

Find out how TulareWORKs is making our community stronger by improving access to services.



Strong Families. Strong Tulare.



Serving the WHOLE COMMUNITY

BY ANNE STOKES

“It’s the person standing in line behind you, it could be your neighbor, your family, or your friend. ... These are our working poor.”

VIENNA BARNES
TulareWORKs deputy director

Tulare County faces many challenges: Over a quarter of residents live in poverty. Finding affordable housing is difficult. Many struggle to find jobs that pay a living wage.

But the good news is there is help: Over half of the population receive at least one form of public assistance, vital services that help pay rent, feed families and provide medical care when residents fall on hard times. Many residents receive these safety net services through TulareWORKs.

“TulareWORKs focuses on supporting low-income families and adults in our communities by promoting self-sufficiency, increasing their potential towards employment, and providing supplemental assistance,” says Staci Chastain, division manager.

Through the agency, clients can get information and help applying for the following programs:

- **Medi-Cal**, which provides health and dental insurance so residents can receive medical care and manage or prevent chronic health conditions.
- **CalFresh**, which supplements individuals’ and families’ food budgets, enabling them to purchase healthy foods at local grocery stores and farmers markets.
- **CalWORKs**, which provides our most impoverished families with financial assistance and resources while seeking employment.

“Our employees are trained to assess for every program available; this way we can ensure that the individuals we are helping can benefit from as many services as possible,”

Chastain says. “Our employees have the ability to make referrals to local food banks and shelters as well as other partner agencies where specialized services can be provided, in collaboration with our programs, to meet the needs of our clients.”

TulareWORKs uses a whole-family approach to help clients deal with the varied and complicated causes of poverty and its resulting hardships.

“If we only treat one symptom that a family or individual is dealing with, we’re not getting to the root of the problem,” Chastain says. “We need to treat the whole family to effectively meet their needs, or it is likely that the challenges they experience will continue to happen in their lives.”

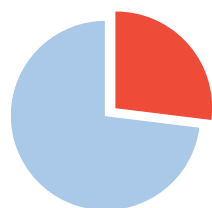
The benefits that TulareWORKs provides don’t stop at individuals and families. Rather, they enrich the whole community.

“Although they’re receiving assistance, they’re staying in our county and that money is being spent here locally,” says Vienna Barnes, TulareWORKs deputy director. “We have approximately 51,000 households receiving (CalFresh) assistance from us. They’re going to our local stores and spending that money back into our county economy.”

TulareWORKs serves more than half of the county’s population. According to Barnes, clients are oftentimes everyday people who are struggling to make ends meet.

“It’s the person standing in line behind you, it could be your neighbor, your family, or your friend,” Barnes says. “These are our working poor, these individuals are working and contributing and bringing income back into the county.”

PROVIDING A SAFETY NET FOR TULARE COUNTY



27.2%
of Tulare County
residents **live in
poverty.**¹



26% of children
under the age of 18
in Tulare County live
in poverty.²

Unemployment rate:

9.9%³



The estimated **living wage** in Tulare
County is **2.5 times** the current
California **minimum wage.**⁴



SOURCE 1: U.S. Census Bureau. 2: Public Policy Institute of California. 3: California's Employment Development Department. 4: United States Department of Housing and Urban Development.

As the mother of five children, Cynthia Rodríguez needed support for her family. She found it in the Welfare-to-Work program and is now working as a medical assistant.
PHOTOGRAPH BY CLAIRE TAKAHASHI



Support, action and faith to **OVERCOME ADVERSITY**

**With help, single mom is able to get
a job to support her kids**

BY N. GISSELA MELENDEZ

How does a single mother support her children without employment or income? Cynthia Rodríguez knows it all too well having lived that experience. “The most difficult thing for me at the time was pretending that everything was fine in front of my children and not being able to show them my struggle.” Due to the lack of money, there were many things that the active mother could not do or buy for her five children between the ages of 13 and 5.

Out of pity and fear of what others may think, Rodríguez did not want to be a part of the welfare program, but her family situation was very difficult. “At one point I had to ‘swallow my pride’ and ask for help because I truly needed it ... my children depended on me and I had to provide for their needs,” she says.

