

Family Assessment Response (FAR) Application

Name of Applicant County: TIOGA

Name and contact information for the person in your agency to contact regarding this application: Gail Barton, Deputy Commissioner – 607-687-8305; 49a018@dfa.state.ny.us

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.

Developing and implementing Family Assessment Response (FAR) in Tioga County will allow child welfare staff and the families we serve flexibility in the process of how the system responds to reports made to the New York State Central Register (SCR).

Between 2007 and 2011, Tioga County experienced an increase in the number of SCR reports investigated each year. Data for Tioga County indicates approximately thirty percent of State Central Register reports are “indicated” and approximately seventy percent are “unfounded.” Allegations of “inadequate guardianship” comprise almost fifty percent of total allegations while reports containing allegations of serious “abuse” account for less than ten percent of all SCR reports. Although the majority of State Central Register reports allege non-serious child maltreatment and the majority of reports are “unfounded,” families coming to the attention of the child welfare system via a SCR report, share a similar “one size fits all” experience during the traditional child protective investigation. In traditional CPS investigations, families are afforded limited opportunity for input and decision-making into the steps that eventually determine their status of guilt or innocence as a “perpetrator” of child maltreatment or abuse.

Serious allegations of child abuse and initial investigations that determine children to be unsafe and in dangerous situations require a traditional CPS response. Other types of allegations and the families who are the subjects of them will be better served using a Family Assessment Response. This approach will still prioritize immediate and on-going child safety while treating families with the respect they deserve as the experts in the raising of their children. Throughout the process, families will be partners in assessing their strengths and needs, in determining the level of support and services that will assure child safety today and in the future.

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

For the district:

Tioga County is anticipating that the percent of families re-reported to the SCR will decrease because families will engage with FAR staff up front to identify the support and services needed to keep children safe.

Tioga County will have flexibility in allocating child welfare staff resources where and how it makes the most sense.

Tioga County staff will acquire additional skills in the areas of family engagement, family assessment, and solution-focused casework practice. The focus will be on staff understanding the underlying conditions and factors that could jeopardize child safety as well as partnering with families to understand the areas of family functioning that need to be strengthened. In addition, FAR staff will be working with families in a non-threatening way that is more in line with the level and type of maltreatment. FAR workers will appreciate having an alternative approach to use with families where they do not need the “authority” that often accompanies a traditional CPS investigation.

Implementing FAR will result in Child Protection staff being viewed more positively by families and community stakeholders.

For the families:

Utilizing FAR will enable families in low-to-moderate risk cases to maintain their children safely in their own homes.

Families will benefit from having their values and cultural backgrounds honored and respected by DSS FAR staff.

Families will benefit from knowing they have a choice in the type of response they receive from child protective services and from knowing if they elect FAR that the process will be transparent. Families will have a say in what FAR staff is doing and who FAR staff is talking to.

Families will benefit from having the opportunity to participate in a family centered, family-led process that welcomes and respects their input and ideas. Instead of being told what is wrong with them and what they need to do to “fix it,” families will be approached in a non-adversarial manner and empowered to describe their strengths and what they believe they need to assure child safety.

Families will have the opportunity for a positive and helpful experience from their involvement with the district.

Families will avoid the stigma of having an “indicated” or “unfounded” case.

Families will become comfortable in asking for help before a child is at risk of harm.

Families will benefit from identifying and utilizing informal family supports that can continue once FAR staff is no longer involved.

The changes that families make will be incorporated into their lives so they are able to keep their children safe in the future and not be re-reported.

For the community:

Community stakeholders often think child protective services either does “too much” or “too little”. Implementing FAR will afford community stakeholders the opportunity to learn about the benefits of using FAR in low- to- moderate risk situations, as well as the opportunity to be assured that in high- risk situations likely to involve court action, removals, and/or criminal charges, child protective services will continue to act to make decisions that protect children.

Implementing FAR will offer an opportunity to increase the level of interaction and trust between community agencies, school districts, and social services, since there will be more openness and inclusion in the process.

There will be an opportunity for community agencies and members of the community to play a larger role in collaborating with families and FAR staff to provide support and services to families to help them keep their children safe.

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.

