

## **Catholic Charities, Diocese of Joliet**

# **ADOPTION PROGRAM PROCEDURES**

*Rev. 2/06*

Adoption services go hand in hand with the services provided in the Maternity Services Program. In the Adoption program, the primary client is the child for whom we are seeking a loving, supportive, and nurturing permanent home. Catholic Charities provides adoption services to infants whose birthparents have decided that placement in an adoptive home is in the best interest of the child, and to children with “Special Needs”. Catholic Charities of Joliet defines Special Needs Children as children age one and over, including those in sibling groups and children with emotional, physical and mental disorders. These children need a permanent, loving home due to various reasons including but not limited to parental neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, or the parents inability to provide proper care, etc. Services to “Special Needs” children are monitored by the courts with the oversight of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.

## **Services to the Children**

Adoption service for Special Needs Children begins with Foster Care. Through our Foster Care Program, these children who have been determined to be in need of substitute care receive a wide range of services to help prepare them for placement in a permanent, loving, adoptive home. Many of the services are mandated by the rules and regulations of the Department of Children and Family Services governing the provision of Child Welfare services in Illinois. All Case Managers are required to be familiar with these rules, regulations, processes, and procedures and should refer to the foster care manual and the foster care Supervisor for direction regarding a specific actions and protocols.

No child served by Catholic Charities shall be denied an opportunity for adoption by reason of age, sex, religion, race, nationality, residence, or disabling condition.

Among other services, children for whom an adoptive home is being sought shall receive the following:

- a. A medical examination and dental exam
- b. A developmental history will be prepared in their file
- c. A psychological evaluation, if age-appropriate and recommended
- d. A evaluation of the individual child’s need, and capacity to benefit from adoption

- e. A history of placements in substitute care
- f. Continuum of care and ongoing assessment of services.

In seeking an adoptive home for the child, the choice of adoptive placement will be made in the best interest of the child and may involve the consideration of previous caretakers. Previous caretakers would be contacted for additional information as to the child's behavior and if possible and appropriate, placement of the child back into the home. However, no placements will be made without using the Matching tool to assess the appropriate home.

Children are placed in the adoptive home as soon as the child and adoptive parents are ready for the placement. Whenever possible, adoptive placements for infants are made as soon as legally possible and surrenders are signed by the birthparent, preferably within the first few days of life. Every attempt is made to eliminate the need for temporary foster care placement for infants.

To achieve this goal, legal risk adoptive placements are made and in such cases the adoptive families are fully informed of the risks involved in such situations. The risk involved may be that mom has signed surrenders but the birthfather has not or vice versa. In such cases, families would sign Catholic Charities's Affidavit of Legal risk at the time of placement.

Catholic Charities' Case Managers will work to ensure that the child has every opportunity for a successful adjustment to their new home. Once placement is made the Case Manager will see the family (adoptive mother and father and child) within 2 weeks of placement and will continue to meet with the family on a monthly basis, providing support and counseling as needed to assist the child with their adjustment until finalization of adoption. In cases where the child qualifies for an adoption subsidy, the adoption worker will complete the appropriate documentation and submit it to IDFCS for approval. Services that may be included in the subsidy include continued payment, medical payment assistance, counseling and other support services.

### ***Program Eligibility for Persons Seeking to Adopt***

When evaluating prospective individuals for consideration as adoptive parents, the needs of the child or children are our primary concern. Catholic Charities works to find homes for healthy infants of various racial and ethnic backgrounds; for special needs children of various ages; and, for sibling groups. All persons seeking to adopt from Catholic Charities, Diocese of Joliet must meet the following criteria:

1. Person(s) seeking to become adoptive parents must be legal residents of the Joliet Diocese: DuPage, Kendall, Will, Grundy, Kankakee, Ford, and Iroquois counties.
2. Person(s) must be at least 21 years of age. Although no upper age limit is followed, the welfare of the child is our primary concern. Catholic Charities reserves the right to consider each applicant's age relative to the child to be adopted, the entire family structure, presence of other siblings, etc.
3. The applicant is required to present a statement from their physician that their general health is good. If an applicant has a serious medical condition, or emotional illness

controlled by medications or requiring treatment, Catholic Charities requires a detailed statement from their physician that must include a prognosis.