When she came to Tulare County’s assistance offices, she was impressed to see that there were so many programs. She knew that staff were committed to helping people in difficult circumstances like hers. “The person in charge of my case [as well as the rest of the staff], supported me a lot during the whole process; She was well prepared and able to explain to me the kinds of assistance I was eligible to receive as well as all of my options.”

In addition to monetary aid, the Welfare-to-Work program aims to give the applicant education or training as a tool to obtain employment. Likewise, the person may be eligible for additional benefits such as transportation expenses and child care, as well as support during their job search.

These services are available to help people better themselves and exit difficult situations in the shortest possible time.

“I am grateful that these programs exist and for all the help given to me and my family.”

CYNTHIA RODRÍGUEZ
Welfare-to-Work Client

However, Rodríguez says getting help takes some initiative from the person who needs it: “Sometimes people ... don’t want to do their part to obtain the benefits available,” she says. “If they were ready to help me, I also should be ready to help myself.”

As part of the Welfare-to-Work program, Rodríguez studied to be a medical assistant, and was employed through Employment Connection. This allows her to support her family and be able to save money. When she reaches her first year of employment in January, she will begin the necessary steps to purchase a home, which is her plan and goal. “I am grateful because these programs exist and for all of the help that they provided for me and my family. No matter what the situation is or how many children you have, you can always succeed in life ... Everything has been a real blessing,” Rodríguez says.

SERVICES BENEFIT JOB-SEEKERS AND EMPLOYERS

For the past 10 years, Proteus, Inc. has partnered with TulareWORKs to offer subsidized employment services in Tulare County that match job seekers with employers in need of workers.

Job seekers start by attending small weekly workshops, where a facilitator determines their interests, education and experience, says Nathan Ross, Adult Division Director. Clients are assessed on whether they have work experience with certain jobs, such as accounting, or would do better in an entry-level position.

Employers also benefit, he says, because Proteus does the prescreening for them and continuously fills their company’s openings. Proteus also pays the employee’s wages for the training period, giving employers a break on payroll while employees learn the job.

“During that time, the employer gets to work with that person and supervise them, and unless there’s some problem, they’re expected to (continue) to employ them,” says Nathan Ross, adult division area manager. “Our goal is to get people back to work.”



Healthy Meals for Healthy FAMILIES

Nutrition assistance helps family keep fresh fruits and vegetables on the table

BY ANNE STOKES



STOCK PHOTO

For the past three years, Veronica* has been a single “mother” to her three grandchildren. Ranging in age from 3 to 9, she is currently in the midst of officially adopting them after their mother — her daughter — lost custody. While she admits it’s been tough, she wouldn’t have it any other way.

“I’m pulling through and I don’t want them in the system,” the 60-year-old says. “They’re happy with me.”

As a senior, Veronica is eligible for Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) benefits that help her keep everyone healthy and fed. Initially, she was hesitant to accept the help, but she soon realized it was the best option for her family of four.

“When I first went in ... I didn’t feel right in taking it — they’re my grandchildren that I should be able to support,” she says. “It’s not much, but it helps me out a lot.”

That’s a common attitude, especially among the senior population, says Bonnie Quiroz, elder and dependent client advocate with Tulare County Health & Human Services Agency. She says many seniors are hesitant to apply for and use benefits like SFMNP and CalFresh because of the stigma attached with assistance. Many don’t think they qualify because they receive Supplemental Security Income, which Quiroz says is not necessarily

true. While still based on income, eligibility now also takes into account rent and utility expenses.

In addition, CalFresh benefits can be used at local certified farmers markets, with certain markets doubling clients’ spending power with a CalFresh benefits matching program.

“The local farmers markets turn out to be a win-win ... it’s beneficial to the farmer along with the clients who are receiving the fresh fruits and vegetables,” says Quiroz. “It’s all going back into the community.”

Veronica says being able to use her benefits at the local farmers market is very helpful. Not only is there usually a healthy selection of fresh produce, her grandchildren love picking out their own fruits and vegetables. “We like to get fruit, they like corn on the cob, and I’ll get chilies,” she says. “That helps out a lot.”

