

FAMILY ASSESSMENT RESPONSE APPLICATION CHEMUNG COUNTY

A) The factors to be considered 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 and services track:**

We plan to assign all reports to FAR when court-ordered intervention and evidence collection is not necessary. Any reports required by SSL 427-a to be investigated will be ineligible for FAR. In addition, cases involving children taken into protective custody, licensed day care, family day care or foster homes, a current household member with two or more substantiated investigations in the last twelve months, arrest or pending arrest of subject for a crime against a child, domestic violence cases where safety interventions and/or abuse/neglect petitions are going to be necessary, a family with an open services case, or cross county reports will be assigned to the investigative track. Decisions regarding families with extensive CPS histories will be made on a case by case basis.

Reports will be screened by CPS supervisors or senior caseworkers in the event they are providing supervisor back-up coverage.

- **The anticipated percentage of reports to be handled through FAR in the first 12 months of implementation:**

We anticipate approximately 60% of reports to be handled through the FAR track in the first 12 months of implementation. This projection is based on the number of reports received in 2008 with allegations of educational neglect, inadequate guardianship, lack of supervision, lack of medical care, inadequate food, clothing and shelter, parent drug/alcohol misuse, child drug/alcohol misuse, emotional neglect and lacerations, bruises, and welts. In 2008, these allegations accounted for approximately 85% of the reports received. Also in 2008, Chemung County unfounded 61% of the 1419 reports received; 14 % were opened for services.

- **Units and workers to be involved:**

Chemung County has three CPS units and a Child Advocacy Center (CAC). The CAC investigates abuse reports and the types of reports described as ineligible for FAR under SSL 427-a; therefore, CAC staff will not participate in FAR. The remaining three units which consist of 15 caseworkers, 2 senior caseworkers, and three Grade B Supervisors will participate in FAR.

At implementation staff will likely have both FAR and traditional investigations.

- **Phase-in/ rollout plans:**

The Director of Services, the CPS supervisory and administrative team and one of the CPS Senior Caseworkers have been meeting bi-weekly, since August 2008, to discuss the principles of and applying for FAR. They are all in agreement to move forward with the application. The Director of Services, Grade A Supervisor, two CPS supervisors and one senior caseworker participated in the FAR training provided by the American Humane Association in Tompkins County. Everyone came away wanting to pursue participating in FAR. Since the training, the Senior Caseworker has been utilizing the partnership principles.

The statute and philosophy of FAR, as well as our hope to implement, has been shared with all casework staff, the DSS management team, the Youth Bureau and Children's Integrated Services. Commissioner Huffner is supportive of the initiative and has shared the plan with County Administration. If approved, additional formal presentations will be planned to meet with all stakeholders.

Within the county, the Director has discussed FAR at a County-School Leadership meeting, with Children's Integrated Services and the lead attorney. The initial response from the county mental health community was one of excitement and support. The statement was also made that the principles of this approach seemed to fit with what they currently observe from our casework staff.

The next phase of roll out will include formal power point presentations to all DSS staff, Children and Family Services, Temporary Assistance, the County Executive and Legislators, and all County Stakeholders. We are also currently in the midst of scheduling focus groups as part of the needs assessment for the next Children and Family Services Plan and the PIP. We plan to include the power point and discussion into all of these meetings.

B) The assessment process regarding child safety and risk as well as the 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:

- **The assessment process that will be used to assess child safety, risk to children and family strengths and needs:**

Child safety will continue to be our first priority and will be continually reassessed throughout the life of the case. Strength-based, solution- focused discussions will lead our work with family members.

The process will include records review, personal interviews with the family, their identified support system and other stakeholders. Tools such as early family engagement strategies, solution focused interviewing and family meetings will be employed. Our goal will be to empower families to be the experts by identifying and acknowledging their strengths and resources to meet their needs. Outcomes and goals will be developed mutually with families.

The current 7 day safety assessment will be completed and approved by a supervisor. At this time, if all children are found to be safe, the SCR will be notified through CONNECTIONS that the track is changed from investigative to FAR.

Supervisors will conference with staff, at a minimum, on a bi-weekly basis to assess safety and risk factors and will review case notes in Connections.

Should safety factors arise and if the case has not yet been progressed to FAR, the case will be reassigned to the investigative track. However, if the case has been progressed to FAR and it is determined that the case needs an investigative response, a new report will be called into the SCR.

We plan to utilize the FAST for all cases assigned to the FAR track.

