



FOSTER PARENTS SOCIETY OF ONTARIO
Charitable Status # 0873919-09

SAFE:

This is an update/Progress report regarding the SAFE I, SAFE II Questionnaires, and the accompanying package of documentation currently used across Ontario, for the purpose of screening prospective Foster and Adoptive parents.

Back in September 2005, the Directors of the FPSO Board were presented with a draft of the Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE), this draft varied slightly to become the finished document currently in use. This package was mandated by the Ministry, December 2006, to be implemented by all of Ontario's Children's Aid Societies.

SAFE is aligned with OnLac, and PRIDE forming the triad of foundational documentation the entire Fostering/adoption system in Ontario is based on. The Ministry put much time and evaluation into all three of these tools prior to their mandatory implementation.

Due to the amount of time, money and evaluation that was invested by the Ministry in these tools, it is difficult to change any of these tools.

However During the January 08 FPSO Board of Director's session, concerns with the SAFE I Questionnaire were put on the table for discussion. The document had already been in use for two full years.

As a member of the Governance and Policy committee, I was seeking to have more opinions on the SAFE I and SAFE II Questionnaires, to help frame in an action plan of how we might address our concerns with the tool. I designed a simple poll, to use in assessing my local peers perspectives on the tools. When this data was brought back to the Board of Directors during the March 08 session, The Directors of the FPSO agreed that the poll data would be of benefit in lobbying to both the Ministry of Child and Youth Services, and The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Society (OACAS).

The Poll was then forwarded to all FPSO Directors to fill out, and hopefully share with their FPA Executives.

During the June 2008 FPSO Annual General Meeting, attendee's shared great concern and frustration with the SAFE questionnaires, reinforcing the FPSO Board of Directors perspectives and concerns with the use of the tool.

Our membership agreed to help with the gathering of the poll data, a motion came from the floor to have a letter written right away, to begin the lobbying process, this motion was carried.

Our first letter was in the mail on June 17 2008, to:

Honorable Deb Matthews Minister of Child and Youth Services
Cathy Paul Director Child Welfare Secretariat

Cathy Harrison, Manager Child Welfare Secretariat
Jeanette Lewis, Executive Director Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies
Virginia Rowden, Ontario Association of Children's Aid Society
All Executive Directors
All Foster parent Association Presidents

We received a response from Minister Deb Matthews on July 24th 2008; the response did not indicate any interest regarding changes to the documentation.

The Governance and Policy committee with the support of the Board of Directors continued to pursue changes to the SAFE I & SAFE II, Questionnaires as we were not content with the Ministries lack of interest in change.

Cecile Brookes and I (Vanessa Milley) continued to pursue meeting with OACAS, as well as the OnLac council, (which also oversees PRIDE and SAFE.). We have attended three of these meetings to date. During the preparation for these meetings we became very aware, that the SAFE Orientation package concerns could not be isolated to the SAFE I & II Questionnaires.

We also have concern with a number of other issues:

- The open ended medical release, which greatly differs from the medical reference letter formerly required.
- The detailed financial disclosure that is now required.
- We have aversion to the tool being used for purposed other than the assessment of prospective homes for children.
- We are not convinced the storage of the tool provides the privacy the information contained within requires.

Over the past year the Poll data has continued to be gathered, and shared with FPSO Board of Directors.

On January 27th and 29th, 2009 Cecile and I were able to attend both OACAS, and the OnLac council meetings, to share among other items, our dissatisfaction with SAFE. A second letter was prepared for this occasion, it not only shared our specific concerns with the tool, but also the SAFE I & II, questions that were found objectionable, as determined by the poll data. These meetings were supported with the prepared letter, and copies of the graphs as generated from the polls.

Following these meetings we received a response letter from Jeanette Lewis, Director of OACAS, the letter does state in the second paragraph of page two, that ***“we will raise your concerns about the SAFE I and II Questionnaires with staff at the Consortium for Children. We will determine if these issues have been raised previously, and if so, how they have been dealt with in order to balance the integrity of the program with fairness to foster parents.”*** This response letter was posted on the OACAS website, as well as mailed to FPSO.

We are encouraged with OACAS's agreement to speak to the Consortium regarding our concerns, (as the Consortium owns the tool, the rights for its use here in Ontario have been purchased by OACAS) and look forward to their response. We were also happy to hear that the medical has already been changed back to a medical reference letter, rather than the open ended release.

In closing, I wanted to acknowledge the input from everyone who filled out one of the polls, thank you, without your opinions reflected in the data, I do not believe we

would have had the impact needed to convey our concerns. I also wanted to thank you all for your patience while we at the FPSO continue to pursue change in this area. Unfortunately this issue was brought back to the FPSO Board table nearly two years after the tool was already in use, amplifying the challenging of this endeavour. Not to mention how slowly things change in a large bureaucracy, however we are fully committed to continue to seek change, and value each of you who are supporting our efforts.

Thank You:

Yours in Fostering;

Vanessa Milley

Vanessa Milley

Foster Parents Society of Ontario

Governance Chair

Attached you will find a copy of FPSO's outline of observations gathered from the SAFE I & SAFE II poll data, along with our concerns, and issued with the accompanying SAFE Orientation Package.

