

New York FAR Quarterly

New York Family Assessment Response (FAR) Quarterly



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A Tribute to Jamie Greenberg



Jamie is retiring after more than 30 years of service with the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), formerly the Department of Social Services (DSS). As a program and policy expert, most recently in his position as Director (appointed in April 2006) of the Bureau of Policy Analysis in the Office of Strategic Planning and Policy Development, he has supported the OCFS mission of “promoting the safety, permanency and well-being of our children, families and communities.”

His work has consistently reflected passion and commitment to New York’s children and families. He has served as an outspoken advocate for policy and practice that positively affect outcomes, and he has promoted action to overcome barriers created by system rules or financing structures. His knowledge and advocacy have influenced New York’s implementation of some of the most significant child welfare legislation, from the Child Welfare Reform Act of 1979 to the current demonstration of the Family Assessment Response child protection model.

Jamie started his career as a caseworker for Albany County (N.Y.)

DSS. He received his bachelor’s and master of social work degrees from the University at Albany.

From Jamie’s co-workers and colleagues across the state:

“Jamie can deliver news, good or bad, with a calm assurance that all will be well. In like manner he has the ability to repeat the same information for the 32nd time leaving the receiver of said information with the impression that this is the first time that he has conveyed the news with no hint of disdain or condescension in his delivery. We will miss this. Thank you Jamie!”

— Essex County

“You’ve been a pleasure to work with. Your sense of humor has really been appreciated, and the fact that you remain helpful even with all of the questions and challenges we pose. Your commitment to Family Assessment Response and the opportunities it presents to New York child welfare practice got us all off to a great start. Thank you and Best Wishes.”

— Tompkins County DSS

“Best of luck to you and thank you! Your enthusiasm and leadership in the implementation of FAR in NYS have been invaluable and much appreciated. You’ll be missed.”

— Suffolk County

“Jamie, your wealth of knowledge is invaluable. It was a pleasure working with you. You will be sorely missed! Best wishes in any and all future endeavors.”

— Raquel Wallen

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“His intelligence, outspoken and outside-of-the-box nature is what you immediately discern from your interactions with Jamie. Yet, Jamie has a style and grace of remaining teachable and open-minded to those around him. What Jamie represents to us here at the Albany Regional Office is that of a leader and friend.

“He has shown us that with hard work and dedication to the Family Assessment Response initiative, which represents a monumental shift in the culture of child protective services practice, that children in New York State and their parents will have a better chance of experiencing agents of change who in some way however

small or large will impact a family and together arrive at a healthier place as a family unit.

“We were recently reminded of the motivational image to never underestimate the power of one and that is what we would like Jamie Greenberg to know and remember about all his contributions to the New York State Office of Children and Family Services.”

—Heidi St. John and Karen Sessions

“You have been an incredible partner on our journey to help support counties implement FAR. Throughout our innumerable debates, disagreements and times of difficult

decision making, you have been a totally committed team player.

“You have the unique way of being forceful in stating your convictions and beliefs about the work (and as much as I hate to admit it, you’re usually right) yet are profoundly humble in acknowledging your contributions. In spite of your humility, the “cat’s out of the bag.” Anyone who has been part of FAR in New York knows how vital you have been to initiating and evolving FAR. To say that I will miss you personally and professionally is a profound understatement. All the best to you.”

—Sheila Poole

FAR Caseworker Helps Grieving Family in Washington County

A caseworker was handling a case reporting inadequate guardianship and lack of medical care regarding a 6-year-old child. The child was exhibiting increased aggressive behaviors at school. Further concerns had arisen that this 6-year-old was depressed and there was the possibility that someone else in the residence had attempted suicide. Caseworkers were already near the family’s residence and did not have cell phone coverage, so they were unable to call in advance of the initial home visit. To the caseworkers’ surprise when they arrived at the residence, the family’s 16-year-old son had in fact committed suicide and the family was planning his funeral. Keeping in mind the FAR principles, the sensitivity of the case and the family’s feelings, the caseworkers scheduled a later visit to give the family some time to process the changes in their family and the death of their son.

