

*Handouts for the Webinar*

# **Fostering Connections: Identifying and Notifying Relatives**

March 8, 2011

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*Produced by*

Family and Children’s Resource Program, part of the  
Jordan Institute for Families  
UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work

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NC Division of Social Services

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# RESOURCES

## Learning More about Fostering Connections

- Fostering Connections Resource Center (<http://www.fosteringconnections.org/>)
- Fostering Connections: A Law Foster Parents Should Know About (article) (<http://www.fosteringperspectives.org/fpv15n1/FosteringConnections.htm>)

## Family Finding Strategies

- Ask parents. “Ask early and ask often” as you build trust and share information on the benefits
- Ask children and siblings: who’s important to you?
- Ask relatives about additional family or friends
- Ask other professionals working with the family (especially foster parents, group home workers, etc.)
- Find the family historian (who organizes reunions, hosts Thanksgiving, has authority in the family?)
- Search case records and agency databases, including other agency departments such as Food Stamps, Medicaid, Child Support Federal Parent Locator Service
- Use online resources
  - Google search
  - USSearch.com
  - Lexis/Nexis (newspapers)
  - Facebook, MySpace
  - State Board of Elections (Voter Registration)
  - NC Department of Corrections
  - District Court calendars
  - County Register of Deeds

## Working with Incarcerated Parents

- [http://www.practicenotes.org/vol7\\_no1/cspn%20vol6\\_1.pdf](http://www.practicenotes.org/vol7_no1/cspn%20vol6_1.pdf)

# NC REVISED POLICY ON RELATIVE NOTIFICATION

<http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-10/man/CSs1201c4.pdf>

## From Chapter IV, Section IV, Placement Decision Making, Item 3 Relative Notification Change# 10-2009, December 2009

When the decision has been made to remove a child from parental custody, federal law, (Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, P.L. 110-351) requires agencies to exercise *due diligence* to notify all close adult relatives of a child (including any other adult relatives suggested by the parents) within 30 days of the child's removal from the parent, of their options to participate in the care and placement of the child.

Notification to relatives is subject to exceptions due to family or domestic violence. The intent of this part of the legislation is to ensure adult relatives of children under the care and supervision of county Departments are given the opportunity and *consideration* to be placement resources and/or to be able to participate in the child's care plan.

For the purpose of this section, *due diligence* means those efforts that are reasonably likely to identify and provide notice to adult relatives and kin suggested by parents, as well as **adult maternal and paternal, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, great grandparents, nieces and nephews**. Efforts include, but are not limited to,

- Interviewing the child and the child's parents or caretakers about the child's relatives and their preferences for placement.
- Using family decision making meetings such as Child and Family Team (CFT) Meetings and Team Decision Making (TDM) Meetings to ask participants to help identify other relatives of the child.
- Contacting identified relatives and requesting names of other relatives, divulging only enough information necessary to help identify additional relatives and assess their interest in accepting placement of the child or providing a connection.
- Accessing internal agency databases such as child welfare and child support
- Utilizing internet based search tools.

This legislation strengthens North Carolina's current laws and policies as they relate to relatives. Relatives are the placement of preference for children in care (N.C.G.S. § 7B-505). Current policy suggests that parents should be asked to help identify relatives and kin who can serve as potential resources for the child (Chapter IV; Section 1201; I; D - Choosing the Best Placement Resource). The agency should work with parents and caretakers to notify relatives/kin they've suggested in addition to pursuing those close relatives that are mandated to receive notification. In keeping with family-centered practice, the agency should inform parents of the requirement to notify relatives beyond those they have identified. Parents may be able to provide necessary background and history of these relatives to assist the agency in determining their suitability. In situations of family or domestic violence, it may not be appropriate to notify such relatives if it is deemed that it would pose a risk to the child or caretaker. If after a thorough assessment of domestic violence, the agency deems that it is not in the child's best interest to contact a relative or kin member then the justification should be thoroughly documented in the case file.

Although the requirement to notify relatives is within 30 days of the agency assuming legal and physical custody of the child, relative notification is an ongoing process. Social workers should follow up with relatives to discuss their desires and options in becoming resources for children. Relatives who demonstrate ambivalence should receive support from the agency to assist them in determining their level of interest and commitment. Relatives and kin may be identified or come forward later in the case and should be afforded the same information and notification as those relatives identified earlier in the case.

