

New York FAR Quarterly

New York Family Assessment Response (FAR) Quarterly



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A Comprehensive Evaluation

By Joanne Ruppel, Research Scientist,
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As part of a comprehensive implementation and impact evaluation of New York's differential response pilot project, outcomes for families who participated in FAR were compared with outcomes of FAR-eligible families who received the traditional CPS investigative response. A randomized control trial design was used in Onondaga County and a historical comparison group was used in Tompkins County to examine the impacts of the FAR approach. The key findings included:

- **Family Engagement and Satisfaction.** Strong evidence was found that families were more positive about the FAR approach than they were about the investigative response. Compared to the investigated parents in the control group, parents assigned to the FAR track in Onondaga County were significantly more likely to report that their caseworkers fully listened to them (87% vs. 75%) and respected them (91% vs. 81%), to feel very or somewhat positive about their overall experience with CPS (86% vs. 72%), and among those who had a prior encounter with CPS, to report that their most recent experience with CPS was better than their previous one (65% vs. 35%). FAR caregivers were significantly less likely than investigated caregivers to report feeling annoyed, stressed, irritated, angry, and worried by the end of the first home visit.
- **Access to Services.** The FAR approach increased, expanded, and expedited families' access to appropriate services, especially services to meet basic family needs, such as food, housing, and utilities. In Onondaga County, FAR families were much more likely to report receiving help from their workers than similar FAR-eligible families who received an investigation (70% vs. 56%). FAR families were more likely than investigated families to report receiving help from caseworkers to get basic things needed for children, such as diapers, formula, food, or clothes (17.9% vs. 6.5%), help with a difficult relationship with a partner or ex-partner (11% vs. 4.9%), and help obtaining public assistance services, such as TANE, food stamps, or Medicaid (9.6% vs. 3.3%).
- **Impact on Child Welfare System Outcomes.**
 - **Petitions Filed in Family Court.** The FAR approach led to a decrease in the need for family court involvement. The percentage of families on whom a petition was filed in family court within six months after the focal report intake date was significantly lower for FAR families than for investigated control group families in Onondaga County (1.9% vs. 4.4%) and trending lower in Tompkins County (2.6% vs. 4%).
 - **Child Welfare Services Cases.** FAR resulted in a reduction in the need for traditional

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public child welfare services (CWS). FAR families were significantly less likely to have a CWS case opened within six months of the focal report than were families who received a CPS investigation in Tompkins County (8.2% vs. 13.8%). Although FAR families in Onondaga County were also less likely than control families to have a CWS case opened (9% vs. 11.6%), this difference was not statistically significant. As one of the essential goals of FAR is to broaden the usage of community resources to serve families, a reduction in new CWS cases could be an indicator that families received sufficient services

from community resources and assistance from their own natural support networks to resolve child safety and other problems without public monitoring.

- **Subsequent Child Abuse/Neglect Reports.** No significant differences were found between the FAR and investigated control groups in the likelihood of having a subsequent report by six months after intake, or by six months after case closure. This finding is consistent with the research in other states with DR programs, where impacts on subsequent reports did not begin to emerge until 18

months after intake. If FAR follows the experiences of the DR programs in other states, it is anticipated that further follow-up will demonstrate a reduction in subsequent reports among FAR families over the long term.

Updates to the child welfare outcomes for families in the study will be reported when 18 to 24 months have elapsed since the families entered the study. The evaluation report can be accessed on the OCFS website (<http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/reports/CPS%20Differential%20Response%20Evaluation%20Final%20Report%20Jan%202011.pdf>).

