

## Reaching Rural Kinship/Grandfamilies

Kinship/grandfamilies in rural areas have [strengths and challenges](#) similar to those of kinship/grandfamilies in other locations. However, data suggests that many families in rural settings face additional difficulties, including physical isolation, limited social support networks, financial hardships, desire for privacy, challenges with internet/connectivity, and overall poorer health. Access to services and government agencies such as family court, child care, health/mental health services, respite care, and various specialists can be scarce in rural areas. Additionally, getting to these services requires a working vehicle and a long drive, and may involve missing work, arranging childcare, and incurring additional expenses.

### Suggestions for Serving Rural Kinship/Grandfamilies

#### Build trust.

- ▶ Find someone who is known and trusted in the community to introduce you to kinship/grandfamilies and local advocates.

#### Ask families what they need.

- ▶ For guidance on seeking kinship/grandfamilies' input in creating programs/offering services, see [Tips to Include Kinship/Grandfamilies in Programmatic Decision-Making](#).
- ▶ Evaluate caregiver interest in using virtual resources such as counseling, telehealth calls, and online education. Provide education on using the internet and computers if needed and desired.

#### Offer multiple ways to connect.

- ▶ Offer connection to other caregivers through virtual support groups. Encourage additional peer-to-peer connections by facilitating email lists, social media groups, phone calls, texts, and letters.
- ▶ Provide one-to-one professional support through warmlines, toll-free phone services, and email. Ask caregivers for their preferred method of communication and have staff conduct periodic check-ins to identify changing needs, offer assistance, provide reassurance, and let families know that they are not alone.
- ▶ Promote family-focused conferences (local, regional, and state) to connect caregivers, offer information and services, and identify those interested in support groups.

#### Create print and online resources that can be accessed 24/7.

- ▶ Use your organization's website to share free webinars and recordings, resources, forums, discussions, and events that address the challenges your families have identified. Nevada's Foster Kinship program has an online [Kinship Resource Locator](#) so that kin caregivers can find the answers they need 24/7 without making a phone call (while also offering a phone number for those without internet access). Other programs are replicating the structure of this tool.

*"Finding therapists that were able to come to our home took months. ... Ultimately, we had to travel 1.5 hours to therapy. ... I'm still young (48 yesterday) and so I'm still ambitious enough to drive my granddaughter into town for activities and field trips. But for some of these older grands, I imagine it's not as easy."*

*– Kin caregiver in rural Colorado*

- ▶ Share resources via social media and other platforms for wider dissemination.
- ▶ Create toolkits around common themes like legal options, available benefits, and local supports. Include links to or printed copies of the [GrandFacts sheet](#) for your location/population.
- ▶ Make and distribute hard copies of resources to individuals without internet access.

### Collaborate!

- ▶ Work with other organizations to close gaps in service (transportation, food, etc.). For ideas of potential partners, see [Identifying and Engaging Untapped Partners](#).
- ▶ Show up in places where grandfamilies might be, like county fairs, schools, grocery stores, etc.
- ▶ Advocate at the nearest healthcare facility to expand mobile services, telehealth calls, and back-to-back appointment scheduling to minimize caregivers' missed work.

### Find ways to make life easier.

- ▶ Ask caregivers to sign short permission-to-contact forms and share them with other service providers to shift the onus of contact from the caregivers to the service providers.
- ▶ Arrange local respite and social activities, like fun family events.
- ▶ Use volunteers, such as through AmeriCorps Seniors Foster Grandparents or RSVP, to provide child care during events or support group sessions.

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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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