

St. Lawrence County 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;

Criteria for assigning reports to the Family Assessment Response track:

During the St. Lawrence County FAR pilot, SCR reports will be assigned to FAR based on the following criteria:

- St. Lawrence County will focus on allegations of inadequate guardianship, educational neglect, inadequate food, shelter and clothing, lack of medical care and lack of supervision. Court ordered investigations will be considered on a case by case basis.
- Families with no SCR history will be a priority for FAR. although, St. Lawrence County is open to considering FAR for a family with prior SCR history if there is reason to believe that FAR might produce a different outcome for the family. Domestic violence cases will be considered on a case-by-case basis based upon the severity of the allegations. This will be determined through supervisory consultation.
- When it appears a neglect petition and/or removal will occur (1021, 1024), a traditional CPS investigation will be completed and the case will not be considered for FAR.
- Reports involving licensed facilities, foster homes or day care will be excluded.
- Families receiving services in an open case (i.e. Preventive Services) from the Department will be excluded.
- All categories specified in FAR legislation as excluded will be excluded. In addition, any report with the following issues in the allegation or narrative, the report will be excluded from FAR before beginning the investigation:
 - o Fatality
 - o When children have been taken into protective custody.
 - o Children currently involved in an Article 10 out of home placement.
 - o Parent/Caretaker is currently a subject of an open CPS Investigation at the time a new report is received.
 - o Sexual Abuse
 - o Report where St. Lawrence County assigned a Secondary role, unless the case is already open as a FAR case.
 - o History- Any indicated report received within the previous year that Was indicated for the following issues: Domestic Violence, Substance abuse, and Sexual Abuse.

If a case is not excluded as a result of the above criteria, the FAR worker/team would start the FAR process. After beginning FAR, if the worker/team determines any of the following factors are present, the case would be ineligible for FAR:

- Unexplained injuries are apparent where it appears an explanation should be available, and the family is unable or unwilling to explain them.
- Parent/Caretaker is unable or unwilling to engage in and/or benefit from services and supports that would address safety factors.

If, after cases are designated for FAR in the CONNECTIONS system, there exists new information obtained through the assessment process that would indicate that a case may no longer meet the criteria for FAR as established above, the FAR worker/team and Supervisor will meet to decide whether the case will remain in FAR or whether a "traditional" CPS investigation should occur.

Anticipated percentage of reports to be handled through family assessment and services track in the first 12 months of implementation

St. Lawrence County anticipates within the first year, at least 50% of reports will be handled through the FAR track. In 2008 St. Lawrence County received 1588 reports and would expect approximately half of the reports to be tracked for FAR within the first twelve months. It is anticipated that the percentage of cases that will be determined to be appropriate for the FAR track will increase after we have more experience with this model.

The particular units and/or workers who will be involved

St. Lawrence County will train all child welfare staff regarding FAR. This will include four Supervisors and nineteen Child Protective Caseworkers. All Child Welfare staff respond to after-hours and on-call CPS services on a rotating schedule. These staff members will receive lesser training regarding FAR case assignment and must seek supervisory approval to address CPS reports where there is a question as to which track the report will take.

Regarding FAR workers/team, this will consist of CPS caseworkers and supervisors. Each FAR worker will have only FAR cases, while other workers will remain as "traditional" CPS workers. Two of our units are already doing the teaming pilot and, while the FAR program is a natural extension of that approach, it would not be possible to name one of these units as a FAR unit, since each teaming unit covers one particular geographic area (one half of our county). Our third unit consists of workers who are likewise receptive to the FAR approach and have workers on each side of the county, allowing for more comprehensive coverage in implementing this approach.. We have decided that

we will seek out workers who are receptive and show the skills necessary to be FAR workers. We may need to reorganize our units if members of the units become FAR workers, so that one unit consists of FAR workers while the other 2 are teaming units. We will continue to reassess the need for reorganization as we progress through FAR implementation based on need and caseload size.

Phase-in or rollout plans

With proper training, St. Lawrence County will be fully prepared to implement FAR in Spring 2011. FAR implementation will be continually assessed for effectiveness and functionality.

b) Assessment process regarding child safety and risk, types of services and interventions to be provided to families included in the family assessment and services track and a description of how the services will be offered

St. Lawrence County will ensure safety while utilizing this alternative approach to providing protection to children by focusing on engaging families in support services that meet their needs and increase the family's ability to care for their children. In doing this the FAR worker/team will continue to assess safety and risk throughout the family assessment process, utilizing the tools provided in standard assessments of safety and risk.

Staff will meet with the parent/caretaker to explain the process and to engage them in family assessment. Staff will obtain permission from the parent/caretaker to involve other community supports and assist them in meeting needs that may be identified throughout the assessment process. Within seven days of the report the formal safety assessment will be completed in CONNECTIONS. A strengths and needs assessment will be conducted in partnership with the family utilizing the FLAG. This process will engage families by acknowledging their ability to use their strengths and resources to meet needs. Furthermore, outcomes and goals will be developed in partnership with families.

