

Catalyst Kids: Supporting Families through a One-Stop-Shop & Collaborative Relationships

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We all need help at some point, so it's just building the relationships with them and showing your human side. – Social Services Resource Manager

Overview:

Catalyst Kids operates over 150 centers across California, with over 30 locations in Orange County. They utilize their parent portal system (Hubbe) and enrollment processes to disseminate information and provide resources based on referrals for families. This system is set up so that families or Catalyst Kids staff can request services through the portal. Once the request is made, the family is emailed a list of resources related to their need and contact information for agencies. Catalyst Kids then follows up with the family within 30 days to ensure they were able to access the resource or service and see if there are any additional needs.

An in-depth interview was conducted with the Social Services Resource Manager, and a focus group was held with an Enrollment Specialist and Site Supervisor to better understand their referral system, including creation, strengths, challenges, sustainability, and impact of the system.

★ Focus on Relationship-Building

Catalyst Kids shared that relationship-building is key to the efforts to reach families. They shared that staff often make referrals after they have had informal conversations with families, who then feel comfortable with staff to share their experiences. Staff indicated the importance of making time to get to know the families, such as through pick-up/drop-off because these are the moments where families can get to know staff. They shared that after connections were made, oftentimes, families felt safe enough to open up with a staff member about the challenges they might be facing or needs they may have during these check-ins.

The relationships between center staff and families are also crucial to ensure the families have actually received support. Once a referral request is made, Catalyst Kids has five days to fulfill that request. They then follow up with the families within 30 days to ensure the family was able to access the

resources and collect feedback. The referral system has a notes section to identify whether or not the family has used the services, who has followed up with the family, and when that communication occurred. This notes section is particularly useful because enrollment staff and the Social Services Resource Manager can review it and follow up with the center so their

I feel because we have that, you know, constant communication and that connection, and, you know, the bonding that we have to connect with the parents and the children. I feel that when they come and have those sit downs with us to bring up any just sometimes it's like a casual conversation we're having, and then all of a sudden, it's turning into a counseling session. So, they tend to bring up things then.

staff can check in with the family. Because the center staff have the greatest opportunity to have a relationship with the family, they are poised to have the most success in confirming whether the families were able to access the services. As one staff member shared, *"We have to be in constant communication."*

From a logistics standpoint, Catalyst Kids also shared that connections are important because not all families can access the technology or are tech-savvy, so building the relationship is helpful putting in the request for the family when they hear about something.

Success stories shared by staff also demonstrated a commitment to building relationships with families and staff.

Community Center Support

One staff member shared that they guided a parent through the referral process asking about specific needs. The staff member sat with the family member to help them request all the services they might need. They ended up connecting the family to a school that brought in a community liaison. The school site and community were able to help the family get food, clothing, blankets, and someone even donated a refrigerator. By working together as a team and really listening to the family's needs, it helped the family have everything they needed for a home.

Supporting Migrant Families

At seasonal centers, Catalyst Kids support migrant families. In the first season, staff were pulled out to help support families with translating forms, help them set up school, etc. The Social Services Resource Manager tracked the hours spent and used this to advocate for more staffing to support. Families were then grateful that there was a dedicated person to provide support, including technology support, parent education, and information on doctors. Relationships with both families and staff helped identify how to advocate for and support both.

Build Trust with Families

Catalyst Kids recognized that supporting families does not come without challenges. Although they incorporate multiple touch-points with families, identifying whether or not families have received services can be a challenge for them. The Enrollment Specialist shared that once families are enrolled in the program, they do not really respond to enrollment specialists, so enrollment specialists rely on center staff to check in on families because of the relationships they can make with families. Center staff can then talk to the families to see if they used any of the resources, and then communicate back to the enrollment specialists.

Interviewees also shared that there is sometimes a stigma around asking for help, so staff have to be proactive in talking to families if they suspect a need. The Enrollment Specialist also shared that there are often concerns about asking for and accepting help, not just because of the stigmas around it, but because there is a fear of sharing personal information. Many families have concerns about how that information could potentially be used against them, such as in immigration cases. Therefore, it is really important to build trust with the families to assuage any concerns they have.

So, it's kind of like, up to me to like, kind of. Establish those relationships with the parents first. So, if they feel comfortable enough to sending me a text message with, like the birth certificate or like things like that, because that's something that's like, really personal and yeah, I mean, they're, they're important documents, so I let them know, but I also want them to be aware that I'm using it only for, you know, the purposes of getting childcare.