**From Chapter IV, Section IV, Placement Decision Making, Item 3a Notification Requirements Change# 10-2009, December 2009**

The federal law lists specific requirements that shall be included in the notification to relatives. At a minimum, the relative notification shall:

- specify that the child has been removed from the custody of the parent,
- explain the options the relative has under federal, state, and local law to participate in the care and placement of the child,
- explain the options that may be lost by failing to respond to the notice,
- describe the requirements to become a foster family home,
- describe the services and supports that are available for children in a foster home, and
- describe how the relative guardians of the child may receive kinship guardianship assistance payments, if the agency has elected to offer such payments.

To this end, social workers will find the following suggested tools helpful to provide notice to relatives. The sample "Relative Notification Letter" (DSS-5317) and the "Relative Interest Form" (DSS-5316) should be sent together to identified relatives/kin as they complement each other. The social worker may include the "Relative Search Information Form" (DSS-5318) tool with the Relative Notification letter to obtain additional relative information. The "Relative Search Information" tool may also be used by the social worker to document relative information for the case file. County Departments may choose an alternate format to notify relatives; however, it must include the minimum criteria listed above to ensure compliance with the federal law.

Although the requirement to notify relatives is within 30 days of the agency assuming legal and physical custody of the child, relative notification is an ongoing process. Social workers should follow up with relatives to discuss their desires and options in becoming resources for children. Relatives who demonstrate ambivalence should receive support from the agency to assist them in determining their level of interest and commitment. Relatives and kin may be identified or come forward later in the case and should be afforded the same information and notification as those relatives identified earlier in the case.

The agency may also determine that it is appropriate to notify identified relatives/kin prior to assuming legal custody of a child. Social worker skill should be utilized to obtain parental consent to notify relatives prior to the child being removed from parental custody.

\_\_\_\_\_(Date)

Relative Name:  
Street Address:  
City/State/Zip:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

\_\_\_\_\_(Child/ren Name/s) \_\_\_\_\_(has been, have been, will be) removed from the physical custody of \_\_\_\_\_ (caretaker name) and \_\_\_\_\_ (is/are/will be) placed into the care and custody of \_\_\_\_\_ (County DSS). You are being contacted because you have been identified as a relative. North Carolina recognizes and values the importance of children's relationships with relatives. Under federal law when a child is removed from parental custody, close adult relatives have a right to be notified and given options about how they can participate in the care and planning of the child.

As a relative, you may consider having contact with \_\_\_\_\_ (Child/ren Name) such as writing letters, phone contact or visitation. You may also consider providing a temporary or permanent home where \_\_\_\_\_ (Child/ren Name) can live. Where children live depends on the needs of each child, your interests and the assessment of the home.

Enclosed you will find a self addressed stamped envelope and two forms. One form is called, "**Relative Interest Form.**" This form includes a place to check if would like to have contact with \_\_\_\_\_ (Child/ren Name/s) and, or if you might be able to provide a home for \_\_\_\_\_ (Child/ren Name/s). The back of the form lists options on how relatives may be able to provide a home to children. The other form is the "**Relative Search Information Form,**" and can be used to write down contact information of other family members you know of that we may contact.

**Since we are currently planning for \_\_\_\_\_ (Child/ren Name/s), please complete and return the forms within 30 days. If the forms are not returned and, or DSS is unable to communicate with you in some other way, DSS will assume that you are currently unable to provide a family connection or a home for {Child's Name} to live.** You may return forms to: \_\_\_\_\_ (Social Worker), \_\_\_\_\_ (County DSS), \_\_\_\_\_ (Address), \_\_\_\_\_ (City/State/Zip).

If you have any questions regarding the information in this letter, please don't hesitate to contact \_\_\_\_\_ (Social Worker) at \_\_\_\_\_ (Phone #).

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_

## Relative Interest Form

I, \_\_\_\_\_ understand that \_\_\_\_\_  
Relative's Name Child/ren's Name(s)

\_\_\_\_\_ (has been/have been/will be) placed in the custody of \_\_\_\_\_ (County DSS), and may be in need of a temporary and or permanent home. Children also benefit from having a family connection and receiving support from their relatives.

