

## Family Assessment Response Application – Madison County

*A. Factors to be considered by the social services district in determining which report 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.*

The family assessment response will be provided in those circumstances where court ordered intervention and evidence collection is not going to be necessary and child safety will not be compromised. Reports will be screened upon receipt by trained personnel, including senior caseworkers and supervisors. The following criteria will be used to screen out reports from the Family Assessment track and will require a CPS investigation.

In accordance with Social Service Law section 427–a, any reports with the following allegations or narrative will be excluded from FAR before beginning the investigation:

- Sexual abuse
- Reports labeled as abuse by SCR
- Fatality reports
- Reports with criminal charges such as murder, manslaughter, assault, failure to thrive, and/or sex crimes
- Licensed day care or foster homes
- Domestic violence cases with child/victim safety concerns\*
- Cases where abuse/and or sexual abuse petitions have been filed
- Reports where a current household member has had two or more substantiated investigations within the last 12 months
- Court ordered investigations.
- Subsequent reports on open investigations
- Cross county reports.

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

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

### **Anticipated percentage of reports to be handled through family assessment and service track in the first 12 months of implementation**

We anticipate 40 percent of reports to be handled through the family assessment and service track in the first 12 months of implementation. We intend to screen reports using our screening tool with all reports during a one-to-two-month period before

implementation to get an accurate percentage of reports which will receive a family assessment response.

### **Units and workers to be involved**

Currently, we have two units that provide Child Protective Response. The unit responsible for investigating sexual abuse and severe physical injuries will not be involved with Family Assessment Response. Of the remaining 10 caseworkers, we anticipate that 5 workers will be assigned FAR cases. These 5 case workers will be supervised by one supervisor who will be FAR trained. All other supervisors will be trained in the FAR process in the event that they are needed to assign reports.

***B. Assessment process regarding child safety and risk, types of services and interventions to be provided in the family assessment and services track, and a description of how the services will be offered.***

### **Assessment process we will use to assess safety, risk, and strengths and needs**

Child safety is our first priority. Child safety and risk will be assessed from receipt of report and throughout our work, in partnership with the family, using a family support approach. Immediately, we will begin assessing strengths, needs, and risks, in partnership with the family, using the Family-Led Assessment Guide (FLAG). We will meet with parents to explain the process and to engage them in the family assessment. We will obtain permission from the parents to involve other community supports and to assist them to meet needs that may be identified throughout the assessment. Seven days after the report, the formal safety assessment will be completed and approved in Connections. The SCR will be notified of the track. A strengths and needs assessment will be conducted in partnership with the family. The process will also include records review and personal interviews with family members, including parents and children, their supports, and other stakeholders. Tools such as genograms, ecomaps, motivational interviewing, solution focused approach, and team meetings will be employed. Our process will empower families by acknowledging their abilities to use their strengths and resources to meet needs. Outcomes and goals will be developed in partnership with families.

**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 the 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:**

The need for services will be assessed throughout the life of the case. FAR caseworkers, in partnership with families, will assist families in the development of goals and strategies, through casework counseling, referrals to community programs, and linkages

to community resources, such as advocacy and parenting programs, supportive networks, and counseling. Outreach to community stakeholders and referrals to preventive services can also be made for the family. Referrals for services provided by other DSS programs include transportation, day care assistance, temporary assistance (TANF), food stamps, Medicaid, child support services, and emergency services. Services that may be provided by community service providers include food, clothing, shelter, mediation, respite, advocacy, early intervention, substance abuse counseling, domestic violence services, shelter services, outreach services, parent support groups, public health nursing, WIC, health services, mental health services, and education services. FAR workers will make referrals and work closely with SPOA and PINS service providers.

The family assessment response caseworkers will be linking families with needed services and advocating for them. They will follow up with the families to see that the services being provided are working and interact in partnership with other services on behalf of families.

*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 LDSS as well as those provided by agencies under contract with LDSS and those provided by other community agencies will be developed and monitored for quality and adherence to negotiated principles and expectations.**

Services provided by FAR caseworkers and community partners will be reviewed and assessed through a minimum of bi-weekly supervision between supervisor and caseworker. The supervisor will review the interviews the FAR worker has had with family members and review the information regarding the family's strengths, needs and types of support the family utilizes. The supervisor will meet with the caseworkers carrying a FAR workload, review their progress notes and information gathered from interviews, and discuss ways of engaging the family or obstacles for the family and solutions. Discussion would include the conditions of the home, the family's support network and the family's strengths.

*D) A description of how the principles of family involvement and support consistent with maintaining the safety of the children will be implemented in the family assessment and services track:*

**Our core practice principles upon which the family assessment response is designed:**

Madison County FAR workers will use a family-focused, strength-based approach with families with safety of the child(ren) being the primary goal. In order to assess safety, FAR workers must employ the principles of family engagement skills, recognizing that the family is most knowledgeable about their needs, strengths, and resources. Reinforcing strengths and engaging the family is the key to assessing safety and ultimate change for the child(ren) and family. The FAR worker will collaborate with community

and family resources to implement and motivate the family for permanent change. Services will be sought out and developed to meet the identified needs.

