



Office of Children and Family Services

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Administrative Directive

Transmittal:	17-OCFS-ADM-05
To:	Commissioners of Social Services Executive Directors of Voluntary Authorized Agencies
Issuing Division/Office:	Child Welfare and Community Services
Date:	June 9, 2017
Subject:	Use of the Foster and Adoptive Home Development (FAD) Stage in CONNECTIONS
Suggested Distribution:	Directors of Social Services Child Welfare Supervisors Foster Care Supervisors Foster Care Homefinders Staff Development Coordinators CONNECTIONS Implementation Coordinators
Contact Person(s):	Please see section VI for contact information.
Attachments:	none

Filing References

Previous ADMs/INFs	Releases Cancelled	NYS Regs.	Soc. Serv. Law & Other Legal Ref.	Manual Ref.	Misc. Ref.
		18 NYCRR §§ 427.6(e) 443.2, 443.3 443.10 and 466.3	Chapter 539 of the Laws of 2014 Chapter 142 of the Laws of 2015 SSL §§376-377	CONNECTIONS Step-by-Step Guide: Training for FAD Caseworkers The Modernization of the CONNECTIONS Foster and Adoptive Home Development (FAD) Stage Job Aid	

I. Purpose

The purpose of this Administrative Directive (ADM) is to mandate local departments of social services (LDSSs) and voluntary authorized agencies (VAs) to record vital information regarding the initial certification or approval, and the annual renewal or reauthorization of foster homes in specific sections of the Foster and Adoptive Home Development (FAD) stage in CONNECTIONS.¹ This information must also be maintained in the external foster home case record. This release also reflects the requirement² that LDSSs and VAs review at the time of the initial application for certification or approval information available in CONNECTIONS to determine whether prospective foster parents have previously held a certificate or letter of approval as a foster parent and whether such certificate or letter of approval was revoked, not renewed, or a foster child was removed from the foster home for health or safety reasons.

II. Background

It is essential that LDSSs and VAs maintain information regarding foster and adoptive homes in the Foster and Adoptive Home Development (FAD) stage in CONNECTIONS. CONNECTIONS was designed to create a single, statewide, integrated system for the collection and recording of child protective services, preventive services, foster care and adoption service information. New York State regulation³ authorizes the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) to mandate the specific information LDSSs and VAs must enter into CONNECTIONS to satisfy the data requirements for particular services.

One of the reasons that a complete and accurate record of foster homes must be maintained in the FAD stage in CONNECTIONS is that a historical review of prospective foster parents is necessary before initial certification or approval, and subsequent renewals. The statutory and regulatory changes recently enacted require that LDSSs and VAs review information available in FAD when screening prospective foster parents. This review provides information on two issues that must be considered in the historical review:

- whether the prospective foster parent ever held a certificate or approval as a foster parent, and if so, whether that certificate or approval had been revoked or not renewed, and
- whether a foster child had been removed from the prospective foster parent's home for health or safety reasons.

The information about previous certification or approval must be considered when determining whether a new certificate or approval should be issued to the prospective foster parent

FAD was created to provide a comprehensive history of foster and adoptive homes in the state. It is to be used to:

- record prospective foster and adoptive homes;
- certify or approve foster and adoptive home; and

¹ Note: The renewal process is referred to as "reauthorization" in CONNECTIONS and the terms "renewal" and "reauthorization" are used interchangeably in this release.

² Chapter 142 of the Laws of 2015, amending Sections 376 and 377 of the Social Services Law (SSL).

³ 18 NYCRR 466.3

- provide ongoing quality assurance of foster and adoptive homes

FAD assists in the certification and approval process by maintaining a database of all foster homes. This record includes:

- Maintaining a database of all individuals residing in the foster home including:
 - foster parent(s);
 - foster parent's biological/adopted child(ren) residing in the home; and
 - individuals, including foster children, 18 years of age or older, residing in the home.
- Providing a record of the foster home certification or approval, and the renewal/reauthorization process, as well as the history of the foster home;
- Providing documentation of services rendered to foster homes, such as foster parent training;
- Supporting state and local regulations, policies, and procedures.

[The CONNECTIONS Step-by-Step Guide: Training for FAD Caseworkers](#) is available as a reference. This guide, subtitled *The Complete Guide to Support Foster and Adoptive Home Development*, provides various techniques to assist LDSS and VA workers in using CONNECTIONS and FAD effectively and efficiently.

