

# Working as One



# 2016



# Message from the Director

Living in poverty is the reality for one-third of all Californians, which, sadly, marks the state with the distinction of having the highest child poverty rate in the nation. Though complex in nature, signs of poverty are evident when people don't have enough to food to eat or a safe place to sleep; where the sick have no access to medical care and the unemployed and under-employed don't earn enough to meet their basic needs. Safety Net programs address these difficult matters and assist individuals and families in overcoming their barriers, lifting them from poverty.

Santa Clara County's Department of Employment and Benefit Services provides many of the core services to combat poverty at the local level. Recognizing that the root cause of poverty is diverse, complex and dynamic, the Department works side-by-side with a robust network of dedicated community partners and other County departments to extend our reach. In this Annual Report, you will learn how we are leveraging partnerships and combining resources to effectively deliver wrap-around support through benefit programs like Medi-Cal, CalFresh, General Assistance, Foster Care Eligibility, CalWORKs, Employment Services and Refugee Services. Some highlights include:

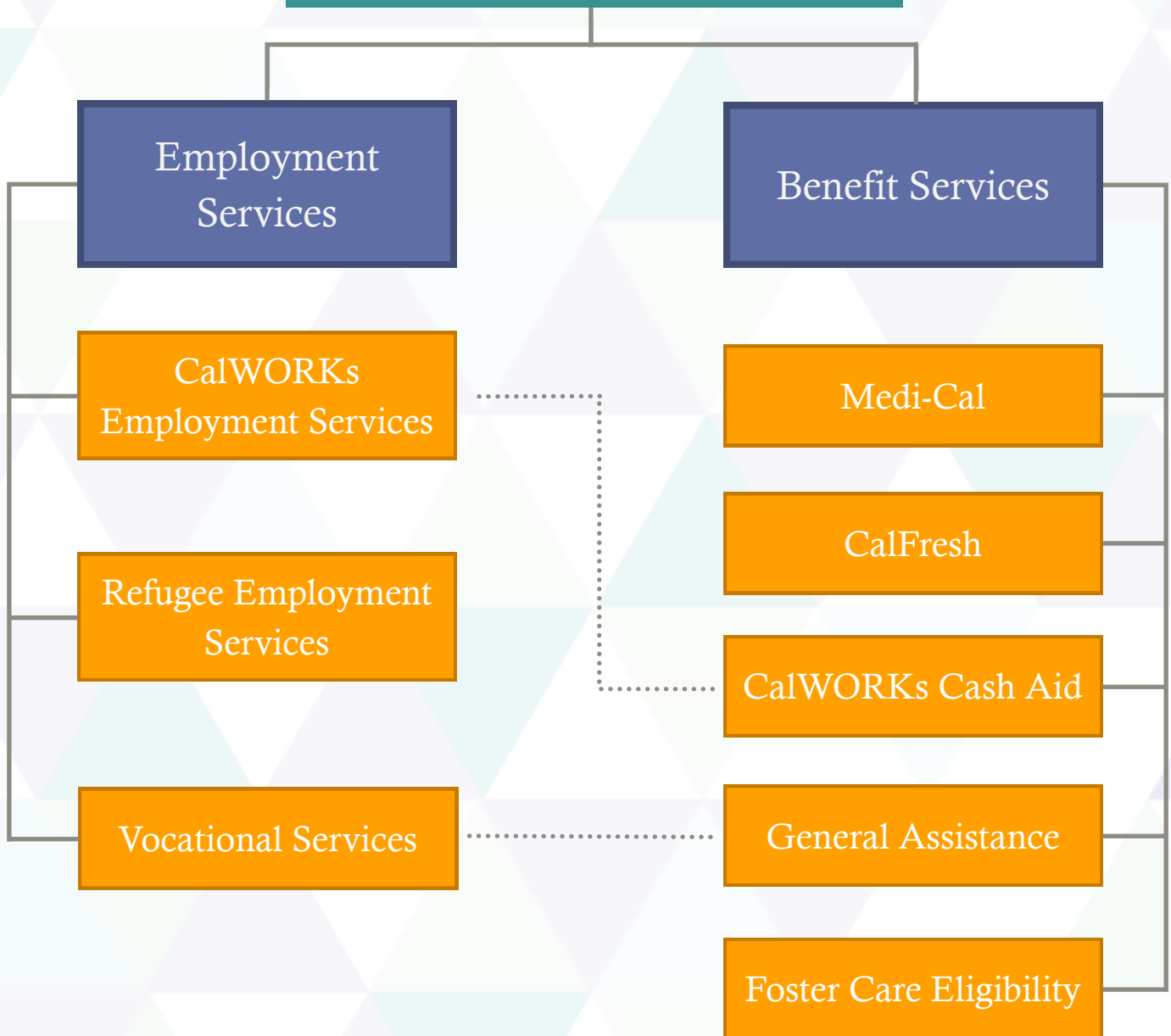
- Improvements to service delivery and customer service, greatly reducing wait times across all programs and offices.
- Broadening coverage to include undocumented children through "Health Care for All" legislation and the expansion of outreach services to assist those most in need.
- Expansion of employment and housing assistance to address whole family issues and combat generational poverty.

The Department of Employment and Benefit Services is striving to better reach underserved populations, promote program services and offer a wider scope of partner-provided services where clients are able to easily access benefits. Working as one with our extended service network, we are providing innovative solutions to challenging issues and offering a means to elevate the vulnerable from poverty to self-sufficiency.

*Denise Boland*

Director of Employment and Benefit Services

# Employment and Benefit Services





# Table of Contents

## **Programs**

Medi-Cal	4
CalFresh	9
CalWORKs	15
CalWORKs Employment Services	19
Refugee Employment Services	35
General Assistance	37
Foster Care Eligibility	41

<b>Ombudsman Services</b>	44
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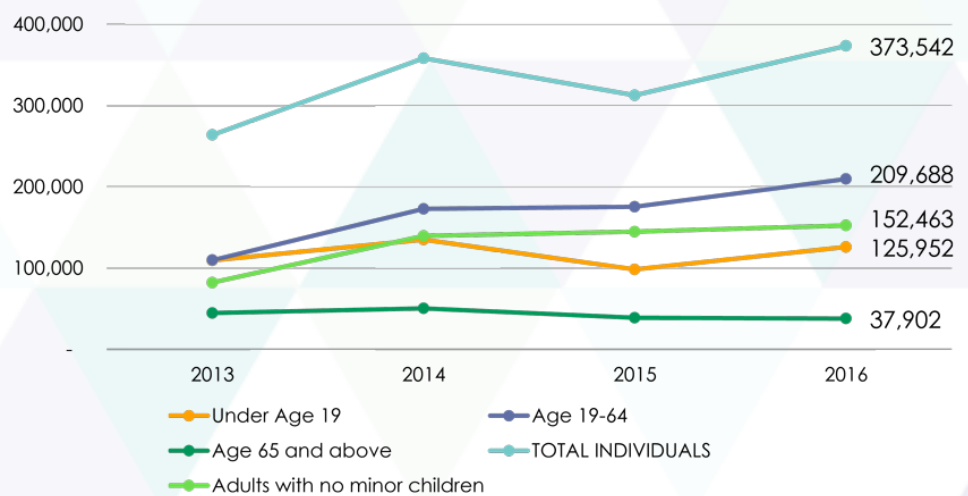
<b>Community Resources</b>	45
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# Medi-Cal

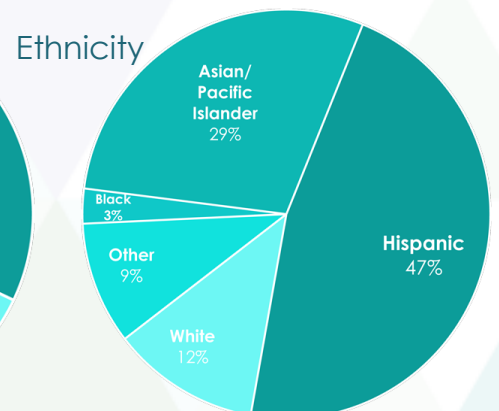
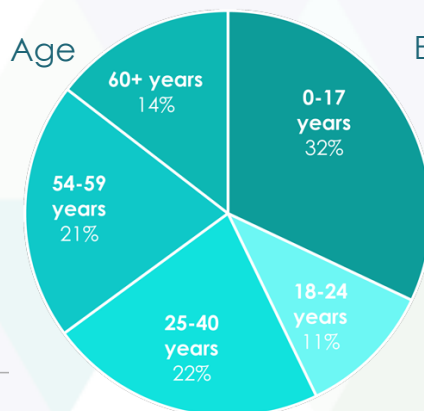
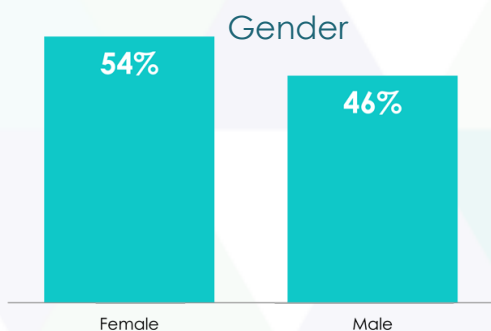
Since its inception in 1966, the Medi-Cal program has provided healthcare coverage to low-income families, seniors, persons with disabilities, foster care children and pregnant women. With the adoption of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in 2014, healthcare is now a reality for nearly all segments of the American population.

Over the last two years, Medi-Cal has grown to be the largest health insurer in the state, providing coverage to more than 13 million California residents. Today, one in every four Californians is enrolled in the Medi-Cal program, increasing access to medical services and reducing the uninsured rate to a record low of 8.1%. Locally, Santa Clara County provides Medi-Cal coverage to nearly 400,000 residents, offering a broad spectrum of medical services such as preventive and primary care, pre-natal care, mental health services, long-term care and both vision and dental coverage.

The ACA expanded Medi-Cal benefit access to previously unserved populations, including working families that did not meet low-income earning thresholds and adults with no minor children. The majority of these new enrollees are adults between the ages of 19 and 64. Prior to the implementation of ACA, there were 109,789 Medi-Cal beneficiaries within this age group. Today, 209,688 adults within this age range are enrolled in Medi-Cal and make-up approximately 56% of the total Medi-Cal population in Santa Clara County.



## Demographics



## Medi-Cal Card Has New Look

Medi-Cal's Benefits Identification Card (BIC) has a bright new look, commemorating its golden anniversary in 2016. The redesigned BIC features a colorful design with the state's official flower, the California Golden Poppy. At present, all benefit cards that are still in use will continue to be valid, while the new card will be made available to new enrollees and those requesting replacement cards.



## Eliminating the Wait for Medi-Cal Services

The influx of new applications brought on by federal and state-initiated Medi-Cal expansions crowded client reception areas and clogged phone lines at every district office. To manage the workload, Employment and Benefit Services implemented specialized call center technology to efficiently manage tasks and respond to client requests for assistance while also upgrading its case management software system to ensure that eligible clients receive uninterrupted benefits.

Over the past year, Employment and Benefit Services has placed a department-wide emphasis on improving customer service by reducing wait times, both on the phone and in the lobbies. To do so, we increased Medi-Cal staffing levels and worked closely with Staff Development to establish a new focus on faster response times. Working toward this common goal, we drastically reduced the call wait time to less than two minutes. This improvement has resulted in less client demand for face-to-face service and an overall reduction in lobby traffic.

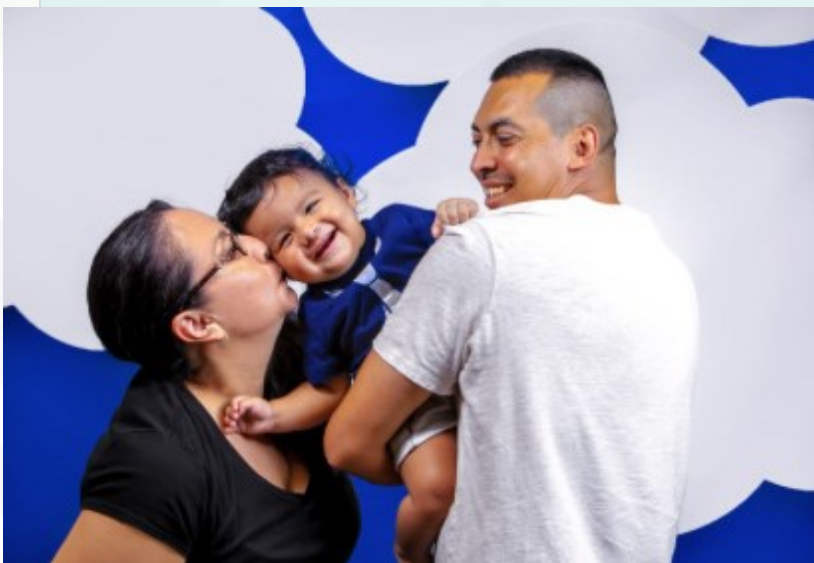
For clients who require a visit to a benefit office, staff also enhanced the lobby client-flow model to serve them more efficiently. Walk-in clients are now greeted by triage workers at the lobby information desk and are directed to Eligibility Workers who are able to serve their specific needs. The expedited walk-in service has yielded positive results and improved customer experience.

