

RESULTS FROM THE GAIN SANCTIONS HOME VISIT OUTREACH PILOT PROJECT



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Background

The implementation of the Welfare-to-Work Act of 1997 (AB 1542) created the California Work and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program. CalWORKs provides cash aid to needy families but differs from programs implemented in most other states by continuing to support children when their parents do not comply with program requirements. The Welfare-to-Work program in the County of Los Angeles is subsumed under Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN). Failure to comply with GAIN program requirements results in financial penalties, referred to as *sanctions*, if the noncompliance issues are not resolved within three weeks. A recent study that the County of Los Angeles Chief Administrative Office (CAO) conducted in conjunction with the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) showed that approximately one quarter of the County's GAIN participants become sanctioned. Moreover, close to an additional 50 percent of the County's GAIN participants are involved in at least one incident of noncompliance per year.¹

The Department has recently given a high priority to the development of strategies through which participants can cure their sanctions and resolve their non-compliance issues before sanctions are imposed. As part of this policy-oriented effort, DPSS conducted the GAIN Sanction Home Visit Outreach Pilot, a project designed to help prevent sanctions among GAIN participants with or without a history of specialized supportive services needs. The pilot was additionally designed to enable sanctioned participants to return to compliance and engage in Welfare-to-Work activities, including specialized supportive services. The first phase of the pilot program provided outreach services to participants with a history of specialized supportive service utilization, while the second phase of the pilot provided outreach services to participants who did not have a history of utilizing specialized supportive services.

The GAIN Sanction Home Visit Outreach Pilot Project

The pilot project consisted of two separate phases, each of which employed an experimental design, featuring an experimental (treatment) group that received the intervention and a control group that did not. The intervention involved sending a letter to the noncompliant participants and then, if necessary, following up with a telephone call in an effort to rectify the noncompliance issue.² If the noncompliance was not resolved after telephone contact, the outreach team attempted to achieve resolution through a home visit.³

Phase I, which took place between July 2004 and May 2005, attempted to resolve the noncompliance issues of randomly selected GAIN participants who had a history of specialized supportive service use and who were at risk of being sanctioned, or who were currently sanctioned. In keeping with the project's experimental design, the outreach team's intervention was not given to the control group. Moreover, the intervention targeted participants with previously identified needs for substance abuse and mental health services, but not participants with needs for domestic violence services. Phase II, which took place between March and May 2005, was structured

similarly, only this time randomly selected at-risk participants had no history of using specialized supportive services.

Evaluating the Pilot Results: Should a Home Visit Outreach Program Be Implemented in the County of Los Angeles?

This evaluation provides information to DPSS regarding the effectiveness of the pilot project. While the central issue at stake in evaluating the results of Phase I is whether or not the outreach efforts were effective among GAIN participants with a history of specialized supportive service use, the analytical objective in assessing Phase II was to discover the effectiveness of the outreach efforts for participants with no prior history of using specialized supportive services.

Research Questions

The evaluation of the GAIN Home Visit Outreach Pilot Project was guided by the following research questions:

- Did the outreach intervention result in a higher proportion of sanctioned and noncompliant participants returning to compliance?
- Did the pilot program enable a higher proportion of noncompliant participants to avert sanctions?
- Did the outreach intervention help participants engage in Welfare-to-Work activities and/or participate in specialized supportive services?
- Did the pilot program increase the capacity to identify participants with specialized supportive service needs in Phase II?
- Did the outreach intervention avert additional instances of noncompliance and sanctions?

The evaluation research conducted for this report shows that the GAIN Home Visit Outreach Pilot produced generally promising results. Based on these rigorously measured outcomes, DPSS implemented the Outreach program in the non-contracted GAIN regions on October 31, 2006, and implemented the program in the contracted GAIN regions on March 1, 2006. The outreach program has now therefore been implemented on a countywide basis.

Evaluation Results

The evaluation gauges the effectiveness of the outreach efforts in relation to a series of outcome measures. A detailed discussion of these measures is given in the technical appendix.

Basic Comparisons

The evaluation began by looking at the extent to which the outreach efforts boosted the capacity sanctioned and noncompliant GAIN participants had to return to compliance within three months of the intervention. Table 1 shows the proportions of sanctioned and noncompliant participants within each phase of the pilot who returned to compliance within three months of their report date.

Did the Outreach Effort Enable Sanctions to be Averted and Lead to Higher Rates of Returning to Compliance?

The main hypothesis guiding this evaluation is that participants who became non-compliant or sanctioned will resolve their non-compliance issues in larger numbers as a result of the outreach efforts. Tables 1 and 2 show the proportions of noncompliant participants within each phase of the pilot who returned to compliance within three months of their report date. Table 1 also includes sanctioned participants for Phase I.

Table 1

Proportions of Phase I Participants Returning to Compliance Within Three Months

Groups	Phase I				
	Returned to Compliance				
	Yes	Percent	No	Percent	Total
Non-Compliant					
Control Group	75	79.8	19	20.2	94
Treatment Group	114	86.4	18	13.6	132
Sanctioned					
Control Group	12	23.1	40	76.9	52
Treatment Group	15	30.0	35	70.0	50

Source: Los Angeles County Department of Social Services (DPSS) pilot database and GEARS data.

