

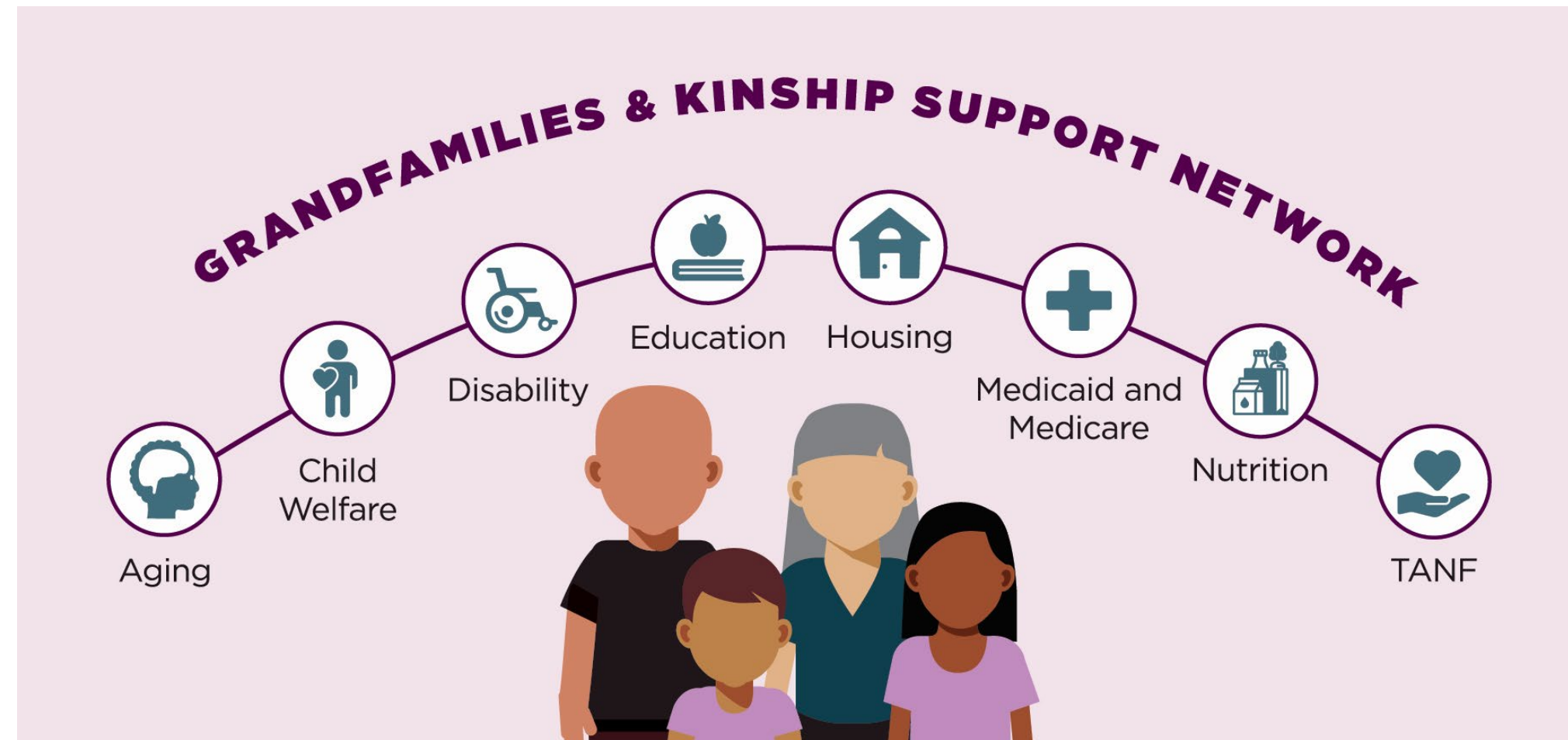
WELCOME

Improving Your Results in Kin-Finding and Placement

September 12, 2023

- We will begin at the top of the hour
- Please type in the **chat** - your name, state, tribe (if applicable), and role
- We'll pause for questions throughout – please type your questions in the chat box at any time
- All participants will receive a link to the slides and recording by the end of the week

