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## Coming Your Way: Assessing Your Agency's Sustainability Of Its Differential Response Child Protective Services System

By Caren Kaplan, American Humane Association

While there is no single agreed-upon definition of "sustainability," one straightforward definition is "the continuation of a program or initiative beyond the period of initial funding and operation." Given that we live and operate in a rapidly changing environment, we run the risk of losing quality programs and innovations in the absence of sustainability planning. While it is never too late to start planning for the sustainability of your Differential Response Child Protective Services (CPS) System, the earlier you start, the more likely it is that you will be able to expeditiously identify that which is most important to maintain and demonstrate that it warrants sustainability.

Sustainability planning and activities are integral to the operations of all seven implementation drivers (i.e., staff selection, training, coaching, performance assessment, outcomes data, facilitative administration and systems change) and ensure model fidelity of the Differential Response CPS System. This deliberate examination allows the agency and its staff to clarify the current implementation status and identify the road to travel. It is an opportunity for the reflection, re-ignition and remediation of those aspects of system reform that are not relevant to preserve.

### Sustainability Webinar

On June 27, 2011, the American Humane Association conducted

a 90-minute interactive webinar on Sustainability of Differential Response with the Round 1 counties. Participation in this webinar was open to any interested staff of these 10 counties — Clark, Fairfield, Franklin, Greene, Guernsey, Licking, Lucas, Ross, Trumbull and Tuscarawas. The first half of the webinar provided an overview of salient sustainability concepts/issues that need to be considered and tracked. This brief presentation provided a foundation for the second half of the webinar — a discussion among the Round 1 counties on the ways in which they are affected by and are attending to these sustainability issues.



The slides of this Webinar are posted at: <http://www.americanhumane.org/children/programs/differential-response/current-projects/ohio-alternative-response.html>

### Sustainability Visits

Each county, after more than one year of differential response implementation, will be offered a one-day sustainability visit from American Humane Association consultants. Currently, our expectation is that all Round 1 counties will receive a sustainability visit during the third quarter of fiscal year 2012 (January 1-March 31, 2012). Likewise, plans will be made collaboratively with

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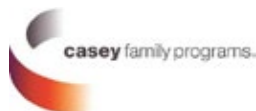
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THE SUPREME COURT of OHIO

Ohio

Department of  
Job and Family Services



## Coming Your Way

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Round 3 counties (Ashtabula, Athens, Coshocton, Erie, Hamilton, Hocking, Huron, Mahoning, Medina and Washington) for sustainability visits during the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2012 (April 1 - June 30, 2012) and with Round 4 counties (Butler, Carroll, Delaware, Miami, Putnam, Sandusky, Scioto and Seneca) during the first quarter of fiscal year 2013 (January 1 - September 30, 2012).

Prior to on-site consultation, counties will be provided with a self-assessment

tool that will help determine the strengths of and challenges to the sustainability of a public children services agency's Differential Response System. This self-assessment is to be completed in advance of the visit and is comprised of the same components as the Differential Response Readiness Assessment, plus several additions, that indicate competency in the planning for, implementation of and responsiveness to sustaining a Differential Response Child Protection System.

Much like the readiness visits, pre-visit consultation with each county is intended to make visits meaningful

and productive. The goal of the visit is to examine essential financial and programmatic elements for continued effectiveness and long-term survival of the Differential Response Sustainability Self-Assessment, used in conjunction with the in-person sustainability consultation, allows each county to appraise its current state of differential response sustainability and provide the information needed to develop a targeted written plan that can provide ongoing guidance.

*Assure, ensure and endure...*

## The Expansion of the Ohio Intimate Partner Violence Collaborative: The Safe And Together Model, A DR Practice Enhancement

*Jenifer Thompson and Denise St. Clair,  
National Center for Adoption Law &  
Policy*

Over the past year, the National Center for Adoption Law & Policy (NCALP), the Ohio Department of Job & Family Services (ODJFS) and David Mandel and Associates (DMA) have developed a plan to expand *Safe and Together* model training to additional Ohio DR counties. Based on the highly successful *Safe and Together* demonstration project conducted in Franklin, Fairfield, Clark and Ross Counties, the expansion plan is two tiered: in Year 1, DMA will directly train two additional two-county cohorts while simultaneously certifying Ohio based trainers to expand training potential in Years 2 - 5.

