

**FAMILY ASSESSMENT RESPONSE APPLICATION  
YATES COUNTY  
2009**

- a) **Factors to be considered in determining which reports will be addressed through the family assessment and services track and size of population.**

**Criteria for assigning reports to FAR track:**

Yates County Children's Services Child Protective Services will screen the following allegations for appropriateness for FAR track: Lack of supervision, Inadequate Guardianship, Educational Neglect, and Lack of Food, Clothing, Shelter.

Families without or with very limited child protective history will primarily be considered for the FAR track. Certain cases with domestic violence allegation or history may be accepted for the FAR response after supervisory consideration. If families are receiving child welfare services already their case will not be moved to the FAR track.

By mentoring families through difficult times where access to services is critical for minimizing risk to children and enhancing alternatives for stability the involvement of various government agencies may be initially utilized, such as Social Services for food stamps or HEAP, Public Health or Veterans Services. With family driven casework practice, the engagement with natural supports and community based resources there should be a disengagement with government as families stabilize and remain connected to community supports and extended family. Safety to children will be increased by this approach as the family becomes more involved with natural support systems.

**Percentage of reports projected to be handled by FAR in first 12 months:**

As we initiate FAR into the Children's Services Unit we project approximately 30% of our CPS cases will be moved to the Family Assessment track. Since approximately 50 % of our CPS cases fall in the categories we have identified for FAR, we will be able to assess the most appropriate, and increase our percentage accepted, if we have the capacity to do so.

**Units or workers involved if not county-wide – scope:**

Since we are a small child welfare unit, we are approaching FAR by educating all casework and supervisory staff in its basic principals, in order to build support for the strengths-based approach that will, ideally, have better child and family well-being outcomes. Initially, the team will pair 2 CPS Caseworkers who have training and experience in foster care and preventive casework to respond to reports moved to the FAR track, with supervision provided by two Sr. Caseworkers (one in Ongoing and one in CPS) and the Children's Services Unit Supervisor. The Deputy Commissioner will provide supervisory oversight to the FAR team.

**Phase-in or rollout plan:**

During the summer/fall of 2009 we completed the application process, and participate in informational sessions/trainings, to include:

Children's Services supervisory staff & administration will participate in statewide telephone conferences w/OCFS and districts, FAR team will visit counties already implementing FAR and attend CPS Forum informational session on FAR in Region II. The Commissioner and Deputy attended NYPWA conference sessions on FAR. Monthly in-services will be held for staff and supervision on FAR principals and planning to be provided Deputy Commissioner and by OCFS Training staff (Margaret Coombs). Casework staff and supervisory staff are presently receiving monthly training in family engagement skill building from CDHS trainer, Kathy Kinder as well as utilizing the Family Engagement Toolkits.

Through July - December 2009, the Deputy Commissioner will establish community service provider meetings to educate agencies and schools on the principals and practice, roles and outcomes of FAR, and to assess community readiness to provide resources and services. These forums will take place initially through the County's CCSI (Coordinated Children's Services Committee) monthly meetings, beginning in July. Out of these collaborative sessions a core committee of community providers and schools will be identified to meet monthly to assess and enhance the community response to FAR cases. Representatives from the FAR team will attend the Tier I CCSI community collaborative meeting to discuss community resources, services and needs in preparation for FAR.

- During the Summer and Fall of 2009 letters were sent to Community agencies/schools announcing FAR with an invitation to partner in developing services and resources to support the model.
- 2009 winter – Power Point Presentation and further community stakeholder meetings on FAR philosophy and practice
- 2009 November-2010 FAR Team Meetings for strategies-procedures and outcomes
- 2010 February/March on-site Training with AHA
- 2010 March begin implementation – with weekly reviews of cases by FAR caseworkers, Supervisors and Deputy Commissioner
- 2010 Monthly community service provider Far Team reviews of strategies/outcomes (CCSI Tier I and Tier II)
- 2010 July – Family customer satisfaction review
- 2010 July – Review of cases returned to CPS track – re-hotlined

**b) Assessment Process regarding child safety and risk factors/ services and interventions:**

The process to assess child safety and risk and family strengths will include an immediate contact with parents/guardians by phone to establish a mutually agreeable time for visit. Collateral contacts will be utilized to further assess the safety and risk to the children. Family strengths will be identified by caseworkers utilizing family engagement skills where what is going "right" with each individual in family, extended family and community relations are described and acknowledged. Family Led Assessment Guide (FLAG) will be utilized to document strengths and needs. Additionally, "Family Circles,"

family maps, and genogram tools will be utilized to assist family and caseworkers in discovering their inherent family connections with extended family, friends and community, and to identify needs for resources and interventions to increase well being.

