

QIC-DR Colorado Consortium

Project Abstract

The Colorado Consortium on Differential Response consists of the Colorado Department of Human Services Division of Child Welfare; Colorado State University; Westat; and the counties of Arapahoe, Fremont, Garfield, Jefferson and Larimer. The consortium, under the direction of a management team, plans to implement and research differential response in these counties. Counties were selected through a request for proposals process for their dedication to innovative and collaborative practice and desire to participate in the program.

The Colorado Consortium plans to follow American Humane's core principles of differential response implementation. Screened-in referrals of alleged child maltreatment will be assigned either to a mandatory investigation for high-risk cases or to a family assessment response (FAR) for low- and moderate-risk cases. FAR eligibility is based on the following criteria identified by American Humane:

- 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.

For the purpose of evaluation, FAR-eligible cases will be randomly assigned to either the investigation pathway or the FAR pathway. Based on 2008 data from Colorado Trails (Colorado's SACWIS), the five counties estimate that at least 5,000 cases will be eligible for the

FAR pathway during a one-year period. A sample size of 900 for each group is projected, based on an 80 percent projected response rate for the random sample of families for which data will be collected.

In the FAR pathway, workers will conduct a comprehensive assessment of family needs and strengths. There will not be a maltreatment determination or use of a central registry for families served on the FAR pathway. Workers will



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use a menu of family engagement strategies in the delivery of services and ongoing assessment of safety and risk. These menu elements include safety-focused family partnerships such as those in the Signs of Safety model, solution-focused therapeutic methods and various forms of family-involved decision-making processes. Family support money will be available to provide flexible funding options in FAR cases. Families can decline services without consequence unless there are implications for child safety. If it is discovered in an assessment that the level of risk to a child meets the threshold for investigation, the case can be reassigned to the investigation pathway.

Other essential components of the project are training and community education at all levels, including administration, supervision and casework. Community education on the principles of differential response and the FAR pathway will be delivered by consortium management team members to interested entities and identified community partners.

The Social Work Research Center at Colorado State University and Westat will conduct a rigorous program evaluation, using random assignment, to determine whether differential response is an effective approach to child protective services. Specifically, the evaluators will conduct process, outcome and cost evaluations. The process evaluation will assess the fidelity of implementation of the differential response model, and will employ interviews and focus groups to assess community involvement in differential response. The outcome evaluation will analyze administrative data to examine safety and permanency outcomes, both initial and intermediate, for children and families receiving services under the differential response model. To ensure collection of the most applicable data, the Colorado Trails

(SACWIS) team is already a collaborative partner in the research design. The outcome evaluation will also administer family exit surveys and caseworker surveys to examine parent and caseworker satisfaction with the process. The cost evaluation will investigate the costs incurred in developing, maintaining and sustaining differential response and compare costs associated with the FAR and investigation pathways.

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