



Answering Oklahoma's Call:

A Bridge Resource Family Guide



Adapted from AdoptUSKids' Answering the Call: Family Pocket Guide

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____



Date you started the journey: _____

Welcome to the DHS Answering the Call Process



Dear Applicant,

Thank you for your interest in becoming a foster or adoptive parent to foster or adopt a child in need. We are very pleased that you are interested in working with us. Because we are seeking both foster and adoptive parents, we call all of our parents “Bridge Resource Parents,” as they may serve in a variety of capacities to provide parenting resources to children and bridge the connections to their families.

The children for whom the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (DHS) is responsible have been removed from their own families due to abuse or neglect. Families provide these children a home in a family environment. Bridge Resource Families work closely with DHS and the child’s family to correct the circumstances that led to the child’s removal. The goal is to return the child to his or her own home, if possible.

Bridge Resource Families help reunify children with their families to maintain important connections, assist with transitions for children who cannot return to their own home, and may provide a permanent, adoptive home for the child. The children in need of homes are typically school-aged; part of a sibling group needing to be placed together; and may have some physical, emotional, and/or developmental needs. Because we are entrusted with the care of these special children, it is with gratitude and humility that we seek to partner with you, our strongest resource for our agency. We believe many Oklahoma families are already strong and up to this task and your role is helping many more Oklahoma families become even stronger.

There is no doubt that fostering and adopting children who are in our child welfare system is hard work and very challenging. There is a lot you will have to do to prepare for this challenge and the many rewards that will come as a result. You may think of this as a life-changing journey. *DHS Answering Oklahoma’s Call: A Bridge Resource Family Guide* was developed to help record your questions, log your progress, and keep important contact information along the way.

This is your guide for the journey. Write your name on the first page and the names of your important contact people on page three. This may be your assigned child welfare worker, orientation coordinator, and/or other important people you will want to remember and be able to call. Please be aware that the steps in this journey take time and we appreciate your patience in working with us.

On page six you will see the seven basic steps of this journey. There is a brief description of each with space for you to write in the questions you want to ask and the answers you receive. You may wonder why there is so much information to gather and questions to be asked in this process. It is because DHS is required by law to assure that foster and adoptive children will be safe and well-cared-for in their new homes. And, we can serve you better once we get to know you and understand your ideas, preferences and unique characteristics.

After reviewing this guide we invite you to visit our website at www.okbridgefamilies.com. You will be contacted within seven working days for follow-up. Again, we sincerely appreciate your interest in helping Oklahoma children and their families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ed Lake".

Ed Lake
Director of Human Services

Key Contacts:

Name: _____
Position: _____
Location: _____
Phone #: _____ Fax #: _____
Email: _____

Name: _____
Position: _____
Location: _____
Phone #: _____ Fax #: _____
Email: _____

Name: _____
Position: _____
Location: _____
Phone #: _____ Fax #: _____
Email: _____

Name: _____
Position: _____
Location: _____
Phone #: _____ Fax #: _____
Email: _____

What Basic Qualifications Do I Need to Go on this Journey?

Following are some of the characteristics necessary to be a good resource parent:

- Stability
- Maturity
- Commitment to maintaining children's connections to kin and culture
- Dependability
- Flexibility
- Sense of humor
- Enjoys children and is an advocate for them
- Team player willing to work with your child welfare worker, the child's parents, and community services

