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Social Services County Letter No. 2012-06

To: County Departments of Family and Children Services
DFCS Regional Directors
State Staff

From: Ron Scroggy, Division Director
Division of Family and Children Services

Re: Initial and On-Going Safety Screens of Caregivers and All Household Members Age 18 and Over

Date: October 19, 2012

Purpose

The purpose of this county letter is to provide information regarding new requirements for conducting screenings of existing and prospective caregivers all household members age 18 and older at:

1. Initial application;
2. Re-evaluation and;
3. At placement, replacement and respite.

Discussion

The Division of Family and Children Services is charged with ensuring the safety and well-being of children that have been identified as victims of child abuse or neglect. Such efforts include: screenings on foster homes at critical intervals including; at initial application, re-evaluation and placement of a child in a home.

The Child Protective Services (CPS) Screening completed in each of these three areas, increases the agency's ability to ensure that children are placed in safe and secure environments. National studies support the necessity for clear indepth CPS screening for potential and existing foster care providers.

The following screens are to be completed at initial application and re-evaluation of applicants and household members age 18 and older:

1. DFCS Protective Services records:
 - a. Georgia SHINES;
 - b. IDS ONLINE;
 - c. PSDS;
 - d. IDS Placement Central;
 - e. County Master Files (as applicable).

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2. Sexual offenders Registry
 - a. Sex Offender Search;
 - b. Predator Search; and
 - c. Absconder Search.
3. Pardons and Parole;
4. Department of Corrections;
5. Child Abuse and Neglect Registry check in any other state the prospective caregiver (s) and their adult household member over the age of 18 older have resided in the previous five year, pursuant to the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006;
6. Foster and Adoptive Home Policy Violations.

The results of the screening assist in determining the caregiver(s) protective capacities and are used to determine a prospective caregiver's eligibility to continue with the approval process or an existing foster parent eligibility to continue as a placement resource. The following results will automatically disqualify a prospective caregiver and/or current foster parent:

1. When an adult household member has a substantiated CPS history where they were named as the maltreater,
2. A applicant who has previously been a caregiver who has two or more Safety Related or Discipline foster home policy violations,
3. An applicant who has a history of Child Protective Services investigations while unsubstantiated revealed safety or parental protective capacity concerns,
4. An applicant who has previously been a caregiver whose home was administratively closed due to the caregiver's unwillingness to recognize the need for change or failure to cooperate with the agency,

For DFCS prospective caregivers, current foster parents at re-evaluation and all adult household members age 18 and older, the SSCM shall:

1. Inform the prospective caregiver, current foster parents and any household member age 18 and older to complete the Child Protective Services History Request Form and return it within five (5) business days.
2. Once the form is received, complete all required screens as outlined above;
3. Document the following in SHINES:
 - a. All results on the third level records check tab;
 - b. The county director's or designee's review of the findings and the decision to approve or deny the continued processing of the prospective caregiver's application or current foster parent's re-evaluation and/or continuation as a foster parent when the prospective caregiver, foster parent or any household member age 18 and older has history in one or more of the databases;
 - c. A thorough description of the findings, the source and any other applicable information to justify the approval or denial of the continued processing of the prospective caregiver's application or current foster parent's re-evaluation and/or continuation as a foster parent.

4. Notify the prospective caregiver or current foster parent of the denial to allow them to continue the application process or to continue as a foster parent within five business days of the decision. Initial notification may be by telephone and must be immediately followed by a written closure letter to the family.

