

New York FAR Quarterly

New York Family Assessment Response (FAR) Quarterly



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Governor Andrew M. Cuomo
Commissioner Gladys Carrión, Esq.

Leslie Wilmot, Project Director

Jeanne Ferguson, Project Manager

Lara Bruce, Project Coordinator

Melissa Thompson, Graphic Designer

Butler Institute for Families

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Good Luck, Marcia Young – You will be missed!

By: Monroe County DSS – FAR Team

Our hats are off to Marcia Young for her 38 years of service to Monroe County’s children and families! Marcia has worked tirelessly for the last 3 years to help make Family Assessment Response (FAR) a reality in Monroe County. When given the opportunity to spearhead this important initiative in Monroe County, Marcia gladly took it on and spent many hours researching what FAR was and how to make it work for Monroe County. Marcia feels that it has been a privilege to have been a part of the changing landscape in Child Protective Services in New York State. She has been diligent in getting FAR up and running and assessing its needs over the past 2 years. Although there have been several changes in staff and many changes in the way Monroe County approaches FAR, Marcia has been behind us, pushing and prodding the whole time, keeping us on target. Without her constant desire to do what is right for the family, Monroe County would not be where it is today. Marcia believes in FAR as a family engagement model and feels that since we engage better with the family, we therefore get better information

from them. Marcia’s hope for FAR is that the screening process be broadened to include both low and higher risk families. Marcia wishes that every family in Monroe County and New York State that is eligible to work with the FAR approach be able to do so.

We in Monroe County will miss her presence at our daily meetings and her reinforcement that we are working to do what is right for the family.

Good luck Marcia!



Marcia Young, Monroe County

Rockland County – Celebrating One Year of FAR

By: P. T. Thomas, FAR Supervisor, Rockland County DSS

Rockland County was accepted to implement FAR, effective May 2, 2011, just one month before FAR was permanently enacted as part of New York State statute. During this one year, 595 out of 1,491 cases were assigned to the FAR track.

Rockland County is one of the smallest counties in New York State in terms of area (173.55 square miles), but has a widely diverse cultural population of 311,687. According to the 2010 Census, 22.1% of the people in Rockland County were born outside the United States, and 35.6 % of the people speak a language other than English at home.

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Rockland County's 1st Year Celebration Cake

Cultural backgrounds include, but are not limited to, Spanish, Haitian, Hassidic Jews, Orthodox Jews, Pakistanis, Indians, Chinese, Korean, Middle Eastern, Polish, and other Eastern European countries. Hispanics themselves belong to various multi ethnic groups, such

as Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Mexicans, El Salvadorians, Guatemalans, Brazilians, and Chileans. The languages spoken in Rockland County homes include, but are not limited to, Spanish (various versions of Spanish, depending upon the country of origin), Creole, French, Polish, Yiddish, Hebrew, Urdu, Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, Mandarin, Japanese, Korean, Arabic, and Yemenis.

When we discussed implementing FAR as part of the Round 4 Cohort, we thought of the importance of understanding our population in order to provide effective services to the families we serve. The selection of FAR staff with knowledge of some of these ethnicities, cultures, and languages was very important. Of course it was very important to select staff and supervisors who are strengths-based in their practice already, but also those that could understand our population.

In our FAR application, we wrote about the qualifications of our staff. The qualifications included two supervisors who are experienced in CPS investigation (one also in Family Preservation); five senior caseworkers with extensive experiences in CPS investigation, PINS Diversion Program, and Intensive Preventive Services; and six caseworkers with multi-lingual abilities and multi-cultural competency, who are experienced in multiple types of child welfare services. Further, all staff have extensive experience with Rockland County Family Court cases, including our Family Treatment programs. They are also trained in various skills, such as teaming, conflict resolution, leadership skills, and other strength-based work with families.

Our staff and supervisors speak English, Spanish, Creole, Polish, Yiddish, Hebrew, Urdu, Hindi, and Malayalam and work to gather a better understanding of various cultures and backgrounds of our population. We have also developed a workshop entitled "Working with Immigrant Families in FAR" and presented it at the FAR Symposium in September 2011, along with Lara Bruce, Butler Institute for Families. The workshop was well received.

Four months after launching FAR in Rockland County, in a roundtable with FAR workers, we identified a few issues needing to be addressed by the FAR team. They included working with CPS investigative workers to change their perception of FAR, family engagement issues, family cooperation, and the attitude of school personnel. These issues were addressed within a FAR coaching opportunity with Brenda Lockwood and Teresa Illinitch in December 2011, and again with Brenda Lockwood in April 2012.

We also did a lot of outreach, both within the CPS team and outside of our agency. Our outside sessions were offered at various locations, including a number of schools, Dominican College, Child Care Resources of Rockland, Rockland Family Shelter, and Refuah Health Center. Our concepts and approaches to FAR were well received by these participants. We also did a public forum on FAR at Suffern Library as a part of the County Initiative, which was well attended by people from all walks of life. They provided very positive feedback about the session.