Family Engagement- Engagement is an essential condition for further cooperation and participation of families in FAR. Tioga County DSS staff have participated in multiple trainings from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) in the area of family engagement. Child welfare staff vary in their level of proficiency. Family engagement skills have increased as child welfare practice has moved away from being a deficit- based practice model. This is reflected in casework practice, case plans, case record documentation, and supervisory case conference feedback. Staff expressing a strong interest in participating in FAR are skilled in family engagement. In 2005, Tioga County implemented Family Team Meetings (FTM’s). OCFS provided excellent training and on-going support for this initiative. Despite excellent training and support from OCFS, FTM’s have had inconsistent participation from child welfare staff and therefore, limited success. The majority of caseworkers did not utilize FTM’s. Staff and families who did participate in the process, found it very beneficial. Due to county budget cuts and under-utilization, the contract for FTM’s is being discontinued December 31, 2012.

Assessing safety and risk- Assessing safety and risk is the primary function of child protective services and will continue to be the primary function of FAR staff. Tioga County has very good timeliness rates for 7 day safety assessments and 60 day SCR determinations. In April 2009, staff from Tioga DSS and OCFS Syracuse regional office reviewed 20 CPS investigations. Regarding the assessment of safety-the review found that sufficient information was gathered at the 24 hour and 7 day timeframes, that caseworkers were proactive and responsive to concerns, and that additional safety factors were identified when not in the original allegations. Opportunities for improvement included the need to interview children in regards to allegations and to make sure the safety assessment form is consistent with case circumstances. Regarding the assessment of risk-when sufficient information was gathered to assess risk, RAP ratings were agreed with and appropriate services were offered. Opportunities for improvement included making casework activity less allegation focused and gathering sufficient information to adequately assess risk and service needs. Child welfare supervisors and staff report casework practice improvement in these areas.

Family –led strengths and needs assessment- This assessment will allow the opportunity for caseworkers to engage the caretakers in a process where they can offer their perception of child safety, including what they need to achieve it and maintain it. Tioga County casework practice reflects variation in the degree of family inclusion in an assessment of the family's strengths and needs. Casework practice, especially the completion and review of the Family Assessment and Service Plans (FASP), reflects increased participation by families in assessing their strengths and needs. However, most case plans are written by casework staff and shared with families upon completion rather than seeking the family's input and assessment prior to writing the plan. Families are encouraged to comment on the content of the plans and to recommend suggested changes.

Solution-focused practice-Tioga County child welfare staff have been very well trained in the use of solution focused practice. OCFS recently provided on-site training for all child welfare staff. This was a refresher for staff that have attended OCFS Common Core. Staff are committed to using solution-focused practice. Examples of the use of solution-focused practice are increasing in case documentation.

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

Staff who have participated in the internal FAR Exploratory Committee have been repeatedly exposed to FAR principles. Tioga County DSS staff will require additional training on the principles of FAR and how FAR is different from traditional investigation. FAR staff will need training and support in the implementation of the FLAG. FAR staff will need training and support in understanding that utilizing a FAR approach is not a process to be used to get in and out and be done with a case. Training and support will be needed to understand and appreciate the family's assessment of what will help them to be able to keep their child(ren) safe and to minimize future risk. FAR requires developing closer collaborations with service providers and community resources. Child welfare staff

that have experience in traditional investigations and who understand, practice, and are committed to family engagement, family-led assessment, and solution-focused practice, will staff the FAR Unit. Further training and support of FAR staff in these areas will be beneficial.

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):
Reports containing the following allegations will not be assigned to FAR:

- fatality
- child listed as abused
- child has been taken into protective custody by law enforcement or a protective hold has been placed on a child by a medical facility
- cross county reports from non-FAR counties
- court ordered investigations (1034's)
- subsequent reports on open CPS traditional investigations
- reports on open mandated preventive or foster care cases
- reports related to the use, manufacture, or sale of illegal substances
- reports alleging domestic violence
- reports alleging excessive corporal punishment where a child is less than 12
- reports alleging lacerations, bruises, welts, where a child is less than 12

