



# Office of Children and Family Services

## Impact Analysis CONNECTIONS – Placement Module Phase 1

### Functional Areas

Foster Care Services, Child Protective Services, Foster Home/Resource Maintenance, Staff Security

### Overview

The Placement Module will be implemented in CONNECTIONS in a series of four phases, beginning with Phase 1 in Spring 2018. Created to aid workers in finding appropriate foster care placements efficiently and quickly, the Placement module will promote best-fit placements by allowing workers to match placement-related child characteristics to foster home characteristics in order to obtain the best foster care placement available on a case-by-case basis. The fully implemented module will standardize placement across all counties and promote fact-based, consistent decision making.

Phase one will include four windows: Child Characteristics, Special Restrictions, Resource Characteristics, and Staff Email, as well as the implementation of all Placement-related business functions.

### What Remains the Same?

- Phase 1 of Placement consists mainly of data collection windows that will support the fully implemented search and match process in Phase 3. It should be noted in each phase of implementation that the Placement module itself is *not* intended to replace detailed data collected in the Family Assessment and Service Plan (FASP) or in the Health module of Family Services Stages. Additionally, the module is not intended to replace valuable communication between placement staff and voluntary agency foster care staff and/or district-certified foster homes outside of CONNECTIONS. Data collection rules and security rules will remain as is for all existing modules unless otherwise noted.
- The Characteristics tab is an existing tab in the Person Info Detail section of all Person Lists in CONNECTIONS. Currently, the tab includes three dropdown selections: Child-Investigation, Parent/Caretaker, and Child-Placement. In Phase 1, the new placement-related Child Characteristics will replace only the Child-Placement section of this tab. Both the Child-Investigation and Parent/Caretaker options will remain unchanged.

### What is New or Changing?

- *Child Characteristics* – A new list of Child-Placement characteristics will be added to the existing Characteristics tab of Person Info Detail, accessible upon selecting a person from a Person List in all CONNECTIONS stages. On this tab of roughly thirty placement characteristics and ten interests

and hobbies, users can select, via checkbox, all of the characteristics that apply to a child in anticipation of the search and match functionality that will be implemented in Phase 3. Each Child-Placement characteristic maps directly to a corresponding Resource Characteristic identified on the Foster Home. All historical characteristics (end-dated characteristics that no longer apply to the child) will be displayed on the Person Data report.

Note also that the “No Characteristics Applicable” checkbox, which is standard across all three Characteristics categories, will *not* apply to Child-Placement characteristics. If a Child-Placement characteristic no longer applies to a child, the characteristic will need to be manually unchecked – checking the “No Characteristics Applicable” checkbox will clear characteristics on the Child-Investigation and Parent/Caretaker dropdowns, but have no impact on Child-Placement characteristics.

- *Special Restrictions* – Special Restrictions will be a new tab created off of Person Info Detail, accessible upon selecting a person from a Person List in all CONNECTIONS stages. The tab consists of four specialized child placement restrictions, including the following:
  - Child should not be placed in a home where any children are residing or placed.
  - Child should not be placed in a home where any children of the opposite sex are residing or placed.
  - Child should not be placed in a home where any younger children are residing or placed.
  - Child has significant special needs that require additional care from the foster parents. Child should not be placed in a home where any other child with special needs is residing or placed.

Here, the worker can identify, via checkbox, any extraordinary placement needs that apply to a child. Comments may also be entered for each selected restriction, as needed. Selected restrictions are saved to the child’s PID to alert placement workers to the existence of a restriction when placing the child, or later, if they select a resource for a new placement where a child with special restrictions is placed, but the restriction itself will not impact the pool of resources returned in a placement search.

- *Resource Characteristics* – Resource Characteristics will be accessible either as a new tab for a resource returned in a Resource Search, or as an additional left navigation link from a resource’s FAD stage. This window will allow users to record characteristics of each resource as they pertain to foster care placement. The window will be used to collect resource characteristics, a list of which directly correspond with child characteristics, in addition to identifying the applicable Local Program Type (ACS only), and whether or not each bed in the home is available or unavailable. Additionally, users can select the languages spoken in the home, as well as indicate whether the home is a Close to Home Resource or an ORRUAC Resource, both of which will flag the resource as inapplicable in a multi-facility foster care placement search.

Any Congregate Care or Regular Foster Care resource that has received or is in the process of receiving certification or approval to provide long or short term housing to children for the purpose of 24-hour care will have access to the Resource Characteristics tab. These resources may include FAD resources that will not be used in the placement matching process. For example, characteristics may be collected on an Approved Relative Home, but this home would never return in a multi-facility placement search. Alternatively, some resources will not have access to the Resource Characteristics tab, including non-FAD resources and Subsidized Housing. For example, Adoption Subsidy homes, although valid FAD resources, would not have access to Resource Characteristics because they fall under the subsidized housing category.

Note here that the number of beds displayed in the home derives from the capacity recorded on the license. Marking a bed as unavailable (due to, for example, a water break in the home which

has rendered a bathroom temporarily unusable) has no impact on the official capacity of the home as determined by the license.

