

Family Assessment Response (FAR) Application

Name of Applicant County: Jefferson County

Name and contact information for the person in your agency to contact regarding this application:

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Please complete all items in this application unless marked “if applicable,” in which case the information should be provided if appropriate. It may be helpful to refer to the OCFS *FAR Readiness Checklist* for ideas about the information to be provided in each section (at <http://ocfs.state.nyenet/cps/FAR/Other%20FAR%20Resources>).

I. Rationale for Implementation of FAR

- A. Describe your rationale for applying to implement Family Assessment Response (FAR) and for undertaking the practice shift to FAR.

Jefferson County Department of Social Services (JCDSS) prides itself in taking a child-centered, family-focused approach in working with children and families. The Family Assessment Response (FAR) provides an alternative response which has demonstrated increased satisfaction among the families involved with this approach. Developing and implementing FAR in Jefferson County will allow child welfare staff and families we serve flexibility in the process of how the system responds to reports made to the SCR. JCDSS realizes there is not a “one size fits all” approach to working with families. While there is a need for traditional CPS response to serious allegations of child abuse, there is also a need for the families we serve to become partners in assessing their own strengths and needs. The FAR approach will allow a differential approach to CPS reports with the ultimate goal being child safety, family stability, and increased family participation in the realization of goals.

- B. What benefits are you seeking for your district through the implementation of FAR? For the families reported to your district? For your community?

JCDSS is looking to empower families that partner in the FAR process. Through the use of the FAR approach it is anticipated that our district will ultimately receive fewer subsequent reports and will develop closer linkages to community resources to support families in need of such services. Families will view this approach as helpful and will be more likely to ask for assistance in areas of need within the family. Through community outreach, mandated reporters will view this approach as a vehicle to assist families rather than placing blame and identifying short-comings. Using our child-centered, family-focused approach to working with families as well as linking families to community

services/resources, it is anticipated families will require less long-term support from Preventive Services.

- C. Provide a brief assessment of your district's current child welfare / child protective services (CPS) case practice, including an assessment of your district's current strengths regarding family engagement, assessing safety and risk, family-led strengths and needs assessment, and solution-focused practice.

CPS workers are trained to approach all families in a respectful and helpful manner. However, not all families view the traditional CPS approach as helpful. Our child welfare units are currently involved in critical thinking training and the group supervision process in order to strengthen their skills in solution-focused practice. Workers complete timely assessments of safety and risk and develop an appropriate course of action based upon their findings. While family meetings are utilized on occasion, this is not the standard procedure on all CPS cases. Children are generally interviewed at school whenever possible and contact is then made with the caretaker notifying them of the report and that their child has been interviewed. All child welfare workers are encouraged to attend trainings on family engagement and solution-focused practice as they become available. Child welfare supervisors also coach their workers on these skills during individual and group supervision.

- D. Identify areas of practice where you anticipate that development and support will be needed in the successful implementation of FAR.

JCDSS will require training on the principles of FAR and how it is different from a traditional Child Protective Investigations. CPS caseworkers, supervisory staff, and management will require support and development to assist them in shifting the culture from investigating all allegations to determining when the use of the FAR approach is appropriate. Encouraging family engagement, having families direct their own needs assessment, and helping families develop their own goals will challenge and change long held thinking regarding Child Protective Services. Outreach with schools, service providers, community-based agencies/programs, and other county partners will be necessary in order to inform them about the implementation of FAR and the benefits to this type of CPS response.

II. Intake - Criteria for Assigning Reports to Family Assessment Response

While New York State Law excludes assignment to FAR of CPS reports containing certain categories of allegations, a majority of all CPS reports remain eligible for FAR assignment. OCFS has found that when districts severely limit the types of allegations assigned to FAR, it impedes the successful implementation of FAR. Therefore, OCFS policy requires districts to commit to screening in a broad range of allegations for FAR assignment.

As per New York State law, reports with allegations said to have occurred outside of family settings (e.g., day care, residential settings) cannot be assigned to FAR. While reports regarding foster boarding homes are not legally excluded from assignment to FAR, their

inclusion cannot be supported by CONNECTIONS at this time. Also in accordance with State law, reports containing the following allegations cannot be assigned to FAR:

- sex abuse (i.e., commission of a sex offense against a child)
- child prostitution
- incest
- a child engaged in, or use of a child for purposes of, child pornography
- assault against a child
- attempted or committed murder or manslaughter in the first or second degree
- child abandonment
- severe or repeated abuse
- neglect resulting in failure to thrive

