CALIFORNIA WORK PAYS
DEMONSTRATION
PROJECT

A PROCESS EVALUATION

PHASE III: 1995

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1994-1995
In 1995, the process study for CWPDP continued two major areas of research started in earlier years. First, the process team continued and expanded their examination of the process by which welfare recipients might learn about new work incentives or the "Work Pays" policies. This area of research has been titled the "Communication of Work Incentives" in earlier reports and is based on the belief that informing clients is a necessary part of implementation. In order to examine the communication of work incentives to welfare recipients, extensive interviews were conducted both in county and state welfare agencies and with staff of community-based organizations, in all four research counties. Second, the study continued to examine implementation and maintenance of CWPDP policy changes and data collection activities in the research counties. In this case the study looks at the operational and organizational changes which represent implementation, for example, what was required of the organization to implement a regulation change and handle control cases differently? This information was gathered from staff at the county and state welfare agencies. The study describes events and the status of programs between September 1994 and August 1995.

In brief, the section of Communicating the Work Pays message makes the following conclusions. In 1995 workers still gave low priority to informing clients about work incentives. The major finding in 1995 was that cases with earned income create additional work for EW's

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and increased the potential for errors, and therefore eligibility workers have little incentive, in fact a dis-incentive, to encourage their clients to go to work and take advantage of “Work Pays.” By the summer of 1995, EW’s had not embraced the “Work Pays” message as a legitimate or important message to communicate to clients, especially because workers were not required by their supervisors or county policies to discuss Work Pays. This lack of communication was observed a full year after the Work Pays policies and the first Work Pays media campaign had been implemented in the counties. Consequently, the state was already planning in 1995 a new media campaign in order to step up informing efforts.

The following is a brief summary of the "Update on CWPDP Implementation." The third year of CWPDP implementation in the research counties consisted of routine activities and ongoing external pressures on county agencies. Implementation of the CWPDP policy changes, particularly those contained in SB 35, was not complex in terms of automating or issuing instructions for changes in rules and benefit calculations. However, utilization of newly available benefits has been slow, particularly the Supplemental Child Care (SCC) program. Underutilization of SCC is attributed by county staff to the fact that regulations have changed several times, forms are complex, training is inadequate and experience with the program is lacking. The many activities required for data collection in CWPDP, which required substantial effort in year one, are now conducted with relative ease and few problems. In mid-1995, creating access to 18 months of case file information was the greatest challenge for the research counties.

In three research counties the last year has been marked by dramatic events affecting all aspects of welfare administration. Alameda County experienced the burgeoning of the transfer
desks and San Joaquin County experienced the initially difficult and resource-consuming transition to an automated eligibility system, SAWS. Los Angeles DPSS was shaken in 1995 by the prospect of having to reduce eligibility staff by 50%. All these events may have affected the treatment of the CWPDP research cases.
Part I: Communicating the Work Pays Message

Rationale

We focus on the front line-delivery of welfare services, and particularly the communication of welfare changes to welfare clients, for several reasons. First, the emphasis on transitional, employment-focused assistance has shifted welfare programs away from a traditional emphasis on cash assistance and toward more explicitly behavioral objectives -- i.e. from "people sustaining" to "people transforming" activities. AFDC and related benefits are increasingly seen as a package of incentives (and disincentives) that can modify clients' behaviors in the areas of work, education, household formation, and even modify decisions about childbearing and contraception. Therefore, the active cooperation of clients in changing their behaviors is critical to policy success. As welfare programs shift toward active engagement of clients, they will need to develop new strategies for informing, educating, and engaging these clients in the joint production of welfare outcomes.

Second, the use of marginal changes in welfare benefits and policies to motivate behavioral changes assumes that welfare clients will make choices based on full and explicit information about alternate courses of action and their consequences. There has been growing recognition and concern, in both research and policy making communities, that welfare rules often create "reverse incentives" because households are frequently better off on public assistance than they would be if adults went to work in low-wage employment. State and national welfare reforms, whether in the form of benefit limitations or service extensions, have aimed to change
these marginal incentives to favor employment and independence from welfare. If these relatively modest and technical changes are to have the desired effect on individuals’ decisions about work and welfare, however, current and potential clients of welfare programs will need substantial information about how various work and welfare choices interact to affect economic well-being.

Finally, many observers suggest that the welfare system, itself, communicates implicit messages to actual and potential clients of the welfare. This argument is made forcefully by Bane and Ellwood (1994), for example, that the “eligibility compliance culture” that dominates welfare operations “encourages passivity, focusing the recipient’s attention solely on the problem of maintaining eligibility, [and] discouraging movements toward self-support” (p. 7). Mead (1986) makes a similar argument when describing communications in “high performing” welfare to work programs as conveying both practical and the moral imperatives for behavioral changes. The extent to which the new generation of welfare reforms produces the anticipated changes in the expectations of welfare clients will depend, in part, on the “implicit” messages about expectations and opportunities that are communicated to current and potential clients of the welfare system.

