

	GEORGIA DIVISION OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY MANUAL			
	Chapter:	(14) Resource Development	Effective Date:	March 2015
	Policy Title:	Recruitment and Retention		
Policy Number:	14.6	Previous Policy #:	1014.S.1	

CODES/REFERENCES

Title IV-E of the Social Security Act Section 471(a)(18)(A) & (B)
 45 CFR Part 1355.38 (a)(2) & (5)
 Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 as amended by the Interethnic Placement Act of 1996 (MEPA-IEPA)

REQUIREMENTS

*The Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) shall adhere to the requirements of the Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 as amended by the Interethnic Placement Act of 1996 (MEPA-IEPA) and **shall not:***

1. *Deny to any person the opportunity to become an adoptive or foster parent on the basis of race, color, or national origin of the person or of the child involved;*
2. *Delay or deny the placement of a child for adoption or into foster care on the basis of the race, color or national origin of the adoptive or foster parent or the child involved; or*
3. *Maintain any statute, regulation, policy, procedure or practice that, on its face, is a violation as defined in sections 471 (a)(18)(A) and (B).*

Compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 shall not constitute a violation of section 471 (a)(18).

DFCS shall diligently recruit and retain foster and adoptive parents through ongoing recruitment and retention efforts which include:

1. The development of a statewide coordinated recruitment and retention plan;
2. The development and implementation of regional foster and adoptive parent recruitment and retention plans;
3. The use of child-specific recruitment efforts to assist in the recruitment of foster and adoptive parents;
4. The use of targeted efforts to recruit caregivers who are able to meet the needs of a specific group/category of children (e.g., medically fragile, teens, siblings);
5. The use of targeted efforts to recruit sufficient placement resources in each local school district so children entering care are able to remain in the same school they were attending prior to removal;
6. The use of regional and state data to communicate the recruitment needs and the results of recruitment and retention efforts.

Each DFCS region shall submit an annual recruitment and retention plan to the Foster Care Services Director's Office to document their planned activities for the upcoming year that support the statewide plan. It shall be submitted by the date established annually by the Foster Care Services Director.

DFCS shall direct recruitment activities toward a broad cross-section of the community and develop recruitment plans that provide for the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed, in accordance with the MEPA-IEPA.

DFCS shall meet MEPA-IEPA's diligent efforts requirements by ensuring each DFCS County Office develops a comprehensive recruitment plan that addresses the following:

1. A description of the characteristics of waiting children;
2. Specific strategies to reach all parts of the community;
3. Diverse methods of disseminating both general and child-specific information;
4. Strategies for assuring that all prospective substitute caregivers have timely access to pre-service preparation and training, including convenient locations and hours of service;
5. Strategies for training staff to work with diverse cultural, racial, and economic communities;
6. Strategies for dealing with linguistic barriers;
7. Non-discriminatory fee structures (i.e., cost of drug screens, medical evaluations, fingerprints, residential modifications, etc.).

DFCS shall direct target recruitment for adoptive parents toward families who wish to adopt children who meet the state's definition of special needs, and for specific children for whom adoptive homes are needed. A child with special needs is defined as:

1. A child who at the time of adoptive placement has been in the care of a public or private agency or individual other than the legal or biological parent for more than 24 consecutive months;
2. A child with a physical, mental, or emotional disability as validated by a licensed physician or psychologist;
3. A child who is a member of a sibling group of two or more placed in the same home.

PROCEDURES

The Foster Care Services Director's Office will:

1. Establish annual statewide targets for recruitment and retention based upon available trend and data analysis.
2. Develop new recruitment campaigns, brochures, posters, and media strategies focusing on the specific needs of the agency for foster and adoptive homes.
3. Provide ongoing technical assistance in the coordination of recruitment activities as requested by the various DFCS regions.
4. Relay information regarding recruitment and retention issues to respective DFCS regions.
5. Review, evaluate, and provide feedback and technical assistance regarding the plans and progress of the regions as it relates to recruitment and retention.
6. Provide monthly monitoring plans of regional recruitment and retention activities.
7. Present a quarterly report focused on five major issues (recruitment indicators, retention indicators, closures, foster parent support, and statewide initiatives) during the Statewide Recruitment and Retention Meeting.

