**SWAN Family Approval Document Guidelines**

**Family Profile Instructions:**

Affiliates may not change the template by adding footers, headers or subheadings. Nor may the affiliates add or replace the SWAN logo with the affiliates’ logo.

**Introduction to the Family Approval Document Guidelines:**

The Family Approval Document contains information and documentation required in order to finalize permanency. While the Family Approval Document has been designed as the third stage in the information gathering process, a request for this document can be made earlier; for instance, to assist in matching and placement decisions or at the point of time when it is apparent the applicant is moving to finalization. In addition to the agency, affiliate and family information found in the Family Profile Synopsis, the Family Approval Document contains documentation of required data such as clearances, health and physical information, references and a family financial summary. This document also contains descriptions of the applicant’s motivation to adopt, their home and community environment, family strengths, and family resources.

Due to the number of Foster to Adopt, Kinship, and Permanent Legal Custodianship (PLC) families, there are separate questions focusing on the preparation that was completed, as well as the applicant’s expectations regarding visitation with birth relatives. In addition, there are sections of the document that include questions specifically for Foster to Adopt families.

**Please note that while the instructions provide a guide for the type of questions/issues to consider when completing the document, the profile writer can focus on other issues. Many county agencies and courts require specific information on areas not covered within this handbook and on areas not required in most other jurisdictions. The profile writer has the flexibility to cover these areas, and insert information in the document where deemed appropriate by the profile writer.**

Section XVI documents the recommendation of the profile writer for the applicant(s) to become a resource family, including verification of the requirement that the profile was reviewed with the applicant.

1. **Agency Completing Document Information:** List the complete name and address information for the affiliate agency, including county, street, city, state, zip code, phone number and email address as well as the contact person responsible for this family.

**Items to be referenced in creation of the Family Profile:** This list is provided to ensure that the profile writer includes mandated information within the profile. This includes:

* Family’s Application to provide permanency
* Home Safety Checklist
* Child Abuse and Criminal History clearances for household members age 18 and over who reside in the home of a foster or prospective adoptive parent for at least 30 days in a calendar year.
* FBI clearances for household members age 18 and over who reside in the home of a foster or prospective adoptive parent for at least 30 days in a calendar year.
* Act 160 of 2004 Disclosures for household members over 18 years
* Minimum of 3 references
* Medical history and recent physical examination for household members
* Financial Summary
* Autobiography from each applicant

The applicant’s physical examinations, clearances, references and family financial summary should only be sent to the public agency once a placement selection of the applicant has been made.

1. **Family Information:**
   * + 1. **Status of Family:** Indicate if the applicant is a foster family with a child(ren) identified; a resource family with no child(ren) identified; an approved adoptive family with no child(ren) identified; or a kinship family.
       2. **Permanency option applicant wishes to provide:** Identify the status of the permanency option: is this adoption, kinship adoption or Permanent Legal Custodianship?
       3. **Applicant Name:** Include first, middle, and last name of potential resource parent. Space is provided for two applicants.
       4. **Occupation/Stay at Home Parent:** Indicate what the applicant does for a living, or if the applicant is a stay at home parent. If the applicant works from the home, list the occupation and indicate that it is a home office or work from home situation. Lastly, briefly describe the applicant’s work schedule: Does the applicant work an evening or overnight shift; work weekends; and/or have a flexible work schedule?
       5. **Date of Birth:** Indicate the month, day and year the applicant was born as well as place of birth.
       6. **Race/Ethnic Group:** Check the race/ethnic groups that make up the applicant’s ethnicity.
       7. **Street Address:** Include all address information, including the street, city, county, state and zip code where the applicant resides.
       8. **Telephone number:** List the primary area code and phone number used to contact the applicant(s).
       9. **Marital Status:** Note the marital status of the applicant.
2. **Children Living With Family:** (Include children over 18 years of age) Give the name, date of birth, gender and race of each child residing in the household, as well as those of the applicant’s children who are not living at home. Include the first name and first initial last name of foster children residing with the applicant and indicate their relationship to the applicant(s).
3. **Children Living Outside Home:** (Include children over 18 years of age)Give the name, date of birth, gender and race of each child residing outside the household. Indicate their relationship to the applicant(s).
4. **Other Adults Living in Household:** Give the name, date of birth, gender and race of all other adults residing in the household, and their relationship to the applicant(s).
5. **Family Preparation Information:**

Include the name and phone number of the agency that provided the preparation.

* + - 1. Indicate if the applicant received First Aid/CPR.
      2. Indicate whether SWAN training was completed (including “Reasonable and prudent parent standard/Normalcy for children/youth”) (yes or no) and the date completed for each applicant.
      3. Provide an explanation if SWAN training was not completed.
      4. Describe any additional training completed.

