**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES**
**SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION**
**311 W. SARATOGA STREET**
**BALTIMORE, MD 21201**

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| **DATE:** | May 15, 2015 |
| **POLICY #:** | SSA-CW# 15-28 |
| **TO:** | Directors, Local Departments of Social Services<br>Assistant Directors of Services |
| **FROM:** | Deborah Ramelmeier, Executive Director<br>Social Services Administration |
| **RE:** | Family Finding |
| **PROGRAM AFFECTED:** | In Home Family Services, Out-of-Home Placement Services |
| **ORIGINATING OFFICE:** | Child Welfare Training and Organizational Development |
| **ACTION REQUIRED OF:** | Local Departments of Social Services |
| **REQUIRED ACTION:** | Implement Policy and Procedures |
| **ACTION DUE DATE:** | June 1, 2015 |
| **CONTACT PERSONS:** | Karen Powell, Program Manager<br>Training and Organizational Development<br>410-767-7788<br>karen.powell@maryland.gov |

**PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this policy is to establish a Family Finding protocol to ensure supportive connections for children and youth upon their exit from the child welfare system in Maryland. Family Finding is an initiative designed to promote permanence and cultivate meaningful, lifelong connections between youth and their families of origin. The goal is to prevent children and youth from languishing in foster care due to failure of the child welfare system to engage potential relative resources in a timely manner. Family Finding is an extension of case management services to assess relatives as potential placement resources and establish "relational permanence" if the relatives are not able to be a placement resource. Developing a stable, caring relationship with an adult who is willing to provide emotional support after emancipation increases the chances that the youth will transition successfully. Family Finding intervention is applicable for children along any part of the child welfare service continuum as deemed appropriate to facilitate permanency and establish lifelong connections.

**BACKGROUND:**

The Department of Human Resources, Social Services Administration (DHR/SSA) piloted Family Finding in seven jurisdictions as part of the Fostering Connections Demonstration Project in 2009. The pilot counties were Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Charles, Montgomery, Prince George's, Washington and Baltimore City. Family Finding builds on the tenets of Place Matters and Family Centered Practice to enhance best practice across the state. As the pilot project ended in 2013, the strategic goal was to align these pilot initiatives and standardize practice expectations to ensure that children and youth maintain or reconnect with their families as appropriate. Implementing Family Finding will enhance engaging and teaming practices with families and facilitate meaningful family connections when child welfare services are closed.

In effort to give youth who lost connections with their adopted sibling and for youth whose adoptions were dissolved, Family Law- Chapter 86, enacted on October 1, 2014, allows local departments to provide Adoptive, Search, Contact and Reunion Services (ASCRS) as part of the Family Finding intervention.

**Target and Special Populations:**

Searching and engaging relative resources should be an ongoing early intervention strategy to facilitate permanency for children and youth during all case planning activities. The primary efforts shall target youth with an Another Permanency Plan Living Arrangement (APPLA) permanency plan who do not have an identified permanent placement or supportive relationship in planning for their exit from Maryland's child welfare system.

At the discretion of the local director or designee, Family Finding efforts may be extended to children with other permanency plans based on the needs of the child welfare population within the local department. These special populations may include children with limited known relative resources upon entering out-of-home care; other challenging barriers to achieving permanency; and children who have a history of placement disruptions or adoption dissolutions.

In cases of a minor in out-of- home placement, who was adopted through a local department and re-entered foster care due to a failed adoption, the director or a designee of a local department is authorized to provide Adoptive, Search, Contact and Reunion Services (ASCRS). A local director or designee may contact relatives of a minor to develop a placement resource or facilitate a family connection with a relative. Relative means "an individual at least 21 years old who is related to the minor by blood or marriage within five degrees of consanguinity or affinity under the civil law rule." The local department must determine that reunification with the minor's adoptive parent(s) is not in the youth's best interest. The local department is also permitted to contact sibling(s) who have been adopted through a local department and is 21 years or older, on behalf of a youth to develop a placement resource or facilitate a family connection.

