

# New York FAR Quarterly

New York Family Assessment Response (FAR) Quarterly



Holiday Edition 2013



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## Happy Holidays and a Happy New Year!

As the holiday season quickly approaches and 2013 draws to a close, the NYS Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) and the Butler Institute for Families at the University of Denver would like to wish each and every one of you, your agencies, and the children and families that you serve happy holidays and a wonderful new year. We would also like to thank you for your dedication to the implementation of Family Assessment Response (FAR) in

your communities. We are honored and humbled to work with you to ensure the success of FAR implementation. As you will see throughout this newsletter, many of our staff and partners also wanted to take this opportunity to send along their well-wishes for the holiday season and the new year. We are all very excited about what 2014 has in store for all of child protective services (CPS) state-wide!

Happy holidays from the Division of Child Welfare and Community Services. We'd like to share our gratitude for your commitment to Family Assessment Response and the families of New York State.

– *Laura Velez, Deputy Commissioner,  
Division of Child Welfare and  
Community Services, OCFS*

Sending warm thoughts and deep appreciation to Monroe, Suffolk, and Westchester Counties' staff and families for your commitment to understanding disproportionality issues in family assessment response. Hope your holidays are safe, happy, and glimmer like the beauty of a New York winter wonderland!

– *Leslie Wilmot, NY FAR Project Director,  
Butler Institute for Families.*

Best wishes to our colleagues in New York. May the new year bring you the joys of love and laughter with friends and family! Thank you for all you do to make the new year bright for families.

– *Nancy McDaniel, Director, Consultation and  
Capacity Building, Butler Institute for Families*

## A Partnership Across the Miles

By Barbara Stoldt, Assistant Director, CPS Investigations Bureau, Suffolk County DSS

On September 25, 2013 the Suffolk County FAR team hosted Yukako Hatakeyama, a University professor from Japan, who has a three year grant from the Japanese government to study Family Assessment Response (FAR) practice in the United States. Last year, she studied FAR in Colorado and Minnesota. This September, she was in New York City prior to spending two days with us. It was a perfect time and opportunity, because our second FAR team was starting on November 6, 2013.

We started with a welcome breakfast for Yukako, our current FAR team, administration, and our second FAR team.

During this time we, shared how a FAR case is screened into the team, and we walked Yukako, and our new FAR staff, through the process of how FAR cases are handled here in Suffolk from the beginning, reviewing prior family CPS history, making that important phone call to the reporting party, and how that call is handled differently than an investigation. We learned about each other's child welfare practices, here in Suffolk and in Japan. We learned caseloads are much higher in Japan and that the traditional approach to the CPS investigation in Japan is not an effective means through which to address every CPS concern reported.

Yukako's focus was to learn as much as possible about FAR and bring this knowledge back in order to implement FAR in Japan. She spent time in the field observing FAR caseworkers

engaging and working with families. We reviewed our statistics and record keeping. Now back in Japan, Yukako is working on her dissertation, which she is planning to evolve into a book. Her plan is to have the last chapter focus on differential response and FAR practice in Suffolk County. In the meantime, our second FAR team has started, and we are all excited to be part of FAR growth in Suffolk County! Thank you!

The Butler Institute for Families would like to sincerely thank the FAR team and administration in Suffolk County and NYC's Administration for Children's Services (ACS) for their willingness and time hosting Yukako Hatakeyama. In her words: "I was really touched by [Suffolk County's] hospitality and willingness to give me all the information. Honestly, their FAR team was one of the best teams that I have seen in my last three year [differential response] study. The county administrative staff, Denise, Mark, and Barbara were wonderful, supportive, and understanding [of] all the good things about FAR. Mary Ellen is the wonderful supervisor and the great practitioner for the team and valued the core of differential response. I really enjoyed myself there so much." The planning for her time in New York began last year and we could not have been more thrilled with the opportunities that both Suffolk County and ACS were able to provide for her!

**Thank you!**



Seated left-right: Cheryl Baruccheri, Maresa Crecca, Alexandra Zubizarreta, Lori Quinn, and Gabriel DeBono.  
Standing left-right: Michael Graham, Mary Ellen Hanwick, Dennis Nowak, Yukako Hatakeyama, Bryon Hunt, Barbara Stoldt, Mark Clavin, Joelle Arty- Eugene, Michael Moody, Cynthia O'Neill, Martha Salzano and Ronald Barnett.