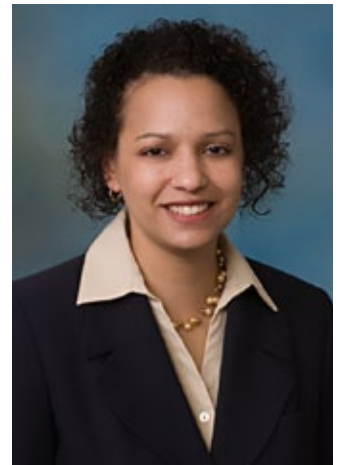
The expansion plan commenced with the announcement of Trumbull and Tuscarawas as the first county cohort to be trained, beginning in October. A second county cohort will be announced later this fall, and will begin training in March 2012. The county cohorts will receive a nine day training package, plus a community partner training day and 3 onsite technical assistance days for each individual

county. Supervisors will receive an additional two days of supervisor training. Training enhancements also include a series of conference calls with DMA offered to the counties throughout the training period.

While conducting the training of the two county cohorts, DMA will also train and certify two cadres of Ohio-based trainers. The trainer certification plan is premised on a "train-the-trainer" type model aimed at enhancing model sustainability and fidelity across Ohio counties. Trainers are chosen through an application process overseen by NCALP, DMA and key ODJFS staff. Trainers selected will participate in DMA's "train the trainer" package that is focused on developing skills in a number of areas, including: training, consultation and mentoring, communication, cross system collaboration, critical thinking, audience engagement, and model history and development, much of which is presented simultaneously with the trainers' observation and/or co-training of a county cohort. Additionally, trainers are required to complete online reading materials and a certification test.

Upon successful completion of these requirements, DMA will provisionally certify the trainers. Full certification will be awarded after DMA's observation of the trainers' delivery of three individual trainings. Trainers will be certified for two years, after which they are expected to apply for a two year recertification.

County child protection agency and ODJFS staff who participated in the demonstration project were invited to apply to become the first cadre of Safe and Together trainers. Four people were selected to participate: Kristi Burre, Melissa VanFossan, and Lynne Rodriguez from Franklin county, and Dorothy Striker from ODJFS. Focusing on building capacity and long-term sustainability, the second training cadre will be selected primarily from an applicant pool from those counties



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### Expanding the Safe and Together Model (continued from page 2)

that have received the training prior to March 2012. Those who are familiar with the *Safe and Together* model who are committed to implementing the skills in practice are invited to apply.

By the end of Year 1 of the expansion plan, it is expected that between 10 and 14 trainers will be certified and ready to begin training additional Ohio counties with DMA's oversight and technical assistance. An additional 14 counties are anticipated to be trained in Year 2. After Year 2, although DMA will retain all rights to the materials, training, and certification process, training responsibilities will transition to the certified Ohio trainers. ODJFS, or its designee, will provide oversight. To better ensure a county training schedule that builds training capacity consistently statewide and enhances sustainability, ODJFS and a selection

team will continue to set the order of counties to be trained. County selection will be based on a variety of factors, including, but not limited to: geographic location, comfort with DR practice, county interest, and length of time implementing DR. The end goal of the expansion plan is for all Ohio counties to have an opportunity to receive the Safe and Together training.

The HealthPath Foundation of Ohio provided essential support to the Ohio IPV Collaborative during the demonstration phase, directly supporting the work of the Ohio Domestic Violence Network (ODVN). ODVN, the State-recognized Domestic Violence Coalition, provided technical assistance to the pilot counties and will continue to provide that assistance to the next county cohort, at least through the end of 2011. ODVN's wealth of resources and information, and its assistance in integrating partner DV

agencies into community discussions, was critical to the success of the demonstration project.