1. Please indicate if you wish DSS to consider you for having contact with the child/ren, such as writing letters, phone contact, visitation or other type of involvement:

|                  |  |   |
|------------------|--|---|
| (Check only one) |  | <b>Yes. <u>Do</u></b> consider me for having some type of contact with child/ren. |
|                  |  | <b>No. <u>Do not</u></b> consider me for having contact with child/ren.           |

2. Please indicate whether you wish DSS to consider you as a possible temporary placement (see back of this form for description of temporary placement options):

|                  |  |  |
|------------------|--|--|
| (Check only one) |  | <b>Yes. <u>Do</u></b> consider me as a temporary placement for child/ren.    |
|                  |  | <b>No. <u>Do not</u></b> consider me as a temporary placement for child/ren. |

3. Please indicate whether you wish DSS to consider you as a possible permanent placement (see back of this form for description of permanent placement options):

|                  |  |  |
|------------------|--|--|
| (Check only one) |  | <b>Yes. <u>Do</u></b> consider me as a permanent placement for child/ren.    |
|                  |  | <b>No. <u>Do not</u></b> consider me as a permanent placement for child/ren. |

To be considered for any of the above options, please sign, date and return this form in the self addressed envelope within 30 days. If you do not return this form or if DSS is unable to communicate with you in some other way, DSS will assume that you are currently unable to provide a family connection or a home for the child/ren to live. If you are unsure and would like to discuss the child/ren's needs and options available to you, please contact \_\_\_\_\_ (social worker) at \_\_\_\_\_ (phone number).

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Relative Signature) / /  
(Date)

Contact Number: ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

cc: case file Date mailed to relative: \_\_\_\_\_

When children are removed from the custody of their parents they may be placed in a temporary home. Below you will find **temporary placement** options that relatives may provide:

|  | <b>Kinship Provider (Non-Licensed)</b>                           | <b>Licensed Foster Care/Kinship Provider</b>  |
|--|--|---|
| <p><b>Requirements for <u>temporary</u> placement resource</b></p> <p>Criminal and child welfare background checks are required for both options</p> | Kinship home assessment; Court approved/designated               | Participate in 30 hours of pre-service foster parent training; First Aid/Universal precautions/CPR training; fire inspection; fingerprint check; physical exam; provide identification document (driver's license, social security card, auto insurance etc); proof of adequate income to support self; Approved home study |
| <p><b>Financial supports that <u>may</u> be available to children/relative providers</b></p>   | Work First grants, medical/dental coverage, food stamps, daycare | Foster care reimbursement payments, medical/dental coverage   |

When children are not able to return to the care their parents, an alternate permanent placement is made for children. Below you will find **permanent placement** options that relatives may provide:

|   | <b>Adoption</b>   | <b>Guardianship</b>   | <b>Legal Custody</b>   |
|---|---|---|--|
| <p><b>Requirements for <u>permanent</u> placement resource</b></p> <p>Criminal and child welfare background checks are required for all options</p> | Approved adoption home study  | Guardianship suitability study                              | Home study<br>Court sanctioned                                   |
| <p><b>Financial supports that <u>may</u> be available to children/relative providers</b></p>  | Adoption assistance payments, medical/dental coverage; Adoption tax credit for adoptive parents | Subsidized guardianship payments (if offered by the county) | Work First grants, medical/dental coverage, food stamps, daycare |

# Relative Search Information

Name of Person Completing Form:

Social Worker:

County:

Child's/Children's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

|  |                              |                                   |                                   |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>1. Relative Information</b>   | Relationship to Child: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Maternal | <input type="checkbox"/> Paternal |
| Name: _____  |                              |                                   |                                   |
| Street: _____  |                              |                                   |                                   |
| City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____ Country: _____  |                              |                                   |                                   |
| Home Phone: (    )      Cell/Work Phone: (    )      Email: _____  |                              |                                   |                                   |
| <b>For county use only:</b> Date contacted: _____ Resource: Permanent <input type="checkbox"/> Temporary <input type="checkbox"/> Contact <input type="checkbox"/> |                              |                                   |                                   |

|  |                              |                                   |                                   |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>2. Relative Information</b>   | Relationship to Child: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Maternal | <input type="checkbox"/> Paternal |
| Name: _____  |                              |                                   |                                   |
| Street: _____  |                              |                                   |                                   |
| City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____ Country: _____  |                              |                                   |                                   |
| Home Phone: (    )      Cell/Work Phone: (    )      Email: _____  |                              |                                   |                                   |
| <b>For county use only:</b> Date contacted: _____ Resource: Permanent <input type="checkbox"/> Temporary <input type="checkbox"/> Contact <input type="checkbox"/> |                              |                                   |                                   |

