

Casey Family Programs
and
Ohio Department of Job and Family Services

ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE PROJECT

Quarterly Progress Report April - June 2009

Introduction

Ohio's January - March 2009 report to Casey Family Programs characterized those months' activities as ones of maintenance and routinization. This same focus was sustained April – June and will continue in anticipation of the Ohio Alternative Response Project Final Report (Final Report) in March 2010. Project findings will establish the foundation to construct Ohio's programming and the decision has been made to maintain existing policies and practices until the findings are known.

April through June 2009 are notable for the external factors impacting on state and county activities, particularly the state's declining financial revenues and the biennial legislative budget agreement process. Reference to the effect of budget cuts and financial uncertainty on operations is woven throughout county and state reports.

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 partners have focused on the following aspects of project operation:

- ✚ **Ensuring that alternative response is integrated into the state's overall priorities:** State staff have spent the past months:
 - *Examining how Alternative Response fits within the new financial horizon.* The January – March report discussed the state's financial crisis as an external element significantly impacting long-range project planning. Because long-range financial sustainability was critical to state-wide expansion plans, Ohio's Alternative Response Project (Project) was developed with a cautionary independence from significant additional

state dollars. The need to avoid creating a program that relies on supplementary funding specifically was noted in the Application Package for Project County Sites:

It is recognized that supplemental project funding will subsidize, rather than support, the cost of serving families in the Alternative Response pathway. This program tracks accepted reports of suspected child abuse or neglect. Therefore, it can be assumed that the substantive portion of cases will not represent “new” families. These are reports that –regardless of the project-- can be expected to come to the attention of the agency, but which, under the auspices of the pilot, now will be served in a different manner. Each pilot site will need to consider the reallocation of existing funds; monies that would have followed these families under the traditional investigative route. Project funds are for the purposes of facilitating organizational transition and cushioning the expected, initial increase in families that receive services past disposition. Given that one of the preeminent goals of this work is post-project sustainability, it is critical that the pilots not be based upon the presumption of a large influx of new dollars, but that existing dollars can be realigned to support the bulk of this new approach to practice.

No Ohio general revenue funds are allocated to the Project at the state level. Project costs primarily are related to evaluation, training and project design; these activities utilize a blend of federal discretionary funding awarded to the states for the purpose of system reform. The service flexibility that has marked sites’ approach was supported through minimal Ohio’s Children’s Trust Fund dollars. It is hoped that the Project’s flexible dollars will provide some clarity on the most effective allocation of funding for families: do services differ when chosen by need versus availability? To acknowledge county sites’ considerable time and personnel investment, each county received a \$50,000 award from Casey Family Programs for the 18 month period.

Even so, the extent to which existing state dollars allocated to families are being reduced through new budget proposals never was anticipated nor factored into planning. While the elements that distinguish “successful” sites from “challenged” sites are not financial, it must be acknowledged that good outcomes for families –regardless of the chosen intervention pathway— rely upon agencies’ ability to make supportive services available to families. County operations and outcomes for families can be expected to reflect service cutbacks that may be necessitated by budget cutbacks. At this point, it is unclear how this will impact Project outcomes.

Alternative Response is especially relevant during these times. A new tier of family can be expected to be brought to the attention of the child welfare agency through poverty-related factors; these families are most appropriately addressed through the alternative response pathway. Additionally, the cost-savings that other states have experienced through alternative response should be especially critical. It will be the state's responsibility to ensure that these factors receive sufficient administrative attention.

- *Integrating alternative response into Ohio's Program Improvement Plan for continued sustainability and commitment:* Alternative Response is one of the four key components of Ohio's proposed plan.
- *Securing legislative authorization for continued site operation:* Both versions of the proposed the budget bill include similar language:

The Department of Job and Family Services shall develop, implement, oversee, and evaluate a pilot program based on an "Alternative Response" approach to reports of child abuse, neglect, and dependency. The pilot program shall be implemented in not more than ten counties that are selected by the Department and that agree to participate in the pilot program. The pilot program shall last eighteen months, not including time expended in preparation for the implementation of the pilot program and any post-pilot program evaluation activity. After the eighteen-month period, the ten sites may continue to administer the Alternative Response approach uninterrupted, unless the Department determines otherwise.

The Department shall assure that the Alternative Response pilot program is independently evaluated with respect to outcomes for children and families, costs, worker satisfaction, and any other criteria the Department determines will be useful in the consideration of statewide implementation of an Alternative Response approach to child protection. The measure associated with the eighteen-month pilot program shall, for the purposes of the evaluation, be compared with those same measures in the pilot counties during the eighteen-month period immediately preceding the beginning of the pilot program period. If the independent evaluation of the pilot program recommends statewide implementation of an Alternative Response approach to child protection, the Department may expand the Alternative Response approach statewide through a

schedule determined by the Department. Prior to statewide implementation, the Department shall adopt rules in accordance with Chapter 119. Of the Revised Code as necessary to carry out the purposes of this section. Until that time, the Department may adopt rules in accordance with section 111.15 of the Revised Code, as if they were internal management rules, as necessary to carry out the purposes of this section.

This language allows sites to continue uninterrupted and to expand pilot sites if so desired at the conclusion of the Project. The permission of pilot expansion prior to statewide implementation is to avoid losing momentum during what is expected to be a significant and lengthy legislative process.

- *Addressing sites' SACWIS case management and tracking issues:* The September 30th cessation of the randomization process means that, at a minimum, the number of cases assigned to the alternative response pathway on October 1, 2009 will double. As counties prepare for this event, the ability to track and record alternative response case information within SACWIS is ever more critical.

The prospect of doubling the number of cases for which information is not accessible through SACWIS also is of concern at the state level. SACWIS, MIS and child welfare policy staff have been working with pilot representatives to establish an interim solution to address case management, tracking and NCANDS reporting. The solution is considered *interim* since enhancement of the SACWIS system to accommodate alternative response will not be initiated until a final program model and language is established. It remains the state's conviction, however, that alternative response --like all child welfare programming-- must be fully functional within SACWIS when considering statewide implementation.



