

New York FAR Quarterly

New York Family Assessment Response (FAR) Quarterly

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Practice Changes in Tompkins County



Tompkins County staff (clockwise from left to right): Bernice Yarosh, Madi Alridge, Jen Browne, Coral Uettwiller, Debbie Patterson, Christine Manning, Sarah Moshier, Marion Boratynski, Suzanne Hillman, Todd Husick and Adam Scholl.

By **Maryanne Banks, Director of Services, Tompkins County**

We've been using family assessment response (FAR) since January 2009.

Things changed in the past year and a half. We had the opportunity to examine other states' differential response models, to learn at national conferences and during training and coaching with American Humane, and to shape our FAR response.

Our staff are strong in engagement, and together, early on, we decided FAR would be an effective response for the majority of reports. Why investigate unless investigation was necessary? Why not support the family in addressing concerns if that would work?

Now we respond to 66 percent of families with FAR instead of with the traditional child protective services (CPS) investigation and risk assessment. About 3 percent of reports that start out in the FAR track move to CPS.

What's different?

All reports not ruled out by law are screened for FAR. Starting with the first phone call to the source, the first history review or the first supervisory consult, questions are different and guide us in both the FAR and CPS investigation response. Besides asking what happened, we are asking questions like: What worked in the past? and How might we approach this family effectively? Our on-call staff are trained in basic concepts of both CPS investigations and FAR.

We respond to 1034 orders similarly: Our family court revised its 1034 orders to give us the authority and responsibility for track assignment and to give families involved with family court the same opportunity to participate in FAR as families not involved with family court have.

Our FAR staff meets from 9 to 10 each workday morning for group consultation. These meetings are used to make decisions about track assignment, safety, planning

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interventions, use of wraparound funds and ending our involvement. During the meetings, staff comes prepared with genograms and brief outlines, and use the Signs of Safety framework and the Six Thinking Hats. Language has been reframed to language we use in front of families.

The vast majority of the time, we make appointments with families rather than unannounced visits. Typically, we do not respond to a report with an interview of children at school or without the parents' permission. We are making appointments, sometimes before or after our business hours, and engaging children and parents in the assessment process.

We now know how to explain FAR to families, how to approach them differently, and how to partner with them. We use the Family-Led Assessment Guide along with the New York Safety Assessment and Risk Elements, and strategies such as "Three Houses," Family Circles, and solution-focused questioning to engage families and children in the assessment and planning. We are

also engaging mandated reporters and community resources in the FAR approach to solution building with families, all of us switching the focus from what happened to how we can help.

We end our involvement with families when safety is achieved, risk is reduced or the family is connected with needed community-based, preventive or CPS services. We do that with a "warm hand-off," connecting and supporting the family through the process.

We are integrating transparency into our work with people. Transparency has been a challenge for some of the mandated reporters we work with, particularly schools. Recently, our largest school district revised its policy on CPS reporting to be in line with FAR principles and practices.

Other CPS and child welfare units are interested and have had the opportunity to participate in some basic solution-focused practice training through American Humane. Our CPS unit is doing group consultations as well, and adopted practices such as determining, case by

case, whether to make appointments rather than unannounced visits, and whether to interview children at school.

Management staff are learning together with line staff and encouraging and using our new principles and practices. We meet regularly, and with our advisory board, to reflect on our model and to build on it.

Finally, most of the feedback we've received from families has been positive. Here are a few comments from parents:

"The caseworker was great with me and my family. I could call if I needed to. If all your workers are like them, you have great staff."

"My experience with FAR helped make a very stressful time for my family less stressful. This is not what I expected from DSS. The support we received was tremendous. I was able to recognize my family's strengths."

"I think this new program will work very well. It gave us some new ideas on what to do and how to react. Thank you very much."