- 5-year (2021-2026) cooperative agreement with Administration for Community Living
- Purpose is to provide technical assistance to the array of tribal, state, and territorial government agencies, as well as non-profit organizations that serve kinship families
- Not designed to serve the families directly – working to improve systems for families



How We Help



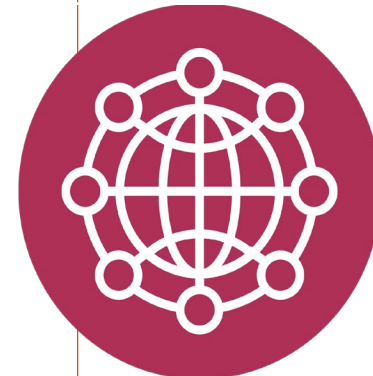
Learning Collaboratives and Information Dissemination

The Network hosts [webinars](#) and facilitates learning collaboratives.



Individual Assistance

We respond to [individual requests for help](#) from government agencies, and nonprofit organizations.



A Centralized Hub

The Network is elevating exemplary kinship/grandfamily practices and programs from around the country on its new accessible website, www.GKSNetwork.org.

The First-Ever National Technical Assistance Center for those who Serve Kinship/Grandfamilies

We help government agencies and nonprofits in states, tribes, and territories work across jurisdictional and systemic boundaries to improve supports and services for families in which grandparents, other relatives, or close family friends are raising children.



Stay Connected & Access Support

Sign up for our monthly newsletter, which will provide you with updates on new Network resources.





< Resources

TIP SHEET

Kin-Finding Toolkit

Download This Resource

Children in care do better when they're placed with family members or other adults they know and trust. But identifying and connecting with extended family members can be a challenge for foster care programs.

Children can't have too many adults who care about them. A strong support system of adults supports young people's resiliency and long-term health and well-being. Yet, most youth enter foster care with more connections than they leave with.



The Network is supported by the Administration for Community Living (ACL), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$9,950,000 with 95 percentage funded by ACL/HHS and \$523,684 and 5 percentage funded by non-government sources. The contents are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACL/HHS, or the U.S. Government.

Launching the Kin-Finding Toolkit

September 2023
Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network



Agenda

1. Origins of the toolkit
2. The 22 practices
3. Next steps



How We Developed the Toolkit

What is “kin-finding”?

Kin are:

“Individuals related to a child by blood, marriage, tribal custom, and/or adoption and other individuals who have an emotionally significant relationship with the child or the child’s parents or other family members (often referred to as ‘fictive kin’).”

“Kin finding” is NOT recruiting new foster families.

We don’t use the term “family finding” because it is often used to refer to non-kin foster family or adoptive recruitment.

Where do these practices come from?

More than 35 state, tribe, and county-administered child welfare systems contributed their practices, policies, forms, and other feedback. We also included inspiration from private agencies and non-profits.

What are kin placement benchmarks?

