



Parental Voice

Catalyzing Change in Child Support Practices and Policies

Parental Voice (Input) from Lived Experience Experts

- Parental voice through day-to-day interactions or surveys
- Focus groups
- Advisory Committee or Council



Listening to Parental Voice: An Introvert's Guide

David Ramm, Executive Consultant
Grays Peak Strategies



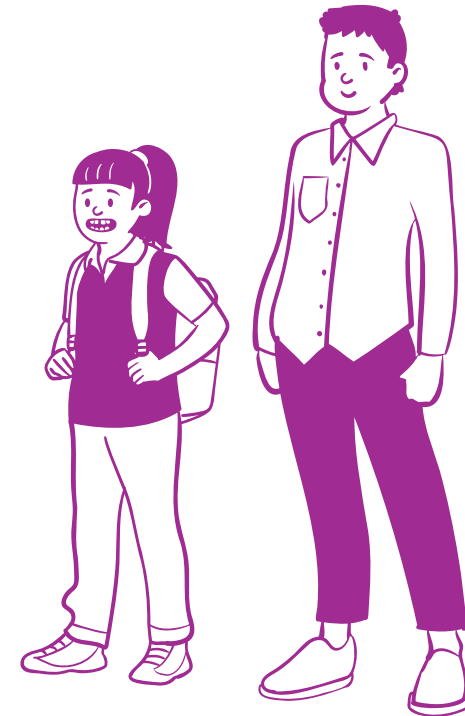
Elevating Parental Voice without Ever Leaving Your Desk

- Listening directly to parents offers programs a level of nuanced, in-depth feedback that nothing else can match
- But lived experience groups, family voice councils, and focus groups do involve talking to ... people [*shiver*]
- The logistics of compensation, the requirements of research-focused review boards, and the availability of appropriate facilities can all create barriers



Parental Voice Is All around You

- Parents offer child support programs feedback in myriad ways
 - Responses to forms
 - Calls, emails, text messages
 - Appearing (or not appearing) at appointments and hearings



The Question We Ask about Forms





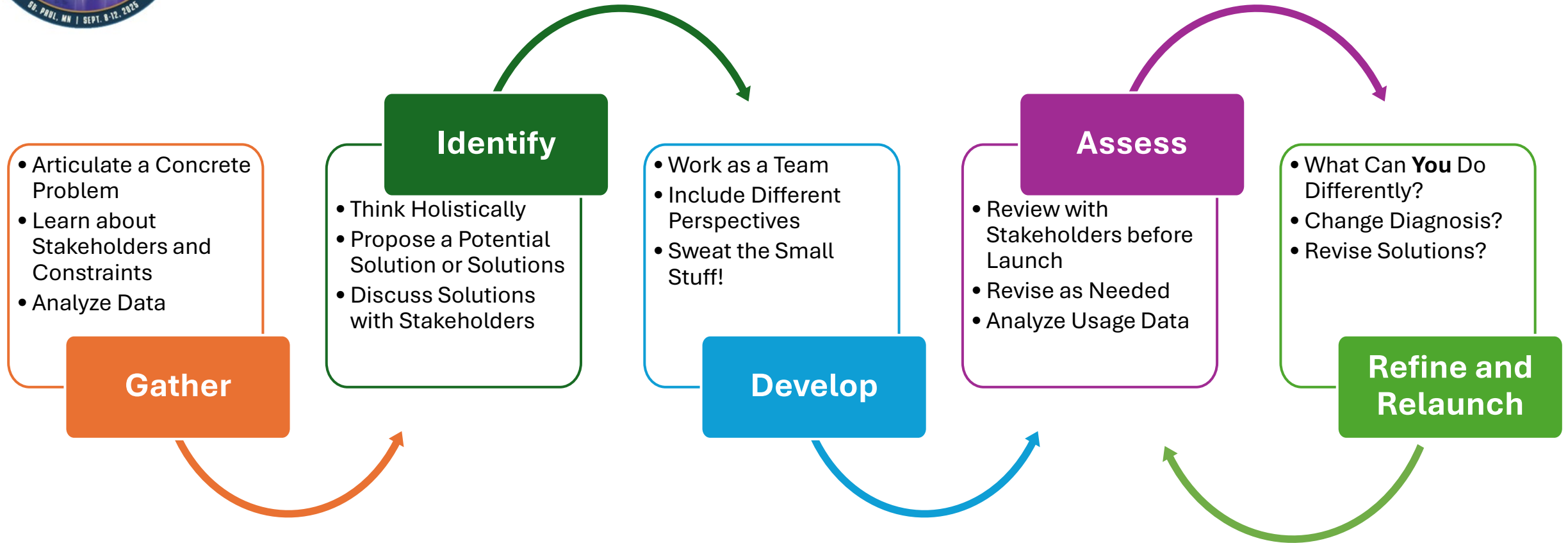
Ramsey County (Minnesota) Forms Project

- Ongoing project, begun in 2021, to make forms and other documents work better for parents and staff
- Emphasis on behavioral understanding
 - Motivational approach to document development
 - Grounded in research
 - Active, clear, helpful language
 - Design used to clarify and maintain interest
 - Direct and respectful
- Getting direct feedback from parents on every document too difficult given the number of forms





A Behavioral Design Methodology



Gather: Starting with Common Responses

- Parents and guardians told Ramsey County staff
 - Frustrated by providing the same information over and over
 - Unsure how to answer, given the wording
 - Not clear why the county needed some information
- Ramsey County staff and attorneys said
 - “Completed” forms were often missing information
 - The most important questions were often the ones missed and skipped
 - Add in slow response times, and the county wasn’t getting the information needed to take the next steps





Getting to the Specifics: The Financial Statement

- Used as part of establishing or modifying a child support order
- Required of both parents
- Long (6 pages) and complicated—and important

Financial Statement

Information in this document may be used to set, modify, or enforce child support.

