

Family Assessment Response Application
For Chautauqua County DSS

Any social services district wishing to implement a 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;**

During the Chautauqua County FAR pilot, SCR reports will be assigned to FAR on the following criteria:

- Chautauqua Co. will highlight allegations of inadequate guardianship, educational neglect and lack of supervision.
- Families with no SCR history will be a priority. Although we will be open to considering a FAR response to a family with prior SCR history if there is reason to believe the FAR response might produce a different outcome.
- Only South County cases will be considered.
- Domestic Violence cases will be considered on a case by case basis based on the severity of the allegations. This will be determined through supervisory consultation.
- No reports flagged for MDT will be identified as FAR.
- When it appears that a neglect petition and/or removal will occur (1021, 1024), a CPS investigation will be completed and the case will not be considered for FAR.
- Reports involving licensed facilities, foster homes or day care will be excluded.
- Families receiving services in an open case from the Department will be excluded.
- Reports that can be engaged by FAR within 24 hours will be considered for FAR assignment. This may exclude reports that are received on nights and weekends.

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;**

The assessment process is being developed by the pilot counties and will utilize a combination of CANS and the North Carolina model. The assessment tool will include 15 -20 questions and a brief narrative around case planning involving strengths and action steps. The information gathering portion of the assessment process will utilize solution focused practices.

Because the front door to CPS is substantial, we will take time to educate our staff as well as our partners. An informational meeting will be held with all South County CPS Supervisors to review the assignment criteria and process for FAR eligible cases.

The assessment process would be shared in the context of the FAR approach. Since all CPS workers rotate through after hours and weekend coverage it is likely that they will have to assess new reports for FAR. If it appears a report is FAR appropriate the worker will consult with the on-call supervisor for direction. Whenever possible a report identified as FAR will be started by the FAR workers. We plan to develop a script for workers to use at initial contact in order to assist them in engaging the client in a manner that differs from the traditional investigative approach.

Once the initial assessment is completed, the FAR worker will complete a 7 day safety assessment to assure that safety needs have been addressed.

The full array of services through the department will be made available as appropriate: casework counseling, parenting, budgeting and home management. Referrals will also be made to community providers including the DV liaison. Chautauqua maintains an expansive resource and referral list that allows staff to provide appropriate linkages to almost every needed service. This list will be utilized by FAR workers. TANF resources will be utilized whenever possible to meet basic needs to promote self-sufficiency. When all other resources have been exhausted, foster care diversion funds will be utilized.

When appropriate we will help partner agencies to understand this approach in an effort to clarify respective roles in assisting families. We currently have well established links with SPOA and CCSI and expect that will continue with FAR. Depending on case timelines we may also consider referrals to Family Group Conferencing. Department Legal staff, the courts and other identified stakeholders will be invited to an informational meeting on FAR.

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

FAR services will be provided by Department staff and monitored directly by the supervisor. The supervisor will monitor cases through the use of the OCI, case

conferences and group supervision. Established milestones will be tracked and reviewed by the worker and the supervisor. Case documentation will capture significant case events including services provided. In an effort to stay current and connected, the HOME team will invite service providers to their team meetings to present new resources in the community and to network.

CCDSS will participate with OCFS evaluators, once identified. Referrals for services will also be made to non-contractual community agencies, as needed.

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;

The family assessment response is based upon our Department Vision:

Anyone coming to DSS for guidance or assistance will remember their experience as significant, perhaps even as a turning point in their lives. Each will recall being valued as an individual with unique strengths and needs whose life experiences were acknowledged and used as the foundation upon which to build something new and better for them and their families. This experience sends a message....you matter and there is hope for the future.

Workers will utilize a solution focused approach to actively engage and empower families in assessing their strengths and needs and in decision making. Utilization of solution focused interviewing techniques will help to identify root issues that traditionally are not addressed using current CPS models. Lack of influence over one's own life, is a key contributing factor to poor outcomes. Solution focused practice will allow a conversation to occur where the family engages in identifying their strengths, underlying conditions and safety issues toward the development of a family-driven plan that can support sustained change. We believe that by engaging families in a non-confrontational, non-accusatory fashion it will result in a deeper conversation around assessment of strengths, risk and needs. This approach removes the traditional barriers with linear CPS investigation. This type of engagement will identify and utilize family protecting factors to address child safety. Family Group Conferencing may also be utilized encouraging the family to make their own plan.

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;

By identifying family's strengths and needs and providing intensive, appropriate and/or tangible services immediately upon receipt of the report, differential response will open a dialogue between the department and the families allowing

the family to view the department's involvement as less punitive and more supportive in nature. Families will more readily engage in the process to take those precautions necessary to maintain the long-term safety and well being of their children. Our decision to focus on first time reports should also allow us to intervene with a family and interrupt the cycle of behavior before it becomes entrenched. We are also optimistic that others in the community might be more willing to work in partnership with DSS if they see we are making every effort to assist the family.

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;

Differential response is a less intrusive approach than traditional investigative approaches and focuses on short-term, front end services. These services will be provided directly by the Department and will identify natural supports within the family and community. This, along with building on the strength's of the family, from a holistic perspective, will allow the family to solve problems in self-sustainable way.