|  |                              |                                   |                                   |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>3. Relative Information</b>   | Relationship to Child: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Maternal | <input type="checkbox"/> Paternal |
| Name: _____  |                              |                                   |                                   |
| Street: _____  |                              |                                   |                                   |
| City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____ Country: _____  |                              |                                   |                                   |
| Home Phone: (    )      Cell/Work Phone: (    )      Email: _____  |                              |                                   |                                   |
| <b>For county use only:</b> Date contacted: _____ Resource: Permanent <input type="checkbox"/> Temporary <input type="checkbox"/> Contact <input type="checkbox"/> |                              |                                   |                                   |

|  |                              |                                   |                                   |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>4. Relative Information</b>   | Relationship to Child: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Maternal | <input type="checkbox"/> Paternal |
| Name: _____  |                              |                                   |                                   |
| Street: _____  |                              |                                   |                                   |
| City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____ Country: _____  |                              |                                   |                                   |
| Home Phone: (    )      Cell/Work Phone: (    )      Email: _____  |                              |                                   |                                   |
| <b>For county use only:</b> Date contacted: _____ Resource: Permanent <input type="checkbox"/> Temporary <input type="checkbox"/> Contact <input type="checkbox"/> |                              |                                   |                                   |

|  |                              |                                   |                                   |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>5. Relative Information</b>   | Relationship to Child: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Maternal | <input type="checkbox"/> Paternal |
| Name: _____  |                              |                                   |                                   |
| Street: _____  |                              |                                   |                                   |
| City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____ Country: _____  |                              |                                   |                                   |
| Home Phone: (    )      Cell/Work Phone: (    )      Email: _____  |                              |                                   |                                   |
| <b>For county use only:</b> Date contacted: _____ Resource: Permanent <input type="checkbox"/> Temporary <input type="checkbox"/> Contact <input type="checkbox"/> |                              |                                   |                                   |

## Fostering Connections: Identifying and Notifying Relatives

# Welcome!

Please click on the colored link below to download the  
handout for today:  
3-01-11 webinar handout



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## Agenda

- Brief Orientation
- Introductions
- Overview of Fostering Connections
- Relative Identification and Notification
- Q & A



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Panel Participants today are:

Danielle McConaga  
Kirk Randleman



Your facilitator is:  
Mellicent Blythe

Technical support is  
provided by:  
Phillip Armfield  
John McMahan

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### Goals of this Webinar



- Increase familiarity with Fostering Connections
- Build knowledge and skills and share resources for effectively identifying and notifying relatives

**Ultimate Goal**  
Safety, permanence, and well-being for children and their families

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### Your Expectations



Please use your chat box:  
What do you hope to get out of today's webinar?

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## Fostering Connections: A Quick Overview

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## Sweeping Reforms for Children in Foster Care and Their Families

### Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (P.L. 110-351):

- Law since October 2008
- Most significant federal reforms for abused and neglected children in more than a decade



Source: Allen, et al., 2010

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## How Fostering Connections Promotes Family Connections

1. New federal **Guardianship Assistance Program** option for states
2. **Competitive Family Connection Grants** to expand or implement:
  - Kinship navigator programs (\$5 million set aside)
  - Intensive family finding
  - Family group decision making
  - Family based substance abuse residential treatment

Source: Allen, et al., 2010

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## How Fostering Connections Promotes Family Connections (2)

3. **Requirement to maintain sibling connections:**
  - Reasonable efforts to place siblings together unless contrary to their safety or well-being\*
  - When not placed together, reasonable efforts to maintain frequent sibling visitation or other ongoing interaction unless contrary to safety or well-being\*
4. **Case-by-case waivers for non-safety licensing standards** for relative homes
5. Expansion of Title IV-E funding for training, of **relative guardians**

Source: Allen, et al., 2010

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### How Fostering Connections Promotes Family Connections (3)

6. Assists older youth with kin:

- **Optional federal Title IV-E payments for youth in foster care, kinship care, or adoptive families to age 19, 20, or 21 (option effective date 10/1/10)**
- Youth who exit to guardianship at age 16 or older are eligible for **independent living services and education and training vouchers**

All above apply to American Indian children and families in federally-recognized tribes with direct access to Title IV-E, in states where there are state/tribal agreements in place, and to American Indian children in state child welfare systems.