In both circumstances, the local director or designee applies for Adoption, Search, Contact and Reunion Services (ASCRS) through SSA. Then, SSA assigns the case to a Confidential Intermediary (CI) in the same local department. The CI will conduct a search on behalf of the minor child to contact the adult adoptee over 21 years and/or the relatives of the adopted youth. Family Finders are permitted to conduct ASCRS search only after being trained and certified as a Confidential Intermediary by SSA.

**Role of Family Finder:**

The Family Finder shall be responsible for conducting intensive searches and exploring any possible kinship resources. The Family Finding activities include engaging, interviewing, and assessing family members, and conducting internet searches. Local departments shall assign a Family Finding gatekeeper to assess the initial referrals and assign cases for search activities.

**Collaboration between the Family Finder and Case Management Staff:**

Permanency planning is a primary responsibility for all child welfare staff. Family Finding is a practice resource to supplement the caseworkers' efforts to search for and engage relatives to help bridge lifelong connections between children and their families. The Family Finder shall demonstrate strengths-based thinking, communication, interpersonal interaction and writing in their work with children, families and their colleagues assigned the child welfare cases. The caseworker shall retain full case responsibility during the Family Finding engagement. The Family Finder will assist and explore pathways to create lifelong and permanent connections through case mining, intensive searches and identifying potential resources.

The Family Finders shall receive specialized training to conduct intensive searches to assist in locating lost family members for the case managers to consider in their efforts to establish appropriate permanency resources for children and youth.

Prior to beginning any search activities, the Family Finder must meet with the caseworker and supervisor to discuss any relevant information pertaining to the child's readiness or desire for contact with relatives. Ongoing communication between the caseworker and Family Finder is critical. Throughout the family search process, the Family Finder shall keep the caseworker and

supervisor abreast of information gathered. All potential risks shall be explored and documented as the Family Finder gathers information to engage the potential relative resources.

Children and youth should not attend this initial case staffing; however, information about their social and emotional well-being as well as their understanding of the Family Finding process shall be shared with the Family Finder. In addition, the caseworker and supervisor shall share a developmentally appropriate explanation about the Family Finding activity with the child or youth.

The role of the Family Finder is not to provide case management services; therefore, benchmarks for transitioning the engagement and teaming activities to the caseworker and supervisor need to occur at the end of the Family Finding intervention efforts. Whoever locates the potential relative resources shall complete all Central Information Systems (CIS) and background clearances on those who express an interest in connecting with or becoming a placement resource for the child or youth located through Family Finding. For example, if the case manager locates the relative resources, he or she must conduct the appropriate CIS and background clearances. Likewise, if the Family Finder locates the relative resources, he or she must conduct the appropriate CIS and background clearances.

**Administrative Oversight to Support Local Department Family Finding Efforts:**

Local administrators shall designate at least one staff with previous child welfare casework experience to be trained as the lead Family Finder. Local departments shall establish administrative oversight to assess the initial referrals and assign cases to Family Finders for search activities. This administrative oversight shall facilitate coordination between the caseworkers and the Family Finders.

Local departments shall begin implementation of Family Finding by assessing all APPLA cases to determine the most effective and efficient internal mechanism to assign cases for Family Finders to search for potential relative resources; however, this does not preclude local departments from assessing other cases to refer to the Family Finder as caseloads permit. Case confidentiality shall be maintained at all times. Any local standard operating procedures must be consistent with this policy and the MD CHESSIE instructions.

The Family Finders and caseworkers must utilize absent parent locator services to ensure that a diligent search is completed for absent parents. In cases where parental rights have been terminated and the youth or siblings have been adopted, the local department must request the intervention of the Confidential Intermediary in reaching out to the youth's previously adopted biological sibling(s).