Ensuring access to skill development and technical assistance that is responsive to worker requests: The Leadership Council continues to examine instruction currently available through the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program in light of sites' experience regarding the skills, competencies and philosophic approach most conducive to effective implementation of an alternative response system. Currently, gaps or skill enhancement that sites are requesting are provided through the AIM Team or sources made available through Casey Family Programs. Recommendations for ongoing training enhancements or revisions will be included in the Final Report.

The AIM Team maintains ongoing contact with the county sites to ensure that practice issues are identified and addressed quickly. Effort is made to solicit input from a range of management and line workers since perspective and

issues may differ. Processes also have been established to ensure that training and technical assistance needs can be identified --by site, AIM Team or State request-- and met in a timely manner. Each site has been assigned an AIM Team member as an ongoing contact and there is a scheduled calendar of ongoing interactions and activities that include:

- Worker and Supervisor Conference Calls
- In-Person Meetings with Workers and Supervisors
- Technical Assistance Check-In
- Training Opportunities
- Coaching
- Chronicling
- Leadership Council

During this period, AIM hosted:

- One case-worker specific conference call and one combined caseworker and supervisor conference calls
- Two in-person meetings with site caseworkers and one in-person meeting with site supervisors
- Two-day on-site coaching in Guernsey, Lucas, Licking, Tuscarawas and Trumbull counties.
- One two-day Leadership Council meeting.



Building state-level support and understanding of alternative response:

State and county staff continue to work with stakeholder associations and agencies to ensure full understanding of the direction of the Project, as well as the potential impact it may have upon the roles, responsibilities and services of partner agencies. During this time period, state and county representatives participated in a number of county, state and national presentations regarding Ohio alternative response project.

Additionally, project staff disburse regular written update on project activities to a wide range of stakeholders. The Alternative Response Quarterly is dedicated to state and site activities; the Ohio Children, Families and the Courts: Ohio Bulletin has a dedicated alternative response column; and, this report to Casey Family Programs has wide distribution.

Alternative response appears to be becoming a regular consideration within planning and long-range policy sessions. Looking ahead to how alternative response may fit within the future state landscape is critical step towards state-wide implementation.



Identifying the elements that are critical to success, as well as future needs for funding and services:

Even as Ohio looks towards the Project findings in the Final Report, there are elements that easily are distinguishable now as

improving practice or as requiring attention throughout the process. For example:

- Field use of the Family Services Plan, an important part of the family engagement process, found wording and format to be awkward and repetitive. During this reporting period, the form was revised by state policy staff on the basis of site comments. Authorizing rule changes were filed and the revised form is now in use by sites.
- Much discussion in Leadership Council has focused on whether the state's philosophical framework supports the proposed shift to alternative response; current perception of the membership is that it does not. There is belief that Ohio's compliance-driven approach and rules-governance structure is contradictory to the state's proposed destination of flexible, family-driven response. Ohio has submitted an application to the Midwest Child Welfare Implementation Center to support a review of the overall construct of administrative rules that govern the state's child welfare response as well as the presumptions that underlie their promulgation. Ohio also would like to assess the state's readiness for systems change, beginning at a state-agency level, but incorporating a look at the state environment and culture as a whole. Ohio's proposal was accepted at the concept paper and interview stages. The state was invited to submit an application and is now awaiting the results of review.
- Anecdotal reporting, information gathered through pilot interaction such as worker, supervisor and coaching sessions, and chronicler's observation indicate a commonality in the factors that differentiate sites that have embraced and moved forward with programming from those that still struggle with the issues all sites encountered in earlier phases. The ability to provide appropriate resources to families –especially basic sustenance-- is a critical element in achieving outcomes and should not be minimized: services matter. During this time of fiscal constraint, however, it is important to note that the elements that define sites who are successfully transforming practice and integrating programming within the agency are not resources or funding. They are:
 - Leadership
 - Unwavering and pervasive commitment to the alternative response approach and practice
 - Transparency
 - Actions that affirm that all voices matter
 - An agency process that is parallel to the process promoted through alternative response.




Monitoring Progress and Outcomes: The fifth phase of Ohio's Project, *Project Evaluation*, runs concurrently with, but independently of, the *Project*

Implementation and Support phase. The 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. A recent IAR presentation that provides background regarding evaluation activities and time frames as well as a very preliminary look at selected data is attached. When reviewing this document, please note that caution should be taken in extrapolating conclusions at this point. This information is, perhaps, most interesting for what it indicates:

- These data could be framed as "intermediary findings" that one would hope to see. The movement in perception and various emotional responses indicates that something is changing in practice, which leads to the possibility of changes in outcomes. If there were no changes here, nothing different could be expected to occur in the longer-term measures. This does not negate the independent importance of what some might dismiss as 'feel good" responses. Sites continue to report that families are engaging more deeply in services, self-disclosing the need for services and various forms of treatment, and expanding the familial support network because of the shifting emotional response to intervention.
- These data trends follow those experienced in Missouri and Minnesota studies. Ohio has established that the outcomes realized by those states are the direction it hopes to be headed. It is promising that Ohio's very early data looks similar to how the data in those states tracked.

Significant findings in outcome measurements are hampered by the shortness of Ohio's study. Minnesota only was beginning to see families' outcomes separate at the 18 month point, with real separation occurring in later years. It is important to distinguish the differences in intent between the earlier studies of other states and that of Ohio. Ohio considers alternative response to be an evidence-based approach that has been evaluated and replicated with established positive outcomes for families. The intent of Ohio's study is not to re-prove the approach, but to identify how it best functions within Ohio's unique composite of characteristics.

 **Continuing project oversight and accountability:** Efforts continue to ensure that Ohio's project operates with an eye to model fidelity and in compliance with established state policies and procedures. At all points in the project, child safety remains paramount.

