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A Note of Appreciation

Jennifer Justice and Leslie McGee, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services; and Steve Hanson, Supreme Court of Ohio

Ohio's alternative response (AR) pilot evaluation has been completed and the states that have gone before us along the AR pathway can say, "I told you so." When 10 counties embraced the challenge of designing and implementing an AR approach specific to Ohio, they knew it would take months, if not years, to find out if Ohio would experience the same positive outcomes reported by other AR trailblazers. It was gratifying, though not surprising, that among other positive outcomes, our pilot counties reduced repeat reports of maltreatment and increased both family and worker satisfaction.

With the release of the AR project final report and its many positive findings comes other important news. One of Ohio's AR pioneers, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services' Kristin Gilbert, is transitioning to a new position as Ohio's project director for its work with the Midwest Child Welfare Implementation Center. As everyone working on the AR project knows, Kristin is an extraordinary leader whose vision and energy has been and will be instrumental as we define how to best strengthen families in Ohio. Her ability to think "outside the box" and hear what counties and families need has improved the partnership between the state and county agencies and, more importantly, between families and agencies.

In her new role, Kristin will continue to help the state improve how it works with the many stakeholders

that support Ohio's child protection system. Although Kristin is not leaving the AR project entirely, we want to express our heartfelt appreciation for her superior leadership over the last six years. This work led to both the proposed Children in Need of Protective Services legislation and the AR pilot project. We look forward to more great accomplishments as Kristin leads the implementation center project.

Although Kristin is transitioning, the AR approach should still be available to all Ohio families and plans for statewide expansion of AR are fully underway. In order to ensure that counties begin implementation of AR with sufficient training and technical assistance support, Ohio's AR expansion will be staggered in "volunteer" counties.

It is important to note that prior to any expansion efforts from the state, six counties went after and were selected for a national evaluation project through the Quality Improvement Center for Differential Response (QIC-DR). The QIC consortium – Clark, Champaign, Madison, Montgomery, Richland and Summit counties – were selected as one of three national sites for a four-year AR pilot. Extraordinary on many levels, these six counties have additional resources and technical assistance that help Ohio in accomplishing its goal of "AR in all 88." This group has engaged in numerous planning meetings during the past several months and will begin data collection for the evaluation phase on Nov. 1, 2010. This consortium of counties will implement the same AR approach designed and piloted in Ohio from July 2008 through December 2009 and participate as members of the AR Leadership Council.

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American Humane
Institute of Applied Research
Minnesota Consultants



THE SUPREME COURT of OHIO

Ohio

Department of
Job and Family Services



A Note of Appreciation

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In addition, 19 county applications were received in response to the request for applications that was released on March 31, 2010. Up to 10 counties will be chosen for this expansion cycle and all county applicants will be notified of the status of their application no later than June 18, 2010. Once identified, the 10 chosen county agencies will join the AR Leadership Council, begin training their staffs and continue with preparing their agency, community and stakeholders for implementation of AR in their county.

Many key activities are currently taking place that support Ohio's expansion of AR. Contract discussions with the American Humane Association are in full swing. The Supreme Court's Subcommittee on Responding to Child Abuse, Neglect and Dependency will review each recommendation of the AR pilot project report and help advise the state on the next steps toward statewide expansion. SACWIS is also an important priority and the leadership council will be asked to provide input on the next round of AR SACWIS enhancements in the coming weeks.

This is an exciting time for child welfare in Ohio. Together we celebrate our accomplishments while knowing we have a long way to go. Please join us in congratulating Kristin Gilbert on all that she has accomplished and in wishing her the best in her new position. And as we look ahead to future challenges, please join us in rolling up our sleeves for the work ahead as we move yet another step closer to statewide expansion.

Five Questions About Ohio's MCWIC Partnership

Kristin Gilbert, Justice Services, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services

Question 1: What is MCWIC?

The MCWIC, the Midwest Child Welfare Implementation Center¹, is part of the Training and Technical Assistance Network administered by the Children's Bureau. Unlike the national resource centers that Ohio frequently uses, the implementation center:

- is organized regionally rather than topically.
- assists states and tribes to develop and execute multiyear strategic plans for sustainable systems change to improve the quality and effectiveness of child welfare services.
- supports systems change implementation projects across the range of issues in child welfare.
- provides long-term support rather than short-term focused intervention.
- has funding and access to outside resources to support projects.

