

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

ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE PROJECT

Quarterly Progress Report
October – December 2008

Project Implementation and Support

Introduction

Ohio's July – September 2008 report to Casey Family Programs detailed the experiences of "going live" in ten communities as the Ohio Alternative Response Project (AR) initiated service operation and transitioned from design to implementation. Although the *Project Implementation and Support Phase* is eighteen months in length (December 2009), its characteristics are progressive in nature. At conclusion of the first third of the project phase, this report reflects the stage when community sites "settle in" with the new approach, develop a comfort level with the work, experience its organizational impact, encounter systemic or community challenges, and begin to realize the first initiation-to-closure outcomes of working with families with an alternative approach. This quarter began to see the state's focus shift from activation issues to ones of monitoring, quality assurance and model fidelity. The first three months can be likened to moving to a new home where rooms are assigned and household organization established; during the following months, occupants begin to identify those elements which mesh with expectation and those that need remodeling.

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 **ten sites'** successes and challenges during the quarter.
- ✓ Lessons Learned: nuggets of wisdom that **ten sites** have gained during the quarter.
- ✓ Planned Activities; a synopsis of the **state's and ten sites'** priorities for next quarter.

Project Progress


State-level partners have focused on the following aspects of project operation:

- ✚ ***Infrastructure and Accountability:*** Counties continue to struggle with the mechanism that was established to accommodate alternative response within

SACWIS during the project period. The logistical and resource demands upon counties, as well as external repercussions, could not be anticipated during conceptualization. During this past quarter SACWIS, MIS and ODJFS' Office of Children and Families (OCF) staff have initiated conversation to identify an enhancement that can be implemented with minimum resource, yet address state reporting and county issues related to monitoring and worker-burden. It is hopeful that this enhancement can be actualized during the next quarter. Planning for final SACWIS enhancement for a concrete alternative response model is anticipated to begin between March and June 2009. Timing for activities will be developed around anticipated July 2011 legislative authorization, with a three – six month field test included.

Anecdotally, pilots report that flexibility to respond quickly to clients' needs with creative solutions and services is a significant and rewarding --both in terms of satisfaction and outcome-- element of alternative response. Establishment of an infrastructure that facilitates this type of response at a county level, within the parameters of the regimented state menu, continues to be a state focus. The primary use of Casey Family Program monies during this past six months has been to establish this framework for project sites. Concurrently, conversation has been initiated through NGA, Summit-related planning and legislatively-driven work to establish a more systemic response. The state continues to examine how the findings of the alternative response project and the experiences of the project sites can augment this ongoing work within the overall state picture. It is important that alternative response not be regarded as a stand-alone initiative, but instead, as a strategy for moving the state towards successful achievement of child and family service review outcome measurements.

During this quarter, project sites began to note the design errors of various forms and processes conceptualized pre-implementation. This is an expected and intended outcome of the project. Perhaps the most pivotal remodel is the Family Service Plan, developed to replace the existing Case Plan utilized in the traditional response.¹ Several aspects of the Family Service Plan, conceived as an interactive tool between family and caseworker, are cumbersome and impractical in practice. Since the Family Service Plan is enacted in rule, change requires an amendment in the Ohio Administrative Code. Any such change requires the full agreement of the Leadership Council. A proposal for revision was developed by the AIM Team on the basis of input solicited through caseworker and administrator teleconferences. This proposed product will be presented to ODJFS and the Leadership Council at the January 2009 meeting.

 **Monitoring Progress and Outcomes:** The fifth phase of AR, *Project Evaluation*, runs concurrently with, but independently of, the Project Implementation and Support Phase. The AR evaluation is being conducted by the Institute of Applied Research

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."

(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.


As of mid-January, almost 2,200 families are in the study. Since it reasonably can be assumed that alternative response pathway assignment will increase as the project progresses and workers and intake staff become more familiar and comfortable with the process, it is realistic to project that Ohio's 18 month study will include 6,000 families. The following chart shows the current project enrollment by county:

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County	Experimental	Control	Total
Clark	130	141	271
Fairfield	97	91	188
Franklin	286	315	601
Greene	93	102	195
Guernsey	37	42	79
Licking	53	53	106
Lucas	173	183	356
Ross	36	36	72
Trumbull	124	128	252
Tuscarawas	37	31	68
Total	1066	1122	2188

IAR is employing a variety of data collection activities; this quarter marked the initiation of several that occur after case closure. Data is collected from SACWIS and completed Family Service Plans. Additionally, sample cases are being randomly selected monthly. Workers are contacted for feedback via e-mail and a web survey form. IAR has established this methodology to obtain systemic information that cannot be obtained other ways, such as changes in child safety, worker views of family response, other needs of families, etc. Additionally, IAR is conducting family surveys and general worker surveys. A community survey was conducted at onset of the project; this will be replicated at conclusion.

