

FAMILY ASSESSMENT RESPONSE APPLICATION TOMPKINS COUNTY

a. Factors to be considered in determining which reports will be addressed through the family assessment and services track and size of population:

Criteria for assigning reports to the family assessment and services track

The family assessment response will be provided in those circumstances where court ordered intervention and evidence collection is not going to be necessary and child safety will not be compromised. Reports will be screened upon receipt, by trained personnel, including senior caseworkers and supervisors. The following criteria will be used to screen out reports from the Family Assessment track, and will require a CPS investigation: All reports required by SSL 427-a to be investigated, child fatalities, situations where children have been taken into protective custody by law enforcement or by a medical hold by hospital personnel due to abuse or neglect, maltreatment alleged to have occurred in a licensed facility such as a day care center, family day care home, or foster family home, reports where a current household member has had two or more substantiated investigations within the last 12 months, reports where the subject of the report has been arrested or is going to be arrested for a crime against a child, domestic violence reports where CPS safety interventions and neglect/abuse petitions are going to be necessary, subsequent reports on an open investigation, and cross county reports.

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

We anticipate 50% of reports to be handled through the family assessment and service track in the first 12 months of implementation. We intend to screen reports using our screening tool with all reports during a 1- 2 month period before implementation to get an accurate percentage of reports which will receive a family assessment response.

Units and workers to be involved

Currently, we have three units which provide Child Protective Response. By 12/31/08, we plan to reconfigure. Staffing will be determined between June 2008 and December 2008 after piloting of our screening tool and process. We will explore this further as we have a better sense of the numbers of families to be approached with a Family Assessment Response, a better sense of the number of staff interested in working in Family Assessment, CPS, and/or both, and a thorough evaluation and discussion of benefits of combining and separating caseloads. CPS and Family Assessment Response senior caseworkers and supervisors and after hours on call staff may be involved in the screening process. If the situation is safe we would like the initial contact with the family to be a Family Assessment Response. On call staff will screen the report using our screening tool and process. If a response is needed during the on call shift, on call staff will respond. On call staff will be trained in the screening process and supervisors which will approve screening decisions will be trained as well.

Phase in or roll out plans

A workgroup comprised of 30% of our casework staff meets bi-weekly or as needed to design our response, identify needs and issues. Workgroup meetings are open to all children's services staff and workgroup members keep their own units informed. If our application is approved all staff will receive formal information session(s) regarding the changes, and formal meetings will be conducted with community stakeholders for their information and input. Our screening tool will be piloted for a 1 to 2 month period before implementation. Program protocols and procedures, including after hours protocols will be finalized in late summer. The assessment tool and process will be finalized with our staff and other counties by late fall. Selection of personnel will occur in late fall. Staff will be trained and a community kick off will occur in early winter. Our workgroup will be reconfigured to an Advisory Board which will include community representatives, and implementation will occur 1/1/09.

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

Assessment process we will use to assess safety, risk, and strengths and needs

Child safety is our first priority. Child safety and risk will be assessed from receipt of report and throughout our work, in partnership with the family, using a family support approach. Immediately we will begin assessing strengths, needs, and risks, in partnership with the family, using a new standardized assessment process and tool. We will meet with parents to explain the process and to engage them in the family assessment. We will obtain permissions from the parent to involve other community supports and to assist them to meet needs that may be identified throughout the assessment. Seven days after the report the formal safety assessment will be completed and approved in Connections. The SCR will be notified of the track. Strengths and needs assessment will be conducted in partnership with the family using a new process including specific dimensions of caregivers' capacity and family and child strengths and needs, giving high priority to the child's well being. The process will be explained to the family with an emphasis on partnership with the family and others in the assessment. The process will also include records review, personal interviews with family members including parents and children, their supports, and other stakeholders. Tools such as genograms, ecomaps, motivational interviewing, solution focused approach, and team meetings will be employed. Our process will empower families by acknowledging their abilities to use their strengths and resources to meet needs. Outcomes and goals will be developed in partnership with families.

Our plan for linking families with goods and services that address their needs, including what services will be provided by county children's services staff, what services will be provided by community service providers, and what relationship the county will have with TANF staff in assessing needs and providing services. How, if at all, will family assessment and services interact with other local models of service access including such things as SPOA, CCSI, etc.

