></p>

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VII. RESEARCH FINDING: Many individuals who are sanctioned need procedures that will facilitate the curing of their sanction.

ACTIONS

A. At least one GSW/CCM in each GAIN Region will be designated to receive calls from deregistered, sanctioned GAIN participants and will assist them with the actions that need to be taken to cure the sanction.

Providing a centralized GSW/CCM in each region will enable participants to receive the immediate information needed to cure their sanction.

Short-Term Goal

B. GSWs/CCMs will interact with sanctioned participants when they come to the CalWORKs district office for their annual redetermination appointment in order to re-engage participants in the WtW process, subject to the availability of GSWs in the CalWORKs district offices for this activity. The first priority of the GSWs in the district offices is to assist homeless CalWORKs participants.

This additional contact with participants will encourage some to cure their sanction and participate in the welfare-to-work program.

Mid-Term Goal

C. Conduct home call to sanctioned participants. This includes re-engaging sanctioned participants in WtW activities.

The purpose of this intervention is to assist participants in resolving issues/barriers related to the sanction and re-engage participants in GAIN activities.

Short-Term Goal

VIII. Other Actions to Prevent and/or Reduce Sanctions.

ACTIONS

A. DPSS will establish a system with Specialized Supportive Service Providers and GSWs/CCMs to ensure participants that are actively engaged in specialized supportive services do not have compliance/sanction initiated and/or implemented.

Automation changes to flag the participants who are receiving Specialized Supportive Services will eliminate them from being sanctioned.

Mid-Term Goal

B. Action will be taken so that participants who are employed full-time are not sanctioned.

Automation changes to flag the participants who are employed full-time will eliminate them from being sanctioned.

Mid-Term Goal

Study of Sanctions Among CalWORKs Participants in the County of Los Angeles

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VIII. Other Actions to Prevent and/or Reduce Sanctions.

ACTIONS

- C. Secure a business consultant to review the processes in the GAIN program, including contractors, for the goal of facilitating participation.**

Obtaining outside, objective evaluation of the GAIN processes may facilitate participation in the various WtW activities.

Long-Term Goal

- D. Prevent sanctions for homeless participants, since State law grants homeless participants good cause for non-participation.**

Automation changes to flag the participants who are homeless will prevent them from being sanctioned.

Mid-Term Goal

- E. Ensure review of the 30 Day Delinquent reports by WtW staff to ensure participants are assigned to the appropriate activity.**

Active utilization of this report will help ensure that participants are not spending time in the program without being assigned to an activity.

Short-Term Goal

- F. Explore the feasibility of reducing GSW caseloads for designated WtW population/activities and addressing such reduced caseloads in the budget.**

Reducing designated caseloads would provide GSWs/CCMs more one-on-one time for interaction with participants which would permit more individual attention to resolving participants' barriers.

Long-Term Goal