## The Path to Redetermining Eligibility

Now that the number of new enrollees is subsiding, the Medi-Cal program has re-directed its focus from processing applications to maintaining these cases, ensuring uninterrupted coverage. Redetermination of eligibility, which previously required multiple forms and paper verifications, has been simplified and streamlined. The ability to electronically verify information has enhanced the speed of processing and renewing Medi-Cal benefits each year.

A significant portion of clients no longer need to submit a full redetermination packet, even if they have to provide information to continue Medi-Cal eligibility. Clients are simply able to call any of our district offices and provide their most recent information over the phone.

In this new world of Medi-Cal, any time clients contact Employment and Benefit Services to report a change, such as an increase or decrease in income, a newborn baby or marriage, this change establishes a new 12-month renewal period for clients. This flexible redetermination process greatly reduces the amount of time clients spend maintaining their healthcare coverage.



### **Healthcare for All Kids**

In an effort to provide medical coverage to the underserved, the State has enacted “Healthcare for All Kids,” a state-initiated expansion of federal health care reform in California, which provides undocumented children of low-income families with full scope Medi-Cal benefits. Under the new initiative, healthcare coverage has been expanded to over 125,000 children within the County. Children now account for approximately one-third of Santa Clara County’s Medi-Cal population.

In preparation for the new Medi-Cal offering, Employment and Benefit Services developed dedicated cross-departmental staffing resources to identify potentially eligible clients in its current caseload. With a clear objective, the team performed a meticulous review of thousands of active Medi-Cal cases with undocumented children in the family to determine if they were eligible for comprehensive Medi-Cal benefits. Through their efforts, nearly 5,000 undocumented children were deemed eligible and enrolled in free or low-cost comprehensive Medi-Cal benefits. The project largely contributed to the 4% growth in the number of children receiving Medi-Cal over the previous fiscal year.

In an ongoing effort to continue enrollment of all children, Employment and Benefit Services has been actively collaborating with its community partners to notify residents and support public outreach efforts by the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) through fliers and promotion at community events.



## Reaching out to the Homeless with the Breakthrough Outreach Hi-Tech Rover

In recent months, DEBS staff have been implementing new strategies for reaching out to the homeless population throughout the County. Each Tuesday, Eligibility Workers Monica Barrera-Ruelas and Eloisa Baldovinos join forces with Breakthrough Outreach's Hi-Tech Rover to provide intake services to homeless individuals at St. James Park.



Clients seeking benefits receive on-the-spot assistance with completing applications for CalFresh, Medi-Cal and General Assistance. Together with Karen Addato, Founder of Breakthrough Outreach, and her staff, Monica and Eloisa offer resources and services to help clients find healthcare, shelter, food, jobs and a pathway to a new beginning.

Learn more about Breakthrough Outreach and the Hi-Tech Rover at <http://hitechrover.org>.

## High Marks in State Review

Working with the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS), Employment and Benefit Services engaged in the Medi-Cal Eligibility Data System (MEDS) Reconciliation project to ensure that Medi-Cal benefits remain uninterrupted while performing record-matching reviews of program eligibility for thousands of clients. Santa Clara County earned the distinction of being one of the highest-performing counties in the state.

California's MEDS system is the eligibility management system from which healthcare providers can verify clients' Medi-Cal eligibility records during a hospital or clinic visit for treatment and care. Through efficient local processing of Medi-Cal cases and timely updates, the County experienced few mismatches between the County and state eligibility systems, which helped the County meet DHCS performance standards. Thanks to the outstanding effort of all staff, Santa Clara County posted a miniscule error rate of 1.29% in May 2016, a remarkable accomplishment.

## Transitioning Back into Society

Employment and Benefit Services is also working to extend medical benefits to individuals leaving correctional facilities. Assembly Bill 720, also known as the Inmates Health Insurance Affordability Program, has empowered the County to designate the Santa Clara County Sheriff's Department as the local inmate representative.



Through this appointment, the Sheriff's Department is able to provide information and complete Medi-Cal applications of behalf of local inmates. Employment and Benefit Services has dedicated Eligibility Workers to process Medi-Cal applications for the institutionalized population. They are able to accept these Medi-Cal applications 90 days prior to release, allowing the incarcerated to have timely access to health coverage upon release. Since 2013, more than 3,000 applications have been approved under this program.

Expedited Medi-Cal enrollment is just one small aspect of the County's overall strategy to aid incarcerated individuals in their transition back into society, thereby reducing recidivism rates and providing access to much needed medical and mental health services.

### **Working as One**

Employment and Benefit Services and our healthcare partners have made great strides in making health care more accessible to Santa Clara County residents. With a unified goal of providing healthcare for all, residents can expect continued enhancement of services through the on-going refinement of our business process and active engagement with other County departments to address the needs of our community.

### **Going Above and Beyond**

I recently retired from 30 years in corporate Silicon Valley, where my insurance needs had always been covered by my employers and my wife had individual coverage purchased through Covered California.

Our situation took an unexpected turn when my wife was diagnosed with cancer and could no longer work. Unfortunately, when she lost her income, she also lost her eligibility for her healthcare plan. The medical bills for her treatment started piling up quickly and the anxiety was overwhelming. We applied for Medi-Cal, a process that was completely new to us.

Our Medi-Cal Eligibility Worker, Maria Leon-Rodriguez (pictured right), helped us through this trying time. On numerous occasions, she met with us on short notice, confidently addressed all of our concerns and went above and beyond to ensure that we were taken care of. She even followed up with us to verify that Medi-Cal coverage was in place in order for treatment to continue. Maria has demonstrated the highest level of professionalism, compassion and support to me and my family and she has earned our sincerest gratitude.



*Thank you! -John*

# CalFresh

It's hard to imagine that one in five children in the nation does not regularly get enough food to eat. The steadily rising cost of living has forced many families to make difficult choices about how to spend each dollar they earn. Sadly, this has left 15.3 million children going to bed hungry every night across the country. Locally, due to income disparity and skyrocketing living costs, it is estimated that over 200,000 Santa Clara County families and children suffer from food insecurity; lacking access to affordable and nutritious food.



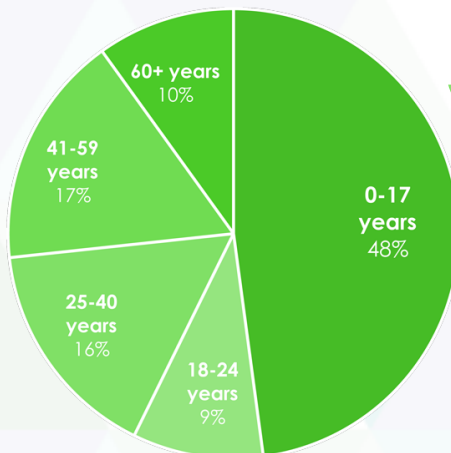
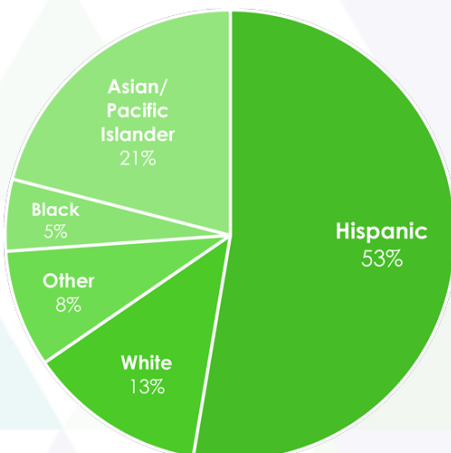
The federal program that has been proven to reduce food insecurity for families and low income individuals is called Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP). Known as CalFresh in the state of California, SNAP is a supplemental food program for low income families that meet income guidelines to help them get the food they need to stay healthy.

The amount of CalFresh benefits issued depends on household size, income and living expenses. While benefits vary according to family size, a family of four with no other income may receive up to \$649 in CalFresh benefits per month to purchase nutritionally significant food.



Benefits are accessed through an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card. An EBT card functions as a debit card and can be used at most grocery stores and local farmers markets for purchasing food, seeds and plants to grow food for household use. CalFresh benefits also generate money for the local economy at an estimated rate of \$1.79 for every CalFresh dollar spent. Everyone benefits when people are able to buy healthy foods from their local grocery store or farmers' market.

Children and working families make up the largest part of the CalFresh population in Santa Clara County



54% female  
40% employed  
58% families



## Safety Net

Co-chaired by Employment and Benefit Services and the Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties, the Safety Net committee is comprised of a large network of non-profit agencies and government entities, including Sacred Heart Community Services, Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the Office of Supportive Housing and many others. The committee convenes once a month with the common goal of taking an active role in fighting hunger in the region through resources, services and advocacy. *See Community Resource A for the meeting schedule.*

Services has long recognized the value of partnering with the Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties (SHFB) and other agencies throughout the region to streamline access to CalFresh to combat the effects of poverty and eliminate hunger. Together with our partners and through multiple joint outreach efforts, we have expanded our reach in spreading the word about CalFresh.

At the heart of our effort is CalFresh Outreach, with the goal of reaching all potentially eligible individuals who are not yet receiving benefits in Santa Clara County. This year, 18,000 households were pre-screened for CalFresh and nearly 2,000 applications were submitted by SHFB and its partners. Additionally, SHFB conducted a total of 1,682 CalFresh Outreach events.



Santa Clara County and SHFB work together in many different ways. Pictured here are County staff distributing fresh produce provided by SHFB's Produce Mobile. Once a month, the Produce Mobile delivers fresh fruits and vegetables to the Senter Road campus for CalFresh families.

## Enhancing CalFresh Services

As part of the Department's ambitious work plan to improve intake and processing times for all programs, district offices developed an enhanced triage process with positive results; in most cases, staff see CalFresh applicants the same or next day for an intake appointment. Assuming applicants have the federally-required verifications, 98% are now able to receive their new EBT card and benefits in less than three days! In fact, the overall number of days for any applicant applying for CalFresh has been reduced from 10 days in January 2016 to less than six in June 2016.

CalFresh has an incredible impact on individual families as well as the overall health of the community. Employment and Benefit

“Partnering with Santa Clara County has been such a positive experience. The Eligibility Workers share their knowledge and provide guidance, strengthening our understanding of CalFresh. We have seen applicants get approved more quickly, spend less time on the phone and receive in-person assistance at many community locations. Clients love the one-stop service we provide through this partnership.”

*-Second Harvest Outreach Staff*



## Out-Stationed Eligibility Workers

Eligibility Workers out-stationed at Emergency Assistance Network (EAN) locations have played a large part in increasing access to CalFresh. Since 2014, they have provided application assistance for community members through a “CalFresh Quickly” model at locations including: St. Joseph’s Family Center, West Valley Community Services, Sunnyvale Community Services, Community Services Agency, LifeMoves and Salvation Army San Jose. In partnership with SHFB Outreach Specialists, they offer both regular and emergency CalFresh application assistance as well as connections to free food resources. By bringing workers out into the community, this highly successful partnership has helped expedite the processing of applications for 546 households this past year.

### Fresh Success

Seeking to increase the employability of CalFresh participants, Gavilan College launched the Fresh Success program, a new employment and training initiative, this May. In order to qualify for the program, students must be receiving CalFresh benefits or be a timed out CalWORKs recipient. Gavilan staff and South County Eligibility Workers are working closely to expedite the enrollment process and register qualified CalFresh recipients into the program.



New Fresh Success recipients receive academic and career counseling, education plan development and academic progress meetings to facilitate their success on the Gavilan campus. In addition, they receive up to \$100 in transportation assistance each month, emergency housing and textbook vouchers. As these students progress, other services will be available to promote their employability, including peer mentoring, job readiness coaching, job development and placement services.

The California Department of Social Services and the California Community College Consortium will be watching as this program matures. Based on its success, we are hopeful to offer similar programs at other local community college campuses. To learn more about this program and to hear about its successes and challenges, please join us at future Safety Net meetings (*Community Resource A*).



## Food Connection

County residents seeking application assistance or referrals to food programs can call the SHFB Food Connection hotline to get information on how to access both emergency and on-going food assistance. Food Connection Representatives also visit over 50 locations to host on-site assistance events, including libraries, schools, WIC centers and medical clinics to assist community members.

This year, Food Connection made over 32,000 food referrals (5,421 to first time callers), served over 10,000 unique households and distributed over 280,000 multi-lingual outreach materials. They also partnered with the Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) by launching a transit ad campaign promoting the Food Connection hotline on 432 buses and light rail trains.

