

State Adoption Exchange and Other Child-Specific Recruitment Activities for Children Under Guardianship of the Commissioner Policies and Procedures

Purpose of the State Adoption Exchange (SAE) and General Information

For a child under guardianship of the commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Human Services who will not be adopted by a relative or foster parent, it is necessary for the responsible county social worker to recruit a new resource adoptive family. Minnesota utilizes several recruitment tools, primarily the State Adoption Exchange (SAE), to identify an appropriate adoptive family for each waiting child. The establishment and maintenance of an adoption exchange is the responsibility of the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, section 259.75. Currently, the Minnesota Adoption Resource Network (MARN) carries out the duties of the SAE on behalf of DHS under a grant contract called MN ADOPT.

Adoption Assistance Eligibility Requires Documentation of Recruitment Efforts

In order to meet one of the eligibility criteria for Adoption Assistance, the placing worker must document recruitment efforts to identify an appropriate adoptive family for a child who is not being adopted by a relative or foster parent. Documentation of recruitment efforts should be included in the child's case file and must be submitted to DHS with application for Adoption Assistance. Recruitment efforts must include:

- Registration of the child on the SAE, using one or more of the three components described in the section below called **Registration on the State Adoption Exchange (SAE) Utilizing Three Components**.
- If registration with the SAE does not result in identification of an appropriate family for the child, the agency must employ at least one other recruitment method as outlined in the sections below called **Other Routine Recruitment Efforts to Identify an Appropriate Adoptive Family** and **Specialized Child-Specific Recruitment Services**.

Statutory Requirement to Register a Child on the State Adoption Exchange (SAE)

Minnesota Statutes, section 259.75, subdivision 2, requires a child to be registered on the SAE within 45 days of the date the child was legally freed for adoption. For a child under guardianship of the commissioner of Human Services, the responsible county social worker is required to enter data through the Social Service Information System (SSIS) to do one of the following:

- **register** the child on the SAE, if adoption recruitment efforts are required because there is no identified adoptive resource for the child [see specific instructions for registration in section below called **Registration on the State Adoption Exchange (SAE) Utilizing Three Components**];
- **defer** the child from registration on the SAE if: 1) the child's foster parent or other person is considering adoption; 2) diagnostic testing is required to clarify the child's needs; or 3) the child is currently in a hospital setting and the child's care needs will not permit placement in a family setting [deferrals for 1) or 2) are valid for 90 days only, with no subsequent deferral granted]; or

- **exempt** the child from SAE registration if the child: 1) is in an adoptive placement, as indicated by the signing of an Adoption Placement Agreement; or 2) the child has been court-ordered into long-term foster care and the court has ordered that adoption recruitment efforts on behalf of the child be ceased [send appropriate documentation of 1) or 2) to DHS].

Registration on the State Adoption Exchange (SAE) Utilizing Three Components

The SAE has three components, any one of which [or a combination of more than one] may be used to meet the Adoption Assistance requirement for SAE registration:

1. Secure matching site (www.mnadopt.org/sae)

Access to this site is limited to social workers who are recruiting adoptive families for Minnesota's waiting children and social workers who have completed home studies on prospective adoptive families seeking to adopt one or more of Minnesota's waiting children. The site is password protected with access authorized by MARN, on behalf of DHS. County social workers register waiting children on the SAE secure site by entering and verifying information in SSIS. DHS forwards child information from SSIS to MARN for inclusion on the secure site. Social workers register home studied families on the SAE secure site by completing an Adoptive Applicant Registration-State Adoption Exchange (DHS 0968) form, available online at: <http://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Legacy/DHS-0968-ENG>, and submitting the form to MARN. Child and family information is entered into the SAE secure database. Both placing and home study social workers can generate lists of potential matches of children and families. Matches are made based on the type of child a prospective parent is willing to adopt in regards to the following *child* criteria:

- Age
- Gender
- Race/ethnicity
- Sibling status
- Level of special needs

Because potential matches are made through this secure database, it is important that placing social workers provide specific, thorough and current information on waiting children through SSIS.

2. Public adoption photo web listing (www.mnadopt.org)

Placing social workers who are recruiting adoptive families for Minnesota's waiting children add children to this site by submitting a recent photo and recruitment description of a child to MARN for inclusion on the website. This public site is intended to provide families interested in adoption a first glimpse of waiting children. The purpose of this site is **not** to provide full disclosure about a child to a prospective adoptive family. This site is available to anyone with Internet access. Therefore, child information on this site should be general and non-identifying. **No specific diagnoses [e.g. FASD, RAD, ADHD, etc.] or sensitive issues [e.g. wets the bed, victim of sexual abuse, etc.] should ever be used on the public website.** If a family is interested in a child after viewing on the public website, the placing social worker may go through appropriate channels, including conversations with the prospective adoptive family's home study social worker and the family, to determine what information about the child will be shared and when. When MARN adds a child to the state public adoption photo web listing, the child is also automatically added to the national public

adoption photo web listing managed through AdoptUsKids, under cooperative agreement with the Children's Bureau and the Adoption Exchange Association (www.adoptuskids.org). Older youth who are of adequate age and developmental capability should provide input about their recruitment plan, including photo and description used. If a youth states that he or she does not want to be included on the **public** websites, discuss the issue with the youth. If the youth continues to decline inclusion, the youth's choice should be respected. Inform MARN if a child should **not** be included on the state and/or national public adoption photo web listings. Clearly document in the case file why the youth is not included in public websites. Even if a youth declines inclusion on the public sites, the youth may still be registered on the **secure** site.

