

Family Assessment Response (FAR)

“My initial response when a child protective worker knocked on my door was complete terror and fear. The last thing I wanted was for someone to take my daughter away from me. It took about an hour for me to realize this was someone who was here to help my family, not just to keep my daughter safe. Family Assessment Response took the fear out of CPS. We were in a tough spot and I began to feel this just may be what my family needs. It is a scary thing to think of where we would be without FAR. I don't know what we would have done if we were separated. Knowing that FAR exists, knowing the resources that exist, I would probably call (the SCR) myself.”

—Brenda, New York Family Assessment Response Symposium, October 4, 2011¹

Family Assessment Response (FAR), also known as alternative response or differential response, provides protection to children by engaging families and providing support services without “indicating” or making a determination about specific allegations of maltreatment against a parent. Realizing that a one-size-fits-all approach is not effective for every report of abuse or neglect made to the State Central Register (SCR), New York State enacted FAR enabling legislation in 2007, and made it permanent in 2011. There are currently 24 counties in the State and one zone in New York City offering a FAR approach along with the investigative approach in child protective services (CPS). Over 36,900 CPS reports were assigned to the FAR track from 2009 through May, 2013.²

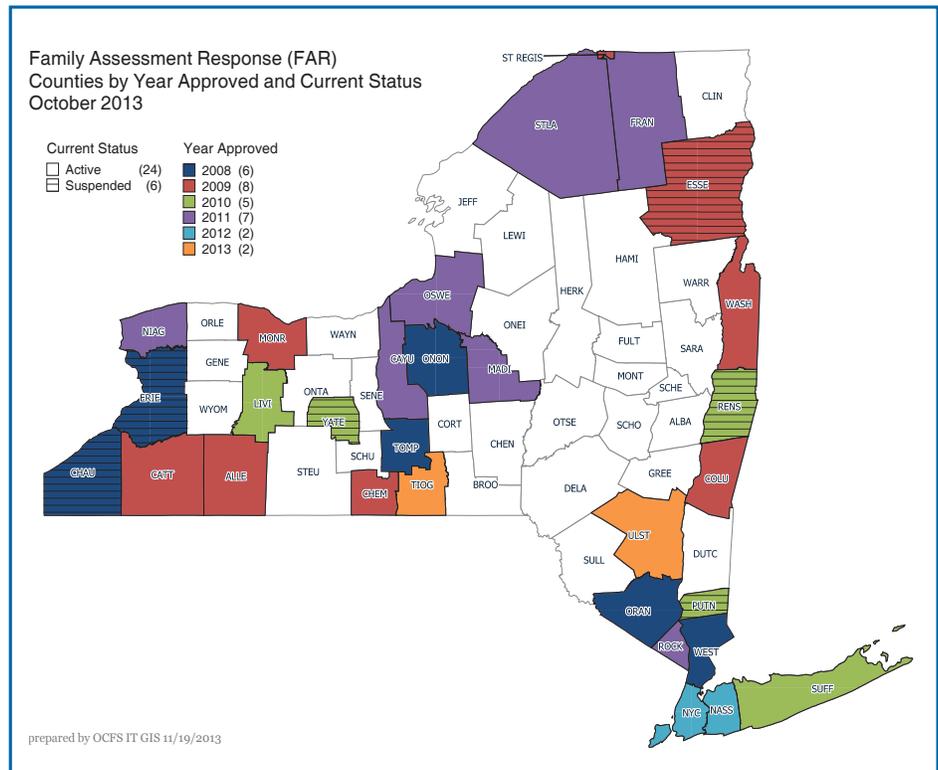
Prior to implementation of FAR, CPS workers treated every report accepted by the SCR with an investigation no matter the allegations made in the report. For example, some reports alert CPS to recurrent cases of head lice,



FAR Facts

- ▶ Evaluation of the data shows that FAR does not put children in jeopardy. In a two-year pilot evaluation of FAR in two counties in New York State, children in families assigned to the FAR track were just as safe as those children whose families were investigated.³
- ▶ By law, reports of potential physical and sexual abuse to children are restricted from assignment to the FAR track.
- ▶ Families assigned to the FAR track receive both safety and risk assessments. If a FAR caseworker finds that a child's safety is in question, then the case is transferred immediately to the investigative track.
- ▶ Families assigned to the FAR track are less likely to have a petition filed in Family Court. Instead of going to court and having a judge order services or place a child into foster care, a family in FAR is offered services and supports that strengthen their ability to care for their children or improve their economic circumstances.⁴
- ▶ FAR can reduce placements into foster care.⁵
- ▶ Both families and caseworkers respond positively to FAR.⁶

teens not attending school, and households with little food. Yet these have been treated the same as reports that suggest serious physical or sexual abuse. With FAR, local departments of social services can strategically dedicate staff time and investigation resources to reports where court involvement may be necessary to protect children, while other staff attend to reports with more poverty-related issues. FAR works because caseworkers work in partnership with family members, identifying solutions and helping them access services. Therefore, family members are more likely to accept services offered.



Endnotes

- ¹ *New York State Citizen Review Panels for Child Protective Services 2011 Annual Report and Recommendations.*
- ² Presentation to the NYS Eastern Citizen Review Panel. New York State Office of Children and Family Services by Joanne Ruppel, Office of Children and Family Services Assistant Director Bureau of Research, Evaluation, and Performance Analytics May, 2013.
- ³ New York State Office of Children and Family Services (2013). FAR Evaluation Impact Study: Two-Year Follow-Up. Accessed at <http://ocfs.ny.gov/main/reports/FAR%20Research%20Brief%20-%20202%20yr%20followup%20FINAL%205-8-13.pdf>.
- ⁴ New York State Office of Children and Family Services (2013).
- ⁵ New York State Office of Children and Family Services (2013).
- ⁶ Ruppel, J. and Huang, Y. (2011). Differential Response in Child Protective Services in New York State. Implementation, Initial Outcomes and Impacts of Pilot Project. Report to the Governor and Legislature. New York State Office of Children and Family Services. Accessed at http://ocfs.ny.gov/main/reports/CPS%20Differential%20Response%20Evaluation%20Final%20Report_%20Jan%202011.pdf.



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