

ERIE COUNTY
Family Assessment Response (FAR) Application

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;

- Please address:
 - the criteria by which you will assign reports to the family assessment and services track;
 - the anticipated percentage of reports that you are projecting will be handled through the family assessment and services track in the first 12 months of implementation.
 - the particular units and/or workers who will be involved, if it is not initially to be done county-wide
 - any phase-in or rollout plans

Reports containing allegations of educational neglect involving children grades 1 through 9 will be assessed for assignment to the family assessment and services track. Approximately 1% of the reports received will be handled through the family assessment and services track in the 1st 12 months. The percentage of reports included in the pilot will be subject to increase based upon successful experience and available resources. One CPS unit, consisting of 6-7 workers and one supervisor will initially be involved in this pilot project. The workers will be oriented to the family assessment and services track approach and will receive training on the use of the Westchester County Screening Tool in anticipation of a January 2009 start up.

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

- Please describe:

- the assessment process that you will use to assess child safety, risk to children and family strengths and needs.

- the plan for linking families with those goods and services that address their identified needs, including what services will be provided by county CPS or preventive services staff, what services will be provided by community service providers, and what relationship the county will have with TANF staff in assessing needs and providing services. How, if at all, will family assessment and services interact with other local models of service access including such things as SPOA, CCSI, etc.

Assessment of child safety, risk to children and family strengths and needs will occur in all cases within the 1st 7 days of the CPS investigation. Staff will be trained on using a strength based approach. Coincidentally, the report will be screened for potential inclusion in the family assessment and services track using the Westchester County Screening Tool. Each report determined to be appropriate for the family assessment and services track will be referred to a contracted agency provider. When possible, DSS staff and contract agency staff will make a joint home call to offer the family an opportunity to receive FAR services.

The contracted agency will serve families who are referred by the Erie County FAR pilot for possible educational neglect due to the excessive absences of their child. The youth may not be consistently in school and often has serious educational deficits due to the loss of so many days. There is a great need to address the educational deficits of the youth and the social emotional issues that arise when the youth is behind. The youth are often frustrated, demoralized, embarrassed, left out, and have reduced self-esteem, limited positive reinforcement for school attendance, and may display an attachment to a “bad kid” self-image. They can’t see their way to future success and enjoyment of school.

Care Coordinators employed by the contracted agency will address the following goals on cases that may have otherwise been deemed educational neglect cases:

- **Reduce further penetration of youth into government systems-Child Protective Services, the Family Court, Probation and/ or residential out-of-home placement with the Social Services or Mental Health systems.**

- **Increase school engagement and attachment as exhibited by increased school attendance and decreased school discipline.**

- **Increase in youth's success in school as exhibited by increased grades.**
- **Increased parent involvement by reducing barriers to engagement with their child's education.**

Wrap-around services will be provided by vendors (sub-contracted) for such services as "Rise and Shine" (insures child is up and to school in the morning), tutoring, mentoring, family advocacy, skill building for the youth, parent skills training, respite, behavior management services, parent aide, translation services and transportation services.

The Care Coordinators will be accessible to project families 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. They will take phone calls to defuse parental crises and offer crisis home visits or other interventions as necessary.

The targeted age range is youth in grade 1 through grade 9 referred by the Family Assessment Response Pilot. The profile of the family can be quite varied, with the common themes of mental health and substance abuse issues (the parents and/or youth), behavioral problems, dysfunctional family dynamics such as inadequate care or supervision of children or the household, inadequate parenting skills, and economic stress. The length of service will involve a 60 to 90 day phase of Intensive Case Management followed by Maintenance Case Management for 3 to 6 months, depending on needs of the case. The contract agency will work in cooperation with the following key partners: Erie County Department of Social Services, Family Court, Buffalo Public Schools, Erie County Department of Mental Health, Erie County Department of Probation and various community agencies. The service values will be strength based (individual and family), respect for youth and family choices, parent mutual support, and youth mutual support

This effort will be guided by the 6 key components of successful truancy programs identified by National Dropout Prevention Center/Network's study on Best Practices and Model Truancy Programs:

- **Collaboration – establish a multidisciplinary group to guide the implement truancy programming**
- **Family Involvement – Target family participation in school attachment activities, engage families in all truancy prevention and intervention efforts, and address family-based needs to support attendance**
- **Comprehensive Approach – The reasons for nonattendance are varied, and a community's response should be flexible and broad**

enough to take into consideration the specific issues experienced by students and families

- **Use of incentives and sanctions – A combination of motivating incentives and accountability-based sanctions work best with youth**
- **Operate in a supportive context – to sustain programming, the program environment, including infrastructure and prevailing policies, must be supportive source of energy and resources.**
- **Rigorous evaluation and assessment – Test the approach to see if the desired outcomes are produced and make midcourse corrections if necessary. Outcome data will help sustain funding for truancy programming and generate positive political will.**

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

- Please include how the assessments and services provided directly by DSS as well as those provided by agencies under contract with DSS and those provided by other community agencies will be developed and monitored for quality and adherence to negotiated principles and expectations.