1. **Family’s Growth During SWAN Preparation Process**
2. Has the applicant had previous preparation activities related to a previous adoption or as a foster parent?
3. Comment on the applicant’s participationin family preparation activities, including level of participation.
4. Comment on the applicant’s knowledge gains and changes in attitudes.
5. Discuss the family’s understanding, response and questions concerning “Reasonable and prudent parent standard/Normalcy for children/youth”
6. Were there any topics the applicants had insight into or difficulty?
7. Provide any special anecdotal statements that provide insight into the applicant’s growth process.

**Note: The following questions should be related to the impact they pose on the parenting of the child(ren). The information is relevant only if it is related to its’ impact on the applicant’s ability to parent a child(ren) with special needs. Responses should remain strength-based, with examples as to how the applicant’s life experiences can help the child(ren).**

1. **Attitudes Toward Permanency:**
   * + 1. Provide a brief description of the factors motivating the applicant to provide permanency; include a discussion of what role, if any, the applicant’s infertility has in providing motivation.
       2. Explain why the applicant is interested in providing permanency to a child with special needs.
       3. Does the applicant have a clear understanding of the children available, and are they flexible enough to accommodate a child’s special needs?
       4. Share a specific situation or occurrence that led them to a decision to provide permanency to a child with special needs.
       5. Has the applicant had any experience or contact with children who have special needs? If so, explain.
       6. Explain what the applicant understands about the commitment needed to parent a child with special needs.
          1. How has the applicant shown commitment when confronted with difficult situations in the past?
          2. How does this translate to their understanding about the commitment needed to parent a child with special needs?
       7. Explain how the applicant plans to include birth parents and kin on an ongoing basis in their family.
          1. If applicable, how has the applicant shown the ability to respond to birth parents contact and issues with past or current placements?
          2. What methods would the applicant use to build a relationship with the birth family and kin?
          3. How would the applicant negotiate difficult situations with the birth family and kin? Give examples of past situations where the applicant had to make compromises or negotiate.
          4. Will the applicant consider a post-adoption contact agreement and how will that address the questions listed above?
       8. Give examples of experiences and attitudes that enable the applicant to be capable of parenting a child with special needs.
          1. If applicable, how has the applicant shown their ability to care for children within their home who have special needs?
       9. Describe family’s current level of support, including agency support and their understanding of decreased agency involvement afterpermanency is established.
          1. If applicable, how has the applicant shown their ability to manage decreased agency support with past or current placements?
          2. Describe the family’s plan for support after this decreased involvement occurs.
       10. Has the applicant experienced a previous adoption and/or foster care disruption?
           1. If so, describe the circumstances of the disruption.
           2. How was this disruption processed with the applicant by the agency?
           3. What type of follow up or support did the applicant receive?
2. **Family Strengths:**

This section should indicate how the family’s strengths will influence their ability to parent a child with special needs.

* + - 1. Describe the characteristics of each applicant that makes them a strong candidate as a resource parent. Strengths of the applicant would include:
         1. Personal characteristics such as honesty, compassion, integrity, ethical, caring, responsibility, cultural competence, etc.

Give examples of the applicant demonstrating these characteristics and how they relate to the role of a resource parent.

* + - 1. Describe the applicants’ substantial losses, both individually and together. Explain how the applicants processed their losses and subsequent grief.
         1. Losses can include, but are not limited to: people, infertility, relationships, family pets, careers, employment, culture, environment, homes, possessions, status, mental or physical health, financial stability.
      2. Describe each applicant’s day-to-day stress and the resources they use to manage it.
      3. Describe any significant stressful events.
         1. How has the applicant resolved them?

If not resolved, how are they managing it?

* + - 1. What special accomplishments have the applicants achieved in their lives?
         1. How do these accomplishments demonstrate the attributes that may contribute to the success of parenting a child with special needs?
      2. Describe any areas of expertise the applicants have that would allow them to parent children with particular special needs.

1. **Health Information:**
   1. Indicate the following information for **all household members:**
      1. Dates of the last physicals for all household members.
      2. Special medical needs or conditions of any household members, and a description of how the needs are being met.
      3. Special mental health needs or conditions of any household members, and a description of how the needs are being met.
      4. Any use of medication by household members, including the type of medication, since this may not be specified within the physical examination form.
      5. Any household members with a communicable disease and how the disease is a being treated.
   2. Are there any specific family issues resulting from an individual’s medical and/or mental health needs? If so, what effect will these issues have on the applicant’s ability to parent a child with special needs?

