



# CalSWEC

California Social Work Education Center

---

**Board of Directors**  
**Research and Development Committee**  
Practice/Research Partnership

**Q U A R T E R L Y   R E P O R T**

**General Information**

Date funding began (i.e. the beginning of the planning period): Jan, 2013

Date of Report: January 15, 2014

Name of Partnership: Transforming Child Welfare Practice through Collaborative Research and Training

University Partner(s): University of California, Los Angeles Department of Social Welfare

County or Tribal Partner(s): Los Angeles County DCFS, Torrance Regional Office

*Lead University Staff/Faculty Assigned to Partnership (list as many as applicable)*

Name: Bridget Freisthler, Ph.D.

Title: Associate Professor

Email: freisthler@luskin.ucla.edu

Name: Todd Franke, Ph.D.

Title: Associate Professor

Email: tfranke@ucla.edu

Name: Alfreda Iglehart, Ph.D.

Title: Associate Professor

Email: Iglehart@ucla.edu

Name: Mary Kay Oliveri, MSW

Title: Title IV-E Program Coordinator, UCLA Department of Social Welfare

Email: mko@ucla.edu

*Lead County or Tribal Staff Assigned to Partnership (list as many as applicable):*

Name: Tedji Dessalegn, MSW

Title: Regional Administrator at DCFS

Email: dessat@dcfs.lacounty.gov

Name: Rosa Tang, MSW

Title: Assistant Regional Administrator at DCFS

Email: tangro@dcfs.lacounty.gov

Name: Howard Kunitz, MSW

Title: Team Decision Making Facilitator at DCFS

Email: kunith@dcfs.lacounty.gov

Point of contact for this report: Bridget Freisthler

## **I. Building a Sustainable Partnership**

- A. Describe ***the progress*** you have made in forming the university/practice partnership that was outlined in your original funding proposal. If you have made changes to your partnership (e.g. how it is structured, who is participating, etc.), describe them.

### **Planning Period: 01/01/13 through 04/17/13**

- The core leadership team, including faculty, the IV-E coordinator, and County representatives meet during the planning phase of the project, both in person and by teleconference, to discuss and support the research projects that will be conducted.
- All Title IV-E students were informed about the project invited to participate on the project through the year-long research project during academic year 2013-2014.
- Faculty are working with the Torrance Regional Office to develop research projects (see details below).
- To date, 3 IV-E students and 2 Non IV-E students have been involved in the planning process. Twelve CSWs at the Torrance Regional Office have participated.

#### **CHANGES**

- A new Title IV-E Program Coordinator (Mary Kay Oliveri) was appointed. Ms. Oliveri has been CalSWEC faculty for many years and is well known by many child welfare agencies in the Los Angeles area. Ms. Oliveri has been briefed on the project and is fully supportive of this effort.
- The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services has been undergoing significant restructuring. To date, this restructuring has minimally affected the Torrance Regional Office but has affected leadership at other offices.

### **Planning Period: 04/18/13 through 06/30/13**

- The core leadership team continued to meet regularly to discuss and support the research projects that will be conducted.
- In addition to the core management team, we have met with additional individuals at the DCFS Torrance office (Maira Torres), with the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (Chad Brinderson), Project ABC (Richard Cohen and Adriana Molina) to discuss how we could fold issues related to Katie A implementation into the Needs Portal. The RA and ARA at the Torrance DCFS Office are supportive of this possible expansion of the portal

### **Year 1: 07/1/13 through 12/31/13**

- The core leadership team continued to meet regularly to discuss and support the research projects that are being conducted.
- In January, Dr. Freisthler will begin attending Systems Leadership meetings to discuss issues related to confidentiality concerns across multiple systems that has currently inhibited some agencies (primarily the Department of Mental Health) from participating in the Needs Portal.