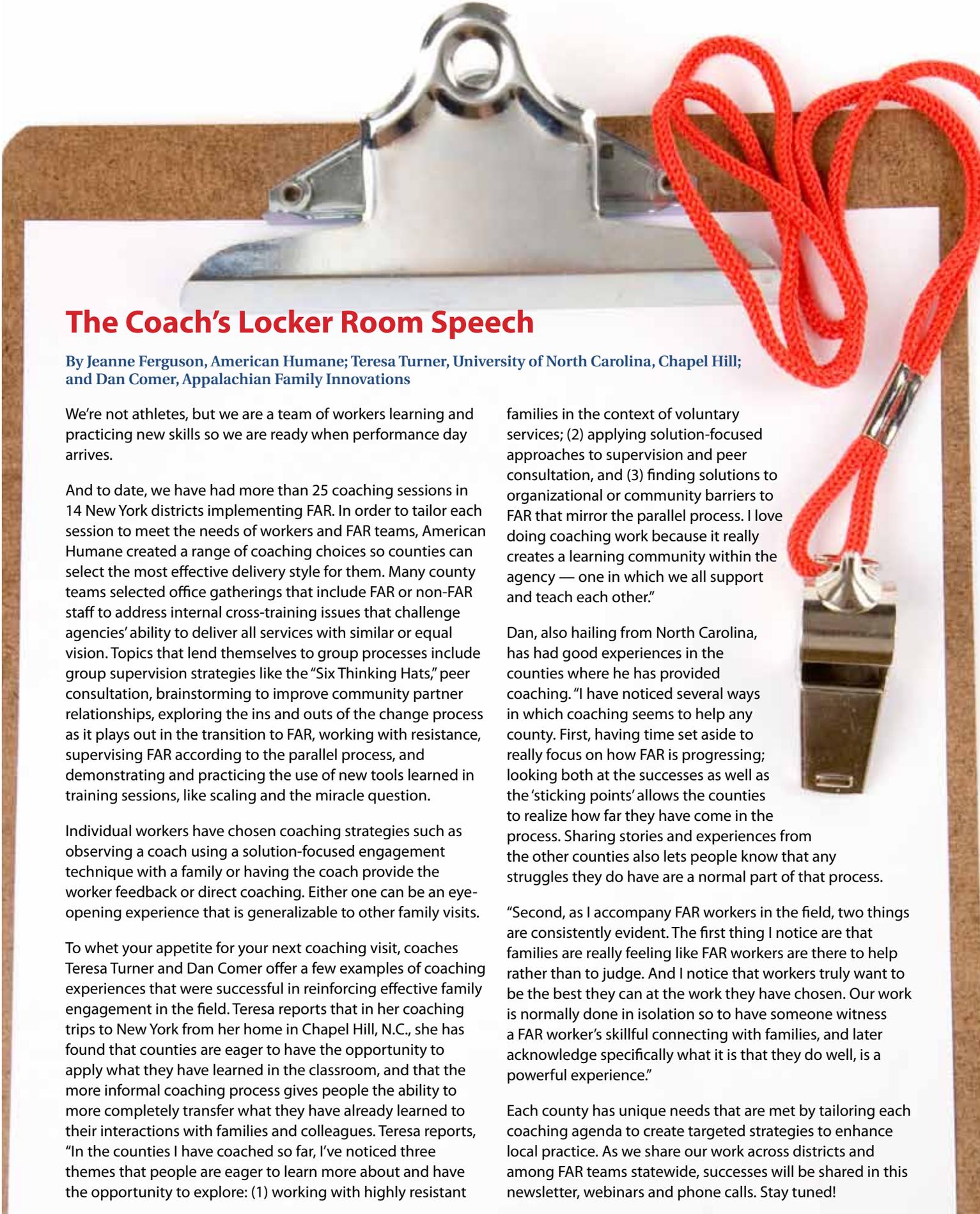
Q & A

Q: Is the seven-day safety assessment part of the overall FAR process?

A: Yes. Assessing safety in a FAR case is a requirement and is part of the Chapter 452 legislation that enabled FAR in New York. The expectation in New York's FAR practice is that a worker responding to a report being tracked to FAR will meet with the family and together, they will assess the family and home conditions that exist for the children in the household. That safety assessment, initiated by the worker or agency and led by the family, must be completed within the first seven days of the life of the report. If, during that time, the worker and family identify safety concerns that cannot be addressed by the family with the worker's support, the report will be transferred to an investigative process, and the FAR worker will explain to the family what the response will be from that point on. A "warm hand-off" from the FAR worker to

the investigative worker is expected, and no reduction in services that are underway should occur while the investigation proceeds.

Transparency of information about the safety assessment and FAR processes and the reasons why a case might be moved from FAR to an investigation are the foundation for the decisions around safety. If no safety concerns are identified, the worker and family continue on to engage in a full assessment (through the use of the FLAG), keeping their eyes open for conditions or dynamics that could change. Either way, the children's safety is assessed not only in the first seven days of the FAR process, but also throughout the life of a FAR case, and the family is a partner in that assessment.

A clipboard with a silver clip and a red lanyard with a whistle. The clipboard is on a white page with text. The red lanyard is coiled and has a silver whistle attached to it.

