



Santa Cruz County Human Services Department’s Remote Motivational Orientation for CalWORKs Employment Services

Summary

The County of Santa Cruz Human Services Department (HSD) administers the county’s Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, which in the state of California is called California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs). HSD’s Remote Motivational Orientation introduces the county’s CalWORKs employment services and other related services. The orientation uses presentations that are designed to be participant centered and empowering. HSD revamped its orientation approach and designed this new remote orientation to help CalWORKs participants learn how program services can support them in pursuing their goals. The remote orientation aims to help participants better engage with services and ultimately improve their employment outcomes by offering clear, simple, and concise information in a motivating, interactive format.

Funding source



HSD pays for the wages of staff who deliver the orientation with state and federal funding designated for CalWORKs services. HSD received training and technical support to redesign and pilot test the orientation under projects funded by the County Welfare Directors Association of California and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance.

Intervention description



HSD’s Remote Motivational Orientation for CalWORKs employment and related services introduces services and program requirements through short presentations designed to be accessible, engaging, and empowering. Employment services case managers conduct the orientation in short, remote, one-on-one meetings with new participants, during which they walk through the presentations.

Services provided



Case management;
Child care; Education;
Soft skills training;
Supportive services; Work readiness activities

Populations served

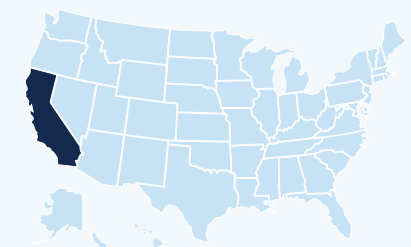


HSD delivers the orientation to CalWORKs recipients who are beginning employment services and live in Santa Cruz County. HSD delivers additional orientation modules to certain CalWORKs recipients, such as those needing child care, or those who are pregnant or have a child aged 3 or younger and are eligible for additional health care and child development resources.

Setting



HSD serves residents of Santa Cruz County, CA. HSD’s two offices are in Santa Cruz and Watsonville, CA.



Year first implemented

2020 (ongoing at the time of data collection)

What are case studies?

Case studies provide practitioners with information about innovative interventions that states, counties, community-based organizations, or other entities are undertaking to improve employment outcomes for TANF participants and other individuals with low incomes, especially public assistance recipients. **Case studies cover interventions not included elsewhere in the Clearinghouse because they have not yet been rigorously evaluated.**

HSD developed the Remote Motivational Orientation as part of an overall state effort to make CalWORKs service delivery more motivational and focused on goal pursuit. As part of that effort, HSD partnered with the organization Mathematica to use a collaborative, staff-led process for identifying and making changes to CalWORKs service delivery in Santa Cruz County. One of the changes staff identified was the need for an updated orientation, as HSD staff observed that participants were not retaining a lot of the information presented in HSD's previous orientation. They hypothesized that participants might be particularly unable to absorb a lot of information when they are enrolling in benefits, because this is a time when they might be under higher-than-usual stress or experiencing a crisis. Staff considered the previous orientation presentation to be long, dry, and densely packed with information, so HSD decided to shorten and streamline it. A staff-led working group developed revisions to the orientation, in part based on examples from other TANF programs, including an orientation presentation used by Michigan Works! Southwest in Kalamazoo, MI.

The resulting Remote Motivational Orientation is simpler, shorter, and includes a discussion of participants' needs. HSD removed nonessential information, which helped shorten the orientation from about 3 hours to 45 minutes. The new orientation avoids technical jargon and words that sound punishing (such as "sanction" or "compliance"). The orientation consists of different modules, and case managers can choose whether to deliver multiple modules in the same meeting or spread them out over multiple meetings, depending on the participant's needs.

The orientation presentations include components that aim to increase participants' engagement in employment and related services. Bitmoji cartoons of the employment and training managers and case managers introduce participants to the HSD staff they might work with. In addition, the orientation is framed around what would be important to the participant; it focuses on participants' goals rather than just program features and rules, and includes a discussion between the case manager and participant about what the participant hopes to get out of the program. References to participants' goals enable case managers to have discussions with participants about how services might help them achieve those goals. Case

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managers also help participants identify steps they can take after the meeting to work toward their goals.