For the past four years I have had the pleasure of meeting and working alongside such a wonderful collection of New Yorkers. This Wisconsin girl feels right at home in every county I visit; am I now a New Yorker? I think you are all transplanted Wisconsinites! While the culture of each county is unique, the commonality across each staff is a dedication to serving your community as a whole, but more importantly, the children and the families that raise them in particular. This journey is a complex one, with exploration and risk-taking, insecurity and yet an eagerness to grow into the best CPS team possible. It's clear that you are confident that New York can offer families two specialized, dedicated tracks from which to create or maintain safety for kids. I am so grateful for the generosity and open-hearted welcome that we at Butler have received from Niagara to Suffolk, Allegany to St. Regis. Thank you so much. Here's to another fruitful year. Cheers!

- Jeanne Ferguson, FAR Project Manager, Butler Institute for Families

## FAR Research & Practice Highlights

With the increasing amount of relevant information and research available related to the implementation of family assessment response (FAR) in the State of New York and around the country, it is often challenging to keep up. This new FAR Research and Practice Highlights segment in each of the upcoming FAR newsletters is intended to provide you with a summary of the latest information and research available. Hopefully these summaries will provide you with an overview of research findings, conclusions drawn, recommendations, and next steps. We will also provide you with access to the full article, when possible.

## A New Look at Parents' Perspectives of Child Welfare Workers

Summarized by Lara Bruce, FAR Project Coordinator, Butler Institute for Families

A summary of *Engagement in Child Protective Services: Parent Perceptions of Worker Skills* by Jill C. Schreiber, Tamara Fuller, and Megan S. Pacey (2013) in *Children and Youth Services Review* 35 (4), 707-715 (Used with permission).

As we all know, engaging families in child protective services (CPS) can be challenging, especially because most parents are already under a great deal of stress when CPS involvement occurs. Previous research has found that parents often fear the child welfare system and its workers.

***"I don't think he ever looked at his paperwork, really, but he was able to tell me everything, and it was like 'Wow.' I mean, that tells you he's definitely good at his job."***

CPS workers are also conflicted in their experiences with families "between their dual roles of ensuring the safety of children... versus supporting the families and helping them gain skills to overcome their problem" (p. 707).

### METHODS

The study summarized here was a component of a larger evaluation of the effectiveness of CPS response to low-risk child maltreatment reports in the state of Illinois. This research evaluated parents' perceptions of CPS and caseworkers, as well as benefits and barriers to their engagement. Parents were provided a survey at case closure and through that survey, indicated their interest

in participating in additional research. In total, 40 follow-up interviews were completed. During the interview process, parents were asked a series of questions related to their experiences with CPS. These questions included.

1. What happened during that first visit? Tell me everything that you remember.
2. How did you and your worker "get along"? Did you work well together? Why or why not?
3. Did your worker make any decisions about you and your family that you didn't agree with? If yes, what were they? How did you handle this?
4. What was the most helpful thing that your worker did for you?

(p. 709)

The information gathered was then coded, analyzed, and reviewed by additional researchers and child welfare workers through "member checking" and a peer debriefing with other researchers who had experience with child welfare research (p. 709).

Two themes emerged for researchers right away: "parents' negative expectations about CPS and its workers and parents' strong negative emotional reactions to the initial CPS visit" (p. 709). These both served as barriers to engagement with families. From these interviews researchers found that "most parents were unaware... that the majority of CPS contacts do not result in the removal of any children" (p. 710).

*Continued on page 4*

**I**would like to give a big kudos and holiday wishes to the Monroe County FAR caseworkers, supervisors, and administrators. They have worked so hard to sustain FAR. Millie Keys has been such a strong advocate for FAR and is so passionate in her training and coaching with the fidelity of the FAR model always in the forefront.

- Thalia Wright, Rochester Regional Office, OCFE

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Research suggests that workers could extinguish parents' initial fears of the agency and worker by providing clear expectations about their visit a key element to the family assessment response (FAR) approach. Parents also expressed a "sense of shame that they were being viewed as bad parents" and anger towards the person who made the report (p. 711). The former was primarily due to a preconceived understanding of the types of parents that would receive a CPS visit. With regards to the latter, some parents thought that they knew the source of the report or spent time trying to figure it out.