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VERONICA*
Senior Farmers Market Nutrition
Program client

Even though raising three young kids is a daunting task, Veronica is determined to do what’s best for them.

“Whatever they want, I try to get for them,” she says. “No matter what, I’m not going to let them go back into the system, I’ll do whatever I can to keep them with me.”

*Last name omitted and photo changed to protect privacy

EATING LOCAL WITH CALFRESH



In a county that leads the nation in agricultural production, it’s ironic that some Tulare County residents can’t buy the produce grown right in their own community.

In certain areas known as food deserts, residents rely on mini-marts and corner stores — which are more likely to carry candy and soda than fruits and vegetables — for their daily staples.

CalFresh, together with local USDA certified farmers markets, are making sure clients have access to fresh, healthy produce.

Not only can benefits be used at certified markets, some even double clients’ vouchers!

“The whole goal of a farmers market is to have it someplace where it’s centralized ... so that everyone can get there to buy fresh fruits and vegetables,” says Albert Cendejas, farmer and assistant director with Community Services and Employment Training (CSET). “CalFresh, I think, is one of the integral parts of making nutrition at home a success. ... Everyone benefits from these voucher programs.”

For market schedules and information on how to use CalFresh and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program benefits, visit visaliafarmersmarket.com.

A Thankful HEART

Medi-Cal keeps young woman heart-healthy

BY ANNE STOKES

By the age of 10, Gabrielle Moralez had survived two open-heart surgeries to repair a defective heart valve. The expensive surgeries were covered by her family's medical insurance. But at age 18, her family lost their coverage, meaning she could no longer see her doctors, including her cardiologist.

"It was scary not to go to my checkup once a year like I usually did," she says. "I didn't know if I was OK."

Luckily, Moralez is now covered under Medi-Cal, which allows her to get annual checkups to monitor her cardiac health as well as address any other general health issues. She says that without Medi-Cal, such care would be cost-prohibitive for her.

"Two weeks ago I had an echocardiogram and I'm going back to get the results for it. I'd probably never be able to afford that," she says. "And I know that if I were to ever need heart medication or anything like that, it would be covered. I'm definitely very, very thankful and I never take it for granted. Even if I'm not going in for my heart, if I'm going in because I'm sick or if I need any kind of medication, I'm covered."

Today, at the age of 25, Moralez is doing well, even though she knows she'll be facing more procedures in the future. Currently a student at the College of the Sequoias, she says that the successful path she's on now is due in part to the affordable medical care that keeps her healthy.

"I know that if I were to ever need heart medication or anything like that it would be covered."

GABRIELLE MORALES
Medi-Cal client

"The money I'd have to use to see the cardiologist, or any doctor at all, I wouldn't be able to spend on books or tuition or anything," she says.

Moralez says her career goals have been inspired by her time spent in hospitals and a desire to help people who are in a similar position as herself. A business major, she hopes to one day work in a hospital setting, possibly in human resources.

"I remember thinking, 'I want to do this!' Growing up I want to work with children and work with people like me," she says. "Maybe not the nursing part of it, but definitely the business part."

Although she was born with a defective heart valve, Gabrielle Moralez is a happy and healthy 25-year-old today due to the affordable medical care she's received through the Medi-Cal program.
PHOTO BY CLAIRE TAKAHASHI



PREVENTION IS WORTH IT



Many people who lack health insurance end up visiting the ER for ailments that could have been prevented or treated in another setting. Treatment in the ER is expensive, both in cost as well as pain and suffering.

With the Affordable Care Act, Tulare County saw a rise in the number of residents qualifying for Medi-Cal coverage. According to Jessica Camarena, Physician's Assistant at the Farmersville Health Care Center, it's a trend that results in healthier communities and saves hospitals and insurance companies money.

"Diabetes is the number one chronic disease that we treat here," she says. "If people are aware of the disease early on, they can live without complications (like dialysis and amputations) ... that cost insurers and hospitals a lot of money."

Medi-Cal coverage allows for preventive services such as:

- Vaccinations
- Blood pressure, diabetes and cholesterol tests
- Cancer screenings such as colonoscopies and mammograms
- Well-baby and well-child visits
- Dentistry
- Mental health care
- Substance abuse
- Prescription medications

A SECOND CHANCE

Teresa Vargas has custody of her two children today, thanks in part to the resources and support she received from TulareWORKs.

