



FAR Evaluation Impact Study: Two-Year Follow-Up

Background

Six counties began accepting families to the Family Assessment Response (FAR) track in late 2008 or early 2009. As required by Chapter 452 of the Laws of 2007, OCFS evaluated the pilot counties and submitted a report to the Governor's Office in January 2011. The evaluation included all families who were referred to FAR between August '09 and February '10. In addition to reporting on families and caseworkers' experiences with FAR, the evaluation report included short-term child welfare outcomes (new child protective services (CPS) reports, service cases, and petitions by six months). Based on the promising findings (most importantly that children on the FAR track were at least as safe as children on the investigative track), permanent legislation was signed into law in 2011 allowing FAR to be used as a child protective service statewide. New York State's FAR Model is outlined at the end of this report.

Research Questions

This two-year follow-up research brief examines the FAR program's long-term impact on:

1. the percentage of families with subsequent reports of child abuse and neglect
2. the percentage of families requiring the opening of a public child welfare services case
3. the percentage of families with Family Court petition filings
4. the percentage of families who have children placed in foster care

Subsequent reports were tracked for two years after the closing of the focal CPS report. For all other outcomes, the two-year follow-up period starts at the intake date of the focal CPS report.

Sample Selection

In two of the six pilot counties, control groups were available to examine the impact of the FAR program. In Onondaga County, a randomized-control trial (RCT) was implemented for seven months. For Tompkins County, a historical control group was constructed using a multi-stage process (including FAR screening and one-to-one nearest neighbor propensity score matching) to identify families who were investigated in 2007 and would have met the FAR criteria had the program existed at that time.

The sample groups in Onondaga County consisted of 946 families who were served on the FAR track and 546 FAR-eligible families who were investigated. For Tompkins County, there were 299 families in both the FAR group and the investigated historical control group. The evaluation samples were selected while the state was still in the early stages of developing its FAR model. Differences in implementation between the two counties are explained in the study limitations section on page seven.

Research Findings

Details of the research findings, including survival analysis charts, are shown on the next four pages. A summary of the findings is on page six.

Subsequent Reports of Child Abuse and Neglect

The percentage of families with any subsequent reports, and any indicated reports, after the focal report closing date are shown in Tables 1a and 1b for Onondaga and Tompkins counties, respectively. Statistical analyses (t-test and survival analysis¹) show that differences in the subsequent report rate between the investigated control and FAR groups are not statistically significant in any of the 6, 12, or 24-month follow-up periods. However, in Tompkins County significantly fewer FAR families had indicated reports at all follow-up periods, with only 14 percent of FAR families with indicated reports by two years, compared to 21 percent of investigated families (see Table 1b and Figure 1b). In Onondaga County, the only significant difference was at the six-month follow-up.

While FAR did not have either short or long-term impacts on reducing new allegations being made, these findings show that assigning families to the FAR track does not negatively impact children’s safety - children from the FAR track are at least as safe as the children whose families were investigated.

Table 1a: Percentage of Families with Subsequent Reports in Onondaga County

	Any Subsequent Report after Focal Closure		Indicated Report after Focal Closure	
	Investigated Control	FAR	Investigated Control	FAR
6-month follow up	26.4%	26.0%	7.5%**	4.1%**
12-month follow up	41.2%	41.1%	12.0%	13.0%
24-month follow up	55.5%	57.2%	21.1%	21.8%

** Percentage differences are statistically significant at .01 level.

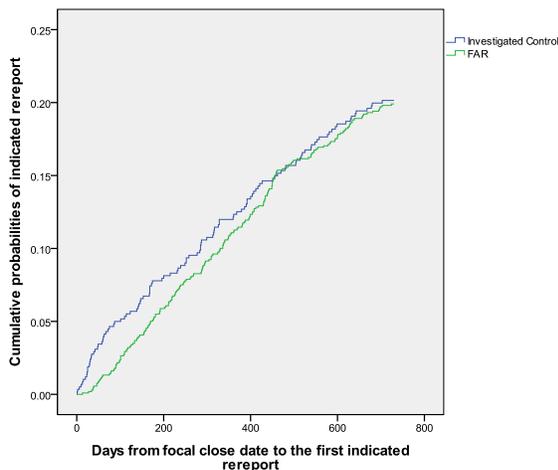
Table 1b: Percentage of Families with Any Subsequent Reports in Tompkins County

