

Developing Rural & Multi-State Kinship Navigator Programs: Lessons, Models & Opportunities

February 11, 2026

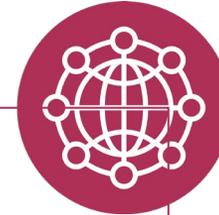
- Welcome, we will begin at the top of the hour
- Please type in the **chat** box - your name, state, tribe (if applicable), and role
- Type questions in the **chat** box at any point during our time together
- **We will provide a separate meeting link for a 30-minute Q&A with our presenters, starting in an hour, at 3 PM ET**
- By the end of the week, all participants will receive a link to the slides and the recording

Who We Are & How We Help



Learning Collaboratives and Information Dissemination

The Network hosts webinars and facilitates learning collaboratives.



A Centralized Hub

The Network is elevating exemplary kinship/grandfamily practices and programs from around the country.



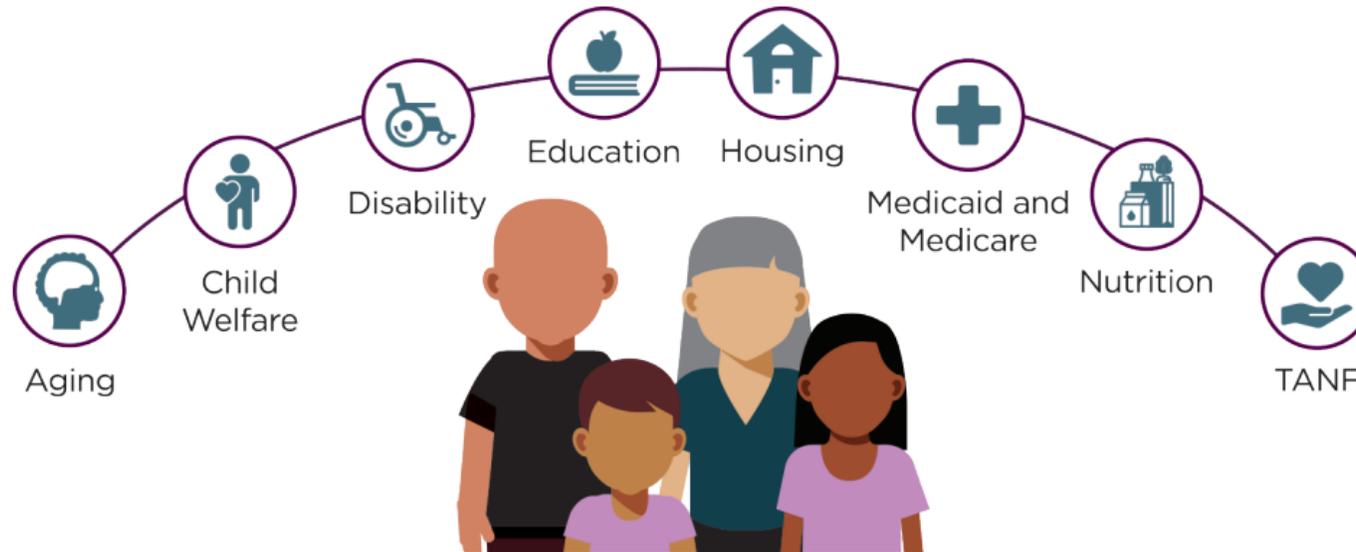
Bridging Systems for Kinship Families

The Network is helping Idaho, San Diego County, and Oneida Nation of Wisconsin optimize their collaborative approaches and improve their services. Solutions will be replicable for others.



Individual Assistance

We respond to individual requests for help from government agencies and nonprofit organizations.



Welcome Our Presenters



Travis Bryant
Executive Director
Adoptive and Foster
Families of Maine & The
Kinship Program



Peyton Vining
Program Manager
Montana Kinship
Navigator Program



Chandra Ortiz
Navigation Programs &
Community Impact
Manager
Kinship Connections of
Wyoming



Gabby McGuire
Kinship Navigator
Kinship Connections of
Wyoming



ADOPTIVE & FOSTER FAMILIES OF MAINE & THE KINSHIP PROGRAM



- 27 years of adoptive, foster, & kinship peer navigation support and support groups in conjunction with the Maine Office of Child and Family Services
- AFFM leveraged private grants, Congressional Direct Spending Grant, & Title IV-B Navigator funds to add Case Management, an evaluation team, and an updated electronic data system in 2019-2021
- Program Staff: 1 FT Program Manager, 3 FT & 2 PT Kinship Navigators
- Joined the Kinship Navigator Collaborative in 2021

