

**Casey Family Programs
and
Ohio Department of Job and Family Services**

ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE PROJECT
Quarterly Progress and Expenditure Report
July – September 2008

Introduction

Ohio's January 2008 report to Casey Family Programs detailed the ***design stage*** of Ohio's Alternative Response Project. During this time, representatives of the ten county sites, state professional membership associations and state agencies ("Design Team") engaged in a state-level decision-making process to construct the framework for Ohio's Alternative Response Project (AR). On July 1, 2008, project focus transitioned to the county level as the ten communities implemented an alternative option for responding to reports of child maltreatment.


This report covers the progress made June 2008 – September 2008. This was the implementation ***stage***, or period of time most accurately characterized as "going live."

The report is organized into the following topical categories:

- ✓ Project Progress; a description of the *state's* progress with the overall project, including obstacles encountered during the quarter.
- ✓ Activities and Results: a snapshot of the *ten sites'* activities during the quarter.
- ✓ County Voices: a general assessment of sites' successes and challenges during the quarter.
- ✓ Lessons Learned: nuggets of wisdom that sites have gained during the quarter.
- ✓ Planned Activities; a synopsis of the priorities for next quarter.

Project Progress

The state has focused on the following aspects of project operation:

 ***Infrastructure and Accountability:*** Ohio's AR is limited to reports of suspected child maltreatment that have been accepted (screened in) by the child welfare agency. After there is a decision to screen in the report, the report is assigned to either the traditional response pathway or the alternative response pathway¹ by applying the assignment criteria established by the Design Team. Random

¹ For the purpose of Ohio's AR, the existing child protection services approach as set forth in Ohio statute and rule is referred to as "Traditional Response;" the experimental approach developed in the ten counties under the authorization of this project is referred to as "Alternative Response."


assignment to a control or experimental group is made within reports assigned to the alternative response pathway

Because AR is designed to operate within Ohio's existing child protection system – these are accepted reports of child maltreatment where a threat of risk or harm to a child has been alleged— the overall project design must maintain the safeguards and accountability consistent with the state's child protection program, as well as meet all federally required monitoring and reporting activities.

Legislative authorization allowed a change in administrative rules but not statute. In both design and implementation, this sometimes has created conflict or need to compromise with what might be perceived as practice better suited to an alternative approach. Similarly, since this is considered a prototype period during which the specifics of program design are fluid, the temporary nature of forms precluded the full integration of AR into SACWIS. It was neither reasonable nor resource-responsible to make full system modification. Both of these project elements resulted in administrative frustrations felt most strongly at the practice level. This will be noted in county and chronicler reports.

During the past quarter, the move to an alternative response practice required the state to:

- ✓ Develop and deploy a SACWIS Work Flow that would permit project sites to capture alternative response case reporting data within SACWIS in a manner that is consistent with the principles of alternative response. This requires minor modifications of the SACWIS system, and also will have pilots operating on paper, rather than within SACWIS.
- ✓ Initiate SACWIS mapping to ensure that Ohio alternative response data is accurately reported to the US Department of Health and Human Services in compliance with federal requirements.
- ✓ Establish a variety of informational avenues to provide SACWIS support to pilot sites and acclimate non-pilot counties to the appearance of the alternative response designation within the SACWIS screen.
- ✓ Enact rules and forms specific to Alternative Response through the Ohio Administrative Code.

 **Monitoring Progress and Outcomes:** The AR evaluation is being conducted by the Institute of Applied Research (IAR). IAR is part of the AIM Team selected by Ohio to assist with the design, implementation and evaluation of AR, but it is conducting the evaluation separately from those assisting with design and implementation. IAR is evaluating:

- ✓ The process of implementation.

