



North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
Division of Social Services

325 North Salisbury Street • Raleigh, North Carolina 27603
Courier # 56-20-25

Michael F. Easley, Governor
Dempsey Benton, Secretary

Sherry S. Bradsher, Director
(919) 733-3055

September 28, 2007

MEMORANDUM

TO: County Directors of Social Services

AGAPE of NC

ASU (Appalachian Family Innovations/BIABH)

Another Choice for Black Children, Inc.

Bethany Christian Services, Inc.

Boys and Girls Homes of NC, Inc.

Catholic Social Services of the Diocese of Charlotte

Children's Home Society of North Carolina, Inc.

The Children's Home

Christian Adoption Services

The Crossnore School

Community Services for Children

Family Services, Inc.

Lutheran Family Services in the Carolina

Methodist Home for Children

Nazareth Children's Home

Project Oz Adoptions, Inc.

Omni Community Services, Inc

Yahweh Center

Youth Homes

Other Private Agencies that are interested in Participating in the Fund

SUBJECT: SPECIAL CHILDREN ADOPTION FUND

The North Carolina Division of Social Services is pleased to announce the availability of \$3,100,000 in Special Children Adoption Fund in SFY 07-08. No local match is required as a condition for receipt of these funds. The Fund, which continues to be a vital resource in the placement of special needs children, has made it possible for hundreds of children who were living in, or likely to be placed in, foster homes or institutions to be adopted into safe and secure adoptive homes.

The purpose of the Fund is to enhance adoption programs, to secure permanent homes for hard to place children, and to foster public/private partnerships. Twenty-five per cent of the Fund is targeted specially for participating private child placing agencies until March 31, 2008. If the private agencies' share of the Fund is not used by the deadline, the balance will be available to both private and public agencies. Partnerships between public and private agencies are strongly encouraged to maximize available placement resources to children in the foster care system.

A committee comprised of representatives from the Division of Social Services, the Association of County Directors of Social Services, departments of social services and participating private adoption were invited to convene on March 28, 2007 to recommend guidelines for administration of the SFY 07-08 Special Children Adoption Fund. Many options were discussed and a recommendation was made pending the Divisions final approval. Following Division review, maintaining the established SFY 06-07 process was determined to be the most equitable based on current reviews and management of the fund. For SFY 07-08, each agency's baseline will be governed by the average number of children who exited the foster care system by a Decree of Adoption during three of the last four years. The highest number in the four year period is not included in the average for the baseline. For those private agencies, (ASU-Appalachian Family Innovations, Another Choice for Black Children, Children's Home Society of North Carolina, Lutheran Family Services in the Carolinas and Methodist Home for Children), under contract with the State to provide special needs adoption services, they are eligible to participate in the fund once they have exhausted the funding for services enumerated in those contracts. The baseline for other private agencies is calculated using the same procedure as for public agencies.

Information for the baseline comes from the Adoption Information Management System (AIMS). Data in AIMS include the dates of the Decree of Adoption, placing agency-whether public or private, and names of children. Please review the baseline information (Attachment I) carefully and contact us if you believe that the information is incorrect. We will change the number if you can prove that the information is inaccurate. The payment levels for disbursement of the Special Children Adoption Fund for SFY 07-08 are:

- Payment level of \$ 9,000 per child for children from 0-12 years
- Payment level of \$15,000 per child for children from 13-18 years
- Payment level of \$15,000 per child for sibling groups of three or more who are placed together at the same time in an adoptive family

The total amount is paid to an agency when the agency recruits, prepares, and supervises the placement. The amount is shared when agencies work together to place a child. For example, each agency receives 50% of the payment if one agency recruits and trains the adoptive family and another agency supervises the placement and completes the necessary paperwork to finalize the adoption. We encourage partnerships and trust that agencies will work together when funds are requested. If agencies share in the placements, it is mandatory that this information is reflected on the DSS-1571, Part IV when reimbursement is requested. We cannot provide the full amount of payment to two agencies for the placement of the same child. The Division of

Social Services expects and recommends that local departments of social services and private adoption agencies ensure that needed child information and prospective adoptive family history is openly shared and communicated between both entities. The Division further encourages both agencies to appropriately assess the amount of supervision needed to monitor the placement, whether or not the custodial agency needs to jointly monitor the placement, that monthly detailed progress reports are submitted, and mutually agree upon the desired timeframe to finalize the adoption based on the needs of the individual child/ren.

The Fund is performance-based in that payments can only be made after a Decree of Adoption has been issued. Payments can only be made on behalf of children who have been determined eligible for adoption assistance cash payments. **Children who meet the “potential handicap” criteria for adoption assistance cash payment *do not* qualify for payment under the Fund.**

To receive a payment from the Special Children Adoption Fund, participating public and private agencies must provide the Division with the following information:

1. Submit the name and *new* SIS identification number for adoption assistance of each eligible special needs child for whom a decree of adoption has been entered since July 1, 2007. This will enable us to identify the point at which the baseline is exceeded. **Do not submit this information until you have exceeded your baseline and become eligible for payment.** **Payments are only made after the case is activated in the Child Placement and Payment System DSS-5095.** Agencies should verify the adoption assistance information has been entered. **If the child’s case is not activated via the DSS-5095 payment for the child will be denied.**
2. Complete the revised DSS-1571 Part IV (Attachment II) to indicate children included in your baseline and to request a payment on behalf of those children for whom the Decree of Adoption enables you to exceed your baseline. Provide all the information that is requested, including race, age, gender, SIS identification number, agency partner sharing in placement, race of adoptive parent, amount of reimbursement, receipt of funds under another contract, and special needs of the child. **Please do not use numeric codes to indicate special needs. It is important to write out the special needs, i.e., sibling, teenager, etc.** **We will eliminate reimbursement requests that do not have the signature of an authorized official on the DSS 1571, Part IV.**
3. Mail the completed DSS 1571, Part IV as soon as possible. Do not include children for whom payment has already been made on the DSS-1571.