4. Individuals seeking to become adoptive parents shall have exhausted all infertility treatment prior to seeking an adoption with Catholic Charities, Diocese of Joliet Inc.
5. Persons seeking to become adoptive parents must demonstrate a stable work history and shall have sufficient income to provide for the needs of the child(ren).
6. A married couple must be married a minimum of three years. The agency will not allow adoptions of unmarried couples living in a domestic placement.
7. Understand that no guarantees are made in regards to timeframes of placements.

Catholic Charities Diocese of Joliet will refer persons not meeting these specifications to another agency that offer similar adoption services.

## **Services to the Adopting Family / Couple / Individual**

All persons seeking to become adoptive parents with Catholic Charities follow these steps:

1. The individual will call Catholic Charities to inquire about adoption services
2. The call is referred to the Intake Worker who will inform them about the various options (DCFS /Infant/ Inter-country)
3. The family will be sent a packet of information including the Catholic Charities Adoption Fees Policy. They will receive specific information on Special Needs Children if they have expressed and interest in these children. (Drug exposed children, etc.)
4. The individual or couple is invited to the next Adoption Orientation and Pride Training. Orientation meetings are held once a month and Pride is schedule bi-monthly.
5. The individual / couple will contact Catholic Charities to register for the next orientation & training session.
6. When they attend the Adoption Orientation meeting, the couple is given all the necessary preliminary paperwork to initiate the adoption process.
7. They complete the application and return it to Catholic Charities if they wish to pursue adoption.
8. Families seeking an infant adoption will be asked to sign off on the fee agreement and a copy of the agreement is sent to the Business office. Upon receipt, the Business office will send the family a bill for the cost of the Application process and Home Study. *No fees are charged to persons seeking to adopt a DCFS ward.*

9. Once the application is completed, the individual will be scheduled to begin the required PRIDE TRAINING (27 hours). During Pride Training the family must demonstrate the five competencies :
  - working as member of a professional team
  - meeting the developmental needs of a child
  - supporting relationships between children and their families
  - connecting children to safe, nurturing relationships intended to last a lifetime
  - protecting and nurturing children
10. At the beginning of Pride Training, the families will be assigned a Case Worker who will begin to complete the DCFS Foster Care licensing requirements and begin the family Home Study. The Home Study will involve a minimum of four visits with the family. Once the Home Study is completed and the family is determined to meet the five competencies the report will be approved by the Supervisor. The family may request a copy of this home study assessment. The family will be sent a copy of their Foster Care License from DCFS. A copy of the license is also received by Catholic Charities and the copy is placed in the family's file.
11. Once the family has obtained their Foster Care License, placement of a child in the home can be considered.
12. If during the Home Study process it is determined that adoption is not recommended by Catholic Charities staff, the family will be counseled that we do not feel that adoption is in their best interest at this time and further work with the family will cease. The worker will discuss their concerns with the supervisor and together a decision will be made about continued work with a family. If the family insists on being licensed, they may call the supervisor and discuss their concerns and in the event the recommendation for non-licensure stands, the family will be informed of the reasons and provided with other agencies who they may wish to contact to become licensed.
13. When a DCFS child is placed in a foster care home, the family will be provided: monthly reimbursement, medical card via IDCFS, and clothing allowance on a monthly basis until finalization.
14. Before finalization of an adoption, all families adopting DCFS wards must complete Adoption Certification Training, provided by DCFS.

## **Steps for Infant Adoptions:**

1. Families seeking infant adoptions must complete the Infant training course (9 hours) that will inform them of issues related specifically to the infant adoption process.