[Activities and Results](#)

All [ten sites](#) continued to offer an alternative response to accepted reports of child maltreatment. In addition to the administrative and management functions that accompany a child protection program, counties addressed a wide range of issues to

integrate new practices into overall agency structure and community network. The variety of counties' focus is reflective of the diversity of counties and the flexibility of design that is required in a state-supervised county-administered system. County-specific data can be located in the attached "County Snapshots."

Clark County focused on:

- ✚ **Developing caseworker skills:** All alternative response staff participated in training on Strengths- and Solution-Based Therapy.
- ✚ **Monitoring of the case assignment system:** As reported in earlier documents, Clark County developed an internal system for assignment to prevent unequal distribution of cases. Modeling the engagement approach of alternative response, the system was established through consensus of involved caseworkers. The activity requires flexibility but prevents workers from carrying mixed case loads, which was a desired outcome. Ongoing monitoring indicates that this is a satisfactory system both for the workers and for the families served
- ✚ **Negotiation to more broadly access funds and services:** Much of this time has been spent learning from the agency's internal PRC (Prevention, Retention, and Contingency) and fiscal units and negotiating for a more expansive access to services for alternative response families.
- ✚ **Educating the community:** All speaking engagements and child abuse and neglect training sessions in the community include information about the alternative response project in Clark County
- ✚ **Utilizing supervisors in quality assurance, model fidelity and skill development:** Supervision continues to emphasize use of engagement strategies
- ✚ **Developing a team:** Participation in conference calls and in-person worker and supervisor meetings continue to reinforce that staff are working as part of a state team that is helping to establish the direction for the state.

Fairfield County focused on:

- ✚ **Continuing to partner with Fairfield County Department of Job & Family Services - Community Services Department:** Significant state budget cuts required the agency to restructure. As a result, the Community Services' staff member designated to serve as a Resource Specialist assigned to alternative response no longer is able to accompany a member of the alternative response team on initial home visits to expedite finalization of benefits eligibility and assist with the "strengths and needs" inventory with the families. This Resource Specialist still is working with the alternative response team and families.
- ✚ **Incorporating a Financial Stability Specialist who provides direct services to alternative response families:** Provided through collaboration with the United Way of Fairfield County and Community Services, this Financial Stability Specialist works with families one-on-one with budgeting issues and identifying resources to address more difficult financial situations. Her services are being shared with all departments within the agency at this time.
- ✚ **Maintaining the partnership with a local mental health organization for early childhood/adult mental health and behavioral assessments:** This endeavor

has eliminated families from a “wait list” for assessment purposes and secured mental health services for 42 individuals to date. Additionally, this piece of alternative response partnership has allowed our child welfare agency to identify the service modality that best suits the family’s needs.

✚ **Integrating group decision-making into regular practice:** The framework utilized in Olmstead County has been integrated into clinical supervision and screening decisions as established practice. This has proven to be an effective way to assure safety of children and provide services to families that are open, honest, and family-driven. This concept has now been incorporated into other service delivery units within our Child Protective Services Agency. Formal framework, policy and procedure has been established and has been overwhelmingly been welcomed by staff and managers.

✚ **Educating the community to promote alternative response and overall safety of children:** Recent cuts in state financial resources have forced the agency to significantly modify outreach activities. The alternative response team continues to take advantage of every opportunity to present to groups and other organizations. Formal presentations have been provided to the local Bar Association and educators within county schools.

✚ **Exploring development of a community response to Domestic Violence:** The county’s alternative response team aspires to develop a comprehensive service system to more effectively address the increasing number of domestic violence reports. Alternative Response partnered with the domestic violence shelter to submit a proposal for an Avon Foundation grant aimed at increasing and providing more comprehensive services for families living with domestic violence. The program would assure a quick response to and assessment of needs for the family who are in the midst of crisis. The team is eager for the Casey Family Programs programming that will be offered on this topic.

✚ **Expanding services:** Through the alternative response process, Help Me Grow and the alternative response team developed recommendations to assure successful linkage with services. Initial meetings have taken place to modify existing practices to promote more effective collaboration on behalf of families referred to Help Me Grow. This is an exciting and growing partnership that holds much potential for families.

Franklin County focused on:

✚ **Ensuring that alternative response is internally integrated within the agency’s composite child protection programming:** This has included monthly internal group meetings with the two Intake and two Ongoing alternative response units. These meetings are used to share information, discuss common issues and alternative response workflow, and to staff critical decision points with a teamed decision-making process. In preparation for expansion of alternative response, these meetings have been opened to traditional service teams. The opportunity to watch and participate in staffing of alternative response cases helps dispel misconceptions about alternative response, promote transfer of learning, and create interest in the approach.

- ✚ **Educating the Community:** Ensuring that the community understands the philosophy of alternative response and how it fits within the agency's overall mission and vision is an important and ongoing component of programming. All the many mandated reporter trainings that are provided to stakeholders include education regarding alternative response. In addition, staff participated in a local news program to share the alternative response message with the community.
- ✚ **Expanding partnerships:** It is an ongoing activity to meet with community stakeholders including schools, hospitals and mental health providers to increase awareness of alternative response and to discuss how new and/or different partnerships can benefit shared goals. These past months, staff also held a meeting with five Settlement Houses to share information about alternative response and to increase partnership with neighborhood based organizations.
- ✚ **Increasing access to services:** Staff have developed a Request for Proposals (RFP) for Home Management Services to support the provision of hard services to families in the most cost effective manner with the goal of increasing family's ability to access needed services in their own neighborhood. This RFP is designed to have a school attendance incentive-based program to service families that struggle with school attendance issue. Additionally, staff are working on RFP to provide needed services to families that struggle with issues of domestic violence as this is a gap identified in service availability.
- ✚ **Increasing staff:** Two MSW students have been added to the alternative response project; one with clinical focus and another with administrative focus.
- ✚ **Attending the Disproportionality/Differential Response Summit:** This summit was hosted by the American Humane Association through its national Quality Improvement Center on Differential Response. Staff also presented at this event.