Child Support Case #: _____

I: Personal Information

1. My name is: _____
2. My date of birth: _____ My place of birth: _____
3. My mailing address is: _____
This mailing address is the same as where I live. ☐ Yes ☐ No, I live at this address: _____
4. My contact numbers are:
☐ Home Phone: _____
☐ Cell Phone: _____
☐ Other: _____

NOTE: You MUST report all changes to the child support office.

5. I am going to school. ☐ Yes ☐ No If yes, ☐ Part time ☐ Full time
School Name: _____
My career field is _____
I have classes: _____ hours per week. I plan to graduate on _____
6. Have you ever been married? ☐ Yes ☐ No **If yes,**
 - a. Who are/were you married to: _____
 - b. Marriage: ☐ Date: _____ ☐ Place: _____
 - c. Separation: ☐ Date: _____
 - d. Divorce: ☐ Date: _____ ☐ Place: _____

II: Monthly Expenses and Debt

7. There are _____ adults and _____ child(ren) living in my household.
8. My average monthly household expenses are \$ _____.
9. Below is the breakdown of **my portion only** of the average monthly expenses and debt in my household:

Excavating the Voice in the Responses

- Looked at a small sample of recent responses (12)
 - All documents redacted by the program before review to protect client privacy
 - Redactions do make it harder to judge how complete a response was
- Analyzed each by
 - Section
 - Question
 - Element (each distinct piece of information)
 - Content
 - Subject (the person completing the form or someone else)
 - Response type (fill in the blank, checkbox, yes/no, etc.)
 - Contingencies (to answer question X, I need to know Y)



Excavating the Voice in the Responses

- Reviewed each response to judge whether the element was:
 - Completed
 - Completed but incorrect
 - Partially completed
 - Unclear completion
 - Skipped but should have completed
 - Skipped but probably shouldn't have
 - Skipped because maybe not applicable
 - Skipped because not applicable
- Tallied the number of elements that were completed correctly or skipped because they did not apply
 - The lower the score, the more likely someone couldn't understand the question or wasn't motivated to answer it





Putting the Data Together

Section #	Question #	Element	Content	Audience	Subject
Pre	[0]	No subordinate elements	Case#	PCF	Case
I	[0]	Heading	Personal Information	PCF	PCF
I	1	No subordinate elements	Name	PCF	PCF
I	2	[i]	DOB	PCF	PCF
I	2	[ii]	Place of birth	PCF	PCF
I	3	[i]	Mailing address	PCF	PCF
I	3	[ii]	Mailing as residence	PCF	PCF
I	3	[iii]	Current residence (vs. mailing)	PCF	PCF
I	4	[i]	Home phone	PCF	PCF
I	4	[ii]	Cell phone	PCF	PCF
I	4	[iii]	Other (phone)	PCF	PCF
I	5	[i]	Going to school (Y/N)	PCF	PCF
I	5	[ii]	School part-time or full-time	PCF	PCF
I	5	[iii]	School name	PCF	PCF
I	5	[d]	"Career field"	PCF	PCF
I	5	[e]	Hours of classes	PCF	PCF
I	5	[f]	Planned graduation	PCF	PCF
I	6	[i]	Married (Y/N)	PCF	PCF
I	6	a	Married to whom	PCF	PCF





What People Didn't Answer (but Should Have)

- **Supplemental Security Income** (both whether they received it and whether the other parent does)
- Retirement, Survivors, and Disability Insurance
- Veterans Benefit
- Other (phone)
- Military retirement
- Worker's Compensation
- Other income (unearned)
- Public assistance from another state
- Medical bills (average cost)
- Restitution/fines
- Student loans
- **Child support paid**
- Other income
- Diversionary Work Program
- General Assistance
- **Start and end time period of paying or receiving child support**
- **Home phone**
- IRS/Taxes
- Source of other income
- **Home phone**
- **Other (phone)**
- Child support received
- Property Value: Other Real Estate
- Property Value: Recreational Vehicle
- Property Value: Other Property
- **Occupation**
- Dental insurance deductible



Motivating Responses: Before

II: Monthly Expenses and Debt

7. There are 1 adults and 1 child(ren) living in my household.
8. My average monthly household expenses are \$ 1580.00 - 1400
9. Below is the breakdown of my portion only of the average monthly expenses and debt in my household:

Vers. 8/3/2017

- 1 -

Rent/Mortgage	\$ <u>825/month</u>	Debt Payments per Month	
Utilities	<u>95</u>	Credit Cards	
Phone		Medical Bills	
House/personal		Restitution/Fines	
care products	<u>100</u>	IRS/Taxes	<u>40.00/month</u>
Life/home insurance		Student Loans	
Transportation	<u>2360</u>	Child Care	<u>300/month</u>
Car/bus	<u>400</u>	Clothing	
Gas	<u>40</u>	Food	<u>360/month</u>
Insurance		Child Support Orders	



Motivating Responses: After

Financial Information

Case 00 [REDACTED]

Necessities for You and Your Children Who Live with You

In this section we ask about the amount of money you pay for certain regular expenses.

