

Grandfamilies- Relatives as Parents Program

Kids, Kin 'n Caregivers

(Virginia)



Kids, Kin 'n Caregivers (KKNC) provides a wide range of services in coastal Virginia to grandparents, other relatives, and close family friends who are raising children whose parents are unable to do so. The organization was established in 2017 to improve the health and stability of kinship families by providing concrete goods and supportive services.

The Grandfamilies-Relatives as Parents Program (KKNC RAPP) strives to empower and strengthen kinship families by instilling confidence, building self-sufficiency, teaching strong problem-solving skills, and providing parent coaching. The program takes a strengths-based approach to service provision, which is designed to promote health and well-being for the entire kinship family.

The program's service goals for kin caregivers are:

- ▶ Increased knowledge of parenting strategies for children who have experienced trauma
- ▶ Increased knowledge of community resources and benefit programs
- ▶ Increased self-care skills and decreased stress and social isolation
- ▶ Increased family resiliency, resourcefulness, and positive coping skills
- ▶ Increased problem-solving skills and empowerment
- ▶ Increased family stability



*Photo courtesy of Kids,
Kin 'n Caregivers*

KKNC RAPP provides an educational-empowerment series to kin caregivers as well as classes and activities designed for children and youth. Youth programs are focused on life skills and financial literacy training, cooking classes, and other activities to engage and empower children and youth raised by kin. This holistic approach to serving kinship families and the program's commitment to providing professional support are two of the reasons the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network is designating Kids, Kin 'n Caregivers' Grandfamilies-Relatives as Parents Program (KKNC RAPP) as exemplary.

Eligibility for Services and Intake

The program is available to any grandparent or other kin caregiver, regardless of their income or child welfare agency involvement. KKNC also provides support to grandparents who are not full-time caregivers but play an important and supportive role in their grandchildren's care due to challenging family circumstances. All kinship families complete an intake form, which helps the program identify the caregiver's needs.

Service Population

In 2024, KKNC RAPP served 132 families, reaching 230 children in those families. In the last 12 months, KKNC RAPP served 110 families, including the 259 children being raised in those families. The caregivers currently served by the program range from those in their mid-20's to great-grandparents in their 80's. The majority of program participants are African American women who are the head of their household and whose families are outside of the child welfare system. Most have parented their relative's child(ren) for three or more years, are on a fixed income, and have one or more chronic illnesses. The majority of the caregivers have sole and/or joint physical and legal custody of the children.



Photo courtesy of Kids, Kin 'n Caregivers

Services

Caregiver Education

- ▶ KKNC RAPP offers KinCare 101, a six- to eight-week educational and family enrichment series on the basics of kin caregiving that covers topics of significance to kin caregivers, such as understanding family dynamics, legal support, child development, parenting

strategies for the 21st century, parenting traumatized children, communication strategies, technology and social media, self-care, and compassion techniques.

- ▶ Parenting Toolbox is a monthly virtual workshop led by subject matter experts on a range of topics, such as bullying, autism, 504 plans, Social Security benefits, and legal services.
- ▶ KKNC RAPP uses Caring for Our Kin, a 12-part support group curriculum developed by Penn State Extension and the West Virginia Extension that integrates an educational component into peer support groups. It is designed to strengthen kinship families through support and education. Each module consists of a list of goals and objectives, lessons, activities, handouts, facilitator resources, and supplementary resources. Topics include child development, behaviors, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), addressing trauma, effective communication, navigating technology, legal issues, school navigation, resilience, and caregiver stress and health management. In the future, KKNC RAPP will begin administering a protective factors survey to those who complete this curriculum.

1:1 Targeted Services and Support

KKNC RAPP recognizes that one broad approach to reaching and helping families does not work. Often, support needs to be tailored to the unique needs of a family. Program staff provide 1:1 help whenever feasible and are ready to assist the kinship family at whatever stage they are in of the caregiving process. A kin caregiver said how valuable it was to have a staff member walk them through the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process and help prepare them for the school meeting. A grandparent who had no experience with technology received help from the director on navigating technology that would help them in their caregiving role. In the cases in which staff members do not have the required expertise needed to help a family, they will bring in someone who does.

“Dr. Kathy helped me learn how to address some of the challenges of raising an autistic child. I would not be able to do it without her.”

– Kin Caregiver and Adoptive Parent

Service Coordination and Resource Navigation

The program links kin caregivers to community services and resources. Program staff and volunteers educate kin caregivers on public benefits and eligibility requirements, and help them apply for respite care vouchers, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Supplemental Security Income.

