



New York State
Office of
Children & Family
Services

OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Second Edition

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STATE OF NEW YORK

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The establishment of the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) in 1998 afforded New Yorkers an opportunity to improve and integrate efforts to address the needs and build on the strengths of the State's children, youth and other vulnerable populations. The creation of the Office responded to a growing recognition of the complexity and interrelatedness of today's problems and solutions. All children, youth and adults require the support of their families and communities. The ability to access supports without regard for funding sources, service capacities, or having to reconcile differing approaches to services among providers is fundamental to securing the safety and well being of all State residents.

Governor George E. Pataki and John A. Johnson, Commissioner of the new Office, endorsed the mission statement developed by a cross section of its staff.

The Office of Children and Family Services serves New York's public by promoting the well being and safety of our children, families and communities. We will achieve results by setting and enforcing policies, building partnerships, and funding and providing quality services.

This mission statement continues to guide the Office's administration of over \$3 billion in public funds aimed at meeting its multiple service delivery responsibilities. In addition to directly providing services, the Office of Children and Family Services funds and supervises local social services districts, youth bureaus, child care programs and community and voluntary agencies in directly providing or collaborating with other agencies to provide a wide range of developmental, preventive and remedial supports to the State's citizens. To succeed, the Office must focus on developing means of maintaining and strengthening the self-sufficiency of families that are both efficient and effective. An example of this is that today, investment in childcare programs for preschool and school aged children surpasses spending on placement of children in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

The approaching fifth birthday of the Office of Children and Family Services is an appropriate time for the Agency and its many stakeholders to reflect on the Agency's operating principles and services. This second edition of the **Operational Framework** (which, in turn, will be revised as issues arise and warrant) is intended to guide the Office in meeting its four core goals:

- Improved safety and well being for all children, youth, families and communities, including safety from crime and violence;
- Promotion of self-sufficient families and individuals;
- Protection of the State's most vulnerable populations, particularly its children, from violence, neglect, abuse and abandonment; and
- Securing permanency for children and youth in out-of-home care by safely returning them to their parents or a relative, facilitating adoption or providing support for a successful transition to self-sufficiency.

In addition, this updated **Operational Framework** should guide local and state stakeholder discussions regarding service agendas for children, youth, adults and their families for the foreseeable future. An updated **Operational Framework** is an opportunity to develop local strategies consistent with a common set of principles that help make the provision of effective services possible in all communities. Application of common principles across local boundaries supports an efficient shared statewide agenda for providers serving New York's families and communities.

Establishing an Operational Framework (June 1998) articulated the mission and directed the activities of the Office. The *Framework* defined the Office's operating principles, strategies for achieving the Office's agenda and a service continuum depicting the spectrum of services provided, funded and/or supervised by the agency. The new Office of Children and Family Services benefited from the discussions generated in response to the *Framework* and the direction it offered local social services districts, youth bureaus and direct service providers. The document represented an important first step in developing a common vision encompassing new agency's mandates of child welfare, juvenile justice, childcare, youth development, community development and adult services.

During the first four years, the Office made major strides in pursuing its mission by specifying and demanding outcomes for its investments. Over 175,000 children receive subsidized quality day care and after school programs. Progress in implementing preventive interventions has coincided with reductions in the number of foster care placements. The decline in the number of children in juvenile justice facilities reflects, in no small way, the refocus of resources to support youth and their families within their communities. Building on its blueprint to promote youth development, the Office has formed partnerships with statewide organizations, state agencies and other states to promote programs to enhance youth development at the state, local and national levels. A proposed overhaul of the method of funding child welfare services will, when enacted, place a greater emphasis on effective in-home services and on facilitating permanency for children placed in foster care. Investments in integrating county planning activities across human service systems have forged and strengthened partnerships in many counties across the State. Growing attention has been brought to the importance of maintaining placements of Native American children in their tribal communities. And, most recently, a partnership with the judiciary has increased attention statewide to reuniting children with their families or, when that is not possible, facilitating adoption.

Studies indicate that children of welfare recipients entering the workforce require ongoing supports to assist their children to become self-sufficient adults. In New York State and elsewhere, younger children have clearly benefited from the expansion of quality affordable child day care and after school programs under welfare reform. Yet, for some adolescents, in these newly self-sufficient families, reform has brought erosion in the quality of adolescent-parent relationships and a decline of parental monitoring.

