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## **WELFARE REFORM: PROGRESS AND PROBLEMS**

### **A Study of CalWORKs in Ventura County, California**

by the League of Women Voters of Ventura County, 1998-2000

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### **ABOUT THIS REPORT**

The League of Women Voters of Ventura County has been involved in a two-year study of the County's new welfare system, CalWORKs. Our purpose has been to evaluate and monitor this reform program and to educate ourselves and the wider community. This report and the May 24, 2000 forum, "Welfare Reform: Progress and Problems", culminates our study, although we will continue to monitor welfare reform in Ventura County.

In the first year of this study, we focused on the structure and implementation of CalWORKs. We reported to members of the League in Ventura County, explaining how new federal and state laws have changed the previous welfare system and affected those who receive assistance. We studied the barriers to self-sufficiency such as inadequate child care and transportation to work places, lack of education, minimal availability of affordable housing, and lack of job skills and job training.

In this second year of our study, we monitored the progress of the CalWORKs system, its services to welfare clients at the Job and Career Centers, and the support of its community partners. We have asked questions, interviewed CalWORKs officials and clients, talked with housing authorities and child welfare personnel, read extensively the many reports now coming out of national, state, and local agencies, and attended meetings of commissions and non-profit organizations serving the county.

The questions we asked elicited more questions, some of them unanswerable at this time because welfare reform is still in its early stages. Nevertheless, we believe this report will serve to inform and educate not only members of our League but also the citizens of Ventura County about a subject of great public concern.

### **WELFARE REFORM BEGINS**

On August 22, 1996, President Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act of 1996 which replaced the dominant welfare program, Assistance to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). With this Act, Congress gave states the responsibility to set up their own functioning welfare systems. A year later, California passed legislation that replaced AFDC with CalWORKs - California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids. The motto of CalWORKs - "Get a job, get a better job, get a career" - clearly focuses on the goal of moving people from being dependents of the state to being independent workers.

The State's job is to set up the goals, guidelines, and administration necessary to run the program and to arrange support services. Beyond that, the State has followed the Federal example by giving each of its 58

counties the responsibility of setting up and administering its own plan for helping clients become independent.

Participating in this nationwide welfare reform, California has set up goals, guidelines, and support services for its counties. Ventura County has formulated and implemented a specific plan to serve its clients effectively.

## **WELFARE REFORM: LEGISLATION AND BACKGROUND**

By replacing AFDC, a system characterized by open-ended cash assistance and entitlement, with a system that emphasized a welfare-to-work approach, welfare in the United States was radically changed. The new Act of 1996 established time limits for cash assistance, mandated strict work requirements for recipients, defined eligibility criteria, and shifted program responsibility and funds to the states. Under the new Act, for example, instead of being able to receive cash assistance for an open-ended period of time, welfare recipients are now restricted to a five-year lifetime limit. It's important to note that the welfare program is meant only for families with dependent children under 18 years of age

In addition to limited cash assistance, adults are required to work at least 20 hours a week after two years on aid and eligibility can be threatened or sanctions imposed if clients do not cooperate with the District Attorney Child Support Division to establish paternity. Teen parents must attend school and live in an adult-supervised setting in order to receive aid. Convicted drug felons and probation/parole violators are ineligible for cash assistance. States must also meet recipient work requirements in order to avoid reductions in block grant funding. While these requirements and restrictions do not exhaust the total list, they are among the key components of the new assistance program.

Responding to the federal legislation's call for states to take responsibility for implementing welfare reform, the California State Legislature passed public law AB1542 CalWORKs to take effect July 1, 1998. CalWORKs mandates statewide eligibility requirements, benefit levels, performance standards, and due process requirements. Although the state's legislation retains some of the AFDC rules and does not entirely eliminate the labor-intensive process of determining eligibility, it does impose stricter work requirements on aid recipients.

Unlike the federal two-year work requirement, California legislation requires clients to work after 18 months of receiving aid. And just as federal legislation shifted responsibility for welfare reform to the states, California state legislation shifted implementation of welfare reform to the counties

## **CALWORKS IN VENTURA COUNTY**

Ventura County has developed a specific implementation plan which espouses the "Work First" model of welfare reform. This plan outlines Ventura County's CalWORKs principles, service delivery system, eligibility process, and recipient work requirements. CalWORKs in Ventura County operates upon several fundamental principles. One of the most important principles is that of personal responsibility and self-sufficiency through employment.

CalWORKs' motto is "Get a job, get a better job, get a career," an explicit reminder that one gains a higher standard of living, by going to work and earning income. One becomes fully self-sufficient not only by working, but by advancing in one's area of work. This is particularly problematic in that, according to Randy Feltman, who directed the implementation plan from its inception and is Director of the Business and Employment Division of the Human Services Agency, the general profile of a welfare recipient in this county is a single mother with two dependent children, and with multiple barriers to success.

A second principle is that the success of CalWORKs depends on the success of local businesses and on the

stability of economic development. Because of its reliance on the business community, CalWORKs in Ventura County treats this community as "valued customers" and assists businesses to grow and create new jobs.

The importance of community involvement is another underlying principle. The CalWORKs Implementation Plan emphasizes partnership as a key component to success and has constructed a net-work of partners in the areas of the county's criminal justice system, educational system, family support services, and community organizations as well as the business community. By maintaining the importance of self-sufficiency, by acknowledging the value of successful local businesses, and by inviting the community and count vacancies to participate actively in serving the needs of CalWORKs clients, Ventura County has built a strong foundation for implementing welfare reform.

Perhaps the most immediately successful component of CalWORKs in Ventura County is its method of "One-Stop" service delivery. The County has set up seven One-Stop Job and Career Centers (JCCS) to replace former welfare offices. These community-based centers bring together various agencies and community organizations under one roof to serve employers, job seekers from the general public, and CalWORKs families alike. In each of these centers, a person gets job counseling and finds referrals for jobs. In the same place, the CalWORKs client can also get needed help or information from other government agencies, for example about transportation, childcare, medical care, substance abuse treatment, public health, mental health, and child support enforcement. These new Job and Career Centers - three in Oxnard, two in Ventura, one in Simi Valley, one in Santa Paula - provide individualized support services tailored to the needs of each family.

