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Working With Kinship Caregivers

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Kinship care is the full-time care and nurturing of a child by a relative or someone who has a significant emotional relationship with the child. If children must be separated from their parents, either voluntarily or by court order, kinship care should be the first placement option explored by the child welfare agency. The Federal Government endorsed this practice most recently in the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008.

This bulletin was written to help child welfare professionals promote kinship care by providing information, referral, and support services to kinship caregivers to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in their care.



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Types of Kinship Care

Kinship care arrangements generally fall into three categories: (1) informal kinship care, (2) voluntary kinship care, and (3) formal kinship care.

Informal kinship care refers to arrangements made by parents and other family members without any involvement from either the child welfare system or the juvenile court system. In this type of arrangement, the legal custody of the children remains with the parents, and the parents can legally take back the children at any time. The parents also maintain legal authority for all decisions related to medical treatment and education or special education needs.

Voluntary kinship care refers to situations in which the children live with relatives and the child welfare system is involved, but the State does not take legal custody. In some cases, children have been placed with relatives by a court, and in other cases an arrangement is made by the child welfare agency with no court involvement. Depending on the State and the circumstances, the legal custody may remain with the parents, or the parents may sign over temporary custody to the kin caregivers. In States and situations where the kin caregiver has legal custody, the caregiver can usually make decisions about education and medical matters, although parents should be included when appropriate.

Formal kinship care refers to cases in which the children are placed in the legal custody of the State by a judge, and the child welfare system then places the children with

grandparents or other kin. In these situations, the child welfare agency, acting on behalf of the State, has legal custody and must answer to the court, but the kin have physical custody. The child welfare agency, in collaboration with the family, makes the legal decisions about the children, including deciding where the children will live. The child welfare agency is also responsible for ensuring that the children receive medical care and attend school (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010).

More information on the types of kinship care can be found in Information Gateway's *Kinship Caregivers and the Child Welfare System*: http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_kinshi/index.cfm

Benefits of Kinship Care

Research has shown that kinship care benefits children in a number of different ways that traditional foster homes may not, including the following:

- Kinship care reduces the trauma that children may experience when they are placed with strangers, and it enables children to live with people they know and trust (Mallon, n.d.).
- Children placed with relatives generally maintain connections to extended family, siblings, and community, and this continuity is essential to a child's well-being.

- Kinship care allows children to receive support from extended family that may be unavailable or sporadic in nonkinship placements (Whitley, Kelly, & Williams, 2007).
- Children in kinship care have a more positive opinion of their placement and are more likely than children in nonkinship homes to report that they like their caregiver and that they wish for this to become their permanent home (Conway & Hutson, 2007; Mallon).
- Children in kinship care experience fewer placement moves than children in nonkinship care (Webster, Barth, & Needell, 2000).
- Children are more likely to be placed with siblings in kinship care.
- Children in kinship care have fewer behavioral problems, as rated by caregivers, than their peers in other out-of-home care settings (Rubin et al., 2008).

Agencies and States may also benefit from kinship care:

- Placing children in kinship care helps States' compliance with Federal requirements to provide children with safety, stability, and permanency. It also meets the provisions of the Fostering Connections Act that require agencies to notify relatives when children are in out-of-home care, to include information about connections with relatives in court reports, and to inform relatives about their options to participate in the care and placement of the children.
- In cases of informal kinship care, there may be no need for court intervention and the

associated time, staffing, and expense of court involvement.

- Agencies do not have to call on their limited supply of traditional foster parents, and this frees up homes for children who may not have available kin to support them.

Although kinship care confers many benefits on the children, kinship caregivers sometimes face challenges due to a lack of resources and support services. Some of the challenges include the following:

- Lack of adequate housing
- Financial difficulties
- Physical health issues, especially with older kinship caregivers
- Emotional stress caused by childrearing responsibilities
- Strained relationships with the children's parents
- Any past criminal charges that may keep a relative from being eligible to become a caregiver
- Lack of easily accessible training about the specific needs and issues of parenting grandchildren or other related children, limited peer support, and lack of information on available resources
- Lack of warning about the plight of the children

Additionally, kinship caregivers often juggle mixed emotions related to taking on the new role of primary caregiver. Some experience feelings of loss and embarrassment. Others may feel guilt because of the child's maltreatment by members of their family. Their loyalties may be divided between wanting