Greene County focused on:

- ✚ **Enhancing family engagement skills:** The agency's alternative response staff and other caseworkers throughout the agency attended a one day workshop conducted by Bob Bertolino, PhD on family engagement. The agency has also contacted Sue Lohrbach, from Olmstead County in Minnesota, to provide targeted training to the agency's entire casework staff on family centered, strength-based practice. It is hopeful that this training will occur in the fall of this year.
- ✚ **Continuing to participate in pilot meetings and phone calls:** The agency continues to be active with its participation in face-to-face meetings for workers and supervisors and the Leadership Council. Staff participates in worker and supervisor calls, which have now been combined into one call. Betsy Blankenship, alternative response caseworker, helped to facilitate the last call.
- ✚ **Having alternative response workers and supervisor team-staff cases:** The supervisor and workers have been meeting together regularly to discuss cases. Benefits of these meetings include coming up with creative ideas regarding services and brainstorming ideas for involving the community. The supervisor finds that the group process is more likely to identify family strengths, while the workers tend to have more tunnel vision in one-on-one supervision. These

meetings have also served as a place for the workers to vent when issues arise. Alternative response workers are beginning to mentor the traditional workers in their same unit by having joint meetings to discuss cases. This will assist in the transfer of knowledge for the expansion of alternative response. The unit plans to continue these meetings in addition to individual supervision.

✚ **Enhancing data collection:** Much effort was devoted to maintaining a data base with information regarding the agency's alternative response cases. Unfortunately, the data was inappropriately sorted on the shared drive and saved. When this occurred, the data was inaccurate and not able to be used. The supervisor has spent countless hours recreating the information. This has led to delays in providing information to IAR and delays in billing for service plan involvement.

✚ **Enhancing the use of service plans:** The number of service plans being written has increased. The supervisor believes the workers are becoming more creative in the ways that family needs are being met through the service plans.

Licking County focused on:

✚ **Educating the community:** Staff have continued to meet with community groups, providing ongoing update on the agency's progress with alternative response. 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 in our county. We have also expanded the scope of our AR staff to work with the Licking County Juvenile Court in response to the court awarding custody of delinquent/unruly children to the agency. Our Children Services administrator and agency Director met with the Licking County Juvenile Court judge and provided him with information about our existing alternative response program. Our Juvenile Court Judge, Judge Robert Hoover, has been very supportive of the program and rallied the alternative response cause during a training he was giving to new judges in our state.

✚ **Engaging staff and developing skills:** Staff continue to participate in teleconferences for alternative social workers and supervisors. The agency takes advantage of available technical assistance and enjoyed having Russell Rowenhorst visit our agency on June 25th and 26th as an alternative response coaching opportunity. Russ was so knowledgeable and helpful, not only to our alternative response staff but the traditional response staff as well. Alternative response social workers and screeners spent the first day of his visit discussing practice issues; the second day was devoted to traditional and alternative response social workers, as well as ongoing/family development unit workers and supervisors. As not only a trainer and educator, but a practicing alternative response (Family Assessment) social worker, his wealth of knowledge was impressive. His visit not only provided concrete answers to our practice questions, but gave us inspiration and enthusiasm.

✚ **Finding creative solutions for families:** The funding allocated to each family via the service plan has allowed the agency to be creative in providing needed concrete services.

Lucas County focused on:

- ✚ **Integrating alternative response forms and process with ongoing processes:** The required CAPMIS documents continue to be completed on all cases and the agency began using the revised service plan in June 2009.
- ✚ **Implementing joint supervision:** Joint Supervision is now held with staff on a monthly basis and supervisors review individual cases with their workers bi-monthly. New assignments are reviewed prior to initiation for an assessment plan.
- ✚ **Developing family engagement skills:** The alternative response coaches came to Lucas County in June 2009 and worked with individual alternative response caseworkers in developing engagement strategies with families.
- ✚ **Participating in project activities:** The Project Manager and the North District Supervisor from Lucas County attended the in-person meetings in May 2009.

Ross County focused on:

- ✚ **Engaging families and community partners:** On June 12, 2009, Ross County Children's Services sponsored an Alternative Response Family Day. This was a fun filled day which brought alternative response families together with both agency staff and our community partners. This event was full of interactive games and activities that were enjoyed by all that attended. Each child/family in attendance that wanted to was afforded the opportunity to take either an individual or family picture and then we helped them make picture frames for their pictures. Community Partners such as the YMCA, National City Bank, Westmoreland Nursing Home and Western & Southern Life set up informational booths on site. The YMCA provided information to families on their programming for the summer which included a summer camp. National City Bank provided informational tips on financial planning and Westmoreland provided information on careers in the field of nursing. Western and Southern Life actually took the fingerprints and pictures of children to complete child identification cards for parents to help ensure child safety. This was a very successful event. The attendance was great and families, the agency, and community partners were able to gather and share in a fun and informative day.
- ✚ **Strengthening group-decision making skills:** As Ross County prepares for the anticipated increase in alternative response cases, the entire Intake Unit participated in a two day facilitator training which was provided by Victoria Solomon. This training was excellent as it focused on the importance of group decision-making when working with families and managing the facilitation process. A facilitator tool kit was distributed to provide staff with principles that easily transfer from the classroom to the field.

Trumbull County focused on:

- ✚ **Increasing the program's "profile" within the Agency:** "Progress and Developments" has been added as topic of discussion during the agency's monthly Supervisors Meeting. This meeting is held on the first Monday of the month, and all agency Administrators and Supervisors are required to attend.

- ✚ **Establishing daily routines:** The alternative response caseworkers are now familiar with alternative response rules and forms and appear to be more comfortable about their roles and expectations.
- ✚ **Educating the community:** During this period, the Agency's alternative response staff have made two community presentations.

