

	GEORGIA DIVISION OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY MANUAL			
	Chapter:	(14) Resource Development	Effective Date:	March 2015
	Policy Title:	Inquiries and Information Sessions		
	Policy Number:	14.7	Previous Policy #:	1014.1 - 1014.2.3

CODES/REFERENCES

N/A

REQUIREMENTS

The Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) shall direct all telephone inquiries from prospective foster and adoptive parents to the Inquiry Information Line (1-877-210-KIDS [5437]).

DFCS shall contact all prospective foster and adoptive parents within three business days of an inquiry to schedule an Information Session, which shall be available at least once each calendar month.

All prospective foster and adoptive parents must attend an Information Session as part of the approval process. This includes families approved by other states that move to Georgia and are requesting a waiver of pre-service training. For applicants who are couples, both must attend the Information Session. There are **no exceptions** to attending an Information Session.

DFCS shall provide an Information Session to any interested persons and not systematically and inappropriately select out persons interested in transracial or interethnic placements. The arbitrary use of race-neutral factors (e.g., income, age, education, family structure, home ownership status, etc.) that also have the effect of excluding groups of prospective families shall be avoided.

PROCEDURES

The Homes for Georgia's Kids (HGK) Inquiry Information Line will:

1. Respond to calls from persons interested in becoming a foster or adoptive parent. When callers have to leave a message, applicants will be contacted by phone within one business day to confirm their interest.
2. Enter each applicant's identifying information into the HGK Information Line Database (i.e., applicant name, address, telephone number, date of birth, age, and race/ethnicity).
3. Mail or email each applicant an acknowledgement letter thanking them for their interest in becoming a foster or adoptive parent and a brochure containing general information about the process. The applicant will be advised to expect to be contacted by their local DFCS office.

To manage inquiries, the local DFCS office will:

1. Check the HGK Information Line database on a daily basis for new inquiries.

- a. Submit requests for access (User ID and password) to the HGK contractor¹.
- b. Notify the HGK contractor when a staff member is no longer working for DFCS or no longer needs access.
2. Contact potential applicants within three business days of becoming aware of their inquiry to follow up on their interest in becoming a foster or adoptive parent. At that time, the local office will gather any necessary information not obtained by the HGK Inquiry Information Line and provide information about upcoming IMPACT FCP Information Sessions.
3. Carefully screen Georgia SHINES (using partial first and last name, DOB, and address) to see if an applicant's information has previously been entered into the system before creating a new Home Information Page and Person Detail pages for all household members. After completion of the Home page, Georgia SHINES will automatically create a new Foster/Adoptive Home (FAD) stage that is used by case managers to document all future casework regarding the applicants. (See Georgia SHINES User manual for directions on *Adding a Home*)
4. Enter the inquiry into the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (Georgia SHINES) within 72 hours of receipt.

To manage Information Sessions, the local DFCS office will:

1. Utilize the scripted IMPACT FCP Information Session. Information presented includes:
 - a. Goal and purpose of foster care and adoption, along with the various placement options available through the state;
 - b. Roles and responsibilities of the caregivers, the legal/extended family of children in out-of-home placement, the children themselves, and the interaction between these entities;
 - c. DFCS philosophy of placement and the philosophy of cooperation and partnership with foster and adoptive families;
 - d. HIPAA, ASFA, and MEPA-IEPA, and their impact upon the foster care and adoption process;
 - e. Importance of clear communication between the foster and adoptive family, agency staff, birth families, courts, schools, and other partners involved in the foster care and adoption process;
 - f. General requirements for parenting children placed in their homes, including the general qualifications for caregivers; requirements for the physical facilities (home); the family evaluation process (i.e., background checks, medical evaluations, etc.); financial responsibility (i.e., per diem and reimbursements for services provided); annual continued parent development requirements; care of the child (i.e., safety, physical care, transportation, child care practices, etc.);
 - g. The mechanics of the placement and the procedures and processes involved;
 - h. DFCS discipline policy, consequences of violating the discipline policy, and overview of the implications of Taylor vs. Ledbetter;
 - i. Supports available from the agency, the community, and other resource families, and accessing services and resources;
 - j. Overview of various levels and types of care for children along the foster care continuum;

¹ The contact information for the HGK contractor can be obtained from the State Foster Care Services Director's Office.

- k. Post-Adoption services.
2. Contact applicants within two business days of a missed Information Session appointment to offer a reschedule date.
3. Close out applicants from Georgia SHINES after three missed Information Session appointments.
4. Send written notification of closure asking applicants to contact the Information Line again when they decide to proceed with the process.
5. When appropriate, consider other ways to partner with applicants who decide not to foster or adopt, such as:
 - a. Special activities/events (Secret Santa, picnics, etc.);
 - b. Volunteer activities for families;
 - c. Recruitment activities;
 - d. Operate clothes closets/food pantries;
 - e. Provide refreshments for future groups;
 - f. Sponsor a child's expenses for scouts, ballet, prom clothing, etc.;
 - g. Use special skills (art, athletics, etc.);
 - h. Serve on citizen panels ;and
 - i. Become a fully approved "respite only" foster parent.

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Applicant

This term refers to a prospective foster or adoptive parent who has contacted the inquiry line or submitted a Prospective Caregiver Application, but has not yet obtained final approval as a foster or adoptive parent. No individual should be denied the opportunity to apply on the basis of race, color, or national origin (of the person or child involved).

Inquiry Line

This toll-free number (1-877-210-5437) serves as the central intake line for all telephone inquiries. The County Department should contact the DFCS State Foster Care Services Director's Office regarding concerns about the inquiry line.

Information Session

The Information Session (previously referred to as Orientation) constitutes the first phase of IMPACT Family Centered Practice (FCP) pre-service training/preparation and is mandatory for all potential foster and adoptive families. The scripted IMPACT FCP Information Session video and PowerPoint presentation should be used. Families approved by other states are also required to have the fundamental information needed to consider fostering or adopting in this state. The Information Session provides a basic introduction of applicable DFCS policy to assist interested parties in making an initial decision about becoming a foster or adoptive parent. Subsequently, they can determine whether or not to continue the process. The Information Session may be completed within a scheduled group setting or individually. Regardless of the format, persons interested in becoming foster or adoptive parents should not have to wait more than **30 days** to attend an Information Session. Making people wait an extended period of time leads to increased drop-out rates. We must move quickly to help people act upon their initial interest and nurture their desire to foster or adopt. Otherwise, their interest and desire may gradually disappear and another potential resource for a child may be lost.

Following the Information Session, persons interested in continuing the application process

must complete an application, which is included in the information packet. Their names will be screened against the county's Child Protection Services (CPS) database, the Sexual Offender Registry, Department of Corrections Offender Query, and the Board of Pardons and Parole database. Any negative findings must be reviewed by the County Director/Designee before an invitation to IMPACT FCP Pre-Service Training is extended.

FORMS AND TOOLS

Homes for Georgia's Kids - Information Line Database Prospective Caregiver Application
