

Subsidized Child Care Assistance Program Policy Manual

Chapter 4. Application, Eligibility Determination & Documentation

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I. CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Families apply for Subsidized Child Care Assistance (SCCA) at the local Department of Social Services (DSS) or Local Purchasing Agency (LPA). This chapter provides an overview of the application process as well as guidelines for implementing a plan of care.

II. INITIAL GUIDED INTERVIEW

Subsidized childcare assistance may be provided to families demonstrating a need for childcare and who have been determined eligible for assistance. The eligibility requirements below must be discussed with the applicant/recipient during the initial interview and all requirements must be met to authorize childcare assistance. The guided interview recommendations include asking the applicant the following information:

- Voter registration
- The applicant/recipient's living arrangement (with childcare questions). Does the recipient meet the criteria of homelessness at the time of initial application or redetermination? This information should be entered into NC FAST.
- The eligibility period must begin with the date of initial application if eligibility is determined within 30 days of application.
- Income - Earned and Unearned
- Resources
- Expenses / Parent Fees
- The intake application and the recipient signature statement of understanding form must be signed and dated.
- Childcare workers should ask questions about developmental delays and special needs; this includes whether referral information is needed and if the plan of care is needed. Additionally, workers should discuss parental choice and joint custody and assist the family with selecting a provider if the family request assistance with selecting a provider.
- Discuss with the applicant that childcare providers can be selected during the interview. If a child care provider is not chosen by the time the application is disposed, the case will remain in approved status.
- If the provider is selected after the application end date, the worker must update the start date for the Plan of Care when entering the provider on a later date.

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- If the certification period ends prior to the provider being selected, the case will need to be rekeyed.
- Inform the applicant that the case cannot be activated without selecting a provider. In multi-child households, there must be at least one Plan of Care with a selected provider for the case to activate.
- Workers should discuss the parental fee that is based on the family's gross monthly countable income, if there are multiple children in need of care the fee is assessed to the child receiving the greatest number of hours of care. In most instances, this is usually the youngest child receiving care.

III. REASON CHILD CARE IS NEEDED

The local DSS/LPA must determine the reason SCCA is needed. To qualify for childcare services; the family must need care for one of the following reasons:

- To maintain employment or a WFES referral to seek employment.
- To support child protective services.
- To attend school or job-training activities that lead to employment.
- To meet the developmental needs of children.
- To support child welfare services; or
- Other reasons as approved by the local Smart Start partnership if Smart Start funds are used.

The provision of subsidized childcare assistance for reasons other than those listed below may occur if other funds are available to the agency such as Smart Start. Subsidized childcare assistance provided with Smart Start funds for reasons other than those described in this manual must be included in the local partnership's Smart Start Plan and approved by the North Carolina Partnership for Children (NCPC). Smart Start funds can provide services for preschool age children only.

IV. INCOME ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

The family applying for subsidized childcare assistance must meet current income eligibility requirements to be approved for assistance unless the assistance is available without regard to income. At the time of application and

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redetermination, families must attest that their assets are not more than one (\$1,000,000) million dollars. If assets exceed \$1,000,000, they are ineligible for Subsidized Child Care Assistance. The asset limit is waived for families receiving care for CPS/CWS.

A. Parental Fees

A parental fee is based on the family's gross monthly countable income, not on the type of childcare arrangement. If there are multiple children in care, the parental fee is assessed to the child receiving the greatest number of hours of care. Usually this is the youngest child receiving care. The Intake Application, Signature and Statement of Understanding form must be signed and dated. Telephonic signatures are acceptable **if** the agency has the software to record them.

1. If the family is eligible for SCCA, the applicant/recipient may be required to pay a parental fee, i.e., a portion of the cost of care. The parental fee is assessed based upon the family's income.
2. Workers should explain that the parental fee that is based on the family's gross monthly countable income. If there are multiple children in need of care the fee is assessed to the child receiving the greatest number of hours of care. In most instances, this is usually the youngest child receiving care.

Refer to Chapter 8 for additional information Parental Fees.

V. WHO CAN APPLY FOR SCCA

Any of the following individuals may apply for childcare assistance:

- A. A parent or responsible adult needing SCCA. The parent or responsible adult is the applicant/recipient and is referred to as the person or persons with whom the child lives and who has primary responsibility for the care and the well-being of the child.
- B. An applicant/recipient needing childcare assistance must apply with their local DSS/LPA.

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- C.** A representative for the applicant/recipient (if the applicant/recipient is incompetent or incapacitated) that needs childcare assistance. Authorized representatives who apply for childcare assistance for the applicant/recipient have the same responsibility as applicant/recipient to provide accurate and complete information to the DSS/LPA.

- D.** Staff designated by the DSS/LPA director if the child is in custody of the department of social services. Designated agency staff should only sign if the child/ren are in the custody of the county (Foster Care). For CPS and CWS with a referral, the parent/responsible adult must sign the application, Recipient Responsibilities and Voucher. The parent/responsible adult will sign the application/voucher when the child is not in DSS custody.

- E.** Anyone other than that child's parent (s) or legal custodian (s) who is providing full time care for a child who is not in the custody of a North Carolina County Department of Social Services.

- F.** Federal Land Trust Residents. Families referred by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians for subsidized childcare assistance to support Child Protective Services (CPS), Child Welfare Services (CWS) and Foster Care. The application will be made in the family's county of residence with the appropriate referral.

- G.** Vulnerable Populations. Vulnerable Populations include families experiencing homelessness and children with special needs according to McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Living Situation: If a client is homeless, select Lacks Fixed Nighttime Address, Hotel/Motel, or Place Not Designated for Sleeping as the client's living situation.

Refer to [Attachment 4 Living Arrangements](#) & the SCCA – Homeless Living Arrangements job aid for more information on homeless selections.

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VI. APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

A. Form Requirements

A formal request for subsidized childcare assistance must be initiated by completing the application in NC FAST by the designated staff person. All applications for childcare assistance will be processed through NC FAST.