## Food Connection Hotline

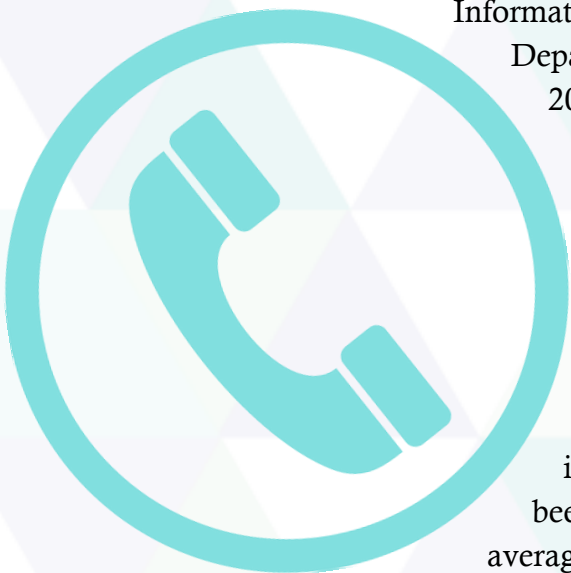
**Call 1-800-984-3663  
or Text 97779:  
HEALTHY (English)  
GRATIS (Spanish)  
FRESH (Vietnamese)**

## Utilizing Technology

CalFresh participation rates depend in large part on robust outreach efforts, but just as important is ensuring existing clients continue to receive their benefits uninterrupted. Recognizing that many clients become discontinued when incomplete, incorrect or late renewal paperwork is submitted, the Department has recently implemented simplified reporting methods.

Taking advantage of existing technology, Social Services Program Manager Erika Garcia and Information Systems Relational Manager Welmin Miltante led the Department in launching a new telephonic signature strategy in 2016. This process offers clients the option of completing renewal reports over the phone by recording a telephonic signature in place of traditional paper and pen. Instead of filling out each form by hand, clients are walked through the renewal process over the phone, saving time and energy and ensuring a complete report.

The telephonic signature roll-out has been incredibly successful, reducing the rate of discontinuance because of incomplete reports from 30% to 10%. Santa Clara County has been able to maintain discontinuance rates well below the state average and was invited to train several other counties that are looking to replicate the model.







Staff are also reminding clients that they can use the My Benefits CalWIN (BCW) mobile application on their smartphones to complete their recertifications. BCW directs clients through each step of the report and allows them to take a photo of verifications and upload them directly for Eligibility Worker review. Clients can also access BCW by visiting [www.mybenefitscalwin.org](http://www.mybenefitscalwin.org). (See *Community Resource B* for more information.)

These recertification options have been well received by clients with busy work schedules and those striving to achieve self-sufficiency. Recently, a CalFresh client was heard to say, “I am so glad I was able to have my interview during my lunch hour and I really liked that I could send my verifications through the mobile application. I didn’t have to complete a packet of paperwork, drop off or mail anything; it was the easiest recertification I ever had to do!”

### **School Partners and Summer Feeding**

Schools play an important role for families as trusted places for both learning and community building. Through a focused collaboration with schools and colleges, SHFB leverages that trust to reach food-insecure families. Outreach materials about food resources and CalFresh information were distributed at targeted districts in high-need areas and full-service pantries were set up at 23 different schools. Nearly three million pounds of food were distributed through these sites, much of which was fresh fruits and vegetables.

### **Hunger Action Summit: Too Hungry to Learn**

Each spring, SHFB and Santa Clara University’s Food and Agribusiness Institute invites community members to participate in the Hunger Action Summit, sparking conversation and inspiring action to end local hunger. This year’s theme of “Too Hungry to Learn” brought together education leaders, anti-hunger advocates and food policy experts to discuss the relationship between adequate nutrition and academic achievement.



In Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties, one in three children struggles with hunger and studies have indicated that hungry children have a harder time concentrating and doing well in school. The long term effects of struggling with hunger often translate to lower academic achievement, compromised job opportunities and a diminished future. Summit speakers addressed the efforts needed to ensure that the next generation of the Valley’s innovators and entrepreneurs has access to the nutritious food they need to succeed.

Throughout the event, discussions focused on expanding current efforts to feed students and their families by increasing the use of federally funded food-assistance programs such as free and reduced-price school meals, the Summer Food Service Program and CalFresh. To learn more about the event and the topics discussed, visit [www.shfb.org/has2016](http://www.shfb.org/has2016).

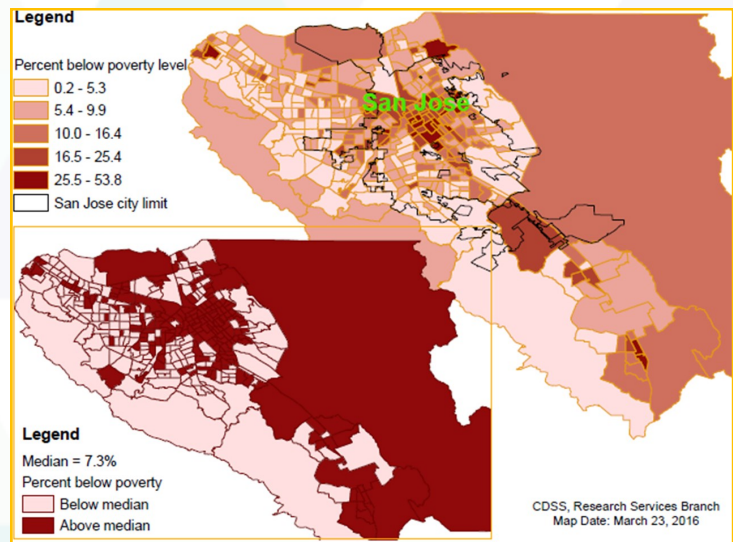


Most of the children who benefit from these school-focused programs also depend on the national free and reduced lunch program. Without access to those resources when school is out, summer becomes a challenging time for their families. In the months before the school year ended, 50,000 households received flyers providing contact information about where they could get free summer meals for

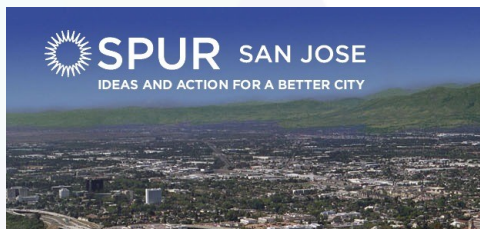
children, free groceries and assistance with CalFresh applications. Over 85 locations throughout the County provided meals this summer, including four libraries, at which SHFB also covered the cost of meals for adults accompanying the children.

### Upcoming Initiatives

In the beginning of 2016, the Social Services Agency and Second Harvest Food Bank were selected by the California Department of Social Services to participate in the “CalFresh Outreach Geocoding Pilot” project. The project utilizes geocoding to develop more targeted outreach strategies, by identifying geographical areas where potentially eligible individuals reside. The outreach team is currently analyzing the available data and exploring options for reaching these areas.



Another exciting new initiative is a collaboration with SPUR, a non-profit organization focused on civic planning and urban issues. Together, we will be launching a pilot project this fall, aimed at increasing the value of CalFresh by providing matching dollars for the purchase of fresh produce at local grocery stores. Similar programs have been very successful in other states, putting more nutritious food on the tables of those who need it most.



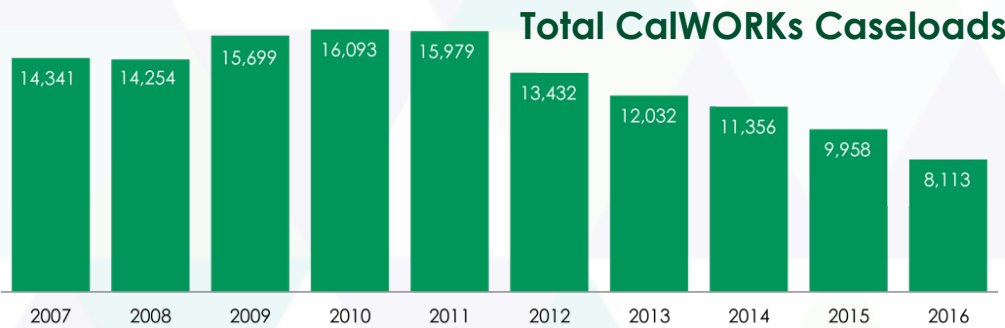
Employment and Benefit Services is deeply invested in serving every hungry individual in Santa Clara County and continues to be involved in various efforts to reach them. To participate in the discussion about new and existing initiatives in the fight to eliminate hunger, join us at our monthly Safety Net meetings at SHFB (see *Community Resource A* for details).

For a general overview of the CalFresh program, consider attending a CalFresh 101 session (*Community Resource C*).



# CalWORKs

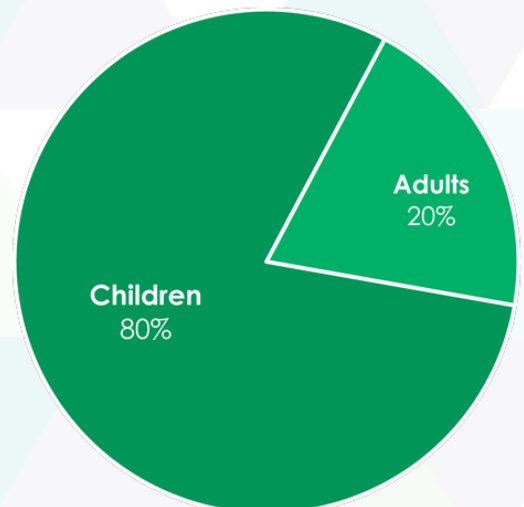
For at-risk families, the bridge to self-sufficiency is paved by the state's California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids, or CalWORKs, program. Through CalWORKs, families with dependent children are eligible to receive a monthly cash grant and access to Employment Services to increase their work opportunities and long-term viability. With these two program components, families are able to work through financial hardships while increasing their prospects for long-term stabilization.



Although the CalWORKs caseload has steadily declined, diminished enrollment in CalWORKs participation does not paint a complete picture. According to the California Supplemental

Poverty Measure, 18% of the County's residents still live beneath the poverty threshold; yet many are ineligible or unable to access the CalWORKs program. A sizeable portion of this population was affected by stringent legislation that reduced time-on-aid to 48 months and placed new time-limits on training and educational programs. Unfortunately, these state mandates are creating conditions in which many may be exiting the program before fully prepared to stand on their own. At the local level, the CalWORKs program and our extensive partner network are providing eligible families with full wrap-around support and the services they need to reach self-sufficiency.

Over the past year, 8,113 families participated in the CalWORKs program. The majority of recipients enrolled in the program are the children of low-income families. While minors may receive aid until the age of 18, adults enrolled in the program may only receive cash grants for a lifetime total of 48 months and are required to participate in Welfare-to-Work employment activities as a condition of receiving aid.



## Helping Families Meet Their Needs

CalWORKs cases are managed by dedicated teams of Eligibility Workers that are staffed throughout the County. Following an initial application, each potential case is evaluated to determine the family's available resources and financial circumstances to gauge their eligibility for the CalWORKs program. Once approved, Eligibility Workers provide ongoing case maintenance, which includes efficient and accurate processing of monthly cash grants, performing redeterminations and providing general support to families navigating the program. Additionally, to streamline the experience of CalWORKs families, their Eligibility Worker also assists in obtaining and managing other benefits like CalFresh and Medi-Cal.



*The Velasquez family is incredibly grateful for the resources offered and the support they have received through the CalWORKs program.*

Monthly cash grants help families meet their basic needs and are determined by various factors that affect a family's overall budget, such as family size, earnings or other financial resources. In Santa Clara County, an average family of three may receive up to \$704 per month.

## Eligibility Workers Make a Difference

Day in and day out, Eligibility Workers at each of Employment and Benefit Services' district offices work hard to make a difference in the lives of the thousands of people they serve. Their dedication does not go unnoticed, and clients often express their gratitude for the assistance and attention they receive.

Mindy Pennington takes great pride in her job as an Eligibility Worker, often going the extra mile to provide useful information to her clients. When Jane asked for help in increasing her CalWORKs benefits, Mindy explained to her that she had a sanction on her case and provided the steps to resolve it. She also sent Jane information about an upcoming CalWORKs child care resource fair. Jane responded, saying, "I really appreciate all the information you've given me. Thank you so much for your help!"

Felix and his family recently moved out of Santa Clara County and could not come to the office to submit missing paperwork for the transfer of his case to his new county. His Eligibility Worker, Phillip Phan, walked him through the My Benefits CalWIN mobile application, ensuring all verifications were received and that Felix's family would receive their CalWORKs benefits with no break in aid. Felix writes, "Thank you for all you've done to help me and my family. I can only pray my next worker is as helpful as you!"