Their multidisciplinary case management teams support a delivery system that increases communication and collaboration among county-based agencies as well as raising the rate and efficiency of services to CalWORKs clients.

Five Intake and Eligibility Centers help people apply for food stamps and assist in applying for Medi-Cal. Formerly, a person on welfare had to go to many different offices, often widely separated, to get necessary help. And government personnel serving these clients, who formerly had to write letters and reports to communicate, can now meet face-to-face with colleagues or with clients.

#### VENTURA COUNTY JOB AND CAREER CENTERS

Contact <http://www.job.ventura.org> for information.

Oxnard College JCC 4000 South Rose Avenue Oxnard, CA 93033 805-986-7300 Director, Larry Kennedy	Simi Valley JCC 980 Enchanted Way, Suite 105 Simi Valley, CA 93065 805-582-8721 Director, Connie Clay
Santa Clara Valley JCC 725 East Main Street Santa Paula, CA 93060 805-933-8300 Director, Judy Rivera	Ventura College JCC 4274 Telegraph Road Ventura, CA 93003 805-477-2000 Director, Kay Faulcon
West Oxnard JCC 635 South Ventura Road Oxnard, CA 93030 805-382-8610 Director, Kathy Smith	West Ventura JCC 701 Santa Clara Street Ventura, CA 93001 805-585-6400 Director, Lauri Flack

Downtown Oxnard, JCC  
505 South A Street  
Oxnard, CA 93030  
805-240-7000  
Director, Art Hernandez

#### INTAKE AND ELIGIBILITY CENTERS

4651 Telephone Road, Suite 100  
Ventura, CA 93003  
805-658-4100

1400 Vanguard Drive  
Oxnard, CA 93033  
805-933-8461

725 East Main Street  
Santa Paula, CA 93060  
805-933-8461

80 East Hillcrest Drive  
Thousand Oaks, CA 91360  
805-494-1009

2003 Royal Avenue  
Simi Valley, CA 93065  
805-584-4842

## CALWORKS' ELIGIBILITY AND WORK REQUIREMENTS

A major change from the older welfare system (AFDC) is the method by which eligibility is determined and processed. CalWORKs eligibility remains complex and based largely on income, property and resources, household composition, citizen-ship/immigration status, and parental deprivation. The creation of Intake and Eligibility Centers now makes the process more efficient. These centers, located in Ventura, Oxnard, Santa Paula, and Simi Valley, and Thousand Oaks, screen and approve applications not for CalWORKs alone, but for the entire spectrum of public assistance.

At the Intake and Eligibility Centers, job seekers receive an initial employment screening, view an orientation video that explains work requirements and time limits, get immediate job search assignments, attend a mandatory "Work First" group orientation, and may gain access to the CalWORKs diversion program that diverts selected families from CalWORKs cash aid by providing a one-time cash payment to help overcome a temporary barrier to self-sufficiency. The Intake and Eligibility Centers help avoid duplication, expedite the application process, and maximize efficiency.

CalWORKs must by law enforce client work requirements. In Ventura County, all CalWORKs job seekers must gain employment or participate in time-limited activities intended specifically to assist them in becoming employed. Adults in a one-parent family are required to have a minimum of 32 hours of participation per week in specified work-focused activities; adults in a two-parent family must have a combined minimum of 35 hours per week of work-related activities.

Two-parent families that receive child care services paid for by federal funds must have a combined minimum of 55 hours per week of work-related activities. Among these time limited Welfare-to-Work activities are

employment; work experience; on-the-job-training; self-employment; educational activities, vocational education and training; job search and job readiness aid; and mental health, sub-stance abuse, and domestic violence services.

## **ELIGIBILITY CHANGES FOR NONCUSTODIAL PARENTS**

A new law adds accountability for welfare parents. The Johnson/Cardin Fathers Act of 1999 addresses eligibility for non-custodial parents, usually fathers, who are unemployed, underemployed, or have difficulty paying child support, and whose child meets at least one of the following criteria:

- \* has received cash assistance for 30 months or is within 12 months of a time limit;
- \* is eligible or receiving benefits from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF);
- \* has left TANF within the past 12 months; or
- \* is receiving benefits from food stamps, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Medicaid, or state child health insurance programs.

The noncustodial parent must be in compliance with a written or oral personal responsibility contract. He must agree to cooperate in the proof of paternity, make regular support payments, go to work, complete high school, or take job training. Protections for custodial parents at risk of domestic violence are part of the plan. Also addressed are the following:

- \* Vocational educational training for the non-custodial parent is now allowed for six months.
- \* Children who are aging out of the foster care system, ages 18-25, are eligible for the welfare-to-Work program.
- \* Current data reporting regulations are replaced with requirements that would be developed by the Secretary of Labor in consultation with the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

## **THE JOB AND CAREER CENTERS AND THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY**

CalWORKS hopes to provide jobs for clients-in-training by cooperating with the business community. To that end, they have invited local companies to make presentations about job availability and to do job interviewing at the Job and Career Centers. In order to put this plan into action, they have formed the CalWORKS Business Council which coordinates the employment sector working with Ventura County agencies. The Council advocates hiring CalWORKS job seekers and promotes economic expansion to create jobs. All seven JCCs are making progress in this endeavor.

The Job and Career Centers have job training and employment pro-grams in place. In the Santa Clara Valley JCC, for example, three programs provided through Ventura College offer training. The "Customer Service" graduates are placed in jobs at Kinko's and GTE through temporary agencies, WesTAFF and Addacao, Other job seekers are hired by other private firms,

Also at the Santa Clara Valley JCC, a state-of-the-art training center for machine operators has been created through HAAS Automation of Oxnard. A class of 25 includes three women, and graduates are finding jobs that pay \$10 per hour. The Center also trains child care providers in a 12-unit program through Oxnard and Ventura Colleges in conjunction with Peppermint Junction and Kindercare.

While these jobs pay only \$7.50 per hour at first, a 24-unit program for graduates puts job seekers on track for lifelong learning and increasingly higher earnings. Other Job and Career Centers have similar programs in place with new courses starting frequently.

The passage of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) in 1998 deter-mined how businesses, large and small, can aid clients in obtaining jobs. Because the seven Job and Career Centers began operation at different

times, implementing the WIA has lagged. However, businesses ranging from agriculture to government to community organizations and private enterprise are represented on the job search computer programs (CalJOBS) and bulletin boards at all the Job and Career Centers.