The plan for linking families with those goods and services that address their identified needs will include offering services immediately and throughout the process. FAR Services will be provided by Department staff, in partnership with families and the community. Services that may be provided by other DSS programs during FAR include transportation, day care assistance, public assistance, food stamps, Medicaid, child support services, and emergency assistance.

FAR services that may be provided by community service providers include basic need services (food, clothing, and shelter), mediation, respite, YAP advocacy, Early Intervention services, substance abuse services, domestic violence services, public health nursing services, WIC, mental health services, classes such as parenting, anger management,

FAR families will be linked with goods and services they need with the assistance of FAR staff. The role of the FAR worker/team will be different than the CPS caseworker role, whose role often times becomes monitoring compliance with a Family Court order. The FAR worker will be engaging families and linking them with needed services and advocating for them. FAR workers will interact in partnership with other local resources on behalf of families with the ultimate goal of child permanency and well-being.

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

FAR services will be provided by the FAR worker/team and will be monitored by A CPS Supervisor. The review of reports will be monitored through the use of case consultations, conferences, and group supervision. Case documentation will record significant case events including services provided and referrals to community agencies and providers. St. Lawrence County is expecting that the assessment instrument utilized will assist in eliciting information about our clients' needs, strengths, and recommendations for future services based on the effectiveness of the FAR approach and identified issues on a program and system level.

The FAR worker will continually assess for strength-based solutions while assessing risk and safety throughout their work with FAR tracked families. They will complete a formal assessment using an assessment tool (FLAG) and complete case documentation in CONNECTIONS for the FAR cases.

The FAR workers will provide assessment, short-term case management, information and referral to community services, and linkages with eligibility benefits administered by LDSS. FAR cases opening for longer-term Preventive Services will be initiated when indicated by service needs.

Families and service providers will be asked for their feedback related to their experiences with the FAR approach, including any recommendations they might have to improve the process and service provision.

d) A description of how the principles of family involvement and support consistent with maintaining the safety of the children will be implemented in the family assessment and services track;

St. Lawrence County is committed to providing services to the community that are child-centered and family focused. It is St. Lawrence County' intent to promote services that strengthen, support, and protect children and their families. By utilizing FAR, St. Lawrence County will ensure children and families have a voice in this process (service planning) that enables them to address issues related to functioning as a family in a manner that is identified and agreed upon by them.

Families will be invited to share their ideas and experiences with the FAR worker/team (CPS Investigators, Supervisors, Preventive Services Workers) who will be trained in facilitating strength-based discussions and assessments that enable families to articulate their priorities for change and self-sufficiency. The process by which parents/caretakers are encouraged to share their ideas will facilitate children being safer by encouraging parents to feel "safe" and valued in sharing information which can be utilized to assess safety and recognizing potential solutions to correct situations which pose a risk to the child/children. In addition, the FAR staff will be encouraged and expected to meet the needs of families in a way that "meets that family where they are at," so they can assist in improving their functioning. The efficacy of this intervention will be strongly related to the quality and availability of field-based training in the area of these core skills.

The FAR track will enhance the Department's ability to practice strengths-based, family-focused service delivery and further the goal of empowering families to fully participate in identifying their strengths, planning and working toward addressing their needs. The evidence that supports St. Lawrence County's readiness for this and its potential for a successful implementation is the high level of consistent enthusiasm and interest about FAR by Department staff, the recognition that issues in families cannot always be served by a limited number of community resources, implementation of supportive services over the past year such as the Healthy Families program through YAP and the support of the St. Lawrence County DOSS administration. In addition, St. Lawrence County is in the process of completing the Family Meetings Toolkit. This tool will be very helpful in engaging families in planning for the safety and well-being of their children and of promoting the agency as a partner in that process, as opposed to an advisory.

e) Description of how the differential response program will enhance the ability of the district to protect children, maintain the safety of the children and preserve families:

The FAR approach to working with children and families is predicated with the understanding that families have strengths, and with support, they can change in a way that improves family functioning. The "traditional" investigation intervention is adversarial, designed to assess the likelihood that a child is being or will be maltreated, neglected, and/or abused, and then act in a manner that protects the child. While this process is necessary for some situations, it may be more beneficial to engage the family system to foster sustainable change.

Through earlier, stronger and more positive engagement of families receiving FAR, prevention efforts will be more effective and will result in fewer subsequent CPS reports, lower risk, a higher degree of safety and fewer out-of-home placements. As families begin to trust the FAR approach to provide assistance in

a non-authoritarian, team approach, they are more likely to seek out assistance before situations become higher risk and involve safety concerns. FAR families can be expected and will be encouraged to call upon FAR worker/team as soon as they identify a need, thereby streamlining and coordinating services for FAR families.

FAR will provide the Department with the process to ensure the safety of children by engaging in a partnership with parents/caretakers and removing barriers that contribute to the likelihood that children will be maltreated, neglected, and abused. In addition, with the FAR process will provide the Department with an opportunity to increase its effectiveness in engaging families in the change process that will increase the likelihood that families will be accurately assessed for services needs and receptive to those interventions which are designed to ensure safety and improve the functioning for long-term, sustainable outcomes.