The recipient will be required to sign the last page of the Intake Application that is generated in NC FAST. The Recipient Responsibilities for Subsidized Child Care Assistance must be completed by the applicant/recipient.

When an application is submitted by mail, the date the agency receives the application will be the first day of the certification period and the date entered in NC FAST as the application date regardless of when the application was signed and dated.

When an application is submitted by email and the documents are legible, the application shall be accepted. The date the agency receives the application by email will be the first day of the certification period and the date entered in NC FAST as the application date regardless of when the application was signed and dated.

When an application is submitted by fax and the documents are legible, the application shall be accepted. The date the child care worker receives the application by fax or the date stamp on the faxed application will be the first day of the certification period and the date entered in NC FAST as the application date regardless of when the application was signed and dated.

If a faxed or emailed application is not legible, the county worker must contact the applicant and request that the application be resubmitted in a legible format. The date the application is resubmitted and legible will be the first day of the certification period and the date entered in NC FAST as the application date regardless of when the application was signed and dated. If a faxed or emailed application is not accepted via fax or email, the county worker must document the reason for declining the application and notify the applicant.

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When an application is completed and signed during a face-to-face appointment, the date of the face-to-face appointment will be the first day of the certification period and the date entered in NC FAST as the application date.

In all situations, apart from face-to-face applications, applications shall not be keyed in NC FAST until a signed paper application is received in the agency. Applications and recertifications should be date stamped. If the email is available (either from the worker's history or client's) that can also be used as verification of date of receipt.

If services are needed to support CPS and CWS with a referral, the parent/responsible adult must sign the application, Recipient Responsibilities and Voucher. Depending on the reason for CWS, it may be the responsible adult (ex. pending adoption) or parent (ex. domestic abuse situations) that should sign.

For Foster Care, the worker must complete and sign the application. Designated agency staff should only sign if the child/ren is in custody of the county.

Refer to Chapter 9: Attachment 5 Child Care Voucher Procedures Timeline Chart & the SCCA - CPS, CWS, and Foster Care Referrals Job Aid for more information regarding the Application Process.

The DCDEE-0456 Application for Child Care Services will only be used in two circumstances. One is when the recipient submits a printed DCDEE-0456 to the local DSS/LPA to apply for childcare assistance. The other circumstance is when childcare is needed for a child in foster care.

A referral from the DSS/LPA must be made in these cases and DCDEE-0456 must be signed by the worker. When a referral for SCCA is received from a DSS worker for a child in foster care, the paper version of the DCDEE-0456 will be completed and signed by the DSS social worker. A signature on the intake Application created in NC FAST will not be necessary for these cases since the signature will be recorded on the DCDEE-0456.

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All individuals who request subsidized childcare assistance must be allowed to sign an application unless the county does not have sufficient funding to serve additional families. When either funds or childcare spaces are not available and services cannot be provided immediately, counties are required to establish and maintain a waiting list.

Refer to Chapter 10: Waiting List Policies for additional information regarding Waiting List.

VII. RESIDENCY REQUIREMENTS

An applicant/recipient requesting childcare assistance must be a resident of North Carolina and must apply for assistance in the county in which they reside, and that county is responsible for payment. There is no requirement for duration of residency. The residency requirement does not apply to some situations, such as protective services cases under the terms of interstate compacts or in response to court orders. Counties have the option to provide services to families who reside in other counties under the following circumstances:

When a child is in foster care outside the county which has custody, the county department of social services that has custody of the child has responsibility for payment; however, it is allowable for the county department of social services where the child resides to pay for care if funding is available.

The county department of social services with custody may take the application and determine eligibility of the foster child, or the county where the child resides may determine eligibility because the foster parent or relative caring for the child is requesting assistance.

VIII. CITIZENSHIP REQUIREMENTS

To align with the provisions in the Childcare and Development Fund Act of 2014, only the citizenship and immigration status of the child, who is the primary beneficiary of the CCDF benefit, should be considered. The Citizenship and immigration status of the parent should not impact the

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child's eligibility for assistance. One of the following citizenship criteria must be met:

- Child is a U.S. Citizen; or
- Child is a legal U.S. Non-Citizen (residing in U.S. legally).
Examples of a child who is a legal U.S. Non-Citizen shall include but is not limited to:
 - Refugee
 - US Citizen/Naturalized Citizen
 - US Non-Citizen National
 - Documented Alien

In NC FAST, citizenship status shall only be selected when registering a new recipient. Childcare workers shall not change the citizenship status of an existing recipient. Changing the status could affect the recipient's eligibility for other programs. Citizenship status should only be changed if documentation is provided by the recipient.

Subsidized childcare assistance may be provided to *non-citizens who are legal residents* if the other eligibility criteria are met. *Non-citizen families who are not legal residents* (including the child and the parents) may receive services in the following instances if all other eligibility criteria are met.

- i. If the child needs childcare to support child protective services or the child is receiving foster care services; or
- ii. If the child needs childcare to support his/her developmental needs.

A. Citizenship Requirements and Verification

Only the citizenship and immigration status of the child, who is the primary beneficiary of the CCDF benefit, should be considered. If residency is questionable, verification may be obtained or requested to determine residency status. A birth certificate or hospital/physician record is acceptable verification of the child's citizenship status.

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The burden of proof regarding documentation of legal status or residency rests with the applicant. The Division does not require workers determining childcare eligibility to report any citizenship or residency information to Immigration and Naturalization Service. The applicant/recipient's statement regarding citizenship or residency is accepted unless there is a reason to question the individual's legal status.

For additional information regarding the type of documentation that may be used to document legal status, refer to Section 111 in the [Work First Manual](#). If the applicant is a recipient of Work First Family Assistance benefits, citizenship and residency were established at the time of application for Work First Family Assistance benefits.

