

**CATHOLIC CHARITIES DIOCESE OF ARLINGTON, INC.
3251 Old Lee Highway, Suite 402, Fairfax VA 22030**

POLICY FOR DOMESTIC INFANT POOL PROGRAM

The following information applies to the Domestic Infant Pool Program at Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Arlington, Inc.

HOME STUDY PROCESS

The \$500 application fee covers the expenses of reviewing your application and initiates the home study process. This is a non-refundable fee.

Once the home study process has begun, if information or a situation arises which might affect the anticipated approval of the home study, the worker will address the issue promptly with the applicant(s) in the hope that a resolution can be found. Prompt attention to such situations helps to ensure that there will be no unforeseen rejections, so that when a home study is completed and presented to the Program Director for review, it is anticipated to be approved.

The agency requires that adoptive applicant(s) (and their child/ren, if applicable) must be in good mental and physical health with normal life expectancy, as determined by the applicant(s) physician.

AFTER HOME STUDY APPROVAL

Throughout the time a family is working with the Agency, we require them to *immediately* notify their case worker should their personal situation change in any significant manner such as: changes in health conditions, financial status, living arrangements, relationship status, modifications within the home environment, etc. By signing this document, the family acknowledges that they understand all services are voluntary and that if they refuse recommended services or fail to comply with program requirements, Catholic Charities may be unable to adequately provide services to assist in meeting their desired goals.

TRAINING & HOME MONITORING

Once home study approved, all prospective adoptive families are required to participate in ongoing education and ongoing monitoring of their home, as mandated by the Commonwealth of Virginia and the Minimum Standards for Licensed Child Placing Agencies.

Ongoing Training

Catholic Charities will facilitate on-going education and training by offering seminars and meetings scheduled on a monthly basis, as well as by providing referrals to educational opportunities in the community, online educational resources, etc. All families are required to participate, at least once annually, in an agency training for approved, waiting families to maintain home study approval with the Agency. Any family that chooses not to participate in training, at least once annual basis, will not maintain an approved status, and will be out of compliance with the agency, thereby jeopardizing their adoption process.

Additionally, approved families in our Pool will be required to complete 12 hours of training per calendar year. The number of hours will be prorated depending on when in the calendar year the family's home study is approved. Trainings should be focused on preparation for adoption and parenting and adoption specific topics. Pool families are encouraged to meet with their worker in person or video call twice a year to provide opportunities for ongoing assessment, preparation and planning related to adopting. Pool families may also be asked to participate in a meeting to discuss

particular areas relating to the family's adoption process and/or matching.

Training Logs

Each January, families will be required to submit an annual training log with attached certificates and/or reflections for any training they have completed outside of Catholic Charities. Reflections should be 2-4 paragraphs and summarize the content of the training material (such as a summary of a book) and how it applies to their role as an adoptive parent. One reflection or certificate will be required for each training credit requested.

Ongoing Home Monitoring

Ongoing monitoring requirements of prospective adoptive homes include allowing a representative of the agency to monitor the provider home at least one time every 90 days, through either a visit to the home or by direct telephone contact. If the family does not schedule or respond to these 90-day check-ins, the family will be placed on hold and be ineligible for a match until the family and their worker have contact either by phone or in person.

If more than 6 months have elapsed since the last home visit date and if the agency is considering placing a child in the home, the agency representative must, prior to the placement of a child, make at least one monitoring home visit to evaluate and verify the home remains in compliance with the requirement set forth in the Standards for Licensed Child Placing Agencies.

PROFILE BOOKS

The profile books prepared by the adoptive family are presented to birth parents as part of the adoptive family selection process for each infant/child. Waiting families may also choose, and are encouraged, to have their profiles displayed on the agency website.

POOL FEES

The Domestic Infant Pool utilizes a sliding scale fee structure, to be paid in three installments. Catholic Charities has a sliding scale for the Domestic Infant Pool Program to ensure that families are able to pursue adoption at a variety of income levels. You will be asked to pay one third of your total fee when you enter the Pool. The first installment goes towards agency services that make it possible to connect with potential birth parents such as pregnancy counseling, community trainings, marketing, etc. The second third of the total fee is due at the time a child is placed in your home and once the birthmother's legal risk has concluded. The final third of your fee is due at the time of your 3rd post-placement supervision visit.

The agency has the obligation to demonstrate that the family is financially stable. This means that the family makes enough money each month to pay for their monthly expenses and has an additional surplus of at least 10% of their monthly income for unexpected needs.