Illinois is at 76%

Rhode Island is at 69%

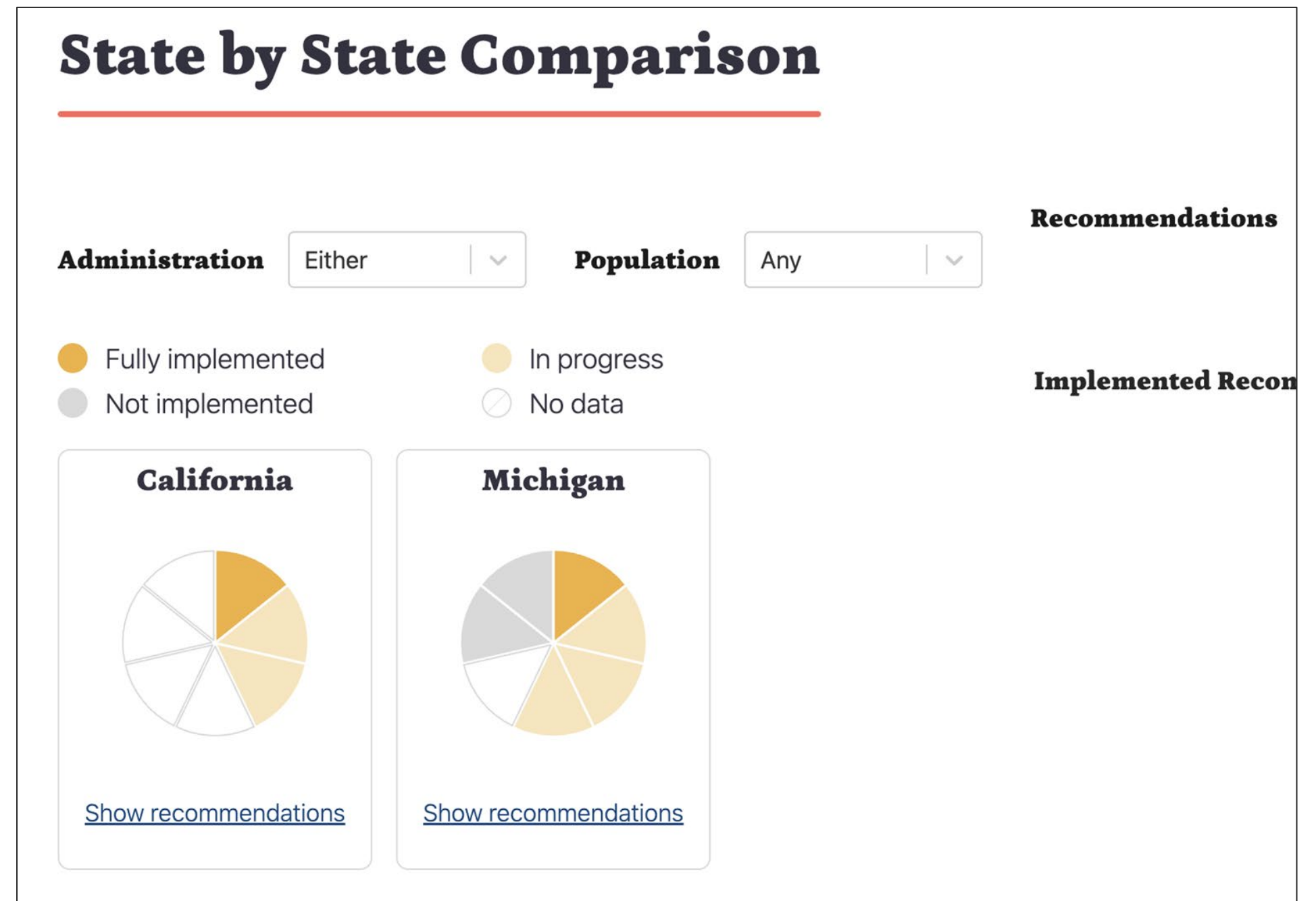
Nationally, based on data collection we did around the draft kin-specific licensing rule, kin placement is currently around 44%.

I believe it is possible to be at 80% nationally with this toolkit.

Tracking toolkit adoption

Update information about
your agency at:

<https://www.childwelfareplaybook.com/compare/states/Kin%20Finding/>





Kin-Finding Promising Practices

Every practice has...

- Detailed instructions on how to implement it in your agency
- List of resources needed to implement (most require few resources)
- Inspiration from other agencies, including examples and templates you can adopt and adapt

#3: Require Senior Staff Sign-Off for Non-Kin Placements or Implement a “Firewall Policy”

Case workers don't want to wake a director in the middle of the night to sign-off on a non-kin placement. Requiring this level of sign-off incentivizes early kin-finding and may prevent placements in group homes.

How To Do This

- ▶ Require senior staff sign-off for non-kin placements, no matter the time of day. For placement changes planned in advance, this process may look different than for emergency placements.
- ▶ Require sign-off on every placement: initial placements, subsequent placements, and congregate care placements.
- ▶ Before signing off, the senior staff member should ask questions about what kin-finding activities were conducted and about future kin-finding plans.

What You Need

- ▶ New or updated policy requiring senior staff sign-off on non-kin placements
- ▶ Clear process for sign-off, including exactly which senior staff member is responsible at any given time, recommended questions the senior staff member should ask about kin-finding progress, and senior staff contact information
- ▶ Resources for kin-finding; this is not an effective tactic if your placement desk has no viable ways to find kin

Inspiration

- ▶ New Mexico has a [policy](#) that a County Office Manager must sign off on any placement with non-kin, whether general foster care or a group home, even if it's the middle of the night.
- ▶ New York's [kinship firewall policy](#) puts guardrails in place to ensure kin are considered first.

