



Ulster County Department of Social Services
1061 Development Court
Kingston, NY 12401
February 14, 2013

www.ocfs.state.ny.us

Dear Commissioner Iapoce and Deputy Commissioner Sorokin,

Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor

Gladys Carrión, Esq.
Commissioner

We are pleased to inform you that your application for participation in New York State's Family Assessment Response (FAR) program has been accepted.

Capital View Office Park
52 Washington Street
Rensselaer, NY
12144-2834

Lara Bruce from our partners at Butler Institute for Families at Denver University will be coordinating training for your staff and should be in touch in the very near future. We look forward to partnering with Ulster County in this endeavor and are confident that FAR will make a valuable contribution to the Child Protective Services response that you provide to Ulster County families.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at (518) 474-9879.

Gail Haulenbeek MSW

Director, Bureau of Program Monitoring and Practice Improvement
Division of Child Welfare and Community Services
NYS Office of Children and Family Services

Cc: Raymond Toomer
Yolanda Desarme
Janice Pressley
Lynn Carlson



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Family Assessment Response (FAR) Application

Name of Applicant County: Ulster County

Name and contact information for the person in your agency to contact regarding this application:

Lynn Carlson, Assistant Director of Services

Lynn.carlson@dfa.state.ny.us

845-334-5521

Please complete all items in this application unless marked "if applicable," in which case the information should be provided if appropriate. It may be helpful to refer to the OCFS FAR Readiness Checklist for ideas about the information to be provided in each section (at <http://ocfs.state.nyenet/cps/FAR/Other%20FAR%20Resources>).

I. Rationale for Implementation of FAR

- A. Describe your rationale for applying to implement Family Assessment Response (FAR) and for undertaking the practice shift to FAR.

Given the large number of unsubstantiated CPS reports, it is evident that not all families require an investigative approach to reported concerns within the family. The Family Assessment Response provides an alternative response which has demonstrated increased satisfaction among families involved with this approach. Although Ulster County has always approached the families reported through the SCR with respect and a non-judgmental attitude, many families find the CPS process to be intrusive and frightening. By utilizing the FAR approach families are less likely to be resistant to openly discuss difficulties they may be facing and will engage with the FAR worker to become a true partner in developing a plan to assist the family.

- B. What benefits are you seeking for your district through the implementation of FAR? For the families reported to your district? For your community?

Through the use of the FAR approach it is anticipated that our district will ultimately receive fewer subsequent reports and will develop closer linkages to community resources to support families in need of such services. Families will see this approach as helpful and will be less reticent to ask for assistance in areas of need within the family. Through community outreach mandated reporters will view this approach as a vehicle to assist families rather than placing blame and identifying short-comings.

- C. Provide a brief assessment of your district's current child welfare / child protective services (CPS) case practice, including an assessment of your district's current strengths regarding family engagement, assessing safety and risk, family-led strengths and needs assessment, and solution-focused practice.

While CPS workers are trained to approach all families in a respectful and helpful manner, not all families view the CPS approach as helpful. Workers complete timely assessments of safety and risk and develop an appropriate course of action based on these findings. While family meetings are utilized on occasion, this is not standard

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procedure on all CPS cases. Children are generally interviewed at school when possible and contact is then made with the caregiver notifying them of the report and that their child has been interviewed. Workers and supervisors are particularly adept at developing creative solutions to difficult situations when these arise.

- D. Identify areas of practice where you anticipate that development and support will be needed in the successful implementation of FAR.

Planned outreach for school personnel, other mandated reporters, and community and church programs informing them of the implementation of FAR and the benefits of this approach utilizing the FAR Orientation Power Point tool will begin as soon as Ulster County's FAR application has been approved by OCFS.

Workers value the family engagement model and will benefit from further trainings in this area to hone their skills in order to be most helpful to the families they come into contact with. All workers who will be part of the CPS/FAR initiative will receive training in this model through the Butler Institute.

II. Intake - Criteria for Assigning Reports to Family Assessment Response

While New York State Law excludes assignment to FAR of CPS reports containing certain categories of allegations, a majority of all CPS reports remain eligible for FAR assignment. OCFS has found that when districts severely limit the types of allegations assigned to FAR, it impedes the successful implementation of FAR. Therefore, OCFS policy requires districts to commit to screening in a broad range of allegations for FAR assignment.