- B. Describe any **barriers or challenges** that have emerged related to the formation and sustenance of your partnership, and how you have addressed them

**Planning Period: 01/01/13 through 04/17/13**

- Initially in the development of the project, we had some miscommunication about how to pilot the research project tool. However, these issues were discussed at our next partnership meeting and we realized we were talking about different concerns.
- Caseworkers seem to be reluctant to participate in some aspects of the partnership particularly related to use of the Needs Portal tool. We have tasked one of our IV-E students, who is placed at the Torrance Regional Office, to serve as liaison to provide in house technical assistance to these caseworkers. This is providing valuable information about how to structure training of caseworkers.

**Planning Period: 04/18/13 through 06/30/13**

- Caseworkers continue to be reluctant to the tool for referrals that are elevated to the level of a case. They have identified a variety of concerns with the tool itself and workers on the front end (e.g, ER workers) want to pass off the case as quickly as possible. In order to address the concerns, we now begin each describing the feedback of DCFS staff and our solutions (below).

**Profile Features**

**Feedback:** Community partners suggested that there should be more options available to indicate which insurance carrier a client may have, or to provide a blank section in which one can write-in a clients' insurance carrier if it is not already listed.

**Solution:** The Portal does provide several options for community providers to indicate which type of insurance is acceptable (Healthy Families, Medical, Private Insurance, Pro Bono, Sliding Scale, No Insurance).

**Login Process**

**Feedback:** CSW's expressed some interest in receiving assistance beyond the training with the log in process.

**Solution:** A DCFS Needs Portal Team member has initiated phone calls to follow up and assist social workers with the log in process and will continue to be available to assist with the log in process.

**Linkage to Clients**

**Feedback:** CSW's expressed an interest in using the Portal to link clients to services in the referral stage and/or with Voluntary Family Maintenance cases.

**Solution:** At this time, the Portal is designed to provide linkage for clients who are currently involved in the child welfare system. We have future plans to incorporate this feature into the system.

**Service Tickets**

**Feedback:** CSW's suggested that we add a new feature to the Portal in which Workers are updated when a community partner completes a service ticket.

**Solution:** The email digest that social workers and community partners receive when a service ticket has been created, or responded to, serves as a reminder to CSW's.

**Feedback:** CSW's suggested that it would be helpful to know which agencies have been contacted via the Portal when a service ticket has been completed and sent out.

**Solution:** The Portal does not allow us to track this type of information at this time.

**Feedback:** CSW's requested that we do not use the Employee ID number to identify the case name (along with the mother's first name, last initial). CSW's stated that using their Employer ID may compromise their personal confidentiality as it may provide access to personal information.

**Solution:** We no longer use the Employer ID to identify the case name. We will continue to use the first name of client and last initial, along with an algorithm number that will be soon be developed. In the meantime, we are using the mother's first name and last initial.

#### Case Transfer Process

**Feedback:** Supervisor's requested to have access of their staff's Portal cases so they can assist with the case transfer process; especially if there is a change in the follow up CSW Worker.

**Solution:** We will provide secondary access to supervisors and TDM facilitators to assist with data input as well as the case transfer process.

#### Usage of Portal

**Feedback:** Request for assistance in navigating through the Portal to initiate a service ticket and complete the service table

**Solution:** Needs Portal Team members are available to provide assistance with any technical questions. We may be contacted via email at: [dcfsneedsportal@gmail.com](mailto:dcfsneedsportal@gmail.com) or through the Contact tab on the Portal.

- We have developed a list of additional ways to encourage participation of caseworkers and are identifying which to implement first. These include:
  - Allowing ER workers to use the Needs Portal for all referrals, particularly those resulting in a case and use re-referrals as an outcome (see Research Projects and Priorities section for more information)
  - Providing Tablets and hot spot devices to allow TDM facilitators assist caseworkers in completing the Needs Portal ticket during and immediately after TDM meetings
  - Having weekly or monthly raffles for caseworkers who use submit tickets (each ticket would be an entry) for Starbucks gift cards or another similar prize.
  - Partner with additional agencies (e.g. DMH, Project ABC) who serve a large portion of DCFS clients to assist in developing and following up on tickets.