Services will be offered immediately and throughout the intervention. Services to be provided by county children's services staff, in partnership with families and our

community, include safety and risk assessment, strengths and needs assessment, development of goals and strategies, casework counseling, referrals to community programs and services, transportation, and advocacy. Services which may be provided by other DSS programs during the family assessment response include transportation, day care assistance, public assistance, food stamps, medicaid, child support services, and emergency services. Family Assessment response staff will have close linkages with TANF staff in assessing needs and providing services, and TANF staff will prioritize emergency needs of eligible families and may work be part of the team working with the family as necessary. Services which may be provided by community service providers include basic needs services (food, clothing, shelter), mediation, respite, advocacy, early intervention services, substance abuse services, domestic violence services, home visiting, teen parenting services, counseling, public health nurse services, WIC, health services, mental health services, classes such as parenting, anger management, aggression replacement training, parent support services, and support groups. Families will be linked with goods and services they need with assistance of Family Assessment Response staff. The role of the Family Assessment staff person is different than the CPS caseworkers role, whose role sometimes includes monitoring compliance with Article X (Child Abuse and Neglect) Court orders. The Family Assessment response staff will be linking families with needed services and advocating for them. They will be following up to see that the service is working for the participants, and working together with the family supports. Family Assessment and services will interact in partnership with other local models of services on behalf of families with the ultimate goal of child well being.

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

How the assessments and services provided directly by us and those provided by agencies who have contracts with us and those provided by other agencies will be developed and monitored for quality and adherence to negotiated principles and expectations.

On a programmatic level, the assessments and services provided directly by us will be developed with our staff, the other pilot counties, OCFS, and community members. Services provided by family assessment staff will be reviewed by the supervisor in biweekly supervision, biweekly review of case records, and through regular supervisory review and approval process. Ongoing weekly formal structured team review will contribute to support of staff and decision-making. Services provided by contracted agencies are monitored on an ongoing basis by the Department, through regular reporting of program outcomes, meetings, and feedback. Effectiveness of services provided by other agencies will be monitored on an individualized basis by the family receiving the service and the family assessment staff and the team working with the family.

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:

Our core practice principles upon which the family assessment response is designed:

Our core practice principles will be finalized with staff and members of our advisory board. Our draft core practice principles include the following:

- The immediate safety of children is our first priority
- We will use a child centered, family focused, strengths based, ecological approach
- We will identify assets and build on strengths to meet needs
- We value partnerships with families, their community, and stakeholders
- We employ multiple strategies for engagement
- We approach parents as the experts on their family
- A positive relationship is a factor in effecting change
- Multidisciplinary practice is fundamental to our work
- A critically reflective approach will underpin our practice
- Quality supervision will be provided and used
- We need to partner with families and the community in order to protect children
- Child protection is a community responsibility
- Our services will meet the diverse needs of culturally diverse families
- Sustainable change is our goal

Approach we will take and the strategy behind such an approach, to more actively engage and empower families in assessment of their strengths, assessing their needs, and in decision-making, while at the same time reassessing child safety

Our interactions will emphasize building a therapeutic alliance with the family and working in partnership with the family and community. The core helping conditions: Respect, empathy and genuineness will be emphasized throughout the intervention. Family members will be involved in the assessment process, full disclosure, and negotiation and mediation may be used to reach mutual understanding with families during the assessment and in strategizing for meeting needs. We will continually examine, with the family, in the team, and in supervision, the efficacy of the relationship with the family. Tools such as ecomaps, genograms, and family team meetings will be used. Child safety will be continually addressed and assessed throughout the intervention. Contact regarding child safety will occur as needed but at least every two weeks. Home visits and collateral contacts will occur with family supports and stakeholders, and the family.

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

The family assessment response will be provided in those circumstances where Court ordered intervention and evidence collection is not going to be necessary. Safety will be our first priority and child safety will be assessed throughout the intervention, through contacts with the family and others. Family assessment staff will focus on the child in need of protective services through the relationship with the family and collaborative partnerships with the family, their supports, and the community. The non-adversarial approach and the absence of investigation will engage more families in change. Using this approach will enable us to redirect our resources, as appropriate, to helping families rather than investigation-- where investigation is not needed-- and involve the greater community in support of the family.

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

How we will engage the family without increasing the involvement of government agencies and without compromising safety of children:

Safety of children is our first priority throughout the intervention. In some situations, for the short term, we anticipate increasing government involvement; for example, if the family has a need for a service provided by a government agency (eg. Section 8 housing vouchers, food stamps, etc). In the long term, we anticipate reducing the involvement of Child Welfare services by linking families with community agencies, building skills, and effecting changes with families and our community.

How traditional service providers, the family's support network, and other community resources will provide assistance to families whose reports/cases will be handled by a differential response program:

The family assessment staff will engage the family, their support network, and other community resources in providing assistance to the family. Tools such as ecomaps, genograms, and team meetings will be used to identify strengths and and engage resources. Assistance to the families will be provided with the family's mutual consent and engagement and coordination within the team working with the family.