HOW THE FOSTERING CONNECTIONS ACT IMPACTS KINSHIP CARE

The Federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 emphasizes kinship care as a priority for children. For instance:

- The act requires agencies to identify and notify children's relatives within 30 days after removing children from their home.
- It requires agencies to make reasonable efforts to place siblings together or, when that isn't possible, to maintain a connection between siblings.
- The act gives States the option to create a subsidized guardianship program so that title IV-E funds can be used for kin caregivers who become legal guardians.
- States have the option to waive non-safety-related licensing requirements on a case-by-case basis for kinship caregivers who want to become licensed foster parents.
- States also have the option to use title IV-E funding to partially pay for training for relative guardians.

For more information, visit the Children's Bureau website:

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/implementation_foster.htm

to help the parents with their problems and wanting to ensure the children are safe and protected. Kinship caregivers may feel anger and resentment toward the child's parent and may experience stress and confusion as roles and boundaries are redefined (Child Welfare League of America, 2000; Crumbley & Little, 1997). All of these feelings are normal, and caseworkers can help caregivers work through their reactions by providing support and services and by linking them to support in their community.

Kinship caregivers are often asked to make decisions quickly about opening their hearts and homes to children in need of care. Unlike other forms of out-of-home care in which foster parents choose to offer their home to children and then undergo training and preparation, kinship caregivers are often contacted shortly after a child enters care, requiring immediate decisions and expedited training. This can put added stress on kinship caregivers.

Training for Caseworkers

Caseworkers who are assigned kinship care cases should receive training in the specific skills and competencies required to work effectively with the kinship triad (parents, children, and the kinship caregivers), including the following:

- Assessing families and identifying risk factors, safety factors, strengths, and needs
- Using family-centered practice to develop a plan to best meet the needs of the child and the family

- Effectively addressing the challenges of kinship care
- Locating and accessing the services and resources available to kinship caregivers
- Planning for permanency for the child

In a Breakthrough Series project in which different agencies around the country tested small changes that could improve kinship care services, the project found that training that included the “voice” of kinship caregivers, either by having them as guest speakers at the training or through videos, had a significant impact on workers (Casey Family Programs, 2007).

Training programs that focus on kinship care are available in many States or through child welfare training partners and national child welfare agencies. The following are just two examples:

- The Jane Addams College of Social Work at the University of Illinois at Chicago began the Kinship Care Practice Project in 1992 to research child welfare practice in kinship care homes. The study resulted in a training curriculum that provides child welfare caseworkers with the tools and skills necessary to support kinship caregivers and to work with families to establish the best permanency plan for the child. Read more on the college’s website: <http://www.uic.edu/jaddams/college/kinicare>
- The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) has released *Collaborating With Kinship Caregivers: A Research to Practice, Competency-Based Training Program*, which introduces CWLA’s Kinship Collaboration Model of Practice. The training identifies major areas of concern that require collaboration between child

welfare agency staff and kinship caregivers and offers collaboration competencies that may be used to address these concerns. The training demonstrates how the Collaboration Model can help achieve federally mandated outcomes of safety, well-being, and permanency. Read more on the CWLA website: <http://www.cwla.org>

How to Support Kinship Caregivers

Relatives may have greater needs for services and support than traditional nonrelative foster care providers, and many of these needs are associated with being older and having a lower income. Despite their greater need, kinship caregivers generally are referred for, offered, and actually receive fewer services for themselves and the children in their care when compared to nonkinship caregivers (Casey Family Programs, 2007).

Planning and delivering services and supports for kinship caregivers should be guided by family-centered practice principles, cultural competence, sensitivity to the complex issues of the kinship triad, and a wide range of services. Workers should be prepared to work with the parents as well as with the kin caregivers and to help mediate the relationship between them. Services and supports should strengthen the kinship caregivers’ capacity to provide a safe, nurturing home for the child and to help achieve permanency for the child. Additionally, supports and services should assist the kinship caregiver in addressing the effects that maltreatment may have had on the child in their care.

Support begins with fully informing the caregivers, assessing their strengths and needs, and then working with them to identify resources, supports, and training that can help them meet those needs. Permanency planning for the child or children is also part of this planning.

