

# Alternative Response

VOLUME 1  
ISSUE 1

*Quarterly*

October 2008

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## Welcome!

*Amy Rohm, Alternative Response Quarterly Editor, American Humane Association*

Greetings! Welcome to the first issue of the *Alternative Response Quarterly*. This newsletter was designed by the AIM team to support the implementation of Alternative Response in Ohio. The AIM team consists of the American Humane Association, the Institute of Applied Research and your Minnesota colleagues.

This is a very exciting time for the entire state of Ohio, and we are grateful to the 10 Alternative

Response pilot counties: Clark, Greene, Fairfield, Franklin, Guernsey, Licking, Lucas, Ross, Trumbull and Tuscarawas. As of July 1, 2008, the counties began serving some of the eligible reports of abuse or neglect with an Alternative Response. This newsletter will explore some of the experiences of a wide group of counties and partners throughout pilot implementation. I hope you enjoy this newsletter, and I welcome any suggestions for future issues.

## Open Letter from Helen Jones-Kelley

*Helen Jones-Kelley  
Director, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services*

As dialogue regarding the nation's fiscal emergency continues, and we in the human services field feel its growing impact on both our community's families and its programs, it is easy to become discouraged. Each of us confronts very complicated decisions in our work, and it is likely that the difficulty of our choices only will increase. Still, I constantly am reminded that the real work continues outside of government conversations.

Every day, professionals across Ohio somehow find ways to connect and support families, despite increasing barriers and growing demand. It is this ingenuity

***"Engaging with families where the families happen to be is best practice. We need to focus on empowering families and ask ourselves, 'What can we do to strengthen the families kids have?'"***

*Helen Jones-Kelley  
Director, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services*

and interest in "doing it right" for the children and families in our community that drive programs such as Alternative Response. Let me publicly acknowledge each of the communities participating in Ohio's Alternative Response Project for investing the personal and community resources, flexibility and stamina that this project's development has required. Like most of our work, it has not been an easy task. The Supreme Court of Ohio study that recommended the consideration of Alternative Response promised that it, along with a statutory rewrite of Ohio's child abuse and neglect definitions, could bring "the most sweeping reform to Ohio child welfare law in well over a decade." I believe that statement to be true. I am excited about other states' research that shows improved possibilities for families, heightened satisfaction of

both families and workers, and a richer culture of collaboration across systems. And, I admit it: I also am excited by the possibility of the savings that could result from fewer children re-entering the child welfare system, families not continuing deeper into the system, and families being able to maintain children within their own home. I like to envision that five years down the road, Alternative Response will be the approach of preference for most of our families and that Ohio will be reinvesting the system's savings from Alternative Response into a broader system of early intervention for families.

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services is committed to Alternative Response. I expect Ohio to experience the same positive results as other states that have initiated this approach, and I take a personal interest in seeing the Ohio prototype that emerges from our 18 months of study. I believe that Ohio's families and communities are ready to embrace this approach, and I expect

Alternative Response to become an option throughout Ohio. I also hope to see the state and county partnership that characterizes this project emerge as the expected manner of our work together.

Community members in the 10 Alternative Response Project sites recognize the leadership role that will be demanded of them if Alternative Response is to move from a "pilot" to "preferred approach." I hope that each of you takes the time to seek out project representatives, ask questions about their program, make suggestions on elements that you think might be important for consideration, and arrange an opportunity for someone to share information within your own community or professional affiliation. It is a topic that is always on my agenda for the future.



AIM



THE SUPREME COURT of OHIO

Ohio

Department of  
Job and Family Services



# Leading the AR Mission

Steve Hanson, Supreme Court of Ohio, and Kristin Gilbert, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services

