



Policy on State Adoption Exchange and Other Child-specific Recruitment Activities for Children Under Guardianship of the Commissioner

Overview:

This policy outlines the requirements for a responsible social service agency to make appropriate recruitment efforts to finalize the adoption of all children under guardianship of the commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Human Services (the “department”).

Reason for Policy:

This policy ensures that the responsible social service agencies understand the various recruitment options available to identify appropriate adoptive parents for children under guardianship of the commissioner, who are waiting in foster care for adoptive parents.

Applicability:

This policy is applicable to all children who are under guardianship of the commissioner as the result of a court order terminating the parental rights of a child’s parents, or court order accepting a child’s parent’s consent to adoption.

Policy:

- The responsible social services agency has the duty to act as the commissioner’s agent in making reasonable efforts to finalize the adoption of all children under guardianship of the commissioner, pursuant to Minn. Stat., section 260C.325.
[Minn. Stat., section 260C.601, subd. 2]
- Reasonable efforts to finalize an adoption include specific strategies to identify a prospective adoptive parent when a child will not be adopted by a relative or foster parent.
[Minn. Stat., section 260C.605, subd. 1 (d)(3)(iv)(A)to(F)]
- A child is required to be registered on the State Adoption Exchange (the “Exchange”) within 45 days of the date they were legally free for adoption.
[Minn. Stat., sections 260C.605, subd. 1 (d)(3)(iv)(A), and 259.75, subd. 2]
- The Exchange is funded through public monies, and therefore, cannot be used by agencies that discriminate against anyone based on race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, status regarding receipt of public assistance, membership or activity in a local commission, disability, sexual orientation or age. An agency that requires anyone 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 monies.

Procedures:

I. Child-specific recruitment activities to identify an appropriate adoptive family

Minnesota utilizes several recruitment tools to identify an appropriate adoptive parent for each waiting child:

1. Relative search, as required in Minn. Stat., section 260C.221
2. State Adoption Exchange, see **Procedure IV**

3. Other routine recruitment activities, see **Procedure VII**
4. Specialized recruitment activities, see **Procedure VIII**

II. Management of the State Adoption Exchange

The establishment and maintenance of an adoption exchange is the responsibility of the department, pursuant to Minn. Stat., section 259.75. Currently, the department contracts with MN ADOPT to administer the duties of the Exchange.

III. Northstar adoption assistance eligibility requires documentation of recruitment efforts

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

- Registration of a child on the Exchange, using one or more of the three components, according to **Procedure V**.
- If registration with the Exchange does not result in identification of an appropriate parent for a child, the agency must employ at least one other recruitment method, according to **Procedures VII or VIII**.

IV. Statutory requirement to register a child on the State Adoption Exchange

Minn. Stat., section 259.75, subd. 2, requires a child to be registered on the Exchange within 45 days of the date they were legally free 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** a child on the Exchange, if adoption recruitment efforts are required because there is no identified adoptive resource for them. See specific instructions for registration in **Procedure V**.
- **Defer** a child from registration on the Exchange if: 1) A child's foster parent or other person is considering adoption; 2) Diagnostic testing is required to clarify a child's needs; or 3) A child is currently in a hospital setting and their 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.
- **Exempt** a child from Exchange registration if a child: 1) Is in an adoptive placement, as indicated by the signing of an Adoption Placement Agreement (APA); or 2) Was court-ordered into long-term foster care (LTFC) prior to August 1, 2012, and the court ordered that adoption recruitment efforts on behalf of a child be ceased. **NOTE:** As of August 1, 2012, a child under guardianship of the commissioner may no longer be court-ordered into LTFC. To document an adoptive placement, send APA, Adoption Placement Decision Summary, and all required documentation to the department as required in *Policy on Foster and Adoption Placement Decisions for Children Under Guardianship of the Commissioner*. To document LTFC, send a copy of the court order to the department.

V. Three components of the State Adoption Exchange

The Exchange has three components, any one of which, or a combination of more than one, may be used to meet the requirement for Exchange registration for Northstar Adoption Assistance eligibility.