Table 1 shows that while 30 percent of the sanctioned participants in the Phase I experimental group returned to compliance within three months, 23 percent of sanctioned Phase I control group participants returned to compliance within the same period of time. As expected, these proportions were much higher in looking at noncompliant participants, as opposed to those that were sanctioned: 86 percent of the

non-compliant participants in the Phase I experimental group returned to compliance in three months, versus 80 percent of the non-compliant participants in the control group.

Table 2

Proportions of Phase II Participants Returning to Compliance Within Three Months

Groups	Phase II				
	Returned to Compliance				
Non-Compliant	Yes	Percent	No	Percent	Total
Control Group	762	87.1	113	12.9	875
Treatment Group	742	89.7	85	10.3	827

Source: Los Angeles County Department of Social Services (DPSS) pilot database and GEARS data.

Table 2 shows that the results for Phase II are similar. Noncompliant participants in both the control and experimental groups returned to compliance in high numbers, confirming that almost 9 out of 10 participants return to compliance even in the absence of an intervention on their own.

For non-compliant participants, a more critical measure is whether a sanction is averted after the intervention. One would expect that noncompliant participants would be sanctioned in higher numbers in the absence of outreach efforts. The effect of the outreach effort on these participants was measured by comparing the proportions of sanctioned participants in the control and treatment groups. The results are shown in Table 3. The proportion of those who were sanctioned in each group refers to those who were sanctioned within three months before returning to compliance.

Table 3

Proportions of Phase I and Phase II Non-Compliant Participants Who Got Sanctioned After Becoming Non-Compliant

Phases /Groups	Sanctioned				
	Yes	Percent	No	Percent	Total
Phase I					
Control Group	9	9.6	85	90.4	94
Treatment Group	11	8.3	121	91.7	132
Phase II					
Control Group	96	11.0	779	89.0	875
Treatment Group	66	8.0	761	92.0	827

Source: Los Angeles County Department of Social Services (DPSS) pilot database and GEARS data.

The results in Table 3 show that, in both Phase I and Phase II, non-compliant participants in the control groups were sanctioned at higher rates relative to participants who were subject to the outreach program. In Phase I, while almost 10 percent of non-compliant participants in the control group were sanctioned following their non-compliance, treatment group participants were sanctioned at 8.3 percent. The difference was higher in Phase II where 11 percent and 8 percent of participants were sanctioned in the control and treatment groups respectively.

Do the Basic Comparisons Yield Significant Differences?

Tables 4 and 5 show the results of chi-square (χ^2) tests that check for the statistical significance of the differences represented in Tables 1, 2 and 3. In Phase I, for both non-compliant and sanctioned groups, Table 4 shows that, in terms of the tendency to return to compliance within three months, the differences between experimental and control groups were not significant. However, the difference is significant at the 10 percent level for Phase II non-compliant participants. In other words, in Phase II the outreach effort encouraged significantly higher numbers of non-compliant participants to return to compliance within three months. In Phase I, however, even though the absolute differences were higher, the effect of the intervention on the return to compliance within three months was not significant in statistical terms due to the small sample size.

Table 4

Testing the Equality of Proportions Across Control and Treatment Groups for Returning to Compliance in Three Months

Phases/Groups	Control Group	Treatment Group	Sample Size	Pearson's χ^2 Statistic	Probability (P value)
Phase I					
Non-Compliant	79.8	86.4	226	1.73	.18
Sanctioned	23.1	30.0	102	.698	.40
Phase II					
Non-Compliant	87.1	89.7	1705	2.87	.09***

*** Significant at the 10 percent level

Source: Los Angeles County Department of Social Services (DPSS) pilot database and GEARS data.

Table 5 shows that non-compliant participants in Phase I did not avert sanctions at higher rates after the intervention. However, Phase II experimental group participants averted sanctions at a rate that was 3 percent higher than the control group (11 percent in the experimental versus 8 percent in the control group). This difference is statistically significant. If we consider that approximately 6,000 participants became non-compliant in December 2005, we should expect that the number of participants who would be

sanctioned dropped from 660 to 480 because of the outreach effort which corresponds to a 27 percent decrease.

Table 5

Testing the Equality of Proportions Across Control and Treatment Groups for Averting Sanctions Among Non-Compliant Participants

Phases	Control Group	Treatment Group	Sample Size	Pearson's X^2 Statistic	Probability (P value)
Phase I					
Non-Compliant	90.4	91.7	226	.105	.746
Phase II					
Non-Compliant	89.0	92.0	1705	4.42	.036**

** Significant at the 5 percent level

Source: Los Angeles County Department of Social Services (DPSS) pilot database and GEARS data.

Beyond the Basic Comparisons: The Importance of Compliance History and Frequent Engagement in Specialized Supportive Services

Logistic regression models confirmed the results of the basic comparisons done with the X^2 significance tests.⁴ The outreach effort is estimated to make non-compliant participants 31 percent more likely to return to compliance within three months. Moreover, Table 6 shows that the models generated important additional results when they controlled for certain variables.