Families are expected to have at least the amount of the first installment in a checking or savings account at the time of home study approval or at the time they enter the Pool in which case, they will provide supporting documentation. In some cases, the agency will work with them to develop a financial plan for paying the adoption fees and/or refer them to another adoption program prior to entering the Pool.

If a family voluntarily decides not to continue for any reason before a child is placed with them, the fees paid will not be refunded. If you move out of the Northern Virginia area, or if you are not placed prior to attainment of the age of 52, there will be no refund of fees. Timely payment of each portion of the fee is expected to proceed to the next step in the adoption process. Any variation in fee or payment schedule requires a decision by the Program Director. If a family does not receive a placement within three years

and consequently requires a home study re-evaluation, finances will be re-evaluated, and you will sign a new fee agreement at the time of the update. The family will be responsible for the cost of renewing their home study but will not be asked to pay anything to remain in the pool of waiting families.

FUNDRAISING

The agency discourages fundraising and crowdsourcing to cover the costs associated with adoption because the structure of the sliding scale and three separate installments allow for additional financial flexibility for families. The agency does not provide any recommendations for grants or fundraising for infant adoption and will not work directly with fundraising entities. If a family is relying on fundraising to cover costs associated with adoption, they should discuss this plan with their worker to ensure they will remain eligible for the Pool program.

PURSUING ADOPTION PROGRAMS CONCURRENTLY

A family may remain in our Pool while investigating other possible *domestic* sources for placement of a child (Interstate or Waiting Child programs). You may not be in our Pool while concurrently pursuing an international adoption, as the processes are vastly different, and placement wait times are unpredictable. The program director must approve release of the family's home study to any entity who is not a licensed child placing agency, including the adoptive family. Depending on the child placing agency/agencies you are working with and depending on the requirements of those states, you may be required to have your home study, background checks, and/or other documents updated *prior* to your Virginia approval expiring. Families in our Pool who are also pursuing adoption through other program(s) will be required to pay the fees associated with updating the home study for their non-Pool program(s) even if their home study is current by Virginia standards. Families in our Pool who are also licensed foster care providers must obtain the consent of both Catholic Charities and the foster care agency to work within both programs and with the understanding that if a child is placed, or the family is matched with a birth family, they must be on hold with the other provider.

If you become matched with a birth parent through another entity, please inform your Catholic Charities worker immediately. We will temporarily remove you from the Catholic Charities Pool until the baby you are matched with is born and the placement is completed. This is necessary in order to be considerate of the birth parents who are depending upon families to be open and available for placement with their expected child.

An adoption home study is valid for one placement only. Any subsequent placements would require a new home study; therefore, the family would need to re-apply and complete a second home study. New fees appropriate to the program the family has applied for will be assessed at that time of their second application.

IF YOU BECOME PREGNANT

Families participating in the Domestic Infant Pool Program should not be actively participating in ongoing fertility treatment. The expectation is that, if applicable, fertility treatments are completed prior to applying to the program.

If a couple becomes pregnant while on the waitlist or in the Pool, they will be placed 'on hold' pending the outcome of the pregnancy. If the pregnancy does not result in a live birth, the couple will contact their worker once they feel ready to remove the 'hold' on their status and process any residual feelings of grief or loss regarding the pregnancy. If the pregnancy results in a live birth, the family will continue to be on hold in the Pool until either:

- A. Their home study expires

B. Catholic Charities completes an addendum to update the status of the home

However, a family may not become active in the Pool until their youngest child has reached the age of 18 months. It is the agency practice not to place another child in your home until your youngest child is 18 months of age and has been in your home at least for one year. If a family had previously paid the 1st installment to enter the Pool prior to the birth of their child, and the home study remains current, they will not be charged that installment again. If, however, the home study has expired, the process will begin again, to include fees associated with entering the Pool.

MATCHING

Families who participate in the Pool program may be presented with opportunities for placements outside of the Pool, as Catholic Charities maintains positive relationships with adoption providers seeking families throughout the country. While this does not happen frequently, it does happen. Families will be consulted and give their permission prior to having their profile shown to any external agencies. If the family is placed externally, they will still be required to pay post-placement supervision fees if applicable.

