

Westchester County Family Assessment Response Application

See Attached Power Point, [Community Based CPS Pilot 5 08.ppt](#).

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;
[See attached "Westchester Screening Tool"](#).
 - the anticipated percentage of reports that you are projecting will be handled through the family assessment and services track in the first 12 months of implementation.
[We anticipate serving approximately 350 reports per year in the unit dedicated to the Family Assessment Response \(FAR\). This would be approximately 5% of the total number of reports received in Westchester in a 12 month period. There are plans to add a second FAR unit in the fall of 2008. With a second unit we would expect to serve approximately 675 reports per year or 10% of our total reports..](#)
 - the particular units and/or workers who will be involved, if it is not initially to be done county-wide
[FAR will be piloted in one CPS/Preventive Service \(PS\) unit in our Yonkers District Office. The unit will be comprised of one Supervisor and four CPS and two PS Senior Social Caseworkers. The selection of this unit and site was based on the work that has been done in the area of truancy and educational neglect in the city of Yonkers. See the attached Yonkers Public Schools Community School concept.doc. The plan to add a second unit anticipates a unit of four CPS and one PS Senior Social Caseworker.](#)
 - any phase-in or rollout plans
[As a member of the Yonkers Truancy Reduction Strategy Group \(YTRSG\), Westchester County DSS has been working with the schools, and community partners to develop protocols and resources. \(See more information at http://programdesign.com/wiki/Yonkers_Truancy\). In response to this initiative we have the staff in place and have begun working with the agencies listed in the Yonkers Public Schools Community School concept.doc. Roll out](#)

plans include training for our staff in the Family Engagement approach, an education campaign for our community partners, beyond those on the YTRSG, and development of protocols and/or Memorandum of Understandings with identified community service providers to whom we would refer families.

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 child safety, risk to children and family strengths and needs. Westchester will begin the pilot using the NYS OCFS seven day safety assessment and the Risk Assessment Profile while we continue to evaluate other available assessment tools.

- 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.

The initial FAR Unit will be comprised of four CPS and two Preventive Services Senior Social Caseworkers. Cases immediately identified as eligible for FAR will be assigned to Preventive staff for an assessment and development of a service plan where indicated. In completing the assessment staff will determine whether the family is in need of continued Preventive Services that require an MPS case or whether the on-going service needs can be met through a community provider.

Currently, Family Ties, Inc. is a partner in the YTRSG and runs the Family Resource Center in Yonkers. They are also partners w/DSS currently providing services to families in the cities of Mt. Vernon and Peekskill. DSS refers families to Family Ties who had an indicated CPS report but have a low or moderate risk rating and would benefit from continued community services. Family Ties also provides Family Group Conferencing to Westchester families.

On the SPOA and CCSI level Westchester DSS has been a long term partner with our Department of Community Mental Health, Youth Bureau and Probation and have been using the Network Model to match family needs with community service providers. We will continue to utilize the Network approach with our FAR unit.

As part of our initial intake protocol in CPS and now in FAR, we require a WMS search to identify families who may already be engaged with the department in any of our service and non-service areas. When an open case is identified we gather additional background information from our co-workers, on both the Services and Non-Services sides of the department as part of our collateral contacts. We use benefits available from Non-services to meet family needs (Medicaid, Food Stamps, TANF grants, EAF, etc.). We will continue this practice with the FAR unit.

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

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

Close partnering and clear communication among child welfare, other public agencies and community-based organizations to address child safety, permanency and well-being.

The roles and obligations of DSS and its community partners are clear with regard to referrals, assessments, service provision and case management.

Ongoing communication mechanisms are in place among community agencies, DSS, and other public agencies to provide relevant information regarding the families they are serving.

All relevant stakeholders understand the goals, processes, risks and benefits of differential response, and the implications for organizational culture, philosophy and service delivery.

DSS and its public and private partners will work together in an ongoing way to strengthen service coordination and integration, based on shared goals and common populations being served.

DSS and its public and private partners make effective use of resources to capitalize on each discipline's expertise and resources.

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;

- 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.

The following was adapted from material developed in California. One of our staff, Phil Goldstein, did extensive work with California when they were developing their Differential Response initiative.

Key Principles:

Children are safer and families are stronger when communities share responsibility and work together with the agency to protect children and support families.

All families who need services receive referrals to appropriate, accessible and culturally relevant services.

The unique needs of children and families are adequately addressed the first time they are referred to DSS.

Agency policies and practice reflect a robust commitment to early intervention.

Substantiation of abuse or neglect is no longer the gateway to services.

Through team approaches such as team decision making, parent accountability, individualized assessment of need and engagement of families are balanced to maximize safety, permanence and well-being of children and families.