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

Experienced senior caseworkers who are interested in the approach will initially provide the family assessment response. We will strive for workloads similar to the workload standards for CPS (12 to 20). Initially, staff qualifications will include: Bachelors degree and 2 years casework experience, demonstrated experience in providing the CPS response, demonstrated successful experience in assessing safety and risk, skill in interviewing and engaging, ability to establish and maintain successful relationships including with family's diverse communities, good powers of observation, analysis, and judgment, knowledge of principles underlying human behavior and growth, and prior CPS training.

How we plan to assign or recruit DSS staff to respond to a CPS report through the family assessment and response track

Staff are interested in working in the family assessment and response track and will be recruited and selected in the fall.

Whether staff will be involved in both the family assessment response track and traditional CPS investigations

Separate staff will provide the traditional CPS investigation and the family assessment response. This is something we would like to explore further as we pilot our screening tool and process and get a better sense of the number of families who will be approached with a family assessment response, a better sense of the number of staff interested and needed to work in the family assessment response, CPS, or both, and a

thorough evaluation and discussion of the benefits and pitfalls of combining and separating caseloads. Screening for track assignment and initial response after hours may be provided by traditional CPS staff as well as family assessment staff, and after hours on call staff. All (8) Children's services supervisors may be involved in the screening process.

Any and all specialized staff resources which will impact on implementation of Family Assessment Response

Our staff resources include: One experienced staff who provided differential response in CPS in another state, one experienced staff who provided Family Preservation Services, Intensive Preventive Services, and has extensive training in family support approach and solution focused approach, one staff who developed and implemented a successful local family assessment response for people involved in Tompkins County Family (Custody) Court, staff with extensive experience and expertise in the traditional CPS response and staff with extensive training and skills in family support approach, solution focused approach, and strengths based work with families.

h. Description of the training which will be provided to district staff regarding the family assessment response program. 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

If our application is approved, formal information sessions regarding the program will be provided to all child welfare staff. Training in the principles, the model, the approach and the requirements will be provided to all family assessment response staff. All family assessment response staff will have received safety and risk training and CPS response training. Cross training for family assessment and investigation staff will be provided as appropriate, and may include training specific to dynamics and interventions in domestic violence and substance abuse situations. Training in the screening process will be provided to all CPS, Family Assessment, on call staff and child welfare supervisors. OCFS could help by providing our CPS and Family Assessment staff with additional or on going training on critical thinking, safety and risk, motivational interviewing, solution focused interviewing, engagement, and identifying and building on family and community strengths to meet the goals of child safety and well being. Refreshers on use of genograms, ecomaps, and family team conferencing would be useful as well. Also, OCFS could be helpful by providing on site coaches, training in use of the assessment tool, access, if needed, to any State trainings and access to any trainings and conferences to improve skills in use of the family development approach and differential response, and guidance on legal questions that may come up before or during implementation.

i. Description of community resources proposed to be used in the family assessment and services track

Community resources such as health services, mediation, family support services, Family Court, domestic violence services, substance abuse services, housing, support groups, children's groups, and counseling may be used as needed.

j. Description of additional funding (beyond regular child welfare finance mechanisms) which may be utilized to enhance the program

If our application is approved, we may apply and utilize local grant funding during start up.

k. Description of protocol to be followed for handling cases in the family assessment 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 the local domestic violence service provider, please describe such collaboration.

We would like to provide a family assessment response to those domestic violence reports where CPS safety interventions and neglect/abuse petitions are not going to be necessary. If we were to provide this, we would like to collaborate with our local domestic violence service provider and our integrated domestic violence court. If our application is approved we will develop specific protocols with our staff, the provider, and the Court. The family assessment response to these reports will be provided in a manner which ensures the victim and the child are safe, supports the adult who has been harmed, and holds the person responsible for the harm, not the person being harmed, accountable. Initial contact and engagement will occur with the victim separately, 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 be developed with this person as well. Additional services such as domestic violence services, advocacy and support, financial services, emergency services, housing, victim support groups, probation, domestic violence treatment, anger management groups, and parenting groups, will be provided as needed.

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

We will approach and meet individually and/or in community forums with community stakeholders, including agencies, schools, Family Court, the faith community, parent advocates, and parents, during the summer, to receive their ideas, inputs, or concerns. We will have a community kick off in late fall.

m. Timeline for implementation

If our application is approved, we plan to provide family assessment response as of 1/1/09.