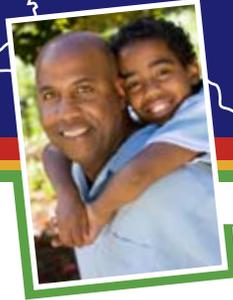


New York FAR Quarterly

New York Family Assessment Response (FAR) Quarterly

VOL. 1, NO. 1



AMERICAN HUMANE

Protecting Children & Animals Since 1877



New York State
Office of Children & Family
Services



Welcome to the First New York State Family Assessment Response Newsletter

I am delighted to write these words of welcome in New York's first newsletter devoted to Family Assessment Response (FAR). I recognize that it has taken a great deal of effort by the selected counties, the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) staff, the legislature and child and family advocates to make the possibility of an alternative response to child protective investigation a reality in New York. By authorizing a pilot for an alternative to investigation as the primary way to protect children, the legislature has endorsed an approach that has proven effective in making a real difference in child welfare systems' capacity to protect children and build strong families.

Your willingness and eagerness to partner with OCFS in developing FAR has been nothing short of inspiring. The way you have worked within your agencies and communities to engage

stakeholders in a vision for and a path toward a better child protective services system has been remarkable. Together we have already breathed life into the legislation, created programs and processes that reflect your unique needs and allowed for a different way of providing protection and real help for children and families.

I am so pleased that OCFS has been able to build a partnership with the American Humane Association, a national and international leader in protecting children, so that we can all learn from this organization's experience and expertise. American Humane's work will support us all as we continue to learn about effective FAR policies and practices, gather data to help inform our decisions and reflect on our experiences. I sincerely hope that this initiative will provide us, the legislature and our stakeholders with the evidence and

experience of lessons learned that will inform our ongoing work as we move to design the child protective system of the future.

Enjoy all of the expert and peer learning opportunities that this newsletter offers. I hope it opens the door to new knowledge, enthusiasm and inspiration for the work ahead.



Gladys Carrión, Esq., Commissioner

New York State Office of Children and
Family Services

Featured Article



Workers and Families and FAR, Oh My!

By Jeanne Ferguson, Manager,
Family Assessment Response,
Children's Division, American Humane

Despite current critical economic challenges, the state of New York has made a major commitment to its children and families by implementing Family Assessment Response in 14 counties to date. If you're reading this newsletter, you are likely already a part of this practice shift in favor of engagement and partnership with families who are reaching for success.

State and county administrators have also joined the effort to create institutional change that will result in fewer children experiencing maltreatment in their homes, and more parents feeling good about their parenting. Words being heard more often in FAR counties are child-centered, family-led, and strengths-based. County community partners are also championing FAR, and in the next year, New York may have nearly 20 counties and tribes pioneering the new practice.

So, what's so new and different? The difference is in meeting, greeting and engaging families to explore how life was for them when things were better and how they'd like their family to be in the future so everyone is safe and working as a team. In the past, when family integrity was threatened by difficulties in knowing how to effectively discipline their kids, the report of those concerns could be handled one way: a full-blown CPS investigation. Now there is an alternative: an assessment of family dynamics that results in a plan for change developed by the family with the support of the FAR worker.

The hope with FAR is that engagement and partnership between families and county and tribal agencies will create more creative options so parents can choose targeted services that support their success.

Welcome to the journey!

Six Principles of Partnership¹ for Engaging Families in FAR

Judgments Can Wait

Holding back judgment doesn't mean avoiding making decisions. Rather, it means staying open to all information, especially the information that doesn't fit our expectations, and allowing that information to inform our understanding.

Everyone Has Strengths

Acknowledging and building on strengths doesn't mean ignoring problems or glossing over concerns. On the contrary, strengths-based practice sees the problem and the strengths and clearly links them together to support the family.

Everyone Desires Respect

We want respect for our experience and perspective, for how we've come to be who we are and how we've developed our way of seeing things.

Partners Share Power

When power is shared, setbacks become opportunities to learn and rethink situations rather than place blame.

Everyone Needs to Be Heard (and Understood)

By inviting families to freely share their ideas and concerns, we bring those resources out of hiding and into the open. We create more options for families when we seek a diversity of opinions.