For CPA prospective caregivers, current foster parents and all adult household members age 18 and older, CPA staff will:

1. Inform the prospective caregiver, current foster parents and any household member age 18 and older to complete the Child Protective Services History Request Form and return it within five (5) business days.
2. Once the form is received, scan and email the completed form to cpsscreening@dhr.state.ga.us or fax the form to 770-359-4641.
3. Conduct a name search on the following databases:
 - a. Sexual Offenders Registry;
 - i. Sex Offender Search;
 - ii. Predator Search; and
 - iii. Absconder Search.
 - b. Pardons and Parole;
 - c. Department of Corrections;
 - d. Child Abuse and Neglect Registry check in any other state the prospective caregiver (s) and their adult household member over the age of 18 older have resided in the previous five year, pursuant to the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006.
4. Document the results in the prospective caregiver's or current foster parent's file. The CPA director or designee will:
 - a. Review all findings;
 - b. Document in the case record the decision to approve or deny the continued processing of the prospective caregiver's application or current foster parent's re-evaluation and/or continuation as a foster parent when the prospective caregiver, foster parent or any household member age 18 and older has history in one or more of the following databases:
 - i. Sexual Offenders Registry
 1. Sex Offender Search
 2. Predator Search, and
 3. Absconder Search.
 - ii. Pardons and Parole
 - iii. Department of Corrections or
 - iv. If the CPA receives information from another state that the prospective caregiver or other household member age 18 and older has a CPS history to include unsubstantiated reports, diversions and screen outs, this information must be reported to the cpsscreening@dhr.state.ga.us. The OPM Director or designee will review the findings from other states and provide written documentation to the CPA as to the decision to approve or deny the continued processing of the prospective caregiver's application or the current foster parent's re-evaluation and/or continuation as a foster parent.

5. Notify the prospective caregiver or current foster parent of the denial to allow them to continue the application process or to continue as a foster parent within five business days of the decision. Initial notification may be by telephone and must be immediately followed by a written closure letter to the family.

For CPA prospective caregivers, current foster parents at re-evaluation and all adult household members age 18 and older, the DFCS state office will:

1. Complete a name search in the following databases:
 - a. Georgia SHINES;
 - b. IDS Online;
 - c. IDS Placement Central;
 - d. PSDS;
 - e. County Master Files (as applicable).
 - f. Foster and Adoptive Home Policy Violations
2. If the prospective caregiver, current foster parent or any adult household member age 18 and older has a Georgia CPS history, the OPM Director or designee will:
 - a. Review the findings from the DFCS systems screenings and any findings reported from other states;
 - b. Provide written documentation to the CPA regarding the decision to approve or deny the continued processing of the prospective caregiver's application or the current foster parent's re-evaluation and/or continuation as a foster parent.

Prior to placement or replacement, including respite, of any child into a foster home (DFCS or CPA) the county must conduct DFCS Protective Services records check, as outlined in number one (1) above, on all caregivers and anyone age 18 or older who reside in the home. Document the placement/replacement screens in SHINES as outlined in the initial/re-evaluation section. If any records are located that would automatically disqualify a prospective caregiver/current foster parent or pose a threat to child safety the placement must NOT be completed. Immediately report the DFCS Protective Services records to the county director/designee and, if applicable the Office of Provider Management.

Both prospective caregivers and current foster parents should be made aware of their status to either continue the approval process or continue as a placement resource as soon as possible. Notification of denials should be provided to the prospective caregiver or current foster parents in an empathetic and supportive manner. DFCS prospective caregivers or current foster parents who wish to dispute the decision should be provided an opportunity to discuss the decision with the county director or designee. CPA prospective caregivers or current foster parents who wish to dispute the decision should be provided an opportunity to discuss the decision with the Office of Provider Management (OPM) Director or designee.

Implementation

The new policy requirements regarding CPS Screenings are effective immediately. In order to facilitate implementations of these changes, the Regional/County leadership shall:

- a. Coordinate opportunities for the review of the county letter for staff to ensure they become familiar with the specific policy changes, practice requirements and related procedures;
- b. Identify and address barriers/concerns that may impede implementation;
- c. Monitor implementations of the new policy and practice.

Questions should be directed to the Field Program Specialist in your region. Regional staff may direct questions to the Practice and Policy Unit at [PPPD Unit@dhr.state.ga.us](mailto:PPPDUnit@dhr.state.ga.us)