

New York FAR Quarterly

New York Family Assessment Response (FAR) Quarterly Newsletter



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Where's Waldo, I mean Butler? And...What is it?

By: **Leslie Wilmot**, New York FAR Project
Director, Butler Institute for Families

Land Ho! Child Welfare has been compared to a "white water" environment, requiring skilled child welfare leaders to successfully navigate turbulent waters. Similarly, after a journey with unexpected twists and turns, the NY FAR Project Team has arrived at the warm and welcoming Erna and Brad Butler Institute for Families at the University of Denver, Graduate School of Social Work, Colorado.

The Butler Institute is a well-known and highly regarded leader in the field of child welfare, both within the state of Colorado and across the nation. At Butler, we offer three major areas of focus and effort:

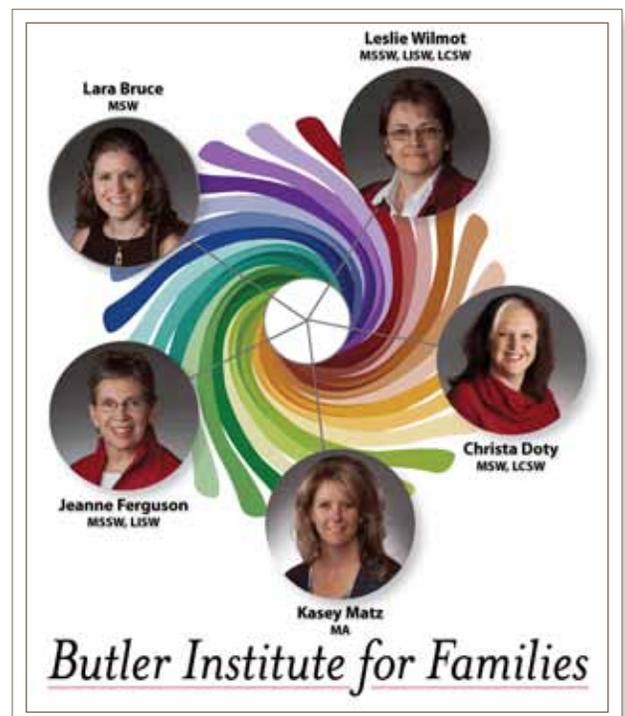
1. Training and Professional Development. Butler staff are responsible for the development and delivery of a range of pre-service, in-service, and advanced child welfare training and professional development activities. Supported through federal, state, and foundation grants, Butler is engaged in multiple efforts to develop and enhance the skills and knowledge of the child welfare workforce in states, tribes, counties, and jurisdictions across the U.S.

2. Research and Evaluation. Butler is involved in extensive research and evaluation activities. We are responsible for the evaluation of multiple

federal, state, and tribal projects, including the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, the Mountains and Plains Child Welfare Implementation Center, Western Workforce Project, and the National Resource Center 4 Tribes. As an evaluator, Butler staff focus on advancing their knowledge about "what works" in practice and systems change.

3. Consultation and Capacity Building. This is the third track of consolidated work and focus at Butler, engaging communities throughout the U.S in creating child safety while strengthening families, communities, and the systems that support them. This is the new welcoming home for your FAR staff team (Jeanne, Lara, and Leslie) and consultants.

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It is a perfect fit for the myriad activities that we have all come to associate with FAR in New York. Along with the continued passion, enthusiasm, and expertise related to family assessment response and differential response that our staff team and consultants have brought with us to Butler (yes; we are continuing to contract with Dan, Teresa, Holly, Michelle, Jackie, Brenda, and Lauren) we have Kasey Matz returning, as well as Christa Doty, one of the first new faces joining us in rolling out the new contract year in partnership with the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) and Casey Family Programs.

When and how will you get to know more of us better? The research team at Butler is already assisting in the FAR Quality Assurance, as well as the Disproportionate Minority Representation (DMR) case reviews that help all of us better understand the current state of FAR case documentation and implementation around the state. That way we can continue to hone our skills and better support families in successfully maintaining child safety, reducing risk, and enhancing family well-being in such challenging times. Information from the first DMR case review is now being consolidated in an executive summary for distribution in the near

future. We are also mid-process in this year's annual quality assurance case review, this time with Round 4 counties. A follow-up series of DMR-county focus groups will launch later this fall. Before you know it, we will all be planning for the annual NY FAR Symposium, scheduled to occur in Spring 2013 (watch for more information in the next FAR newsletter). So, both familiar and new faces will be joining us as we bring on additional FAR communities, provide extensive coaching and training, deliver webinars, and much, much more.

