

Columbia County  
Family Assessment Response Application

**A. Factors to be considered in determining which reports will be addressed through the family assessment and services track and size of population to be the subject of the Family Assessment Response Program (hereinafter FAR)**

**The following allegations/reports will be eligible for consideration for the FAR track during Columbia County's FAR pilot:** The Hudson City School District and Germantown Central School District will be the FAR targeted districts.

- Educational Neglect
- Inadequate Guardianship
- Lack of Supervision
- Domestic Violence cases will be included on a case by case basis evaluating severity of the incident. May include parent/child conflict.
- Caretaker or child drug/alcohol abuse that does not involve law enforcement.

**To be excluded during FAR pilot:**

- Reports flagged for CART; i.e. sex abuse, physical abuse
- Fatality reports
- Reports with the following criminal charges will be automatically excluded from FAR; murder, manslaughter, assault, failure to thrive, all sex crimes. All other charges will be assessed for FAR on a case by case basis.
- Child(ren) taken in protective custody
- Licensed day care or foster homes
- Cross county reports, open cases with court orders, subsequent reports
- Domestic violence cases with child/victim safety concerns
- Any case where an abuse or neglect petition may be filed
- Any case where inclusion could compromise the health and safety of a child(ren) will be automatically excluded.

**Anticipated percentage of reports to be handled through the family assessment and service track in the first 12 months of implementation:**

CCDSS will screen all reports using an agency developed screening tool. Screening will begin a minimum of 2 months prior to implementation in order to get an accurate percentage of the number of reports that will receive the FAR.

CCDSS has estimated that 35% to 40% of the SCR reports received in the Hudson/Germantown School District will be handled through the FAR. Approximately 50% of all investigations involve the Hudson and Germantown School Districts. This equates to 20% of the total SCR reports being handled through FAR.

The CPS workers assigned to the Hudson/Germantown School District will initially be involved in providing a Family Assessment Response. Three CPS Caseworkers will handle FAR cases and two CPS Caseworkers will be assigned to traditional investigations. The Grade B Supervisor will only supervise the FAR Caseworkers within the Hudson/Germantown District. If at all possible FAR workers will not take on traditional investigations in addition to their FAR cases. Reports involving non-identified school districts will remain with a traditional investigation

response. The FAR workers will be trained on the Family Assessment Services Track approach and will also receive training on the use of the Columbia County screening tool in anticipation of an October 2009 start up date.

**Phase in or rule out plans:**

- CPS supervisory staff, as well as the Director of Services, have been meeting and will continue to meet in order to identify our needs and issues and devise our plan of action.
- The meetings will be expanded to include CPS caseworkers currently functioning in the identified school districts or those CPS caseworkers who have expressed an interest in FAR.
- All services caseworkers will receive a formal informational session.
- Formal meetings will be conducted with community stakeholders on the FAR.
- The screening tool will be piloted during July and August 2009
- FAR protocols and procedures including On Call protocols will be finalized by the end of September 2009.

**B. The assessment process regarding child safety and risk as well as the other types of services and interventions to be provided to families involved in the family assessment and services track, and a description of how the services will be offered;**

**Please describe:**

- **The assessment process that you will use to assess child safety, risk to children and family strengths and needs.**
- **The plan for linking families with those goods and services that address their identified needs, including what services will be provided by county CPS or preventive services staff, what services will be provided by community service providers, and what relationship the county will have with TANF staff in assessing needs and providing services. How, if at all, will family assessment and service interact with other local models of service access including such things as SPOA, CCSI, etc.**

Child safety will continue to be our first priority and will be continuously assessed throughout the length of the case. In a FAR case, as in all CPS cases, child safety, risk and needs will be assessed in partnership with the family. The FAR approach will call upon the identified FAR caseworkers to use a strength-based approach.

Child safety and risk will be assessed from the receipt of the report and throughout our work in partnership with the family. CCDSS will immediately begin assessing strengths, needs and risks with the family using the Family Advocacy and Support Tool (FAST) revised by OCFS. The FAR caseworker will complete the seven (7) day safety assessment. At that time, the case will be identified for FAR in Connections. The FAST will be completed and will be used to identify the family's strengths and needs.

