

St. Regis Family Assessment Response Application

Any Social Services district wishing to implement a Child Protective Services (CPS) differential response (which OCFS shall refer to as family assessment response) program must apply to OCFS to participate by submitting a plan for implementation. Any plan approved will be posted on OCFS' website within 60 days of such approval, as acquired by Chapter 452 of the Laws of 2007. The plan must address all the criteria listed below:

a) The factors to be considered by the social services district 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;

- **Please address:**
 - **The criteria by which you will assign reports to the family assessment and services track;**
 - **The anticipated percentage of reports that you are projecting will be handled through the family assessment and services track on the first 12 months of implementation;**
 - **The particular units and/or workers who will be involved, if it is not initially to be done county wide;**
 - **Any phase-in or rollout plans**

CRITERIA: During the St. Regis FAR pilot, SCR reports will be assigned to FAR based on the following criteria:

- St. Regis will focus on allegations of inadequate guardianship, educational neglect and lack of supervision.
- Families with no SCR history will be a priority for FAR. Although, St. Regis is open to considering FAR for a family with prior SCR history if there is reason to believe that FAR might produce a different outcome for the family.
- Domestic violence cases will be considered on a case-by-case basis based upon the severity of the allegations. This will be determined through supervisory consultation.
- When it appears a neglect petition and/or removal will occur (1021, 1024), a traditional CPS investigation will be completed and the case will not be considered for FAR.
- Reports involving licensed facilities, foster homes or day care will be excluded.

- Families receiving services in an open case (i.e. Preventive Services) from the Department will be excluded.

In addition, any report with the following issues in the allegation or narrative, the report will be excluded from FAR before beginning the investigation:

- Fatality
- When children have been taken into protective custody.
- Children currently involved in an Article 10 out of home placement.
- Parent/Caretaker is currently a subject of an open CPS Investigation at the time a new report is received.
- Sexual Abuse
- Court-ordered investigation
- Report where St. Regis assigned a Secondary role.
- History- Any indicated report received within the previous year that involved any of the following issues: Domestic Violence, Substance Abuse, and Sexual Abuse.

If a case is not excluded as a result of the above criteria, the FAR worker/team would start the FAR process. After beginning FAR, if the worker/team determines any of the following factors are present, the case would be ineligible for FAR:

- Parent/Caretaker disputes that the incident(s) or condition(s) alleged in the CPS report occurred or exist.
- Unexplained injuries are apparent where it appears an explanation should be available.
- Parent/Caretaker is unable or unwilling to engage in and/or benefit from services and supports in the future.

If, after cases are designated for FAR in the CONNECTIONS system, there exists new information obtained through the assessment process that would indicate that a case may no longer meet the criteria for FAR as established above, it will be at the discretion of the FAR worker/team and Supervisor whether the case will remain in FAR or whether a "traditional" CPS investigation should occur.

ANTICIPATED REPORTS: St. Regis anticipates within the first year, about 70% of reports will be handled through the FAR track. In 2008 St. Regis received 75 reports and would expect approximately 48-50 reports to be tracked for FAR within the first twelve months.

UNITS INVOLVED: St. Regis, as a small department of two units, Protective and Foster Care/Preventive Services, will train all staff regarding FAR. This will include two Supervisors, three Protective Caseworkers, and three Preventive Foster Care Caseworkers. All will receive trainings related to FAR as all staff respond to after-hours and on-call CPS services on a rotating schedule. Of the casework staff, two are CPS Caseworkers. These two CPS Caseworkers will be

involved in both FAR tracked cases and the traditional CPS investigations, due to size of the Department.

ROLL-OUT/PHASE-IN PLAN: St. Regis will be fully prepared to implement FAR in November 2009. FAR implementation will be continually assessed for effectiveness and functionality.

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;

- **Please describe:**
 - **The assessment process that you will use to assess the child safety, risk to children and family strengths and needs;**
 - **The plan for linking families with those 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.**

St. Regis will ensure while utilizing this alternative approach to providing protection to children by focusing on engaging families in support services that meet their needs and increase the family's ability to care for their children. In doing this the FAR worker/team will continue to assess safety and risk throughout the family assessment process.

Staff will meet with the parent/caretaker to explain the process and to engage them in family assessment. Staff will obtain permission from the parent/caretaker to involve other community supports and assist them in meeting needs that may be identified throughout the assessment process. Within seven days of the report the formal safety assessment will be completed in CONNECTIONS. A strengths and needs assessment will be conducted in partnership with the family utilizing the FAST. This process will engage families by acknowledging their ability to use their strengths and resources to meet needs. Furthermore, outcomes and goals will be developed in partnership with families.

The plan for linking families with those goods and services that address their identified needs will include offering services immediately and throughout the process. FAR Services will be provided by Department staff, in partnership with families and community. Services that may be provided by other DSS programs during FAR include transportation, day care assistance, public assistance, food stamps, Medicaid, child support services, and emergency assistance.

FAR services that may be provided by community service providers include basic need services (food, clothing, and shelter), mediation, respite, advocacy, early intervention services, substance abuse services, domestic violence services, home visiting services, public health nursing services, WIC, health and mental health services, classes such as parenting, anger management, parent support and support groups.