ODJFS sees the IAR work to have much greater implications than simply AR. We are in a time of fiscal constraint; one where each stakeholder struggles to identify the services and programs that yield the greatest return for investment. The information that is secured from this study will be very valuable to ODJFS and its sister agencies as we begin the task of budget planning and redesign of the state's service menu. The voices of workers, families and the community should help us as Ohio seeks to design a more meaningful system through the Child and Family Services Review Program Improvement Process. As the volume of data grows over the next six

months, early information should offer an helpful window into Ohio's child welfare system.

 **Ongoing Access to Support and Skill Development Opportunity:** An important aspect of AIM's ongoing support is regular and scheduled meetings for pilot staff and administrators. The purpose of these sessions is to establish a network for peer support and problem solving. Although facilitated at this time, it is expected that leadership will transition to ODJFS at project conclusion. The sessions also provide the state and AIM rich material to monitor project progress.

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 bi-monthly peer-to-peer teleconferences for caseworkers.
- ✓ A schedule of bi-monthly 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 with AIM mentors.

AIM, the Leadership Council, Casey Family Programs and state staff have identified a menu of training needs. Topics have been resource-tagged related to availability and accessibility; those sessions that can be secured through existing sources, those that can be provided by AIM; and, those for which outside support is required. While first priority is to secure skills for AR workers and supervisors currently providing services, training also must be designed with an eye towards long-term impact. Some sessions will offer "sampling," enabling the Leadership council to identify aspects that must be added to existing Ohio curriculum; some training will be designed as a "training of trainer" experience to build capacity within Ohio's own resources; and, some aspects undoubtedly will require out-source development.

Not surprisingly, the most desired training is related to the development of advanced engagement skills. Workers and administrators each report that workers become more aware of the need for greater levels of competency as they themselves become more deeply engaged with the families. Several counties have made similar comments that "We thought we were using a family engagement model. We now see that there is so much more." It appears that workers are visualizing new possibilities for working with families and are seeking support in doing so.

The Leadership Council is working closely with Casey Family Programs, Aim and the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program to secure training that addresses vocalized needs. Four days of training with Bob Bertolino, who continues to support Minnesota work, is scheduled in March 2009. Programs also are asking for more opportunities for face-to face dialogue regarding concrete practice issues.

- ✚ **Continued legislative authorization for pilot sites:** Language was prepared and submitted for inclusion in the state's budget bill (July 1, 2009). The language authorizes continuation of the pilot sites unless ODJFS at any time determines it unadvisable. This language also includes authorization, if so chosen after the 18 month pilot program has concluded, to expand the number of pilot sites. This language simply is to provide flexibility of approach. It only is seen as temporary stopgap if needed until the enactment of comprehensive statutory revision.
- ✚ **Sustainability:** While implementation tasks continue to exist in these early days, the state is beginning to shift its focus upon issues of sustainability. Sustainability strategies were developed to guide project operation; all project activities are measured to ensure relevance with long-term strategies for sustainability. A copy of Ohio's Sustainability Strategies is attached as a separate document.

Through the IAR evaluation and the state's review of the flexible funding provided under the Family Services Plan, the state is examining the services that are being provided to families when services are family-driven; selected by choice rather than compatibility with or availability of funding streams. This assessment should provide valuable information regarding those services that are perceived as "most useful" by workers and families. Not surprisingly, these currently appear to be services related to basic sustenance, such as food, shelter, clothing, transportation and employment. Workers and families see sustainable flexible funding as critical to successful work with families.

The primary obstacles that the project has encountered during this period remain products of its "pilot" nature:

- ✓ Working outside of SACWIS is time consuming and difficult to monitor. This is, perhaps, the most significant barrier faced by the project sites. Several counties have indicated a desire to expand the alternative response population, but flatly cite an unwillingness to do so while outside the electronic system. State staff is working with SACWIS and MIS staff to find a solution that does not require significant SACWIS enhancement.
- ✓ The randomizing process hampers anticipation and management of worker caseloads. In some counties, this has created tensions between the traditional and alternative response caseworkers; in others, supervisors have been forced to have workers carry dual caseloads. Dual caseloads appear to be a less-desired structural configuration, and workers express frustration and confusion with this arrangement.