**Technical Assistance from the Social Services Administration (SSA):**

SSA will provide technical assistance to the local departments to implement and sustain practice for the Family Finders as part of the statewide replication of the Fostering Connections Demonstration Project. Specialized training for the Family Finders will be offered to include

technological resources available to search for and identify relative resources. All child welfare caseworkers and supervisors are encouraged to register and attend the Family Finding overview course, Supporting Permanency: Debunking, Myths, Engaging Youth and Beginning Family Finding, offered by the CWA. This course highlights the importance and shared responsibility of achieving permanency for children and youth in addition to explaining the rationale for Family Finding as an additional case management resource to support permanency.

## ACTION:

***Development, Consultation and Collaboration:*** The Family Finder shall begin collaborating with child welfare caseworkers and supervisors by conducting an initial case staffing. During this staffing, the caseworker shall provide information about the youth, as well as their readiness and preparation for Family Finding services. Information must also include any relatives, or potential resources that have been identified, as well as any attempts to locate and/or contact them. The initial meeting between the caseworker and the Family Finder shall include the following:

- Review of the case record and discussion of the permanency plan
- Information about the child's current well-being and special considerations

***Child Preparation***: Depending on the youth's age and development, the Family Finder shall consult with the caseworker and supervisor to determine the appropriateness of having the Family Finder meet with the youth to the discuss the expectations or concerns about the Family Finding process. The Family Finder may meet to orient the child or youth to the Family Finding process if there is mutual agreement with the caseworker and supervisor or request from an administrator. Otherwise, the child preparation meeting with the Family Finder is not required.

***Family Search***: The Family Finder shall begin the process to identify as many family members as possible, as well as appropriate adults who have a relationship or may have been key supporters of the child or youth in the past. The Family Finding activities shall include family interviews, case mining to search for potential leads on relative resources as well as databases and internet search engines. Through these intensive search activities, the Family Finder shall provide the caseworker and supervisor with identified family members and significant adults who have expressed interest in being considered as a potential placement resource or connection for the youth.

***Engagement***: The Family Finders shall enlist the support of family members and other significant adults to provide information that will assist in locating other extended family members. The process of engaging these family members is intended to encourage these potential resources to consider their role in offering permanent placement or "relational permanence" for the child or youth referred to the Family Finder.

***Teaming and Assessment***: No later than 45 days after the initial case staffing or before the Blended Perspective Meeting, the Family Finder and case management staff shall schedule a

meeting to discuss the progress to date of the Family Finding engagement. During this follow-up discussion, the Family Finder and the case management staff shall decide whether to plan a meeting with the potential relative resources or whether additional efforts should be extended to seek other potential relative resources.

The Family Finder shall schedule and invite family members and significant others who have expressed interest in the child or youth to participate in a Blended Perspective Meeting. The Blended Perspective Meeting is a specialized Family Finding forum to discuss options for supporting the child or youth after the relative resources have been identified. This meeting should be scheduled during a mutually convenient time to take full advantage of the relatives' attendance. Participation is strictly voluntary for family members; however, an assessment of any barriers to their participating needs to be discussed by the Family Finder to further inform recommendations for considering these relatives as a permanency resource. The child's caseworker and the supervisor must participate in this meeting.

While a face-to-face meeting is preferable, consideration of other meeting formats is permissible. During the Family Finding training, specific guidelines for facilitating the Blended Perspective Meeting will be disseminated in an effort to assist in managing the dynamics of the meeting, as well as to aid in the uniformity of the meetings across the Family Finding practice continuum.

Children and youth shall not be included in the Blended Perspective Meeting with the identified family members. As a precaution, care should be taken to protect the emotional well-being of the child or youth and avoid exposing them to sensitive issues that could arise during the preliminary discussion with the potential relatives without the appropriate clinical preparation.