Catholic Charities discourages families from self-advertising and attempting to self-match as this is highly risky and can lead to unethical practices and potential fraud. However, there are circumstances in which a family in the Pool may be presented with a potential match through their community or approached directly by an expectant family. If the expectant family resides in the Diocese of Arlington, the hopeful adoptive family should contact their worker to discuss the possible placement options via Pool or private adoption and services available to the expectant parents.

Pool profile books are not shown to expectant parents until they are about 7 months along in pregnancy or possibly later, depending on the time of their initial contact. This is to ensure that expectant parents are provided options counseling to process through their options and express the desire to continue to move towards making an adoption plan.

ETHICAL PRACTICE & BIRTH PARENT CARE

Catholic Charities approaches adoption in an ethical framework that ensures the protection of all parties while keeping the best interest of the child as central. In all circumstances, counselors will be working with the expectant/birth parents to ensure that they are aware of supports and services that exists that could assist them in choosing to parent and to assess the reasons they are considering adoption and if those reasons are based on temporary circumstances that could be fixed or if they go beyond current circumstances. For this reason, the agency will not encourage expectant parents to consider prospective families until they have reached a resolve that they are “leaning towards adoption”, with the understanding that it is likely for feelings to ebb and flow. Families working with the Catholic Charities Domestic Infant Pool Program should understand that this approach protects expectant parents from making a lifelong decision they will regret or without all necessary information. It decreases the likelihood of the family experiencing a “failed match”. Adoption is deeply complex and every circumstance is different however, the agency strives to implement evidence based and ethical practice in all areas of adoption work. The agency will maintain transparency with hopeful adoptive families and commits to providing direct and honest recommendations regarding any circumstance in which they are matched and/or placed.

PLACEMENT

It is required that at least one parent be at home with the child for at least twelve weeks after placement. This kind of arrangement should be discussed with the family’s worker in advance. Catholic Charities places a strong emphasis on promoting attachment between the adopted infant and the family.

Recommendations for ways to promote attachment are covered at length during the Pre-Adopt training and ongoing resources are provided to the family prior to and following placement. It is the expectation that the family will follow recommendations made to promote attachment once the child is placed in their care.

Because of the agency's legal responsibility for children up to the time a Final Order of Adoption is granted, the following policies must be observed:

1. If hospitalization, surgery or any invasive procedures are indicated, the agency must sign consent for any child in its custody. Please notify the agency promptly in emergency situations so that the necessary papers may be signed at the hospital.
2. If a child becomes ill any time after placement and before the Final Order of Adoption is signed by a judge, the agency must be notified promptly.
3. If a family takes a child on a trip across state lines at any time before the Final Order of Adoption is signed, the agency must be notified prior to travel.
4. The child cannot be placed in the overnight care of someone other than the adoptive parents until the adoption is finalized.
5. If the adoptive family experiences a significant change in their personal lives or home environment, such as separation, divorce, major illness, death, change in residents in the home, major home damage or renovations, etc., the family must contact the agency immediately to inform their worker of the event.
6. The family will provide documentation of all medical appointments (scheduled and unscheduled) to the agency until the adoption is finalized.
7. The family will follow through on all recommendations documented in the medical record (i.e. specialist appointments, change in diet, etc.)
8. The adoptive family and others will not post any pictures of the child on social media platforms until the adoption has been finalized or without express permission from the agency.

OPENNESS

The family will abide by the openness agreement established with the birth family and agency and outlined in the Post Adoption Contact and Communication Agreement (PACCA). Until the adoption is finalized, the adoptive parents will provide the agency with copies of updates to be added to the adoption record.

POST-FINALIZATION

Catholic Charities remains a lifelong resource for families, children and birth parents. The family is welcome to seek guidance and support relating to adoption from Catholic Charities at any time.

The family should encourage the birth parent(s) to contact the agency for grief and loss counseling, processing adoption, difficult dynamics in openness or other areas related to adoption. This will also assist the family in focusing on their relationship with the birth family while connecting the birth family with an external source to promote healing.

The family is encouraged to utilize the agency as a support if difficult dynamics arise in navigating openness with the birth family.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

It is the policy of Catholic Charities that the agency neither solicits or accepts contributions from adoptive applicants during the period of application or before an adoption has been finalized.

It is the policy of Catholic Charities that no board member or employee of Catholic Charities Diocese of Arlington may participate in any pregnancy and adoption support services.

We have read, understand, and agree to the above stated policies regarding agency adoptions and CCDA's Domestic Infant Pool Program as set forth by Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Arlington, Inc.

DATE: _____

Signature of Adoptive Applicant

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