Promising
Practice

01

Ask youth about their kin

Ask youth about their kin

Why this works:

- Nobody knows a youth's kin better than that youth. Yet, we often never ask them about their supportive connections.

Highlights:

- Example questions for talking with youth
- Tools for capturing their answers
- Inspiration from states

Use an expansive legal
definition of kin

Use an expansive legal definition of kin

Why this works:

- Using an expansive legal definition of kin allows staff to find more placement options for youth more quickly, and can mean more adults qualify to be emergency placements.

Recommended definition of kin:

- “Individuals related to a child by blood, marriage, tribal custom, and/or adoption and other individuals who have an emotionally significant relationship with the child or the child’s parents or other family members (often referred to as ‘fictive kin’).”

Require senior staff sign-off for non-kin placements

Require senior staff sign-off for non-kin placements

Why this works:

- This practice shifts incentives to encourage making additional kin-finding efforts.

Highlights:

- Example agency “firewall” policies

Promising
Practice

04

Maintain a shared list of kin

Maintain a shared list of kin

Why this works:

- Kin are often lost in case notes or handwritten paperwork. A shared list also enables team members, including foster parents, lawyers, and CASAs, to identify missing kin and/or to help nurture relationships with the child.

Highlights:

- Example checklists for expansive kin search

Promising
Practice

05

Dedicated Family-Finding Responsibility

Dedicated Kin-Finding Responsibility

Why this works:

- The old adage that when it's everybody's job, it's nobody's job, rings especially true in kin-finding. Kin-finding needs to be somebody's formal responsibility at the end of the day.

Highlights:

- Explanations of different models to help select the one that fits your agency best
- Examples for codifying kin-finding responsibilities in position descriptions, performance evaluations, etc.

Promising
Practice

06

Use social media to find kin

Use social media to find kin

Why this works:

- Social media can find kin, and allow you to contact them, that you would not be able to find elsewhere.

Highlights:

- Example social media policies
- Tips from multiple states

Promising
Practice

07

Use a variety of contact
methods

Use a variety of contact methods

Why this works:

- Personal preferences, technology literacy, and mobility all impact which communication channels kin can use. If you are only using one method to reach kin, such as mailing physical letters, you are not reaching everyone you need to find.

Highlights:

- List of contact methods used by agencies today
- Tips for complying with legal and IT requirements across communication mediums

Promising
Practice

08

Involve kin prior to removal

Involve kin prior to removal

Why this works:

- Identifying kin early ensures that kin placements are already known to the agency if a removal is ultimately necessary.
- Activating a support network can **prevent** removal

Highlights:

- Example practices from agencies that do this today
- Consideration for privacy implications pre-dependency

Promising
Practice

09

Use genograms

Use genograms

Why this works:

- Drawing out a child's connections helps identify gaps, and ensures kin aren't lost.

Highlights:

