



CDSS

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REASON FOR THIS TRANSMITTAL

- State Law Change
- Federal Law or Regulation Change
- Court Order
- Clarification Requested by One or More Counties
- Initiated by CDSS

June 13, 2011

ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE NO. I-35-11

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS
ALL CHILD WELFARE SERVICES PROGRAM MANAGERS
ALL CHIEF PROBATION OFFICERS

SUBJECT: FINDING RELATIVES FOR CHILDREN IN OUT-OF-HOME
PLACEMENT

REFERENCE: FAMILY CODE SECTION 7950; WELFARE AND INSTITUTION CODE
(W&IC) SECTIONS 361.3, 309(e), 628; PUBLIC LAW (PL) 110-351;
ALL COUNTY LETTER (ACL) No. 09-86

Over the past several years various activities have been undertaken to improve permanency for foster children, some of which focus on helping children stay connected to family. Both the California Child Welfare Council (CWC) and the Blue Ribbon Commission (BRC) reviewed and discussed current practice and made recommendations for the purpose of improving processes for foster children to live with, or stay connected to, their extended families. On the national level, the federal Fostering Connections for Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (PL 110-351) enacted provisions that further permanency with relatives, corresponding to and supporting the CWC and BRC recommendations.

In response to PL 110-351, California legislation was passed and funding made available to promote increased efforts to find and engage relatives of children in out-of-home care. For instance, Assembly Bill (AB) 938, enacted in 2009, amended W&IC sections 309 and 628 to require that within 30 days of a child's removal from the home, the social worker or probation officer must exercise due diligence to conduct an investigation to identify and locate all grandparents, adult siblings and other adult relatives, including those suggested by the parents for the purpose of connecting them with family members (see ACL 09-86).

Additionally, in an effort to promote permanent connections for foster children, many counties have either developed or begun development of protocols and procedures to

execute Family Finding and Engagement activities. This All County Information Notice (ACIN) is issued to provide counties with information and resources about family finding and engagement activities to assist in their diligent efforts to identify, locate and engage appropriate relatives for reasons outlined above.

Family Finding and Engagement Activities

The purpose of undertaking Family Finding and Engagement activities is to ensure that children and youth in care are able to maintain and develop permanent connections with relatives and other important individuals in their lives, as well as reduce the length of time children are in foster care. There are several models that outline the steps for the family finding and engagement process. The one developed by the National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice and the California Permanency for Youth Project is representative of these models and presents the following six discrete, repetitious activities. They are:

- *Setting the stage:* The social worker or probation officer assembles a permanency team comprised of the youth, caregivers, professionals, and other people the youth identifies as important to his or her life. The permanency team creates a shared agreement as to the goals and initial tasks of the group.
- *Discovery and review of discovery:* The youth, with assistance from the permanency team, identifies the targets of the search. The team assigns the tasks and timeframes to conduct the search and initial engagement, and to report back to the team for review and further exploration.
- *Engagement, to include collaborative meetings:* The youth identifies who they would like to begin to engage with and the team creates an engagement strategy for each person identified. Both the youth and the identified potential connections are prepared and supported throughout the contact process.
- *Exploration and planning:* The permanency team identifies and incorporates new members resulting from search and engagement to participate on the team. The permanency team begins the process of developing an individualized permanency plan for the youth reflective of the participation of those who have been recently identified.
- *Decision Making:* The permanency team evaluates the results of the initial planning and devises primary and backup plans for permanency. Legal issues are explored specific to the plans that are generated, progress is monitored, and plans are reviewed and revised as needed.
- *Sustaining Connections:* The primary permanency plan has been achieved. Contingency plans, risk factors, resources, successes and strengths are reviewed and updated to support the sustainability of the plan.