While both of these issues are pilot-related, they do create stress and dissatisfaction within the existing framework. The hope is to negate the impact so as to minimize resultant burnout. On a positive note, this experience has taught practical lessons regarding workers' needs and preferred organizational structures.

The difficult financial time during which this project is operating cannot be ignored. On a state level, this has effected staffing levels and management, as well as distracted from project operation. Plans for peer mentoring of state staff, as well as staff's on-site involvement have had to be modified. There is no question that this has affected the ability of the state to transition to project ownership; however, it will not prevent transition from occurring. Similar impact also is reported in the county-specific sections.

Activities and Results

All sites completed the following activities during this time frame:


✚ ***Established Routine*** The excitement of “kick-off” slowly is dissipating and trepidation of whether safety is maintained without traditional investigative elements is transitioning to confidence in the approach. Counties report that alternative response caseworkers are becoming more comfortable with AR rules and forms, and are more self-assured in their roles and expectations.

Individually, counties are discovering how planned case flow, management and timeframes developed in concept actually function in practice. For some, this has required organizational or vision adjustment; for others, success has provided added opportunity. For example:

- ✓ Changes were made to agency procedure charts as workers discovered that a Family Team Meeting is not always required if the case stays open longer than 45 days. (Greene)
- ✓ Internal AR Team meetings have been expanded to include all alternative response supervisors and workers. This has improved communications and refined day-to-day operations. (Franklin)
- ✓ Joint supervision meetings are held twice monthly and individual supervisors review all assigned cases on a bi-monthly basis. (Lucas)
- ✓ The group decision-making process based on the framework used in Olmstead County has been integrated into clinical supervisions and screening decisions. This has proven to be an effective way to ensure the safety of children and to provide services to families that are both open, honest, and family-driven. (Fairfield)
- ✓ A system for case assignment has been implemented to alleviate the problem of dual caseloads for workers. The system involves a rotation of assignments, and it soon will be time to initiate the first rotation. This will be closely monitored to ensure the efficacy of the process. (Clark)

- ✓ Building upon the success of the streamlined benefits eligibility process, a Financial Stability Specialist has been incorporated into alternative response. Through collaboration with the United Way and the Community Services Department, this staff person can work with families one-on-one on budgeting issues and identify resources to address more difficult financial situations. (Fairfield)
- ✓ Levels of expectation regarding the use of Hawaii project materials had be modified, although the materials have been distributed to the alternative response unit. (Clark)
- ✓ All counties met, or have times scheduled to meet, on-site with AR evaluation staff. For some counties, more careful inspection of the process has required the collection of additional data or a change in the way data is gathered; for others, it simply provided clarification on anticipated processes. All sites take the responsibility of evaluation very seriously and are working hard to ensure the process is smooth and accurate. (all counties)
- ✓ There is a fertilization effect as staff are utilizing the AR practices in other program areas. For example, Licking County has expanded the scope of its alternative responsive workers in response to the juvenile court's new practice of awarding custody of delinquent and unruly children to the child welfare agency. It is the agency's hope that these social workers who are versed in the alternative response approach can advocate for community-based services as opposed to placement. Although this is outside the purview of AR, it utilizes the engagement process to extend the reduction goal to a different population. (Licking)
- ✓ The positive manner in which families are responding has permitted agencies to give families more responsibility in guiding interaction. Families are more willing to be truthful and the increased level of cooperation from families has allowed alternative response workers an option to develop safety plans with families that directly address the safety factors that they, themselves, identify. This level of open and honest communication by families to the alternative response workers is a positive outcome that is credited to the family engagement approach used in alternative response. (Ross)
- ✓ For some counties, the characteristics of the alternative response families are different than envisioned. For example, based on research and the experiences of other sites, Guernsey County prepared for a high segment of families with mental illness. In reality, they are encountering fewer families requiring intensive mental health services, but many more families with serious substance abuse issues than anticipated. (Guernsey, Clark)
- ✓ At times, it is the county's or agency's internal management processes that do not facilitate progress. For example, Clark County has found that the

county procedures for accessing funds, goods and services can present barriers to effective utilization of the flexible funding. Progress in working with the agency's fiscal unit to clarify the process continues; although this is a "work in progress," there now is a set of written procedures to follow. The positive aspect is a message that appears consistent among pilot communities and stakeholders: all remain committed to success and to identifying solutions to barriers. (Clark)