System responses and outcomes are fair and equitable for all children and families who come in contact with DSS.

Key Components—The following, are the key practice areas for implementing differential response.

Standardized approach to assessment of safety, risk, protective capacity, and needs.

The assessment process accurately determines the needs and strengths of the families.

County protocols are clear about who (DSS, a community-based service provider or a team of people from multiple agencies) should conduct standardized assessments based on the particular circumstances of the case.

Decision making and forms reflect the new assessment procedures.

DSS, other public agencies and community partners understand the assessment approach and how to implement it.

Systems are in place to capture and share assessment information across agencies.

Engaging families to achieve better outcomes: using a voluntary engagement process when possible.

A key to engaging families is a shift in focus from substantiating abuse and neglect to addressing the needs of families.

Child welfare social workers and community-based service providers build a relationship with the families that includes communication, honesty, respect, information, and clear objectives.

Child welfare staff and partners offer change oriented services based on family need and level of risk rather than on substantiation of child abuse and neglect.

Families understand the assessment and referral process and give permission for voluntary referral to community-based services.

The wisdom of families and the people they trust will be used in the assessment, safety, and case planning processes.

Use team decision-making approaches to engage families and community partners in the assessment, case planning and service delivery processes.

Access to a range of integrated, culturally appropriate resources—Establishing availability and access to a network of resources and opportunities to address the needs of vulnerable children and families.

The network will include formal and informal supports and services to meet identified needs.

Each community will have a clear understanding of existing resources, patterns of access to services, and gaps in core services.

Service and resource gaps will be addressed through capacity development and coordinated case management strategies.

DSS will develop performance-based contracts with community agencies.

- 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;

Safety of children is never compromised, no matter what the system is. Dual track would allow for quicker family engagement, which in turn will identify the family's strengths and supports at the front end. This in turn leads to a better and more informed safety assessment of the children as well as increasing the likelihood of the family accepting services.

Risk and safety assessments are integral to both the assessment and investigative tracks. The better we understand the family and have a more complete family assessment, the better we can work with the family in meeting their needs to support their children and keep them 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;

- Please describe:

- how the district will engage the family without increasing the involvement of government agencies without compromising safety of children
- 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.

DSS will remain as the initial contact point for the family through the receipt of a CPS report and assignment to the FAR track. From there, through the Family Engagement principals, we will look to the family to identify their key supports such as family, friends, community and faith based organizations. Those family identified resources will be invited into the assessment and planning process to be used as the first level of response to the family's needs. Utilizing those resources will reduce the need for further government involvement beyond the initial assessment response.

For families without any immediate community resources, or who may be reluctant to identify resources themselves, we will utilize the Network approach. The family will be invited to a Network meeting to discuss their needs and challenges and the Network group will offer appropriate venues of service. In addition the Network can provide community support circles to help the family through the process.

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 FAM

FAR will be piloted in one CPS unit, in our Yonkers District Office. The unit will be comprised of one Supervisor and six Senior Caseworkers. The staff were chosen from volunteers interested in the FAR approach. The staff will receive CPS reports related to truancy and educational neglect. Based on the nature of CPS reports it is anticipated that while truancy/educational neglect may be the basis for the report, these case will include issues across the CPS spectrum. The staff will handle both FAR and investigation cases. It is anticipated that they will receive 5-7 reports per month and will have a total caseload ranging from 8-14 cases at any given time. We plan to add a second unit of one Supervisor and five Senior Caseworkers in the fall of 2008. This second unit would handle the same range of number of cases as the first.

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 be used 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;

Staff will be trained in the Family Engagement approach, Cultural Competency, Network Meeting Facilitation, Education Law and

Regulation and will also be trained as facilitators for Family Group Conferencing.

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

As described above we have community partners on board through the YTRSG. The current partners are listed in the attachment, [Yonkers Public Schools Community School concept.doc](#).

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

There is a pending application for USDOJ OJJDP Title V dollars for the early chronic truancy prevention that would supplement available services.

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

- 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.

Westchester County has co-located Domestic Violence liaisons in each of our district offices. Our protocol calls for referral to and screening by the DV liaison whenever there is a reason to suspect that there may be DV issues within the family. We will continue to use this protocol in the FAR unit.

- 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 planning for and implementing a family assessment response;

As described above we have community partners on board through the YTRSG. The current partners are listed in the attachment, [Yonkers Public Schools Community School concept.doc](#).

- m) Please indicate your projected timeline for implementation.

As previously indicated Westchester has done considerable groundwork in conjunction with the YTRSG. We have staff in place and services lined up. We could begin implementation in July/August 2008.