

**Family Assessment Response Application
Allegany County**

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

Criteria by which we will assign reports to the family assessment and services track:

Allegany County has opted to initially assign only educational neglect reports to the family assessment and services track. All other reports will be investigated through the traditional track as required by regulation SSL 427-a. There may be those educational neglect reports which may not be appropriate for the FAR track so all educational neglect reports will be screened by trained supervisor(s) and senior caseworkers as appropriate upon receipt. An example of an inappropriate report may include a case in which there have been 2 or more substantiated prior reports in the family either for educational neglect or for other reasons. At no time will the safety of children in the home be compromised.

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

We anticipate approximately 10% of reports to be handled through the family assessment response in the first 12 months of operation. We intend to utilize our screening tool 1 to 2 months prior to implementation to obtain a more accurate percentage of reports that may receive the family assessment response.

Units and workers to be involved:

Allegany County is currently divided geographically into three areas which are covered by three CPS workers in each of these three areas. Division of territories was determined historically based upon the numbers of reports received within those areas within the last year and meted out to equalize as much as possible total reports received in each territory. We anticipate one CPS worker from each of the three territories will be designated as the FAR worker for these initial educational neglect reports. We have already met with the staff and two workers have received the FAR training with anticipation that they may want to be a FAR worker. One other staff person has already volunteered to be involved in the FAR process. Our desire is that we will have staff who voluntarily want to be involved with the process as we feel it will be more successful. The current CPS supervisor will remain as the supervisor with the FAR cases as well. As we have a small percentage of reports that we will be starting out with, the FAR workers will also have to maintain a percentage of traditional investigation cases. We are also going to lobby our local legislature to gain permission in hiring a new preventive worker, preferably with a social work or clinical background, who will work closely with our FAR workers in establishing that strength-based response with families and can assist with guidance in the social work principles.

Phase in or roll out plans:

A work group will be formed which will include representatives from all of children's services. This work group will be responsible to keep the members of their units informed on their progress. This work group initially will meet monthly and then bi-weekly as necessary as implementation grows nearer. This group will work to identify our needs, responses, issues, and processes. FAR staff will be trained in July or later as necessary and process, protocols, or procedures will be finalized by this group in late fall. A screening tool will be utilized 1 to 2 months before implementation. Community involvement will begin in summer to continue throughout the process, including provider agencies, schools, other governmental agencies, and community coalitions and collaborations. Our target implementation date will be 1/1/10.

b. Assessment of 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:

Allegheny County has already had a joint safety and risk refresher training for all child welfare staff and for our voluntary provider agencies held on March 18 and 19 of this year. 60 persons from 10 different agencies completed this training; not only as a refresher for some, but as a precursor to the FAR implementation. Child welfare supervisors have met since that meeting to discuss on-going implementation and process regarding child safety and risk and have drafted internal procedures and ticklers to address such concerns in initial and on-going case activity. Once finalized, this procedural method will be shared with our voluntary provider agencies. Allegheny County is also perusing the benefits of solution-focused intervention/approach to help identify children and family strengths and needs by involving the family directly in the process. This training is initially scheduled for April 21 and 22 of this year. We plan to have an on-going mentor in this approach to help staff work proactively with the families throughout the life of the case. Utilizing a standardized assessment tool, most likely the FAST, we will immediately be assessing strengths, needs, and risks in partnership with the family; explaining the FAR process at the onset. Community supports, with permissions from the family, will be involved based upon the strength/need assessment and the reason for the involvement by the department. The safety assessment will be completed at the 24-hour time frame and at seven days after receipt and will be documented in the Connections system. The SCR will then be notified of the FAR track. Our on-going assessment process will also include record review, personal interviews with family members, their supports, and other stakeholders. Social work tools may be utilized such as genograms, solution focused approach as mentioned previously, team meetings, and/or eco-maps. Outcomes will be developed in conjunction with family members.

