

New York FAR Quarterly

New York Family Assessment Response (FAR) Quarterly



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A FAR Pioneer Looks Back: Q & A with Maryanne Banks, Tompkins County

The Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) wishes Maryanne all the best in her retirement this year. Your willingness to partner with us and with your fellow Family Assessment Response (FAR) counties to establish, evaluate, and “grow” FAR has been instrumental in FAR’s development in New York State. Your insight, recommendations on the development and implementation of FAR, and willingness to assist other counties will be greatly missed.

Q: As Director, what was appealing to you about FAR when you first heard of the possibility of becoming an inaugural county? What impact did you envision for families and for your agency?

A: I heard about some creative ways other people were doing child welfare services including differential

response at a meeting hosted by Cornell University, many years before we were given the opportunity to try it. Other County Directors, Deputy Commissioners, Commissioners, and CPS staff were at the meeting too. There was a great deal of energy around differential response and support for changing New York law. The depth of feelings expressed by New Yorkers working in the field during that meeting really struck me. I came to the conclusion that we needed to be looking at innovation in our system, which hadn’t changed in a long time. We needed to be listening to people doing the work, people working with us, and to families. We needed to be thinking creatively and looking beyond our borders. Within child welfare we always need to look for ways to promote children

Photo Taken by: David Weiner

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Tompkins County CPS Team:

Left to right: Debbie Patterson, Pete Angie, Christine Manning, Maryanne Banks, Marion Boratynski, Cindy Jacobson, Gina Newlin, Donna Scott, Erin Peterson, Cindy Austin, Sarah Moshier, Nancy Parrot, Shanise Riley Suzanne Hillman.
Missing: Jen Browne, Madi Alridge, Amy Franz, Beth Jolles, Rick Reed

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growing up in strong families, who have whatever kind of protection and support they need when they need it.

Family Assessment Response (FAR) appealed to me because I believed our staff and our community were well positioned to contribute to New York State's efforts. Our staff have a philosophy of working with families and our community supports. There are pros and cons to being in a pilot. Even before we submitted the FAR application, I could feel the partnership and creativity going on between staff and management along with other pilot counties, OCFS, and advocates and the sense that we were all "learners" in this venture. That appealed to me. I think various parts of the system working together can result in better outcomes. That appealed to me because it was a way to grow our practice. It also gave us some opportunities to learn some great concepts, strategies, and practices.

The impact I envisioned for children and families was that they would be safe, they would receive the help they needed, and they would find the interaction with us positive.

Q: When you launched your Advisory Board in Tompkins County, what benefit did you hope for and what results materialized?

A: The Advisory Board was an absolute



necessity for me. I clearly understand CPS responsibilities, yet I firmly believe child welfare does not do its work alone. It includes our frontline workers and our policy and planning staff. By engaging at least some of the amazing talent we have here in our community and on our staff, I thought we could do it well. I hoped for help from the Advisory Board with knowledge of best practices and research. I wanted some expert advice. I wanted people who were in touch with people we worked with and who could lend their expert advice and help us include and hear the voices of families and children. I hoped Advisory Board members who were in other systems would inform their systems and families about changes we were making and tell us how our changes were impacting them. Finally, I hoped that convening an Advisory Board would make it easier for our staff to implement changes, do their CPS work, and help them connect families with needed services.

The result was that the Advisory Board contributed to all the above. I also believe community partners were grateful to be part of the planning and implementation process. They gave suggestions and helped write the letters we sent to families and mandated reporters and our initial screening protocol. They helped us convene a meeting with families and include the voice of families in our planning and service design. They participated in presentations about FAR to other groups. When we had input into formation of the program and evaluation with OCFS, we included their input. Advisory Board members completed the Three Houses activity and shared with us their House of Good Things, House of Wishes, and House of Worries. They learned with us and informed their



constituencies about FAR and CPS as whole. They saw the results of our reviews and made recommendations for practice, community education, training, and teamwork, as well as suggestions for evaluation. The Advisory Board helped lay the foundation for the frontline FAR work with entities such as not-for-profits, counselors, and schools. The Advisory Board met for four years before discontinuing their efforts in 2012. They still want to receive the FAR newsletters and hear from us if we face issues they might help with. Recently, we received a grant to partner with a Board member's agency to provide enhanced home-visiting services for young families with infants who are involved with FAR.

Q: Your staff have both embraced and struggled with the practice shift of family-led, solution-focused practice. What do you see being the most useful qualities to nurture in your CPS staff so they have the greatest success in serving families well via FAR or INV?