FAR families will be linked with goods and services they need with the assistance of FAR staff. The role of the FAR worker/team will be different than the CPS caseworker role, whose role often times become monitoring compliance with a Family Court order. The FAR worker will be engaging families and linking them with needed services and advocating for them. FAR workers will interact in partnership with other local resources 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 under the family assessment and services track;

- **Please include how the assessments and services provided directly by LDSS as well as those provided by agencies under contract with LDSS and those provided by other community agencies will be developed and monitored for quality and adherence to negotiated principles and expectations.**

FAR services will be provided by the Department staff and will be monitored by CPS Supervisor. The review of reports will be monitored through the use of case consultations, conferences, and group supervision. Case documentation will record significant case events including services provided and referrals to community agencies and providers. St. Regis is expecting that the assessment instrument utilized will assist in eliciting information about our population's needs, strengths, and future desired needs on a program and system level.

The FAR worker will continually assess for strength-based, risk and safety throughout their work with FAR tracked families. They will complete a formal

assessment using an assessment tool (FAST) and complete case documentation in CONNECTIONS for the FAR cases.

The FAR workers will provide assessment, short-term case management, information and referral to community services, limited transportation and linkages with eligibility benefits administered by LDSS. FAR cases opening for longer-term Preventive Services will be initiated when indicated by service needs.

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;

- **Please describe:**
 - **Your county's core practice principles upon which the family assessment response is designed.**
 - **The approach you will take, and the strategy behind such an approach, to more actively engage and empower families in (i) assessment of their strengths. (ii) assessing their needs, and (iii) in decision-making, while at the same time reassessing child-safety, as need be.**

St. Regis is committed to providing culturally-sensitive and culturally-specific services to the Akwesasne Community that are also child-centered and family-focused. It is St. Regis' mission and effort to promote services to strengthen, support, and protect Akwesasne families in all stages of life for seven generations. By utilizing FAR, St. Regis will ensure children and families have a voice in this process (service planning) that enables them to address issues related to functioning as a family and members of a community in a manner that is identified by them. FAR is an opportunity to actively engage this action for our Investigations population.

Families will be invited to share their stories and experiences with the FAR worker/team (CPS Investigators, Supervisors, Preventive Services Workers) who will be trained in facilitating strength-based discussions and assessments that enable families to articulate their priorities for change and self-sufficiency. The process by which parents/caretakers are encouraged to share their stories will ensure children are safer by the manner in which they are presenting valuable information that the Department will use to ensure that children are safe.

In addition, the FAR staff will be encouraged and expected to meet the needs of families in a way that "meets that family where they are at," so they can assist in improving their functioning. The efficacy of this intervention will be strongly

related to the quality and availability of field-based training in the area of these core skills.

The FAR track will enhance the Department's ability to practice strengths-based, family-focused service delivery and further the goal of empowering families to fully participate in identifying their strengths, planning and working toward addressing their needs. The evidence that supports St. Regis' readiness for this and its potential for a successful implementation is the high level of consistent enthusiasm and interest about FAR by Department staff and the community agencies that have been engaged in the planning process thus far.

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

The FAR approach to working with children and families is predicated with the understanding that families have strengths, and with support, they can change in a way that improves family functioning. The "traditional" investigation intervention is adversarial, designed to assess that likelihood that a child is being or will be maltreated, neglected, and/or abused, and then act in a manner that protects the child. While this process is necessary for some situations, it may be more beneficial for families to engage the family system to foster sustainable change.

Through earlier, stronger and more positive engagement of families receiving FAR, prevention efforts will be more effective and will result in fewer subsequent CPS reports, lower risk, a higher degree of safety and fewer out-of-home placements. As families begin to trust the FAR approach to provide assistance in a non-authoritarian, team approach, they are more likely to seek out assistance before situations become higher risk and involve safety concerns. FAR families can be expected to call upon FAR worker/team as soon as they identify a need, thereby streamlining and coordinating services for FAR families.

FAR will provide the Department with the process to ensure the safety of children by engaging in a partnership with parents/caretakers and removing barriers that contribute to the likelihood that children will be maltreated, neglected, and abused. In addition, with the FAR process will provide the Department with an opportunity to increase its effectiveness in engaging families in the change process that will increase the likelihood that families will be accurately assessed for services needs and receptive to those interventions which are designed to ensure safety and improve the functioning for long-term, sustainable outcomes.

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;

- **Please describe:**
 - **How the district will engage the family without increasing the involvement of government agencies without compromising safety of the child(ren).**
 - **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.**

FAR is planned as a less intrusive approach than "traditional" investigative approaches and focuses on short-term, front-end services. These supportive services will be provided by the Department and other community partners and will identify natural supports within the family and community. This, along with building on the strength's of the family, from a culturally-sensitive and culturally-specific, holistic perspective, will allow the family to find solutions in a self-sustainable way.

FAR will introduce a process to reduce the family involvement with government agencies that will occur as a natural result of this initiative. The Department involvement will end at the earliest point possible after safety has been assessed and a referral for services has been completed. The key accomplishment of this initiative will be to link willing families with available services and community resources that will promote their independence and their capacity to successfully address their own issues. To the extent possible this effort will involve the use of community based services and natural supports.

