



State of Florida
Department of Children and Families

Charlie Crist
Governor

George H. Sheldon
Secretary

DATE: October 29, 2010

TO: Regional Directors

THROUGH: Peter Digre, Assistant Secretary for Operations
David L. Fairbanks, Assistant Secretary for Programs

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

SUBJECT: Resources for Diligent Searches for Locating Parents and Diligent Efforts in Locating Relatives
ACTION REQUIRED: Disseminate to Circuit Administrators, CBC lead agencies, supervisors, and all other appropriate staff
DUE DATE: No due date but should be communicated as quickly as possible

PURPOSE: The purpose of this memorandum is to provide information on available resources and practice guidance for conducting diligent searches for parents and tools to assist in locating relatives.

BACKGROUND: Per section 39.01(24), Florida Statutes, "Diligent search means the efforts of a social service agency to locate a parent or prospective parent whose identity or location is unknown, initiated as soon as the social service agency is made aware of the existence of such parent, with the search progress reported at each court hearing until the parent is either identified and located or the court excuses further search."

As provided in the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, Title IV-E agencies are required to exercise due diligence in notifying all adult relatives of a child's removal within 30 days of removal from his/her home. This provision further aligns with one of the guiding principles of the Family Centered Practice framework in that the first priority for placement should be given to the family of origin or kin, or people with whom the child has a connection. Diligent search efforts support this framework and promote normalcy as it is important that children be close to family.

Further, the Florida Quality Improvement Plan requires the development and sharing of resources available to frontline staff, attorneys and the courts to assist with establishing effective practice guides for conducting diligent searches to locate parents, and diligent efforts to locate relatives who may serve as placement resources for children in care. There are a number of best practices occurring in many areas of the state. One

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example is Family Finders. Family Finders is a strategy used to find lifelong supports for children and young people in foster care by finding relatives who can play significant roles in the lives of children whose family connections have gone untapped. Search firms and the use of team decision-making techniques to identify relatives and other "lost" but healthy connections have found families for many children.

The Florida Center for the Advancement of Child Welfare Practice's website includes a wealth of information to assist staff with efforts to locate parents and relatives. Helpful tools such as "Making Relative Search Happen – A Guide to Finding and Involving Relatives" is one of many resources available to provide information on the relative search process and the use of internet searches. This document and other information can be obtained through the Center's website:

<http://centerforchildwelfare.fmhi.usf.edu/kb/dlgntsrch/Forms/AllItems.aspx>

ACTION REQUIRED: Please distribute this memo broadly for use of these excellent resources.

CONTACT INFORMATION: If further information is needed, please contact Grendy Henry, In-Home and Out-of-Home Care Specialist, at (850)413-8712 or grendy_henry@dcf.state.fl.us.

cc: Mary Cagle, Children's Legal Services
Sandy Neidert, Office of Court Improvement