3. Adoption e-mail list serve

MARN administers a statewide adoption e-mail list serve under the MN ADOPT grant contract with DHS. The list serve is for county and private agency social workers who facilitate adoptions of children under guardianship of the commissioner. Membership on the adoption e-mail list serve is limited to those granted access by MARN, who manages the list serve on behalf of DHS. A social worker may recruit for an appropriate adoptive family for a child by sending a description of the child, and photo if available, on the list serve. The recruitment narrative should include characteristics of the child as well as the adoptive family that would best meet the child's needs. Because the security of email cannot be guaranteed, either through the initial sending or through subsequent forwarding, **no identifying information should be included in the description**. For more information on appropriate use of the list serve, please see *Statewide Adoption Email List Serve Policies and Procedures*.

Determining Which of the Three SAE Components is Most Appropriate

The SAE coordinator will consult with county and private agency staff on a case-by-case basis as needed to determine the most appropriate SAE component, or combination of components, to utilize, considering the age and special needs of the child. Call or email the SAE coordinator at MARN for consultation.

Other Routine Recruitment Efforts to Identify an Appropriate Adoptive Family

If additional routine recruitment efforts are required, they should be made concurrently with SAE registration. Other recruitment efforts include:

▪ Review of families approved for adoption who are associated with the placing agency

If the agency responsible for the placement of the child also conducts adoption home studies as part of routine business, the placing worker should review the pool of prospective adoptive families with approved home studies to assess if any of the families might be interested and capable of meeting the identified needs of the child.

▪ Minnesota Task Force on Permanency presentation

County and private agency adoption social workers meet the second Thursday of each month for Minnesota Task Force on Permanency. The meetings are scheduled from 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and alternate locations between Children's Home Society in St. Paul [even-numbered months] and Lutheran Social Services in Minneapolis [odd-numbered months]. Each meeting includes

presentations of Minnesota's waiting children, adoption-related announcements and training/discussion on adoption-related topics. Child presentations should include a photo of the child plus a brief description of the child's strengths, needs, diagnoses, personality, type of family sought, etc. If you are unable to attend Task Force, you may contact the SAE coordinator to request assistance in presenting a child.

- StarTribune Minnesota Waiting Child feature

One waiting child or sibling group is featured in the Minneapolis StarTribune newspaper the first Monday of each month. The feature includes a photo and description. Since this is a public venue, **no identifying information should be included in the description of the child(ren)**. The SAE coordinator facilitates the Minnesota waiting child feature each month. Please note that other local newspaper features may be utilized as an appropriate recruitment tool; however, the SAE coordinator is not responsible to facilitate features in newspapers other than the StarTribune.

- Thursday's Child segment

KSTP-TV, a Twin Cities metro television station, films video on a Minnesota waiting child or sibling group to air as a "Thursday's Child" segment every Thursday during the 11:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. news broadcasts. Since this is a public venue, **no identifying information should be included in the child's feature**. The SAE coordinator facilitates the scheduling for filming "Thursday's Child", and makes efforts to choose activities of interest to the child participants.

Specialized Child-Specific Recruitment Services

If SAE registration and all of the routine recruitment efforts listed above have been unsuccessful in identifying an appropriate adoptive family for a child, a county social worker may contract with a private agency that specializes in intensive child-specific recruitment services. These services are available as part of DHS's Public-Private Adoption Initiative (PPAI) grant contracts with eight private adoption agencies:

- Ampersand Families: www.ampersandfamilies.org, (612) 605-1904
- Bethany Christian Services: www.bethany.org/plymouth, (763) 553-0344
- Children's Home Society & Family Services: www.chsfs.org, (651) 646-6393 or toll free (800) 952-9302
- Downey Side: www.downeyside.org, (651) 228-0117
- Family Focus: www.mnfamilyfocus.org, (612) 331-4429
- HOPE Adoption and Family Services International, Inc.: www.hopeadoptionsservices.org, (651) 439-2446
- Lutheran Social Service: www.lssmn.org, (612) 879-5230 or toll free (800) 205-3769
- North Homes: www.northhomesinc.org, (218) 327-3055 or toll free (800) 430-3055

Funding for these PPAI services will be paid by DHS, but the county social service agency will be required to complete a Child Service Agreement (CSA) for each child for whom services are requested. Child-specific recruitment services may also be provided by private adoption agencies that are not under the PPAI grant contracts. Funding for services from these agencies may be available from DHS through Purchase of Services (POS). For more information on the PPAI and POS, contact Amy Wescott, DHS's program consultant responsible for grant contracts.