**Note: No person to who confidential HIV-related information has been disclosed under the Confidentiality of HIV-Related Information Act may disclose that information to another person, except as authorized by this act. A copy of the statute can be obtained through the SWAN Prime Contract**

1. **Home Environment:**
   1. Describe the home the applicant resides in including:
      1. The style of the home (i.e. two story, rancher, etc.)
      2. Provide a description of the interior of the applicant’s home, including the room layout and sleeping arrangements for children placed in the home.
      3. The outside space surrounding the home, including any detached buildings and play or recreational equipment.
   2. Do any household members smoke?
      1. If so, document the family’s understanding of Clean Air Act and that smoking is not allowed. For a copy of Act 27 of 2008, please contact the SWAN Prime Contract.
   3. Do any household members have pets?
      1. If so, what if considerations are pertinent in terms of the placement of a child?
      2. Describe pets’ behaviors or temperament.
   4. Discuss the relationship of the applicants to each other:
      1. How long the applicants have been together.
      2. Describe how they demonstrate a caring relationship with good communication and cooperation between them.
      3. How do the applicants resolve disagreements? Give an example that shows how they resolved a conflict.
   5. Have there been any previous marriages or significant relationships, and if so, what issues led to the break-up?
      1. How did the applicants attempt to address problems in the previous relationship?
      2. What effect do these past relationships have on how household members interact?
   6. If the household includes a step-parent:
      1. How do the children interact with the step-parent?
      2. How does the step-parent interact with the children?
      3. How do the step-siblings interact with each other?
      4. How do current family members interact with previous spouses/partners and children from previous marriages not living in the household?
      5. How will these relationships impact a child with special needs who may be adopted?
   7. Describe how all household members interact.
      1. Describe the alliances, who goes to whom for what, who fights the most, who is perceived as the favorite by others, what role does each child fill.
   8. Describe each applicant’s parenting style and what methods of discipline work best for each child in the family.
   9. Describe how well the applicant provides care, guidance and protection of their children currently in the home. In addition:
      1. Are the needs of all children currently in the household being met?
      2. Have children in the household been prepared for the arrival of a sibling with special needs?
      3. How will the applicant address the trans-cultural or trans-racial needs of the child?
      4. Detail the child care arrangements in place for a child with special needs.
   10. How will the family composition and lifestyle influence the applicant’s ability to parent a child with special needs?
   11. **For a Foster to Adopt family:** Will the applicant continue to do foster care, with either current children or additional foster children? How will they plan for the individual needs of all children in their family?
2. **Community:**
   1. Describe the applicant’s neighborhood and community:
      1. Would the neighborhood be described as urban, suburban or rural?
      2. How safe is the neighborhood?
   2. Describe the school the child will be attending. Can the school and its programs support a child with special needs?
   3. Can the social and cultural needs of the child be met in this community?
3. **Resources:**
   1. What resources would benefit the applicant in an effort to secure permanency?
   2. What informal resources (e.g. family, friends) are available to the applicant? Describe how the applicant specifically used informal resources in the past.
   3. How willing is the applicant to seek and use resources/support?
   4. Does the area where the applicant resides have accessible medical/mental health services for children with special needs, as well as access to post-finalization services?
   5. If applicable, describe how the applicants accessed and utilized community services in the past.
   6. What respite plan has been developed?
   7. If the applicant had a previous adoption or foster care disruption/dissolution, how did the applicant attempt to make use of formal and informal supports available to them?
   8. Financial resources:
      1. Describe the family’s sources of income and how the income was verified.
      2. Describe the applicant’s employment history.
      3. Provide information about current liens and bankruptcy findings within the last ten years.
      4. Describe the family’s ability to live within their means (i.e. is the family financially stressed, regardless of income; or does the family live comfortably within their income limits?)
      5. Comment on the impact of the “new” child(ren) on the family’s current financial status.

**XIV.**

1. **Clearances, References, Mandated Change of Status Statement, and ACT 160 of 2004:**

1. Clearances

1. Give the date and results for criminal history from Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) and Child Abuse History Certification from the Department Of Human Services (Child Abuse), Fingerprint based federal criminal history submitted through the PSP or its authorized agent (FBI) for all household members over eighteen years old who reside in the home of a foster parent for at least 30 days in a calendar year or who reside in the home of a prospective adoptive parent for at least 30 days in a calendar year.
2. If the family lived in another state within the last five years, they must have Child Abuse clearances or its equivalent in each state in which they resided within the pervious five-year period.
3. FBI clearances are required for all adult household members 18 years and older.
4. Foster and adoptive parents must submit clearances prior to their approval.
5. In accordance with §2530 (relating to home study and preplacement report) of the Adoption Act, 23 Pa.C.S., Chapters 21-29, updated Child Abuse, PSP and FBI clearances are also required prior to a child being placed in the home by an adoption agency or intermediary if clearances are more than a year old.
6. Renewal Requirements - Beginning July 1, 2015, clearances must be obtained by foster and pre-adoptive parents and their adult household members in the home for at least 30 days in a calendar year every 60 months. clearances
7. Clearances do not need to be attached to the SWAN Family Approval Document. Please retain the documents in your agency file.