The family's strengths identified during the completion of the FAST will be utilized to identify those goods and services that will best match their needs. These goods and services will be offered as needed throughout the FAR case. All FAR families can be referred to any County or community based resource.

FAR caseworkers will assist families in accessing resources and services that will address self identified needs.

Some community resources will only be available to select populations and may require that certain criteria be met. i.e. ICM.

FAR caseworkers will work directly with families to navigate service delivery systems and to insure that adequate and appropriate services are available to the family.

FAR caseworkers will refer families to centralized points of service access and information such as SPOA, CCSI, and school guidance counselors.

Families will also be provided with community services directories and web site locations to access more detailed information about services and resources.

FAR caseworkers will help families to identify any financial barriers to service provision and to explore sliding scale or alternate payment arrangements if necessary.

Columbia County has a rich service community that is available to families.

These resources include but are not limited to parenting classes, support groups, respite, mentoring, case management, recreation and social activities, mental health treatment, drug and alcohol treatment, dispute mediation, crime victim services, anger management counseling, domestic violence services, day care, and housing services.

Services located outside of Columbia County will also be explored if necessary to meet a need.

FAR caseworkers will assist in identifying any gaps and or barriers that exist within the service community. CPS Supervisors and management staff will work towards eliminating those gaps/barriers in coordination with our community service partners. System issues will be referred to the CCSI Team for discussion and resolution.

**C. A description of the process to be followed for planning and monitoring the services provided under the family assessment and services track;**

- **Please include how the assessments and services provided directly by LDSS as well as those provided by agencies under contract with LDSS and those provided by other community agencies will be developed and monitored for quality and adherence to negotiated principles and expectations.**

FAR services that are provided directly by CCDSS staff will be monitored directly by the FAR Supervisor. The Supervisor will monitor cases through the use of weekly case conferencing and reviewing the OCI on individual cases and weekly group conferencing and group supervision. Established milestones will be tracked and reviewed by the Caseworker and Supervisor during case conferencing. Case documentation will capture significant case events including services requested and provided. This will allow for the maximum support of Casework staff and a review of decision-making regarding the families' needs.

Referrals for services will also be made to contractual and non-contractual agencies as needed and as permitted by the family. Service providers with the families consent will provide regular updates to the family and Caseworkers. Effectiveness of services provided therein will be assessed and monitored on an individualized basis by the family receiving the service and the assigned Caseworker/Supervisor.

Service providers will be invited to quarterly team meetings to present on current and new resources available and to network with each other and CCDSS staff.

CCDSS will contract with providers who deliver services in a manner which supports the principles of family centered and strength based practice. Preventive service contract providers have incorporated outcome and performance provisions according to 07-OCFS-LCM-12.

**D. A description of how the principles of family involvement and support consistent with maintaining the safety of the child(ren) will be implemented in the family assessment and services track:**

CCDSS' core practice principles upon which the FAR is designed:

- a. The immediate safety of the child(ren) is always our 1<sup>st</sup> priority.
- b. CCDSS will use a family focused, strength based, child(ren) centered approach.
- c. CCDSS, together with the family, will identify assets, resources and strengths to meet families' needs.
- d. CCDSS respect partnerships with families and their community.
- e. CCDSS approach parents as the expert on their family.
- f. Establishing a positive relationship is fundamental in achieving and maintaining effective change.
- g. A multidisciplinary practice will be utilized.
- h. Quality supervision will be provided and utilized.
- i. CCDSS will partner with families and the community to protect their child(ren).
- j. Child protection is a community responsibility.
- k. CCDSS will seek services that meet the needs of culturally diverse families.
- l. Sustainable change is the Agency's goal !!

The approach CCDSS will take is to actively engage and empower families in the assessment of their strengths, assessing their needs, while at the same time assuring child safety.

CCDSS' interactions will involve working in partnership with the family and their community. CCDSS will emphasize respect, empathy and genuineness throughout our involvement with the family.