- reports alleging parent's drug/alcohol use where a child is less than 12
- reports indicating there may be immediate safety concerns
- reports where a person legally responsible has 2 or more indicated reports in the past 24 months, unless there is reason to believe utilizing FAR might produce a different outcome for the family
- reports with unknown demographics
- on-call reports (a report may be screened to FAR the next day, when appropriate)

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

Reports containing the following allegations will be given priority for FAR assignment:

- inadequate guardianship
- lack of supervision
- educational neglect
- lack of medical care
- inadequate food, clothing, shelter
- emotional neglect
- child's drug/alcohol misuse
- cross county reports from FAR counties where criteria for FAR is similar
- excessive corporal punishment where a child is at least 12 years old
- lacerations/bruises/welts where a child is at least 12 years old
- parent's drug/alcohol use where a child is at least 12 years old
- other (alleged sex offender in the home)

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

A FAR Process Checklist has been developed by the FAR Supervisor. Reports will be screened into FAR according to the types of allegations eligible for FAR consideration. A screening tool has been developed and "tested" since January 1, 2012. The screening tool has been modified and updated several times. The FAR Supervisor will screen and assign all SCR reports to FAR or traditional investigation. If/when there is a need for discussion about a report's appropriateness for either FAR or traditional investigation, a discussion will take place among the three CPS Supervisors. If the CPS Supervisors do not agree about report assignment, then the Deputy Commissioner will be consulted and a decision made about report assignment.

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):

- In 2011, Tioga County had **1036 CPS reports**. After subtracting out Merged, Secondary, and Additional Information/Duplicate reports, there were **684** determined reports. Of the **684** determined reports, **632 (92.4%)** reports were determined as *Maltreatment*, and **52 (7.6%)** were determined as *Abused*.

2. Number of reports projected to be assigned to FAR in the first year:

- 190

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 numbers will be reviewed at the 90 day mark to determine if additional staff may be needed, or to determine if we need to consider requesting a change to our FAR criteria. Tioga Plans to train all CPS and on-call staff in FAR in the event there is FAR staff turnover or there are more reports assigned to the FAR track than initially planned for.

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.?

Tioga County Department of Social Services asked current child welfare workers to volunteer to be part of the FAR Team. Those who expressed an interest in FAR were asked to provide a short, written description as to why they wanted to work in the FAR Unit. Tioga County DSS had more caseworkers interested in FAR than projected positions on the FAR team. The volunteers are staff who have consistently expressed interest in FAR and have participated on the FAR Exploratory Committee. The FAR Exploratory Committee is a mixture of CPS and Preventive Services caseworkers, with various levels of experience. All caseworkers selected for FAR have already completed Common CORE and CPS Response training, as well as other advanced CPS trainings. The staff selected for FAR by the Services Supervisors and Deputy Commissioner have

demonstrated skills in family engagement, solution-focused practice, strengths and needs assessment, and the assessment of safety and risk. FAR workers must be good representatives of the Agency in the community.

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:

a. Three units, including one unit that specializes in abuse cases

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

a. CPS caseworkers: 7 (this includes 3 Senior caseworkers)

b. CPS supervisors and senior caseworkers who supervise CPS:
3 Grade B Supervisors

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): none

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: 1 Supervisor

Mixed caseload units (if applicable): none

Describe the experience and qualifications of anticipated FAR supervisory staff:

The proposed FAR supervisor is a current CPS/Preventive Grade B Supervisor, who has experience as a CPS caseworker and a Preventive caseworker. The FAR Supervisor

believes in the philosophy of FAR, is comfortable with the team approach, will encourage FAR caseworkers in family-led solution based practice, and is safety- focused.

5. Caseworkers to be assigned to FAR

Designate the number of caseworkers who will have FAR caseloads:

There will be 1 Senior Caseworker and 2 Caseworkers who will have caseloads. The Grade B Supervisor will have a FAR caseload of up to five cases, as needed. Caseload sizes will be monitored weekly.

