


STATE OF WISCONSIN
Department of Children and Families
Division of Safety and Permanence

DSP Memo Series 2009 - 09 /ACTION
December 1, 2009
Re: Competitive Award Process for the
Alternative Response Pilot Program

To: Area Administrators/ Human Services Area Coordinators
Bureau Directors
Child Placing Agency Directors
Child Welfare Agency Directors
County Departments of Community Programs Directors
County Departments of Developmental Disabilities
Services Directors
County Departments of Human Services Directors
County Departments of Social Services Directors
Indian Child Welfare Directors
Licensing Chiefs/Section Chiefs
Tribal Chairpersons/Human Services Facilitators/Indian Child Welfare Directors

From: Cyrus Behroozi 
Administrator

Introduction

In order to develop the most appropriate, most effective, and least intrusive response to child maltreatment reports, the Wisconsin Legislature authorized a pilot of an alternative response approach to child protective services in four counties and the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare. Alternative Response is an approach to child protective services (CPS) that is family focused and strengths based in supporting child and family well-being. Key principles to an alternative CPS response approach are:

- Child safety is the first goal of intervention;
- Families are fully informed about the child protective services process and the legal rights of parents and children are protected throughout the case process;
- Parents have primary responsibility and are primary resources for their children;
- Families and communities are responsible for assuring that children are safe and protected;
- Families' natural supports are included in the intervention process;
- Case planning is a collaborative, team process that is based on the strengths and needs of families; and
- Services are community-based and culturally responsive.

Background

Nationally, there is increased concern that the traditional response to child maltreatment reports is inflexible and often adversarial. While this approach is usually viewed as intrusive intervention, it is used effectively to gather evidence in serious cases of child maltreatment to support a court case. An alternative response approach typically delineates two separate pathways or responses to CPS reports. Some states also employ a third pathway that serves cases through the provision of community services when a report is identified as not meeting the state's criteria for abuse or neglect.

Initial pathway assignment depends on an array of factors (e.g., presence of imminent danger, level of risk, the number of previous reports, the source of the report, and/or presenting case characteristics such as type of alleged maltreatment and age of the alleged victim). Initial pathway assignment can change

Document Summary

This memo describes the process for county child welfare agencies to apply to pilot an Alternative Response Approach to Child Protective Services Cases. Proposals are due to the Division of Safety and Permanence by January 7, 2010. Announcement of site selections will be made by January 31, 2010.

based on new information that alters safety threats or levels of risk. Reports assigned to an alternative CPS response are CPS cases and receive the same prompt and active attention as a traditional CPS response. These are not low priority cases; rather they can just be served more effectively using a supportive, collaborative approach.

The purpose of the program is to allow the development of improved procedures for the response to reports of child maltreatment. National data for existing alternative response models shows that for lower to moderate risk cases, a non-adversarial, non-threatening family assessment approach enhances parental engagement and increases the likelihood of voluntary participation in services; when parents feel less under CPS surveillance and experience less stigma, they typically engage more positively in the change process.

A central tenet of alternative response is that many children and families that come to the attention of CPS are better served using a supportive and collaborative approach that focuses on strengths and needs of a family and is free of the constraints and stigma of an investigation. By redesigning the ways in which CPS responds to screened-in reports of alleged child maltreatment, an alternative response approach may create more flexibility for agencies and their staff in identifying and addressing family needs.

Competitive Site Selection Process

Pilot opportunities will be offered to county agencies through a competitive site selection process. The four county agencies selected will each receive \$10,000.00 to support enhancing the county service array, training of child welfare staff and community stakeholders particularly the law enforcement and legal systems, and community meetings and outreach.

This competitive selection process will evaluate, score, and rank applications in the following proposed general areas:

- 1. Agency Structure and CPS Training and Experience.....25 points**
 - Describe the agency structure; the number of staff that will be involved in the pilot; the worker case load size; and the supervisory workload (including worker to supervisor ratio).
 - Describe supervisor and staff CPS experience; supervisor and staff training experience especially in the areas of Safety, Access, Initial Assessment, Engaging, and Teaming; and Cross-system training and experiences.
 - If the agency is a Community Response site, discuss success and barriers to implementation and program fidelity.
 - If the agency is **not** Community Response site, discuss success and barriers in referring families for community services.

- 2. QSR or Other Review Findings.....25 points**
 - If there has been a QSR in the county, summarize the findings;
 - If there has been another type of review (Egregious Incident, pilot for other QSR type reviews), discuss the findings;
 - Describe any technical assistance or training needs as a result of a review or other activities within the county.

- 3. Proposed Implementation Approach.....25 points**
 - Provide a statement of agency need;
 - Describe how supervisors and staff involved in this pilot will focus attention and be solely responsible for the CPS process;
 - Describe how pilot process will be introduced to CW stakeholders;
 - Discuss strategies and plans to involve the community to provide services for families participating in the pilot program.

4. Collaboration.....25 points

- Describe current collaborative efforts with legal and law enforcement partners that will support the pilot process. In situations where these efforts need to be enhanced, discuss strategies and plans to engage legal and law enforcement partners in the pilot program.
- Describe collaborative efforts with the medical community and how medical partners will be involved in the pilot program process
- Letters of support from law enforcement to include but not be limited to 1) an acknowledgement that the Alternative Response program overview was reviewed, 2) the support for the county agency piloting process, and 3) the agreement to participate in peer training to support the implementation of the pilot program and a description of the plan to update the MOU, if needed;
- Letter of support from the district attorney's office or the corporation counsel's office to include but not be limited to 1) an acknowledgement that the Alternative Response program overview was reviewed, 2) the support for the county agency piloting process, and 3) the agreement to participate in peer training to support the implementation of the pilot program;
- Letter of support from the circuit court to include but not be limited to 1) an acknowledgement that the Alternative Response program overview was reviewed, 2) the support for the county agency piloting process, and 3) the agreement to participate in peer training to support the implementation of the pilot program;

Pilot sites will also be required to participate in evaluation, including but not limited to collecting and providing data related to the impact and effectiveness of the alternative response pilot program. The evaluation will include as assessment of implementation issues encountered, as well as the overall operation of the alternative response program and recommendations for improvement.

In addition, the evaluation will include, but not be limited to, the following:

- The turnover rate of child protective services caseworkers providing services under the pilot.
- The number of families referred for the traditional CPS response and the alternative CPS response.
- The number of families that accepted and declined services offered via a traditional CPS or alternative CPS response.
- The effectiveness of the Access function in determining the appropriate type of response.
- The impact of the program pilot on the number of out-of-home care placements.
- The availability of needed services to address the issues of child and family safety, risk of subsequent abuse and neglect and family strengths and needs in the community.
- Rate at which children referred for each type of response (traditional and alternative and community, when applicable) are subsequently subjects of new reports.
- Satisfaction of families referred for each type of response.
- Cost effectiveness of responding to reports in the manner provided under the pilot.

For any questions regarding this process, please contact Connie Klick at (608) 266-1489. Proposals are due by 5 p.m. on January 7, 2010 and may be sent to the Division of Safety and Permanence, 201 East Washington Avenue E200, Madison, WI 53708 or emailed as a Word document to Connie.Klick@wisconsin.gov.

REGIONAL OFFICE CONTACT:

AREA ADMINISTRATORS

CENTRAL OFFICE CONTACTS:

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Attachments:

[Draft Program Guidelines](#)
[Alternative Response Q and A document](#)