Source: Allen, et al., 2010 10

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### Identifying & Notifying Relatives

➤ Within 30 days of removal, the state must exercise due diligence to:

- Identify and
- Provide notice to
- All adult grandparents and other relatives (with a domestic violence exception)

➤ In NC, must be written notice

Source: Allen, et al., 2010 11

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### Lessons Learned from State Notice Letters

|   |  |
|---|--|
| ➤ Start with importance of family connections   | ➤ Include a form for identifying other relatives                                 |
| ➤ Make letters available in multiple languages  | ➤ Follow-up promptly after notice is sent  |
| ➤ Be clear and simple; avoid jargon or acronyms   | ➤ Document conversations with relatives; incorporate their questions or concerns |
| ➤ Offer a range of options in addition to placement, such as letter writing, transportation, and visits |  |

Source: Allen, et al., 2010 12

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### NC Identification & Notice Tools

- NC Revised Policy:  
<http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-10/man/CSs1201c4.pdf>
- Optional Samples
  - Sample letter (DSS-5317) for notice to relatives
  - Relative Interest Form (DSS-5316)
  - Relative Search Info. Tool (DSS-5318)

Source: Allen, et al., 2010

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**Please use your chat box:**  
What strategies or tools have you used to find and engage relatives?

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### NC Identification & Notice Tools (2)

- Requirement for American Indian children
  - Tribal notification form
  - Used for children from state-recognized or federally-recognized tribes

• Only federally-recognized tribes such as Eastern Band of Cherokee will have final say in child's placement (ICWA)

• State-recognized tribes should have a voice and seat at the table, similar to family members. DSS has final say based on child's best interest.

Source: Allen, et al., 2010

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### Lessons Learned from NC Tribal Notification Form

- Asked early in life of the case (prior to placement)
- Offers a range of options for involvement, such as CFT attendance
- Includes an option to help identify other relatives of the child

Source: Allen, et al., 2010

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### Involving Relatives: A Case-by-Case Decision

What is in the **best interest** of the child?  
Requires **assessment** of safety, well-being and permanence in context of child's and relative's lives

Attending school & sporting events  
Dr. appts  
Visits  
Christmas together  
Phone calls  
No contact  
Maintaining connections  
Full custody

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### School Transportation

Legislation requires...

- IV-E issues

Make a **case-by-case decision** based on child's best interest

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## Fostering Connections Resource Center

[www.fosteringconnections.org](http://www.fosteringconnections.org)

- Answer questions about the law
- Limited technical assistance to agencies
- Toolkits for implementing the law
- LinkedIn Discussion forum offers groups on kinship, guardianship, adoption, older youth, education, health, training and Tribal topics.

<http://www.fosteringconnections.org/resources?id=0007>

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## Implications for Practice

- Use your chat pod:  
What have learned today that will be helpful?



What questions do you still have about relative identification and notification or Fostering Connections?

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## Presenter Contact Information

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# Recommendations, Questions, and Answers from the Webinar

## *Fostering Connections: Identifying and Notifying Relatives*

Webinar delivered March 8, 2011

Follow-up document date: April 8, 2011

*Presented by*

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Family and Children's Resource Program,  
part of the Jordan Institute for Families  
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*Sponsored by*

North Carolina Division of Social Services

Be sure to consult the handouts for this webinar:

[https://www.ncswlearn.org/ncsts/webinar/handouts/13\\_Webinar\\_3-8-11\\_Handouts.pdf](https://www.ncswlearn.org/ncsts/webinar/handouts/13_Webinar_3-8-11_Handouts.pdf)

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### I. Participants' responses when asked if they knew of existing family residential substance abuse treatment facilities in North Carolina.

- East Coast Solutions, Wilmington, NC (<http://www.eastcoastsolutions.org/casaworks.html>) provides both CASAWORKS/SEARISE and Kelly House
- One in Boone, NC (possibly New River Behavioral Health Care? <http://www.newriver.org>)
- UNC Horizons, Chapel Hill, NC (<http://www.med.unc.edu/obgyn/centers/unc-horizons-program>)
- Cascade Services at Community Alternatives, Charlotte, NC (<http://www.comalt.org>)
- North Carolina Recovery Supports in Wake County (<http://www.northcarolinarecovery.com>)

