

Family Assessment Response Application

Any social services district wishing to implement a Child Protective Services (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.

Essex County Department of Social Services will provide a Family Assessment Response to calls received from the State Central Register for Abuse or maltreatment. The caseload limit will be a maximum of 15. We anticipate that we will see approximately 10% or 65 to 70 of our annual intake, be addressed through this alternative track. We will begin with one caseworker providing FAR track services. There will also be the support of current staff that provides homemaker services, parent aide services, and transportation. There will also be supervision provided by the Grade B Supervisor in the Child Protective Unit. Initially we will provide this option in the central area of the county which will include the towns of Elizabethtown, Lewis, Westport, Willsboro, Essex, and Keene. As we move to the second and third phase we will extend to other areas of the county. Phase 2 will be concentrated in Saranac Lake, Lake Placid, and Wilmington, and phase 3 will be based in Ticonderoga and Crown Point. In every aspect of FAR we wish to remain flexible and sensible, we do not wish to build in any artificial guidelines but to serve families in the least restrictive manner, that promotes safety and self sufficiency. As of the end of July, 2009 the caseworker who will first implement the FAR track will no longer receive any traditional CPS reports. This will allow time to complete all investigations and prepare for the first FAR cases. If circumstances allow taking into account our desire to

remain flexible we would begin taking FAR cases that meet criteria within the established area for phase 1 even earlier than September 1.

At intake, we will offer this option to families who are facing allegations of educational neglect and on case by case basis, allegations of inadequate guardianship, maltreatment, lack of supervision, family conflict, and medical neglect. We anticipate being flexible and not focusing specifically on the allegations but more the information in the report and any information available in the agency, i.e. previous reports, closed cases, etc. We have developed a screening tool to determine initial eligibility for differential response handling of reports. (Attachment 1) Attachment 2 provides a flowchart of case flow in Family Assessment Response in Essex County.

Our plans for roll out include sending staff to the American Humane Symposium to be held in Albany July 30 and 31st. Following that all staff in children services will be given an overview and trained in the concepts of Family Assessment Response. We are planning a community stake holders meeting for August 19. We are beginning immediately to share with members of the Child Serving System, (an established system of providers, protocols, and meetings as describe under b), in Essex County our plan to begin this model and will ask for questions and input from our well trusted and knowledgeable colleagues from agencies such as Essex County Mental Health, Essex County Probation, Families First, OMRDD, Schools, Mobile Mental Health Team and Youth Advocate Program. The August 19th meeting invitation list will also include colleagues from Adirondack Community Action Programs, Public Health, Early Intervention, Family Court, Eligibility Programs at DSS, Medical personnel, Law enforcement, Alcohol and Substance Abuse providers, Domestic Violence Services, the Mental Health Association, North Country Mediation Services, The Prevention Team, Essex County Youth Bureau, and independent contractors who provide services in the community.

If our application is approved we plan to begin implementation on September 1, 2009. If the program grows as we hope, we anticipate adding a second worker on March 1, 2010 and a third worker on September 1, 2010. Staff has been chosen based on volunteerism and supervisory input for all three phases. When we are trained on site by American Humane we plan to have all staff trained in the general tenants of FAR and then more intense and specific training for the identified FAR staff to include the Director, Supervisor and 3 caseworkers who will be involved in phases 1 thru 3.

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.

Currently CPS staff is having regular meetings to formulate our plan for provision of Family Assessment Response services. We are reviewing available assessment tools to assist in a formalized assessment of the family's readiness to employ the concepts of FAR.

Child safety is our first priority, safety and risk will be assessed from receipt of a report through case finalization. We will in addition to completing the required 7 day assessment of safety complete, a yet to be identified, family assessment tool. We will seek assistance from our partners at OCFS to identify a tool that will be family friendly and will provide an effective measure of family functioning.

The fact that Essex County has a small population has forced our service providers to work together to plan for service provision and to share resources. We work very closely through CCSI and

the Essex County Child Serving system to try to provide appropriate services to families, seeking to provide what is needed not merely what we have. We have developed a system to assist with the provision of services to families. The basis is the child family team meeting. These are designed to be family focused with all service providers available to provide honest feedback and to assist in arranging for services. If further help is needed families are invited to take part in a presentation at Interlinks. This is a group of frontline service providers who meet monthly and are available to brainstorm and make suggestions when the Child and Family Team have met a barrier that needs further assistance from the service community at large. Weekly Meetings of what is the SPOA Committee and Superlinks are available for the reviews required by the SPOA process and then supervisory staff meet to review service provision issues, look at placements and discharges and to share service provision issues, suggestions, etc.