IX. AGE REQUIREMENTS

Childcare assistance may be provided to children **through age 17**. However, requests for assistance for children ages 13 through 17 must be carefully evaluated to determine the need for care. Some examples of instances in which assistance for teenagers may be provided include the following: the teen has a special need; is under court-ordered supervision; is receiving child protective services or foster care services; or the child would be left in an unsafe situation if care is not provided.

A child meets the age requirement if they are:

- i. Birth through 12; or
- ii. 13 through 17, when one of the following situations is documented in the case record.
 - a. Child has a special need or circumstance which could include a documented medical situation.
 - b. Child is under court-ordered supervision.
 - c. Child is receiving child protective services or foster care services.
 - d. Child would be left in an unsafe situation if care were not provided. For example, a single parent works second, or third shift and the child would be home alone at night.

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A child may be eligible for [Adult and Family Services](#) once they reach their eighteenth birthday. When a child becomes eligible for kindergarten services in public school (turns age five (5) on or before August 31 of that school year), childcare services may only be provided during those days and hours that the regular school program is not in operation.

However, there may be case-specific situations when it is in the best interest of the child to delay entry into the public-school system. An example may be when the child just meets the cutoff date to be eligible for public school but is small or immature for their age or has some other developmental delays and the child would benefit from continuing to receive preschool care for an additional year. The reason for the child not enrolling in public school must be documented in the record. In any case, childcare may not be provided for more than one (1) year past the date the child is eligible to begin kindergarten.

A school-age child is defined as a child who will reach the age of five (5) on or before August 31 of that school year and is enrolled in a public or private school during the school year in accordance with the rules of the educational institution where the child is enrolled.

If the child's birthday is:

- i. First day of the month - the child is considered their new age for the entire month.
- ii. Any other day - the child is considered their new age starting on the first of the following month.

A. Specific age groups with NC FAST

1. Child Turns Five Years Old- When a child turns five, a task is sent the month prior to a child turning five years old, requesting that the case owner determine if the child is attending school. The recipient may need a change to hours of care.
2. Child Turns Six Years Old- When a child turns 6, a task is sent the month prior to a child turning six years old, requesting that the case owner determine

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if the child is attending school. The service changes from 0-5 Years to School Age. The recipient may also need a change to hours of care and/or a change to the provider.

3. Child Turns 13 Years Old- When a child turns 13, SCCA benefits will continue through the end of the current Certification Period. Do not terminate services at the time of a child's 13th birthday or during the month that they turn 13 years of age.

However, if the child turns 13 on the 1st day of their new Certification Period, end date services on the last day of the prior month. The case worker receives a task the month prior to a child turning 13 years old, requesting a review of the evidence to determine if the child has special circumstances that make them eligible for continued benefits, such as court-ordered supervision or mental incapacity. If the child has special circumstances, add Exemption Evidence.

NC FAST will automatically terminate care on the last day of the certification period after a child turns 13 years of age. No action is required in NC FAST to make this termination occur. Childcare workers need to ensure that the child's parent/responsible adult understands that services will terminate at the end of the certification period and not during the birthday month.

If the child has special circumstances, add exemption evidence. If a family receives graduated phase out at the end of their certification period and a child turns 13 during the graduated phase out, subsidized childcare for the 13-year-old child should continue until the end of the graduated phase out. If the family becomes income eligible during the graduated phase out, the 13-year-old cannot be recertified past the end date of the graduated phase out.

X. VOTER REGISTRATION REQUIREMENT

The purpose of the NVRA is to make more opportunities available for individuals to vote. The NVRA requires individuals, who are U.S. citizens, and at least 16 years of age, be offered the opportunity to register to vote or update a voter registration record at any application for service,

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recertification, or renewal, or when reporting a change to their address when related to an existing application.

Voter registration services must be offered when an NVRA covered transaction (an application, recertification, or renewal, or change of address) is received via ePASS, telephone, mail communication, or in-person. Therefore, at any time a person seeks services at an agency that offers public assistance, disability services, or unemployment services, the person must be offered voter registration services.

[Click here](#) for steps the DSS/LPA must take to ensure voter registration requirements are met. The written protocol and NC FAST documentation must always remain current. County DSS agencies must report a change in county NVRA point of contact to the NC DSS Civil Rights/NVRA Coordinator.

NVRA CONTACTS FOR ASSISTANCE

State Board of Elections (SBE) – nvra@ncsbe.gov

DHHS NVRA Coordinator – NVRA@dhhs.nc.gov

The worker must ensure that NVRA requirements were documented by the SCCA worker in the narrative as required and. DCDEE staff must see that the most recent date NVRA evidence was updated at a later date than that of the documentation date. The consultant can view the history to see if there was an update at the time of the SCCA worker's narrative.

Refer to section XIV. Narratives and Documentation and Attachment 1 Sample Narrative for additional information regarding Documentation.

XI. ESTABLISHING THE INITIAL ELIGIBILITY PERIOD

A. Standard Eligibility Period

The DSS/LPA has 30 calendar days from the date the application is received in an agency to determine eligibility. The application should be date stamped as verification of the date received. If approved, the twelve-month period of eligibility begins on the date the application was received by the agency. The certification period will end on the last day of the last month of the eligibility period. This is also true at redetermination. All ending

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certification dates must be the end of the month, regardless of weekends and holidays.

The worker can wait 30 days before making an eligibility determination. If eligibility is not determined within 30 days, the application is denied. The worker will notify the family of the application denial.

If a client submits a signed SCCA application but does not have a need for care but states they will have a need for care and verification within the 30 days, the child care worker can wait for the 30 days from the date received before denying the application. Be sure to document the case narrative thoroughly. The worker may also refer the applicant to the Work First Program if the applicant is seeking a job.

B. Notifying the Applicant at Initial Application

The applicant/recipient must be notified of any eligibility decision within 30 calendar days after the date of application. A copy of the childcare application or intake application serves as notice. Failure by the applicant/recipient to provide the required information to determine eligibility within the 30-day time frame is an allowable reason for the application to be denied.