Table 6

Estimating the Probability of Returning to Compliance in Three Months Among Phase II Participants⁵

Explanatory Variables	Odds Ratio	Pr > X^2	Percent More Likely to Return to Compliance
Treatment Group vs. Control Group	1.31	.08***	31
If not sanctioned earlier	1.95	.0005*	95
Number of earlier good cause use	1.12	.028**	12
Age of the Participant	1.021	.015**	2.1

* Significant at the 1 percent level

** Significant at the 5 percent level

*** Significant at the 10 percent level

Source: Los Angeles County Department of Social Services (DPSS) pilot database and GEARS data.

Table 6 shows that, while almost no background or demographic characteristics had a significant impact on outcomes (i.e., ethnicity, language, marital status, education, gender), one exception was the age variable for Phase II participants. The results showed that older participants were more likely to return to compliance (2.1 percent more likely for each year of age).

The results represented in Table 6 also indicate that a participant's past sanction history contributes significantly to subsequent moves back to compliance. Participants who were not sanctioned earlier were 95 percent more likely to return to compliance within three months. Since this effect is very strong, the program should target those non-compliant participants with prior sanction incidents. At the same time, the number of times participants used a good cause affected the outcome.⁶ Table 6 shows that each additional good cause successfully used in the past made a participant 12 percent more likely to return to compliance within three months.

The regression models showed that the type of services a participant used in the past did not affect the return to compliance, and neither did the duration of usage. One exception is the use of specialized supportive services in Phase I. Since the treatment effect for Phase I is not significant, results of the regression model for this phase are not tabulated. However, data show that each additional past specialized supportive service spell for a Phase I participant made them 32 percent more likely to return to compliance within three months. This finding emphasizes the importance of specialized supportive services: Participants more frequently engaged in these services were more likely to resolve their non-compliance issues.

Table 7 shows the results of the logistic regression model run to test the effectiveness of the intervention on avoiding sanctions for non-compliant participants. The outreach effort increased the sanction aversion rate by 44 percent for non-compliant participants in Phase II. In addition, those participants with no prior sanction history were 2.4 times more likely to be sanctioned after becoming non-compliant. As in the earlier model, none of the demographic factors with the exception of age are significant. Since the findings for Phase I are not significant, the results are not shown in Table 7.

Table 7

Estimating the Probability of Averting Sanctions for Non-Compliant Participants in Phase II

Explanatory Variables	Odds Ratio	Pr > χ^2	Percent More Likely to Return to Compliance
Treatment Group vs. Control Group	1.44	.032**	44
If not sanctioned earlier	2.41	.0001*	2.4 times
Age of the Participant	1.027	.0035*	2.7

* Significant at the 1 percent level
** Significant at the 5 percent level

Source: Los Angeles County Department of Social Services (DPSS) pilot database and GEARS data.

Did the Outreach Encourage Participants to Engage in Welfare-to-Work Activities?

Another key issue examined in this evaluation was whether outreach efforts encouraged participation in Welfare-to-Work activities. Table 8 examines participant engagement in different activities following the outreach intervention.

Table 8

Engagement in Welfare-to-Work Activities and Work for Phase I Participants⁷

Engagement	In Three Months	Percent	In Six Months	Percent	SSS in Three Months	Percent	Employment in Three Months	Percent	Total
Control Group									
Noncompliant	23	41.8	32	58.2	13	23.6	4	7.3	55
Sanctioned	5	55.6	7	77.8	2	22.2	1	11.1	9
Total	28	43.8	39	60.9	15	23.4	5	7.8	64
Treatment Group									
Noncompliant	52	56.5	61	66.3	30	32.6	15	16.3	92
Sanctioned	11	73.3	13	86.7	6	40.0	2	13.3	15
Total	63	58.9	74	69.2	36	33.6	17	15.9	107
Total	91	53.2	113	66.1	51	29.8	22	12.9	171

Source: Los Angeles County Department of Social Services (DPSS) pilot database and GEARS data.

Table 8 shows the engagement rates separately for noncompliant and sanctioned participants in both control and experimental groups. However, the table only includes participants who returned to compliance within three months and then engaged in an

activity within three or six months of their report date.⁸ The data shows that participants in the treatment group engaged in Welfare-to-Work activities at much higher rates than participants in the control group. The difference is particularly high among participants who return to the program within three months following the outreach intervention. The issue of whether these higher engagement rates are an effect of the outreach efforts is tested below using logistic regression models.

Table 9 shows the engagement rates for Phase II participants. Moreover, the question of engagement within six months is not applicable to Phase II since the study period was not long enough to follow all Phase II participants for six months.

Table 9

Engagement in Welfare-to-Work Activities and Employment for Phase II Participants

Engagement	In Three Months	Percent	SSS in Three Months	Percent	Employment in Three Months	Percent	Total
Control Group							
Noncompliant	279	49.9	30	5.4	99	17.7	559
Treatment Group							
Noncompliant	296	55.0	46	8.6	107	19.9	538
Total	575	52.4	76	6.9	206	18.8	1097

Source: Los Angeles County Department of Social Services (DPSS) pilot database and GEARS data.