CCDSS will continually evaluate with the family and our community partners to supervise the efficacy of our relationship with the family. Tools such as ecomaps, genograms and family meetings will be used.

Child safety will be continually addressed and assessed throughout the intervention. Contact to assess the child(ren)'s safety will occur as necessary.

Regular home visits and contact will occur with the family and service providers.

**E. A description of how the Family Assessment Response Program (FAR) will enhance the ability of the district to protect children, maintain the safety of children and preserve families;**

The FAR will enhance the ability to protect children and preserve families by beginning to alter the community perception that the primary aim of CPS is investigation and enforcement. Rather, families will begin to experience CPS as a genuine source of support without a punitive or coercive component. That change in perception is expected to result in greater cooperation and collaboration between CPS and the families it is charged to serve and protect. That improved level of cooperation and the empowerment

of families to control their own destiny will improve the attainment of safety and permanency for clients.

**F. A description of how the district will reduce the involvement of government agencies with families and maintain the safety of children through the use of community resources;**

- **Please describe:**
  - **How the district will engage the family without increasing the involvement of government agencies without compromising safety of children**
  - **How traditional service providers, the family's support network, and other community resources will provide assistance to families whose reports/cases will be handled by a differential response program.**

The appropriate assessment and maintenance of child safety will remain paramount in the FAR program. CPS reports involving the Hudson/Germantown School Districts will be screened using the county developed tool upon receipt and mandatory exclusions and other high risk cases will be handled in the traditional investigatory manner. If new safety concerns arise after the FAR assignment in Connections, a new report will be called in by the FAR worker. If concerns arise before the 7-day assignment period than the report will return to the Supervisor for a traditional CPS investigation assignment.

The FAR caseworkers will engage with the family to help them self identify their own support systems including natural supports (family, friends, faith based organizations) along with more formal supports (not for profit and non governmental service agencies.)

These supports will be formally invited to assist the family in both creating plans and delivering services. For families with minimal supports, the FAR caseworkers will create opportunities for the families to meet and network with multiple providers who can provide services.

The initial stages of work with families may involve the provision of some governmental assistance such as Medicaid, food stamps, Section 8 housing vouchers, etc. However, in the long term the family's ability to develop and utilize their own network of community based resources will increase and their reliance on traditional child welfare services will decrease.

The FAR Caseworker will assist families with building the necessary skills and capacities to locate and utilize services to meet their own needs. A more customized matching will eliminate the use of a more traditional menu of services that may be used in an arbitrary fashion rather than based on actual need. This will increase the effectiveness of interventions and decrease dependence on more formal governmental services.

A FAR case will be able to be closed at the earliest point possible rather than being driven by external investigation timelines.

**G. A description of the staff resources proposed to be used in the family assessment and services track, including the proposed staff workloads and qualification;**

- **Please include:**

- **How you plan to assign or recruit DSS staff to respond to a CPS report through the assessment response track**
- **Whether staff will be involved in both the family assessment response track and the traditional CPS investigation**
- **An indication of the use of any and all specialized staff/resources that will impact on the implementation of FAR**

CCDSS' plan is to solicit one CPS supervisor and three CPS caseworkers. These caseworkers will be fully trained and will have a minimum of one year CPS experience. Any CPS caseworker who volunteers will be made aware that they will be working under the specific supervisor chosen, that they will be making a year commitment to the FAR program and that the FAR program will be targeted to begin October 2009. Additionally, those caseworkers who express an interest in the FAR approach should have already demonstrated their ability to assess safety and risk, to interview and assess a family's needs, to establish and maintain good working relationships with their families and their ability to utilize the skills learned through their CPS and anticipated FAR training.

CPS recommended or self selected caseworkers will then go through an internal screening process which will involve a FAR orientation and interview with the FAR Supervisor. The FAR Supervisor will make the final selection of FAR Caseworkers in consultation with the Director of Services. Once the CPS caseworkers have been selected they will develop a schedule with their current Supervisor and close any open investigations in order to make the transition to a FAR caseload. During that transition process, the caseworker(s) selected will begin their FAR training. The Supervisor and two Senior Caseworkers currently working in CPS will be piloting a triage period prior to the implementation of the FAR approach in an effort to assess the needs of the CPS Unit and the school districts initially designated to receive the FAR approach.

