ECRP
Minutes of the Meeting
September 21, 2012

Attendees:  
Ed Blatt          Julia Biewlawski          Lance Jackson  
Carrie Smith     Hector Ramirez           JoAnn Merriman

Guests:  
Faith Aprilante, Orange County Case-Supervisor
Tracy Miller, Onondaga County Administrative Supervisor
Jessica Hopps, Onondaga County FAR Unit Supervisor/Trainer
SCAA Staff:  Diane Mastin

Handouts:  
Agenda
2012 Report Timeline
NYS OCFS Response to the 2011 Report and Recommendations of the NYS Citizen Review Panels for Child Protective Services
Discussion Points from 2012 Panel meetings
Outline of Commissioner’s Discussion, February 24th meeting
MRT Reinvestment Program, Public Health Innovation, DOH Medicaid Waiver application
Minutes from the May 18th meeting
June 14th Joint Panel meeting minutes

The meeting began with a welcome and introductions. Panel guests from Orange and Onondaga Counties discussed their experiences implementing Family Assessment Response. These counties were two of the original six pilot counties to begin FAR work in New York State. They talked about their experiences, lessons learned and next steps with FAR.

They both reported success with the FAR approach: families are more engaged with the approach and feel part of the decision making process rather than just having something happen to them. Community members call in reports and ask that the report be tracked to FAR. At the beginning they were worried about a drain on their preventive funding. That has not happened because families are finding support they need within the community. They do keep FAR cases open a little longer than they do for investigative cases. Counties are given the option for closing a FAR case between 60 to 90 days. Onondaga County chose 60 days; Orange County chose 90 days.

Orange County started with 12 caseworkers assigned to FAR and now have 17 ½ workers with approximately 47% of their reports assigned to FAR. Onondaga County began with 7 workers, quickly expanded to 27 and
then pulled back to 16 early in the process. They now have 27 workers assigned to FAR, though two positions are open at this time. They have plans to expand FAR with two additional positions. Both reported that caseworker turnover continues to be a problem as new workers move on to higher paying positions elsewhere. They both stressed the importance of training and the effectiveness of coaching. Caseloads are set at 9 new reports per month on average but can go as high as 17 or 18 which they deemed too high. They stated that caseworkers in the investigative track should be trained in FAR as well and that the skills learned could prevent burnout. They were not in favor of workers rotating between the two tracks.

They also believe that between 85 to 90% of the reports coming into their counties through the SCR could be assigned to a FAR track. Some of those cases that they believe could benefit from the FAR approach are not allowed under current law to be assigned to an alternative track. Orange County tested the FAR approach on some cases involving injuries to children and domestic violence situations. They found that assigning those cases to FAR was at least as, if not more, successful than assigning them to the investigative track. Panel members noted their concern that Onondaga County tracks all cases in which English is not spoken to the investigative track. Recently the department hired a Spanish speaking caseworker.

In answer to a question about costs, Orange County reported opening fewer cases and spending less money on preventive services. Onondaga reported that they found reports of re-entry came back as a higher level report with the investigative track at double the rate of re-entry for FAR cases. They concluded that the FAR intervention changed the trajectory of the cases. According to their 2010-11 date, 84% of investigative cases led to court petitions; 6% of FAR cases led to court petitions. As of mid-May in 2012, that number decreased to 4% with FAR cases. They reported receiving calls for help that they would not get before FAR.

Onondaga County department of social services has developed a new preventive process and pilot with the Syracuse School district for working on educational neglect situations before making a report. Under the new process, concerns are addressed before a report to the SCR is made. If a report to the SCR is needed, the department of social services will work with the family and the school together. In one year of the pilot, educational neglect reports were reduced by 62% and petitions dropped 82%. The local department of social services staff plans to roll out this pilot to additional school districts in the county.

The presenters suggested a few changes to improve FAR, including:

- Provide local departments of social services the flexibility to change a case from the investigative tract to the FAR track.
- Changing the statute to allow for track assignment to be made at the end of the 7 day assessment time period, not earlier.
- Incorporate FAR training into the CORE curriculum.
- Increase FAR training opportunities. Currently, the training is not offered frequently enough to meet their needs. Onondaga County established its own training unit to support their needs.

Panel members discussed possible recommendations for their 2012 report and made decisions as to which ideas to bring to the joint panel meeting in October.