## 2. Indian Tribes in North Carolina

### **Is the Eastern Band of Cherokee the only federally-recognized tribe in NC?**

The Eastern Band of Cherokee is the only federally recognized tribe for the purposes of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) with a physical tribal boundary located in North Carolina. Members of any federally recognized tribe could be present in North Carolina, however. There are several state-recognized tribes in North Carolina that are not federally-recognized for ICWA purposes. More information is available at the website for the North Carolina Commission on Indian Affairs:

<http://www.doa.state.nc.us/cia/tribesorg.htm>

## 3. Identification and Notification of Relatives

### **Who must child welfare agencies notify within 30 days of a child entering foster care?**

In North Carolina, child welfare agencies must contact all adult relatives and kin suggested by parents, as well as adult “third degree” relatives, which in North Carolina means maternal and paternal grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, great grandparents, nieces, and nephews. While notice must be provided in writing, it is important to have follow-up conversations with relatives and kin.

### **Are there expectations to look into extended family of a step-parent who has raised the child?**

Best practice would suggest that any relatives or people identified by the family as kin (biological or step) who have had caretaking responsibilities of the child would be notified of the child’s placement in care.

### **What should we do in the case of children who are removed from their adoptive parents and who have kept in contact with their biological relatives? Must we notify biological relatives within 30 days of the adopted children re-entering foster care?**

In this situation, agencies must base their decisions on the nature of the continued relationship with the child and other factors specific to the case.

### **Is CPS required to identify relatives prior to taking custody?**

Yes. North Carolina policy requires CPS to identify possible safety resource placements prior to custody as a preventive measure; this requirement is unrelated to Fostering Connections. Once a child enters foster care, agencies have 30 days to identify and notify relatives.

### **What happens if a parent does not want certain family members to be contacted? Do we still contact paternal relatives, even if the mother does not wish it?**

Fostering Connections requires that notice be provided to all adult relatives, maternal or paternal, of a child within 30 days after the child’s removal from the custody of his or her parents – subject to exceptions due to family or domestic violence. While it’s important to explore a caretaker’s desire not to contact other relatives, including the other parent, law and policy require that they be contacted unless it would pose a risk to the child and or caretaker.

### **Do you have to notify grandparents or relatives that are known to the agency to have prior CPS involvement when the agency knows they will not be an appropriate placement (e.g., family history of sex abuse)?**

Fostering Connections requires that notice be provided to all adult relatives of a child within 30 days after the child’s removal from the custody of his or her parents – subject to exceptions due to family or domestic violence. Notification does not entitle relatives to placement of the child however; they may be able to provide information about other family and community connections related to the child. The agency

will conduct the appropriate assessments and determine what is in the child's best interest in terms of contact with any relatives or kin notified.

**What if the children do not want to be placed with the identified relatives?**

Notification is not just about finding placements--it is also about strengthening family connections to the child.

**Under Fostering Connections, what is the "DV exception" to notifying relatives?**

In situations of family or domestic violence, it may not be appropriate to notify such relatives if it is deemed that it would pose a risk to the child or caretaker. If after a thorough assessment of family or domestic violence, the agency deems that it is not in the child's best interest to contact a relative or kin member, then the justification should be thoroughly documented in the case file.

**Are we required to notify family after a child was in custody for four years and we were not aware of these particular family members? The parents' rights have been terminated and we are seeking an adoptive family for this sibling group. The family member that has now been identified is not willing to consider both children for placement, but wants the child that is blood related. Are we required to consider this family member and separate these siblings that have a strong attachment and bond to each other?**

The identification and notice requirements became effective on the date of enactment of Fostering Connections, October 7, 2008. These requirements generally do not extend to children placed in care prior to that date. However, good practice supports continuous identification and engagement of relatives as long as a child remains in the care and placement responsibility of the DSS.

Any case specific issues may be staffed with the Division's Policy Consultants or Children's Program Representatives.

**Are we required to send letters by certified mail?**

Fostering Connections law and North Carolina policy do not require written notification to be made by certified mail.

**Is there a standard letter that North Carolina uses to ensure standardization from county to county?**

The Division of Social Services provides a sample letter, the DSS-5317, which agencies can use to fulfill the requirements of Fostering Connections. You can find this letter on the Division's forms site: <http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/forms/dss/DSS-5317.pdf>.

**Is the DSS-5317 available in Spanish?**

No, not at this time.

**Current practice in our agency is to make diligent efforts and contact relatives and fill out a form prior to filing a petition. Should we still do this process?**

Any current practices by counties to identify, locate and engage relatives should only strengthen their ability to comply with the Fostering Connections Act.

