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Administrative Directive

Transmittal:	18-OCFS-ADM-13
To:	Commissioners of Social Services Executive Directors of Voluntary Authorized Agencies
Issuing Division/Office:	Bureau of Child Welfare and Community Services
Date:	June 5, 2018
Subject:	**Placement Module in CONNECTIONS**
Suggested Distribution:	Directors of Social Services Child Protective Services Supervisors Child Welfare Supervisors Foster Care Supervisors Staff Development Coordinators CONNECTIONS Implementation Coordinators
Contact Person(s):	See Section VI
Attachments:	None

Filing References

Previous ADMs/INFs	Releases Cancelled	NYS Regs.	Soc. Serv. Law and Other Legal Ref.	Manual Ref.	Misc. Ref.
18-OCFS-ADM-07		18 NYCRR 428.6, 430.10(d)(1), and 431.10	SSL §§ 358-a, 384-a; FCA §1027-a		Activities Coding Guide GIS #16-006

I.   Purpose

The purpose of this Administrative Directive (ADM) is to introduce the new Placement module in CONNECTIONS (CNNX). This component of CNNX is designed to assist local departments of social services (LDSSs) and voluntary authorized agencies (VAs) in matching children to the best available foster care placement. This provides for more stability for children in foster care and positively impacts the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in foster care.

II.   Background

When a child has been placed by the court in the care and custody or guardianship and custody of an LDSS, it is the responsibility of that LDSS, or a VA under contract with the LDSS, to find the least restrictive and most home-like setting in which the child can be maintained safely and receive all services specified in the child's service[1] plan. Traditionally, the home finder has created a manual method for locating placements that involves knowledge of the child and of the foster care resources available in their community.

The goal of the home finder is to find a placement that is a good fit for the child's interests and needs, and that makes as few changes as possible in the child's life, (e.g., supporting educational stability by keeping the child in the same school when it is in the best interest of the child). In addition, there are statutory[2] and regulatory[3] requirements to place siblings together unless it is not in one or more of the children's best interests to do so. Attention to these details can lead to a more stable placement for the child.

A new Placement module in CNNX is being rolled out incrementally over the next several months. This module provides an automated process for identifying a potential placement from a pool of placement resources that match a child's characteristics in order to provide home finders with information that can assist in selecting the most appropriate placement for a child. The process of matching a child with a resource that meets that child's needs will have several benefits regarding the permanency of a child's placement, reduction of future moves, and improvement in the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in foster care.

As a part of this roll-out, the current Child Placement Characteristics information will be removed from CNNX so that all records will use the same characteristics.[4]

III.   Program Implications

The Placement module will be released in four phases over several months. Each release builds on the previous release(s). Phases 1 and 2 provide mechanisms for recording child and resource characteristics, and prioritizing those characteristics. Phase 3 provides the system functionality to conduct matching of a child with a pool of appropriate foster care resources. Phase 4 includes management and operational reports, providing the tools for both management and staff to monitor the placement process

Phase 1 is scheduled for release statewide in June 2018, and includes four components:
- Child characteristics
- Special restrictions applicable to the child
- Resource characteristics
- Staff email addresses

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[1] 18 NYCRR 430.11(d)(1).
[2] SSL §§ 358-a(11), 384-a(1-a) and FCA §1027-a.
[3] 18 NYCRR 428.6(a)(2)(vi) and 431.10.
[4] Parent/Caretaker and Child Investigation categories remain unchanged.

This first phase is the preparatory step for the placement process, laying the groundwork for the full implementation of the system's matching functionality in Phase 3. There are two major functions included in Phase 1:
1. The appropriate child and resource characteristics must be entered. The system will use this information as well as information on capacity, setting, OCFS and local program types, and language to identify matches.
2. Staff business email addresses must be provided. This is necessary for automatic communication with case workers and home finders which will be implemented in Phase 3.

Currently, the Characteristics tab on the Person Detail window in CNNX provides the capability of recording child placement information as well as other key information. With the release of Phase 1, the child placement category will contain a new set of placement characteristics; the data currently recorded in that section will be removed. Once Phase 1 is in place in June 2018, child characteristics must be recorded in CNNX for children in an open Family Services Stage (FSS) with a program choice of placement. The only exceptions are for those children who are
• in a pre-adoptive placement,
• aging out of foster care with an APPLA goal,
• in a placement ordered by family court, e.g., approved relative home, or
• in an approved relative foster home where placement is not ordered by family court.