Support Groups

Once a week, KKNC RAPP holds virtual Grandfamilies Coffee and Conversation Support Groups. Team Kin, a monthly in-person support group, is based on the Circle of Parents®

mutual self-help support group model, an evidence-informed program model in which support groups are facilitated by program staff and led by kin caregivers.

Kinship Cares

Kinship Cares provides concrete resources to caregivers, such as school supplies, clothing, diapers, HOPE packs, and toys, as well as monthly food distribution.



Photo courtesy of Kids, Kin 'n Caregivers

Dinner and Dialogue

These in-person gatherings bring together kinship families for an intergenerational activity, followed by dinner. After families eat together, children engage in their own activities while caregivers can connect with one another in an informal setting.

Kin Kids Adventure Groups

These events provide age-appropriate programming for children from ages 5-11, connecting them with other young people who are being raised by kin and giving them the opportunity to experience socialization activities together.

Youth RAPP/Kin Crew Program

This program is designed for tweens and teens, ages 12-17. Programming includes life skills training, strategies to build self-esteem, and financial education.

*"I found out that
there were other
people like me."*

*– Young Program
Participant
Raised by Kin*

Cooking with Miss B.

This five-week virtual cooking class is very popular amongst children and youth in the 5th grade and beyond.

Staff

The program is staffed by its executive director, a part-time staff member who assists with youth events, and three contract staff. The goal is to increase the number of staff members as the program grows. The organization has a strong internship program with several local colleges and universities, with approximately three interns assisting at any given time. The interns, who need to meet social work, counseling, and human services educational requirements to

participate in the program, assist with support groups, work 1:1 with families to access resources, organize children's activities, and help with special projects. Additionally, the organization has a very engaged and committed board of directors who are "on the ground" helping kinship families, planning events, or lending a hand wherever needed. The board members understand the unique circumstances and needs of the families; some are kin caregivers or bring expertise in social, health, and aging services.



Photo courtesy of Kids, Kin 'n Caregivers

Key Partners

Maintaining and establishing new partnerships has been essential to KKNC RAPP's efforts to build capacity and deliver vital resources and services to kin caregivers. KKNC RAPP has a long list of strong community partners that provide both direct and in-kind support to the program. The following is not a full list of partners but shows the diversity of partners available to meet the needs of kinship families:

- ▶ **Endeppendence Center** – helps kin caregivers address educational matters, such as Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 Plans, and offers other support to children and caregivers with disabilities and other special needs
- ▶ **Foodbank of Southeastern Virginia** – addresses food insecurity among kinship families by referring families to emergency food assistance through their network of over 200 partners
- ▶ **Healthy GrandFamilies Chesapeake** – offers access to HUB, a monthly program staffed by a registered nurse, a social worker, and a dietitian that addresses caregiver health and nutrition
- ▶ **JustServe** – a nationwide service, offered through the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, that matches community volunteers with local organizations, such as KKNC; through this partnership, KKNC RAPP has been able to access volunteer support for enrichment programs for families and has received donated holiday gifts, school supplies, home goods, care baskets for kin caregivers, etc.
- ▶ **Schools, such as the Chesapeake Public Schools Office of Family and Community Engagement** – partner with the program to meet their common goals of empowering

families and providing enrichment programming for children raised by kin. Other schools, such as Simonsdale Elementary School in Portsmouth, connect caregivers to resources available at KKNC RAPP through their Title I Family and Community Engagement Liaison.

- ▶ **St. Paul's United Methodist Church** – provides access to a kitchen and space for support groups, trainings, events, and storage
- ▶ **Virginia Beach Kinship Navigator Program** – provides short-term case management and refers kinship families to KKNC RAPP for support groups, the KinCare 101 program, and concrete goods
- ▶ **Virginia Cooperative Extension** – facilitates the virtual cooking classes and other activities for kinship families
- ▶ **Virginia Poverty Law Center** – helps kin caregivers learn how to navigate legal and court processes

Collaborations such as these have generated support from the broader community and facilitated the expansion of essential services and resources for kinship families. In an area that covers multiple cities, with different ways of administering services, cross-system collaboration can be challenging and caregiving can become complicated for families who interact with multiple jurisdictions.

Community partners acknowledged how adept the program staff members are at helping caregivers navigate services for themselves and the children they are raising in this environment. The program continues to seek new partnerships and ways to connect community partners to benefit kinship families no matter where they live.

“Kids, Kin ‘n Caregivers is exceptional. We couldn’t do this work without them. They cover a large area and manage the complexities of a multi-city area.”