**What is the expectation of how to handle visits to all of these relatives, if the extended family responds that they would like visits?**

Visits should be handled based upon what is in the best interest of the child. Fostering Connections law does not entitle relatives to have contact or become a placement resource for the child. Child welfare agencies will have to assess the safety and risk and what is in the best interest of each child.

**North Carolina has several programs that collect data on individuals—OLV, Law Enforcement, tax data, etc. Is there planning in process to streamline the process of acquiring state information so that child welfare agencies can save time—possibly speeding up identification of relatives?**

North Carolina Families Accessing Services through Technology (NC FAST) is a program designed to improve information systems within NC DHHS and county departments of social services. It will increase worker efficiency allowing them to spend more time with families. To find out more about NC FAST go to <http://www.ncdhhs.gov/ncfast/>.

**Does anyone know of any resources for locating relatives residing outside the US (especially for finding relatives in Mexico)?**

Try the embassy or consulate for the country in question. Webinar participants reported that the Mexican Consulate will work with child welfare agencies if relatives reside in Mexico, and may even perform home studies. Contact information for the Mexican Consulate in Raleigh can be found here: <http://portal.sre.gob.mx/raleigh/>.

#### **4. Engaging Relatives**

**Is there a handout I could use with a grandparent placement to explain how it would benefit a child to remain connected with their relatives on the other side of the family? There is tension there.**

North Carolina's child welfare policy highlights the importance of relative and kinship involvement in the care and planning of children involved with DSS. It may be helpful to share this policy information with relative caretakers. It may be accessed online at [http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-10/man/CSs1201c4-05.htm#P242\\_24298](http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-10/man/CSs1201c4-05.htm#P242_24298) and [http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-10/man/CSs1201c3-04.htm#P50\\_4515](http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-10/man/CSs1201c3-04.htm#P50_4515)

## 5. Relative Search Resources

It is difficult to know in advance where you will find the person you are looking for. Best practice would be to have a number of resources and utilize them all. This list of resources was provided by participants and is not an endorsement by the Division. Confidentiality laws may prevent the sharing of information from some of these sources for the purpose of notifying a relative. Consult with your agency attorney with case-specific questions.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><u>Web sites</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="http://www.zabasearch.com">http://www.zabasearch.com</a> (great search tool and free!!)</li> <li>• <a href="http://www.ancestry.com">http://www.ancestry.com</a></li> <li>• <a href="http://www.facebook.com">http://www.facebook.com</a></li> <li>• <a href="http://www.spokeo.com">http://www.spokeo.com</a></li> <li>• <a href="http://www.peoplesearch.com">http://www.peoplesearch.com</a></li> <li>• <a href="http://www.google.com">http://www.google.com</a></li> <li>• <a href="http://www.accurint.com">http://www.accurint.com</a> (there is a fee we share the contract with other departments in the county)</li> <li>• <a href="http://www.ussearch.com">http://www.ussearch.com</a></li> <li>• <a href="http://www.myspace.com">http://www.myspace.com</a></li> <li>• People Find is a resource that has been beneficial to us in Durham County</li> </ul> | <p><u>Records/data bases</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• other units in agency (CPS, Work First and Food Stamp records)</li> <li>• OLV</li> <li>• AOC site</li> <li>• criminal checks</li> <li>• Medicaid/food stamp check</li> <li>• DMV is always a good resource</li> <li>• social security</li> <li>• death registry</li> <li>• Economic services within DSS</li> <li>• Register of deeds in other counties and states</li> <li>• Child support</li> </ul> |
| <p><u>Speaking with Individuals</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage relatives during CFT Meetings</li> <li>• Ask the children about their family members</li> <li>• Genograms</li> <li>• interview relatives</li> <li>• "who's in jail"</li> </ul>  | <p><u>Other</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• white/yellow pages</li> </ul>  |

## 6. Confidentiality

**Our agency has access to the Food Stamp, Medicaid, child support, and ESC databases...can we use these tools to locate parents or would this be a breach of confidentiality to use those systems for child welfare purposes?**

Social Services Bulletin, No. 37, October 2002, provides an annotated index of federal and state confidentiality laws. It may be accessed at <http://www.sog.unc.edu/pubs/electronicversions/pdfs/ssl37.pdf>. University of North Carolina's School of Government provides additional resources via their website at <http://www.sog.unc.edu/programs/dss/confidentiality.htm> that may assist counties with issues of confidentiality.