Companies based in Ventura County have conducted job fairs and presented talks on how to prepare resumes and interview for jobs. Kinko's held a Job Fair at the Ventura College Job and Career Center. Other companies have talked with potential employees at the JCCs' Job Club sessions about their employment needs. The JCCs have also filmed mock interviews to aid clients in becoming familiar with a process that may not lie within their experience.

The East County Job and Career Center in Simi Valley early established its job preparation program. Business owners and county officials have met with the staff to aid them in planning how best to function and how to meet the business community. In west Simi Valley, a new shopping mail with major employers is helping to make the East County's JCC program a success.

The Job and Career Center at Oxnard College is open in temporary facilities. Ground breaking for a new building is slated for April 2000. Nevertheless, the Center is seeing about 80 clients a day, primarily students. To better serve Spanish-speaking clients, classes are first conducted in Spanish. Then students transition into English.

**Kathy Smith, Director of the West Oxnard Job and Career Center, tells of a small business owner who attended the Center's Entrepreneurial Academy before establishing his increasingly successful business. When he found that he needed additional employees, he turned to the Job Center to recruit potential employees. The Center placed a trainee with him for several weeks. If the trainee is a good match for the business, he or she will be hired. Lauri Flack, Director of the West Ventura Center, points to the Job Fair last September at Ventura's Pacific View Mail as the largest single collaboration between CalWORKs, the Employment Development Department (EDD), Workforce Development Division (WDD), and the business community. Twenty-five employers and 2500 clients were present for interviewing and exchanging information. Current businesses using this Center include Pic'n Save, Auction One, CDI Corporation, Ventura Urgent Care, Norell Staffing Service, State Farm Insurance, CalCoast Irrigation, Kinko's, Magneson, and Classic Chiropractic.**

## **NEW PROGRAM - NEW ATTITUDE**

A major strength of CalWORKs is its emphasis on changing the attitude of participants from one of dependency and entitlement to one of evolving self-sufficiency. The mottoes of "Work First" and "Get a job, get a better job, get a career" underscore that new attitude. As witness to the change, one client told our League of Women Voters interview team that her children were proud of her now that she was dressing up and going to work each day.

A change in the attitude of Career Services Specialists (formerly called caseworkers) is noticeable as well. In an interview with members of the League of Women Voters Study Committee, one Career Services Specialist said he felt positive about the change in his job with CalWORKs because he is actually working with clients rather than simply checking to see if they meet the requirements to receive aid. A spirit of cooperation with other agencies working under the same roof and a shared sense of common goals permeates the Job and Career Centers.

**In a recent workshop entitled "Welcome to Self-Sufficiency City," sponsored by the Human Services Agency, County employees gained a unique opportunity to walk in the shoes of the clients they serve. Through an intensive role-play simulation, employees learned about the barriers that clients face and the resources they need in order to become self-sufficient. They also discovered the importance of working together as one Agency to diminish client barriers and to build on client strengths.**

**The workshop invited representatives from the Job and Career Center Partner agencies such as the Child Resource Agency and the State Department of Rehabilitation and educators from the community colleges to introduce themselves and describe the services they provide. Workshop participants met in groups to discuss such issues as identifying which areas of the old system reinforce dependency, what knowledge and skills are necessary for agency staff to assist clients effectively, and which client behaviors can become transferable job skills.**

**They also discussed needed changes in management such as case conferences with CalWORKs applicants at intake and workshops for the hardest to place clients as well as examples of current positive practices within the system.**

## **LABOR AND JOB TRAINING REFORM: THE WORKFORCE WIA'S INTENSIVE SERVICES INVESTMENT ACT OF 1998**

The comprehensive legislation providing much of the funding for CalWORKs is WIA, the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. Replacing previous federal and state work programs, this program, supervised by the Department of Labor, provides a framework for a national workforce preparation and employment system. In other words, as far as work goes, this program trains people and helps them find jobs. In addition to CalWORKs clients, it trains eligible adults, dislocated workers, and youth.

According to Bruce Stenslie, Director of Administrative Services in the county's Human Services Agency, it is the WIA legislation that established one of the strongest parts of welfare reform - the one-stop center. The Act states that "customers must be able to conveniently access employment, education, training, and informational services at a single location in their neighborhoods" (WIA of 1998.1). Because Ventura County knew about the Labor Department's intent to create one-stop environments, the County established the Job and Career Centers as the means of implementing service delivery for CalWORKs.

A major benefit of the one-stop system of service delivery is that it broadens both the population it targets and the services it provides. WIA no longer limits labor and job training programs to CalWORKs clients, low income adults, dislocated workers, and at-risk youth, but extends its services to the business community and to the general public. In fact, it requires universal access to core services, allowing the general public to receive job search and placement assistance, access to information on the labor market, skills assessments, and some job retention services. By increasing its vision of labor and job training programs, the Workforce Investment Act promotes a stronger workforce by giving businesses and job seekers opportunities to improve.

Ventura County is one of eight counties selected to participate in a three-year research study that will inquire into systems which will affect the success of clients. The Employment Readiness Demonstration Project (ERDP) has been under way for over a year. According to ERDP's Sandra Nellis, it involves 3600 selected welfare recipients who have multiple barriers, that is, significant problems getting and keeping a job while at the same time raising their children. Half the people in the study will receive enriched services; the other half will be served by CalWORKs in the standard way.

In Ventura County, Goodwill Industries has contracted to provide specially designed training in computer skills and to improve self-esteem and coping skills. About 40 clients have been referred to ERDP so far. Curriculum guidelines have recently been developed for the project statewide. California State University, San Bernardino is collecting the data but has not yet published results. The League will continue to monitor this project.

## **WIA'S INTENSIVE SERVICES**

WIA also broadens existing services to adults, dislocated workers, and youth. While not open to the general public, intensive services such as comprehensive assessments, development of individual employment plans, group and individual counseling, case management, and short-term pre-vocational services are available for those who are eligible

Those who receive intensive services but are still unable to find employment may receive training services directly linked to job opportunities in their local area. These services include occupational skills training, on-the-job training, entrepreneurial training, skill upgrading, job readiness training, adult education and literacy activities in conjunction with other training. Low income youth who face challenges to work entry are eligible for further programs such as tutoring, study skills training, instruction leading to completion of secondary school, alternative school services, mentoring by adults, paid and unpaid work experience, occupational skills training, and leadership development.