	Any Subsequent Report after Focal Closure		Indicated Report after Focal Closure	
	Historical Control	FAR	Historical Control	FAR
6-month follow up	34.1%	30.3%	7.7%*	4.0%*
12-month follow up	47.8%	45.5%	16.1%*	6.4%*
24-month follow up	58.2%	58.5%	21.1%*	14.0%*

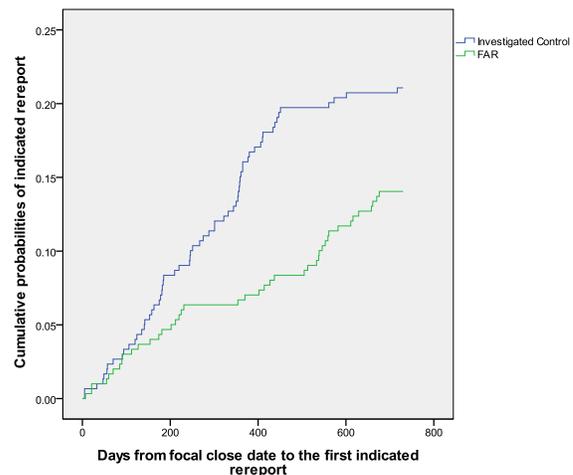
* Percentage differences are statistically significant at .05 level.

Figure 1: Cumulative Probability of Subsequent Indicated Report within Two Years of Case Closure

a. Onondaga County (controls for prior CPS reports)



b. Tompkins County (significant at .05 level)



Child Welfare Services Case Opening

The percentage of families for whom a public child welfare services (CWS) case was opened after intake is shown in Table 2. A CWS case could include preventive, long-term protective, and/or foster care services. (Families with a CWS case open at time of intake were excluded from the analyses.)

In Tompkins County, a higher percentage of families in the historical control group (28.4 percent) had a CWS case open within the two-year follow up period than the FAR families (22.9 percent). The difference did not reach statistical significance at 24 months ($p=.098$), even though there were statistically significant differences at the six and twelve month points. Survival analysis (see Figure 2) confirms that the difference between these groups is not statistically significant at the .05 level, even though the observed pattern suggests that families in the historical control were more likely to have a CWS case open within the two-year follow-up period.

Consistent with the six-month and one-year findings, the percentage of families with a new CWS case opened within two years of the focal intake date is very similar in both the investigated and FAR groups in Onondaga County. The percentage of investigated families with child welfare services cases increased from 11.6 percent by six months to 20.2 percent by 24 months, compared to a trajectory of 9 percent to 21 percent for FAR families in Onondaga.

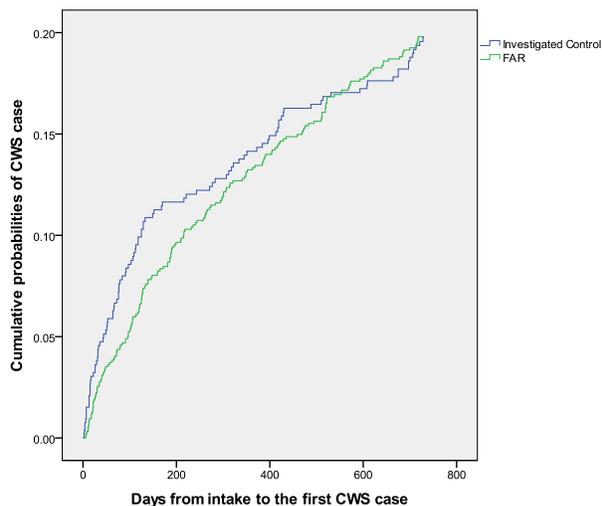
Table 2: Percentage of Families with Public Child Welfare Services Case Opening