There is no current plan to have assigned FAR caseworkers carry a mixed caseload of FAR and investigations. If there is a circumstance where a FAR case needs to be turned into an investigation, that case will be turned over to a caseworker who holds an investigative caseload. CCDSS will be working toward keeping the workloads of the FAR caseworkers similar in standard to those prescribed by OCFS, i.e., 12 to 15 cases. The Agency goal will be for FAR cases to be completed, closed and transitioned, if necessary, within a maximum of 60 days. FAR cases open longer than 90 days will be offered preventive services.

CCDSS will be monitoring caseloads throughout the implementation process and beyond to ensure that the caseloads of the FAR caseworkers are reasonable and able to be managed within the timeframes set by the FAR protocols and procedures of the Agency.

**H. A description of the training that will be provided to district staff regarding the family assessment response program. Additionally, please include a description of training to be provided to any non-district staff to be used in the differential response program. Both descriptions should include, but not be limited to, a description of the training involving maintaining the safety and well-being of children and any cross training planned for family assessment and investigative staff;**

All services staff including support staff will receive a general orientation to the FAR approach.

All caseworkers serving on the On-Call System will receive a more in depth training in the FAR model's underlying principles and screening process so that they can appropriately handle after hour reports from the targeted geographic area. All On-Call Staff have access to the Connections system.

As CPS staff will be implementing the FAR they will have already received safety and risk training and CPS response training.

CPS staff designated to provide a FAR will receive specific formal trainings including the use of the screening and assessment tools, solution focused interviewing, family engagement, family team conferencing, managing Connections and any other identified training topics. Trainers will be selected based on their knowledge and skill level.

Any OCFS capacity to provide on site coaching and or consultation (especially during initial implementation) would be helpful.

OCFS will be requested to participate in a FAR orientation for the CCDSS attorneys, which will provide information on confidentiality and other potential legal issues. This training will better prepare them to present FAR in a favorable light to the Family Court personnel.

The Director of Services and CPS supervisory staff (Grade B and Senior Caseworkers) involved in the implementation of FAR will work together with the CCDSS Staff Development Coordinator (DOA) to coordinate a training needs assessment to meet initial and ongoing needs and also to implement all trainings/orientations.

**I. A description of the community resources that are proposed to be used in the family assessment and services track;**

All community resources can be utilized to support families and to meet identified needs.

These include but are not limited to:

- Columbia County Mental Health Services
- Twin County Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services
- Parenting Classes - Northeast Parent and Child Society, Columbia County Cooperative Extension, Mental Health Association of Columbia and Greene Counties (CCMHA), Catholic Charities of Columbia & Greene Counties.
- School Based Preventive Services– School and Community Based Project, CCMHA
- Anger Management Counseling - Columbia County Mental Health Services, Private Therapists
- Individual and Family Counseling – Columbia County Mental Health Services, Catholic Charities of Columbia and Greene Counties, Private Therapists, School Based Services
- Domestic Violence Services - Columbia Greene Domestic Program
- OMH Case Management and Assessment Services – Columbia County Mental Health, ICM, Parsons OMH Waiver, CCMHA Tier I meetings, Mobile

Assessment, B2H services are provided by - Northeast Parent and Child Society and Parsons Child and Family Center