Inform Kinship Caregivers

Caseworkers should provide relevant information about the child to the kinship caregivers prior to placing the child in the home. This information should include a full disclosure about why the child is in need of out-of-home care; any special needs of the child; and the child's medical, psychological, and educational history (A. Saunders, personal communication, September 6, 2011). Full disclosure will allow the potential kinship caregiver and the child welfare agency to make the best placement decision for the child.

Workers can also offer information on the foster care provider options in the State and thoroughly discuss the benefits for each option. Not all States require kinship caregivers to be licensed foster parents, although all States have criteria that must be met before children can be placed in a formal kinship caregiver setting. Kinship caregivers should also be informed about guardianship and other options. It should be stressed that a permanent, nurturing home is needed for the children if they are not able to return to their parents, so all permanency options should be discussed.

Workers should also provide information to kin caregivers about the court process, including the role of the court, the different types of

hearings, court procedures, and the caregiver's role in any court proceedings.

Assess for Strengths and Needs

The child welfare agency needs to thoroughly assess the strengths and needs of the kinship caregiver, exploring the following areas (CWLA, 2000):

- The nature and quality of the relationships between the kinship caregiver, the child, the parents, and other relatives
- The physical and emotional health of the kinship caregiver and his or her spouse or partner (Commission on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, 2009)
- The physical condition of the kinship home and the ability of the kinship caregiver to provide a safe, nurturing environment for the child
- The kinship caregiver's ability to meet the child's developmental and educational needs, including any special needs (CWLA, 2000; Commission on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren)
- The predicted length of time the child will be placed in the kinship home and how long the kinship caregiver is willing to have the child in the home
- Other family members who can assist with the responsibility of caring for the child (Commission on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren)
- The kinship caregiver's current resources and support system
- The willingness and the ability of the kinship caregiver to comply with the child

welfare agency, including following the safety and case plan (CWLA, 2000)

The assessment should include both the primary caregivers, as well as other family members.

Use Family-Centered Practice

Caseworkers should assess and regularly reassess additional needs of the kinship caregiver and provide or refer to services when needed. Kinship care will be more successful and beneficial to the child when the kinship caregiver feels supported and is able to meet the needs of the family. Family-centered practices such as Family Group Decision Making and family conferencing are excellent opportunities to explore the resources and support that kinship families need. For more information on Family Group Decision Making, visit the American Humane website: <http://www.americanhumane.org/children/programs/family-group-decision-making>

Inclusiveness of all family members, as appropriate, in group meetings and decisions is essential. Involving many family members can result in broader support for the caregiver and the children and can help lead to a permanent commitment from the family.

Offer an Array of Services

Workers should assess the need for and provide information to the kinship caregivers on financial resources and other supportive resources available to them. Caseworkers should be prepared to discuss the best financial support option for each kinship caregiver. Although these may vary across States, the following generally are available to kinship caregivers:

- The Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program may provide a subsidy. Caregivers do not have to have legal custody in order to apply for TANF benefits, but they do need to meet their State's TANF definition of a kinship caregiver. Even if a relative caregiver or the caregiver's family does not qualify for TANF benefits, it is possible to apply only for and receive benefits only for the relative children being cared for in the home. In these situations, only the children's income is considered for eligibility.
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, previously known as food stamps, are available to families with incomes below a certain level. In this case, the entire household's income is considered, and the relative children can be included in family size for determining benefit amount.
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI) may be available to children or caregivers who are disabled. Information about SSI benefits is available from the local Social Security office or online: <http://www.ssa.gov/ssi>
- Foster care payments may be available to kinship caregivers who are licensed foster parents taking care of children placed with them by their local child welfare agency or court.
- Kinship guardianship payments are an option in many States since the passage of the Fostering Connections Act in 2008. States have the option to use title IV-E funds for kinship guardianship payments to support children and youth placed in guardianship arrangements with relatives. As of September 2011, 29 States had submitted title IV-E plan amendments to

enable them to make claims for Federal support of eligible guardianship assistance. Read more on the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections website: http://www.nrcpfc.org/fostering_connections/state_gap.html

- Adoption assistance payments may also be an option to kinship caregivers should they choose to adopt the child.
- Respite care has also been determined to be a need for kinship caregivers. Many States and community organizations offer

Many States have resource manuals or websites for kinship caregivers. For example:

