

Family Assessment Response Pilot Instituted in New York State

All of SCAA's work and alliances — in virtually every policy area — are part of our larger vision to redefine child well-being in New York State and to arm those who work on the front lines of child protection with the resources (funding, information on best practices, caseworker and supervisor training) necessary to truly support families and keep children safe.

SCAA contends that the state's existing approach to child protection cannot and does not guarantee child safety. Rather, the current paradigm of investigation toward finding fault and offering little in services simply fails to serve children and families.

Consequently, we applaud 2007 state legislation to enable Local Social Service Districts to pilot implementation of a differential response approach with some families who are reported to the State Central Register for child abuse and maltreatment. The program is called Family Assessment Response (FAR). Its goals are the same as for the Child Protection Services (CPS) program: the protection of children; preservation of families, when possible; and, prevention of maltreatment.

FAR shifts CPS intervention from an incident focus to a service delivery focus that supports parents in meeting their children's safety and developmental needs. The CPS worker collaborates with the family in identifying family strengths, stressors and other factors likely to precipitate abuse or neglect. Family assessment provides the basis for a child safety plan and for an individualized family service plan.

This year, six counties will utilize the FAR model and be the focus of the pilot. Funding from the Marguerite Casey Foundation will allow these local service providers to partner with community-based organizations to assist in providing ongoing case assessments, specialized services and concrete supports for a portion of the county's clients. SCAA will administer Casey funds and coordinate collection of data from participating agencies in the pilot counties.

The FAR pilot aims to decrease the rate of repeat child maltreatment reports for participating families and increase family satisfaction with services. In conjunction with the state Office of Children and Family Services, participating Local Social Service Districts agencies will track and report on cases diverted to the FAR program.

Stay tuned for more information about this ground-breaking initiative.