Tuscarawas County focused on:

- ✚ **Communicating progress to the community:** Staff routinely communicate the progress of alternative response with the community through our Foster Care Planning Committee quarterly meetings. This group came together to find ways to reduce the number of children in foster care, and alternative response updates have become a regular part of the agenda because it is believed to have contributed to a reduction in the number of children removed from their families and placed in foster care. The number of children in foster care placement decreased from 127 in July 2008 to 96 as of June 30, 2009. Although not solely responsible for this change, alternative response has made an impact.
- ✚ **Educating schools:** In May 2009, the Protective Services Supervisor mailed a letter to all school districts within the county providing an overview of the alternative response approach. A copy of the newsletter, Alternative Response Quarterly, was included.
- ✚ **Expanding the approach within the agency:** The alternative response approach has moved beyond our Protective/Investigation unit into both Case Management (CM) units. Both CM supervisors and one staff member from each unit have been trained in alternative response. This change served two purposes: (1) to allow CM workers who have experience in handling cases for a longer duration to take on the alternative cases which require a lengthier involvement and (2) to begin spreading the work of alternative throughout the department in preparation for adopting alternative as a practice standard throughout the agency.
- ✚ **Experimenting with group supervision:** Coaching with Brenda Lockwood (Minnesota) was recently completed. As a result, we are experimenting with group supervision as a means to focus on core issues from a strengths-based perspective.

Successes

All *ten sites* report:

- ✚ Families are more engaged and satisfied
- ✚ Workers are more satisfied with their roles/responsibilities
- ✚ Enhanced community awareness, support, collaboration & participation

Examples of family successes are highlighted in the attached "County Notes." Agencies also report systemic successes and achievements:

Clark County:

- ✚ **Staff** energy, commitment and involvement remain at a high level.

- ✚ **Families continue to report satisfaction** with the assessment process and **access to "hard" services**. Alternative response workers continue to note the improved relationships they experience with their families.
- ✚ **Access to flexible funds** continues to be a great advantage to our families.
- ✚ Positive interest in and response to alternative response by **community service providers** continues. The Pilot Leader was asked by Cluster Supervisors and the Family and Children First Council to come to a meeting and update the group on the implementation of alternative response in the community. Overall response from the Cluster Supervisors was positive and supportive.
- ✚ Staff continue to work with the Fiscal Unit to clarify procedures for **accessing funds, goods and services**.

Fairfield County:

- ✚ The success of **group supervision and decision-making** has been adopted by other areas of the department and has become a crucial part in decision making regarding family cases opening for on-going services with the agency.
- ✚ Agency continues to receive numerous **thank you cards and letters from families** served in alternative response.
- ✚ The agency continues to receive **positive feedback from partner agencies**. This has increased interest from other service providers on how we can collaborate more efficiently in serving families.
- ✚ Several families have experienced success from our agency's ability to provide a **non-traditional service** delivery system. One example can be seen in our ability to assist a family threatened by the possibility of adoption disruption due to living conditions and mental health issues. The family received a positive inspection after the parents and family team invested much time in the home. Mental health services have been secured for members of the family and they have been linked to respite services through PASS application. All of these services were possible as a result of approaching the family in a manner focused on identifying root cause behaviors after establishing a trusting relationship.

Franklin County:

- ✚ The Intake and Ongoing units have developed **close partnerships** with each other while implementing alternative response. Intake and ongoing workers meet jointly with a family to assure a warm handoff to the next service team. They are working together with families to develop service plans, all taking place in the comfort of the family's homes. We have also listened to families when they express that they would like to remain with the Intake service team. We have allowed the lines of Region and Intake to be blurred when it will encourage the family's participation in needed services. We believe that **listening to the needs and desires of families** is important and whenever we can meet those needs we make efforts to do so. We have **not allowed our traditional work roles to inhibit progress for families**.
- ✚ It is believe that **placement costs** will continue to be impacted through increased engagement with families. The agency has implemented a team approach to critical decision making in alternative response. We have come

together as a team to discuss the possible need to place children in an out of home care setting. In these team meetings we have been able to **prevent placements** that have often looked inevitable. The team approach brings a wealth of knowledge, shared responsibility and accountability to the table which impacts the decisions that are made. In the more than 600 families that have been assessed through alternative response, three out-of-home placements have occurred, one resulting from Blind Orders from the court.

+ **Team decision-making** is a tool that can be used in the development of staff. Caseworkers have the opportunity to lead the discussion as they present their case and staff around the table reap the benefit of learning from all participants in the group. Teaming has resulted in **increased creativity** in searching for solutions which has resulted in positive outcomes for families.

+ **Families do not seem to feel the stigma** that often comes with involvement with children service agencies. Parents have been willing to participate in Family Listening Sessions to talk about their experiences with our agency and ultimately to inform our practice for the future. They have also been willing to share their testimony in conferences and other venues when invited to do so.

+ **Shared responsibility for child safety is occurring.** In one team meeting, two cases were staffed. It initially was thought that placement would be inevitable for both. One case involved an unsafe home and educational attendance issues and the other involved a drug positive infant at birth. In both cases we were able to enlist extended family members and friends to help parents to assure the safety of their children while parents received the intervention needed to address root causes of the concerns (mental health and addiction). Parents were able to remain in the home with their children with supports in place. The mental health issue and addiction issue are not resolved at this point and may not be in the near future but a level of safety was achieved that allows these parents to parent their children when able to do so. A safety net has been built for other family members to step in if the parents are unable to safely care for the children. These examples confirm that the responsibility of assuring safety need not fall solely in the hands of an agency, but can be shared by family and community.

Greene County:

+ While there have not been any new large scale system successes, the Alternative Response Unit continues to have **client successes** day after day. Please see the attached "County Snapshots." for examples.

