

New York FAR Quarterly

New York Family Assessment Response (FAR) Quarterly Newsletter



Winter 2013



New York State
Office of Children
& Family Services

www.ocfs.state.ny.us

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo
Commissioner Gladys Carrión, Esq.

Leslie Wilmot, Project Director

Jeanne Ferguson, Project Manager

Lara Bruce, Project Coordinator

Kasey Matz, Training & Technical
Assistance Specialist

Christa Doty, Training & Technical
Assistance Specialist

Melissa Thompson, Graphic Designer

Butler Institute for Families

UNIVERSITY OF DENVER GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

In This Issue

Happy New Year FAR! Sharing
Resources, Resolutions &
Reflections..... 1

Good-Bye Michelle Rafael: Her
Good News is Our Bad News by
Roberta Upadhyay..... 2

Consultants Corner: Featuring
Dan Comer 4

FAR Resources for Counties..... 5

Happy New Year FAR!

Sharing Resources, Resolutions, & Reflections

During the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, several members of our "FAR family" were asked to take a few moments to reflect on their FAR journey thus far. They were asked to consider where they and their organization can take FAR into the future and their plan to purposefully influence getting to that goal successfully. Their reflections are scattered throughout this newsletter as a reminder to each of us that the past leads into what becomes our future and as encouragement for all we have accomplished so far. Contributing authors include:

- **Margaret Coombes** – SUNY RF PDP Regional Specialist, OCFS Rochester Regional Office
- **Howard Knoll** – Senior Director, Case Family Programs
- **Nancy Sigler** – Child Welfare Manager, Westchester County
- **Karen Sessions** – SUNY RF PDP Regional Specialist, OCFS Albany Regional Office
- **Millie Key** – Child Welfare Supervisor/Trainer, Monroe County

New Year's Resolution #1

As I reflect on the past year, I'm proud of the amount of work by the Office of Children and Family Services to sustain this initiative. I'm proud of the local departments of social services who agreed to embark on the road less travelled. Each agency has had to overcome obstacles and change their perception of how families can be best served.

What we know is that FAR is not a panacea for child maltreatment and investigative procedures are a critical and necessary component of child protective services. Nevertheless, FAR definitely offers flexible and creative services to support families in overcoming internal and external challenges, such as a lack of resources, while the focus remains on child safety. As a state, we have been at a crossroads and we have chosen to ensure that a consistent and high standard of service is provided to children and families. My resolution is to

***support the integration of FAR
philosophy into the delivery of ALL child
protective services,***

and this can be accomplished through training and knowledge mobilization.

- Margaret Coombes



Good-Bye Michelle Rafael: *Her Good News is Our Bad News*

By: **Roberta Upadhyay, OCFS**



Michelle Rafael
Director of the OCFS Policy Analysis Unit

This December, OCFS and the FAR community lost another one of their pillars to retirement, saying a reluctant goodbye to Michelle Rafael, Director of the OCFS Policy Analysis Unit. As anyone who knows Michelle is aware, she has an inordinate passion for her work. But Michelle says that there is a time for every purpose, and she is sure that this is the time for her to retire. While she does not have any specific plans for her retirement, she will certainly be spending time with her two children and especially with her two spectacularly exceptional grandchildren. Also, Michelle, a voracious reader, says she is really looking forward to being able to read in the morning.

However, Michelle's good news is our bad news; her departure leaves a gaping hole, as we are losing her encyclopedic knowledge about virtually every aspect of child welfare and the history of its implementation in New York State in the last 32 years.

Michelle has been an integral member of the OCFS FAR team since its inception

in New York State. She contributed to the initial policies on FAR, which described the program, provided instructions for applying to FAR, and described how to use CONNECTIONS when using FAR. She developed many of the FAR resource materials and was responsible for making them available through public folders and the OCFS website. For the last two years, she was the "queen of flex funds" and implemented FAR-related spending and reimbursement instructions for the post-flex funds period. She was also part of the team that designed future changes to CONNECTIONS that will facilitate and reflect FAR practice.

What readers may not know is how much Michelle's experience in child welfare has informed her FAR work in incalculable ways. Michelle started her career in 1968, as a caseworker in what was then the New York City Department of Social Services. After moving upstate, she spent almost four years as a caseworker at the Saratoga County Department of Social Services, working in child protective services, foster care, and adoption.

Her state career began in 1980, at the NYS Department of Social Services. Since then, she has worked for the state in practically every area of child welfare, developing an unmatched breadth of knowledge that she brought to every project on which she worked. Michelle's first job at DSS was at the Bureau of Services Information Systems (BSIS), the precursor to the Division of Information Technology in the days before widespread computer use. There, she worked on developing the facility file and on designing and implementing CCRS and WMS.

After a couple of years, Michelle moved to the office where she really wanted to be — Policy. She wrote the

first Child Protective Services Manual, worked on designing the Uniform Case Record (including the paper version, the computer templates, the risk assessment version, and, ultimately, the CONNECTIONS versions).