As the name implies, the center is intended to support the process of implementing sustainable changes to the child welfare system.

Question 2: Why Fix What's Not Broken (and Why Now)?

Each *AR Quarterly* highlights lessons and experiences that county, state and federal partners have shared as we learned alternative response together over the past three years. What has been the lesson most consistently cited, whether in discussion regarding worker practice, supervisory skills, agency organization or state policy? The defining values of AR must be reflected at all levels of interaction. It is a simple thought: the manner in which caseworkers are expected to engage with families should be mirrored in the way supervisors engage with caseworkers. This same level of engagement and the philosophy that supports this interaction should be infused into each human and administrative interaction, including between the state and county.

Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) leaders long have recognized that sustainable implementation of AR requires that the Office of Families and Children (OFC) re-structure how it works with counties. The science of implementation² and our own personal experience and common

sense tell us that unless the existing environment is changed to support the effectiveness of an innovation, the innovation simply will adapt over time to fit the system, reverting to business as usual. Alternative response requires a fundamental shift in the philosophical and structural framework of Ohio's work with families. This fundamental shift comes, of course, at a time when the state is faced with the most significant reduction in tax revenues in more than a decade. But, perhaps this creates the most compelling rationale for change: While agencies struggle to maintain "business as usual," there is a growing realization that the "usual" is no longer feasible.

Throughout the past budget process and various organizational changes, the OFC has been asked to define and clarify its purpose, priorities and main functions. Individually, employees are clear; every individual can quickly explain his or her job and why it is important. In fact, OFC employees have a passion and breadth of knowledge that have repeatedly been demonstrated through the many successes OFC continues to achieve, even as budgets diminish and resources are cut. Less clearly defined

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¹For additional information about MCWIC, see <http://www.mcwic.org/>.

²For additional information, check out the valuable resources of the National Implementation Research Network at <http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~nirn/>.

Five Questions About MCWIC
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is how each individual fits within the bigger picture and how all the pieces combine. Both ODJFS staff and those outside the office have remarked on the lack of a clearly identifiable mission and vision that is steady over time and that can be used to guide decision making. The lack of a consistent vision and mission was a frequently cited comment in Ohio's federal Child and Family Services Review, and was suggested by federal staff as a component that needed to be included in Ohio's Program Improvement Plan.

We know change is happening in child welfare. New initiatives, budget realities, and the desire for change all are contributing to a future that certainly will look different. Ohio's new partnership with the MCWIC is a means to drive this change in a way that supports the lessons and experiences of the past three years.

Question 3:
What Is the MCWIC Partnership Supposed to Do?

The three-and-a-half-year partnership between the ODJFS and the MCWIC is intended to develop a new model for how the state works with the many stakeholders that support Ohio's child protection system. It is based on two concepts:

1. OFC agency practice must mirror effective casework practice to achieve the best outcomes for children and families.
2. When the state and the counties work together, it results in better outcomes for children and families.

At the conclusion of the three-and-a-half-year MCWIC partnership, ODJFS will:

- Have a clear vision and mission that is consistent across OFC.
- Ensure that all OFC rules support and are consistent with the OFC vision and mission.

- Have supports that enable staff to carry out the OFC vision and mission.
- Have an improved working relationship with the many stakeholders that support Ohio's child protection system, one where we are viewed as partners.

Question 4:
How Will the MCWIC Partnership Work?

Ohio's partnership with the MCWIC consists of several distinct elements:

- Formal assessment of OFC organizational culture and climate
- Development and installation of the new technical assistance model
- Rule review
- Implementation of OFC organizational structure and function to facilitate the new model
- Ongoing monitoring of fidelity to the new model

This project is a part of the ODJFS' systemic effort to improve child welfare outcomes, and it will materially alter how the counties and department work together on behalf of families. Ohio was selected through a highly competitive federal process, and this award brings both financial support and access to the resources of the federal Children's Bureau Training and Technical Assistance Network.

Question 5:
How Can I Get Involved?

As with any good partnership, success will depend on open communication and the ability to build a truly collaborative relationship. This will require the support and engagement of Ohio's child welfare stakeholders. There will be varied opportunities to participate throughout the three-and-a-half-year process, but two ways to be involved are:

1. **Regional Forums:** The MCWIC will be hosting a forum in each of the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program's Regional Training

Centers to understand how the ODJFS can better work with and support Ohio's public children services agencies (see the following dates). Please consider adding your agency's voice to the process.