- The Washington State Department of Social and Health Services website includes links to information about financial assistance, health care, support groups, raising children today, and legal issues: <http://www.dshs.wa.gov/kinshipcare>
- The Baltimore County Department of Social Services provides kinship caregivers with a *Kinship Care Resource Manual* that provides detailed information on financial and income issues, housing assistance, education, and health care: <http://www.dhr.state.md.us/ssa/pdfs/kinman.pdf>

The Information Gateway website maintains a database of State Guides and Manuals. Check here for your State's resources: <http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/sgm>

kinship caregivers respite care ranging from a few hours to overnight and weekends. Read more on the National Respite Network website: http://www.archrespite.org/images/docs/Factsheets/FS_45-Grandparents_Grandchildren.pdf

Additional services most often needed by kinship care families include therapy and counseling, child care, educational services, education advocacy, tutoring, and affordable housing (A. Saunders, personal communication, September 6, 2011; Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2005). Federal funding helps States and communities provide supportive services to kinship caregivers. These services range from tangible services, such as bedroom furniture and clothing for the children, to intangible services, such as therapeutic interventions and referrals to support agencies.

Provide Training for Kinship Caregivers

Some kinship caregivers view the requirement for training as intrusive, while others may be intimidated by the idea of training. However, generally all kinship caregivers will need some type of training (Child Focus, 2008). Many kinship caregivers take in their children during or after a family crisis and have not had time to prepare for the role. They often have limited knowledge about the child welfare system or the resources available to them. Additionally, kinship caregivers often need to develop new skills in order to effectively parent emotionally abused and neglected children. Caregivers may also need training and guidance on how to best work with the children's parent (who may be the caregiver's own child).

More information on the different types of kinship caregiver training can be found in Information Gateway's *Kinship-Specific Training*: <http://www.childwelfare.gov/management/training/curricula/foster/kinship.cfm>

CWLA, in its *Standards of Excellence for Kinship Care Services* (2000), outlines the following issues that should be addressed in training for kinship caregivers:

- Clarifying and managing the multiple roles faced by kinship caregivers
- Recognizing issues specific to the stresses and dynamics of full-time parenting for the second time
- Being an active participant in permanency planning
- Attending to the relationships among kinship siblings and other children in the household
- Resolving family conflict, including mediation approaches
- Understanding and managing the effects of chemical dependency, parental incarceration, and HIV/AIDS
- Addressing children's specific medical, educational, emotional, and sexuality needs
- Accessing and addressing financial and resource issues
- Addressing cultural, ethnic, and religious orientations, as appropriate
- Working as a member of a team, including participating in case reviews, court involvement, counseling sessions, medical services, school meetings, and agency team meetings, as appropriate

Work With the Kinship Caregiver to Develop a Permanency Plan

Caseworkers need to discuss openly and honestly with the relative the possibility that the placement arrangement could be a long-term or permanent placement for the child. Including the kinship caregiver in permanency planning is relevant to making the best decision for the child and the family. In addition to understanding permanency options, caseworkers should ensure that kinship caregivers receive information regarding the court process and their role in the process, as well as services available to them should the kinship care arrangement become permanent (Mallon, n.d.).

The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) strongly encourages adoption as a viable permanency option for children in the care of relatives or nonrelatives when reunification with their birth parents is not possible. However, ASFA also recognizes that children living with relatives who are not interested in adoption may provide a reason not to pursue termination of parental rights. Guardianship, including subsidized guardianship, offers kinship caregivers an opportunity to assume responsibility for the child without terminating parental rights, which may support cultural norms and be more palatable for some families (Mallon, n.d.).

The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Training Program through the University of Pittsburgh (n.d.) suggests that the child welfare caseworker and the kinship caregiver explore the following issues to determine whether the kinship caregiver is prepared to assume a greater level of commitment to the child:

Does the kinship caregiver have an adequate support system?

- Child care/respite care
- Emotional support
- Concrete support (financial, transportation, etc.)
- Other essential supports

Can the kinship caregiver protect the child from maltreatment without the monitoring and assistance of the child welfare system?

- Has a safety plan been developed with the caregiver and the caregiver's support system?
- Has the caregiver and her/his support system demonstrated the ability to consistently implement an appropriate safety plan?

Has the kinship caregiver discussed the following with her/his support system?