**Research Methods**

Data for this study were collected through interviews in county welfare offices and at the state. All data were collected in 1995 in four California research counties: Alameda, San Joaquin, San Bernardino, and Los Angeles, as part of the evaluation of the California Work Pays Demonstration Project conducted by UC DATA and the California Department of Social Services.
Data Collection

Much of the data collection in the 1995 process evaluation study continued in the same format as previous years. For example, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with workers and direct supervisors. These interviews addressed many aspects of the workers’ job, including the incentives they face and discretion they have in their work, and also asked for their understanding of and opinions about recent welfare reforms. They were also used to obtain systematic information about workers’ perceptions of their transactions with clients and the characteristics of their jobs. In 1995, interviews were also conducted with mid- and high-level managers in AFDC.

Interviews with eligibility workers and supervisors were conducted using a semi-structured format to increase comparability and focus the data collection efforts. Interviews lasted approximately one hour. Questions addressed workers’ usual tasks and responsibilities, the structure of rules and incentives for their work, the content and form of performance standards and measurements, the extent and type of discretion they exercised in their work with clients, and their priorities and constraints when interviewing clients. Workers and supervisors were also asked to describe their understanding of and opinions about recent welfare reforms. In year three, unlike year one when the first EW interviews were conducted, the “Work Pays” communication campaign and policy changes had been fully implemented for over a year.

AFDC managers, in particular, were asked for their opinion of the Work Pays policies and how they perceived the impact of Work Pays on welfare recipients and on the welfare department.
What did they think about the various forms and documentation involved? Do clients who work require different administrative procedures? Do workers and/or clients have problems completing the required paperwork? How has "Work Pays" changed the EW's job? Are EW's instructed to inform clients about "Work Pays"? Why or why not?

Interviews were also conducted with staff at the state Department of Social Services involved with the Work Pays Demonstration Project, especially about the second Work Pays media campaign. At the time of this research, August 1995, and throughout 1995, this campaign was in the planning and development stages, so materials had not yet been disseminated to AFDC staff or clients. A summary of the planning process and a recap of the earlier Work Pays media campaign are included in a later section of this report.

**Findings from Interviews with EWs and Managers**

During the summer of 1995, the process team interviewed thirty-five administrators and EWs in Alameda, Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and San Joaquin Counties. Most of the EWs interviewed had worked in both intake and continuing areas, and some had worked with both control and experimental cases. According to management or fellow workers, all of the EWs interviewed were among the best trained and informed ones in each county.

Discussions with EWs echoed the findings of interviews conducted in earlier years; conversations about Work Pays and going to work were 1) client-initiated only, 2) considered inappropriate to initiate with most intake clients, who are typically in urgent need of basic assistance, and 3) take place when the client is already working. Upon being asked whether they
informed new or continuing clients about any of the "Work Pays" components, few welfare employees stated that telling people routinely about "Work Pays" was on their agenda when interviewing clients for either intake or re-determination purposes.

Eligibility workers also believed they lacked clear authorization to discuss work and welfare reforms. Many indicated that discussions of work and work-related benefits as fundamentally incompatible with their jobs, with their responsibility to clients, and with their perception of the clients' own interests. As one described it: "It would be a waste of time to tell every client about those programs. They are not thinking about work when they come in there. They want their check."

According to the intake workers interviewed, it is not viewed as their responsibility to tell clients about work programs. Many asserted that because the GAIN program assists people in seeking employment, that GAIN would also be the appropriate place to provide information about Work Pays. This was the EWs' explanation for why informing was not their responsibility, but they did not assert that, or know whether, this informing actually took place in GAIN. Workers are aware that not all clients go to GAIN, but many workers believed that the referral process to GAIN already selects those clients who are able to go to work\(^2\), and that, as a result, the clients who were not referred were unlikely to look for jobs. The components of the "Work Pays" program were therefore not viewed as applicable in a normal intake process.

Continuing EWs stated that work-related conversations with clients generally take place

\(^2\) Every county has different referral criteria for the GAIN program, depending on funding available to the county.
when the client already works. In these cases, topics of discussion usually concern the filling out of CA7s, or any type of grant computation problem. Some stated that non-working clients call to find out what would happen to their grant if they started a job. In this case, the information given to recipients is that *when they start working* they should fill out the CA7 and send it in, because the EW's can not compute an exact monthly grant prior to knowing exactly how much the actual earnings are. Estimates are not given because clients, according to EWs, rely on the quotes and then complain later if the benefits don't exactly correspond to any estimate previously given. In addition, most of the EWs felt that it would be a waste of time to calculate benefit levels prior to employment, because many never actually enter the work force after all. The EW’s did not suggest or seem aware of the possibility that clients may refuse jobs if they have difficulty finding out before starting to work how their grants will be affected.