As per New York State law, reports with allegations said to have occurred outside of family settings (e.g., day care, residential settings) cannot be assigned to FAR. While reports regarding foster boarding homes are not legally excluded from assignment to FAR, their inclusion cannot be supported by CONNECTIONS at this time. Also in accordance with State law, reports containing the following allegations cannot be assigned to FAR:

- sex abuse (i.e., commission of a sex offense against a child)
- child prostitution
- incest
- a child engaged in, or use of a child for purposes of, child pornography
- assault against a child
- attempted or committed murder or manslaughter in the first or second degree
- child abandonment
- severe or repeated abuse
- neglect resulting in failure to thrive

- A. List additional criteria you will use to screen out reports from FAR (if applicable):
Any reports that are currently investigated by the Family and Child Advocacy Multi-Disciplinary team will be screened out of the FAR unit. These reports include child sexual abuse, serious physical abuse, all domestic violence reports, and child fatalities.

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B. List the types of reports to be screened into FAR:

Educational neglect; inadequate guardianship; lack of food, clothing, shelter; lack of supervision; parent's drug/alcohol abuse where there are no criminal charges and no extensive history of drug/alcohol abuse; lack of medical care; COI's that do not include the excluded allegations, bruises that do not appear to be severe or intentionally caused.

C. Describe the procedures you will use to screen reports into FAR:

Support staff who accept SCR reports will use the FAR screening tool to determine if a new SCR report is in the Kingston School District catchment area. If the report meets this criteria, the report along with the screening tool will be given to the FAR supervisor for completion and determination of the appropriate track for the report, i.e. CPS/FAR or CPS/INV. If the FAR supervisor is not available, the Screening Tool will be completed by another CPS supervisor or by the Assistant Director of Services. (CPS/FAR screening tool attached)

III. Projected Caseloads and Workforce Allocation

Developing a successful FAR program requires assigning a sufficient number of cases to FAR to foster a vibrant program. Districts should commit to assigning to the FAR track a meaningful percentage (i.e., a minimum of 30-40%) of those CPS reports that fall within the categories of cases meeting the district's criteria for FAR. Alternatively, medium to large sized districts may wish to serve one or more communities that have a disproportionately large number of CPS reports and/or a disproportionately high minority representation in their CPS reports; they should commit to assigning to FAR a minimum of 15-20% of all CPS reports in those communities that meet state requirements for FAR inclusion.

A. Caseload projections - After reviewing past CPS data in your district and the criteria you plan to use to assign cases to FAR, provide the following information to estimate your **projections** for the assignment of cases to FAR in the first 12 months of operation:

1. Total number of CPS reports in your district in the past year (use the most recent data available):
2547 reports received in 2011
2. Number of reports projected to be assigned to FAR in the first year:
500
3. % of all CPS reports received that you project will be assigned to FAR:
20%
4. % of those CPS reports *meeting your district's criteria for inclusion in FAR* that you project will be assigned to FAR:
85%
5. Additional comments (optional):

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B. Decision-making about staff allocations

Describe how you plan to staff FAR. (Please note: because FAR is a CPS service, the basic training requirements for staff assigned to FAR are the same as those for other CPS staff.) Include a description of your process for the identification of staff who will implement FAR. Are you assigning based on specific criteria, asking for volunteers, etc.?

The FAR staff will initially consist of 4 caseworkers and one senior caseworker who will directly supervise the unit. The four caseworkers have volunteered to be considered for the unit. A fifth worker was selected by supervisory staff to be fully trained in the model in case volume of reports necessitates the addition of another worker. All staff are currently CPS/INV workers.

C. Staff allocations projected for the first year

Field experience has demonstrated that FAR is implemented most easily and most effectively when staff assigned to FAR are responsible for FAR cases only and do not have mixed caseloads. Therefore, OCFS will not approve applications with a plan to implement FAR in which individual caseworkers will be assigned to routinely carry case loads of both FAR and Investigation cases. Supervisory oversight of mixed units should be considered only in small districts with two or fewer CPS units.