Collaborate to Build and Maintain the System and Library of Resources

Catalyst Kids had to transfer their referral process and library from a hard-copy system to an online system. As with all aspects of their work, collaboration and teamwork were critical in not only the development of this system, but also the maintenance and sustainability of it. Although it was a time-consuming process to transfer the original information, by working as a team, they successfully added it to the system, piloted it with staff, and collected their feedback to finalize the process. It was then rolled out to the organization through trainings.

To maintain the library, the Social Services Resource Manager not only spends about two hours each week looking for new resources across the State, but also relies on the feedback from those in the organization to ensure the list of resources are up to date. Staff know through the

I can't say it enough, the teamwork part of it, and making sure that everyone is an understanding of what's available. And once they know how easy it is, they thrive.

trainings how to reach out if an email from a certain agency or organization bounces back, which helps ensure the Social Services Resource Manager is aware if an organization or resource no longer exists. Additionally, staff share with the Social Services Resource Manager any resources they hear about so they can be added to the system. As key members in their communities, they are in a position to identify any helpful local resources. Building on their relationships with the families, they are also in a position to help families identify the most useful support for their specific needs. They can help communicate with the family to find resources that are tailored to their needs. Family feedback also plays a critical role in updating the system because they can also reach out if a resource is unavailable or not helpful, or to share resources they find useful.

★ Ensure there are Multiple Avenues for Families to Access the System

A lot of the time my enrollment specialist would let me know when she gets those referrals, or I'll see it, because they'll come in, hey, can you scan this into the enrollment specialist and I'll see it [...] and then I'll make sure I communicate with her. And it's like, hey, you know so and so parent was requesting, you know information about Medi-Cal, can you just make sure that you know you CC me, and then we just have that communication?

To make it easier on families, Catalyst Kids built in multiple avenues for families to request support through the portal at different stages in their experience with Catalyst Kids:

1. **Enrollment Process:** Families can indicate on a Referral Assessment Form whether they would like more information or a referral in various areas.
2. **Center-Based Referral:** Center staff can use their iPads to access the portal and refer families when they believe there may be a need.
3. **Communication Tools:** Catalyst Kids has integrated information about the referral requests and library of resources into their communication protocols, including having questions about support needs on their parent-teacher conference forms, distributing the QR code on flyers, and including a reference in newsletters.
4. **Family-Driven:** Families can initiate a request through the use of a QR code that is distributed through multiple avenues or by talking with center staff.

Catalyst Kids wanted to include multiple ways to request supports to ensure families know they always have access to these supports and resources. Having these different avenues available throughout families' experience with Catalyst Kids, and not just at single time

points, allows families to access support whenever they need it. Staff shared that they also ensure there is communication between centers, enrollment, and the Social Services Resource Supervisor so all are aware of the families' needs and requests.