- July 7 – Cambridge
- July 8 – Athens
- July 14 – Loveland
- July 15 – Columbus
- July 16 – Dayton
- July 26 & 27 – Cleveland
- July 28 – Toledo
- July 29 – Akron

Go to www.mcwic.org to register, and follow the link to "Ohio Regional Forums Registration." Space at each forum is limited, and will be available on a "first-come" basis. An open survey is also offered as an alternative for those unable to attend: <http://www.mcwic.org/events/partnersForOhiosFamilies.php>

2. **Advisory Committee:** The project's structure includes an advisory committee that will:
 - Operationalize the project mission and vision.
 - Coordinate communication and provide guidance to project task teams.
 - Provide input and recommendations on the implementation progress to the ODJFS leadership group.

The advisory committee will be composed of up to 20 decision makers representing a range of stakeholders.



Additional questions?
Contact Kristin Gilbert at Kristin.Gilbert@jfs.ohio.gov.

The Results Are In! Final Evaluation Summary

Tony Loman and Christine Filonow, Institute of Applied Research

As the evaluators of Ohio’s AR pilot, we are pleased to report that the research results show positive changes for families served through AR. Between experimental and control groups, statistically significant differences were found that support the notion that AR is a better way to engage and serve families involved with the child protection system.

Local offices in the pilot counties determined that a little more than half of the child abuse and neglect reports were appropriate for an AR family assessment rather than a traditional investigative assessment. These reports were randomized into experimental and control groups and served in either the alternative or traditional, investigative manner. By the conclusion of the pilot, 4,529 families had entered the study group, of which 2,285 (50.5 percent) were experimental and 2,244 (49.5 percent) were control.

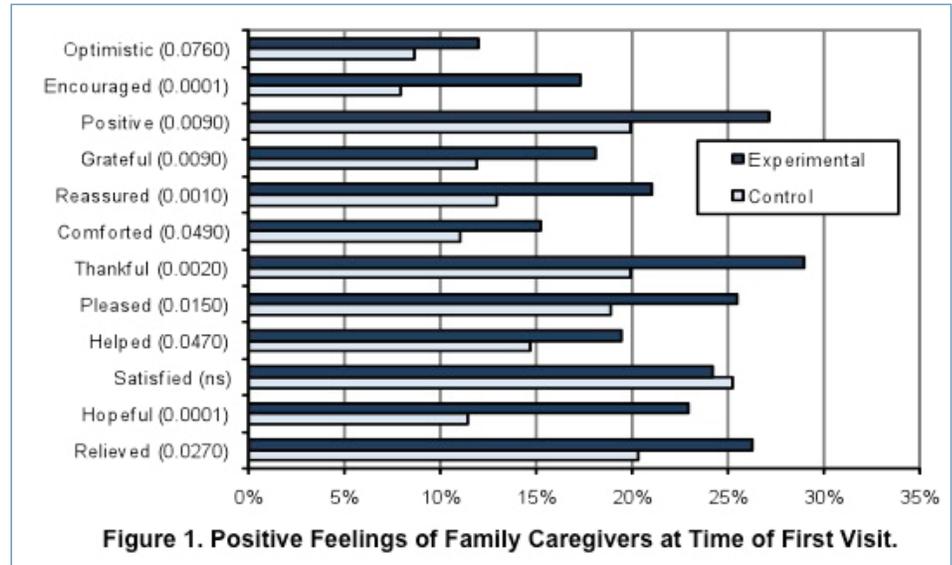
The families that were appropriate for the AR pathway were among the poorest in Ohio. Over two-thirds of the families surveyed reported incomes of \$15,000 or less, compared to eight percent of Ohio families as a whole. A wide range of needs were present in these families. Eight of every 10 families had received food stamps and a little less than a quarter had participated in TANF in the past year. High rates of unemployment, single parent status, female-headed families and lower educational achievement were each associated with low income. Families with these characteristics typically experience problems with unaffordable and unstable housing, making utility payments, lack of furniture and appliances, unreliable transportation and occasionally lack of sufficient food and clothing. The experimental and control groups were shown to be highly comparable in all of these areas.

Under AR, workers reported feeling better able to intervene effectively

with families. There was evidence of improved family engagement and satisfaction with the alternative approach. Initial emotional reactions to the first visit by the assessment worker were significantly more positive for families that had received an AR

assessment than for those that received a traditional assessment. Likewise, negative emotions were experienced more frequently by control families (see Figure 1, levels of statistical significance are given in parentheses).

