

Family Assessment Response Application
Orange County Department of Social Services
August 2008

Orange County has provided non-CPS intake services including Generic Intake and Juvenile Justice Intake for over fifteen years. Generic Intake has provided Orange County residents with the ability to receive assessment, information, referral to community services and short-term case management services without Child Protective Services involvement. Intake caseworkers complete safety and family assessments similarly to our Child Protective units. Referrals often originate from schools, family court, law enforcement and families. A Family Assessment and Services track would be similar to our Generic Intake services, which are well established and widely known in Orange County.

A. ASSIGNMENT CRITERIA

The criteria by which we will assign reports to the Family Assessment Response (FAR) track includes targeting reports with allegations of educational neglect, supervision and/or hygiene issues, those involving custody disputes and caretakers' developmental disabilities. Additional reports designated for the FAR track may include those where initial assessments find all children to be safe, allegations that were recently investigated and closed unsubstantiated or reports made by non-CPS Intake workers. We anticipate that within the first year, about 50% of reports will be handled through the Family Assessment Response track. In 2007 Orange County received 3473 reports and would expect approximately 1700 reports to be tracked for the Family Assessment Response within the first twelve months.

Orange County currently has seven CPS units with seven Case Supervisors and forty-two Senior Caseworkers. With the exception of our Multi-Disciplinary Team, which investigates all sex abuse, serious physical abuse and fatality reports, all CPS units will participate. A percentage of current CPS staff, as well as a percentage of Children's Services caseworkers will be designated to work on Family Assessments Response tracked cases based on their particular experience, knowledge and strengths. CPS Family Assessment Response (FAR) Senior Caseworkers, as well as CPS Case Supervisors will provide supervision for Children's Services caseworkers assigned FAR cases. Intake caseworkers (a contracted service with a community agency) may also be assigned FAR cases after an initial assessment is completed by Department of Social Services staff.

B. ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The assessment process will be consistent with current practices of all Social Caseworkers and Senior Caseworkers. Strengths-based, risk and safety assessments will be completed initially with reassessments occurring on a regular basis as work with families continues. All CPS reports alleging physical and/or sexual abuse, all those initially assessed with significant risk and court-ordered investigations will remain in the regular CPS track. All CPS reports will be reviewed by a Case Supervisor and assigned to either the investigative or FAR track. Reports assigned to the FAR track will be initially assessed by a CPS Senior Caseworker or Children's Services Social Caseworker

trained in conducting safety assessments. After the initial assessment is completed, any reports found to involve physical or sexual abuse or a significant degree of risk will be re-assigned to the CPS investigative track. FAR caseworkers will continually assess for risk and safety throughout their work with FAR tracked families. They will complete a formal assessment using a valid, reliable assessment instrument and will complete case documentation utilizing the format planned for Connections, for Family Assessment Response cases.

OCDSS caseworkers will provide assessment, short-term case management, information and referral to community services, limited transportation and linkages with eligibility benefits administered by DSS. Case openings for longer-term Preventive Services will be initiated when indicated by service needs.

C. MONITORING

Both in-house and contractual service provision are closely monitored by a combination of administrative, supervisory and monitoring staff. Regularly scheduled meetings for case reviews and monitoring all aspects of service delivery are held. Written standards of case recording are enforced, including financial penalties for contracts with late documentation. Outcome measures are identified for all preventive services and are tied to a percentage of the overall value of each contract. Outcome measures are also identified and tracked for Mandated Preventive Services provided directly by OCDSS. OCDSS participated in round one of the Getting to Outcomes (GTO) project and has begun to employ GTO in RFP and contract language.

OCDSS has recently developed a contract to provide Generic Intake Services. This contract holds the service provider to the same high standard of service delivery traditionally provided directly by OCDSS staff. Expectations include thorough case documentation, written safety and risk assessments, information, referral and linkage to services, case planning, opening and seamless transfer as necessary. Services provided by OCDSS staff directly will require the same standard of delivery and documentation.

