

## SOAR Consortium (The Ohio Project)

### Project Abstract

The Six Ohio Counties Alternative Response (SOAR) Consortium unites six county-level public children services agencies (PCSAs) in Ohio — Champaign, Clark, Madison, Montgomery, Richland and Summit — and our evaluation partner, the Human Services Research Institute.

Family and Children Services of Clark County, the lead agency, has completed its second year as one of 10 counties in the Ohio Alternative Response pilot. Thus, the composition of the SOAR Consortium is similar to the hybrid option described in the QIC-DR's *Final Report of the Information Summit on Research and Evaluation* (2009), combining a mature site (Clark) with the other five counties as new sites.

The SOAR Consortium is a grouping of geographically distinct yet similarly minded counties unified in their approach to child welfare. Each is committed to enhancing safety, family stability and permanency, and experienced in using evidence-based and best practices. The Consortium is united in its commitment to organizational and practice improvement and to the advancement of knowledge about child welfare. Each partner has already made considerable investment in and commitment to the core values of differential response: family engagement and flexible, supportive services dictated by needs expressed by the family. Each has built local collaborative, community-based systems that are the ideal foundation for differential response.

Also, the Human Services Research Institute has more than 30 years' experience in program evaluation.

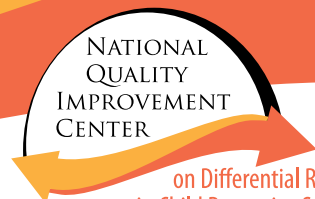
The SOAR counties possess characteristics representative of the state-supervised, county-administered child welfare system in Ohio and of Ohio's population. For example:

- Eleven percent of Ohioans are African American; 10 percent of the population in the SOAR Consortium counties is African American.
- Almost 15.8 percent of families with children under the age of 18 live in poverty in Ohio; the same percentage of families with children under 18 in the SOAR Consortium counties lives in poverty.
- Fourteen percent of all new allegations of abuse and neglect in Ohio occur in the counties that make up the SOAR Consortium; similarly, 14 percent of all Ohio children in custody are in the six counties.

The SOAR Consortium also represents enough variability to supply valuable information about how differential response works in different settings. For example, variables include:

- large counties versus small counties;
- free-standing PCSAs versus PCSAs as divisions within combined agencies;
- racially diverse counties versus more homogeneous counties;
- urban counties versus rural counties;
- small cities versus large cities; and
- PCSAs with many child abuse and neglect reports versus those with few reports.

The SOAR model builds on the Ohio alternative response model, which is patterned after



on Differential Response  
in Child Protective Services

the Minnesota model. The key components of the SOAR model are:

- Dedicated caseworkers grouped in units, with an ideal of one worker per case;
- Ongoing training and coaching;
- Differential response as the explicit model to follow and adherence to model components;
- A broad service array, including use of “informal” services and supports; and
- Extensive interagency collaboration.

### The SOAR Evaluation Planned by the Human Services Research Institute

1. Implementation study: Focus on the process of adopting differential response, fidelity to model, changes in agency culture and practice (including service array), agency leadership, management style and worker skill; gather data through site visits (interviews, focus groups), caseworker survey and fidelity checklist; and analyze differences among sites, grouping the sites on characteristics such as size, maturation and organizational structure.
2. Outcomes study: Focus on child safety (need for placement, re-report of child abuse and neglect, re-entry to PCSA) and family experiences (functioning, satisfaction, services); obtain data from SACWIS and through case-level worker survey and family follow-up survey; and analyze differences between randomly-assigned alternative response (AR) and traditional response (TR) cases, and separately for Clark County compared to the other five SOAR counties.
3. Cost study: Focus on the cost of implementation and ongoing

operation of AR versus TR pathways, at the agency level (program implementation costs) and family level (worker and service costs); and gather agency-level data through interviews, worker survey and expense records, and family-level data through SACWIS, purchased services contract data and staff time log.

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