Potential Information to Include in a Child Recruitment Description for PUBLIC Venues

- First name
 - Year of birth
 - Personality [e.g. talkative, quiet, outgoing, shy, funny, helpful, introverted, anxious, laid-back, cautious, adventurous, etc.]
 - Favorites [e.g. foods, subjects in school, TV shows or movies, music or singers, books, sports, toys, season of the year, etc.]
 - Activities and interests [e.g. dancing, building models, ice skating, reading, shopping, church, etc.]
 - Strengths [e.g. talents, hobbies, things child does well, etc.]
 - Needs [e.g. structure and routine, clear expectations, slow transitions, high level of supervision, etc.]
 - Progress in school [e.g. does well in reading, needs assistance in math, etc.]
 - Future goals, dreams, aspirations and plans [e.g. wants to be a veterinarian, saving money for first car, planning on going to college, etc.]
 - Type of family the child wants [e.g. lots of siblings, has pets, lives in the country, etc.]
 - Type of family that would be best suited for the child [e.g. structured, consistent, sense of humor, composition where the child would be the youngest or only child in the family, etc.]
- Please note:** Including requirements for family characteristics in a child's recruitment description will reduce the number of potential adoptive families to consider in the matching process. Assess if a specific family characteristic is a *preference* or truly a *necessity*. For example, a recruitment description that states a child has a high energy/activity level requiring adoption by a two-parent family will eliminate from the pool of potential resources a single-parent who also has a high energy/activity level and/or has a significant support network to assist with parenting responsibilities. The social worker must ensure that a prospective adoptive parent *can meet the identified needs of a specific child*, not conform to a social worker's values about what makes a good parent.
- People with whom child must maintain contact [e.g. siblings, paternal grandmother, previous foster parent, etc.]
 - ICWA eligibility, if applicable – do not mention specific tribe

Information that Should NOT be Included in a Child Recruitment Description for PUBLIC Venues

- Specific mental health and medical diagnoses [e.g. Cerebral Palsy, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, Reactive Attachment Disorder, Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder, Bipolar Disorder, Major Depressive Disorder, etc.]
- Behaviors or conditions that are sensitive or might be considered embarrassing to a child [e.g. enuresis, victim of sexual abuse, history of psychiatric hospitalization, borderline IQ, hoards food, harms animals, sets fires, etc.]
- Time-sensitive information [e.g. specific age, grade in school, etc.]
- Specific tribal affiliation for ICWA eligible child

General Guidelines for a Child-Specific Recruitment Description for PUBLIC Venues

- Positive statements about the child should outnumber negative or neutral statements about the child.
- Begin and end description with a strength or positive quality of the child.

- Interview the child to learn information to include in the description [e.g. likes/dislikes, type of family the child wants, etc.].
- Talk to the child, as age and developmentally appropriate, about his or her description and photo and ask what should be included.
- Whenever possible, write the description in the child's own words.
- Be as creative and descriptive as possible.
- Public descriptions are used to spark initial interest in a child, **not** to provide full disclosure of a child's family history, diagnoses and behaviors.
- Recruitment description should be updated once a year at minimum.

General Guidelines for a Child Photo for Public Venues

- Photo should be as recent as possible.
- Utilize a professional photo whenever possible.
The Minnesota Heart Gallery continues to coordinate a pool of volunteer professional photographers around the state to provide portraits at no charge to assist recruitment efforts for Minnesota's waiting children and youth. Ampersand Families administers The Minnesota Heart Gallery. Contact Ampersand Families at: www.ampersandfamilies.org, (612) 605-1904.
- Photo should be a close-up shot of the head and shoulders.
- If recruiting for a sibling group, provide one photo with all of the siblings together.
- Have the child wear bright colors whenever possible.
- Minimize the colors, patterns, etc. in the background.
- A prospective parent's first impression of a child is greatly affected by the child's photo. Be sure the photo is engaging.
- Photo should be updated once a year at minimum.

Documenting Recruitment Efforts

It is the county or private agency social worker's responsibility to document the recruitment efforts utilized to search for an appropriate adoptive family for a child. Documentation of recruitment efforts should be kept in the child's permanent county file and must be provided to DHS as attachments to Adoption Assistance application forms. Some examples of appropriate documentation:

- copy of the computer screen print from the secure SAE;
- copy of the computer screen print from the state and/or national public photo web listings;
- copy of the email sent on the adoption e-mail list serve;
- copy of the description/photo distributed at Task Force plus Task Force meeting minutes verifying the date of the child presentation;
- copy of the StarTribune or other newspaper feature, including date of publication;
- air date of the "Thursday's Child" segment plus child's name and location/date of filming; and
- child-specific recruitment plan developed by private agency under PPAI or POS.

DHS's Non-Discrimination Policy

The SAE is paid through public funds, and therefore, cannot be used by agencies that discriminate against anyone based on race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, status in regard to public assistance, membership or activity in a local commission, disability, sexual

orientation or age. An agency who requires a person to sign a statement of faith, subscribing to the agency's specific religious beliefs, in order to receive services, cannot receive public funds or services paid through public funds.

SAE Contact Information

For consultation regarding available recruitment options or appropriate information to include in public versus private recruitment activities, contact:

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For information on DHS's MN ADOPT or PPAI grant contracts or Purchase of Service contracts, contact:

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