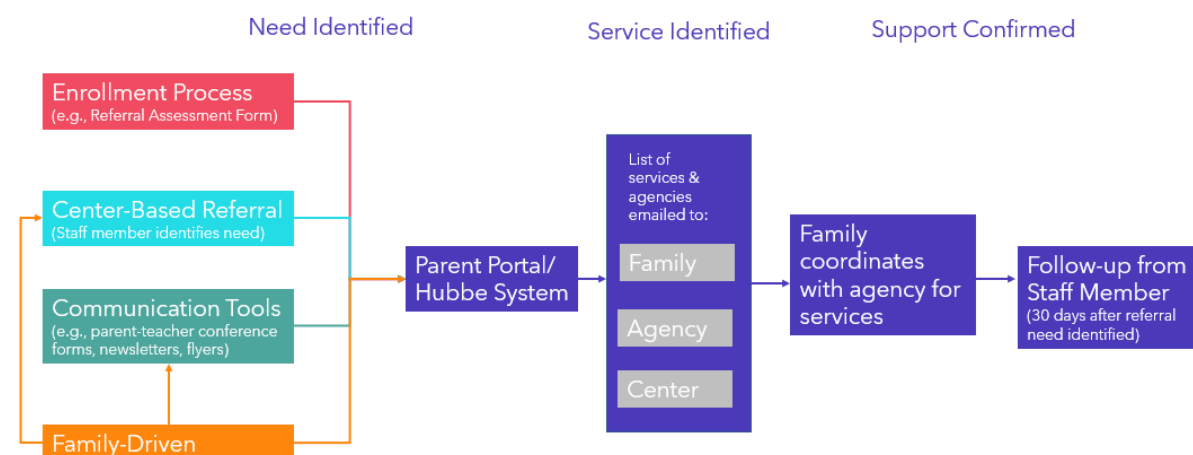


Figure 1. Overview of Referral System

★ Provide a One-Stop Support Shop to Remove Barriers for Families

As previously mentioned, Catalyst Kids started with a hard-copy library of resources. When families needed support, they received paperwork on resources available. However, they decided to migrate it to their Hubbe to reduce barriers for families and staff to access

information. The online library of resources now lives within a system that families and staff are already using, and who have indicated it has helped make it easier to request support.

The highlights are that it's like a one-stop shop now, and less of a paper trail, because the old system was, let me print out a flyer, let me give it to you. And really, a lot of us will get something and maybe put it down and it just that connection never happens. So, the fact that it's all in one location and accessible to everyone makes it a lot easier.

The library includes agency information by category of support with at least three resources for each support area needed for every county in California they serve to ensure comprehensive support and multiple options for families. The system is also cross-referenced with state requirements for different types of funding to ensure compliance with state guidelines. When families need support, they indicate their need and are emailed a generated list of resources, agencies, and the agencies' contact information. The library also includes educational materials to support teachers, parents, and caregivers that are free to access without going through an agency.

Areas of Support:

1. Health/medical services
2. Housing services
3. Mental health services
4. Parent education
5. Food
6. Educational services
7. Childcare services
8. Legal services
9. Employment services
10. Special needs of child

★ Engage in and with the Community to Build Library of Resources

The advice is, take time to do some research, sign up for things that are offered, and attend those fairs, information fairs and expos, because that's the only way you're going to get that that information.

When asked how they hear about resources, Catalyst Kids shared that finding ways to engage in and network with their community was the best way to learn what is available. For instance, they shared that attending community events, such as health fairs or career fairs, or participating in workgroups, are great ways to hear more about what resources exist in the community. They also provided ways to share the needs of families with community organizations and shared the work of their center so that others in the community are aware. As one interviewee noted, *"You never know who you'll run into,"* when sharing that any connection made could be turned into a powerful partnership. The Social Services Resource Manager also shared that Orange County had some of the best partners across the State because they were the most responsive. They shared the most helpful ones provided not just a multitude of resources and services, such as food banks and housing, but also opportunities to connect, such as through newsletters and community meetings.

Stand-Out Orange County Partners

- Families First
- Help Me Grow
- 211
- First 5
- Bright Life Kids

When meeting with community partners, Catalyst Kids shared that it is important to find ways to connect on a personal level, including calling them directly to introduce yourself and share your work. They explained that this helps provide a personal touch to the interaction and starts to build a relationship in which they can support each other.

★ Provide Ongoing Trainings to Sustain System

Everyone has to be on the same page and understand the importance of providing people with things that they need.

One of the biggest challenges Catalyst Kids faces is staff turnover, which is consistent with trends across the state. Interviewees shared that it is important to have a strong system despite staff turnover. Therefore, they make sure there are ongoing trainings so staff are up to date and new hires are aware of the system and resources available. They also noted that having regular communication with centers about new hires helps to make sure that new staff do not fall through the cracks in learning the system.

★ Desire to Serve Families is the Heart of Catalyst Kids

The thing I look forward to most is, like helping those families who aren't able to do, you know, the things that they need to do to provide for their family [...] They're grateful that they can do like, their everyday work, and then not have to worry about paying for childcare, or for who's going to be watching their child.

Throughout discussions, the staff at Catalyst Kids demonstrated their passion for the field and supporting families. When asked about their favorite part of their jobs, all three staff members interviewed shared that at the core of their work is helping families. They were able to build strong relationships with each other and with families because the desire to do so drives their work. They seek to build to connections. As one staff member advised, *"Don't wait until you're asked, be proactive and bring that information in. Make those connections and overshare, overshare, because you just never know at what point someone might need it."*

Keys to Success

Collaborate and communicate

Be engaged in community

Focus on relationships

I think just patience level, everything's gonna end up working out. It's just more of taking it step by step. Use your resources, use the people, connections that you've built[...]And kind of just working collaboratively with your team.