

CalWORKs 2.0 | Questions, Poll Results, and Participant Responses

Webinar #3 – Executive Functioning

August 30, 2017

Questions and responses:

<p>1. Is the objective to increase an individual's executive function (EF) or to use tools and strategies to work with the individual's existing EF in accomplishing the CalWORKs-related goal?</p>	<p>Both are important. You can encourage strategies that allow someone to express the best of their executive functioning like sleep and exercise, building habits of planning ahead, and holding oneself accountable. It remains to be seen whether concentrating on a singular EF skill is beneficial. The CalWORKs 2.0 tools and resources are designed to reduce the demands on EF skills whenever possible, build skills through repeated routines that can help to strengthen them and create workarounds that minimize the problems that can result from weak executive function skills.</p>
<p>2. What is the impact of poverty on the development of EF skills?</p>	<p>Poverty has multiple negative impacts on EF skills through exposure to stress, malnutrition, toxins, brain injury, and abuse etc. We try to understand how factors influence development – related to brain architecture, behavior expression and other physiologic factors, and address them holistically.</p>
<p>3. What about the effect of domestic violence on later cognitive skill development or expression?</p>	<p>We have seen in the research that domestic violence can cause more rapid aging of DNA. We also see heightened fear responses – as in a brain that is more wired to respond quickly to potential threats in the environment. It is hard to isolate the effect of domestic violence on development because it occurs with other factors.</p>
<p>4. Have you ever heard of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and do you think this applies to your research as well and working on stabilizing a family before trying to focus on their future goals?</p>	<p>Maslow's pyramid shows basic needs at the bottom – food, shelter, security, safety, and then more complex needs higher up – like having a family, a job, or external social stimulus. At the top is self-fulfillment and actualization. It is difficult to modify basic impulses, but realistic to address basic needs. You should spend your coaching energy around the highest level where you will have impact. One has to address the most basic needs first, nothing else can happen before achieving stability.</p>
<p>5. Planning is an area that people struggle with most. What are the kinds of things staff can do to help address weaknesses and increase peoples' skills in looking to the future.</p>	<p>EmPath has done a lot of good work trying to address individual customer's needs, figure out how to generate their own goals, and then make progress towards them. We speculate that as people scaffold their skills in the habit of planning that they strengthen connections to the frontal region of prefrontal cortex. The repeated exposure and coaching around the CalWORKs 2.0 tools will help to scaffold across sessions and build habits.</p>

<p>6. How long does it take if you are doing individual interventions to see improvement in skills? Does frequency matter, does messaging matter?</p>	<p>We have seen changes in as little as 3 months, some earlier than that. Spacing (sleep) is important for consolidation of new learning. For example, working with a customer Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays is better than Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays to give their brain time to learn. We are at the beginning of this type of research on how long a program needs to last to make an impact, when do you need a booster etc.</p>
<p>7. You have a laboratory in California, are there other interventions that you would like to test?</p>	<p>We would like to research what effects programs like CalWORKs 2.0 are having on planning skills. We don't know what is happening to the brain through programs. Would like to talk with people who have boots on the ground who have experience with these challenges. At some point we can arrange to have a small group conversation with people who are doing this work.</p>
<p>8. Can you speak to internal locus of control and how it is related to EF and motivation?</p>	<p>Providing choice is critical; people need to feel participation in their life through choices for motivation to develop. Being internally versus externally motivated is not a set factor; it can be learned over time. The best strategy to use in current research is to provide choice, lots of choices, any choice matters from the smallest to the largest such as selecting appointment times and other simple things at orientation that are not necessarily common practice in TANF programs. People have more engagement in programs that are not overly directive. There is the basic idea of respect for customers and their families, and that plays well with letting them participate actively in their CalWORKs experience.</p>

Participant Responses to Questions

1. Given both the importance of building strong executive functions in children and the CalWORKs whole-family vision, please share some examples of how you engage the whole family in your work today.

Family Stabilization

- Our County offers a Family Stabilization program that addresses the whole family unit. – 10 responses
- We provide economic support with the hopes it provides family with stability. Families at a whole that are stable are able to enhance learning, i.e., more high school graduates.

Some Engagement

- If a parent discloses the child has issues, then we work to address those.

