

**Family Assessment Response Application
For Livingston County
September 21, 2009**

Any social services district wishing to implement a Child Protective Services (CPS) differential response (which OCFS shall refer to as family assessment response) program must apply to OCFS to participate by submitting a plan for implementation. Any plan approved will be posted on OCFS' website within 60 days of such approval, as required by Chapter 452 of the Laws of 2007. The plan must address all the criteria listed below:

a) The factors to be considered by the social services district in determining which reports will be addressed through the family assessment and services track and the size of the population to be the subject of the differential response program;

As Livingston County receives reports from the SCR, each one will be screened using a screening tool to determine if moving the report to the FAR track is appropriate.

Reports that have the following criteria will NOT be eligible for FAR:

- 1) Case is flagged for Multidisciplinary Team involvement by the SCR.**
- 2) Case is already open for Preventive, CPS or Foster Care services.**
- 3) Fatality is noted.**
- 4) Children have been removed, or are out of the home on an Article 10.**
- 5) Reports involving Day Care facilities / Registered Day Care Homes and Foster Families.**
- 6) Subjects of the report have been arrested, or have criminal charges pending, related to the SCR report.**
- 7) Subsequent reports on open Investigations.**
- 8) Sexual Abuse allegations.**
- 9) Reports involving drug sales or trafficking.**
- 10) Families that have had an indicated report within the previous year.**
- 11) Severe physical abuse is noted.**

Livingston County receives approximately 900 new child protective reports per year. It is anticipated that approximately 30%, or about 270, of new referrals from the SCR will be allocated and appropriate for the FAR track, initially. As our experience grows, we may decide to refer a larger portion of referrals to FAR and only keep the specified legislative allegations for traditional Investigation. We have begun screening all reports as of 8/1/09 to get a better assessment of how many reports this may be in order to get a better perspective on how to manage caseload sizes. The discretion by supervisory staff to manage intake and assignment will remain so workload and caseloads can remain manageable.

As cases are initially screened and assigned to the FAR approach there will also be considerations regarding final decision of the appropriateness for the case to remain within the FAR track. These considerations, if present, will return a case to traditional investigation prior to the initial 7 day safety assessment:

- 1) The parent refused FAR or is uncooperative and unwilling to work with the FAR caseworker;**
- 2) There are injuries to a child that cannot be explained and it appears that an explanation should be available;**
- 3) Significant Domestic Violence, drug use / sale / trafficking is uncovered; and**
- 4) Any other information is learned that suggests that there may be a safety concern for the child (ren).**

There will also be on-going safety assessments made of the family during the time the case is open as a FAR. If at any time during a FAR case, there are any safety concerns, the case will be referred back to the state central register as per the legislation.

A community Stake Holder's meeting was held on 8/26/09 where discussion about what trends CPS statistics are showing us currently and looking at implementing the FAR process for our families. The agenda generated discussion about what community supports have been available to our families and how we can utilize them differently moving forward to assist in building the support network our families so often lack. It was identified that as service providers we tend to "over service" our clients / families and often are not getting enough information or buy-in from the families to make the services successful. It was also noted that earlier, relevant intervention for families appears to be lacking. The families then continue down a path of alternating crisis and stabilization without the benefit of better functioning. They often will have more children and/or develop new issues that further impede their progress. It was noted that CPS intervention is often not seen as positive and most families feel threatened just having CPS involved in their lives. This is not conducive to positive self – motivated change. Discussion showed that positive reinforcement beginning at the parent level can be the most rewarding.

Service Providers within Livingston County offered enthusiasm to the FAR approach and a willingness to be on board. Community Partners expressed desire to collaborate regarding our mutual families and getting them services that they feel would benefit them. They were willing to expedite referrals and services whenever possible to provide faster more intensive services to the families while the crisis may still be happening. Discussion was had that fewer but more effective services may provide the

family more sustainable positive opportunities for change. Providers were also willing to provide further feedback to us as we progressed in our implementation of the FAR approach.

b) The assessment process regarding child safety and risk as well as the types of services and interventions to be provided to families included in the family assessment and services track and a description of how the services will be offered; Please describe:

While the way in which we approach a family may be different with FAR, field workers will be held to the same regulatory standards as those for CPS Investigations as they pertain to determining safety. An example for how this would be different:

We would approach the family who is eligible for FAR with the presumption that they would be forthcoming with information regarding the well-being of their children. The approach will also be very solution focused and centered on the family being the largest player in identifying their needs and strengths. This approach will be used to address the concerns raised for the family, as well as utilized to empower the family to find their own solutions to problems they may be experiencing and that may be increasing the concern for safety of the entire family.