1. Number of units currently (pre-FAR) providing child protective services:

Four

2. Number of caseworkers and supervisors currently (pre-FAR) assigned to CPS:

CPS caseworkers 23

CPS supervisors and senior caseworkers who supervise 5

3. Number of units to be assigned to FAR

Designate the number of units that will be responsible for FAR cases only, and the number of any units that will have mixed caseloads (if applicable):

Number of FAR units: 1

Number of mixed caseload units (if applicable): 0

4. Supervisors to be assigned to FAR

Designate the number of supervisors and senior caseworkers who supervise who will be responsible for:

FAR cases only: 1

Mixed caseload units (if applicable): 0

Describe the experience and qualifications of anticipated FAR supervisory staff:

The senior caseworker who will directly supervise the CPS/FAR unit has been a supervisor in the CPS/INV unit for 7 years. Prior to this she was a CPS/INV worker for 4 ½ years, and had 5 years experience as a caseworker in the intake unit.

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5. Caseworkers to be assigned to FAR

Designate the number of caseworkers who will have FAR caseloads:

4-5

Describe the experience and qualifications of anticipated FAR caseworker staff:

All anticipated CPS/FAR caseworkers are currently CPS/INV workers and have attended CPS response training. 1 has 7 years experience, 1 has 3 ½ years, 2 have 2 years, and 1 has 1 ½ years experience.

6. Describe other staff resources to be dedicated to FAR (if applicable):

The Assistant Director of Services will be involved in establishing the CPS/FAR unit. The Grade B supervisor of CPS will directly supervise the CPS/FAR Senior Caseworker Supervisor of the CPS/FAR unit.

7. Include additional information about units and/or workers to be assigned, including location information if implementation will not be countywide (if applicable):

The CPS/FAR initiative will initially be implemented in the Kingston School District only. Kingston is the County seat and has the largest number of CPS reports per school district in this area. Approximately 30% of all CPS reports are in the Kingston School District catchment area. It is anticipated that of these 30% of reports approximately 85 % will be assigned to the CPS/FAR unit.

D. Projected Start Date for FAR

Start date will be approximately one month after staff members have been trained in the FAR approach. It is anticipated that the start date will be within the first quarter of 2013.

E. Phase-in for the Workforce

Describe your plans for phasing in your FAR workforce (if applicable):

Trained FAR workers will begin receiving FAR reports as soon as the launch date has been initiated. They will complete any CPS investigations on their workload and in a maximum of 59 days will have a dedicated FAR workload

F. Future Plans (After the First Year)

Describe any additional plans you may have regarding the future size of the FAR program and staffing patterns to accommodate the FAR program after the first year (if applicable):

IV. Plans for Service Provision

Describe:

- the types of services and supports you plan to provide to families in FAR.
- the procedures you will use in offering these services, including:

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- your strategies to apply the principle of actively engaging and empowering families in an ongoing process of assessing their strengths and needs, assessing child safety, and decision-making; and
- how you plan to link families with needed services and goods through relationships with preventive services staff, TANF staff, and community service providers, including any plans to contract for such services.

Families assessed through the FAR track will have access to all services generally available to families both through CPS and Ulster County's Intake Unit if there is a need to avoid out of home placement. These services include but are not limited to: Preventive Services, Family Educator, YAP, Families Now, Coordinated Children's Services, NEXIS, daycare, Mental Health services, Early Intervention, Healthy Start, transportation assistance, budgeting, advocacy, and linkage to community services.

Workers will engage families whenever possible by calling and requesting a time to meet that is timely and convenient for the family. They will explain the FAR approach and will supply the family with a yet to be developed brochure explaining this initiative. FAR workers will work with family members first to assess their strengths and supports and have the families identify what areas of their family life are working for them. Workers will then ask the family to identify any areas in which they feel they need assistance. Through an empathetic and active listening approach, FAR workers and families will jointly explore potential services which may assist the family. The FAR worker will explore with the family any existing supports and together they will make referrals and linkages to services both within the community or the Department. The emphasis will be on assistance rather than investigation.

Ulster County is fortunate to have a continuum of services available to families and referral procedures are well established and will continue to be utilized. Since the FAR initiative will initially be limited to the Kingston School District catchment area, additional community services will be identified and utilized by the FAR workers.

V. Community and Other Resources

The success of every FAR Program is dependent upon the creation of vibrant and cooperative partnerships with services and programs in the community.