III. Program Implications

When an application is received from prospective foster parents, it is required that LDSSs and VAs operating a foster family boarding home program ascertain⁴ whether the applicants have previously applied for certification or approval as foster parents. This information may be received directly from the applicants, or from a Foster/Adoptive Home Search in CONNECTIONS. The LDSS and VA must verify information provided by the applicant by

- contacting the previous agency to inquire as to why the home had been closed, and
- conducting the Foster/Adoptive Home Search in CONNECTIONS to review any existing closure report.

If the prospective foster parents have previously provided care, then the LDSS and VA must review all available information in CONNECTIONS regarding the prior certificate or approval. If as a result of that review it is determined that a previous certificate or letter of approval was revoked or not renewed, or that a foster child had been removed from the applicant's home for health or safety reasons, such information must be considered in determining whether a certificate or letter of approval should be issued to such applicant. These inquiries must be completed and evaluated before the authorized agency may issue a certificate or letter of approval to the applicant.

It is imperative that all information pertaining to foster home certification or approval be recorded accurately and in a timely manner in the FAD stage. This provides an electronic, historical record of information for persons involved with the foster home.

⁴ 18 NYCRR 443.2(b)(12)

While reviewing historical information and documenting current information regarding the foster home in the FAD stage is mandated, documents cannot be stored in CONNECTIONS. Therefore, there is a continued need to maintain external foster home case records on the home. In this external foster home case record, workers must retain paper copies of all required documents for certification or approval such as: New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) criminal history (fingerprint) record checks, Statewide Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment (SCR) database checks including, where applicable, out-of-state SCR checks, Justice Center Staff Exclusion List (SEL) statewide register checks, medical exams, copies of foster home certificates or approval letters, etc.

The certification or approval process of a foster home in New York State consists of the following steps:

1. Inquiry
2. Orientation
3. Application
4. Training
5. Home study
6. Determination of whether to certify or approve a foster home
7. Submitting a foster home certification or approval for supervisory approval
8. Renewal or reauthorization of a foster home

FAD supports LDSS and VA workers by providing a mechanism for documenting each step of this process.

1. Inquiry

Individuals inquire about becoming certified or approved foster parents in a variety of ways. They may contact an LDSS or VA by phone, mail, through a website, or during a foster parent recruitment event.

Upon receiving an inquiry from an individual who is interested in becoming a foster parent, the LDSS or VA must:

- respond in writing to the inquiring person within 10 days of the initial contact; and
- offer an individual appointment to the person(s) or invite them to a group orientation session on becoming a certified or approved foster parent.⁵

2. Orientation

At the appointment or orientation meeting, the LDSS or VA must provide the individual who is interested in becoming a foster parent with an application for a home study and medical report forms. They must also inform the prospective applicants of the certification/approval process requirements.⁶

When information is received from a prospective applicant during the inquiry and orientation processes, two steps must be taken:

⁵ 18 NYCRR § 443.2 (b)

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1. A Foster/Adoptive Home Search must be conducted in FAD to locate any existing records. This must be done to avoid creating a duplicate record of a home in the system.
2. If no existing records are found, a new foster home record must be created in FAD. All of the information regarding the prospective applicant(s) must be recorded in this record regardless of whether or not the home becomes fully certified/approved.

3. Application

There currently is no standard application form for prospective foster parents. However, each application form used by an LDSS or a VA must elicit information about the applicants which includes, but is not limited to, the following factors:⁷

- Age
- Health
- Physical functioning
- Income
- Marital status
- Employment of the applicant(s)
- Information regarding the physical facilities of the prospective foster home
- The names of those persons who will be sharing living accommodations with the child in foster care, including the names of persons 18 years of age or older living in the home
- The existence of any other application for certification or approval, the decision regarding that application, and reasons for its disapproval, if applicable.

In order to create or update the foster home record in CONNECTIONS, LDSSs and VAs must record the information received from these applications in FAD.

4. Training

LDSSs and VAs are mandated to provide training to each certified or approved foster parent. This training program must be approved by OCFS and is designed to prepare the foster parent to meet the needs of the children in their care.⁸ This training must include OCFS-approved training in the application of the reasonable and prudent parenting standard. In addition to the training provided at initial certification or approval, foster parents may be required to attend annual trainings covering a variety of topics.

Foster parents who receive a “special” foster care rate for providing “special” foster care services must participate in agency training for foster parents of not less than four hours per year. Foster parents who receive an “exceptional” foster care rate for providing “exceptional” foster care services must participate in at least five hours per year.⁹ These training requirements do not limit any additional training hours required by the LDSS or VA.

