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Local Commissioners Memorandum

Transmittal:	14-OCFS-LCM-15
To:	Local District Commissioners
Issuing Division/Office:	Strategic Planning and Policy Development
Date:	October 16, 2014
Subject:	Accurate Reporting of Kinship Foster Care Placements
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Attachments:	No
Attachment Available Online:	No

I. Purpose

The purpose of the Local Commissioners Memorandum (LCM) is to provide information to local departments of social services (LDSS) on a new field that must be entered to report kinship (relative) foster care placements in the child welfare reporting

system, Child Care Review Service (CCRS). This new requirement is not a change in practice in regards to best interests decisions for placements and relative placements (09-OCFS-ADM-04); rather, it is intended to be used to more accurately reflect the data on foster care placements. CCRS is being transformed to be incorporated in CONNECTIONS and this change will be made concurrently with that transformation.

II. Background

A relative is someone who is related to the child by blood, marriage or adoption. Children may be placed with a relative via different types of care¹ that include a foster care placement. Relative foster care homes or kinship foster care homes² are certified or approved foster homes, depending on the degree of relation.

The Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) requires LDSS to report certain data on foster care placements through the CCRS system. One such requirement is to report data on placements for children in foster care, so there is an accurate picture of the types of placements being made. Historically, OCFS has reviewed whether a foster home was certified or approved to determine whether or not it was a kinship foster home or non-relative foster home placement.

Approved kinship foster parents are foster parents who are related within the third degree to a parent or step-parent through blood or marriage. In addition, a person who is unrelated to a child may be approved to be a relative foster parent to that child if the person is so related to the parent or step parent of the child's half-sibling and such approval will allow the half-siblings to remain together [18 NYCRR 443.1(i)]. Certified foster parents are foster parents who are non-relatives or are relatives beyond the third degree through blood or marriage.

Unfortunately, using the approved foster home data is not an accurate means of collecting information on kinship foster care placements, because children who are placed with relatives in foster homes are sometimes placed in certified foster homes for a variety of reasons. Some examples of situations where a kinship foster home placement may be reflected as a certified foster home placement are:

- Foster homes where the child is related to the foster parent(s) but not within the third degree;
- Foster homes that include both children who are related and children who are not related to the foster parent(s);
- Foster homes that are certified and then later have a relative child in need of care; or
- Foster homes that are used to foster a relative child, but are also interested in being used to foster non-related children in the future.

¹ For types of relative care, see the publication *Having a Voice & a Choice, New York State Handbook for Relatives Raising Children* at <http://ocfs.ny.gov/kinship/resources.asp>

² The terms relative foster care and kinship foster care are used interchangeably. For the purposes of this policy release, we will use the term kinship foster care.

In these situations the home would show as a certified foster home in the CCRS system, but may include a child in a kinship foster placement. Under the current approach of collecting data, that case would not be counted as a kinship foster care placement.

In an effort to more accurately reflect data on kinship foster care placements, OCFS has identified a solution to allow for districts to report data on the type of placement, whether kinship or non-relative, for each new foster care placement made and for each transfer to a new foster care placement. This solution will result in more accurate data on the number of children placed in kinship foster care.

III. Program Implications

As previously indicated, the CCRS movement codes will be moved into CONNECTIONS through the CCRS transformation project. Data previously reported to CCRS will now be entered into the CONNECTIONS Activities Window accessed from the Search/Maintain dropdown on the CONNECTIONS home page. With regard to each foster child placed in a foster family boarding home, LDSS will be required to select either Relative, if the child is related to the foster parent(s) by blood, marriage or adoption (irrespective of the degree of relationship), or Non-relative Type of Placement in CONNECTIONS from this point forward when a foster child is either placed in a foster home or transferred to a new foster home.

The activity codes where this relative/non-relative indicator is required are:

- M910 - Child Placed
- M960 - Child Ends Absence
- M980 - Child Returned from Trial Discharge
- M-981 - Intra-agency transfer- New Facility
- M-982 - Inter-Agency Transfer - New Agency

Current projections are that this requirement will go into effect in November 2014. Data entry will not be required on placement entries previous to this date; however, LDSS may opt to enter this data retroactively.

LDSS that contract with provider agencies to enter this data on their behalf will need to work with those providers to adjust business processes to comply with this requirement.

/s/Rayana Gonzales

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