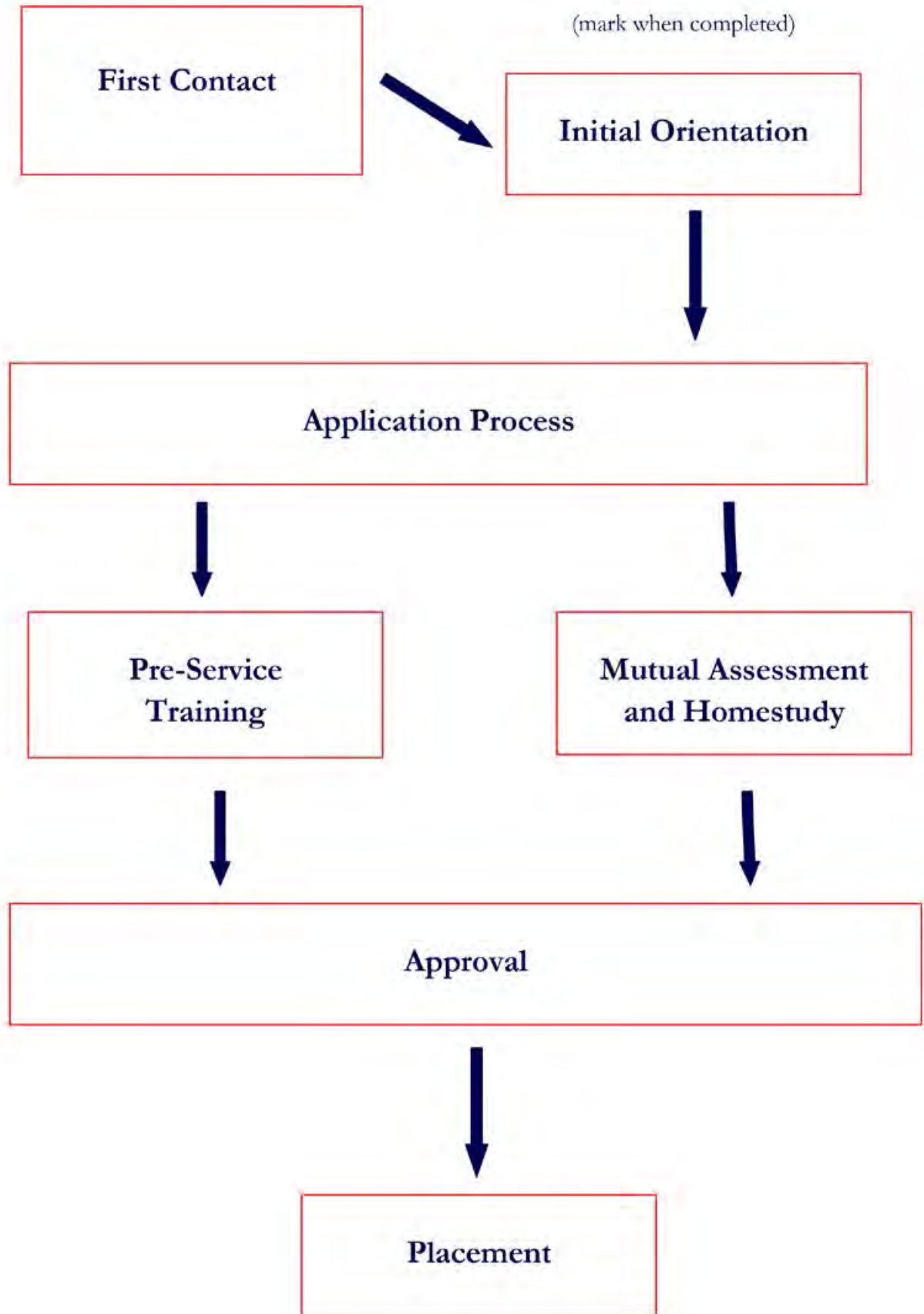
Prospective resource parents must complete an assessment and approval process that requires:

- The ability to love, understand, care for, and accept a child to whom they did not give birth
- An age requirement of at least 21 years of age and preferably no more than 55 years older than the child considered for placement
- Applicants may be married, single, legally separated, or divorced
- Good physical condition and mental health to provide for the needs of the child
- Sufficient income to meet current expenses
- Sufficient beds and bedroom space for additional children
- Criminal record and child welfare history check at local, state, federal levels including fingerprinting
- The assurance that no household member has a prior conviction of any sexual offense
- Have a working vehicle and a telephone
- Be a legal resident
- Confidentiality agreement
- Attend and complete 27 hours of pre-service training



See pages 22 and 23 for answers to other frequently asked questions

The Seven Step Journey



Step I: First Contact

What is it?