Eligibility workers repeatedly stressed that they did not have the resources to counsel clients. They saw their priority and most legitimate responsibilities as collection and processing of information about welfare claims; in fact, this stems from their official job description which has been in place and reinforced by training and supervision for two decades. A worker couldn’t “talk about future scenarios” like going to work, as one described it, because she could only interact on the basis of the application material at hand. Nor could she afford the time consuming work of “counseling” clients about Work Pays, explaining complex work incentives, or referring them to the new benefits and services for which they might be eligible. Many workers pointed out that it was simply not their job to help clients with issues other than applying for and receiving welfare benefits. Because of severe time constraints in simply processing eligibility for ever-increasing
numbers of cases, discussing optional programs or benefits structures with clients was a luxury workers couldn’t afford. This conception of their role in informing clients was reinforced by their supervisors. “Workers are only paid to determine eligibility,” one supervisor described it. “Unless they get paid more or their workload is reduced, they can’t do it [counsel clients about their options].”

**Underlying Reasons for the Lack of Communication**

Eligibility worker performance is measured along guidelines which were established Federally. Supervisors check for error rates in budget computation, for timely issuance of benefits, and for accurate processing of CA7's. Work loads are often assigned by number of cases, rather than the nature of cases, meaning that some welfare workers have more complex cases to process than others. In the climate of budget constraints of the past years, workers have been faced with higher and higher caseloads which demand more and more expertise, detail orientation, computational skills and program knowledge. The pressure to do more with fewer resources has increased continuously.

The eligibility worker is the contact person for clients who have concerns about their grants, especially then they wish to know why their checks are lower than anticipated. Every time AFDC grants are reduced, eligibility workers have to answer numerous calls from people who may blame them for their financial loss. They can receive an enormous amount of pressure from frustrated recipients, a fact which does not help to improve their relationships with clients. In fact, some offices have developed mechanisms to keep clients at a safe distance by restricting
contact; for example, in some offices, workers are available by phone for only two hours per day, often early in the morning.

One county AFDC manager told us that some EWs may resent clients who take advantage of the "Work Pays" components. Eligibility workers are not highly paid. Some may find themselves with an equal or lower income than welfare recipients who take advantage of the "Work Pays" incentives, with the difference that their clients have the advantage of help from public assistance. This, in turn, may influence the way they interact with their clients.

There may also be resentment because working clients create additional work which must be accomplished in the same period of time. Calculating the earned income budget in AFDC is very complex, especially when compared to the alternative of issuing the maximum grant. If clients apply for Supplemental Child Care, additional complex budget computations and paperwork are required, creating a considerable amount of additional work for EWs. Many clients seem to have problems completing the additional monthly forms that are required to receive SCC benefits. EWs often have to explain how to fill out forms on the phone, or ask clients to provide information that is needed to process benefits. This makes computing grants in a timely way more difficult and stressful.

The complexity and the time constraints involved in budget calculation create an additional problem: workers are more likely to make errors on income cases, and errors create more work and more stress.3 First, clients often complain if their grant is incorrect or discontinued, requiring

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3 In some cases, but not all, eligibility workers could use automated systems to calculate earned income budgets, which made processing the cases easier but not fool-proof. In San Joaquin County in 1995, I-SAWS was still being implemented, therefore some earned income
extra time to address complaints and work to correct the problem. Second, the performance of eligibility workers is evaluated by their error rates and client complaints. Therefore, a simple way to manage workload requirements and receive positive evaluations is to avoid cases with earned income. Thus the operating environment becomes one where EWs actually have a dis-incentive to encourage their clients to work. Since supervisors are under pressure to keep both errors and worker complaints about workload at a minimum, managers expressed concern over the conflict between encouraging work by recipients and keeping error rates in check.

**Other Sources of Communication: Recap of Results of the State's First Work Pays Media Campaign**

As early as 1993, the state was developing efforts to communicate the “Work Pays” message directly to clients, rather than relying solely on eligibility workers in the local county welfare departments. The CDSS conducted a media campaign to inform clients, EWs, and the population as a whole, of the changes in AFDC. Welfare recipients were targeted through brochures that were supposed to be mailed to them by the local welfare departments, and "Work Pays" posters that should have decorated the walls of the welfare offices. In addition, the Department of Public Outreach at CDSS had sent buttons with the "Work Pays" logo to EWs to

cases were in I-SAWS and had automated grant calculations and many were not yet in I-SAWS and were budgeted manually. Even with automated earned income budgets, there are instances where workers still need to do manual calculations, for example if the computer is down or if they need the budget that day and cannot wait for overnight computer processing. Also, county staff agree that its important to understand the manual calculation so that workers can judge if computer results are valid, because sometimes wrong codes or data are entered by accident. Only in Alameda and with I-SAWS in San Joaquin do workers actually input data into computer systems directly, and even in those counties results are not instant.
wear during client interaction. It was hoped that the logo would spark conversations about work.