 ***Established ongoing support and communication for front-line workers and supervisors.*** Team development and training activities include:

- ✓ All counties' alternative response caseworkers and supervisors are taking advantage of the worker and supervisor calls. They also participate in the on-site meetings and site-specific technical assistance. Team members are very responsive to requests to identify training and resource gaps, and are articulate about their needs. Counties report that workers feel rejuvenated from the opportunity to share like concerns and successes, as well as collaboratively problem. (all counties)
- ✓ Supervisors continue to use appropriate transfer of learning activities. (Clark)
- ✓ Teleconference calls specific to Domestic Violence (sponsored by CFP) have supported several counties' aspiration to develop a comprehensive service system to address the increasing frequency of intimate partner violence. (Fairfield)
- ✓ All but one county sent a team of agency staff and county stakeholders to the National Conference on Differential Response. For example, Franklin County was able to send 29 staff plus six community partners. This opportunity enhanced knowledge and provided the opportunity for staff to network and learn what other states are experiencing with alternative response. (nine counties)
- ✓ Counties are identifying skill-specific training that matches the characteristics of their county's caseloads. For example, Guernsey County provided training on recognition of mental illness and how to utilize mental health assessments within families' homes. (Guernsey)
- ✓ To expand understanding of the process agency-wide in anticipation of program integration, "Progress and Developments" has been added as a topic of discussion during the agency's monthly supervisors' meetings. All agency administrators and supervisors are required to attend. (Trumbull)

 ***Expanded, adjusted or stabilized 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:

- ✓ Meetings were held with two family support service contract vendors and all five Community Settlement Houses. These meeting improved our staff's understanding of what these agencies provided so that appropriate referrals can be provided, It also opened the opportunity for a discussion around how to better explain and secure involvement in all services. (Franklin)
- ✓ As the county agencies expand thinking about the ways in which services can be delivered and the types of services that provide opportunity for families' stability, new and sometimes unanticipated partners are being identified. For example, one county, while seeking to address a family's transportation issue, established contact with a local insurance agency and AAA. These agencies offered services for the family, and found the experience sufficiently rewarding to join into an ongoing partnership with the agency. (Ross)

✚ ***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 Toledo Public School Counselors. (Lucas)
- ✓ Incorporating a discussion of alternative response into the regular trainings with school officials. (Fairfield)
- ✓ An alternative response presentation was provided to approximately 50 contract placement providers in order to develop and awareness of alternative response and establish the expectation for a new direction child welfare practice. (Franklin)
- ✓ Updates are provided to the Family and Children First Council, as well as the Regional Coordinator of Parent Advocates. The Coordinator is circulating Alternative Response fact sheets in the region. (Greene)
- ✓ The Pilot Leader and AR Supervisor made a presentation about Alternative Response to the Help Me Grow and Early Intervention staff in our community. Much of our work overlaps and their understanding and support are important. (Clark)

 **Continued serving families in the alternative response pathway.**

 **Empowered sites to seek new solutions to old problems.** For example:

- ✓ One family, already under duress due to the birth of a medically fragile twins, became overwhelmed when their car broke down and they were unable to transport their children to Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus for needed medical treatment. Through the flexibility of AR, the agency was able to buy new tires for the family's car, purchase an AAA membership and pay their car insurance for six months. As a result, the family remained intact, and they now have an ability to transport children to the necessary appointments. This experience also established two new community partners for the agency, AAA and Salyers Insurance. (Ross)
- ✓ In a domestic violence situation where the mother was minimizing the problem, the worker was able to get the mother into counseling and meet with the mother to offer support and encouragement, The worker was able to help the mother realize that she did not deserve to be treated in such an unhealthy manner. The mother's extended family had ceased contact with her because of the violent situation. When the mother broke off the unhealthy relationship, the mother's family reconnected and was able to provide additional support. (Greene)
- ✓ Our agency became involved with a mother who was experiencing mental health issues and required in-patient hospitalization. We were able to provide her with care for the children during her hospitalization and have subsequently purchased food and assisted her in locating housing. We were able to use flexible funds to pay two months rent and her security deposit to "get her back on her feet." This mother was in our care as a teen after one of her brothers shot and killed another brother in her presence. Her only parent had died in an accident a few months before. The mom has agreed to ongoing services and is the agency's first ongoing case. (Licking)
- ✓ AR workers continue to note the improved relationships they experience with their families. One family reported that one of her friends encouraged another friend to call the AR worker and ask for help, which she did. The worker was able to persuade the caller to allow her to make a referral regarding her situation. (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 continue to report satisfaction with the assessment process and access to “hard” services. One mother who had no prior experience with our agency said, this is a good little program,” and indicated her experience with our agency did not meet the negative expectation she had before coming in.
- ✓ Several AR clients have asked us to not close their case.
- ✓ Access to flexible funding continues to be a great advantage to our families. We have been able to purchase everything from automobile tires to basketball uniforms to the more typical payments for rent, utilities and home furnishings. All of these things have , in some way, increased the safety and stability of the family.