XII. APPLICATION PROCESS

For a child to receive childcare assistance, an application must be completed with the local DSS/LPA. The application is necessary to gather accurate and complete information used in deeming a child or family eligible for services. There must be a determination that the income unit is correct, the countable income is verified and computed correctly, and that the parental fee is correct.

Refer to Chapter 7 Family Definition and Determining Eligibility for additional information regarding the Income Unit and Countable Income.

Types of SCCA applications include:

- A new application from applicant face to face interactions,
- Mailed, faxed, or emailed applications to be processed,
- CPS, CWS, & Foster Care

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When an applicant has been determined eligible for Food and Nutrition Services (FNS), they are deemed income eligible for childcare assistance. Some of the information needed for the initial interview can be found in NC FAST. This includes members of the income unit, child's age, race, citizenship status, and income. Using the information from NC FAST as the first step of the interview process will help streamline the application process. For families that state they are self-employed or receive child support, do not deem these income types from FNS.

Refer to Chapter 7: Family Definition and Determining Income Eligibility & Attachment 3: Verification of Child Support for more information regarding Child support.

Social Security Numbers (SSN) are **NOT** required to determine eligibility for subsidized childcare assistance; however, social security numbers may be requested when there are:

1. child only cases and
2. when the online verification (OLV/OVS) results in insufficient data.

In this instance, child care workers **must** use OLV/OVS for verification if there are insufficient results or a household member does not provide an SSN. The child care worker **must** inform the applicant that the SSN is only used to identify individuals in the household **ONLY**.

The parent cannot be forced to provide the SSN, however, if the parent fails to provide the SSN and OVS returns "insufficient data", any unearned income such as Child Support or Social Security **must** be verified using the Verification Hierarchy. The worker **must** document how they went about obtaining the unearned income verification if the OVS/online data cannot be run due to the lack of the SSN.

NOTE: Social Security Numbers are not to be used to verify income and are not required for the SCCA Program unless there is a child only case or insufficient data.

Refer to Chapter 7 Family Definition and Determining Eligibility.

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for additional information regarding Social Security Numbers and Online Verification (OVS/OLV).

A. Application Submission

1. Mailed Application

When an application is submitted by mail, the date the agency receives the application will be the first day of the certification period and the date entered in NC FAST as the application date regardless of when the application was signed and dated.

2. Faxed or Emailed Applications

When an application is submitted by fax or email and the documents are legible, the application shall be accepted. The date the agency receives the application by fax or email will be the first day of the certification period and the date entered in NC FAST as the application date regardless of when the application was signed and dated.

If a faxed or emailed application is not legible, the county worker must contact the applicant and request that the application be resubmitted in a legible format. If a faxed or emailed application is not accepted via fax or email, the county worker must document the reason for declining the application and notify the applicant.

3. Face-to-Face Application

When an application is completed during a face-to-face appointment, the date of the face-to-face appointment will be the first day of the certification period and the date entered in NC FAST as the application date.

NOTE: In all situations, except for face-to-face applications, applications shall not be keyed in NC FAST until a signed paper application is received in the agency.

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While completing the Application for Child Care Assistance in NC FAST, childcare workers should ask why subsidized childcare assistance is needed, including specific information regarding the days and hours the care is needed. Determine the family unit, calculate income, and parent fees correctly, and obtain verification of income.

Processing an SCCA application includes evidence management, verifications, eligibility checks, activating evidence, and authorization or denial of benefits. An authorized application creates a case that must be activated. Active cases must be followed by voucher processing.

Children authorized for payment must be determined eligible by the DSS/LPA for the entire period for which the provider is paid. Recipient files may be checked to determine that proper documents are located there, with proper signatures and due dates.

The electronic application in NC FAST or the Application for Child Care Services (DCDEE-0456), when needed, and eligibility documentation must be current every twelve months and on file for each child enrolled and authorized for payment. In addition, the current Child Care Voucher (DCDEE-0446) must be on file for each child enrolled and authorized for payment.

The applicant/recipient must sign the voucher with a wet or typed signature. Vouchers will no longer be on paper but will be sent via the NC FAST, Provider Portal for provider to accept or reject. Vouchers are maintained electronically.

i. Signatures

The signature can be:

- a. a wet signed signature with or without chain of custody
or
- b. typed signature with the chain of custody in a

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communication by the client that the county can consider the typed signature their signature.

Examples include:

- The original communication from applicant/recipient from their personal or business email address with the document attached (photo of document acceptable).
- A typed signature is equivalent to a handwritten (wet), signature only they are created in a digital environment.

If an applicant/recipient submits a typed signature, the worker must:

1. Document in the case notes that it is a typed signature and record chain of custody.
2. Documents that may have a typed signature include:
 - a. SCCA Application,
 - b. SCCA Recertification
 - c. Recipient Responsibilities, and
 - d. Voucher
3. Provide verification from the applicant that shows their intent to communicate electronically and for the county to accept their typed signature.

If the DSS/LPA does not have an email (chain of custody) and there was a typed signature, without documentation, then it is a financial error that will result in a county responsible overpayment.

If changes occur during the twelve (12) month eligibility period, the Child Care Action Notice (DCDEE-0450) must be on file which is also maintained electronically in NC FAST. The electronic application is completed in NC FAST by the childcare worker. Exceptions to this are only when foster care referrals are received by the childcare worker and when a recipient completes a mail-in application. In these cases, the

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(DCDEE-0456) is utilized and subsequently entered in NC FAST.

B. Applications when there is more than One Case

A recipient can submit one (1) application for all children in the household. Through NC FAST, there can be one (1) application for a family that has more than one (1) case.

If a recipient applies for services for his/her own child in addition to a child whom they are the nonparent caretaker, there will be one (1) application and two (2) cases. The exception to this would be for foster children who are in the legal custody of DSS. In these situations, the Foster Care Social Worker is required to apply for child care services.

When a recipient applies for SCCA for his or her own child and has unofficial or undocumented responsibility of another child, who is not in the legal custody of DSS, both children can be placed on one application for both cases.