+ On a system wide basis, the county still enjoys a **close collaboration with system partners** in support of Alternative Response, particularly our Alternative Response Advisory Group members (CDJFS, Help Me Grow, Family and Children First Council, and our adult community drug, alcohol, and mental health provider). Within this last quarter, we have experienced involvement of our Regional Parent Advocacy Coordinator in the Alternative Response Advisory Group and are considering developing a Parent Council with her assistance.

Licking County:

- ✚ Maintaining an equitable case load with uncertain numbers has been challenging. Our alternative response social workers have been accepting traditional cases in order to reduce the work load for the traditional response social workers. Last quarter, however, we decided to assign alternative response social workers those FINS cases where the Juvenile Court has notified us that the Court is planning to award custody of delinquent/unruly children to the agency. We have assigned alternative response social workers to these FINS families, in an attempt to utilize their special skills to **prevent placements and keep families intact**. We feel that the Court has listened to our recommendations and that we have been successful in keeping some of the children in home with services as opposed to an automatic placement as in the past. This plan also has helped in equally distributing the intake work load. If alternative response case numbers increase dramatically after the randomizer then this plan can be reviewed.
- ✚ The alternative response social workers continue to appreciate and enjoy 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.

Lucas County:

- ✚ Families and staff continue to provide generally positive feedback on alternative response. One family declined to have the alternative response coaches conduct the interview with them present and only wanted the worker in their home. We believe this was an excellent example of the ability to **empower families through the alternative response process**.
- ✚ Staff are finding **solutions with families**. Case examples can be located in the attached "County Snapshots."
- ✚ Lucas County continues to work with families to identify specific needs that will assist them in **functioning after our case is closed**. Typical expenses are rent, utility bills, food, clothing, appliances, and furniture. However the agency has also assisted families with job training for nursing assistants (STNA) and dog grooming supplies. Both of the families that we have assisted with STNA training have completed the class work and fieldwork. One of the mothers called to thank her worker upon graduation and stated that she had started to look for work.
- ✚ Most families have not required financial assistance, but rather **assessment and case management services** from the alternative response staff.

Ross County:

- ✚ **Alternative Response Family Day** was a very successful event. The attendance was great and families, the agency, and community partners were able to gather and share in a fun and informative day.
- ✚ Economic hardships continue to present barriers for our alternative response families. During this quarter we witnessed first hand the benefit to families when **barriers are removed**. Case-specific examples can be found in the attached "County Notes."

Trumbull County

- ✚ **A year of service provision without any major issues or problems** should always be considered a success.

Tuscarawas County

- ✚ It has been said that the most significant change about alternative response is **the way we view families**. Staff worked with a mother whose case previously had been handled through the traditional response, resulting in a loss of her child to the permanent custody of the agency. She had a new baby which necessitated our involvement again. This time, we were able to assess safety/risk utilizing the alternative response approach and determined that this parent had made life altering changes that supported her keeping the newborn in her care.

Obstacles and Challenges

All **ten sites** report:

- ✚ Difficulty in working outside of SACWIS/Maintaining dual documentation system
- ✚ Caseload Demands
- ✚ Wanting more families/cases to receive alternative response than are eligible during pilot
- ✚ Concern about how alternative response caseload will be managed when randomization is eliminated
- ✚ Tension between alternative and traditional response workers, although this has been resolved in varying degrees

Sites each have encountered systemic obstacles that continue to challenge :

Clark County:

- ✚ **Systems are not inherently designed to promote flexibility**. As alternative response brokers new partnerships, it requires working within sometimes difficult guidelines. For example, along with the successes in working with the Fiscal Unit come the additional challenges of securing "quotes" for the purchase of certain goods.
- ✚ The agency **lost the services of the Mental Health and Recovery Board consultant** due to non-renewal of his contract with the Board. He had helped us to access services.
- ✚ **Access to substance abuse assessment and treatment services** remains an enormous challenge.
- ✚ Access to mental health assessments and treatment for both adults and children is a challenge. **Long waiting lists** continue to be an issue in our community.
- ✚ **Services for the "working poor"** remain most difficult to access.
- ✚ Severe budget cuts have necessitated the **cutting of agency contracts** for purchase of supportive services for client families. There are **fewer services** to which we can refer our families.
- ✚ **State budget cuts to programs** such as Help Me Grow will severely impact our ability to assure safety of children in their own homes.

- ✚ The **uncertainty of the state budget** situation makes it impossible to predict what future staffing levels will be, or to predict our ability to provide needed services. There is bound to be some impact on our ability to serve all families, including alternative response families.
- ✚ Training is a process, and there **continue to be training needs** for staff working in alternative response. Even though workers attended training on using a strengths-based approach, they continue to have training needs, particularly around engagement skills.
- ✚ Working with a family using the alternative response approach takes more time with the family than a traditional investigation. With staff cutbacks and additional responsibilities **it will be increasingly difficult for workers to spend as much time** with their alternative families. The concern is that this will affect their engagement and effectiveness with their families.

Fairfield County

- ✚ 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.
- ✚ Given the philosophy of alternative response, many reports coming into the agency are very appropriate for alternative response. The agency had identified three alternative response team members to serve alternative response families through CPS; even then staff had relatively high caseloads. Recent state budget cuts have forced a shift in casework staff, duties and priorities. **Alternative response caseloads are the highest they have been thus far in the project.** In fact, the alternative response manager has had to shift the managerial duties associated with alternative response and project evaluation to working a case load.