	Onondaga County		Tompkins County	
	Investigated Control (N=510)	FAR (N=873)	Historical Control (N=282)	FAR (N=280)
6-month follow up	11.6%	9.0%	13.8%*	8.2%*
12-month follow up	14.3%	13.7%	19.1%*	12.1%*
24-month follow up	20.2%	21.0%	28.4%	22.9%

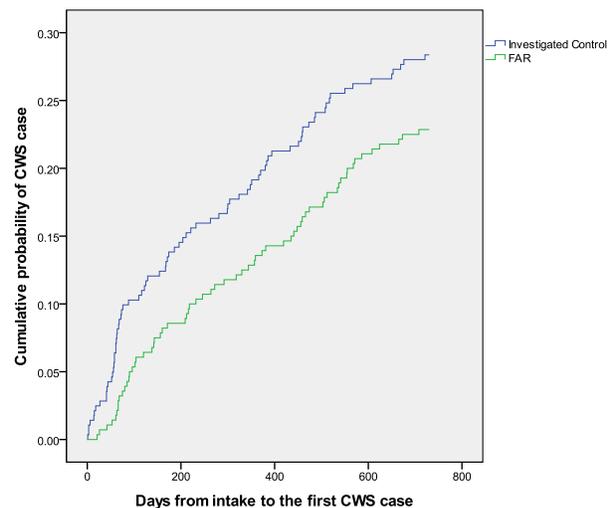
* Percentage differences are statistically significant at .05 level.

Figure 2: Cumulative Probability of CWS Case within Two years of Intake by Group Assignment

a. Onondaga County (controls for prior reports)



b. Tompkins County



Petitions Filed in Family Court

The filing of an abuse, neglect, PINS, or JD petition in family court is used by local districts when voluntary efforts are not enough to protect the safety and well-being of the child. Reducing the need for family court intervention is the outcome where FAR really showed its impact in reducing penetration into the child welfare system.

The percentage of families with a petition filed in family court is shown in Table 3. T-tests and survival analysis (Figure 3) show a strong effect of FAR on this outcome, especially at the two-year follow-up point. Families in the control group in both Onondaga (9.3 percent) and Tompkins (14 percent) counties were more likely to have a petition filed in family court than those in the FAR group (6.1 percent and 8 percent) within the two-year follow-up period. In all earlier follow-up periods, the FAR group had a lower petition rate, although in Tompkins the difference was not significant until the two year point.

Table 3: Percentage of Families with Petition Filed in Family Court

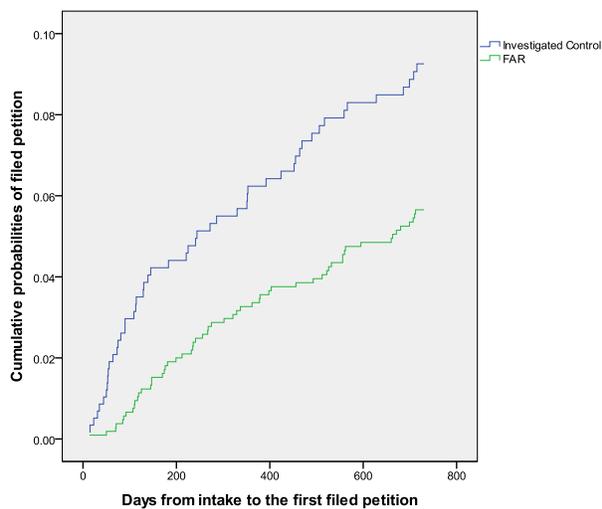
	Onondaga County		Tompkins County	
	Investigated Control	FAR	Historical Control	FAR
6-month follow up	4.4%*	1.9%*	4.0%	2.7%
12-month follow up	6.4%*	3.3%*	8.4%	4.4%
24-month follow up	9.3%*	6.1%*	14.0%*	8.0%*

* Percentage differences are statistically significant at .05 level.