- a. Community agencies who are providers of parenting, family preservation services, public health, mental health, domestic violence prevention, budgeting and Temporary Assistance staff will be involved as partners to respond to FAR cases, and upon a family's request for services consents will be signed and referrals will be made. Tier I through CCSI initiative will be a general information meeting monthly for non-confidential information sharing and resource and referral for caseworkers and supervisors to utilize. For the majority of FAR cases, the LDSS caseworker will assist the family if requested by them to arrange a meeting with the agency provider(s) either in their home or at a place of the family's choice. All services referrals will involve practice principles that are strengths-based and family driven. Family Team meetings will be an option to support families in utilizing their own family and community connections to reach their goals. This County has supervisory staff trained in the original New York State Family Resolutions project and has often utilized strengths-based, family empowerment team service plan reviews to assist with family needs for children. Children's Services participates weekly in the SPOA Linking and Planning Services (LAPS) committee in order to assure that the mental health and community interventions for children in need are met. FAR families with needs for children that meet the criteria will be offered the services through LAPS as an option they may choose. The coordinator for this program and the Assistant Director of Community Services will be part of the community collaborative partnering with DSS for resources and interventions for FAR families, as will the Youth Bureau/Workforce Development Director.

**c) Description of the process for planning and monitoring services provided under FAR track:**

Assessments and plans will be monitored by a Sr. Caseworker and Unit Supervisor with review by Deputy Commissioner on a monthly basis for outcomes and timelines. The OCI will be utilized by supervision to review and monitor cases in the FAR track on a daily basis. Community agencies working with FAR cases will provide outcome measure reports on a monthly or quarterly basis, depending on agency and duration of service. Intensive Home Based Services through Kinship Family and Youth Services will provide monthly reports on referrals, participation, and outcomes. Parenting services through Child & Family Resources will provide monthly reports on their services outcomes. Domestic Violence prevention services through Safe Harbors of the Finger

Lakes (conflict resolution skill building) will provide monthly outcome reports on FAR cases.

Case closure with FAR families who have received services will include a “customer service satisfaction” survey to assess outcomes for family and their satisfaction with family engagement by Yates’ DSS and provider agency staff.

**d) How the principles of family involvement and support in tandem with maintaining child safety will be implemented:**

- a. The safety of children will be the first focus of any FAR case. The 7-day Safety Assessment will be completed, and cases where it is determined with supervisory review, that even with the FAR approach the family will not be able or willing to ensure child safety the case will be moved to the child protective investigation track. At any point during the FAR assessment should new safety issues arise, a new hotline will be made. All families will be engaged from a strength-based approach, emphasizing a “solution-focused” interview style in order to empower families and children to develop their own plans and engage them in self-directed change. This will help families to perceive the involvement of the Department as less adversarial and more of a partner in support of their own decision making process. This method should decrease some of the resistance to change that can exist when the child protective response is experienced in a more adversarial role. It will help to initiate positive change at an earlier stage for families as they will, hopefully, engage more fully in making the changes needed to stabilize their homes and minimize the risk to their children.

**The approach we will take and the strategy behind such an approach to more actively engage and empower families in assessment of their strengths, assessing their needs, and in decision-making, while at the same time re-assessing child safety.**

The safety of all children in the home will be a constant focus throughout interactions with families open in FAR. Safety will be a focus of supervisory review of cases on a weekly basis. Our casework staff will engage with families in a manner that is committed to respect, genuineness, and empathy, while emphasizing ‘family-driven’ interaction. This means that the family-identified needs, hopes, and dreams will be paramount, as well as providing support to them in the identification of their existing strengths, assets and capacities they can build upon to bring about the change and well-being they seek. Our approach is committed to partnering with the family’s natural supports, i.e. extended family, friends, and community, in order to maximize the achievement of their goals. We will utilize mediation, peace circles, genograms, family team meetings, and ecomaps, as needed, to assist the family in developing effective assessments and strategies. Our commitment to bringing family teams together assures that the fragmentation of services and supports will be

minimized or eliminated as all are partnering together toward shared family goals.