The family encountered many unexpected difficulties all at once from the loss of their son, including

hospital and flight-for-life helicopter charges and funeral expenses, as well as maintaining stability for the 6-year-old adopted relative with serious mental health issues. In follow-up visits, due to the mother’s inability to mention her son’s name without breaking down, the caseworker graciously assisted to make the necessary phone calls and fill out needed paperwork. The family was very thankful that this knowledgeable and experienced caseworker was aware that Medicaid would pay for the hospital, helicopter and funeral expenses, which totaled more than \$20,000.

This caseworker also went above and beyond for the family by calling counseling agencies that would take the mother’s insurance in both New York and Vermont so the mother would have this information when she was ready to seek out services. Because the family had to take time off from work and lost wages due to this tragic incident, the caseworker used the FAR flex funds to supply the family with food gift cards to

get them through this difficult time. The caseworker also recognized that the 6-year-old child was in distress but had already been attending counseling.

In allowing the family time to heal and process this tragic event and recognizing the needs of the 6-year-old child, the caseworker referred the child to a summer camp program, which was also paid for through FAR flex funds. Despite the extremely difficult nature of the case, the family was very receiving of the FAR process and appreciative that the caseworker was able to help them beyond typical child welfare services by assisting them with moving forward with the paperwork process and the difficult conversations they thought they would never have to have.

To date, the family continues to reach out for assistance and seeks support from this caseworker as a result of the caseworker’s kindness and knowledge of our agency’s mission and the FAR process.

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



Local Regional Office Project Associates (ROPAs) Make Good in the Land of FAR

By Jeanne Ferguson, Manager, American Humane Association, Family Assessment Response in New York

Some of the more significant players in the OCFS implementation of FAR in New York have been staff of the University at Albany’s Professional Development Program’s (PDP) Permanency Planning Project, known as ROPAs (Regional Office Project Associates). I caught up with three of them this fall (and I do mean caught up with them, as they are fleet of foot and on the road much of the time) to capture on paper what they do for counties when it comes to FAR support.

ROPAs Margaret Coombes, Region 2 in Rochester, and Heidi St. John and Karen Sessions, Region 4 in Albany, offer a detailed description of their job responsibilities relative to FAR. I asked them to answer a few questions so you can be confident when turning to your FAR lead for specific support and assistance in meeting your needs as you forge ahead with your FAR work.

Jeanne: As the FAR lead in your regional office, what does that mean to county FAR workers? What

do you offer that they can be sure to take advantage of as they go about engaging families?

Heidi and Karen: County workers look to us for consultation and technical assistance on FAR case practice. They often ask about how other FAR counties are handling situations. Because of our involvement with the Statewide Implementation Team, we can bring the experiences of all FAR counties to inform and support each county’s implementation.

Margaret: Initially when the state passed the legislation, I was asked by the Regional Office director to disseminate information to the OCFS Regional Office staff and districts about how differential response/FAR was different from a traditional CPS investigation. I provided information about the national research, the benefits and struggles of the service to agencies and families. I encouraged group discussion about the service differences and encouraged folks to discuss their fears and concerns of whether children would be safe when using FAR compared

to a CPS investigation. The state has made great progress and has experience with FAR, and now my role is to share state information and support the implementation by continuing to offer technical assistance regarding expectations and how to access resources.

Jeanne: In addition to your FAR support role, what other initiatives or areas of practice are you involved in?

Heidi and Karen: The Permanency Planning Project, sponsored by OCFS, is designed to assess district-specific training and technical assistance needs and to provide the resources needed to improve case practice. We assess training needs and broker training resources for districts and agencies in Region IV. We support the Regional Office monitoring of local district and agency practice through CPS, foster care and voluntary agency reviews. We also act as the Region IV Teaming Initiative liaisons, supporting implementation and providing access to resources.

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We facilitate the Region IV child welfare regional supervisor meetings for preventive and foster care programs, and Karen facilitates the Joint Planning Committee, a collaboration between voluntary agencies and local districts.