Describe the experience and qualifications of anticipated FAR caseworker staff:

The anticipated FAR Team members all believe in the principals of FAR, demonstrate good family engagement skills; are safety focused; able to think outside of traditional investigative practice; have good time management skills, including excellent timeliness for progress notes, safety assessments and determinations; have strong initiative; and knowledge and understanding of community supports and resources. The anticipated FAR casework staff have the following experience and qualifications: Senior Caseworker-hired 9/20/04, experience in CPS, Preventive, PINS Diversion, Adult Services; Caseworker-hired 7/26/10, experience in CPS, Preventive, Mental Health, Transitional Living Services; Caseworker-hired 1/18/11, experience in CPS, previous casework and supervisory experience for a voluntary child care agency.

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

All CPS and on-staff staff will be trained in FAR. This will allow for future consideration of FAR screening by on-call staff.

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

Not applicable

D. Projected Start Date for FAR

April 1, 2013

E. Phase-in for the Workforce-

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

Once the FAR plan is approved, the following phase-in activities will occur:

- 1). FAR staff will be identified.

- 2). Tioga DSS will confer with OCFS and the Regional office to determine when FAR staff and back-up FAR Supervisors will be trained. Trainings will be scheduled and completed.
- 3). The FAR staff will begin meeting every two weeks.
- 4). Thirty-Sixty days before FAR start-up, child welfare caseworkers who will be assigned to FAR will not be assigned any new SCR reports that do not meet the FAR screening criteria. This will allow time for staff who will be assigned as FAR workers to complete, close, or transfer any traditional SCR investigations. Any CPS/Preventive staff who are going to be assigned to FAR will complete, close, or transfer any preventive cases to non-FAR casework staff.
- 5). Thirty-Sixty days before FAR start-up, the FAR Supervisor will begin screening and assigning all SCR reports. Currently three CPS Supervisors screen and assign all reports.

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):

There are no current plans to expand FAR beyond one unit. Depending upon the volume of FAR referrals, there may be a need to re-consider FAR staffing.

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 first contact with a family, FAR workers will utilize family engagement skills to develop a respectful relationship with the family. Throughout the duration of the FAR case, enhancing child safety by supporting and helping the family will be the practice framework within which a FAR worker operates. The family and the FAR worker will assess family strengths, needs, and supports by utilizing the Family Led Assessment Guide (FLAG). This assessment will help direct the FAR worker and family in identifying goals and service needs, focusing on goals and services that support and promote child safety, well-being, and improved family functioning.

Empowering the family to identify and engage their own informal support system will be of primary importance. FAR staff will reach out to engage the family's informal supports, when appropriate, and if requested by the family to do so.

FAR families will be provided with a list of community supports and services that can address their needs. The FAR worker will provide whatever assistance is needed to link FAR families to services, including referring the family to the service(s). The services and supports include, but are not limited to, the service providers identified as FAR stakeholders: mental health, drug and alcohol, parenting education, domestic violence, public health, Early Intervention, WIC, Head Start, and public transportation. It is anticipated that a primary referral source for eligible FAR families will be Tioga DSS Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and Transitional Supports. Child welfare and TANF staff are located in the same building and have a close working relationship.

With the guidance and support of the FAR worker, it is anticipated that the family will express sufficient confidence in their knowledge and skills to be able to access community services on their own after the FAR case is closed.

On-going preventive services will be offered to the family if a determination is made by the family and the FAR worker that additional casework services are needed and the family is eligible. FAR and Preventive staff are co-located in the same area so referring a FAR case for preventive services can easily occur. There will be a formal written process for referrals from FAR to Preventive.

DSS contracts for parenting education services for families in receipt of preventive services, however any family may access parenting education and support services, including Family Resource Centers, through Cornell Co-operative Extension.

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:

- Tioga County School Districts-FAR presentations have been done to two of the districts.
- Tioga County Family Court
- Tioga DSS Commissioner's Advisory Council-FAR presentations have been done to the Council
- Law Enforcement Agencies
- DSS Temporary Assistance and Transitional Supports
- County Attorney's Office

- Other County Departments, including Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol, Probation, Youth Bureau, Public Health
- A New Hope Center-Domestic Violence Service Provider
- Voluntary Child Welfare Agencies
- Tioga Opportunities Incorporated, including Head Start and WIC
- Agencies that contract or collaborate with DSS-Catholic Charities, Rural Ministry, Open Door Mission
- Major providers of medical services-Guthrie, Lourdes, United Health Services
- Franciska Racker Center –serving adults and children with disabilities
- Healthy Families Parents and Children Together (PACT)
- Cornell Cooperative Extension
- Tioga County Legislature
- Informal Supports, such as faith-based community members