D. FAMILY INVOLVEMENT AND SUPPORT

Orange County is committed to empowering families and assisting them in becoming actively involved in service planning, with a goal of self-sufficiency, while minimizing risk and promoting safety for children. We require our contract services to be strengths-based and family-focused and have strongly encouraged this philosophy with OCDSS staff. Our expectations include identification of family strengths and resources, as well as inclusion of family identified goals in service plans. Additionally, our county agency partners, Mental Health, Probation and the Youth Bureau all share this philosophy, making it well entrenched in our communities and services. OCDSS has a strong interest in providing Family Group Conferencing and hopes to formally initiate this type of practice with families within the next few years. (DSS and contract staff have previously received training and utilized student interns to facilitate a small pilot project of Family Group Conferencing. Currently Permanency Mediation is available through a contract agency.) We believe that the Family Assessment Response track will enhance our ability to practice strengths-based, family-focused service delivery and further our goal of

empowering families to fully participate in identifying their strengths, planning and working toward addressing their needs.

E. FAMILY PRESERVATION

Through earlier, stronger and more positive engagement of families receiving the Family Assessment Response, prevention efforts will be more effective and will result in fewer subsequent CPS reports, lower risk, a higher degree of safety and fewer out-of-home placements. As families come to trust Children's Services to provide assistance in a non-authoritarian, teamwork approach, they will be more likely to reach out for help before situations become higher risk and involve safety concerns. As occurs with our Generic Intake unit, families can be expected to call upon Child Welfare professionals as soon as they identify a need, thereby eliminating the necessity for others to initiate interventions, including contacting the State Central Register to make a Child Protective report.

F. FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Orange County is rich with a multitude of community resources. Citizens are fortunate to be easily able to access a wide variety of services, most located in the most populated, inner-city areas. OCDSS has a long-standing philosophy of first identifying any concerns for risk and safety and then working with families to support their access to and involvement with community services, which can fulfill identified needs and promote optimum safety for children. On a continuum, families are provided with only the degree of assistance they require to successfully engage in services sufficient to address risk, safety and other identified needs. For some families, information and referral materials are provided with independent follow through. For others, referrals are made, transportation to initial appointments is provided and monitoring is conducted to insure follow through. When families receive just the right amount of support and given choices, they are more comfortable accepting services and more likely to follow through or ask for additional assistance when needed.

G. STAFF RESOURCES

OCDSS will assign Family Assessment Response (FAR) reports to Child Protective Services Senior Caseworkers and to Children's Services caseworkers and Generic Intake caseworkers designated for FAR, after the initial assessment is completed by an OCDSS caseworker. A percentage of CPS Senior Caseworkers and Children's Services caseworkers will be designated to receive FAR tracked reports, with each CPS Unit comprised of CPS Senior Caseworkers assigned to investigate CPS tracked reports, CPS Senior Caseworkers assigned to work with FAR tracked families and Children's Services caseworkers who will also be assigned FAR cases. Generic Intake contract staff, managed by a former DSS CPS caseworker, may also work with FAR tracked families. Their work will be monitored by Case Supervisors with CPS experience and training.

Child Protective Services units receive assignment of reports based on geographic territories. Each State Central Register CPS report will be reviewed by a CPS Case Supervisor, who will make a decision to track for either investigation or FAR. Tracking decisions will be made based on allegations, information known about a particular family

and other pertinent information. Once this decision is made, the report will usually be assigned within the same unit to promote continuity of supervision.

For additional information, see Section A. Assignment Criteria.

H. TRAINING

All OCDSS and contract staff planned to receive FAR reports have completed NYS Child Welfare Core training and many additional trainings related to NYS Children's Services programs, community services and other relevant topics. Additionally, all CPS staff have completed CPS Core training and periodically receive specialized CPS training. All supervisory and casework staff involved in FAR implementation will be provided with an overview of the Family Assessment Response and training/certification on use of the F.A.S.T. assessment tool to be used with FAR cases. Additionally, all Children's Services staff and Generic Intake contract staff will receive training in the OCDSS implementation of the Family Assessment Response and (new) documentation procedures supported by Connections, including written protocols to guide practice. Non-CPS casework staff assigned to work with FAR tracked families will additionally receive training in conducting safety assessments.

I. COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Families will be provided with information on services available to address identified needs and referrals and linkages will be made to contract and community services and programs. OCDSS contract agencies include: Dispute Resolution Center, South West Key Program, McQuade Children's Services, YAP, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Occupations, RSS, Catholic Charities, Astor Home for Children, Winslow Therapeutic Center, Windsor Counseling Group, Safe Homes, Emergency Housing, Project Life, RECAP, NHS, Dispute Resolution, OC Mental Health Department, OC Probation Department and OC Youth Bureau.

