



**Foster and Adoptive Home Diligent
Recruitment Plan
2020 – 2024 Child and Family Services
Plan**

**Administered by
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Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services
Licensure Unit
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Foster and Adoptive Home Diligent Recruitment Plan

MDCPS Foster and Adoptive Diligent Recruitment Plan is a comprehensive plan that addresses the following areas:

- A description of the characteristics of children for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed;
- Specific strategies to reach out to all parts of the community;
- Diverse methods of disseminating both general information about being a foster/adoptive parent and child specific information;
- Strategies for assuring that all prospective foster/ adoptive parents have access to agencies that license/approve foster/adoptive parents, including location and hours of services so that the agencies can be accessed by all members of the community;
- Strategies for training staff to work with diverse communities including cultural, racial, and socio-economic variations;
- Strategies for dealing with linguistic barriers;
- Non-discriminatory fee structures; and
- Procedures for a timely search for prospective parents for a child needing an adoptive placement, including the use of exchanges and other interagency efforts, provided that such procedures ensure that placement of a child in an appropriate household is not delayed by the search for a same race or ethnic placement.

Characteristics of Children Needing Foster and Adoptive Homes

The following tables identify the demographics of children and youth in the custody of MDCPS:

Table 1: Children in care as of 8/26/19

	Number	Percentage
Children in Foster Care	4529	

Table 2: Gender Breakdown

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	2261	49.92%
Female	2268	50.08%

Table 3: Race Breakdown

Race Value	Number	Percentage
American Indian	5	0.11%
American Indian/White	6	0.13%
Asian	6	0.13%
Asian/Black	3	0.07%
Asian/White	4	0.09%
Black	1738	38.37%
Black/White	138	3.05%
Hawaiian	5	0.11%

Hawaiian/Undetermined/White	1	0.02%
Hawaiian/White	1	0.02%
NA or Undetermined	116	2.56%
White	2506	55.33%

Table 4: Ethnicity Breakdown

Not Hispanic or Latino	4178	92.25%
Hispanic or Latino	101	2.23%
NA or Unable to Determine	250	5.52%

Table 5: Age Breakdown

0	275	6.07%
1	333	7.35%
2	317	7.00%
3	302	6.67%
4	280	6.18%
5	266	5.87%
6	232	5.12%
7	222	4.90%
8	239	5.28%
9	235	5.19%
10	214	4.73%
11	230	5.08%
12	232	5.12%
13	208	4.59%
14	182	4.02%
15	195	4.31%
16	195	4.31%
17	187	4.13%
18	115	2.54%
19	48	1.06%
20	21	0.46%
21	1	0.02%

As part of the *Olivia Y. 2nd* MSA agreement, MDCPS is required to conduct an annual foster home needs assessment to determine the number of foster homes required to provide family-based placements for children in foster care. Based on the assessment, statewide/regional/county targets are set. To achieve this provision annually, MDCPS must also submit strategies and actions it will employ to recruit and retain foster families.

Structure

The Deputy Commissioner of Child Welfare oversees all Field Staff as well as the Licensure and Adoption Units.