2. At the beginning of Infant Training, the families will be assigned a Case Worker who will begin to complete the DCFS Foster Care licensing requirements and begin the family Home Study. The Home Study will involve a minimum of four visits with the family. Family may request a copy of this home study assessment. *During the Home Study, the fees related to Infant Adoptions will again be reviewed and an estimated fee will be shared with the family (Fees are based on income at the time of placement).* Once the Home Study is completed and the family is determined to meet the needs of an infant, the report will be approved by the Supervisor. The family will be sent a copy of their Foster Care License from DCFS. A copy of the license is also received by Catholic Charities and the copy is placed in the family's file.
3. The adoptive family shall sign and receive a copy of their rights, responsibilities, and the grievance procedures upon receipt of application
4. If during the Home Study process it is determined that adoption is not recommended by Catholic Charities staff, the family will be counseled that we do not feel that adoption is in their best interest at this time and further work with the family will cease. The worker will discuss their concerns with the supervisor and together a decision will be made about continued work with a family. If the family insists on being licensed, they may call the supervisor and discuss their concerns and in the event the recommendation for non-licensure stands, the family will be informed of the reasons and provided with other agencies who they may wish to contact to become licensed.
5. Family completes three Adoptive family profiles and submits them to the worker so that they can be dispersed throughout the three sites. The three sites have copies of the profile so that a birthparent can have full access to our families regardless of their location of residency. The profiles contain non-identifying information about the adoption, along with a Dear Birthmother letter, pictures of the family and a brief explanation of why the family has chosen to adopt. The profiles should be updated annually.
6. Adoptive family signs a Release of Information form to allow for the disclosure of non-identifying information with the birthparents.
7. Once a family has completed their profiles, the worker will inform the maternity specialist via the telephone and or email that a new family needs to be added to the list of waiting families. This list is updated monthly by the maternity specialist in Joliet. Workers to know about available families.
8. When a birthparent has indicated a desire to explore adoption and would like to participate in the selection of the family, Catholic Charities adoption staff will meet with the birthparents and provide them with three profiles (minimum) of families that have what the birthparent (s) is looking for (i.e. other children, religion, etc.).

9. Families are encouraged to contact their Case Worker if they have any questions as they wait to hear about a possible child.
10. If a birthmother selects the family, the family will be notified of a “possible” placement, and possible date of birth. (Catholic Charities Case Workers clearly remind the family that the birthmother may still choose to parent their child.)
11. If desired by the birthparents, a meeting with the selected adopting couple is set up for everyone to get acquainted.
12. Once the child is born, the adopting couple is notified of the birth, and is again reminded that the birthmother has not yet signed legal surrenders.
13. Upon hospital discharge the infant is placed either in a temporary foster home, or directly into the adopting family’s home.
14. Adopting couple meets with the Catholic Charities staff and signs all necessary paperwork to receive child in their home: payment of agreed upon adoption fees, legal risk forms if applicable, medical background receipt, adoptive placement agreement, etc.
15. Within two weeks of the placement of the child into the home, the family’s Case Worker will conduct an initial home visit to monitor child and family’s adjustment.
16. During the next six months, the Case Worker will complete three additional visits to the adoptive home.
17. Case Worker completes Report of Investigation (narrative report, original and 2 copies to the family’s attorney for inclusion in the court file).
18. Once the Judgment of Adoption is entered in the court record, a copy of adoption decree is forwarded to Catholic Charities and placed in the adoptive family’s file as well as the child’s file.
19. Agency sends a congratulations card on the adoption to the adoptive family.
20. At this time the Catholic Charities Case Worker will determine if the adoptive family wishes to keep their license open
21. Close file when requested by the family. Case Worker complete closed file checklist to ensure that all necessary information is included.

