

Human Services Agency Assistance Programs: Caseloads and Training

Summary

The 2007-2008 Ventura County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) conducted a follow-up investigation into the 2005-2006 Grand Jury report “Ventura County Information Systems Department, CalWIN Implementation”.

The Grand Jury found that despite extensive and ongoing efforts by the County Human Services Agency (HSA), some caseworkers in selected offices encountered challenges in making the conversion from the old system to the new CalWORKS Information Network (CalWIN) System and their expanded responsibilities.

The Grand Jury found extensive training was provided before, during, and after the implementation of the new system. This training continues for new and existing employees.

The Grand Jury also found that a lack of updated users manuals reflecting the CalWIN System, and supporting paper files that are still maintained, create employee frustration and impede productivity.

The Grand Jury found several other areas where improvements could be made:

- ensure that CalWIN trainers are well versed in both the CalWIN System and the programs administered by the County
- continue remedial training for those HSA employees who face challenges using the CalWIN System
- update the user manuals as soon as possible to include the CalWIN System
- pursue imaging technology to eliminate supporting paper files
- complete the caseload study and implement any required changes

Background

The 2005-2006 Grand Jury followed the implementation of the CalWIN System. The implementation of this system was primarily viewed from the Information Systems point of view because of its complexity, expense, and impact on a large number of county employees and residents. A favorable report was issued; however, some deficiencies were noted in the training given to HSA caseworkers.

The CalWIN System is used daily by more than 650 Ventura County employees and services over 62,000 cases per month. The CalWIN System helps to manage food stamps, foster care, the Medi-Cal health insurance programs, general relief, Cal-Learn, refugee cash assistance, cash assistance program for immigrants, and California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKS). CalWIN

created a “one stop” process with the system evaluation of a potential client’s needs and eligibility for programs.

HSA assumed responsibility for the CalWIN System from Ventura County Information Technology Services shortly after system implementation. HSA has their own support staff, trainers, and Help Desk function.

The 2007-2008 Grand Jury decided to conduct a follow-up investigation after a number of HSA employees made known to the Board of Supervisors their frustrations with the system. The primary areas of concern are the amount and quality of training provided and the caseloads assigned.

Methodology

The Grand Jury received briefings from HSA regarding the progress of the system since its first report in June 2006. The Grand Jury reviewed training documentation and other planning documents related to changes that would occur to the system. The Grand Jury received a presentation on the training and a demonstration of the CalWIN System from HSA staff. The Grand Jury visited several HSA facilities and observed the system in use. The Grand Jury interviewed HSA employees who use the CalWIN System at each site to gain an understanding of the issues raised and their opinions of the system, training, and caseloads.

Findings

- F-01.** The use of the computer was challenging for some HSA caseworkers who found it difficult to switch from a mostly paper-based system to a totally computerized system.
- F-02.** The training provided to HSA caseworkers who handle multiple benefits using the CalWIN Training System is lengthy and complex. The training includes classroom and practical experience using the CalWIN Training System to simulate real caseloads.
- F-03.** Training is provided by HSA instructors who divide it into system use and benefits administration. Some HSA trainers are more versed in program benefits while others in the CalWin System. In some instances, a system instructor may not be able to answer benefits/program questions, and a benefits instructor may not be able to answer system questions.
- F-04.** New CalWIN employee training is composed of the following:
- eight weeks of classroom training on the system and programs
 - eighteen weeks of closely supervised training while working a reduced caseload
 - ongoing training for system enhancements and fixes
 - ongoing refresher training using the CalWIN Training System
 - ongoing training by leads and first level management to assist workers who need extra help

- F-05.** Prior to the conversion from the Welfare Information Computation and Reporting System (WICAR) to the CalWIN System, most HSA caseworkers handled a single benefit program.
- F-06.** Some caseworkers had difficulty converting from the WICAR System, where they administered a single benefit, to the CalWIN System where they administered multiple benefits.
- F-07.** There is ongoing instruction to cross train as many caseworkers as possible to be “Combo Workers”. This training qualifies HSA caseworkers to administer multiple benefits programs.
- F-08.** There are ongoing monthly team meetings between office management and caseworkers regarding training, system enhancements, caseloads, and other concerns.
- F-09.** Employees are notified of enhancements, system problems, and program changes brought about by legislative action. This is done either electronically, or if extensive, in paper form.
- F-10.** Operations Manuals have not been updated to reflect the CalWIN System; however, the manuals do reflect current benefits/programs administration.
- F-11.** A project to rewrite Operations Manuals using “Policy Tech”, a software package designed to support this function, was recently initiated and will take approximately two years to complete.
- F-12.** One of the objectives of the CalWIN System is the reduction or elimination of supporting paper files, however a large number of supporting paper files are still being maintained and are sometimes difficult to locate.
- F-13.** HSA and the Information Technology Department have initiated a project to evaluate imaging software packages which will eliminate most CalWIN supporting paper files.
- F-14.** Caseloads assigned to employees vary:
- fully trained “Combo Workers” have a caseload of approximately 300 which can vary from office to office
 - caseworkers who have recently completed training have caseloads of approximately one-half of those fully trained
- F-15.** Management is currently studying caseloads and will make adjustments as necessary. This study should be completed during the summer of 2008.
- F-16.** HSA employees stated that although more time is spent setting up new cases using the CalWIN System than the old WICAR System, less time is needed for client record updates.

Conclusions

- C-01.** Some HSA caseworkers found the conversion to the CalWIN System difficult and challenging despite the amount of training. (F-01 through F-07)
- C-02.** The amount of training provided to caseworkers using the CalWIN System is extensive and on-going. (F-01, F-04, F-05, F-08 through F-10)
- C-03.** Initial training on CalWIN is more difficult because the training is divided into:
 - technical use of the system
 - benefit programs (F-03)
- C-04.** All aspects of training and system use are difficult because Operations manuals have not been updated to reflect the CalWIN System. (F-11)
- C-05.** Maintaining supporting paper files, which are at times hard to locate, adds to inefficiency and poor client service. (F-12)
- C-06.** Because current caseloads have not been validated, this created frustration among employees and may hinder customer service. (F-14, F-15)

Recommendations

- R-01.** Continue to train caseworkers who find using the CalWIN System and/or administering multiple benefit programs difficult. (C-01 through C-03)
- R-02.** Revise CalWIN training so instructors are proficient in both the computer system and the benefits programs. (C-03)
- R-03.** Complete the updates of the Operations Manuals within a two-year time frame to reflect the CalWIN System. (C-04)
- R-04.** Complete the imaging software study and testing as soon as possible. (C-05)
- R-05.** Implement imaging technology to reduce paper and provide better customer service. (C-05)
- R-06.** Complete the caseload analysis for HSA caseworkers using the CalWIN System by the summer of 2008 and implement all required changes. (C-06)

Responses

Responses Required:

Board of Supervisors, County of Ventura (R-01 through R-06)

Responses Requested:

Human Services Agency, County of Ventura (R-01 through R-06)