Specifically, we want to know how much you pay to support yourself and the children of yours who live with you. For example, if you split your rent with a relative or partner, only tell us about your portion of the rent.

You may have to estimate some items. For example, the amount of money you spend on utilities probably changes from month to month. We still need you to give us an average.

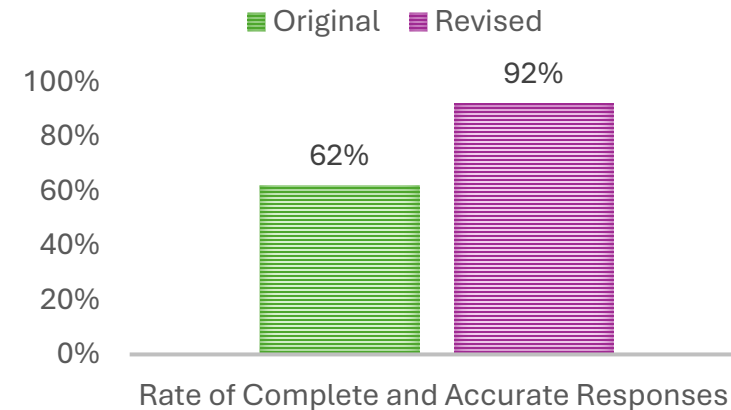
Type of Expense or Debt		Amount That You Pay	How Often You Pay That Amount		
			Weekly	Monthly	Annually
Home	Rent/Mortgage	\$ 1550		✓	
	Association or Other Fees	\$ 298		✓	
	Home or Renters Insurance	\$ 2,454.21			✓
	Property Taxes	\$ 1,475.94			✓
Utilities and Phone	Water	\$ 135		✓	
	Electricity	\$ 177.06		✓	
	Gas	\$ 48.01			
	Phone	\$ 232.90		✓	
	Internet	\$ 133		✓	
Transportation	Car Payment	\$ 976		✓	
	Bus or Other Public Transit	\$			
	Rideshare (for example, Uber)	\$			
	Gas	\$ 30	✓		
	Car Insurance	\$ 175		✓	
Food, Clothing, and Personal Care	Food	\$ 450		✓	
	Clothing	\$			
	Personal Care	\$ 50		✓	
Other Debts	Medical Debt	\$			
	Credit Cards	\$ 75		✓	
	Student Loans	\$			
	Tax-related Debt or Fines	\$			
	Other Fines/Restitution	\$			



Checking Results: Rerunning the Sample with New Responses

- New sample, same analytic approach
- A 30 percentage point (48%) increase in completion rate.
- Increased even when asking more questions about ability to pay.

FINANCIAL
STATEMENT: RATE OF
COMPLETE AND
ACCURATE RESPONSES



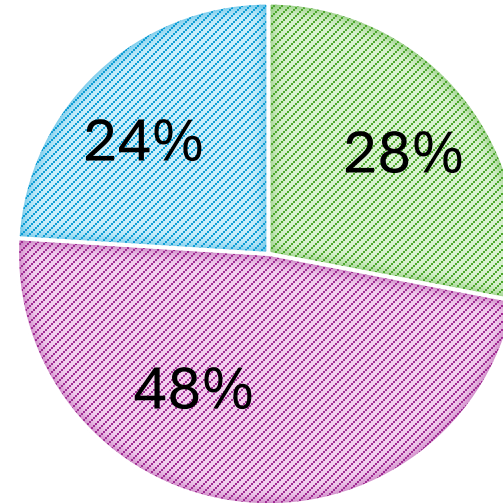


Accessibility Results

- The average reading level for first 25 forms completed on this project is 5.3.
- The highest reading level of any of the forms was 6.5.

READING LEVELS OF REVISED FORMS

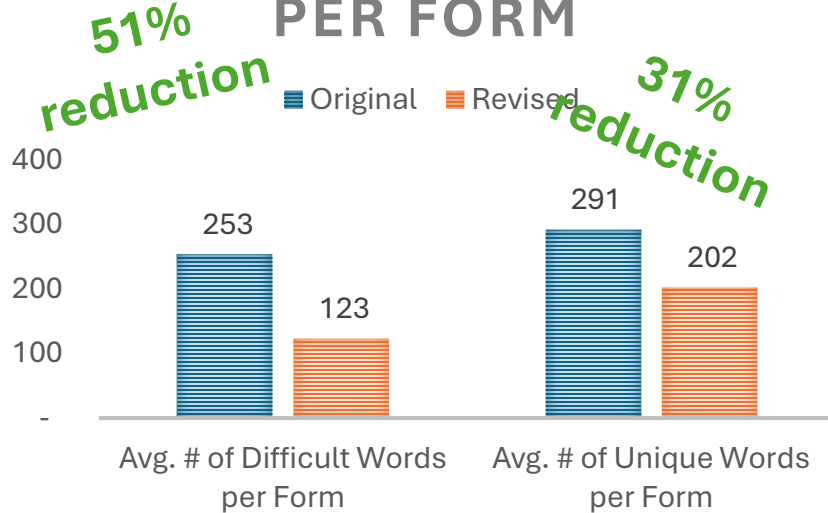
- 4th-grade Reading Level
- 5th-grade Reading Level
- 6th-grade Reading Level



