

GRANDfamilies Kinship Care Children's Service Society of Utah



Children's Service Society of Utah (CSS) is home to GRANDfamilies Kinship Care, the only kinship-serving program in the state. Due to its robust collaborations, another program is not necessary. This central point for Utah's kinship families partners with seven of the eight government systems in the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network's [umbrella](#), along with many other organizations and nonprofits, including the University of Utah, Extension, and Utah Parent Centers. The high level of community engagement; tailored services and supports for both children and caregivers; and passionate, bilingual staff are all key components of what makes this program exemplary.

Since 2002, the GRANDfamilies Kinship Care program has offered wrap-around services to all kinship families, whether they are involved with the child welfare system or not. Originally created in response to the growing number of children going into the care of kin due to the methamphetamine (meth) drug epidemic that swept Utah, the program has responded over time to the families' changing needs. It continues to learn and grow and is working to create another office in a frontier region of Utah to reach kinship families in one of the most remote communities in the country.

The GRANDfamilies Kinship Care program's core components are:

- ▶ An intake process that assesses a family's strengths and challenges
- ▶ Case management from a designated "family advocate," with wrap-around services
- ▶ Individual on-site counseling for children and caregivers
- ▶ Educational support groups for caregivers and separate educational support groups for children and teens
- ▶ Monthly social events for the families

Eligibility for Services

The GRANDfamilies Kinship Care program is open to any kin caregiver and child or teen in their full-time care. It has no income, age, relationship to child, child welfare involvement, or other eligibility requirements. On a case-by-case basis, the program occasionally serves kin who do not yet have the children living in their homes but anticipate becoming kin caregivers due to known substance use by the parent.

The program's intake process involves the caregiver meeting virtually or in-person with a family advocate. That advocate conducts an individual assessment of the family's needs/strengths associated with the five [Strengthening Families Protective Factors](#):

- ▶ concrete supports in times of need,
- ▶ social connections,
- ▶ parental resilience,
- ▶ knowledge of parenting and child development, and
- ▶ social and emotional competence of children.

The assessment gives the caregiver the opportunity to share their story and see that their family might benefit from other resources or services, beyond the laser-like focus on obtaining guardianship that often initially brings them through the door.

Service Population

The program essentially serves the whole state through seven offices and is in the process of opening an eighth office in Uintah County, which has unique access needs due to its very remote location (it has a [frontier](#) designation). The Salt Lake City office assists caregivers in its county in addition to those who live in a county without an office. To directly reach additional grandfamilies, [Wasatch Behavioral Health](#) implements the program in Utah County and closely collaborates with GRANDfamilies Kinship Care to ensure fidelity to its model.

GRANDfamilies Kinship Care serves roughly 1500 caregivers and children each year. While the program serves kin caregivers of all ages, the majority are between the ages of 45 and 59. Most clients identify as white, about 13 percent as Hispanic, 3 percent as Black, and 3 percent as Native American. These demographics generally reflect Utah's overall population, but the percentages of Black and Native individuals served are double the representation of those populations in the state. This discrepancy is likely because Black and Native children and caregivers are overrepresented in kinship families. Although this overrepresentation is likely a product of the centuries-long shameful treatment of these communities by the United States and the many inequities

these communities continue to face, it is also a reflection of their cultural strengths and resilience.

Services

Case Management & Wrap-Around Services

Each kin caregiver has a designated family advocate who completes the intake process with each family and checks in with them weekly. Each advocate provides each family with help navigating paperwork and systems, including assistance obtaining a legal relationship, applying for TANF financial assistance and Medicaid, and getting the children enrolled in school and accessing special education services and Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). The advocate stays involved for as long as each family needs. The program also offers crisis intervention services, which include assistance with concrete needs, such as clothes and beds. Additionally, as part of a larger agency that approves homes for adoptions, the program provides the families who want to adopt with free home studies. Being part of a larger agency also allows the advocates to offer individual counseling to children and caregivers through a licensed social worker.



Photo courtesy of GRANDfamilies Kinship Care

10-Week Psychoeducational Courses

Four times each year, the program offers a 10-week series of psychoeducational courses, with separate sections for kin caregivers, teens ages 12 through 18, and

children ages 4 through 11. The courses meet concurrently for caregivers and children, so caregivers do not have to arrange for childcare. Similar topics are covered across the age groups and are modified depending on the ages involved. The courses feature topics such as kinship family dynamics, self-esteem, setting healthy boundaries, trauma and coping skills, anger management, substance use disorders, and more.

Two weeks prior to the start of the 10-week course, each family must complete a Traumatic Experiences Questionnaire. The questionnaire answers help staff prepare for the groups by giving them more information on the level of trauma involved and help inform whether they should refer caregivers and children to individual counseling.

