

**RENSSELAER COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

Family Assessment Response Application

(a)

The factors to be considered by the social services district in determining which reports will be addressed through the family assessment and services track and the size of the population to be the subject of the differential response program.

Cases to be considered for the FAR track will be those which include allegations of inadequate guardianship, lack of medical care and educational neglect. Any report alleging physical or sexual abuse, abandonment, or failure to thrive where the subject is a parent or guardian or which involves alleged abuse or maltreatment by a subject who is providing daycare, babysitting or foster care to such child must be investigated as a traditional CPS case. Rensselaer County will exclude COI/1034 reports and cases with on-going police involvement where the alleged subjects will be arrested. CPS will screen reports very closely regarding substance abuse, domestic violence and cases with prior indications or past foster care involvement. Decisions to include these cases will be made on a case by case basis.

The Deputy Commissioner and Director of CPS have been meeting with a workgroup comprised of supervisors and caseworkers from CPS as well as caseworkers from all child welfare units. We have been meeting weekly for several months in preparation for completing our application to be considered for inclusion in round 3 of the FAR Pilot. We have been discussing the FAR philosophy and working on developing our screening tool. The group's response has been very positive and they have been sharing the information from our meetings with all other child welfare staff.

Rensselaer County will screen reports utilizing an agency developed screening tool. (Please see Attached.) Preliminary screening has occurred by two CPS Supervisors. This allowed the team to tweak the instrument to meet our needs. However, as we move forward with implementation the tool may need further changes. One month prior to implementation the tool will be used to screen all reports in preparation for going "live." After reviewing internal statistics, we estimate that 40% of the total reports in a 12 month period could be screened for the FAR track. However, based upon current staffing shortages we are proposing that we will utilize the FAR track for approximately 25% of the reports for the first six months, 30% by nine months and will reach the 40% goal by the end of the first year.

The number of supervisors and workers dedicated to FAR will be commensurate with the number of reports we will be handling in this track. Initially, one supervisor and four to

five workers will be dedicated. At the end of the first year we anticipate that two Child Protective units each with one supervisor and a total of eight to ten workers will be dedicated to handling FAR cases. Each weekday morning the assigning supervisor, CPS Director and the FAR supervisors will meet to discuss and screen each case from the prior night on-call to determine eligibility. As reports come in during the day the assigning supervisor will consult with the FAR supervisors to screen reports and consult with CPS Director or Deputy Commissioner as needed. Initially, on call reports will be handled in the traditional investigative manner. However, as supervisors and workers become more familiar with FAR core principles and process we will transition the use of the FAR approach to all reports received nights and weekends that are deemed eligible.

(b)

The assessment process regarding child safety and risk as well as the types of services and interventions to be provided of families included in the family assessment and services track and a description of how the services will be offered.

Child safety is and will be our first priority. Child safety and risk will be assessed throughout the duration of the case. The FAR worker will team with the family to identify strengths and resources, identify problem areas of risk and safety and create a plan to utilize family and community resources. The standardized tool, Family-Led Assessment Guide (FLAG) will be used to gather information from the family to assist in establishing needs and potential risk factors. The caseworker will work with the family to identify areas of strengths and needs and establish a plan along with the family to ensure the safety of the children and make appropriate referrals as necessary to establish family self sufficiency. The tool will be reviewed with the family at various times throughout the life of a case to reevaluate goals and to help determine when the family can safely maintain themselves without Rensselaer County assistance.

(c)

A description of the process to be followed for planning and monitoring the services provided under the family assessment and services track.

Any services provided directly by Rensselaer County staff will be monitored in several respects. The Director of CPS and Deputy Commissioner will utilize random case reviews to ensure quality assurance and to ensure that safety is being assessed throughout the life of the case and the FAR core principles are being utilized with families as standard practice. In addition, the FAR focus group will continue to meet on a quarterly basis to review a sampling of cases. They will discuss problems and concerns that may arise and will make recommendations for improvements. Any contracted or non-profit agency providing services to the FAR families will be monitored based upon strength based measures and outcomes.

(d)

A description of how the principles of family involvement and support consistent with maintaining the safety of the child(ren) will be implemented in the family assessment and services track.

The safety of children is our first priority. Safety of children is continually assessed through out the duration of the Department's involvement with the family. Safety will be assured by on-going dialogue with the family and service providers as well as very close supervision between the FAR worker and their supervisor. It is our belief that all families have the intrinsic right to be treated with dignity and respect. We will approach the family in the most non-intrusive way possible while always maintaining the safety of the children. We will use a strength based, family focused approach as a foundation to our work with families. We will use a transdisciplinary approach engaging all existing service providers, familial and community resources to create a viable and sensible plan which will reduce the risk to the children. We will utilize the practice of family meetings as well as service provider collaboration to put supports in place to strengthen the family unit. Agreed upon goals and outcomes will be family driven. When we meet the family where they are at and a mutual understanding of the issues are agreed upon, the success rate will significantly increase.

(e)

A description of how the differential response program will enhance the ability of the district to protect children, maintain the safety of children and preserve families.

The differential response will enhance the ability of the Department to protect children and preserve the families in a myriad of ways. First and foremost, by teaming with the families in a strength based approach they will be more open and honest with the caseworkers which will enable them to complete a more thorough and comprehensive safety and risk assessment. By identifying family and community resources to support the family there will be interventions in place to reduce risk factors after Rensselaer County stops working with the family. By creating an environment for the family to share their concerns and needs more openly, families are more apt to reach out for services in the future before a report to the SCR is necessary.

(f)

A description of how the district will reduce the involvement of government agencies with families and maintain the safety of children through the use of community resources.