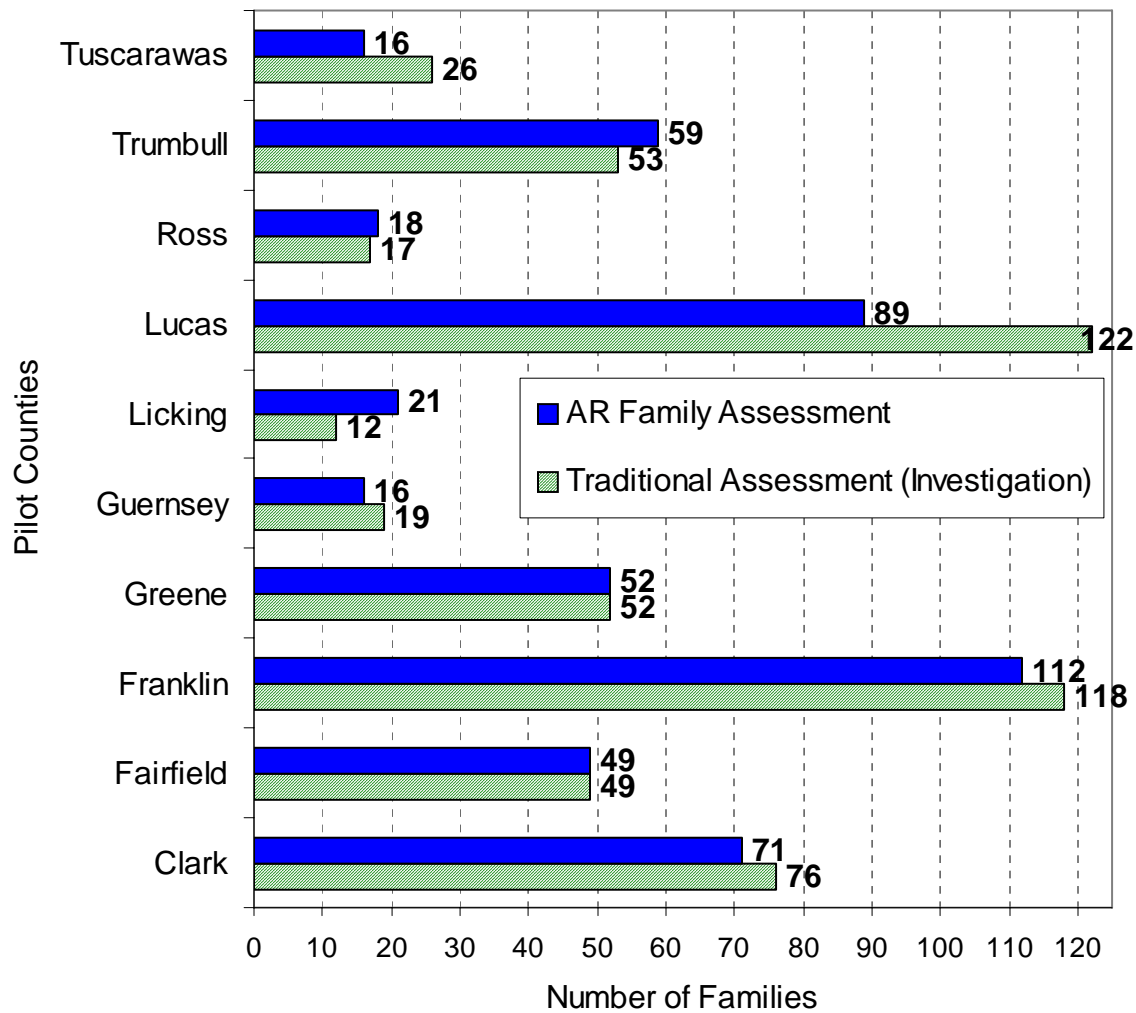
- ✓ Changes in outcomes for children, families, the agency and the community that may result from the introduction of AR.

Outcomes that will be monitored include:

- ✓ Child safety
- ✓ Family satisfaction
- ✓ Family and worker perceptions of change
- ✓ Benefits and deficits of the AR approach
- ✓ The occurrence of later reports of child abuse or neglect
- ✓ Later removal and placement of children in families offered AR
- ✓ Community stakeholder perceptions of AR
- ✓ Effects of AR on caseloads of workers
- ✓ Short-term and longer-term costs of AR to the state
- ✓ Other potential changes resulting from the introduction of this approach.

The basic design of the outcome evaluation is a field experiment. For the first thirteen months of the pilot project (July 1, 2008 – September 30, 2009), families that are determined to be appropriate for an alternative response will be randomly assigned to one of two groups: 1) those offered a family assessment, which includes greater participation in decision making by families and a broader approach to family needs or 2) those offered the traditional approach, which includes a Child Protective Service (CPS) investigation and other actions of CPS toward families. The second group is the control group composed of the “business as usual” families. Differences in activities and outcomes for these two groups will be compared to determine whether the effects of AR are positive, negative or represent no change from the traditional approach of CPS.

The following chart shows the progress of the assignment of families during the first three months (through September 25, 2008). As of this time, 503 families had been assigned to the AR and had received family assessments compared to 544 that received the traditional approach. Franklin County (Columbus) entered the pilot later, at the beginning of August, but already has the largest number of families in the study. This process will continue through the end of August, 2009, after which time all families determined to be appropriate will be assigned to AR. The evaluation will continue to track families and the progress of the pilot through the end of 2009.



Number of Families Assigned to Alternative Response (AR) Pathway

Ongoing Access to Support and Skill Development Opportunity: AIM, the Design Team and state staff spent considerable time establishing pre-service competencies. All sites participated in site-specific and/or regional training pre-implementation training that included sessions specific to workers, supervisors, and the community. The training was provided by AIM and site representatives. State policy staff participated in every session.

Post-implementation activities have focused on ensuring that sites have easy access to technical assistance and that immediate training needs are addressed. Currently, AIM is providing:


- ✓ In person consultation meetings of lead staff in pilots (quarterly)
- ✓ A schedule of peer-to-peer teleconferences for caseworkers.
- ✓ A schedule of peer-to-peer teleconferences for supervisor.

- ✓ A schedule of regionally organized meetings for caseworkers
- ✓ A schedule of regionally organized meetings for supervisors.
- ✓ Regular county-specific contact

Each site will receive four days of on-site Continued Quality Assurance by the AIM Team.