Schoolinks is a system set up that provides an employee from the child serving agencies who acts as a liaison for a school district. This provides a person who is available to field questions and search out possible options and report back to the school in an attempt to provide services before families are looking at being reported or entering the legal system. Each of our 13 school districts uses this resource differently but it does provide a conduit for information sharing that was previously not present. While Schoolinks is a level of the Child Serving System in Essex County we see limited use for FAR other than program information sharing with schools. Tier II meets bi-monthly and is available to deal with policy issues and membership is at the administrative level. (Please see the Essex County Child & Family Serving System chart - 2 pages)

We will begin sharing information about FAR and our decision to complete the application process. As we move along all of these member agencies, as well as, all other child serving agencies within the county will be invited to attend our stake holders meetings. We are confident that the Family Assessment

Track will be well received and that we will be able to rely on our service partners to provide services through FAR recognizing the strength base approach which is a basic tenant for all kid's service providers in Essex County.

Work with the TA/MA/Daycare staff at Essex County DSS will continue to be positive. These staff members will be invited to the stake holders meetings and will be kept apprised of the new initiative. We foresee a continued positive working relationship with casework advocacy being met with affirmative and helpful actions on the part of eligibility staff. For those families that meet program eligibility and would like to continue to receive services on a voluntary basis Preventive services will be receptive to referrals from FAR and will anticipate an organized transfer with the family aware and invested in completing the plan they have begun. We will be reliant on the funding from OCFS for financing emergency goods and services that cannot be accessed through any other mean for FAR families. Since we have an established method of service provision via the Child Serving System, FAR workers will employ the system as any other service provider would in addition to case management, advocacy, support and wrap around services for the family.

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.

We anticipate using the services that are currently available within the county, as well as, non-traditional wrap around services which will be funded by the Office of Children and Family Services. For years whenever possible we have written into grants money that can be used for those items that are necessities but do not fit the bureaucracy. We pride ourselves on our ability to do creative casework and on our positive working relationships with other agencies in the county. It appears at this time we are not in a position to create specific services for FAR families, but will continue to work with other agencies

attempting to fund additional services within Essex County. An example is exploration of Recovery Act money for Mentoring.

Monitoring of services will be the responsibility of supervisory and administrative staff as is the case for any services for which ECDSS contracts. We would also incorporate a consumer satisfaction survey to be completed by parents who are in receipt of FAR services. At this point we anticipate using the Family Assessment Response Parent/Client Satisfaction Survey. (Attachment 3)

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.

Essex County Department of Social Services has been described by families as being the "kinder, gentler" agency. Staff is invested in engaging folks, treating them with respect and believing that change is possible. While we make people aware that certain issues are non-negotiable, i.e. safety of children, we are open to hearing what is important to the consumer how they would like their lives to change and sensitive to their strengths and identified needs. Living in an area that is sparsely populated with family ties reaching across the county it is not unusual for staff to be working with someone's child or aunt, etc. Although this presents unique challenges for us it also provides us with a constant reminder that we need to be respectful and non-judgmental with all of our families as we work in partnership toward change.

It is our expectation that Family Assessment Response will be welcomed by the families to which it is offered. We recognize that that being reported for abuse or maltreatment is a frightening experience and workers have to overcome the innate fear in parents that they are there to remove their children. It is hard merchandise to sell that we are here to see what you did

wrong and then we are going to help you never do it again. We expect that giving people the option of help versus investigation will be welcome. In all of our cases be it preventive or foster care or protective we are constantly assessing safety. We are confident that the solid casework practice that our workers have been taught in the classroom and that has been reinforced in the field will be welcome by both families and the workers who have volunteered for this new approach to child safety and family preservation.

Furthermore we plan to ask families to complete a Family Assessment Response Parent/Client Survey form (Attachment 3) to assist in our continued development of this program. We anticipate that feedback from folks who have experienced the differential response first hand will be extremely helpful in the ongoing planning for and implementation of this approach to services.