### **Steps for International Adoptions:**

1. Family selects a host agency and inform worker so that collaborative work is completed.

2. Adoptive completes required documentation and paperwork for Dossier, host agency and Catholic Charities of Joliet.
3. Case Worker would complete home study and submit to INS and IDCFS for approval.
4. Families are encouraged to maintain contact with their Case Worker if they have any questions as they wait to hear about a possible child.
5. Upon family receiving info on a possible placement worker will discuss medical issues and possible developmental issues with family to determine if placement is a good match.
6. If family approves of placement, the case worker will inform host agency and continue to work collaboratively until placement.
7. Once the child is placed, into the adopting families home family Case Worker will conduct initial home visit within 2 weeks to monitor child and family's adjustment.
8. Case worker will monitor home and submit reports to placing agency that has legal custody of child as pre-determined by host agency.
9. Case Worker will complete visits to the adoptive home and discuss with family about child becoming a U.S. citizen. If family wishes, worker will assist family with re-finalization process.
10. Adoptive family completes payment for adoptive services received.
11. Case Worker completes Report of Investigation (narrative report, original and 2 copies to the family's attorney for inclusion in the court file).
12. Judgment of Adoption is entered in the court record and copy of adoption decree is forwarded to Catholic Charities and placed in the adoptive family's file.
13. Agency sends a congratulations card on the adoption to the adoptive family
14. Determine if the adoptive family wishes to keep their license open (placement of second child)
15. Close file when requested by the family. Case Worker complete closed file checklist to ensure that all necessary information is included.

**DCFS Adoptions \*\*\*\***

1. Family who desires a Special Needs child completes an application for the Adoption Information Center of Illinois.
2. Families are encouraged to contact their Case Worker if they have any questions as they wait to hear about a possible child.
3. The Foster Care Supervisor will meet with the staff at least monthly to review all active cases: foster children for whom substitute care pending court decision is the goal. If parental rights are terminated and no unresolved issues are pending, case will be referred to the adoption supervisor.
4. Case Worker will submit a referral packet to the Adoption Supervisor to approve and assigned an adoption worker.
5. Adoption worker will complete all pertinent paperwork for adoption (i.e. subsidies, legal papers, home study, etc.) and submit to DCFS and Attorney of family's choice for approval.
6. Once paperwork is approved, the adoptive parents will be advised of the court date to complete the adoption.

\*\*\*\* (see Foster Care procedures for additional steps that may be required for this population)

## **Inter - Agency Placements**

Collaborative efforts will be made with DCFS, International Agencies, and other agency's seeking adoptive placement for an infant or child in their care. Catholic Charities of Joliet only works with licensed and approved agencies for placement of children. Agencies must provide proof of licensure or other appropriate credentials for placing children needing adoptive homes, if outside the state of Illinois.

- a. The placing agency must provide pertinent information on child needing a home (i.e. psych and social history, medical, etc.)
  - b. Case Worker will meet with the Adoption Supervisor to review existing families and will select three families that meet the needs for the child.
  - c. The Home Study reports are faxed to the placing agency.
  - d. The placing agency selects the adoptive family for the child.
1. Family is notified about a child needing placement. Family is given all relevant non-identifying information. All information provided during intake. This information will include disclosure of all know disabilities, previous placements, etc.

2. If family agrees to the proposed placement, whenever possible, pre-placement visits are scheduled. In some emergency situations the child will be directly placed into the home.
3. As soon as possible, more complete information from the child's file is disclosed to the adoptive family.
4. The Case Worker will meet with the family within two weeks of the placement to evaluate the adjustment of all parties.
5. The Case Worker will monitor the placement monthly until finalization of the adoption by the courts.
6. Catholic Charities' Case Worker will complete all forms required to approve the adoption and to secure the adoption subsidy from DCFS.
7. DCFS will indicate their approval of the adoption by either approving the subsidy or sending an approval letter.

## **Post – Adoption Services**

1. After an adoption is finalized, the family members are eligible to receive post-adoption services. Post-adoption services provided by Catholic Charities include: information and referral, counseling, and search activities. Case Managers are directed to follow the procedures identified in the Post-adoption services policy.
2. Following the initial intake screening and needs identification session, Catholic Charities shall bill the client for ongoing service needs in the following areas: general counseling services, and search services. The client shall be informed about any applicable fees before the service is initiated.
3. If counseling services are written into the family's adoption subsidy, not charge will be made for the counseling.
4. All persons will be notified of any delay in receiving services.