Fairfield County **Successes**

- ✓ The success of group supervision and decision-making is being adopted by other areas of the department.
- ✓ The agency continues to receive numerous thank you cards and letters from families served in alternative response.
- ✓ The agency has received positive feedback from presentations provided to the community --especially educators-- regarding the implementation of alternative response.
- ✓ Community leadership officials have received positive feedback from community stakeholders regarding the early success of Alternative Response.
- ✓ Several families have experienced success from agency’s ability to provide non-traditional service delivery. For example, we were able to successfully work with an entire family –including the aggressor-- that experienced domestic violence, and were able to assist a family find safe housing after being displaced due to an uninhabitable rental and low fixed-income.



Franklin County **Successes**

- ✓ The Alternative Response brochures have been translated into Spanish and Somali to facilitate greater engagement of an expanded population. ODJFS is going to print the translations in quantity for use by other sites.
- ✓ Alternative Response is well received by our community partners.
- ✓ The issues of dual caseloads have diminished for Intake AR staff, although it continues with regional staff.
- ✓ Staff have become more knowledgeable overall about the community resources available to them and have expanded capacity to more effectively utilize resources.
- ✓ Overall the project is going well. Staff continue to be enthused, supportive and excited with the outcomes they are experiencing with families.

- ✚ **Greene County *Successes***
 - ✓ The most important successes are the client success stories. (See Stories from the Field)
 - ✓ The agency has created a spread sheet on its shared drive that has addressed issues regarding data collection. Information appears to be flowing between the evaluators and the agency.
 - ✓ Workers report that the families they have served have appreciated this approach.

- ✚ **Guernsey County *Successes***
 - ✓ There is an overall sense that this is a better way to practice in many cases, but we have only had one of these cases move to ongoing services.

- ✚ **Licking County *Successes***
 - ✓ On the plus side, the AR 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 AR parents.
 - ✓ Our greatest successes are our families. (See Stories from the Field)
 - ✓ Even though we are only a few months into AR, we are strong supporters of the concept. 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 AR, we hope to provide intensive services to an intact family unit so children can remain safely in the care of their family.
 - ✓ We are continuing AR weekly team meetings. Discussing cases and sharing ideas has been very productive in managing AR cases.

- ✚ **Lucas County *Successes***
 - ✓ Families and agency staff continue to report positive changes as a result of Alternative Response. If the trend in decreasing numbers of open cases and placements continues and internal research indicates these cases are Alternative Response cases, this would be a significant accomplishment for our agency and the families in our community

- ✚ **Ross County *Successes***
 - ✓ During the second quarter of the pilot program, Alternative Response Workers were able to utilize the flexible funding afforded through this initiative to meet families impending transportation needs. As the current economic state continues to decline, families are finding it more difficult to provide a minimal sufficient level of care. Our families find themselves dealing with food and housing insecurities as well as a lack of transportation. AR Workers were able to address these issues during this quarter while ensuring child safety and family security.
 - ✓ Our greatest successes are our families. (See Stories from the Field)



Trumbull County **Successes**

- ✓ Six months of service provision without any major issues or problems is a success that never should be overlooked.



Tuscarawas County **Successes**

- ✓ Our pre-purchased cards from Wal-Mart and Lowes, as well as the contracts for non-Medicaid counseling services and transportation, continue to go well.
- ✓ From January to June 2008, our agency overall had 33 foster care placements. Since implementing Alternative Response, foster care placements have decreased to 24 representing a 27% reduction. While it is early to entirely attribute this decline to alternative response, it is a critical factor to consider. If this trend continues, it is a significant success for our agency and the families in our community.