In the development of the expansion plan, substantial emphasis was placed on model fidelity, practice sustainability, and the value of DMA's continued oversight and technical assistance, as well as the critical importance of cross-system collaboration through the cross-systems implementation of *Safe and Together's* precepts. Now, with planning concluded and expansion beginning, all partners anticipate that the "train-the-trainer" model will allow for maximum *Safe and Together* model fidelity and sustainability over the long term. Further, the model tested here, in addition to creating robust local training capacity, has the potential to be utilized by DMA nationwide, making the Ohio experience a template for other state IPV programs.

## American Humane Association's 2011 Conference on Differential Response in Child Welfare

American Humane Association is holding its 6th Annual Conference on Differential Response in Child Welfare — *Giving Voice to Vision: Effectively Engaging Youth and Families in Child Welfare* — on Nov. 8-10, 2011, in Chicago.

We are very excited about the variety of presentations offered and hope you join us as we continue to explore exciting advancements taking place around the country in this practice. Our goal for this conference is to provide opportunities for open dialogue and shared learning among individuals involved in or working along the child welfare continuum, with a keen interest in improving the outcomes of children and families who are involved in, or have the potential to become involved in, the child welfare system.

New to the conference are the pre-conference skills-building institutes that will take place on Tuesday, Nov. 8. These are full-day intensive trainings that will allow you to increase your knowledge in addition to expanding the scope of the conference.

You can find more information and register on our website at: <http://www.americanhumane.org/children/programs/differential-response/>



## Nurturing Community Partnerships: Erie County's Aiding Children's Excellence Awards

Erie County Department of Job and Family Services (ECDJFS) holds an event annually to recognize the individuals in Erie County that go above and beyond to help the children and families in the community. This is a celebration to recognize the outstanding work and partnerships that assist in keeping children safe each and every day. This year on April 27, 2011, the agency held our event at the Sandusky State Theater, where more than 175 individuals attended and enjoyed dinner made by culinary students from Ehope Vocational School. The night welcomed casual conversation and the opportunity to enhance and support relationships in the year-round effort to look at the needs of the community. Local businesses donated items to be raffled off throughout the evening to show their support.

The agency looks forward to the banquet each year to show how much they appreciate the efforts and services of those who help support the mission of ECDJFS. These relationships have assisted in making differential response a success in Erie County. The continuous support from the county's Family and Children's First Counsel and the County Commissioners has allowed the Children Services Unit to advance in the practices of child welfare service delivery within Erie County. This team effort has assisted

in preserving families and providing services that are identified by the family to meet them where they are at.

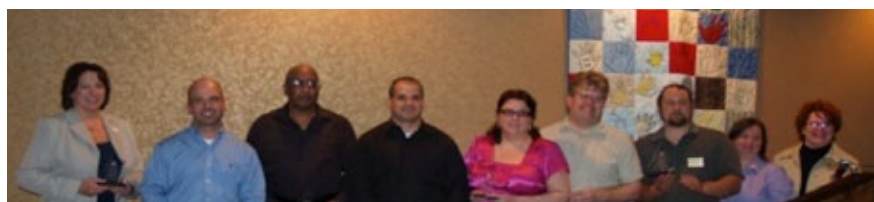
This year, the agency recognized more than 39 individuals and/or organizations who were nominated for an Aiding Children's Excellence Award and more than 44 individuals, businesses or groups who made the holidays exist for 283 children and families by providing dinners and gifts. This year's Law Enforcement winner was Det. Sgt. Jared Oliver, chosen for his willingness to assist caseworkers 24 hours a day in any way he can. He is a tremendous resource to the agency and ensures safety is paramount. The agency's Foster Parents of the Year, Thomas and Irene Kazmierczak, truly welcome children not only into their home, but into their hearts.