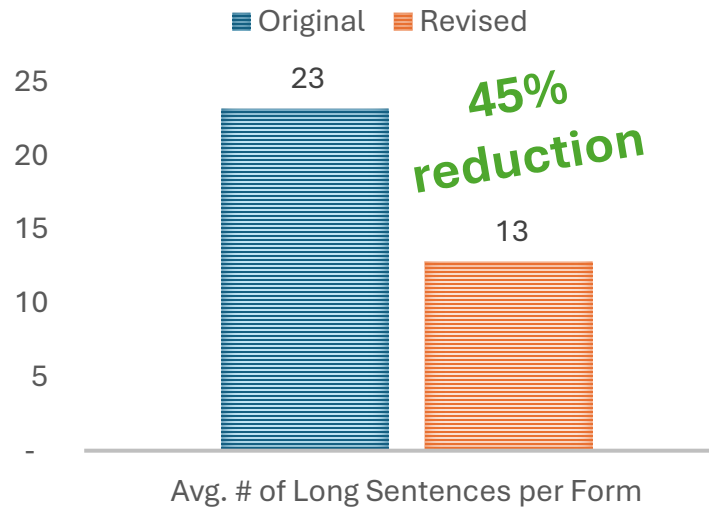


What Makes Forms Easier to Read?

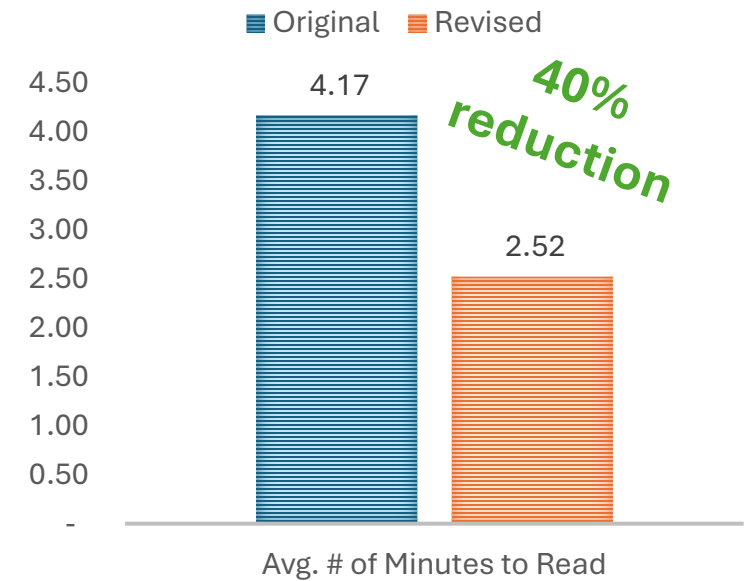
AVERAGE # OF DIFFICULT WORDS AND UNIQUE WORDS PER FORM



AVERAGE # OF LONG SENTENCES PER FORM



AVERAGE # OF MINUTES TO READ



Broadly Applicable Method

- Have used a similar approach to analyze:
 - Call center data (connections between call center topics and business process issues and website content)
 - Emails from clients
 - Web content





Lived Experience Experts as Collaborators

valerie lunderville

SAVES Grant: Big Picture

The overall goal of the SAVES demonstration grant is to **increase safer access to child support and related parenting time services for victims/survivors of domestic violence**

- 13 Demonstration sites, 12 states and 1 tribal child support program
- Newly-founded [SAVES Center](#) as training and technical support; peer learning hub
- Project Requirements:
 - Advisory council; partnership with state-wide coalition
 - Lived experience expert involvement



SAVES grant Lived Experience Experts

Recruitment:

- Trusted partners
- Community Networks – sharing among peers
- Informed Consent
- Details of engagement, expectations
- “Don’t know how to ask for what I don’t know I need to ask for”





SAVES Advisory Council

Which core priority of SAVES work does this reflect?	Survivor-centered collaboration and systems-change
What challenge or need were you addressing?	Work being led by those most closely impacted, trusted messengers and partners, with institutional policy-makers
What did you do first ?	Connected with state-wide coalition and hotline for sign-on to the work, and began identifying community partners

What did the process look like?	Regular planning meetings; development of co-leadership model. Bringing in partners and recruiting. Once established: relationship building, developing trust, shared language, and spheres of influence
What was the outcome or learning takeaway ?	We are moving at the speed of trust; Systems change requires many levers. Collaborating versus advising looks different.
How did this promote safer access for survivors ?	Centered our lived experience experts and their trusted community partners to co-lead, guide, and advise on the work. Allowed for real-time integration of feedback.



It is possible and beneficial to incorporate survivors into policy conversations

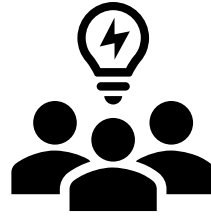
- CSD Leadership



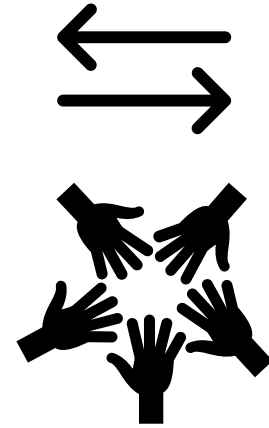
Structure and Foundation



- Charter
- Values
- Terminology
- Confidentiality
- Acknowledgements
- Consensus model
- Group agreements



- Meaningful ice-breakers
- Deeper introductions
- Inter-disciplinary small groups
- Cross-training
- “Agenda-less” spaces
- Reflection spaces – “what’s not working?”