Completing a comprehensive assessment with the family while continually providing for safety and risk will reduce government involvement in several ways. Identifying needs and providing wrap around services early on with the family may shorten the time of CPS involvement. Referrals to government agencies, such as TANF, Medicaid, Food Stamps and the Homeless Coordinator may be made on behalf of the family to assist with basic needs and ensure safety of the children. However, making these linkages and creating a plan including community and family supports will move the family towards self sufficiency. National research indicates that implementing the differential response and engaging families early on as partners results in better assessments, participation and will improve children's safety. The Department feels that by providing caseworkers with an alternate way of working with families that the process will ultimately reduce the maltreatment recurrence rate in Rensselaer County.

(g)

A description of the staff resources proposed to be used in the family assessment and services track, including the proposed staff workloads and qualifications.

It is our hope that the CPS supervisors and caseworkers to be involved with the FAR Pilot will naturally emerge as the awareness of the program increases. The final staff appointments to the program will be made through a collaborative process including the Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, Director of CPS and consultation with the current CPS supervisors. Only CPS staff will be assigned to work with FAR families. Staff will not be involved with both the family assessment response track and the traditional CPS investigations. However, as the workers' caseload's transition from the traditional track to FAR, they will work on both types of cases simultaneously. The average caseload for an investigative worker is around 15 and it is our anticipation the FAR workers will be comparable. Those caseworkers who express an interest in the FAR approach should have already demonstrated their ability to assess safety and risk, to interview and assess the families' needs in a strength based manner and to conduct casework in a non-adversarial way. If it is deemed a case is no longer eligible for FAR due to new allegations and a report must be made, the FAR worker will accompany the CPS worker to transition the family in the most appropriate manner possible. Rensselaer County is fortunate to have a Clinical Coordinator on staff. Our clinical coordinator will be available to assist the FAR workers on cases that involve mental health issues and to assist in making appropriate referrals to the mental health system.

(h)

A description of the training that will be provided to district staff regarding the family assessment response program. Additionally, please include a description of training to be provided to any non-district staff to be used in the differential response

program. Both descriptions should include, but not be limited to, a description of the training involving maintaining the safety and well-being of children and any cross training planned for family assessment and investigative staff.

All Rensselaer County child welfare staff have completed NYS child welfare core training and other trainings related to children services programs. All CPS staff have completed CPS Core Training and continually partake in specialized trainings related to safety and risk. Although only CPS staff will be working with FAR families directly, we feel that it is of utmost importance that all child welfare staff be trained on the core principles of the program. Several informational and training sessions will be held with all staff to discuss the FAR program and the expectations that it will create a culture change within the agency and the way we conduct casework practice. All designated child welfare staff will be mandated to attend the full day trainings provided by American Humane Association (AHA) and OCFS. Any non-district staff to be involved with the FAR model such as Northeast Parent and Child Society will be mandated to participate in the initial AHA trainings and any ongoing training deemed beneficial.

(i)

A description of the community resources that are proposed to be used in the family assessment and services track.

Referrals will be made to community agencies as warranted. These include but are not limited to Hudson Mohawk Recovery Center and Conifer Park if alcohol and/or substance abuse issues are identified. Other community based agencies include, Community on Economic Opportunity (CEO) and various programs for low income families including Head Start. Samaritan Hospital and its programs will also be available as a community resource. The Start Program, Healthy Families, Hispanic Outreach and the Alight Care Center may be accessed for parenting and anger management classes. Families may be referred to other county based agencies such as Unified Services for Children and Adults (USCA) and Probations programs.

Rensselaer County currently contracts with Northeast Parent and Child Society to purchase services with their Intensive After-school Prevention Program (IAPP). This is a short term, intensive, in-home program to prevent placement of children. The Department will utilize several of these slots for families identified with high needs in the FAR track.

(j)

A description of any additional funding (beyond the regular child welfare finance mechanisms) that may be utilized to enhance the differential response program.

Wraparound monies provided by OCFS will be utilized to assist some families involved with the FAR track.

(k)

A description of the protocol to be followed for handling cases in the family assessment services track when domestic violence is suspected or confirmed. The protocol must address the need to maintain the safety of the child(ren). If you plan to collaborate with your local domestic violence service provider concerning any aspects of your family assessment and services track, please describe such collaboration.

The Unity House Domestic Violence program and CPS have developed a collaborative project that was created to improve casework outcomes and provide comprehensive services to victims of domestic violence and their families. We currently have a Domestic Violence liaison that is on site at Rensselaer County 3-4 hours per week. She works directly with caseworkers taking referrals and making joint home visits on cases when appropriate. It will be mandated that Unity House participates in some aspect of the training provided by AHA. All current protocols and procedures will be utilized with FAR families.

(l)

A description of your plan to involve community agencies, schools, Family Court, other key stakeholders in your county or catchment area, and the community as a whole in planning for and implementing a family assessment response.

We will begin meeting with community stakeholders to discuss our anticipated participation with the FAR pilot. Current forums exist where Rensselaer County staff can present information and begin dialogue regarding this initiative. These include but are not limited to School Partnership meetings, Court Diversion Council, Children's Services Committee, the Enrichment Team, Fatality Review Team, 0-5 Task Force and Family Treatment Court.

We will explore the possibility of creating an advisory committee comprised of Rensselaer County staff and local stakeholders to monitor goals and outcomes as we move forward with FAR.

(m)

Please indicate your projected timeline for implementation.

Rensselaer County's timeline for implementation will be contingent upon receiving the first round of training from AHA. We plan on implementing the program approximately one month following this training.