



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
Office of the Commissioner

S. Duke Storen
Commissioner

November 4, 2021

MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Ralph Northam
Governor of Virginia

Honorable Janet D. Howell
Chairman, Senate Finance

Honorable Luke E. Torian
Chairman, House Appropriations

Daniel Timberlake, Director
Department of Planning & Budget

FROM: S. Duke Storen *S. Duke Storen*

SUBJECT: Annual Report Adoption of Special Needs Children

I am pleased to provide the annual report on adoption of special needs children and ongoing supportive services, pursuant to Item 354 F.1 and F.2 of the 2021 Appropriation Act. Please contact me if you have questions.

SDS:kc
Attachment

**Department of Social Services
Annual Report on Adoption Contracts
(June 1, 2020 – May 31, 2021)**

Report Mandate and Background

Items 354 (F.1.) and (F.2.) of the 2021 Appropriation Act provides:

- (1) “Out of this appropriation, \$1,500,000 the first year and \$1,500,000 the second year from the general fund shall be provided to implement pilot programs that increase the number of foster care children adopted.”
- (2) “Beginning July 1, 2017, the department shall provide an annual report, not later than 45 days after the end of the state fiscal year, on the use and effectiveness of this funding including, but not limited to, the additional number of special needs children adopted from foster care as a result of this effort and the types of ongoing supportive services provided, to the Governor, Chairmen of House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees, and the Director, Department of Planning and Budget.”

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) uses appropriated general funds to increase the number of finalized adoptions of children and youth with special needs. These are children with significant behavioral or medical challenges who tend to be older, in care longer, and who have had multiple foster care placements. Funds are also allocated for post adoption support services, which are critically important to encourage the adoption of children and youth who have special needs and are effective at keeping them safe and stable in their new families.

In June 2020, the first month of this reporting period, VDSS expended \$55,263 for pre and post adoption services for special needs children adopted from foster care. June 2020 was the last month of several efforts initiated in state fiscal year 2020.

The Extreme Recruitment® project ended on June 30, 2020. Extreme Recruitment was an evidence-based intervention that located relatives and kin of foster care youth who had parental rights terminated in order to find permanency through guardianship or adoption. Extreme Recruitment® worked exclusively with the following groups of children: children between the ages of 10 and 18 years old, sibling groups, children of minority status, and youth with emotional, developmental, or behavioral concerns. The appropriated funds invested through that contract helped reconnect youth in foster care with a network of safe, appropriate adults, to include the identification of over 2,000 relatives for the 73 children served by the Extreme Recruitment® project.

Once the contract period ended, VDSS was unable to issue another Request for Proposal (RFP) for Extreme Recruitment due to Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition’s decision to discontinue their expansion in Virginia. Youth that were still waiting for placement at the end of the project were transitioned to the Adoption Through Collaborative Partnerships (ATCP) grant for continued recruitment and adoptive placement services. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and an inability to add new referrals, pre-adoption client activity dropped significantly during state fiscal year 2020.

Direct service post-adoption contracts also ended on June 30, 2020. Because of ongoing post adoption supportive services that were provided in state fiscal year 2020 to special needs children and youth, including case management and mental health services, 68 adoptive families were stabilized and 39 adoption dissolutions were prevented. June 2020 was the final month of these contracts.

Table 1: SFY20 (June 2020) Recruitment and Support Services Expenditure Table

Type of Expense	Expended Amount
AREVA Contract Workers (including travel)	\$39,283
Extreme Recruitment and Post Adoption Community Contracts	\$15,979
Total Expended in June 2020	\$55,263

VDSS had initially planned to use a portion of this appropriation to implement the 30 Days to Family intervention in SFY21. 30 Days to Family® is a more preventative approach that searches for relatives and kin within the first 30 days of the child entering foster care for permanency options such as adoption. 30 Days to Family® is an intense, short-term intervention developed by the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition with a focus on the following: 1) increasing the number of children placed with relatives/kin at the time they enter foster care, and 2) ensuring natural and community supports are in place to promote stability for the child. VDSS held several meetings with the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition to work towards implementation of 30 Days to Family®. The final meeting was held in early March 2020, just before the COVID-19 pandemic. After the call it was determined this model did not align with our needs.