AIM, Casey Family Programs and the Design Team have established a process for pilots to request technical assistance as events arise during the pilot process. Dependent upon the nature and cross-jurisdictional relevance of the request, response can range from a telephone call to specialty training by national experts.

AIM, the Design Team, Casey Family Programs and state staff now are engaged in identifying ongoing training needs, both from the standpoint of general curricula and topic-specific competencies.

 **Sustainability:** The tasks of this project period primarily have focused on addressing the early issues of implementation; however, if the long-term intent is full-state roll-out, then all activities must be conducted with an eye towards sustainability. During this project period:

- ✓ Forms and policies were developed with consideration of long-term impact outside the ten project sites, and constructed in form consistent with existing policies and procedures for easy integration.
- ✓ Through technical assistance support provided by Casey Family Programs, informational materials were developed for sites to use with community members, families and media.
- ✓ Discussion regarding continuing legislative authorization was initiated. Support of the National Governors' Association Policy Academy was sought and gained.
- ✓ Discussion regarding potential funding of site expansion was initiated.
- ✓ The concepts of "reduce and reinvest" were integrated into state budget conversation, specifically as related to AR.
- ✓ Funding from the Ohio Children's Trust Fund Board was secured.
- ✓ A plan for regular dissemination of project information was initiated.
- ✓ The Project Chronicler met with representatives of all sites and stakeholders. A synopsis of the Design Phase Themes is included as Attachment 1.
- ✓ AR requires collaboration across state systems, as well as local systems. Meetings with state sister agencies on the topic of AR have been scheduled, and the topic is regularly presented to the cabinet council.

It is recognized that the future of AR lies in the hands of the project sites. These are the leaders that will build the political will for change within their home and peer communities. The Design Team has accepted this role, and reconfigured its purposes to include this responsibility. To signify this new mission, it replaced the name "Design Team" with the new title "Alternative Response Leadership Council." A new sub-group to strategize the most effective methods of long-term

implementation was established under this group. The September 25 – 26, 2008 minutes and Task Team Descriptions are included as Attachments 2 and 3.

The primary obstacles that the project has encountered during this period are related to timing:

- ✚ The time demands upon SACWIS and MIS staff as SACWIS rolled-out state-wide created a tremendous resource drain, often making it difficult for staff to devote time and resources. Still, the resourcefulness of staff and willingness to “go the extra” facilitated collaboration with counties that achieved a workable compromise.
- ✚ We are working under compromise during the pilot period. As will be noted by several counties, this has created less-than-ideal circumstances in some facets of project operation.
- ✚ This is a difficult economic time to ask for consideration of new funding methodologies. Prevention requires early investment and reallocation of resources. These are times of economic and resource scarcity.
- ✚ State budget cutbacks have affected staffing.

Activities and Results


All sites have completed the following activities during this time frame:

- ✚ ***Established and/or filled Alternative Response staffing.*** Most pilots have chosen to establish a specialized unit with Alternative Response-dedicated workers. Several counties reassigned existing workers; some hired new workers. Several pilots have used this opportunity to co-locate with service providers or expand skill sets within the unit. For example, sites have:
 - ✓ Added the services of a Community Services Department staff member as a Resource Specialist. This staff member has relocated her office so the position is physically located within the Alternative Response Team. This has provided a higher level of coordinated services for tasks such as benefits, housing and employment. (Fairfield)
 - ✓ Collaborated with the local mental health system to hire a full time social worker to work with Alternative Response Families. The worker completes mental health assessments as needed and he provides home based mental health support to Alternative Response Families. This is a new collaboration between these agencies and has allowed the mental health worker to engage Alternative Response Families in their own homes at times that are convenient to them. Families have welcomed him into their homes and have expressed their appreciation for him as the newest member of the Alternative Response Team. (Ross)

- ✓ Acquired an Americorp Volunteer to serve as a Budget Consultant for families served in the Alternative Response Pathway (Fairfield)
- ✚ **Trained all workers** in the agency on Alternative Response. Screening Decision-Makers received special training on what cases to consider for Alternative Response and how to use the Pathway Assignment Tool and the randomizer for assignment of control and experimental groups.
- ✚ **Established ongoing support and communication for front-line workers and supervisors.** Team development and training activities include:
 - ✓ Frequent [usually bi-weekly] meetings to become familiar with rule and tool changes; to improve interviewing skills, to address concerns of unit members, and to continue to identify further training needs. The unit also attended formal training provided by the AIM Team members. The supervisor has followed up with appropriate transfer of learning activities in subsequent unit meetings and in her individual meetings with unit members. (Clark).
 - ✓ The procedure charts developed by one site are included as attachment 4 to provide example. (Greene)
 - ✓ Participation in an immersion experience in three Minnesota counties (one progressive medium size and two metro) that resulted in adopting new practices, such as the strengths-based model in case consultation and strengths-based questions in the screening process. Casey Family Program funds supported this opportunity to experience Alternative Response in an environment of preferred practice. (Fairfield and Franklin)
 - ✓ We also indicated a desire for other materials to support the workers in family-centered practice, and were pleased to get the materials from the Hawaii Casey Family Programs project. (Clark)
- ✚ **Established site-specific data bases and processes to track and monitor key components** of alternative response, including both outcomes and information critical to administrative oversight, such as case assignment, expenditures, and services.
- ✚ **Established new partnerships with community service providers.** As sites focus on finding solutions to families' needs, new associations continue to develop. Examples include:
 - ✓ Partnering with a local mental health organization for early childhood/adult mental health and behavioral assessments in which a member of the Alternative Response Team accompanies the mental health therapist to the

family's home so the assessment can be timely and as family -engaging as possible. (Fairfield)