⁷ 18 NYCRR § 443.2(b)(12)

⁸ 18 NYCRR § 443.2(e)(1)

⁹ 18 NYCRR § 427.6(e)

FAD provides a mechanism for LDSSs and VAs to maintain a cumulative log of all training completed by each foster parent.

5. Home Study Narrative

A home study is required for foster home certification or approval and must be completed in compliance with the criteria set forth in 18 NYCRR Part 443. LDSSs and VAs must complete a home study within four months after acceptance of an application unless delays occur as a result of circumstances either beyond the control of the agency or made by mutual consent of the applicant and the agency representative.

OCFS regulations require that the home study and evaluation of the members of the foster family household or the relative's family household determine compliance with all of the following criteria for certification or approval.¹⁰

- Age
- Health
- Employment
- Marital status
- Character, including the names of three persons who may be contacted for references
- Ability and motivation to provide care.

CONNECTIONS maintains a historical listing of all narratives for the home.

At this time, there is no standard home study narrative utilized throughout New York State for prospective foster parent(s). However, three templates for home study narratives are provided within FAD: **Standard Home Study**, **MAPP/GPS Home Study**, and **Other**. The **Other** option is a blank template that can accommodate a home study that doesn't fit in the other two templates.

6. Determination of whether to certify or approve a foster home

Throughout the course of the certification or approval process, LDSS and VA workers must have regular conferences with their supervisors to address the suitability of the prospective foster home. At the completion of this process, the LDSS or VA worker must make a recommendation to their supervisor as to whether the foster home should be disapproved, or whether the home should be certified or approved, including any recommended limitations for the care of children in foster care. Once the supervisor receives the recommendation, the supervisor's decision must be consistent with the standards set forth in 18 NYCRR Part 443, and based on all of the information gathered on the prospective foster parents and household members gleaned from the application, personal interviews, family assessment, home site inspection (specific health and safety standards and physical plant requirements¹¹), and external record checks (SCR, SEL, criminal history). All information gathered throughout the entire home study process must be documented in FAD.

¹⁰ 18 NYCRR § 443.2 (c)(1)

¹¹ 18 NYCRR § 443.3

7. Submitting a foster home recommendation for supervisory approval

The LDSS or VA worker must submit all certification and approval documentation to their supervisor. This includes both the information maintained in the external foster home case record and that which is recorded on existing and modernized CONNECTIONS windows. These modifiable windows will be accessed from the navigation pane under the *My Workload* tab.¹² Upon review, the supervisor may approve or reject the recommendation for certification or approval of the home consistent with the standards set forth in OCFS regulations, 18 NYCRR Part 443.

Prior to approving or rejecting a foster home, the supervisor must have had regular supervisory conferences with the LDSS or VA worker regarding the suitability of the prospective foster home, and have reviewed all documentation submitted by the LDSS or VA worker. These conferences can be documented in CONNECTIONS in the Contacts area of the FAD dialog. The supervisory conferences and the documentation review are necessary to determine the home's compliance with the requirements of 18 NYCRR Part 443.

8. Annual renewal/reauthorization of a foster home

Foster homes must undergo an annual renewal/reauthorization process to renew the certification or approval of the foster home for one year. The process for renewal/reauthorization process is referred to as an Annual Reauthorization in CONNECTIONS.

Annual renewal/reauthorization must include¹³:

- a written evaluation of the home and family to update the Home Study, using the criteria described above for certification or approval, and addressing any structural or family composition changes since the time of initial certification or approval,
- a written evaluation of the care provided to children in the home, and of the working relationship of the foster parents with the LDSS or VA,
- a written statement from a physician about the foster parent(s) health, if it has been two years since the date of the last medical exam,
- an oral review of the evaluation with the foster parent(s),
- the completion of FBI and DCJS criminal history (fingerprint) record checks of the foster parent(s) and each household member 18 years of age or older who is currently residing in the foster home, where such foster parent(s) or other household member had not previously had a criminal history (fingerprint) record check completed, and
- review of the responses to the Youth Voice Questions from youth 14 years of age or older in foster care in the home.¹⁴

After all of the required information is collected, the LDSS or VA worker must record the following information in FAD:

1. Review/update all Person and Home information.
2. Complete the annual reauthorization narrative, using either the **Standard Annual Reauthorization** template, or the **Other** template.