Please remember that the Special Children Adoption Fund operates on a “first come, first serve” basis until funds are depleted. Therefore, it is most important that participating agencies submit payment requests as soon as possible after the Decree of Adoption has been issued. Funds will be electronically transferred to counties and checks will be mailed to private agencies.

All agencies that received payments from the Special Children Adoption Fund for SFY 06-07 must provide information on how the money was used to enhance or expand their adoption program before funds can be received for the current fiscal year. Agencies must provide the following information with the first request:

- **The total amount of money that was received; and**
- **An itemized statement documenting how the money was used or will be used in its entirety before the end of SFY 07-08 to enhance adoption services for the agency.**

Allowable uses for the Fund include the direct provision or purchase by contract of services included in the definitions of Adoption Services (010), Adoption Recruitment (011), Adoption Assistance Case Management (012), Child-Specific Recruitment, Assessment and Training of Adoptive Parents (013), and Post Adoption Case Management (016). We encourage you to use these funds for legal or court related services to expedite the adoption process, for post-adoption services and for child-specific recruitment efforts. This would include the funding for contracts with-out-of-state agencies that are willing to provide a family for your child. **Funds cannot be used to purchase automobiles for the county or to supplant the salaries of current workers.**

Since the legislative intent for the Fund is to have an impact on the state's adoption program, payments from the Fund cannot be made *until* this information is received. The Division will contact the agency if there are questions about the information submitted. We encourage you to keep clear and accurate records of the use of the funds for auditing purposes, if requested. If you do not exceed your baseline, it is not necessary to submit this information.

With the increasing number of teenagers and sibling groups in care who need permanent homes, the Division recognizes that recruitment presents many challenges and remains committed to supporting permanency among these populations. The LINKS Program is a resource the Division strongly encourages agencies to become more familiar and share with families. Many families may not be aware that children whose adoptions were finalized after their thirteenth birthday are eligible for services and resources that are intended to help them transition to self-sufficiency. In addition, children who are adopted from foster care after their sixteenth birthday can qualify for up to \$5,000 per year to assist with post-secondary educational and vocational training expenses. (Please refer to *Family Services Manual, Chapter IV: Placement Section 1201*, for more information on the LINKS Program.)

Also, the Division is pleased to announce that last session the General Assembly also approved funding to help children adopted from DSS custody after the age of twelve to pay for postsecondary education. Known as the North Carolina Postsecondary Education Support Scholarship (NCPCESS) the fund will help eligible students pay for tuition, fees, books and supplies and a room and board allowance at one of North Carolina's public universities or community colleges. Funds will be available for all students who were or become eligible on or after July 1, 2007. For more information on the LINKS Program or NCPCESS please contact Joan McAllister, LINKS Coordinator, at (919) 733-2580 or Joan.McAllister@ncmail.net.

Last year 39 agencies participated in the Special Children Adoption Fund program. Of the 320 children that were adopted, there were 8 sibling groups of four or more; 11 sibling groups of three; and 40 sibling groups of two. 28 of the children were over 13 years of age. We continue to emphasize the need for adoptive placements of siblings groups and the older children in foster care. We appreciate your efforts in making it possible for these children to secure permanency.

The Division encourages more agencies to participate during SFY 07-08. The purpose of the fund is to recognize and reward strong performance in adoption services. It is our expectation that all participating agencies adhere to best practice standards in providing these services. Failure to adhere to best practice standards will result in an agency's ineligibility to continue participation in the Fund.

If you have questions regarding the Special Children Adoption Fund, please contact Amelia Lance at (919) 733-2580 or Amelia.Lance@ncmail.net. Requests for payments, including all of the required documentation described in this letter should be sent to Ms. Lance at the following address:

**North Carolina Division of Social Services
Family Support and Child Welfare Services Section
Foster Care and Adoption Policy and Interstate Team
325 N. Salisbury Street Suite 715
2409 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-2409**

We sincerely appreciate all of your efforts in providing safe, permanent homes for children. The Fund offers us an opportunity to provide additional financial resources to county departments of social services and our private adoption agency partners to improve adoption services for children. Since the creation of the Fund the number of adoptions has steadily increased. We believe that the Special Children Adoption Fund is one of the positive factors in that accomplishment.

Sincerely,



Esther T. High, Acting Chief
Family Support and Child Welfare Services Section

cc: Sherry Bradsher
Jo Ann Lamm
Sarah Barham
Family Support and Child Welfare Team Leaders
Children's Programs Representatives
Work First Program Representatives
Local Business Liaisons
LaKeitha Miller

ETH/PW/al

Attachments:

Attachment 1

Attachment 2

FSCWS-63-07