- *Staff Email* – A new tab, “Email”, will be accessible from the existing Staff Security module upon selecting an employee via the “Staff/Security” search dropdown. Here, users may enter the local portion of their employee email address – the agency/domain name (@dfa.state.ny.us, or, @acs.nyc.gov, for example) will be collected prior to Phase 1 implementation and display as read-only. Local email may be entered by either the employee themselves, on their own employee ID, or by the employee’s designated Security Coordinator. CONNECTIONS users from State, Regional, OMR, OMH, CQC, CCF, and DFY offices will enter their entire email address, including the domain name.

### **Security/Business Functions/Access**

- Various levels of security and business functions are required to modify each of the four Phase 1 modules, some of which differs between ACS and Upstate counties and voluntary agencies. As follows:
  - Child Characteristics
    - Both ACS and Rest of State: Modifiable from a worker’s workload for INV, FAR, FSI, FSS, and FAD stages.
  - Special Restrictions
    - ACS Stages Only (including ACS stages where Voluntary Agencies have case planning responsibilities) – Worker must have the Maintain Placement business function in addition to access to the INV, FAR, FSI, FSS, or FAD stage on a worker’s workload.
    - Rest of State – Modifiable from a worker’s workload for INV, FAR, FSI, and FSS stages.
  - Resource Characteristics
    - ACS and Voluntary Agency Staff– Worker must have the Resource Administrator business function, both when accessing the tab from the Resource Search dropdown *or* from a FAD stage on a workload.
    - Rest of State – Worker must have the Resource Administrator business function when accessing from the Resource Search dropdown. No additional security is needed when accessing from the workload for FAD stages.
  - Staff Email
    - Both ACS and Rest of State can enter the local portion of their email address for their own PID. An employee’s designated Security Coordinator (staff with the Maintain Security business function) can also modify the local email address.

### **Implications/Considerations**

- **Security/Business Functions** - Administrators will need to review current business processes and decide to whom the Maintain Placement and Resource Administrator business functions should be assigned, especially at ACS, where modify access will be specifically tied to business function, rather than a role in a stage. Additionally, establishing a process for onboarding employees in which local email address is recorded in CONNECTIONS by either the employee or their Security Coordinator will be helpful in maintaining the new Staff Email portion of Staff Security.

Note that all other Placement module business functions will be available in Phase 1 and can be viewed and assigned on the Staff Security window, but have no impact in CONNECTIONS until later phases of the module are implemented. All Placement module business functions are as follows:

- INITIATE PLACE
- ASSIGN PLACE
- \*MAINT PLACE (*Applicable in Phase 1*)
- SEARCH FOR PLACE
- RESOURCE COORD
- \*RESOURCE ADMIN (*Applicable in Phase 1*)
- PLACE DASH

## Recommendations

- Phase 1 of Placement provides the ability to capture child and foster care resource characteristics in anticipation of eventual search and match functionality that will be implemented in Phase 3. It is important to collect characteristics and special restrictions for children in existing open CONNECTIONS stages, as well as for children who are new to the system, and a business process should be established that lends itself to the most thorough and efficient means of collecting these imperative data elements. Likewise, as new resources are licensed or recertified, FAD workers should evaluate and record all corresponding Resource Characteristics to establish a detailed snapshot of each foster home. Child Characteristics and Resource Characteristics, specifically, drive the Placement search functionality available in Phase 3, and without accurate and dependable data entered and maintained on each end, best-match placements will not be found.
- The fully implemented Placement Module will determine availability and vacancies based in part on data entered in the Activities Module – therefore, local districts and voluntary agencies should begin reevaluating their Activities data entry processes now. The importance of accurate and timely data entry in Activities cannot be stressed enough, as although with full implementation, the Placement module will allow easier and partially automated entry of initial placements and transfers into the Activities module, discharges, which determine vacant beds, are still entirely left up to Activities data entry workers.
- Local district/voluntary agency administrators should be alert to OCFS/CONNECTIONS communications and announcements concerning the new Placement Module **and share that information with their staff**. RIST meetings will address the new window with more targeted follow up meetings if needed. *CONNECTIONS Build Bulletins* will be distributed with updates on the status of Placement: Phase 1, and will include links to information and resource materials as they are finalized. All materials will be posted on the Implementation Page of the CONNECTIONS websites.

## Training/Documentation and Preparation Tools

- A **Quick Start Guide** that contains descriptions of the new windows, screen-shots, and step-by-step instructions will be available electronically, posted both to the CONNECTIONS Implementation website and within the application, on the Helpful Info tab.

- **CONNECTIONS Regional Implementation staff** will be conducting Regional Implementation Support Team (RIST) meetings with local district and voluntary agency implementation staff. These meetings will provide a preview of the changes and identify work areas impacted by the build.
- **18-OCFS-ADM – Placement Module in CONNECTIONS.** OCFS Policy will release an administrative directive to Commissioners of Social Services and Executive Directors of Voluntary Agencies introducing the new Placement Module and specifying the program implications, required actions, and system implications for Phase 1.
- **On Site Support** - Local district/voluntary agency administrators should work with OCFS/ITS regional implementation staff to arrange on-site support for their staff in the weeks that follow the release of the new windows. These staff will also be available to provide presentations to administrators/supervisory staff in advance of implementation, as needed. A list of your assigned implementation specialist, by district, can be found on the CONNECTIONS Intranet and Internet website.