By investing in effective programs aimed at adolescent developmental needs and opportunities, we can replicate with adolescents the successes achieved with younger children. The Office will aggressively follow New York State's blueprint for youth development and build upon the early successes of its Advantage After Schools program. Continued focus on helping parents match their workforce participation gains with improved life chances for their children can only increase family stability and, ultimately, enable sustained multigenerational financial self-sufficiency. Clearly, parents comfortable with their children's safety, achievements and prospects are better able to appreciate their own work successes.

To achieve these ends and fulfill its mandates, it is essential for the Office to enhance its ability to develop and maintain effective partnerships. Expertise in meeting the multiple and complex needs of children, youth, adults and families resides across a variety of stakeholders. Collaborative service planning and integration produces coordinated efforts that effectively and comprehensively leverage existing resources to address people's needs. For example, arranging quality childcare to afford growing numbers of children opportunities for developmental gains, achieving safety and stability for children of substance abusing parents, supporting adolescents as they move to independence, and adding foster

parents to the services team encourages them to support parents in resuming care of their children. Other examples include helping visually impaired adults develop skills and seize opportunities for self-sufficiency and helping to safely maintain vulnerable elderly in the homes of their adult children.

SERVICE CONTINUUM

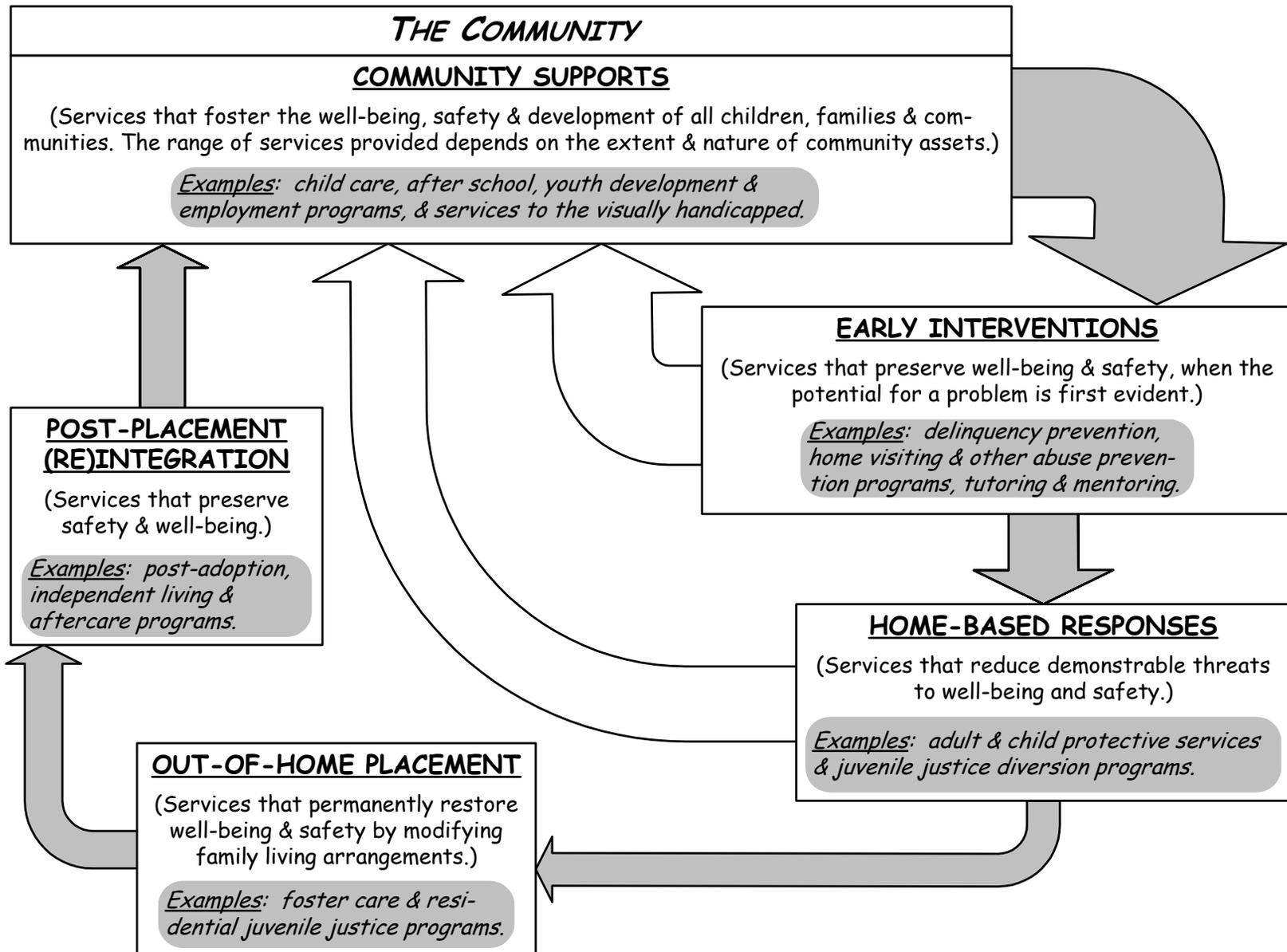
This updated *Operational Framework* further elaborates the original **OCFS Service Continuum**. Since the creation of the Office, Commissioner Johnson has championed a new role that challenges and encourages local providers to take the initiative by preventing, rather than reacting to, family upheavals by intervening early with activities designed to reduce the need for removal of a child, youth or adult from the household. The Office's focus on prevention is why the revised **Service Continuum** has its broadest effects in services meant to support families in their communities. Indeed, even when such broad-based supports fail to prevent problems, early interventions should be available to individuals in the context of their families and families in context of their communities.

