

## A Snapshot of Exemplary Kinship Programs

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Throughout 2023, Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network staff and partners/subject matter experts visited organizations across the country. Our mission: To identify exemplary programs serving kin caregivers. Following application reviews and site visits, the Network is granting exemplary status to 14 programs. This resource spotlights the best practices and visionary approaches of three of these exemplary programs. Our overall goal with this work is to help kinship service providers learn from each other and support more kinship families around the country.

### The Programs

- ▶ The [Kinship Care Project at Atlanta Legal Aid Society, Inc.](#) serves grandfamilies in five Atlanta-area counties. To qualify, grandfamilies must have incomes below 200% of the federal poverty rate. The project offers free legal representation in adoption, guardianship, and legal custody cases as well as a holistic assessment of families' needs and a connection to public benefits. In 2023, the project assisted over 722 children in the metropolitan Atlanta area, and they train more than 50 volunteers each year.
- ▶ [GRANDfamilies Kinship Care at Children's Service Society of Utah](#) operates throughout Utah, with a physical presence in eight counties and statewide virtual services. They provide case management; psycho-educational classes for caregivers, adolescents, and children; monthly events; and short-term clinical services and clinical referrals. Their staff developed, wrote, and facilitate their own grandfamily support curriculum to address the families' needs.
- ▶ [High Country Caregivers in North Carolina](#) serves kin caregivers in a six-county rural area, regardless of child welfare involvement, family relationship, or income. Kin caregivers benefit from monthly support groups, weekly coffee chats, and respite during youth activities. Youth participate in field trips, camping adventures, career guidance, and more. Since starting kinship navigation in 2019, High Country Caregivers has had a 756% increase in program participation.

### Common Themes Among Exemplary Programs

- ▶ **Quality Intake Assessment and Follow-Up** – The Kinship Care Project at Atlanta Legal Aid uses a comprehensive kinship check-up to ask about all issues a family might be facing, with a second assessment designed to assign attorneys to families. GRANDfamilies Kinship Care administers a pre-survey to determine concrete needs and assess how caregivers are doing, with a follow-up survey at twelve weeks. High Country Caregivers does an in-home visit within seven days of initial contact to address “first needs,” such as finding housing, obtaining tangible resources such as beds, and accessing legal services.
- ▶ **Caregiver Involvement in Programming and Advocacy** – The lived experiences of caregivers are a critical part of developing, improving, and advocating for programming for kinship families. GRANDfamilies Kinship Care engages caregivers in advocacy with state legislators. High Country Caregivers conducts an annual survey of caregivers. Volunteers

include kin caregivers, and one serves as the chair of its board of directors. At the Kinship Care Project, both the managing attorney and the senior paralegal are kin caregivers.

- ▶ **Engaging Clients and Building Trust** – “Nine times out of ten we give them something at that first meeting,” often a referral to a lawyer who can help them, says Marty Wilson, CFO and Program Director at High Country Caregivers. She notes that about half of their referrals now come from word of mouth. Building on that, Jacqueline (Jacki) L. Payne, Managing Attorney at the Kinship Care Project, shares the importance of “being open and honest...and then following up... Word gets passed around.” Alyssa Craven, GRANDfamilies Director at GRANDfamilies Kinship Care, says that their program is “a no strings attached, free service to families, and we really try to emphasize that, that we’re just here to support you...We’re just there to walk every step with them, if they’re willing.”

## Advice for Other Programs

- ▶ Jacki says, “start small” and build as people hear about what you are doing. She adds that the people they serve “are just startled and stymied and trying to figure out ‘Where do I start? What do I need to do?’...Look for the grants. The work will come. It’s like Field of Dreams. If you build it, they will definitely come.”
- ▶ Alyssa advises researching what is available in the community so that you are filling gaps rather than duplicating efforts. Her organization used the Utah [GrandFacts fact sheet](#) to help identify what was missing in their state.
- ▶ Marty suggests providing information aligned with service areas. Her team has developed a Resource Guide for each county they serve. She also suggests convening a Board of Directors with firsthand lived experience to guide the work.

You will find complete profiles of exemplary programs [here](#). Please use our [form](#) to reach out to our technical assistance specialists, Shalah Bottoms and Kylee Craggett, with any questions.

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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](http://www.GKSNetwork.org).

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