A. Identification of stakeholders – List the stakeholders for FAR that you have identified in your district and in your community:

- | | |
|--|---------------------|
| Family Court | Family of Woodstock |
| Kingston School District | Family Services |
| Healthy Start | YMCA |
| Family Practice | YWCA |
| Pine St. Pediatrics | Head Start |
| Kingston Hospital | Astor |
| Ulster County Temporary Assistance, Medicaid, and SNAP | |
| Mental Health Association | |
| Early Intervention Services | |

B. Community outreach – Describe how your district has reached out to and coordinated with community stakeholders (or plans to do so) in the planning of FAR:

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A meeting with Ulster County Family Judges has already been requested to discuss the implementation of the FAR initiative.

Plans are to meet with Kingston School District administrative staff and school social workers.

Letters will be sent to local mandated reporters explaining the FAR initiative with an invitation to meet personally with anyone interested or to answer any questions they may have by phone conference.

C. Community resources that may be used to assist families in FAR. Specify:

• Government agencies or resources:

Ulster County Mental Health; Ulster County Temporary Assistance, Medicaid, and SNAP; Family Court; Ulster County Community College; Youth Bureau; Ulster County Probation; Early Intervention Services

• Non-government agencies or resources:

Healthy Start; YMCA; Boys and Girls Club; YWCA; Family Services; Community Action; Cornell Cooperative Extension; Church groups; Ulster Mediation Services; YAP; Family of Woodstock; Mental Health Association; Resource Center for Accessible Living; Kingston Housing Authority; Rural Ulster Preservation Company

D. Describe how you will use community resources to reduce government involvement (including that of child welfare services) in the lives of families while maintaining child safety and preserving families:

FAR workers will provide families with information concerning community services equipped to assist with issues identified by the family as being problematic. If necessary and with the permission of the families, FAR caseworkers will assist the families in the application for community services.

E. Local District Funding for Goods and Services

A key component of FAR is the provision over the short term of needed goods and services, including wrap-around services, to families and children. While OCFS has had FAR flex funds (with no local share) available to districts that previously applied to participate in FAR, there is no current plan for the provision of State-only FAR flex funds going forward. Describe your plans for funding such services and your policy for the use of those funds. Provide an affirmation that, when necessary, you plan to fund these services for FAR families with a local share of the costs. (Note: Local share is to be claimed through the use of protective funding.)

When a needed service is identified that cannot be met through community services, FAR workers will access protective services for an identified need. Funding will be accessed through IV-E; EAF; Protective and Preventive services.

VI. Maintaining Safety / Assessing and Responding to Risk

A. Intake – The initiation of a safety assessment within 24 hours is a FAR requirement. Describe the procedures and processes you will follow to initiate the assessment of the

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safety of children in FAR cases, including how you will or will not screen and assess SCR reports for FAR inclusion during on-call hours:

Child safety will always be the over-riding factor in any situation be it CPS/Inv or CPS/FAR. Safety assessment will be consistent with current practice and will be established within the initial 24 hour period after receiving a report as well as continually throughout the involvement of services staff. The source of the report, if known, will continue to be contacted immediately when a phone number is available to assist in determining the immediate safety of any children alleged to be at risk. A review of any prior CPS/INV or CPS/FAR history will be conducted at intake.

When a report in the CPS/FAR catchment area is received during on-call hours, the on call worker will first initiate contact with the source of the report if a phone number is available and will then contact the on call supervisor. The on call supervisor will determine if immediate contact with the family is necessary or if the report will be assigned to the CPS/FAR unit the next business day. If the immediate safety of a child cannot be determined through collateral contact, the on call worker will make contact with the family to assess the immediate safety of the child/children. The on call worker will explain to the family that they will be contacted the next business day by the assigned worker.

B. Assessment -- The completion of an initial safety assessment within seven days is a FAR requirement. FAR staff must also complete an assessment of risk and an assessment of family strengths and needs. OCFS requires that districts use the Family Led Assessment Guide (FLAG) for these comprehensive assessments and that a completed FLAG be maintained in the case record.

- Describe the procedures and processes you will follow to protect the safety of children and engage families in fully assessing safety, risk, strengths and needs.
- Include a statement in which you affirm that you will make a report to the Statewide Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment (child abuse hotline) if, at any time after a CPS report has been tracked to FAR, there is reason to suspect that a child is in immediate or impending danger of serious harm or the family refuses to cooperate in addressing family problems and there is evidence of maltreatment.