The Coach's Locker Room Speech

By Jeanne Ferguson, American Humane; Teresa Turner, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; and Dan Comer, Appalachian Family Innovations

We're not athletes, but we are a team of workers learning and practicing new skills so we are ready when performance day arrives.

And to date, we have had more than 25 coaching sessions in 14 New York districts implementing FAR. In order to tailor each session to meet the needs of workers and FAR teams, American Humane created a range of coaching choices so counties can select the most effective delivery style for them. Many county teams selected office gatherings that include FAR or non-FAR staff to address internal cross-training issues that challenge agencies' ability to deliver all services with similar or equal vision. Topics that lend themselves to group processes include group supervision strategies like the "Six Thinking Hats," peer consultation, brainstorming to improve community partner relationships, exploring the ins and outs of the change process as it plays out in the transition to FAR, working with resistance, supervising FAR according to the parallel process, and demonstrating and practicing the use of new tools learned in training sessions, like scaling and the miracle question.

Individual workers have chosen coaching strategies such as observing a coach using a solution-focused engagement technique with a family or having the coach provide the worker feedback or direct coaching. Either one can be an eye-opening experience that is generalizable to other family visits.

To whet your appetite for your next coaching visit, coaches Teresa Turner and Dan Comer offer a few examples of coaching experiences that were successful in reinforcing effective family engagement in the field. Teresa reports that in her coaching trips to New York from her home in Chapel Hill, N.C., she has found that counties are eager to have the opportunity to apply what they have learned in the classroom, and that the more informal coaching process gives people the ability to more completely transfer what they have already learned to their interactions with families and colleagues. Teresa reports, "In the counties I have coached so far, I've noticed three themes that people are eager to learn more about and have the opportunity to explore: (1) working with highly resistant

families in the context of voluntary services; (2) applying solution-focused approaches to supervision and peer consultation, and (3) finding solutions to organizational or community barriers to FAR that mirror the parallel process. I love doing coaching work because it really creates a learning community within the agency — one in which we all support and teach each other."

Dan, also hailing from North Carolina, has had good experiences in the counties where he has provided coaching. "I have noticed several ways in which coaching seems to help any county. First, having time set aside to really focus on how FAR is progressing; looking both at the successes as well as the 'sticking points' allows the counties to realize how far they have come in the process. Sharing stories and experiences from the other counties also lets people know that any struggles they do have are a normal part of that process.

"Second, as I accompany FAR workers in the field, two things are consistently evident. The first thing I notice are that families are really feeling like FAR workers are there to help rather than to judge. And I notice that workers truly want to be the best they can at the work they have chosen. Our work is normally done in isolation so to have someone witness a FAR worker's skillful connecting with families, and later acknowledge specifically what it is that they do well, is a powerful experience."

Each county has unique needs that are met by tailoring each coaching agenda to create targeted strategies to enhance local practice. As we share our work across districts and among FAR teams statewide, successes will be shared in this newsletter, webinars and phone calls. Stay tuned!

Family Group Decision Making and FAR

By Jeanne Ferguson, New York FAR Manager for American Humane



At American Humane's annual Conference on Family Group Decision Making and Other Family Engagement

Approaches across beautiful Lake Champlain this June, the link and partnership between family group decision making (FGDM) and family assessment response was well and truly made. Vermont was the proud host of this year's conference, and is one of several states demonstrating the efficacy of and relationship between these two approaches. Using family safety meetings (modeled after Turnell and Edwards' Signs of Safety work), the Green Mountain State is offering families the option of an initial differential response, followed by a family safety meeting to jointly facilitate the family's assessment of its children's safety needs.

FGDM practice involves the specific engagement of a full constellation of family members, as the family defines them, as well as non-family providers, to convene gatherings that place responsibility for child safety where it belongs: in the hands of the child's caretakers, with the specific support of family and community partners who are committed to the child and family. Numerous models are being used in the U.S., most of them springing from New Zealand's family group conference structure, which prominently

features private family time as an essential component in the family-led process. Several counties in New York are experienced with family group conferencing or other modified family meeting processes, and most appreciate the practice for its simplicity and honoring family competencies and wisdom.

What research has shown definitively in numerous studies is that most families, when afforded the opportunity to operate autonomously with sufficient, credible information available to them, create family plans that ensure child safety. They choose services and resources that they cannot otherwise supply to enhance their own capacity, and both children and families thrive. In the U.S. and Canada, several states and provinces have enacted enabling legislation for FGDM, similar to New York's Chapter 452 enabling FAR, to delineate and protect practice designed to be made available to families experiencing distress and subsequent contact with the child welfare system.