NC FAST will create one or more cases based on who should be included in the income unit. If there is more than one income unit, then there will be multiple cases created from one application. Documentation of the recipient's case file must provide adequate information regarding eligibility and the plan of care.

C. Applications for Families Experiencing Homelessness

Families experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness must be prioritized in accordance with the General Provisions for subsidized childcare. The length of the childcare authorization shall be 12- months and redetermination will be completed at the end of the 12- months. The Local DSS/LPA have the option to add to their 4% set aside for families experiencing homelessness and children with special needs.

If no appropriate openings are available, the family may be placed on a waiting list. If the DSS/LPA contacts DCDEE and requests transfer of funds from the 4% set aside to non-smart start, then these vulnerable populations cannot be added to the waiting list. Funds for these

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populations must be fully expended before adding them to the waiting list.

The local DSS/LPA must provide childcare assistance to families if they are considered homeless and have a valid need for childcare. Every recipient must have a need to be evaluated for SCCA. This includes employment, job search, education and/or training, developmental needs, CPS, and CWS. Note, job search is not considered an acceptable need for new applications unless the client is an active Work First recipient with a referral.

Families experiencing homelessness and seeking subsidized childcare through this program must comply with the financial and service need requirements of the Income Eligibility Requirement of the SCCA Program. If a recipient meets the criteria of homelessness at the time of initial application or redetermination, this information should be entered into NC FAST per the SCCA – Homeless Living Arrangements job aid.

If the recipient does not have all the supporting documentation at the time of application, the recipient's application should be entered into NC FAST based on what is reported and the application should be approved if the reported information meets eligibility criteria. The childcare worker shall then grant the recipient a 30-day grace period to gather and submit the required documentation.

If it is determined that the recipient is not eligible for child care services once all required documentation has been submitted, the child care case should be terminated with a 10-day notice provided to the recipient and the child care provider. A 10-day notice should also be provided if a recipient does not provide the required documentation to support his or her eligibility for child care services by the end of the 30-day time period.

D. Living Arrangements

When families experiencing homelessness apply for childcare assistance, the childcare worker will ask the applicant/recipient if their

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current address is a temporary living arrangement and if this temporary living arrangement is due to economic hardship. When the answer is “yes”, several options will be available from which to select.

Additionally, economic hardship will be identified. Families may be identified as homeless only if the living arrangement is temporary. When an applicant/recipient comes in to apply/recertify for childcare assistance, and it is stated that the family is in a temporary living arrangement, the worker will check the appropriate box on the childcare application in NC FAST indicating where their family resides.

Refer Attachment 4 Fact Sheet for additional information regarding Living Arrangements.

E. Grace Period for families experiencing homelessness

Families experiencing homelessness should be made eligible at the time of application based on information reported by the recipient. If the recipient does not have all the required documentation on the day of application, the recipient’s reported need for care and reported income shall be used to complete an application.

If the reported information meets all eligibility criteria, the application should be approved, and childcare services can begin immediately. The recipient will then have 30 days to provide all needed documentation to support their eligibility for childcare services. Failure to submit required documentation within 30 days can result in termination.

If it is determined that the recipient is not eligible for childcare services once all required documentation has been submitted, the childcare case should be terminated with a 10-day notice provided to the recipient and the childcare provider.

A 10-day notice should also be provided if a recipient does not provide the required documentation to support his or her eligibility for childcare services by the end of the 30-day time period. If either of these situations occur, the childcare provider shall be paid for services provided based on the start date on the voucher through the last day of the 10-day notice.

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Any payment made to the childcare provider prior to the final eligibility decision shall not be considered an error or an improper payment and shall not be recouped from the provider.

Refer to the Homeless Living Arrangements Job Aid.

F. Applications for Federal Land Trust

During the application process for Federal Land trust, the childcare worker will select yes or no in NC FAST if the family states they live on a tribal reservation.

G. Applications for Foster Care

When childcare assistance is needed for a foster parent, the childcare worker must have a written referral from the foster care worker to support the need for care, indicating whether placement of the child is in a licensed foster home or in the home of a relative. A referral for foster care is required at application and recertification even if the placement remains the same.

When the need for care supports employment whether there are one or two foster parents in the licensed foster home, employment information, including name of employer and days and hours of employment, must be verified for each foster parent and the information must be included on the referral from the foster care social worker.

The DSS Social Worker must complete and sign the paper version of (DCDEE-0456). A signature on the Intake Application created in NC FAST will not be necessary for these cases. Children in foster care are the case head in their own case and the staff designated by DSS will sign the voucher. With sibling groups, the youngest child will be case head. When entering NC FAST, enter the youngest child first. If the family is divided, each child will be his own case head.

The Guided Interview includes questions about the referral, and the answers are mapped (transferred) to create Program Referral evidence on the application. The worker must start the application from the child's Person page as the child is the case head on an SCCA

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application. If there are multiple foster children in a household, enter the youngest child first. Foster care applications are child-only except in the case of sibling groups.

- i. If there is a sibling group placed in the same foster care home, the case head on that application is the youngest foster child, and that child's address should be the address of the DSS.
- ii. If there is a sibling group placed in the same foster care home, and one of the children is placed with a new foster parent outside of the sibling group, that child should be the case head on their own case.

The worker will maintain their cases individually even if they later rejoin the sibling group.

- iii. If the DSS/LPA is paying for childcare to support children in foster care, and the foster care case closes, the county will need to close the child only SCCA case.

The parent/responsible adult (RA) will need to apply in his/her name and the county can mail the application even if the parent/RA lives in another county.

The county will then process the application. When the signed voucher is received and all paperwork is completed, the county can transfer the activated case in NC FAST to the county where the parent/RA resides.

a. Foster Care Referrals & Evidence

The worker must record referrals as Program Referral evidence on the Evidence Dashboard. Foster Care Program Referral evidence requires verification such as the written referral, signed by the CPS worker or their supervisor.

