



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

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

Beverly Eaves, Governor
Lanier M. Cansler, Secretary

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

September 30, 2009

DEAR COUNTY DIRECTORS OF SOCIAL SERVICES

DEAR EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS OF ADOPTION CHILD-PLACING AGENCIES

SUBJECT: SPECIAL CHILDREN ADOPTION FUND

The North Carolina Division of Social Services (the Division) is pleased to announce the availability of \$3,000,000 in Special Children Adoption Fund (SCAF) for State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2010. 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 and expand adoption services, to secure permanent homes for hard to place children, and to promote public/private partnerships. Twenty-five per cent of the Fund is targeted specially for participating private child placing agencies until March 31, 2010. 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, the Association of County Directors of Social Services, county departments of social services and participating private adoption agencies were invited to convene on February 25, 2009 to recommend guidelines for administration of the SFY 2010 Special Children Adoption Fund. Many options were discussed and recommendations were made pending the Division's final approval. The Division concurred with the Committee's recommendation to maintain the established SFY 2009 guidelines which were determined to be the most equitable based on current reviews and management of the fund.

For SFY 2010, **each agency's baseline will be determined 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.

Private child placing agencies, ([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, are eligible to participate in the fund once they have exhausted the funding for services enumerated in their 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 the Division immediately, if you believe that the information is incorrect. The Division will correct the baseline number if your agency can provide information that shows that the information found in Attachment I is inaccurate. The payment levels for disbursement of the Special Children Adoption Fund for SFY 2010 are:

- Payment level of \$9,000 per child for children from 0-12 years;
- Payment level of \$15,000 per child for **ALL** children from 13-18 years, regardless of whether an agency has met its baseline; and
- 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 and trains the adoptive parent, supervises the placement and completes the legal paperwork for adoption. 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. It is imperative that partnering agencies mutually determine each agency's responsibilities in the adoption process and the percentage of payment that each agency will request if the placement is shared. The Division encourages partnerships and trust that agencies will work together when funds are requested. If agencies share in the placements or received payment from another agency or the adoptive parents, it is mandatory that this information be reflected on the [DSS-5320](#) when reimbursement is requested. The Division cannot provide the full amount of payment to two agencies for the placement of the same child nor reimburse an agency for adoption services for which it has already received compensation. The Division expects that local departments of social services and private adoption agencies ensure that needed child information and prospective adoptive family history are 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 or for consideration in determining agency's baseline.**

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, 2009. This will enable Division 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, unless you are requesting payment for youth age 13 or older included in your baseline. 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 [DSS-5320](#) 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 name, race, age, SIS identification number, agency partner sharing in placement, inclusion of child in another state

contracts, amount of reimbursement, receipt of funds under other sources, 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.

3. All sections on the Special Children Adoption Fund Reimbursement ([DSS-5320](#)) must be completed, including the signature of an authorized agency official. **AN INCOMPLETE DSS-5320 WILL NOT BE PROCESSED.** (See Instructions for Completing the [DSS-5320](#))
4. Mail the completed [DSS-5320](#) as soon as possible. The Division will not accept faxed [DSS-5320](#). Do not include children for whom payment has already been made on the [DSS-5320](#).

Please remember that the Special Children Adoption Fund operates on a “first come, first serve” basis until funds are depleted. Therefore, it is imperative 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 or deposited in accounts of private child placing agencies monthly.

All agencies that received payments from the Special Children Adoption Fund in the past ***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;**
- **The state fiscal year in which the money was received; and**
- **An itemized statement documenting how the money was used or will be used in its entirety before the end of SFY 2010 to enhance and/or expand 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). The Division encourages 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. You are encouraged 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 (13th) 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 (16th) birthday can qualify for up to \$5,000 per year to assist with post-secondary educational and vocational training expenses. (Please refer to [Chapter IV; Section 1201; Number VII - Adolescent Services: NC LINKS](#), for more information on the LINKS Program.)

The General Assembly also approved funding to help children adopted from the department of social services custody after the age of twelve to pay for postsecondary education. This program known as

[NCReach](#) 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. For more information on the LINKS Program or NCReach please contact the Child Welfare Policy Team at (919) 733-4622.

Last year 45 agencies participated in the Special Children Adoption Fund program. Of the 311 children that were adopted, there were 62 sibling groups, including 5 sibling groups of 4 or more children; 17 sibling groups of three; and 40 sibling groups of two. One hundred seven of the children (including 72 youth that were included in baselines) were over 13 years of age. The Division of Social Services continues to emphasize the need for adoptive placements of siblings groups and the older children in foster care. The Division appreciates your efforts in making it possible for these children to secure permanency.

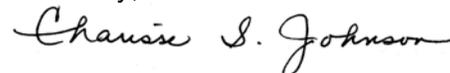
The Division encourages more agencies to participate during SFY 2010. The purpose of the fund is to recognize and reward strong performance in adoption services. It is the Division's expectation that all participating agencies adhere to best practice standards in providing these services. Failure to 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) 334-1096 or amelia.lance@dhhs.nc.gov. Requests for payments, including all of the required documentation described in this letter should be sent to the following address:

North Carolina Division of Social Services
Child Welfare Services Section, Policy Team
325 N. Salisbury Street Suite 725
2408 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-2408
Attn: SCAF Payment Request

The Division sincerely appreciates all of your efforts in providing safe, permanent homes for children. The Fund offers 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,



Charisse S. Johnson, Chief
Child Welfare Services

Attachment:

[BASELINE FOR PARTICPATION IN THE SPECIAL CHILDREN ADOPTION FUND SFY 2010](#)

cc: Sherry S. Bradsher
Sarah Barham
Child Welfare Services Team Leaders
Children's Services Program Representatives
Local Business Liaisons
Regulatory and Licensing Services Consultants
LaKeitha Miller
Jack Rogers

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