With neighbors Vermont and Pennsylvania moving in directions similar to New York, both family assessment response and family group decision making are giving new meaning to strengths-based practice, for workers and for families. Now, after many years of changing our language to suggest a

family strengths commitment, it is possible for families to benefit from the system changing its practice and philosophy to support family integrity and control. Putting our actual practice where our mouths have been for quite a while is another step in the direction of empowering families — the exact place our system intends to be, now and into the future.

New York's OCFS and the Center for Development of Human Services have developed a set of toolkits to support family engagement practices. Many counties have chosen the family meeting as a way to meet the expectation of incorporating family engagement into their program improvement plans.

If you'd like additional information about the intersection of FGDM and FAR, please contact your local regional lead about FAR and other family engagement practices and your regional office will facilitate coaching from American Humane on how to integrate FAR and family meetings. Use these links to access the Toolkit for Family Meetings and other supportive tools for engagement:

- Family Meetings Toolkit
- Family Meetings Toolkit Video

We are all delighted to share our excitement about these twins of best practice in child welfare.

Helpful Resources

From American Humane:

The Quality Improvement Center on Differential Response in Child Protective Services:

www.differentialresponseqic.org

Evaluation report of Ohio's Alternative Response Pilot Project:

www.americanhumane.org/protecting-children/programs/differential-response/ohio-alternative-response.html

Differential Response Approach in Child Protective Services: An Analysis of State Legislative Provisions:

<http://www.differentialresponseqic.org/assets/docs/differential-response.pdf>

FAR Orientation Session: Designed With Counties in Mind

By Lauren Morley, Manager, Training and Prevention, Child Welfare, American Humane Association

One of the essential elements of successfully implementing FAR at the local level is the ongoing education of community stakeholders. Whether it is the youths and families served by the local agency, school personnel or the media, different stakeholder groups in your local community can greatly benefit from ongoing learning about:

- The practice shift to FAR within the agency and how your agency hopes it will change;
- How the implementation of FAR will impact your agency's work with each particular stakeholder or group; and
- The outcomes your agency hopes to achieve for children and families through FAR.

In September 2009, American Humane created the New York Family Assessment Response (FAR) Orientation and corresponding presenter's guide and PowerPoint presentation. This one-hour orientation session was developed for use by FAR counties and OCFS and was written with the intent of being delivered to community partners and stakeholders, including families. This orientation includes information on:

- The definition of family assessment response;
- The history of the differential response movement nationally in child welfare;
- How FAR is developing within the state of New York;
- How FAR practice is different from and similar to an investigation;

- The benefits of FAR for families and children; and
- FAR's impact within the local community in which it is being delivered.

The material used in the orientation session was adapted from the New York Family Assessment Response (FAR) Process and Practice Training curriculum, so each community can receive the same fundamental information that your agency received when you were initially trained by American Humane. Recent updates (June 2010) have been made to the presenter's guide and PowerPoint. The updated versions can be found on the FAR intranet site managed by OCFS.

While the material provided in the FAR orientation session is foundational in educating community stakeholders, American Humane encourages local FAR districts to consider adding information to the orientation session to customize it for different stakeholder groups. For example, many districts find that ongoing education of school personnel is especially critical to their success. It might be helpful to add some slides about the philosophical shift toward family assessment response, by discussing the shift from child-centered to family-centered practice. Many FAR districts have found school personnel struggling to align with how the agency initiates a FAR case: through a meeting with the family rather than by interviewing the child separate from the parents. Spending time exploring how this way of initiating a response with a family can build engagement — perhaps through the use of case scenarios



— might be beneficial to building acceptance of this practice approach. This additional, focused information can also help school personnel better understand how child safety is achieved through family engagement.

In addition to exploring how to best educate each group about FAR, it can also be useful to consider how your agency organizes its meetings with stakeholder groups. Leaving enough time for questions from the group will help ensure that stakeholders are leaving the orientation session having had their concerns addressed. It might also be possible to arrange for a parent or caregiver who has participated in a family assessment response to accompany agency staff to a stakeholder meeting to share firsthand the “consumer perspective.” This perspective can be very powerful in helping stakeholders better understand the practice shift to FAR, not only for your agency and the community, but also for the children and families served through this type of response.