When a new Child Protective report is received from the SCR, and contact with the source if available, has been made, the next contact made will be with the parent/caretaker and/or alleged subject (as opposed to the traditional method of interviewing the child in school first without the parents' knowledge or permission). The family will be informed that there has been a referral to the agency with concerns for their family and that we would like to meet and discuss the referral with them. The family needs and strengths will be assessed with the family and the discussion will not be allegation driven. We will request to meet with their child at a time that's convenient for them, that is also within an acceptable timeframe to ensure the child's safety. It is expected, per regulation, that an initial safety assessment of the children and family situation will be done within 24 hours of the receipt of the report.

Once safety has been established and the appropriateness of the FAR case is confirmed, the field worker would complete the 7 Day Safety Assessment and progress the case to FAR status within CONNECTIONS.

During the next few weeks the caseworker with the family will identify family competencies and acknowledge deficits. This may be done with the family as a whole, or with some members separately depending on the discussion and planning that is warranted. These decisions would be

family driven. We will use the Family Lead Assessment Guide (FLAG). Based upon the family's input, they will decide what the actionable priorities are with the FAR worker. A plan will be made with the family using the strengths and assets the family already has to leverage the motivation and resources to address the prioritized needs.

The community services and outreach programs within Livingston County are generally very tight knit. We are a small enough county that most all service providers know each other and are all willing to work together to assist in meeting a families needs to ensure the safety of the children within the household. We have a historic good working relationship with our community partners and hope to gain a great deal more collaboration as a result of our Stake Holder's Meeting. Livingston County already has some historic collaboration under its belt. We have been utilizing a model of "Team Interviewing" within our TANF department. Each Team consists of a TA Examiner, an Employment Examiner and a Services Caseworker. This approach has helped families address their needs as a whole. The approach also creates the interview environment where the family is a greater part of the solution by making informed decisions about what would help their family the most. We have also had Co-located staff through our local Battered Womens' Shelter, Genesee County CASA, and have many collaborative regular meetings with local school district superintendents(Compact) and SPOA, for example.

The FAR worker would assist the family with making an application to receive assistance for Income Maintenance programs when it is clear that the family's needs can be met through those resources, and other nongovernmental resource options are determined to be inappropriate or nonexistent, as well as making referrals to other systems (MH, MRDD, OASAS) for needed services identified by the family that DSS doesn't provide. The difference being a more actively assisted referral to these service providers as opposed to giving the family the contact information and leaving the contact up to the family with no follow up. Currently, existing service providers are largely used as collateral contacts for an investigation. With FAR they will be utilized in a more problem solving fashion with the family.

c) A description of the process to be followed for planning and monitoring the services provided under the family assessment and services track;

The current process in CPS is weekly case reviews and supervision. This process would remain intact for all FAR workers. Each worker has a set time each week to meet with their direct supervisor for guidance and direction regarding case planning and supervision. Each worker will be expected to have no less than 2 face to face contacts with their clients each

month and minimally monthly contact with all service providers to monitor the family's progress and service provision to the family.

It is expected that there will naturally be more contact with families under the FAR approach based on the guiding principals of the process. The expectation is to provide families with more intensive and appropriate services to meet the needs the families have identified. Weekly supervision will be the time for the FAR workers to discuss the progress of their families, discuss other options that may be available to the families, and determining continued safety for the children and family.

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;

Livingston County is committed to child-centered, family focused practice, and has historically always embraced the best case practice strategy when approaching any family. The traditional Investigation guidelines drive the processing of information currently received from a family. The FAR approach is an opportunity to give families a stronger, more empowered voice that enables them to address issues related to functioning in a way that makes sense to them. FAR is an opportunity to put this plan into action for our Investigations population. Using the FAR approach, families will be asked to relate their stories, process the information they have provided to better determine their needs, and understand the need to keep their children safe.