Margaret: I was intrigued by FAR because of my previous interest in exploring family engagement in child welfare. The FAR approach engages families by teaching caseworkers to be strength-based, take a family-driven approach and use solution-focused interventions. Most of the Region II agencies are under fiscal restraints and are seeking interventions that work best to engage families. The research has shown that families that are engaged participate in their own service decisions and are more likely to have better child welfare outcomes. I was also involved in another state initiative that partnered with parents who were active in the child welfare system. One initiative was the implementation of a parent advocate program pilot in Rochester that served families active in CPS. This supported a similar paradigm shift in how the system worked with families. The program hired parents who had a history with CPS and were successfully discharged from the system. The parents were then hired as parent advocates who supported and helped navigate other parents through the CPS system.

Jeanne: What's the thing that you like most about your work with local counties?

Margaret: I enjoy partnering with the local districts to bring about change. The districts have worked hard to implement the new service and families have benefited. My job is to support all their hard work. It is amazing to hear the

agencies' commitment and service to families, knowing that the FAR approach is reinforced when a family drives the service needs, does well and/or makes the necessary changes. It is a real bonus to see how much FAR caseworkers enjoy their work.

Jeanne: As New York expands its FAR scope more deeply within counties, and more broadly around the state, do you see your role expanding or being fine-tuned to encourage the best family-led practice in FAR?

Margaret: As NYS FAR expands, I'm unsure of the future role of a regional FAR lead. However, I'm hopeful that the designated role will fade because it will be no longer necessary. The hope is that FAR will become an accepted and integrated part of CPS practice. Safety assessments will be thorough and caseworkers will refine their engagement skills and this will be the evidence of the change in the CPS relationship with families and community resources.

Jeanne: Name the most gratifying practice shift you've seen in your FAR counties to date.

Heidi and Karen: In some districts, there is most definitely a shift in practice that encompasses mutuality, transparency and engagement with families with concrete outcomes. From a caseworker's perspective, FAR enhances their ability to use solution-focused practice and see positive outcomes.

Margaret: The FAR approach can change the perceptions of families and community partners of CPS and encourage everyone to participate in keeping children safe. Region II is in a transition phase and there are core groups within the agencies and community

supporting and encouraging this practice change. Nonetheless, caseworkers are still struggling to assess and plan with families and community resources for the future. FAR encourages a community approach to help families get their needs met.

As your FAR programs solidify and expand, if you have questions or needs, you can turn to your assigned regional staff person to guide your path in finding answers. Most regional staff have attended all of American Humane Association's FAR trainings. Many have participated in coaching events, and they will be continuing to support FAR as the statewide implementation reaches out to include additional counties in the next several years.

Your current FAR leads are:

Region 1: Buffalo

Gwen Bennett, (716) 847-3266

Region 2: Rochester

Margaret Coombes, (585) 238-8561

Region 3: Syracuse

Sonoma Pelton, (315) 423-1197

Region 4: Albany

Karen Sessions, (518) 474-0025

Heidi St. John, (518) 473-1595

Region 5: Spring Valley

Raquel Wallen, (845) 708-2491

Kevin Atkins, (631) 342-7057

Andrea Blair, (845) 708-2492

Andrea Straker-Smith, (845) 708-2462

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.

National Differential Response Conference: Huge Success

The 2010 differential response conference took place at the Disney Paradise Pier Hotel in Anaheim, Calif. More than 300 individuals from 24 states (including New York), the District of Columbia and Canada gathered to learn, share and network at this event. The 2010 conference differed from past years in that the workshops focused on four tracks:

1. Prevention and early intervention of child abuse and neglect
2. Differential or alternative response, also called family assessment response
3. Traditional response/ investigation
4. Chronic neglect, also called frequently encountered families

At the conference, Ben Tanzer from Prevent Child Abuse America spoke about engaging the community and tapping into public support about our work. He pointed out that it's often overwhelming for people to hear how CPS has failed them again; instead of wanting to get involved, they run in the other direction. He talked about reframing the message we send to the public about child welfare issues. They don't understand what their responsibility could be, which is a communications failure because we haven't successfully shown them what they can do.