## **WIA AND FUNDING**

Just as the Workforce Investment Act altered forms of service delivery, target populations, and training programs, it also changed funding of the system. The Act specifies three funding streams to states and local areas: adults, dislocated workers, and youth. For adults and youth, 85 percent of funds are allocated to local areas, with the remainder reserved for statewide activities. For dislocated workers, 20 percent of funds are set aside for National Emergency Grants, dislocated worker demonstration efforts, and technical assistance.

Of the remaining 80 percent, 60 percent goes to the local area; the rest goes to the State for statewide activities. Significantly, at least 30 percent of local youth funds must be used to help those who are not attending school. If adult funds become limited, recipients of public assistance and low income clients receive priority for services. The one-stop Job and Career Centers receive funding from money set aside for CalWORKS, the Workforce Investment Act, and the Welfare-to-Work program. While reforms have been made, funding remains a complicated issue.

## **WIA AND WIBS**

The Workforce Investment Act calls for the creation of state and local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) to implement and monitor the new labor and job training system. Workforce Investment Boards will be established and states will develop five-year strategic plans. Governors will designate local Workforce Investment Areas and oversee local WIBs, which in turn will help them develop a statewide workforce investment system and labor market information system. Youth Councils will be established as a sub-group of local boards to develop programs for youth.

Working with elected officials to plan and oversee the local system, local WIBs will designate one-stop operators, identify providers of training services, monitor system performance, negotiate local performance levels with the state WIBs and Governors, and will help to develop a labor market information system. Local funding is managed by the County Board of Supervisors and local WIBs.

Some restrictions apply. The County Board of Supervisors does not have the power to name the members of local WIBs until the Governor designates the location as a Workforce Investment Area. The Department of Labor will not give states WIA money until state and local WIBs are established. Local WIBs will consist of private industry workers and one-stop partners and will meet 11 times a year. As the governing structure of the Workforce Investment Act, state and local Workforce Investment Boards will ensure that the mandates of the Act will be carefully implemented and adequately enforced.

## WHAT RECIPIENTS SAY ABOUT CALWORKS: RESULTS OF A SURVEY

The League of Women Voters of Ventura County drew up and administered a questionnaire for clients of CalWORKs in January, 2000. It was designed to maintain the confidentiality of the client while inquiring about her or his welfare experience. The League was given a client's first name only and an appointment time by the Job and Career Centers' administrators. The job seekers were interviewed individually in private meetings which lasted about twenty minutes. Clients were not asked their addresses, but it was assumed they lived near the area served by the Job and Career Center where they were interviewed; East County JCC, West Oxnard JCC, Ventura College JCC, and the Employment Readiness Demonstration Project in Oxnard. We assumed the clients represented most of the county regions.

Twenty-eight CalWORKs recipients were interviewed. There were three men and twenty-five women which made up twenty-six family units. These family units had 74 dependent children.

The survey was intended to gather information and to give job seekers a chance to discuss their experiences and make suggestions. The League is aware that the information gathered is anecdotal. The survey was not meant to be of statistical significance. At the same time, we noted useful information, such as the high percentage of clients who were pleased with their Career Service Specialist (formerly social worker), and yet a little over half did not know how much time they had left on assistance.

The League does not intend to interpret the findings of this survey, and cautions readers before drawing conclusions to take into account the small number interviewed and the selection method. To our knowledge, this is the only survey of CalWORKs job seekers in Ventura County, and thus it provides an opportunity to examine what twenty-eight people say of their experiences. Suggestions for change, complements, criticisms, and disappointments were expressed. For further elucidation, comments made by the clients are included under each question in the compilation.

N = 28 CalWORKs Job Seekers

Family units = 26

Dependent children = 74

### Question 1. *When did you start CalWORKs? How much time do you have left?*

#### A. When started?

Most of the people had been in the program a year or two, and two entered the program about two weeks before the survey. The people who began in 1994, 1997, and January, 1998 appear to have reached the limit of 24 months, yet they were still in the program.

No answer	1	3.6%
1994	1	3.6%

1997	1	3.6%
1998	6	21.4% (3 in Jan., 2 in Dec., 1 no month given)
1999	17	60.7% (2 in Jan., 2 in June, 1 in July, 1 in Aug., 3 in Sept., 3 in Oct., 1 in Nov., 4 in Dec.)
2000	2	7.1% (2 weeks)

### B. Time left?

Don't know	15	53.6% (including 8 who transferred from AFDC to CalWORKs)
From 6 mo. to 24 mo.	11	39%
Unexplained answer	2	7.1% (See comments below)

#### Client comments:

- \* I have no time limit. (not explained)
- \* Not sure but not planning to use it all.
- \* About a year. Was on welfare about 15 years.
- \* I have 18 months to two years. Some people get extensions on a case by case basis.
- \* Planning to ask the CSS worker.

### Question 2. *How many children do you have? Their ages?*

Based on the 74 dependent children in 26 family units, the average number of children per unit is 2.8. The numbers of children in each family range from one to seven children and the ages range from 8 weeks old to 17 years old. In two families there were adult children who were not counted in this survey.

#### Families with:

One child	4	15.4%
Two	9	34.6%
Three	7	26.9%
Four	3	11.5%
Five	0	
Six	2	7.7%
Seven	1	3.8%

#### Age grouping of children:

Infants to 2 years	12	16.2%
3 to 5	18	24.3%
6 to 10	23	13.1%
11 to 13	11	14.9%
14 to 17	10	13.5%

**Question 3. When you entered CalWORKs, were you satisfied with the services and help received? How would you rate the intake staff?**

Rating is on a scale from 1-3, one being the highest. Rate the Career Service Specialist. Rate the Job Club. Rate services with the Partners (co-operating agencies including the Public Health Nurse, Child Protective Services, Child Development Resources, etc.)