Evaluation of this outreach campaign did not produce much hope that the state efforts to directly inform clients were working. During the second year of the process study (1994), researchers found that only two of the four research counties included the brochures in their intake and re-determination packages at the time. Only two EWs of those observed by researchers were wearing the Work Pays buttons, and few posters were seen in places to which clients had access. Another source of evidence for the effectiveness of the campaign came from CDSS itself; they had drafted a survey to assess whether the "Work Pays" brochure was an effective outreach tool for clients. The survey was conducted by the quality control arm of CDSS, which asked almost three hundred recipients to evaluate the brochure. The findings from the survey showed that clients did not understand what the brochure was attempting to communicate to them. Fifty-two percent of clients who received the brochure stated that they did not know about the changes in welfare policy.

From these observations, the process evaluation team concluded that the state’s first media campaign did not have the desired impact in disseminating the message that "Work Pays." If welfare recipients were learning about the new rule changes, they were not getting a consistent message from either the state or their local welfare offices.

**Planning a Second Work Pays Campaign**

For the 1995-1996 budget year the CDSS received additional money, $200,000, for outreach. During 1995, the campaign was in the planning and development stages. The components of the campaign were decided by later summer 1995, and materials were developed
over the rest of the year. A Work Pays Campaign Committee was formed to conduct the second campaign, and members addressed ways to improve upon the earlier campaign which they were aware was not as effective as they had desired. Early on the Committee had decided that the campaign would focus on producing videos, a medium which had not been used in the first campaign. A video for clients had been proposed by the process team and by others in the previous year.

At the CWPDP Research Advisory Committee (RAC) meeting in October 1995, the process team reported on continuing problems with communicating work incentives in the county welfare offices, and on the role of community-based organizations in assisting with outreach. Eloise Anderson, Director of DSS, heard this presentation and had her Community Relations staff contact the process team to discuss more options for outreach. The process team met with them in November. At the October 1995 RAC meeting Del Sayles, Director of the AFDC Program Branch, provided an update on the Work Pays II Campaign. In particular, she confirmed that the video concept had been adopted and that the message of the campaign would shift from "Work Pays" to "Work Pays in So Many Ways," emphasizing the non-financial benefits of working. The Work Pays II Campaign was not implemented until January 1996 and for this reason any materials available to clients in 1995 were left over from the first campaign, launched more than a year earlier.4

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4 In January 1996, process study researchers again interviewed state DSS staff about the Work Pays II Campaign and received an overview of the entire campaign as implemented. This information is included in the phase four process study.
Conclusion

During the research conducted in 1995, the process team again found that eligibility workers do not routinely communicate the "Work Pays" message to clients. As described in earlier reports, this finding is explained primarily by the nature of the eligibility worker’s job, which is geared around timely and accurate issuance of benefits, rather than counseling or engaging clients in behavioral change. Completing this job under conditions of very high caseloads and low organizational resources does not allow for interactions with clients outside the task of establishing eligibility. The major finding in 1995 was that cases with earned income create additional work for EW’s and increased the potential for errors, and both workers and their supervisors are concerned with error reduction. Therefore eligibility workers have little incentive, in fact a dis-incentive, to encourage their clients to go to work and take advantage of “Work Pays.” By the summer of 1995, EW’s had not embraced the “Work Pays” message as a legitimate or important message to communicate to clients. At this time, workers were not required by their supervisors or county policies to discuss Work Pays, so the message had not yet been legitimized by those with direct authority over their work.

In 1995 workers still gave low priority to informing clients about work incentives, encouraging them to leave welfare, or referring them to training or other support services. Nearly all indicated that they did not routinely initiate discussions about work, and they discussed the impact of work on benefits only when clients asked or reported new earnings. No workers observed routinely included discussions of “fill the gap budgeting,” the elimination of the 100 hour work rule, the $30 &1/3 income disregard, Supplemental Child Care, or other work incentives with clients. And this lack of communication was observed a full year after the Work
Pays policies and the first Work Pays media campaign had been implemented in the counties.