- ✓ Community agencies have been extremely supportive of our participation in the pilot program and excited that we are offering a non-traditional approach with families. For example, upon discussing our need for family activities with the local YMCA, that organization has offered a \$700.00+ annual family membership to our Alternative Response families for \$166.00. (Licking)
- ✓ In house training seminars have allowed the division to form relationships with two new community partners: the Child Development Center (Discovery Tree Family Resources) and Elizabeth's Hope Pregnancy Resources. Through the Discovery Tree Family Resources, Alternative Response Families are able to participate in early literacy events, baby sign language, Loss and Grief Groups, "Dad & Me" Adventures, Teen Self Esteem Groups, Grandparents Support Groups and individual parent coaching. At the Discovery Tree they use a strength based approach to working with families identifying what families are doing right and then building on that.
- ✓ Elizabeth's Hope is a wonderful resource for families that find themselves struggling with a planned or unplanned pregnancy. They provide support and guidance, peer counseling, parenting classes and much more. Both Discovery Tree Family Resources and Elizabeth's Hope Pregnancy Resources are being utilized by Alternative Response Families. We are excited to have formed relationships with these new community partners as we continue to build a collaborative network to meet the needs of the families we serve. (Ross)
- ✓ A small group has been convened with representatives from the County Department of Job and Family Services, the local adult mental health/drug and alcohol agency, the Help Me Grow program, and the Educational Service Center (ESC). As a result of the collaboration, the ESC has conducted mandated reporter training to the school counselors and provided them with information regarding Alternative Response. Work has begun with the local adult mental health/ drug and alcohol agency to develop procedures regarding priority referrals for drug and alcohol services. A procedure has been completed to speed up the referral process for PRC funding. (See attached) Another side benefit of the Alternative Response Pilot and Advisory group has been the funding through the local OCTF process of a Parents as Teachers program specifically for Alternative Response and some limited general agency clients. This project is currently just getting under way. (Greene)

 **Continued educating the public and professional community** on alternative response. All counties have held community meetings and have had excellent

press coverage that enhanced the overall understanding of child welfare. Activities have included::

- ✓ Trainings on Alternative Response for mandated reporters in the public system that targeted the specific zip codes for Alternative Response cases. This has not only resulted in an understanding about Alternative Response, but also how the agency conducts business when referrals are made to the agency. (Franklin)
- ✓ Alternative Response orientation meetings with eight family support contract providers and four community centers that have garnered much interest and support of the Alternative Response approach. (Franklin)
- ✓ A presentation by the Agency Director to the county's Family and Children First Council. Council agencies are signing up for mandated reporter training, as well as, more detailed Alternative Response training. The FCFC has also asked for an Alternative Response update at the November Council meeting which will likely become a regular activity. (Greene)
- ✓ Two radio interviews of the alternative response worker and supervisor to explain the program and answer any questions from call-in listeners. (Tuscarawas)

✚ ***Began serving families in the alternative response pathway.***

✚ ***Empowered sites to seek new solutions to old problems.*** For example, one county used Casey Family Programs funding to purchase lap top computers and air cards for all the workers in the Alternative Response Unit, the supervisor and the primary Screening Decision Maker to allow them to work from the field, to fill out forms in the field while sitting with the families, and to keep abreast of the work coming in, the assignment of work, and timely response to one another on case related issues and needs. (Clark)

County Voices: Success and Challenges

County sites were asked to identify their top successes and top challenges. The consistency of message between sites is apparent. This is important to note in light of the individuality of counties' adaptation of the model. Most successes seem attributable to the model; most challenges seem attributable to either the logistics of the pilot or scarcity of specific resources.

✚ Clark County ***Successes***

- ✓ Staff energy, commitment and involvement remains high.
- ✓ Staff report that families like not being labeled as "perpetrators," especially those families who had previous experience with our system. Families are reporting that this is a "better way" of doing business.
- ✓ Having more funds available for purchase of goods and services for families
- ✓ Having the ability to build relationships with families .

- ✓ Positive interest in and response to Alternative Response by many service providers in the community.
- ✓ The Alternative Response Fact Sheet and brochures

Fairfield County **Successes**

- ✓ The implementation of group supervision and decision-making.
- ✓ Agency has received numerous thank you cards and letters from families served in Alternative Response.
- ✓ Agency has received positive feedback from presentations provided to the community, especially educators, regarding the implementation of Alternative Response.
- ✓ Several families have experienced success from agency's ability to provide non-traditional service delivery such as enrolling a mom in nursing school and purchasing supplies for a wood burning stove.