¹² [The Modernization of the CONNECTIONS Foster and Adoptive Home Development \(FAD\) Stage](#)

¹³ 18 NYCRR 443.10

¹⁴ 10-OCFS-ADM-09

- The **Standard Annual Reauthorization** document is a template that allows workers to record specific information needed for the annual reauthorization of a foster home.
 - The **Other** allows a worker to copy and paste an outside document.
3. Submit the appropriate information for supervisory approval. When the Annual Reauthorization Narrative is completed, the worker can automatically submit to their supervisor by selecting *save* and *submit*.
- To make a determination regarding renewal/reauthorization of the home, the supervisor must:
 - have had regular supervisory conferences with the LDSS or VA worker regarding the suitability of the prospective foster home; and
 - have reviewed all the necessary documentation submitted by the LDSS or VA worker to determine whether reauthorizing the foster home would be in compliance with the requirements of 18 NYCRR Part 443.

IV. Required Action

LDSSs and VAs must complete various steps when opening a new foster home in order to determine whether the prospective foster parent(s) have previously held a certificate or letter of approval as foster parents. The application may provide this information, but a search must be done in FAD to confirm the information.

- a) If the foster home search yields results, the LDSS or VA worker must determine the status of the home.
- If the home exists in **Inquiry, Applicant, or Accepted Active** status, and exists in another LDSS or with another VA, the LDSS or VA worker must contact such authorizing agency and the applicant(s) to determine if the home should be transferred.
 - If the home exists in a *Closed* status
 - the LDSS or VA worker must open the FAD home in inquiry status to review the information in FAD;
 - the home closure report must be reviewed, if available, to determine the reason for the home's closure before proceeding with the inquiry; and
 - if there is no home closure report, the worker must:
 - a. contact the previous agency to discuss the reason(s) the home was closed; and
 - b. have a conversation with the prospective foster parent to address the reasons for the home's prior closure.
- b) If there is no historical record found on the search, a new record must be created in the FAD stage in CONNECTIONS using all the information obtained as outlined below.

1. Inquiry

All of the information regarding prospective foster parent applicants that was acquired during the inquiry process must be recorded in FAD, as early as possible, regardless of whether or not the home becomes fully certified or approved.

2. Orientation

All of the information regarding prospective foster parent applicants that was acquired during the orientation process must be recorded in FAD, as early as possible, regardless of whether or not the home becomes fully certified or approved.

3. Application

The LDSS and VA worker must record in FAD the information received from prospective foster parent's applications in order to continue the foster home certification or approval process.

4. Training

The LDSS and VA worker must utilize FAD to maintain a cumulative log of all training completed by each foster parent. Training that is required for certification or approval of the foster home must be completed and recorded prior to submitting the application for supervisory review and approval. Information regarding the type of courses and training hours completed must be recorded on the Foster/Adoptive Home Member Training List/Detail window.

5. Home Study Narrative

Home studies must be completed prior to initial approval or certification, and updated prior to renewal/re-authorization. All home study narratives need to be completed using the **Standard Home Study or MAPP/GPS Home Study** templates located in FAD. The **Other** option can be utilized only if a waiver is received from OCFS.

All home study narratives must be recorded in FAD.

6. Review of Youth Voice Questionnaires

A review of the responses to the Youth Voice questions from the youth 14 years of age or older placed in the foster home must be done.¹⁵

7. Determination of whether to certify or approve a foster home

All information collected during the home study must be considered by the LDSS or VA worker when recommending to their supervisor a decision on whether to approve or certify the foster home. All of this information must be documented in FAD. This must include at the time of initial application an evaluation of the history of revocation or nonrenewal of foster home certification(s) or approval(s), and the removal of foster children from such home for health and safety reasons.

¹⁵ 10-OCFS-ADM-09

8. Submitting a foster home application for supervisory approval

The LDSS or VA worker must submit all certification or approval documentation to their supervisor. This includes information maintained in the external foster home case record and the information entered in the FAD. Upon review, the supervisor will either approve or reject the certification or approval of the home.

The supervisor of the LDSS or VA worker, must have done the following prior to signing off on the FAD home:

1. Had regular supervisory conferences with the LDSS or VA worker regarding the suitability of the prospective foster home;
2. Reviewed all documentation submitted by the LDSS or VA worker to determine whether certifying or approving the prospective foster home would be in compliance with the requirements of 18 NYCRR Part 443.