***Planning:*** In addition to emphasizing the importance of establishing life-long connections for the child or youth outside of the child welfare system, the goal of the Blended Perspective Meeting is to discuss the realistic options and practical considerations from the perspective of the local department and the family members to achieve permanency or relationship support. The next steps for engaging the youth with the relatives shall be identified during the Blended Perspective Meeting, but those action steps shall be carried out by the caseworker and supervisor. Those action steps shall be briefly outlined as recommendation on the ***Family Finding Summary*** **(DHR/SSA 2085)**

***Decision Making***: The child welfare case worker and supervisor shall develop the service plan based on the action steps discussed during the Blended Perspective Meeting and consider subsequent recommendations from the Family Finder. The caseworker and supervisor shall meet with the youth, as appropriate, following the Blended Perspective Meeting. The purpose of the meeting with the youth is to discuss and explore options for renewing and restoring relationships with viable relative resources. The developmental and emotional needs of the child and youth must be taken into account when having this discussion. Unfortunately, some contacts with identified relatives will need to be terminated if pursing the connection poses a potential risk to the child or youth.

***Case Closure:*** Within 30 days after convening the Blended Perspective Meeting, the Family Finder shall end the search engagement efforts. The Family Finder shall complete the ***Family***

***Finding Summary*** **(DHR/SSA 2085)** that includes information about the identified family members and others, and recommendations to caseworker and supervisors. This information must be uploaded to the file cabinet in MD CHESSIE for the caseworker and supervisor to follow-up with any identified family members as appropriate. The caseworker and supervisor shall assume primary responsibility for communicating outcomes of the Family Finding engagement to the youth. The Family Finder shall be involved in those conversations at the discretion of the supervisor or local administrator.

The caseworker and supervisor shall include any viable family resource(s) in subsequent Family Involvement Meetings (FIMs) as appropriate. The caseworker and supervisor shall ensure that risk and safety assessments are completed before pursuing placements and visits with the relatives identified by the Family Finder. All members of the youth's team shall be invited to participate in the FIM. The Family Finder may attend the FIM to offer support to the youth and family members.

**MD CHESSIE DOCUMENTATION[1]:**

All Family Finding case activity shall be documented in MD CHESSIE in order to track delivery of service.

- After the referral for Family Finding has been accepted and the Family Finder has been identified, MD CHESSIE administrative rights to the case shall be granted to the Family Finder.

- Upon acceptance of the referral, the Family Finder shall schedule an initial staffing with the caseworker and supervisor. The Family Finder shall document all meetings, contacts and any Family Finding activities in MD CHESSIE by selecting the following options as most appropriate to describe the activity:

    1. **Family Finding Initial Meeting** - *First joint meeting with caseworker and supervisor to discuss referral.*

    2. **Family Finding Member Engaged** - *First time contact with any family member to assess their potential support.*

    3. **Family Finding Meeting** - *Any face-to face meeting related to Family Finding other than Blended Perspective Meeting.*

    4. **Family Finding Member Contact** - *Any general contact note to document Family Finding efforts with any relatives, after the first time any member engaged.*

[1] Currently MD CHESSIE terminology is "Family Find. " Future build will update to "Family Finding."

5. **Family Finding Blended Perspective Meeting** -*The meeting with relatives identified through the Family Finding process to discuss options to plan for child or youth.*

- A narrative of all meetings and outcomes shall be documented under "Comments."
- The Family Finder shall ensure that the names and addresses for "Primary Relatives" identified are documented in the "Collateral Folder." The "Primary Relative" is defined as those contacts that represent the most viable potential resources. The contact relationship information for the "Primary Relative" shall be chosen from the collateral drop down box. Detailed information about the relative's willingness to be considered as a placement resource or to provide a meaningful, lifelong connection shall be outlined in the ***Family Finding Summary.*** **(DHR/SSA 2085)** Names and contact information for all other relatives shall be listed in the ***Family Finding Summary*** **(DHR/SSA 2085)** ***and*** stored in the "File Cabinet" when the Family Finding case is closed.
- The outcome of the Blended Perspective Meeting shall be documented in MD CHESSIE "Contact" folder, detailed as Family Finding Blended Perspective Meeting.
- Careful consideration should be given to the documented reasons the relative was not initially explored as a placement option; however, the current risk and safety factors should be used to assess the appropriateness of engaging this relative resource.

