

# New York FAR Quarterly

New York Family Assessment Response (FAR) Quarterly



Fall 2013

## Reflecting on our Past, Planning for our Future

By: *Laura Velez*, Deputy Commissioner,  
Division of Child Welfare and Community  
Services

Our lives, both personal and professional, are so busy and jam-packed with dozens of issues, family crises, calls, and meetings that we rarely have the opportunity to really and truly focus on one thing. The FAR symposium provided us with that opportunity to really think about Family Assessment Response, to listen, and reflect on where we have been and where we need to go. I appreciated experiencing all of the candid, thoughtful conversations and I know that all of the OCFS staff in attendance did as well. The feedback on the forum was overwhelmingly positive, with most participants remarking how much they liked the “think tank” format and the way it engaged so many people in honest and helpful conversations.

It was necessary to hear the successes, hopes, areas needing improvements, and worries people have. We all seemed to share some common wishes and concerns. That consensus, knowing that we are on the same page, enables us to move forward with confidence in building on the successes we have experienced to address the challenges we continue to face.

One of the highlights for me was listening to Eric Fenner from Casey Family Programs describe the journey he and his staff undertook in Franklin County, Ohio to imbue their agency with their practice principles and to live those principles through all of their programs, especially through their alternative CPS response program. Eric’s perspective of the journey helped to “normalize” our experiences and reinforce my sense that we are developmentally where we should be.

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*Eric Fenner, with Casey Family Programs, delivers the keynote address for the 2013 FAR Symposium.*

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Symposium participants had lots of opportunities to network with staff from other FAR counties throughout the event.

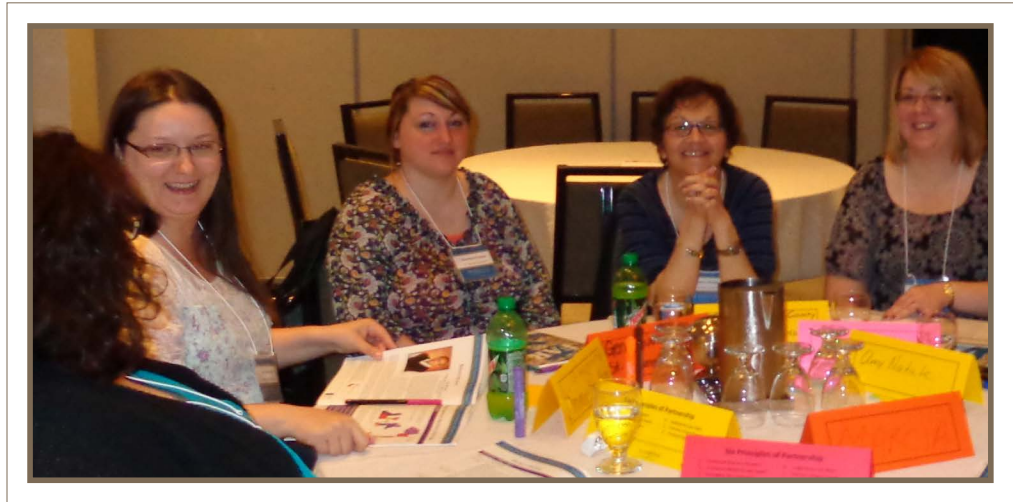
Franklin County's continuous outreach and education of their stakeholders and the resultant support for their family assessment response has lessons for all of us as does their steadfast commitment to a family assessment response in the face of critics from the media. One of my "take-aways" is Eric's point about how little the public and our stakeholders really know about child protective services, what it can and cannot do, and how important it is for us as public agencies to provide ongoing education to the public.

It was clear from all of the discussions in the think tanks and the debriefings that FAR is going strong! The commitment was impressive. The partnership that we have mutually developed over time could be felt in everyone's participation and openness. We heard a lot about the creativity caseworkers are bringing to the challenges in addressing family needs as well as the challenges they are experiencing. But in all honesty, I do not think we heard anything from administrators, supervisors, caseworkers, training partners,

Casey Family Programs staff or OCFS staff, that by working together, we cannot overcome. So much is going right!

I hope everyone at the symposium felt they had the opportunity to be heard. We continue to be open to feedback and will be soliciting more in the months to come. Thanks to all who participated for your ideas and recommendations. We all can be very proud of the last five years of FAR and confident about the next five!

Remember it's a process, not an event!



Symposium attendees participated in a 3 Houses activity to kick-off the event.