Franklin County **Successes**

- ✓ Caseworkers are already seeing the value of the Alternative Response approach and are invested in what they are accomplishing with families. (See Stories from the Field)
- ✓ We have been able to try different things on a smaller scale in the agency, such as having closer relationships/communications between Intake and Ongoing caseworkers for the benefit of families.
- ✓ Families' identified needs are being met, quickly leading to engagement and better assessments.

Greene County **Successes**

- ✓ The most important successes are the client success stories. (See Stories from the Field)
- ✓ Workers report that the families they have served have appreciated this approach.
- ✓ The supervisor believes that we have avoided transferring cases for longer term support services because the case was followed for up to 90 days by the assessment worker.
- ✓ Perhaps one of the most unexpected successes has been the interest expressed by the Advisory Group in helping the agency overcome any barriers to making this pilot a success and the resulting changes in procedures. The pilot has enhanced the agency's casework practice and fits very nicely with the direction the agency has been moving in for the last several years.

Guernsey County **Successes**

- ✓ Families and staff like this process much better and find it faster to engage families with the box removed.
- ✓ We have been able to provide financial support to families who we would have had to turn away previously or whom helping would have depleted agency funds.

- ✓ We have been able to assist families with utilities, rent and food that have been helpful especially given the significant loss of resources in our community in the past 6 months.

Licking County **Successes**

- ✓ The Alternative Response social workers have appreciated and enjoyed the ability to interact with the families on a different level. The ability to allow the family to steer their own ship with guidance from their social worker has been very successful with most of our Alternative Response parents.
- ✓ Our greatest successes are our families. (See Stories from the Field)

Lucas County **Successes**

- ✓ Families have reported a positive difference in the interactions between themselves and agency staff.
- ✓ Agency workers have found that families are more willing to provide information and identify needs.
- ✓ New engagement techniques have helped staff more effectively identify the needs of families. Staff ask each family to identify strengths as a place to start engagement. One caseworker asks each family for the "five things you worry about most." The other workers have started using this and have found that it is often not what we, as professionals, would have identified.

Ross County **Successes**

- ✓ New partnerships are establishing new resources to meet families' basic needs. We have found that many of our families are living in substandard housing conditions. Not only is there a shortage of quality low income housing, but there also is a 6-9 month waiting period for subsidized housing in our community. The flexible funding of Alternative Response permitted the alternative response worker to collaborate with Elsea's Mobile Homes to meet the need of an individual AR Family. From this, a new partner ship was forged where Elsea's will work directly with Alternative Response Families to provide in-house financing with low monthly payments based on the families' resources. In addition, they have agreed to accept Ross County Job & Family Services Vouchers. We are very excited about this new partnership and through it, the potential to help families secure one of their basic needs, safe and affordable housing.
- ✓ As suitable housing has been one of our major challenges during this first quarter, Alternative Response Workers have begun an initiative where they present a cleaning supply basket to every family for which they help secure housing. Alternative Response Workers are routinely helping families clean new/old homes.
- ✓ Alternative Response Workers have received great personal reward by comments made from families such as, "Changes really happened in my life when Children Services got involved this time." This comment was from a family that had a prior open protective services case; however, the family

noted positive changes occurring in their family after working with an Alternative Response Worker.

- ✓ We see the potential to reduce the number of cases transferred to protective services. During this first quarter, the cases served via Alternative Response would have typically been transferred to protective services as they were not resolved within the designated 30 day time frame. We expect this number to continue to grow as the number of Alternative Response cases increase.

Trumbull County **Successes**

- ✓ Alternative Response has been well received by the Agency's social services staff assigned to the project and the families they have served.
- ✓ Statewide partnerships, first developed during the design phase, have been solidified. This should not be overlooked as a major accomplishment.

Tuscarawas County **Successes**

- ✓ Our contract for mental health assessments and counseling is going well. The referral process is going smoothly and this provider is seeing our Alternative Response clients quickly.
- ✓ A second contract we have for transportation is also meeting the needs of our Alternative Response clients.
- ✓ Casey Family Programs funding enabled us to purchase gift cards from both Lowes and Wal-Mart. This gives us the ability to first address families' basic needs.
- ✓ We have been pleasantly surprised at how creative families and our Alternative Response worker can be when it comes to developing plans to meet their needs. This is a benefit our 'traditional' work doesn't afford us. The Alternative Response families are very concrete when it comes to identifying things they need to help alleviate their problems.
- ✓ Working with families on this level has definitely helped build a good relationship between them and the worker and increased the level of trust the families have with the worker.