The orientation includes the following three modules for all employment services participants:

- **CalWORKs Employment & Training Services: Introduction and Basics.** This presentation introduces the employment and training services staff that participants will work with, describes services offered to participants (including health and safety, family stability, education, and employment services), and gives a preliminary overview of participant responsibilities. HSD frames the presentation in terms of the participant's goals and finishes by having the case manager work with the participant on setting their first goal.
- **CalWORKs Employment & Training Services: Program Participation.** Similarly framed in terms of the participant's goals, the presentation discusses program rules such as time limits on benefit receipt, participation requirements, reports participants will have to complete monthly, and how to get help from program staff when needed. It ends with a discussion of what's next, during which the case manager provides a worksheet with a checklist containing a small number of concrete next steps to help participants work toward their goals. These might include discrete activities or tasks, such as lining up child care or getting a social security card.
- **Opportunities and Supportive Services.** This presentation describes supportive services available through CalWORKs as well as other services HSD offers or can help participants access, such as subsidized employment, training, disability benefits, mental health services, substance use disorder treatment, homelessness services, and child care. The focus is on how these services can support the goals participants set.

To deliver the orientation, the employment services case manager schedules a meeting with each participant assigned to them. When setting up that meeting, the case manager asks about the devices the participant has (for example, a laptop or phone) and whether to hold the meeting by videoconference, by phone, or in person. If needed, the county will purchase a computer for participants and help pay for their internet. The case manager typically emails the presentation to the participant before the meeting (or in rare cases, mails a physical copy), and then goes over it with the participant during the meeting. Often this occurs by sharing screens using a Microsoft Teams link, but also can happen by phone. Recorded videos of HSD staff walking through the presentations are publicly available on YouTube in English and Spanish. The videos are available as a general resource, and in some cases might be an alternative to the one-on-one meeting; for example, if a participant does not have time for a full appointment to go over the presentation, the case manager might direct them to the video and then meet to answer questions later.

In addition to the three modules that constitute the initial orientation for new employment service participants, HSD staff designed three other modules to use as needed with subsets of participants. These modules include:

- **CalWORKs Child Care.** This presentation provides information on the child care services available, eligibility and other rules of the program, help available in finding a provider, the claim form required for the county to pay the provider, who to contact as different questions arise, and next steps in accessing child care. The case manager only delivers this presentation to participants interested in accessing child care.
- **CalWORKs Thrive by Three.** This presentation is an orientation to the Thrive by Three program that provides access to parenting, health, and child development services. This program is available to CalWORKs participants who are expectant parents or have a child aged 3 or younger. The presentation provides background on the program and its benefits, who can receive the services, partner organizations involved, and the process for receiving a referral to the program.

- **Cal-Learn Orientation.** This presentation is an orientation to the Cal-Learn program that provides case management, supportive services, and incentives to pregnant and parenting teens whose parents are receiving CalWORKs cash assistance. The program's goal is to help teens graduate from high school or earn a GED and become independent adults and thriving parents. The presentation provides background on the program and its benefits, describes other programs that provide related services, and discusses the next steps for teens. The teens participate in these services instead of employment and training services and do not go through the three modules for all employment services participants described above.

HSD surveyed staff and participants about their perceptions of the orientation shortly after its implementation. Participants responded positively, with most reporting that the orientation provided relevant information in the right amount. Most staff respondents reported that the materials provided the right amount of information, though some thought it left the expectations of participants somewhat unclear. HSD decided to add more information on next steps in response to staff and participant feedback. Separately, staff have proposed additional modules on services available through the workforce system, the process for lifting sanctions, program time limits, and the monthly activity reports participants must complete. Program managers noted that having some staff be part of the working group that led the orientation redesign was important in getting overall staff buy-in on using the new presentations.

Staff faced some challenges with delivering the orientation remotely. They felt there was less personal interaction with remote delivery and less ability to pick up on participants' nonverbal cues. On the other hand, program managers reported that participants seem to like the remote meetings more because they do not need to find child care or transportation to attend the orientation. Program managers also said they have had to update the presentations and YouTube videos more often than they anticipated, particularly given the frequency with which state requirements change.

Research on intervention to date

This intervention has not been rigorously evaluated for effectiveness. As described earlier, HSD surveyed staff and participants to gather feedback on the new orientation. However, there are no evaluations of the orientation.

Case study information sources



In spring 2022, the Pathways Clearinghouse collected information for this case study from telephone interviews and email communications with CalWORKs employment services managers at HSD. The Pathways Clearinghouse shared a draft of the case study with HSD for accuracy and completeness. For

more information about the methods for selecting and developing the case studies, please see the Protocol for Pathways Clearinghouse Case Studies on the [Pathways Clearinghouse project page](#).

More information



More information on this intervention is available at <https://santacruzhumanservices.org/>. In addition, videos of the orientation presentations are available on Santa Cruz HSD's YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/SantaCruzHSD/videos>.

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