**A. Are you satisfied with the services and help from CalWORKs?**

Yes:	18	64.3%
No:	0	
Neutral:	2	7.9%
No answer	8	28.6%

**B. Rate Intake Staff**

Rated #1:	16	57.1%
Rated #2:	2	7.1%
Rated #3:	1	3.6%
No rating:	9	32.1%

**C. Rate CSS**

Rated #1:	25	89.3%
Rated #2:	3	10.7%
Rated #3:	0	

**D. Rate Job Club**

Rated #1:	8	28.6%
Rated #2:	4	14.3%
Rated #3:	1	3.6%
No rating:	3	10.7%

Not started Job Club	6	21.4%
Not required to attend Job Club	6	21.4%

#### E. Rate the Partners

Rated # 1:	12	42.9%
Rated #2:	0	
Rated #3:	0	
No rating:	9	32.1%
Not aware of Partners	2	7.1%
Did not need Partners	2	7.1%
Did not use Partners	3	10.7%

#### Client comments:

- \* The CSS was very helpful. The JobClub was a waste of time. Some of the clients in the Job Club showed disrespect, which was ignored by the teacher.
- \* People come from local companies to show how to do interviews and resumes. Also, they do mock interviews at the center and film them so that we can go back and comment on them.
- \* I attended the Job Club two or three times and the last one was really good, led by EDD.
- \* I'm real satisfied with the caseworker. I can talk with her about anything. I hardly ever talked with AFDC worker.

#### Question 4. *Have you gotten job training?*

Yes	16	57%
No	12	43%

#### Client comments:

- \* I'm learning skills like being on time for work.
- \* When I was in the Job Club I had child- care. I'd like to be trained for childcare when I can.
- \* I got help to get my GED.

**Question 5. *Would you like more job help? In what areas?*****A. Would you like more job help?**

Yes	12	42.8%
No	12	42.8%
No answer	4	14.3%

**B. In what areas?**

**Childcare giver, medical/dental assistant, auto mechanic, computer skills, sales.**

**Client Comments:**

- \* You can't get enough training.
- \* I never found a job hard to get, but I would like a better work environment.
- \* The job paid minimum, \$5.75 an hour, and that's not enough for my family.
- \* I need more training but my children need more attention.
- \* I found another job which I got myself.

**Question 6. *Have you gotten a job from CalWORKs?***

Yes	5	17.8%
No	22	78.6%
No answer	1	3.6%

**\*Reasons given include being too new to CalWORKs, enrolled in class or community college, in an apprenticeship program, found her own job, already was working, was moving out of state, or currently being interviewed for jobs.**

**Client comments:**

- \* I need a case conference to clarify overlapping regulations of Core Grant, EOPS and CalWORKs. Money is being deducted from my TANF aid.
- \* I had gotten a lot of job leads from CalWORKs and found my own job, paying \$6.25 an hour with no benefits for a forty hour week.
- \* I found a job from a community college program.
- \* There is an excellent program for working people in college called PACE.

**Question 7. *Has your family gotten funds for childcare? What kind of day care do you use? Are you satisfied with the child-care provided?* N = 26****A. Has your family gotten funds for childcare?**

Yes	17	65.4%
No	11	42.3%

**B. What kind of care do you use?**

Unlicensed family member or friend	14	53.8%
Licensed day care	7	26.9%
After school program	2	7.7%
No answer	5	19.2%

**C. Are you satisfied with the childcare?**

Yes	17	65.4%
No	2	7.7%
Neutral	2	7.7%
No answer	7	26.9%

**Client comments:**

**\* I use a family friend for childcare. There were not a lot of choices but it works out.**

**\* I use a licensed center and I'm very pleased with the care provided; the children do not want to leave. Some of my children have special needs.**

**\* I was using an unlicensed friend for childcare but my friend did not want to get involved with CalWORKs clients.**

**Question 8. Are you and your children covered by medical care? What is the coverage?****A. Are you and your children covered by childcare?**

Yes	26	93%
No	1	3.5%
No answer	1	3.5%

**B. What is the coverage?**

Medi-Cal	26	93%
Other	1	3.5%
No answer	1	3.5%

**Question 9. What are the major things that keep you from fully supporting your children? (Job training, affordable housing, childcare, education, transportation, illnesses?, etc.)**

**Note: The percentages total more than one hundred because there was more than one answer available.**

Affordable Housing	16	57.1%
Education	11	39.3%
Job Training	9	32.9%
Childcare	6	21.4%
Transportation	4	14.3%
Illness	1	3.6%
Other	15	53.6%

**\*Obstacles to self-sufficiency mentioned by the clients include: language barriers, work layoffs, former drug and alcohol problems, and lack of child support payments.**

**Number of people with three or more barriers: 9 32.1%**

**Client comments:**

- \* It took 10 years to get into section 8 housing.
- \* I have section 8 housing, but this is still a problem for me.
- \* Well, AFDC is not enough to pay the bills.

**Question 10. *Today are you doing better than before CalWORKs? Are your children doing better?***

**A. Today are you doing better than before CalWORKs?**

Yes	21	75%
No	4	14.3%
No answer	3	10.7%

**B. Are your children doing better?**

Yes	20	68%
No	6	21% (Includes 4 who said the children remained the same.)
No answer	3	11%

**Client comments:**

- \* **Yes, because my family gets Medi-Cal.**
- \* **I became a better mom due to child development classes at Oxnard College.**
- \* **Our time together is more enjoyable and not so stressful.**
- \* **I'm trying to make them strong and not make the mistakes I've made.**
- \* **We are able to pay for food and the bills.**

**Question 11. *What do you think will happen if the economy takes a downturn and you haven't a job?***

Don't know	8	28.6%
Have plans	7	25%
Other	11	39.3%
No answer	2	7.1%

**Selected comments:**

- \* **"I'm in that position now and surviving."**
- \* **"Well, it happened before and it will happen again—I'll just have to deal with it."**
- \* **"I would be in trouble—I don't have any money in the bank."**
- \* **"By that time I will have a good job."**
- \* **"It's a scary thought—I have to get plans."**
- \* **"Move in with my mother."**

**B. What help can you get from friends, family or agencies to back you up?**

Family will backup	10	35.6%
Organizations will backup: Church, Big Sisters/Brothers group, ARBOR (These three were the only groups mentioned.)	3	11%
None ("None" is word used by interviewee.)	7	25%
Unsure or vague plans	6	21.4%
No answer	2	7.1%

