



# A Social Worker's Guide to MARE Programs & Services

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*Working Together to  
Achieve Our  
Common Goals*



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## The MARE Mission

**MARE** exists to find "a place to call **HOME**" for **CHILDREN** in foster care, including sibling groups and children who are traditionally harder to place. We do this by recruiting, educating, supporting and advocating for **FAMILIES** throughout the adoption process.

## Introduction

Welcome to the Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange's (MARE) guide for social workers. Founded in 1957, MARE is a private, non-profit organization that works with public and private adoption agencies to recruit adoptive families for children in foster care. MARE provides extensive resources, programs and services related to foster care adoption. Please visit the Social Worker Info section of the MARE website at [www.mareinc.org](http://www.mareinc.org) to access the forms mentioned in this booklet, keep updated with MARE events and professional adoption information, and much more.

Through our programs and services, MARE assists with the adoptive placements of approximately 150 children from foster care each year. It is MARE's belief that there is a permanent and loving family for every child who is waiting. Over the years, MARE has seen how effective recruitment can be for every kind of waiting child. Please utilize this guide to allow the children with whom you work to have access to the ever-widening pool of waiting adoptive families. This pool of families includes single people, married couples, gay and lesbian singles and couples, families who are not yet homesteaded, and those families who live out-of-state. Our waiting children deserve the best family we can find for them, and MARE is committed to looking at all different family situations in order to make this happen.

Some of the MARE recruitment tools we use to find families for children waiting to be adopted from foster care are the MARE Photolisting®, online Photolistings, MARE website, database and online matching programs, Heart Gallery, adoption parties, Single Parent Matching Nights, MARE Newsletter, and print and TV media recruitment campaigns.

It is MARE's sincere hope that the information contained in this booklet helps clarify our programs and services, procedures and policies. Please hold on to it for future reference, but never hesitate to contact MARE with questions or concerns. Please check the back pages of this booklet for staff contact information. MARE looks forward to working in collaboration with all the agencies and individual social workers toward the adoption of waiting children.

## Child Registration and Photolisting

State legislation approved on March 31, 1999, requires agencies to register children with MARE as follows. "Each placement agency shall register with an adoption resource exchange in the Commonwealth any child whose goal is adoption, whether the child is free for adoption or at legal risk, for whom the placement agency has been unable to identify a specific adoptive family or initiate the adoption process with a prospective adoptive family **within 60 days of the determination of the goal of adoption**. For the purposes of this section, adoption resource exchange shall mean a nonprofit agency the primary purpose of which is to link children awaiting placement with permanent families by providing information and referral services and by the recruitment of potential adoptive families." (Section 2, Chapter 3 of the Acts of 1999)

Registering a child with MARE is a very simple process that does not require much time. The area adoption worker, the regional recruitment worker or the contracted private agency worker for a child can complete the MARE Child Registration form (hardcopy or on-line at [www.mareinc.org](http://www.mareinc.org) under the Social Worker Info section) and forward it to MARE.

Once this form is received, MARE will begin the matching process for this child. When a child is registered with MARE, he or she becomes part of the MARE matching program and is eligible to attend MARE adoption parties. The MARE matching program is a database system in which families' criteria will be compared with the needs of the children registered with MARE. If a match is identified, MARE will forward the family's homestudy directly to the child's recruitment worker. Follow-up on such referrals is at the discretion of the child's social worker.

The MARE Photolisting® consists of descriptions and photographs of all available children actively registered and photolisted with MARE. It is available to prospective adoptive parents at numerous public libraries and social service agencies throughout the state. MARE sends out monthly updates, including new pages, to the involved organizations. **Children can be photolisted if they are legally freed or at legal risk.**

In order to include child in the MARE Photolisting®, you must include a close up photo of the child, ideally one in which his/her face is at least 2 inches high. For siblings, please send a group photo along with the individual photographs of the children. You can send photos to MARE via email (please send them to your MARE Child Services Coordinator) in .jpg format with the child's full name. If you have a problem getting good quality photographs, please call MARE for assistance. Please see MARE's Photo Guidelines on our website for simple tips for taking great pictures.