Overall, it is important to keep in mind that just as with families, building partnerships with stakeholders is a process, not an event. Applying the Six Principles of Partnership to building engagement with community stakeholders will result in increased engagement, just as it does with families. The orientation session (and subsequent materials) was developed for you, so feel free to use it, adapt it and share it as you wish to enhance your FAR work in your community.

Participant Comments from the FAR Family Survey (October 2009 – May 2010)



“The worker was very helpful, prompt and concerned about the case and he did everything he could to help.... If everyone that works in that program is that helpful as the person we had, I can see it working and being effective, I hope that others receive the quality of services I did.”

“Our worker was very timely in finding & referring me to the right place for more info. I am very glad we had this experience — it all is for the best in getting the care my son needs.”



“My worker went beyond his job to always be available & ready to help with any & all problems.... I feel blessed to have met my worker. I do consider him a friend of my family — not a social worker.”



“I think that they need more workers like the lady that helped me out, she was very kind and sweet and very understanding and she actually listened to me instead of judging me, others treated me badly and she actually treated me like a human being and I really appreciated that from her. She helped me out in every way she could, she was nice and sweet. She would be the person I call if I ever had any problems.”



“Thanks to the Children’s Services Worker I was able to obtain the funds needed to renew my nursing license and I have found employment. I just wish something could’ve been done to save our house but things began to look up the day she came to visit and I never thought I’d ever feel that way about a Children’s Division worker.”

“[Our worker] was very nice and made me and my kids feel like she really cared about our situation. She was very understanding and encouraging as well. She was a joy to work with.”



Visiting the State Central Registry

By Amy Chaffee, Child Protective Services Supervisor, Tompkins County

In April, the FAR program was invited to give a panel presentation at the New York State Prevent Child Abuse Conference. While we were there, Faith Aprilante, our FAR panelist from Orange County Department of Social Services suggested that we try a visit to the State Central Registry (SCR). Our OCFS hosts, Jamie Greenberg and Sheila Poole went about making the arrangements, and I and Lauren Morley and Jeanne Ferguson of American Humane joined in.

The SCR is where all of the state’s hotline calls come in (except for Onondaga and Monroe counties, which have their own hotlines).

In 2009, the SCR received 359,000 calls, of which 297,000 were hotline calls.

Mandated reporters, concerned family members, neighbors and anyone else call the SCR when they have a concern that a child is being maltreated or abused. The workers at the SCR screen these calls to make certain there is valid cause for concern before sending the call along to the appropriate county. The SCR is staffed and open for business 24/7, 365 days a year. The calls are received by a staff of 150 child protection specialists. In addition, there are 28 supervisors to support decision making and consultation to callers. In 2009, the SCR received 359,000 calls, of which 297,000 were hotline calls. They processed 180,000 intake reports, handled 223,000 database check requests and received 7,700 administrative review requests and 9,000 requests for information. In addition, the Abandoned Infant Information Hotline received 95 calls in 2009.

The SCR is located in a confidential location. While waiting to enter the building, Lauren commented, “it feels like we are getting in to see the wizard.” To the contrary, we were greeted warmly by Roberta Frederick, who gave us a tour and answered our many questions. Roberta continued to stress that the SCR would like more counties to visit, and more of an exchange of information and an increased flow of communication between the SCR and the local departments of social services. She also stressed that phone calls from local departments with questions, comments, feedback and requests for clarification were very welcome. During the tour, we were awed by the scale and scope of task given to the SCR and gained a renewed respect for their piece in the work we all do.

The “bubble” or “mission control” center was amazing, and the staff were very professional and skilled in steering their big ship through the day’s work. With the data collected from years of taking calls, supervisors are able to predict the number of calls that may come in during a given time, and they staff

the hotline and shift child protection workers to other duties, accordingly. The SCR is

about the size of two football fields. Due to the stressful nature of the work, calming quiet is instilled and respected in the large, open area. Supervisors have taken the windowless offices so the specialists’ cubicles are open to the wall of windows. Besides a lunch room and training room, there is a room for quiet and “time out.” As Roberta played a few recordings of calls for us, my thoughts were to the SCR workers’ stress, possibly from never knowing the outcomes of these calls, which our FAR workers experience at the end of 60 days as being mostly positive. Roberta patiently answered our many questions, and appreciated receiving our FAR-related information, which may not filter back to the SCR very often. It is always enlightening to hear how the “other side” sees the work, and that was true for all of us. We left with a great list of contact people at the SCR that will come in handy when there are cases that need to be discussed quickly to solve problems.