Clark County **Challenges**

- ✓ Some staff report continuing discomfort with explaining AR to families. They report that the most difficult thing to overcome is the perception that all we are interested in doing is "taking their children".
- ✓ Inability to use SACWIS continues to be a challenge.
- ✓ Access to substance abuse assessment and treatment, both in-patient residential and out-patient is a huge challenge. Service for the un-insured "working poor" is the largest issue. There is a sliding fee scale for some services, but clients are reluctant to use their limited resources to pay for this service.
- ✓ Access to mental health assessments for adults and treatment for both children and adults is a big challenge. There is a Mental Health staff person on-site who can assess children; however, adult assessments are a problem. There are long waiting lists for counseling/therapeutic services for all in the community.
- ✓ Internal fiscal procedures sometimes cause delays in accessing funds for needed goods and services by creating additional "hoops" that workers must jump through in order to get what families need. Some auditing requirements, such as the need to obtain "quotes" for purchases are the newest issue to require solution. Some of our AR colleagues from around the state have been kind enough to offer suggestions for solutions to this issue, and these will be presented to our fiscal office.
- ✓ Training needs, specifically interviewing and assessment skill building continue, but should be addressed in the next quarter.



Fairfield County **Challenges**

- ✓ Fairfield County does not offer a countywide transportation system; this continues to be a challenge.
- ✓ Housing issues remain difficult due to current economic and state financial challenges. CPS is currently pursuing a new grant to assist in addressing this issue.

- ✓ As a result of a shift in philosophy, the families identified appropriate for AR are 2-3 times higher than originally projected. As a dual purpose, the three newest hires to CPS have begun their initial training and caseworker responsibilities with the AR track. This will assist with the caseload sizes of the AR unit and simultaneously provide AR training, exposure, and family engagement strategies to these individuals.

Franklin County **Challenges**

- ✓ Working in two different tracking systems (SACWIS & Excel Spreadsheet) is challenging and confusing and thus leaves room for error. We continue to press for a modification that allows case to be visible within SACWIS.
- ✓ Caseworkers carrying a dual caseload (AR/TR) has diminished but has not been eliminated.

Greene County **Challenges**

- ✓ Trying to determine at the screening point what may be low to moderate risk has been difficult.

Guernsey County **Challenges**

- ✓ Not fully knowing the research requirements from IAR 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.
- ✓ Still seeing a higher proportion of cases with serious substance abuse issues and less mental illness which is the opposite of what we prepared for based on research and experiences of other areas already using AR
- ✓ Because the module is not in SACWIS, there is some confusion over the paperwork requirements. Staff do not have issues switching between AR and TR in the sense of the in the house portion of it, but the paperwork and file tracking is confusing at times. Also, the delay in getting the new service plan implemented is an issue for staff.

Licking County **Challenges**

- ✓ Licking County's biggest challenge remains identifying families for the AR program. We have increased our numbers significantly but still feel that we would like to offer the program to more Licking County families. We are continually working toward increasing the numbers of reports which can be delineated AR. The agency still receives a significant number of families alleged to be using/distributing/manufacturing methamphetamines as well as sexual abuse reports and cannot include those families in the AR track.
- ✓ Maintaining an equitable case load with uncertain numbers has also been challenging. Our assigned AR social workers have been accepting TR cases in order to reduce the work load for the traditional response social workers. Recently, however, we have decided to assign those FINS cases to the AR social workers, in which Juvenile Court has notified us that the Court is planning to award custody of delinquent/unruly children to the

agency. As of this time, we will not be assigning TR cases to AR social workers. With AR social workers assigned to these FINS families, we are hoping that an AR approach could prevent placements and help keep families intact. As these are not cases which are involved in the pilot, this should not affect the evaluation. Secondly, this plan will help in equally distributing the intake work load. When or if AR case numbers increase dramatically, then this plan can be reviewed.

- ✓ We are still encountering issues with the restrictions imposed by the pilot. Not being able to choose AR cases, and not being able to switch pathways from TR to AR has impacted the AR program. However, this is common to all pilots, is temporary, and will resolve itself upon full implementation.