A. List additional criteria you will use to screen out reports from FAR (if applicable):

- Court ordered investigations
- Child fatalities
- Subsequent reports on open investigations
- Open Ongoing Children's Services case
- Reports with same day response or immediate safety concerns
- Ongoing police investigation or arrest
- Allegations of Domestic Violence with an arrest (does not include military charges)
- Serious/excessive bruises or injuries
- Person Legally Responsible (PLR) currently incapacitated due to alcohol/drugs, mental illness, violence
- Cross county reports where secondary county is not a FAR county
- Reports where a household member has had two or more substantiated investigations within the last 12 months
- Cases where physical/sexual abuse petitions have been filed

B. List the types of reports to be screened into FAR:

- Inadequate Guardianship
- Lack of supervision
- Use of corporal punishment/bruises that do not appear excessive
- Lack of food, clothing, or shelter
- Lack of medical care
- Educational Neglect
- Parent/child relationship issues
- Child behavioral issues
- Allegations of Domestic Violence without an arrest (cases with military charges may be screened into FAR)
- Parent's drug/alcohol abuse where there are no criminal charges and no extensive history of drug/alcohol abuse
- Cross county reports where secondary county is a FAR county

C. Describe the procedures you will use to screen reports into FAR:

Community service workers who accept SCR reports will use the FAR screening tool to determine if a new SCR report meets the criteria for consideration as a FAR case. If the report meets the criteria, the report along with the FAR screening tool will be given to the FAR Supervisor or Senior Caseworker for completion and determination of the appropriate track for the report (CPS/FAR or CPS/INV). If the FAR Supervisor and Senior Caseworker are not available, the Screening Tool will be completed by another CPS Supervisor, Senior Caseworker, or the Grade A Supervisor.

III. Projected Caseloads and Workforce Allocation

Developing a successful FAR program requires assigning a sufficient number of cases to FAR to foster a vibrant program. Districts should commit to assigning to the FAR track a meaningful percentage (i.e., a minimum of 30-40%) of those CPS reports that fall within the categories of cases meeting the district's criteria for FAR. Alternatively, medium to large sized districts may wish to serve one or more communities that have a disproportionately large number of CPS reports and/or a disproportionately high minority representation in their CPS reports; they should commit to assigning to FAR a minimum of 15-20% of all CPS reports in those communities that meet state requirements for FAR inclusion.

A. Caseload projections - After reviewing past CPS data in your district and the criteria you plan to use to assign cases to FAR, provide the following information to estimate your **projections** for the assignment of cases to FAR in the first 12 months of operation:

1. Total number of CPS reports in your district in the past year (use the most recent data available):
2014 – 2,106 reports
2015 (Jan-mid-August) – 1,342 reports
2. Number of reports projected to be assigned to FAR in the first year:
700
3. % of all CPS reports received that you project will be assigned to FAR:
30%
4. % of those CPS reports *meeting your district's criteria for inclusion in FAR* that you project will be assigned to FAR:
85%
5. Additional comments (optional):
These projections will be reviewed at the 90 day point to determine if additional staff may be needed for FAR cases or if we should consider requesting a change in FAR criteria.

B. Decision-making about staff allocations

Describe how you plan to staff FAR. (Please note: because FAR is a CPS service, the basic training requirements for staff assigned to FAR are the same as those for other CPS staff.) Include a description of your process for the identification of staff who will implement FAR. Are you assigning based on specific criteria, asking for volunteers, etc.? JCDSS will be asking current child welfare workers to volunteer to be a part of the new FAR team. All volunteers for the FAR team must have already gone through CORE and CPSRT. If needed, interviews will be held with the identified FAR volunteers, to determine those best fit for the team. The FAR team will initially consist of 6 caseworkers, one senior caseworker, and one supervisor. A 7th caseworker will be selected to be fully trained in the model in case the volume of reports necessitates the addition of another worker.

C. Staff allocations projected for the first year

Field experience has demonstrated that FAR is implemented most easily and most effectively when staff assigned to FAR are responsible for FAR cases only and do not have mixed caseloads. Therefore, OCFS will not approve applications with a plan to implement FAR in which individual caseworkers will be assigned to routinely carry case loads of both FAR and Investigation cases. Supervisory oversight of mixed units should be considered only in small districts with two or fewer CPS units.