**e) Describe how the differential response program will enhance our ability to protect children, maintain the safety of children, and preserve families.**

As we begin the FAR program in Yates our involvement will be with families and children who have not previously been involved in indicated CPS reports of a serious abuse or neglect nature, or where safety of children required Court ordered intervention. Our assumption is that a strength-based, family driven and non-adversarial approach with families who may be struggling with meeting basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, and with needing to learn appropriate parenting of their children, may prevent the risks to children of a more serious nature that could arise without a coordinated effort toward community involvement and extended family supports. A CPS response that is non-adversarial and strengths oriented can increase the willingness of families and the community to engage openly with the Department, partnering agencies, extended family and friends to achieve positive change for their children and themselves. Ultimately, these enhanced connections and open paths towards intervention can minimize a great deal of future risk and safety concerns for their children.

**f) Description of how we will reduce the involvement of government agencies with families and maintain the safety of children through use of community resources.**

By mentoring families through difficult times where access to services is critical for minimizing risk to children and enhancing alternatives for stability the involvement of various government agencies may be initially utilize, such as Social Services for food stamps or HEAP, Public Health, or Veterans Services. With family-driven casework practice, the engagement with natural supports and community based resources there should be a disengagement with government as families stabilize and remain connected to community supports and extended family. Safety to children will be increased by this approach as the family becomes more involved with natural support systems.

**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.**

As the casework staff engages with the families through the assessment process, the family's needs, hopes, and expectations will drive the initiation of various methods to draw in necessary community resources and services, extended family members, schools or other friends and connections. Family Team meetings or group conferencing can be utilized as appropriate, bringing essential participants to the table who know, love and serve the family already to assist in developing

plans and supports for the family and children to stabilize and minimize risks. A formal consent process will occur as providers and other services are engaged. Additionally, the Tier 1 CCSI service provider meetings will be utilized to brainstorm resources and opportunities, generally, as casework staff seek options for families needs. The identified family and children will have opportunity through the casework counseling engagement process to fully reveal extended family and friends that may be of assistance to them in bringing stability and well-being to their family. These individuals will be engaged with respectfully, as the family identifies their role in their own stabilization. Drawing them into team meetings and planning sessions will occur as the family is ready for this.

**Factors to be considered in determining which reports will be addressed through the family assessment and services track and size of population.**

A family with previous Family Court involvement or indicated CPS reports of a serious nature, or repeated indicated CPS reports with poor family response will not be assigned to the FAR track. During the first year, we will aim for 30% of our CPS reports to be assigned to FAR that have allegations of lack of supervision, inadequate guardianship, lack of food clothing or shelter, or educational neglect. Some cases that have domestic violence concerns of a lesser nature (no physical conflict) will most likely be included in the FAR response.

**g) Description of staff resources to be used in the family assessment and services track, including the proposed workloads and staff qualifications.**

We will utilize two Sr. casework staff with CPS training and Family Development Credentialing backgrounds in direct supervision of two CPS trained casework staff. The caseworkers will have at least 2 years experience that includes preventive /ongoing services, as well. They will be strengths oriented in their casework approach, with proven records of engaging families positively and teaming well with community service providers and schools. They will maintain caseloads of 12-15 in order to more effectively accomplish the needed face to face engagement with families.

**How we plan to assign or recruit DSS staff to respond to a CPS report through the family assessment and response track.**

Our casework staff are positive about the FAR response and those who know they would not naturally engage in this method versus the traditional CPS investigation approach have identified themselves. We are a small children's services unit with eight casework staff and one senior caseworker in the field part time, all caseworker will be informed of FAR principles. Selection will occur based on staff with strong CPS risk and safety assessment capability, and with proven abilities to engage families positively and build and maintain community partnerships in achieving family and child service goals.

**Will staff be involved in both the FAR track and traditional CPS investigations?**

We will commit two caseworkers to FAR with a minimal or no regular CPS case involvement. Court ordered investigations may be 10 percent of one FAR caseworker's caseload, which we find compatible with a family-driven, strength oriented approach.

**Any and all staff resources which will impact on implementation of FAR.**

Sr. Casework staff and Children's Services Supervisor have Family Development Credential training and extensive CPS backgrounds. Additionally, the CPS Unit Supervisor and Sr. Caseworker were trained in the strengths approach through family group conferencing with the Family Resolutions Project in the late '90's. They are aware of the positive impact that a non-adversarial, family driven approach can bring to family engagement and positive change. Thus, the extensive training mentioned in our supervisory staff in both CPS and strength-based models will provide a high level of oversight as to safety concerns and assessing the intensity of risk factors, as well as offer insight regarding a strengths approach. The caseworkers who are selected will have at least two years CPS experience, as well as extensive experience in community based team meetings, PINS diversion assessments, and training in family engagement skills, solution focused interviewing, and trauma informed casework practice. The Children's Services caseworkers receive monthly family engagement training that includes solution focused methods, offered by CDHS. A contracted DSS preventive worker trained in Family Development and specializes in conflict resolution/domestic violence will team with caseworkers when these issues are identified in the family assessment. Our contracted parenting education program and intensive home based services providers will team with the FAR staff.