- Probation Services – Columbia County Probation Department.
- Respite Services – Columbia County Mental Health Association, Berkshire Farm Center and Services for Youth, Northeast Parent and Child Society
- DSS Preventive Services - Berkshire Farm Center and Services for Youth, Northeast Parent and Child Society, CCMHA, DSS Caseworkers
- Day Care Services – Child Care Council of Columbia and Greene Counties, Family of Woodstock, (DSS Subsidy), Hudson Day Care Center, Columbia Children’s Center.
- Vocational Services – Columbia Green Community College, Work Force Investment, Columbia Opportunities, Glenmont Job Corp, Questar III
- Early Intervention and Preschool Services -Columbia County Health Department
- Housing and Emergency Services – Columbia Opportunities, Columbia County Department of Social Services
- Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention and Services – Columbia Opportunities, Planned Parenthood
- Mediation Services – Common Ground
- Youth Development – Cornell Cooperative Extension, Columbia County Youth Bureau
- Recreation and Cultural Activities – Crellin Morris Association, Hudson City Youth Department, Town and City Summer Programs, Hudson Opera House, Operation Unit, Columbia County School Districts
- Literacy Programs – Columbia Opportunities, Hudson City Library
- Parents Support Groups – Family Resource Center of Columbia County, Catholic Charities, CCMHA
- Community Health Care – The Health Care Consortium, Columbia County Public Health Department, Columbia Memorial Hospital.
- Disability Services – COARC, Independent Living Center, Columbia County Mental Health Services, Special Needs Programs, Inc.
- Crime Victims Services – The Reach Center, Inc.

**J. A description of any additional funding (beyond the regular child welfare finance mechanisms) that may be utilized to enhance the Family Assessment Response Program (FAR);**

Columbia County will explore additional funding (beyond child welfare funding mechanisms) which will be utilized to support the FAR program.

These alternatives might include private foundations, grants, sliding scales, community donations, faith based or not for profit funding resources, in-kind contributions, the Edith Casey Stocking Fund, volunteers and the United Way of Columbia and Greene Counties.

**K. A description of the protocol to be followed for handling cases in the family assessment services track when domestic violence is suspected or confirmed. The protocol must address the need to maintain the safety of the child(ren);**

- **If you plan to collaborate with your local domestic violence service provider concerning any aspects of your family assessment and services track, please describe such collaboration.**

Cases involving concerns or specific allegations of domestic violence will not be automatically excluded from the FAR approach. All cases with the above designation will be considered on a case-by-case basis. This will be done in consultation with a CPS Supervisor or Senior Caseworker when those reports are received. With these cases, it will be considered whether a CPS intervention and/or a neglect/abuse petition will be necessary, the case history and the severity of the allegations. Any cases with domestic violence concerns or allegations that are assigned to the FAR track will be done so with the intention that the response will ensure that the victim and child(ren) are safe, that there are adequate supports for the parent/caretaker victim and that services are provided.

CCDSS currently has a Domestic Violence Liaison who works to link the Agency and the Columbia-Greene Domestic Violence Program and is able to respond with a CPS caseworker whenever a report involving domestic violence is received. This process will continue when the FAR approach is implemented. The Liaison will be able to provide additional supports as needed including, but not limited to advocacy, support, counseling and any other services that the Liaison Program is able to provide. The Liaison will also be invited, to attend all FAR trainings. The Domestic Violence Liaison will also be invited to any conference related to the cases in which the Liaison has provided services.

Any cases that have been assigned to the FAR track and are later found to have domestic violence concerns or allegations and meet the criteria of needing a traditional CPS investigation or a neglect/abuse petition will be re-reported to the SCR for investigation if this occurs after the 7-day assignment period.

**L. A description of your plan to involve community agencies, schools, Family Court, other key stakeholders in your county or catchment area, and the community as a whole in planning for and implementing a family assessment response;**

Before FAR implementation Columbia County DSS will engage in the following activities with community agencies, schools, Family Court, and other key stakeholders in our community;

- a. Informational forums will be conducted for service agencies and individual providers including Family Court personnel and law guardians.
- b. FAR supervisors and other implementation staff will meet with the Hudson and Germantown School District staff to provide a FAR orientation and answer questions.
- c. CCDSS will develop and distribute a FAR brochure for families and providers.
- d. CCDSS will identify evaluation tools to use post implementation to insure ongoing quality improvement.
- e. CCDSS will survey families who have experienced a Family Assessment Response.

**M. Please indicate your projected timeline for implementation.**

If Columbia County is selected to provide a FAR, the implementation plan is to formally begin in October of 2009.