1. Number of units currently (pre-FAR) providing child protective services:

Four

2. Number of caseworkers and supervisors currently (pre-FAR) assigned to CPS:

CPS caseworkers- 24

CPS supervisors and senior caseworkers who supervise- 8

3. Number of units to be assigned to FAR

Designate the number of units that will be responsible for FAR cases only, and the number of any units that will have mixed caseloads (if applicable):

Number of FAR units: 1

Number of mixed caseload units (if applicable): 0

4. Supervisors to be assigned to FAR

Designate the number of supervisors and senior caseworkers who supervise who will be responsible for:

FAR cases only: 2

Mixed caseload units (if applicable): 0

Describe the experience and qualifications of anticipated FAR supervisory staff:

The supervisor and senior caseworker who will directly supervise the FAR workers have an average of 23 years of experience in child welfare services at JCDSS. They have worked in CPS as well as Foster Care/Preventive services.

5. Caseworkers to be assigned to FAR

Designate the number of caseworkers who will have FAR caseloads:
6-7

Describe the experience and qualifications of anticipated FAR caseworker staff:
All anticipated CPS/FAR workers are currently CPS/INV workers and have attended CPSRT. Some of these workers have also worked in our Ongoing Children's Services units (Foster Care/Preventive/Adoption). The qualifications for these workers will be that they truly believe in the principles of FAR and demonstrate good family engagement skills. They must be able to think outside of investigative allegations and let the families direct their own goals. They must have knowledge of the available community programs and how to access these resources.

6. Describe other staff resources to be dedicated to FAR (if applicable):

The Director of Services and Grade A Supervisor will be involved in establishing the CPS/FAR unit. A CPS Grade B Supervisor will directly supervise the CPS/FAR senior caseworker and 4 FAR workers. The FAR senior caseworker will directly supervise 2-3 FAR workers. CPS community service workers (support staff) will be available to the FAR unit as needed.

7. Include additional information about units and/or workers to be assigned, including **location** information if implementation will not be countywide (if applicable):

N/A

D. Projected Start Date for FAR

It is anticipated that the start date for FAR will be approximately one month after FAR workers and other applicable staff have been trained in the FAR approach. It is anticipated that this will occur no later than the first quarter of 2016.

E. Phase-in for the Workforce

Describe your plans for phasing in your FAR workforce (if applicable):

Trained FAR workers will begin receiving FAR reports as soon as the launch date has been initiated. They will complete any CPS investigations on their workload and in a maximum of 59 days will have a dedicated FAR workload.

F. Future Plans (After the First Year)

Describe any additional plans you may have regarding the future size of the FAR program and staffing patterns to accommodate the FAR program after the first year (if applicable):

In the interest of maintaining the program, additional CPS caseworkers will be fully trained in FAR. This will allow for trained staff to transition promptly into the FAR unit if a vacancy arises or the program numbers grow and additional workers are needed in the FAR program.

IV. Plans for Service Provision

Describe:

- the types of services and supports you plan to provide to families in FAR.
- the procedures you will use in offering these services, including:
 - your strategies to apply the principle of actively engaging and empowering families in an ongoing process of assessing their strengths and needs, assessing child safety, and decision-making; and
 - how you plan to link families with needed services and goods through relationships with preventive services staff, TANF staff, and community service providers, including any plans to contract for such services.

From the very first contact with the family and throughout the duration of the case, the FAR worker will assess families' strengths, needs, and supports by utilizing the Family Led Assessment Guide (FLAG). This will help to direct the FAR worker and families to create goals that the family has identified as their own personal areas of concern in addressing safety issues. Families in FAR will be provided with advocacy and linkage to community resources that they can access without opening a Preventive Services case. JCDSS has the unique opportunity to have a Behavioral Health Specialist(BHS) co-located in the CPS unit. The BHS can provide assistance to FAR workers and the families in identifying appropriate resources within the community. The BHS can provide mental health and substance abuse assessments in the home, short-term family/individual counseling, and other parenting instruction/services as needed. FAR workers and supervisory staff will be well versed in community resources available in order to empower the families by helping them to facilitate the attainment of these services. The FAR workers will assist the family in identifying any existing supports and together they will make referrals and linkages to services within the department and community. The emphasis will be on assistance rather than investigation.

V. Community and Other Resources

The success of every FAR Program is dependent upon the creation of vibrant and cooperative partnerships with services and programs in the community.

- A. Identification of stakeholders** – List the stakeholders for FAR that you have identified in your district and in your community:

Key stakeholders in Jefferson County are: Family Court, the schools and Head Start programs, hospitals and pediatricians, law enforcement agencies, Voluntary Child Welfare Agencies, Fort Drum, Behavioral Health Agencies and the Mental Health Association, Public Assistance Programs, the Victims Assistance Center, and the Jefferson County Legislature. Additional community stakeholders include the Community Action Planning Council, Advocacy and Independent Living programs, The Urban Mission, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Jefferson County, and the YMCA.