Friend2Friend Social Events

Once one family member has completed at least 7 sessions of the 10-week psychoeducational course, the whole family is eligible to participate in Friend2Friend events. Family advocates, interns, and volunteers organize these free monthly outings, designing them to bring kinship families together in a safe and welcoming environment. The events take place at desirable venues, such as the Children’s Museum, with time for meals and socializing too.

“My [granddaughters] get to see that they’re not alone. It is good for them to see hundreds of others in the same boat.”

– Kin Caregiver



*Photo courtesy of
GRANDfamilies Kinship Care*

Teen Friend2Friend Social Events

The GRANDfamilies Kinship Care program recently began holding social events tailored for teens. These events have been successful in creating a therapeutic environment, with activities that appeal to this age group, including volleyball and cookie decorating.

Grief Support Group

Among the program’s many partnerships is one with the University of Utah College of Nursing, which operates a grief support group for adults called Caring Connection. All

kin caregivers are invited to participate in Caring Connection, where they can receive support from and provide support to fellow kin caregivers.

“CSS was one crutch and grief support was another. Together, I could walk again.”

– Kin Caregiver

Staff

A staff of 16 run the GRANDfamilies Kinship Care program. Staff include:

- ▶ **Coordinators** who oversee the regions served,
- ▶ **Family Advocates** who work with the individual families, and
- ▶ **A Therapist** who provides individual services to caregivers and children.

While program staff are not kin caregivers themselves, the larger agency has kin caregivers on staff. Kinship advocates and other program staff are well-versed in the needs and strengths of the families and participate in routine training. One family advocate is a native Spanish speaker, and Latino families connect with and trust her. A committed, long-term executive director hires staff, looking for people who are flexible, passionate, and accountable for their actions. The support they give to the families is individualized and detail-oriented – to the extent that they each call their caregiver clients each year to organize a specially-designed cake for each child on their birthday.

The agency has a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee that meets biweekly and develops resources that are discussed in agencywide staff meetings. Many of the youth the program serves identify as LGBTQIA+ and the Human Rights Campaign Foundation [All Children - All Families](#) program has recognized the agency as LGBTQIA+ inclusive. For this designation, staff complete training when hired and all staff participate in ongoing, annual training.

Key Partners

About 15 years ago, the Utah Kinship Coalition was formed to help coordinate the needs of kinship families. Members consist of many program partners and caregivers. Children’s Service Society (CSS), the parent organization of GRANDfamilies Kinship Care, manages the Coalition, and it meets monthly, even throughout the COVID pandemic. Many of the program’s partners are part of the Coalition and collaborate closely to refer families to each other and to support the program.

Our partnership “doesn’t feel territorial; it’s very united and collaborative.”

– Partner Agency Representative

Among the program's many partners are:

- ▶ **Cake4Kids** – creates free-of-charge specialized cakes for children's birthdays and other events (and has chapters in other states).
- ▶ **Department of Child & Family Services** – works with the program on replicating Nevada's Foster Kinship navigator program and securing title IV-E federal funds for its work.
- ▶ **Department of Workforce/TANF** – helps kinship advocates overcome challenges in assisting caregivers with applications for the TANF Specified Relative Grant and Medicaid.
- ▶ **Division of Adult and Aging Services** – provided the program with "Caregiver Talking Points," which staff are finding helpful.
- ▶ **Extension** – provides nutrition classes for adults and children and teaches children to prepare healthy meals.
- ▶ **Help Me Grow Utah/United Way** – gives free information and referral help to those raising children ages eight and under.
- ▶ **Roads to Independence** – helps individuals with disabilities with their mobility, including by providing bus passes and wheelchairs.
- ▶ **State Board of Education** – provides a mentor for each child in foster care, called "Check and Connect Mentors," and has a specialist to help families make use of McKinney Vento to enroll kids who are in "informal" kinship families.
- ▶ **University of Utah School of Nursing** – accepts referrals to its Care and Connections grief support group and refers families to the program.
- ▶ **University of Utah Social Research Institute** – helps evaluate the program.
- ▶ **Utah Division of Indian Affairs** – refers families to the program.
- ▶ **Utah Foster Care** – refers families to the program.
- ▶ **Utah Parent Centers** – help kinship advocates connect children in kinship families with special educational services, including by helping with IEPs (Individualized Education Plans) and by training program staff at least annually to ensure staff understand current services.

One of the program's partners – a state lobbyist – noted that the strength of the GRANDfamilies Kinship Care program's collaborations is a key reason the state legislature funds them each year. The legislature does not want to create another bureaucracy. It appreciates that CSS is a central point for kin and does not seek to replicate the work of others.