Partnership Is a Process

Try to learn from what does and doesn't work well. Involve families in evaluating your efforts to work well together.

¹Adapted from Smith, C., White, P., & Comer, D. (2006). *Cornerstone III: Self study guide for family assessment*. Morganton, NC: Appalachian Family Innovations.

True Stories

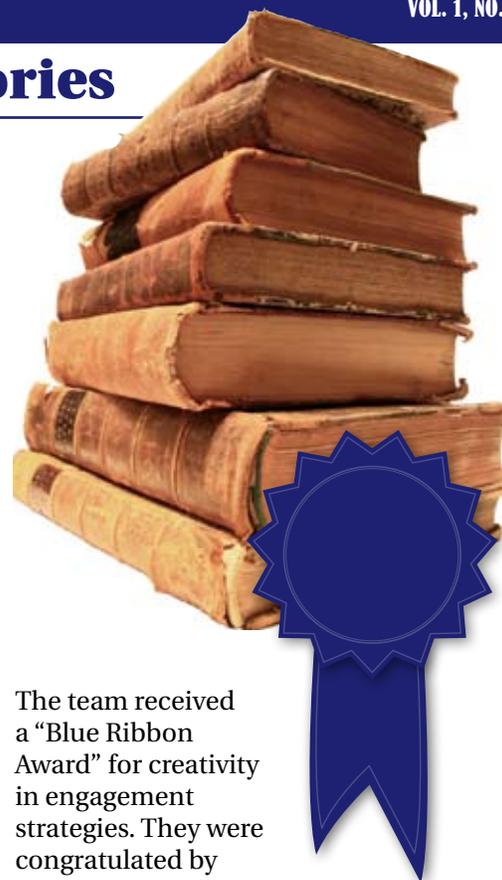
Sharing Success: Blue Ribbon Award Recipients in Tompkins County

Tompkins County received an inadequate guardianship report due to reoccurring head lice that was not being properly treated within a family. The report was screened into FAR after the team reviewed the case during group supervision. The FAR caseworker attempted to contact the family by phone but was unsuccessful since they did not have a working phone. The caseworker went to the home, where she found the family very angry about this and previous reports. The family was visibly angered by the worker's presence and because they thought they knew who had made the report, and they threatened to physically harm the worker if she didn't leave. Due to this hostility and the basic FAR principles, the worker left the home.

The caseworkers brought the case to group supervision the next day and discussed whether the case should be transferred to a more traditional

response, given that the family was not agreeable to the FAR worker's approach. The team strategized how to engage the family and used wraparound funds to buy them salon-quality products to help get rid of the lice infestation and prevent future outbreaks. A different worker offered to go back to the home and deliver what they called "a gift" to the family.