This is when you, the prospective resource applicant, contact DHS to get information about becoming a foster or adoptive (Bridge) home. Or, perhaps you spoke to a child welfare worker directly and are serious about wanting to get more information.

What do I have to do during this step?

As a result of your initial contact, you need to decide whether or not you want to find out more about this journey. You should attend an orientation/“let’s get acquainted” meeting.

Do you want to continue on the journey?

Yes

No

If No...

There are many other ways to help children in need in Oklahoma, please contact us at _____, or contact our volunteer coordinator at _____.

Date of initial contact: _____

Who I talked to: _____

Phone number: _____

Date and time of orientation meeting: _____

Location: _____

You may also want to consider our “**Top 10 Things You Can Do for a Foster Child**” list on page 24.

Step 2: Initial Orientation

What is it?

This is an orientation meeting which occurs occasionally. The meeting includes a Bridge Resource Applicant Orientation DVD (also available online at: www.okbridgefamilies.com/trainingcontent/139_en_audio/index.php) where you will be given a good basic understanding of:

1. Who the children are
2. The role and responsibilities of resource parents
3. The process you will go through
4. The next steps you will take on the journey

What do I do during this step?

1. Have an open heart and mind
2. Ask questions and listen carefully to what is being presented
3. Prepare to ask any questions you might have thought of before the meeting
4. Take notes on things like:
 - a. What you will need to do to be approved as a resource parent
 - b. Who your important contacts are
 - c. When the next meetings will happen

During this orientation you may hear for the first time the real challenges of fostering/adopting. Things such as:

- These children have had a tough journey of their own
- The importance of their parent(s) and sibling(s) to them
- Growing to care for the children and having to say goodbye to them when they return home
- The length of the process

At this point in the journey, your emotions may come to the surface. Don't be afraid to ask questions and be prepared to open your heart and mind to what is being said. You don't have to make any major decisions right now. The only decision you need to make is whether or not you want to continue the journey to Step 3: the Application Process.

Step 3: Application Process

Note: County offices will differ as to when they ask you to fill out an application.

What is it?

This is where you, as a prospective resource parent, complete the application and you and your assigned child welfare worker go over it carefully to ensure everything is correct.

Each applicant's file generally includes reference letters from people who know your family well, medical records, family financial history, and criminal record checks, along with other information. Background checks are completed by providing information to DHS and signing and dating the "Request for Background Check" form. At this point in time, you will also receive fingerprinting cards and can start the fingerprint process as well.

What do I do during this step?

Applicants for foster care or adoption are responsible to:

1. Be open and honest in filling out the applications, during the personal interviews, etc.
2. Supply the necessary information completely and accurately and as fast as possible
3. Cooperate with the criminal background checks
4. Ask for help if you don't understand something; it's better to take a little longer to fill out the application correctly



Refer to the back of this guide for a Resource Parent Checklist to use during the application process.

“We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”

– Sir Winston Churchill

Step 4: Pre-Service Training

What is it?

This is a training program that prepares you to address the challenges of caring for children in the child welfare system. The classroom-based training takes nine, three-hour sessions totaling 27 hours to complete. Homework assignments are given and completed outside of class. (Check your local county office for more details on training availability.)

Sessions are designed to:

1. Prepare you for fostering/adopting
2. Create a basis for teamwork between you, DHS and the child's family
3. Challenge you to grow and develop as a resource parent
4. Help you consider:
 - Is fostering/adopting for me?
 - Am I able to parent a child who has been neglected and/or abused?
 - What type of skills do I need?
 - How can I successfully parent a child born to someone else?
 - What skills do I currently possess?
 - Would I be interested in parenting a teenager?
 - Could I parent a child with special needs?
 - Would I be available to care for children in sibling groups?

What happens during this step and what is my part?