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

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

b. Public adoption photo Web listing (www.mnadopt.org)

Placing social workers who are recruiting adoptive parents for Minnesota's waiting children add children to this site by submitting a recent photo and recruitment description of a child to MN ADOPT for inclusion on the website. This **public** site is intended to provide parents interested in adoption a first glimpse of waiting children. The purpose of this site is **not** to provide full disclosure about a child to prospective adoptive parents. 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., Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, Reactive Attachment Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, etc.) or sensitive issues (e.g., wets the bed, victim of sexual abuse, etc.) should ever be used on the public website.** If a parent is interested in a child after viewing on the public website, the placing social worker may go through appropriate channels, including conversations with a prospective adoptive parent's home study worker and the parent, to determine what information about a child will be shared and when. When MN ADOPT adds a child to the state public adoption photo Web listing, they are 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 they do not want to be included on the **public** websites, discuss the issue with them. If they continue to decline inclusion, their choice should be respected. Inform MN ADOPT 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 a youth is not included in public websites. Even if a youth declines inclusion on the public sites, they may still be registered on the *secure* site.

c. Adoption email listserv

The department administers a statewide adoption email listserv for county and private agency social workers who facilitate adoptions of children under guardianship of the commissioner. Membership in the adoption email listserv is limited to those granted access by the department. A social worker may recruit for an appropriate adoptive parent for a child by sending a description of a child, and photo if available, on the listserv. The recruitment narrative should include characteristics of a child, as well as the type of adoptive parent that would best meet the child's needs. Because the security of the email listserv cannot be guaranteed, either through the initial sending or through subsequent forwarding, **no identifying information, diagnoses or sensitive issues should be included in the description.** For more information on appropriate use of the listserv, see *Policy on Statewide Adoption Email Listserv.*

VI. Determining which of the three Exchange components is most appropriate

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

VII. Other routine recruitment efforts to identify an appropriate adoptive family

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

- *Review of parents approved for adoption who are associated with the placing agency* – If an agency responsible for the placement of a child also conducts adoption home studies as part of routine business, the placing worker should review the pool of prospective adoptive parents with approved home studies to assess if they might be interested and capable of meeting the identified needs of a 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. at Children's Home Society of Minnesota in St. Paul. Periodically, Task Force on Permanency meetings are held in additional locations in central and northern Minnesota. The meeting dates and locations are announced on the adoption email listserv. 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 their strengths, needs, personality, type of family sought, etc. If unable to attend the Task Force meeting, contact the Exchange coordinator to request assistance in presenting a child.

- *Star Tribune Minnesota Waiting Child feature* – One waiting child or sibling group is featured in the Minneapolis Star Tribune newspaper the first Monday of each month. The feature includes a photo and description. Since this is a public venue, **no identifying information, diagnoses or sensitive issues should be included in the description of the child(ren)**. The Exchange coordinator facilitates the Minnesota waiting child feature each month. Other local newspaper features may be utilized as an appropriate recruitment tool; however, the Exchange coordinator is not responsible to facilitate features in newspapers other than the Star Tribune.
- *Thursday's Child segment* – KSTP-TV, a Twin Cities metro television station, films video on a Minnesota waiting children or sibling groups to air as a "Thursday's Child" segments airing during news broadcasts and on the KSTP-TV website. Since this is a public venue, **no identifying information, diagnoses or sensitive issues should be included in a child's feature**. The Exchange coordinator facilitates the scheduling for filming "Thursday's Child," and makes efforts to choose activities of interest to child participants.

VIII. Specialized child-specific recruitment services

If Exchange registration and other routine recruitment efforts listed in **Procedure VII** 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 the department's grant contracts with four private adoption agencies, including:

- Ampersand Families: www.ampersandfamilies.org, 612-605-1904
- Children's Home Society of Minnesota: www.chsfs.org, 651-646-6393, or toll free 800-952-9302
- Kindred Family Focus: www.nexustreatment.org/treatmentsites/Kindred, 320-529-0862 or 763-271-1670
- North Homes: www.northhomesinc.org, 218-327-3055 or toll free 800-430-3055

Funding for these private agency adoption services will be provided by the department, but the county social service agency will be required to complete a child-specific Service Agreement (CSSA) for each child for whom services are requested. For more information on services available through the adoption contracts, contact the department program consultant responsible for adoption grant contracts.