As co-managers of Ohio's Alternative Response Project, we have the challenging role of "preparing the canvas." It is our job to ensure that: funding and authority are in place; contracts contain the appropriate language and are effective within required time frames; the necessary areas of our vast child welfare system are engaged; the roadblocks identified by consultants, program areas and county sites are addressed; and the project maintains integrity with its preset parameters, the intent of the Advisory Committee on Children, Families and the Court, and its legislative authority. While these tasks can be difficult — ensuring the alignment of Alternative Response and SACWIS while SACWIS was mid-rollout — the consistent willingness of everyone to find ways to "make it work" has been a rewarding experience. Our system sometimes gets derided for inflexibility, but we have not once encountered this in any aspect of our efforts. Rather than

inflexibility, we have found complexity. This was well-expressed by a project representative who described the county agency by saying: "We're a huge ocean liner. It's not that we're not coming with you; you just have to remember that it takes us a while to turn!" Like the families with whom we work,

our problems often initially have appeared simple, but then

revealed themselves as having extensive depth and ramification. Both of us appreciate the persistent willingness to find answers and get the work done that have greeted our inquiries and requests. It appears that this project has a common sense to it that resonates with others.

Our most significant responsibility is to ensure that this project maintains momentum and sufficient interest. It is our goal that the term "Alternative Response" become so familiar that 18 months from now people remark, "Isn't that law yet?" While our task is boosted by administrative support at the highest levels, we also have been encouraged by the number of people who have approached each of us saying, "I can't wait until Alternative Response comes to my county!" It is exciting to hear the reports from the county

*"We need to continue to reach out to partners, including those who may not have been receptive upfront."*

Representative from the Supreme Court of Ohio

by sharing stories with peers, asking questions of pilot

sites and recognize that our challenges primarily seem to be administrative in nature, related to the restrictions that accompany the operation of a "pilot." Caseworkers, supervisors and administrators seem to be energized by the changes in practice. Please help us in this job

representatives, and encouraging all stakeholders to learn more about this project and how it could transform each of our roles.

Our attention must now turn from the task of implementation to long-range strategy. We will be studying the early results from the evaluation to learn what we can about critical elements and future needs for services or funding. We work under the assumption that Ohio's experience will mirror those of the other 15 states where Alternative Response has been implemented, and so begin to anticipate a large-scale roll-out, asking the questions: "What will that require?" and "What should it look like?" We expect lots more challenges!

# From the Eyes of a Worker

Mindy Gallant and Mary Bohnett  
Lucas County Alternative Response Workers

Imagine one year ago, going to a home, meeting the family, and throwing out all types of lingo that they don't understand: ALLEGATIONS, ALLEGED PERPETRATOR and ALLEGED CHILD VICTIM. We can now approach the family in a kinder and gentler approach that emphasizes partnership with the families rather than blame. In Lucas County, workers offered the basic food, clothing and furniture vouchers in the traditional approach. Now workers can become more creative with the help that we offer families based on needs they identify. Alternative Response does not change the seriousness of child abuse and neglect, or a focus on child safety, but instead it centers on strengths to address issues, and it promotes permanency within the family.

Currently, we are working with a family that consists of mom, dad and four children. The agency got involved due to domestic violence. We worked with mom to focus on her understanding of domestic violence and how it affects her children. We didn't jump in the home and make dad move out. We allowed mom to determine if and when that needed to be done. It took a couple of weeks, but mom made that decision on her own. Since that time, she has worked on getting things in her name and starting her own bank account. Mom linked herself to services but needed an income. Mom can't find a job that will work the hours

she needs so she can take care of her children. With Alternative Response, our agency was able to work with mom and get her enrolled in State Trained Nursing Assistance classes that would provide her with an education, job placement and independence — something that she wanted to pursue but could not because her husband controlled the money.

We also worked with a family that was reported for safety concerns due to reported abuse (a human bite) and substandard housing. The family consists of mom, dad, a son who is nonverbal and has cerebral palsy, and another child who is diagnosed with ADHD. Their house was full of roaches and their carpets were beyond cleaning with a vacuum. Taking the family's lead, we were able to utilize our Alternative Response dollars and fumigate the house, clean the carpets, purchase a used gas dryer to help keep the children's clothing clean and, while the home was being worked on, the family is spending the weekend at a hotel, so all are safe. The family has never been to a hotel before. The caseworker plans to go to the hotel with the family so check-in is smooth. The family will also receive a free breakfast (included), access to a swimming pool, video games, etc. They are very excited!

These are a couple of examples of how we have been able to change the focus of an assessment from blame to support. Traditional assessments would be based on identifying the weaknesses of the family with a requirement to make a dispositional finding and assess blame. Alternative Response allows the assessments to be family oriented and strength based. What a benefit to a family!