1. Make the commitment to attend and actively participate in the training sessions
2. Give careful consideration to the information presented
3. Come prepared to ask questions
4. Devote time to consider the full impact of fostering and/or adoption on your family
5. Gain the necessary information to make a personal decision about whether to continue the process
6. Gain knowledge of what type of child you can best parent
7. Be sure to save and provide your child welfare worker with copies of training certificates of completion

During this step, you will likely have made new friends with other prospective parents, staff and experienced resource parents. You will start to see yourself as part of an enthusiastic, hardworking and competent team. You are not in this by yourself!

Date, time and location for my pre-service training: _____

Step 5: Resource Family Assessment and Homestudy

What is it?

This is the time that your child welfare worker or a contractor meets with you in your home to talk about your personal history, family relationships, reasons for wanting to foster or adopt, and about the supports you have available to you. They will determine whether your home is safe and has sufficient space for a foster or adopted child. This process is known as the Resource Family Assessment Homestudy. The point of this step is to help you and DHS make the best possible decisions about whether placement of a child in your home will or will not work and to determine the characteristics of the children who you are most able to parent.

What do I have to do during this step?

Applicants for foster care or adoption are responsible to:

1. Get agreement among the members of your household to proceed with the process.
2. Review and sign the “Notice of Bridge Resource Applicants” form.
3. Cooperate with the homestudy process, whether completed by DHS or a contractor, and the home visitation process. It is very helpful to have your documents and records available for review: immunizations, auto insurance, copies of driver’s licenses, copies of current pay stubs, Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB) card and enrollment card, marriage licenses, divorce decrees, pet vaccinations, etc.
4. Plan for at least three visits for this step of the process to be able to complete interviews, collect missing information, and review the completed home assessment packet.
5. Schedule a medical exam for your doctor to complete the “Medical Examination Report.”
6. Provide the name/contact information of at least one person/family who would be an alternative or respite caregiver for children placed in your home. Also, provide the name/contact information of at least one person who can be the permanent custodian. (If you are not able to care for the child sometime in the future, the permanent custodian can step in to provide care.)
7. Ensure that all necessary information is supplied completely and accurately.
8. If you have not met with experienced foster/adoptive parents, now is a good time to do this.
9. Agree to maintain confidentiality about the child and his/her family, and to provide nurturing, safe and affectionate care for the child.

Don’t be afraid to ask for the help you need to be qualified. You can even ask to delay this step if you feel you or members of your household are not yet ready.

If you discover that you are not ready or are not able to be approved for fostering or adoption, please consider helping by serving in other roles. You have valuable abilities that can be put to work for children. Consider performing work as a community volunteer, respite worker, office assistant, tutor, mentor to teens, babysitter and/or assistant recruiter. Discuss these options and others you may think of with your child welfare worker.

Step 6: Approval

What is it?

This is a time of waiting for you. You may be waiting for your child welfare worker or others within DHS to complete your background checks and review the various pieces of information you provided. The agency will have to complete a written assessment of the homestudy and other approval/contractual paperwork. All of this takes time. During this step of the journey, try to be patient. Agree to maintain confidentiality about the child and his/her family, and to provide nurturing, safe and affectionate care for the child.

During this step of your journey, try to be patient:

1. You may be having a hard time understanding why it takes so long to complete the paperwork
2. You may be concerned about what has been put in the record about you and your household
3. Now is a good time to contact your local foster/adoptive parent group or association and attend a meeting

You will be asked to review a copy of your homestudy so you can look it over and correct any inaccuracies. This is also a great time to complete further reading of your materials or do some networking with other resource parents. Don't be afraid to use DHS to answer questions and help solve problems during this period.