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;

FAR is planned as a less intrusive approach than “traditional” investigative approaches and focuses on short-term, front-end services. These supportive services will be provided by the Department and other community partners and will identify natural supports within the family and community. This, along with building on the strengths of the family, will allow the family to find solutions that are more likely to be self-sustainable.

FAR will introduce a process to reduce the family involvement with government agencies that will occur as a natural result of this initiative. The Department involvement will end at the earliest point possible after safety has been assessed and a referral for services has been completed and implemented. The key accomplishment of this initiative will be to link willing families with available services and community resources that will promote their independence and their capacity to successfully address their own issues. To the extent possible this effort will involve the use of community based services and natural supports.

The Department in partnership with the family will be responsible for identifying the appropriate interventions required to address the identified issues impacting the child and family. FAR cases will receive services for an average of 60-90 days. Cases that are in need of continued services beyond 90 days may be open for traditional Preventive Services. During the 60-90 day period, the FAR worker/team will assist the family in arranging formal and informal support systems which may include family/group conferencing to identify family supports and referrals to community service providers and other resources. The referrals may be made to organizations that provide an array of services such as alcohol/substance treatment programs, counseling services, domestic violence

services, budgeting, parenting skills, housing, health services, anger management, and basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter.

g) Description of the staff resources to be used in the family assessment and services track, including the proposed staff workloads and qualifications;

St. Lawrence County will train all CPS staff regarding FAR. This will include four Supervisors and nineteen Child Protective Caseworkers. In addition, an overview training will be provided to all other caseworkers related to FAR as all staff respond to afterhours and on-call CPS services on a rotating schedule.

Regarding FAR workers/team, this will consist of CPS caseworkers and supervisors. Each FAR worker will have only FAR cases, while other workers will remain as "traditional" CPS workers. Two of our units are already doing the teaming pilot and, while the FAR program is a natural extension of that approach, it would not be possible to name one of these units as a FAR unit, since each teaming unit covers one particular geographic area (one half of our county). Our third unit consists of workers who are likewise receptive to the FAR approach and have workers on each side of the county, allowing for more comprehensive coverage in implementing this approach.. We have decided that we will seek out workers who are receptive and show the skills necessary to be FAR workers. We may need to reorganize our units if members of the units become FAR workers, so that one unit consists of FAR workers while the other 2 are teaming units. We will continue to reassess the need for reorganization as we progress through FAR implementation based on need and caseload size.

h) Description of the training the will be provided to district staff regarding the family assessment response program. A description of training to be provided to any nondistrict staff to be used in the differential response program. Both descriptions should include, but not 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;

Prior to initiation of FAR for St. Lawrence County, the Department will need additional training on FAR and the CONNECTIONS component. Family engagement training has been provided to the majority of our staff. All Department staff planned to receive FAR reports have completed or will have completed NYS Child Welfare CORE trainings, CPS Response training, Supervising Concurrent Planning which included training in family engagement and other relevant topics. All Supervisory and Casework staff involved in the FAR implementation will be need to be provided with an overview of FAR and

training/certification on the use of the FLAG assessment tool to be utilized with FAR cases.

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

FAR tracked families will be provided with information on services available to address identified needs and referrals/linkages will be made to community resources and service providers. Community services such as health services, family support services, Family Court, domestic violence services, substance abuse services, mental health services, housing support groups, Parent/Youth advocacy services may be used as needed.

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

Pending approval of this application, St. Lawrence County plans to utilize current wraparound funds provided by the OCFS pilot. Where training resources needs are identified, availability of local district and OCFS funding will be explored.

k) A description of the protocol to be followed in handling cases in the family assessment and services track when domestic violence is suspected or confirmed. The protocol must address the need to maintain the safety of the children. 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.

Domestic violence reports will only be approved as FAR cases with supervisory consultation, on a case by case basis. If the domestic violence has resulted in serious injury to a household member and/or an arrest, the case will not be appropriate for FAR services. FAR services will be provided to those domestic violence reports where CPS safety interventions and neglect/abuse petitions are not going to be necessary. The Department will collaborate with our local domestic violence service provider. With this program, the Department will develop specific protocols with our staff and the provider. The FAR delivery of these reports will be provided in a manner that ensures the victim and the child are safe, and provides appropriate supports to maintain that safety.

Initial contact and engagement will occur with the victim independently, and safety planning will occur with the victim. Engagement with the person responsible for the harm will occur as well, and crisis and safety plans will also be identified. Additional services such as domestic violence services, advocacy and support, financial assistance, emergency services, housing, victim support groups, domestic violence treatment services, anger management, parenting groups, will be provided as needed.

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 the planning for and implementing for a family assessment response;

The Department will approach and meet individually and/or in community forums with community stakeholders, including agencies, schools, and Family Courts, to receive their ideas, inputs, or concerns. The Department will introduce the FAR approach to the stakeholders with information and informative materials shared at numerous venues including meetings, presentations, and trainings to provide education about the process changes, availability, target population, and access.

m) Please indicate your projected timeline for implementation.

Pending approval of this application St. Lawrence County plans to develop specific procedures for FAR, train staff, share information with community stakeholders and would intend to be ready to move forward by Spring 2011.