*Mindy Pennington*



*Phillip Phan*



## Enhancing the Client Experience

As with other benefit programs, all district offices serving CalWORKs families have adopted multiple new strategies to enhance client services, streamline case management and contribute to reduced wait time for lobby services.

Greeters are stationed in each of the client lobbies to manage walk-in client needs. As they enter, all clients are greeted and provided general program information. Client inquiries that require in-house attention are quickly guided to the first available staff member to address their needs. Clients are also receiving on-site instruction on using My Benefits CalWIN, the online application that provides a web-based interface with the CalWORKs program. Through the mobile app, clients are able to instantly access their case information and submit required case reports.

This has reduced the need for calling in or scheduling future appointments for basic case inquiries.



*CalWORKs clients, employed through the subsidized employment program, greet clients entering the Continuing Benefit*



*A CalWORKs client uses a tablet to demonstrate the My Benefits CalWIN mobile application.*

New this year, clients are also being offered the option to perform their annual redeterminations through a phone interview, using a Telephonic Signature to authorize their report. At each phone appointment, clients are asked to provide the requisite information to renew their case and can submit required documents via mail, email, fax or My Benefits CalWIN. Phone interviews have proven to be extremely convenient for families participating in employment activities while balancing family responsibilities. Additionally, the use of Telephonic Signatures is

contributing to a reduction in lobby traffic and a lower churn rate (the frequency in which client cases are discontinued due to incomplete redeterminations, then reinstated soon after when clients complete the process to continue aid).



## Modest State Efforts to Reduce the Effects of Poverty

Despite statewide declines in caseload and a call to utilize savings to thwart deep poverty and cost of living increases, Governor Brown introduced several modest revisions to the CalWORKs program in the 2016-17 state budget. In October, grant levels are slated to undergo a small increase of 1.43%, bringing the average grant for a family of three to \$714 each month. This is the third grant increase for CalWORKs families over the last three budget years, each only marginally restoring grant amounts to pre-recession levels. On average, for all cases statewide, the new increase is expected to increase grants for families by \$7.60 per month.

In June 2016, the California State Assembly repealed the CalWORKs Maximum Family Grant (MFG) rule. Under the rule, CalWORKs families were prohibited from receiving CalWORKs assistance for any additional children born while the household was on aid. The MFG rule has been long criticized for being ineffective, purposely limiting the reproductive choices of the poor and further inflicting hardship on impoverished families. Recognizing the long term health consequences of denying infant services, the state is now moving to protect these children and provide greater opportunity to rise from poverty. Starting in January 2017, the MFG will be disregarded and families will be able to receive grants based on their actual family size. Preliminary data suggests that approximately 2,000 children will be eligible for grants in Santa Clara County.

## Looking Ahead

Santa Clara's CalWORKs program is continuing its focus to provide the most meaningful and effective means to transition our families into self-sufficiency. For many, this means extending support and employment based services to all members within the family unit. In this early stage, the CalWORKs program is working with its partner network to explore, develop and pilot new projects aimed at providing targeted services for CalWORKs households. With an emphasis on each family's "bigger picture," we envision an opportunity to foster healthy well-being and ensuring success while actively participating in the CalWORKs program and beyond. (*Attend a CalWORKs 101 session to learn more; see Community Resource D for details.*)



## Achieving Success Together

This Spring, Supervisors and Managers from both Benefits and Employment Services gathered for an informal session to discuss CalWORKs participation. Attendees followed the path of a typical CalWORKs client, from initial benefit intake, through the transition to Employment Services, all the way to Post Aid Services, touching on the many services offered along the way. It is through conversations such as this that we have cultivated the strong partnerships needed to work toward the common goal of serving our clients and achieving success together.

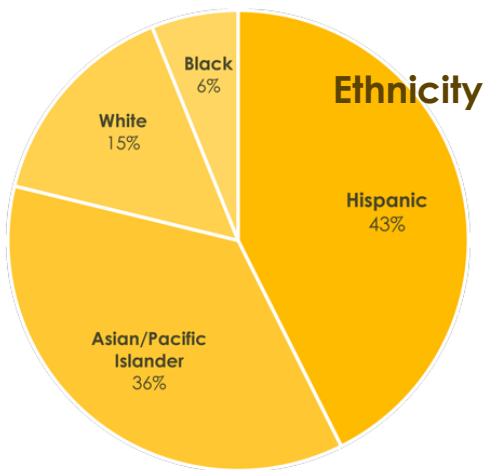
# CalWORKs Employment Services

For families working their way back to self-sufficiency, no two journeys are the same; nor are the solutions needed to lift them from poverty's grip. Once part of the CalWORKs program, each path starts with a step into Employment Services.

Employment Services is the access point where families are able to receive critical services, vital support and gainful employment that will help get them back on their feet. Working with an extensive network of partners, Employment Services is able to address a wide array of complex barriers facing our families through supportive services, educational training and employment based activities.

## A Closer Look at Employment Services

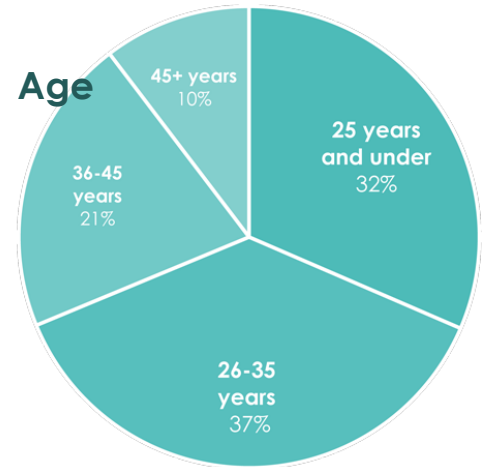
The average CalWORKs Employment Services participant is a working, single mother approximately age 30.



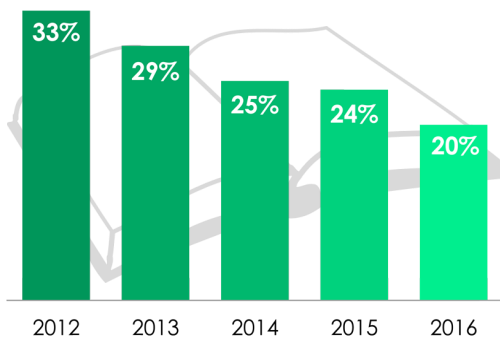
**81%**  
Female



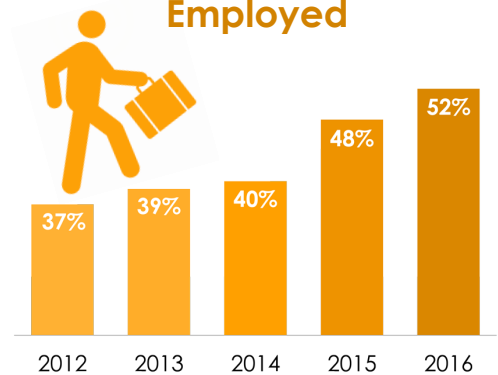
**79%**  
Single Parents



### Attending School



### Employed



## Families of Employment Services

Enrollment in Employment Services and participation in approved employment activities are a requirement for all adults receiving CalWORKs cash grants. Eligible participants are referred to Employment Services by an Eligibility Worker who manages CalWORKs cash benefits. Each month, new recipients are enrolled in Employment Services. Throughout the year, the program was able to make a difference in the lives of over 3,000 enrolled families and provide support to an additional 1,302 receiving post-aid services.

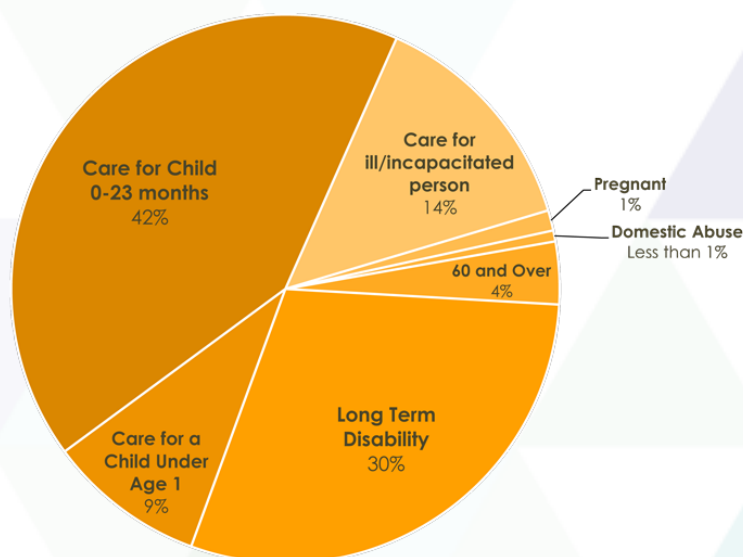
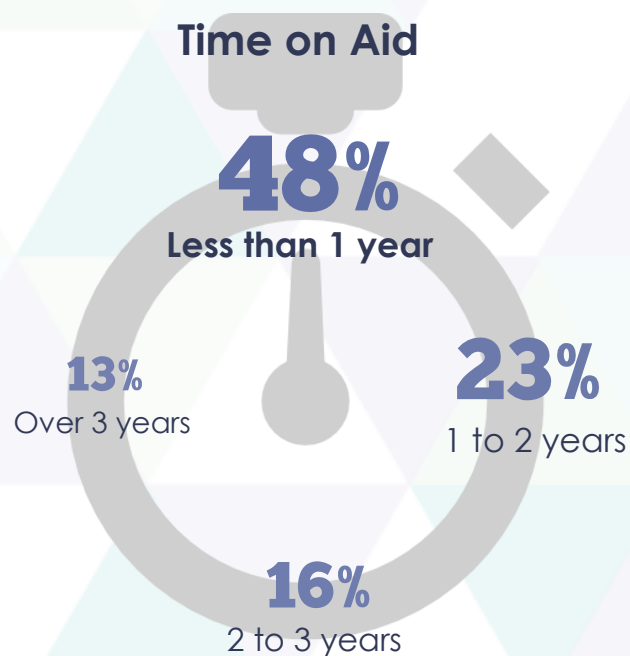
### Time on Aid

CalWORKs benefits and participation in Employment Services is limited to a lifetime total of 48 months. While on aid, participants' families receive the full support of our resources to bridge themselves back to self-sufficiency. Surprising to many, over 70% of all families participating in the program receive assistance for two years or less.

### Exemptions

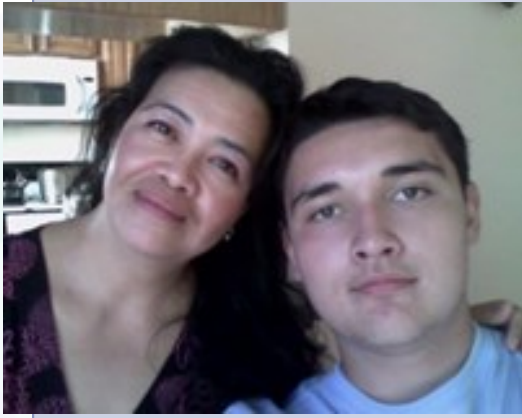
Although all eligible CalWORKs adults are required to participate in employment activities, some may be working their way through adverse situations or experiencing a crisis that prevents them from fully engaging in or benefitting from their experience. To ensure that families are fully prepared to effectively participate, the State permits exemption categories that allow clients to temporarily defer work participation requirements, as shown in the chart to the right.

Clients who qualify for an exemption may opt to participate as an Exempt Volunteer. These clients have the option of working with an Employment Counselor to align supportive services and participation in employment-based activities like work and educational or vocational training. At present, 274 clients have chosen this option.



**Exemption Types**





## Starting over with Unexpected Support

Earlier this year, Noemi found herself facing one of her biggest fears as a single mother; she had lost her home healthcare business: her only source of income. Being an educated, financially stable professional, she was humbled when she found herself unable to provide for her son. Noemi reached a breaking point when she found herself homeless and sleeping on yoga mats in a friend's garage. Exhausted, she turned to CalWORKs for help.

With multiple degrees and experience in the medical and tech fields, Noemi was convinced that there was little she could learn by enrolling in the Employment Services program. What she was not expecting was the support she would receive while searching for a job. Working with the team of Employment Counselors, she was able to fine tune her resume and get it into the hands of dozens of employers. Noemi soon received multiple job offers and accepted a job as a Bridge Services Specialist with Momentum for Mental Health earning \$22.50 an hour! *We are so inspired by you, Noemi!*

## Tailoring a Path

At intake, each client participates in a robust appraisal to design a Welfare-to-Work employment plan that guides their way back to self-sufficiency. The appraisal is a combination of an interactive computer based questionnaire with the Online CalWORKs Appraisal Tool (OCAT) and a personalized one-on-one conference with an Employment Counselor. During their OCAT appraisals, clients engage in a multi-faceted questionnaire that explores twelve separate categories to fully evaluate their needs. In doing so, OCAT examines the client's educational background, skill sets, work experience and potential barriers like transportation issues, substance abuse, homelessness, mental health or family crisis. Using the information gathered during the session, the Employment Counselor utilizes the OCAT summary report and data as a guide to work with both the client and service providers to arrange employment activities and support services to help them reach their employment goals.