Clark County **Challenges**

- ✓ The inability to use SACWIS for Alternative Response cases; no "ticklers" to remind workers about requirement deadlines.
- ✓ Having to carry both alternative and traditional response cases; workers were under the assumption that they would have an "all- Alternative Response " caseload. This was necessitated by the randomization of cases required for the evaluation.
- ✓ Accessing services for substance abuse cases, and to a smaller degree, counseling services when those are required. Unanticipated contract changes at exactly the time Alternative Response was implemented have created some barriers to service delivery.
- ✓ Training needs, specifically, interviewing and assessment skill building.
- ✓ Difficulty with implementing the Family Service Plan document with families
- ✓ Getting comfortable with explaining to Alternative Response families.

- ✓ The financial "crunch" in which we all find ourselves is coming at a most inopportune time. We are more in need of certain services such as "hard services," substance abuse and mental health treatment, and more intensive service provision in order for alternative response to be implemented with fidelity to the model we are using. Yet, we find ourselves in an environment where food banks are bare, usual funders of "hard services" such as rents and utility payments are out of money and agencies are finding a need to cut back on contracts with providers of substance abuse, mental health, and other services in order to try to stay fully staffed themselves.

Fairfield County **Challenges**

- ✓ Fairfield County does not offer a county wide transportation system.
- ✓ Housing issues remain difficult due to current economic and state financial challenges.
- ✓ Cases involving custody disputes are asked by legal entities to be given a disposition in order to find one party at fault.

Franklin County **Challenges**

- ✓ Working in two different tracking systems (SACWIS & Excel Spreadsheet) is challenging and confusing and thus leaves room for error.
- ✓ Caseworkers were carrying a dual caseload (AR/TR) due to initial start up and a low pool of cases when school was out and struggled with balancing two sets of rules.

Greene County **Challenges**

- ✓ There have been no insurmountable challenges.
- ✓ Timing was not optimal: launching SACWIS at exactly the same time as the pilot was not the best option for workers or administrators.
- ✓ Having the Alternative Response workers still carry traditional cases through August (until Franklin went live) was not ideal.
- ✓ Staff continue to struggle with explaining the pilot to clients. This results from it being new; assistance in skill development would be helpful.
- ✓ Trying to determine at the screening point what may be low to moderate risk has been difficult.

Guernsey County **Challenges**

- ✓ We have not yet been presented with issues serious enough to involve the mental health system as planned last fall.
- ✓ We thought the pre-paid visa cards would be a great way to go, but found this not to be the case. We later found that there were too many fees and restrictions on how and when we could use them. This has been a learning process; we would not choose to do this again.
- ✓ Not fully knowing the requirements from the Institute for Applied Research at the start has placed a burden on agency staff to create new systems which will provide the information researchers needed. We did not get this information until October.

- ✓ We are concerned about the possible fall-out of offering so much concrete service to families who may be crisis; neglect-based families who never remediate the issues which cause crisis, thereby creating a dependence on the system.

Licking County **Challenges**

- ✓ Licking County's biggest challenge has been identifying families for the alternative response program. Unfortunately, many of our reports are alleging use of cocaine and/or methamphetamines.
- ✓ Due to pilot construction, often families who appear to be the best candidates for Alternative Response services are screened out.
- ✓ Maintaining an equitable case load with uncertain numbers has been challenging. Our assigned alternative response social workers have accepted traditional response cases in order to reduce the work load for the traditional response social workers. This practice has led to some confusion with cases, considering the different approaches.
- ✓ We did not anticipate the restrictions imposed by the pilot. Not being able to choose Alternative Response cases, and not being able to switch pathways from Traditional Response to Alternative Response has impacted the Alternative Response program. However, this is common to all pilots, is temporary, and will resolve itself upon full implementation.

Lucas County **Challenges**

- ✓ The randomization of cases has created unexpected managerial issues. We had envisioned case assignment to occur in a steady manner; instead cases are assigned in "clumps." Even in a metropolitan agency such as Lucas, the unequal distribution of cases has been difficult for staff to manage.
- ✓ Timing has been an issue. Lucas County experienced logistical problems due to gearing up, and going live with SACWIS, two weeks post-implementation.
- ✓ It would have been helpful to require, rather than recommend, that all agency staff attend the Alternative Response overview training. It was difficult to anticipate the amount of interest throughout the agency and the number of areas that the project actually touches. Training for all staff would have assisted with integration of the Alternative Response philosophy.

Ross County **Challenges**

- ✓ One of the challenges that we continue to face in Ross County is securing mental health services for families who are in need of psychiatric care and/or counseling.
- ✓ There is also a gap in service provision for at risk children who are in need of intensive mental health services.

Trumbull County **Challenges**








- ✓ Because Ohio's AR has yet to be integrated into SACWIS, the tracking of county level data has proven to be very labor intensive.

- ✓ As Ohio's AR is largely a "Paper and Pen" system, there is considerable concern about how the county data will be transferred to the researcher for analysis.
- ✓ Staff training, for those not involved in the project, remains an ongoing issue. Starting in October of 2008, TCCS' Alternative Response supervisor will make monthly presentations to the Agency's executive team, and during department meetings.
- ✓ The manual gathering and tracking of TCCS remains very labor intensive and cumbersome to manage.