“Thank you for this opportunity. This event recharges and renews my vision.”

– Conference Participant

New York FAR Reception

To welcome the New York FAR representatives to the conference and to thank them for their excitement and dedication to FAR, American

Humane Association held a small gathering for these staff members. The get-together included conversation, networking and door prizes. About 20 New York staff members attended and a good time was had by all!

“I had very limited understanding of differential response and this conference gave me great knowledge about the practice and why this can work over the current systems.”
– Conference Participant

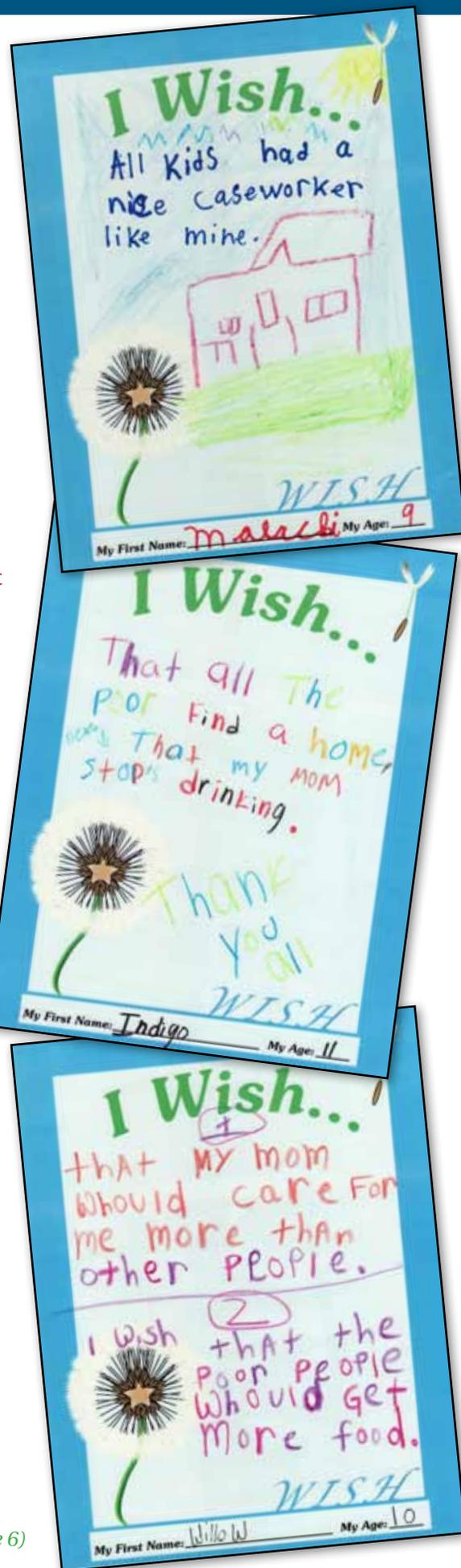
Wish Sheets

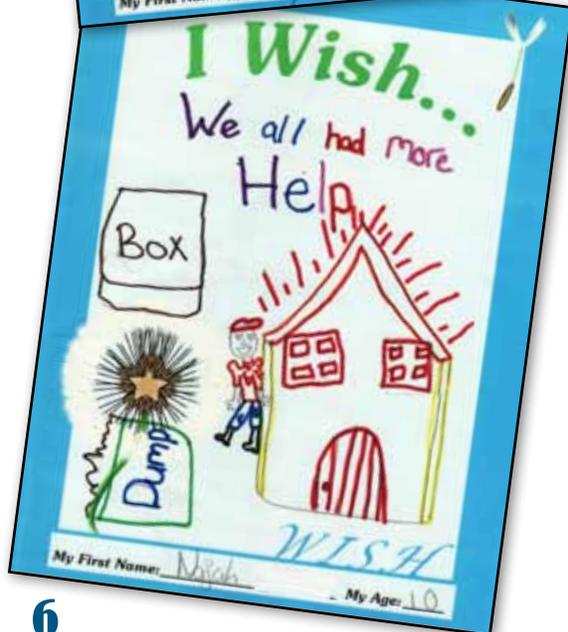
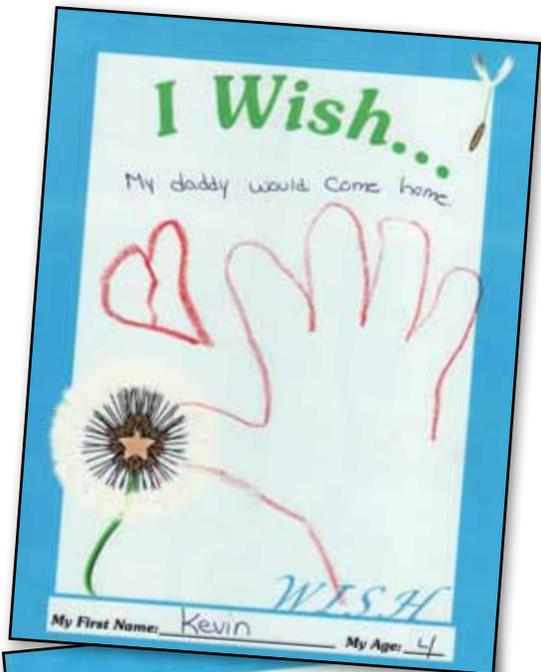
In an effort to bring the voices of children and families into our conference space, American Humane Association reached out to some of your colleagues in the field and asked them to gather messages from the children and families they work with. These messages are poignant and powerful reminders to each of us that children and parents have a voice — voices not only to hear, but also to learn from.

American Humane Association would like to thank the following counties for their willingness to participate in this effort. These wish sheets would not have been possible without their openness and eagerness to bring the voices of the families they work with to the fore.

Orange County, Goshen, N.Y.
Westchester County, Yonkers, N.Y.
Suffolk County, Ronkonkoma, N.Y.
Allegany County, Belmont, N.Y.
Essex County, Elizabethtown, N.Y.
Tompkins County, Ithaca, N.Y.
Monroe County, Rochester, N.Y.
Onondaga County, Syracuse, N.Y.

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Webinar Series: You Spoke and We Listened

Thanks to those who participated in the 2010 FAR and differential response webinar series and provided feedback on the individual sessions and overall series. Based on your feedback, we have created a plan to be sure that FAR counties are receiving the kinds of webinars you would most benefit from.