PHOTO BY CLAIRE TAKAHASHI



Mom is rebuilding a life for her and her kids

BY ANNE STOKES

When Child Welfare Services (CWS) took custody of her 7-year-old son and 3-year-old daughter in 2015, it was the second time Teresa Vargas' drug use cost her her family.

This time, she was given a choice: Go to jail for two years and eight months and lose permanent custody of both children, or go to drug court.

Through drug court and TulareWORKs, Vargas was connected to Linkages, a program that coordinates the efforts of CWS and CalWORKs, providing clients with resources such as parenting

whole-family approach to care. It's an approach that provides a foundation for success by addressing the oftentimes multiple obstacles to self-sufficiency.

"What are some of the issues that are causing folks to not be able to get back into work and be productive?" Webb says. "We don't want a Band-aid fix. We want to do whatever we can to stop that bleeding and put people on the path to recovery and health in all ways. How do we get them the other services they need to be successful? Because we know they need more than just a check."

Vargas admits that for many years, she was not used to functioning like a normal adult. She was an addict.

"The only time I would stop was either when I was in jail or I was pregnant. ... I was a totally different person on drugs and I made a lot of bad choices," she says. "Now ... I look at myself as a different person."

On January 18, 2017, Vargas graduated from Tulare County's drug court, having worked a perfect program: She passed every random drug test, attended every assigned meeting and stayed out of legal trouble during the year-long program. Today, she is sober, has a full-time job and custody of her son and daughter.

"I want to work my butt off, take care of my kids, have grandkids one day and live the rest of my life without worrying about a relapse, not having a job, [or] not having money," she says. "Without the help of drug court, CWS, Linkages and TulareWORKs, it probably wouldn't have been so good for me."

"Without the help of drug court, CWS, Linkages and TulareWORKs, it probably wouldn't have been so good for me."

TERESA VARGAS
TulareWORKs client

classes and job and life skills. Clients can also find help with costs related to transportation, employment and housing — issues that can sometimes get in the way of creating a safe and stable home.

According to Juliet Webb, director of the Tulare County Health & Human Services Department, coordinating services is part of the department's

BREAKING THE CYCLE



Poverty and child abuse often go hand in hand. They create a vicious cycle that affects a child's social, emotional and physical well-being. According to Sherlyn Porter, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker at the Porterville Mental Health Clinic, without help,

that cycle may continue even into adulthood.

"That affects their ability to find housing, their ability to maintain job placement, to work and to be self-sufficient as an adult," Porter says.

Safety-net programs, such as Child Welfare Services and CalWORKs, provide resources to families, including:

- Financial assistance
- CalFresh benefits
- Parenting and general life skills
- Employment skills and job placement assistance

The end goal? Porter says, "Children who are healthy and happy can become healthy and happy adults who contribute back to society in a positive way."

For more information visit www.tchhsa.org or call 1-800-540-6880.

Helping People GROW

Q&A with self-sufficiency counselor Wayne Powell

BY THEA MARIE ROOD



Wayne Powell, a self-sufficiency counselor with TulareWORKS, says he sees many success stories.
PHOTO BY CLAIRE TAKAHASHI

Wayne Powell's title is a good illustration of the way Tulare County has changed its approach to helping people: He is a "self-sufficiency counselor" as opposed to an "eligibility worker" — what his job used to be called. In fact, Powell says he and his TulareWORKS colleagues are passionate about their clients, who they work with the entire time they receive assistance. "They become a member of your family," he says. "And it's a pleasure to watch people grow."

Q: First, the specifics: What assistance does TulareWORKS offer parents and dependent children? How long do benefits last?

A: The Welfare-to-Work Program is part of CalWORKs. Participants of the CalWORKs program can receive financial assistance in addition to job search assistance for up to 48 months for themselves, then they "time out": Their portion of cash-aid ends (they'll only receive the portion for their children) and we no longer help with work — but the goal is *always* to help the client become self-sufficient before that day comes. An eligible cash-assisted client must maintain a certain amount of weekly hours of employment, approved school or job training — activities we hope will lead the client to becoming self-sufficient.