Rockland County also has a committee on Disproportionate Placement of Minority Children, and our FAR team works closely with the committee to reduce the incidents of ethnically diverse placements in foster care. It may be noted that Rockland County had 65 children placed in foster care in 2011, and this year the number of placements has gone down to 5, as of April 30, 2012.

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The Rockland County FAR Team and Butler coaching staff, Brenda Lockwood and Teresa Illinitch



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Many of our staff and supervisors are also trained in “Undoing Racism” and participate in the monthly discussions following their participation in the training. All of them are also trained as facilitators in Family Meetings.

From Day 1, we approached our staff with a partnership attitude. We did group case discussions, group supervision, and peer consultations even before we were trained in these terms. The interaction and dynamics between FAR supervisors were supportive and positive, and Supervisor Paula Ross worked tirelessly to make sure that each FAR worker is completely on board with the FAR philosophy. The support of the investigative supervisors Rollin Aurelien, Carla Ortiz, and Ronnie Riskin was also an integral part of our growth and success.

For any program to be successful, it needs the support and guidance of the administration. Commissioner Susan Sherwood, Deputy Commissioners John Fella and Carol Barbash, Planning Coordinator Jan Jason, Children Services Coordinator Linda McMullen, and Director Barbara Gavin not only supported the initiative, but also explored every possible avenue to help us make sure that we succeeded in our efforts.

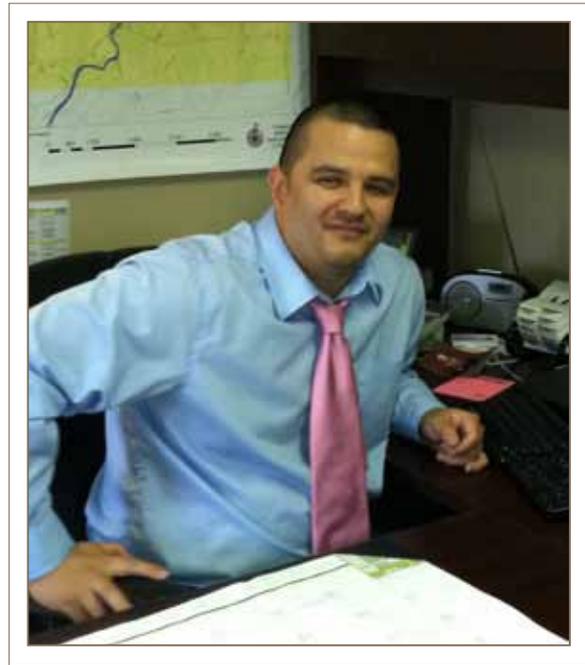
As we are celebrating the one year anniversary of FAR in Rockland County, we can proudly say that we have made a concerted effort to strengthen the families and thereby protect the children, and our approach is widely welcomed and appreciated.

Representing FAR Across the Country

By: Gilbert Jacobs , St. Regis Mohawk Tribe DSS

Hello, my name is Gilbert Jacobs and I work for the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe Department of Social Services (St. Regis DSS). I have worked in the Child Protective Unit since 2008. In 2009, the department made the decision to implement FAR into the menu of child protective response options we have available to families in our district. St. Regis has experienced great success and some challenges along the FAR implementation journey.

One of our main goals within FAR implementation was to reduce the rate of recidivism. This has been an area of great accomplishment for us. I have worked on 34 cases in the FAR track. Of those 34 cases, only 3 have had to be referred to the State Central Registry (SCR) again, after FAR involvement. We have also been able to educate families on the services available to them in the community. Several of the families that we have worked with still keep in regular contact with the department. These families have also



Gilbert Jacobs, St. Regis Mohawk Tribe DSS

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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.



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started to spread the word about the good work we are doing to other families in the community. I have received several phone calls from families inquiring about services available to them in the community.

During our participation in FAR, we were asked by the American Humane Association to attend a special Tribal Symposium in Washington, D.C. Along with the Chippewa-Cree, Osage, Fort Peck, Confederate Tribes of the Umatilla, Crow, and Northern Cheyenne nations, we were able to share not only our stories about FAR, but our cultures as well. From this opportunity, I have also been able to travel to such places as Albany, New York, Chicago, Illinois, and, most recently, Scottsdale, Arizona, to represent the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe and present on our FAR initiative.

St. Regis DSS is currently trying to increase the number of cases that we are accepting into the FAR track. All of our staff are now trained and can accept FAR cases. Our neighboring counties, Franklin and St. Lawrence, are now implementing FAR into their practice approach. Now when we have native families living off the reservation and in the neighboring counties, we can collaborate and use the FAR track to work with these families.