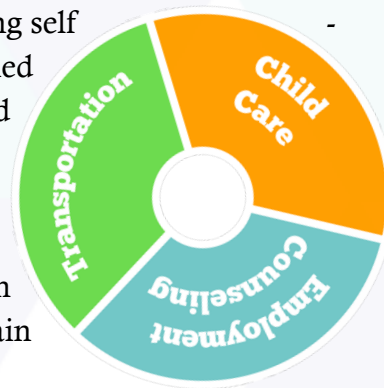


The employment plan outlines the activities the client has agreed to participate in and the support services needed. Each plan incorporates specific timelines for the client's participation in the program. These timelines adhere to state and federal guidelines, ensuring that participants utilize their time on aid effectively while maintaining compliance with CalWORKs regulations. The employment plan is a team effort that is co-managed by Employment Counselors, service providers and partner agencies. Working as one, all clients receive optimum services to ensure the path of self-sufficiency is both achievable and accomplished in a timely and efficient manner.

In 2016, Employment Services served an average of 3,287 individuals per month in a variety of activities ranging from job readiness and job search to vocational training, educational programs, work experience projects and employment (see *Community Resource E* for a list of all Employment Services activities and supportive services).

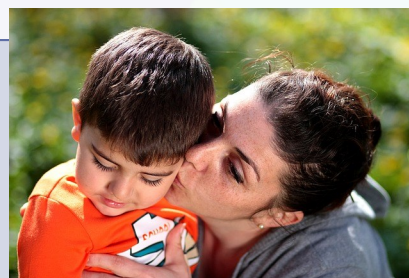
### Post Aid Services

For many CalWORKs clients, going off aid is the first step in establishing self sufficiency. Over the past year, approximately 1,300 participants attained employment and were provided with services after being discontinued from cash aid due to their earnings. Post Aid Services are a critical component for client success after leaving the program and are designed to support employed clients to ensure job retention over a 12-month period. These services include access to child care, transportation and case management. All play a key role in helping participants maintain their jobs, ensuring independence from public assistance.



### Family Services

At times, participating in the appraisal process and working closely with an Employment Counselor will reveal adverse conditions or emergency situations that require a direct response to overcome a significant barrier. To serve these at-risk families, Family Services are a vital sub-set of services and resources that were developed to help families address acute crises. Through barrier removal and collaborative case management, many families are able to overcome sizeable barriers to fully engage in Employment Services.



#### A Fresh New Start

Delfina always felt like she had her life under control; but when she lost her job, she slowly began to abuse alcohol and drugs in an attempt to cope with both the loss of income and her history as a victim of domestic violence.

She reached out to the CalWORKs program, where she was linked with the Family Services Unit. Her Employment Counselor immediately referred her to mental health services, where she received counseling to address her past, depression and substance abuse. Through the recovery process, Delfina regained her sense of self and grew strong enough to participate in employment activities. She began to volunteer at her son's school, where she was recently honored for her contributions to the school community. Delfina is now looking forward to returning to school herself and earning her GED.

*Way to go, Delfina!*





Taking a more holistic approach, recent legislation adopted by the state now allows for the extension of services to all family members registered in the CalWORKs household. The new strategy is expected to have a big impact in cases where family related issues may be preventing the primary CalWORKs participant from engaging in their employment plan. These family needs may range from specialized counseling services for one or more family members, housing support, financial literacy, employment counseling and referrals to community resources.

## Family Services Unit

Within the Employment Services operation is a dedicated Family Services (FS) Unit comprised of Employment Counselors, Social Workers, Housing Support Specialists, Mental Health Specialists and a Domestic Violence Advocate. All work closely with both clients and their families to resolve any problems that are interfering with participation. Working as a team, the group provides wrap-around support and coordinates services in a seamless fashion. In 2016, a combined total of 402 referrals were made to the FS Unit.

The FS Unit engages in a case conference approach with clients to develop a Family Services Plan. Each plan is a detailed step-by-step outline of the actions and goals necessary to address any challenges and attain stability. Plans may include participation in a variety of support services that include: expedited entry into subsidized employment, access to food and clothing, domestic violence services, mental health or substance abuse counseling, financial literacy training, emergency housing services and housing subsidies.



### A Safe Place to Call Home

A young family with limited resources, Jessica, her husband, Kevin, and their two children had a difficult time finding an affordable place to rent. Bouncing around, they were able to temporarily stay with friends and family, but ultimately wound up living out of their car or the occasional motel room when they had extra money.

Despite the turmoil, Jessica and Kevin did not give up hope. They worked closely with the CalWORKs program and received an immediate referral to Abode Services for housing support. Amazingly, Jessica was able to maintain her full-time job throughout the whole ordeal and the extra income was the key to stabilizing her family. Working with

Abode, the family was able to find a two-bedroom apartment that was within their budget and they no longer wonder where they're going to sleep each night.

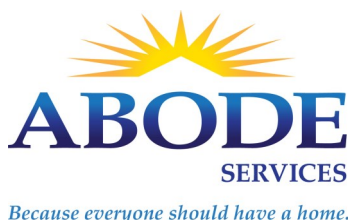
*Congratulations, Jessica and Kevin!*

## Housing Support Assistance

Increased housing costs continue to be one of the biggest challenges faced by CalWORKs families in Santa Clara County. Without factoring in any other living costs, a typical CalWORKs grant falls desperately short of the \$2,792 average rent in the San Jose metropolitan area and it's estimated that only 30% of the low income families in the area have access to affordable housing units. (City of San Jose, Housing Market Update, <http://www.sanjoseca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/56776>).



The combination of insufficient grant levels and a lack of affordable housing are a crucial consideration that families must address as they work toward self-sufficiency.



*“The most gratifying part is being able to see the smiles and anticipation in the eyes of the families as they receive the key to their new home.”*

*– Karimae Geronimo, Abode Services*

Families in danger of losing affordable housing due to unpaid rent, eviction or rising rental costs may find reprieve with Family Stabilization Services. Working with the FS Unit, families are able to explore homelessness prevention strategies to help them maintain their current home or get through a financial crisis that threatened their housing. These services may include assistance in paying overdue utilities, back rent, moving costs and security deposits if a move is necessary. This year, Employment Services has made 88 homelessness prevention payments on behalf of participating families. This one time housing service has made an immediate impact in stabilizing the housing situation for many in the program.

## One Time Housing and Utility Issuances

Due to continually rising housing and utility costs, Employment Services issued two separate assistance payments for these expenses to active CalWORKs families. Eligible families received a winter subsidy of \$350 in January to help offset the cost of energy bills and a spring subsidy of \$650 in May to help with escalating housing costs.

In total, Employment Services staff issued 3,523 utility payments and 2,764 for housing. Their hard work and dedication had an immeasurable impact on struggling families dealing with unexpected and unaffordable costs.

Unfortunately, many families don't reach out to the CalWORKs program until they've already lost their home and find themselves battling homelessness. These families are referred to the CalWORKs Housing Support Program, which is able to provide more extensive services that link housing resources and employment support. Through the program, Housing Specialists with our partners at Abode Services assist families in finding affordable housing and provide subsidies to help pay move-in and rental costs. Focusing on sustainable housing solutions, Abode's Housing Specialists ensure that each rehousing placement is in a financially sustainable home so families are able to fully take over after their initial short-term rental subsidy. Throughout this past year, the Housing Support Program has provided rehousing and emergency housing solutions to 114 families.

### Performance

Each CalWORKs enrollee must participate in employment based activities; these hourly requirements range from 20 to 30 hours per week for single-parent families or 35 hours per week for two-parent families. On a monthly basis, the State performs a case review of samples from each county, measuring compliance with hourly participation requirements. This measure is called the Work Participation Rate (WPR).

WPR is the primary performance indicator for state Welfare-to-Work programs nationwide. Santa Clara County has maintained an outstanding performance record, regularly performing well above the 50% threshold requirement for single-parent families and distinguishing itself as a top performing county. This past year, Employment Services achieved a monumental accomplishment by attaining a WPR rate above 70% for four separate months during the 2015 fiscal year. This raised the County's yearly average to 66.49%, the highest yearly average rate our county has ever attained.



**Work Participation Rate—Fiscal Year 2015**





*The Steering Committee meets regularly to evaluate performance and procedure as well as develop new strategies for meeting WPR.*

With Santa Clara's exceptional WPR performance, Employment Services has been working with other counties to help them improve their service delivery models. This year, we hosted five symposiums to share strategies and key performance elements. Each event was well attended by guests from counties as far south as San Bernardino and as far north as Shasta. Our symposiums highlighted the internal partnerships and teamwork that generate WPR success. Presentations focused on the collaboration of our Rapid Response Team, Decision Support and Research Department, Staff Development and dedicated Eligibility staff, who band together to review and identify client cases to ensure compliance with requirements and engage those that may need additional activity hours or case management.

The groups also discussed innovative employment activities that are designed for clients who do not meet the WPR. These activities include rapid entry into subsidized employment, distance learning that allows clients to complete training modules online with a County provided tablet and short term training workshops that focus on enhancing professional skills. Following the symposiums, many counties have begun to model our business processes and incorporate our successful strategies into their own workflows.

In addition to the symposiums, Santa Clara County was invited to present a workshop at the CalWORKs and Refugee Programs Training Academy in Anaheim this past December. At the conference, our WPR leadership team shared the stage with other top performing counties and hosted over 200 attendees. While in the spotlight, the team shared best practices and provided an in-depth look at our WPR strategy, with an emphasis on a collaborative team effort to meet and exceed the state threshold. The workshop was very well received and many of the participants will be attending a local symposium with their staff.

Santa Clara County is currently working on strategies to further engage two-parent families. With a higher federal threshold of 90%, the WPR Steering Committee will be working on recommendations in the coming year to achieve the higher rate.

## Employment Connection Center

Having access to work opportunities is crucial to families working toward self-sufficiency. For CalWORKs jobseekers, the Employment Services Program operates the Employment Connection Center (ECC), a one-stop employment shop that provides both guidance and services that are tailored to meet participant needs. Ensuring access to all participants, the Employment Connection offers three full service sites across the County in Mountain View, San Jose and Gilroy.



*Clients gather for an Employer Panel at the Employment Connection Center in San Jose.*

CalWORKs clients looking to enter the workforce have multiple paths to help them get there. When joining the Employment Connection, each client spends time working with an Employment Counselor and participates in comprehensive job preparation activities. These activities are designed to ready them for the job search and interview process and may include an introduction to traditional and online job search methods, how to complete job applications, resume development, mock interviews and peer-led employment discussions.

The ECC also hosts interactive and motivational employment workshops. Special guest speakers from our partner employers regularly contribute their expertise to our client population. For example, our liaisons at Josephine Staffing presented a workshop on transitioning temporary work assignments into permanent employment, while Infinity Staffing provided additional support by delivering an in-depth look at mastering job interviews. The ECC also reached out to the Santa Clara County Federal Credit Union to provide Financial Literacy training to help clients manage their earnings and budget once they've found a job.

Through this collective effort, the ECC helped 570 clients find employment last year! A significant achievement, each job gained is a direct result of continuous job development, on-site job recruitments and placement into private sector and subsidized employment.

## ECC Employment by the Numbers

**570**

Clients Employed

Average Hourly Wage

**\$12.81**

**27.3**

Average Hours  
Worked per Week



## Subsidized Employment

Now entering its fourth year, the Employment Connection Works program, also known as EC Works, is providing subsidized employment opportunities for those who aren't able to find employment through a traditional job search. Subsidized jobs are designed to help clients build their skill levels while employers receive financial incentives to hire and train CalWORKs employees. Utilizing a multi-tiered approach, Employment and Benefit Services has designed an employment program to match the skills, education and work experience of nearly any client who walks through the door. To date, the program has provided employment opportunities to over 267 participants.

EC WORKS

### TIER 1

Private sector employment  
Full reimbursement  
Full-time positions

### TIER 2

Paid work experience  
Fixed hourly wage  
Part-time positions

### TIER 3

CalWORKs College Work Study  
Partial reimbursement  
Part-time positions



### A Day to Remember

With no food, money or family support, Cynthia was determined to provide for her twin daughters, age six. She searched for work every day but had a hard time finding a job that allowed her to balance work and her responsibilities as a mom. Knowing that she needed help, she turned to the CalWORKs program.