FAR staff will be trained in a Solution Focused, strengths-based skill set so their discussions and assessments enable families to articulate their priorities for positive change going forward. This process will ensure that children are safer by the fact that the families are presenting the information and prioritizing their needs and their children's needs in a way they can understand and feel empowered to act.

It has been a consensus since initial discussions about the FAR approach amongst Livingston County CPS staff and administration that the general principals of the process reflect our agency Core Beliefs. All workers view themselves as agents of change, and the FAR approach will provide opportunity for positive change within families. There has been an overwhelming acknowledgement that the way we approach our families is not producing the results we hope for on a consistent basis. It is agreed by CPS staff we need to do something different. There has been general enthusiasm at the prospect of having the opportunity to approach our CPS investigations in a different way, with hopes of having a more positive impact for the families.

The community has always been very supportive of getting services to our families and in working cooperatively with CPS. It is hoped that the FAR approach will only enhance that relationship and further benefit our families in Livingston County.

e) A description of how the differential response program will enhance the ability of the district to protect children, maintain the safety of children and preserve families;

FAR's approach to working with families is predicated upon the understanding that families have strengths, and that with some support, they can change in a way that improves their family functioning. The current investigation intervention is designed to assess the likelihood that a child is being or will be maltreated, neglected, and/or abused, and then act in a way that protects the child. While this assessment is necessary, it is often insufficient to engage the family to foster sustainable change. FAR equips DSS with a vehicle to ensure the safety of children by partnering with parents and removing barriers that contribute to the likelihood that children will be maltreated, neglected, and abused. Furthermore, its effectiveness in engaging families in the change process increases the likelihood that families will be accurately assessed for service needs and receptive to those interventions, which are designed to ensure safety and improve functioning for long-term, sustainable results.

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:

Livingston County has a multitude of community resources despite its small size. Community members are able to easily access a wide variety of services. The FAR worker will first work with the family to identify any concerns for risk and safety and then support their access to, and involvement with, community services which can address the identified needs and promote optimum safety for children. Families will be provided with only the degree of assistance they require to successfully engage in services to address risk, safety and other identified needs. For some families, information and referral materials will be provided with independent follow through. For others, referrals will be made with assistance, transportation to initial appointments will be provided if needed and monitoring will be conducted to insure follow through. When families receive just the right amount of support and are given choices, they are more comfortable accepting services and are more likely to follow through or ask for additional assistance when needed in the future from non-government resources. The expectation will be to help families build

community and family supports, thereby decreasing the demand for governmental involvement with their family.

g) A description of the staff resources proposed to be used in the family assessment and services track, including the proposed staff workloads and qualifications;

At this time, the CPS unit in Livingston County consists of 1 Grade B Case Supervisor who oversees the entire unit and supervises 4 CPS workers directly, and 2 Senior Caseworkers who separately supervise 3 CPS workers directly. This makes for a total of 10 CPS caseworkers and 2 senior caseworkers that each also carries a very small caseload themselves.

We have been developing an implementation plan as a team and asking people to volunteer as FAR caseworkers within CPS. The time line we have includes additional training once our application is approved, so we may begin implementation of FAR as soon as the training resources are available to us here in Livingston County. We have had several of the current CPS staff attending Solution Focused interview and technique training. The next round of Solution Focused training is scheduled for October 2009. This training will assist the caseworkers with the transition to FAR practice and build upon the assistance that will be given by The American Humane Association regarding the FAR process. The staff selected will have completed this as well as the initial training being given by American Humane by as close to implementation as possible. We will also be scheduling the Family Meeting training offered by OCFS.

It is planned that there will be a designated set of FAR workers within the CPS unit that consists of a senior caseworker providing direct supervision to 3 workers, leaving 7 traditional CPS investigators and a senior. This "sub – unit" will be dedicated to the FAR approach and will not be doing traditional CPS investigations. It is planned that all CPS Supervisory staff will be trained in supervising the FAR approach, and all workers will be trained in Solution Focused and strength based approach. As we learn from experience, and as referrals warrant, additional staff may be moved from traditional investigation to FAR.