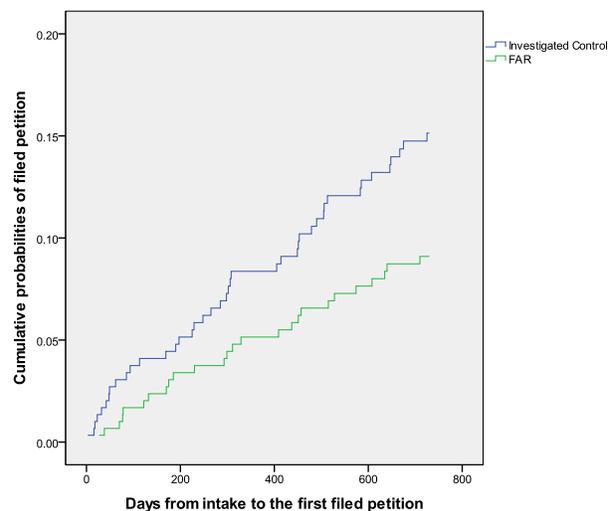
While the majority of family court petitions were Article 10 (abuse/neglect) petitions, this outcome measure also includes Article 7 (PINS) and Article 3 (JD) petitions.

Figure 3: Cumulative Probability of Petition Filed within Two Years of Intake by Group Assignment

a. Onondaga County (controls for prior reports)
Difference is statistically significant at .01 level.



b. Tompkins County
Difference is statistically significant at .05 level.



Foster Care Placement

Foster care is a last resort to protect child safety. The impact analysis shows that FAR had an impact on this outcome in one county. The percentage of families with foster care placements within one-year and two-years is shown in Table 4. (Six-month follow up statistics are not shown in the table because foster care placements within six months were very rare.)

The data reveals that families in the historical control group (11 percent) had a foster care placement rate almost twice as high as families in the FAR group (6 percent) in Tompkins County. The survival analysis graph (Figure 4) illustrates when the first foster care placement occurred within the two-year follow-up period, and provides further support to the conclusion that FAR had a long-term impact on reducing foster care placement in Tompkins County for families who met the FAR eligibility criteria.

Onondaga had a very low rate of placement by two years in both the control (2.7 percent) and FAR (2.6 percent) group by two years, and FAR had no impact on placement rates in this county.

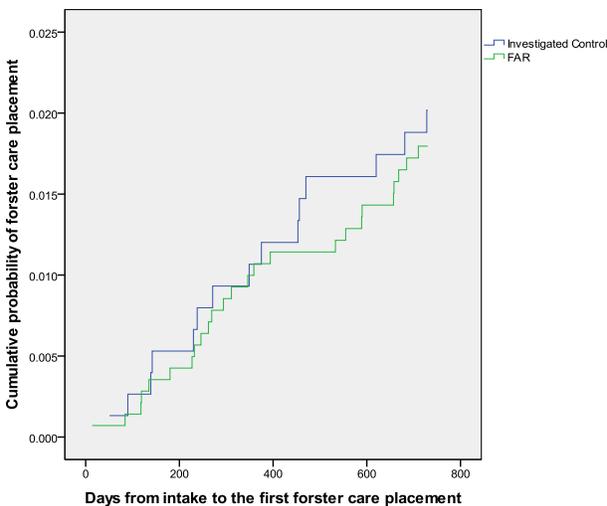
Table 4: Percentage of Families with Foster Care Placement

	Onondaga County		Tompkins County	
	Investigated Control	FAR	Historical Control	FAR
12-month follow up*	1.5%	1.6%	6.0%	3.3%
24-month follow up	2.7%	2.6%	11.0%*	6.0%*

* Percentage difference is statistically significant at .05 level.