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;

In every aspect of children's services our first priority is safety. Constant guard for safety will be an invariable element of the family assessment services offered in Essex County. As we approach families being tracked in the family assessment track we will be offering a service without the punitive features that accompany a child protective report. We are confident that this option allowing energy to be focused on services rather than investigation and compilation of evidence will allow the agency and the FAR workers to be about service provision as opposed to reprimand. The realization that families under investigation often spend the bulk of their energy on cover up rather than seeking change is not a new discovery. It is our sincere belief that through family engagement and concrete offers of assistance we can help families focus on areas that jeopardize their children's safety and assist them in making changes that are a result of their needs and values, not merely a short term

covert operation in which to engage until the agency is off from their back.

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:

o how the district will engage the family without increasing the involvement of government agencies without compromising safety of children

In Essex County the government agencies that families could be involved with are the Department of Social Services, the Probation Department, law enforcement and the family court. When we look at the differential response we anticipate a more informal and practical response to family troubles than the sometimes harsh and punitive response of the investigation of abuse or neglect. There may be times when a PINS petition may be suggested to a family but we anticipate that there may be other gentler suggestions that might address the safety of children while leading to a less restrictive response to the needs presented by the family. As we use caseworkers in a more supportive and helpful role able to offer more flexible and seamless assistance to families we anticipate that CPS (FAR) involvement will be short lived. And if we are successful in screening appropriate cases for the family assessment response we should see little or no need to involve law enforcement or the family court through neglect petitions or PINS or JD petitions. As previously stated safety is constantly assessed.

o 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.

Service providers will be aware of the differential response program through community education and stake holder meetings. They will know that a family has been referred from a FAR caseworker but that will be the only differentiation in service provision. Since we do not anticipate developing any new services designed just for the FAR population referral for services will be made to those agencies within our county that offer services on a voluntary basis. We look forward to the flexibility options that FAR funding will provide and anticipate

using the same services providers on a voluntary, community wide basis.

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

Staff who is assigned to the differential response track will not provide traditional casework for child protective cases with the exception of response while on call during non work hours. We anticipate that this will be a struggle especially initially when the FAR worker will have few cases. We are committed to not straying from this tenant. We will begin the transition to FAR on August 1 by no longer assigning cases to the FAR worker. This will allow her a month to clear her case load so that on September 1, 2009 she will have no traditional cases. When new cases come in that pass the screen and are in the initially identified area of the county they will be assigned to the FAR worker.

Minimum qualifications for caseworkers assigned to FAR will be to meet the minimum qualifications for caseworker status through the civil service system. They will have attended the core training and specialty training for child protective services required and provided by the Office of Children and Family Services. While this is the minimum we will be looking for folks with an interest in this approach to child safety and family service and will be looking for folks who have availed themselves of training opportunities provided through staff development. We additionally would like to have these folks trained in family engagement and are waiting for this training through the family engagement specialist in the Albany regional office of OCFS.

We have identified staff who will work in the FAR program for the first three phases which will encompass a year's time. This was done through staff meetings and information coupled with

supervisory input and staff interest. The worker we have chosen to begin this work is trained as a school counselor, and has experience working with seriously emotionally disabled children and their families. Because we are a very small agency we will be forced to have supervisory staff with a foot in both programs. It is our plan to utilize our CPS homemaker/parent aide in FAR cases with families that can benefit from assistance with budgeting, nutrition, role modeling parenting skills, education, coaching and support as directed by the FAR caseworker. We also have a transportation aide on staff that will devote as much time as possible to this program but will divide her time among FAR, CPS and preventive services. We also have on staff a registered nurse who has experience in pediatric nursing. We foresee that her expertise may be significant in assisting families that are facing medical issues.

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;

The Director of Social Services, the Child Protective Supervisor and the two caseworkers scheduled to kick off phase 1 and phase 2 of FAR will attend the July 30 and 31st FAR Symposium to be offered in Albany. This will allow for staff to be trained in the principles of FAR and also to meet with other counties who have already begun this program. The Family Engagement training will be offered and we will require that folks will complete the poverty training which Essex County brings on-site. Of course, all required training provided by the Office of Children and Family Services will be required along with the minimum of 6 hours of approved training required annually for all child protective workers. All child protective staff and support staff will be asked to complete the family engagement training and will be part of any on-site training in Essex County. Additionally we will ask that staff from preventive and foster care also have at least an abbreviated training on the FAR principles. We do not anticipate using any staff other than ECDSS staff to provide

differential response services. We are still unsure of the tool that we will use for assessment of family functioning but when that decision is made appropriate training for use of that tool will be required, as well.