- Listening practice
- Institutional role; betrayal
- Self and systems
- Sphere of influence
- Change management

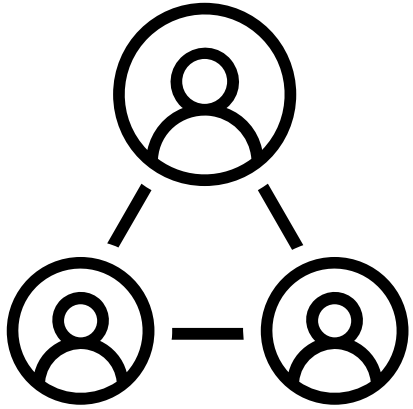


Domestic Abuse Definition

- A pattern of behaviors, tactics, *and/or threats* that may include physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, and financial abuse. While the frequency and intensity of these may differ, the constant component is an individual's consistent efforts to achieve compliance from or power and control over an intimate partner (current or former), family, or household member.



Survivor Acknowledgement



Five lived experience experts in MN SAVES

- We acknowledge victims/survivors and keep all those impacted by family violence or other forms of abuse at the forefront of our work. We recognize the devastating impact of family violence on individuals, families, and communities, and honor those lost and unseen in this work.

- We recognize that safety is a unique experience for everyone, and that what is safe for one person may not be for another as there is no universal survivor experience even though there are commonalities. We honor the strength and resilience of the children and adults who have and may still be experiencing family violence and understand that being a survivor does not mean the experience is “over” or that it will feel “over.”

- While we honor and recognize those who see themselves in this language and those who don’t yet use the language of survivor to explain their experience, we understand this is a statement and that tangible actions are needed to address the financial, mental, physical, familial, and social impacts of being a survivor.



**Take care
of yourself**

**Confidential
space -
Learning can
leave, stories
stay**

**One person,
one mic or
spotlight**

**There is more than
one way of
knowing; there is
more than one way
of being an expert.**

**Embrace collective
expertise – no one
person knows
everything, but
together we know a
lot**

*** this includes no
recording of meetings
or conversations
including ai transcripts**

**Be present
with yourself
and others**

**We are
moving at
the speed
of trust**

**Be curious
with yourself
and others**

**Be generous
with yourself
and others; we
cannot be
articulate all
of the time**

**Group
Agreements**





Shared Expertise

Commonalities in purpose, goals



Why I am here:

I am here because of my expertise. Because of my experience. Because it is important.

I am here because I have seen the child support system do good. I am here because I have also seen the child support system do harm. I am here because many are undereducated on DV and trauma issues.

I am here because the community I work in and come from is underrepresented and often unserved.

I am here because there are both barriers and a lack of resources for victims and survivors. Because navigating cases is time consuming and frustrating. Because Child support remains a taboo topic in our community.

I am here because I am a survivor. Because my daughter is a survivor. Because I survived violence but was victimized by the system.

> Excerpt from group advisory council activity



How will I know when I am successful?

I will know I am successful when survivors and families tell me. When they tell us they are safe.

When I start to see changes implemented and families indicate a more positive experience with child support.

I will know when I am successful in this work when goals have been defined, outlined, and achieved. When contribution and collaboration is recognized as crucial to enhancing the lives of Minnesotans.

I will know I am successful when I am heard and my experiences considered. When these systems are unrecognizable from their current form.

When the policies, procedures, and processes are smoother. When staff are educated in domestic violence and trauma-informed processes.

> *Excerpt from group advisory council activity*





“I am realizing our input can impact this work significantly - great conversation is happening and it's in depth.” - Lived Experience Expert





“Thank you for the changes that are already being made from our suggestions as we actively try to improve these areas.” – Lived Experience Expert





“Some of us survivors may be dealing with ongoing effects of abuse, people should have an awareness that “survivor” does not mean the situation is over.” – Lived Experience Expert





“Thank you for all you do! I've not been apart of a group that really does have the survivors in the forefront of everything, I really appreciate it.” – Lived Experience Expert