- Genogram templates and software suggestions

Use a Heart Map to identify
a youth's important
relationships

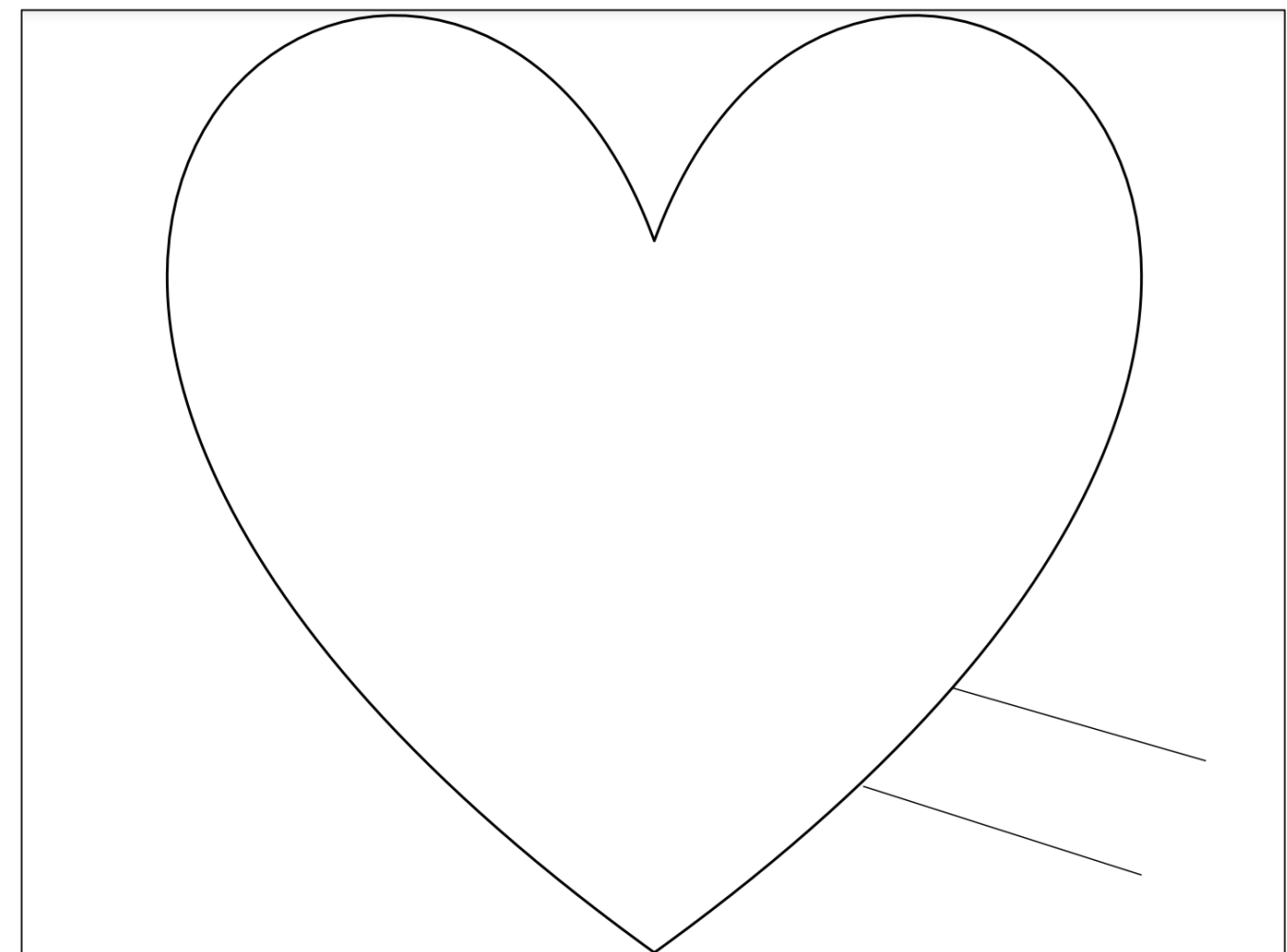
Use a Heart Map to identify a youth's important relationships

Why this works:

- The Heart Map exercise provides a meaningful way for staff to surface contacts with youth, in order to strengthen and maintain those relationships.

Highlights:

- Printable Heart Map



Make a plan to keep youth
connected to their
supportive adults

Make a plan to keep youth connected to their supportive adults

Why this works:

- When a formal plan is in place to maintain connections, youth will have more people that they can count on for emotional support, rides, tutoring, advice, and everyday connections.

Highlights:

- Example plan templates
- Stories from agencies doing this today
- Meeting models that are inclusive of kin

Promising
Practice

12

Leverage the court system
to encourage kin

Leverage the court system to encourage kin

Why this works:

- The court system, from initial hearings to ongoing check-ins, can provide a powerful checkpoint to ensure that kin-finding activities are thorough and ongoing.

Highlights:

- Tips for updating court forms and procedures
- Inspirational stories

Promising
Practice

13

Use the snowball method

Use the snowball method

Why this works:

- Asking kin for more kin potentially creates a richer network. It can also help to find contact information and to encourage kin to communicate with one another.