- The Office Director of Licensure oversees the State Office Licensure Unit, the Licensure staff in the field, the Rescue 100 Unit as well as the ICPC Unit in State Office.
 - Licensure Unit, State Office: They are responsible for fielding any calls from potential foster parents, troubleshooting any issues with applying on line as well as manually entering all applications into the system for assignment. They track all relative and non-relative applicants to make sure homes are licensed timely. They also conduct reviews for safety, non-safety and court ordered issues for any relative homes. They track various things for the field licensure staff and notify families, employees, and the chain of command when issues arise. They are an ongoing support to existing foster parents and employees with the day to day duties of licensing and maintaining foster homes.
 - The Licensure Unit in the field: The Area Social Work Supervisor assigns all new inquiries to their Licensure Specialists for completion of the home study process. The Licensure Specialist engages the family in the licensure process and notifies the family of approval/denial. They also monitor those homes monthly to make sure the children are safe and families are complying with policy and practice expectations. The Licensure field staff also handle any Corrective Actions needed for issues that arise while in the foster home. They respond to appeals when a home is closed and work with the family to alleviate issues so a child can safely remain in their home. They are charged with making sure placement options are available to the county staff and that each child is matched with the proper foster home that can best meet their needs. The field Licensure Unit also is charged with recruitment each week so they can gain more foster homes for the children in foster care.
 - The Rescue 100 Unit: Rescue 100 has training events every other month in various regions of the state. These are geared to the faith-based community. Each region has an event scheduled at least once a year. Rescue 100 staff reach out to the churches in that community and provide one-hour Orientation/information sessions to interested families. The Rescue 100 Unit has contractors who complete the home study and evaluate if the home can be licensed for foster care. Once the home is approved, the home is transferred to the county licensure unit's workload for placement of a child as well as monitoring monthly.

Statewide Plan

- MDCPS developed and maintains the state office licensure unit responsible for processing/tracking foster home licensure applications statewide. Applications are accepted by web (www.mdcps.ms.gov) and by phone (800-821-9157). Potential resource parents, who call or email with questions, receive accurate, up-to-date information on navigating the licensure process.
- The Rescue 100 Unit, part of the licensure unit focused on recruiting and licensing foster homes from within the faith-based community statewide, is designed for timely licensure, training and support for new non-relative foster parents. Through this unit, the staff recruits potential foster parents, provides orientations and training, and supports potential foster parents going through the licensure and screening process. Rescue 100 staff engage the faith-based communities with weekend trainings held at a host church every other month. These events occur in all regions statewide within the calendar year. The agency contracts with private individuals to ensure timely and quality home studies are completed for non-relative foster families who are navigating the licensure process. Once these homes are licensed, Rescue 100 staff transfers the homes to a licensure specialist in the county to provide ongoing support and licensure services and to inform foster parents when children can be placed in the newly developed homes.
- The Licensure Unit develops and implements an annual recruitment plan as well as targets for licensing non-relative homes. Staff are encouraged to develop inventive ways to recruit foster parents. As part of recruitment plan, at a minimum, agency staff distribute printed materials with basic information about becoming resource parents and direct prospective foster families to the foster/adoption information hotline, email address, and website. All recruitment activities are documented and tracked monthly to ensure staff in each county are actively recruiting foster parents.
- Support Groups are another outlet MDCPS leverages to recruit additional foster parents and retain current foster parents. MDCPS maintains a schedule of all support groups for the state and provides this information to licensure staff to encourage foster parents to attend. At these meetings, foster parents are afforded the opportunity to receive ongoing training hours to assist them in maintaining their license with the agency. This is also a forum by which relevant updated agency policy can be shared. Foster parents are also provided support from their peers/group leaders to help retain them as foster parents and to help us recruit additional foster parents.
- MDCPS has enhanced its tracking and monitoring of applicants moving through the licensure process to improve the experience for prospective foster parents and for the children placed in their homes to aid in recruiting additional foster parents. This tracking has reduced barriers to timely licensure.
- MDCPS believes that sharing lived experiences of current foster parents is a powerful way to help recruit and communicate the need for foster parents. The agency continues to seek foster parents who are willing to sharing their experiences in local newspapers or other media outlets to appeal to potential foster parents. Regular focus group meetings with experienced and new foster parents are hosted by the MDCPS leadership to gather input and feedback on the foster parenting experience. Suggestions are incorporated into improving training, licensure, support and other policy areas.
- As with the lived experiences of foster parents, MDCPS embraces the voices of youth who have personal knowledge and experience of living in a foster home as well as input from birth families

willing to share how they have benefited from the time-limited foster care placement services. MDCPS believes that identifying youth who are available for adoption and in need of forever families, foster care alumni willing to share their stories, and birth families who have had children placed in foster homes have powerful messages to encourage families to open their homes to foster. The agency considers these groups to be invaluable stakeholders and contributors to ongoing efforts for improving the foster care system.