Cynthia was linked to child care services and transportation assistance, which allowed her to attend East Side Adult Education to obtain the diploma that she had given up on years ago. The CalWORKs Liaison on campus provided her with the support and guidance she needed to succeed in the program. At the time, she didn't realize that her aspirations would lead to a very special day for her entire family. This past June, Cynthia was able to walk the stage to receive her

diploma, which happened to take place on the same day that her daughters graduated from kindergarten. Sharing their achievement sparked a new level of motivation and Cynthia enrolled with the Employment Connection, joining the Paid Work Experience program while she searches for a full-time position. *Good luck, Cynthia!*



## Dress for Success

Through our partnership with Dress for Success San Jose, CalWORKs clients have access to a confidence boosting wardrobe for interviews and employment. All female participants receive a fitting and style session with a highly trained personal shopper who selects professional attire appropriate for interviews and accessories to compliment the new outfit. Additionally,



those who land a new job may return for a second fitting and additional garments.

This year, they outfitted 149 clients referred by the CalWORKs program. By providing professional attire, Dress for Success is ushering participants out into the job market empowered, with style and a boost in confidence that will ease their transition back into the workforce.



## Future EC Works Opportunities

Recently, the State expanded the subsidized employment eligibility guidelines to include the Safety Net population, which is comprised of participants who have timed-out of the CalWORKs program. This will have a positive impact on CalWORKs children whose parents may no longer be eligible for cash benefits, but will now have direct access to employment services. In Santa Clara County, there are potentially 1,233 Safety Net families that may be eligible for subsidized employment. As the state provides further direction, we will be looking for opportunities to incorporate these families into the EC Works program. Find out about new developments at future CalWORKs Advisory Meetings (*see Community Resource F*).



*Paid Work Experience clients at work in the Continuing Benefit Services office.*

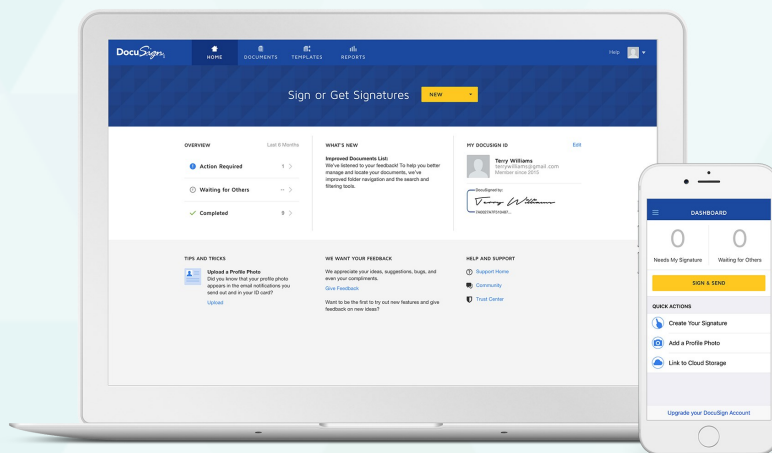


Boldly leading the drive toward innovation, the Department of Employment and Benefit Services was among the first in the County to embrace and successfully develop strategic new uses for DocuSign, an electronic signature technology. DocuSign's strength is in its simplicity; through online document viewing and access to an email account, users are able to provide legally binding signatures on contracts and forms from anywhere they have an internet connection. Adopted early by the EC Works subsidized employment program, the introduction of DocuSign has generated strong gains in both customer satisfaction and streamlined business workflow.

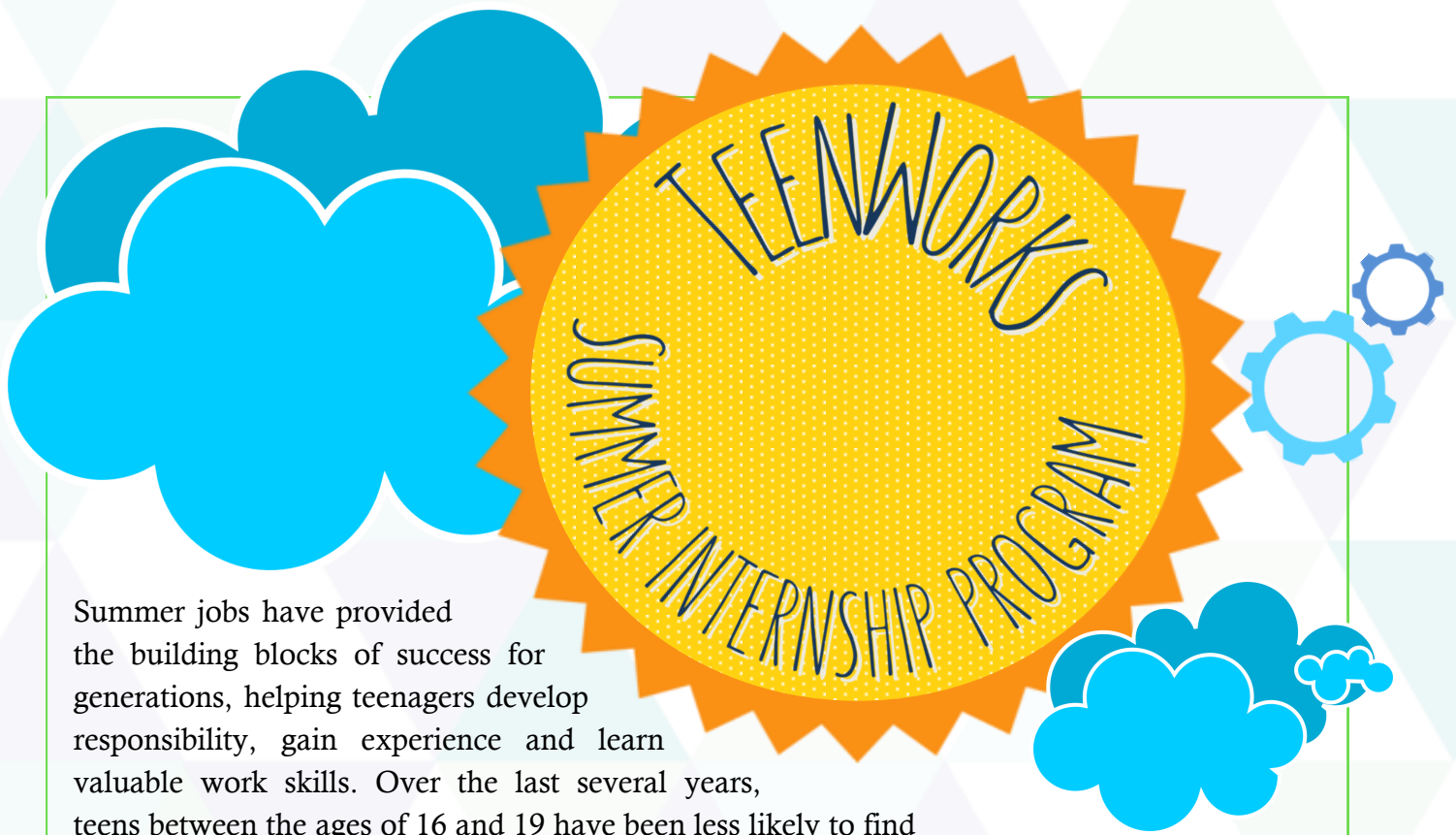
DocuSign's benefits have extended beyond those initially imagined. Its original workflow use was designed to facilitate the signatory process in executing the 200 subsidized employment contracts that Employment Services engages in each year. Thinking outside the box, Employment Services partnered with the Information Systems Department, Financial Management Systems and the DocuSign Development Team to create a seamless invoicing process for employers in the subsidized employment program.

Through DocuSign, Employers are able to fill out forms, attach supporting documentation and sign a contractor invoice to request wage reimbursements in the EC Works Program. With the new system in place, invoices received each month are submitted and paid on time with little follow-up from staff. Employment Counselors are also able to electronically send out timecards to all participating Supervisors and clients to record time in the Paid Work Experience program. By completing the process online, Employment Services and Financial Management Systems are able to easily manage the bi-weekly timecards of approximately 200 subsidized employees.

With DocuSign, Employment Services is expediting payment processes and negating a variety of common issues stemming from the wet signature process, such as illegible writing, unnecessary printing and scanning, physical collection of documents and late submissions. The Department is enthusiastically exploring additional new uses for DocuSign.







Summer jobs have provided the building blocks of success for generations, helping teenagers develop responsibility, gain experience and learn valuable work skills. Over the last several years, teens between the ages of 16 and 19 have been less likely to find a part time or summer job and are being replaced by seniors or other adults. According to a 2015 survey released by the Pew Research Center, teen summer employment is at an all-time low, with less than one-third of all teens working each summer. Finding a summer job can be even more difficult for CalWORKs teens, who often lack the resources and guidance to find employment, depriving them of an experience that may impact the rest of their lives.

Employing a “whole-family” approach to combat generational poverty, the Employment Connection focused on providing meaningful employment to CalWORKs teens through a new summer work program called TeenWORKs. With a launch date in



*Employment Counselor Marisol Elliott meets with an intern and her mother to begin the job matching process.*



*Parents and teens attend a weekend orientation session.*

late June, the program offered teens (between the ages of 15 and 18) of CalWORKs families the opportunity to participate in a six-week internship, working 20 hours per week and earning \$15 per hour. Over 2,000 TeenWORKs invitation letters went out to CalWORKs households with eligible teens, yielding over 200 enthusiastic young adults who were eager to work.



Throughout the summer, a team of Employment Counselors and clerical staff managed the TeenWORKs program. Staff worked tirelessly for three weeks, preparing for the program launch, often working evenings and weekends, facilitating orientation sessions to



*A TeenWORKs intern receives his brand new bicycle.*

accommodate the schedules of teens and working parents. In all, 205 teens attended these sessions and a total of 178 were successfully placed in positions throughout the County. During each session, teens and parents learned all about the program and received a crash course on workplace expectations and behavior. Each teen was also provided with individual support from an Employment Counselor, a summer VTA pass, a bicycle provided by Family Transportation Services and a pay card to receive their bi-weekly paychecks.

Employment Services was able to develop a wide array of intern opportunities by leveraging our partner network of non-profit agencies and a significant number of County Agencies and Departments. Having a large selection of jobs to choose from was a key element of successful placement as each intern was given the opportunity to work with an employer that matched their interests and long-term career goals. For over 75% of participants, their TeenWORKs internship was their first job and being exposed to real world operations in their chosen field was a golden opportunity.

### **TeenWORKs Interns Celebrate Their Success**

On August 5th, a celebration was held to mark the end of the TeenWORKs Summer Internship Program. Youth who interned with the Social Services Agency gathered at the Employment Connection Center with their worksite supervisors and TeenWORKs staff. The event was organized by interns at the Employment Connection, who planned the celebration for their peers.



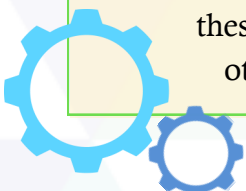
Several youth spoke about their experiences and shared how the program was a positive influence on them. Interns talked about the skills they developed and how these skills would help them in the future with other job opportunities.



*Angelica*



*Tatiana*





TeenWORKs interns also capitalized on special projects designed to help them hone their leadership abilities and work skills. For example, at the Continuing Benefit Services office, interns worked as a team to complete daily work and projects. Each week, the team elected a different leader to develop a strategy to facilitate work tasks and guide the group in day-to-day activities in order to complete their assignments. At a weekly meeting, the lead interns provided status updates and reported what work had been completed and the challenges they overcame. For most interns, participating in a work group, both as a lead and in a supportive role, provided a better understanding of what it's like to experience real-world duties, expectations and objectives. Closing in on the end of the internship period, supervisors recognized a noticeable growth in maturity and confidence.

By all accounts, from both supervisors and interns, the TeenWORKs program was a tremendous success and a deeply impactful experience for everyone involved. Employment Services is presently exploring options to continue the positive momentum of the pilot program with potential enhancements to work with CalWORKs teens year-round in both subsidized and unsubsidized employment. Through early engagement, the Employment Connection will be at the forefront, helping teens navigate pathways to careers and building a foundation for a brighter future.

### County Board of Supervisors Recognizes TeenWORKs Participants

On August 15, 2016, the Board of Supervisors recognized two outstanding TeenWORKs interns, Tyler Wasniowski and Abel Berhane, for their participation in the program. Also receiving special recognition was the Gardner Family Health Network, for providing nine interns with a fulfilling work experience this summer. Hundreds of attendees gathered to show their appreciation for the teen interns, local employers and the TeenWORKs staff.



*Top left: Tyler Wasniowski, joined by his uncle and grandfather, addresses the crowd after receiving his award from Board President David Cortese.*



*Top right: Abel Berhane accepts his award from Supervisor Joe Simitian.*



*Bottom left: Gardner Family Health Network receives its award from Supervisor Mike Wasserman.*



*Bottom right: TeenWORKs staff stand to be recognized by the Board of Supervisors and meeting attendees.*







# Spotlight:

## TeenWORKs Interns on the Job

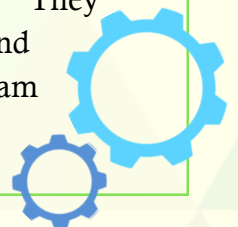


**Setty Rangel** worked with the Employment Support Initiative Unit and helped develop a screen capture training video for other TeenWORKs interns. The video was a step by step guide on how to electronically sign an intern timecard using DocuSign technology. With his help, over 500 timecards were signed and collected during the six-week internship!