Plan for linking families

Allegheny County DSS FAR staff will promptly link children and families to identified services in conjunction with family strengths and needs and will

monitor and assist with any on-going needs or goals with these service providers. They will also assist with on-going casework counseling, referrals to community providers as necessary, help develop goals with the families, help identify strengths and needs in conjunction with the families, monitor safety and risks, and utilize family engagement skills. Other DSS workers may also be utilized in this process that may provide services such as day care, transportation, financial assistance, emergency need services, or occasional unusual service such as purchasing alarm clocks or providing a more direct “wake-up” service via contract. Child welfare staff already have a good working relationship with TANF staff in that we are a small agency that is centrally located to one another and that several staff have promoted to the child welfare unit from TANF. We have had internal meetings with TANF staff to help promote this relationship and we expect that it will only improve as we progress. We also maintain excellent relationships with community agencies with whom we do or do not directly contract with. Line staff and supervisors regularly attend team meetings or coalitions or collaborations within the county constructs. Examples of these linkages that are already well established, but certainly not exhaustive, are: the bi-weekly SPOA meetings, the quarterly CCSI meetings, the monthly Partners for Prevention meeting, the Behavioral Health Committee, the weekly trauma systems therapy team, the mental health community services agency, probation PINS reform team, the Allegany-Western Steuben rural health network, the agency/school network meeting, the Council of Agencies meeting, and the Success by Six collaborative. Preventive staff have already been involved in disseminating and reinforcing information generated by the Success by Six committee (early childhood education) to families in home and will continue to be involved in this new endeavor as we target educational neglect. We will continue with these established linkages and work to strengthen them as we all work towards the support in these family systems.

c. A description of the process to be followed for planning and monitoring the Services provided under the FAR track.

Internally, any new services, assessments, or processes provided directly by us will be developed in conjunction with our staff and supervisors, other pilot counties, OCFS, and relevant community members. Programmatically, we already maintain regularly scheduled supervision between staff and supervisors in order to monitor individual cases on an on-going cases and it is expected that this will be the same, if not more intense, with the FAR cases. We also plan on holding FAR team meetings in order to support decision-making for staff and supervisors in this new process. It is expected that FAR cases, as in traditional investigation cases, will be monitored for a minimum of 60 days, but will also be based upon the individual family’s needs. Contracted provider agencies are already regularly monitored by the Department through program reports, outcome data, meetings and constant feedback. This will continue in the FAR cases, as well as utilizing family and staff feedback for services provided by contracted agencies in individual cases.

- 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.**

Core principles:

Though we want to ensure the involvement of staff and members of the FAR team in the final determination process of core principles, we do want to employ the principles of family engagement skills; recognizing that the family is most knowledgeable about their family strengths, needs, and resources. Positive relationship is key to the engagement, regular encounter, assessment, and ultimate change for the child and family. We rely upon and encourage involvement from the community, family resources, and other stakeholders as a team to help effect permanent change. Quality and frequency of supervision will be paramount to case consistency, achievement of goals, and safety of the children. Services will be directed to meet the immediate and on-going identified needs of the families and, should gaps be identified; services will be sought out and developed to meet those identified needs. Teamwork is essential to the ultimate success and permanent change of children and families. Respect will be paramount among all team members and identified families. Though safety is our primary concern, our ultimate goal is the continued success of the families who have risen to the level of the Department's and the community's involvement.

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.

Therapeutic alliance will be the key principle behind the engagement and empowerment of families in effecting change. Caseworkers and provider agency staff will utilize trainings of family engagement, solution-focused therapy, motivational interviewing, and other skills to work with the family on the identified strengths and needs; while, at the same time, determining initial and on-going safety and risk issues with regular assessment and appropriate supervision of individual case needs. As stated earlier, respect, safety, teamwork, and quality of relationship will all work towards stated objectives in a thoughtful and playful manner.

- 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.**

Besides ensuring the safety and protection of children, most caseworkers became involved in the field of child welfare to make a difference in the lives of these children and families. Making a difference means making sustainable change in these families in order to enhance the quality of their ongoing relationships with one another in the process of meeting their individual and family goals for the future. In this manner, staff can feel uplifted in helping families out of situations that otherwise may have held them back in the hopes of not needing further intervention from governmental sources, but rather relying

upon one another and their extended family resources. Reducing recidivism would allow workers to direct attention to other families not yet able to do the same. Joy in success is a great motivator to accomplish more and more and stimulates others in the provider arena to do the same. On-going monitoring of our process, supervision regarding safety and risk, and adherence to the principles of family engagement and skill-building on a regular basis will only strengthen our resolve in our work with FAR families. This will also begin to carry over in our traditional investigation cases which may have a positive effect on recidivism in that arena as well. Also, by engaging with community partners in this endeavor, we strengthen the team work approach and ultimately assist the community in helping to protect our children.

