

# Alternative Response

## *An Innovative Approach to Serving Children & Families*

Summit County Children Services (SCCS), along with a consortium of five other Ohio counties (Champaign, Clark, Madison, Montgomery and Richland), has been successfully awarded grant funding to develop and implement the "Alternative Response" (AR) model of Child Welfare services.

Alternative Response was officially launched at SCCS on September 1, 2010, and has been part of a national research project to further the knowledge of Alternative Response services nationally and ultimately improve outcomes for children and families served by the Child Welfare system.

### **WHAT IS ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE**

Alternative Response is an emerging practice in child welfare with promising outcomes for children. The model includes an alternative service track for families brought to the agency's attention for alleged abuse and neglect which eliminates the labels "victim" and "perpetrator," and there is no case disposition requirement. (Only reports of abuse/neglect are eligible to receive AR services.)

The focus is on the needs of the family and on rapid implementation of tangible and intangible services and supports to keep children safe and in their own homes.

**The goals remain the same: Child Safety, Permanency and Well-Being.** The keys to success are:

- No labels - no victim, perpetrator, disposition
- Family engagement
- Family-focused service
- Active problem solving
- Community collaboration
- Rapid service provision
- One worker throughout the case

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### **HOW ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE SERVICES WILL BE PROVIDED BY SCCS**

Criteria are established to define families eligible for Alternative Response services. **(All reports involving sexual abuse, serious injury, hospitalization or death, and potential criminal charges, are ineligible for AR and will be assigned for traditional investigation.)**

Cases meeting AR criteria will be assigned for services. (All other cases will be assigned for traditional investigation.) Once a case is assigned for AR, the Intake worker will continue to serve the family until agency services are terminated (60-90 days).

Included in the service is the completion of all ODJFS mandated assessments, family contacts and required documentation within mandated timeframes.

Three Intake units consisting of six social workers and one MSW supervisor each will manage all AR cases.

### **HISTORY (and future) OF ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE**

Minnesota began AR services in the 1990's and was the first state to implement the service statewide. At present, more than 20 states have implemented an alternative response track for reports of abuse and neglect.

Preliminary outcomes of the service include:

- Child safety is NOT compromised
- Increased frequency of worker/family contact
- Fewer children enter foster care
- Reduced length of agency involvement
- Fewer repeat maltreatment calls
- Improved client and staff satisfaction

Currently, 70 Ohio counties are involved in AR service delivery. Notably, however, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services has confirmed its commitment to statewide implementation of AR services within the next few years.

Our grant was generously funded by the Department of Health and Human Services and the Casey Family Foundation. The Quality Improvement Center for Differential Response through the American Humane Society and The Kempe Center since 2012 administered the grant. *(Rev 6/2014)*

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