MARE policy requires the annual update of children's pages. The most obvious reason for this policy is that children grow and change within a year's time, and their Photolisting pages need to reflect such changes (in appearance, behavior, interests, etc.) if we are to present an accurate picture of who these children are and recruit the most appropriate parents. Additionally, many prospective adoptive parents regularly visit

their local libraries or social service agencies to review the MARE Photolisting®. We know they often review only the most recently published pages, disregarding those that have been in the book for longer periods of time. By updating every child's page at least once a year, we will ensure that prospective parents will see children who have been waiting longer. Children's social workers receive two months notice to submit new photographs and write-ups to update pages. If MARE does not receive updated materials, the child's page is terminated and he or she becomes ineligible for MARE media recruitment campaigns.

Prospective parents can opt to subscribe to the MARE Photolisting®, particularly if they live in an area in which the listing is not available. A subscription costs \$50 annually. Libraries and social service agencies receive the Photolisting at no cost. For more information about Photolisting subscriptions, please contact Cheryl Morrison, [cherylm@mareinc.org](mailto:cherylm@mareinc.org), at MARE.

## Internet Photolistings

All legally free children actively registered and photolisted with MARE will automatically be featured on the MARE website as well as the national AdoptUsKids website. We are noticing an increased number of homestudied families using the Internet to browse online photolistings to view waiting children. Also, MARE continues to see an increase in the number of placements of children with families who made their connection through this source. If you do not want to recruit families for your child through the Internet, please submit this request in writing to your Child Services Coordinator at MARE.

Please note that the "Adoption and Safe Families Act passed by the U.S. Congress in 1997 (ASFA) [seeks] to eliminate barriers that keep children from quickly finding safe, permanent homes. The section of ASFA on cross-jurisdictional placements tries to promote this goal by prohibiting states from delaying or denying 'the placement of a child for adoption when an approved family is available' " (Kroll, J. and Riggs, D., "Cross-Jurisdictional Adoptions Can Be Affordable," Adoptalk, Winter, 2000). "State Title IV-E foster care and adoption assistance funding is conditioned on the state not denying or delaying a child's adoptive placement when an approved family is available outside of the jurisdiction with responsibility for the child" (CWLA Summary of The Adoption And Safe Families Act of 1997: P.L. 105-89).

According to ASFA, there is no acceptable reason for not **considering** an approved family. For recruitment purposes, MARE can describe the types of services and visitation that the child requires, but cannot automatically disqualify a family simply because they live out of state. For example, a child's Photolisting page can state, "Mary should maintain regular contact with her siblings, including, but not limited to, visits." MARE cannot, however, state that the child can only be placed in New England because they need sibling contact.

## **MARE Online Matching**

This program gives social workers and families the opportunity to search for waiting children and families who are registered with MARE, including children who are at legal risk and those who are not in the MARE Photolisting®. Please see MARE's FAQs about the Online Matching Program on our website.

Families have the opportunity to describe the kind of child or children they are interested in adopting and search for children who are registered with MARE. They are asked to create an account with an email address, a password and some basic family contact information. Once they have done this, they can conduct a search and make inquiries to MARE about particular children. Families also have the option to create a family "Profile", which indicates the characteristics of the child or children they are interested in adopting. From this profile, MARE will send automatic email notification of the children who meet the description in the profile.

Social workers have the opportunity to search for both waiting children and families. They can create an account by entering basic information such as their name, agency and contact information. The child search functions the same as it does when families are searching for children, except that social workers do not have the ability to create a profile and receive automatic notifications. In order to search for families, social workers enter information about the type of family they are looking for and basic information about the families will be returned to them via email. Social workers can then call or email the MARE office to find out families' names and social workers' contact information. Due to issues with confidentiality, we cannot provide families' names or contact information through the web.

## **Media Recruitment Campaigns**

Once a child is published in the MARE Photolisting®, he or she becomes eligible for media recruitment (Sunday's Child®, Wednesday's Child, etc.). Currently MARE has over 18 ongoing, child-specific features published in newspapers throughout Massachusetts that feature waiting children on a monthly, bi-weekly or weekly basis, including four Spanish newspapers. Eligibility for specific media campaigns depends on the child's legal status and information provided by the worker regarding any recruitment restrictions. There are media campaigns available to feature both legally free children as well as children at legal risk. Our newest TV program is "En Busca de un Hogar" on Univision New England, featuring legally free children who can be placed with Spanish-speaking families. To schedule a child or sibling group for "En Busca de un Hogar" or Wednesday's Child, contact your Child Services Coordinator at MARE.