I think I hear the familiar strains of Willie Nelson singing "On the road again..."

Oswego County in the News: DSS Launches Family Assessment Response Program to Handle Child Maltreatment and Neglect*

*This article was originally posted on August 7, 2012, by Contributor to Oswego County Today.com, <http://oswegocountytoday.com/?p=94159> and is reprinted in its entirety here.

MEXICO – Thanks to a new method of handling reports of child maltreatment and neglect, families are taking a more active role in solving problems in the home environment, and caseworkers at the Oswego County Department of Social Services have more options to help strengthen families.

The Family Assessment Response, or FAR program, provides an alternative to traditional investigations of child protective reports.

"Family Assessment Response focuses on the child's safety, but relies on the family members working with the caseworker to identify the family's strengths and needs," said Gregg Heffner, commissioner of the County Department of Social Services. "Family members commit to taking an active



Meet some of the Oswego County FAR Team.
From left to right: Back/standing: Laura Peters (Senior Caseworker), Kris DeSpain (Caseworker), Brooke McLymond (Caseworker), Kelly Hurlbut (Senior Caseworker), Lisa Warchol (Caseworker). Front: Mike Terotta (Caseworker), Stephanie Tassone (Caseworker), Diane Godfrey (Caseworker) and Jennifer Delmar (Caseworker).

role in identifying and receiving community-based services. FAR is based on the belief that parents love their children and want them to be safe. Sometimes parents need help to make that happen."

The County Department of Social Services received approval to develop a

Family Assessment Response program late last year.

The first unit began accepting cases in March and a second team was launched in June.

Federal, state and local laws require that child protective services take action on each report of abuse, neglect or

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maltreatment that the agency receives. Historically, the investigation would focus on fact-finding and identification of the victim and a perpetrator.

“When Oswego County child protective workers are notified about concerns regarding a child’s safety, we first do an initial safety assessment,” said Rachael Pelow, family assessment response supervisor. “The criteria for referral to the FAR unit are based on state law. Certain reports, such as sexual misconduct, assault against a child or abandonment of a child, are not eligible for a FAR assessment.”

“When a case is referred to FAR, we immediately schedule an appointment with the family. In partnership with the families, we focus on the safety of children and family strengths to address concerns,” Pelow continued. “We do not focus on the details of a specific incident to prove or disprove that maltreatment or neglect occurred. We also discuss the family’s needs and offer to help the families meet their needs. We connect families with resources in their communities or through their informal support systems. The staff shares a strong commitment to the principles and practices of FAR.”

Research from other states has shown that children are found to be safer, that family engagement is improved, and that services to families and children increased using the Family Assessment Response approach.

Families and caseworkers alike are noticing a difference in Oswego County.

“The number one takeaway from the family meetings is that the parents didn’t realize the impact their actions had on their child,” said a child protective worker in the FAR unit. “The process is focused on the safety of the child and engaging the family in lasting change. Families don’t feel they have to hide something from caseworkers because there is no investigation. It surprised me how much better this works.”

The Oswego County Child Protection Advisory Council has been a strong advocate of Family Assessment Response as an alternative to child protection investigations. FAR staff recently updated the Child Protection Advisory Council on the progress of the program.

“The Child Protection Advisory Council wholeheartedly supports the department’s efforts to implement FAR,” said council chair Karrie Damm, director of the Oswego County Child Advocacy Center. “The Family Assessment Response model is invaluable in engaging and partnering with families, to help them achieve stability and increase safety for children in our community. Research has shown that families enrolled in the FAR program saw fewer incident reports and placements of children, and that family engagement was improved. Child protection staff members have embraced the practice, and I commend them for the extensive training and effort that they are putting into the program to make it succeed.”

Family Assessment Response Resources

The revised and updated FAR Documentation Guidelines are now available in the FAR folder on the OCFS intranet site.

New Report: Comparison of Experiences in Differential Response (DR) Implementation: 10 Child Welfare Jurisdictions Implementing DR. Casey Family Programs. 2012.

<http://www.casey.org/resources/publications/DifferentialResponseReport.htm>

New Resource: Differential Response: Early Implementation and Fidelity: Cross Site Report of the National Quality Improvement Center on Differential Response in Child Protective Services. Brown, Brett, Merkel-Holguin, Lisa, Hahn, Amy.

