

Family Assessment Response Application – Monroe County

- a. Factors to be considered by the social services district in determining which report 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.*

In accordance with social service law section 427–a, any reports with the following allegations or narrative will be excluded from FAR before beginning the investigation:

1. Fatality
2. Sexual Abuse
3. Failure to thrive
4. Assault in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd degree against a child
5. Abandoned child
6. A child subjected to repeated and severe abuse

Additional criteria that would make a family ineligible for the Family Assessment Response track would include:

1. Families currently involved with an article 10 petition or court order
2. Families who are unable or unwilling to engage in and/or benefit from FAR services
3. Reports involving abuse or maltreatment in day care or foster care settings

Reports involving allegations of educational neglect, and those where the family has no SCR history will be prioritized for assignment to the Family Assessment Response (FAR) track, though others will be considered as well where appropriate. Monroe’s “FAR team” will consist of 6 supervisors/senior caseworkers and 6 caseworkers on 3 CPS Investigation Teams to provide family assessment response services during our pilot period. Families will initially be screened for family assessment response services by use of a screening tool, yet to be developed. Monroe’s “FAR team” is comparing tools currently being used for FAR by the various round one counties. If we are not able to adapt one to meet our needs we plan to create one. We anticipate the screening will be done by the supervisors and/or senior caseworkers on the three FAR designated teams.

The anticipated percentage of reports projected to be screened and/or handled by the family assessment and service track in the first 12 months of implementation is unknown at this time. We have 12 CPS Investigation teams, most of which have 6 caseworkers. We have selected CPSI 4, 7 and 12 to participate in FAR. Each of these teams have 5 caseworkers instead of the usual 6. We anticipate that initially, 3 caseworkers in each of the targeted units will do traditional response, and the remaining 2 will do FAR. This means that a total of 6 FAR workers will be initially

designated. We anticipate a gradual increase in FAR staff as need arise. Cases are assigned to teams as the primarily based on geographic locations. Team 7 only has TANF eligible families (although other teams also serve this population). Team 7 works with families in the city zip codes, including those in the infamous crest who are over represented in the statistics of conditions that significantly challenge families. These include: living at or below poverty level, high crime, school drop out, teen pregnancy, etc. Teams 4 and 12 overlap a number of those city zip codes as well as several western suburban towns and villages. While the initially selected teams happen to be the ones primarily serving the western portion of the county, the intention is to implement FAR throughout the county as we continue to grow and add staff. The percentage of total reports received that end up being handled by FAR workers remains to be seen as we develop proficiency in screening and assignment of cases to this track.

Monroe County plans to meet with stakeholders to provide information and seek input regarding the process. The stakeholders include at-risk families, community agencies, MCDHS staff, contracted preventive service providers and local school districts.

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 assessment and services track and a description of how the services will be offered:

The process of assessing child safety and risk and family strengths and needs, will involve the caseworkers utilizing the same regulatory standards for child safety as in a regular CPS investigation. Child safety and risk will be assessed throughout the life of the case, as it is in any investigation.

While FAR workers have all the authority of CPS, and are considered to be providing a form of CPS, the focus of assessing safety and risk will be unlike traditional CPS in that interventions will be strength based and family lead. Concerns will be addressed by solution focused approaches, rather than determination and fault finding. There will be no decision as to indicating or unbounding of reports.

A Report is received through the SCR, or our local hotline, and assigned to a CPS investigation team. If appropriate for Far upon screening, the case is then assigned to a caseworker on the unit who is designated to accept FAR reports. A 24-hour safety check must be completed, and could be completed by the supervisor, senior caseworker or the assigned caseworker, depending on the circumstances of the case. The FAR designated caseworker will then review the report and make contact with parents or caretakers to explain the process and begin engagement. The family will also receive written information regarding FAR services. The caseworker will make arrangements to meet with the children and family in a time frame to ensure the child's safety. Outcomes and goals will be developed in partnership with the family, and the worker will obtain releases of information from the parents to access

community supports and services to assist the family in meeting their needs. A seven-day safety assessment will be completed on each family.