The Heart Gallery is a striking portrait exhibit of children in the Massachusetts foster care system in need of permanent families. Professional and amateur photographers volunteer their expertise to create visual images of the children, and the exhibit moves

to different locations around the state in addition to permanent exhibits at all Jordan's Furniture stores. To schedule a child for the Heart Gallery, please contact your Child Services Coordinator at MARE.

MARE has guides available for preparing children for different types of publicity.

If a social worker is anxious to feature a child in any MARE media campaigns, he or she can call MARE with this request. Occasionally, MARE sponsors specialized recruitment and will contact workers to request featuring specific children.

## **Adoption Parties and Single Parent Matching Nights**

Adoption parties are good resources for both sharing information and matching. They also provide great opportunities for adoption newcomers to meet experienced adoptive families, for waiting children to make new friends and reunite with some old ones and for everyone to have a chance to share and learn from each other.

MARE currently hosts four to six parties each year, with each event located in a different region of the state. Occasionally, MARE hosts targeted adoption parties to recruit families for specific children, such as a recruitment event for older boys or for children of color. MARE sends invitations to social workers and prospective parents. Social workers and families can call MARE to request they be added to the mailing list.

**Children must be registered with MARE in order to be eligible to attend MARE-sponsored adoption parties.** It is also important for these children to be photolisted prior to attending a party, so they can be featured in the "Today's Waiting Children" booklet. This booklet contains photographs and profiles of the children pre-registered for the event and is given to all prospective parents at the event. It is an extremely helpful tool for those seeking to identify potential matches. Children not included in the booklet tend not to receive inquiries.

**Social workers should strictly adhere to the registration deadlines for adoption parties so that MARE can plan accordingly to accommodate all of the waiting children who will attend.**

MARE has a written guideline on preparing children and families for adoption parties. Please contact Tracy Scatterday, [tracys@mareinc.org](mailto:tracys@mareinc.org), at MARE or you can download it from the MARE website at [www.mareinc.org](http://www.mareinc.org) under the Social Worker Info section.

MARE hosts Single Parent Matching Nights three times a year, which bring together social workers and homestudied single prospective parents (children are not in attendance). At these gatherings, social workers present children on their caseloads who can be matched with single parents. The prospective parents in attendance have the opportunity to express their interest in specific children presented and ask further

questions about them. These events, like the adoption parties, occur in various regions of the state. Social workers and families can call MARE to request they be added to the mailing list.

**Check the Events page of the MARE website for updated MARE events. Registration for both adoption parties and single parent matching nights can be done via mail, phone or online through the MARE website, [www.mareinc.org](http://www.mareinc.org).** Families and social workers can also request to be added to the Adoption Party mailing list and/or MARE's quarterly newsletter, *Exchange News*, mailing list via mail, phone or online.

## Confirmation of Inquiries and Follow-up Letters

If a family calls MARE for general information on the adoption process, they will be sent an information packet and referred to the DSS 1-800 line as well as to private contracted agencies in their area. A *Confirmation of Inquiry* letter will be sent to DSS Central Office and the private agencies the following business day. DSS Central will log the inquiries in Family Net and then notify the appropriate regional office.

For child-specific calls, the family or social worker will be given contact information for the child/ren's recruitment worker. Callers are encouraged to contact the recruitment worker directly. Additionally, if the caller is not yet homestudied, they will be sent an information packet and given contact information to start the adoption process. The child/ren's recruitment worker and adoption worker will receive a *Confirmation of Inquiry* letter, which gives the contact information for the family or agency who called to inquire about the child. Social workers are encouraged to follow-up with all inquiries.

Six weeks after a family or social worker has called for general or child-specific information, a follow-up letter will be sent to them. The caller is encouraged to contact MARE if they require additional information or services.

## Status of Registered Children

**It is essential that workers inform MARE of any changes to a child's status, as well as changes in adoption or recruitment social worker assignment.** Below is a list of the MARE statuses and their explanations.