Program Referral evidence ensures NC FAST applies foster care status to policy rules on the application and case. Foster Care

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Referral functions as verification of the selected Need Type; verification evidence, such as Student, Paid Employment or Earned Income of the Foster parents should be included (it will not count towards a parent fee).

At recertification, current Foster Care referrals should be ended with the last day of the current Certification Period and a new Foster Care referral should be started with the Start Date as the first day of the new Certification Period with the new information. [The same is true for all other program referral categories. The worker cannot go in and update/edit the current referral evidence in NC FAST.]

Workers can continue to use the same POC evidence that was used when the case began unless changes need to be made. Document thoroughly that a new referral was obtained and the dates on the referral should line up with the recertification date.

b. Foster Child Transition to a New Living Situation

If a foster child receives SCCA based on a foster parent's Need Type of education or employment and their living arrangement changes within a 12-month Certification Period, the worker will reassess the need for care of the new foster family (or relative or caregiver):

If the new foster family has a need for care, review the new Program Referral for changes to the case and update Plan of Care evidence as needed. SCCA coverage will continue through the end of the Certification Period.

If the new foster family does not have a need, the childcare worker should confirm with the new foster family as to whether they would like to continue services. If the new foster family declines childcare, the case should be terminated with a ten-day notice.

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If the new foster family does not decline childcare, the worker must allow services to continue through the end of the certification period. This information must be clearly documented in the case notes.

c. Foster Care Outside the County

When a child is in foster care outside the county which has custody, the county department of social services that has custody of the child has responsibility for payment; however, it is allowable for the county department of social services where the child resides to pay for care if funding is available. The county department of social services with custody may take the application and determine eligibility of the foster child, or the county where the child resides may determine eligibility because the foster parent or relative caring for the child is requesting assistance.

d. Foster Care Need Type

NC FAST follows policy in determining requirements and benefits for children in foster care:

1. Foster care is not Need Type in Plan of Care evidence.
2. Foster parents must have a need for childcare (such as employment or education) that has been verified by the Foster Care worker.
3. Because a foster parent is not included on the application for foster care, the system cannot track the 20-month time limit when the Education Need Type is selected.

If the Need Type is Education in a Foster Care case, select Developmental Needs as the Need Type and keep track of the 20-month time clock outside of NC FAST.

Each responsible adult in the household can receive 20 months of SCCA to support education for foster care cases.

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Refer to Chapter 5: Establishing Need and a Plan of Care & Attachment 2 Sample Foster Care Referral for additional information regarding FC.

H. Application and County Transfers

1. Application Transfers

When a new Subsidized Child Care Assistance (SCCA) application is submitted, NC FAST creates a new Integrated Case. If a recipient already has an existing Integrated Case and is making a new application for services, transfer the new application to the existing Integrated Case. This simplifies the management of evidence and reduces confusion when multiple Integrated Cases and multiple Product Delivery Cases (PDC) exist. The goal of an Application Transfer is to have only one open SCCA Integrated Case. The created Integrated Cases from the transferred application should be closed.

The worker should transfer a new application only after it is submitted and before it is disposed. The primary applicant for the existing Integrated Case and the new application must be the same person. Transfer applications to an existing Integrated Case only when the recipient's Integrated Case includes an existing disposed application. Close the new Integrated Case once the Application Transfer is complete.

2. County Transfers

When a family moves from one county to another within the state and continues to need subsidized childcare, the family's eligibility for SCCA and their case shall continue with no interruption in eligibility and the case shall be transferred to the new county. The family shall not be placed on a waiting list in their new county. Recipients are required to report changes to their DSS/LPA including when they move from one county to another within the state.

When a recipient reports a move from one county to another, the original county of residence should collect information from the recipient about the move.

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When a case is transferred, the transferring county needs to send the case to the supervisor of the new county and then that supervisor of the new county needs to assign it to a worker. When the Integrated Case is transferred, all the Product Delivery Cases attached to the case transfers with it.

When a transfer is accepted, the Supervisor assigns the case to a worker in their county. That worker must immediately accept the decisions on the transferred case in order for NC FAST to update the fund obligations on the case. This is to ensure that DSSS/LPAs throughout the State receive the notification in NC FAST that a subsidy case has been transferred to another DSS/LPA.

Refer to the SCCA County Transfer Job Aid.

When there is a SCCA case with a CPS referral, both counties would have to agree to transfer and accept services. SCCA cases with CPS referrals should not transfer unless CPS case closes. The county who moves the SCCA case is financially responsible.

Below is list of items that should be reviewed with the recipient and updated in NC FAST if the recipient has the information: (Note this is not an exhaustive list).

- a) Updated recipient's contact information including phone number and address.
- b) Recipient's childcare provider choice if known.
- c) Recipients continued need care for care
- d) Once this information is collected, the worker in the original county of residence should complete the following steps:
- e) Update NC FAST with all information provided by the recipient.
- f) Enter the transfer into NC FAST following instructions in the county transfer job aid and the system will then transfer the case to the new county.
- g) Transfer copies of the recipient's entire paper file to the new county of residence via mail. For counties that do not maintain paper files, uploading electronically maintained files into NC FAST is acceptable in lieu of mail. Refer to the NC FAST Job

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Aid.

- i. The case file will need to be provided for the new county AND the original signed voucher for the current childcare provider.

Example: Applicant/recipient started receiving childcare in January 2017 with ABC County and moves to XYZ County today (March 2021), ABC County needs to provide XYZ county with the information that covers recertifications for January 2018, January 2019 and January 2020 and the Child Care Voucher signed by the client in January 2017(as long as it is the same provider).

If the client changed providers in January 2019, that is the Child Care Voucher that XYZ County will need, the most current provider. The original county of residence will be the funding county for the entire month that the transfer is entered into NC FAST. The new county of residence will become the funding county the month after the transfer is complete.