The family has had multiple sibling groups in their home and has been an ongoing support for the family after reunification has been achieved. The Sandusky State Theater was selected as the Business or Group of the Year for the ongoing opportunities they provide to families that may not be able to attend otherwise. The Sandusky State Theater has put on free movies while providing popcorn and pop, as well as hosting fundraising events for children in need in the community. Children have been able to participate in programs and musicals, giving them the opportunity to perform on stage. The Educator Award this year was presented to Sharon Schaeffer, who coordinated and secured funding for the first-ever children ages 0-11 health assessment. This has provided the

community with data that can assist in service planning for children and families that is a reflection of the needs identified. Bill Myers was selected as the award recipient for the Public or Private Non-Profit Social Service Agency or Individual of the year. Bill provides youth in the community with behavioral therapy through equine therapy, which has been a very effective intervention in enhancing communication skills in their interpersonal relationships. The Volunteer of the Year was awarded to Chico Alexander. Chico is a retired



*Erie County Department of Job and Family Services*



*2011 Aiding Children's Excellence Awards (Left to Right)*

*Educator: Sharon Schaeffer, Erie Co. Health Dept; Public or Private Non-Profit Agency or Individual: Bill Myers, therapist; Volunteer: Chico Alexander; Law Enforcement/Attorney: Det. Sgt. Jared Oliver, Erie Co. Sheriff's Dept; Foster Parents: Thomas and Irene Kazmierczak; Business or Group: Sandusky State Theater*

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Nurturing Community Partnerships  
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law enforcement officer who works with Wraparound, mentoring children who have gotten in trouble or who have behavioral issues due to their special needs. Chico is an ongoing support for youth in the community.

This year, the agency added another category to recognize the outstanding efforts and dedication that one individual puts forth every day as a law enforcement officer. Erie County was saddened at the loss of Sandusky Law Enforcement Officer Andrew Dunn on March 19, 2011. Officer Dunn was a great inspiration to all of the children in the community and aspired to make a difference in the lives of the children he came in contact with through his job. Officer Dunn worked with the Erie County Children Services Unit on many cases. He will be remembered each day through our memories and in our hearts, but also by recognizing someone each year in the category of the Officer Andy Dunn Award.

## We Want to Hear From You!

If you have an idea or would like to contribute a short article to the *Alternative Response Quarterly* newsletter, contact Rene King at (303) 704-6105 or [renek@americanhumane.org](mailto:renek@americanhumane.org).

**Thank you!**



## Carla's Corner

*Carla Carpenter*



It's hard to believe that just one year ago, we started on the journey to transition differential response in Ohio from a successful pilot to a fully integrated, statewide child welfare practice. So much has been accomplished during the past year! In the fall of 2010, counties in Rounds 2 and 3 were just beginning to serve families through an alternative response (AR) pathway. Now, one year later, we have enacted a statutory foundation for statewide implementation, and there are 33 counties practicing differential response with another group of counties soon to be selected for the next round of implementation.

In August, following several months of planning and preparation, the eight counties in Round 4 (Butler, Carroll, Delaware, Miami, Putnam, Sandusky, Scioto and Seneca) began serving families with an alternative response approach. The Round 4 counties also selected two representatives to serve on Ohio's Differential Response Leadership Council. Elaine Evans from Scioto County and Jennifer Horstman from Putnam County were welcomed to the Leadership Council during its September meeting. Congratulations to Jennifer and Elaine! The 15 voting members of Ohio's Differential Response Leadership Council reflect counties of every Child Protection Oversight and Evaluation (CPOE) size category and geographic region from around the state.

In September, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services released a Request for Applications (RFA) for the next round of differential response expansion. As with previous rounds of implementation, the RFA represents much more than simply a competitive proposal process driving the selection of counties. This application process provides guidance to assist counties in thoroughly examining their readiness for differential response implementation.

The format of the RFA provides a framework for exploring the various decisions and factors that impact the strength and fidelity of implementation, including the county's planned structure for providing the AR approach; involvement of staff in planning efforts; selection of staff for AR practice and supervision; support for staff implementing this practice shift; partnership with the community; model fidelity and outcome measures; and sustainability of the practice. The time spent by each county in planning and developing its application is an important up-front investment in the agency and community infrastructure needed to support this work.

We look forward to welcoming Round 5 counties later this fall and working with this next group of counties to support the continued growth of Ohio's differential response practice.



## Interdisciplinary Child Welfare Institute: Changing the Way Future Advocates Learn

*Janifer Thompson, National Center for Adoption Law & Policy*

Few service systems rely as heavily on the successful intersection of such a broad variety of professional stakeholders as the child welfare system. Academicians and practitioners alike are in agreement that effective collaboration among professionals is of paramount importance in achieving safety and permanency for children. However, there are few opportunities for current students and future child welfare professionals to engage in developing the necessary skills to work together effectively.