Consequently, the state was already planning a new media campaign in order to step up informing efforts.
Part II: Update on CWPDP Implementation

During the Spring and Summer of 1995, the process team gathered documents and conducted interviews with staff at county welfare agencies about the continued implementation of CWPDP, including the status of Senate Bill 35 (SB 35) programs and policies and the ongoing operation of research and data collection for the demonstration project. In general, the policy changes associated with SB 35 were in the form of rule changes and did not require more attention by county staff after initial implementation; however, administration of the Supplemental Child Care program has presented challenges since its inception. Although maintenance of the research cases is routine in all four counties, significant events and changes in each county's welfare operations have affected the treatment of research cases and therefore may have a dramatic impact on the CWPDP research and data collection.

Implementation of SB 35 Policies

Approximately one year to eighteen months after implementation of various SB 35 or "Work Pays" policies, county AFDC staff were asked about the operation of these policies. Most of the work incentives, especially grant reductions, need level increases, the $30 & 1/3 income disregard, and the increased property limit had been implemented through automated systems and/or updates to instruction manuals. Other than initial programming challenges, these rule changes were of little concern to AFDC administrators. Ensuring that regulation changes are understood and accurately applied falls to individual line supervisors who review the work of their eligibility workers.
AFDC administrators were asked about the utilization of the programs legislated under SB 35 which were intended to assist clients in transition from welfare to work. These programs include "restricted accounts" which allows recipients to save for education, the California Alternative Assistance Program (CAAP) enabling clients to refuse a grant and receive Medi-Cal and child care, and Supplemental Child Care providing reimbursement for more of clients' child care expenses. These programs are reported to be vastly underutilized. For example, three of the counties reported that as far as they knew no "restricted accounts" had been established by AFDC recipients in their counties. Three counties also indicated that no clients had taken advantage of the CAAP Program, but county AFDC managers were not surprised; they commented that CAAP provided less child care benefits than if recipients accepted the grant and received the child care disregard and Supplemental Child Care, and if recipients choose CAAP they must still go through all regular AFDC processing.

Utilization of Supplemental Child Care (SCC) is far below the expectations of county administrators. For example, in June 1995 Los Angeles County had approximately 9000 cases that were receiving the child care disregard, but only 50 to 60 cases were also receiving SCC. This number is not only negligible for LA's caseload, it is very small in comparison to San Joaquin, which had 105 of its 217 child care disregard cases also receiving SCC. Supplemental Child Care is available to all working AFDC clients, including CWPDP experimental and control cases; it is not part of the CWPDP waiver but it's availability is an important component of the state's Work Pays message.

Low utilization is connected to several factors, including lack of adequate training of EW's, lack of experience of EW's with the program, difficult forms for both clients and workers,
and lack of notification about the availability of the program. AFDC administrators feel that because EW's process SCC claims so rarely, they are likely to not think of informing clients about it and have difficulty when asked to process it. Proper implementation of SCC has also been hampered because the regulations and forms have been changed several times, with one major change occurring shortly before our interviews. Each change poses new implementation challenges and requires additional training.

At least two counties have retrained workers in the new SCC procedures, and additional training is planned in hopes that, as workers learn more about the program, they will pass the information on to clients. Automation of the SCC calculation in the SAWS system in San Joaquin County seems to reduce at least one obstacle for the workers in implementing the program. Two counties expressed concern that utilization of SCC and other child care benefits would suffer in the future as the Trustline registry system is implemented, and child care providers reluctant to be fingerprinted will no longer provide care for children on AFDC.⁵

Management of Research Cases

In general, management of CWPDP cases has become routine in the research counties. Most problems, concerns or changes result from actions or events external to the demonstration project. These events are discussed in more detail in the next section. Each county Coordinator's

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⁵ The Trustline system is a registry of license-exempt child care providers whose backgrounds have been checked by the California Department of Justice. These providers can only receive reimbursement through AFDC-related programs when registered in the Trustline system.
focus has shifted to Cal-Learn implementation or to other pressing needs in the department or agency. All four coordinators had responsibilities other than CWPDP during 1995. During the year, implementation of Cal-Learn and planning for Cal-Learn research was the major CWPDP activity for the county coordinators. San Bernardino county had the additional burden of being the first to actually implement the Cal-Learn factorial research design.

As "Work Pays" research tasks have become more routine, they have been delegated from the coordinators to line staff. For example, integrating the replacement sample, pulling files for the data validation and case coding project and finding phone numbers for the telephone survey are handled with ease by the supervisors of control case units or clerical staff in three of the counties. In Los Angeles, separate administrative support divisions assist with the logistics of these tasks. In general, the coordinator's primary role in all four counties is to address problems and answer questions as needed and to act as a liaison with the state and UC DATA.