- ii. Once a transfer is entered into NC FAST by the original county of residence, the following steps will apply:
 - a. The childcare supervisor in the new county of residence will receive the transfer in a work queue and assign the case to a childcare worker.
 - b. The worker in the new county of residence must review the case and contact the recipient.
 - c. If errors are found by the worker in the new county of residence upon review of the transferred case, the error must be corrected and dated the first day of the month the new county of residence is financially responsible for the transfer case.

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3. County Transfers with CWS

- a) The county where the CWS case was opened is the county responsible for the case, i.e., application, documentation, etc.
- b) The county where the CWS case was opened is also responsible for funding as well.

County Transfers has the potential to impact spending within counties. Each county should closely monitor their spending in NC FAST. DCDEE will also closely monitor transfers that occur across the state and the impact that transfers have on county's spending. If the case transfer result in a county overspending or underspending, the county should contact DCDEE for assistance.

4. Process for Making Monitoring Corrections on Transferred Cases

If errors are found by a worker in the new county of residence upon review of a transferred case(s), the error must be corrected and dated the first day of the month the new county of residence is financially responsible for the transferred case(s). The new county of residence becomes the funding county the month after the transfer is complete.

If an error(s) is not found and corrected by the new county of residence and the error is cited during a monitoring visit, the county monitored will be responsible for making corrections back to the point the error occurred. Likewise, if an error is found during a monitoring visit and the case is transferred out of the original county of residence following the visit, the error must still be corrected by the county monitored. Because of varying circumstances and case specifics, the Program Compliance Consultant will determine and work with all involved counties to ensure that any error(s) found during monitoring is corrected.

Financial responsibility for errors may be shared by both the original and new county of residence if the corrections are for a current and ongoing certification period and/or if the error resulted in incorrect payments to the provider for one or more months the original county of residence was the funding county and for one or more months the new county of residence was the funding county.

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The Program Compliance Consultant leading the monitoring team for the county monitored, will work with both counties involved to ensure the error(s) is corrected and that any county responsible overpayments are correctly assigned and paid to DCDEE. Corrective action steps will be explained in the monitoring report for the county monitored and a summary page for the county not monitored.

XIII. AUTHORIZING CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE

A. Determining a Plan of Care

When a family has been determined to meet all eligibility criteria, the childcare worker must then work with the family to determine what type of childcare arrangement best meets the needs of the child and family. The circumstances that justify the need for childcare assistance and the plan of care must be documented in the case record.

NOTE: Every child in the same assistance unit must have the same Need Type in their Plan of Care.

Refer to Chapter 5 Establishing Need and Plan of Care for additional information regarding Plan of Care.

B. Issuing the Child Care Voucher

The Child Care Voucher (DCDEE-0446), which authorizes eligibility for subsidized childcare assistance, must be issued to the applicant/recipient for each child in need of assistance. The DSS/LPA should discuss the recipient choice when selecting a childcare facility. Explain the difference between regulated and unregulated childcare arrangements.

Refer to Chapter 9 Voucher Procedures for additional information regarding Vouchers.

XIV. NARRATIVES AND DOCUMENTATION

The Division requires that childcare workers use narratives (case notes) to document how all requirements were verified, such as how income was

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verified using pay stubs. The Narrative is located in NC FAST. Workers must document if/when they followed-up on incomplete information on the application and what the outcome was from the follow-up.

NOTE: There may be a county where they are required by their director to enter their dictation in the agency software such as Northwoods, etc. Counties may use their systems. However, for monitoring purposes, counties must upload any documents that are not readily available in NC FAST, for cases that are being audited. This includes documentation narratives that may be used outside of the system. DCDEE allows agencies an opportunity to provide missing information that may mitigate potential errors. The requirement is that the information is readily available. Therefore, the expectation is that the documentation for cases that are due to be audited must be uploaded to NC FAST prior to the audit.

The narrative tells the story of what is happening to the recipient and records the initial office visit, initial application, redeterminations, and reviews, as well as telephone calls when reporting changes.

For telephone interviews, the NC FAST applications should not be disposed, and the voucher should not be issued until the mailed in application/paperwork has been received with signatures from the applicant. Initial applications SHALL NOT be keyed in NC FAST until a SIGNED paper application is in Agency, or the Agency obtains telephonic signature.

The narrative document should support the need for care, plan of care, special needs of the child, need for a supplemental payment, and/or care for a child 13 years or older, if applicable. The narrative should reflect the date the information was received and the initials of the person entering the information. If narrative documentation is entered in NC FAST, the worker is identified systematically. Narrative documentation must be updated as needed with the most current information filed in the record on top.

The local DSS/LPA should use narratives in NC FAST to describe and document conversations and actions taken on cases. In NC FAST, the case narratives are referred to as case notes. Documentation in the family's case record must provide adequate information regarding eligibility and the plan of care, the reason care is needed, and income information. The documentation is

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in the "contact" tab under the "notes" folder of the income support case.

Information from the application does not have to be repeated in the case narrative; however, the circumstances which create the need for care must be fully described in the narrative. The worker's documentation must include sufficient detail so that a County, State, or Federal reviewer is able to determine the reasonableness of the worker's determination and/or actions.

A. The following documentation must be provided in the narrative if not included elsewhere in the case record or in the supporting documentation:

1. Document circumstances to justify the need for childcare services and the plan of care.
2. Document when a typed signature is used.
3. Explain the rationale for the method of averaging income, if applicable.
4. Identify the place of employment and work schedule. In cases where there are two responsible adults in the home, the place of employment and work schedule must be included for both responsible adults if the need for care is to support employment. This also applies if there are two foster parents.
5. Identify the education or training program, goals, schedule, travel, and study time. When determining travel time, workers must consider the time spent traveling home-to and from work or activity and allow appropriate study time.
6. Describe the basis on which developmental needs or delays or risks of delays were determined.
7. Explain any unusual circumstance such as third (3rd) shift work and first (1st) shift care.
8. Record the basis for denial, reduction, or termination of services or any

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change, i.e., change in schedule or type of childcare arrangement, employers, or shifts.