## New Resource:

## 2013 Differential Response Conference Materials Now Available!

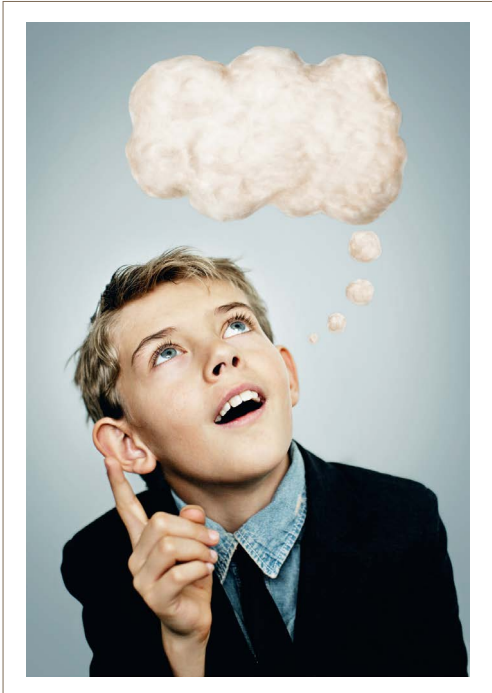
Check them out and watch for the Call for Presentations for the 2014 Conference in Seattle, Washington.

The 8th Annual Conference on Differential Response occurred October 22-25 in Vail, Colorado. Over 350 participants from across the United States, Canada, Hong Kong and Sweden attended and presented at this year's conference. This event provided a great opportunity to learn more about the progress of differential response implementation, practice, and research across the country.

All of the session materials are being made available through the conference website:

<http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/colleges/medicalschoo/departments/pediatrics/subs/can/DR/Pages/DiffResp.aspx>

# Incorporating the Principles of Partnership Throughout CPS



## Partnership is a Process

### Ask Yourself:

- Am I leading this process or inviting collaboration?
- Relationship and trust building takes time. How might I continue this?
- What do I need to do to facilitate a sense of equality?

## Judgments Can Wait

### Ask Yourself:

- What preconceived notions and judgments have I brought to this relationship?
- Reflect: What's informing my judgments?
- When have I been surprised to be wrong about a judgment in the past?
- What do I need to do to come without preconceived ideas and judgments so a relationship or interaction can naturally develop?
- What might be the worst thing if I come with judgments that are already firm?

## Partners Share Power

### Ask yourself:

- What is challenging to me about letting go of organizational or position power?
- How can I let go of the overexertion of power I legitimately hold, but may not need to exert?
- How can I engage in an open discussion about power differences and my desire to share power and engage in partnership?
- How might cultural differences impact the experience or use of power bases?
- How will we know when power is truly shared?

## Everyone has Strengths

### Ask Yourself:

- What can I appreciate about the person before me?
- How can I get the person before me to identify what they perceive as their own strengths?
- Can the person before me talk about how their strengths have helped them cope or prosper in the past?
- How can I stay focused on strengths when challenges are also present?
- How do I keep from moving into judgments when judgments can wait?

## Everyone Desires Respect

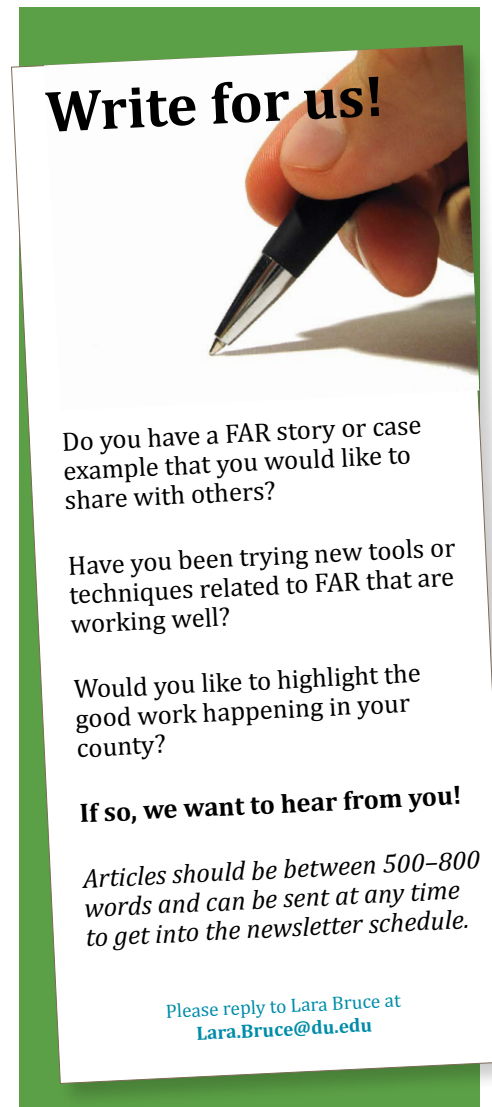
### Ask Yourself:

- What does respect look like to me?
- How would I want to experience it?
- How might cultural differences change the way respect is desired and experienced?
- How does it sound?
- How am I conveying it?