The Family Assessment Team will link families with services that will address their identified needs by coordinating with all contracted Preventive providers as well as the Family Access and Connections Team (FACT). FACT is Monroe County's integrated entry to care for our community's highest needs/highest risk children and youth who are exhibiting behavioral problems. FACT incorporates the Office of Mental Health, Children and Youth's Single Point of Access (SPOA) as well as the Persons In Need of Supervision (PINS) diversion system. Other stakeholders with whom we collaborate include: Youth and Family Partnership (YFP), Alternatives for Battered Women (ABW), Temporary Assistance, all local school districts, and other formal and informal community partners including faith-based institutions, extended family members and other community resources. All potential service providers will be invited to participate and provide input in shaping the FAR process.

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

The family, in collaboration with the FAR caseworker, will determine whether and when services will be provided. The families will also have ongoing discussions with the FAR worker about whether or not the services continue to meet the needs of the family. In addition, all services will be reviewed by the unit supervisor and/or administrative caseworker during weekly supervision meetings and at various other points throughout the life of the case. Services provided by the contracted agencies will be assessed as to their effectiveness by the family, the FAR caseworker and the Department's Preventive Unit. A peer supervision group to review cases and share experiences for purposes of group learning and further refinement of the FAR process will be assembled. This group will consist of the 6 participating caseworkers, 6 supervisory staff (3 supervisors and 3 senior caseworkers) as well as 3 administrative staff. [The 6 supervisory staff will be responsible for a total of 15 caseworkers, including 9 traditional CPSI caseworkers who will not be included in the peer supervision group].

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:

FAR caseworkers will utilize approaches that actively engage and empower families to participate in planning to identify the strengths and meet the needs of individual family members. FAR trained workers will use interviewing techniques that are strength based. Families will engage in identifying their strengths and needs, and will create solutions for the challenges that they face. They will be able to match strength to needs, and develop plans to meet their unique and specific needs. This approach will equip the families to identify and utilize family protective factors to address child safety and improve family functioning.

- e. A description of how the differential response program will enhance the ability of the district to protect children, maintain safety of children, and preserve families.***

Thus far, Family Assessment Response has been proven to have positive effects on engaging families and achieving better outcomes regarding sustained safety of children in places where it has been implemented. Not only is there strong potential to reduce the recurrence of child maltreatment, but also to reduce repeat reports to the SCR through stronger and more positive engagement with families, improved trust building, better understanding of the families' needs and strengths, and empowering families to do the work necessary to keep their children safe.

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

We intend to continue the collaboration with stakeholders as needed on an ongoing basis, in order to develop better individualized services to meet the specific needs of families. MCDHS is committed to making the cultural shift in understanding that families know best what they need. The agencies that provide these services are committed to quality assurance and to implementing services that have been proven to have positive outcomes for specific client needs. The form and frequency of such discussions will develop as we begin the pilot.

- 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:***

Our plan is to solicit 6 CPS Investigation supervisory staff (3 supervisor/senior caseworker teams) and 6 CPS caseworkers for the pilot. Every effort will be made to recruit staff volunteers for this project, as we would prefer to begin with those who demonstrate the ability and desire to use family engagement strategies and the Child and Family Team process (CFT). CFT is values based collaborative planning strategy for youth and families with complex needs. Team members come together to discover family and team strengths, identify needs, match strength to needs and develop a plan that involve preexisting and create customized services and interventions. These concepts fit well with FAR approach, and are in keeping with Monroe's vision for better outcomes for families, while holding fast to best practice standards. To maximize the success of the pilot, we prefer to begin with staff that are willing to embrace innovation and to try new approaches. Separate staff will provide the traditional CPS investigation and the family assessment response approaches within the 3 identified CPSI teams.