For four years, Michelle also worked in Program Development, where she supervised a staff that managed contracts for programs addressing

New Year's Resolution #2

At Casey Family Programs, we are committed to the continued

growth and sustainability of the FAR initiative

in NY State for 2013. We envision leading the way for additional community districts in the future, through the successful launch of FAR in the borough of Queens. We envision upstate counties continuing to embrace this philosophy of "family engagement" and affirming their commitment to FAR, where circumstances may have shifted their attention otherwise. Most importantly, through the planned "FAR 101 Train-the-Trainers," we are enhancing a sustainable "in-state" skill set that the state, county and university partners can turn to as we continue to develop the FAR trainers for the future.

- Howard Knoll



(continued on page 3)

(continued from page 2)

child abuse, domestic violence, and adult protective issues. In that position, she created the first child protective/domestic violence collaboratives at the local district level, based on the work of Susan Schecter in Boston, Massachusetts.

When the federal government decided to require that every state have a SACWIS system and provide AFCARS information, Michelle returned to BSIS to work on developing the system that would become CONNECTIONS. Eventually, she returned permanently to Policy, where, among other things, she became the liaison to CONNECTIONS, taking on the task of making sure that CONNECTIONS comports with the

state's laws, regulations, and policies.

The areas of child welfare in which Michelle made major contributions over the years are too numerous to list here. But, to pick one from the last several years, Michelle's greatest passion, and the most important focus of her work, has been foster care and relative care. Several years ago, she wrote a comprehensive handbook on options for relatives who provide care. She has written numerous policies to bring New York State into compliance with the federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act. Michelle says that, for her, this work culminated in the establishment of the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program



(KinGAP) in New York State. Michelle took the lead in creating the program design and a wealth of materials to support the program throughout the state.

There are many other areas of child welfare in which Michelle has done essential work that cannot be listed here because of space constraints. She has been able to bring all of this knowledge with her to the work of designing and implementing FAR. I asked Michelle a few questions about her perspectives on FAR. Here are her responses:

Q: What has being a part of CPS/FAR for the last three years meant to you?

Michelle: I see FAR as a major component in my goal to keep families together and allow children to have permanency. When I was a CPS worker, I would always try to identify and resolve the needs of the family I was working with. I think FAR is a natural progression of how many people in child welfare work. Most CPS reports are for neglect, especially chronic neglect; investigations do not lead to the best outcomes in most of those cases. FAR is more likely to lead to the strategies needed for those families to attain stability.

Q: What has been most challenging in implementing FAR?

Michelle: For me, limited flex funds have been a problem. The legislation did not come with funding, and the problem remains as to how to appropriately

New Year's Resolution #3

Westchester County (Yonkers FAR) has learned a lot in our FAR experience. As a Round 1 County, we have been involved from the beginning and have made various changes and have revised our practice as new information was received. We started with two units that carried FAR and Investigations, and then a year later, expanded to three units. In February 2012, all eight CPS units began carrying both FAR and Investigative cases. We have now recognized that carrying mixed caseloads of FAR and Investigations is very challenging for our caseworkers. We are very excited and reenergized, as we are in the process of restructuring our Yonkers CPS program. In February 2013, we will have two pure FAR units and six pure Investigative units.

To use the analogy of a train, we know that we have traveled many directions and have taken various turns. We recognize that we may still go slightly off track, but we welcome these challenges, as we know that there are further learning opportunities, and we know we will quickly "get back on track" and resume our progress. We believe that our experiences have led us to exactly where we need to be and we are confident that we will

***stay on course and continue
towards our destination.***

Westchester County (Yonkers FAR) is a living example of the fact that FAR is a process and not an event; we are looking forward to our next chapter in this amazing process.

- Nancy Sigler

(continued from page 3)

fund the program. For the program in general, I think getting folks to change their mind-set. Conducting investigations is a very entrenched way of thinking for CPS workers that is sometimes hard to break.

Q: What have you found most gratifying about your work with FAR?

Michelle: Knowing that families that are reported will not have the stigma of a determination, and that they will get the supports that they need.

Q: What are your hopes for other areas of child welfare?

Michelle: My passion has always been for permanency through reunification, adoption, or KinGAP. The time to finalize adoptions in New York State has not moved from taking approximately four years; it's too long in a child's

life. More work needs to be done early in the process using concurrent planning, which means that, as early as possible, the child should be placed in what could be their permanent placement, while continuing to work towards reunification. In the event that reunification is not possible, the child will not have to move again.

Michelle finished our conversation by acknowledging that it will be difficult to leave the work she has done for more than three decades and the colleagues with whom she has shared her passions and frustrations. She summed up, "The reason I've always liked my work in Policy is because you can create something, and then it is institutionalized. One can shape things, and I have been privileged to do that." And we have been privileged to have her doing that.