#### **Year 1: 07/1/13 through 12/31/13**

Two barriers emerged during this past reporting period:

- Issues around caseloads at DCFS have escalated resulting in a three day strike in December. During this time, caseworkers across Los Angeles County participated in a three day strike. Administration (including our partners, the Torrance RA and ARA) had to fill in a variety of tasks normally handled by caseworkers.
- There also continues to be reorganization at DCFS. Torrance will no longer have TDM facilitators. These facilitators have been very strong proponents of the Needs Portal and have included

completing tickets a part of many TDMs. We are waiting to see how we can capitalize on the reorganization and continue to move the project forward.

- C. List the **key lessons have you learned** as part of your partnership that would benefit other partnerships?

**Planning Period/Quarter 1: 01/01/12 through 08/31/12**

- Caseworker feedback has been integral to helping identify the ways in which the Needs Portal tool can be improved. We are using this feedback to develop a set of frequently ask questions about the project.
- We have also used caseworker feedback to help ensure that the intervention is relevant to their needs and concerns.

**Planning Period: 04/18/13 through 06/30/13**

- We continue to rely on caseworker feedback to improve the tool. We currently have a few caseworkers who are very interested in “championing” the tool but are not ER workers. We have been working with them to help identify ways in which we can better promote use of the tool.
- In speaking with other agencies about the tool (DMH, Project ABC), we find they are also strong supporters of this intervention. They are currently assisting us in identifying additional caseworkers that have multiple roles (e.g., DCFS caseworker who works closely with DMH on Katie A implantation) who might be able to provide assistance to caseworkers in using the tool.

**Year 1: 07/1/13 through 12/31/13**

- Flexibility is key. Given the events over the past six months (e.g., strike, reorganization), our ability to redirect efforts and think through how to update procedures to account for these events has been key in maintaining and strengthening our partnership. This often goes against conventional research projects where researchers want to control all the pieces. Here, the goal is being able to allow the project to morph when conditions change.
- Cross system collaboration will be essential in the ultimate success of the tool. Thus, developing procedures to address issues related to confidentiality becomes very important.

- D. What can **CalSWEC do to further assist you** with the development of your partnership?

**Planning Period: 01/01/13 through 04/17/13**

- No additional assistance requested from CalSWEC at this time.

**Planning Period: 04/18/13 through 06/30/13**

- No additional assistance requested from CalSWEC at this time.

**Year 1: 07/1/13 through 12/31/13**

- No additional assistance requested from CalSWEC at this time.

## II. Research Projects and Priorities

- A. List the **primary research project(s)** that you are currently pursuing via your partnership, and the **research questions that are being examined**. If these have changed since the last report, please indicate how they have changed and why:

### **Planning Period: 01/01/13 through 04/17/13**

- The primary research question to be answered via the partnership is “Does use of the Needs Portal reduce the length of time from service request to service initiation?” This question has not changed.

### **Planning Period: 04/18/13 through 06/30/13**

- We are considering expanding the first research project to allow the Needs Portal to be used with families who have referrals, but do not become cases. If this occurs, we will add an additional question “Does use of the Needs Portal reduce the likelihood of a family being re-referred to the Child Welfare System?”

### **Year 1: 07/1/13 through 12/31/13**

- The primary research question “Does use of the Needs Portal reduce the length of time from service request to service initiation?” has not changed. We anticipate moving opening the Needs Portal to referrals during the summer/fall of next year. If this occurs, we will add an additional question “Does use of the Needs Portal reduce the likelihood of a family being re-referred to the Child Welfare System?”

- B. For each project, indicate any **problems or barriers** that you have encountered, and what you have done to address them.

### **Planning Period: 01/01/13 through 04/17/13**

- Los Angeles County DCFS has announced that it will be ending the Inter University Consortium (IUC) which trains IV-E students. We have been utilizing the IUC training facility for all training activities related to the Needs Portal. That facility will be closed at the beginning of June, so we are currently looking for additional space. We can use space at the Torrance DCFS office, if needed. This may limit the implementation of the first research project, if not all workers can be trained during the planning period. We don’t anticipate that being the case.