The Phase II results given in Table 9 replicate the results shown for Phase I. However, the differences between the control and treatment groups are not as pronounced. Similar to the results shown in Table 8, Table 9 only shows the 1,097 participants who resolved their noncompliance in three months and did not exit welfare or become exempt. One significant difference between the two phases is reflected in the termination and exemption rates. These rates were twice as high in Phase II (14 percent of the Phase II participants exited welfare and 16 percent became exempt within three months of their report date).⁹

The statistics presented in this evaluation indicate that larger proportions of Phase I and Phase II participants in the treatment groups engaged in Welfare-to-Work activities as a result of the outreach efforts. In order to find out whether this result was attributable to the outreach intervention in the case of Phase I participants, two logistic regression models were used to estimate the probabilities that participants would engage in Welfare-to-Work activities three months and six months following their report date. The results of these regression models are provided in Table 10. The table only shows those explanatory variables that were found to be significant in estimations.

Table 10

Estimating Probabilities to Engage in Welfare-to-Work Activities in Phase I

Explanatory Variables	Odds Ratio	Pr > χ^2	Percent More Likely to Engage
Probability to Engage in Activities in 3 months			
Treatment Group versus Control Group	1.74	.092***	74
Number of earlier Supportive Services use	1.19	.07***	19
Probability to Engage in Activities in 6 months			
Treatment Group versus Control Group	1.84	.086***	84
Number of earlier Supportive Services use	1.45	.003**	45
Sanctioned vs. Non-Compliance	2.78	.081***	2.78 times

** Significant at the 5 percent level

*** Significant at the 10 percent level

Source: Los Angeles County Department of Social Services (DPSS) pilot database and GEARS data.

Results presented in Table 10 indicate that the treatment/control group coefficient for the first model estimating the likelihood of engaging in activities within three months is significant at the 10 percent level, which means that the outreach effort independently increased the likelihood of participating in Welfare-to-Work activities. The odds-ratio shows that the participants who received the intervention were 74 percent more likely to participate in an activity within three months, which is a significantly high value. For this model, each additional specialized supportive service used in the past also made a participant 19 percent more likely to participate in an activity within three months.

The second model (engagement in Welfare-to-Work Activities within three months) generated similar results, showing that participants who received the intervention were 84 percent more likely to participate in an activity within six months. The sanction/non-compliant coefficient in this model also proved to be significant: Sanctioned participants were almost three times more likely to participate in an activity after resolving their compliance issue relative to non-compliance participants.¹⁰

Table 11 shows the probability of participating in Welfare-to-Work activities in three months for Phase II participants. The table only shows those explanatory variables that are found to be significant predictors. The coefficient for the treatment/control group coefficient is significant for two models estimated at the 10 percent level. This suggests that the outreach intervention made Phase II participants more likely to be engaged in Welfare-to-Work activities within three months of the intervention. However, the Phase II results were not as strong as those for Phase I.¹¹ The results represented in Table 11 also indicate that a participant's past noncompliance history contributes to engagement in Welfare-to-Work activities. Each additional noncompliance incident prior

to a report date made participants 6 percent less likely to engage in Welfare-to-Work activities within three months.

Table 11

Estimating Probabilities to Engage in Welfare-to-Work Activities in Phase II

Explanatory Variables	Odds Ratio	Pr > χ^2	Percent More Likely to Engage
Treatment Group versus Control Group	1.22	.099**	22
Number of earlier non-compliances	.94	.0006*	-6

* Significant at the 5 percent level

** Significant at the 10 percent level

Source: Los Angeles County Department of Social Services (DPSS) pilot database and GEARS data.

The findings presented in this section indicate that the outreach effort promoted higher rates of participation in Welfare-to-Work activities. Based on these results, we can expect that in the future, higher rates of engagement in Welfare-to-Work activities are likely to result in higher compliance rates among program participants.

Did the Outreach Efforts Encourage Participation in Specialized Supportive Services?

As an extension of the previous section, the study also measures the extent to which the outreach intervention encouraged engagement in specialized supportive services. Table 12 summarizes the results of models estimating the probability of engagement in specialized supportive services three months after the outreach intervention. The treatment/control group coefficient for this model is significant at the 5 percent level and the impact of receiving intervention is stronger. Participants in the treatment group were 2.6 times more likely to be engaged in a specialized supportive service component within three months than participants in the control group. The Phase II results were similar though again not as strong. Phase II experimental group participants were 43 percent more likely to be engaged in a specialized supportive service component within three months. (The treatment dummy variable for the Phase II model is significant at the 10 percent level). These findings are especially noteworthy given the positive impact, revealed earlier, that engagement in specialized supportive services has in helping participants resolve their compliance issues.

Table 12

Estimating Probabilities to Engage in Specialized Supportive Services in Phase I and Phase II

Explanatory Variables	Odds Ratio	Pr > χ^2	Percent More Likely to Engage
Phase I			
Treatment Group versus Control Group	2.58	.02*	2.6 times
Number of earlier Supportive Services use	1.68	< .0001*	68
Phase II			
Treatment Group versus Control Group	1.43	.096**	43

** Significant at the 5 percent level
 *** Significant at the 10 percent level

Source: Los Angeles County Department of Social Services (DPSS) pilot database and GEARS data.

Did the Outreach Efforts Help Identify Participants With Specialized Supportive Service Needs?

The analysis above indicates that the outreach pilot encouraged participation in specialized supportive services and suggests that if participants with substance abuse and mental health issues are identified through outreach efforts and treated with the appropriate case management plans, it is reasonable to expect that they will ultimately comply with Welfare-to-Work program requirements. However, this line of reasoning assumes that the outreach efforts are successful in identifying participants with specialized supportive services needs. This hypothesis must be tested by looking at Phase II participants, none of whom had ever used specialized supportive services in GAIN at the time the outreach efforts were undertaken.