- Caring for the child as the child grows older
- Caring for the child if the caregiver becomes ill or dies
- Caring for the child if other changes occur in the caregiver's family or support system

Has the kinship caregiver, with the help of her/his support system, made an informed decision concerning permanence?

- Is the caregiver committed to raising the child to adulthood?
- Does the caregiver have a clear understanding of the legal aspects of adoption and custodianship?

- Has the family redefined family roles in terms and ways that are comfortable for the caregiver, the child, the kinship network, and others in the social support system?
- Has the family agreed upon the degree and type of contact and responsibilities of members of the kinship network for any permanent plan?

Find the full list of questions on the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Training website: <http://www.pacwcbt.pitt.edu/Curriculum/208AchievingPermanencyforChildreninKinshipFosterCare/Handouts/HO30AssessingTheAppropriateness.pdf>

View the entire Achieving Permanency for Children in Kinship Foster Care curriculum here: <http://www.pacwcbt.pitt.edu/Curriculum/208AchievingPermanencyforChildreninKinshipFosterCare.html>

Read more about options in Information Gateway's *Kinship Caregivers and the Child Welfare System*: http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_kinshi/index.cfm

Many States are now providing kinship caregivers with written and/or electronic information pertaining to the permanency options for the child in their care, including New York and Texas: <http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/publications/pub5108.pdf>
<http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/documents/ChildProtection/pdf/KinshipManualEnglish.pdf>

Examples of Programs for Kinship Caregivers

A number of successful programs around the country offer services to help kinship caregivers. In some cases, the programs are the result of Federal initiatives and funding; in other cases, the programs grew from the idea of one committed person or small group.

Kinship Navigator Programs

Kinship navigator programs are State initiatives funded by the Children's Bureau's Family Connection Kin Navigator grants to provide information, referral, and follow-up services to grandparents and other relatives raising children. Offering toll-free hotlines or help desks, the programs help kinship caregivers access services and programs like TANF, Medicaid, SNAP benefits, and legal assistance. These programs also provide information through written materials and websites.

Kinship Care Ohio is one of the kinship navigator programs funded by the Family Connection Kin Navigator grant. Kinship Care Ohio's statewide website (<http://www.kinshipohio.org/Default.htm>) provides links to resources and support services across the State, as well as online applications for public assistance programs. Kinship Care Ohio operates in seven counties, and each has a navigator and a local advisory group. Each site offers telephone support, resource referrals, support groups, and limited legal assistance. The support groups provide child care to the children while providing the kinship caregivers with information on relevant issues including

family dynamics, parenting, and child development. Additionally, kinship caregivers are provided assistance with the Ohio Benefit Bank, which provides online information on and applications for financial resources. Eligibility is based on the individual kinship caregiver's circumstances (Crystal Allen, personal communication, October 21, 2011).

The California Kinship Support Services Program (KSSP) is another kinship navigator program funded by the Family Connection Kin Navigator grant. The program provides kinship caregivers with comprehensive phone support and access to services in their local communities. The toll-free lines are operated by current or previous kinship caregivers. Additionally, the KSSP website (<http://www.edgewood.org/kssp>) provides additional information on resources available to kinship caregivers across the State.

For information on all the Family Connection Kinship Navigator programs and grantees, visit the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections website: <http://www.nrcpfc.org/grantees.html>

Similarly, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Aging (AOA) administers the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP). The NFCSP provides funds to States, which distribute the funds to area agencies on aging to provide support to grandparents or others aged 55 and older who are raising children, as well as family caregivers of older individuals. Supportive services funded through these programs include the following:

- Information about available services
- Assistance in gaining access to services

- Individual counseling, support groups, and training to assist and educate in the areas of health, nutrition, and budgeting and in making decisions and solving problems related to the caregiving role
- Respite care

For more information, please visit the AOA website: http://www.aoa.gov/AoA_programs/HCLTC/Caregiver/index.aspx

Support Group Programs

Support groups for kinship caregivers, as well as for the children placed with them, are viewed as an effective way of sharing information, discussing resources, and providing peer support (A. Saunders, personal communication, September 6, 2011). Support groups allow kinship caregivers to discuss the challenges of caring for grandchildren and to receive feedback from those in similar situations.