Lucas County **Challenges**

- ✓ As implementation has continued, we have resolved identified barriers. Case assignments from the randomizer have evened-out and we have also adjusted internal assignment of cases. The group supervision meetings have allowed our staff to address logistical issues with cases to be addressed. No new barriers have developed.

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 Pilot has yet to be integrated into SACWIS, the tracking of county level data has proven to be very labor intensive. As Ohio's AR Pilot is largely a "Paper and Pen" system, there is considerable concern about the county data will be transferred to the researcher for analysis.

Tuscarawas County **Challenges**

- ✓ One challenge we encountered this quarter was helping a family get their home weatherized. The weatherization agency would only do it if the home had insurance. It was difficult finding an insurance company. The insurance company did not want to insure this home long term and required a deposit to even get the home assessed. It took a lot of contact hours on the worker's part to get the deal processed. In the end, the weatherization agency is getting started on the project. The family's furnace has been fixed so far.
- ✓ Some community partners are still unsure of AR. There is a community culture in Tuscarawas County that still wants to penalize and find fault with the parents rather than being willing to figure out how to best support the family. The community standards and expectations for families are still high and are often compared to an individual's personal value system vs. the safety and risk factors that the State of Ohio requires us to assess. Some

community members still feel that the best place for children is foster care and there is little understanding about the trauma that children endure during removal.

Lessons Learned

- ✚ We echo the comments made in the last report about the financial "crunch" which has hit every agency, organization, employer and other institution in our community including the foundations. The biggest challenge for all of us will be to build the political will to change and to sustain our own "will" to keep this project going in the face of all the challenges.
- ✚ The things which our families need most are the exact things which are in short supply, sometimes even if there is money to pay for them. Examples of this are substance abuse and mental health assessment and treatment. Wait lists abound and affect everyone equally, whether or not they have money to pay for service.
- ✚ It is vital to continue educating the AR project with community stakeholders. This has resulted in partnerships and understanding of AR.
- ✚ Partnering with other services/resources is essential for AR service delivery but ultimately is impacted by financial considerations to implement joint partnerships/agreements to serve families.
- ✚ Many more families are appropriate for AR track services versus TR track than were originally projected, resulting in recruitment of additional staff to provide AR services.
- ✚ A less intrusive approach to family engagement doesn't diminish safety for children.
- ✚ Research and tracking efforts take lots of work and planning more than our original expectations.
- ✚ No nuggets at this point, except that lack of community services in rural counties, which already make child welfare practice difficult make AR even more so. We can engage families, they want the services, but we just do not have good, solid, stable ones in our community.
- ✚ 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.
- ✚ 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 again found that concrete services have been the most utilized of all services. Our agency has traditionally been able to meet concrete needs of our TR families, however, with AR funding, we have been able to take our service provision on step farther. For example, we could normally help families by providing enough funds to prevent a utility disconnect, however with AR 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
- ✚ Another interesting fact that we discovered this quarter is that 29% of all experimental cases had domestic violence risk factors and 39% had substance abuse risk factors. The data reflected that there was a definite overlap between those families who had domestic violence identified as a risk factor and those families that had substance abuse as a risk factor. All of the families, except for one, that had domestic violence identified as a risk factor also had substance abuse identified as a risk factor.
- ✚ 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 AR, staff not assigned to the project appear to still be struggling to understand the difference between AR and Traditional services.
- ✚ The fiscal crisis is affecting our staff and our services even as it affects our families. So, while we see families’ needs for services expand –not just more but more intense and a wider variety—concurrently, we encounter diminished availability of resources and staff to deliver. Community partners that embrace the concept are experiencing similar pressure and are being forced to draw back. This is a difficult time, but one during which the need for an approach of

this nature is most critical. We believe we are preventing removal of children by providing families with the resources to stay intact; this is not entitlement, this is simple economics and the value that guides our work.

- ✚ The CHIPS legislation is not as separated from this work as originally envisioned. We need laws that do not require us to place blame, but allow us to focus simply on the children which is where our responsibility lies. CHIPS needs to be integrated into AR.

Planned Activities

The state will focus on:

- ✚ 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).
- ✚ Ensuring that alternative response is integrated into the state's overall priorities and child and family services review performance improvement plan.
- ✚ Continuing project oversight and accountability.