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In Celebration of the First 10 Alternative Response Pilot Counties

Kudos to Ohio’s alternative response pioneers: Clark, Fairfield, Franklin, Greene, Guernsey, Licking, Lucas, Ross, Trumbull and Tuscarawas counties. To the directors of each of the pilot county agencies, the leadership council members, the supervisors and workers who exhibited conviction and courage by embracing a new way of doing “business” with families, the many co-workers who supported this transformation, and the numerous community “sponsors” who creatively supported families in need, we extend our gratitude.

You are called **leaders** for good reasons – you have achieved what at many times seemed undoable, you have attained a level of performance and success that is significant and admirable, and now, having become the first “data points” in the trend line, you will serve as the champions and the teachers of those who follow you. Ohio’s pursuit of statewide implementation of AR is a direct result of your tireless efforts. The children and families in your respective counties are beneficiaries of your contributions. In short, you are **the best!**

Congratulations!
~ The AIM Team

The Results Are In!

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Families in AR were also more satisfied with their workers and felt that they had more say in decisions that were made. Reports of participating a great deal in decision making occurred more frequently with experimental families than with control families. Conversely, more control families reported that no decisions were made regarding their family.

Workers who served families through AR were more likely to report providing some type of services, support or assistance than were workers who provided a traditional response (See Figure 2). Provision of poverty-related services of various kinds increased under AR; assistance with food

26.3 percent of traditional response workers reported this. In order to provide these services more often and more effectively, contacts between workers and families increased under AR and cases were kept open for slightly longer periods. AR personnel often stated during interviews that increased family engagement through the removal of dispositional language and labels, the extended time frame for AR assessments and access to flexible funds were three of the main factors that contributed to increased service provision among AR families.

AR families that completed a survey about their experience with child welfare reported being more satisfied with services received than did control families. Likewise, control families reported nearly twice as often as AR families that no services had been offered to them. Comments provided by families on the survey instrument and during interviews suggest that being treated with respect and being listened to was critical to the quality of their experience. Providing good information to families and following through to fully connect them to resources was one of the most important things that workers could do to create a positive and productive experience for families, even if the interaction was very short-term.

No evidence was found that replacement of traditional investigations by AR family assessment reduced the safety of the children. Children were as safe under AR as they were under the traditional approach. In addition, subsequent reporting of

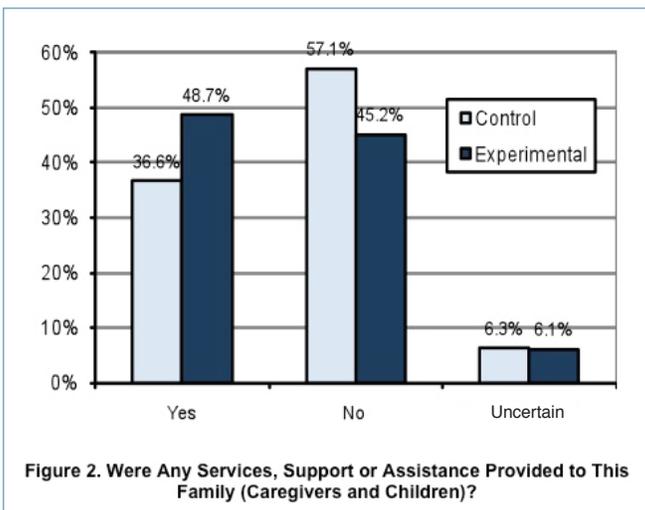
families for child abuse and neglect declined slightly under AR, particularly among minority families, the most impoverished families in the study. Removals and out-of-home placement of children also declined.

The cost study showed that full indirect costs measuring worker times were slightly more expensive for AR than for a traditional response by the end of the evaluation period.

Overall, the majority of staff involved with AR stated that the pilot had affected their approach to families a great deal or in a few important ways. Workers believed that AR families were more likely to view the agency as a source of support and assistance and more likely to feel better off because of their involvement with the agency than were TR families. In addition to recognizing that AR does not require substantiation or formal finding, AR-involved staff saw AR as leading to a more friendly approach to families, more family participation in decisions and case planning, and more cooperation from families in the assessment process.

These results demonstrate that important strides were made in child welfare system reform through the AR pilot. Positive changes for families and workers suggest that the AR model is a valuable practice shift for ODJFS and children service agencies.