Across the findings, it was determined that many workers were able to overcome these barriers and engage families in the CPS process "using skills... that included behaviors that conveyed a sense of professional competence... effective communication skills... and that involved the provision of care" (p. 711). Parents seemed to have preconceived notions that CPS workers were "rude, biased, or judgmental" (p. 710-711). Workers who appeared to be knowledgeable, skilled at their job, and efficient, as well as calm, thorough, and neutral in their actions with families, were able to overcome these stereotypes

***"[The worker] very openly listened to what we had to say and was on board with helping us and getting everything rectified."***

to engage the parents in the process (p. 711). Parents felt more comfortable with workers who were well-prepared and organized to meet with them, who demonstrated a solid understanding of policies, procedures, and guidelines of the agency and their role in working with the family; and who took the time to explain the process in a calm and careful way. One parent stated, "I don't think he ever looked at his paperwork,

really, but he was able to tell me everything, and it was like 'Wow.' I mean, that tells you he's definitely good at his job. I mean, he doesn't have to sit there and just read off paperwork to figure out what's going on" (p. 711). Parents were also more accepting of the worker when they had gathered information and talked to all pertinent family, friends, and other professionals, and when they were "impartial in their analysis of the information that had been collected" (p. 711). Parents also appreciated when workers explained the relevance of questions and when questions were tailored to the circumstances or the parents' capacity. One parent stated, "[The worker] very openly listened to what we had to say and was on board with helping us and getting everything rectified" (p. 712). This belief demonstrates an additional finding in this study: the importance of workers as active listeners. "CPS workers who listened carefully were

also able to respond to parent needs more appropriately. These workers were also perceived by parents as being more accessible for future questions or discussions that the parents might need

*Continued on page 5*

## 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 Lara Bruce at [Lara.Bruce@du.edu](mailto:Lara.Bruce@du.edu)

2013 was an eventful year for our FAR community. Over 8,200 reports were responded to with FAR over the past year. Highlights include: the excellent work from our Symposium "think tanks" helped OCFS target areas for strengthening its own FAR work and ways to support counties to strengthen theirs; partnering of OCFS and counties to weather internal or media storms; supporting and learning from the implementations in ACS Queens, Ulster, and Tioga, as well as from the expansion of FAR in many FAR counties; learning from the challenges in Essex, Erie, and Rensselaer that factored into their decisions to end their FAR initiative; partnering with the Butler Institute for Families to bring Increasing the Voice of Children and Youth in FAR into our series of FAR trainings; partnering with Butler and Casey Family Programs to conclude our exploratory study of DMR and FAR; increasing the capacity of our university and FAR county training partners to deliver more of the training to their FAR colleagues; developing and revising draft FAR regulations; developing CONNECTIONS support for FAR; and the list could go on. Wishing all of our FAR partners a warm and wonderful holiday season!!! On to 2014!!!!

– Gail Haulenbeek, Director, Bureau of Program Monitoring and Practice Improvement, OCFS

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after their initial visit with the family” (p. 712).

An additional area of discovery in this study was “the importance of the emotional and concrete support provided by the CPS workers” (p. 712). This study defines these areas as ‘care’. Caseworker “care” for a family was demonstrated through:

- The identification of a family’s strengths;
- Positive reinforcement;
- Clarification of the types of child behaviors or situations that were “normal” or expected for that particular child’s age or developmental level;
- Building trust through shared identities or common experience (for example, sharing that the worker has a child the same age); and
- Providing and “brokering” concrete resources, services, or referrals. (p. 709)

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The findings in this research study reinforce much of the philosophy behind the implementation of family assessment response (FAR) in a system or agency. However, as this research also demonstrates, “there are a core set of relationship-building skills that can be effectively employed to the engagement of parents in even non-voluntary contexts” such as investigations (p. 713). A new component to the existing research on parents’ perceptions of CPS workers in the U.S. is the idea of worker competence, and that seemed to play a large role in increasing engagement between CPS workers and families.

Even with its limitations, this study has several implications for CPS agencies that are struggling to find ways to engage families. Because not all CPS workers are social workers by education, researchers suggest that CPS training include teaching “skills that enhance parent engagement” (p. 713). Workers should also be given

the chance to think about their own backgrounds and experiences and the impact those have on their expectations for children and families in the child welfare system. The findings also highlight the importance of a worker’s ability to manage intense emotions, both their own and those of other people. “Parents were better able to engage when workers remained a non-anxious presence and remained calm while letting the parents vent” (p. 712).


This study also highlights the need for CPS workers to have an adequate amount of time to engage parents in the process. As indicated previously, parents were more likely to engage with a worker when they were prepared for meetings, set appointments that were at a convenient time for both the family and the worker and followed-up with the family in a timely manner. These all take time and as we know, this is all less likely to occur when workers’ caseloads increase. One recommendation from this study suggests that “CPS agencies hoping to increase parent engagement must start by lowering caseloads to acceptable levels so that workers have enough time” to properly prepare to engage parents in the CPS process (p. 714).