- B. Community outreach** – Describe how your district has reached out to and coordinated with community stakeholders (or plans to do so) in the planning of FAR:

Voluntary agencies and internal JCDSS staff have been advised of the principles of FAR and our plans to implement FAR locally. The County Administrator has been advised of our FAR application. We plan to hold a meeting with the Jefferson County Family Court judges and Attorneys for Children. Presentations will be provided to area schools and voluntary agencies. Letters will be sent to local mandated reporters explaining FAR and inviting them to meet face to face or via phone conference to answer any questions they may have. An article will be placed in our agency's quarterly newsletter outlining the principles of FAR. The newsletter will be distributed throughout the community. Information regarding FAR will be placed on the Jefferson County website as well.

C. Community resources that may be used to assist families in FAR. Specify:

- Government agencies or resources:

Jefferson County Family Court, The Victims Assistance Center of Jefferson County, Jefferson County Mental Health Association and Single Point of Access (SPOA) Committee, Jefferson County Temporary Assistance Programs, Jefferson County Youth Bureau, Jefferson Community College, and Jefferson County Public Health/Early Intervention Services.

- Non-government agencies or resources:

Behavioral Health Agencies, Voluntary Child Welfare Agencies, The Urban Mission, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Jefferson County, YMCA, Community Action Planning Council, Mediation services, centers for Independent Living, the Watertown Housing Authority/Opportunities Housing Assistance Program, local food pantries, the Prenatal/Perinatal Council, Aids Community Resources, and the Behavioral Health Specialist co-located in CPS.

D. Describe how you will use community resources to **reduce government involvement (including that of child welfare services) in the lives of families while maintaining child safety and preserving families:**

A goal for implementing FAR in Jefferson County is to reduce the number of Preventive Services cases being opened from Child Protective Services and the length of time they remain open. Families working with FAR will be linked to available community resources without having to open a Preventive Services case. Families working with FAR will gain the skills necessary to identify and act on their own needs and to access community resources and supports. These skills will enable them to address their own future needs without involving Child Protective Services.

E. Local District Funding for Goods and Services

A key component of FAR is the provision over the short term of needed goods and services, including wrap-around services, to families and children. While OCFS has had FAR flex funds (with no local share) available to districts that previously applied to participate in FAR, there is no current plan for the provision of State-only FAR flex funds going forward. Describe your plans for funding such services and your policy for the use

of those funds. Provide an affirmation that, when necessary, you plan to fund these services for FAR families with a local share of the costs. (Note: Local share is to be claimed through the use of protective funding.)

Jefferson County is committed to helping families obtain whatever goods and services they need to keep children safe and improve family functioning. There will be occasions where utilizing protective funds to support FAR families will be necessary and appropriate. Jefferson County understands and is committed to funding the local share of such expenditures.

VI. Maintaining Safety / Assessing and Responding to Risk

A. Intake – The initiation of a safety assessment within 24 hours is a FAR requirement. Describe the procedures and processes you will follow to initiate the assessment of the safety of children in FAR cases, including how you will or will not screen and assess SCR reports for FAR inclusion during on-call hours:

Child safety will always be the over-riding factor in any situation be it CPS/INV or CPS/FAR. Safety assessments will be consistent with current practice and will be established within the initial 24 hour period after receiving a report as well as continuously throughout the life of the case. Once a report has been received from the SCR, the source of the report will be contacted (if known) and a review of CPS history will be conducted. Once a case is assigned to a FAR worker they will call the family and immediately begin to gather information regarding safety of the children and any possible ideas and/or solutions to address any issues. Although the FAR worker will not go out to the house unannounced, if at all possible, they will try to schedule to meet with the family as soon as possible. CPS reports received on call may later be screened into FAR however, there will not be a designated FAR on-call worker. On-call reports will be handled in the same manner as CPS investigations until they are screened for FAR eligibility.

B. Assessment -- The completion of an initial safety assessment within seven days is a FAR requirement. FAR staff must also complete an assessment of risk and an assessment of family strengths and needs. OCFS requires that districts use the Family Led Assessment Guide (FLAG) for these comprehensive assessments and that a completed FLAG be maintained in the case record.

- Describe the procedures and processes you will follow to protect the safety of children and engage families in fully assessing safety, risk, strengths and needs.
- Include a statement in which you affirm that you will make a report to the Statewide Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment (child abuse hotline) if, at any time after a CPS report has been tracked to FAR, there is reason to suspect that a child is in immediate or impending danger of serious harm or the family refuses to cooperate in addressing family problems and there is evidence of maltreatment.