The Office of Children and Family Services provides, funds and oversees a wide range of services. One way to understand the interrelation among the totality these services is on a continuum that distinguishes them by the point of service delivery. The chart below, "The Children and Families Service Continuum," delineates some of the key features and gives examples of these services.

In the original **Operational Framework**, the Service Continuum was a straight line. Services were arrayed according to the degree of a community resident's willingness to participate, from self-selected to court-ordered. In the new continuum, the emphasis is different. The ends of the continuum are connected, with the community as the beginning and end of service delivery. The Office increasingly recognized that the provision of effective services to children, youth, adults and families could not be separated from the community. Just as the success of efforts to prevent placement are dependent on the effectiveness of interventions offered prior to placement, successful return from out-of-home placement depends on the supports provided after families are reunified.

In the new continuum diagram, arrow size indicates the relative number in a community moving between the five service categories. Arrow size progressively decreases for each movement away from **Community Supports**. This reflects the reality that almost all of a community's residents benefit from **Community Supports**, while increasingly smaller groups need the progressively more intensive services available through **Early Interventions**, and **Home-based Responses**. However, for a small minority, **Out-of- Home Placement** may be the only available solution and almost all of this group will need some sort of **Post-placement Reintegration** service. It should be noted that the more effectively a community can resolve problems earlier in the continuum, the smaller the population that needs to advance to the next more intensive service.

The Children and Families Service Continuum



Community Supports promote and sustain the well being, safety and healthy development of all children, youth, adults and families. Community supports must be available to all community residents. However, the scope, type and nature of community supports vary widely among communities, reflecting the assets, strengths and needs of their residents. For example, communities with large proportions of preschool children should have more childcare programs than senior citizen communities that need other sorts of programs. For most community residents, these **Community Supports** meet their needs and obviate the need for more intensive services.

Invariably, community supports do not suffice for some community residents and more targeted and intense supports are required. For individuals and families at risk of such problems, the Office supports **Early Interventions**. These programs aim at preserving the well being and safety of community residents, when the potential for a problem first becomes evident. Typical of an early intervention, Healthy Families New York Home Visiting Program engages at-risk expectant or new parents in a program of home visits focused on improving parent child interactions, healthy child development and self sufficiency, building on families' strengths. Similarly, successful education and support of the visually handicapped rely on early identification of visual impairments among individuals who lack sufficient supports to prepare them to achieve self-sufficiency.

For a smaller proportion of a community's individuals and families, these early interventions are not enough. For them, the Office supports and oversees the provision of a third category of services, **Home-based Responses**. These aim to reduce demonstrable threats to the well being and safety of these individuals and families. Vulnerable adults, victims of domestic violence, and families working to keep their children safely at home are among those who benefit from home-based responses. Child welfare protective or preventive services signal the beginning of the permanency planning process which emphasizes the right of children to be raised in safe and permanent homes, preferably with their birth families. Programs that divert youth, who have engaged in antisocial behaviors, from out-of-home placement by treating and supervising them in the community, represent another home-based response.

For an even smaller part of the population, whether because of abuse or neglect or for antisocial behavior, home-based responses are unable to preserve individual and/or community safety. OCFS funds, supervises and provides **Out-of-Home Placement** services for such circumstances. **Out-of-Home Placement** aims at developing a permanent outcome as expeditiously as possible. These outcomes include return home, living with a relative or other resource person, adoption and independent living.