**Client comments:**

- \* **Someone would (be backup).**
- \* **Workforce Development.**
- \* **Continue school and job training.**
- \* **I'm thinking of moving to a cheaper apartment.**

**Question 12. *What other things would you like to say about your experiences with CalWORKs?***

No response	3	10.7%
Complimentary	19	67.8%
Suggestions	4	14.3%
Criticisms	6	21.4%
Disappointments	3	10.7%

#### **Client comments:**

- \* We don't get enough money to rent an apartment.
- \* In the beginning I felt like I didn't fit, but the staff encouraged me and told me I was just right for it. Ventura College staff has also been very supportive.
- \* I've had really good experience. It helps when you want to better yourself.
- \* Everyone is nice. They gave me self- confidence. Sometimes they want you to take any job, but not always.
- \* CSS workers are very nice and excellent—they seem to like what they are doing. I think that the maximum value of \$5000 for a car is not realistic in today's auto market. It is hard taking a bus carrying a baby, stroller, diaper bag and book bag. No one helps you on or off the bus.
- \* I don't want to be on it (CalWORKs) but I can't find the right job because of stupid people and stupid hours.
- \* The 100 hour rule for couples needs to be amended, and qualification should be based on income, not hours of work. I believe there needs to be more affordable housing in Simi Valley.
- \* It helped me a lot. The instructor made me realize that I could achieve something.
- \* I need more information on medical services for my special-needs child.
- \* I don't fully understand the contract I signed and want staff to explain more carefully and give me more time to read through the paperwork.

The responses often included a variety of comments. The suggestions, praise, and criticism expressed by this sample of job seekers in Ventura County demonstrate that they want their ideas of the progress and problems of welfare reform to be heard. All of us, including the recipients of CalWORKs and the administrators, can profit from this survey.

#### **PROGRESS AND PROBLEMS: A COMMENTARY**

What conclusions can we draw from our study of welfare reform in Ventura County? Very few at this early point in its development. Because CalWORKs is but two years into its implementation, because an up-to-date computerized tracking system is not yet in place, and because our study committee cannot be privy to the day- to-day workings of the welfare system, we are limited in our ability to make definite conclusions about progress. We continue to study the subject, however, and can make several informed observations, some of them discussed below.

Among the positive changes brought about by CalWORKs is the establishment of one-stop Job and Career Centers. These centers serve not only CalWORKs clients but also other job seekers who can use their facilities and services. Because they do serve the whole of Ventura County's job seekers and business employers as well, we believe they are a vital part of the economic well-being of the county. Although job seekers are finding employment and welfare clients are leaving welfare rolls, we believe it is to the county's advantage to keep the JCCs open in the event of a downturn of the economy. If that happens, the centers will be needed even more.

**Our survey generally indicates the value CalWORKS clients place on the services they receive at the JCCS. We do, however, urge the centers to publicize their services more visibly. Some citizens who might want to get help are not aware of their existence although there are centers in every major area of the county.**

**A good place to find out about the JCCs is through their web page: <http://www.jobs.ventura.org>. We suggest the JCCs list their locations and phone numbers in both the government and white pages of the phone book as well. Outdoor signs and notices in area newspapers, in Government offices and other public places, and in local markets may attract the attention of people who could benefit from the centers' services.**

**Early in our study, two things were clear to us. First, the lack of opportunity at the lower end of the labor market for job seekers to "Get a job, get a better job, get a career" inhibits the move toward self-sufficiency that is the goal of welfare reform. In California and elsewhere, economic inequality has increased, driven by the nature of our economy. The job market is "cruel and hostile," according to one of our sources. Low-skilled jobs, lack of benefits, few incentives to climb the job ladder, lack of education - these characteristics create a formidable barrier to becoming self-sufficient and prevent people from rising out of poverty. Note the implications of CalWORKS' Management Report discussed below.**

**Second, welfare is largely a women's issue. Most people on welfare are mothers with two children or more. Beyond finding a job, the problems of having transportation to and from a job and finding adequate child care present serious roadblocks to a woman's being able to get off the welfare rolls.**

***Remember the Children: Wave 1 Findings*, a report of a four-year study by UC Berkeley and Yale University, shows that single welfare mothers with preschool children may not be better off under the new welfare reform. This study looks at 948 single mothers with preschool-aged children in California, Connecticut, and Florida. Of these 473 are Californians. The study says it is too early to know whether children are less better off, but the most significant findings in the first wave of the study are that mothers were three times more likely to be depressed than the national average. Also, child care nationally was often of low quality, with too much passive watching of TV and videos and very little preschool skills offered. Even licensed care often had too many preschoolers per teacher for quality learning.**

**A large percentage of the families did not take advantage of child care funding for reasons not fully understood. This is a concern because of welfare time limits, raising the question whether mothers will be able to continue working, or will have to revert to receiving cash assistance, or will drop out of the system.**

**One finding of the UC Berkeley-Yale University study is that the incidence of severe levels of maternal depression was disturbingly high. Maternal depression constrains women's employability and affects their children's emotional and intellectual well-being. Additionally, about a quarter of the parents were isolated socially, and about one-third ran out of food before the end of the month. These findings are generally known to be detrimental to young children's development.**

**According to the authors of *Remember the Children*, "policy makers must decide whether to address the development of children with the same intensity they display in moving single mothers swiftly into jobs" (Executive Summary, 4). Poverty, hunger, depression, low-level of schooling, isolation, uneven parenting and child care are the red flags signifying, problems for mothers and children in the welfare system.**

## **VENTURA COUNTY CALWORKS'CURRENT REPORT**

**The fourth-quarter Management Report: CalWORKs Program, March 20, 2000 from the Business and Employment Services Department of the Human Services Agency lists several key findings. This most recent report compares fourth quarter figures for 1999 with those of the same quarter in 1998. These findings highlight employment, barriers to client success, and continuing need for improvement in services.**

**Monthly placements of job seekers were 244.3 for the fourth quarter, 15% lower than the same period in 1998. However, the placement average as a percent of the average monthly job seeker case-load increased by a half-percent over the same quarter in 1998. Gross income for fourth quarter placements is projected as \$12,433 or \$215 higher than a year earlier. Preliminary results for 1,040 job holders who were placed initially in 1998 and who had one or more placements in 1998 and 1999 showed starting earnings increased for 59.2% of them and decreased or did not change for 40.8%.**