MONTANA KINSHIP PROGRAM



- ▶ 20+ years of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren peer support groups in conjunction with Montana State University Extension
 - ▶ Offered statewide Information & Referral ‘warm’ line
- ▶ Montana rebranded (MTKNP) & added Case Management in 2021 using Title IV-B Navigator funds
- ▶ Program Staff: 1 FT Program Manager/Lead Navigator, 1 PT Student Interns
- ▶ Joined the Kinship Navigator Collaborative in 2021

KINSHIP CONNECTIONS OF WYOMING



- ▶ Program created from the ground up in 2019 using Title IV-B Navigator funds
- ▶ Piloted program in Natrona & Laramie Counties in 2020
- ▶ Designed to do both Information & Referral and Case Management with existing I & R channel of Wyoming 211
- ▶ Program Staff: 1 FT Program Manager, 1 FT Kinship Navigator
- ▶ Joined the Kinship Navigator Collaborative in 2021

PURPOSE & BENEFITS OF THE KINSHIP NAVIGATOR COLLABORATIVE

- Support kinship families caring for their children – safety, stability, permanency
- Build community capacity to link families with community resources
- Bring together states / jurisdictions / Tribes that have yet to stand up a Kinship Navigator model to agree on common programs elements
- Ensure this common Kinship Navigator model meets federal requirements for KN programs (and lessons learned over time)
- Ensure evaluations in the multiple sites meet the rigorous standards to build evidence so it can be positively rated by the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse, and be eligible for ongoing, future entitlement funding and reimbursements
- Technical support and guidance from Casey Family Programs, Generations United and Dr. Angelique Day from the University of Washington
- Design and completion of a program manual for an evidence-based program

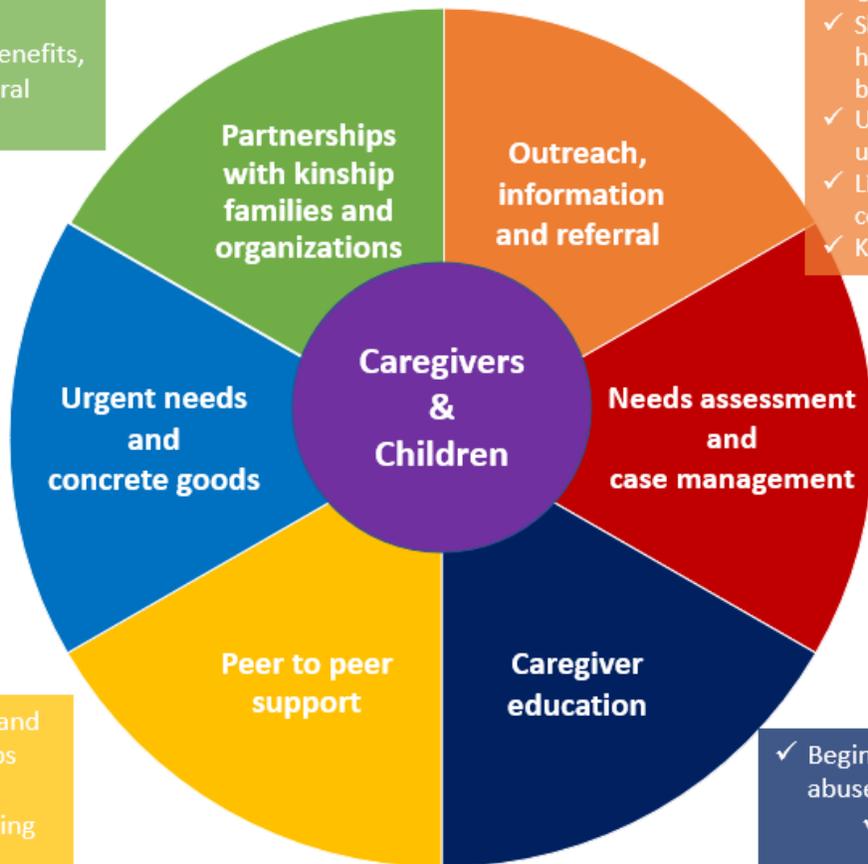


Kinship Navigator Collaborative Program Model

- ✓ Advisory Council— eight (8) current members; includes caregivers, coalition leaders, local kin/family organizations; meet quarterly to encourage ongoing feedback
- ✓ Our staff trained in placement options, public benefits, trauma, grief & loss, case management, & cultural competence

