



Vetting Prospective Foster Parents

The wrong foster parent can pose a security threat to a child and a liability threat to a human service agency. So, do you know someone who wants to be a foster parent? Expect them to be vetted as part of the home study process.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, “In recent decades, the number of Americans who have had contact with the criminal justice system has increased exponentially. It is estimated that about one in three adults now has a criminal history record—which often consists of an arrest that did not lead to conviction, a conviction for which the person was not sentenced to a term of incarceration, or a conviction for a non-violent crime.”¹

Vetting is the clearance process required for people who will have substantial unsupervised access to children. The purpose is to provide an appropriate level of assurance as to the trustworthiness, integrity, and probable reliability of the prospective foster parent. Such things as criminal background, identity verification, employment history, character, and residency are checked. Results of the vetting should not be taken at face value. Additional probing is key:

- Are job titles and responsibilities exaggerated? Embellishment is a sign of being misleading.
- Are the dates of the applicant’s work and education history accurate?
- Are there unexplained gaps in the application that the applicant seems to be trying to cover up?
- Some applicants may have lived or worked abroad. Such global experience should be verified.
- Are there any discrepancies in an applicant’s past? Such discrepancies could be considered material



misrepresentations and grounds for denial or revocation of a license.

- Qualifications such as degrees or certificates earned should be verified.
- Does cybervetting—the search and analysis of a person’s digital footprint—reveal any concerns or potential pitfalls?
- If an applicant falsifies any significant elements of the application they should be rejected. After all, if they lie about the “little” things won’t they certainly lie about the “big” things?

Vetting is a filter. Once through the initial vetting process there may be a tendency to be lulled into a false sense

of security. Some people have a clean record simply because they haven’t yet been caught. Just because an applicant passes the initial formal hurdles, human service staff must remain vigilant. Vetting applicants is a necessary undertaking for understanding an applicant’s risk prior and *during* their licensure. It is not a one-time, isolated activity. It is always appropriate to investigate if something doesn’t seem right. Discrete inquiries should be encouraged. Questions should be asked, and results analyzed.

Rescreening can ensure that no new red flags have appeared since

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the initial home study. In Montana, per Admin. Rule 37.51.310, "...5) An annual name-based criminal records check and a motor vehicle check for licensed foster parents are required for relicensure. (6) Persons formerly licensed as foster parents will be treated as new applicants if the former foster parents have not been licensed for a period of more than one year or if the foster parents have lived out of state for any period of time since being licensed in Montana. (7) If an applicant has children, a child protective services check will be requested from all states in which an applicant has lived since the birth date of the applicant's oldest child. (8) If an applicant does not have children, a child protective services check will be requested from all states in which the applicant has lived in the previous 15 years ..."

Foster care recruiters must have the correct vetting processes in place to reduce the risk of licensing parents

who are dishonest and potentially dangerous. Pennsylvania attorney Katie Shipp observes, "Unfortunately, there are many cases where children are placed in foster care only to be retraumatized and abused by those who were selected to care for them. It is the responsibility of human service agencies to make sure that foster children are truly protected. This goes beyond just finding them a bed with a roof over their heads. Individuals who prey on foster children may specifically target high-risk children with no support system. An effective risk management approach unfortunately requires expecting the worst and hoping for the best in every single case. Only with constant vigilance and close supervision can agencies protect the vulnerable children in their care."

If done correctly, the vetting process will indicate to the public, the applicants, and the human service agency's own staff that the agency is serious about licensing only applicants of the

highest caliber with unimpeachable integrity. Recruitment staff should consult with their supervisors and legal counsel to ensure that the process of vetting foster care applicants complies with appropriate federal and state laws and regulations as well as conforming to the industry's appropriate standard of care. 📌

Reference Note

1. See DIR 2013-02, available at <http://www.dol.gov/ofccp/regs/compliance/directives/dir306.htm>, citing written Testimony of Amy Solomon, Senior Advisor to the Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), submitted for EEOC Meeting to Examine Arrest and Conviction Records as a Hiring Barrier (July 26, 2011), available at <http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/meetings/7-26-11/solomon.cfm>

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The graphic features a central arrangement of colorful puzzle pieces (green, yellow, red, purple, blue) and interlocking gears. Silhouettes of people are integrated into the design, including a family in a gear, two people in a gear, and a group of people. The text 'INSPIRE.' is in a gear on the left, and 'IMPACT.' is in a gear on the right. 'INNOVATE.' is written at the bottom center. The APHSA logo is at the top right, followed by 'NATIONAL HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES 2016 SUMMIT'. The dates 'MAY 22-25' and location 'KEY BRIDGE MARRIOTT ARLINGTON, VA' are also present. Social media icons for LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter are at the bottom left, along with the website 'www.APHSA.org' and the handle '@APHSA1'.

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