Child safety continues to be the primary goal of CPS. This will be explained to FAR families in a non-threatening, non-accusatory way. Families will have the option of FAR or traditional CPS response. Throughout the life of a FAR case child safety will be continually assessed. The 24 hour safety assessment will be completed and a determination made by day 7 whether or not to keep a case FAR based upon the information learned to date. The FAR worker will complete a 7 day safety assessment to ensure that any identified safety needs have been adequately addressed. Utilizing the FLAG, families will lead the process in identifying their strengths and needs and the appropriate solutions, resources, and services that they feel will best meet their needs and support them in keeping their children safe.

Jefferson County DSS affirms that we will make a report to the Statewide Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment if, at any time after a CPS report has been tracked FAR, there is reason to suspect that a child is in immediate or impending danger of serious harm or the family refuses to cooperate in addressing family problems and there is evidence of maltreatment.

- C. Service provision** – Describe how the FAR Program will enhance your ability to protect children, maintain their safety, reduce risk, and preserve families:

Implementing FAR in cases of low to medium risk will enhance the district’s ability to protect children and reduce future risk by allowing caseworkers to use a family engagement, strength-based approach to gain the trust and cooperation of families in order to develop a plan to keep children safe. Knowing there will not be a “substantiated” report with an identified “perpetrator” should help to foster a more productive relationship that will enhance child safety and minimize future risk. It is anticipated that if a family recognizes that the caseworker’s goal is to help them, and to not prove allegations, they will be more willing to be honest about their needs, family dynamics, and ideas/solutions for addressing any concerns.

- D. Domestic violence cases** – Describe the protocol that you have developed to maintain the safety of child(ren) and the non-offending caretaker in FAR cases with suspected or confirmed domestic violence:

Reports with allegations of domestic violence with an arrest will be screened out of FAR. However, if domestic violence is discovered while working with a family in FAR, in the absence of an arrest, the non-offending parent and children will be linked to the Victims Assistance Center where they can obtain legal advocacy and access to the shelter if needed.

VII. Training

District staff and any non-district staff contracted to provide FAR assessment and services must participate in the FAR training and coaching programs, as designed by OCFS.

- A.** Describe training that has already been provided or is planned for FAR staff:

Neighboring FAR counties has met with Jefferson County CPS staff to provide an overview of the components of FAR. The Regional office/OCFS have offered to assist in the process in whatever way needed. All caseworkers and supervisors, including contract agency staff, will attend FAR 101. The Supervisor, Senior Caseworker, and Caseworkers identified for the initial FAR team will attend the Solution Focused Family Engagement Training, FAR CONNECTIONS computer training, and the Safety and Risk training. The FAR Supervisor and Senior Caseworker will also attend the FAR Supervisor training. The identified FAR team will participate in any coaching days offered.

- B.** Describe any cross training, orientation, or preparation that has already been provided or is planned for FAR staff, CPS investigative staff, any other child welfare staff, and/or other district staff:

CPS staff met with Oswego County and Madison County to discuss their FAR programs. Several meetings have been held with CPS supervisory staff to discuss the FAR process. Services staff were informed of the FAR initiative at a full staff meeting and will be kept apprised of progress at future staff meetings.

- C.** Describe FAR training/orientation that has already been provided or is planned for non-district organizations or entities:

We plan to hold a meeting with the Jefferson County Family Court judges and Attorneys for Children. Presentations will be provided to area schools and voluntary agencies. Letters will be sent to local mandated reporters explaining FAR and inviting them to meet face to face or via phone conference to answer any questions they may have.

VIII. Monitoring and Quality Assurance

Each district must agree to participate in any monitoring or quality assurance activities with OCFS and its agents as may be designated by OCFS. Each district must commit to engage in internal quality assurance activities that will enable them to continuously assess their fidelity to the FAR practice model and the efficacy of their FAR program, and adjust procedures and practices as necessary.

- A.** Describe the quality assurance procedures that your district plans to follow in order to self-monitor and assess the success of your provision of services in FAR cases:

FAR cases will utilize weekly group supervision meetings in order to monitor and assess service provision of FAR cases. JCDSS plans to implement a monthly case review process which will include FAR cases. JCDSS also plans to track statistics regarding CPS report recidivism for FAR cases, cases that revert back to CPS investigations, and FAR cases that are opened to Preventive Services. This will allow us to monitor the effectiveness of FAR in Jefferson County.

- B. Describe the procedures your district will use to monitor and assess the provision of services to families in the FAR Program by agencies with which you contract to provide services:

The FAR Supervisor will monitor the provision of services through the use of case conferences, team meetings, and group supervision. The FAR team will utilize the CPS Behavioral Health Specialist to assist in family engagement and service provision. There will be clear documentation in FAR cases of the community-based services families were referred to and utilized.