IX. 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, attending 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 parent the child wants (e.g., lots of siblings, has pets, lives in the country, etc.)
- Type of parent 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.) NOTE: Including requirements for parent characteristics in a child's recruitment description will reduce the number of potential adoptive parents to consider in the matching process. Assess if a specific parent 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. Social workers must ensure that a prospective adoptive parent *can meet the identified needs of a specific child*, not conform to a social worker's values and ideals about what makes a good parent.
- People with whom a child must maintain contact (e.g., siblings, paternal grandmother, previous foster parents, etc.)
- Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) eligibility, if applicable – do not mention specific tribe.

X. 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.

XI. General guidelines for child-specific recruitment descriptions for *public* venues

- Positive statements about a child should outnumber negative or neutral statements.
- Begin and end description with a strength or positive quality of a child.
- Interview a child to learn information to include in the description (e.g., likes/dislikes, type of parent they want, etc.).
- Talk to a child, as age and developmentally appropriate, about their description and photo, and ask what should be included.
- Whenever possible, write the description in a 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 their family history, diagnoses and behaviors.

- Recruitment description should be updated once a year, at minimum.

XII. 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 child portraits at no charge to assist recruitment efforts for Minnesota’s waiting children. 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 a child wear bright colors whenever possible.
- Minimize colors, patterns, etc. in the background.
- A prospective parent’s first impression of a child is greatly affected by their photo. Be sure the photo is engaging.
- Photo should be updated once a year, at minimum.

XIII. Documenting recruitment efforts

It is the county or private agency social worker’s responsibility to document recruitment efforts utilized to search for an appropriate adoptive parent for a child. Documentation of recruitment efforts should be kept in a child’s permanent county file, and must be provided to the department as attachments to Northstar adoption assistance application forms. Some examples of appropriate documentation include:

- Copy of the computer screen print from the secure Exchange.
- Copy of the computer screen print from the state and/or national public photo Web listings.
- Copy of the email sent on the adoption email listserv.
- Copy of the description/photo distributed at Task Force, plus Task Force meeting minutes verifying the date of the child presentation.
- Copy of the Star Tribune 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.
- Child-specific recruitment plan developed by private agency under contract with the department.

XIV. Exchange staff responsible for consultation regarding available recruitment options or appropriate information to include in public versus private recruitment activities:

Cathy Stang, Exchange coordinator

MN ADOPT

cstang@mnadopt.org

Local: 612-746-5131

Toll free: 866-303-6276, ext. 131

XV. Department staff responsible for adding and removing members from the listserv, and providing consultation on using the listserv as a recruitment tool:

Emily Palmer, social services program consultant

emily.palmer@state.mn.us

651-431-4712

XVI. Department contact for adoption grant contracts:

Emily Palmer, social services program consultant

emily.palmer@state.mn.us

651-431-4712

Form(s) that apply:

None

Related Policies and References:

Policy on Statewide Adoption Email Listserv

Policy on Foster and Adoption Placement Decisions for Children Under Guardianship of the Commissioner

Training:

None

Legal Authority:

Minn. Stat., section 259.75

Minn. Stat., section 260C.601, subd. 2

Minn. Stat., section 260C.605, subd. 1 (d)(3)(iv)

Standards:

None

Definitions:

Adoption Placement Agreement: The written agreement, on the commissioner's designated format, between the responsible social service agency, the commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Human Services and the adopting parent which reflects the intent of all the signatories to the agreement that the adopting parent establish a parent and child relationship by adoption with a child who is under guardianship of the commissioner.

Child under guardianship of the commissioner: An individual under 18 years of age, who is under guardianship of the commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Human Services by court order, pursuant to Minn. Stat., section 260C.325.

Pre-adoptive parent: An adult who has signed an Adoption Placement Agreement regarding a child. This has the same meaning as adopting parent.

Prospective adoptive parent: An individual who may become a pre-adoptive parent, regardless of whether the individual has an adoption home study approving the individual for adoption, but who has not signed an Adoption Placement Agreement.

Responsible social service agency: The county social service agency that has legal and financial responsibility for care, custody and control of a child.

Waiting child: A child under guardianship of the commissioner who is not in an adoptive placement, and has not been court ordered into long-term foster care.

Policy Contacts:

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This policy and its procedures remain in effect until rescinded or updated.