2. References

1. A minimum of three references must be obtained.
2. Persons submitting references should be asked to comment on:
   * + - * The nature and length of their relationship with the applicant.
         * The applicants’ ability to care for children, related to their experience with children or to their life experience.
         * Characteristics of the applicants that would make them a good resource for children with special needs.
3. All references must be current within the year of the completion of the SWAN Family Approval Document. Original references can be updated over the phone and followed up by something in writing.
4. References do not need to be attached to the SWAN Family Approval Document. Please retain these documents in your agency file.
5. Summarize the nature of the references and note significant observations or comments. In terms of using identifying information about the reference, refer to your agency’s policy.

3. Act 160 of 2004

The following information must be documented and/or obtained during the application process:

1. Previous addresses within the last ten years.
2. Criminal history clearances (CHRI) and child abuse and school employee abuse history of the applicant(s) and anyone 18 years of age and older living in the home of the applicant for at least 30 days within a calendar year.\*
3. Protection from abuse orders filed by or against either resource parent and/or anyone residing in the household, provided that such records in such proceedings are accessible to the county or private agency. The applicant should be asked to provide copies of any petitions or court orders related to such proceedings.
4. Details of any proceedings brought in family court regarding the applicant and/or anyone residing in the household, provided that such records in such proceedings are accessible to the county or private agency. The applicant should be asked to provide copies of any petitions or court orders related to such proceedings.
5. Information about drug related or alcohol related arrests and hospitalizations, if criminal charges or judicial proceedings are pending and if there are convictions or hospitalization within the last five years. If the applicant provides information regarding convictions or hospitalizations in that five-year period, then information on the prior five years shall be requested related to any additional convictions or hospitalizations. The applicant should be asked to provide copies of any information regarding the court proceedings and/or hospitalizations and should sign a release so that the approving agency may obtain information from any treating hospital.
6. The mental and emotional well-being of the resource family applicants. If there is any question regarding the mental or emotional stability of any person residing in the resource family household, a psychological evaluation of that person shall be required before approving the resource family household.
7. Evidence of financial stability, including income verification, employment history, current liens and bankruptcy findings within the last ten years must be provided. \*
8. Number and ages of foster children and other dependents currently placed in the home.\*
9. Detailed information regarding children with special needs currently living in the home. The applicant or the individual authorized to sign a release must sign a release authorizing the approving agency to obtain information to confirm the special needs. Refusal to sign a release may result in disapproval of the resource family applicant.\*
10. Related education, training or personal experience working with foster children and the child welfare system.\*

\* *This information is requested in other sections of the Family Approval Document and may not need to be completed here.*

Reporting Requirements

Approved resource parents are required to report changes within their household composition as mandated in Act 160 0f 2004. This report must include any changes in the CHRI (Criminal History Record Information) or child abuse, or school employee abuse history clearance information about themselves and anyone 18 years and older. This report must be provided to the approving resource family care agency within 48 hours of the changes. Resource parents are required to report any other changes in the resource family household composition within 30 days of the change for review by the approving agency.

Disclosure Statement

The Department recommends that agencies have resource parent applicants sign a disclosure statement relating to the information that the agency must obtain when assessing, and consider when determining approval status of an applicant. The disclosure statement signifies that the applicant has provided the agency with accurate information and understands their responsibility of reporting to the agency any changes in clearance information about themselves and individuals age 18 and older who reside in the home, as well as changes in household composition. A conversation about necessary information should occur with each applicant asked to sign a disclosure statement. A sample template is included as Appendix C in the Act 160 of 2004 bulletin. The Department recommends that agencies have a disclosure statement signed on an annual basis in conjunction with the annual re-approval process. Should information appear fraudulent regarding a resource parent, the agency should further investigate the concern.