As with any complex project affecting only a portion of cases a few problems still remain. One county was particularly concerned with developing methods to ensure continuity of research cases transferring between counties (ICT's), as tracking these cases continues to be a problem. At least two counties reported ongoing difficulty keeping staff who are not involved in the project informed about what control cases are and how they should be treated. Because some staff are confronted with control cases infrequently or for the first time, it often takes time to straighten out questions or errors in processing. In three counties, the most difficult ongoing problem for data collection was maintaining access to file folders for the data validation component of the research. Because 18 months of CA7's (clients' monthly reports) were required in the second phase of case coding, coders very often need access to historical case folders as well as to case
files containing the most current paperwork. Retrieval of case files from storage is generally
difficult, so attempts are made to centralize all the folders for research cases, requiring additional
clerical assistance and management, as well as adequate space. Other than the difficulty of finding
older folders, case reviews for data validation were proceeding smoothly. Both county staff and
state reviewers reported that after initial difficulties with coordination of the case reviews each
month, the process was much smoother and the county-state interaction much improved.

**Major Issues and Events Affecting County Welfare Agencies**

All county welfare agencies have been affected by increased demands and decreased
resources. One new policy which has preoccupied AFDC staff is the requirement that clients be
given the opportunity to register to vote, also called "Motor Voter." Fulfilling this new task
increases the workload of eligibility workers, requiring operational adjustments and raising new
questions about the role of EW's. All counties are under pressure to increase efficiency and
consistency in eligibility processing, and one result has been to expend large amounts of resources
and effort on automation. In the case of highly-automated Alameda County, methods are being
developed such as color-coding and bar coding documents to ensure that processing of
paperwork is more accurate. Most counties are also feeling the effects of increasing overall
caseloads in the midst of increasing fiscal constraints, resulting in either ballooning worker
caseloads or increased management-labor conflict, and generally a lower quality and reduced
quantity of client interaction.
Alameda County

Alameda County was one of two counties where researchers witnessed the same phenomenon: a major event eclipsed all activities and had ramifications for all aspects of the AFDC program. This was the case in Alameda County Social Services Agency, where a major change to the AFDC system has been the vast expansion of the "transfer desks," that is, an expansion in the volume of cases not assigned to specific workers. The term "transfer desk" originally referred to the area where cases transferred from other offices or counties are kept before being assigned to individual workers. As Alameda's ability to assign cases dwindled, newly approved cases were also sent to the transfer desk and special workers were placed at the transfer desk to process the cases. Thus the transfer desks became "banking systems" where case folders are permanently stored and cases changes are processed as needed.

Whereas the "transfer desks" previously held several hundred cases waiting for assignment, by 1995 they held more than half of the continuing AFDC and Medi-Cal cases. Each of three transfers desks, one at each district office, holds thousands of cases, and is staffed by the equivalent of one to two worker units. Transfer desk workers are either responsible for sections of the alphabet or for specific tasks, and have no ability to develop relationships with clients they serve.

The burgeoning transfer desks are the result of strict union restrictions on the maximum size of continuing caseloads (157) combined with an inability to hire enough workers to keep pace with the caseload. The workers assigned to the transfer desks are exempt from caseload restrictions, because they are in a higher classification (Eligibility Technician III); however, the
union still monitors their workload carefully. The union is even more concerned with the procedure for transferring cases out of the transfer desks when slots in workers’ caseloads open up or new trainees become available. Cases on the transfer desks are generally in greater disarray compared to assigned cases, creating a disincentive for workers to discontinue their own cases and receive new cases from the transfer desks.

Cases on the transfer desks are handled differently from assigned cases in many ways, including CA7 processing, redeterminations, and client contact. In general, staff have no time to ensure that the contents of case folders are processed, up to date, and properly filed. Clients are seen on a drop-in basis or yearly, but most transactions are processed on the Case Data System, Alameda's computer system. EW's and staff are hard pressed to process and file CA7's (clients' mandatory monthly reports) within the month. A major concern of the county is ensuring that CA7's are collected and processed. The fear is that clients learn this and fail to send in their CA7's. This has driven the development of procedures to better handle the thousands of CA7's which come into each transfer desk each month and determine which clients have completed them. For example, the agency is planning to bar code the monthly CA7's, so they can quickly establish which clients did not turn their CA7 in by the deadline.