Additionally, resource characteristics must be recorded, as appropriate, for every certified foster home, and congregate care facility.

Knowing the child characteristics provides OCFS, and each LDSS and VA with the ability to identify common characteristics of children in care. This information can be used to develop training and focus recruitment efforts. When there is a more accurate picture of the needs and characteristics of children in foster care, agencies are able to equip caseworkers and home finders with the skills necessary to work with the needs of the children they serve. Similarly, identifying the types of homes that are needed for the children entering foster care can help to define recruitment efforts in appropriate segments of the community.

Child and Resource Characteristics
To facilitate the matching process, the same characteristics are used for both children and resources. The characteristics provide information about the needs of the child and the type of child a foster care resource is willing and able to care for. The list of resource characteristics is identical to the list included in the new foster boarding home application.

The initial Child and Resource Characteristics list includes the following:

Aggression towards others
Aggression towards property
Autism
Bedwetting or encopresis

Chronic medical condition
Complex medication regimen
Developmental disability
Dietary restrictions
Frequent appointments
Goal of adoption
Halal
History of fire-setting behavior
History of frequent AWOLs or running away
History of justice involvement
History of sexual abuse
History of sexual exploitation
Intellectual disability
Issues with activities of daily living
Kosher
Lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB)
Need for a handicap-accessible resource
Need for a non-smoking resource
Need for a resource with no pets
Pregnant or parenting
Self-injury
Special education needs
Special equipment for medical condition
Substance abuse not requiring treatment
Substance abuse requiring treatment
Transgender or gender non-conforming (TGNC)
Verbal aggression

Child Characteristics

Multiple characteristics can be selected, but if no listed characteristic is applicable to a particular child, none needs to be selected. Characteristics can be updated as needed, and a historical record is maintained.

Resource Characteristics

Any congregate care or foster boarding home resource that is licensed or certified, or in the process of being certified, should have characteristics added to its record in CNNX. The number of beds is also recorded. This information derives from the capacity recorded on the license or certification. CNNX also provides the information necessary to identify which foster homes have previously provided care for multiple children for a 6-month period, indicating which homes are potential resources for sibling groups.

Interests and Hobbies

This list of a child's interests is added to CNNX at the suggestion of youth in foster care. It is intended to provide a more robust description of a child to fine tune the placement

process. For example, if the child is an avid baseball fan, it would improve the likelihood of a successful placement to match that child with a placement where that interest will be supported and nurtured.

While this list may be updated, currently the list of interests and hobbies includes:

Arts and Crafting
Cooking/Baking
Movies, video games, or television
Music
Outdoor activities
Performing Arts
Reading/Creative writing
Science/Math
Sports
Technology/Engineering

Special Restrictions

Some children have unique needs that must be considered in any placement decision. In some cases, these unique needs are such that much time and attention must be devoted to those children, thus limiting the placement options for them. The Special Restrictions feature provides a mechanism for recording those factors for a child so that a placement worker can take them into consideration when selecting a placement for the child.

There are four specialized child placement restrictions:

- Child should not be placed in a home where any children are currently residing or placed.
- Child should not be placed in a home where any children of the opposite sex are currently residing or placed.
- Child should not be placed in a home where any younger children are currently residing or placed.
- Child has significant special needs that require additional care from the foster parents. Child should not be placed in a home where any other child with special needs is currently residing or placed.

These restrictions are saved to the child's person ID (PID) to alert placement workers to the existence of a restriction. However, the restriction itself will not impact the pool of resources returned in a placement search. A comment can be recorded for each selected restriction to provide additional information.

Staff Email

When the Placement module is fully functional, automated messages regarding placements will be sent to workers via email. A new tab, Staff Email, will be accessible off the existing Staff Security tab in CNNX when an employee is selected via the Staff/Security search dropdown.