## 2008 Differential Response in Child Welfare Conference

Nov. 12-14, 2008  
Hyatt on Capitol Square  
Columbus, Ohio

plus

Ohio Alternative Response  
Reception  
Thursday, Nov. 13,  
5-6:30 p.m.  
The Columbus  
A Renaissance Hotel  
All Conference attendees from  
Ohio are welcome!

To register, please visit  
[www.americanhumane.org/differential](http://www.americanhumane.org/differential)

### Scholarships Available!

Scholarships are available from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and the Supreme Court of Ohio to facilitate wide Ohio participation. Contact Kristin.Gilbert@jfs.ohio.gov for more info.

# Research in the Pilot Counties

L. Anthony Loman, Ph.D.  
Institute of Applied Research

The evaluation of the Ohio Alternative Response (AR) pilot project is being conducted by the Institute of Applied Research (IAR). IAR is part of the AIM Team selected by Ohio to assist with the design, implementation and evaluation of AR, but is conducting the evaluation separately from those assisting with design and implementation. IAR is evaluating the process of implementation of AR and changes in outcomes for children, families, the agency and the community that may result from the introduction of AR. Outcomes that will be monitored include child safety; family satisfaction; family and worker perceptions of change, benefits and deficits of the AR approach; the occurrence of later reports of child abuse or neglect; later removal and placement of children in families offered AR; community stakeholder perceptions of AR; effects of AR on caseloads of workers, short-term and longer-term costs of AR to the state; and many other potential changes resulting from the introduction of this approach.



## Tip from Tuscarawas County:

Enclose Alternative Response pamphlets with mandated reporter letters to provide community partners with an explanation for this different approach with families.

Veronica Spidell  
Tuscarawas County Job and Family Services

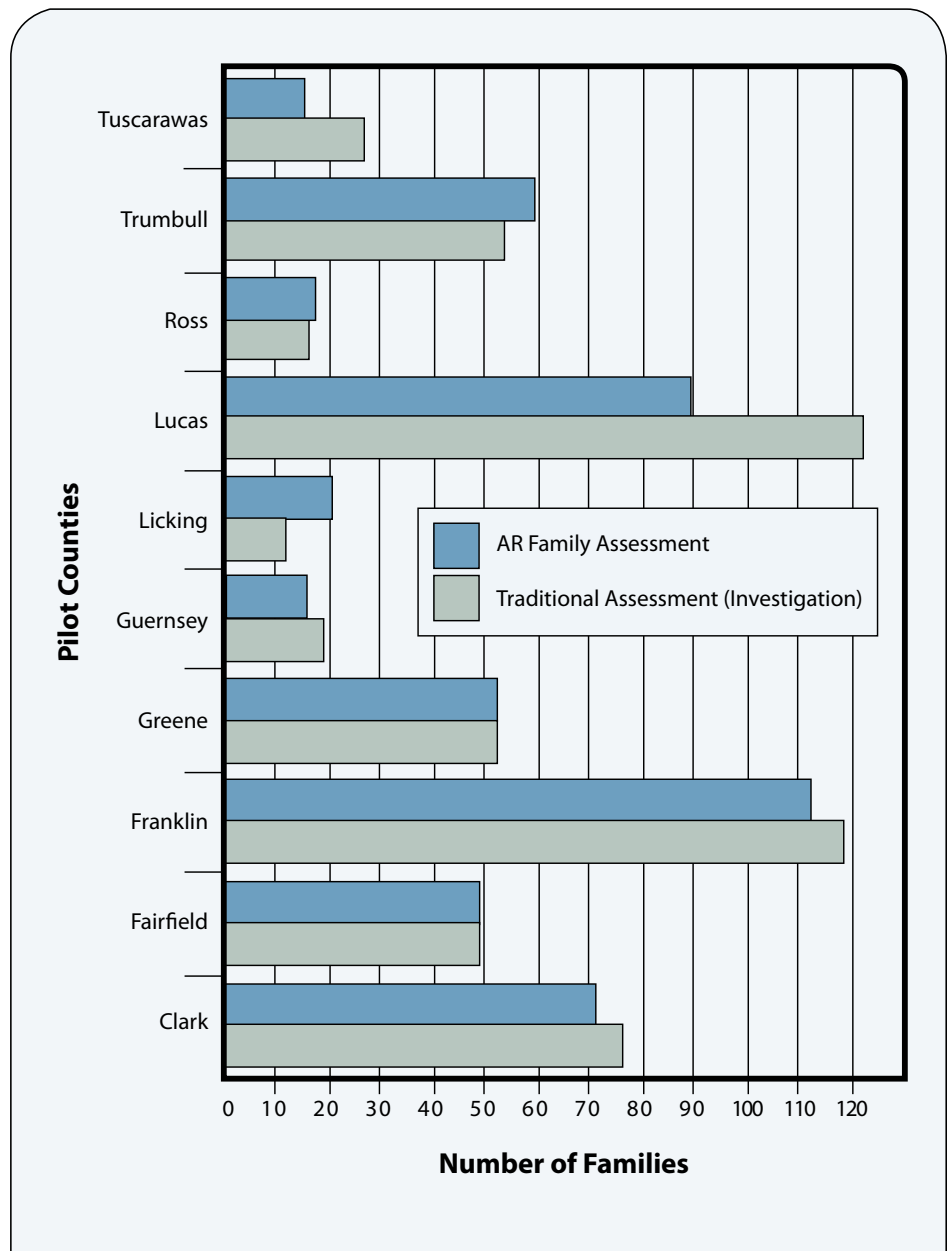
The basic design of the outcome evaluation is a field experiment. For the first 13 months of the pilot project, which began on July 1, 2008, families that are determined to be appropriate for AR will be randomly assigned to one of two groups:

