

FAR Application for Onondaga County (5/13/08)

The following answers are in response to the corresponding questions taken directly from the FAR application that was forwarded to counties via 08 OCFS-LCM-02.

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

Any reports with the following issues mentioned in the allegations or narrative will be excluded from FAR before beginning the investigation:

1. Fatality
2. When children have been taken into protective custody
3. *Any substance abuse-related allegation (anything we'd do a TWEAK on)
4. Licensed facilities; day treatment program
5. Foster home reports
6. Child currently involved in an Article 10 out of home placement
7. Allegation constitutes or would constitute a crime, if found to be true.
8. Client has been arrested or is going to be arrested
9. Allegations that, if found true, would result in the filing of a petition in Family Court.
10. Caretaker is already the subject of an open CPS Investigation at the time the new report is received.
11. Family is open for Services (except for PPS)
12. Sexual Abuse
13. *Domestic Violence
14. Court-ordered investigation
15. Reports with Onondaga assigned as secondary
16. Reports on employees
17. History- Any indicated report received within the previous year that involved any of the following issues: Domestic Violence, Substance Abuse, Sexual Abuse.

*As we gain more experience in doing FAR, it is anticipated that these types of allegations or others may be included in the FAR track at the discretion of the FAR supervisor.

If a case is not excluded as a result of the above criteria, the FAR worker would start the investigation. After beginning the investigation, if the FAR worker determines that any of the following factors are apparent, the case would be ineligible for FAR:

1. Parent disputes the fact that the incident(s) or condition(s) alleged in the CPS investigation occurred or exist
2. Unexplained injuries where it appears that an explanation should be available

3. Parent is unable or unwilling to engage in and/or benefit from services and supports in the future

It is difficult to determine what percentage of our investigations will go to FAR at this time. However, Onondaga County applied our aforementioned exclusionary criteria to cases from 6/1/08 through 7/3/08 and determined that 31% of the cases received during the period could be eligible to go to FAR. The actual number of cases that go to FAR will be determined by how many CPS staff are available to accept FAR cases and how many cases still meet the eligibility criteria for FAR after a FAR worker has met with the family. We will offer FAR as an opportunity for as many clients as are eligible using the aforementioned criteria, and as long as we have the staffing capacity to handle FAR cases at that point in time.

If, after cases are made FAR cases in CONNECTIONS, there exists new information gained through the course of the assessment process that would indicate that a case may no longer meet the criteria for FAR, it will be at the discretion of the FAR worker and the supervisor whether the case remains a FAR case or if an Investigation should ensue.

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](#)

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 and risk. 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. Therefore, after contacting the source, it is likely that the first contact we make will be with the parent and/or alleged subject (versus interviewing the child in school without the parents' knowledge or permission). We would address the concerns in the investigation, and request to make arrangements to meet with their child at a time that's convenient for them, but that is within an acceptable timeframe to us to ensure the child's safety. If parents were unable or unwilling to allow us access to their children for the purpose of ensuring safety, we would choose to investigate the case, as opposed to making it a FAR case.

After safety has been established and the appropriateness of the FAR case is confirmed, the field worker would complete the 7 Day Safety Assessment and make the case a FAR case in CONNECTIONS. It would be at a point soon after that time that the full strengths and needs assessment would be conducted with the family. We are currently considering using an assessment that is similar to the Family Advocacy and Support Tool (FAST) or the North Carolina Family Assessment of Strengths and Needs (CFAS).

The FAR worker will conclude the assessment with the family determining, based upon the family's input, what the actionable priorities are for their case. A plan will be made while using the strengths and assets the family already has to leverage the motivation and resources to address the prioritized needs.

Onondaga County has several nonprofit agencies that provide basic needs assistance to families on a walk-in basis, so FAR workers will need to be familiarized with those resources, and how they're accessed. We have had one meeting with a few community providers with whom we have discussed FAR, and had preliminary discussions about how to develop and maintain a network of communication and resources for our FAR families. We have not yet determined whether it is practical, feasible, or necessary to enter into formal agreements (MOU's or contracts) with community agencies to support this initiative. We are about to embark on a series of focus groups with families about FAR to solicit their feedback about community needs and how FAR can have a more positive impact in the lives of our families and children than a traditional investigation. We believe that these meetings may make our decision making easier about how to develop and maintain the aforementioned network of care for FAR cases.

The FAR worker would assist the family with making an application to receive assistance through Mandated Preventive Services or our Income Maintenance programs when it is clear that the family's needs can be met through those resources, and other non-governmental resource options are determined to be inappropriate or nonexistent. As with any investigation, field workers will be encouraged to make referrals to other systems (MH, MRDD, OASAS) for needed services that DSS doesn't provide.

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

Any services provided by DSS will be monitored day to day by our current quality standards for CPS Supervision (random case reviews) and for Preventive Services (random case reviews and quarterly outcome reports submitted to DSS by and discussed with providers). We are hopeful that the assessment instrument that will be used by Onondaga County can be easily scored and aggregated in such a way as to yield information about our population's needs; strengths, and what's being provided to plan for future needs on a program/system level.

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

Onondaga County is committed to child-centered; family focused practice, and has implemented a strategic plan in an effort to provide children and families with a 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 to action for our Investigations population. Families will be asked to tell their stories as a vehicle to determine needs, and FAR staff (actually, all CPS Investigators; supervisors and some Services workers; supervisors) will

be trained in facilitating strengths-based discussions and assessments that enable families to articulate their priorities for change going forward. The process by which parents are encouraged to tell their story will ensure that children are safer by the fact that they're presenting DSS with the very information we will use to ensure that children are safe. Additionally, FAR staff will be encouraged and expected to meet the needs of families in a way that makes sense to the families, so that they can improve their functioning. The efficacy of this intervention will be strongly related to the quality and availability of field-based training in the area of these core skills. The evidence that supports Onondaga County's readiness for this and its potential for a successful implementation is the high level of consistent enthusiasm and interest about FAR by DSS employees and the community agencies who've been included in the planning process thus far.

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 with the understanding that families have strengths, and that with support, they can change in a way that improves 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](#)

FAR field workers will be trained to assess strengths and needs, and to include natural supports (families, friends, and other nonprofessional people and things) in the planning process with families. Our traditional case management model (case planning and a la carte services) may still be necessary and effective for some families who are served by FAR, but too often these services are applied to situations not necessarily because they'd be useful, but instead because they're all the DSS system has to offer. This limits the effectiveness of these interventions, and fosters a family's dependence on formal services to meet basic needs (i.e. social support, advocacy). By accessing goods (i.e. food, clothing, transportation, and shelter) from community providers, clients are not dependant on the government to meet their needs. When FAR workers include the family's personal support network in the planning process, it decreases the likelihood that families will need government-provided case management to overcome needs related to social isolation, advocacy, and respite; child care.

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

Our plan is to solicit CPS supervisors to volunteer to supervise FAR staff. After we get those volunteers, we will ask CPS field workers to volunteer. Any CPS field worker who chooses to participate in FAR will be encouraged; able to do so, with their agreement to the requirement that they are supervised by a supervisor who has also chosen to participate. We believe this will cause us to have several CPS units with a mixture of workers- some who will be taking FAR cases; others who will be taking investigations. We do not plan to have CPS field workers carry a mixture of FAR cases and investigations, although it has been decided that field workers who have FAR cases that turn into investigations (i.e. due to noncompliance by caretakers) will complete the investigation, versus passing it to an Investigator to complete. We will offer FAR as an opportunity for clients for as many as are eligible, as long as we have the staffing capacity to handle additional FAR cases. Our plan is to train in FAR every CPS field worker and as many field workers from our Services units who want to volunteer, which will assist us in moving our agency culture toward this type of intervention, and assist us with bringing in new FAR staff subsequent to start-up in the event we have turnover, a reduction in workforce, etc.

Onondaga County CPS Investigators are currently receiving approximately 10 new investigations per month, and it is our belief that it would be desirable to have reduced caseloads for FAR (perhaps 8 new FAR cases per month), but our current staffing resources and a reduction in the funding from OCFS to support reduced caseloads in CPS will likely compromise our ability to ensure reduced caseloads for FAR workers. It is anticipated that the average length of service a family will receive in FAR will be 45 days. Our goal is to have FAR cases completed, closed, and when applicable, transitioned to services within a maximum of 60 days. FAR field workers will not be allowed to service FAR cases beyond 90 days under any circumstances.

We will be using our local Hotline to perform the triaging function for establishing which cases are eligible for FAR and which aren't prior to beginning each Investigation.

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 CPS Investigations staff and some Services staff will be trained in FAR. These staff will need training in completing the assessment instrument, and guiding the strengths and needs conversation that would be the vehicle used to get the information to complete the

assessment. They will also need to be trained in strengths-based interviewing and engagement, and also facilitating meetings with families and their natural supports. These trainings should be action-oriented, field-focused (OJT), and if possible, should include (as well as the didactic components) a field coaching component. This training should be provided by people/agencies who have direct experience in doing Differential Response work. Onondaga County does not have funding for training in FAR, and requests that OCFS acquire the training, provides it as frequently as is necessary by districts, funds it, and enables full district participation in the process of determining the value of each component of the proposed curriculum and its application.

Onondaga County will provide for its FAR staff training about community resources that would meet the needs of FAR families, and the pathways and processes by which those resources are accessed.

Onondaga County will provide training; orientations about FAR to key community providers and stakeholders who will support or participate in the FAR process for some of our families. Who those people are will be determined at a time later in our planning process.

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

Please see section “f.”

j) A description of any additional funding (beyond the regular child welfare finance mechanisms) that may be utilized to enhance the differential response program

We have entertained the idea of writing a grant for flexible funds, should they not be sufficient or available from OCFS, to support FAR.

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)

This is not applicable to Onondaga County. We intend to exclude from FAR any case that has domestic violence as a concern or specific allegation.

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

It has yet to be determined if we will begin the initial implementation of FAR with a specific geographical region within Onondaga County, or if it will be applied to the county at large, so who the specific people and providers will be has yet to be

determined. We intend to include community/neighborhood agencies, schools, MRDD, providers of housing assistance, faith-based leaders and institutions, medical providers (i.e. hospital ER staff; pediatric services groups, pediatric dentists), Onondaga County Departments (i.e. Health, Mental Health, Youth Bureau), and families (people who've had experience with our system and who want to help to improve it) in our plan.

Our initial step is to have a series of meetings with families who've had experience with CPS, and who are willing to tell us about their experiences. These meetings will be held at community agencies, and will commence in late May; early June. We expect to hear from OCFS as to whether our application has been approved or not by the conclusion of these meetings.

Our next step will then be to determine whether or not to begin to implantation county-wide or restrict it to a particular community, which will allow us to be more specific about who to include from our community besides DSS and its County Department partners.

Our goal is to create a community steering committee that would assist with the implementation of FAR and the tracking of outcomes (qualitative and quantitative) on an ongoing basis, with an eye toward expansion to other FAR potential populations, once initial success is confirmed.

m) [Please indicate your projected timeline for implementation.](#)

Please see section "1" and;

Training would need to occur in September or October for a November, 2008 startup.