Caregiver Engagement

This program began after caregivers elevated their needs to CSS and the organization saw the impact of meth on their existing families and noticed that children were going into the care of their kin. Caregivers have informed the program through town halls, surveys, and ongoing feedback. Recently, their input informed a complete overhaul of the curriculum for the 10-week course. Caregivers participate in the Kinship Coalition, informing statewide services and supports for the families.

“It means so much to me.”

– Kin Caregiver

Outreach to Families

Most families arrive through referrals from the program’s network of community partners and caregiver word of mouth. Program staff actively work to educate community partners about their services and the general needs of kinship families. The team also conducts outreach by distributing agency literature at expos, fairs, and other events; posting on social media; and updating the agency [website](#). The board, which includes pediatricians and attorneys, is also a good source of referrals.

The program does a “great job of targeting meaningful outreach opportunities and partnering – rather than just sitting at a fair all day that may yield little.”

– Staff Member

Funding & Sustainability

The GRANDfamilies Kinship Care program has a diverse and sustainable funding base. The program operates through line-item funding directly in the governor’s annual budget; contracts with the state’s child welfare agency; corporate foundation support; and an individual donor base that provides recurring cash support and in-kind donations of clothing, shoes, school supplies, and holiday resources. For its clinical services, the program is working towards fee-for-service payments through Medicaid. The program also benefits from volunteers and interns working towards Master of Social Work degrees.

Demonstrating Success & Continuous Quality Improvement

CSS collects and analyzes data in several ways. Prior to intake, every kinship family completes a pre-survey. Families complete a follow-up post survey after they have been

involved with the program for 12 weeks. In addition, clients are asked to complete surveys after each class of the 10-week program and each Friend2Friend event. The program also distributes an annual survey of services.

Program staff analyze these surveys along with audits and feedback from a client complaint form. Staff meet monthly to review program progress, implementation, and contract compliance. If a nonconformance issue is identified, the program implements a solution through an eight-step process to carry out changes and prevent recurrence.

The program also uses feedback to improve and offer additional services. For example, based on comments in satisfaction surveys after a Friend2Friend event, the program began offering the teen-only Friend2Friend events.

About 15 years ago, the GRANDfamilies Kinship Care program underwent an evaluation with Utah Valley University that yielded good results. Now, the program is in the middle of a research project with the University of Utah Social Research Institute, with anticipated completion and submission to the [Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse](#) by the fall of 2024. As of November 2023, the program has signed a contract with [Nevada's Foster Kinship](#) program for temporary implementation of its program and is working with the state child welfare agency to apply for the title IV-E match based on that implementation. One county in Utah will continue with the CSS model to maintain fidelity for its own submission to the Clearinghouse.

Challenges & Areas for Program Improvement and Growth

Staff noted that one of their biggest challenges is getting kin caregivers to participate long-term with the Kinship Advisory Council. They can get caregivers to participate initially but struggle to keep them engaged. Another significant challenge is teen engagement. The program is planning to involve teens in revising the curriculum of their 10-week psychoeducational course for teens, and they plan to form a teen council.

Program leadership, staff, caregivers, and partners all identified the same basic areas for growth. Beyond their existing statewide virtual services, stakeholders would like to see physical offices in each county to better reach grandfamilies living on tribal lands and in remote, frontier areas. The program plans to open offices in all counties with enough families and needs to sustain those sites. The program also plans to hire a family advocate with experience supporting kinship families who are members of Utah's tribes.

Stakeholders are also eager for the program to conduct more outreach and advertising so that families can find the program easier; expand therapeutic services; and offer

more respite, including through adult-only social events. The “more please” feedback speaks volumes about the program.

Lesson Learned

Among the lessons learned, the key lesson elevated by staff is to engage kin, find out their biggest needs, and build services around those needs.

Additional Program Resources

- ▶ [Program website](#)
- ▶ [Intake form](#)
- ▶ [Program video](#)
- ▶ [Traumatic Experiences Questionnaire](#)
- ▶ [General services flyer](#)
- ▶ [Client pre-survey](#)
- ▶ [Psychoeducational group topics](#)
- ▶ [Client post-survey](#)

Learn More about the Network’s Exemplary Designation

Network staff, along with staff of a partner organization, participated in a site visit to this program and are available to answer questions based on this summary. Please complete this short [form](#) and we will get back to you.

For information about the steps and criteria of the exemplary designation process, please click [here](#).

The Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network: A National Technical Assistance Center (Network) helps 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 whose parents are unable to do so. For more information, please visit www.GKSNetwork.org.

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.

© Generations United, 2023

The Network is a project of
Generations United.

**generations
united**

Because we're stronger together®