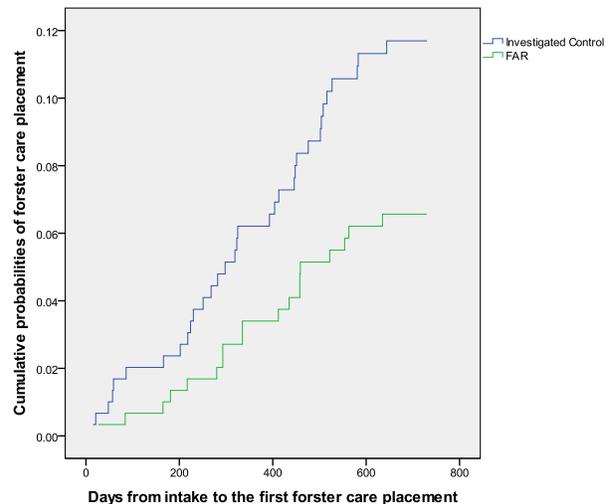
Figure 4. Cumulative Probability of Foster Care Placement within Two Years of Intake by Group Assignment

a. Onondaga County (controls for prior reports)



b. Tompkins County

Difference is statistically significant at .05 level.



Summary

The FAR program avoided further penetration into the child welfare system by reducing family court petitions and foster care placements.

- Compared to FAR-eligible families who were investigated, families served on the FAR track were less likely to have family court petitions and foster care placements throughout the two year follow-up period.
- The strongest finding was that the FAR approach led to a decrease in the need for family court involvement in both counties. The percentage of families for whom a petition was filed in family court within two years after the focal report intake date was significantly lower for FAR families than for investigated control group families in Onondaga County (6.1 percent vs. 9.3 percent) and in Tompkins County (8.0 percent vs. 14.0 percent).
- The FAR approach also led to a significant decrease in foster care placements in one county, but essentially no difference in the other county. The percentage of families with at least one child placed in foster care within two years after the focal report intake date was significantly lower for FAR families than for families in the investigated control group in Tompkins County (6.0 percent vs. 11.0 percent). Onondaga had a very low placement rate for both FAR- eligible groups; 2.7 percent for investigated families and 2.6 percent for FAR families after two years.

The FAR program delayed FAR families' need for continuing public child welfare services (CWS), although the effect may diminish over time.

- At six months and one-year follow-up, FAR decreased the need for opening a CWS case in Tompkins County, suggesting 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. Although the same trend was observed—a lower percentage of FAR families than investigated families had an open CWS case within the two-year follow-up period in Tompkins County (22.9 percent vs. 28.4 percent)—this difference was not statistically significant at .05 level. These findings suggest that FAR had an impact on reducing the need for the public child welfare services in the short term, but that this impact diminishes over time. There was no effect in Onondaga County.

Children served on the FAR track were just as safe as investigated children.

- No significant differences were found between FAR and investigated control groups in the likelihood of a subsequent report two years after report closure.
- Significantly fewer FAR families had subsequent indicated reports at six months in both counties, but only in Tompkins County did the effect remain through all follow-up periods, with 14 percent of FAR families and 21 percent of investigated families with subsequent indicated reports two years after report closure.
- Although there are many reasons outside of CPS and families' control that affect reporting rates, it is possible that a more recent sample of FAR cases would show more of an effect on subsequent reports. The FAR sample in this study was chosen very early in the project when the program model was not completely defined and training and coaching of FAR workers and supervisors was very minimal, in contrast to the current mature FAR program model and extensive training requirements.

Limitations of the Study

While the impact findings are accurate and valid, cross-county and over-time comparisons may not be appropriate for several reasons. The evaluation samples were selected while New York State (NYS) was still in the early stages of developing its FAR model. Based on the pilot counties' experiences, many program requirements - including a much more extensive training and coaching program - were implemented after the sample was selected. While the basic outlines of the program have remained the same (eligibility requirements, appointments made for first home visit, voluntary, no determination of allegations, etc.), so much program development work has since transpired to improve the engagement, assessment, and helping skills of FAR caseworkers that a more recent sample might show different impacts on child welfare outcomes.