Safety Assessment

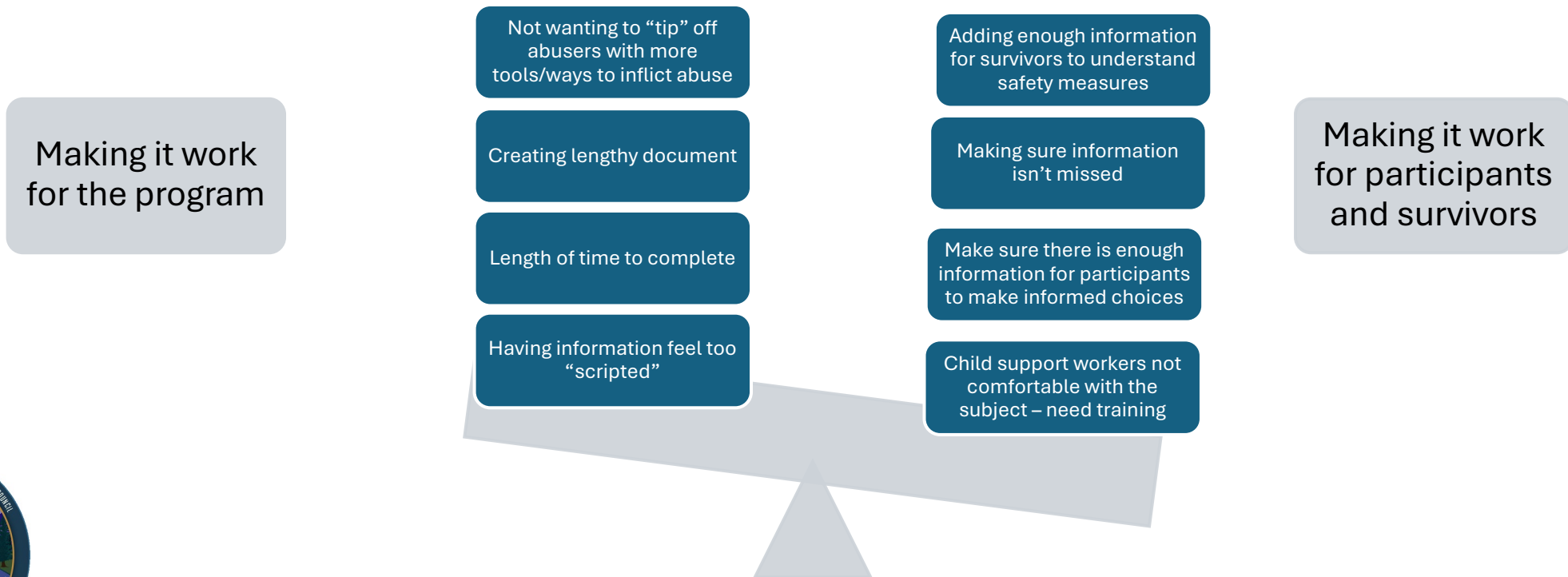


Draft 1 after Lived
Experience review

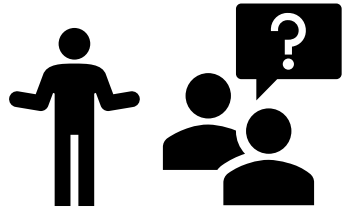


Balancing Lived Experience and Program Needs

What's our goal? To offer safer child support services.
Do the best assessment to find out who has safety concerns, and what safety measures we need to put in place



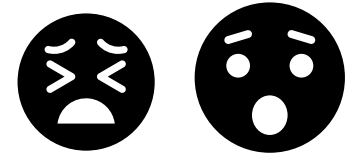
Good Cause



Confusing



Burdensome



Re-Traumatizing



NUMBER

#25-68-18

DATE

July 9, 2025

OF INTEREST TO

County Directors

Tribal Chairpersons and Tribal
Directors

Financial Assistance Supervisors
and Staff

County Child Support
Supervisors and Staff

Navigators, In-person assisters,
and Certified Application
Counselors

Community Partner Agencies
and Advocates

Good Cause Exemption for Child Support Cooperation Processes, Procedures and Best Practices for Public Assistance Programs

TOPIC

This is a joint bulletin between the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), Diversionary Work Program (DWP), Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), Medical Assistance (MA), and Child Support Division on the good cause exemption for child support cooperation processes, procedures and best practices for cooperating with child support requirements.

PURPOSE

This bulletin clarifies the good cause exemption from cooperation with child support policy and disseminates best practices to create consistent procedures to ensure the safety of all parties.



Expectation-setting

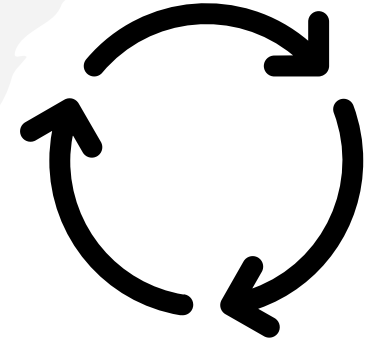
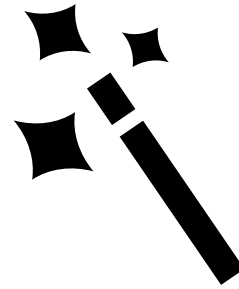
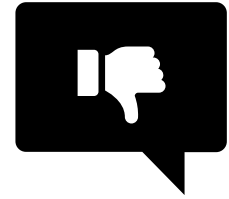
- This is what we can do now
- This is what we may be able to do in the future
- We can't do this because [reason]

“Magic Wand”

- If nothing was in the way, what would you want?

Comprehension checks; feedback loops

- “Did we hear you correctly”
- “Here’s what we did with your guidance, did we get it right?”



Contact Information

MN SAVES: Child Support Division
Department of Children, Youth, and Families

mnsaves.dcyf@state.mn.us



Listening to our Customers and Creating Change

Natalie Dillon, Director
Colusa Sutter Yolo Regional Child Support Agency



California – Ogilvy Research Report 2017

Qualitative Consumer Research Component

- 78 people participated
- 10 in person focus groups across 5 locations; Fresno and San Diego were in Spanish
- In each location: one group of females receiving child support and one group of males paying child support



First Associations Exercise

The general market groups used almost all negative words



Child Support Today

**Complex, disorganized
and chaotic**

“A **mess.**” – Female,

“Wild and crazy.” – Male

“My head is **spinning** when I go there.”
– Female

“Carved up. **Unorganized.**” – Male

“**Chaotic.**” – Male

**Corporate, bureaucratic
and unhelpful**

“Like a **maze.** You have to figure your way out.”
– Female

“Like a blank piece of paper. You get no
answers.” – Female

“They ask you for **books** of information.”
– Female

“There’s **so much** and so many people. It’s a
cycle that doesn’t change.” – Female

“They are **a waste of time.**”
– Female

Collage: Today

Women: reminds them of their vulnerability



“Alone and hanging from one arm.” – Female

“I feel underwater, alone.” – Female

“I’m walking on eggshells.” – Female

“You feel very intimidated in that office.”
– Female

Collage: Today

Men: emasculating and threatening



“I feel eaten alive.” – Male

“I feel like a toy with them. They do anything they want with me.” – Male

“Overbearing, intimidating.” – Male

“Authority – I’m going to mess you up.”
– Male

“If you don’t pay, the police come after you.” – Male

Collage: Future

Organized and clear



“A sense of balance and structure.”
– Male

“Technically advanced.” – Male

“Their office is clean and organized.”
– Female

Collage: Future

Personal, through intimacy or advocacy



“Friendly, can relate to my experiences.”
– Female

“Everyone gets along.” – Female

“More personable. There for you. Like family.” – Female

“Have my back and be my teammate.”
– Female

“There is love.” – Male

Collage: Future

Collaborative and flexible



“You’re working on a team together.”