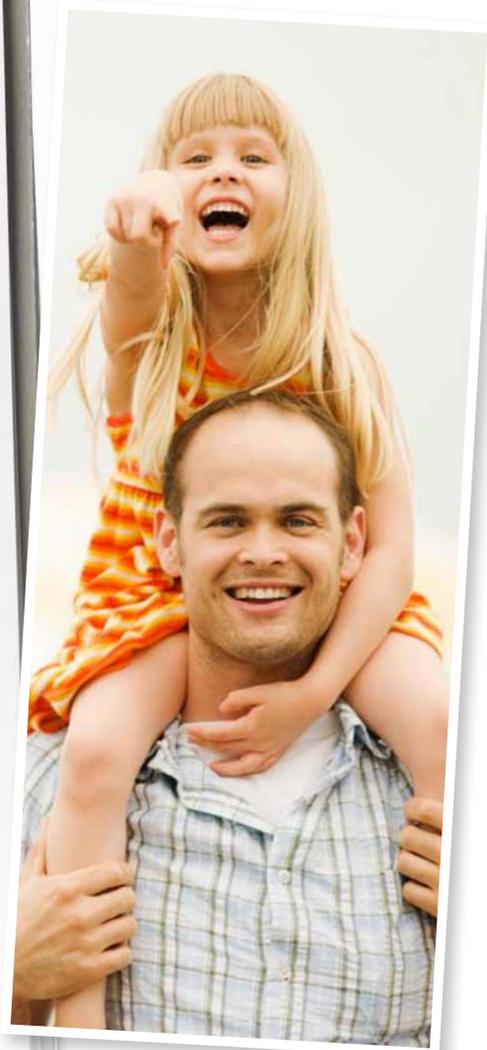
Documentation, Documentation, Documentation!

By Jennifer C. Yannette, CPS Administrator, Grade A Supervisor, Chemung County Children and Family Services

Lauren Morley, MSW, LSW, Manager, Training and Prevention, Child Welfare, American Humane Association

We had the opportunity to participate in the Round 2 Quality Assurance Case Review Process in Albany in September 2010. Upon reading some of the FAR case documentation, we felt it might be useful to put together a sample FAR case – from beginning to end – to provide a solid case example of documentation that highlights the use of the FAR principles and values, family-led activities, solution-focused questions, individual supervision and group case consultation, introducing and completing the FLAG with the family, addressing inconsistencies or differences of opinion with a family, and making the case-closing decision with the family. The case

example that was created, which is available in its entirety on the NY FAR public folders, was adapted from a real case and rewritten to protect the privacy of the family involved. In particular, we wanted to highlight how to document when concerns are resolved by engaging a family and how safety and risk can be assessed through family-led activities and engagement strategies. We recognize that practice varies by county, so there might be aspects of FAR process or practice highlighted in this case example that varies from how FAR looks in your county. For example, how the family is engaged in completing the FLAG is a practice that varies by county and sometimes even by worker. This case example isn't meant to be prescriptive, but is instead meant to highlight an approach to documenting FAR case activities and engagement. We hope workers and supervisors find this to be a useful resource.





Quality Assurance Case Review: Round 2 Counties

By Gail Haulenbeek, Director, Bureau of Program Monitoring and Practice Improvement, Office of Regional Operations, Division of Child Welfare and Community Services

With the support of Casey Family Programs, the Office of Children and Family Services, American Humane Association, and the Round 2 counties conducted a case documentation review over a five-day period at the end of September 2010. Based on the number of cases that each county had handled through FAR, a sample was selected. Reviewers read 10 cases from Allegany DSS, 7 cases from Cattaraugus, 25 from Chemung, 14 from Columbia, 15 from Essex, 25 from Monroe, 4 from St. Regis Mohawk Tribe, and 25 from Washington. Staff used a review protocol that had been developed with county input last year, with some refinements based on last year's review experience.

A partnership approach was used by having teams of staff from the participating counties (Millie Key – Monroe, Jodi Smith – Washington, Jennifer Yannette – Chemung, and Susan Johnson – Essex), AHA (Jeanne Ferguson, Lauren Morley, Lara Bruce, and Brenda Lockwood), and OCFS Regional Offices (Gwen Bennett – Region 1, Margaret Coombes – Region 2, and Karen Sessions and Heidi St.

John – Region 4) work together to review cases. Reviewers examined the cases and reached consensus on the areas of strength and areas in need of improvement.