A: Besides the complex skills necessary to do CPS, I think the most useful qualities to nurture are commitment to the protection of children and the well-being of children and families,

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New Resource:

The National Quality Improvement Center on Differential Response in Child Protective Services recently released their newest issue brief:

Disparities in Child Welfare: Considering the Implementation of Differential Response

By Heather Allen, MSW
& Michelle Howard, MS, LPC

Michelle was our featured consultant in the last NY FAR newsletter!

Check it out!

www.differentialresponseqic.org

or

<http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/colleges/medicalschool/departments/pediatrics/subs/can/QIC-DR/Documents/Final%20Issue%20Brief%204.pdf>

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respect, and transparency. Also, it's important to nurture a commitment to the agency, to excellence, and to continuous improvement. Self-awareness, enthusiasm, creativity, going above and beyond, flexibility, dependability, positivity, honesty, teamwork, valuing differences and, of course, empathy are important. Confidence in your work is important. When you're tracking as many reports to FAR as we are, you need to be serious about it and confident in your CPS skills, your team, and your agency.

Q: Teamwork and transparent communication are essential to good practice within an agency and with families. What has been the key,

in your view, to creating a FAR team within your CPS team that supports the voice of children and families?

A: Training, coaching, supervision, and group consultations (which sometimes include CPS investigations staff, domestic violence advocates, management, or our legal department) have been key in supporting the voice of children and families in the FAR approach. Also, tools such as the Three Houses, Wizards and Fairies, conversation starters, and Turnell, Sawyer, and Lohrbach's, *Building Safety and Strengthening Families Framework*, as well as Family Team Meetings involving families, their supports,

and people concerned about them. The ability to contact our colleagues in other counties or at OCFS and the Butler Institute staff when we are faced with a tough issue has also been helpful. Relationships with people in the community who are involved with children and families, and our staff's ability to work with them has helped include children and families' voices in practice. Our CPS practice is evolving and I think it will be important for our FAR staff, our Investigations staff, and our management staff to continue to learn from each other—from our experiences, from families, and from our colleagues—to grow and shape our practice for the future.

Write for us!

*Do you have a FAR story or case example that you would like to share with others?
Have you been trying new tools or techniques related to FAR that are working well?
Would you like to highlight the good work happening in your county?*

If so, we want to hear from you! Articles should be between 500 and 800 words and can be sent at any time to get into the newsletter schedule.



Please reply to Lara Bruce at Lara.Bruce@du.edu

Consultant Corner: Brenda Lockwood



Brenda Lockwood

Currently, Brenda H. Lockwood, MA, CLC, is an independent child welfare reform consultant and a certified life coach. Prior to beginning her own life coaching and consulting business, Brenda spent 14 years in the child welfare field. From 2009 to February of 2012 Brenda held the position of Manager of Differential Response Initiatives at the American Humane Association. Prior to her work with American Humane, Brenda spent three years as the child welfare reform consultant at the Minnesota Department of Human Services. During those years, she provided technical assistance related to the implementation of differential response and child welfare casework practice to Minnesota's 87 counties and 11 tribes.

Brenda has nine years of direct practice experience in working with children, families, and vulnerable adults. Four of those years were spent as a child protection worker in Anoka County, Minnesota

where she managed ongoing child protection cases and later was hired as a differential response social worker when the agency became a pilot site during Minnesota's implementation of the approach. She would eventually move on to working for the Minnesota Child Welfare Training System, at the University of Minnesota's School of Social Work, where she acted as a regional training manager for eight counties in the Twin Cities metro area.

Ms. Lockwood has been a national consultant, trainer, and coach in the field of child welfare for over 10 years. She has provided training and coaching to child welfare professionals on the topics of risk and safety assessment, differential response policy and practice, family engagement, and solution focused casework practice. She is also trained in custody and visitation mediation and Family Group Decision Making facilitation.

Ms. Lockwood received her BA in Liberal Studies from the College of Saint Benedict, St. Joseph Minnesota. She has her Master's degree in Psychology from Saint Mary's University, Winona, Minnesota, and attended Alder Graduate School for her Professional Life Coaching certification.

Involvement in NY FAR Implementation:

Brenda has been working with counties throughout the state of New York on the implementation of FAR since 2009. She has provided FAR training and skills coaching to multiple agency child protection staff,

supervisors, and administrators. She has also presented workshops at the FAR Symposium held in Albany in 2011 and added her insights to several of the FAR quality assurance case documentation reviews (QA).

Highlights of FAR implementation in NY:

For Brenda, one main highlight of FAR implementation in New York State includes watching FAR counties learn as they grow in their FAR implementation. Every county begins this process with much excitement, as well as many questions and apprehensions. It is always fun to make coaching visits a few months after a county has begun assigning cases to the FAR pathway. The "Aha!" moments that occur for caseworkers and supervisors, once they have a chance to get their feet wet with the FAR approach, is always affirming. Applying the principles of the FAR approach to actual casework with families moves these principles away from theory and into the realm of what's possible.