## Family Finding Initial Contact

Details | Comments | Quality of Care

ID: Source: Name:

* Date: 03/02/2015 * Time: 10:00 AM * Contact Initiated / Contact Received

Search Authored By: Entered By: Wadding, Terry

* Type of Contact: Face to Face * Location: LDSS Office

*Duration of Contact: hrs mts Travel Time: hrs mts * Status: Completed

Participants Select Collateral Select

* Reasons Select
Family Find Initial

Non Client/Non-Collateral Edit
OH Worker
OH Supervisor

Visitation Log | OK | Save | New | Cancel | Help

Contact Details - Service Cases (#6102361)

Details | Comments | Quality of Care

| Entered By | Entered Date | Comments Type |
|---|---|---|
| | | Narrative |

* Comments Edit

Family Finder met with OH worker and supervisor to discuss new referral. The worker reported there is not an immeidate family member who is willing to care for Craig. The worker has asked relatives for names of distant relatives who may be willing to care for Craig. Craig's next review hearing is scheduled for August 12, 2015. Family Finder has agreed to move forward with the search.

Visitation Log | OK | Save | New | Cancel | Help

## Family Finding Member Engaged

Contact Details - Service Cases (#6102400)

Details | Comments | Quality of Care

ID: 20001540 Source: Service Case Name: Abrams, Craig

* Date: 03/16/2015 * Time: 02:30 PM * Contact Initiated / Contact Received

Search Authored By: Entered By: Terry Wadding

* Type of Contact: Phone * Location: LDSS Office

*Duration of Contact: 1 hrs 0 mts Travel Time: hrs mts * Status: Completed

Participants Select Collateral Select

* Reasons Select Non Client/Non-Collateral Edit

Family Find Member Engaged

Beverly Scott

Visitation Log | OK | Save | New | Cancel | Help

Contact Details - Service Cases (#6102580)

Details | Comments | Quality of Care

| Entered By | Entered Date | Comments Type |
|---|---|---|
| Terry Wadding | 4/21/2015 13:58:06 | Narrative |

* Comments Edit

Ms. Beverly Scott contacted this Family Finder. Ms . Scott said she is the cousin of Craig Abrams. This FF asked if her maiden name was Beverly Smith and she confirmed. Ms. Scott stated she received the letter and is interested in speaking more about connecting with Craig. This FF asked if she has thought about what level of commitment she would like to take in connecting with Craig. Ms. Scott said she is open to whatever Craig is willing including having him reside with her. Ms. Scott does not have children and has a flexible job so she has no foreseeable barriers.

This FF informed Ms. Scott that she would like to reach out to other family members who would also be willing to connect with Craig. Ms. Scott said all her relatives live in California but, Craig was close to a family friend. Ms. Scott said she has not seen the friend in a while but, his name is James Thomas IV. Ms. Scott said she believes a paternal uncle, Leroy Abrams, may still reside in Crownsville, MD. She does not have contact info for either.

Visitation Log | OK | Save | New | Cancel | Help

## Family Finding Meeting

Contact Details - Service Cases (#6102620)

Details | Comments | Quality of Care

ID: 20001540 Source: Service Case Name:

* Date: 03/30/2015 * Time: 01:00 PM * Contact Initiated / Contact Received

Search Authored By: Entered By: Wadding, Terry

* Type of Contact: Phone * Location: LDSS Office

*Duration of Contact: hrs mts Travel Time: hrs mts * Status: Completed

Participants Select Collateral Select

* Reasons Select Non Client/Non-Collateral Edit

Family Find Meeting

OH worker

Visitation Log | OK | Save | New | Cancel | Help

Contact Details - Service Cases (#6102620)

Details | Comments | Quality of Care

| Entered By | Entered Date | Comments Type |
|---|---|---|
| | | Narrative |

* Comments Edit

This FF contacted the OH worker to gave an update of potential resources. So far FF has located a cousin, Beverly Scott, a friend, James Thomas IV, and paternal uncle, Leroy Abrams. All individuals are available to meet on April 7, 2015 at 10 for the Blended Perspective Meeting. The OH worker and her supervisor will attend the meeting as well. The FF and OH team will meet on April 6,2015 at 2:30 to prep for the meeting.