Several themes emerged from the preliminary data:

- Solution-focused practice with families was more evident than in the Round 1 case review.
- Decisions regarding the assignment to FAR and the safety assessment were appropriate.
- Staff continued to be challenged by the FAR practice shift away from gathering the specifics of an incident or an allegation toward a focus with the family on family functioning and their children's needs.
- Staff experienced challenges in integrating child and family engagement and family-led assessments with the need to have honest and direct conversations about issues of LDSS concern; staff can benefit from continued coaching in these skill areas.
- The documentation of FAR practice was significantly more evident than was seen in the case

review conducted last year with R1 cases. The inference is that the documentation guidelines have proved helpful to staff.

The Casey support for the project allowed AHA to conduct a few focus groups in three Round 2 FAR counties (Monroe, Columbia, and Washington), which helped to broaden our understanding of FAR practice and of the gap that can occur between practice and documentation. After the review, participants made recommendations as to how the FAR case documentation review instrument and guidelines could continue to be strengthened so that a clearer picture of FAR practice could be mined from the case records. Those recommendations were incorporated into the tools and have been posted on the FAR public folders so that FAR counties can use them in their own quality assurance efforts.

While it entailed considerable sacrifice on the part of all participating staff to be away from home, from families, and from their offices while work piled up, we believe that the lessons learned were worth it. A big “thank you” to all who participated and contributed to the continued learning of New York's FAR “family.”



FAR Team Meetings – A Peer Review Process

By Theresa Donovan, Supervisor, Chemung County Children and Family Services

Here in Chemung County, we have been implementing the FAR approach for the past 15 months. Over the course of our development, our FAR team meetings have evolved as well. We have utilized the Signs of Safety, the Six Thinking Hats, and case presentations, complete with genograms. Despite these efforts, after about a year the FAR caseworkers seemed disinterested in the meetings and viewed the three to four hours per week together as a cumbersome task rather than a helpful support. This situation left me stumped. I have goals for 2011! I would like the FAR caseworkers to look forward to the meetings, to bring experiences to share with their colleagues, to leave each meeting with new ideas to improve their casework with families, and to develop a sense of ownership of all of the FAR cases – not just the cases specifically assigned to them. I knew that I needed to try something new . . . but what?

I knew that I needed to try something new . . . but what?

When reflecting on my own development, I identified that the quarterly review process, including reading investigations using the State’s tool, aided my understanding of what needed to be completed and documented in the casework practice. I thought about what an exciting and interesting exercise this would be in our FAR team meetings. The team would be able to utilize the FAR Review Instrument to ensure quality work, to increase their knowledge and skills, and to learn from each other. Learning from each other was a key focus for me. More often than not, our caseworkers submit cases for supervisory review, guidance, and

The feedback that the caseworkers shared from the reviews exceeded my expectations.

next steps. The crucial decisions of the casework are left in the hands of one person (“supervisor”), who would very much like to enhance the critical thinking skills of his or her caseworkers and share this responsibility. This exercise seemed like a perfect opportunity.

A week prior to the identified FAR team meeting, I held a discussion with the FAR team in order to prepare them for a fun activity at the next meeting. I asked that they bring one

completed safety assessment that was ready for supervisory approval. At that meeting, each of the caseworkers exchanged their documented casework with a co-worker. They were each given a copy of the FAR Review Instrument and were asked to assess the case utilizing the tool. They were to keep special note of examples of engagement techniques, family-led casework, solution-focused interviewing skills, and the use of FAR tools (wizards/fairies/pushing buttons, etc.). The caseworkers were instructed that the meeting would be treated like “SAT” time: no talking to each other to ask clarifying questions. After all, as we all know, *if it is not in the case record, then it did not happen*. I returned in one hour and we then reviewed each case.

One week later, we completed the process again, but this time caseworkers brought a case prepared for closure for review. The feedback that the caseworkers shared from the reviews exceeded

my expectations. All members felt that this was one of the most helpful FAR meetings that we had ever had. I could not hide my smile! We spent the next hour discussing each of the cases individually.