**An average of 33.2% of all aided families reported earned income each month during the fourth quarter of 1999 compared to 33.4% for the same period in 1998. Total earnings for all families per month averaged \$1,600,068 compared to \$1,715,607 for the same period in 1998.**

**The current management report shows that the rate of decline in caseloads continues to go down. The average monthly change in caseloads was down 49 cases for all of 1999 compared to 117 in 1998 and 127 in 1997. Cases which do not include an active job seeker made up nearly half of the aided caseloads for the fourth quarter 1999.**

**Clients who received aid for three years or more were likely to be over 40 years old and less likely to have a high school diploma or GED, to have attended school beyond the 10th grade, to be proficient in reading and/or speaking English, and to have worked in the previous 24 months. Over two-thirds of job seekers were engaged in paid or unpaid work in the fourth quarter. At the same time, enrollment in training or education programs was low. Only vocational education captured a sizable average enrollment (13.3%).**

**The report points out implications of these findings, implications which our committee has been questioning throughout our study. Although more job seekers are being placed in jobs today, as their number declines, the remaining job seekers will be harder to place.**

**The low pay of available jobs, the low level of participation in education and training, and the lifetime restrictions on aid contribute to the uncertainty about the prospects for self-sufficiency, particularly for those who are faced with multiple barriers to employment.**

**The management report also points out that low enrollment in treatment services (mental health, substance abuse, domestic abuse, etc.) indicate the need to improve how CalWORKs identifies and delivers services to this segment of job seekers.**

## **SOME REMAINING QUESTIONS**

***Do clients have access to public transportation or other means of getting to and from work and child care facilities?* A survey conducted by the Business and Employment Department of the Human Services Agency in Ventura County between January and March 1999 identifies areas for development for transportation services for CalWORKs recipients. Of the 653 job seekers who completed the survey, 218 were employed and 435 not employed at the time. According to Craig Ichinose, Research Statistician with Human Services Agency, several significant results emerged. Of those respondents who were employed, 14% said they rode or planned to ride the bus to work; but over four times (64%) as many of them said only that they could ride the bus to work. Of those who could not take the bus, various reasons such as lack of an accessible embarking or disembarking point, the length of travel time, the ease of other modes of transportation, and the difficulty in coordinating public transportation**

and child care were given.

Another finding was that of those who were not employed, 38% said they planned to ride the bus when they found a job. Ichinose surmises that while unemployed recipients plan to take the bus when they get jobs, they encounter the barriers to public transportation mentioned above. Addressing these barriers to taking public transportation is essential.

In our report to League members last year, we noted that more than 50% of welfare-to-work clients do not have an operable car to get to work. They depend either on friends or family driving them to work or on public transportation. Some response to this problem have already seen results. A shuttle bus service in Simi Valley now serves the Job and Career Center and the Workforce Development Department directly. These sites were accessible only by car before.

In addition, since bus service to some areas in the county may not be cost effective, carpool or vanpools can be better alternatives. An emergency guaranteed ride home program serves workers who use bus, train, or carpool to get to work. Other schemes to serve bus riders, such as "Smart Card," are being used in some parts of the county. Card holders pre-pay an amount and the system deducts individual fares as they accrue.

Adequate, efficient, county-wide transportation to serve the public is essential for all Ventura County residents - especially those who cannot get to work any other way. We urge transportation agencies such as the Ventura County Transportation Commission to coordinate their planning with CalWORKS in order to serve this population better.

A promising plan to offer low-cost cars to CalWORKS' recipients has been in place for three years but seems now to be picking up speed. Through Many Mansions, a non-profit organization that provides low-cost housing, donated cars are repaired and put into good working order, then offered at less than \$5000 to welfare recipients who qualify and can pay about \$75 a month toward the auto loan. The program, called Many Motors, hopes to have 25 to 30 cars available by the end of the year. Only seven of the county's 6000 or more CalWORKS clients have acquired cars this way so far.

*Has access to affordable housing improved for CalWORKS clients?* In interviewing Ventura County housing agencies, our study committee found that housing does not fully participate in CalWORKS as a partner in the centers. CalWORKS' Randy Feltman agreed with us that housing is a vital need for welfare families as well as other low-income families, but said that this need has not yet been adequately addressed or funded in either federal or state welfare reform legislation. He pointed out the rising cost of housing in Ventura County, local growth controls that limit construction of low income housing, a low apartment vacancy rate, declining federal low-income housing subsidies, and long waiting lists for public housing present a challenge for CalWORKS families (Response to League of Women Voters Questions, Oct. 19, 1999).

CalWORKS staff have submitted a grant application to HUD to increase the availability of Section 8 housing vouchers for CalWORKS families. Even if the grant is approved, the declining number of landlords who participate in the Section 8 voucher program due to rent controls and the low vacancy rate in the county remains a problem. The most critical need for affordable housing is in Oxnard where local housing authorities are working on strategies that can be implemented within existing budget limits, according to Feltman.

*How successful has the planning and funding for child care been in meeting the needs of tire children, tize welfare families, and tile goals of welfare reform?* Child care is operated by Child Development Resources (CDR), a local, well-regarded, non-profit agency. The state has designated three stages of child care. Stage one provides funding for the care of children of new CalWORKS job seekers for up to six months, or until the parents are able to pay for it or become eligible for the next step. This stage provides drop-in child supervision at all the JCCS. Stage two covers families who are in training,

working, and on assistance, or moving off assistance. Stage three begins when funded spaces are available for current and former CalWORKS families, or severely low-income families not on assistance.

Funding has not been realistically provided by the state for stages two and three. This results in some families, although working, being too poor to afford child care and thus vulnerable to having to quit work in order to care for their children while at the same time being, at risk of returning to welfare.

CDR reports that 70% of the funded placements are unlicensed settings, usually with family members or friends selected by the parent. If in the future the parents decide their children would be better prepared for school and life if cared for by trained teachers, there would not be enough places for them in licensed settings and the cost to them would be higher.

It is one of the objectives of welfare reform to teach parents the value of education which, if successful, leads to an increasing need for additional child care funding. Welfare reform will not succeed if children are not well provided for and well educated.