Phase II findings discussed earlier indicate that the outreach efforts led to identification of more participants with specialized supportive service needs. Table 9 reveals that 8.6 percent of the Phase II experimental group versus 5.4 percent of the control group was engaged in specialized supportive services within three months of the intervention. A T-test comparing these proportions showed this difference to be significant at the 10 percent level, which means that the intervention led to significantly higher proportions of participants identified with specialized supportive service needs.

Did the Outreach Efforts Help Prevent Recurring Non-Compliance and Sanctions?

Table 13 shows a descriptive picture of recurring non-compliance and sanction rates for participants who returned to compliance within three months of their report date. The table shows the proportions of non-compliant participants who became either non-compliant or sanctioned within three months and over three months after returning to

compliance. Sanctioned participants for Phase I are excluded due to their small sample size.

Table 13

Recurring Non-Compliance and Sanction Rates for Non-Compliant Participants Who Returned to Compliance Within Three Months of Their Report Date

Groups	NC in Three Months	Percent	NC over Three Months	Percent	SN in Three Months	Percent	SN over Three Months	Percent	No NC	Percent	Total
Phase I											
Control Group											
Noncompliant	19	25	28	37	6	8	7	9	28	37	75
Treatment Group											
Noncompliant	28	25	29	25	6	5	18	16	49	43	114
Phase II											
Control Group											
Noncompliant	172	23	197	26	100	13	35	5	351	46	762
Treatment Group											
Noncompliant	160	22	202	27	93	13	35	5	339	46	742

Note: NC = Non-Compliant
SN = Sanction

Source: Los Angeles County Department of Social Services (DPSS) pilot database and GEARS data.

Logistic regression models indicated that the differences represented in Table 13 between the Phase I and Phase II control and experimental groups were not significant in terms of recurring non-compliance and sanctions. Hence the results of these models are not tabulated. It should be pointed out here, however, that considerable proportions of participants in both Phases experienced recurring non-compliance or sanctions. On average, one out of five participants in both phases had another non-compliance issue within three months of resolving an earlier incident. In both phases, the outreach efforts did not lower recurrence rates. These results suggest that there is a group of participants that have problems or barriers leading to repeated non-compliance episodes and that the outreach efforts generally do not correct these types of long-term problems for this group.

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

The GAIN Sanctions Home Visit Outreach Pilot produced some encouraging and positive results. At the same time, there are some areas that need to be studied further to improve the overall effectiveness of the program. In order to gain a better understanding of refinements that might potentially be made, it is necessary to summarize this evaluation’s findings and spell out their policy implications.

Conclusions

- **The outreach efforts helped prevent sanctions among non-compliant participants with no history of specialized supportive service usage.**
- **A higher proportion of non-compliant participants returned to compliance in Phase II when they were exposed to the outreach efforts.**
- **The outreach efforts did not help non-compliant and sanctioned participants in Phase I to avoid sanctions or return to compliance. However, frequent and/or ongoing engagement in specialized supportive services made participants more likely to resolve non-compliance issues in three months.**
- **The outreach efforts promoted higher rates of Welfare-to-Work participation, both for participants with a history of specialized supportive services usage and participants without such a history.**
- **The outreach efforts encouraged participants to engage in specialized supportive services, regardless of their past histories of using these services.**
- **The outreach efforts were effective in identifying participants with needs for specialized supportive services, even when these participants did not have a history of using such services.**
- **The outreach efforts did not lower recurrence rates for non-compliance and sanctions.**
- **The introduction of outreach efforts resulted in some positive results that will likely change the organizational culture of GAIN Social Workers (GSWs) and will promote organizational effectiveness as GSWs develop professional tools to work with both sanctioned and at risk participants.**

Policy Recommendations

- ***A process evaluation of the County-wide implementation of the GAIN Sanction Home Visit Outreach project, would help address crucial questions and fine tune the program that was implemented in late 2005.***

The information collected in this type of process evaluation would provide vital inputs in the effort to assess program effects and make practical refinements. Since the pilot was not designed to test the effectiveness of the home visit component of the outreach program, the conduct of home visits should be assessed in depth. Home visits are the

most critical aspect of the program and the effectiveness of this component should be measured accurately.

- ***Outreach efforts should target non-compliant participants with prior sanctions.***

This report shows that non-compliant participants who were previously sanctioned are less likely to return to compliance. This group of participants should therefore be targeted for more intensive outreach. One suggestion would be to pay home visits to these non-compliant participants without first sending letters.

- ***The department should re-assess the outreach effort for non-compliant participants since the majority of them return to compliance on their own.***

The study showed that nine out of ten non-compliant participants return to compliance on their own in the absence of an outreach effort. The department should therefore reconsider the implementation of the first phase of the outreach—i.e., sending letters to these participants. The department may wish to consider discontinuing these letters altogether and resort instead to a direct telephone call to participants who do not contact their GSWs within 20 days. Another alternative would be sending letters 10 days after a non-compliance is discovered.