The Institute of Applied Research is grateful for the opportunity to have worked with such a wonderful group of stakeholders, administrators, supervisors and workers during the course of this evaluation. The project was a success because of the genuine commitment and dedication of everyone involved.



and clothing, help with utilities, other financial help, car repair and transportation and money to pay rent or help in obtaining appliances and furniture was given more frequently to experimental families. Nearly half of AR workers (46.7 percent) said they were responsible for directly providing or connecting families to resources and services, while only

➤ The first Ohio Alternative Response Symposium was a **huge** success, with more than 200 people from around the state in attendance! The symposium was a celebration of the success of the pilot counties, the first public release of the final evaluation results and a forum to educate other counties about AR. Check out the numerous resources from the symposium at <http://www.law.capital.edu/adoption/AR/>.

Next Steps for the Subcommittee on Responding to Child Abuse, Neglect and Dependency

Rhonda Reagh, Ph.D., Chair



A little over a year ago, as the new chair of the Ohio Supreme Court Subcommittee on Responding to Child Abuse, Neglect and Dependency, I reviewed the subcommittee history and composition in this newsletter. Now, it is a pivotal time in the life of the subcommittee and in AR, as the subcommittee undertakes the next phase of its charge – the oversight

and approval of the AIM Team's final evaluation report.

The final report was presented to the subcommittee on April 7. The AIM Team delivered a phenomenal document, which included quantitative evaluation findings, recommendations and a chronicle of Ohio's AR pilot. Members commented that the report far exceeded their expectations and provided much food for thought. The membership felt confident enough in the evaluation findings to make a motion to recommend full implementation of AR statewide in Ohio to the Advisory Committee on Children, Families and the Courts. The vote was unanimous! This recommendation was considered and approved by the advisory committee on May 12.

So, what happens next? Beginning in July, the subcommittee will undertake a full review of each recommendation in the final report. Upon completion of the review, the subcommittee will prepare a full report on remaining items and present its recommendations to the full advisory committee in September 2010.

The work of everyone involved in this process, from the pilot counties to the advisory committee members, has been stellar and speaks volumes about the interest in reforming child welfare in Ohio. Subcommittee members and staff members from the Ohio Supreme Court, ODJFS and NCALP have worked on some aspect of AR and Ohio's CHIPS proposal (HB371) for more than five years. Most of the original subcommittee membership remains stable today and its interest in and passion for AR remains high. Yet it seems important to remember the person who had the vision to bring us all together. Chief Justice Thomas Moyer passed away in April before he could read the final evaluation report or entertain any of the recommendations made, but his hand is present in all of this work. We are all sorry he is not here to share in the success, but happy that AR will be part of his legacy. It is a great time for child welfare innovation in Ohio.

Congratulations to the next wave of alternative response counties! Ashtabula, Athens, Coshocton, Erie, Hamilton, Hocking, Huron, Mahoning, Medina and Washington counties were chosen through a competitive process to join the original 10 pilot counties and the five new counties funded by the National Quality Improvement Center on Differential Response (www.differentialresponseqic.org).

This fall, Ohio will have 25 counties implementing alternative response!

SAVE THE DATE!
**2010 CONFERENCE ON
 DIFFERENTIAL RESPONSE
 IN CHILD WELFARE**

Nov. 8-10, 2010

Disney's Paradise Pier Hotel
 Anaheim, California

County Spotlight: Reflections From Guernsey County

Patricia Harrelson, MSSA, LISW, Director of Casework Services

AR in Ohio is at an exciting and scary transition point. It is like an infant moving toward toddler in its developmental pathway. More than two years ago, Guernsey County participated with nine other counties, colleagues from Minnesota, the American Humane Association, the Institute of Applied Research (IAR) and the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services to “birth the baby” of AR in Ohio. In many ways, we were like new parents, trying to make sure we did the right things – we fed the baby well, nurtured it, provided consistency and developed rules with which to raise this new baby. I think I can speak for the team in saying we did our best, and we believe that we created a good foundation for this new endeavor. We know that we are not the first to make these changes, nor will be we the last in Ohio or even in the country, if our success is any indication. The addition of a new federal demonstration project for five counties and 10 more joining us for round two is inspiring and daunting. We welcome the new counties and hope to serve as a role model and share in their learning as well. We hope to work together to improve the chances of this new approach reaching full adulthood in Ohio.