Franklin County:

- ✚ **Working outside of the SACWIS** system has created tracking issues, double case assignment occurrences, incorrect record checks etc. Franklin County is working with SACWIS developers and ODJFS policy staff to develop an interim solution for this concern.
- ✚ “Engagement” is a process that benefits from time. During peak seasons (during months that school is in session) **available service time** is not at an optimal level. Organization is developing solutions to address peak season times.
- ✚ Encouraging staff to **participate in worker/supervisor calls** to connect/share with other pilot counties can be a challenge. The agency is working to increase participation and contributions to agenda topics to assure topics meet the needs of participants
- ✚ **Service gaps** are being identified, especially related to domestic violence and educational attendance interventions. The agency is working on RFPs and training to address these types of risk contributors

Greene County

- ✚ None of the small obstacles we have experienced are insurmountable. An ongoing concern is the **change management process**, particularly how to stage levels of change. A continuing issue is identifying the 'right' time to introduce more information about alternative response to staff and the community. This is a large scale change that will occur over time but it is very connected to the long range plan of the agency. It needs to be viewed that way instead of as a pilot program. This takes constant attention and communication.

Guernsey County

- ✚ Some partner entities still do not understand they cannot refer a family for the program. No matter how many times we try to explain, we can walk out of a community presentation and still have a referral the same day to "alternative response." This will be eliminated as the agency looks to simply integrate the process and it is no longer a study issue.
- ✚ The agency needs to work on having referrals made for "child maltreatment" rather than as a referral for alternative response as a service. This is a struggle here as many agencies see alternative response as a chance to get a service that is not available unless a family first meets the primary catchment of reported and accepted child abuse and neglect. The agency will continue to hone its message and work to a wider change in the message for the change from pilot status.
- ✚ There are general factors that involve the budget environment and the potential loss of staff as tied to service delivery level, as with any type of case.
- ✚ There is challenge in moving all staff to this approach. It takes time to integrate the message to all staff.

Licking County

- ✚ We are still encountering issues with the **restrictions imposed by the pilot**. Not being able to choose alternative response cases and not being able to switch pathways from traditional to alternative response pathways has impacted the program. However, this is common to all pilots, is temporary, and will resolve itself after the randomizer period ends.

Lucas County

- ✚ SACWIS issues continue to be a challenge. Particularly, **it is difficult for workers to switch back and forth between traditional cases and alternative response cases when both are not accessible in the computer system**. Also, when Lucas County originally planned staffing needs for the project it was anticipated that the assigned workers would have a "clean" caseload of AR cases. Because of the number of cases that have been received from randomization and increased workload of traditional cases, this has not been possible. Lucas County also reduced the number of workers to attempt to accomplish the dedicated caseload, but this has still not resolved the issue. Further reduction of AR staff is not anticipated due to coverage issues.
- ✚ An additional difficulty encountered has been **keeping all agency staff apprised** of AR progress. Lucas County Children Services employs nearly 400 staff.

Training of AR was offered prior to implementing the project. Since all staff were not required to attend, and because it is now a year later, many staff have lost the knowledge they gained, aside from those who work directly with AR families each day. The agency is planning to feature AR stories in its bi-monthly newsletter that is distributed to all staff to address this issue. We will also begin training again in the fall in anticipation of discontinuing randomization of cases.

Ross County

- ✚ **Access to mental health services** is an ongoing obstacle. In this county, we continue to have long delays from the time that a referral for service is made and the initial appointment time. We have tried multiple solutions including in-house mental health contracts to no avail. Due to the small caseloads that the alternative response workers have been able to carry, they have been able to work more closely with these families to act as a support and monitor until traditional mental health services can be initiated. Through the utilization of family team meetings, alternative workers have also had success identifying a supportive network to embrace families while traditional services are pending. We have found that these supportive networks of friends, family and community partners have been a key factor to provide long term stability for families.
- ✚ Due to the current economic state with both federal and state financial cuts which directly impact counties and the services we are able to provide to families, Ross County continues to struggle with planning post pilot stage in light of the **elimination of flexible funds** with which to creatively respond and meet families' needs.

Trumbull County

- ✚ Because the Project has yet to be integrated into SACWIS, the **tracking of county level data** has proven to be very labor intensive. This problem has increased proportionally as the number of cases assigned to the alternative response program has increased.
- ✚ A **disproportionate number of cases are remaining in alternative response** for a prolonged period of time. As of the writing of this report, 1/3 of the cases currently open in alternative response have been open greater than 100 days. This backlog is being to erode the flow of the system.
- ✚ As the agency's program moves ahead, it will be difficult, if not impossible to formulate our long-term plan until we know the State's final position on allowing the **assignment of Dependency reports to the alternative response pathway**.

Tuscarawas County

- ✚ The schools continue to have **traditional investigation expectations** from our county. However, we hope the letter sent before school recessed will aid in a better understanding of the work of alternative response as will our continued work in the community utilizing the alternative response approach.
- ✚ The **current state financial crisis** causes some trepidation as to what work at the county level may look like and will we be able to help families access needed services.

- ✚ The work of alternative response could be advanced more smoothly if the state would be more **flexible in how funding can be utilized**.

Lessons Learned

- ✚ The **internal complexity of accessing funds** within our organization was an unexpected challenge. Looking back, it would have been advisable to start working on this earlier in the implementation process. (Clark)
- ✚ **Early training in engagement skills** would be advisable. Changing our approach to abuse/neglect and to initial contact with a family sounds easier than it actually is to implement. (Clark)
- ✚ It is vital to **continue educating community stakeholders**. This continues to promote partnerships and increased understanding of alternative response. Due to staff and management personnel actively working cases, this important aspect of the alternative response process has been somewhat lessened. (Fairfield)
- ✚ **Partnering with other services/resources is essential** for alternative response service delivery but ultimately is impacted by financial considerations to implement joint partnerships/agreements to serve families.(Fairfield)
- ✚ There are many service provision lessons, perhaps the most important being **the importance of quick linkages with needed services** identified by clients. Over the duration of the pilot, staff and service providers have been working to improve this. (Greene)
- ✚ We are constantly learning **the importance of ‘family voice’** in all of our services. Alternative Response has given us a new linkage with parent advocates which will benefit the entire agency long term. (Greene)
- ✚ In terms of roll-out, the budget crisis may very well pose a risk and the message is critical. We must be on the same page language-wise with what alternative response really means. It is possible that Ohio missed it with “alternative.” **The word itself has connotations** for people and entities as opposed to “differential.” This may seem minor, but needs to be considered. (Guernsey)
- ✚ **We do not see any impact on placement avoidance** at this time. (Guernsey)
- ✚ The agency is continuing alternative response **weekly team meetings**. Discussing cases and sharing ideas has been very productive in managing cases. (Licking)
- ✚ Once again, **concrete services have been the most utilized of all services**. Our agency has traditionally 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 on step farther. For example, we could normally help families by providing enough funds to prevent a utility disconnect. Alternative response funding has permitted payment not only of the disconnect bill but also has 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.** (Licking)