- ***It would be beneficial to evaluate the long-term outcomes of outreach efforts.***

This evaluation measured outcomes within three to six months of report dates and extrapolated program effects from this short-term period. However, outcomes may be stronger if they are given a longer time frame to work. In order to capture these long-term effects, it would be necessary to monitor participants for at least one year.

- ***All non-compliant participants with specialized supportive services needs should be visited by specialized GAIN Social Workers.***

The study showed that outreach efforts did not affect participants with a history of specialized supportive services in terms of returning to compliance, avoidance of sanctions, or recurrences of non-compliance and sanctions. The engagement in specialized supportive services, however, helps these participants return to compliance. Moreover, this study showed that the outreach program strongly increases the rates of participation in specialized supportive services. Hence, it is essential to intensify the outreach effort to participants in need of specialized supportive services. It is recommended to pay home-visits to all non-compliant participants with specialized supportive services needs since the size of this population is relatively small.

- ***Sanctioned participants in Phase II need to be carefully monitored in order to more accurately assess the impact of outreach efforts on this group.***

The pilot project failed to sample an adequate number of sanctioned participants for the control group in Phase II. This prevented a rigorous evaluation of the effectiveness of the intervention on sanctioned participants with no previous history of using specialized supportive services. The outcomes for the sanctioned participants in the treatment group were encouraging. Moreover, it is expected that home visits would be highly effective for sanctioned participants since the majority of non-compliant participants are returning to compliance on their own. However, in order to more confidently affirm these results; sanctioned Phase II participants should be carefully monitored as the outreach program continues.

- ***The Department should consider conducting focus groups to learn why Phase I non-compliant and sanctioned participants were less likely to resolve non-compliance issues.***

The Department may also wish to conduct focus groups with participants to learn why outreach efforts did not lower recurrence rates of non-compliance and sanctioned participants. Information should also be collected on the best methods of conducting home visits. The information obtained from having these focus groups can be utilized to fine-tune the existing countywide outreach efforts.

- ***The Department should develop guidelines ensuring that agreed upon standards of conducting pilot programs are followed for pilots that is deemed to require empirically verifiable evidence.***

The Department should provide standards for DPSS to follow in conducting pilot programs that requires scientific evaluation methods. For example the protocol could consider and address statistical issues of research design, sampling, randomization requirements, internal validity, and assessment of experiments. The guidelines should also contain recommendations to assist the department in making decisions as to when to implement a pilot program on a countywide basis.

Technical Appendix

This report presents the results of an impact evaluation designed to determine the extent to which the GAIN Home Visit Outreach Pilot caused significant changes in a particular set of outcomes. Impact evaluations are useful when the objective is to compare different programs or test the effectiveness of new efforts to ameliorate specific problems. Impact analyses typically involve the comparison of outcomes for program participants (the experimental group) with those of a control group. To undertake such a comparison, appropriate scientific methods and controls must be employed in the sampling, data collection, and data analysis steps to ensure that the estimated program impacts are unbiased. These methods are summarized in this technical appendix.

Sample

Phase I: 328 Participants

The sampled populations are tabulated in Table A-1. Originally 519 participants were selected for Phase I of the pilot. After deleting duplicate records, as well as those participants with needs for domestic violence services, Phase I was reduced to a total of 442 participants. Participants with domestic violence needs were excluded since they are not targeted by the project. Several additional adjustments were made based on the most recent and accurate data available on the sanction and noncompliance statuses of these participants. These adjustments led some participants to switch from one status to another. Some records with no proof of noncompliance or sanctions at the time of reporting were also deleted. After all these adjustments, the sample size for Phase I dropped to 402 subjects.

The piloted outreach program did not mail letters to numerous participants selected for the Phase I treatment group. Some of these participants had contacted their GAIN Social Workers (GSW) before the intervention took place. In other cases, letters were not mailed because participants had moved out of the County, or were homeless, without a valid address, or had already exited welfare. These participants were not subject to the intervention and they were excluded from the study. Approximately one-third of the noncompliant participants and 11 percent of the sanctioned participants in the experimental group did not receive the intervention (see Table A-1). After deleting these records, the final tally for the Phase I population was 328 participants.

The study did not conduct an adjustment for the participants who did not receive a letter, i.e., were not subject to the intervention. Several X^2 tests of significance were conducted between participants who received letters and participants who did not. The results did not show significant differences between these groups in terms of their rates of returning to compliance within three months. Since these groups are similar, no adjustments were made in the analysis.

Out of this population of 328, 146 of the participants (45 percent) were designated for the control group and 182 (55 percent) were placed in the treatment group. While 52 control group participants (35 percent) were sanctioned, at the time of the outreach intervention, 50 treatment group participants (35 percent) were sanctioned at the same time.

Table A-1
Sample Proportions for Phase I and Phase II

Groups	Original	Adjusted	No Mail	Percent No Mail	Final	Percent Currently in SSS
PHASE I						
Control Group						
Noncompliant	80	95	0		94	13.7
Sanctioned	84	52	0		52	0.0
Total	164	147	0		147	9.7
Treatment Group						
Noncompliant	168	199	67	33.7	132	11.4
Sanctioned	110	56	6	10.7	50	2.0
Total	278	255	73	28.6	182	5.3
Total	442	402	73		329	8.8
PHASE II						
Control Group						
Noncompliant	910	875	0		875	
Sanctioned	32	22	0		0	
Total	942	897	0		875	
Treatment Group						
Noncompliant	1056	1028	201	19.6	827	
Sanctioned	150	132	20	15.2	0	
Total	1206	1160	221	19.1	827	
Total	2148	2060	221		1702	

Source: Los Angeles County Department of Social Services (DPSS) pilot database.