Regardless of outcome, reestablishment of necessary community supports poses significant challenges. Furthermore, **Community Supports** alone often do not suffice to preserve safety and well being or to maintain the permanency of the living arrangement. Thus, **Post-placement Reintegration** interventions such as aftercare, post adoption and independent living services are necessary to promote individual and community safety as well as permanency for those returning from out-of-home placements.

Some programs meet needs at multiple points along the continuum of services. Childcare, for example, may function as a **Community Support** to enable a caretaker to enter the workforce. It is equally well suited as an **Early Intervention** for children requiring special attention. As a **Home-based Response**, it can be a valuable adjunct to other efforts to reduce risk of abuse/neglect. In **Out-of-home Placement** or as a **Post-placement Reintegration** service childcare can help promote healthy development while in fostercare or during the period of reintegration with family and community. Likewise, effective parenting programs may be a valuable component in all five service categories.

OPERATING PRINCIPLES AND STRATEGIES

The same four principles that have guided the Office’s leadership in supporting and providing services remain pivotal. Four years of experience have contributed to refinements and revisions of our understanding of their implications. It has also become apparent that the need for services to be based in communities, while always a valued attribute, needed to be raised to the level of an operating principle. In short, the new list of principles mobilizes the Office’s commitment to promoting services that are developmentally appropriate, family-centered, responsive to local needs, community-based and demonstrated to be effective in achieving desired outcomes

SERVICES SHOULD BE DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE. The first four years of the Office's operations served as a reminder of the importance of the stages of human development in guiding service delivery. The cognitive, emotional, physical and social skills of children, youth and adults is fundamental to their need for and ability to benefit from services. Recent studies in the separate fields of child development and youth development address the value of focusing on competencies rather than deficits. Building on individuals' strengths facilitates the efficacy of all services. It reduces the likelihood they will engage in negative behaviors and increases their understanding and subscription to the goals of provided services.

The creation of the Office of Youth Development within OCFS reflects commitment to this principle and provides the means to promote the developmental approach in service delivery. Continuation of efforts to view competencies as central to service delivery remains a key operating principle for the Office. Throughout the continuum of services, incorporating client competencies in selecting and delivering services to individuals and families is recognized as fundamental to success. When the goal is to safely maintain individuals in their homes, assessment of risk and safety necessarily involves a careful look at deficits. Even here, success can best be achieved by building on individual and family competencies and community strengths to overcome deficits.

SERVICES SHOULD BE FAMILY-CENTERED. Supporting families that foster the healthy development of their members requires serving the family as a whole, as well as individuals within the family. Research conducted on the development of children, from newborns through teens, emphasizes the crucial role of parents in the successful cognitive, emotional, physical and social development of their children. In fact, with the support of their communities, most families meet and exceed the expectations put on them. Strategies for family-centered services require families to participate actively with other stakeholders in identifying the design of community based supports.

The Office remains committed to family-centered services and to the promotion of family-centered models of service delivery. In fact, over the past several years, the Office has sponsored implementation of models to prevent unnecessary out-of-home placement of children by engaging parents and other family members directly in the design and provision of services. Models such as family conferencing, multisystemic therapy and mediation, in combination with a new training curriculum that focuses on developing skills for involving parents in decision making for their children, have proven effective in promoting better outcomes and more timely decisions by families. The Office plans to expand this commitment by more deliberately involving parents in advising the design and development of services to support families.

SERVICES SHOULD BE COMMUNITY-BASED. Communities play a critical role in supporting the growth and development of their children and the self-sufficiency of their adults and families. The involvement of community-based organizations, schools, businesses, childcare providers, health care facilities, faith-based organizations, law enforcement and courts offer supports for children, youth, adults and their families in their neighborhoods. Development of comprehensive, collaborative, integrated, long-term community-based programs that address the full spectrum of child, youth, adult and family needs represent a wise investment of resources.

The Office plans to continue its support to counties and other municipalities that focus on community-based programs. School-community linkages, such as Advantage After School programs, will play a pivotal role in this community-based approach. The diversity of New York State dictates that the Office provides localities flexibility in tailoring programs to meet their unique circumstances. To help make this a reality, the Office is committed to help inform localities about some of their strengths and needs by making timely data available regarding childcare, child welfare, youth development and juvenile justice needs and services.

The Office of Workforce Development is a significant component of the Office of Children and Family Services' support for community based services. Workforce Development is currently working with employers across the State to increase New York's capacity for and access to providing meaningful employment and training opportunities to youth on the road to self-sufficiency.

More generally, OCFS, in meeting its oversight and quality assurance obligations, devotes substantial effort to improving the competency and capacity of the many service providers and leaders on which it depends, including its own workforce. Local worker training, integrated planning initiatives, asset development seminars and better practice dissemination are but a few examples of how the Office materially contributes to a high quality network of services in each community.