To complete the Annual Recruitment and Retention Plan, the local DFCS will:

1. Utilize statewide targets and goals to establish a profile of recruitment and retention needs within the county that addresses:
 - a. Characteristics and numbers of children in foster care;
 - b. Average number of children exiting care annually;
 - c. Assessment of the usability of foster and adoptive homes;
 - d. Annual number of home closures and the reason for closure;
 - e. Assessment of past recruitment and retention efforts (i.e., areas needing improvement, efforts that were successful, etc.);
 - f. County/Regional demographics of potential resources.
2. Determine and document the strategies to be utilized for recruitment, such as:
 - a. Use of church bulletins, flyers, and brochures;
 - b. Informational booths at local fairs and carnivals;
 - c. Participation in town hall and neighborhood association meetings;
 - d. Utilization of existing foster and adoptive parents to provide information to groups about fostering and adopting;
 - e. Participation in foster care or adoption celebrations, galas, parties, and picnics;
 - f. Development of National Adoption Month and National Foster Care Month activities;
 - g. Use of child-specific recruitment.
3. Develop a calendar of scheduled regional and county recruitment activities for the upcoming calendar year (January – December);
4. Determine and document the strategies to be utilized for retention of foster and adoptive parents, such as:
 - a. Making forums available in which information can be shared with foster parents;
 - b. Creating avenues in which foster parents can share questions/concerns;
 - c. Assessing regional training needs in an effort to determine what general supportive or educational information is needed to increase the parental capacity of foster and adoptive parents;
 - d. Providing ongoing training and support to meet the specific needs of foster and adoptive parents.
5. Include strategies for meeting MEPA-IEPA requirements, the steps needed to carry out the recruitment and retention activities, and any possible barriers to implementation;
6. Draft the Annual Recruitment and Retention Plan considering the aforementioned information and submit it to the Regional Director for review and approval;
7. Submit the approved plan to the State Foster Care Services Director's Office by the date established annually by the Foster Care Services Director's Office.

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

The recruitment and retention of caregivers is critical to the overall success of the foster care and adoption programs in Georgia. An effective recruitment and retention program is necessary to ensure the availability of appropriate resources for children who enter the foster care system. Recruitment and retention efforts must be designed to provide the community with information about the characteristics and needs of the children (and their families) requiring foster or adoptive homes, as well as the basic requirements and minimum standards. In addition to presenting information, it involves providing feedback and consultation. Effective recruitment strategies build public interest and awareness of the need for foster and adoptive parents for children. Recruitment efforts must not focus solely on developing a certain number of families,

but on developing the most appropriate families to meet the needs of children in foster care.

MEPA-IEPA and Recruitment

Experience demonstrates that minority communities respond when given information about the need for homes and when they are treated with respect. Recruitment strategies must not systematically discourage or deter the interest of prospective substitute caregivers in trans-racial or interethnic placements. In addition, placement of a child in an appropriate household must not be delayed by the search for a same race placement. Moreover, DFCS must avoid the arbitrary use of race-neutral recruitment factors (e.g., income, age, educational level, family structure, home ownership status, etc.) that have the effect of excluding groups of people on the basis of race, color, or national origin.

General Recruitment Strategies

Examples of general recruitment strategies include, but are not limited to:

1. Posting information about foster care and adoption on bulletin boards in various places of business within the community;
2. Hosting an information table at farmers markets, fairs, and community festivals;
3. Partnering with pizza places and other local restaurants to have them attach small flyers to pizza boxes or use tray liners that encourage people to considering becoming foster or adoptive parents;
4. Utilizing existing caregivers to share their first hand knowledge of the needs of children in care and their experience working with DFCS to help meet those needs;
5. Partnering with faith-based communities to inform the public about the needs of children in foster care;
6. Engaging the medical community by providing information regarding the special medical needs of children in foster care.