As detailed in letters mailed; Jan. 29, 2009.

Foster parents are offended by the amount of information required, the amount of detail necessary, and the obligation to also disclose private information about their extended family without consent.

The medical forms violate the foster parent human rights; we have a right to privacy. Prior to the use of this tool; agencies required a medical reference letter from your doctor upon completion of a medical, which was acceptable, it was to say you were in good health, that you were a stable individual. This new form is an open ended release, and opens the foster home to being medically scrutinized at any moment; this is not reasonable, or respectful. We question the lack of a time limit on this document.

The financial forms are an equal issue, too invasive, too much detail required. We understand the need to provide enough information to verify financial solvency, but the details currently required far exceed this.

We also have grave concerns about the rights of our extended families are also being violated, as we are being asked to share their personal information along with our own, this information is being required without written permission. Once all of the information required has been provided it becomes a portion of our foster home file. Our rights, vulnerability and privacy are further compromised by the use of safe 1 and safe 11 documents if our file is subpoenaed, given to the court, and in cases to a biological family who choose to represent themselves, and they aim to build their case with the requiring of our file, it is given to them in its entirety, as we have seemingly no way to protect our personal information from being subpoenaed, and we have no control of who they show it to, or what they choose to do with it, it could even end up posted on the internet.

We would like this whole SAFE Orientation package, eliminated, as we feel that it violates our rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms Act. We take issue with the Medical, the financial, and the SAFE I & II Questionnaire. We do recognize that the entire removal of this package is unlikely; however we have some strong recommendations regarding the tools.

First: We want to see the Medical revert to a reference letter, rather than the medical release that is currently being signed.

Second: We want to see the Financial Questionnaire restructured, to verify the family is comfortably solvent, no more.

Third: We want to see our foster files legally protected from being pulled into the court system, especially from being used to support the case of the biological family. Court should be about their ability of the biological parents to parent the child, not about the foster families personal information.

Fourth: We would like to see provisions put in place that would isolate the information in the SAFE orientation package from being used for any purpose other than assessing the viability of a family to become foster/adoptive parents. The questions re our extended families should be removed from the questionnaire.

Last: Based on review of the data gathered from the foster parents polled on the SAFE I & SAFE Questionnaires, we have discovered the questions that are particularly offensive to foster parents,

SAFE I Questionnaire

Question #18, 74% of responses found this question to be objectionable

Question #22, 74% Objectionable

Question #24, 78% Objectionable

Question #25, 92% Objectionable

Question #33, 66% Objectionable

Question #34, 63% Objectionable

Question #36, 87% Objectionable

Question #37, 73% Objectionable

Question #46, 67% Objectionable

Question #51, 72% Objectionable

Question #56, 63% Objectionable

Question #57, 75% Objectionable

Regarding the SAFE I Questionnaire, 12 out of 57 questions were found to be objectionable, Removing this 21% of questions, would make this tool acceptable to the majority of Foster Parents in Ontario. We would recommend taking this course of action.

You will find after reviewing this information that the objectionable questions focus on; sexuality, intimacy in relationships, and questions regarding the extended family. You will also find the number of questions that are objectionable in SAFE II far exceed SAFE I. SAFE II is substantially more offensive to the foster parents who are after all the ones required to fill it out.

SAFE II Questionnaire

Question #1, 68% Objectionable

Question #2, 72% Objectionable

Question #3, 90% Objectionable

Question #4, 91% Objectionable

Question #6, 65% Objectionable

Question #7, 74% Objectionable

Question #8, 67% Objectionable

Question #9, 81% Objectionable

Question #10, 69% Objectionable

Question #11, 78% Objectionable

Question #12, 77% Objectionable

Question #13, 71% Objectionable

Question #14, 71% Objectionable

Question #15, 94% Objectionable

Question #16, 91% Objectionable

Question #17, 71% Objectionable

Question #18, 71% Objectionable

Question #19, 69% Objectionable

Question #20, 80% Objectionable

Question #21, 61% Objectionable

Question #23, 72% Objectionable

Question #24, 72% Objectionable

Question #25, 82% Objectionable

As you can see only 2 questions out of 25 were found to be acceptable by the majority of foster parents surveyed.

We want to see the SAFE II questionnaire suspended, it needs to be replaced by a document that honours the privacy rights of intimacy, sexuality, and the extended family.

The FPSO recognizes the agencies have a responsibility to know who we foster parents are, how we got to be who we are, but this can be done in the interviewing process. It does not need to be done in a questionnaire, stored away in our foster files, for reading at any time. From time to time the opposing council will require a foster parent's file to build their case. This document is particularly invasive and private, for anyone to demand to have.

Lastly we are concerned that this document is psychometric testing but is being administered by non psychologists, putting further vulnerabilities on the foster parents.

Respectfully submitted, on behalf of The Foster Parents Society of Ontario

Vanessa Milley

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Foster Parents Society of Ontario

Governance and Policy Chair