Tuscarawas County **Challenges**

- ✓ We are finding difficult to overcome is the lack of adequate and stable housing for our clients. Closely connected to that is the lack of adequate income. The unemployment rate is becoming a bigger and bigger obstacle for our families.
- ✓ An in-agency challenge has been the tracking of funding for this program, especially the post assessment funding. We are constantly checking with our fiscal staff to make sure our records for this funding match.
- ✓ We continue 'tweaking' our in-house forms to make sure they capture all the information we think we need for this program.
- ✓ The randomizer does not always assign enough cases to the Alternative Response track, so we have, on occasion, assigned some other work to our Alternative Response worker.

Lessons Learned

-  If we can show some success in this difficult economic environment, then we can only imagine what success is possible in a more hospitable environment.
-  We are fortunate to have the support of Casey Family Programs and the continued "will" of all involved to keep this project going in spite of the obstacles
-  It has been vital to continually discuss the Alternative Response project with traditional intake investigators as they come to see the impact of Alternative Response
-  Our community has never focused on a coordinated response to domestic violence as a primary concern.
-  The use of Family Team Meetings has been more productive as the families approach the meeting with less anxiety.
-  Asking support systems identified by the family to take an active responsibility works.
-  Alternative Response is not a shortcut.

- ✚ Our families are desperately poor. They need food, shelter and basic needs more than they need good advice. The reality is that they can't take good advice until their basic needs are met. Families who are poor and have nothing and come to you because you have something to give: that's reasonable behavior.
- ✚ We are definitely seeing a need for hard services for basic needs such as rent, utilities, and clothing, and we have been able to meet these needs quickly. This has often given us the ability to further engage and complete a more thorough assessment.
- ✚ We are learning that there is a strong need to educate staff about community resources in a concise manner and to work with them on how to successfully engage our families with these agencies.
- ✚ The key to this going statewide if research determines it should is how it is marketed and discussed with other Ohio counties. It cannot be about engagement as a process as how it was introduced to the pilot counties. This is a wonderful process and how it is introduced will either make or break staff. Our staff is not engaging differently, it is the removal of the barrier of the label that simply makes it faster and less work to engage a family in the process.
- ✚ Even though we are only a few months into AR, we are strong supporters of the concept and believe that it can have an impact on the need the place children in care. As a county with a substantial number of children in foster care, one of our focuses is to "front-load" our services to prevent the need for placement. Through Alternative Response, we hope to provide intensive services to an intact family unit so children can remain safely in the care of their family.
- ✚ One of the project activities which we have put in place for Alternative Response was an Alternative Response weekly team meeting. Discussing cases and sharing ideas has been very productive in managing Alternative Response cases.
- ✚ We have found that concrete services have been the most utilized of all services. Our agency traditionally has been able to meet concrete needs of our Traditional Response families; however, with Alternative Response funding, we have been able to take our service provision one step farther. For example, we could normally help families by providing enough funds to prevent a utility disconnect, however with Alternative Response funding, we have paid not only the disconnect bill but added monies to pay the balance of the bill. This allows the family to use their resources more productively and the family can stabilize their budget and avoid future financial crises. When we can easily eliminate one issue in a family, we can concentrate on working on more difficult ones.
- ✚ We do not utilize the concrete service delivery as a method of engaging families, this discussion comes after the engagement.

- ✚ We were a bit harder at first in terms of what we put into the randomizer; we are loosening up more and more, and this just may be something every county has to go through.
- ✚ On going education and training remains an issue of concern. While the staff and families involved in the project appear to have good understanding of the basic principles of Alternative Response, staff not assigned to the project appear to still be struggling to understand the difference between Alternative Response and Traditional services.
- ✚ We are now including the AR pamphlet with our Mandated Reporter letters for assigned Alternative Response cases. Although many of these folks came to the community overview we hosted in May, the pamphlet serves as an additional educational tool to this very important group of our community partners.

Planned Activities

The state will focus on:

- ✚ Securing continued legislative authorization for pilot sites.
- ✚ Ensuring counties have access to skill development and technical assistance that is responsive to requests.
- ✚ Building state-level support and understanding of alternative response (political will for change).
- ✚ Continuing project oversight and accountability.

Sites have selected activities that meet jurisdictional need:

- ✚ Clark County
 - ✓ Supervision with the Alternative Response Unit making use of the training materials from the Hawaii project, particularly the handout materials on interviewing and assessment skill building
 - ✓ We are fortunate to have the services of a consultant from the Mental Health Board who serves as a problem-solver when we experience barriers to accessing substance abuse and mental health services. We plan to make full use of this person to address our issues with access to needed services.
 - ✓ Implement a system for case assignment in the Alternative Response Unit that will alleviate the problem of workers carrying both Alternative Response and Traditional Response cases. The Alternative Response Unit has come to consensus on a possible solution, and this will be implemented during the next quarter to test its efficacy.
 - ✓ Continuing to give feedback about worker needs; what is working, what is not working; and making suggestions for improvement in all aspects of the work.