In 1994, when Nancy Darr of Manatee County, FL, first received custody of her grandsons, she didn't know where to turn for help or for information about grandparents raising grandchildren. After a conversation with a friend who also was raising a grandchild, Nancy started the Manatee County Grandparents as Parents program, which included support groups and an around-the-clock "warmline" that put the caller directly in contact with Nancy. She wanted to be available to answer questions or just offer support whenever it was needed by another kinship caregiver. She continues to offer these services even though her grandsons are adults. However, she now works in collaboration with Manatee Children's Services. The collaboration has allowed for an expansion of the program to include monthly

lunch meetings for kinship caregivers and the children in their care, caregiver support groups, children's peer groups, parenting workshops on topics relevant to the kinship caregiver, advocacy services, and resource information and referrals (Nancy Darr, personal communication, September 21, 2011).

Although the program has expanded and is now better able to support and meet the needs of more kinship caregivers in Manatee County, one aspect has not changed: When someone calls the Manatee local kinship warmline, Nancy still answers the call 24/7. Read more about the program on the website: <http://www.manateechildrens-services.com/index.php>

Housing Programs

Affordable housing for kinship caregivers has been cited as a challenge by many sources. With the assistance of Federal and State funding, some communities have established multigenerational housing for kinship caregivers who have limited financial resources.

The GrandFamilies House, which opened in Boston, MA, in 1998, was the first housing community in the nation specifically developed for grandparents raising grandchildren (Kanders, 2002; Generations United, 2005). Located in the Dorchester neighborhood, GrandFamilies House was the product of collaboration between three local nonprofit organizations: Boston Aging Concerns–Young and Old United (BACYOU), YWCA Boston, and the Women's Institute for Housing and Economic Development. This apartment building provides affordable housing and social and educational activities for 26 grandparent-headed families (Kanders). GrandFamilies House offers an onsite resident

services coordinator, educational services, transportation services, and assistance with accessing other services. The YWCA provides an onsite program called Generations Learning Together that includes preschool, afterschool, and summer programs. The afterschool program focuses on developing and improving math, computer, and science skills. This program also provides access to a computer learning center, tutoring, and homework assistance. In addition, BACYOU and the YWCA offer educational workshops, parenting classes, intergenerational community events, holiday celebrations, and respite outings for grandparents (Kanders; Generations United, 2005). Read more on the website: <http://www.bos.frb.org/commdev/c&b/2002/spring/gf.pdf>

The Presbyterian Senior Services (PSS) Grandparent Family Apartments in the South Bronx, NY, has 49 apartments designed to meet the needs of older kinship caregivers and the children they are raising. The onsite PSS Kinship Program offers a variety of services to both apartment residents and community members in need of kinship support services. Services to the youth include an afterschool program that provides tutoring, workshops on such topics as public speaking and gang awareness, and creative activities. All of the school-age children who reside in the Grandparent Family Apartments attend charter schools, and 100 percent of the children were promoted to the next grade at the end of the 2010-2011 school year. The PSS Kinship Program also offers services to the grandparents that include weekly support groups, legal services, visiting nurse services, health screenings, and a Stay Well program. The PSS Grandparent Family Apartments recently lost State funding;

however, the internal community has worked together to raise funds to ensure that services are not lost and that residents can continue to receive the comprehensive services that have made the program a success (Michelle Chapelle, personal communication, October 20, 2011). Read more about the program: http://www.pssusa.org/index.asp?Type=B_JOB&SEC=%7BE0BACB81-7379-479F-AA58-5FDDE453DF7B%7D

There are other communities in the country with grandfamily housing and still other communities that are in the process of developing grandfamily housing programs in order to ensure that kinship caregivers and the children placed with them have affordable, safe housing. Read more on the Generations United website: <http://www2.gu.org/OURWORK/Grandfamilies/GrandfamiliesHousing.aspx>

For families that don't have these options for housing, workers may need to help them identify other housing possibilities. The Fostering Connections Act allows States to waive non-safety-related foster care licensing requirements, on a case-by-case basis, for kinship caregivers. What this means for caregivers is that States may be able to waive requirements for a certain number of bedrooms, for instance, in order for children to be placed with grandparents or other relatives.

Programs That Promote Education for Children

Kinship caregivers may need assistance in enrolling children in school as well as with advocating for the educational needs of their children. The Fostering Connections Act mandates that case plans for children in the custody of the State include an educational

plan. This plan needs to be discussed with the kinship caregivers in order to determine what services may be needed to assist the family in achieving the education goals of the child. Additionally, the educational needs of the child should be thoroughly assessed and reassessed by the child welfare agency in collaboration with the school system on a regular, consistent basis.