The need for safety of a child and what that means will be discussed with the caregiver at the initial contact by the FAR worker. Families will be given the opportunity to discuss their idea of child safety so that the family and worker have an open understanding of the concept of child safety. This will occur in a dialogue and not in a one-sided conversation. When families feel they are being listened to and their opinions are valued, they are far more likely to avail themselves of services.

As mandated reporters, all DSS workers are well aware of their obligation to make a CPS report if they have reason to suspect that a child is in immediate or impending danger of serious harm. FAR workers will also be trained to understand that while the family has the option of accepting the FAR track, should the family refuse to cooperate with this approach and issues of safety have not been addressed the FAR worker will be obligated to make a CPS report.

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- C. Service provision** – Describe how the FAR Program will enhance your ability to protect children, maintain their safety, reduce risk, and preserve families:

Since FAR workers will not be handling the more serious reports of child abuse and maltreatment, they will have more time to devote to the assessment process. Since families will not feel like they're being investigated for alleged wrongdoing involving the care of their children, they are more likely to ask for and receive needed assistance before issues become unmanageable. FAR workers will assist families to have their needs met through extended family resources by utilizing family meetings. FAR workers will also assist the family in accessing community services available to them including Healthy Start, Resource Center for Accessible Living, Community Action, Cornell Cooperative Services, Boys and Girls Club, YMCA and a variety of religious organizations who are active in the Kingston area. FAR workers will have a maximum of 90 days rather than 60 days to be involved with families, and will have a greater opportunity to link families to community resources or to put short term services in place which may rectify any issues the family and worker have identified as needing attention. This is truly an approach which may prove the adage that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

- D. Domestic violence cases** – Describe the protocol that you have developed to maintain the safety of child(ren) and the non-offending caretaker in FAR cases with suspected or confirmed domestic violence:

Domestic Violence reports will not be accepted into the FAR unit and will continue to be assigned to the multi-disciplinary unit at the Ulster County Family and Child Advocacy Center.

VII. Training

District staff and any non-district staff contracted to provide FAR assessment and services must participate in the FAR training and coaching programs, as designed by OCFS.

- A. Describe training that has already been provided or is planned for FAR staff:**

An introductory review and orientation has been provided to designated FAR staff.

- B. Describe any cross training, orientation, or preparation that has already been provided or is planned for FAR staff, CPS investigative staff, any other child welfare staff, and/or other district staff:**

CPS Supervisors and the Assistant Director of Services have met with Orange County FAR staff and supervisors to discuss their FAR program. Orange County generously gave of their time and expertise and offered to allow prospective Ulster County FAR staff the opportunity to shadow their workers.

Several meetings have been held with the entire CPS staff and DSS Legal staff to discuss the FAR process.

Services staff were informed of the FAR initiative at a full staff meeting and will be kept apprised of our progress at future staff meetings.

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- C. Describe FAR training/orientation that has already been provided or is planned for non-district organizations or entities:

A meeting with Ulster County Family Judges has already been requested to discuss the implementation of the FAR initiative.

Plans are to meet with Kingston School District administrative staff and school social workers.

Letters will be sent to local mandated reporters explaining the FAR initiative with an invitation to meet personally with anyone interested or to answer any questions they may have by phone conference.

VIII. Monitoring and Quality Assurance

Each district must agree to participate in any monitoring or quality assurance activities with OCFS and its agents as may be designated by OCFS. Each district must commit to engage in internal quality assurance activities that will enable them to continuously assess their fidelity to the FAR practice model and the efficacy of their FAR program, and adjust procedures and practices as necessary.

- A. Describe the quality assurance procedures that your district plans to follow in order to self-monitor and assess the success of your provision of services in FAR cases:

Monthly management reports will be provided by the supervisor of the FAR unit in keeping with agency policy. The monthly management report will include how many eligible cases in the catchment area have been screened in and out of the CPS/FAR unit and statistical data will indicate the reason for any reports deemed ineligible for FAR. Data Warehouse tracking will provide additional statistical information. Ulster County will also be participating in the OCFS FAR reviews.

- B. Describe the procedures your district will use to monitor and assess the provision of services to families in the FAR Program by agencies with which you contract to provide services:

Contract agencies all maintain evidence based statistics that are provided on a monthly basis. Monthly reports will be reviewed by the Assistant Director of Services. An end of the year evaluation will be utilized as well.