National Quality Improvement Center on Differential Response in Child Protective Services. Walter R. McDonald and Associates. 2012. <http://www.differentialresponseqc.org/evaluation/>

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.

Why-o-Why Ohio?

By: Jeanne Ferguson, FAR Project Manager, Butler Institute for Families



Thanks to the generosity and amazing organizational skills of staff with Casey Family Programs, a group of eager “students” of FAR from New York traveled to Columbus, Ohio, for three packed days at the end of July to meet with those responsible for Ohio’s statewide Alternative Response (AR) or FAR initiative. The purpose of this journey was to provide an opportunity for representatives from the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) in New York City to visit the closest metropolitan city currently implementing AR and to create a dialog where ACS representatives could ask questions and learn from Ohio AR stakeholders’ experiences in advance of ACS’s launch of FAR in Queens. The visit included a field trip to Franklin County DSS (Columbus, OH), a meeting with State organizers within the Judicial Branch of their state government, and a panel discussion with administrators from four other counties currently implementing their own unique AR initiatives.

The New York participants included five managers from ACS, two staff from the Butler Institute for Families, the OCFS Regional Office lead for New York City, and Casey Family Programs staff from around the country. All in all,

it was a fantastic opportunity to “try on another city’s shoes,” hear what it takes to prepare for and implement a robust new program initiative from all levels within a metropolitan area, and learn first-hand what worked for them in preparing for success. While there isn’t a city in the world quite like New York City, Columbus represents a multi-cultural, urban/suburban mix of cultures and socio-economic realities that can approximate the range of the family conditions existing in Queens.

Participants were asked to share their experiences and the impact that this visit had on them, given their unique perspective within their organization and their various responsibilities for the success of FAR in Queens.

We asked them to respond to two questions:

Question 1: What was one take-away you have from visiting with AR staff and stakeholders in Ohio?

Question 2: How will your experiences in Ohio directly impact/influence the implementation of FAR in NYC?

Howard Knoll, Senior Director, Casey Family Programs:

Answer 1: “That preventing children from entering foster care through a ‘differential response’ is achievable and demonstrated by the commitment of all levels of Ohio’s child welfare system.”

Answer 2: “That differential response can be internally sustainable through training of statewide facilitators and integrating differential response as a core approach to all child welfare practice.”

Eden Hauslaib, Chief of Staff, Division of Child Protection in ACS:

Answer 1: “I was moved by how dedicated and enthusiastic all staff were about AR and how they truly believed in the work they were doing, which

translated into families being served in a more engaging and transparent way, achieving better outcomes for children and families. I was also overwhelmed by the support that Ohio Counties Social Service programs had from the Courts, stakeholders, and communities; they presented as a united front to make this work succeed.”

Answer 2: “We are thinking more broadly in terms of outreach to the stakeholders and communities to educate them around AR and to try to enlist their support to ensure that FAR succeeds in NYC.”

Kasey Matz, Training Specialist, Butler Institute for Families:

“It seemed to me that that people of Ohio demonstrated a genuine commitment to FAR implementation across all levels and layers and that it is because of their diligence that they have experienced such profound success. In their approach to implementation they engaged in a continuous and ongoing process of self-evaluation, reflection, examination and new insights emerged all along the way. One example of this was their effective use of readiness assessment tools, resources, and support. Another key factor in their successful outcome is their wise and remarkable willingness to collaborate, not only internally but also with community partners. While there, we were able to hear from local judicial leadership and it sounded like the

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combined and inclusive efforts between the judicial branch and child protective services increased the pledge for FAR from multiple perspectives and players, right from the start. It cannot go without saying that certain innate characteristics of both state and local leadership also played an integral and impactful role in achieving FAR excellence. During this observation trip, we heard from leaders who are: visionary and open to the idea of “what’s possible” willing to take strategic and calculated risks; unwavering in their strengths-based

approach to organizational design; and steadfast in their demonstration of the “parallel process,” that is to say, they were confident and competent at practicing leadership skills that directly reflected the practice skills they wished to see between workers and families.”

As you can see, this opportunity was rich with information that is proving indispensable to staff in Queens, to our partners at Casey Family Programs, to the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), and to the Butler

Institute so every new FAR county can benefit from the knowledge gained. It won’t be long before we will be able to pay it forward to other states and counties who are embarking on a path toward this new practice shift in their region, especially large cities whose implementation strategies are extremely complex.

We’d all like to offer many thanks to Casey Family Programs for making this short journey and our longer New York FAR adventure possible.