– Male

**“With the power to reach good agreements
with them.”** – Female

**“You can have a partnership to take care of
your kids.”** – Male

**“Everyone winning together... a group
effort.”** – Female

**“We’re happy now and we’re sticking it out
together.”** – Female

Collage: Future

Reassuring and soothing



“Relaxed. Relieved.” – Female

“Peaceful.” – Male

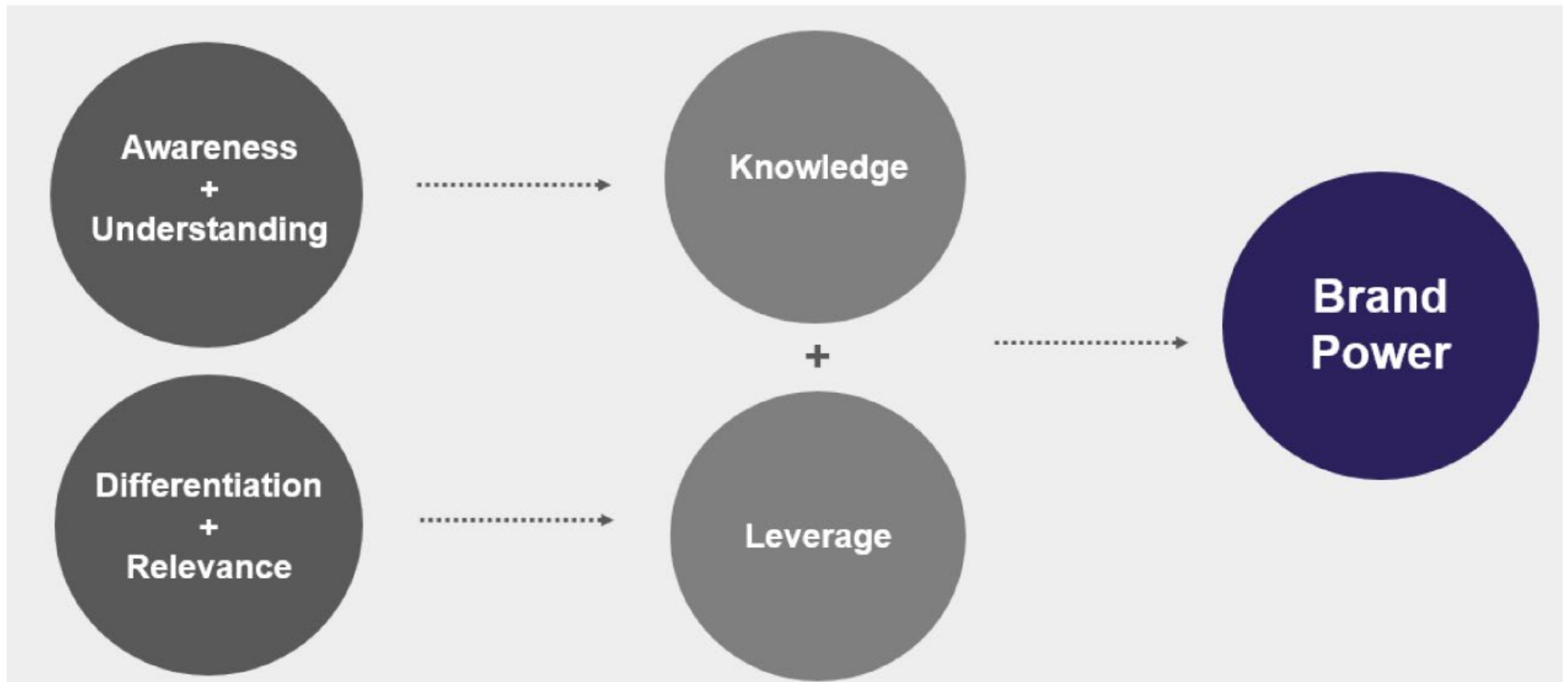
“Comforting.” – Male

“Peace and tranquility.” – Male

**“They make you feel at home
with a cup of coffee.”** – Female

Recommendations

Start with the elements of brand power



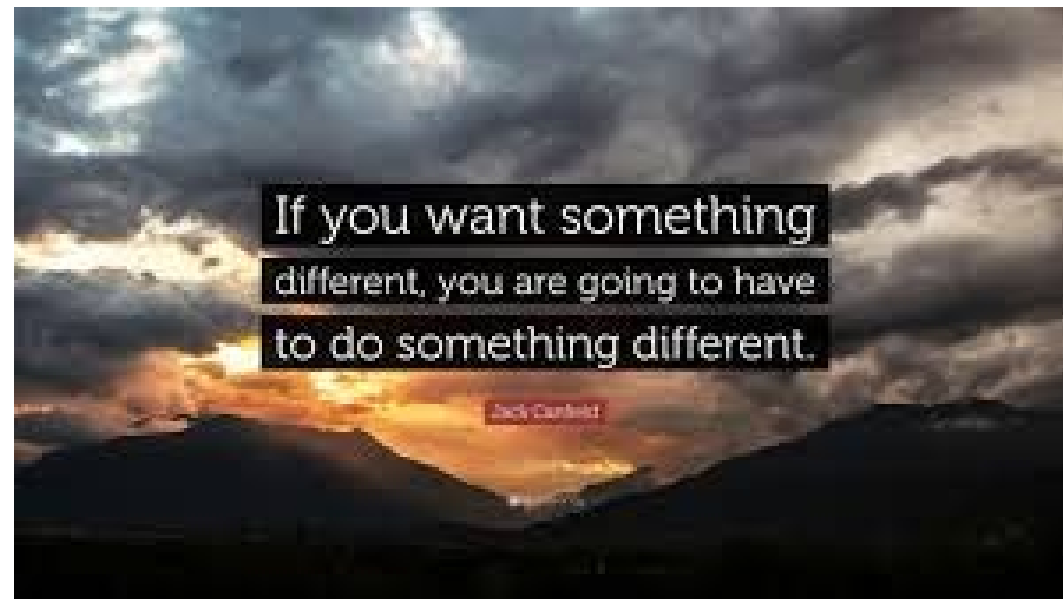


Recommendations

- Improve Understanding
 - Considerations: name, logo, internal communications, alignment of processes, external communications – website, imagery, brochures
- Prove Relevance
 - Identifying and providing a benefit that flows from the programs function and brand.
 - Brand Equities – Functional Equities & Emotional Equities
 - Perceptions of a brands product or service (intellectual relevance)
 - Positive feels associated with the brand (emotional relevance)

Our Takeaway

Given what customers statewide were saying, what did we take away, and what did we do differently?



By Jack Canfield

New Agency – New Brand

Organizational Brand & Values BE IT!

- Balance
- Engage
- Innovation
- Teamwork

New Website

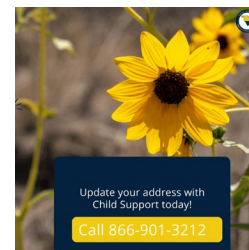
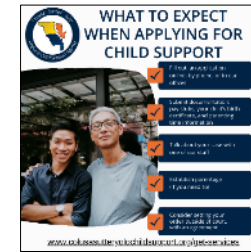
www.Colusasutteryolochildsupport.gov



Colusa Sutter Yolo Regional Child Support Agency Branding

All parents are engaged in supporting their children.

- Child Support has value
- Our agency provides high quality services and education by engaging with **both** parents
- Our community is a beautiful place to live and work
- We understand the needs of our community
- Our staff are reflective of our community
- It is not just about the money



It Is Not Just About the Money



Support Sentinel - More than Fireworks