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:

Several FAR presentations to stakeholders have already been done. Tioga County DSS has developed a FAR Power Point presentation and has access to the OCFS Power Point presentation. Representatives from many of the agencies referenced in (V) (A) are members of the Commissioner’s Advisory Council and have viewed the FAR Power Point. The Council members asked many questions and were supportive of FAR implementation in Tioga County. Internal DSS staff have been advised of the principles of FAR. The following activities for stakeholders are planned for the first six months 2013:

- Develop and distribute a FAR brochure to FAR stakeholders
- Offer two presentations at DSS to FAR stakeholders
- Offer on-site FAR presentations to stakeholders who cannot attend the DSS presentations

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

• **Government agencies or resources:**

TCDSS will be able to provide temporary and emergency assistance to families in FAR through Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and Transitional Supports. There is a county-wide public transportation system. Other governmental agencies providing assistance to FAR families will include: counseling, treatment, medication management, and Single Point of Accessibility (SPOA) through Tioga County Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol Services; Early Intervention screening, services, and well child visits through Tioga County Department of Public Health; New York State Office of People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD); and the New York State Department of Labor.

- **Non-government agencies or resources:**

There are a number of non-government agencies and resources in the county. Tioga Opportunities, Inc., provides a variety of resources to the community that can be accessed by FAR families. These include WIC, housing services, family planning, and Headstart. Faith-based agencies such as Tioga County Rural Ministry, Samaritan Counseling, Catholic Charities, and the Open Door Mission, offer assistance with meeting basic needs. Cornell Cooperative Extension offers family education and parenting classes and family resource centers in the two most heavily populated areas of the county. A New Hope Center, the domestic violence agency, offers services to victims and perpetrators. ACCORD, the dispute resolution center, offers mediation services. There are food pantries located throughout the county.

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:

Increasing families' knowledge and ability to access community supports, services, and resources will improve self-sufficiency and self-advocacy to meet challenges and needs. FAR workers will empower families to identify and utilize both formal and informal resources that will assist them in keeping their children safe and their family intact. FAR workers will support families in developing proactive plans to address the concerns that led to FAR involvement, as well as other issues identified through the ongoing FAR assessment and response. FAR families will be encouraged to reach out to FAR staff after formal DSS involvement has ended if they have a question or need additional information about how to access community agencies.

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.)

Tioga County's policy is one of a commitment to help families obtain whatever goods and services they need to keep children safe and to improve family functioning. Tioga County plans to utilize TANF and other Transitional Supports for eligible families, whenever possible. Tioga County will also support families in seeking assistance from community agencies, focusing on long-term planning and self-sufficiency. There will be occasions where utilizing protective funds to support FAR families will be necessary and

appropriate. Tioga 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:

Tioga does not have an immediate plan to screen on-call reports for FAR, but plans to have all on-call caseworkers trained in FAR with the hope of eventually being able to screen and assess SCR reports for FAR inclusion during on-call hours. When appropriate, SCR reports received on-call may later be screened into FAR.

Tioga County understands that the initiation of a safety assessment within 24 hours is a FAR requirement. The initial safety assessment in a FAR tracked report will be conducted in a similar manner as the safety assessment in a traditional CPS report. Within 24 hours of receiving a report, the FAR worker will assess child safety in one of several ways: face to face contact or a telephone contact with the subjects and/or other persons named in the report or other persons in a position to provide information about whether any child may be in immediate danger of serious harm. Once a report is tracked to FAR, an immediate attempt will be made to contact the source of the report to determine the current whereabouts of the children and any **immediate** safety concerns. Additional information may be gathered from the source related to family strengths, and sources of family support. If the source cannot be reached, or if the source cannot address current child safety, the FAR worker will attempt to contact the family. If the FAR worker is successful in contacting the family the FAR worker will begin to gather information regarding the safety of the children. The FAR worker will request to make a home visit as soon as possible.