Sites have selected activities that meet jurisdictional need:

- ✚ Clark County
 - ✓ 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.
 - ✓ Continuing to provide support, supervision, and skill building for the AR Unit including attendance for the entire unit at formal training sessions.
 - ✓ Continuing to address problems with access to mental health and substance abuse treatment.
 - ✓ Continuing to monitor case assignment system to see that it is working for both families and unit workers.
 - ✓ Continuing to solicit feedback from unit members and families regarding AR
 - ✓ Continuing to work with our organization's PRC and fiscal units to iron out issues regarding access to funds and services,
 - ✓ Continuing to educate the community about Alternative Response.
 - ✓ Taking advantage of the planned training and technical assistance opportunities being offered by Casey Family Programs and AIM.
- ✚ 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:

 - ✓ Securing involvement of Help Me Grow through a (rescheduled) planning with Family, Adult and Children First Council.
 - ✓ Beginning to develop a comprehensive service plan for families that have experienced domestic violence. On February 26, 2008, there is an information-sharing meeting scheduled with the county Domestic violence shelter. All other community stakeholders will be sought.

- ✓ Monitoring results of group supervision.
- ✓ Participating in Leadership Council.
- ✓ Collecting and analyzing Fairfield County data regarding needed resources for potential families to be served by Alternative Response. Data collection and analysis provides new areas of concern for gaps in services and the data supports the development of services to address these areas.
- ✓ Collaborating with law enforcement regarding domestic violence (still in the scheduling process).



Franklin County

- ✓ Making the newly translated brochures available and integrating them into alternative response work with families.
- ✓ Taking advantage of all technical assistance opportunities offered by Casey Family Programs and the AIM Team.
- ✓ Presenting on AR at the Child Abuse Prevention Conference in April 2009.



Greene County

- ✓ Exploring training regarding family engagement.
- ✓ Participating in pilot meetings and phone calls.
- ✓ Initiating team staff of cases with the Alternative Response workers and supervisor.
- ✓ Enhancing data collection
- ✓ Enhancing the use of service plans



Guernsey County

- ✓ Widening the net for what we take in to AR to more of the domestic violence cases. We generally have kept these out of AR, but want to use the information Casey is pulling together and the information from Florida to see how we can integrate this better.
- ✓ Offering the training that the National Center for Adoption Law and Policy is pulling together for the legal community here to reduce the adversarial relationship which occurs when families engage with us, but also end up in court or with attorneys.
- ✓ Planning to provide more targeted training to our staff both AR and TR on how to handle drug abuse/addiction issues in their cases.
- ✓ Planning a community wide workshop on Engagement utilizing technical assistance from Minnesota. We will be sending staff to the training being conducted in Columbus in March to evaluate the trainer to see if we might bring him to our county to work with all providers to increase community capacity for dealing with CA/N.



Licking County

- ✓ To increase the number of AR cases screened into the program. The agency identified 22 AR cases for the month of October, 26 AR cases for the month of November, and 17 cases for the month of December.

- ✓ Reducing/eliminating the number of TR cases assigned to AR social workers to allow the social worker to concentrate on services to AR families.
- ✓ Continuing to explore contracts/agreements with community agencies to provide additional services to AR families.



Lucas County

- ✓ Lucas County will continue with its assignment of Alternative Response cases.
- ✓ Supervisors and workers plan to attend the in-person meetings in January and we will also be presenting our county's perspective at the Northwest PCSAO Meeting in January.
- ✓ We will begin the process of determining which cases are remaining open as Alternative Response cases versus Ongoing Services cases.
- ✓ We will also gather information about agency wide placement statistics and specific reductions in case openings for Ongoing Services.



Ross County

- ✓ Sponsoring an in-house training on the Ohio Consumers Council for Alternative Response Workers and Supervisor. 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.
- ✓ Continuing to work with The Welcome Home Project (a local collaboration between children's division and area churches) during this quarter and continue to look for opportunities to form a relationship with new community partners.



Trumbull County

- ✓ Instituting ongoing staff trainings on the core concepts of Alternative Response, and the progress of the project.
- ✓ Remaining an active member of the Statewide AR Leadership Council.
- ✓ Beginning to use data from the first six months of service provision to refine and modify service delivery.



Tuscarawas County

- ✓ Beginning discussions within the Social Services Department to explore expanding AR to a case management worker for cases requiring longer term involvement. If AR is to become a reality statewide, we believe it would be prudent to explore how this will work from a case management perspective. We also believe this may prevent burnout for the sole AR worker and supervisor, as well as provide them peers with whom they could collaborate from an AR perspective.



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