Family Finding and Engagement Implementation Toolkit

The Administrative Office of the Courts is currently working on a Family Finding and Engagement Implementation Toolkit for the purpose of having a common curriculum that can be used across California. This toolkit will provide counties with guidance in implementing the six activity steps mentioned above, as well as provide other valuable tools that can be applied to individual counties. The toolkit may result in some modification to the steps outlined above while preserving the core purpose of providing practical, proven techniques for success. The toolkit is to be completed by June 30, 2011.

Additional Resources

The following are additional resources that can assist counties in implementing family finding and engagement.

- A publication entitled Making “Relative Search” Happen provides information for finding and involving relatives at every stage of the child welfare process. It is electronically available at:

www.childfocuspartners.com/images/RelativeSearchGuide10-15.pdf

As this guide was produced by ChildFocus™ with foundation funds, it is in the public domain and can be freely distributed. This document contains many tools, links to other resources, and examples of successful practices in California and elsewhere in the nation. It is appropriate for counties of all sizes. The guide contains information on establishing the principles and values to guide a strong relative search process, building a strong policy framework for supporting effective relative searches and making it manageable. There are also sections on how workers can best value family connections and how to effectively use internet searches. This is a well written guide with practical information.

- A publication entitled Family Search & Engagement Practice Guide provides a detailed step-by-step process for successful family search and engagement. It is from EMQ Children and Family Services and the Family Partnership Institute, and is available at:

http://emqff.org/services/family_finding.shtml

- A guide developed jointly by the National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice and Permanency Planning at the Hunter College School of Social Worker and the California Permanency for Youth Project is entitled: Six Steps to Find a Family: A Practice Guide to Family Search and Engagement.

This guide outlines steps both for finding families and creating connections once family members are found. This guide is available at:

<http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/SixSteps.pdf>

Training Resources

The National Institute for Permanent Family Connectedness (NIPFC) is another resource which offers a range of training, coaching and consultation on family finding and permanency work with multiple stakeholders and audiences across the state and county. Recently, NIPFC added training on the development processes to comply with AB 938 (Fostering Connections-Notice and Engagement of Relatives). For more information on these trainings, send an email to familyfinding@senecacenter.org or call 1-510-654-4004, extension 2238. To view the website and training menu, go to: http://www.senecacenter.org/perm_training.

EMQ's Family Partnership Institute (FPI) provides training based on its Family Search & Engagement Practice Guide publication and can customize trainings to meet a county's needs. Click on "Training" at the EMQ website: <http://www.emqff.org>, and then click on the link to FPI.

The Resource Center for Family-Focused Practice of the University of California Davis Extension offers training on Family Finding for juvenile probation placement officers. For more information, please e-mail Janet Lee at: jlee@ucde.ucdavis.edu or call 1-(530) 757-8586.

Counties are also encouraged to contact their local Regional Training Academy to inquire about Family Finding classes available in their area.

- Bay Area Academy: <http://www.bayareaacademy.org>
- Central California Training Academy:
http://www.csufresno.edu/swert/projects_programs/ccta/index.shtml
- Northern Regional Training Academy:
<http://www.humanservices.ucdavis.edu/academy/index.asp>
- Southern – Public Child Welfare Training Academy:
<http://www.theacademy.sdsu.edu/programs/PCWTA/PCWTA-1.htm>

Funding

Funding has been made available to reimburse counties for performing family finding/search and engagement and relative notification activities; please see County Fiscal Letter (CFL) 10/11-46, page 19. Claiming instructions are contained in

CFL 09/10-46, page 4 (family finding/engagement), and CFL 10/11-48, page 5 (relative notification). These CFLs can be accessed at:

<http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/lettersnotices/PG960.htm>

Questions pertaining to family finding/relative search and engagement should be directed to the Kinship Care Policy and Support Unit at (916) 657-1858. Questions concerning allocation and claiming instructions in the CFLs should be submitted via email to fiscal.systems@dss.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Original Document Signed By:

KAREN B. GUNDERSON, Chief
Child and Youth Permanency Branch
Children and Family Services Division