Phase II: 1,702 Participants

In Phase II the number of participants dropped from 2,148 to 1,702 after making the same kinds of adjustments described above. However, since the sample size for sanctioned participants was very small, this group is excluded from the analysis. Overall, the proportion of participants who did not receive a letter (i.e., the intervention) was lower than in Phase I. Out of the 1,702 participants, 875 (51 percent) were in the control group and 827 (49 percent) belonged to the treatment group.

In a randomized experiment, it is not desirable to have significantly different sample sizes among the control and experiment groups. The relative sizes of the treatment and control groups are acceptable in this study. However, the share of Phase II sanctioned participants was too low to make any rigorous analysis of this sub-group. Since the expected outcomes for sanctioned and non-compliant participants are significantly different, these groups have to be analyzed separately.

The Experimental Method and Random Assignment

The experimental method is generally considered the most robust of the impact evaluation methodologies. By randomly allocating the intervention among eligible beneficiaries, the assignment process itself creates comparable treatment and control groups that are statistically equivalent to one another, given appropriate sample sizes. The control groups generated through random assignment serve as a perfect counterfactual, free from the troublesome selection bias issues that exist in all evaluations. Outcome measures, chosen on the basis of program objectives, are observed at some interval after the intervention ends, with any differences between groups attributable to the causal impact of the program.

Phases I and II of this evaluation used a randomized experimental design. In Phase I, all participants with specialized supportive services needs (except for those that used domestic violence services), and who were either sanctioned for the first time or non-compliant at the time of reporting, were selected. The reporting period included all days from March 1, 2004 through May 31, 2005. Since the population size was small, all participants who met these requirements were selected in this phase. The sampling procedure was therefore one that selected the whole study population and then randomly distributed the participants to the control and experimental groups. For Phase II, all participants who were either sanctioned for the first time or non-compliant at the time of reporting were sampled and then randomly distributed to control and experimental groups. The Phase II reporting period included all days from March 1 to May 31, 2005.

Outcome Measures

This study uses several categorical outcome measures (1 if yes, 0 if no) to evaluate the effectiveness of the GAIN Sanction Home Visit Outreach Project. The main outcome measure is *returning to compliance within three months of the report date*. The report date is the date when a participant is selected to a group. Almost all of the noncompliant participants had been reported to a group at the time when their noncompliance was discovered. Sanctioned participants were selected differently. In Phase I, all participants who were sanctioned earlier than the start date of the study (March 1, 2004) were also selected if it was their first sanction incident. For Phase I, then, the gap between a participant's sanction start date and the report date was, on average, 300 days. If a participant resolved his/her non-compliance or ended his/her sanction within three months of the report date, the outcome was measured as 1. Otherwise the outcome for this measure was 0.

A second outcome measure used in the study was *averted sanctions* for non-compliant participants. This outcome was assigned a value of zero if a sanction was imposed for a non-compliant participant within 90 days before the return to compliance. Otherwise, the outcome was assigned a value of 1, indicating that the sanction was averted.

A third outcome measure used in the study was *participation in a Welfare-to-Work activity, or work within three months of the report date*. In Phase I, this measure was tested within three and six months of the report date, separately, in order to examine longer term effects. However, since the study period was not long enough in Phase II, the evaluation only used the three-month measure. The participation measure is also categorical (i.e., participation = 1; otherwise = 0).

The fourth measure was *participation in a specialized supportive services component within three months*. Since the study focuses on these services, a separate measure was used to test if participants were engaged in specialized supportive services at higher rates following the intervention. This measure was also categorical. Furthermore, for the second phase another measure was used to test if the *rate of new cases identified with specialized supportive service needs* increased after the intervention. This was a continuous variable measured as the number of new cases identified.

Another categorical measure was used to test if the noncompliant and sanctioned participants who returned to compliance after the intervention experienced other incidents of non-compliance or sanctions within three or six months (only three months for Phase II). However, since results were not significant, they are not shown in the report.

Statistical Comparison of Proportions and Means

This impact evaluation examines differences between outcomes for participants who receive an outreach treatment and those who do not. Since participants were randomly selected for receiving an intervention, the impact of the outreach program can be measured as the difference in outcome values for the treatment and control groups in each phase. If the sample sizes are adequately large, random assignment to the two groups makes it very likely that any substantial difference in values is due to the program and not due to random differences in the characteristics of participants in the two groups, which are likely to be small.

This study used the Chi-squared test (X^2) of homogeneity to test the effectiveness of the outreach intervention. This test is a two-sample test for the equality of two proportions. It facilitates comparison of sample proportions across multiple groups when the data is categorical. The X^2 test assesses whether the proportions of participants who resolved their noncompliance within 90 days was equal across control and treatment groups. If this X^2 statistic is significant, then we accept the hypothesis that the intervention is effective.