Each county is compared to its own control group because counties were permitted to implement FAR with varying client populations, use different types of staffing structures, and serve varying percentages of the CPS caseload. Tompkins County had the broadest FAR inclusion criteria and assigned about 66 percent of CPS familial reports to the FAR track during the sampling period. Onondaga County's FAR inclusion criteria was more restrictive than Tompkins' and it assigned about 28 percent of CPS familial reports to the FAR track during the sampling period. Families with substance abuse and domestic violence problems were excluded from FAR in Onondaga, but were accepted into FAR in Tompkins during the sampling period.

In addition, Tompkins County had been planning the FAR model with extensive staff and community input and education for more than a year before any families were assigned to the FAR track. The Tompkins FAR workers were all experienced Senior CPS caseworkers and a talented social work supervisor was dedicated to FAR. Daily group supervision for case consultation was immediately implemented and allowed for rapid learning transfer among FAR workers. In contrast, Onondaga, a much larger district with a major city, had a sudden influx of brand new caseworkers assigned to FAR during the pilot period. Despite the best of intentions, this county just did not have the time and resources available to develop the FAR casework and supervisory skills needed to truly transform case practice during the initial short evaluation period, although they have continued to deepen their practice over the ensuing years.

That more positive impacts were found in Tompkins is consistent with the knowledge that Tompkins was more advanced in its practice change than Onondaga at the time the evaluation sample was drawn. The pilot counties have continued to actively engage with the New York's community of FAR trainers and other counties that have since implemented FAR. Since the FAR practice model, training opportunities, and skills and experience of FAR workers and supervisors are much broader and deeper now, it is reasonable to conclude that the findings reported here are minimal effects and that a more recent sample would show even more positive impacts.

The New York State Family Assessment Response Model

When using the FAR approach to respond to a child protective report, the focus of the FAR worker is about identifying, assessing, and addressing each family's unique needs and strengths, and doing this in an intentionally family-centered, non-adversarial manner. While safety is of utmost concern with both the FAR and regular investigative tracks, with FAR, safety is sought through family engagement and partnerships, rather than through investigative techniques that are more suited to discovering whether allegations are true or false. The FAR approach encourages the use of services without the stigma of a formal determination of neglect.

FAR practice begins with a transformation of the language used when working with families. Instead of labeling people as "alleged subjects," "perpetrators" and "victims," families are just families, mothers, fathers, children and so forth. When practiced by skilled FAR workers, the tone, content, and intent of questions explored with families on the FAR track are so different than in a typical investigation that families on the FAR track have a very different, more positive experience with CPS than families subject to the traditional CPS investigation process.

Key aspects of the FAR model include: child safety is achieved through family engagement and collaborative partnerships; supportive and encouraging approaches, interventions, and services are used; comprehensive and holistic assessments are conducted with families; and FAR allows flexibility for both the CPS system and families. The six principles of partnership that are infused throughout the FAR program are: everyone desires respect; everyone needs to be heard (and understood); everyone has strengths; judgments can wait; partners share power; and partnership is a process. The New York State FAR Model has been a partnership in progress for more than six years and the NYS FAR Practice Guide continues to be updated as more knowledge is gained.

¹ A type of survival analysis, Cox proportional hazards regression, was used to compare the outcomes of the FAR and control groups. Cox regression considers the timing of the event and the rate at which it occurred simultaneously, and takes censoring into account (i.e., event did not occur by the end of the observed period and/or cases that were observed for less than the maximum follow-up period). The "Strata" option in Cox regression allows for the estimation of hazard functions for each group separately (i.e., FAR and control groups).

The FAR evaluation study was conducted by Joanne Ruppel, MA and Yufan Huang, PhD.

Many thanks to Faye Rees and Cynthia Mulford for cross-checking subsequent reports, to the Onondaga hotline staff who implemented the RTC, and to the Tompkins staff who helped screen the historical control group for FAR eligibility.

The 2011 report to Governor and Legislature includes findings from surveys of families and caseworkers and can be found on the OCFS website: [Differential Response in Child Protective Services in New York State: Implementation, Initial Outcomes and Impacts of Pilot Project](#)