- ✚ One of the most valuable results of the project's **flexible funding** was the ability to contract with a private counseling service in order to receive expedited mental health assessments. ([Tuscarawas](#))
- ✚ The pilot's **flexibility in funding** has permitted exceptional purchases that have resulted in positive outcomes for families. For example, flexibility has allowed the agency to pay for: a temporary apartment for a father so that he could live apart from the family while undergoing counseling for his emotional abusiveness issues; STNA training for a mother to improve her ability to earn enough to support her children; and, the insurance deductible in order for a client to obtain counseling. ([Tuscarawas](#))
- ✚ The agency has begun utilizing the **Clinical Decision Making Framework Model** which has proven to be particularly effective in planning our work with families. ([Tuscarawas](#))

Planned Activities

State:

- ✚ Enhancing case management and tracking capacity within SACWIS.
- ✚ Supporting sites' "post-randomizer" plans.
- ✚ Implementing skill development opportunities supported by Casey Family Programs.
- ✚ Building alternative response into state's ongoing priorities.
- ✚ Project oversight and accountability.

Clark

- ✚ Plan for agency-wide implementation of alternative response and submit report to the AIM Team by August 31, 2009.
- ✚ Participate in coaching activities in July to improve our implementation of alternative response and to assist staff with skill levels.
- ✚ Begin training of intake workers who are not currently using the alternative response approach in order to prepare for agency-wide implementation.
- ✚ Continue to emphasize engagement skills in supervision including the taping and critiquing of interviews.

Fairfield

- ✚ Involve Help Me Grow through a rescheduled planning meeting with the Family, Adult and Children First Council.
- ✚ Receive notification regarding Avon Foundation Grant; continue developing a comprehensive service plan for families that have experienced domestic violence.
- ✚ Continue monitoring results of group supervision.
- ✚ Continue participation in Leadership Council.
- ✚ Continue 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.
- ✚ Collaborate with law enforcement regarding domestic violence.

- ✚ Develop strategies for October and the completion of the randomizer. This will include consideration of the number of family situations appropriate for alternative response services, case load size and looking ahead to the integration of alternative response into SACWIS.

Franklin

- ✚ Review Family Listening Session feedback.
- ✚ Conduct numerous scheduled speaking events.
- ✚ Plan for expansion of alternative response.
- ✚ Plan for post-randomization.
- ✚ Continue effort to address service gaps.
- ✚ Increase exploration of team decision making meetings/group supervision.
- ✚ Explore Appreciative Inquiry and how it can be incorporated into alternative response.
- ✚ Respond to a Call for Presentations for national Differential Response Conference.

Greene

- ✚ Maintain the service delivery standard currently in practice.
- ✚ Plan for transition from randomizer and expansion of unit.
- ✚ Train new Alternative Response staff and all on-going staff.
- ✚ Communicate Alternative Response successes with community providers and public.
- ✚ Assess impact of local budget cuts on services to Alternative Response clients.
- ✚ Use impact information to determine service gaps.

Licking

- ✚ To increase the number of alternative response cases screened into the program.
- ✚ Reduce/eliminate 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 families.
- ✚ Plan for accommodating increased numbers of alternative response reports after randomizer ends. The agency, together with the Intake social workers, will be discussing a “sliding scale” approach by training current traditional response social workers in alternative response practice and philosophy
- ✚ Finalize an agency-wide plan in reference to alternative response case transfer. At this point, alternative response intake social workers are maintaining the case if the case is deemed to require additional services past 45 days through 90 days or beyond. Agency supervisors will be developing a more concrete plan as non-court involved alternative response case numbers increase and hopefully court-involved cases decrease in number.
- ✚ Develop an internal “checks and balances” review system to aid the social worker in making timely and effective decisions for the family.

Lucas

- ✚ Continue with random assignment of cases through the end of September 2009.
- ✚ Continue the planning process for alternative response implementation throughout the county. Discussions have been held with management staff and alternative response workers. We will provide information to Direct Services Managers and Coordinators in July 2009 to continue with this planning process.
- ✚ Begin Regional Training Center planning for to train additional alternative response Lucas County staff, as well as regional staff in the fall of 2009.
- ✚ Attend the In-Person meetings and National Differential Response Conference this summer and fall.

Ross

- ✚ Host a two day on site coaching session with Russell Rowenhorst on July 16-17. We are very excited about this and to ensure a transfer of learning we have included the members from the entire division to participate along with specific community partners.
- ✚ Continue to develop a plan for alternative response after the pilot.

Trumbull County

- ✚ Conduct on-going staff training on the core concepts of alternative response and the progress of the project.
- ✚ Remain an active member of the Leadership Council.
- ✚ Outline how the Agency will transition to post-randomization. This must be in the form of a formal written plan that is submitted to the AIM Team by August 31, 2009. This plan must include the following items:
 - Data collection consequences
 - Staffing consequences
 - Anticipated community services consequences
 - Rationale for our decision. What is the company line, what is the word to the public about why the agency has chosen to go forward with the work?

Tuscarawas County

- ✚ Finalize the agency's transition plan.
- ✚ Train two more alternative response intake workers.
- ✚ Begin development of a plan to make alternative response a fact of life throughout the Social Services department.