American Humane Association is excited to invite you to participate in the 2011 national differential response webinar series. And, as part of our upcoming contract with OCFS, American Humane Association is offering NY FAR counties the opportunity to participate in up to **four** of the 2011 sessions for **FREE!**

How to Take Advantage of This Great Opportunity

Print and fill out the series registration form posted at www.americanhumane.org/protecting-children/training-professional-development/differential-response-webinar.html and select the webinars you are interested in participating in. In the payment area, please write "Paid by NY FAR – [Your County]." If you are interested in more than four sessions, simply select as many as you would like to participate



in, write "Paid by NY FAR – [Your County]" somewhere on the form, and submit payment for the remaining sessions. Remember, if you register for four or more additional sessions, they are only \$25 per session.

New this year for social workers:

You can also earn continuing education units (CEUs) for participating in this year's series. However, these will not count toward training credits for NYS.

In addition, American Humane Association's FAR staff will be providing four FAR-specific webinars, beginning after July 2011. There will not be any overlap in the topics provided by the differential response series and the FAR series. The FAR series will be more specific to the needs of FAR counties, as you have identified in your feedback. The differential response series will provide you with a national overview on a variety of topics relevant to New York and other states and counties.

Additional Resources

- FAR-related video clips from OCFS: <http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/cfsr/safety.shtm>
- Coming soon! Quality Assurance Case Documentation Review Final Report
- Materials from the 2010 differential response conference: www.americanhumane.org/protecting-children/programs/differential-response/resources/past-conferences-events.html