Targeted Recruitment Strategies

Targeted recruitment strategies target a specific population in need of foster or adoptive home resources (e.g., teens). One strategy might include developing community based recruitment teams to build a resource pool for specific populations of children in care. Recruitment activities should provide potential foster and adoptive parents with information about the characteristics and needs of the target population. Recruitment efforts should focus on identifying an adult or groups of adults (e.g., church group, nurses, teachers, etc.) that potentially meet the needs of the target population. Targeted recruitment efforts may also focus on a particular area (i.e. zip code or school zone) in which there is a high removal rate.

Child Specific Recruitment Strategies

Child specific recruitment strategies help to identify caregivers for specific children in foster care. These strategies begin with a comprehensive child assessment and preparation process. Examples of child specific recruitment strategies include:

1. Conducting intensive case file mining, including talking with older youth to explore past connections and important relationships with supportive adults who might be able to provide permanency at this time, even if they were unable in the past;
2. Featuring children in photo listing services (i.e., It's My Turn Now Georgia and Adopt Us Kids);
3. Using local media partnerships such as Wednesday's Child for featuring a child, youth, or sibling group;

4. Developing a Heart Gallery- a traveling exhibit of high quality, compelling photographs capturing the unique personalities of children in care;
5. Creating presentations with youth using technology (e.g., PowerPoint and iMovie) that can bring the personalities and stories of youth to life in their own words, pictures, and graphics.

Retention Variables

In order to maintain an adequate pool of caregivers to meet the needs of children in foster care, special attention must be made to the support that is offered. Homes are closed for a variety of reasons. Some home closures are related to positive events, such as a child being adopted by their foster parent. On the other hand, some caregivers request closure of their home due to negative experiences related to retention variables such as the following:

1. Satisfaction with DFCS Staff – This includes customer service, response to phone calls, or any other interaction with DFCS staff or providers;
2. Confidence in Ability to Meet the Needs of Children- This includes how confident the caregiver feels about being able to manage the demands of being a partnership or resource parent;
3. The ability to express concerns without fear of retaliation from DFCS.

Retention Plans

County retention plans must address local issues affecting foster parent retention and may include activities such as the following:

1. **Customer service training for DFCS staff** - Webinars and on-site presentations may help address general customer service issues, such as how to best respond to visits and phone calls from foster parents.
2. **AFPAG/Foster Parent Partnership Meetings** – These may serve as a forum for foster parents to offer wisdom and expertise on ways to recruit, retain, and support foster homes.
3. **Regular email, phone or web based survey of foster parents** - Surveys may help the county determine what is working and what needs improvement to ensure that foster parents are provided with ongoing support.
4. **Exit interviews with families leaving the program** - Brief interviews with foster parents leaving the program should be conducted by staff not known to the families. Results of interviews should be used to assess current practices and make improvements.
5. **Clearly communicated Foster Parent Grievance Procedure** – The County Director should use this opportunity to assess what event(s) occurred that caused the foster parent to file a grievance. Recommendations and “lessons learned” from the staffing and/or case review should be employed across program areas to improve practices as it relates to supporting caregivers.
6. **Respite care partnerships**- Develop respite partnerships with parent support groups to ensure the availability of such resources when caregivers need a break.
7. **Procedures for placement disruptions**- Establishing procedures for placement disruptions in advance helps reduce stress on caregivers and DFCS staff. All parties will know what is expected of them to facilitate a smoother transition for the child (ren) involved.

FORMS AND TOOLS

<http://www.itsmyturnnowga.com>

<http://www.adoptuskids.org>

<http://www.wednesdayschildga.com>