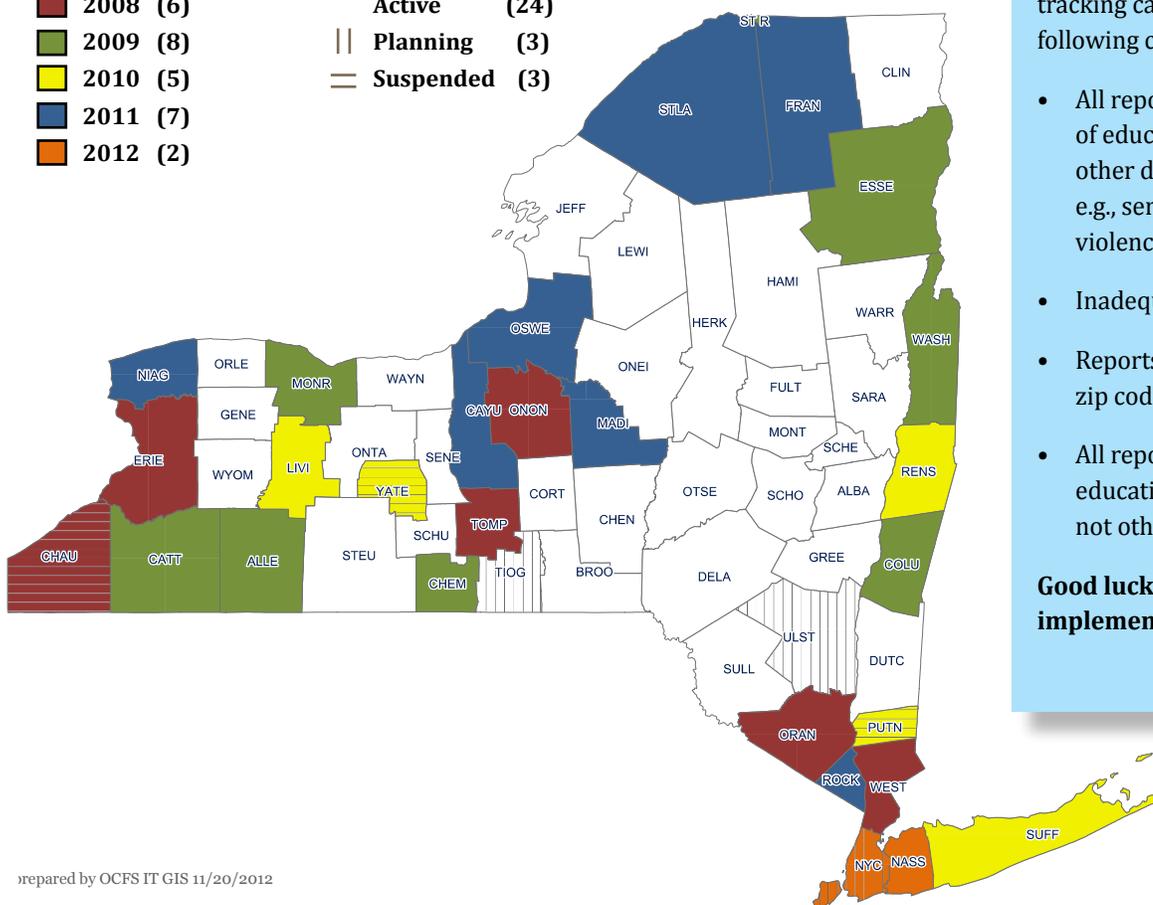
Family Assessment Response (FAR) Counties by Year Approved and Current Status November 2012

Year Approved

- 2008 (6)
- 2009 (8)
- 2010 (5)
- 2011 (7)
- 2012 (2)

Current Status

- Active (24)
- Planning (3)
- Suspended (3)



Prepared by OCFS IT GIS 11/20/2012

Welcome Nassau DSS to the FAR “Family”!

Congratulations and welcome to our newest FAR community, Nassau County. They began tracking cases into FAR on October 1 and have assigned two of their twelve CPS units to FAR-only cases. They will be tracking cases to FAR that meet the following criteria:

- All reports involving allegations of educational neglect (without other disqualifying allegations, e.g., serious bruises, domestic violence);
- Inadequate guardianship;
- Reports originating in six specific zip codes; and
- All reports submitted by educational personnel that are not otherwise disqualified.

Good luck during your initial FAR implementation!