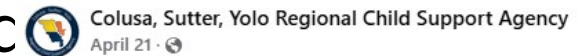
Fireworks are fun. But you know what really lights up a child's life? Knowing their needs are met, their parents are cooperating, and their future is secure. Every day, I stand for moments like these. Happy Independence Day from your Support Sentinel.

Independence Means Options

When families have support, they gain the freedom to say yes — to school supplies, to planning ahead, and to peace of mind. Support isn't just about meeting needs — it creates new opportunities!

Education

- Including messages on services and values to parents
- Information, services and programs offered
- Available Community Services
- Normalization

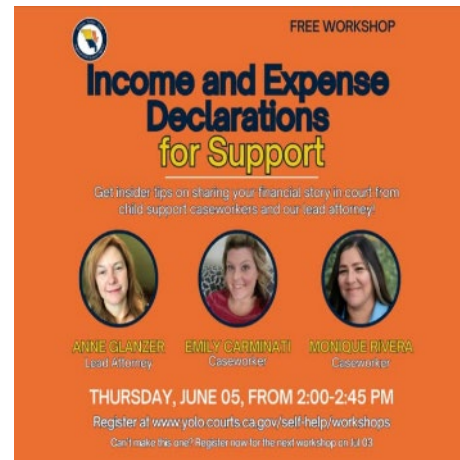


Not sure where to start?

Child support doesn't have to feel like a maze. We're here to help you find your way—no judgment, no hassle, just solutions. Let's chat. 🗨️ #ChildSupportHelp #SupportSentinel



www.colusasutterylolochildsupport.gov





Intentionality Regarding Language Access

Building Relationships is Key

Colusa

- 53% of people speak Spanish at home

Sutter

- 21% of people speak Spanish at home (plus 16% who speak Punjabi and Asian languages)

Yolo

- 20% of people speak Spanish at home (14% Asian and other Indo-European languages)

Walk the Talk

- Reception - Spanish speaking
- Spanish caseloads
- Spanish speaking supervisors for escalated issues
- Everyone is a brand ambassador



Customer Service Surveys

- Call Center Surveys (Agent and Caseworker)
 - Customer Connect – online interaction
 - Call Center - Timeliness, Respect, Acknowledgement, Question Answered, Satisfaction, Next Steps, Open Comment
- Survey Monkey Customer Survey (Walk ins and Email)
 - Walk in's - Timeliness, Resolution, Respect, Knowledge, Convenience



Email/Text to Participants
Outlook Signature Line
Flyer in all Interview Booths
Colusa Sutter Yolo Website

It Is Just the Beginning

Incorporating what we hear; making a better program for tomorrow.