1. Those offered an alternative response, which includes greater participation in decision making by families and a broader approach to family needs; or
2. Those offered the traditional approach, which includes a Child Protective Service (CPS) investigation or family assessment in Ohio and other actions of CPS toward families.

The second group is the control group composed of the "business as usual" families. Differences in activities and outcomes for these two groups will

be compared to determine whether the effects of AR are positive, negative or represent no change from the traditional approach of CPS.

*The following chart shows the progress of the assignment of families during the first three months (through Sept. 25, 2008). As of this time, 503 families had been assigned to AR and had received family assessments, compared to 544 that received the traditional approach. Franklin County (Columbus) entered the pilot later, at the beginning of August, but already has the largest number of families in the study. This process will continue through the end of August 2009, after which all families determined to be appropriate will be assigned to AR. The evaluation will continue to track families and the progress of the pilot through the end of 2009.*





# Alternative Response in Ohio: From Proposal to Practice

Carla Carpenter  
Associate Director, National Center for Adoption Law and Policy

**"Frontloading services in a non-adversarial setting will certainly assist in getting family 'buy-in' ... it creates an atmosphere of respect for everyone involved."**

Juvenile Court Judge, December 2006

**"I'm excited about everything — but especially the Alternative Response, which I would implement tomorrow if I could."**

PCSA Representative, October 2006

After many months of planning and hard work, Ohio's Alternative Response pilot is finally under way! Many workers and supervisors followed the Design Phase of the project with great anticipation, and now the real work of serving families through AR has begun. It may surprise some to know that this significant milestone is actually the culmination of more than four years of study, discussion and planning.

The initial work toward developing an Ohio AR system began in 2004 with the Supreme Court of Ohio's Advisory

Committee on Children, Families and the Courts. The Advisory Committee, co-chaired by Director Helen Jones-Kelley (then Director of Montgomery County Children Services) and Judge David Basinski, established a Subcommittee on Responding to Child Abuse, Neglect and Dependency to make recommendations regarding Ohio's child protection statute, policies and investigative practices.

The Subcommittee was formed with a broad, multidisciplinary membership, including:

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, the Public Children Services Association of Ohio, the Ohio Association of Juvenile Judges, the Ohio Prosecuting Attorneys Association, Legal Aid, the Ohio State Bar Association, law enforcement, pediatric medical professionals and mental health professionals, among others. Under the leadership of Chairperson Barbara Riley (then Director of ODJFS), the Subcommittee began a two-year process to research and develop comprehensive recommendations.