Brenda reports her experience with NY FAR implementation has been similar to those she has witnessed in other states. Introducing and implementing a system-reform effort as significant and comprehensive as FAR is no small feat in any jurisdiction. OCFS and the FAR counties in the state of New York have approached this major reform effort in a thoughtful, planned, and purposeful way. The dedication and commitment to successful implementation throughout the state of New York bodes well for the ongoing success of FAR.

Collaboration Can Make All the Difference

By Marion Boratynski, FAR Caseworker, Tompkins County

Carmen Guidi is a foster parent and the owner of Guidi's Collision, in Newfield, NY. He is also well known in the community for his work and commitment to ending homelessness and was recently honored at an event for his work connecting many community resources. This effort led to the recent opening of a homeless shelter. When I first met Carmen, all of this information was unknown to me. It wasn't until a year or so later, when Carmen invited me to be his guest at an event honoring all of these good deeds, that I realized his impact on our community. During the event, he mentioned that I had been influential to him while on his journey. Needless to say, I was honored to have been one of his invited guests.

OUR COLLABORATION

The case Carmen and I worked on together involved a mom, dad, and their son. The family was homeless and staying where ever they could. They regularly stayed in "The Jungle," a tent city located in a downtown Ithaca area where homeless people are known to camp. This family started their journey with social services at the front desk for emergency assistance because of their variety of needs including: homelessness, such as emergency food stamps (FS), emergency Medicaid coverage (MA), shelter needs, and public assistance (PA), among others. They were then connected to special services within the Department of Social Services (DSS) and were then referred to the CPS family assessment response (FAR) unit. Apparently this family had been to DSS eight different times trying to get help prior to Carmen's intervention.

LESSONS LEARNED

What was it about the situation or circumstances that created the partnership between you and the family?

Carmen Guidi: Prior to meeting with Marion, things had not gone well. There was a perception that the CPS workers meeting with the family were very cold, possibly due to their prior history working with the father. He said in hindsight that he felt it all boiled down to

miscommunication. Workers didn't take the time to sit down and talk to the family on their level to learn more about where they are and to then go from there. Marion finally met with them and the father was thankful that someone was finally there with them that didn't create that feeling of tension. The caseworker was a compassionate person that didn't put up walls or barriers and just wanted to help the family. At that time, Marion was still seen as the enemy to the father because he was scared about what people had told him about DSS taking his child from him.

Marion Boratynski: By the time I met with the advocate, the family situation was pretty tense and it was obvious to me that something had happened prior to them meeting with me, even though I wasn't sure what. At first this tension felt like a brick wall. This family was not able to trust me and all I kept wondering was, "What have I just walked into?" In order for my presence to be of some benefit to this family, I had to let them know that whatever experiences they had encountered prior to my involvement was history and that my focus was to try to move forward in order to help them. I let them know that it was up to them whether or not I could help. The wall between us started crumbling down and we began to move forward.

What are your thoughts about the benefits of your partnership for this family?

Carmen Guidi and Marion Boratynski: We each felt that we were finally working with someone willing to follow through with support. That initial knee jerk reaction opened the door for us to be able to work together in delegating who would follow up on each "next step." We stayed in close communication with each other regarding the status and outcome of all the "next steps." In the end it felt like all of our work together and the successful outcome for this family went well because of this partnership.

What lessons have you learned about, and from, each other?

Carmen Guidi and Marion Boratynski: We really need each other's support. Our



Marion Boratynski (left) and Carmen Guidi (right)

agency and community resources working together achieved maximum outcomes for this family's benefit. When collaborating with community resources, it is crucial to keep an open mind—not cluttered with judging, not filled with preconceptions—so as to be able to look into each family's unique situation with a clear lens.

What do you want to share with the NY FAR 'family' about this experience?

Carmen Guidi and Marion Boratynski: It can be absolutely beneficial to have an advocate working in partnership with CPS on behalf of the families within both FAR and Investigations. The advocate can help the family's voice be heard and translate for them, if needed. Not every case may need this sort of advocacy but this kind of support can be extremely important and/or imperative for a successful outcome.

This situation and so many others demonstrates that when an advocate is able to connect with some of our (DSS) families without knowledge of the family's history with CPS, positive things can happen. While CPS information cannot be shared with external stakeholders due to confidentiality, families can also choose to sign a release allowing the sharing of this information with the advocate, if necessary. If an advocate does not clearly understand why an agency takes certain next steps, it can be a valuable role for the caseworker to play. If left unresolved, this misunderstanding can turn into a brick wall between the advocate and DSS and progress between them and their families can be stunted as a result.