

Alternative Response Pilot underway

On July 1, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, in partnership with the Supreme Court of Ohio, a team of national consultants, and Casey Family Programs, kicked off an 18 month project to study a new prototype for responding to reports of child abuse and/or neglect: **Alternative Response**. This program includes a rigorous research component that will provide ongoing evaluation and monitoring of various child, family and system factors.

Alternative Response is a formal response that assesses needs of the child or family without requiring a determination that maltreatment has occurred. The Alternative Response pilot will allow public children services agencies (PCSA) to provide families the option of a non-investigative, family-friendly assessment and utilize a less structured, more family driven approach to delivery of services. Alternative Response does not replace the traditional assessment/investigation, which still is most appropriate for certain types of cases, especially those which may involve criminal activity and require evidentiary documentation. Instead, Alternative Response offers caseworkers another option for response, recognizing that child of abuse and neglect comes in many different forms, as individual as the families we serve.

“We are pleased to partner with the Supreme Court of Ohio and Casey Family Programs on this important initiative,” said Director Helen Jones-Kelley. “Our first line of defense is early intervention. This program will offer services to children and families well before a crisis occurs, and will empower caseworkers to promote a more constructive and beneficial relationship between families and our community.”

Ten PCSAs are participating in this pilot. These PCSAs include Clark County Department of Job and Family Services, Fairfield County Department of Job and Family Services, Franklin County Children Services Board, Greene County Children Services Board, Guernsey County Children Services Board, Licking County Department of Job and Family Services, Lucas County Children Services Board, Ross County Department of Job and Family Services, Trumbull County Children Services Board, and Tuscarawas County Department of Job and Family Services.

As with Ohio’s traditional response, child safety is the heart of alternative response. Alternative Response is based upon the premise that, for many families, child safety is most successfully maintained through

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services and that services are most effective when families are engaged. The following principles form the foundation for Ohio’s alternative response:

- Provide families the opportunity to make an informed decision to participate in alternative response pathway or be served by the traditional pathway.
- Assess child safety through practices that are child-centered and family-focused.
- Engage families in a partnership where the labels of perpetrators and victims have been removed.
- Identify families’ strengths and needs by emphasizing the engagement of families.
- Develop creative solutions, including informal supports and formal services, by emphasizing the engagement of families while attending to underlying conditions and contributing factors which interfere with child safety.

Alternative Response is designed to help better serve and respond to the diverse, individual needs of the children and families in Ohio. It emphasizes the importance of creating partnerships between families and the child welfare agencies and community agencies designed to serve them. Working in collaboration, families’ strengths and challenges are identified and solutions are implemented to ensure child safety and well-being while keeping families together. Alternative Response is designed to help protect children and ensure their safety and well-being by strengthening their family.

GOT NEWS?

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