The Child Protective Intake Team houses our Child Protective Hotline, which receives reports called in locally in addition to receiving reports from the SCR. The Intake unit assigns reports to the Child Protective Investigation Teams based on

geographic location. The Intake Unit will continue to assign cases according to the current guidelines. Upon receipt of a case by a team designated to do FAR, the supervisory staff will make a determination based on the above-mentioned criteria in Section A, as to which case will get the traditional response and which will get the FAR response.

h. A description of the training that will be provided to district staff regarding the family assessment response program. Additionally please include a description of training to be provided to any non- district staff to use 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.

All CPS caseworkers, supervisory staff and administrative staff have completed Child Welfare Core training and many additional trainings. Each staff member is mandated to obtain 6 hours of approved training a year. Initially, a series of preliminary informational meetings will be held in order to familiarize all DHS Child and Family Services staff about the intended goals and processes for FAR. Identified FAR staff will be further trained through OCFS-sponsored training by the American Humane Association, in the family assessment response model approach and state requirements. The training will emphasize that child safety is always a priority. All identified FAR staff will receive training in the use of the screening tool and FAST documents. Contract agencies will receive training on safety and risk assessment along with training on the family assessment response approach. Non-CPS casework staff assigned to work with FAR tracked families will also receive training. It is our intention to do a series of site visits to departments in various stages of implementation.

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

Families will be linked with services based on their identified strengths and needs, with the families' informal network of supports being the primary resources. Monroe County also has a rich array of services available in the community that will be utilized as appropriate, some of which may be under-utilized at this time. It is anticipated that efforts will be made to join with faith-based, recreational and other informal and formal resources in the community in addition to existing DHS-contracted services. The anticipated stakeholders meetings will be key in beginning and, in some instances, continuing the development of such resources.

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

In addition to existing contracted and non-contracted community service resources, it is anticipated that OCFS FAR pilot wraparound funds will be available; other funding could be generated in the future via collaboration with the stakeholders.

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. This protocol must address the need to maintain the safety of the children.

Family assessment response cases in which domestic violence is suspected or identified will be referred by the FAR caseworker to the Safety First Program - Alternatives for Battered Women Advocates who are co-located with CPS investigative staff and are available for consultation and /or immediate contact with the victim to offer domestic violence prevention and intervention services. When possible, a joint visit will be made by the caseworker and ABW advocate to ensure child safety and provide domestic violence prevention services.

To insure collaboration and better planning of services, the Safety First Advisory Board (comprised of CPS and ABW administrative and supervisory staff together with the ABW advocates) meets on a regular basis. Additionally, the FAR workers will be able to access services via direct referral to ABW as well as other community agencies and the Monroe County court system.

l. a description of your plan to involve community agencies, school, Family Court, other key stakeholders in your county or catchment area, and the community as a whole in planning for and implementing a family assessment response;

A series of stakeholders meetings will be planned in order to give information about FAR, and to solicit input. The stakeholders will include the ones mentioned above as well as families, other DHS divisions and staff, including collaboration with CPS Management staff that are now participating in the CFT process. It is anticipated that FAR staff will meet with stakeholders such as other DHS staff, Department of Health, family court judges, and other court personnel, medical providers, school districts and other formal and informal networks including faith based and other community organizations. These meetings are beginning immediately with other DHS staff. Over the next few months (Summer 2009) meetings will be held with the judges/court staff, and medical providers. Meetings with the school districts and informal networks are anticipated to begin fall 2009. The intent is to continue communications with stakeholders beginning immediately and continuing through implementation. Additionally, a format will be developed for eliciting feedback from all FAR families prior to their cases being closed.

m. please indicate your projected timeline for implementation;

The plan is to submit the application to OCFS by 05-04-09; following approval, we will immediately begin the planning strategies as described above. MCDHS will be

prepared to fully implement FAR by January 2010. FAR implementation will be continually assessed for effectiveness and functionality, and a database developed to track recurrence of maltreatment and repeat CPS reports involving FAR families going forward. A complete program assessment will be conducted and adjustments made as necessary in January, 2011 to promote optimal success with this initiative after its first year of implementation.