- h) Description of training which will be provided to district staff regarding the FAR program. A description of training to be provided to any non-district staff to be used in the differential response program. Both descriptions would include but not be limited to, a description of the training involving maintain safety and well being of children and any cross-training planned for family assessment and investigative staff.**

Supervisors and select staff in Children's Services attended the August CPS Forum on Family Assessment Response in Region II, where participating counties in this vicinity presented their experiences and insights. All staff will participate in introductory FAR trainings by OCFS representatives and key selected staff will be trained by the American Humane Association prior to the month in which implementation is to occur subject to the American Humane Association availability. Children's Services will invite casework and/or supervisory staff from other counties who are implementing FAR to present to all of our casework staff during the Fall of '09 and/or have select staff and supervisory staff visit them. Tompkins County was visited by the FAR Team from Yates in September of '09. Additionally, regular OCFS and county conference calls will be attended by supervisors and Commissioners, as well as select casework staff. Every opportunity for cross or mutual training of CPS investigative and casework staff will be acted upon. Because we are a smaller unit, we believe it is imperative for

all of our casework staff to understand the value and cross collaboration needed to serve families through FAR and keep children safe in the community. The family engagement training by CDHS, plus the training in the Family Engagement ToolKits to begin in December/January, is being provided to all caseworkers and supervisors on a monthly basis through the rest of the year.

**i) Description of community resources proposed to be used in the FAR track.**

As mentioned above, the following contractual services can be utilized as needed: parenting education services through Child and Family Resources, Intensive Home Based Services through Kinship Family and Youth Services, domestic violence/conflict resolution skills through our contracted preventive worker from Safe Harbors of the Finger Lakes, and mediation services through Center For Dispute Settlement. Additionally, families with mental health service needs for their children will be referred to our SPOA Linking and Planning Services Committee. Team meetings will be utilized through community partners who participate in CCSI Tier I and II, which includes Public Health early intervention programs, Cornell Cooperative Extension food and budgeting programs, Workforce Development, Rushville Health Center outreach services, Drug Court and Alcohol Substance Abuse Services through FLACRA.

**j) Description of additional funding (beyond regular child welfare finance mechanisms) which may be utilized to enhance the program.**

Local associations, the Red Cross, Salvation Army, and community food programs will be utilized for vouchers and cash for children and family needs for food, clothing and emergency items. Other grant funded resources will be explored through community collaborative meetings such as CCSI Tier I and Tier II.

**k) Description of protocol to be followed for handling cases in the FAR track when domestic violence is suspected or confirmed. The protocol must address the need to maintain the safety of the child(ren).**

Supervisory review will occur on a case by case basis when domestic violence is a concern. Such review will be utilized to assess the safety of children and determine whether the case can be maintained in the FAR track rather than moving it to the CPS investigation track. When verbal conflict has not risen to the level of substantially impacting the children emotionally, or has not become physical, then the case may be considered to remain in the FAR track. Team meetings on the level of domestic violence reported and how it is being impacted by services and engagement will be reported out on a weekly basis. Safe Harbors of the Finger Lakes will be part of the Team Review through their preventive worker and her supervisor.

**l) Description of your plan to involve community agencies, schools, Family Court, other key stakeholders in your county and the community as a whole in planning for and implementing a Family Assessment Response.**

As mentioned above, the CCSI Tier II collaborative committee meets monthly and will be a significant stakeholder in the implementation of the response, as



human services agencies, schools, service providers and government agencies throughout the county attend to discuss services, resources and strategies for the community. The Tier I committee will be attended by the casework staff involved in FAR partner with community providers on services and options to address child and family needs (no confidential information will be shared). As the FAR families identify local service needs there will be consents signed and those providers can attend family meetings, or set up individual meetings, as requested by family members.

**j) Timeline for implementation:**

We plan to begin the FAR response in 2010. The Fall/Winter of '09-'10 will be used to educate and partner with community teams on FAR principles and philosophy, to complete staff and community trainings, and to refine our case practice procedures and protocols.

Nana Carrillo  
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