To help meet that need, for the past three years Capital University Law School, home of the National Center for Adoption Law & Policy, has offered masters-level social work and law students from across the country the chance to engage in interdisciplinary learning through the Interdisciplinary Child Welfare Institute (ICWI).

ICWI is an intensive, one-week, interdisciplinary graduate-level course that provides students with a foundation of mutual understanding of legal and sociological principles in child welfare work and strategies for effective multidisciplinary practice among child-serving professionals. To aid the interdisciplinary learning experience, the course is co-taught by a law professor and a social work professor. The 2011 class, held during the last week of July, was taught by Angela Upchurch, associate professor of law at Capital University Law School, and Rhonda Reagh, Ph.D., MSW, former assistant director of the Public Children Services Association of Ohio and former director of Greene County Department of Job and Family Services.

The ICWI class format is very interactive and covers topics critical to interdisciplinary child welfare work, including federal policy and law, history and basics of child welfare, recent developments in child welfare, family relationships and family rights, child development and the impact of trauma, screening processes, assessment, case planning, liability issues, record creation and record keeping, interviewing children, client counseling, introduction to trial work, permanency planning, the elements of a differential response (DR) approach, and alternative dispute resolution in child welfare cases.

ICWI students also engage in numerous experiential learning opportunities, including mock interviews, the utilization of practicing caseworkers for witness preparation, guest speakers and panels of foster youth and foster parents. To end the week, ICWI hosts a professional networking lunch with local, state and national child welfare professionals to offer words of encouragement and practical advice to the students.

Throughout the week, students are also introduced to cutting-edge practice and policy innovations from the national perspective, such as differential response. Students learned how DR was integrated into screening, intake, service planning and termination. They also learned how comprehensive family assessment was integrated into alternative response (AR) and traditional pathways. Small-group experiences were offered in class that assisted students in understanding how screening decisions were made and in determining what

cases could be assigned to an AR pathway. In addition, the final exam included an essay question where AR could have been selected as an intervention strategy. Students from outside of Ohio were encouraged to go home and find out where their states stood on DR implementation.

Over the past three years, ICWI has hosted 95 total students, 44 of whom were visiting students from 19 different states. Student evaluation of the course has been overwhelmingly positive. Over the years, several students have commented that ICWI provided a more global perspective of child welfare and the need for collaboration. Other students commented on the need to ensure that differential response is practiced in their state. One student this year noted, "I feel like I know more about the process and the need for a holistic approach. It helped put a 'face' to some issues."

In addition to students, ICWI is open to licensed social workers and attorneys for professional credit. Over the past three years, 10 professionals participated in the Institute for credit, and in 2011, 10 caseworkers participated as mock witnesses during the trial preparation portion of class. A professional who participated this year commented, "This course should be mandatory for prospective CPS attorneys." Another said, "The interviewing exercise was excellent ... A lot of caseworkers would benefit from it."

**For more information about the ICWI, call (614) 236-6730.**



## Sandusky County's Successful Community Orientation

The Sandusky County Department of Job and Family Services was one of the counties selected to implement differential response during the Round 4 rollout in Ohio. A Differential Response (DR) Implementation Team was formed during the application stage to tackle each phase and step of implementation. The team was represented by each unit within the agency (Supervisors, Investigations, Ongoing, Adoption/Foster Care, and QA). The Implementation Team was further broken into subcommittees: Financial, Community Forum, Training, Survey and Tracking. The Community Forum Committee met several times after the Initial Readiness visit from Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) and American Humane Association. The Community Forum Committee consisted of Melanie Allen, family resource unit supervisor; Judi Simon, social program administrator; Tami Ward, intake/investigation supervisor; Dorothy Richie, quality assurance specialist; Linda Ackerman, training officer; and Allison Zam, family resource unit worker.

The first undertaking was setting a date that worked for our administration and county commissioners. Melanie Allen attended the commissioners' meeting with the agency director, Cindy Bilby, to discuss differential response and schedule the community forum at a time most convenient for all of them. Once we selected a date and time that also

worked with staff at American Humane Association, we proceeded with further planning.