The Subcommittee retained the National Center for Adoption Law and Policy (NCALP) and the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law (ABA) to perform project work. Over an 18-month period, NCALP and the ABA conducted extensive legal and field research under the Subcommittee's direction. This work included a national review of best practices in statutory design and field practice in other states; interviews and surveys with hundreds of stakeholders throughout Ohio; a comprehensive review of Ohio's child welfare statute and its application in practice; and focus group testing of various reform proposals.

In January 2006, the Subcommittee submitted a Final Report outlining several recommendations, including a proposal to establish an Alternative Response practice model through a rigorously evaluated pilot process. The Advisory Committee directed the Subcommittee to continue its work to educate stakeholders about the recommendations contained in the report and to collect feedback regarding the proposals. Over the next 18 months, NCALP worked with the Subcommittee to offer informational sessions to more than two dozen stakeholder groups.

As momentum built around the Subcommittee's efforts, Ohio Senate Bill 238

was enacted in June 2006, authorizing ODJFS to implement an Alternative Response pilot in up to 10 counties. Throughout the next year, ODJFS worked to garner the necessary resources to initiate the state's AR pilot. The Supreme Court of Ohio — through its Advisory Committee on Children, Families and the Courts and its Subcommittee on Responding to Child Abuse, Neglect and Dependency — continues to partner with ODJFS to provide guidance and support to the pilot project.

**"Except in the most serious cases, this is how we should be working with families."**

Representative from Lucas County

## Free Differential Response Journal

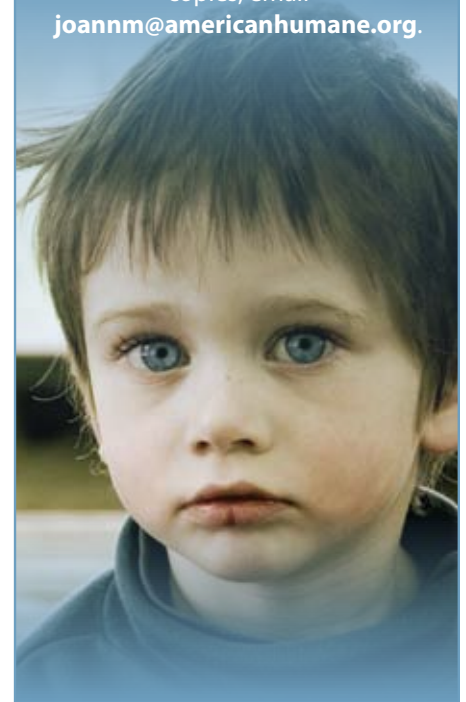


American Humane just released the second volume of *Protecting Children on Differential Response*.

To order a FREE copy of "Exploring Differential Response: One Pathway Toward Reforming Child Welfare," please visit the Child Welfare Information Gateway at [www.childwelfare.gov/index.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/index.cfm)

and search for "Differential Response" on the Online Catalog page. This will direct you to a link where you can identify the desired resource and receive a free copy by mail. To order multiple copies, email

[joanm@americanhumane.org](mailto:joanm@americanhumane.org).



# Spotlight: Fairfield County

*Rich Bowlen  
Director, Fairfield County Child Protective Services*

## Ready! Set! Go!

After months of Design Workgroup meetings, local presentations, community education and staff development, Fairfield County proudly implemented its Alternative Response project on July 1, 2008. To date, more than 85 cases have been identified for the AR Track with 50% of those identified receiving assignment to AR. As the project marches on, we have learned a lot by just getting started.

*Getting Ready!* Building on lessons learned from our good friends in Minnesota, Fairfield County spent a significant amount of energy on preparation. Ensuring that staff had a thorough understanding of where AR would take us was as important as how it would work. As we started preparation, we heard the familiar statement, "But we already do that ...", so we decided to send certain staff to trainings specific to their role and tailored for the project. For example, screeners participated in public relations training and developed strength-based questions for all referrals. We reminded everyone that sometimes the slightest adjustment to their sails might take them to an entirely different place.

*Set!* Ah, the big sigh before the plunge.