VDSS continued to support the Adoption Resource Exchange of Virginia (AREVA) using appropriated funds. AREVA is a service offered by VDSS that connects families with children who are available for adoption within Virginia. AREVA is one tool used to help local departments of social services (LDSS) reach the federal goal of permanency within 24 months, as mandated in § 471 of Title IV-E of the Social Security Act (42 USC § 671), and the requirement for LDSS to file Adoption Progress Reports, as outlined in § 16.1-283 of the Code of Virginia. The purpose of AREVA is to increase opportunities for children waiting to be adopted by providing services to child-placing agencies having custody of these children

Additionally, each year, during National Adoption Month in November, VDSS celebrates adoptive families and helps raise awareness for the hundreds of children and youth in foster care in Virginia who are waiting for permanent, loving families. Adoption Month incorporates various media campaigns to promote local community activities. VDSS hosts the annual National Adoption Month conference for professionals, foster and adoptive families, LDSS case workers, and other community partners and focuses on reducing the number of youth at risk for aging out of foster care with no familial connections. The conference held in November 2020, *Engaging Youth: Listen & Learn*, focused on the special needs of youth eligible to be adopted. The conference was offered virtually in two parts, with the first evening focused on foster and adoptive families. The following full day of workshops, including a youth panel, was targeted towards LDSS staff and community partners who work with youth at risk of aging out of foster care. Topics such as “*How to Speak with Children about Race and Adoption*”, “*Race Matters: Strategies for Addressing Racial Bias in Transracial/Transcultural Adoption*” were presented to over 100 individuals who

attended the two-part virtual conference from around the state. There was no cost to facilitate the virtual Adoption conference. The Family Engagement in-person conference was not scheduled due to COVID-19.

Due to an intentional Departmental delay in entering into new contracts, based on budget concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic, VDSS planned to delay implementation of any new adoption contracts which would have been effective July 1, 2020. That delay combined with the complexity of the procurement process and the prioritization of other projects during the public health emergency resulted in no new adoption contracts being implemented in SFY21. Previously, all post adoption contracts were funded with this appropriation. However, for SFY21, when the program implemented the Post Adoption Consortium, all of the new contracts were funded by Adoption Reinvestment funds (state). The reinvestment spending was prioritized, in order to maximize federal reimbursement and ensure that Virginia did not lose access to that funding in the future. Table 2 shows how VDSS initially planned to allocate appropriated funds versus what VDSS actually spent on permanency, family recruitment, or support services for special needs children and youth in foster care. It is important to note that VDSS is not allowed to carry over any unexpended balances in Table 2.

Table 2: SFY21 Appropriated Funding Plan from July 1, 2020 – May 31, 2021

Type of Service	Allocated Amount	Amount Expended
Extreme Recruitment and Post Adoption Community Contracts (FY20 services paid for in FY21)		\$25,952
Post Adoption Support Services	\$200,000	\$0.00
30 Days to Family	\$650,000	\$0.00
Family Recruitment and Post Adoption web site development	\$150,000	\$119
Adoption & Family Engagement Conferences	\$250,000	\$16,531
AREVA Contract Workers (including travel and postage)	\$200,000	\$103,703
Foster & Adoptive Parent on-line college memberships	\$50,000	0.00
Total FY21 (July 1, 2020 – May 21, 2021)	\$1,500,000	\$146,306

For SFY22, VDSS is in the process of determining how best to use these appropriated funds to maximize resources and continue support of services for special needs youth in foster care and increase permanency for the more than 800 special needs youth awaiting families through adoption. Without continued support, VDSS would be forced to limit the amount of assistance provided to LDSS, and as a result, children will remain in care longer and adopted children will be in jeopardy of returning to care. Now that the COVID-19 pandemic is coming to a close, VDSS will be able to focus on allocating these funds in support of permanency and increasing adoptions.