During our Community Forum planning meetings, we developed a list of people and agencies that would need to have information on differential response and therefore should be invited to our community forum. We compiled a list of commonly utilized service providers (e.g., CASA, mental health agencies, health department, doctor offices and schools). We also added any boards or council groups that may be impacted by differential response (e.g., Bar Association, Wraparound, and Family and Children First Council). Schools, banks and churches were added to our list. We made sure that we included other administrators in the Child Support Enforcement Agency, the Job Store, and Family and Individual Services (FIS) within our DJFS. The list also included adult and juvenile probation, the prosecutor's office, local law enforcement agencies and judges. The list was kept as a shared document accessible by all DR Implementation Team members.

Ideally, we wanted to make as many personal contacts as possible to encourage attendance. In all, about 40 different agencies and people received a personal phone call from at least one member of our team, including a news reporter at our local newspaper. The newspaper ran an article the week before our event explaining differential response and also provided the date and time of the Community Forum. We had many positive responses to our phone calls and invitations. Many of the people contacted directly committed to attending the forum.

Team members also worked on the invitations. Once the invitation was finalized, we mailed or hand-delivered more than 120 invitations to our Community Forum. Children Services staff members were also made aware of the date and time of the forum, and their attendance was also encouraged. The majority of the staff attended the forum.

During our Community Forum committee meetings, we also discussed the agenda, timeframes, the need for a sign-in sheet and what we needed to do for food. We organized a simple breakfast put together by a local grocery store. The cost of the forum was minimal as we only spent \$184

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Sandusky County  
(continued from page 6)

on food. There were 84 people in attendance during our forum.

Rene King with American Humane Association presented general information on DR, the history of DR in Ohio and how it has impacted casework practice. Linda Ackerman and Melanie Allen then presented a slide show on implementation issues specific to Sandusky County. We have also scheduled individual sessions with other community support agencies as a result of the personal phone calls and invitations that were mailed.

Overall, this Community Forum was successful due to the time we took to personally contact our stakeholders and those people who would be most interested in the impact DR will have in this county. We were pleased with the support we received from staff, the county commissioners, CASA, law enforcement and various other community partners.

The Sandusky County DJFS Implementation Team from left to right (photo on previous page): Melanie Allen, Sherry Ward, Jami Hill, Dottie Richie, Judi Simon, Allison Zam, Gabby Henry and Tami Ward. Not pictured: Amy Reinhart, Linda Ackerman.

## OCWTP Supportive Training for Differential Response

*Nan Beeler & Mary Kay Hawkins*

The Ohio Child Welfare Training Program (OCWTP) currently offers several training courses and delivery methods that support the skills and competencies needed to implement differential response. Topic areas include:

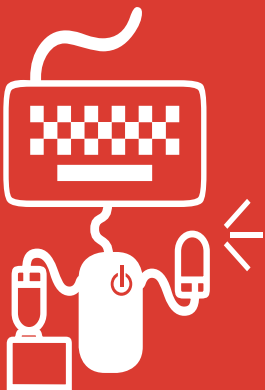
- Assessment
- Engaging families
- Specific interview techniques
- Culture and diversity
- Domestic violence (partnering with families)
- Creative problem solving
- CAPMIS assessment model
- Solution-focused work
- Facilitation of groups
- Neglect
- Developmental disabilities
- Sexual abuse
- Trauma
- Mental health
- Substance abuse
- Worker safety

Some of these topics are offered using alternative delivery methods, such as web-based training, embedded self-directed learning assignments, skill-building learning labs, tool kits and coaching. The CAPMIS Toolkit is one example of an alternative

delivery method that Ohio counties may recently have utilized. (Find the CAPMIS Toolkit at <http://ocwtp.net/CAPMIS/capmishome.html>) Workers and supervisors should select trainings that meet workers' specific training needs and consult with their Regional Training Center for assistance.