Services provided by the contracted agency provider will be monitored by a County worker during the first 30 days of the Intensive Case Management phase of services. The County worker will ensure that a strength based assessment has been completed and an appropriate offer of services has been made. The County worker will fulfill a role equivalent to that of a monitor until the case exits the Intensive Case Management phase or a determination is made that DSS monitoring is no longer necessary, based upon verification that appropriate services are in place.

The contract agency will submit quarterly reports to the ECDSS Contract Coordinator. The report will track data on adherence to the negotiated principles, expectations and outcomes, including the work of community based agencies involved in the case.

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;

- Please describe:
 - your County's core practice principles upon which the family assessment response is designed.

the approach you will take, and the strategy behind such an approach, to more actively engage and empower families in (i) assessment of their strengths, (ii) assessing their needs, and (iii) in decision-making, while at the same time reassessing child safety, as need be.

The family assessment and services response is based upon the principle that families are best equipped to formulate solutions to the challenges they face when provided with the necessary support and access to services is facilitated. The County will facilitate this level of empowerment through the core practice principles of Respect, Empathy and Genuineness. In every instance families will be afforded an opportunity to control their own destiny with regard to avoiding further penetration of the child welfare system. The ten principles of the wraparound process that provide the basis for the delivery model of in-home mental health services in the Family Voices Network in Erie County will also guide the design of this intervention. Those ten principles are:

- 1. Family voice and choice - Family and youth/child perspectives are intentionally elicited and prioritized during all phases of the wraparound process. Planning is grounded in family members' perspectives, and the team strives to provide options and choices such that the plan reflects family values and preferences.**
- 2. Team based - The wraparound team consists of individuals agreed upon by the family and committed to them through informal, formal, and community support and service relationships.**
- 3. Natural supports - The team actively seeks out and encourages the full participation of team members drawn from family members' networks of interpersonal and community relationships. The wraparound plan reflects activities and interventions that draw on sources of natural support.**
- 4. Collaboration - Team members work cooperatively and share responsibility for developing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating a single wraparound plan. The plan reflects a blending of team members' perspectives, mandates, and resources. The plan guides and coordinates each team member's work towards meeting**

the team's goals.

5. Community-based - The wraparound team implements service and support strategies that take place in the most inclusive, most responsive, most accessible, and least restrictive settings possible; and that safely promote child and family integration into home and community life.

6. Culturally competent - The wraparound process demonstrates respect for and builds on the values, preferences, beliefs, culture, and identity of the child/youth and family, and their community.

7. Individualized - To achieve the goals laid out in the wraparound plan, the team develops and implements a customized set of strategies, supports, and services.

8. Strengths based - The wraparound process and the wraparound plan identify, build on, and enhance the capabilities, knowledge, skills, and assets of the child and family, their community, and other team members.

9. Persistence - Despite challenges, the team persists in working toward the goals included in the wraparound plan until the team reaches agreement that a formal wraparound process is no longer required.

10. Outcome based. - The team ties the goals and strategies of the wraparound plan to observable or measurable indicators of success, monitors progress in terms of these indicators, and revises the plan accordingly.

Each family will be educated concerning this alternate approach and will be encouraged to identify those services they believe are necessary to allow them to succeed. Central to that process of education is the affirmation of the fundamental requirement of child safety at all times. Every plan formulated and pursued will explicitly address the issue of child safety and include unique strategies for both the family and provider, to routinely monitor and document child safety throughout the period of involvement with the family assessment and services response. Contract agencies will be required to use the Family Advocacy and Support Tool to assess each family's strength and needs.

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;

The differential response program will enhance the ability to protect children and preserve families by beginning to alter the community perception that the primary aim of CPS is investigation and enforcement. Rather, families will begin to experience CPS as a genuine source of support without a punitive or coercive component. That change in perception is expected to result in greater cooperation and collaboration between CPS and the families it is charged to serve and protect. That improved level of cooperation and the coincidental empowerment of families to control their own destiny will improve the attainment of safety and permanency for client families.

f) A description of how the district will reduce the involvement of government agencies with families and maintain the safety of children through the use of community resources;

- Please describe:
 - how the district will engage the family without increasing the involvement of government agencies without compromising safety of children
 - 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.