- ✓ Comfort Cases; Emergency Financial Assistance; Concrete goods (diapers, wipes, pull-ups, toiletries, calm down boxes)

- ✓ Monthly peer to peer support group in both Case and Control counties – Case and Control support groups will be separate of each other
- ✓ Peer to peer support group has one caregiver leading with guidance of a Kinship Navigator if needed



- ✓ WY has a website w/contact us email feature; links to KN contacts in each county; Wyoming 2-1-1 contact
- ✓ Permission to contact embedded in the Contact Us feature; Permission to Contact form shared with child welfare offices (DFS, GAL's), CASA programs, schools in each county, pediatricians & pediatric dentists offices
- ✓ Coordinated w/211 to help guide caregivers to kinship services
- ✓ Share public benefit information, legal referrals, medical and mental health referrals with families ; offer support in enrolling into public benefit programs and complete guardianship paperwork
- ✓ Use FB for marketing new events, and also to consistently inform users of all things family support related
- ✓ Listservs: Monthly newsletter; soon to incorporate a donor/partner community newsletter
- ✓ Kinship Navigators sit at multiple vendor events through the year

- ✓ For CM, each referral is handled by the Kinship Navigator assigned to that county; the Pre-screening tool is used to determine if eligible for Case Management; Intake/Family Needs; Assessment/Caregiver Stress Scale conducted; county specific referral packet sent
- ✓ For I&R, referral is handled by KN assigned to county; Intake/Family Needs Assessment/Caregiver Stress Scale conducted; county specific referral packet sent

- ✓ Begining May - June to offer NTDC trainings (substance abuse, grief & loss, trauma, self-care)
 - ✓ This will be done in partnership with Montana – training groups will be combined between the states



UPDATED KINSHIP NAVIGATOR COLLABORATION (KNC) Project Timeline 2022-2026

1

**DECEMBER
2021**

- Soft launch
- Discussions to finalize decisions about fidelity to the model.
- Begin enrolling families with the understanding that some may not be counted in the evaluation if services do not fully meet final fidelity requirements.

2

**FEBRUARY
2022**

- Full launch
- Fidelity to the model **finalized**.
- Continue enrolling at least 7 families per month on average to reach 125 in the intervention group by end of 18 months.

3

**DECEMBER
2024**

- Families enrolled in December 2024 have completed the intervention period.

4

MAY 2025

- Each state has enrolled at a minimum 125 families.

5

**DECEMBER
2025**

- 6-month evaluation follow up with all intervention families completed.

6

**MARCH -
JUNE
2026**

- Compile results, submit to peer-reviewed journals and prepare for clearinghouse submission.

7

MARCH - JUNE 2026

Submit to clearinghouse.

WHY WE JOINED FORCES

- Montana and Wyoming are both rural frontier states with lower populations than many states applying for funding.
- Both states have purposes and challenges of rural states in meeting guidelines for Clearinghouse approval.
 - Ability to compete with larger states for funding opportunities
- Both states have strengths to bring a willingness to work together to form a joint program and evaluation.
- Continue to have work guided by the collaborative, at times shaping the directions of the collaborative and providing insights based on what each state has already begun to develop.
- Both states are on board to develop joint plans to meet both navigator and evaluator needs, and ultimately those of the kin families, and state/federal funding partners.
- No other programs have submitted to the Clearinghouse with a program for evaluation that serves both formal and informal caregivers.



OUR FAMILIES

Information & Referral

	MT	WY
Average Age of Caregiver	53.09	51.32
Age Range	25-75 years old	22-78 years old
Average # of Kinship Kids in the Home	1.98	1.69
Race/Ethnicity	74% White, 20% American Indian	86% White, 5% American Indian, 5% Two or More Races, 2% Black, 1% Declined to Answer

Case Management

	MT	WY
Average Age of Caregiver	53.89	50.74
Age Range	20-83 years old	20-78 years old
Average # of Kinship Kids in the Home	2.08	1.53
Race/Ethnicity	57% White , 41% American Indian	88% White, 4% American Indian, 2% Two or More Races, 3% Black, 2% Declined to Answer

LESSONS LEARNED

- Outreach
 - Kinship 101, Statewide trips
- Partnerships - critical
 - Department of Family Services/Child Protection Services
 - State 211 programs –linking families to services
 - Tribal partners
- Fidelity
 - