

Family Assessment Response (FAR) Application

Name of Applicant County: Oswego County

Name and contact information for the person in your agency to contact regarding this application:

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Please complete all items in this application, unless marked “if applicable,” in which case the information should be provided if appropriate. It may be helpful to refer to the *Family Assessment Response Readiness Checklist* for ideas about the information to be provided in each section.

I. Rationale for Implementation of FAR

A. Describe your rationale for applying to implement Family Assessment Response (FAR) and for undertaking the practice shift to FAR.

Oswego County Department of Social Services (OCDSS) is eager to implement Family Assessment Response (FAR) in Oswego County for several reasons. New York State has been moving towards utilizing family engagement/family centered practices in regards to child welfare cases. FAR and has been successfully implemented in other counties in New York State and other differential response models realize success across the US. OCDSS is looking forward to the many benefits of this alternative child protective response in the Oswego County community. By providing FAR services to families in Oswego County, OCDSS and its stakeholders will be better able to ensure family stabilization, child safety, and increased family participation in realization of goals.

B. What benefits are you seeking for your district through implementation of FAR? For the families reported to your district? For your community?

OCDSS is looking to strengthen, empower, and stabilize families that partner in the FAR process. By utilizing this differential response, OCDSS hopes to break the cycle of generational child protective involvement, and reduce recidivism of child protective reports for families that work with FAR. Another goal is for participating families to partner with their caseworkers in successful realization of family goals, hopefully altering their perceptions of the Department and child welfare workers. Once the families feel like that caseworkers are there to help them, and not penalize them, families should feel more comfortable working with the Department. OCDSS also hopes that using a client/family centered approach and linking families to community services, this will require less long term support from Preventive Services.

C. Provide a brief assessment of your district's current child welfare/CPS case practice, including an assessment of your district's current strengths regarding family engagement, assessing safety and risk, family-led strengths and needs assessment, and solution-focused practice.

OCDSS currently has four child welfare centered units. These include: Child Protective Services, Family Services, Youth Services, and Foster Care/Adoptive Unit. Caseworkers and investigators from the child welfare units diligently work to engage family members and to assess safety and risk in a home. Caseworkers from all units work to develop goals with the family, and help them to identify their strengths and resources throughout the duration of an investigation or preventive case. Over the past year, all child welfare workers at OCDSS have been working to remain contemporaneous with all case notes and be in compliance with state mandates regarding all aspects of child welfare cases. The supervision team has had ongoing trainings and has been diligent in monitoring this progress. Many improvements have been made, and this has become a strength for child welfare workers in Oswego County. By being in compliance with state mandates, workers are ensuring that safety assessments are done within the time frame allotted, better enabling CPS workers to assess safety of the families they are working with. Additionally, the use of critical thinking and group supervision has provided skills and solution-focused practice rather than looking only at allegation based investigation practice.

All child welfare workers are encouraged to attend trainings on family engagement, and solution focused practices as they become available. In-service trainings are also held at OCDSS monthly, training all child welfare workers on different services and community programs available in Oswego County. This allows CPS workers to help families identify needs, along with linking them to community services they can access without the need for opening a Preventive Services case.

D. Identify areas of practice where you anticipate that development and support will be needed in the successful implementation of FAR.

OCDSS will require training on the principles of FAR and how it is different from a Child Protective Investigation. CPS Investigators and Senior caseworkers will require support and development to assist them in shifting the culture from investigating all allegations to determining when the use of FAR is appropriate. Encouraging family engagement, having families direct their own needs assessment, and helping families to develop a goal/service plan will challenge and change long held thinking in the Child Protective Unit.

II. Intake - Criteria for Assigning Reports to Family Assessment Response

While New York State Law excludes assignment of Child Protective Services (CPS) reports containing certain categories of allegations to FAR, a majority of all CPS reports remain eligible for FAR assignment. OCFS has found that when districts limit the types of allegations assigned to FAR, it impedes the successful implementation of FAR. Therefore,

OCFS policy requires districts to commit to screening in a broad range of allegations for FAR assignment.

As per New York State law, reports with allegations said to have occurred outside of family settings (day care, foster care) cannot be assigned to FAR. Also in accordance with State law, reports containing the following allegations cannot be assigned to FAR:

- sex abuse (i.e., commission of a sex offense against a child)
- child prostitution
- incest
- a child engaged in, or use of a child for purposes of, child pornography
- assault against a child
- attempted or committed murder or manslaughter in the first or second degree
- child abandonment
- severe or repeated abuse
- neglect resulting in failure to thrive

A. List additional criteria you will use to screen out reports from FAR (if applicable):

- Court Ordered Investigations
- Child fatality
- Open Preventive Services case
- Reports with same day response or immediate safety concerns.
- Ongoing police investigation/arrest
- Allegations of Domestic Violence/arrest
- Serious/excessive bruises or injuries
- PLR currently incapacitated due to alcohol/drugs, mental illness, violence
- Two indicated reports in past 12 months
- Cross county involvement (to be reviewed if the other county has FAR)
- On-call issues
- Unknown demographics

B. List the types of reports to be screened into FAR:

- Inadequate Guardianship
- Lack of supervision
- Use of corporal punishment
- Food, clothing, shelter issues
- Lack of medical care
- Educational Neglect
- Parent/child relationship issues
- Child behavioral issues

C. Describe the procedures you will use to screen reports into FAR:

The first step to screening for FAR case will begin once the report is received by the CPS clerks and sent on to the CPS intake worker. The intake worker will review the allegations and use the FAR VS. CPS Screening Tool to determine whether or not the circumstances fit a FAR case. An initial CPS history check will be conducted by the

intake worker to determine whether or not the case fits the OCDSS criteria for FAR cases. Then the FAR senior caseworker and intake senior caseworker will review the report and make the final decision on whether or not it is initially eligible to be a FAR case.

III. Projected Caseloads and Workforce Allocation

Developing a successful FAR program requires assigning a sufficient number of cases to FAR to foster a vibrant FAR program. Agencies should commit to assigning to the FAR track a meaningful percentage (minimum of 30-40%) of the CPS reports that fall within the categories of cases that meet their criteria for FAR. Alternatively, medium to large sized districts may wish to serve one or more communities that have a disproportionately large number of CPS reports and/or a disproportionately high minority representation in their CPS reports, with a commitment to assigning a minimum of 15-20% of all such allowable CPS reports to FAR.

- A. Caseload projections** - After considering the criteria you plan to use to assign FAR cases and reviewing past CPS data, estimate your **projections** for assignment of cases to FAR in the first 12 months of operation:

% of all CPS reports received:
30%

% of CPS reports meeting criteria for inclusion in FAR:
90%

Total number of reports to be assigned to FAR:
900

Additional comments (optional):

These numbers will be reviewed at the 90 day point to determine if: additional staff may be needed for FAR cases or if we should consider requesting a change in criteria from OCFS.

- B. Decision-making about staff allocations**

Describe how you plan to staff FAR. (Please note: because FAR is a CPS service, the basic training requirements for staff assigned to FAR are the same as those for other CPS staff.) Include a description of your process for the identification of staff who will implement FAR. Are you assigning based on specific criteria, asking for volunteers, etc.?

OCDSS will be asking current child welfare workers from CPS and Preventive Services to volunteer to be part of the new FAR team. All volunteers for the FAR team must have already gone through Common CORE and CPS Core trainings. Interviews will be held with the identified FAR volunteers, to determine those best fit for the team. It is assumed that the OCDSS FAR team will have a mixture of former CPS investigators and Preventive caseworkers.

- C. Staff allocations projected for the first year**

Field experience has demonstrated that FAR is implemented most easily and most effectively when staff assigned to FAR are responsible for FAR cases only and do not have mixed caseloads. Therefore, OCFS will not approve any applications with a plan to implement FAR in which individual caseworkers carry case loads of both FAR and Investigation cases. Supervisory oversight of mixed units should be considered only in small districts with two or fewer CPS units.

1. Number of units to be assigned to FAR

Designate the number of units that will be responsible for FAR cases only and the number of any units that will have mixed caseloads (if applicable) and include the number of caseworkers / senior workers or supervisors assigned to each unit:

There will initially be one FAR team that will be responsible for FAR cases only. The team will consist of one senior caseworker and six FAR caseworkers. If the eligible FAR cases exceed our anticipated percentage during a month, we will cap the eligible FAR cases and review for the remainder of the month. At the 90 day point, this process will be assessed to determine if additional staff and supervision will be added.

2. Number of Supervisors to be assigned to FAR / experience and qualifications

Describe the experience and qualifications of supervisory staff:

There will be one FAR supervising senior caseworker initially, which will also be under the supervision of the CPS Grade B Supervisor. The senior caseworker should be from a Family Services or Child Protective team, and have a safety centered focus. They should also believe in the philosophy of FAR, and encourage their caseworkers to let the family direct them instead of making decisions for the family. FAR supervisors should demonstrate good family engagement skills, be able to think outside of investigative allegations, and have good time management skills. The FAR supervisor should also be able to propose alternative resources for families, and be comfortable utilizing a team approach to FAR cases.

Designate the number of supervisors responsible for FAR cases only, and those that will have mixed caseloads (if applicable):

There will be one supervising senior caseworker responsible for FAR cases initially. This will be reviewed after implementation to determine the need to increase team size or number of teams dedicated to FAR cases. OCDSS will not have any teams with mixed CPS and FAR caseloads.

3. Number of caseworkers assigned to FAR / experience and qualifications

Describe the experience and qualifications of caseworker staff:

Initially there will be six FAR caseworkers on one team. The qualifications for these caseworkers will be that they truly believe in the principals of FAR, and demonstrate good family engagement skills. They must have a safety focused mindset and be able to let the families direct their own goals instead of controlling the family decisions. Caseworkers for the FAR team must be able to think outside of investigation allegations. They must also have good time management skills, and not have a history of being chronically late with progress notes, investigations, and/or other

work pertaining to cases. They must also have knowledge of the available community programs and how to access these vital resources.

Designate the number of caseworkers who will have FAR caseloads:

Initially there will be six caseworkers with FAR caseloads. This will be assessed at the 90 day point to determine if an additional team and Senior should be added. At that point, we would consider two teams of five workers with a Senior caseworker supervising each team. All potential candidates for both projected teams will be expected to participate in the required and ongoing FAR trainings offered.

4. Describe other staff resources to be dedicated to FAR (if applicable):

Additional staff resources that will be available to the FAR teams will be the CPS clerks, caseworker aides, and other support staff employed at the agency. OCDSS is also exploring the possibility of having a Temporary Assistance worker designated to work with FAR cases if there are immediate concerns regarding housing, food stamps, or other Temporary Assistance issues.

5. Include additional information about units and/or workers to be assigned, including location information if implementation will not be countywide (if applicable):

n/a

D. Phase-in or Rollout Plans for Workforce

Describe your plans for phasing in your FAR workforce (if applicable):

Approximately 90 days after implementation of the first FAR team, we will review numbers and cases to determine the need for additional team members including a second Senior Caseworker, thus forming two teams of five FAR caseworkers with each team having a Senior Caseworker providing direct supervision. As stated above, it will be expected that all potential candidates for both projected FAR teams will participate in all of the required and ongoing FAR trainings offered.

E. Future Plans (After the First Year)

Describe any additional plans you may have regarding the future size of the FAR program and staffing patterns to accommodate the program after the first year (if applicable):

See above ongoing plan

IV. Plan for Service Provision

Describe

- **the types of services and supports you plan to provide to families in FAR**
- **the procedures you will use in offering these services, including:**
 - **your strategies to apply the principle of actively engaging and empowering families in an ongoing process of assessing their strengths and needs, assessing child safety, and decision-making; and**
 - **how you plan to link families with needed services and goods through relationships with preventive services staff, TANF staff, and community service providers, including any plans to contract for such services.**

From the very first contact with a family and throughout the duration of the case, the FAR worker will assess families' strengths, needs, and supports by utilizing the Family Led Assessment Guide (FLAG) in conjunction with all of the family members. This will help direct the FAR worker and families to create goals that the family has identified as their own personal areas of concern in addressing safety issues. Families in FAR will be provided with advocacy and linkage to community resources that they can access without opening a Preventive Services case. FAR caseworkers and senior caseworkers will be well versed in the available community services available in Oswego County and empower families by giving them information regarding services and helping them to facilitate attainment of necessary services. This may include helping them identify family and friend supports that can be used as caregivers and rides to appointments. FAR caseworkers will also provide families with information regarding public transportation and transportation to medical appointments that they can access on their own. FAR workers may also assist families with accessing food pantries or applying for temporary or emergency assistance. Referrals may be made to different community resources such as mentoring programs, counseling, and Oswego Behavioral Health Services when necessary. FAR workers may initially walk the families through the steps to accessing the services with the hope that once the case is closed they will have the skills and knowledge base to utilize these services on their own.

V. Community and Other Resources

The success of every FAR Program is dependent upon the creation of vibrant and cooperative partnership with services and programs in the community.

A. Identification of stakeholders – List the stakeholders for FAR that you have identified in your district and in your community:

The Child Protective Advisory Council (CPAC) is one of the major community stakeholders for the implementation of FAR. They have been presented information regarding the FAR approach, and will be ambassadors for the community “buy in” of this differential response to CPS reports. Other key stakeholders are the schools in Oswego County, Oswego County Family Court, hospitals, law enforcement agencies, Oswego Behavioral Health Services Division, Public Assistance Programs, Voluntary Child Welfare Agencies, agencies providing Domestic Violence services such as Services to Aid Families (SAF), and the Oswego County Legislature. Additional community stakeholders include programs through Oswego County Catholic Charities, The Salvation Army, The Red Cross, Liberty Resources, Oswego County Opportunities, and Cornell Cooperative Extension of Oswego County.

B. Community outreach – Describe how your district has reached out to and coordinated with community stakeholders (or plans to do so) in the planning of FAR:

OCDSS has presented to CPAC the basics of the FAR program. A meeting presenting FAR to the Health and Human Services committee for the Oswego County Legislature is scheduled for September 28, 2011. Contract agencies and internal OCDSS staff have been advised of the principles of FAR and our plans to implement FAR locally.

Presentations will also be provided to the area schools, and voluntary agencies. All community stakeholders will also be invited to participate in the FAR 101 training when it is offered in Oswego County. Additionally, over the past few months, CPAC has been presenting community forums across Oswego County to educate and address child welfare issues with community members. A goal of these community forums is to encourage community members to embrace child safety as a community responsibility.

C. Community resources that may be used to assist families in FAR. Specify:

- **Government agencies or resources:**

OCDSS will be able to provide temporary and emergency assistance to families in FAR through TANF and Public Assistance programs. Other governmental agencies may include education and resources from the Oswego County Public Health Department, counseling and medication management from Oswego Behavioral Health Services Division. Schools in the county and law enforcement agencies may also be utilized when necessary. Oswego County Mental Hygiene Division can also provide mental health treatment and services for adults and children through their Single Point of Access (SPOA) committee.

- **Non-government agencies or resources:**

Oswego County Opportunities (OCO) provides a variety of resources to the community that can be accessed by FAR families. These include SAF domestic violence services, Homeless Intervention Program, Program to Assist the Teenage Homeless, and case management services for pregnant and parenting teens. OCO also has transportation programs available for medical appointments for those that have Medicaid, and also public transportation services. The Salvation Army in Oswego County can provide emergency assistance for families regarding rental payments, and also food pantry services. Catholic Charities of Oswego County can also provide emergency assistance, food pantry, and case management services for families and youths. Catholic Charities also offers parenting classes, and services regarding case management, kinship, mentoring, and advocacy. Cornell Cooperative Extension has programs available to food stamp recipients providing nutritional education classes to their families. New Justice Services can provide mediation for families in the Oswego County community regarding custody and other disputes.

D. Describe how you will use community resources to reduce government involvement (including that of child welfare services) in the lives of families while maintaining child safety and preserving families:

A goal for implementing FAR in Oswego County is to reduce number of Preventive Services cases opened from Child Protective Investigations and the length of time they remain open. Families working with FAR will be linked to the available community resources, without having to open a Preventive case. Additionally, recidivism for child protective reports will be reduced for families involved in the FAR process. Families

working with FAR will gain the skills necessary to identify and act on their own needs and to access community resources and supports. These skills will enable them to address their own future needs without involving Child Protective Services.

E. Additional Funding

A key component of FAR is the provision over the short term of needed goods and services, including wrap-around services, to families and children. While OCFS has had FAR flex funds (with no local share) available to districts that previously applied to participate in FAR, there is no current plan for the provision of State-only FAR flex funds going forward. Affirm that you plan to fund these services for FAR families with a local share of the costs, and describe your policy for the use of those funds. (Note: local share is to be claimed through the use of protective funding).

Any needed services or financial assistance for families will be assessed for use of Administrative funds that are currently available, on a very limited basis, as they are for ongoing Preventive cases.

A fund balance has been created in the OCDSS budget for 2012 to assist FAR families with emergency needs and needs to sustain family stability. The use of TANF funds will be resourced as appropriate. FAR protective funds will be used for items such as: appliance replacement/repair, minor home repair (on property owned by the client), emergency auto repair (if public transport is not available), any other legitimate expense that impacts the stability of the family and safety of children. Funds will also be recommended for a family outing or other supportive family activity. We expect a cap of \$400 per family for emergency funds. There will be flexibility in this formula as we know not every family will utilize the fund.

VI. Maintaining Safety/Assessing and Responding to Risk

A. Intake– The initiation of a safety assessment within 24 hrs is a FAR requirement. Describe the procedures and processes you will follow to initiate the assessment of the safety of children including how you will or will not screen and assess SCR reports for FAR inclusion during on-call hours:

The initial safety assessment will be conducted in a similar manner as CPS investigations. Once a report has been received from the SCR, the source of the report will be contacted. Intake workers will ask about the whereabouts of the children, current condition of the children, and how they know the information being. Scaling questions may also be utilized to assess the level of safety of each of the children. Once a case is assigned to a FAR worker they will call the family and immediately begin to gather information regarding safety of the children and any possible ideas and/or solutions to address any issues. Although the FAR worker will not go out to the house unannounced, if at all possible, they will try to schedule to meet with the family as soon as possible.

CPS reports received on-call may later be screened into FAR, however, there will not be a designated FAR on-call worker. On-call reports will be handled in the same manner as CPS investigations until they are screened for FAR eligibility.

B. Assessment - The completion of a safety assessment within seven days is a FAR requirement. FAR staff must also complete an assessment of risk and an assessment of family strengths and needs. OCFS requires that districts use the Family Led Assessment Guide (FLAG) for these comprehensive assessments and that a completed FLAG be maintained in the case record. Describe the procedures and processes you will follow to protect the safety of children and engage families in a full assessment of safety, risk, strengths and needs.

Once a CPS report is received child safety will be assessed with the source and throughout the duration of the case. When a case is determined eligible for FAR, caseworkers will call the family to schedule a meeting as soon as possible. From the initial telephone contact, caseworkers will begin to gather information to determine the children's safety and work with the family on problem solving, and determining the family's own concerns and goals. Caseworkers may bring out a paper copy of the FLAG tool in order to complete the assessment with all of the family members, including children. Caseworkers will work to identify strengths and resources with the families in order to help them meet their self-determined goals, and ensure child safety in the home. Caseworkers may utilize genograms and ecomaps to help determine the family's supports and resources. FAR caseworkers will also employ a solution focused approach when addressing concerns with the family, in order to empower them to identify and meet their own needs.

C. Service provision – Describe how the FAR Program will enhance your ability to protect children, maintain their safety, reduce risk, and preserve families:

The FAR Program will enhance OCDSS' ability to protect children, maintain safety, and reduce risk by utilizing family engagement techniques, resulting in a more trusting working relationship and family driven solutions for addressing safety and risk concerns. It is anticipated that if a family recognizes that the caseworker's goal is to help them, and to not prove allegations, they will be more willing to be honest about their needs, family dynamics and ideas and solutions for addressing any concerns.

D. Domestic violence cases – Describe the protocol that you have developed to maintain the safety of child(ren) and the non-offending caretaker in FAR cases with suspected or confirmed domestic violence:

Reports with allegations of domestic violence will be screened out of FAR. However, if domestic violence is discovered while working with a family in FAR, the family will be linked to Services to Aid (SAF) advocates that work in conjunction with Oswego County caseworkers. SAF will provide legal advocacy and linkage to the SAF house if necessary to non-offending parents and their children in order to ensure their safety.

VII. Training

District staff and any non-district staff who are contracted to provide FAR assessment and services must participate in the FAR training and coaching programs, as designed by OCFS.

A. Describe training already provided or planned for FAR district staff:

OCDSS has had a FAR overview provided by the Regional office. All caseworkers and supervisors, including contract agency staff will attend FAR 101. This number is projected to be approximately 80 attendees. Caseworkers and Senior Caseworkers who have been identified for the initial FAR team and the projected second team (12) will also attend the Solution Focused Family Engagement Training, FAR CONNECTIONS computer training, and the Safety and Risk training. The FAR Supervisor and two Senior Caseworkers will also attend the FAR Supervisor training. The identified FAR team will participate in any coaching days offered.

B. Describe any cross training, orientation, or preparation that has already been provided or is planned for FAR staff, CPS investigative staff, any other child welfare staff, and/or other district staff:

All child welfare workers in Oswego County and assigned workers in voluntary agencies will attend FAR 101. Presentations have been made at OCDSS by SRO Sonoma Pelton regarding the basic principals of FAR, to orient staff with the changes that are being made to child protective response in Oswego County.

C. Describe FAR training/orientation that has already been provided or is planned for non-district organizations or entities:

All community stakeholders and voluntary agencies will be invited to attend FAR 101 training. Presentations are also planned for stakeholders and the county legislature to educate community members regarding the principals and practices of FAR. The principles of FAR and our local plans to proceed have been presented to the CPAC committee and various local service providers.

VIII. Monitoring and Assessment

Each district must agree to participate in any monitoring or quality assurance activities with OCFS and its agents as may be designated by OCFS. Each district must commit to engage in internal quality assurance activities that will enable them to continuously assess their fidelity to the FAR practice model and the efficacy of their FAR program, and adjust procedures and practices as necessary.

A. Describe the quality assurance procedures that your district plans to follow in order to monitor and assess the success of your provision of services in FAR cases:

FAR cases will utilize weekly group supervision meetings in order to monitor and assess service provision of FAR cases. OCDSS employs internal quarterly reviews of CPS cases, which will also be implemented for FAR cases. The Department also plans on tracking statistics regarding CPS report recidivism for FAR cases, cases that revert back to CPS investigations, and FAR cases that are opened to Preventive Services in order to monitor the effectiveness of Family Assessment Response in Oswego County.

B. Describe the procedures your district will use to monitor and assess the provision of services to families in the FAR Program by agencies with which you contract to provide services:

OCDSS currently reviews services annually that are contracted with the Department in order to evaluate the effectiveness of services that are being provided. This practice will continue and be expanded to review services provided to families in FAR.