Q: Does immigration status matter?

A: You must have a Legal Permanent Resident card or be a citizen in order to be eligible for cash assistance.

“It's a pleasure to watch people grow.”

WAYNE POWELL
Self-sufficiency counselor, TulareWORKS

Q: What myths about this program would you like to clear up?

A: There is a tendency to focus on people who abuse this system. But when you see someone homeless with an overloaded grocery cart, there's no comparison to someone who is asking for help and working their way out of here, happy and fulfilled when they get there. We have success stories where we really help someone. And it's always about the children. If you help a parent become a productive member of society, you've lifted up the entire family. And our job is to make sure within 48 months people are self-sufficient, but some move through here much more quickly than that. They just need a job to help get them out [our] door — and they never come back.

Q: Can you share a success story?

A: I walked into a restaurant the other day, and ran into my client who works there. He had the biggest smile on his face. He's a single dad, and all we really did was help him with gas and some interview clothes. Now he's holding down a job and going to school to become a nurse. There's no doubt he was worth investing in.

SUPPORT WORKS

In Tulare County,
51.5% of residents participate in one or more forms of assistance.



Employment

12,000 families receive financial support from CalWORKs to help bridge the gap until parents can get back to work.



Reducing Hunger

51,000 households get supplemental nutrition assistance through CalFresh to put food on the table, and more than half of these households have at least one child age 0-17.



Access to Health Care

236,000 individuals (children and adults) have health insurance through Medi-Cal that allows them to see a doctor for routine checkups, screenings and maintenance of chronic conditions, such as diabetes.

Source: TulareWORKS

LIFTING UP

Families and Communities



TulareWORKs serves more than half the county's population. A department of Tulare County Health & Human Services Agency, it connects families with resources to help them in their path to self-sufficiency through employment, nutrition, parenting classes, cash assistance and health insurance. These safety-net programs not only provide for families, but contribute to the whole community's well-being.

- **Local markets and farmers benefit** from families spending their CalFresh benefits.
- **Landlords and retail stores benefit** when CalWORKs clients pay rent and buy goods.
- **Businesses benefit** when they hire qualified employees.
- **Medical providers benefit** when they're paid for the care they provide through Medi-Cal.
- Most importantly, **communities benefit** when healthy and happy children grow up to become contributing members of society.

Know someone in need?

Visit www.mybenefitscalwin.org or call 1-800-540-6880

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TULAREWORKS' SUCCESS IN THE COMMUNITY



“TulareWORKs brings comfort to many families during challenging times and provides services to ensure they create a strong foundation for their future. Many of our working families benefit from TulareWORKs and thrive because of the support they receive. The staff is compassionate and strives to provide the utmost service to the families of Tulare County.”

ANITA ORTIZ
Deputy Director of Child Welfare Services, Tulare County HHSA



“For families who struggle to make ends meet, the benefits TulareWORKs provides are tangible: CalFresh helps feed their children tonight; Medi-Cal allows them to see a doctor when they are sick; CalWORKs helps supplement their income so they can keep a roof over their heads.”

JULIET WEBB
Director of Human Services at Tulare County HHSA and Kings/Tulare Area Agency on Aging (K/T AAA)



“TulareWORKs programs are designed to help families on a temporary basis while they find their next job or increase job skills. Our main goal is to encourage participants and connect them to services that can improve their lives and the lives of their children, along with the whole community.”

JASON T. BRITT, MS
Agency Director of Tulare County HHSA



“If individuals suffering from severe and persistent mental illness do not have the essential necessities of life such as food, clothing, and shelter, attending mental health appointments becomes a much lower priority. With the outstanding work of the TulareWORKs staff, [they are able to] lead productive and meaningful lives in the community.”

DR. TIMOTHY D. DURICK, PSY. D.
Director of Mental Health Services, Tulare County HHSA



“[TulareWORKs has] a history of working with local nonprofits to seek out creative approaches, ideas, innovative ways to address the needs of those living in poverty. ... They recognize that you can't ... address those big, audacious things that need to get done in your community without working together.”

MARY ALICE ESCARSEGA-FECHNER
Executive Director of Community Services Employment Training (CSET)



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