Research cases in Alameda County

In January of 1995, the county estimated that approximately 400 CWPDP experimental cases were on transfer desks, and the CDSS and UC DATA were concerned about the differential treatment that these cases were receiving. In effect, three treatments had been occurring to research cases. Control cases receive one treatment; they are centralized with the best staff.
Experimental cases receive two other treatments; most experimental cases are randomly assigned in district offices, and the others are held on transfer desks. For example, in January, about one fifth of experimental cases were on the transfer desks, and four-fifths were in district offices. Transfer desk cases not only are treated differently by the organization, but also are less complete for purposes of data collection. Researchers and staff considered centralizing experimental cases, but instead were able over many months to assign CWPDP cases to new trainees or open caseloads, despite union concerns that CWPDP should not be a priority for assignment. In August 1994, county staff had optimistically estimated that all but nine experimental cases would soon be off the transfer desks. However, a year later, in the Fall of 1995, at least sixty experimental cases still remained.

At the same time as the transfer desk became an overwhelming issue, the administrative structure of Alameda county’s Social Services Agency continued to be adjusted following a major reorganization in 1994. Divisions were further consolidated and the position of the CWPDP control unit and the CWPDP Coordinator shifted as a result. The CWPDP Coordinator position turned over twice. Despite this change, continuity was maintained through at least two staff members continuing to be involved with CWPDP.
In San Joaquin County, as in Alameda, one event colored all welfare activities. The county's Human Services Agency was overwhelmed by the process of implementing the Statewide Automated Welfare System (SAWS). Implementation of SAWS also coincided with the culmination of several years of reduction and change in upper management, resulting in a new administration, specifically for the AFDC program.

All aspects of welfare operations in San Joaquin were dramatically affected by the adoption of SAWS in August 1994. SAWS implementation dominated the activities of management, fundamentally reorganized line operations, and drastically slowed client applications. The agency was thrown into chaos while trying to rapidly train workers on a constantly changing system, in which many "bugs" were being discovered and removed. Despite their best efforts it took time for system support staff to correct problems and increase capacity to the extent needed to run the system in the nine "I-SAWS" counties without interruption. Finally, in the last six months of the 16 month conversion period, the benefits of the new automated system were beginning to override the pains of implementation. Continuing workers with experience on the system were beginning to realize the benefits of automated calculations and eligibility processing.

During the implementation of SAWS, a new administration in the agency reorganized the intake process for AFDC, Medi-Cal and Food Stamps. For example, intake workers were trained

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9 Nine counties were selected to implement SAWS before the rest of the state might attempt to convert their AFDC systems; these nine counties are called the "Interim-SAWS" counties or "I-SAWS" counties.
in the regulations of all three programs, as the system takes applications for all three. This training took time and required overcoming the initial resistance of eligibility staff to learning additional sets of complex rules. As a result of lengthy delays in the processing of applications during early SAWS implementation, an intake process was devised which dramatically increased the volume of applications which could be processed. However, this change required a reorganization of the work space of intake workers, leaving them with less desk space and privacy to do their work.

**Research cases in San Joaquin County**

In general, SAWS has made the demonstration project more complicated for San Joaquin county. Because SAWS is not able to process control cases for purposes of the demonstration project, control cases are handled manually by four workers in a specialized unit which was established before implementation of SAWS. If control cases re-enter the system through intake, their applications are processed in SAWS, and later they must be taken out of the system by a designated worker in the control unit. This process was developed to accommodate workers who are trained in either automated or manual eligibility, but not both. Most intake workers are no longer trained in manual intake procedures, which require more knowledge of regulations; therefore they were not asked to process control case reapplications manually. Four continuing workers asked to be assigned the control cases, before SAWS implementation, because they did not want to learn the new SAWS system. One worker and the supervisor of the control case unit are proficient in both the automated and the manual system and can convert and handle complex cases.
Between August 1994 and December 1995, the agency has been converting CWPDP experimental cases into SAWS. Consequently, over that time some of the approximately 2000 research cases were processed manually, and some in SAWS, with increasingly more in SAWS as time passed. This means that data collected from these cases come from different sources (from SAWS, from the older automated system, from manual budget computations) over different periods of time. The impact of early bugs in the system and changes in quality control monitoring on data collected over this period is uncertain. One problem with collecting data from SAWS cases is that only essential information is maintained by workers and historical files are stored away. During Summer 1995, agency staff were planning to centralize historical files for experimental cases near the control case unit to increase access to files for the CWPDP Data Validation and Case Coding research component.

Los Angeles County

Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) was besieged in 1995 with many different projects, but planning for massive layoffs was by far the largest. In June, Los Angeles DPSS learned that it would have to layoff 20% of its employees to meet county budget reductions. At this point, administrative attention focused on how to maintain services with such a loss. The staff reductions were going to take place among line staff, translating to a loss of 50% of the Department's eligibility workers. Eligibility workers at this time were already carrying AFDC (no income) caseloads of at least 300, and would be hard pressed to carry twice as many cases after the layoffs. The administrative staff at DPSS prepared to implement a banking system,
similar to Alameda's transfer desks, so that remaining EW's would be assigned tasks rather than caseloads. The layoffs never came to pass. However, anticipation of their arrival resulted in productivity loss and low morale at the line level, as well as a refocusing of administrative attention from other projects.