- **Plan for linking families with goods and services that address their identified needs, including what services will be provided by county CPS or preventive 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:**

The need for services will be assessed on an on-going basis as it is now. The full array of services available through the Department will continue to include assessment, casework counseling, advocacy, partnering with community stakeholders, identifying supports and referrals to our in-house preventive program. FAR staff will continue to work with other DSS departments (TA, FS, MA) to advocate for families and will provide support, linkages and advocacy for families working with community agencies. We are fortunate to have two Temporary Assistance staff currently co-located in the Chemung County Children and Family Services Division who partner with us to provide emergency needs and plan for the financial needs of the family.

Referrals to community agencies will be made in conjunction with the family and will be based on the family's identified needs. FAR staff will assist, when necessary, by advocating for and establishing linkages with community providers. When appropriate they will also clarify respective roles in supporting the family.

The Children and Family Services manager, administrative, and supervisory staff currently have established meetings with community partners who provide mental health and substance abuse counseling/treatment, DV services, child care, preventive programs, Probation, Children's Integrated Services and with all of the school districts. These forums are used, as appropriate, to link families to services to meet their needs.

Chemung County Children's Integrated Services currently provides PINS Diversion Services, SPOA, CCSI and First Response for families experiencing behavior issues with their children. On a case by case basis, when school truancy is the primary problem, cases may be transferred to them to do FAR. We have well established links and protocols in place.

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

Services provided by FAR staff and community partners will be reviewed and assessed through a minimum of bi-weekly supervision between supervisor and caseworker, observation of casework at home visits, review of case records and the regular supervisory approval processes. The Grade A supervisor will also have oversight responsibilities.

Services provided by community partners will also be assessed through the above methods, contract monitoring and in consultation with the family to ensure the service is meeting their needs.

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:

- **Our core practice principles upon which the family assessment response is designed:**
Respect, empathy, genuineness, mutual planning and full disclosure will define our approach;
child safety is paramount and is always our first priority;
the problem does not exist 100% of the time;
all families have strengths and are the experts at finding their own solutions;
these strengths must be utilized to keep children safe and risk reduced;
everyone has the ability to change;
positive relationships with families and community partners are the key to sustained change and keeping children safe.
Regular quality supervision will be included in the plan. It is essential to develop critical thinking, staff development, promoting child safety and creating strength based culture designed to facilitate sustained change.

We believe that this approach has the potential to more actively engage and empower families in assessing their own strengths and needs, identifying protecting factors and making decisions that will lead to change that they can sustain, while at the same time continually assessing child safety. Family members will become full partners and will be included throughout our involvement with the family. Full disclosure around mandated reporting, assessments and processes will occur.

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:

Engaging and empowering families earlier in the process, focusing on the family's strengths and needs rather than looking to place blame will assist us in establishing and maintaining a positive relationship with families. We can then use our time and resources to link families to needed services in a more timely fashion, thereby increasing safety and reducing risk. We are also hopeful that this approach will decrease the families feeling that we are intrusive and assist us in our effort to be viewed as partners who want to and can assist.

We also believe that this approach will assist us in staff retention which will result in more experienced and professional staff with finely honed skills. They will be better equipped to work with families to facilitate sustained change.

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 without compromising safety of children:**

Safety of children will always be our first priority. We anticipate reducing the involvement of Child Welfare Services by engaging and empowering families and involving extended family members and supports in the planning for the children. Additional staff will be trained in facilitating family meetings and will be expected to utilize this approach in their work.

By mutually planning with families, advocating for service provision and linking them with community agencies and their faith community when desired, it is more likely that the family will engage in services. We also believe that by empowering families to be the experts that they will identify/learn the skills needed to solve future problems on their own.

The FAR approach will reduce the number of neglect petitions being filed in family court as well as the number of fair hearings requested.

- **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:**
Community partners and stakeholders will be part of the planning and implementation of FAR in Chemung County. Team and family meetings will be held with the consent of the family.

FAR cases may receive services up to 60-90 days. Cases that are in need of additional services may be referred to our in-house preventive program for traditional preventive services or there may be a planned hand off to Children’s Integrated Services if their primary need is driven by school truancy.

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:

We plan to assign the majority of our cases to the FAR track. As we convert to FAR, initially, all CPS caseworkers and supervisors will carry FAR cases as well as traditional investigations. We will then transition to having separate caseloads of FAR and investigations. This decision was made based in conjunction with the supervisors who participated in training in Tompkins County and on the feedback received from the first round pilot counties and their experiences of assigning the majority of the cases to the FAR track. We will reevaluate this quarterly.