This article was to be completed in April, and would have likely had very different content. But since April, American Humane and IAR have completed a major report outlining the successes and challenges of AR in Ohio, and a request for proposals went out, asking 10 more counties to join us. The request has meant that many other counties interested in AR have sought our counsel (and, I am sure, that of many of our co-pilot counties) and this has lent itself well to

reflection in our own house. So, what has been the impact of AR for Guernsey County? How do we see it changing our practice?

This was a very difficult question to answer even six months ago, but especially 18 months ago. We were also in the midst of becoming COA-accredited during most of the AR pilot, which anyone who has been through this process knows, brings reflection and change to practice. Change is an interesting process, and developmental for agencies and systems, no differently than for the people in them. I find answers more quickly now and in many ways, it is what AR challenged us to consider in all of our cases, AR or traditional, that has led to this place.

Since American Humane and our Minnesota friends brought us cutting-edge child welfare practices in the Signs of Safety approach and many other wonderful innovations, it was difficult at the beginning of the project to sort out what was AR and what were the other wonderful practices available

to us. This was a challenge that for us, ultimately brought revelation, that is, what does it matter? It matters for sure in the sense of designing and implementing a program, and in creating change that can be measured, evaluated and tweaked. But, this is where we think the need for clarity likely ends.

First and foremost, AR is no different from the traditional approach in the desire for and focus on child safety. The method at the door, and the opportunities to engage the family in discussions about child safety and about everything are very different. Does this mean that these approaches are excluded from a traditional approach? No, definitely not. It just means that the work of AR can and does inform system change and practice change if used well. We would encourage all of Ohio’s counties to see AR as an opportunity to make changes within your agencies and communities, which involve families more in what

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County Spotlight (continued from page 7)

they need and how best to design, decide on and receive interventions from the agency and community. This process is worked a bit differently in every county in the pilot phase, but with common threads that brought us common purpose.

We have always used emergency services monies in Guernsey County to provide concrete services to families. AR was not different in this way, it simply improved our ability to do this critical work. It allowed us significant flexibility for the delivery of these concrete services. We also hope our success informs Ohio about the best uses of money for the concrete needs of families. Certainly, the tragedy of our entire system is that families must be involved with us and have an allegation of child abuse or neglect to receive this help. In an ideal world, the stressor of financial difficulty is a risk factor diminished or eliminated from a deck already stacked against our children living in or near poverty. We may not have impact initially within the larger system; AR does some wonderful things to lay a foundation for these discussions in other places. Taking the punitive approach out of our work with many families, for example, is a good first step we can make to show society that there is a better way. This is an opportunity of AR.

Of course, there are cases that due to their very nature are currently excluded from AR. More than any single case in our system in the past 18 months, the following case example caused us to see child welfare differently and to challenge some of our own practice assumptions. This was possible because of AR.

One night in 2010, our on-call worker received a call from our local hospital. An infant suffered a broken bone, the cause unknown, and the explanation was inconsistent with the injury. The police had yet to be called. Our worker responded to the emergency room, engaged the father and went to the home to meet the mother and a toddler to further assess safety. The police responded to the home upon our request. The initial case information told us that there was clear concern for physical abuse, and that it was likely a criminal issue as well as a child welfare issue.

While the case was assigned to a traditional response, it led to many discussions in our agency. Even the police officer did not feel that charges would necessarily lead to the best family outcome. Regardless, felony indictments were returned and the case is proceeding in our system as well as in the criminal system. Interestingly, we have avoided placing the family in our juvenile court system. This was a major decision. We received much pressure

from other parts of the system to file for protective supervision. We worked with the family and chose instead a safety plan to reduce safety concerns while supporting the parents. Court is always an option open to us, but not one that walks back easily and the family has been open to options that support the safety of their children.

The unavoidable fact is that the family still associates us with the criminal process even though we have tried to explain that working with them to keep them out of juvenile court was a big deal in our system. The worker and the police officer worked closely together, as is desired in so many child welfare cases. We have asked ourselves critical questions in the past months, such as, "When and how do the criminal and the child welfare responses separate and when do they need to be seamless?" Our worker walked an incredibly fine line very well, and brought much of her experience from AR cases into this difficult traditional response case. The process of AR has impacted many areas of our practice and we hope that it continues to do so for the benefit of families, children and our community. We are excited to take this next step with the rest of Ohio.



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 Amy Rohm at (303) 925-9413 or amy@americanhumane.org.