In addition to this major summer event, DPSS staff have been busy implementing other important changes in AFDC. Fingerprinting of recipients for the Automated Fingerprint Image Reporting and Match System (AFIRM) program was a high priority for six months in 1994, and in 1995 staff were preparing for the implementation of "on-line issuance" of AFDC checks at check-cashing centers. Program specialists will soon be occupied with assisting in the development of "LEADER," the county's new automation system. The department continues to feel the impact of the Northridge earthquake, as well as the downsizing of its management over the past couple of years. Unable to open new offices, caseloads continue to increase dramatically; for this reason, the Los Angeles DPSS decided to go ahead with the implementation of a banking system.

Research Cases in Los Angeles County

Increasing caseloads and the anticipation of layoffs may have had an impact on the processing of paperwork in all AFDC cases in the county. As caseloads increase, workers have more work to accomplish in the same period of time and are more likely to make errors or fail to process certain information. To the extent that productivity slowed in anticipation of layoffs, similar problems may have occurred with the processing of non-essential information. Data collected on experimental research cases would reflect these problems over this period of time.
Control cases are identified and centralized in five district offices and, for this reason, may be less affected by general county trends in eligibility work.

**San Bernardino County**

Relative to the other research counties, San Bernardino's welfare department is extremely stable. Upper management reorganizations are infrequent, and AFDC worker caseloads are maintained at target levels (for example, 167 cases/worker in June 1995). During the period of study, San Bernardino County opened new offices and was able to hire workers to keep pace with the increase in AFDC cases. Unlike other counties, the San Bernardino County Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) avoided a hiring freeze in recent years by imposing furloughs. The other research counties have been either unable to hire staff or expand work space in the same way during the previous three years.

Caseload targets have increased at times, and the setting of these targets is a concern of workers and their union. Management is continually pressured to examine workload issues. Staff throughout the department report that AFDC earned income cases have increased as a proportion of EW caseload, and that this has increased the workload burden on eligibility staff. In the opinion of some managers, the increase in income cases was related to "Work Pays" in that fewer cases were being discontinued as a result of earnings. They also noticed an increase in two-parent family cases with earned income.
Research Cases in San Bernardino County

The opening of a new office in 1994 had the most impact on the organization of research cases. Experimental cases from many areas of the geographically expansive county and all control cases were moved to the new Colton office. Two other offices, one in San Bernardino and one in Victorville, continued to hold the rest of the experimental cases. The research cases for the Cal-Learn evaluation were also sent to Colton and were assigned to workers who were carrying CWPDP experimental cases. Interestingly, these workers reported that the Cal-Learn cases require more work than regular cases because the Cal-Learn teens seem to have many more changes in their lives than the adults typically do. This perceived increase in workload seems to be the only impact of combining Cal-Learn and CWPDP cases. Any workload burden is probably offset by the fact that the workers handling research cases are generally more experienced and have been handling research cases from the beginning of the project. They moved with the cases to the new office, so continuity has been maintained. Clients in research cases are seen by workers in their local district offices, so CWPDP workers only occasionally need to travel to other districts.

Conclusion

In summary, the third year of CWPDP implementation in the research counties consisted of routine activities and ongoing external pressures on county agencies. Implementation of the CWPDP policy changes, particularly those contained in SB 35, was not complex in terms of automating or issuing instructions for changes in rules and benefit calculations. However, utilization of newly available benefits has been slow. The research counties have reported concern
with the operation of the Supplemental Child Care program, as regulations have changed several times, forms are complex, training is inadequate and experience with the program is lacking. These problems explain the very low number of SCC benefits actually issued to working recipients.

The many activities required for data collection in CWPDP, which required substantial effort in year one, are now conducted with relative ease and few problems. In mid-1995, creating access to 18 months of case file information was the greatest challenge for the research counties.

In three research counties the last year has been marked by dramatic events affecting all aspects of welfare administration. In Alameda County, the burgeoning of the transfer desks; that is, the increase in unassigned banked cases, has dominated administrative concerns and posed questions about the differential treatment of CWPDP experimental cases. San Joaquin County is just now restoring operations to normal after the initially difficult and resource-consuming transition to an automated eligibility system, SAWS. The impact of SAWS on data collection is yet to be determined. Finally, financial constraints in the counties have increased pressures for efficiency and automation in processing. Los Angeles DPSS was shaken in 1995 by the prospect of having to reduce eligibility staff by 50%, while still recovering from the Northridge earthquake. To handle increasing caseloads, this department will soon be turning to a banking system, changing the way research cases are handled over time.