– *Community Partner*

Caregiver Engagement

Two kin caregivers serve on the organization’s board, and other caregivers support the program by helping at events or providing extra support to newer caregivers. The program solicits and receives feedback and input from kin caregivers through several surveys each year. The findings from these surveys inform the refinement of programs and services, advise on the development of new programs and resources, and help identify topical areas for support groups and upcoming trainings. Conversations during support groups also help inform the program of unaddressed caregiver needs. A kin caregiver shared that the program truly pays attention to what they say they need. For example, caregivers wanted information to help prepare their

adolescent grandchildren for success. The program responded by developing a life-skills training. Other caregivers discussed how hard it was to find time for self-care. The program connected with the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, and caregivers can now access respite vouchers.

Outreach to Families

Schools, kinship navigators, local Departments of Social Services, and community organizations all refer families to KKNC RAPP. Families also find the program through family friends and Google searches. KKNC RAPP attends community events, participates in vendor fairs, provides workshops, and seeks other opportunities to inform the community about the program through various media outlets, including local television stations. KKNC RAPP distributes program and event information to their email subscribers and vast network of community partners, kinship navigators, parenting education networks, and other organizations that work closely with families. A recent partnership with local Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) programs resulted in information about the program being placed in all family court offices in the area.

Funding and Sustainability

KKNC RAPP is sustained through public and private grants, individual and corporate donors, and fees for services. KKNC has a contract with a nearby city to provide parenting classes to biological and kinship families, and they are planning to contract with a county to lead KKNC's Youth RAPP program.

Their 25 Donor Club encourages individual donors to provide ongoing, monthly financial support used for direct assistance to kinship families. The program continues to identify and pursue new and expanded funding sources from the public and private sectors, as well as new partners. The program benefits from a long list of individuals and organizations that provide in-kind donations such as food, material goods, school supplies, gift cards, holiday gifts, and more. Its expansive volunteer base is key to program sustainability. Board members, volunteers, community-based organizations, and local corporations provide expertise and resources to meet the complex needs of kinship families. Families that have received services want to give back to the program and provide peer support.

Demonstrating Success and Continuing Quality Improvement

KKNC RAPP uses continuous quality improvement processes and procedures with the goals of providing high-quality services to clients; fostering a cohesive team with staff, board members, volunteers, lived experience leaders, and community partners; reducing waste and activities that

do not add value; increasing safety in the work environment; and being good stewards of their funds.

KKNC RAPP administers several surveys each year to assess program satisfaction and service utilization and needs. An annual survey invites participants to rate their satisfaction with the services they receive and the extent to which the support impacted them and their families. A separate annual survey helps the program understand caregiver needs, utilization of services, and educational topics that are most relevant to them. A third survey was administered to active KKNC RAPP program participants – kin caregivers who regularly participate in two or more program offerings (i.e., support groups, resource navigation, educational seminars, family/intergenerational activities) per year. That survey assessed the kin caregivers' program needs and overall satisfaction with the services they received. The most recent survey revealed that 97% of participants found KKNC RAPP's services to be very helpful. Participants in life-skills and educational classes take pre- and post-tests to assess the efficacy of the classes.

The executive director of KKNC and board members who are members of grandfamilies are instrumental in evaluating the survey results and applying the information to inform program improvements and future initiatives that will best serve kinship families.

Challenges and Areas for Program Improvement and Growth

KKNC RAPP wants to invest more time and resources in advocating for more legal services for kin caregivers. They want to enhance their community outreach to families to increase families' utilization of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). In order to have more kinship families participate in KKNC RAPP, they need to tackle the barriers to family participation, such as transportation, lack of free time, and concerns about false perceptions of being unable to care for the child if they apply for services.

Lessons Learned

KKNC RAPP has learned that being intentional and strategic in establishing a board of directors is critical to success. The program has learned to take the time to get to know potential board members so that it can assess the person's true commitment to the agency's mission and service to kinship families. KKNC RAPP has realized the significant importance of including kin caregivers and individuals with backgrounds in social services on the board of directors.

The Virginia Department of Social Services is a state-supervised and locally administered social services system, with 120 local offices across the state. KKNC RAPP borders several cities and localities with different ways of implementing state regulations, which can make caregiving

challenging for some families. KKNC RAPP has learned how to be flexible, adaptable, and resourceful to help kin caregivers navigate the complexities of accessing services in a multi-jurisdiction, multi-regulatory area.

The advice that program staff members have for others interested in replicating their program is to focus less on the numbers of families served and more on the quality of programming that is offered. They also advise others not to be discouraged when results do not come as quickly as you want. The program team has learned that growth and impact take time. KKNC RAPP has demonstrated that commitment, discipline, and patience are key attributes of successful kinship programs. The director shared, “As you try to build partnerships and raise money, you might not get a response right away. Plant seeds and be patient for the results that will come later.”

Additional Program Resource

- ▶ [Kids, Kin ‘n Caregivers website](#)

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.

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