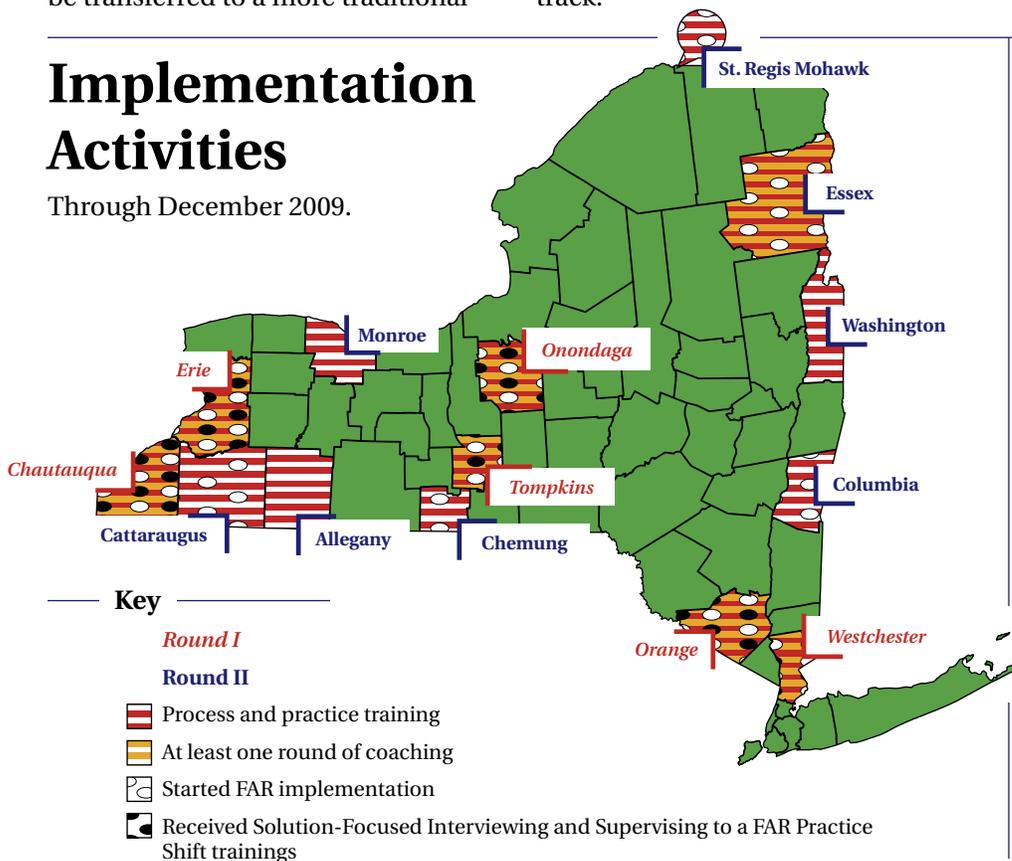
The caseworker arrived at the home with a big smile and told the family that she had heard they had been "struck by the lice fairy" and that she was there to bring them a gift of supplies to help. The family found humor in this gesture and accepted the gift. The caseworker also took the opportunity to share how her family dealt with lice outbreaks and explained how to use the products, including a lice-zapping comb. After this attempt, the family agreed to work with the department in the FAR track.



The team received a "Blue Ribbon Award" for creativity in engagement strategies. They were congratulated by their colleagues for agreeing to work with each other as a team, keeping the focus on what's possible, being good sports, keeping each other in check and having a sense of humor.

Implementation Activities

Through December 2009.



Helpful Resources

American Humane Association, Differential Response:

- www.americanhumane.org/differential
- National Quality Improvement Center on Differential Response: <http://www.differentialresponseqic.org/>
- Merkel-Holguin, L., Kaplan, C., & Kwak, A. (2006, November). *National study on differential response in child welfare*. Denver, CO: American Humane Association and Child Welfare League of America.
- Merkel-Holguin, L. (Ed.). (2005). *Differential response in child welfare. Protecting Children*, 20(2 & 3).

Child Welfare Information Gateway, Alternative Response:

- <http://www.childwelfare.gov/responding/iaa/alternative/>

Institute of Applied Research:

- www.iarstl.org

New York OCFS Approved FAR Applications:

- <http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/prevention/assessmentResponse.asp>

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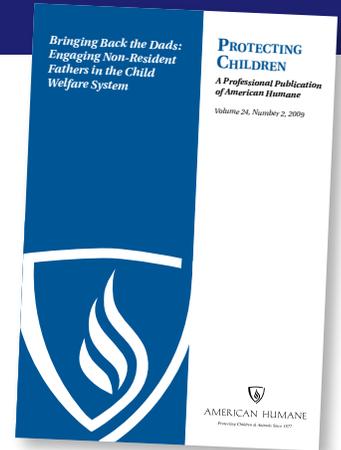
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American Humane Updates



Now Available for Free!
New Protecting Children Issue on Non-Resident Fathers

Historically, the child welfare system has mainly interacted with mothers. In this issue, you will find information on how to enhance your knowledge of fathers' relationships with their children and better serve families. Order your free copy of *Bringing Back the Dads: Engaging Non-Resident Fathers in the Child Welfare System* now!

Order Now!

Expand the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act

At a U.S. Congressional hearing, American Humane's Caren Kaplan testified for reauthorization and expansion of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), plus increased use of new child welfare approaches, including differential response.

Find out more.

Write for Us!

Contact us with your ideas so we can get them into our schedule. We'll feature one story per issue. Please reply to Lara Bruce at Larab@americanhumane.org.



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The American Humane Association provides this newsletter to New York counties currently implementing Family Assessment Response.