One area we continue to struggle with is the inclusion of domestic violence and substance abuse cases in FAR. We are currently hesitant to allow these cases into FAR due to the elevated risk involved. Domestic violence has been hard for us to assess at meetings, as families tend to lead the assessments away from that particular subject. We have received training from our domestic violence agency and are hoping to find a way to utilize what we learned in training in our screening and assessment process. Substance abuse cases present increased levels of risk for the family, so, at this time, we are very selective about allowing these types of cases into the FAR track.

I recently presented to our Tribal Council on the department's implementation of FAR. The Tribal Council was admittedly not familiar with how the entire social services department operated. The Tribal Council was very impressed with the work that has been done in FAR. Several members of The Tribal Council were interested in attending the next available symposium, so that they can continue to learn more. I was also asked to present at a future public forum to educate not only about FAR, but also services available through the Department of Social Services.

Learn more about the Tribal Symposium on Differential Response by visiting:
<http://www.differentialresponseqc.org/resources/>

Implementing Family Assessment Response with a Focus on Equity

*Kerron Norman, Westchester County DSS,
Director of Child Welfare*

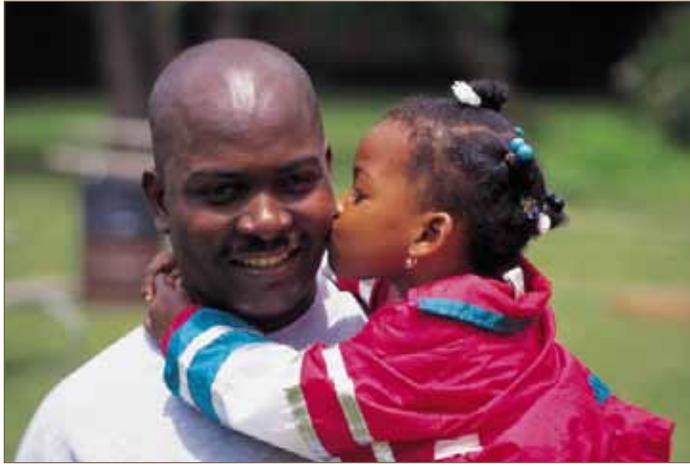
The Family Assessment Response (FAR) initiative's development and implementation in Westchester County's Department of Social Services (WCDSS) has been a gratifying and amazing experience. My involvement and shared state of consciousness with my staff has strengthened my belief that there is an essential connection in the use of the FAR model and reducing disparities in child welfare services. FAR employs core principles that are necessary to successfully engage families and children who may have otherwise been negatively impacted by the various social systems. There is an abundance of literature that links the overrepresentation of children of color in child welfare and other social service systems to social, class, and



Kerron Norman, Westchester County DSS

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economic factors that must be recognized in order to ensure that the needs of all children are fairly and appropriately served.

From April 2011 through January 2012, WCDSS sponsored the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond Undoing Racism/Community Organizing (URW) for 280 WCDSS staff, senior county attorneys, community partners, and older adolescents. The URW is an intensive 2½-day workshop designed to educate, challenge, and empower people to “undo” the biased structures that hinder effective social change and social services. The workshops included debrief sessions that were held within six weeks after the workshop in order to renew and deepen discussions, obtain staff feedback for the Department’s improvement, and to enhance overall learning.

The URW was used as a required staff development activity in WCDSS for those participating in the FAR initiative. All of Yonkers and the majority of Mt. Vernon CPS staff received URW training in preparation for a FAR rollout department wide. The WCDSS leadership understands that addressing race, ethnicity, and culture in our systems of care must become a major theme in child welfare training. This is very significant to FAR, because FAR builds on a collaborations and connections with communities, families, and youth.

It is also my belief that all child welfare professionals need to develop greater fluidity in starting, responding to, and participating in elevated conversations about inequity, race, class, gender, culture, and access to power. By this, I’m referring to conversations that are not centered on individual acts, negative or positive, but that have a basis in moving our institutions towards greater accountability, greater equity in service delivery, respectful treatment,

policies, and practice shifts that improve outcomes for all children.

State and local child welfare leaders also have a responsibility to create ongoing opportunities for discussing, reviewing, and revising policies and practices that lead to disparate practices and treatment. The child welfare system and the communities it serves must ensure that all children, regardless of their cultural, ethnic, or racial identity, receive services that address the full spectrum of their needs in a manner that reflects the strengths of their families.

In closing, FAR principles suggest that there has to be an increased awareness and commitment to accountability by the child welfare system to its constituents enacted through consultation and cooperation with parents, children, and the community. This will naturally include the development of policies and practices that foster engagement, and increase mutual trust, understanding, and respect. The overarching goal of FAR is to help the families and communities served by child welfare to realize their own power in determining the course of their lives and the lives of their children.