We will continue to train all Children and Family Services staff in early engagement and strength based interventions and interviewing on an ongoing basis.

Our goal is to keep caseloads between 12-15; however, we are currently striving to reduce CPS caseloads to 12-18 cases.

- **Whether staff will be involved in both the family assessment response track and the traditional CPS investigations:**
This is an area that will depend on staff resources at the time and will need ongoing evaluation. At implementation, staff will likely have both FAR and traditional investigations. This is not ideal and when possible will move towards select caseloads.

We plan to assign all reports to FAR when court-ordered intervention and evidence collection is not necessary. Upon receipt of the SCR report, prior to contact with the family, the case will be screened for FAR by the assigning supervisor.

- **Any and all specialized staff/resources that will impact on the implementation of FAR:**

The Director of Services is a LCSW with extensive training and experience in the use of strength based and solution focused interviewing techniques. Experienced caseworkers in Chemung County have been trained in solution-focused techniques through specialized trainings. We have two supervisors who have their MSW, one is a CPS Supervisor.

Binghamton University has applied for a five year grant to provide a stipend to MSW interns in Chemung County who are interested in a career in Child Welfare. If the grant is received, the primary role of the intern will be to assist us in implementing FAR.

H) Description of the training that will be provided to district staff regarding the family assessment response program.

In-service training with all CPS staff and supervisors has been occurring bi-weekly. This will be followed with a formal power point presentation for staff including the legal and the management team.

If our application is approved, all Chemung County Children and Family Services staff will participate in the American Humane Association training.

Family Meeting and Solution-focused interviewing training has been requested and approved by the regional office. Date TBA. This will occur whether or not we are approved.

Meeting facilitation training will be scheduled.

In-service training on FAR screenings and the six principles of partnership is planned for CPS supervisors, administrators, senior caseworkers and the on call team.

We will continue to provide in-service training in assessing safety and risk, on-call and steps of an investigation yearly for all staff. Date TBA

Most of our CPS staff has attended the DV training for CPS workers.

Connections training and updates on management of FAR cases will be planned.

A description of training to be provided to any non-district staff to be used in the differential response program:

Prior to implementation, date TBA, formal meetings will be held to educate and discuss the FAR principles, rationale behind the practice change and how the change will impact our work together. We will meet with our community partners, service providers, voluntary agencies, schools, Family Court, attorneys, county administration and legislators. We have regularly scheduled meetings with these partners and will incorporate our training into those forums.

We are currently scheduling focus groups as part of the needs assessment for the next Children and Family Services Plan and the PIP. We plan to include the power point and discussion into all of these meetings.

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

Community Mental Health service providers
County school, administrations, guidance, social workers, CSE
Family Court
Faith-based community
Children's Integrated Services
SPOA
Youth Bureau
Chemung County Child Care Council
Trinity (drug/alcohol assessment and treatment)
Domestic Violence advocates and service providers
Comprehensive Interdisciplinary Services (CIDS)
Educational Opportunity Program (EOP)
Respite Providers
TA/FS/MA
Community Dispute Resolution Center
Victims Services
Medical Providers
Community Food Banks

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

We do not have additional funding to support the implementation of FAR...

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.

Domestic violence cases will be assessed for FAR on a case by case basis. Cases where CPS safety interventions or court involvement are necessary will be ineligible for FAR.

Specific protocols for cases with DV concerns will be drafted in conjunction with Children and Family Services staff and DV advocates to ensure that our intervention is not placing the child(ren) or victim at risk of harm and that appropriate interventions are being employed (advocacy and support, financial services, housing/shelter, child care, etc.)

- **Plan to develop a plan to collaborate with our local domestic violence service provider concerning FAR:**

Safehouse, Chemung County Family Services and Rape Crisis will be part of our implementation planning. The special circumstances around domestic violence situations will be discussed and plans/protocols developed to ensure safety of all family members in these situations.

L) A description of the plan to involve community agencies, schools, Family Court, other key stakeholders in the community as a whole in planning for and implementing a family assessment response:

Discussions have already begun with key stakeholders through regularly scheduled forums. We are actively planning power point presentations and timelines for information sharing with community partners.

In addition, all of our stakeholders will be invited to participate in focus groups as part of the needs assessment for the next Children and Family Services Plan and the PIP. We plan to include the power point and discussion into all of these meetings.

M) Projected timeline for implementation:

We hope to implement FAR in the late fall of 2009; however, this is contingent on training and preparedness.

Submitted by:
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April 21, 2009