Phase 1 requires that staff identified as having a role in a child's case must have their work email addresses entered on the Staff Email tab. The appropriate agency or district domain will be pre-filled, (e.g., @state.ny.gov, @erie.gov, @acs.nyc.gov), for every staff person. In that way, the individual authorized to add the email will only need to add the personal portion of the email address. This is to ensure that only professional email will be used, providing for data security and confidentiality. When a staff person leaves, the system will automatically deactivate that individual's email address when their access to CNNX is terminated.

Additional Phases

Phase 2 is anticipated to be released later in 2018. This component of the module enhances and supports the search and match functionality.

Two reports will be released as part of this phase. The Resource Availability report and the Resource Roster will be available as references. They combine and display for each resource the information collected during Phase 1. This information can be used during Phase 2 to assist workers in making placement decisions.

Phase 3 will add the searching and matching functionality to allow for a pool of appropriate placement options to be provided for children entering foster care.

Phase 4 will follow the full implementation of the search and match functionality, and will provide added functionality around reporting.

IV. **Required Action**

In Phase 1 staff must capture child and foster care resource characteristics in CNNX
Child characteristics and special restrictions must be entered
- immediately for children entering foster care; and
- as soon as possible, but no later than the end of calendar year 2018 or the release of Phase 3, for children in existing open FSS stages with the program choice of placement, **except** for those who are
   o in a pre-adoptive placement,
   o aging out of foster care with an APPLA goal,
   o in a placement ordered by family court (e.g., approved relative home), or
   o in approved relative foster homes where placement is not ordered by family court.

Capturing the information on children and resources provides information allowing analysis of the common characteristics of children in foster care. This information provides for more accurate targeted recruitment of foster parents and the development of training to meet the needs of the children in care.

FAD workers and/or resource administrators must record all corresponding Resource Characteristics for all existing foster care resources as well as newly certified resources. Accurate and dependable data must be entered and maintained to provide best-match placements when Phase 3 is released.

The fully implemented Placement module will determine availability and vacancies based in part on data entered in the Activities module. The importance of accurate and timely data entry in the Activities window is crucial to the determination of discharges and vacant beds. The search and match functionality of Phase 3 noted above is dependent on timely entry in Activities.

V.   Systems Implications

A *Quick Start Guide* containing descriptions of the new windows, screen shots, and step-by-step instructions will be available electronically for Phase 1. CNNX regional implementation staff will be conducting regional implementation support team (RIST) meetings with LDSS and VA implementation staff. These meetings will provide a preview of the systems changes and identify work areas impacted by the build.

Security for Phase 1

Each of the three windows comprising phase 1 – Child Characteristics, Special Restrictions, and Resource Characteristics – employs different security.

1. **Child Characteristics** requires only that the worker has access to an open stage on a workload.

2. **Resource Characteristics** is accessible from two different paths, each with different security requirements:
   a. From a Resource Search, the Resource Administrator business function is required to modify the characteristics of a resource.
   b. From an open FAD stage on a worker's workload,
      - ACS and voluntary agency staff (across the state) will need the RESOURCE ADMIN Business Function to update Resource Characteristics both via a Resource Search and within a FAD stage on the workload using the NAVIGATION PANE link
      - Rest of State (ROS) district workers will be able to update Resource Characteristics without the Business Function from within a FAD stage on the workload using the NAVIGATION PANE link. However, they will need the RESOURCE ADMIN Business Function to do so via a Resource Search.

3. **Special Restrictions** has different security for NYC and ROS:
   o For any NYC stage, including those where a VA has case planning responsibility, the worker will need the Maintain Placement (MAINT PLACE) Business Function in addition to having access to the open stage.

o   For any ROS stage, no additional security is required. As is the case for Child Characteristics, the worker needs access to the open stage on a workload.

Additional guidance will be available as each phase is released.

VI.   Contacts

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Questions regarding the CONNECTIONS changes can be directed to the appropriate CONNECTIONS implementations specialists.

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For a full listing of CNNX contacts, please visit: https://ocfs.ny.gov/connect/contact.asp.

VII.   Effective Date

This is effective with the CNNX release in June 2018.

/S/ Laura M. Velez

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Issued by:

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Division/Office: Child Welfare and Community Services