The ASVP team, comprised of **Charlie Yapit, Raul Centeno, Cristian Medel** and **Alexis Evans**, was assigned to make 44 copies of the Forms Binder that Eligibility Workers depend on for their daily functions. From start to finish, the team professionally assembled each manual, ordering supplies, labelling each insert and composing a table of contents for every copy.



**Mario Martinez, Izaya Martinez, Alexandria Ruiz** and **Ainullah Yousafzi** collaborated and assisted in the creation of the first Continuing Benefit Services TeenWORKS PowerPoint presentation. These four individuals also pioneered the idea of rotating a lead each week to obtain additional skills and experience scheduling and assigning work. They implemented morning huddles and weekly unit meetings that included team building skills.





# Refugee Employment Services

Santa Clara County has become a beacon of hope for refugees fleeing war, religious persecution, natural disasters and human rights abuse. Aiding these families through tumult and anguish, the Refugee Employment Services program has been there to provide economic support and social integration services to refugees who resettle here.

Despite the rising cost of living, Santa Clara County's strong job market offers ample employment opportunities and the area remains a magnet for new settlers. During the last federal fiscal year, approximately 200 refugees were fortunate enough to resettle in Santa Clara County. Following the trend from last year, the majority of the newly arrived refugees came from Iran, Iraq, Eritrea, Somali, Afghanistan, Russia and Cuba.

A budding new partnership between local resettlement agencies and the Immanuel House, a non-profit residential service provider, aims to bridge the housing gap for hopeful refugees. Through the partnership, new arrivals will be eligible to stay in an affordable transitional boarding home while they settle in, find employment and acclimate to their new environment. This is expected to make an immediate impact on refugee resettlement rates as the housing opportunity is anticipated to double the number of new arrivals next year. (To learn more about Immanuel House, visit [www.immanuelhousesj.org](http://www.immanuelhousesj.org).)

## Humble Beginnings

Those within the refugee population often face a wide range of employment barriers when trying to enter the workforce. Common barriers include a limited work background, lack of English language skills or health related issues. However, the County is now experiencing a new trend of displaced professionals. These highly skilled individuals are finding that their degrees or certified training are not recognized in the U.S. job market. Regardless of the need, the Refugee Employment Services program is poised to ease the resettlement process by offering temporary financial assistance, medical benefits and employment training and support. The program often begins with an introduction to the U.S. job market, job readiness, job search services, English language training and job placement.

Employment and Benefit Services provides these specialized services by partnering and collaborating with community based organizations that possess both expertise and staff with specialized linguistic skills and cultural competence to serve the refugee population. Presently, our partners include the International Rescue Committee and Jewish Family Services of Silicon Valley.



*Refugee Employment Services clients participate in an English class.*

## Preparing for a Brighter Future

I arrived in the United States as a refugee from Iran. In my country, I was a student studying computer science and I didn't have any job experience. It was difficult for me to think about a job or career in the U.S., because so many things related to working in this country were unfamiliar to me.



Jewish Family Services of Silicon Valley (JFS) helped me with resume preparation, career counseling, employment leads, housing advice, public transportation expenses and job placement. I'm currently working as a Sales Associate at an electronics store. I also work part-time as a tutor at DeAnza College while I continue to study computer science. I'm really grateful for all the assistance I've received from JFS, and I know I couldn't have achieved all that I have in such a short time without their help.

-Pazam J.

Through the last federal fiscal year, the Refugee Employment Services program served 207 participants. Through the tireless work of our partner agencies, 129 refugee settlers were able to enter the workforce, earning an average of \$14.33 per hour. With a helping hand, refugees in the County are able to establish a solid foundation to launch their new life.

## Representing Local Refugees in Washington

As mentioned, Santa Clara County has received a growing number of professional refugees and immigrants that are highly trained, experienced or educated, yet have a difficult time finding compatible jobs because of non-credited or unrecognized professional certifications or degrees from their home countries. The Refugee and Immigrant Forum (RIF), a multi-agency collaborative in Santa Clara County, has recognized this challenge and spearheaded efforts to address the issue on a national level.

They are now working on the White House Task Force on New Americans and attended the National Skills and Credential Institute Conference to assist in finding solutions to this barrier. The peer-led learning conference will unite a consortium of community leaders, workforce representatives and educational providers to help develop public and private sector strategies to help strengthen career pathways for skilled immigrants. A tremendous honor and opportunity, the Santa Clara County RIF will be reporting new information or breakthrough strategies back to the County over the next year. Join in the discussion by attending monthly Refugee and Immigrant Forum meetings (*see Community Resource G*).

## Starting Anew

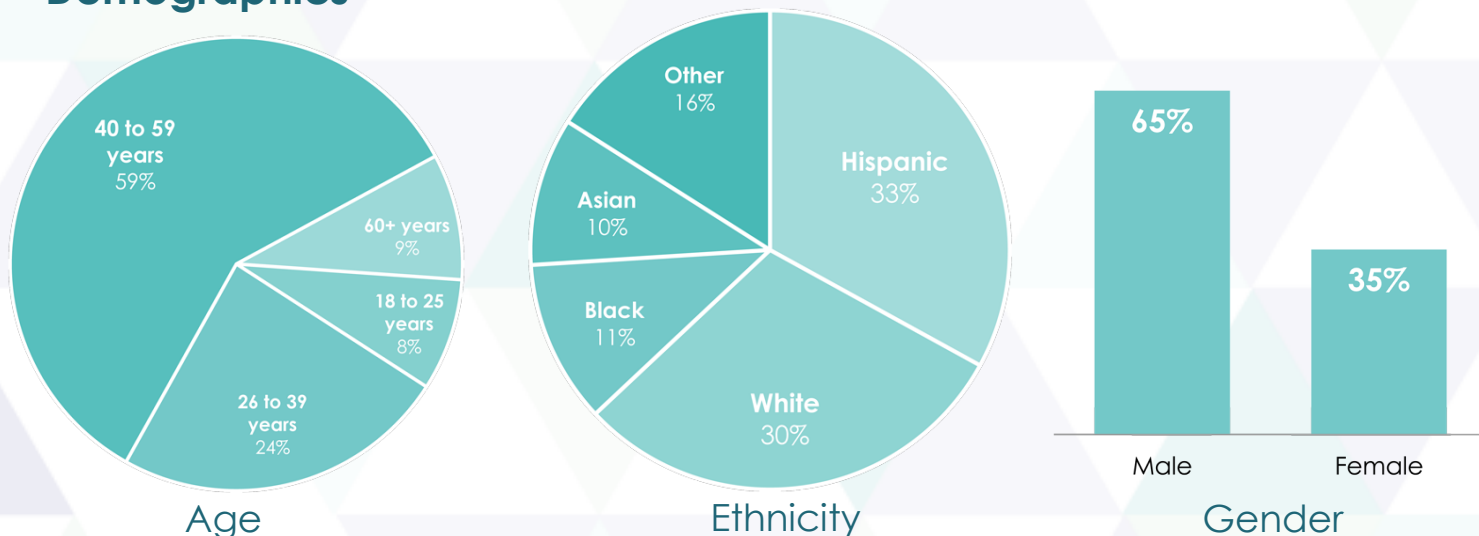
With abundant opportunity and an established support network, Santa Clara County is a hospitable host to those pursuing their American dream. The Refugee Employment Services program will be working side by side with partner agencies to provide the continued support that new settlers need to help transition into their new life.

# General Assistance

General Assistance (GA) is a County-funded program that provides safety net services for the indigent adult population, assisting individuals in becoming stable or employed. The GA program serves over 4,000 adults each month, providing Medi-Cal, CalFresh and cash assistance. Clients may also be eligible for additional services, including Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Advocacy, Vocational Services, Re-Entry Services and the Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants (CAPI).

Serving an average of 400 clients per day, GA staff spent much of this year striving to improve the overall customer experience, reducing lobby wait times and appointment delays. As a result of their efforts, the average wait time decreased to just over four minutes in March 2016, an incredible achievement. In addition, the Board of Supervisors approved several GA policy amendments this spring to minimize barriers for recipients as well as providing a small cash grant increase.

## Demographics



## Partner Services: A Helping Hand

Safety Net populations often experience a multitude of physical and behavioral health issues stemming from or amplified by challenges such as health problems, housing instability, unemployment and food insecurity, all of which influence the client's ability to succeed and obtain self-sufficiency. To this end, Employment and Benefit Services has worked hard this year to provide additional services at the local district office or have a "warm hand off" to services at outside facilities.





One example of this effort is the Valley Medical Center (VMC) Homeless Healthcare Program's Mobile Medical Unit. Since March 2015, each Tuesday, clinic staff provide basic medical care, social work and psychological services to an average of 12 clients per day. Clients who may require specialized services or additional care are referred to VMC, but the majority of clients receive the care they need right away on the mobile unit.

Joining VMC on Tuesday mornings is our newest partner, Project WeHOPE, who launched the Dignity on Wheels program at GA this June. In collaboration with the Office of Supportive Housing, Project WeHOPE is bringing their mobile hygiene services to locations throughout Santa Clara County. Their state of the art trailer is equipped with three full showers and three washers and dryers for homeless individuals who do not regularly have access to these amenities. The unit provides up to 30 free showers and 14 loads of laundry during each four-hour session.

Finally, inside GA's busy lobby is the Health Care Options window. Representatives are available every Tuesday and Thursday to provide information about and assist clients with selecting a Managed Care health plan. They guide clients through the process of either enrolling in or changing health plans, saving them the time and energy it often takes to access these much needed services over the phone.

Working with Dignity on Wheels has been an incredibly positive experience for both clients and staff. Several Vocational Services clients are gaining valuable work experience by volunteering with the project.

Dignity on Wheels staff are also grateful for the opportunity to work with GA and have said, "We bring our mobile services to many different sites throughout the Bay Area, but the GA location truly stands out. Staff clearly care a great deal about the clients, providing extra items, such as setting up a waiting area with chairs, offering free snacks and supplying clothing for those who need it. We also love the assistance we receive from client volunteers. They have been such an asset that they now volunteer with us at other sites as well. We hope this partnership lasts a long time!"



## Vocational Services

After being deemed eligible for cash benefits, over half of all GA clients are considered to be employable and must engage in a work activity. A team of seven Employment Counselors guide Vocational Services (VS) clients through the job search process, serving over 2,000 clients each month. In the past year, an average of 140 clients found employment each month and earned an average of \$16 per hour at 29 hours per week. In May of 2016, the VS team achieved a record high number of 160 employed clients!

The Vocational Services (VS) program provides employment assistance to this segment of the GA population, offering tools and resources to enhance employability and promote self-sufficiency. VS provides a positive, supportive environment to rebuild clients' confidence following periods of homelessness and employment gaps.

## VS by the Numbers

**68%** male  
average age **43**  
**63%** have a **GED** or higher

**94%** consider **English** to be their primary language

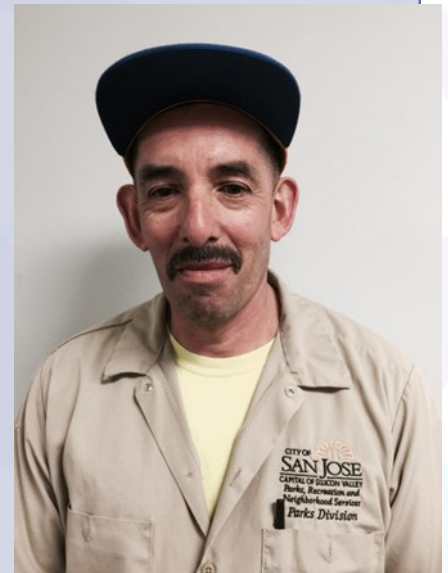
**72%** may be **homeless** at any given time

### Starting Over and Giving Back

Daniel had a thriving career as a contractor working on high end homes for prominent builders and was incredibly successful for many years, with a job he excelled at and a family he cherished. Over time, he became dependent on drugs and lost everything. Destitute and homeless, he turned to Vocational Services for help.

His strong work ethic and eagerness to start over fueled his job search; he once submitted over 40 job applications in one day! He was thrilled when he was offered a part-time, on-call position with the City of San Jose in the Parks Division. He worked hard, despite the limited work hours, knowing that this opportunity could lead to more.