*How involved is the mentoring program at the present time in giving CalWORKS clients support and assistance as they transition from welfare to work?* As one of the Partners in the JCCS, volunteer mentors are to help clients with job readiness, job retention, transportation, and one-on-one support. We reported last year that a sizeable number of volunteer mentors were available, but that they had not been appointed to give their assistance.

In an interview last September with Betty Krause, Volunteer Services Administrator, we learned that the problem was not in finding mentors, but in finding eligible mentors. This may be because clients do not understand the importance of having a mentor and are hesitant to ask for one. More significantly, clients often do not qualify for a mentor under criteria set by Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). These criteria have recently been relaxed so that a recipient does not have to have been on aid for 30 months and must meet only one of seven criteria such as educational level, work history, or substance abuse. However, other obstacles include the fact that the commute across the county may prevent mentors meeting with mentees, and that the lack of mentors from some cultural groups (Asian, Vietnamese, Filipino, for instance) may create a gap in cultural understanding.

We did not find personnel at the JCCs as aware of the mentoring program as we had hoped. At six of the seven JCCS, we asked about the mentor program but did not find referrals being made. While this situation may have improved recently, we hope that CalWORKS and the various volunteer organizations that provide mentors will work to implement this much-needed service.

*What is happening to the unspent federal surplus of money held by the State of California? Where is that money going? Who decides how it will be allocated and spent?* A recent article in *The Los Angeles Times* cites a study by the National Campaign for Jobs and Income that shows billions of dollars in federal anti-poverty aid sitting unused in 45 states and the District of Columbia (Feb. 25, 2000. A2). To date, California has accumulated \$1.6 billion of those funds, based on statistics provided by the state to the federal government through September 1999.

Although some states have been found to be diverting federal appropriations meant to help the poor become self-sufficient into other projects, California is not apparently one of them. The unused money is building up, even though the welfare rolls are declining, because federal anti-poverty money is fixed by law at 1994 levels. According to the *Times* article, the money was intended as an incentive payment to counties for each welfare recipient who entered the workforce.

This money should be spent on relieving those barriers to self-sufficiency this report has detailed: child care, transportation, job training, and a support system that enables job seekers to stay on the job and

raise their families at the same time.

*What will Congress do when its self-imposed time limit on the new welfare program has run out? Will they renew it? Revise it? Replace it? We don't know. But we will be watching.*

The federal law which established Temporary Aid for Needy Families terminates in August 2001. It is expected to be reauthorized by Congress but probably in some modified form. How this will affect local and state welfare programs and their funding is a matter of great concern.

*What happens when the five-year aid limitation for each recipient runs out? We feel this program has had limited success so far, but there appear to be about 20% of aid recipients who do not or cannot benefit from this sort of program. The problem here is a matter of public policy that will have to be addressed.*

## RESOURCES FOR INFORMATION

Many important sources helped the League of Women Voters Study Committee on Welfare Reform in Ventura County become informed about this complex subject. We perused books, pamphlets, reports, and newspapers, surfed the Internet, interviewed County personnel and clients, and visited Job and Career Centers. Government publications are central to an understanding of the welfare system because they delineate the goals and guidelines. A good library or the Internet can lead right to the Federal Department of Human Services or the State Department of Social Services. The immediate helpful written resource for us was The Ventura County CalWORKs Implementation Plan, February 1998, for this helped us see the structure and the planned future of welfare reform here.

The California Department of Social Services commissioned the Rand Corporation to evaluate CalWORKs. Rand's *Welfare Reform in California: State and County Implementation of CalWORKs in the First Year* gives the necessary background and describes and evaluates the initial phase of the new program. Rand will publish more comprehensive studies of the 25 counties they are following in the Springs of 2000 and 2001. (Ventura, unfortunately, isn't one of them.) The *California Family Impact Seminar*, funded by the California State Library, has a significant early publication (1998) focusing on children and families.

Another non-profit organization making significant contributions is the Public Policy Institute of California which studies economic, social, and political issues in California. It has separate 1999 publications that indicate two areas affecting welfare reform that are more serious in California than in any other State: the increasing gap between rich and poor and the level of basic skills of welfare recipients. This League of Women Voters study is specifically focused on Ventura County.

Newspapers provide current information. A series of articles in *The New York Times* through 1999, by Jason DeParle points to the claimed successes of welfare reform and poses some touch questions about where the new system might lead. Although his research was done primarily in Wisconsin, his questions and findings often pertain to welfare reform in Ventura County. *The Los Angeles Times* and *The Ventura County Star* have featured articles examining welfare issues locally. Most notably, a recent article in *The Los Angeles Times* points to the study by UC Berkeley and Yale University which questions whether poor children's lives do in fact improve when their mothers go to work.

The Study Committee also interviewed local welfare officials and visited all the Job and Career Centers, some more than once. County personnel have been helpful and cooperative. Members of our Committee visited the JCCS, observing the procedures for clients, talking with the Directors of the centers and with personnel working with child care, employment, case supervision, Medi-Cal eligibility, and other areas pertinent to services available to clients. Each Center had a Job Club, which one of our members attended. run by the Employment Development Department (EDD).

Welfare administrative personnel in the County have been especially helpful. We submitted questions in advance to Randy Feltman, Director of Business and Employment Division, who, with Craig Ichinose, Research Psychologist with Human Services Agency, provided us with written responses and granted extensive interviews with them and other Human Services Agency staff, including Leticia Lachberg, Ruth Vomund, Debbie Bergevin, and Patty McWaters. Over the two-year period of our study, we have interviewed other Human Services Agency personnel, particularly Barbara Fitzgerald, Director of the agency, and Bruce Stenslie, Director of Administrative Services.

In addition, we interviewed in person or by telephone representatives of other agencies and services who play important roles with- in the CalWORKs system or who represent Partner organizations. Among them were Julie Irving, Executive Director of Child Development Resources; Don Henninger, Director of Child Care Resources, and other Human Resources Agency personnel specializing in child care resources: Betty Krause, Volunteer Services Coordinator for the Ventura County Mentor Council; Ginger Gherardi, Executive Director of the Ventura County Transportation Commission; Penny Bohannon Boehm, Past President and Director of Legislative Affairs for the Ventura County Economic Association; and many others. Barbara McGinley, management assistant to Randy Feltman, has graciously helped us make contacts, set up appointments, and gain access to information about CalWORKs.

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