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. Explaining this to FAR families will be done 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 continually be assessed. The 24 hour safety assessment will be completed and a determination made by day 7 whether or not to keep a case in 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, both formal and informal, that they feel will best meet their needs and support them in keeping their children safe. A FAR case will remain open up to 60 days with a possible extension for an additional 30 days. Eligible families who request additional assistance may continue to be served via an open preventive services case.

Tioga 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 to FAR, there is reason to suspect that a child is in immediate or impending danger of serious harm or a family refuses to cooperate in addressing family problems and there is evidence of maltreatment.

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

Traditional CPS investigations are by nature intrusive and adversarial. This creates an atmosphere of distrust of “the system” and anger and fear towards the caseworker. Such emotions are not conducive to caretakers being open and honest about their family stressors and the needs that may impact their ability to keep kids safe. 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 to develop a plan to keep kids 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, minimize future risk, and allow families to remain intact. Using the FLAG, caseworkers will assist families in articulating their areas of concern and work with them in identifying how best to address them. Families will be empowered and assisted in making connections with informal and formal support systems that can help them achieve the goals of child safety and risk reduction.

C. 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 DV do not meet the Tioga FAR criteria and will not be assigned to the FAR track. If domestic violence is suspected or confirmed in a FAR case

during the first 7 days, the case will be re-assigned to traditional investigation. If domestic violence is suspected or confirmed in a FAR case after day 7, a new SCR report will be made and the report assigned for traditional investigation.

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:

- 2011-2012-Staff participated in Solution-Focused Practice Training and Family Engagement Training provided by OCFS Syracuse regional Office staff
- DSS Deputy Commissioner, FAR staff, Services supervisory staff, and other staff as permitted by time and caseloads, are anxious to begin formal FAR training and coaching programs as appropriate and available

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:

- 6/16/11-AHA webinar on Solution Focused Planning for CPS Supervisors
- 12/11/11-OCFS FAR presentation to all Services staff
- 10/4/-10/5/11-Deputy Commissioner attended FAR Symposium in Albany
- 11/8-11/11/11-CPS Supervisor attended American Humane Association National Conference in Chicago
- 2011 and 2012-Meetings of DSS FAR Exploratory Committee; monthly FAR updates to all Services staff at monthly Services meetings;
- 2011 and 2012-Monthly participation in FAR conference calls; distribution of meeting minutes to staff interested in FAR
- 2011 and 2012-On-site visits to Chemung, Tompkins (multiple), and Madison counties; Madison County FAR staff visited Tioga and met with all Services staff
- FAR presentations to be offered to other district staff upon plan approval

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

- 2012-On site meetings were held with mandated reporters from two school districts
- 2012-Power point presentation was given to the Commissioner's Advisory Council
- 2013-FAR presentations will be offered to all stakeholders upon plan approval

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:

Upon implementation, the Deputy Commissioner will meet weekly with the FAR Supervisor for the first three months to review caseloads and to discuss FAR successes and challenges. The Deputy Commissioner will meet with all FAR staff monthly during the first six months of implementation to assess staff satisfaction and challenges. After the first six months, the Deputy Commissioner will continue to meet monthly with the FAR Supervisor. The Deputy Commissioner will randomly attend group supervision conferences during the first six months of implementation. The Deputy Commissioner, FAR Supervisor, and FAR staff plan to utilize the New York Family Assessment Response Practice Reflection Tool to self-assess the use and incorporation of New York's Family Assessment practice principals and protocols in individual cases and overall practice. A former CPS Supervisor who now supervises Adult Protective Services and continues to serve as a supervisory resource for on-call staff, will be trained in FAR. This Supervisor, the Deputy Commissioner, the Staff Development Coordinator, the FAR Supervisor, and designated FAR staff, will randomly review FAR cases each quarter, utilizing OCFS FAR Quality Assurance tools.

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:

Tioga County DSS contract agencies are responsible for meeting and reporting on identified goals and measurements annually. The FAR Supervisor will monitor the provision of services through the use of case conferences, team meetings, and group supervision. The FAR Supervisor and FAR staff will need to be educated in the DSS contracts for services that are not child welfare specific in order to be able to monitor and assess the provision of services to FAR families. There will be clear documentation in FAR cases of the community-based services families were referred to and utilized.