A SPOA-type universal referral process is in place and will be utilized for Family Assessment Response cases to access contract services, including PINS prevention programs such as Community Connections, YES, MST, FFT, Residential Alternatives, Newburgh Achievement Program and CRYPS. Families can be assisted with negotiating Single Point of Access (SPOA/CCSI) processes for mental health, OMRDD and PINS prevention services and to apply for Temporary Assistance, Food Stamps, Medicaid, Social Security and housing assistance.

Referrals will also be made to community services such as TASA, Healthy Families, School-based Preventive Services, Home and Community Based Waiver, Mental Health Association, Safe Homes, Child Care Council, Early Intervention, Head Start, mediation, clinical mental health services and substance abuse programs.

With regard to domestic violence services, Orange County DSS has an extensive contractual and excellent working relationship with the county provider of domestic violence services, Orange County Safe Homes. Contract services include residential and non-residential domestic violence prevention services, a Family Justice Center, special

programs and educational opportunities, and for more than a decade, a Domestic Violence Liaison co-located with DSS staff and readily available for consultation.

FAR cases in which issues of domestic violence are suspected or identified will be referred to the Domestic Violence Liaison, who will contact the victim and offer domestic violence prevention services. The Domestic Violence Liaison can also consult on cases assessed to potentially involve domestic violence.

J. ADDITIONAL FUNDING

All contract agencies are encouraged to seek and secure private funding, such as that often available through foundations and grant opportunities to enhance contract programs and services. OCDSS Generic Intake contract provider, a nationally recognized large-scale provider of services for children, youth and families may secure such funding, which would further enhance our Family Assessment Response services.

K. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES

As mentioned above in the “Family Assessment Process” section, Orange County DSS has an extensive contractual and excellent working relationship with Orange County Safe Homes, the county’s provider of domestic violence services. Over 10 years ago, OCDSS developed a Domestic Violence Liaison position, which is shared between Children’s Services and TANF, co-located with DSS staff and available for consultation. OCDSS also contracts with Orange County Safe Homes for a wide variety of residential and non-residential services to support victims of domestic violence and their children. OCDSS and Orange County Safe Homes have a long-standing interagency workgroup and participate in periodic cross-training of staff. To insure collaboration at administrative and planning levels, the Deputy Commissioner/Director of Human Services serves on the county Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

OCDSS and Safe Homes will continue to work closely to provide services to victims of domestic violence in a safe, sensitive and coordinated manner. The FAR will enhance this approach and our positive working relationship by allowing victims more control and a greater ability to influence the case planning process. Through the Domestic Violence Liaison, FAR tracked families with domestic violence issues will be offered domestic violence prevention services.

L. COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

OCDSS routinely communicates and shares information with all community partners, agencies, institutions, service providers and other stakeholders. When any new service is introduced in the community, information and informative materials are shared at numerous venues including meetings, open house events, presentations, trainings, and conferences to introduce the new service or program and provide education about process changes, availability, target population, and access. OCDSS administrators, supervisors and program monitors participate in numerous committees, boards, workgroups and interdepartmental meetings where program information can be distributed, in addition to postings on list serves and limited web sites. All avenues of communication are utilized

to insure awareness of and support for new programs and procedures affecting our communities. Information about FAR and its implementation in Orange County will be shared with contract and other county and community agencies, as well as with Family Court, school districts, health care providers and citizens. Informational meetings will be planned for various targeted groups in addition to the information shared at board, committee and other meetings.

An internal implementation team will facilitate planning tasks, including the dissemination of information. They will also facilitate the development of informational materials for stakeholders. The input of these stakeholders will be sought and considered throughout the implementation and pilot processes.

M. TIME LINE

OCDSS plans to develop specific procedures for the Family Assessment Response, train staff, share information with stakeholders and prepare for implementation during the next several months (June 2008 - December 2008). OCDSS will be prepared to fully implement FAR in January 2009, after Connections support becomes available.

FAR implementation will be continually assessed for effectiveness and functionality. A complete program assessment will be conducted and adjustments will be made as necessary to promote optimal success moving forward in 2009.