Finally, researchers in this study point out that “CPS has a huge image problem” and that the media is directly contributing to parents’ perceptions of the system. Even when media outlets painted the role of a social worker in a positive light, they are “often portrayed as sad, disconnected, faceless or ineffectively worrying about the confines of the bureaucracy” (p. 714). Researchers recommend that child welfare agencies “should increase public awareness of the functions they actually perform for the community” (p. 714). They suggest that during times of agency and/or community crisis, child welfare agencies need to be at the forefront of providing information to the media, “so that victim or advocate messages are balanced by the official sources of information” (p. 714).

## CONCLUSION

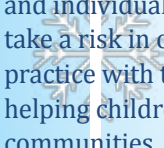
Slowly, but surely, research is catching up to what many of us already know: parents who are treated with kindness,

honesty, and directness are more likely to be engaged and participate in the initial assessment of their family. While researchers and practitioners alike are struggling with how to define and study the engagement of families within child protective services, these findings provide suggestions that agencies can begin to use with the staff in their organizations. Finally, the voices of parents and children are very powerful in assessing where we have been and how far we’ve come as individuals, agencies, and systems as a whole. Their perspective should be included in every step of the child welfare decision-making process, both to determine the individual needs of children and parents in their families, as well as the needs of the system.



The Spring Valley Regional Office wishes to extend best wishes for a joyous holiday season to all the FAR counties, especially those in Region 5: Orange, Nassau, Rockland, Suffolk, Ulster, and Westchester.

– Spring Valley Regional Office



With all the joy and excitement of the holiday season in the air, I am reminded of the magical work I have had the privilege of witnessing from Niagara County to Washington County, Queens to Franklin County and all the counties in-between! It has been such a privilege to see the amazing dedication to FAR and its principles; as well as the willingness for counties and individuals to be vulnerable and take a risk in order to improve their practice with the ultimate goal of helping children and families in their communities. Each time I have the privilege of being invited into a county to witness people’s work, I leave richer because of that experience. New York is a leader in the FAR movement, and I can’t wait to see where the new year brings us all in our FAR journey!

– Christa Doty, Training and Technical Assistance Specialist



## Meet Missy Berglund, Newest Member of the FAR Team at the Butler Institute for Families



Missy Berglund with her family (Pictured from left to right: Missy, Lorelei, Virginia, and Steve).


I am so excited to be joining the New York Family Assessment Response team here in the Butler Institute for Families at the University of Denver. Since starting at the Butler Institute in 2012, I have hoped to be a part of this exciting work. As a former FAR worker in the state of Colorado, I have been through the process of transforming my practice from investigative to FAR. The most memorable part of that process was watching members of the community start to view the child protective service (CPS) system in a more positive light. In my mind, having clients excited to talk about their progress, watching them

become more confident in their parenting, and seeing a village grow in support around a child is an experience every child welfare worker deserves. I believe that by increasing our toolkits to include the FAR approach as an option for families, we increase our likelihood of having that wonderfully reinforcing opportunity to see first-hand that we really do make a difference.


Another area of work for me here at the Butler Institute is as a trainer for the Colorado Child Welfare Academy. I am passionate about helping new workers understand what their responsibilities

will entail. Prior to joining the Butler Institute, I was a FAR worker in a county here in Colorado. I have also worked as an ongoing worker in a teen parent unit and was an investigative worker previously. Additionally, I have been a victim advocate for several community organizations, as well as a counselor for adolescent girls at a therapeutic treatment center. Those experiences have fueled my passion for collaboration and family engagement.

I am a Colorado native with Kansas roots. I love to hike, swim, run, and bike while enjoying our beautiful scenery, but don't ask me about skiing. I am not a fan of being that cold. I received a Bachelor's degree in Sociology, Psychology, and English from Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado. I live in Denver with my husband, Steve, my amazing daughters, Virginia and Lorelei, and my two dogs, Shadow (a German Shepard) and Bogie (a miniature Schnauzer).



As 2013 comes to a close, I am reminded of all of the partnerships that were formed and those that continued to grow throughout this year and how grateful I am to work with so many amazing partners through this process of FAR implementation in New York State. At the end of the day, it's the relationships we build that make the work meaningful for children and families, and I am so excited to see what the future holds! Kudos to those of you who brought FAR to your communities this year and to those of you who have dug deeper into FAR practice through expansion and other efforts! Happy holidays and a happy New Year!



—Lara Bruce, FAR Project Coordinator,  
Butler Institute for Families.

**NEW  
RESOURCES!**

**The Disproportionate Minority Representation (DMR) in Family Assessment Response (FAR) reports and materials are now available via the OCFS Intranet:**

<http://ocfs.state.nyenet/cps/far/RaceDisproportionality.asp>