*Legally Free/At Legal Risk:* At the time of registration, you are required to indicate a child's legal status. Should that status change at any time, MARE must be notified. Please note that if the courts have decreed a child free, but that decree is under appeal, the child is considered legally free until such time that the appeal is approved. (Per DSS Central Office)

*On Hold:* A child should go on hold when a match has been identified and visitation is underway, or if a child is in such crisis that hospitalization, or a period of reassessment,

is required. Social workers can also request that a child be listed on hold if they are overwhelmed with inquiries. Please note that children cannot be on hold for more than 6 months at a time.

*Withdrawn:* A child should be withdrawn if the goal changes to something other than adoption (i.e. foster family moves to do guardianship, goal changes to reunification).

*Placed:* A child should be listed as placed when he or she moves in with a family in a pre-adoptive placement.

*Off Hold:* A child is taken off hold and listed as active when the social worker wishes to restart recruitment efforts for the child. When a child is taken off hold, MARE will send the child's recruitment social worker copies of the inquiries received while the child was on hold.

*Reactivated:* A child is reactivated when he or she had previously been listed as withdrawn or placed and the social worker wishes to restart recruitment efforts. In this case, a new registration for the child is required. If a child is reactivated, MARE will send the child's recruitment social worker copies of the inquiries received while the child was listed as withdrawn or placed.

*New Worker:* Please notify MARE if a child receives a new adoption or recruitment social worker.

## **Family Registration and Family Profiles**

Massachusetts families with completed and approved homestudies for adoption through foster care can register with MARE. There is no fee for this service through which registered families become part of the MARE matching program. Through this database matching program, a family's criteria will be compared with the needs of the children registered with MARE. If a match is identified, MARE will forward the family's homestudy directly to the child's recruitment worker. Follow-up on such referrals is at the discretion of the child's social worker. Workers and families can call MARE to request a Family Registration form, or register online through the MARE website at [www.mareinc.org](http://www.mareinc.org).

Families with completed and approved homestudies are encouraged to partner with their social worker to create a Family Profile that can be shared with social workers at MARE events such as Single Parent Matching Nights and Adoption Parties. Guidelines for these profiles can be found on MARE's website: [www.mareinc.org](http://www.mareinc.org).

## **MARE-Assisted Placements**

MARE needs to track any placements in which it played a part. This information is necessary for MARE's own statistics and to substantiate the success of its programs

and services. When a worker reports a child is placed, MARE has the authorization of the DSS Central Office to retrieve the pre-adoptive family's information and determine what role, if any, MARE played in the match.

**Giving credit to MARE for assisting with a placement does not affect DSS or private-contracted agency placement statistics in any way, nor is it a breach of confidentiality for workers to share family information with MARE.**

***As established by the DSS Central Office, MARE should be given credit for assisting with placements when:***

1. A family's homestudy was sent to you by MARE and used:
  - a) for the child(ren) referred.
  - b) for another child(ren) on your caseload.
  - c) for a co-workers' child(ren).
2. A child(ren)'s information was sent to you, or discussed with you, and utilized:
  - a) for the family referred.
  - b) for another family on your caseload.
  - c) for a co-worker's family.
3. A family is referred to you after they call about a child(ren) featured in the MARE Photolisting®, MARE On-line Photolisting, MARE media campaigns, or other MARE-sponsored recruitment, and is matched with:
  - a) the featured child(ren).
  - b) another child(ren) on your caseload.
  - c) a co-workers child(ren).
4. Your (or your representative's) attendance at a MARE adoption party, or other MARE event, results in:
  - a) a match for the child(ren) you brought.
  - b) a match with another child(ren) on your caseload.
  - c) a match with a co-worker's child(ren).
  - d) a match with a family on your caseload.
  - e) a match with a family on a co-worker's caseload.
5. A family calls MARE for adoption information, is referred to your agency for training and homestudy, and is ultimately matched with a waiting child or sibling group.
6. A family who has previously adopted a child(ren) with the assistance of MARE programs and services returns to adopt again.

## Contact Information

website: [www.mareinc.org](http://www.mareinc.org)

### MARE Main Office

45 Franklin Street, 5th Floor  
 Boston, MA 02110  
 617-54-ADOPT (617-542-3678)  
 1-800-882-1176  
 Fax: 617-542-1006  
 TTY: 617-542-7772

### MARE Western MA Office

c/o Department of Children and Families  
 140 High Street, 5th Floor  
 Springfield, MA 01105  
 413-452-3431 or 413-452-3365

## The MARE Staff

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