During our planning phases, workers have volunteered themselves to learn and implement the FAR approach. We will also be utilizing our Family Resolutions Coordinator for FAR cases where appropriate to assist with family safety planning, Family Group Conferences, and mediation when necessary. We will also be looking into more training for caseworkers regarding holding family meetings and utilizing the Family Meeting Toolkit trainings and support offered by our regional OCFS.

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 FAR workers will have been through Common Core and CPS related trainings. All FAR workers will be trained in Safety and Risk Assessments, although written risk assessments are not required for FAR cases. It is planned that all supervisory staff and FAR workers will have had technical support training as needed regarding Connections issues, completing the FLAG, and available training offered by The American Humane Association. All CPS staff will also be trained in the Solution Focused model approach to interviewing. As mentioned earlier, training from our regional OCFS regarding Family Meetings will also be explored.

i) A description of the community resources that are proposed to be used in the family assessment and services track;

Families will be provided with information on services available to address identified needs and referrals and linkages will be made to agency and community services and programs.

Agency/County related services would be TANF, Medicaid Programs, Food Stamps, Section 8 Housing Subsidy, Probation, Public Health Services (including Early Intervention), Hillside Children's Center Skill Builder Program, TRI Parenting Education and Support, Resource Families, respite care, Family Group Conferencing, and Family Safety Advocate.

Community based services that may be utilized would be Livingston County Mental Health, Noyes Mental Health, Council on Alcoholism and Substance Abuse of Livingston County, Child Care Council, Catholic Charities, Cooperative Extension, Kid Start / Head Start Programs, SPOA, Chances and Changes (DV shelter and non-residential services), Center for Dispute Settlement, Mobil Mental Health Crisis Services, Youth Bureau, ARC / DDSO Services, NOYES First Steps Program, Victim's Assistance, Coalition of Churches, Children's Protective Association, and Focus on the Children.

There are also a wide variety of local Kiwanis and Lions "like" clubs, as well as churches within the communities who are very active and willing to assist families with needs that cannot be met from other resources.

j) A description of any additional funding (beyond the regular child welfare

finance mechanisms) that may be utilized to enhance the differential response program;

At this time there is no local district funding to enhance the FAR Approach. We will still have the ability to assist a family through our normal CPS avenues when warranted. State wrap around quality enhancement funds will be used, if available.

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);

Cases with Domestic Violence allegations and concerns will not automatically be excluded from the FAR approach. Each case will be considered based on the severity of the allegations and situation and with consultation of the assigning supervisor. Cases where arrests, and injury may have occurred will be referred to the traditional Investigative tract.

Livingston County has a full time Family Safety Advocate(FSA) from the local domestic violence shelter/program co-located at the agency. Referrals and consultation with the FSA will occur regarding the possibility of families with DV concerns being placed within the FAR tract. Consideration for cases of this nature to be a part of the FAR approach will only be when all family members can address the issues safely. At no time if there is any concern for the safety of the children or a caretaker will the family be placed in the FAR tract. The FSA is a part of the CPS unit, and will continue to attend all weekly staff meetings.

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;

A Community Stake Holder's meeting was held on 8/26/09. Most of the service providers listed in section "j" were invited to attend. The agenda and discussion focused around our CFSR Data, service provision to identified populations and introduction to FAR. It is anticipated that there will be several smaller planning and collaborating meetings with the individual service providers regarding implementation and moving forward with the FAR approach to CPS reports.

The use of the FAR approach will be incorporated into our community Mandated Reporter In-service trainings. We generally do these trainings annually for all school districts, the Day Care Council, and some

law enforcement agencies. We offer the full Mandated Reporter class to Mandated Reporters within the community 2 times per year.

m) Please indicate your projected timeline for implementation.

Several of the staff have already had Solution Focused training and additional staff are attending in December 2009 and January 2010.

It is hoped we would be able to coordinate with The American Humane Association and the Rochester Regional Office for the necessary and offered trainings as soon as they are available to us .

Final staffing decisions will be made by the end of 2009 and implementation is hoped as soon as possible.