It is anticipated that the FAR approach will impact the decision to file neglect petitions by utilizing alternatives to judicial intervention. This may reduce the number of neglect petitions filed and the number of fair hearings requested. With the emphasis on developing a support network tailored to the family's needs, we expect to see an increase in the number of referrals made for specialty services to the community.

FAR cases will receive services for an average of 60 – 90 days. Cases that are in need of continued services beyond 90 days may be open for traditional preventive services and reassigned to services caseworkers within the HOME team or the case may be closed with services being provided by community based organizations. During the 60 – 90 day period, the FAR workers will assist the family in setting up formal and informal support systems which may include Family Group Conferencing to identify family support systems and referrals to community based organizations. Referrals may be made to agencies that provide as array of services such as alcohol and substance abuse treatment, counseling services, DV services, budgeting, parenting, housing, health services, anger management, and basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter.

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;

The HOME team was selected because of the willingness and enthusiasm of the supervisor to become involved in the FAR project. The HOME team is a blended team made up of CPS, Foster Care and Preventive staff. The team was originally designed to provide additional support to staff as well as to families. Case outcomes are supported by the entire team. Since the team keeps its own preventive and foster care cases, energy and focus is not lost in case transfers. We believe FAR is a natural adjunct to the blended team approach.

The team consists of CPS caseworkers, foster care caseworkers, preventive caseworkers, and community service workers. There are a total of 7 staff and a supervisor on this team. Of the casework staff, three are CPS caseworkers. Of these, 2 will be identified as FAR workers. These workers will be involved in only FAR tracked cases and not traditional CPS investigations. We hope to have one experienced caseworker teamed with one less experienced caseworker. Community Services Workers, who are LDSS employees, will provide hands-on, instructional services to families in parenting, budgeting, housekeeping, nutrition, etc. Team meetings will, at times, involve review of FAR identified families. All members of the team will engage in group supervision of FAR cases. The joint case review process will help the rest of the team to become familiar and comfortable with the FAR approach to cases.

The two FAR workers will begin with a 50% caseload (approximately 5 cases per worker per month) which is approximately 6% of the overall CPS investigations received in Chautauqua County annually. We will monitor caseloads throughout the project to be certain this workload is reasonable and sustainable within the operation as a whole. As previously mentioned, if a FAR report turns into an investigation, all efforts will be made to assign the investigation to the HOME team CPS worker. FAR subsequent reports requiring investigation will also be assigned to the CPS investigator on the HOME team.

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;

A preliminary informational meeting concerning FAR has been held with all CPS staff and supervisors. Prior to November, we will need training on engagement (solution focused), CONX, CORE, CPSRT, supervisor training, group supervision, and team building.

We think there is merit to the suggestion that OCFS organize a kickoff to introduce and explain the model to stakeholders and other key players. This includes but it not limited to DSS staff, TANF, Legal, Courts, schools, mandated

reporters, SPOA, CCSI and community agencies. We further request that OCFS develop a brochure that could be used to provide community partners with a quick introduction to the FAR approach. CCDSS will also need training on the assessment tool.

Once implementation takes place we will assess the FAR approach on an ongoing basis and reserve the right to request additional technical assistance or support as needs are identified.

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

Services that will be provided are the usual array of services provided by the Department including casework counseling, parenting, budgeting, home management, and referrals to community resources including the DV liaison. The resource and referral list will be updated. TANF resources will be utilized whenever possible. When there are no other resources, Foster Care Diversion funds will be used.

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

In addition to TANF resources which will each be used whenever possible, the department FAR pilot will utilize wraparound funds provided by the OCFS FAR pilot. Where training resource needs are identified, availability of local district and OCFS funding will be explored. Staff ratio monies will be applied for to offset the reduction in workload for FAR workers.

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);

Domestic Violence allegations will not be automatically excluded and instead, will be considered on a case by case basis based on the severity of the allegations and in consultation with a supervisor. The on-site DV case manager funded by OCFS will be invited to a minimum of quarterly HOME team meetings to provide specific informational sessions, participate in case conferencing and to offer services to appropriate cases. The DV case manager may be utilized to initiate CPS response with the assigned CPS caseworker and may assist in the identification of safety issues for the non-offending parent and child. The DV case manager will also provide training on using the DV assessment tool with victims and the impact on the children. Non-traditional paradigms of DV will be explored by the DV case manager and presented to the HOME team. The DV case

manager and her supervisor will be invited to attend the presentation by Dave Thompson on July 11, 2008. We will also invite the DV case manager to attend FAR training opportunities and technical assistance days as appropriate.

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;

As mentioned above, a key stakeholders meeting will be held to present information to and to seek input from the stakeholders regarding the districts FAR pilot. Prior to the stakeholder's meeting, workers will share information on FAR with community providers on an informal basis in their day to day contact and in presentations.

m) Please indicate your projected timeline for implementation.

Prior to November we will need training on engagement (solution focused), CONX, CORE, CPSRT, supervisor training, and team building. We request that the State have a kickoff to introduce and explain the model, provide training on the assessment tool and develop a one page tool/pamphlet to describe FAM. We will also need to educate our stakeholders including DSS staff, TANF, Legal, Courts, schools, mandated reporters, SPOA, CCSI and community agencies. Once implementation takes place we will assess on an on-going basis to include the impact on other operations in the division.

The November 1st start date is contingent upon the phase in activities being completed, CONX being on line, staff being in place, and staff and supervisor preparedness.