A reduction of family involvement with government agencies will occur as a natural result of this initiative in that official government involvement will terminate at the earliest point possible after safety has been assessed and a referral for services has been completed. The key accomplishment of this initiative will be to link willing families to available services and community resources in a way that promotes their independence and their capacity to successfully address their own problems. To the extent possible this will involve the use of community based services and natural supports.

The contract agency will be responsible for identifying the appropriate interventions required to address the identified issues impacting the child. The interventions available will include direct casework counseling by the agency as well as linkage with available community resources including: parenting instruction, individual and family counseling, alcohol and substance abuse services, mental health services, community services for the developmentally disabled and health services. Where deemed appropriate the agency will facilitate the linkage of the family with PINS diversion services or the Family Voices Network (community based wraparound services provided via mental health services) and school based family support services, i.e., the Closing the Gap school program

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;

- Please include:
 - how you plan to assign or recruit DSS staff to respond to a CPS report through the family assessment response track
 - whether staff will be involved in both the family assessment response track and the traditional CPS investigations
 - an indication of the use of any and all specialized staff/resources that will impact on the implementation of FAM

One CPS unit, consisting of 6-7 workers and one supervisor will initially be assigned to this project. Every effort will be made to recruit volunteers for the project. Experienced staff with at least 2 years of experience that have demonstrated the ability to use family engagement strategies will have preference in the selection process. The limited nature of the reports to be included in this project and the anticipated low volume will allow for the workers to be involved in both the family assessment and response track and traditional CPS investigations. During the initial start up phase a Clinical Specialist will be assigned to work with the CPS unit as an adjunct consultant available to discuss referral decisions until staff attains confidence in the decision making process.

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;

CPS staff will be oriented to the family assessment and services track approach and will receive training on the use of the Westchester County Screening Tool in anticipation of a January start up. All training will include an emphasis on the unaltered principle, that child safety remains a primary focus during all phases of agency involvement. Additionally, staff will be trained to communicate that principle along with every offer of participation made to a client family to ensure their awareness and commitment to the ultimate goals of child safety and family preservation. Both the department of social services and contract agency staff will receive training on the Wraparound process including Child and Family Team meetings, Solution Focused interventions and The Family Advocacy and Support Tool (FAST). Contract agency staff will also receive training on safety and risk assessment.

There is ongoing training for all Erie County services staff on Cultural Competence. They will also receive an overview of the Family Assessment Response program.

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

A request for proposal will be issued to solicit bids to provide the family assessment and services follow up upon referral from CPS staff. The successful bidder will fulfill the case planner/coordinator role on all cases referred. That role will include linking families with the existing resources available in the community as noted in item b) above.

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

Identifying additional funding will be challenging due to the 2% reduction in State Preventive Funding. Any available state resources to support the provision of flexible funds to assist families will be helpful. Erie County anticipates partnering with OCFS in training and orienting community agencies, schools, Family Court and other key stakeholders. A commitment by OCFS to provide or fund the necessary training for both county and agency provider staff will also be necessary. Additionally, Erie County will require a dedicated source of funding for the community-based services that will support this pilot.

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);

- If you plan to collaborate with your local domestic violence service provider concerning any aspects of your family assessment and services track, please describe such collaboration.

No reports with verified incidents of domestic violence will be included in this pilot. Any cases referred to the family assessment and services track that are later found to involve domestic violence which impacts upon the children will be re-reported to the SCR for traditional investigation.

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;

For the past several years the Erie County Department of Social Services has been partnering with community agencies, schools and other stakeholders to develop service responses within our County for families with children who are at varying degrees of risk for out-of-home placement. The Community Optional Preventive Service (COPS) Programs currently operating in Erie County are representative of Erie County's commitment to expand the continuum of services that will allow for interventions in the least restrictive setting. These services address the needs within the communities and as a whole are designed to build upon the assets of families and their children. Utilizing this network of providers will be the basis for the initial roll out of the Family Assessment Response program. Working with the Closing the Gap COPS provider, existing school based family support centers and with cooperation from the United Way, outreach meetings and planning sessions will be choreographed. By working together to craft coordinated approaches to serve the families the Department will increase its effectiveness and reduce duplication of efforts. Erie County anticipates marketing the new approach to the community and stakeholders with direct assistance and participation of OCFS Regional staff.

m) Please indicate your projected timeline for implementation.

August 2008	Obtain Administrative and Legislative Approval to Seek Funding for Contracted Service.
July 31	Program design
August 29	RFP completed
September 15	Release Request for Proposal
October 6	Receive bids
October 24	Select Provider
October	Inform and Orient Community Providers and DSS staff to Family Assessment and Services Track
November	Preliminary community collaboration meeting
December	Complete CPS and Non-district staff training
JANUARY 2009	Family Services Response implementation

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