B. Other supportive documentation, if applicable, must include:

1. Written documentation of information verified from the WFFA/FNS tab on the evidence from the integrated case.
2. Written referral from the CPS worker to support the need for childcare and that it is an open case with the child in his/her own home.
3. Written referral from the foster care worker to support the need for care indicating placement of the child in a licensed foster home or with an adult other than their parents.
4. Written referral from the Work First Employment Services worker to support the need for childcare assistance to support employment and activities leading to employment.
5. Information about the payment of a special needs supplemental rate that is not included on the Child with Special Needs Additional Expense Documentation form (DCDEE-0454A).

Refer to Chapter 5 Establishing Need and Plan of Care for additional information regarding Work First.

NOTE: If an applicant/recipient request copies of their records, the DSS/LPA may share copies of the record. Copies include the application, voucher, Child Care Action Notices, etc. However, information in the record from third party sources should not be provided as copies to the applicant/recipient but they should have access to view them.

Refer to Chapter 7 Family Definition and Determining Eligibility, Attachment 1 Sample Narrative Documentation Record and the Narratives

Job Aid for additional information regarding Documentation.

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XV. RECERTIFICATIONS

A. Recertification Application Submission

An automatically generated recertification packet is mailed to the recipient through DHHS Central Print. The recertification application packet contains an instruction letter informing the recipient that a recertification on their case is due, the Child Care Recertification form, and the Recipient Rights and Responsibilities (NCFAS- 20009) document.

Recertification applications must be received in the agency on or before the last day of the recipient's certification period to be processed as a recertification.

Refer to Chapter 7 Family Definition and Determining Eligibility, Chapter 11: Responding to Eligibility Changes and Redetermination and the Application, Recertification & Base Periods Guide for additional information regarding Recertification & Base Periods.

XVI. TERMINATION OF SCCA

Termination notices are only sent when certain situations occur.

Refer to Chapter 11 Responding to Eligibility Changes and Redetermination for more information regarding Termination of SCCA.

XVII. PREVENTION OF OVERPAYMENTS AND FRAUDULENT MISREPRESENTATION

The key to preventing fraudulent misrepresentation and inadvertent errors is skillful interviewing during the initial application, during reviews and when changes in the family's situation occur. Therefore, the childcare worker should ask the applicant/recipient specific questions, evaluate their reaction, and document the responses. The questions are to be phrased in an understandable way and the applicant/recipient must be given ample time to respond in their own words.

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At recipient *application and review*, the childcare worker should:

- A.** Explain to the applicant/recipient, before the Application for Child Care Services is completed in NC FAST, their obligation to give accurate and complete information regarding the need for subsidized childcare assistance and the family circumstances.

- B.** Ask if they have been disqualified from receiving subsidized childcare assistance in any county.

- C.** Read, discuss, and explain the information on the Recipient Responsibilities for Subsidized Child Care Assistance and the Application for Child Care Assistance that addresses rights and responsibilities, hearings and appeals, and sanctions. Obtain their signature and file the original documents in the family's childcare case record and give a copy to the applicant/recipient.

- D.** Other preventative measures include establishing intra-agency communication among the various units in the DSS/LPA by developing a systematic way to report changes and exchange information. To obtain prompt and accurate information needed to determine eligibility, it is important to establish a good working relationship with other agencies, employers, and institutions as well.

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For additional information on policy discussed in this chapter please refer to:

SCCA Manual:

- Refer to Chapter 5: Establishing Need and a Plan of Care
- Refer to Chapter 7: Family Definition and Determining Income Eligibility
- Refer to Chapter 8: Parental Fees
- Refer to Chapter 9: Parental/Recipient Choice and Voucher Procedures
- Refer to Chapter 10: Waiting List Policies for more information
- Refer to Chapter 11: Responding to Eligibility Changes and Redetermination

Attachments

- Attachment 1 Sample Narrative
- Attachment 2 Sample Foster Care Referral
- Attachment 3 Verification of Child Support
- Attachment 4 Living Arrangements

NC FAST Job Aids:

- SCCA- Action and Termination Notices Reference Guide
- SCCA- Add Child to Waiting List
- SCCA- Add Client to Case
- SCCA- Age Change
- SCCA- Alien Evidence for Documented Aliens
- SCCA- Application to Case - Guided Interview
- SCCA- Application to Case Check list
- SCCA- Application Transfer
- SCCA- Applications for Work First Recipients
- SCCA- Cancelled, Reissued, Rejected, and Voided Vouchers
- SCCA- County Transfer
- SCCA- CPS, CWS & Foster Care Referrals
- SCCA- Creating Vouchers
- SCCA- Deeming FNS Income
- SCCA -Decision Details & COC Reference Guide

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- SCCA- Documented Alien Evidence
- SCCA- Eligibility Decision Results Reference Guide
- SCCA- Employment, Self-Employment, and Income Evidence
SCCA- Evidence Reference Guide
- SCCA- Exemption Evidence
SCCA- Foster Care
- SCCA- Homeless Living Arrangements
- SCCA- Joint Custody
- SCCA- Managing Evidence for Military Applicants
SCCA- Narratives
- SCCA- Overpayments and Underpayments Verification Worksheet
- SCCA- Overpayments and Recoupments: Receive, Allocate, and Reverse
Payments
- SCCA- Plan of Care Evidence
- SCCA- Prioritizing the Waiting List
- SCCA- Provider Sanctions Fraudulent Misrepresentation
SCCA- Special Need Supplemental Payment Evidence
- SCCA- Special Needs Evidence
- SCCA- Split Parent Fee
- SCCA- Task Reference Guide
- SCCA- Unearned Income Evidence
- SCCA- Using FNS Evidence as Verified
- SCCA Evidence SCCA- Voucher Reference Guide,
- SCCA- Voucher Tasks and timeline Reference Guide
SCCA- Waiting List Configuration
- SCCA- LPA Fund Manager: Funding approval process for Out of County
Children