Kinship care advocates in Baltimore, MD, witnessed kinship caregivers struggling to help the children placed in their homes with school assignments; although there were tutoring services available, the community needed something more for these families. In May 2011, Grandfamilies Parent Teacher Student Association (GPTSA) was founded in Baltimore (A. Saunders, personal communication, September 6, 2011). GPTSA is a community-based affiliate of the Maryland PTA and the National PTA. This organization helps meet the education-related needs of grandparents and other caregivers responsible for raising relatives' children. Furthermore, it offers its members information and support that strengthen the families' ability to understand their children's educational requirements and needs and to locate necessary resources.

Ohio's House Bill 130 created legal documentation to assist grandparent kinship caregivers in an informal kinship care arrangement. The Power of Attorney is for grandparents whose grandchildren's parents have authorized the grandparent's power of attorney for their grandchild, and the Caregiver Authorization Affidavit form is for grandparents of children whose parents' whereabouts are unknown or who cannot be located. This legal documentation, when notarized and filed with the court, assists grandparents in enrolling the children in

school and in obtaining medical and dental care for the children (Crystal Allen, personal communication, October 21, 2011).

Training Program for Kinship Caregivers

The Foster and Kinship Care Education (FKCE) Program in California provides training classes to foster and kinship caregivers, as well as nonrelative extended family members, at 65 community colleges throughout California. Title IV-E funds are used to match the California Community Colleges Proposition 98 funds in providing foster parent and kinship caregiver training. These classes are open to relative caregivers who wish to attend as well as prospective and current foster parents who must attend to become licensed or to maintain their license as a foster parent. Classes cover a number of learning objectives and are free of charge.

Visit the website for more information on the FKCE Program and courses offered: <http://www.cccco.edu/SystemOffice/Divisions/StudentServices/FKCE/tabid/618/default.aspx>

Conclusion

When children are raised by kinship caregivers, they experience greater continuity of care and family preservation. Children living with kin have a sense of permanency, nurturing, safety, and well-being. Kinship care also assists in maintaining the family's culture, traditions, values, and goals, and kinship placements help children maintain connections not only to family members, but often to their schools and communities.

Agencies that cultivate a culture that welcomes kinship caregivers as partners and that gives them support, training, and resources through family-centered practice should reap the benefits of knowing that they are providing children with safety, permanency, and the well-being that comes from being with family.

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Additional Resources

Child Welfare Information Gateway

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/outofhome/types/kinship.cfm>

- "Supporting Kin Caregiver Family Engagement Video" developed by the Children's Bureau's National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care Resources. The video spotlights the Kinship Liaisons Program of Clark County, NV, and how the child welfare agency integrated kinship specialists into its workforce: <http://www.childwelfare.gov/management/reform/soc/communicate/initiative/familyvideos/#skgVideos>
- *Kinship Caregivers and the Child Welfare System* (Factsheet for Families) http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_kinshi/index.cfm
- Kinship/Relative Care Related Organization List http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/reslist/rl_dsp.cfm?subjID=238&rate_chno=W-00061

National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections

http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/kinship-relative-care.html

State Kinship Navigator Programs

- Ohio: <http://www.areaofficeonaging.com/kinship.html>
- New York: <http://www.nysnavigator.org>
- New Jersey: <http://www.state.nj.us/dcf/prevention/support/kinship.html>
- California: <http://www.yfs.ymca.org/programs/kinship-support-services/kinship-navigator.html>
- Connecticut: <http://www.211ct.org/referweb/Subcategory.aspx?;0;;0;1508873;KINSHIP%20CAREGIVERS>

Resources for Kinship Caregivers

- AARP GrandFamilies Guide to State and Local Resources
<http://www.aarp.org/relationships/friends-family/info-08-2011/grandfamilies-guide-resources.html>
- AARP GrandFamilies Guide to Grandparents Raising Grandchildren
<http://www.aarp.org/relationships/friends-family/info-08-2011/grandfamilies-guide-getting-started.html>
- Generations United
<http://www.gu.org/OURWORK/Grandfamilies.aspx>
- The Grandfamilies State Law and Policy Resource Center
<http://www.grandfamilies.org>

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