Visitation Log | OK | Save | New | Cancel | Help

## Family Finding Member Contact

Contact Details - Service Cases (#6102600)

Details | Comments | Quality of Care

ID: 20001540 Source: Service Case Name: Abrams, Craig

* Date: 03/27/2015 * Time: 11:00 AM * Contact Initiated / Contact Received

Search Authored By: Entered By: Terry Wadding

* Type of Contact: Phone * Location: LDSS Office

*Duration of Contact: hrs 45 mts Travel Time: hrs mts * Status: Completed

Participants Select

Collateral Select: Ms. Beverly D Scott

* Reasons Select: Family Find Member Contact

Non Client/Non-Collateral Edit

Visitation Log | OK | Save | New | Cancel | Help

Contact Details - Service Cases (#6102600)

Details | Comments | Quality of Care

| Entered By | Entered Date | Comments Type |
|---|---|---|
| | | Narrative |

* Comments Edit

FF contacted Ms. Scott and informed her of new developments with the case. At, this time Craig is slightly apprehensive about meeting Ms. Scott. FF explained this is normal behavior and it would be discussed in more detail with Craig as the process moves along. This FF asked if she was still willing to move forward with connecting and possibly having Craig reside in her home. Ms. Scott said yes and asked if anyone else has been identified. This FF said that all interested family members would be at the meeting to discuss next steps. This FF asked if she would be available on April 7, 2015 at 10 am to meet? Ms. Scott said yes, she would be in attendance.

Visitation Log | OK | Save | New | Cancel | Help

## Family Finding Blended Perspective Meeting

Contact Details - Service Cases (#6102641)

Details | Comments | Quality of Care

ID: 20001540 Source: Service Case Name:

* Date: 04/07/2015 * Time: 10:00 AM * Contact Initiated / Contact Received

Search Authored By: Entered By: Wadding, Terry

* Type of Contact: Face to Face * Location: LDSS Office

*Duration of Contact: 1 hrs 30 mts Travel Time: hrs mts * Status: Completed

Participants Select

Collateral Select
Mr. James Thomas IV
Ms. Beverly D Scott

* Reasons Select
Family Find Blended Perspective Meeting

Non Client/Non-Collateral Edit
Leroy Abrams
OH worker
OH supervisor

Visitation Log | OK | Save | New | Cancel | Help

Contact Details - Service Cases (#6102641)

Details | Comments | Quality of Care

| Entered By | Entered Date | Comments Type |
|---|---|---|
| Terry Wadding | 4/21/2015 14:44:57 | Narrative |

* Comments Edit

This FF and the OH team met with Ms. Scott, Mr. Thomas, and Mr. Abrams. Mr. Abrams participated via telephone. The OH team identified the current permanency plan for Craig and what the agency hopes will happen after this meeting. The OH worker shared what Craig hopes will take place once the process ends. Ms. Scott is still interested in Craig residing in her home when he is ready to take that step. She is fine with him having day or weekend visits and visiting him in his current placement. Mr. Thomas is being stationed overseas in Japan for the next 2 years. He is willing to call, write, Skype with Craig while he is overseas. Mr. Thomas would like for his role to be that of mentorship and support to Ms. Scott. Mr. Abrams is not willing to do anything at this time. Mr. Abrams stated his health limits his activities and he wishes Craig well. Mr. Abrams would like for team to only contact him in the case of an emergency.

Visitation Log | OK | Save | New | Cancel | Help

## Family Finding Summary

| **Family Finder:** | **Date:** |
|---|---|
| **Child's Name:** | **Child's D.O.B:** |
| **Family Finding Initiated:** | **Family Finding Ended:** |

**Blended Perspective Meeting Held?** ☐ Yes, date ☐ No

If **NO** please explain

**Primary Relatives documented in MD CHESSIE?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

| **Non Primary Relatives Demographics** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Name** | **Phone Number/Email Address** | **Home Address** |
| | / | |
| | / | |
| | / | |
| | / | |

**Detailed Recommendation for Caseworker & Supervisor:**