If you are approved to provide foster care:

1. Review and sign the "Verification of DHS Rules" form
2. Receive a Resource Parent Handbook
3. Review and sign the "Notice of Grievance for Foster Parents" form
4. Sign the "Out of Home Care Fixed Rate Regular Foster Care Contract"
5. Receive a copy of your home assessment

If you are approved to adopt:

1. Review and sign the "Verification of DHS Rules" form
2. Receive a copy of the Adoption Process Tip Sheet
3. Receive a copy of your home assessment
4. Receive a Post-Adoptive Parent Toolkit

If you are denied or decide to withdraw from the process:

You will receive a letter explaining the reason for denial. Please contact DHS for additional questions and concerns you may have or for the possibility of working with us in another capacity or as a volunteer.

Step 7: Placement

What is it?

If you've been approved and are ready to proceed to the next step in this journey – you have arrived at placement. Congratulations! Thank you for your patience and hard work. This is where you and DHS work to assure the right match between you and a particular child's or sibling group's needs. Requirements will differ at this stage, depending on whether a child is placed with you for foster care or adoption.

What do I have to do during this step?

As approved resource parents you have the responsibility to the child, the child's parents, and DHS to:

1. Make sure you have the necessary information to make an informed decision about placement
2. Provide a safe, nurturing, stable environment for the child including caring for them as you would for a biological child
3. Assure that religious training appropriate to the child's denomination be respected
4. Assure that the emotional, medical, dental, and educational needs of the child are met
5. Report any changes related to the child's care and/or your family's composition to your child welfare worker
6. Promote physical, emotional, social, and intellectual growth and development of each child
7. Maintain confidentiality
8. Cooperate with DHS, especially in any treatment planning for the child
9. Respect the feelings of the foster child for their family
10. Participate and help develop the child's visitation plan with his/her parents, siblings or others, when applicable

Thank you for taking this life changing journey!

Once a child or sibling group has been placed with you, another new journey begins. You may be working with a different child welfare worker and/or team. As you care for these children, you will also be attending continual in-service training (12 hours) on an ongoing basis to provide you with regular resources over time. We encourage you to continue your learning by attending this additional training, working with other resource parents, and your child welfare team.

Someday we hope you will become a trainer or guide for other new resource parents.

Wishing you much success!



Frequently Asked Questions

Is there financial help available for resource families?

Yes, foster parents are given an amount each month to defray the cost for caring for each child they foster. Check with DHS for the current rates on the monthly stipend standards for foster parents.

Children with special needs who have been adopted from DHS may be eligible for medical and/or financial post-adoption assistance, which is paid to the adopting family. DHS has its own eligibility requirements and the amount of support will vary. It is important to ask DHS for information about medical and financial subsidies available for the specific child or children you are considering for adoption.

Does the child have medical insurance?

Yes, each child has coverage through Medicaid-SoonerCare for foster care children in the custody of DHS. Many children adopted from the custody of DHS are eligible for medical insurance through Oklahoma's Medicaid (SoonerCare) program.

What is the minimum income requirement to be eligible to foster and/or adopt a child or children?

It is necessary for the resource parents to have sufficient income to support their current family's needs, before adding additional children to their family. DHS can answer specific income questions you have about your family's ability to provide for a resource child.

Is home ownership a requirement?

No, you can rent or own an apartment, single-family dwelling or condominium. DHS does have certain requirements about the space you have available for a foster or adopted child.

If I live in a rural area or have a good reason for not being able to attend the pre-service training, can I still foster or adopt?

If there are special circumstances, make sure you talk with us. We will try to accommodate you as best as we can.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I work outside of my home?

Yes, provided that your work will not make caring for children too difficult. The plan is guided by the needs of the child. Child care help may also be available from DHS. Be sure to check with us in advance to work out the details before a child is placed needing child care.

Is there a limit to the number of children in my home?

Yes. The maximum number of children allowed is six (6) including all children residing in the household, but not more than five (5) foster children at any one time. Oklahoma has different requirements for adoption versus foster care; however, DHS can guide you through the details.

Can single parents adopt?

Yes, adoption by single parents is permissible and supported.

Can I be a resource parent if I already have a child or children?

Yes, you can. Families who have experience parenting are a great support for waiting children. Some families may even adopt children while their biological children are still in the home. Many families who have grown children become resource parents, most often for an older child or sibling group.