Fairfield County

With guidance from families served, FCJFS plans to reach out to other service providers for participation in Alternative Response. This will be achieved by:

- ✓ Involving “Help Me Grow” through a meeting that has been scheduled with the Family, Adult and Children First Council.
- ✓ Increasing collaboration with the local domestic violence shelter.
- ✓ Increasing collaboration with law enforcement (for domestic violence cases).
- ✓ Monitoring results of group supervision.
- ✓ Having Resource Coordinator and Mental Health Specialist attend Differential Response conference in Columbus, OH.
- ✓ Continuing participation in Design Work Group.
- ✓ Collecting and analyzing Fairfield County data regarding needed resources for potential families to be served by Alternative Response.



Franklin County

- ✓ The agency has a contract for translation services and will have the Alternative Response forms and brochures translated into Spanish and Somali. The state has agreed to pay for printing.
- ✓ The agency is exploring a contract that will allow hard services to be provided directly to families, reducing red tape, the time it takes to secure these services, and enhance the utilization of agency and community resources more effectively and collaboratively.
- ✓ Continued Alternative Response education and communication strategies with staff and community.



Greene County

- ✓ The agency will focus on data collection. The data base that was created to capture data from the track assignment form is a good check and balance on ensuring forms are completed on all new reports of abuse and neglect. However, it has been very time consuming to enter the data and we have fallen behind in data entry. It is a priority to be more current in data collection.
- ✓ Now that the agency has received information regarding what is needed for evaluation purposes, a system needs to be developed in order to ensure that the information is captured.
- ✓ The agency needs to focus on providing training to social service agencies in the county that have requested specific training on mandated reporting and alternative response.
- ✓ The agency will seek specialized training for Alternative Response staff regarding brief interventions.
- ✓ Continue to participate in phone calls and face-to-face meetings at all levels.



Guernsey County

- ✓ We want to conduct training for our staff on recognition of low level mental health issues that could involve a mental health referral but do not at this point. This should help us better engage the mental health system.

- ✓ We want to provide technical assistance and training to our staff in the best practice uses of concrete services to families in a child welfare environment.



Licking County

- ✓ To increase the number of cases assigned to the Alternative Response pathway.
- ✓ Reduce the number of Traditional Response cases assigned to Alternative Response social workers to allow the social worker to concentrate on services to Alternative Response families.
- ✓ Continue exploring contracts/agreements with community agencies to provide additional services to Alternative Response families.



Lucas County

- ✓ Continue to assign Alternative Response cases.
- ✓ Institute a new system of case assignment so that the work load is distributed among all Alternative Response workers, instead of specifically assigned geographic districts.
- ✓ Send ten staff to the Differential Response Conference in November 2008.
- ✓ Continue with community training as requested.



Ross County

- ✓ Alternative Response Workers and Supervisor will participate in an in-house training on the Ohio Consumers Council. The training will be utilized to give workers the tools needed to become advocates for families who face utility shut offs. The target population of this training is families who have large utility bills with shut off notices.
- ✓ The Welcome Home Project (a local collaboration between children's division and area churches) is scheduled to be operational during this quarter. Through this collaboration we will be able to provide a house warming gift to families as they move into new housing that will include needed house hold items (i.e. hand/face bath towels, dishes etc.). This is an opportunity for the agency and our community partners to celebrate every milestone with our families.
- ✓ This agency will continue to work with our local mental health agencies to see if we can utilize our current in-house mental health professionals to complete the preliminary assessments needed to reduce the waiting period for new referrals to see a psychiatrist or psychologist.



Trumbull County

- ✓ Institute ongoing staff trainings on the core concepts of Alternative Response, and the progress of the project.
- ✓ Reexamine, and hopefully simplify, TCCS' d Alternative Response data management and analysis processes and procedures.
- ✓ Use data from the Institute for Applied Research, and TCCS' "in-house" database to further refine the Agency's Alternative Response program.
- ✓ Remain an active member of the Statewide AR Design Workgroup.



Tuscarawas County

- ✓ Our Alternative Response supervisor will be sharing the progress of this pilot with our Foster Care Planning Committee. This committee meets quarterly and is made up of agency staff and reps from local MH, MR/DD, Juvenile Court, placement networks, FCFC and the County Commissioners.
- ✓ We will be having regular meetings with our fiscal staff to monitor the use of Alternative Response funding.



Ohio's Alternative Response Project has adopted Casey Family Program's 2020 goal to **Reduce and Reinvest**.

Ohio anticipates that alternative response will **reduce** the number of families who return to the child welfare system because of a recurrence of maltreatment, as well as **reduce** the depth that families penetrate the child welfare system.

Although initially more expensive, it is expected that alternative response will provide long-term savings to **reinvest** in the development of early intervention services for families. To accomplish this, project design has embedded the eight components of change within all aspects of work.

The Eight Components of Change

1. Build Political will
2. Develop leadership
3. Provide quality front-line supervision
4. Set reasonable caseloads
5. Engage community
6. Collaborate across systems
7. Enforce data-driven accountability
8. Allow time