SERVICES SHOULD BE LOCALLY RESPONSIVE. The development of effective services and supports for individuals and families requires community involvement in decisions about service priorities, strategies and program interventions. Over the past four years, the Office has developed tools essential to enhancing local capacity. An increase in the Office's regional infrastructure has resulted in an expanded capacity in assisting localities in tailoring local service delivery systems to community needs. Integrated County Planning, a county-based cross-agency planning demonstration, has helped the Office promote local public and private human services partnerships. The joint identification of local needs based on common definitions support program planning and development that addresses needs in a manner compatible with existing community resources and interests. The Office is committed to becoming a regionally centered organization that keeps decision-making as close to the customer as possible.

Such alliances with other agencies maximize both expertise and services. The Office plans to expand its alliances with state and local stakeholders to inform policy and program development. On the local level, expansion of integrated county planning with resulting shared outcomes and principles hold promise for effective service delivery and positive outcomes.

SERVICES SHOULD BE EVIDENCE AND OUTCOME BASED. The human services field has increasingly emphasized the use of outcomes for measuring program success. The move to outcome-based practice has resulted in a new series of questions about which practices most effectively produce

desired outcomes. Too long guided by intuition and anecdote, human service providers and administrators have begun to look for more reliable and valid evidence to inform their service investments. The label "best practice," in and of itself, is no assurance that investments in a program will actually contribute to achieving a desired outcome

The Office's determination to achieve desired outcomes by implementing programs informed by good research requires periodic review of the outcomes sought, scientific program evaluation and systematic communication with practitioners and administrators regarding new evidence-based and promising programs. Promising programs are new and incompletely tested programs and strategies that have potential for filling gaps in current service delivery or that meet emerging service needs where no evidence-based program currently exists.

It is a matter of fact that outcome oriented and evidence-based programs need careful monitoring and diligent efforts at quality assurance to derive previously demonstrated benefits. For this reason, the Office will seek to bring the latest monitoring technology and quality assurance methods to bear to ensure that evidence-based program investments are delivered in a manner likely to achieved the promised outcomes.

Effective services not only need programs aimed at the achievement of outcomes using the most effective methods, but the ability to make accurate consistent decisions all along the service continuum. Automation of the child welfare, juvenile justice and childcare systems has made available substantial information that can be used to inform planning, policy, program development and case practice. The Office is committed to enhancing outcome attainment through the systematic use of more accurate and accessible data to support better decision-making at all levels.

ACTION AGENDA

These five operational principles are the Office of Children and Family Services' guideposts for the near future. The enactment of Governor Pataki's proposal to restructure the funding of child welfare services allows for the Office to partner with its stakeholders in expanding community-based services, particularly those oriented to serving children and youth within the context of their families and communities. This approach to child welfare finance creates a three-pronged approach to funding a broad array of services. In addition to block granting foster care funding, it provides uncapped, 65 percent reimbursement of local spending on in-home services to vulnerable children and youth and their families. It also creates a capped quality enhancement fund to facilitate testing by the Office of innovative approaches to service delivery and expansion of services to underserved communities.

The introduction of a new funding strategy for services to children, youth and families requires the Office to review its approach to community-based services. This clear statement of principles is a critical first step to planning, policies and the allocation of resources. The Office will use these principles as it moves forward in developing a robust complement of services. The principles will set the agenda for the Office's alliances to achieve positive outcomes for children, youth, adults and families. The Office encourages localities to consider these principles as they pursue outcomes relevant to their communities and stakeholders.

The Office of Children and Family Services has invested in development of an expanded regional capacity for technical assistance and oversight of local social services districts, youth bureaus and service providers. The Office stands ready to support localities in becoming full partners in using the **Framework** to the benefit of New York State residents.

The development of this edition of the *Operational Framework* provided the Office an opportunity to examine the extent to which our activities were consistent with the directions set forth in the original paper. It also allowed us to assess the impact our various operations and policies had on achieving the goals we had established for ourselves. To be sure, this necessary exercise, though not always pleasant, was healthy and instructive.

It is expected that this document will be the frame of reference within which the Office and those individuals and organizations affected by the Office's activities will evaluate our performance over the coming years. We hope that our stakeholders find the document useful for examining their own policies and procedures and the way they impact on their constituents. Finally, above all else, this second edition of the *Operational Framework* is intended to encourage continued dialogue and collaborative action among all those concerned with the future of New York's children, youth and families.

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