



## Managing multiple inquiries

...and providing stellar customer service while doing so

WRITTEN BY MARGARET WHITE

Often, we focus on how to help garner more family interest for youth photolisted on MARE. Sometimes, however, the pendulum swings and you may receive a high number of inquiries for a youth. A large number of inquiries can seem overwhelming and it can be hard to narrow it down. At MARE we have seen a recent increase in workers sending the Child Adoptive Assessment to multiple families – or even multiple families attending information sharing meetings. Not only is this practice contrary ADM 720, it can lead to frustration for hopeful families and the teams that are working for them. Read on for tips to manage multiple inquiries while keeping in alignment with policy and providing good customer service.

You must reach out to the family workers for all families who have inquired. If there are certain family requirements that are an absolute must for the child on your caseload, please feel free to state that in the emails requesting the homestudy. For example, if the child must be the youngest or only child in the home, you can ask that up front to help quickly and effectively rule out families that don't match that requirement.



### What does policy say?

Per ADM 720: The child's CAA must be sent **only** to the selected prospective adoptive family's worker and not to every prospective adoptive family who inquired about the child.

## Fall 2024

In this issue:

Pages 1-2: Managing Multiple Inquiries

Page 3: Heart Gallery recap

Page 4: Enhanced Narratives

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Do you have children or families that live in remote areas? Sign them up for January's virtual meet and greet! Registration will be open soon.

Once reviewing homestudies, respond about families who are not a match for the child as soon as possible and provide a brief, but concrete reason for ruling them out. This quick communication can help families redirect their hope to other children while also clearing out your inbox for the families that are a stronger potential. Be sure to also complete your MARE Inquiry Follow up reports.

Clear, timely communication is critical for family retention. "Providing top notch service is imperative," says Jamie Miller, Foster Care Adoption Supervisor for Bethany Christian Services' Muskegon office. "Potential adoptive families have made a tough decision to open their hearts and home to children who have come from hard places and have often taken a few years to take that first step to becoming an adoptive family and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect."

When the CAA is sent to multiple families and the child's team is not transparent about that, it can lead to unnecessary disappointment and can even cause families to quit trying. Jamie Miller has seen this first hand. "We've had numerous families who have been chosen and, once they've decided to proceed with a full disclosure meeting, find out the child's agency was considering more than one family and has moved forward with the other family. Our families have been devastated by this. Families have felt misled and they begin to question the true need of adoptive families for the children who are waiting to achieve permanency through adoption. Families often give up hope and throw their hands up and walk away with a distaste of the adoption process."

Instead of sending out the CAA to multiple families, try this method: send the family workers a few questions to help you zone in on the strongest prospect. Be transparent and let the family workers know you have a lot of interest and are trying to determine which family to move forward with. Not only will this help you select the best possible family for the child, it also provides the family with a little feedback while they are waiting.

The customer service you provide has a tremendous impact on the permanency for the children we serve, the families who are hoping and waiting to adopt, and our colleagues from agencies across the state. MARE is here to assist in cases like this as well. If you are feeling overwhelmed with the inquiries and need assistance, reach out to Margaret White at [margaret\\_white@judsoncenter.org](mailto:margaret_white@judsoncenter.org).

"Potential adoptive families have made a tough decision to open their hearts and home to children who have come from hard places... (they) deserve to be treated with dignity and respect."  
-Jamie Miller, Bethany Christian Services

# Heart Gallery Recap

On Saturday, September 21st, roughly 160 people were in attendance for the 2024 Michigan Heart Gallery Premiere. Those in attendance ranged from MARE youth and staff to foster workers to Judson Center and MDHHS employees.

We were delighted to hear from enthusiastic speakers such as Demetrius Starling, Senior Deputy Director for the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services' Children's Services Administration and George Winn, Chief Strategy Officer of Judson Center.



MARE staff presented the Heart Gallery Photographer of the Year Award to Lynell Miller for her dedication and passion of volunteering her time and talents to the MARE youth awaiting adoption.

Additionally, two families who adopted teens were presented with the Mac Ballantine Award. This award is in honor of former MARE Navigator, Mac Ballantine, who was passionate about finding forever families for teens in foster care. Thank you to everyone who made it to the event and we hope to see you next year!

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## Customer Service Tips from a Colleague

Jamie Miller, Foster Care Adoption Supervisor at Bethany Christian Services' Muskegon office, offers these tips for top-notch customer service and communication.

1. Treat others with respect, regardless if you're the child's agency or the family's agency; we are all trying to achieve one goal and that is achieving permanency through adoption for our waiting children who desperately need and deserve a family!
2. Respond to inquiries timely and rule out families as quickly as possible so families move on if they are not the right fit for that particular children.
3. Consult with your supervisor if you're unsure of how to proceed, ask questions, review the DHHS Adoption Policy Manual; there are a lot of resources out there to support workers navigating a child who is photolisted on MARE.





# Enhanced Narratives

## LOOKING FOR INNOVATIVE WAYS TO RECRUIT FOR YOUR MARE FOSTER YOUTH?



**Emilee, C010236**

A personalized and engaging narrative helps capture the interest of potential families, hopefully leading to more inquiries. When youth are first photolisted, they answer a set of questions that the MARE staff uses to write a strength-based narrative. But with some one-on-one time spent with the youth and an easy-going but comprehensive interview, MARE can take it a step further. The end result is what we call an enhanced narrative. A highly personal, strength-focused narrative that dives deeper into what makes each youth special; their passions, quirks, and aspirations.

This form of youth-led recruitment can help increase family interest and strengthen recruitment efforts.

Recently, MARE Communications Specialist Adriana Cazzell and Youth Specialist Gabrielle Werkheiser spent time with Emilee, a bright and creative foster youth. During their chat, Emilee shared her dream of visiting the Mall of America and her love for drawing pigs, even if they don't look exactly like pigs yet! Most of all, MARE learned how family-focused she is and what she is hoping for with a forever family. These little insights create an enhanced narrative that brings a youth's story to life, making them more relatable to potential adoptive families.

After publishing an enhanced narrative, MARE also does a social media push to promote the youth's profile and new narrative.

If you're ready to elevate recruitment for your MARE foster youth with personalized, enhanced narratives, contact us today!

- Gabrielle Werkheiser: [gabrielle\\_werkheiser@judsoncenter.org](mailto:gabrielle_werkheiser@judsoncenter.org)
- Adriana Cazzell: [adriana\\_cazzell@judsoncenter.org](mailto:adriana_cazzell@judsoncenter.org)

Let's work together to find the right family for your foster youth!

## Calendar

**January 18**

**Meet & Greet**

Virtual Event

Registration will be available on [www.mare.org](http://www.mare.org)

**February 22**

**Meet & Greet**

Ann Arbor

Registration will be available on [www.mare.org](http://www.mare.org)

For more information, contact [jessica\\_thompson@judsoncenter.org](mailto:jessica_thompson@judsoncenter.org) or call 734-528-2070.

**Take note:** Watch for notices of upcoming Meet & Greets on [www.mare.org](http://www.mare.org) and on Facebook and Instagram.

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## MARE contact information

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