ODJFS, OCWTP and American Humane Association have developed a transition plan to address future differential response training and coaching needs for Ohio workers and supervisors. OCWTP is currently preparing and approving Ohio trainers to train the *Differential Response Primer*, the two-day curriculum developed by American Humane Association. Several Ohio trainers already have co-trained with the American Humane Association trainers.

In addition, OCWTP serves on Ohio's Differential Response Statewide Implementation Team. Two task teams of the Implementation Team are dedicated to strengthening Ohio's training and coaching capacity in relation to differential response. Through the work of the Implementation Team and its task groups, OCWTP and county and state partners will be developing strategies and recommendations for a differential response coaching network to support Ohio's growing differential response practice.



## Register Now for the Webinar Series

Does your agency work independently in your community? Are you geographically isolated or do you have limited resources to attend trainings or conferences? These sessions on differential response practice, implementation and supervision are designed to provide easy access to topical information for anyone interested in differential response with families.

Webinar topics range from engaging fathers, to handling domestic violence cases, to safety planning and more.

Learn more about the series and register online at [www.americanhumane.org/differential](http://www.americanhumane.org/differential)

# County Spotlight: Greene County Collaboration Starts at Home

*Shelley Brecount*

When the Alternative Response Pilot was introduced in Ohio, Greene County Children Services recognized the positive impact that this family-centered, strengths-based practice would have on the children and families we serve. The agency was one of the first 10 counties to pilot alternative response (AR). Piloting AR has provided the agency with some great opportunities for building partnerships with local families, as well as building partnerships within the agency.

Prior to the AR pilot, the decision of whether or not a referral of abuse or neglect was accepted as a report was made by the screening supervisor and/or another assessment supervisor. Occasionally, some discussion between the assessment supervisors would occur regarding the acceptance of a referral, but this was not the norm. Following the AR pilot, each accepted report that was eligible to be assigned to alternative response was submitted to the randomization process. The randomizer software program would then determine if the case was assigned as alternative response (AR) or traditional (TR). All cases would be assigned to the appropriate unit and caseworker, and placed on the Assessment Assignment Board on a rotation basis. This was our protocol for some time.

One aspect of AR that was introduced to the pilot counties was the “Red Team” group decision-making concept. Initially, we felt that our agency’s decision-making process did not need to be reorganized. Through the voices of our caseworkers, however,

it became clear that while we were partnering better with families, we were not embracing all that the alternative response pilot had to offer, and that a procedural change could benefit the agency.

The process of group screening of referrals began initially with the review of referrals by the family services director and the assessment supervisors. Monthly referral-screening meetings were held with the goals of promoting consistency and improving the quality of the agency’s practices. Realizing that these goals were indeed being realized, the three assessment supervisors made a commitment to screen all referrals together at least once a day.

In early 2011, the group-screening process expanded to include caseworkers. This change was based on caseworkers’ requests, as well as management’s recognition of the need for staff to be an integral part of the overall process. Internal discussions and knowledge gained from American Humane Association helped the agency understand the need for transparency in good, effective practice. In June 2011, the agency implemented group screening as a practice standard that occurs twice daily. At least one assessment supervisor is present for group screening. In addition to AR caseworkers and traditional assessment caseworkers, directors and ongoing support caseworkers also participate at times. The group-screening process has been embraced by staff and has been a unifier within this agency. It has also provided the opportunity for a transfer

of learning between supervisors and caseworkers.

Another Red Team concept that has become an agency practice within the AR unit is group case consultation, which we now do up to three times a week. Gradually, this practice has also grown in other areas of the agency. With the expansion of the group-screening process, the agency has also incorporated group case conferencing during the group-screening meetings. This has allowed both AR and traditional caseworkers to consult and provide different methods for working with our families.

Collaboration clearly starts “at home” within the agency. As a result of successfully implementing the philosophy and methods of the alternative response pilot, we have enhanced the safety, permanency and well-being of the children and families we serve. In addition, our agency has realized many internal benefits, including:

- Improved consistency and quality of referral acceptance decisions
- A new level of staff cooperation, insight and transparency
- The opportunity for staff to be actively involved in the decision-making process

As a final note, we would like to thank Brenda Lockwood and the American Humane Association for their valuable training and insight into the group decision-making process.

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