Other recruitment activities

- MDCPS staff continues to seek community events for networking and onsite recruitment of foster parents.
- Engage stakeholders to identify locations where MDCPS recruitment material may be placed.
- Engage churches with large congregations and community presence where MDCPS recruitment material may be placed (even if the church may not choose to sponsor a Rescue 100 event).

Ensure regional and county staff are well-trained and equipped to meet the needs of foster parents.

Diligent Recruitment Goals

MDCPS Foster Homes Licensure Targets – 2019

The 2nd Modified Mississippi Settlement Agreement and Reform Plan (2nd MSA) provides in Section 3.3.a that MDCPS, in conjunction with the Monitor, shall establish annual statewide and county performance requirements and time periods for new foster home licensure. In order for the first annual performance targets to be set for calendar year 2018, Public Catalyst recommended that MDCPS conduct a foster home needs assessment to understand the number of licensed foster homes currently viable and to determine the number of licensed foster homes needed to ensure that: MDCPS has the capacity to make safe and appropriate placement matches; children are placed in close proximity to their family and community; children are placed with their siblings; children with special needs are placed with families who can meet those needs and foster home capacity limits are routinely met. Utilizing segments of MDCPS' assessment analysis as well as child custody data, caseload data, licensure data and foster home development and closure data, the Monitor established the 2018 foster home licensure target at 400 homes, a 25 percent increase over the previous year's target. On February 18, 2019, MDCPS completed a point-in-time Foster Homes Needs Assessment to establish the number of foster homes that need to be developed for 2019. It was determined that 395 foster homes should be developed. The time periods for licensure are:

- 160 new foster homes will be licensed by June 30, 2019
- 285 new foster homes will be licensed by September 30, 2019
- 395 new foster homes will be licensed by December 31, 2019

Method and Target Calculation - 2019

MDCPS employed the following method to determine the statewide new foster home licensure targets for 2019:

- Using the Custody Child Snapshot dated 12/17/2018, MDCPS counted children in custody by placement groupings identified in the table below.
- Determined the count of children in Foster Homes and Congregate Care/Other for whom foster homes would be an appropriate placement and applied a standard of approximately two beds per home to identify the number of homes needed to accommodate those children.
- Subtracted the number of active foster homes (excluded homes vacant for more than 180 days) from the number of homes needed and multiplied the number of homes needed by 150% capacity (a target suggested by the Annie E. Casey Foundation to ensure that a foster care system has more homes licensed than will be utilized at any one point in time). Current foster home numbers were selected from the Foster Home Needs Assessment run on 2/18/2019.

MDCPS used the Monitor's logic from last year that established a reasonable target as 64% of the new foster homes needed to meet capacity but increased the percentage to 70%, an increase of 6%.

Strategies for assuring that all prospective foster/ adoptive parents have access to agencies that license/approve foster/adoptive parents, including location and hours of services so that the agencies can be accessed by all members of the community;

Our agencies website (www.mdcps.ms.gov) has information on how to become a foster parent, commonly asked questions, requirements to become a foster parent as well as links to our application in English and Spanish. Our hotline number is on that page as well as links to AdoptUsKids and the Ms. Heart Gallery. Rescue 100 has a page to explain their process and how one can apply. The 1-800 number is available 24 hours a day. If the on-call person isn't able to answer the phone, a voice mail is set up for messages. The Licensure Unit in State Office returns calls on the next business day.

Our Mississippi Heart Gallery has a tab on this page for pictures and information on children that are on the Heart Gallery. Interested families are encouraged to call the Adoption number at State Office

Diverse methods of disseminating both general information about being a foster/adoptive parent and child specific information;

Media outreach through the MDCPS state office's Communications Department as well as social media posts inform the public of the need for additional foster parents. Statistical information on the number of children in foster care and the number of existing foster homes in each county is shared regularly with local newspaper, radio and television outlets statewide as well as promoting the need on a state level with larger media outlets.