Highlights:

- Instructions
- Inspirational stories from states

Promising
Practice

14

Use gentle commitment
escalation with kin

Use gentle commitment escalation with kin

Why this works:

- Kinship connections may be permanently lost if an initial communication feels too overwhelming and demanding. Start with a question like, “Do you have a family photo you can send?”

Highlights:

- Instructions
- Example conversations and questions when interacting with kin

Promising
Practice

15

Never stop looking for kin

Never stop looking for kin

Why this works:

- The beginning of foster care is a difficult and emotional time for children and their families. Both children and adults may be too stressed or afraid to share a complete list of connections during an initial meeting.

Highlights:

- Example agency policies and checkpoints

Promising
Practice

16

Test your communications
with real kin

Test your communications with real kin

Why this works:

- Communications that look like legal notices, use government acronyms and jargon, or that aren't translated may be discarded or overlooked.
- Unclear communication **misses** potential kin

Highlights:

- Detailed instructions and case studies
- We are excited to develop templates in 2024 with interested agencies

Make keeping in touch with
kin a formal foster family
responsibility

Make keeping in touch with kin a formal foster family responsibility

Why this works:

- Foster parents may not know or realize the importance of maintaining a child's kin connections.
- Children deserve to maintain their kin connections.
Someone who is not willing to do that is not the right fit for fostering.

Highlights:

- Detailed instructions
- Example foster family trainings

Promising
Practice

18

Use a red team to prevent
adverse placements

Use a red team to prevent adverse placements

Why this works:

- While agencies may not be able to devote intense kin-finding resources to every child, they could concentrate them on those facing extreme adverse placements, such as group homes or far-away non-kin placements.

Highlights:

- Inspirational stories from states

Make sure kin have a robust
presence at meetings

Make sure kin have a robust presence at meetings

Why this works:

- Invite at least three times as many kin as paid staff members to meetings to maximize the benefits of this support network.

Highlights:

- Example meeting templates

Promising
Practice

20

Use “Extreme Family Finding”

Use “Extreme Family Finding”

Why this works:

- Child welfare systems have limited resources for kin finding, and kin may be unwilling to talk to government officials like Department staff. Extreme Family Finding puts a private investigator on the case.

Highlights:

- Inspirational results

Promising
Practice

21

Create life books for youth in care

Create life books for youth in care

Why this works:

- A life book captures a child's key milestones and relationships, and it should follow them throughout (and after) their time in care. A life book can help maintain kinship connections.

Highlights:

- Printable blank life books

The image displays three printable life book templates. The first template, 'MY LIFE STORY', features a colorful geometric pattern of triangles in yellow, teal, and navy blue, with a central white cloud-like shape containing the title. The second template, 'ON THE DAY I ARRIVED', has a white background with a yellow border and includes sections for 'CALENDAR DATE', 'TIME OF DAY' (with a clock face), 'WEATHER', and various categories like 'National Leaders', 'World Leaders', 'Headlines', 'Popular Entertainers', 'Popular Songs', 'Best-Selling Authors', 'Hit TV Shows', 'Sports Stars', and 'Fashion Trends'. The third template, 'IMMUNIZATIONS', also has a white background with a yellow border and includes a table for recording immunizations with columns for 'Date' and 'Reaction', and rows for various vaccines like Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis, Polio Vaccine, Measles, Mumps, Rubella, Haemophilus, Hepatitis B, Pneumococcal Conjugate, Varicella (Chicken Pox), Rotavirus, and others.

Promising
Practice

22

Use DNA to find more family connections

Use DNA to find more family connections

Why this works:

- This is controversial, but, DNA tools that can uncover more family members can be a useful tool for children in care with no or limited kinship placement options or supportive adults.

Highlights:

- Real-world examples and privacy considerations



Next Steps

Call to Action

Read our toolkit!

Submit new and updated examples.

Our goal is for every agency to **adopt at least one new kin-finding practice** from this toolkit.

In 2024, we'll run **communities of practice** around a subset of practices, pairing agencies looking to implement the play with agencies that already have, and providing implementation support.

Answer our poll to determine which practices are selected!

Thank you!

Send questions/comments to Marina
at marina@marinanitze.com