We focused on the following areas:

- ◆ How did the caseworker engage with the parent after the report was received (i.e. Did we schedule a home visit rather than arriving unannounced?)?
- ◆ How did the caseworker notify, explain, and gain approval from the family to have a FAR response to their referral?
- ◆ How did the caseworker gather the family’s perspective of their current situation, strengths, and needs?
- ◆ Was the 7-day safety assessment accurate, and were case notes completed and submitted in a timely manner?
- ◆ Was the FLAG included in the connections case dictation and was there a clear explanation as to why each question was answered in the way that it was? Was there evidence that the family participated?
- ◆ If needs were identified, did the caseworker and the family mutually identify and agree to next steps? Were SMART goals utilized to ensure clarity?
- ◆ Was there evidence of solution-focused interviewing with the family throughout the case to help improve their functioning and decrease risk?
- ◆ Did the caseworker provide examples of the FAR tools for the family? (wizards/fairies/pushing buttons, etc.)?
- ◆ Was the family asked how best the agency could support them and their family?
- ◆ Did the caseworker contact the collateral (i.e. school, mental health, family member, etc.) with the family member present via phone or in person?
- ◆ Did the caseworker ask the family if they were ready to have their case closed prior to closing?

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Although the list on page 4 may appear to be long, the conversation moves along pretty quickly. The post-review discussions have taken about 15 to 20 minutes each. The caseworkers were engaged and they were leading the meeting! The caseworkers were even willing to stay after work to hear more from their peers and looked forward to their turn to hear feedback. This is a notable change from the days when you could hear a “pin drop” in our supervisor-led FAR team meetings that felt more like case conferences. The caseworkers have provided the following feedback on the review process:

- ◆ They are identifying areas that the State is focusing on in their casework that they were not previously aware was a focus.
- ◆ They are identifying areas where they are completely forgetting to document (i.e. Asking the parent to participate with FAR and their response.).
- ◆ They can now more clearly identify where they can improve their casework – in terms of strength identification and discussion with families, utilization of FAR tools, utilization of solution-focused interviewing throughout the case to measure progress, etc.
- ◆ They are recognizing the necessity of documenting how they engaged the parent or child in their interview and how the caseworkers knew the family was engaged – behavioral observations.

It is nice to hear positive feedback about their work from their peers.

We know that our caseworkers each have their own strengths and areas of expertise.

- ◆ They are recognizing how time-consuming it can be for a supervisor to review cases and that supervisors are not just being “picky” about their casework documentation.
- ◆ It is nice to hear positive feedback about their work from their peers.
- ◆ It is helpful to hear another perspective from peers, such as the next steps peers think the caseworkers should take on the case.
- ◆ They would like to continue to have these peer reviews.

As their FAR Team Leader, I could not be happier. Ideally, this is what the FAR team is all about. The

caseworkers are working together to ensure the quality of our casework. As supervisors, we know that our caseworkers each have their own strengths and areas of expertise. This review process has allowed caseworkers the opportunity to share their skills and ideas without seeming “bossy.” I now know that this format has had many unintended positive impacts.

To simply name a few:

- ◆ Caseworkers are communicating more with one another. The team is strengthening. They are learning to be resources of information for one another.
- ◆ They are developing skills in providing constructive/ developmental feedback to their peers. This can be a difficult task, but these skills can then be applied when delivering feedback to community partners

and families, making this a beneficial parallel process.

- ◆ Caseworkers seem to have a higher desire to have a good case reviewed by and presented in front of their peers. They want their co-workers to value their work. They are placing emphasis on better casework with thorough documentation in key areas.
- ◆ While the caseworkers are reviewing each other’s work, the supervisor is able to have uninterrupted time to review pending case work or other tasks.

In retrospect, I don’t know why we did not try this “Peer-Review” a long time ago. Our team has decided to have a review every other week during our FAR team meeting. This is a nice opportunity for us all to learn from one another and share in the responsibility of ensuring child safety.