***E) A description of how the Family Assessment Response Program (FAR) will enhance the ability of the district to protect children, maintain the safety of children and preserve families:***

Child safety will be continually assessed and evaluated throughout the case by engaging the family in open discussions about what they think their family needs and empowering the family to make changes if necessary. In addition, FAR workers will make home visits and referrals to service providers when necessary. By identifying a family's strengths and needs and providing appropriate services upon receipt of the report, a differential response will open a dialogue between the department and the family, allowing for the family to view the department as less punitive and more supportive in nature. The overall goal is to engage and support families rather than put them on the defensive.

***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:***

**How the district will engage the family without increasing the involvement of government agencies without compromising safety of children.**

The Family Assessment Response is a less intrusive approach than the traditional CPS response. The FAR approach focuses on short-term, front-end services, thereby reducing government involvement over time. By having the family identify their own needs and community resources, they will be better able to address future problems, thus eliminating future government involvement. Safety will be regularly monitored through supervision of cases and regular contact with the families.

**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.**

The FAR workers will engage the family, their support network, and other community resources in providing assistance to the family. Family strengths will be identified and services will be provided with the family's mutual consent.

***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.**

After discussing the FAR program, six Madison County CPS workers volunteered to be part of the FAR program. Of these workers, five were identified who will become the FAR workers. All five workers have demonstrated experience in providing the CPS response, success in assessing safety and risk, skill in interviewing and engagement of the family, ability to establish and maintain therapeutic relationships, common sense and judgment, and excellent observation and analysis abilities. The supervisor who will supervise the workers assigned to FAR cases has six years of experience supervising CPS caseworkers.

If a FAR caseworker leaves the unit other caseworkers will be asked if they would like to volunteer for FAR. If someone volunteers they will be assigned to the FAR unit, if not someone newly hired as a caseworker will be assigned to FAR.

**Whether staff will be involved in both the family assessment response track and the traditional CPS investigation**

If a case is initially assigned to a FAR worker and it is determined that the case should follow the traditional track, the case will remain with the assigned FAR worker. However, it is anticipated that FAR workers will carry predominately FAR caseloads.

**An indication of the use of any and all specialized staff/resources that will impact on the implementation of FAR**

The FAR supervisor has been a CPS supervisor for six years. All five caseworkers, that will become FAR workers, have worked in CPS for at least six months. One caseworker previously worked in Preventive Services and at several private agencies. Another has been with the department for several years.

*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 involved maintaining the safety and well-being of children and any cross training planned for family assessment and investigative staff:*

If our application is approved, formal information sessions regarding the program will be provided to all Child Welfare Staff. Training in the principles, model, approach and requirements will be provided to all Family Assessment Response staff by the American Humane Association. All Family Assessment Response staff have received safety and risk training and CPS response training. Cross training for Family Assessment and investigation staff will be provided as appropriate, and may include training specific to dynamics and interventions in domestic violence and substance abuse situations. Training in the screening process will be provided to all CPS, Family Assessment, and all Child Welfare supervisors.

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

As a family engages with the FAR caseworker and identifies the services needed, all efforts will be utilized to connect the family with the necessary services. This may range from applying for day care services to domestic violence services, shelter services, substance abuse treatment, school advocacy, mentoring services, counseling, or helping the family arrange for transportation or find a job. A SPOA universal referral process is in place and will be utilized for Family Assessment Response cases to access contract services, including PINS prevention programs. Families can be assisted with negotiating Single Point of Access (SPOA) processes for mental health, OPWDD and PINS prevention services. They can also be assisted with applying for temporary assistance, food stamps, Medicaid, Social Security and housing.

***J) A description of any additional funding (beyond the regular child welfare finance mechanisms) that may be utilized to enhance the Family Assessment Response Program FAR:***

Madison County will apply for any grants and/or funding available from the State or County, which may be utilized to assist with ongoing training, mentoring and technical support.

***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 provider concerning any aspects of your family assessment and services track, please describe such collaboration:**

Madison County has an ongoing relationship with the domestic violence provider (Liberty Resources Victims of Violence Program). Although many cases involving domestic violence will not be handled by FAR workers, they may be at the supervisor discretion. When there is domestic violence suspected or confirmed all interviews of family members shall be coordinated with the Victims of Violence advocate using the protocols previously established for traditional investigations. Referrals may be made to support groups, legal services, domestic violence shelters, and parenting classes. If at initial contact there are safety concerns, then the case may be transferred back to the traditional investigative track.

***L) A description of your plan to involve community agencies, schools, Family Court, other key stakeholders in your community or catchments area, and the community as a whole in planning and implementing a family assessment response:  
Please indicate your projected timeline for implementation:***

Madison County has already started to involve the community and local stakeholders in the anticipated implementation of the Family Assessment Response. We have met with the local school superintendents and members of administration in several private agencies and county departments to explain the FAR process. Training will take place on an on going basis as needed for staff, providers and the community. We anticipate providing presentations regarding FAR to all local school districts. If Madison's application is approved, we would plan to start the Family Assessment Response by November 2010.