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

We propose using any and every service available to provide what a family requires. Although Essex County is small we have an array of services, but with limited availability. We work on a regular basis with Adirondack Community Action Programs to include Head Start, children and family services, weatherization, youth employment, employment for adults, GED program, parenting classes, day care certification and food shelf. We work on a regular basis with Families First an agency designed to work with families of seriously emotionally disturbed children. They provide services for the children and are also the contract agency for Medicaid intensive case managers and waiver services.

We have contracts for service provision with Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. to provide after hours PINS related emergency services, Intensive Home Based Services, and in home Parenting Services. We contract with a parent aide and a foster care visitation aide, as well as, a victim sexual abuse counselor. We contract for services to victims of domestic violence and for a group for batterers.

Other agencies we work with on a regular basis include the mental health clinic, probation, OMRDD, Schools, Family Corner, Mediation Services, Drug and Alcohol counseling services, Public Health, and on a more limited basis the Prevention Team and the Essex County Youth Bureau.

Because we are small we have developed our CCSI process (described earlier) to allow for an even distribution of services

and to try to assure that families are not receiving services that might be duplicative. We plan to include all of these agencies and partners in our stake holders meetings to prepare for the implementation of the Family Assessment Response in September of 2009.

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

Any additional funding available for provision of services to FAR families will be greatly appreciated. We also look forward to a level of flexibility in using these funds to allow us to maximize the benefits of FAR.

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.

At present we are not intending to include domestic violence cases in the FAR track, however we have asked for the ability to do a case by case determination of appropriateness for FAR. We would develop a safety plan with the family and also insist that this be done with staff from STOP Domestic Violence. We have worked closely with staff from the domestic violence agency for years. For several years they had staff co-located at our offices. Presently they attend our CPS staff meetings and share information regarding cases in common. Staff is available to come to our office on an emergency basis to assist victims of domestic violence. This collaboration is already in place and could easily be extended to fit the FAR track if we decide that we can work with families in this vein.

l) A description of your plan to involve community agencies, schools, FamilyCourt, other key stakeholders in your county or catchment area, and the community as a whole in planning for and implementing a family assessment response;

We have already begun the work of explaining Family Assessment Response to our in house and community partners. We are reporting on progress and ideas for FAR at our ongoing CCSI tier meetings. This will continue as we prepare to implement the program. We have planned an August 19, 2009 Stakeholders informational meeting to include all community partners. We plan to send a save the date letter as soon as practical. We are working within the agency to explain to the other units, i.e. food stamps, Medicaid, temporary assistance, child support, adult services and accounting, to understand this exciting prospect for our consumers.

We continue to try to reach out to our partners in the Essex County Family Court. They will be included in the invitation for the stake holders meeting and will be offered the opportunity to meet privately with us to hear more about this departure from the traditional CPS system that is now in place. We are hopeful that at the very least the information provided in our letter of invitation will provide information that will impel an audience with the judge.

We also will be inviting medical personnel from the 4 hospitals that we deal with regularly. Two are in the county and two in contiguous counties. We will invite them to the stake holders meeting and also offer individual meetings to share the information.

m) Please indicate your projected timeline for implementation.

We anticipate submission of our completed application for providing Family Assessment Response Services to families in Essex County by April 15, 2009. Immediately we will begin sharing information regarding the Family Assessment Response with folks who attend Interlinks, Superlinks, and Tier II. We will send a team of people to the July 30 and 31st American Humane Symposium to be held in Albany, NY. Staff has been selected for phase 1, 2, and 3 of the geographical roll out of FAR. Training of all children services staff in FAR principles and the application as planned in Essex County to be completed prior to August 19,

2009. On August 19, 2009 we will host a community stake holders meeting to explain FAR and solicit support from community agencies. Invited guests for this meeting will include all agencies who attend our regular interagency meetings as listed previously, as well as all community partners who serve children in Essex County. We eagerly await our first FAR case on 9/1/2009 with the second phase being implemented on 3/1/2010 and the third on 9/1/2010.