After three long years, he was finally selected to interview for a full time position. With the help of his VS counselors, Daniel spent days preparing and practicing and was ultimately hired, beating out 200 other applicants! Daniel's enthusiasm and never-give-up attitude has led him to a place where he can now give back to the community. He is earning over \$25 an hour and supervises VS clients at his worksite, serving as a role model, encouraging and guiding them toward self-sufficiency. *Congratulations, Daniel!*





## **Supplemental Security Income Advocacy**

General Assistance clients who are unable to work due to long term disabilities are assisted by the SSI Advocacy unit, through which they receive assistance in obtaining SSI benefits. In the past year, the unit served 900 clients and successfully secured 170 Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) approvals.

This specialized unit has nine Social Workers, who work collaboratively with outside agencies such as the Santa Clara Valley Health and Hospital System. While the Social Workers work through the lengthy SSI/SSDI process, staff coordinates additional services, such as bus passes, access to medical and mental health services and subsidized housing.

To ensure that no client waits for this valuable service, the unit partners with local law firms to handle client overflow or to represent them at hearings or appeals. Last year, these firms worked with over 155 clients.

## **Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants (CAPI)**

Immigrants and refugees who are aged, blind or disabled and do not qualify for the Supplemental Security Income/State Supplementary Payment (SSI/SSP) program are able to receive cash assistance through the Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants (CAPI). In Santa Clara, 930 seniors are currently receiving CAPI benefits.

## **Re-Entry Resource Center**

In an effort to provide seamless re-entry from incarceration, SSA joined several agencies in a County-wide effort to provide a single point of entry through the Re-Entry Resource Center (RRC). Through this program, newly released inmates are provided with access to a full menu of services for post-release support, including: peer mentorship, job readiness, housing assistance, health referrals, food assistance, clothing and intensive case management.

A full unit of Eligibility staff from GA is stationed at the RRC, providing on-site application assistance and enrollment for public benefits. Since the partnership began in 2012 as the local implementation of the 2011 Public Realignment mandate, nearly 6,000 individuals have applied for a combination of Medi-Cal, CalFresh and General Assistance benefits.

## **Serving the Whole Person**

The General Assistance team remains committed to assisting clients in leveraging available services, striving to become healthy, self-sufficient members of the community. Toward that end, on-going efforts are underway to continue to enlist non-profit community programs and other County Agencies to offer additional services at the General Assistance office.





# Foster Care Eligibility



Santa Clara County's Foster Care Program is a unique collaboration between the Department of Family and Children Services and Employment and Benefit Services. Together, we strive to ensure that the children and families we serve have access to all available benefits and support services they require.

The Foster Care Eligibility (FCE) Bureau plays an important role in the Foster Care Program. Each year, this team of Eligibility Workers and clerical staff work behind the scenes, processing over 5,000 highly sensitive cases to ensure the needs of each child are met. Services provided include eligibility determinations and ongoing case management for benefits such as Foster Care payments, Medi-Cal and CalFresh.

In addition to these basic benefits, FCE also administers several other programs and supportive services: the Approved Relative Caregiver program, the California Alternative Payment Program, SSI Advocacy, transitional housing placement and adoption assistance.

## **Approved Relative Caregiver Program**

In many cases, the transition to a foster home is more successful when a child is placed in the care of a family member, where trust has already been established. In years past, relative caregivers received reduced payments in comparison to non-relative providers. The state adopted a new initiative in 2015, the Approved Relative Caregiver (ARC) Program, which aligns the amount paid to an approved relative caring for a foster child with the basic foster care rate. In this first year, 119 families participated in the ARC program, receiving financial relief and allowing the children to remain with trusted relatives.



## California Alternative Payment Program

The cost of child care can be a heavy burden for many families, including those with foster children. In order to help with this expense and provide the means for families to have access to quality child care options, the Child Development Program provides subsidized child care for dependents of Santa Clara County who are placed with a foster care family. An average of 200 families and 300 children receive financial assistance with child care payments each year.



## SSI Advocacy

Each month, Social Work Coordinators screen an average of 10 foster care youth age 16.5 and older for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) eligibility and submit an application on their behalf. In approved cases, the County is named as the authorized payee and a Social Work Coordinator manages the monthly payments. The child or young adult's monthly placement costs are paid out of these benefits and any remaining funds are held in reserve for additional expenses, such as school tuition or supplies.

There are currently over 100 foster youth receiving SSI. All are strongly encouraged to continue with the Extended Foster Care program, which provides three years of additional support, through age 21. While under the extended program, youth receive the training and guidance they need to become self-sufficient and independent.

## Continuum of Care Reform

Over the next two years, Foster Care services will be transformed through the state's Continuum of Care Reform. This comprehensive framework is designed to support children, youth and families in achieving permanency across placement



## Santa Clara County Continuum of Care

settings while increasing capacity for home-based care. The Department of Family and Children Services and Employment and Benefit Services, as well as their partners in Probation and Mental Health, are already meeting to design this new and improved system. These program improvements will offer foster youth the greatest chance to thrive in permanent and supportive homes and provide the opportunity to grow into successful, self-sufficient adults.



## Summer Jobs for Foster Youth

Building on the success of last year's summer employment program, Santa Clara County again partnered with the work2future Foundation to offer Santa Clara County Summer Jobs for young adults, ages 16 to 24, who are in or have aged out of foster care. This summer, over 100 youth participated in the program, which provided financial literacy and work readiness training before placing them at non-profit organizations throughout the County to gain valuable work experience. Following the same framework as the TeenWORKs program for CalWORKs youth, participants worked 20 hours per week and earned \$15 per hour.

Each participant started his or her journey at the Hub, a one-stop community resource center for foster youth in Santa Clara County, that served as the central enrollment location for the program. With co-located staff, the Foundation worked very closely with the Hub from the outset, forming an incredibly positive and productive collaboration, which resulted in enrollment figures that exceeded the original goal. Foster youth attending orientations also benefitted from professional attire that was donated via a clothing drive organized by Supervisor Cindy Chavez.

The success of the program would not have been possible without the hard work of staff at the Hub and with the Independent Living Program. Kudos goes to Marisela Martinez, Sovandy Hang, Briana Saldivar, Ty Thompson, Elena Marquez, Anna-Maria Karnes and Julio Flores for their assistance and diligence in helping these young adults become employed this summer.

## Former Foster Youth Receive Board of Supervisors Commendations

Michael Morales and Jose "Tony" Mora, two former foster youth, were acknowledged by the Board of Supervisors on August 15, 2016, for their incredible work ethic at their summer jobs. Both young men are on their way to a strong and stable future, thanks in part to work2future and the support they received through the Santa Clara County Foster Care program.

SOMOS Mayfair, a community organization that has served the working poor and immigrant population of San Jose for 20 years, was also recognized by the Board for their contributions and support of the Summer Jobs program. Four foster youth were employed by SOMOS this summer.



*From left to right: Jose "Tony" Mora receives his award from Supervisor Cindy Chavez; Victor Vasquez, Program Manager of SOMOS, is greeted by Board President Dave Cortese; Supervisor Cindy Chavez introduces Michael Morales to meeting attendees.*



# Ombudsman Services

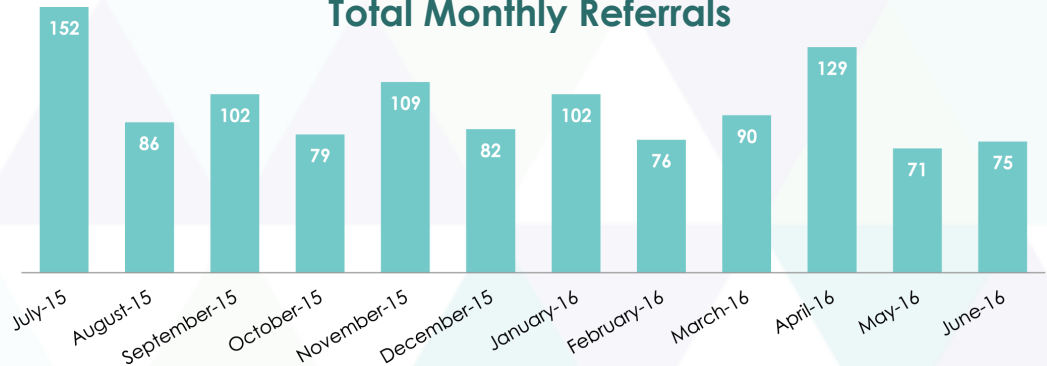
Employment and Benefit Services developed the Office of the Ombudsman in late 2014, offering impartial and confidential consultations to clients receiving public benefits, many of whom are receiving services for the first time through the Affordable Care Act. The Ombudsman is tasked with conducting informal fact-finding and troubleshooting resolutions to difficult cases for individual clients while also reporting emerging challenges for the Department as a whole.

Over the past year, the Ombudsman has worked closely with 1,153 clients, the majority of which requested assistance with Medi-Cal cases. As shown in the chart below, the number of inquiries received by the Ombudsman has begun to decline. Among other business process changes already discussed, the Department shifted to individual caseloads, providing clients an assigned worker. This strategy has led to a decrease in call volume to the Ombudsman, an indication that client services have improved.

Fostering community outreach and partner involvement, the Ombudsman also spearheads the coordination effort of the monthly Safety Net meeting. This

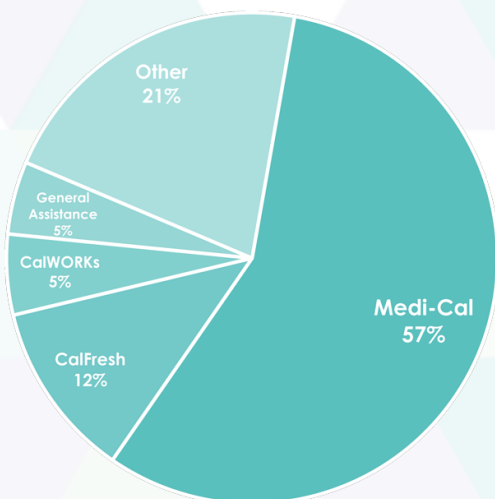
forum allows partner agencies and service providers an opportunity to stay up to date with available services and resources. Through engagement in the Safety Net, the network also receives

**Total Monthly Referrals**



direct information from Employment and Benefit Services in regards to its programs and emerging local initiatives. (See *Community Resource A.*)

**Referrals by Program**



The Office of the Ombudsman consistently addresses the evolving needs of the Department. This coming year will see an expansion of Ombudsman services, offering the same dedicated support and assistance to foster care families, a population that faces its own unique set of challenges.

With a continued focus on serving those in need, the Ombudsman is a valuable asset to the Department and the County, making a lasting difference in the community. *For more information about Ombudsman services, see Community Resource H.*

# Community Resources

Those working with low-income families are strongly encouraged to get involved and learn more about our programs, explore our resources and actively participate in the Safety Net Committee or CalWORKs Advisory. Together, we can combat the effects of poverty and make a difference in the lives of our clients by promoting awareness of Employment and Benefit Services programs and increasing access that leads directly to economic self-sufficiency. The following pages contain additional information about community meetings, resources and services mentioned in the Annual Report.

- A. Safety Net Meeting Calendar
- B. My Benefits CalWIN
- C. CalFresh 101
- D. CalWORKs 101
- E. Menu of Employment Services and Activities
- F. CalWORKs Advisory Meeting Schedule
- G. Refugee Forum Schedule
- H. Ombudsman Services
- I. CalWORKs Resource Guide
- J. District Office Directory

# Employment and Benefit Services Offices

Office Name	Address	Phone	Services
Benefit Assistance Center	1867 Senter Road San Jose, CA 95112	(408) 758-3800	Application Center for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health Coverage</li> <li>• Food Assistance</li> <li>• Financial Assistance</li> </ul>
Continuing Benefit Services	1870 Senter Road San Jose, CA 95112	(408) 758-4100	On-going Public Benefits
Victor Calvo North County Office	1330 W. Middlefield Road Mountain View, CA 94043	(408) 278-2400 (650) 988-6200	Full Service Center including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Application Center for all Public Benefits</li> <li>• Continuing Benefit Assistance</li> <li>• CalWORKs Employment Services</li> </ul>
South County Office	379 Tomkins Court Gilroy, CA 95020	(408) 758-3300	Full Service Center including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Application Center for all Public Benefits</li> <li>• Continuing Benefit Assistance</li> <li>• CalWORKs Employment Services</li> </ul>
General Assistance	1919 Senter Road San Jose, CA 95112	(408) 796-8900	Service Center for Indigent Adults Seeking: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General Assistance</li> <li>• Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants</li> <li>• Vocational Services</li> </ul>
CalWORKs Employment Services	1879 Senter Road San Jose, CA 95112  1330 W. Middlefield Road Mountain View, CA 94043  379 Tomkins Court Gilroy, CA 95020	(408) 758-3500  (408) 278-2402 (650) 988-6200  (408) 758-3300	Service Center for CalWORKs Employment Services Clients







SANTA CLARA COUNTY  
SOCIAL SERVICES AGENCY