Are there health requirements for resource parents?

DHS does require physical examinations from a doctor for the applicants and adults in the household. However, this does not mean that you and/or your family members have to be in perfect physical condition to qualify.

Does a recent marriage, divorce, birth of a child, or other major change in the family affect the application process?

Yes. Any major life change will be assessed on an individual basis. Sometimes a brief wait is encouraged. Families need stability before considering the addition of a child to their family.

Adapted from the State of Connecticut Department of Children and Families, AdoptUsKids, and the Bridge Resource Family Pamphlet from the Oklahoma Department of Human Services.

Top 10 Things You Can Do for a Foster Child

10. Pray for the children in foster care and their families.
9. Collect birthday gifts for the foster children in your community.
8. Have a baby shower to collect baby essentials.
7. Donate luggage for foster children in transition.
6. Collect school supplies.
5. Mentor a foster child.
4. Be an alternate caregiver for a foster family.
3. Contact your local DHS foster care specialist about specific needs in your community.
2. Host foster children's visits with their birth families at your facility.
1. Become a foster parent.

To participate in the **Top 10**, go to www.ok.gov/faithlinksok



Office of
**Community and
Faith Engagement**

My Resource Parent Application Checklist:

- Resource Family Reference Letter for each Employer (Form 04AF011E)
- Resource Family Assessment Reference Letter for Mental Health Professionals (if applicable) (Form 04AF013E)
- House Assessment (Form 04AF004E)
- Names/contact information Resource Family Reference Letter for Adult Children (if applicable) (Form 04AF015E)
- Resource Family Reference Letter for School Personnel (if applicable), (Form 04AF014E), or Resource Family Reference Letter for Home Schooling (if applicable) (Form 04AF025E)
- Resource Family Personal Reference Letter (Form 04AF016E)
- Resource Family Assessment Application (Form 04AF001E)
- Medical Examination Report (Form 04AF008E)
- Resource Family Financial Assessment (Form 04AF010E)
- Written verification of employment
- Family Health History (Form 04AF017E)
- Records Check (child welfare history and criminal records check on family members) (Form 04AF007E)
- Child's Needs Information List (Form 04AF018E)
- Child's Mental Health Reference Letter (Form 04AF012E)
- Certificate of Release of Discharge from Active Military Duty (if applicable) (DD Form 214)
- Alternate Caregiver Reference Letter (Form 04AF026E)
- Notice to Adoptive Parent Applicant(s) (Form 04AN009E)
- Written Plan of Compliance (Form 04AF023E)
- Verification of Receipt of DHS Rules (Form 04AF021E)

Continued on next page

- Notice to Foster Parent Applicant(s) (Form 04FC003E)
- Letter to Verify Tribal Membership of Resource Family Applicants (Form 04TB001E)
- Child's Questionnaire, optional (Form 04AF019E)
- Family/Parent Questionnaire, optional (Form 04AF020E)
- Trainer's worksheet from OKPRIDE classes
- Copy of any previous home assessments or evaluations if this is not your first application or you have applied with another state or agency
- Verification of income (which may include copies of paycheck stub(s) for the head of the household and spouse)
- Family network diagram, genogram and/or eco-map (completed during home assessment)
- Copy of all divorce decrees (if applicable)
- Copy of current marriage license (if applicable)
- Copy of legal separation document (if applicable)
- Statement of health from physician for each child in family (if applicable)
- Immunization records for each child in family (if applicable)
- Copy of Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB) card (if applicable)
- Copy of tribal membership card or tribal enrollment (if applicable)
- Copy of automobile insurance verification
- Copy of Social Security card for each applicant (parent)
- Copy of driver's license for each applicant (parent)
- Copy of current pet vaccination record (if applicable)
(Rabies vaccinations must be administered by a licensed veterinarian.)



Funded through a Cooperative Agreement with the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, Grant # 90CO1033.



Child Welfare Services

11-17

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Revised 2/2014