

GRANDFAMILIES & KINSHIP SUPPORT NETWORK

A National Technical Assistance Center



KINSHIP MATTERS TO

TANF

INTRODUCTION TO KINSHIP FAMILIES & GRANDFAMILIES

Kinship families, also known as grandfamilies, are families in which grandparents, other relatives, or close family friends are raising children whose parents are unable to do so. Your agency, organization, or program likely already serves kinship/grandfamilies yet may not provide tailored services specifically for them.



Over 2.4 million children in the U.S. are being raised by their grandparents, other relatives, or close family friends



47 percent of all TANF cases in the U.S. are child-only and the majority of these children live with a relative who is not their parent



For every 1 child in foster care, there are **18 children** being raised by kin outside of foster care



About 13 percent of children in kinship families are accessing TANF child-only, yet most are eligible

Being part of a kinship family benefits both kin caregivers and the children in their care. Compared to children living in foster care with non-relatives, children with relatives experience **greater safety, stability, and well-being**. Kin caregivers report feelings of **satisfaction, pride, and meaning in their role**. However, these caregivers also face an array of challenges. They may lose their peer group; feel socially isolated; and/or experience guilt, deep concern, and/or grief related to their own adult child or relative who cannot parent. These emotional challenges are compounded by the stress of needing to meet the child's basic needs, including their education and health care, all without the automatic legal authority that parents have.



KINSHIP/GRANDFAMILIES AND TANF

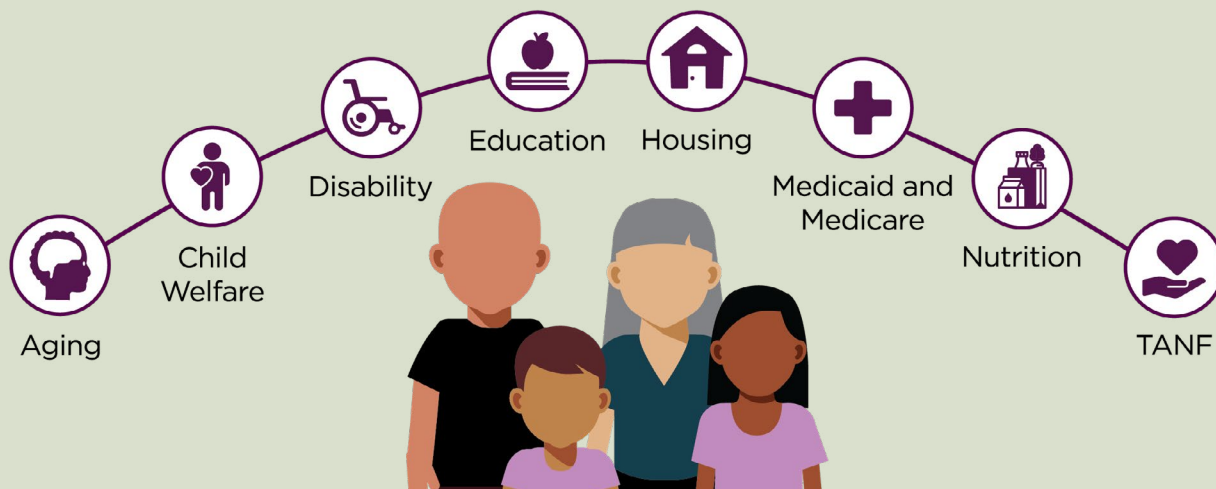
The vast majority of kin/grandfamily caregivers are raising the children in their care without the involvement of the foster care system. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) child-only grants are often the only source of ongoing financial support for these families. One of the primary purposes in the 1996 federal law creating TANF is to provide assistance so that children may be cared for “in the homes of relatives.”

Nevertheless, many kinship families encounter roadblocks in their attempts to access TANF child-only. In most jurisdictions, the application process is unclear for these grants and the grants only increase incrementally for each additional child, so kin caregivers raising a large sibling group may find it nearly impossible to meet the children’s basic needs.

States, territories, and tribes have a great deal of flexibility in how they implement TANF, and they can provide this important support in ways that are directly responsive to the needs of kinship/grandfamilies, as seen in the program examples highlighted in this booklet.

KINSHIP/GRANDFAMILIES INTERACT WITH MANY SYSTEMS

In addition to TANF, kinship/grandfamilies interact with many other systems, including aging, child welfare, disability services, education/schools, housing, Medicaid/Medicare, and nutrition providers. Dealing with multiple systems is time-consuming and emotionally draining. TANF agencies can help by facilitating or participating in cross-system collaboration and coordination and by supporting individual families as they navigate this challenging landscape.





PROGRAM EXAMPLES

Under federal law, all TANF agencies are permitted to offer good-cause exemptions to the requirement to assign child support collection to the state. **Massachusetts** and **Wyoming** have instituted policies that allow all kin/grandfamily caregivers who apply for TANF child-only to qualify for these good-cause exemptions. By taking this step, these states have removed the stipulation that is thought to be the most significant reason that many relative caregivers do not access TANF.

In New York, the kinship navigator program has a **“permission to contact”** form, which they share with TANF agencies. A TANF worker who is assisting a kin caregiver can invite the caregiver to complete the form if they would like to be contacted by a navigator, which shifts to the onus of making the first contact to the navigator.

Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe provides kinship/grandfamilies with per-child TANF grant amounts, similar to foster care maintenance payments. This policy supports the many caregivers striving to keep siblings together.

Legal Aid Of West Virginia receives TANF state block funds to provide legal services to kin caregivers who receive TANF child-only benefits.

THE GRANDFAMILIES & KINSHIP SUPPORT NETWORK CAN HELP

The Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network offers **no-cost assistance** to state, tribal, and territorial government agencies and community-based organizations to empower them to better serve kinship/grandfamilies. Access tip sheets, reports, webinar recordings, and more, all free of charge, on our **website**.



Sign up at GKSNetwork.org to receive our monthly newsletter, which contains the latest resources and information from the Network and around the field.

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