Strategies for training staff to work with diverse communities including cultural, racial, and socio-economic variations;

To accommodate the needs of current and potential foster parents, the licensure unit has restructured pre-service and ongoing training to make it more convenient and accessible to resource parents to reduce the amount of "classroom" time needed to become licensed or re-licensed:

1. An online program thru Cornerstone was procured to house and support parts of pre-service training for foster parents in one location and to streamline the training process. Applicants are registered to complete on-line training of Path (Parents as Tender Healers) as well as

Finance/Travel Training and Child Safety Training. Once the on-line training is completed, the agency is notified of the completion and we then schedule the family to attend 8 hours of face to face training to cover the remaining Path curriculum that must be covered in a group setting. This allows for feedback, questions and a more in-depth conversation about what they learned on-line and in the face to face training.

2. MDCPS utilizes online providers, such as Foster Parent College, for on-going training to support the convenience of all foster parents. Existing foster parents are required to receive 10 hours on on-going training a year. Five of those hours can be on-line and the other five hours must be face to face. Foster Parent College is provided, free to the foster parent, so they can receive their on-line hours. Foster Parent College has over 30 topics to choose from and they increase their curriculum each year to change with the rising needs of foster parents. Their topics relate to issues a foster parent will encounter with children in care. MDCPS also partners with other organizations offering face to face trainings that are beneficial to our foster parents. Those training schedules are shared with foster parents at their request and through email, texts and phone calls. Support Groups are held monthly in every region and there is normally a one-hour face to face in-service/training group meeting that the foster parent can attend so they can obtain face to face training hours. These are at no charge to them.

Strategies for dealing with linguistic barriers;

The state's interpreter unit has Spanish speaking interpreters on staff as well as an internal database with a list of contract interpreters. The list has over 30 different spoken languages we can reach out to in the event the language interpreter is needed. When a language is not on the provider list, MDCPS interpreter staff has been successful, using their networking skills to find qualified contract interpreters for the needed language. All MDCPS LEP clients who are in need of interpreter services will be provided an interpreter free of charge for as long as they have an open case with MDCPS. This means that they will have an interpreter during investigations, court hearings, doctors' appointments, any required trainings, forensic interviews etc. As long as an MDCPS social worker is present the interpreter will be as well.

Non-discriminatory fee structures; and

There is no fee to be licensed as a foster parent. There are certain licensure requirements that must be paid for by the applicant, such as paying fines off, medical exam, household repairs, pet immunizations, etc. If a child is being placed with a relative, and that relative can't afford to purchase certain things to be compliant with requirements (such as home improvements, medical exams, etc), the agency can request assistance in paying for services. Of course, this is contingent on the county having funds. For non-relative homes, we do not have a mechanism in place to address paying fees, exams, etc. We do try to assist them in the resources available in their community to acquire needed items such as beds, plumbing contractors, etc.

Procedures for a timely search for prospective parents for a child needing an adoptive placement, including the use of exchanges and other interagency efforts, provided that such procedures ensure that placement of a child in an appropriate household is not delayed by the search for a same race or ethnic placement.

Our agency has a Placement Matching Tool that is used to match a child with the most appropriate foster family. The tool looks at the age range and proximity of the child and compares that to the pool of licensed foster parents that match that search. Race and ethnicity is not a factor in this decision. When determining the most appropriate placement, the worker is able to limit the miles between the child and biological family as well as the proximity to schools, extracurricular activities and medical facilities. When that child is unable to be reunified with their family, and adoption becomes the plan, we encourage their existing foster parent to provide long term care through adoption. If that foster parent is not interested in adoption, we utilize the Mississippi Heart Gallery and Adopt US Kids to provide information to potential families who want to adopt that child. Interested families go through the

same licensing procedure and are considered Child-Specific homes. If that family is unable to take that specific child, we encourage the family to foster other children who might be a match for their home.