Multivariate Regression Models

While the easiest way to conduct an impact evaluation is to compare the values of outcome variables for the experimental and control groups, outcome differences may at least partially reflect factors other than the impact of the intervention. For this reason, the differences may change when we control for other factors that influence outcomes. The precision of estimation increases when other factors that help explain variations in outcome measures are included. This requires using more complex multivariate methods. The regression model specifies that the outcome variable is a (linear) function of a set of explanatory variables. The coefficient of each explanatory variable represents the effect of a change in the explanatory variable on the outcome, holding all other factors constant.

One of the explanatory variables should be a dummy variable to indicate whether a participant is in the treatment group; other explanatory variables represent several background and program characteristics that may have an effect on the outcome variable. The estimated coefficient of the treatment dummy is the treatment effect. Dummy variables act like switches that turn various parameters on and off in the regression equation. Since the outcome variables estimated in this study are categorical, logistic regression models are used. A general form of the model is shown below where i indexes observations, K is the number of explanatory or predictor variables and n denotes sample size.

$$Y_i = a_0 + a_1T_i + a_2S_i + b_1X_{i1} + b_2X_{i2} + \dots + b_KX_{iK} + e_i \quad i = 1, \dots, n$$

Y_i = Outcome score for the i^{th} unit (participant)

a_0 = Coefficient for the intercept

a_1 = Coefficient for the treatment dummy

a_2 = Coefficient for the sanction dummy

T_i = 1 if i^{th} unit is in the treatment group
0 if i^{th} unit is in the control group

S_i = 1 if i^{th} unit is sanctioned
0 if i^{th} unit is not sanctioned (non-compliant)

X_{i1} = First explanatory variable used in the model for the i^{th} unit

X_{iK} = K^{th} explanatory variable used in the model for the i^{th} unit

Data Sources

For Phase I, starting from July 2004, the GEARS system generated daily reports listing noncompliant participants with a history of a specialized supportive services needs. These participants were either in noncompliance, pending a recommended sanction, or they had a first sanction imposed. Similar reports were generated for Phase II participants between March and June 2004. The GAIN Services Supervisor (GSS) for the Home Visit unit utilized these GEARS daily reports to input the data onto an

ACCESS database. This database provided information to identify whether a participant was a member of the control or the experimental group.

Later the home visit data for these participants were linked to GEARS data files to add other fields required for the study, such as demographic information, non-compliance and sanction histories, and Welfare-to-Work participation data (including specialized supportive services utilization). The data fields were collected for these participants starting from 2002 through their reporting dates, and for all months from their reporting dates through August 2005. All multivariate analyses were run using data fields from these administrative data sources.

Endnotes

¹ Manuel H. Moreno, et al., *Study of Sanctions Among CalWORKs Participants in the County of Los Angeles: Who, When and Why?* Chief Administrative Office/Service Integration Branch/Research and Evaluation Services. Prepared for the County of Los Angeles Department of Public Social Services, March 2005.

² These outreach efforts were conducted exclusively in GAIN Region 1.

³ These outreach efforts were conducted exclusively in GAIN Region 1.

⁴ The results of the logistic regression model estimating the likelihood of returning to compliance within three months are shown for phase II in Table 5 of the main text. Since, the coefficient for the treatment dummy, which shows the impact of the intervention, is not statistically significant even at the 10 percent level of significance for phase I, the results for this phase are not included. Table 5 only shows explanatory variables found to be significant. Several other variables not shown in Table 5, such as various demographic and program factors were not significant in explaining variations in the likelihood of returning to compliance in three months. These non-significant explanatory variables were not included in the final model.

⁵ The values in the “Pr > χ^2 ” column of Table 5 show the level at which coefficients are significant. The table only shows those explanatory variables that are found to be significant in estimations.

⁶ When a participant is informed that they are noncompliant, they are expected to provide documentation of “good cause” to substantiate the reason for being out of compliance with program rules. When it has been determined that the criteria for good cause exist the non-compliance is cancelled.

⁷ Table 8 only shows engagement (within three months) in two activities: the specialized supportive services component and employment. Subtracting the total of these two columns is from the “in three months” column gives the reader the number of participants engaging in other activities. For example, six non-compliant control group participants engaged in other activities such as appraisal or job clubs.

⁸ It should be noted that 112 participants who failed to resolve their noncompliance in three months were excluded (these participants are shown in Table 1 of this report). Furthermore, 28 participants (17 from the Phase I control group and 11 from the Phase I experimental group) exited welfare, and another 27 participants (13 from the control group and 14 from the experimental group) became exempt. These 50 participants who either exited or became exempt were left out of the analysis here because they were not in a position to participate in an activity. Moreover, there were 58 Phase I participants (approximately 18 percent) who never engaged in an activity, even six months after the intervention. However, subtracting the “In Six Months” column figures from the “Total” column will give the reader these participants. For example, there were 23 noncompliant participants from the control group who were never engaged in an activity (55-32=23).

⁹ Regression analyses were conducted to find out if the intervention made participants more likely to exit welfare or became exempt but the results were insignificant for both phases.

¹⁰ In this context, it should be noted that being sanctioned made a difference after three months (between the fourth and sixth months). Sanctioned participants eventually engaged in Welfare-to-Work activities at higher rates, although not during the three months following the outreach intervention.

¹¹ As far as actual employment is concerned, logistic regression models showed that neither Phase I nor Phase II participants were more likely to find employment after the outreach intervention.