**XV. For Foster, Kinship, and PLC**

* 1. Considerations

Describe the family’s consideration of the following issues as they move toward permanency:

* + 1. Bedrooms
       1. If the child is sharing a room, how will the bedrooms change when the child is older?
    2. Neighborhood
       1. How safe is the neighborhood for children who are more independent and will no longer stay confined to the family’s yard?
    3. Childcare
       1. Has the family thought about the likelihood this child may still need supervision at an age when most children can be trusted to spend some time alone?
    4. School
       1. If the child is in elementary school, where will he go to high school?
       2. How will the school district meet this child’s future education needs?
    5. Services
       1. What is the family’s ability to cope with the decreased level of agency support as permanency approaches?
       2. What changes are foreseen in mental health and other formal service needs as child ages?
    6. Finances
       1. The family negotiates a subsidy with the placing county.
       2. How is the family planning for unexpected expenses?
          - Teenagers cost more to support.

Will they outgrow the family car?

Will their child get a drivers license?

Will their child go to college?

Is the family aware of the Chaffee Education and Training Grant?

* + 1. Medical care
       1. The family’s insurance may cover services, but the co-pays are often expensive and the child’s medical assistance may not cover the services the family chooses to use.
  1. Understanding
     1. Explain the applicant’s understanding of issues and emotions the child may have and their understanding of how the roles of family members will change.
     2. Describe how the applicant’s previous role with the child has changed to the current role of permanency provider.
     3. Describe how the applicant addressed the role change with the child and the child’s response to the change in roles.
  2. Visitation
     1. What is the current visitation plan and contact between the child and birth relatives?
     2. What are the applicant’s expectations/attitudes regarding contact from and visitation with the child’s birth relatives after permanency is finalized?
     3. Describe the child’s current and future relationship with their biological family as well as the visitation plan.
     4. Provide the family with a Post Adoption Contract Agreement

In summary for this section, family profile writers should help families project how the future may look for them as they raise their child to adulthood and beyond.

1. **Affiliate Signatures:**
   1. Indicate whether the applicant has been recommended as a permanent resource family for a special needs child
   2. If known list the names of specific children the profile is approved for.
   3. If the applicant is not recommended for approval, indicate why in the space provided.
   4. Upon reviewing the profile with the applicant, the profile writer/worker and their supervisor sign the document and indicate the date of the review.
2. **Applicant Signatures:**
   1. **Applicants with no identified child(ren):** The applicant(s) indicate the Family Approval Document has been reviewed and is a fair and accurate representation of their family by placing a checkmark before the statement. The applicant(s) also indicate permission to share the Family Approval Document with counties by placing a checkmark in the appropriate box. The name of the affiliate that can share the Family Approval Document will be written in the space provided. Lastly, each applicant signs and dates the section.
   2. **Applicants with an identified child(ren):** The applicant(s) indicate the Family Approval Document has been reviewed and is a fair and accurate representation of their family by placing a checkmark before the statement. The applicant(s) also indicate their permission to forward the Family Approval Document to the county by placing a check mark in the appropriate box. The name of the affiliate that can share the Family Approval Document will be written in the space provided. Lastly, each applicant signs and dates the section.
   3. **Applicants with an identified child(ren) and an interest in pursuing a match with another unidentified child:** The applicant(s) should complete and sign both of the previously mentioned sections.
3. **Preparation of Family Autobiography:**

The completion of a family autobiography is a required component of the Family Approval Document. The worker can assist the family in a variety of creative ways, such as “interviewing” the applicant and writing the information for them; audio taping the applicant’s thoughts and ideas; using pictures and photographs; or any such manner which will allow the applicants to feel most comfortable in putting this information together.

* Family autobiography guidelines are included in these guidelines and in the Family Approval Document as a separate document and can be shared with the family to assist them in completing this task.

**Family Autobiography**

Hearing a family’s voice is an important part of the family profile process. This is your opportunity to share information about your life and your family in your own words. Below are some points to consider as you write your family statement.

* Include in your statement something about yourself that may provide a better understanding about you as a person and parent**.**
* In your family statement, consider how family preparation has impacted your beliefs and attitudes about providing permanency for a child who has special needs.
* It is important for us to know about significant life events (positive and negative) and how they affected you.
* Children in the system have experienced tremendous loss. Include in your statement significant losses you have experienced. Losses could include but are not limited to: death of a loved one, loss of job, home, pet, relationship, culture, dreams or goals.
* How you have managed difficult times tells a lot about your coping skills. Those times can include such things as, marital difficulty, financial stress, family interference, school or work issues, among others.
* Think about the personal experiences that played a part in preparing you for parenthood and may assist you in providing permanency for a child with special needs.
* It is helpful to consider how family interactions will change with the addition of a child with special needs. That includes feelings of any children in your family and the attitudes of extended family members about your decision to provide permanency.
* Motivation for wanting to provide permanency for a child with special needs is an important factor and should be included in your family statement.