



**State of Florida  
Department of Children and Families**

**Charlie Crist**  
*Governor*

**George H. Sheldon**  
*Secretary*

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**DATE:** February 3, 2010

**TO:** Regional Directors  
Circuit Administrators  
CBC CEOs  
Executive Leadership Team

**FROM:** George H. Sheldon, Secretary

**SUBJECT:** Quality Parenting Initiative

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'G. Sheldon', is written over the 'FROM:' line of the memo. The signature is fluid and cursive, extending slightly to the right.

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When Child Protective Services removes a child we must ensure that the child's needs are met in any out-of-home placement. One of the most basic of these needs is parenting that can help the child recover from the trauma experienced, encourage healthy development and support permanency. The Department is committed to making changes necessary to ensure that quality parenting becomes a reality. The Quality Parenting Initiative is an approach to foster parenting designed to ensure that this need is met by foster families in Florida.

The initiative views foster parents as skilled respected partners in caring for children, strengthening families and achieving permanence. Their special role is to provide high quality trauma-informed parenting to children, to mentor and support bio parents, kin or others who are or will be permanent parents and to maintain a long term relationship with the child even after he or she leaves the foster home.

Achieving this vision requires two things: First we must recruit people who have the potential to fulfill these responsibilities and are committed to doing so. Second, every participant in the system must act with families in a way that supports and facilitates this vision of foster parenting.

Recruitment materials and all communications with the public must convey the message that foster parents have extraordinary responsibilities that include, but go beyond, loving a child. These include participating in case planning, communicating with the court, working with bio-parents toward re-unification, advocating for the child with other systems like schools, medical facilities, etc., making a permanent commitment to a child including maintaining a relationship with a child and family after reunification. Parenting a foster child takes more skill, information and sophistication than parenting other children in the community. Foster families are respected for their ability to cope with and reverse the effects of trauma on these vulnerable children.

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1317 Winewood Boulevard, Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0700

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Mission: Protect the Vulnerable, Promote Strong and Economically Self-Sufficient Families, and Advance Personal and Family Recovery and Resiliency

Even more important is changing procedures and policies to support this concept of foster parenting. All participants in the system including investigators, case managers, recruiters, and lawyers and those who provide supplementary support like substance abuse and mental health should reassess their practices to see if they are consistent with this approach. Current practice can unwittingly undermine foster parents' efforts to work with bio-parents by withholding information and maintaining separation. Failing to consult with the foster parent when scheduling case meetings or visitation conveys the message that the foster parent is not really important to the process. Some practices, such as the use of "transporters" to take children to medical or therapeutic appointments, are inconsistent with good parenting. Although convenient, it ultimately undermines this vision.

These are but a few of many issues that a select seven of our community-based care lead agencies have engaged in during the last 18 months as part of the Quality Parent Initiative. Please review the attached memorandum that invites all who are involved in our foster care systems to take advantage of the unique training opportunities before you as a result of our partnership with the Youth Law Center and Eckerd Family Programs.

I am committed to reassessing our practice and procedure to ensure that it is consistent with quality parenting and hope you will join me in this effort.



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**DATE:** February 5, 2010

**TO:** Regional Directors

**THROUGH:** David L. Fairbanks, Assistant Secretary for Programs  
*Patricia Badland for Pete Digre*  
Pete Digre, Assistant Secretary for Operations

**FROM:** Alan Abramowitz, State Director, Office of Family Safety 

**SUBJECT:** Quality Parenting Initiative with Youth Law Center/Eckerd Family Foundation Update

**ACTION REQUIRED:** Disseminate to Circuit Administrators and Lead Agencies

**DUE DATE:** February 26, 2010

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**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this memorandum is to:

- 1) provide an update on the Quality Parenting Initiative progress/next steps and
- 2) request information about pre-service training for foster parents.

**ACTION REQUIRED:** Please disseminate this information to circuit administrators and Community Based Care lead agencies. In the response on pre-service training, please include the following information and send to [Gay\\_Frizzell@dcf.state.fl.us](mailto:Gay_Frizzell@dcf.state.fl.us) by February 26, 2010:

- Name of lead agency and contact person,
- Name of agency providing pre-service training for foster parents,
- Name of training program used to prepare foster parents (MAPP, PRIDE, etc.),
- Extent to which foster parents act as co-facilitators of the pre-service training for prospective parents, and
- Your interest in participating in redesign of pre-service training for foster parents.

**BACKGROUND:** The Quality Parenting Initiative is the foster parent recruitment project begun during former Secretary Butterworth's administration. On January 7, 2010, Carole Shauffer presented an overview of the project, results, and next steps to Secretary Sheldon and the Department leadership team. The following is a brief summary of that presentation.

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During fiscal year 2008-09, three lead agencies participated in a series of workshops and consultation sessions to develop their foster parent brands and action plans for improving quality. The three lead agencies included Hillsborough Kids, Community-Based Care of Seminole, and Big Bend Community-Based Care. Each of these agencies has implemented practice changes to support their agency's version of this consensus brand. The brand states "A foster parent is a full partner in a team supporting the healthy development of and achieving permanency for children who cannot live with their parents. The specific job of the foster parent is to provide high quality parenting consistent with the needs of the child, and when appropriate, to mentor the parent and to maintain a lifelong commitment to the child wherever he or she lives." For an excellent example of recruitment materials supporting this brand, please go to the following link to view a video produced by Hillsborough Kids: <http://dreamkeepersmedia.com/media/HK11.4a.mov>.

Beginning at the Dependency Summit in August 2009, four more lead agencies began working on developing their brands. This includes Child and Family Connections of Palm Beach, Family Services of Metro Orlando, Heartland for Children, and Eckerd Community Alternatives. The approach is similar to the first year's project and includes the following major elements: training on data analysis, branding, human resources and system change as well as consultation with a wide range of system of care representatives including foster families, biological parents, and youth.

The next steps are as follows. Project leads from the lead agencies will (or already have) be asking for Department staff to attend the on-site action planning meetings listed below. The participation of Department or Sheriff protective investigative and family support workers will be helpful in developing action plans for improving foster parent recruitment and support.

February 11	Family Services Metro Orlando Team Meeting
February 16	Child and Family Connections of Palm Beach Team Meeting
February 17	Eckerd Community Alternatives Team Meeting
February 18	Heartland for Children Team Meeting

On March 16, all seven of the lead agencies participating in this project, have been invited to send teams to participate in training on human resources and system change specific to quality parenting and recruitment. On March 17, a group is being convened to work on a new and optional approach for delivery of foster parent pre-service training and recognition of superior foster families. The meetings will be held in Orlando.

The goals of this collaborative project and its results are unique in the nation. We are appreciative of your efforts and your lead agency teams for this innovative work.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:** For additional information, please contact Gay Frizzell at [Gay\\_Frizzell@dcf.state.fl.us](mailto:Gay_Frizzell@dcf.state.fl.us) or at 850-921-3005.