The Department will be responsible for identifying the appropriate interventions required to address the identified issues impacting the child. FAR cases will receive services for an average of 60-90 days. Cases that are in need of continued services beyond 90 days may be open for traditional Preventive Services. During the 60-90 day period, the FAR worker/team will assist the family in arranging formal and informal support systems which may include family/group conferencing to identify family supports and referrals to community service providers and other resources. The referrals may be made to organizations that provide an array of services such as alcohol/substance treatment programs, counseling services, domestic violence services, budgeting, parenting skills, housing, health services, anger management, and basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter.

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;

- **Please include:**
 - **How you plan to assign or recruit DSS staff to respond to a CPS report through the family assessment response track;**
 - **Whether staff will be involved in both the family assessment response track and the traditional CPS investigations;**
 - **An indication of the use of any and all specialized staff/resources that will impact on the implementation of FAR.**

St. Regis, as a small department of two units, Protective and Foster Care/Preventive Services, will train all staff regarding FAR. This will include two Supervisors, three Protective Caseworkers, and three Preventive Foster Care Workers. All will receive trainings related to FAR as all staff respond to after-hours and on-call CPS services on a rotating schedule.

However, regarding FAR workers/team, this will consist of CPS caseworkers, foster care/preventive caseworker, and community services workers. There will be a total of 4 staff and a supervisor on the team. Of the casework staff, two are CPS Caseworkers. These two CPS Caseworkers will be involved in both FAR tracked cases and the traditional CPS investigations, due to size of the Department. Team meetings will involve review of FAR track families. All members of the team will engage in group supervision of FAR cases. This joint case review process will assist the team in becoming familiar and comfortable with the FAR approach to cases.

h) A description of the training the 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 be used in the differential response program. Both descriptions should include, but not 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;

A preliminary FAR informational meeting has been held with Department staff, both Protective and Foster Care/Preventive Services Units. Prior to initiation of FAR for St. Regis, the Department will need additional training on family

engagement (solution-focused), FAR-CONNECTIONS, supervisor training, group supervision, and team building. All Department staff planned to receive FAR reports have completed NYS Child Welfare CORE trainings and many additional trainings related to NYS Child Welfare Services programs and other relevant topics. Additionally, all CPS staff have completed CPS Response Training and periodically receive specialized CPS trainings.

All Supervisory and Casework staff involved in the FAR implementation will be provided with an overview of FAR and training/certification on the use of the FAST assessment tool to be utilized with FAR cases. In addition, non-CPS casework staff assigned to work with FAR tracked families will receive additional training in conducting safety assessments.

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

FAR tracked families will be provided with information on services available to address identified needs and referrals/linkages will be made to community resources and service providers. Community services such as health services, family support services, Family Court, domestic violence services, Substance abuse services, mental health services, housing support groups, Parent/Youth advocacy services may be used as needed.

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

Pending approval of this application, St. Regis plans to utilize current wraparound funds provided by the OCFS pilot. In addition, the Department may apply and utilize local grant funding. Where training resources needs are identified, availability of local district and OCFS funding will be explored. Community resources and service providers are encouraged to seek and secure private funding, such as that often available through foundations and grant opportunities to enhance programs and services.

k) A description of the protocol to be followed in handling cases in the family assessment and services track when domestic violence is suspected or confirmed. The protocol must address the need to maintain the safety of the children;

- **If you plan to collaborate with your local domestic violence service provider concerning any aspects of your family assessment and services track, please describe such collaboration.**

With supervisory consultation, FAR services will be provided to those domestic violence reports where CPS safety interventions and neglect/abuse petitions are not going to be necessary. The Department will collaborate with our local domestic violence service provider. With this program, the Department will develop specific protocols with our staff and the provider. The FAR delivery of these reports will be provided in a manner that ensures the victim and the child are safe, while supports the adult who has been harmed.

Initial contact and engagement will occur with the victim independently, 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 also be identified. Additional services such as domestic violence services, advocacy and support, financial assistance, emergency services, housing, victim support groups, domestic violence treatment services, anger management, parenting groups, will be provided as needed.

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

The Department will approach and meet individually and/or in community forums with community stakeholders, including agencies, schools, Family Courts, the faith community, parents and elders, to receive their ideas, inputs, or concerns.

The Department will introduce the FAR approach to the community with information and informative materials shared at numerous venues including meetings, open houses events, presentations, and trainings to provide education about the process changes, availability, target population, and access. In addition, the Department staff and supervisors continued participation in various community boards, workgroups, and inter-departmental teams where program information can be distributed.

m) Please indicate your projected timeline for implementation.

Pending approval of this application St. Regis plans to develop specific procedures for FAR, train staff, share information with community stakeholders

and prepare for implementation during the next several months (June 2009-October 2009). St. Regis will be fully prepared to implement FAR in November 2009. FAR implementation will be continually assessed for effectiveness and functionality.

Respectfully Submitted by: Michelle L. Farnsworth, MSW
Date: April 30, 2009