An Energizing Visit for Positive Implementation

In February, several Madison County FAR staff (Round 4) visited with the Tompkins County FAR team (Round 1) to assist with their county's FAR implementation. Some of the comments from staff after meeting with the Tompkins County staff were: very energizing; excited to get started; Tompkins County staff very enthusiastic as well as honest about real world; helpful; came away with a much better understanding; enjoyed the case review meeting and how parallel process was used.



(left to right): Coral-lee Uettwiller – Tompkins County, Jennifer Browne – Tompkins County, Sue Eppolito – Madison County, and Jim Norrs – Madison County

Additional Resources

- **Now Available in the FAR Public Folders:**
 - Quality Assurance Case Documentation Review Report and Supporting Materials for both Round 1 and 2 Counties
 - Updated Quality Assurance Case Documentation Instrument and Guidelines
 - FAR Documentation Guidelines developed in 2010
 - Sample FAR Documentation
 - The Family-Led Assessment Guide (FLAG), now available in Spanish!
- **American Humane Association's Differential Response Webinar Series:** www.americanhumane.org/drwebinar
- **American Humane Association's Training and Professional Development Catalog:** <http://www.americanhumane.org/assets/pdfs/children/pc-training-catalog.pdf>



(left to right): Sarah Moshier, Cindy Austin, Christine Manning, and Marion Boratynski – Tompkins County



(left to right): Cathyann Schlick – Madison County, Cathy Fowler – Madison County, Gina Newlin – Tompkins County, and Julia Villari – Madison County

3 Houses Activity, Not Just for Families Anymore

Christine Manning, Supervisor with Tompkins County, recently completed the 3 Houses activity during a recent FAR Advisory Board meeting. She demonstrated how the activity is used to capture the voices of children and families. She then asked the Advisory Board members to try it out with respect to FAR. Below is that summary. Maryanne Banks, Director of Services in Tompkins County, commented that, “all their worries and wishes took me back to our first FAR symposium and all of our worries and wishes then.” The Tompkins County staff are using many of the tools, including the 3 Houses, with children and families. The staff shared these tools at a recent staff meeting and brought numerous actual examples.

HOUSE OF GOOD THINGS

- Staying out of court process
- Holistic approach
- Personal responsibility
- Worker satisfaction
- Community engagement and involvement
- Provide support/resources
- Openness to new approaches
- Willingness to get others involved
- Positive response
- Help and support
- Reduce fear of family
- Empowerment
- Long-term help
- Ability to work with chronic neglect
- Families and children get their needs met and learn ways to break negative cycles
- Way to help families in times of stress, frustration, and confusion
- FAR workers helping by attending uncomfortable meetings
- Innovative
- Family focused and centered
- Family preservation
- Positive outcome

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

HOUSE OF WORRIES

- Missing child with critical need
- Sustainability?
- Time constraints and staff stress
- Family barriers
- Poverty
- Case screening – what screened, FAR vs. CPS and multiple reports
- Follow-up at case closing “warm handoff”
- Staff not having the opportunity to develop relationships with other community agencies
- When a FAR worker terminates, families might need more support
- Gaps in services
- Transitional programs
- Family support groups
- Families who change only while FAR is involved and then revert to previous behaviors
- Families who turn down support/ after services from FAR end
- Lack of collaboration with mandated reporters and how to resolve this
- Need for more teamwork and how to build relationships
- Still worried about silos and us/ them dynamics
- Safety concerns missed
- Children injured/harmed due to lack of safety plan
- Families not preserved
- Child injuries

HOUSE OF WISHES

- Reduce incidence of need – eg. chronic neglect
- Total engagement of all family members, including extended family members
- Self-sufficiency
- Reduce recidivism & risk
- All children safe
- More FAR workers and programs
- Increase FAR in its program, counties, and community awareness
- Longer-term intervention and follow-up
- Transition program for families
- Endless financial support
- Many creative services available
- More collaboration through relationship-building and open communication
- Incorporate community into the vision (FAR)
- Develop more trust between CPS/FAR staff and mandated reporters
- Improving lives of children

Write for Us!

Contact us with your ideas so we can get them into our schedule. Please reply to Lara Bruce at Larab@americanhumane.org.