9. Renewal/Reauthorization of a Foster Home

The LDSS or VA worker must complete the following steps to complete the annual reauthorization process in FAD:

1. Select the Annual Reauthorization link on the navigation pane.
2. Review and update all person and home information.
3. Complete the annual reauthorization narratives utilizing the **standard annual reauthorization template**. The **other** template may only be used with a waiver from OCFS. The annual reauthorization narrative must be recorded in FAD.
4. Review any information provided by a foster child 14 years of age or older in response to the Youth Voice Questions.
5. Submit all the available information for supervisory approval. The supervisor must:
 - have had regular supervisory conferences with the LDSS or VA worker regarding the suitability of the prospective foster home; and
 - have reviewed all documentation submitted by the LDSS or VA worker to determine whether certifying or approving the prospective foster home would be in compliance with the requirements of 18 NYCRR Part 443.
5. Complete a written evaluation of the home and family to update the Home Study, using the criteria described above for certification or approval, and addressing any structural or family composition changes since the time of initial certification or approval,
6. Complete a written evaluation of the care provided to children in the home, and of the working relationship of the foster parents with the LDSS or VA,
7. Obtain a written statement from a physician about the foster parent(s) health, if it has been two years since the date of the last medical exam,
8. Conduct an oral review of the evaluation with the foster parent(s),
9. Ensure the completion of FBI and DCJS criminal history (fingerprint) record checks of the foster parent(s) and each household member 18 years of age or older who is currently residing in the foster home, where such foster parent(s) or other household member had not previously had a criminal history (fingerprint) record check completed, and

10. Review the responses to the Youth Voice Questions from youth 14 years of age or older in foster care in the home.¹⁶

V. System Implications

The FAD stage in CONNECTIONS was recently updated. This included requirements to document specific information in FAD regarding Justice Center Staff Exclusion List (SEL) checks, the Statewide Central Register for Child Abuse and Maltreatment (SCR) database checks, and criminal history (fingerprint) background checks. See [The Modernization of the CONNECTIONS Foster and Adoptive Home Development \(FAD\) Stage Job Aid](#) for specific, step-by-step instructions on how to navigate the changes.

Listed below is a brief overview of the changes that affect the foster home certification or approval, and the reauthorization process.

- **FAD Checklist**
 - A date has been added to indicate when the prospective foster parent contacted the agency. This will assist the Home Finder in tracking the length of time it takes a prospective foster parent to complete the application process.
- **Training**
 - A cumulative log of all trainings completed by each foster parent can be maintained in FAD. This includes the dates which allow the worker to track the length of time for all required trainings to be completed by an individual foster parent/prospective foster parent.
- **Staff Exclusion List Section**
 - CONNECTIONS requires the SEL checks to be sent, received, and results recorded for all persons 18 years of age and older living in the household.
 - An SEL assessment must be completed, and the date of the assessment recorded, for all persons with a result of 'Record Found'.
- **SCR Database Check Section**
 - Workers are required to record the dates and results of the SCR Database check. They must record dates that the requests were sent and received, as well as the results of the database check. This must be done for the applicant, as well as all those individuals 18 years of age and older living in the household.
- **Fingerprint Information Section**
 - This section now includes **Results** and **Safety Assessment Date** fields. CONNECTIONS requires the fingerprint information results for all persons 18 years of age and older living in the household.
 - When anyone in the home has criminal history (fingerprint) results of Discretionary Disqualifier or Hold in Abeyance, a safety assessment must be completed for approval of the foster home to occur.

¹⁶ 10-OCFS-ADM-09

- When anyone in the home has a criminal history (fingerprint) check result of 'Mandatory Disqualifier' or 'Must be Denied', the foster home certification or approval cannot be approved in CONNECTIONS.

Please note: At the time of renewal/reauthorization of the foster home certification or approval, an FBI and DCJS criminal history (fingerprint) record check is required for adults residing in the foster home, who have not previously completed the criminal history (fingerprint) record check. This includes foster children over the age of 18. SEL and SCR database checks are not to be completed for these individuals, unless they are applying to become foster parents.

VI. Contacts

Any questions concerning this release should be directed to the appropriate regional office, Division of Child Welfare and Community Services:

Buffalo Regional Office-Amanda Darling (716) 847-3145

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VII. Effective Date

This policy directive is effective immediately.

/S/ Laura Velez

Issued By:

Name: Laura Velez

Title: Deputy Commissioner

Division/Office: Child Welfare and Community Services