**Is confidentiality a problem when notifying relatives? What information can we share, other than that the child is in foster care, especially when contacting relatives who do not know the children.**

Early on the case, you need to judge how much to disclose based on how much information you need to ensure the child's safety, well-being, and permanence. It is important to note that the act requires notice that the child has been or is being removed from the custody of the parent or parents, but does not require notice about any specifics about the circumstances of the removal.

**Do parents have rights with regard to confidentiality with relative notification? We have had one where the mother did not want us to notify relatives and the case was in foster care.**

Fostering Connections requires that notice be provided to all adult relatives, maternal or paternal, of a child within 30 days after the child's removal from the custody of his or her parents – subject to exceptions due to family or domestic violence. While it's important to explore a caretaker's desire to not contact other relatives, including the other parent, law and policy require that they be contacted unless it would pose a risk to the child and or caretaker.

## **7. IV-E, Schools, and Transportation**

**Is it true we have one year to get a relative licensed or we can't use IV-E anymore?**

From the North Carolina Child Welfare Funding Manual at [http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-78/man/Section%201500.htm#P61\\_5383](http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-78/man/Section%201500.htm#P61_5383): Title IV-E funds may also be used for administrative time; the time that a social worker spends implementing foster care. IV-E administrative costs may be claimed during the time a relative is being licensed, for a maximum of 12 months or for the average time it takes to license a relative placement, whichever is less.

**How can we convince a school system to work with us to keep children in the same school once they enter foster care? Ours doesn't allow this. According to their rules, if the child moves to a new district the child must be placed in a different school in that district.**

Counties can refer their school districts to North Carolina policy around the educational needs of children in foster care at [http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-10/man/CSs1201c5-05.htm#P166\\_30888](http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-10/man/CSs1201c5-05.htm#P166_30888). County departments are encouraged to develop memorandums of understanding with their educational partners to help ensure children remain in the same school district.

**Does the McKinney Veto act still cover children in foster care in the same county but different school district?**

You may contact the school district liaison for specific information related to the McKinney-Vento Act. To identify the school district liaison, you may contact the State Coordinator for Homeless Education, Lisa Phillips at SERVE Center at UNCG, P.O. Box 5367, Greensboro, NC 27435, (336) 315-7491, [lphillip@serve.org](mailto:lphillip@serve.org).

**Should IV-E reimbursement for school transportation be captured on the 5094?**

Reimbursement for these expenses may be made by way of the DSS-5094 by including the cost of the transportation in the payment amount. This is done in the same way as a clothing allowance is handled on the DSS-5094. See Dear County Director Letter dated November 16, 2010 through this link: <http://www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/dcdl/famsupchildwelfare/CWS-26-10.pdf>.

**Under Fostering Connections, how does funding for transportation to keep the child in the same school work if the child is not IV-E eligible?**

Please note that if the child is IV-E eligible, reimbursement to the county will be at the full amount. If the child is not IV-E eligible, the reimbursement will be capped when the reimbursement reaches the maximum allowable rate. See Dear County Director Letter dated November 16, 2010 through this link: <http://www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/dcdl/famsupchildwelfare/CWS-26-10.pdf>.

**Where can we obtain more information about IV-E funds to pay for school transportation? Is it discussed in North Carolina's child welfare policy manual?**

On Nov. 16, 2010 the Division issued a Dear County Director letter about IV-E funding for school transportation. The letter can be accessed through this link: <http://www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/dcdl/famsupchildwelfare/CWS-26-10.pdf>

**How much will the travel reimbursement be for the foster parent who is helping the child to remain the same school?**

The county DSS has the discretion to determine what is considered reasonable travel in examining factors such as cost, distance, and length of travel. See Dear County Director Letter issued on November 16, 2010 through this link: <http://www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/dcdl/famsupchildwelfare/CWS-26-10.pdf>

**Can individual counties decide whether to use IV-E to support school transportation or is this a State decision?**

It is required to keep children in their same school district unless the agency can document why it is not in the child's best interest. If the county has other means to support school transportation then they may utilize these resources to ensure this requirement.

**8. Participant suggestions for future webinar topics**

- McKinney-Vento Act
- Working with tribes for Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)
- Contacting relatives when domestic violence or sex abuse have occurred
- Contacting/working with families outside the USA
- IV-E
- A more in-depth webinar on searches