I highly recommend that other counties visit the SCR.





FAR Flex Funding

By Jamie Greenberg, OCFS

A key component of FAR practice in New York is the availability of funding specifically aimed at meeting a family's short-term need that is not easily addressed through traditional temporary assistance or services funding, or providing an incentive or recognition to a member(s) of a family for progress made toward achieving a positive child welfare outcome, as agreed to by the family and FAR worker. Every county implementing FAR receives a modest allocation of what OCFS refers to as FAR flex (or wraparound) funds that casework staff can use to meet identified needs.

Use of Funds

Some of the purposes for which the FAR flex funds have been used or designed to be used are:

- Purchase of clothing and household items
- Purchase of mattresses and bedding
- Furniture and appliance repair
- Car repairs, bus passes and gas cards
- Purchase of phone cards and cell phone minutes
- Purchase of food and grocery cards
- Purchase of garbage cans and cleaning supplies
- Purchase of items such as children's shoes and pizza certificates to reward and demonstrate appreciation for progress or positive behavior demonstrated by a family member

Source of Funds

Round I FAR counties received approximately \$35,000 each, regardless of the anticipated FAR caseload, to be used over a two-year period, thanks to a generous grant provided by the Marguerite Casey Foundation. These funds were and continue to be managed by the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy. Counties implementing FAR after the first round are receiving a flex fund allocation that is funded completely with state dollars.

The state flex funds are available to counties based on an allocation assigned to each county initiating FAR. Counties must spend FAR flex funds and submit claims to the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), as is done for other child welfare services. OTDA will reimburse counties for their entire amount of spent FAR flex dollars up to the county's initial or adjusted allocation.

Protocols and Controls for the FAR Flex Funds

It is advisable that FAR counties establish protocols concerning how caseworkers can access the flex funds, and what levels of control and retained documentation is maintained. OCFS has not established a set of requirements in relation to county protocols other than to advise that counties should maintain a sufficient level of control in keeping with good administrative and accounting practices, and then inform staff as clearly as possible how to access and account for the funds.

Tompkins County was an early protocol developer and has shared its protocol with other FAR counties. The Tompkins County protocol first established overall requirements (these requirements need not be identical elsewhere and are shortened for the purpose of this article):

- Funds must be for families involved with FAR
- Funds must be approved prior to spending

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- Funds must be for goods and services not otherwise available to a family or not available when the family needs it; the family and worker agree that it will support child and family well-being and the family will use the goods or services
- Receipts must be obtained
- The worker must get verification that the client received the goods or service (e.g., the parent could sign the back of the receipt)
- There must still be flex funds available
- Benefits must be sustainable (e.g., a one-time payment or purchase of goods versus payment for something the family will not be able to afford in the future)

After outlining the above requirements, the Tompkins protocol contains the following headings (Note: we are not describing the content in this article but their protocol may be viewed in the FAR Public Folder in the “Other FAR Resources” subfolder or by contacting the author of this article):

- Typical items that may be needed and are not available through other funding streams
- Approval process
- Monitoring the account
- How these things will be purchased
- Caseworkers’ responsibility
- Looking to the future

Based on anecdotal information from FAR implementation counties to date and the experiences of the two most rigorously evaluated state differential response initiatives, Minnesota and

Missouri, we believe that flex funds need to remain a core component of New York’s FAR program. In an Institute for Applied Research report, *Alternate Response Research in Missouri, Minnesota and Virginia*¹, the evaluators found, “The types of services delivered to families changed in both states, with a shift toward family support services that would address financially-related needs.”

In terms of how much specificity ought to be in statutory language or OCFS guidance to FAR counties concerning the exact purposes for which FAR flex funding may be used, we are inclined to shoot for a middle ground. From one perspective, there ought to be some boundaries understood by all counties and workers as to the allowable parameters for using flex funds. The other perspective that we hope to maintain is that we do not conclude that we can anticipate all family circumstances; thus a certain degree of latitude at the case and county levels should be preserved.

OCFS welcomes any comments about this article and any thoughts on how to improve flex funding to better support the families we serve using FAR.



Write for Us!

Contact us with your ideas so we can get them into our schedule. Please reply to Lara Bruce at Larab@americanhumane.org.



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The American Humane Association provides this newsletter to New York counties currently implementing Family Assessment Response.

¹A PowerPoint summary of this report can be found at <http://www.americanhumane.org/assets/docs/protecting-children/PC-AR-MO-MN-VA.pdf>.