## Everyone Needs to be Heard and Understood

### Ask Yourself:

- Am I present and focused on the discussion or exchange with someone?
- Am I listening, really listening?
- Have I understood, more than just heard?
- How will I know that I understood correctly?
- Ask or check in with the individual.



**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 500–800 words and can be sent at any time to get into the newsletter schedule.*

Please reply to Lara Bruce at [Lara.Bruce@du.edu](mailto:Lara.Bruce@du.edu)

# A Reflection On the First 8 Months: ACS FAR Symposium

By Valerie E. Moore, M.Sc., Public Affairs Specialist, Office of Communications, Administration for Children’s Services

On August 22, 2013, Commissioner Ronald E. Richter and Department of Child Protection (DCP) Executive Deputy Commissioner Gilbert A. Taylor presided over a symposium to review the progress of the Family Assessment Response (FAR) demonstration project in Queens. FAR provides an alternative approach to a full scale child protective investigation. It has been a demonstration project within the Queens Borough Office of the Division of Child Protection since January 2013. The symposium gave staff, stakeholders, and community representatives the opportunity to reflect upon the work that has been done thus far, and to share their experiences, challenges, and successes.

Opening the symposium, Assistant Commissioner Queens DCP, Marsha Kellam reported on the progress of FAR. She noted that since the program began in January, 208 cases went down the FAR track. Of these cases, 173 successfully completed the process with the balance rerouted to the traditional investigations track. Under the FAR process, families decide whether to participate, and a key component is that families are involved in the decision-making process. In addition, with FAR there is no determination (indication or unsubstantiation) of the SCR report, which helps to eliminate the stigma associated with child protective investigations. However, child safety is always paramount, and FAR cases can be sent down the traditional investigative track, if necessary.



Executive Deputy Commissioner Taylor, second from right, and other attendees at the FAR symposium in an engrossing conversation. From left are Lisa Ghartey Ogundimu, Division of Child Welfare and Community Services, OCFS, Melissa Baker, Eric Fenner and Howard Knoll, Casey Family Programs.

Commissioner Richter thanked the staff in the Queens Borough Office for all their hard work and dedication throughout the demonstration, adding that “because of the disparate viewpoints on differential response throughout the country, I must say that I was somewhat anxious about implementing FAR.” But, he noted “the experience has been unique and challenging, and the FAR staff has done a wonderful job.” Keynote Speaker Eric Fenner, Managing Director for Strategic Consulting Services at Casey Family Programs, spoke about his experiences in implementing differential response during his tenure as head of the Franklin County Children Services in Columbus, Ohio. He noted that even though there was pushback from the community, law enforcement, and even the families themselves, safety was never

compromised. He encouraged staff to never stop asking what was best for families, and to develop partnerships with the community in order to be successful.

Following the opening ceremonies, a panel comprised of staff who have been participating in FAR—Eve Taylor, CPS Supervisor; and Child Protective Specialists Tricia Kelly, Michael Antonello, and Myrna Alexander—answered questions about the process. Panel members outlined some of the benefits of FAR, noting that families welcome the opportunity to be heard and become proactive and empowered when they are involved in decisionmaking. They noted that one of the biggest obstacles to the process involves challenges in systems outside of ACS’s control, such as securing housing and employment for families. They recommended that there needs to be continued ongoing work to educate the community about the benefits of FAR.

The seminar was attended by senior staff from DCP and other ACS divisions, leaders from Casey Family Programs, judges from the NYC Family Court as well as City and State child welfare professionals including Lisa Ghartey Ogundimu, Assistant Commissioner for Child Welfare and Community Services at the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), and Sandra Killett, Executive Director of Child Welfare Organizing Project, (CWOP).



DCP Staff Panelists from left Eve Taylor, Tricia Kelly, Michael Antonello, and Myrna Alexander.