

GRANDFAMILIES & KINSHIP SUPPORT NETWORK

A National Technical Assistance Center



KINSHIP MATTERS TO

CHILD WELFARE

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 or program likely already serves kinship/grandfamilies:



Over 2.4 million children in the U.S. are being raised by a grandparent, other relative, or close family friend, with no parent living in the household



More than a third of all children in the foster care system – over 120,000 children across the country – are placed in the care of relatives



Over 30% of all children adopted from foster care are adopted by relatives



Over 10% of children who exit foster care exit into guardianships

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.

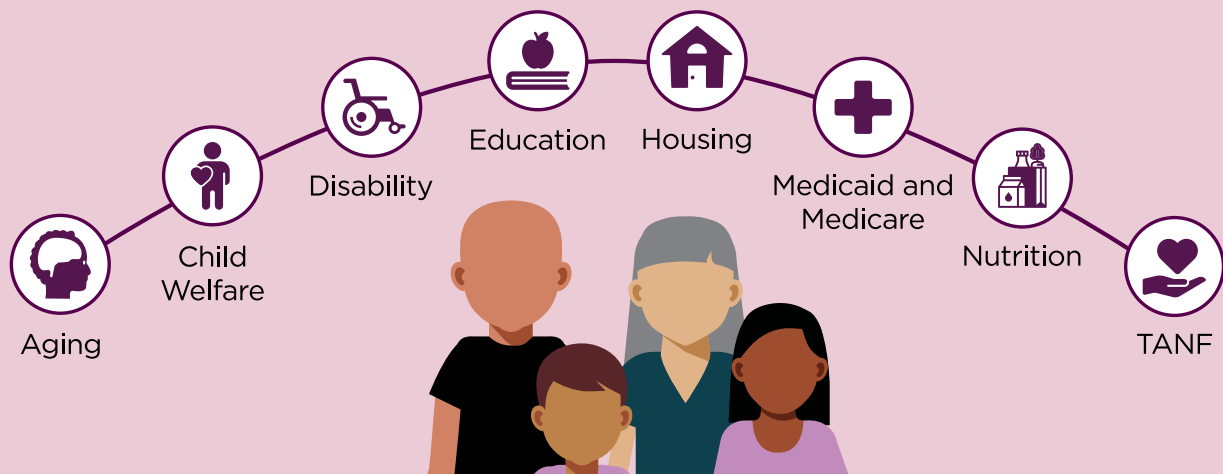


KINSHIP/GRANDFAMILIES AND CHILD WELFARE

When child welfare must remove children from their parents' care, it is important to **find kin** and place children with their kin whenever possible and safe. Kin caregivers should receive information about the benefits and challenges of foster care licensing and the various permanency options so that they can make informed decisions for their families. The federal government now allows **separate kin-specific foster care licensing**, and many **states and tribes** are implementing this commonsense flexibility to help support children placed with kin in foster care.

For every 1 child in the foster care system with a relative providing the care, there are 18 children being raised by kin outside that system. Reaching and supporting kinship/grandfamilies that are not in the foster care system can be an important part of the preventive efforts promoted by the Family First Prevention Services Act (Family First). **Jurisdictions can receive Family First funds** to offer "evidence-based" prevention services to children who are at "imminent risk" of entering or re-entering foster care. States, tribes, and territories have flexibility to make and update their own definitions of "imminent risk." Children, their parents, and their kin caregivers may receive mental health support, substance use treatment and prevention services, and in-home parent skill-based services.

Family First also allows ongoing federal reimbursement for kinship navigator programs, which help link caregivers and the children they raise to services and supports. Because this is federal child welfare funding (from title IV-B and title IV-E of the Social Security Act), child welfare agencies control the funding. A few child welfare agencies run their own kinship navigator programs, while others use their federal money to contract with trusted community nonprofits that serve all kinship families, such as Nevada's **Foster Kinship Program**.





KINSHIP/GRANDFAMILIES INTERACT WITH MANY SYSTEMS

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

PROGRAM EXAMPLES

In the District of Columbia, the Child and Family Services Agency has two subsidy programs, **the Grandparent Caregiver Program and the Close Relative Caregiver Program**. Both programs support low-income kin caregivers who are raising children outside of the child welfare system.

Allegheny County, Pennsylvania's child welfare agency worked with the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) to support a **grandfamilies stipend program**. Through this program, 901 income-eligible kinship families known to the AAA who were not receiving support from the child welfare system were able to secure one-time stipends of \$1,000.

In **Washington State**, child welfare and the Aging Network collaborate to run the statewide kinship navigator program, which is an approved evidence-based model in the Title IV-E Clearinghouse.

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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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.

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