With great anticipation and excitement, Fairfield County began identifying cases for the AR Track. Almost immediately, we began struggling with wishes that certain cases would survive the gauntlet known as the "randomizer," which is used to distinguish cases being assigned to the experimental or control group. As cases made it through and received assignment, we realized many of our Traditional Investigators felt a bit jilted by the celebratory assignments to AR. It became very important to constantly acknowledge the good work being accomplished by the Traditional Response team, as well as continually educating about the nature, purpose and difference of the two tracks.

*Go!* The first several months of AR service delivery proved to be a lot of fun. To begin, a team of four workers from Fairfield County Child



*Kristi Burre and Rich Bowlen from Fairfield County holding their "AR" cookies specially baked for the Alternative Response Orientation Training with community stakeholders.*

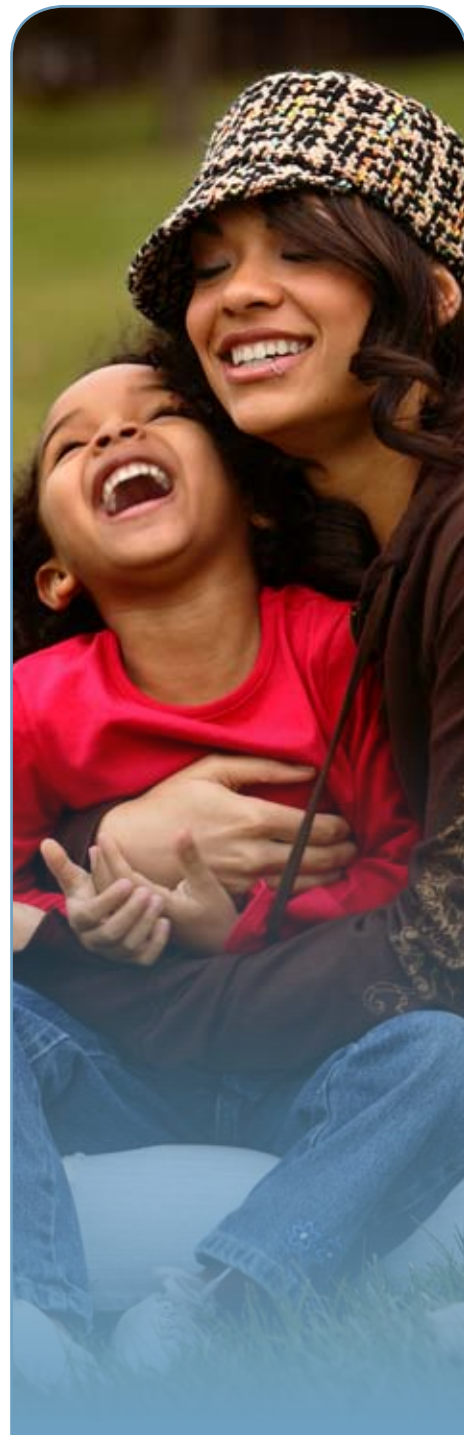
Protective Services traveled to Minnesota to visit a few counties and experience their Alternative Response Teams. This proved to be a very worthwhile experience filled with best practice ideas which will undoubtedly be implemented in upcoming months. The Fairfield County AR Team consists of one manager, three caseworkers and one resource specialist.

***"This is not just a project — it's a philosophy of how to work with kids and families."***

*Representative from the Supreme Court of Ohio*

Additionally, Fairfield County's AR plan included specific partnerships with mental health services to assist in identifying recommendations for early childhood emotional and behavioral issues; and an AmeriCorps volunteer to assist families with budgeting. In the early stages, the AR Team has experienced some exciting partnerships, including: a family receiving a free pass to a local water park, a mother who is a victim of domestic violence enrolling in nursing school, and a low-functioning family finding support from their employer when they decided to take shifts, enabling them to check on the family's new baby.

While this has been a great opportunity to participate in a pilot project, we feel more fortunate to have the opportunity to continually learn from so many other counties and organizations. We are confident that the adjustment in our sails will lead to a new place.



If you have an idea or would like to contribute a short article to the *Ohio Alternative Response Quarterly* newsletter, contact Amy Rohm at (303) 925-9413 or [amy@americanhumane.org](mailto:amy@americanhumane.org)