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

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

By upfronting service delivery when the case is identified, we hope to reduce the involvement of governmental agencies in the longer term. Having the family identify and access community resources and family strengths themselves will serve to arm them with the practice skills necessary to tackle any future issues; thus effecting longer term change and reducing the likelihood of future governmental involvement. Safety again is our first priority and that will be regularly assessed at onset, duration, and closing of cases through appropriate supervision and team consultation.

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.

As stated previously, Allegany County has already started the process of involving the community and providers in this program endeavor. By training, collaborating, and engaging, we will help traditional service providers see the value in providing up front service provision to these families in order to effect permanent change. Utilizing skills obtained through safety and risk refresher training, solution-focused training and other social work skills will be invaluable in establishing team work with all providers and family support networks.

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

Ideally, experienced senior caseworkers will be interested in this endeavor and will volunteer to pilot this program. As stated previously, two staff have already attended training and one more staff has expressed an interest. Staff who want to work with this response may have a better chance of success. Workloads will be similar to stated CPS workload standards at 12 to 20 cases per worker. Qualifications include a Bachelor's Degree and 2 years experience; demonstrated

experience in providing the CPS response, success in assessing safety and risk, skill in interviewing and engaging, ability to establish and maintain therapeutic relationships, common sense and judgement, and good powers of observation and analysis.

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

The plan is to assign staff that are interested in the family assessment response track. Should we be successful in obtaining another preventive position, recruitment for that position would be looked at internally through transfer. The current CPS supervisor is planned to supervise the FAR team as well.

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

Based upon the educational neglect cohort that we have chosen to begin with, workers chosen for the FAR response will have responsibility for working in the FAR track as well as the traditional CPS investigation arena. We will have one FAR worker per geographical area (three) and these workers will also have other cases. All supervisors in the child welfare unit will be trained in this response so as to effect team work and success of the program. Other CPS workers not specifically chosen to be FAR workers, will be informed of necessary information in order to help make determinations when necessary should a new case come in that could be considered a FAR case whether during normal business hours or during on-call status.

h. Description of the training which will be provided to district staff regarding the family assessment response program. Description of training to be provided to any non-district staff to be used in the differential response program.

Allegany County has already commenced training internally and in the community with providers and collaboratives surrounding this new initiative and will continue to do so throughout the start up period. As mentioned, safety and risk refresher training has been given to child welfare staff and provider agencies. Solution-focused training has been set up for April 21 and 22 of this year. In regular meetings with contract agencies and coalitions, they have been informed of our intention in this direction and general background information has been provided. More formal information sessions will be given to other stakeholders as we progress, including schools and other collaboratives. Cross training will be provided for those involved in screening cases. An on-going solution focused mentor has been engaged. Other trainings as necessary will be sought based upon needs assessments with staff and the FAR implementation team. We have committed to sending some staff to the FAR training in July, in addition to the four staff and supervisors who have already attended.

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

Any and all community resources identified as necessary to the family's success will be utilized or sought should a gap be identified. These may include family support services, mediation, mentoring, substance abuse services, housing, counseling, domestic violence services, education services, or other community services available.

j. A description of any additional funding that may be utilized to enhance the differential response program.

Funding assistance may be utilized to assist with start up training, ongoing mentoring with the FAR program, technical support, or any other apropos grant funding.

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 safety of the children.

Our standard protocol will apply should a domestic violence issue occur with any family involved in the family assessment response. We have an ongoing relationship with our county provider and they have attended many coalitions and collaborations in conjunction with the Department. As our initial cohort will involve educational neglect reports, any domestic violence issues will be assessed as part of the initial contact and safety assessment with the families. Standard protocols include interviewing the parties separately, establishing safety plans, linking families or victims with the local advocacy agency, providing emergency needs, and ensuring safety of the child(ren). Referral to support groups, legal services, domestic violence treatment, anger management, or parenting will be part of this protocol. If, at initial contact, the domestic violence raise other CPS issues, then the case may be transferred to the traditional investigative track.

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

We have already started the process of involving the community stakeholders as mentioned earlier and will continue to do so throughout the start up process. We will meet individually and in groups as necessary or as more apropos to the situation to involve community agencies. All above agencies will be included in this process; particularly schools during this phase in process.

m. Timeline for implementation

If our application is approved, we plan to provide family assessment response as of 1/1/10.