- We goal set for the entire family.
- Child and Family Team Meetings.
- Offer home call appraisals and in office appraisals which the whole family can attend.
- We engage clients through assessing their current whole family situations and conditions. Then we set goals and a plan of action to achieve at least 3 important goals that they want to accomplish, with dates of completion.
- Provide backpacks for kids.
- Striving to communicate clearly with the family. Plan ahead and written communication.
- Staff use of the OCAT tool is a helpful way to determine next steps and begin engagement.
- Participation in TDM (Team Decision Making), TEAM and Linkages.
- We attempt to take the whole family into consideration when we think about the "success" of the family. We try to incorporate the success throughout the family when we think about client goals.
- Require most intake workers to conduct the OCAT to screen for barriers for participants and other household members, including children.

Parenting and Early Childhood education

- Discussion with parents about importance of kids school attendance and sharing of First5-development years crucial for developing EF in kids.
- Link parents to appropriate child care. – 2 responses
- Supporting father involvement with discussions between parents.
- Parenting classes and workshops. – 5 responses

Referrals

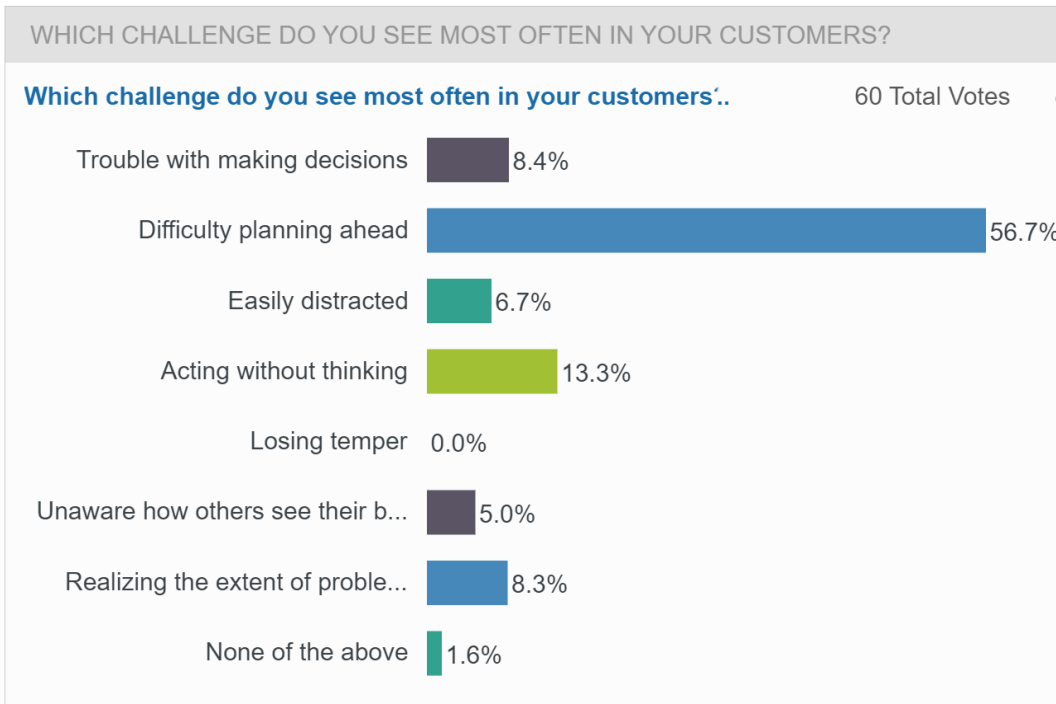
- We refer children to counseling services when we see a family dynamic problem.
- Referral to after school programs or to boys and girls club.
- We send for services - first 5 services, counseling, and school services.
- Encourage licensed child care providers, provide recreational scholarships, and provide outreach materials to library events and community resources including parenting classes.

- Complete referrals for childcare services, community or in-house resource centers, and make referrals for mental health or family counseling when needed. – 5 responses
- OCAT/Appraisals, Community Resources/Family Resource Centers, Family Stabilization Services.
- Provide guidance to children regarding the importance of education and providing families with valuable resources within the community. Make referrals to DASU (local agency) or family stabilization as appropriate.

Do Not Provide Services

- We do not include the children at all, except paying for child care while the parents are engaged.
- WTW only engages adults to participate.
- We try to push long-term goals of going to school to get education for customers so they can support themselves long-term.
- I don't believe our County is doing much to engage children in CalWORKs families, but rather assist children by increasing family income through employment.

2. Which challenge do you see most often in your customers?



3. In which Executive Functioning area (planning, self-control, monitoring) do you most often see as a weakness that might contribute to a customer's lack of success?