New Year's Resolution #4

My perspective on the NY FAR journey can best be summarized by saying we have grown from the brand newness of counties putting their toe in the water of FAR practice to diving into the water more fully. NY has grown to the point of developing regulations that will guide NY FAR practice going forward. Local districts have shown their growth through the demands they have placed on NY to meet their training and staffing needs that will allow them to expand FAR. NY has hit a point of saturation and recognizes the need

to self-reflect and regroup

for the coming year.

– Karen Sessions



Consultants Corner Featuring Dan Comer



Consultant Dan Comer

Dan Comer is based in Asheville, North Carolina, and provides training, coaching, and consulting to support efforts towards greater engagement with families and Differential Response implementation. Dan has over 30 years of experience in the human services field and is a

clinical instructor within the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina. Dan has served as a foster care worker, supervisor, residential services administrator, and, for the last two decades, as a curriculum developer, trainer, and consultant, currently with the Barium Springs Training Group. Dan received his Bachelor's degree in Psychology from Ohio University and his Master's degree in Special Education from Appalachian State University.

A note from Dan:

I have been assisting the State of New York with their FAR implementation efforts since 2008. Through my work in a number of different states, I have been able to identify some of the key factors in successfully shifting Child Welfare practice towards increased engagement with families, while, at the same time, recognizing the power of

parallel practice as FAR implementation efforts move forward. Both of these practice shifts benefit from truly using the Principles of Partnership (everyone desires respect, everyone needs to be heard, everyone has strengths, judgments can wait, partners share power, and partnership is a process) at each stage of the process. This type of approach—whether with families, workers, or community partners—leads to transparency and greater ownership of the process.

I see my chief role in New York as a facilitator. I have taken the excellent examples I have witnessed in New York and shared them with our colleagues elsewhere—and vice versa—and truly enjoy being in the role of improving practice with families by sharing your strategies, tools, and techniques with others striving towards best practice.

Family Assessment Response Resources for Counties

- 7th Annual Differential Response Conference materials now available:**
http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/colleges/medicalschoo/departments/pediatrics/subs/can/DR/Pages/2012_dr_presentations.aspx
- Suffolk County, NY passes progressive language access policy (New York State Immigrant Action Fund, Nov. 15, 2012).** Steve Bellone signed an executive order requiring that county agencies provide translation services for non-English speaking residents and for those who do not speak English well. All agencies must now translate public documents into Spanish, Italian, Mandarin Chinese, Polish, French Creole, and Portuguese, as well as provide interpreters for the 120,000 residents of limited English proficiency. While New York State and New York City have enacted similar laws, Suffolk County is one of the first suburban counties in the nation to implement such a policy.
<http://nysiaf.org/2012/11/15/suffolk-county-adopts-pro-immigrant-language-access-policy/>
- Buscando a Parientes Biológicos (Searching for Birth Relatives).** Provides guidance to adopted persons and birth families on the search process and information access, as well as resources for further help in conducting a successful search.
<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/buscando/index.cfm>
- Differential Response: Early Implementation and Fidelity: Cross Site Report of the National Quality Improvement Center on Differential Response in Child Protective Services (2012).** From the National Quality Improvement Center on Differential Response in Child Protective Services.
<http://www.differentialresponseqic.org/assets/docs/cross-site-report-may-2012-1.pdf>
- Dynamics That Contribute to Racial Disproportionality and Disparity: Perspectives From Child Welfare Professionals, Community Partners, and Families (2012).** Children and Youth Services Review, v. 34, 11, November 2012, p. 2201-2207. Available from: Elsevier.
- Comparison of Experiences in Differential Response (DR) Implementation: 10 Child Welfare Jurisdictions Implementing DR.** (Casey Family Programs, 2012.)
<http://www.casey.org/resources/publications/DifferentialResponseReport.htm>
- A Three-Pronged Approach to Addressing Racial Disproportionality and Disparities in Child Welfare: The Santa Clara County Example of Leadership, Collaboration and Data-Driven Decisions.** (Duarte, Crystal Soderman, Summers, Alicia, 2012.)
<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10560-012-0279-8>

New Year's Resolution #5

How exciting it is to be a part of NY FAR in 2013. The vision of the Monroe County FAR team is that within five years, "FAR is offered to all families who are eligible and is accepted as a solution-focused response in addressing and promoting the safety, permanency and well-being of children and families." Our NY FAR resolution over the next year is to

achieve consistency in FAR process and practice

among our current FAR teams and to do more education about FAR, both in-house and around our community at large. In 2013, we intend to have supervisory/coaching up and running as well as offering "refresher" FAR trainings, starting with "HOW TO USE THE FLAG."

- Millie Key



Write for us!

*Do you have a FAR story or case example that you would like to share with others?
Have you been trying new tools or techniques related to FAR that are working well?
Would you like to highlight the good work happening in your county?*

If so, we want to hear from you! Articles should be between 500 and 800 words and can be sent at any time to get into the newsletter schedule.



Please reply to Kasey Matz at Kasey.Matz@du.edu