### **Planning Period: 04/18/13 through 06/30/13**

- Given the low use of the Portal for cases, we are considering expanding the use of Portal to referrals.
- We have also identified a variety of other ways (listed above) to encourage participation in the Portal and will be implementing them over the next two months.

### **Year 1: 07/1/13 through 12/31/13**

- Right now are main barrier is getting access to old case records to conduct the evaluation. This request is currently being vetted by the County Supervisors. We will continue to work with ARA Rosa Tang to obtain access to those files for the evaluation.

C. Please list ***any new findings or results*** that have been identified by your partnership's projects. If you do not have any new findings, indicate when you expect to have some.

**Planning Period: 01/01/13 through 04/17/13**

- We expect initial findings to be available Summer 2014, when the evaluation is complete.

**Planning Period: 04/18/13 through 06/30/13**

- We expect initial findings to be available Summer 2014, when the evaluation is complete.

**Year 1: 07/1/13 through 12/31/13**

- We expect initial findings to be available Summer 2014, when the evaluation is complete.

D. What are the implications of your findings for ***workforce development and curriculum***?

**Planning Period: 01/01/13 through 04/17/13**

- As this is the planning process, research projects are not currently being conducted. We will address this question once research projects are underway.

**Planning Period: 04/18/13 through 06/30/13**

- As this is the planning process, research projects are not currently being conducted. We will address this question once research projects are underway.

**Year 1: 07/1/13 through 12/31/13**

- Through the process evaluation, we have learned that caseworkers have very limited community agency networks. Users of the Needs Portal have identified additional agencies that can be used to serve their clients. We have learned that the Academy training has incorporated a small piece related to community agencies. As we move forward in this process, it may be important to develop several modules on engaging and communicating with community agencies.
- A parallel to this is the same types of training around non-traditional agencies, such as faith-based agencies.

E. What are the implications of your findings for ***practice improvement***?

**Planning Period: 01/01/13 through 04/17/13**

- Research projects are not currently being conducted. We will address this question once research projects are underway.

**Planning Period: 04/18/13 through 06/30/13**

- Research projects are not currently being conducted. We will address this question once research projects are underway.

**Year 1: 07/1/13 through 12/31/13**

- At this early stage in the project, we don't have concrete practice recommendations. However, we may have some that arise from the briefs developed as a part of the student projects.

F. What are your **dissemination activities** for this period? For subsequent periods? (Please see the Dissemination Tool.)

**Planning Period: 01/01/13 through 04/17/13**

- We have conducted 3 trainings of caseworkers (12 caseworkers total) and 4 trainings of community agencies (20 agencies total). These trainings introduce the Needs Portal intervention to those individuals who are not already familiar to the project and train them on the use of the Portal.

**Planning Period: 04/18/13 through 06/30/13**

- There have been a total of 91 caseworkers trained (79 during this period) and 31 agencies (11 agencies during this period).

**Year 1: 07/1/13 through 12/31/13**

- There have been a total of 134 caseworkers trained (43 during this period) and 53 agencies (22 agencies during this period).
- During the Fall 2013, four Title IV-E students conducted research projects using Needs Portal data. These projects are being turned into one page "Issue Briefs" to be disseminated to our Torrance Partners. The titles of the projects are:
  - The Relationship between Insurance Status and Number of Responses from Agencies Regarding Services for Families in Torrance DCFS Office (Stella Truong)
  - Child Welfare Domestic Violence Cases and Resources (Brianna McCullough)
  - Domestic Violence and Referrals to Legal Services in the Child Welfare System (Maegan Mattock)
  - Looking at Number of Service Needs Requested for Parents Involved in the Child Welfare System and the Relationship between Parent's Race and Age (Michael O'Hara)

G. What can **CalSWEC do to further assist you** with your research or evaluation projects?

**Planning Period: 01/01/13 through 04/17/13**

- No assistance is necessary at this time.

**Planning Period: 04/18/13 through 06/30/13**



- No assistance is necessary at this time.

**Year 1: 07/1/13 through 12/31/13**

- No assistance is necessary at this time.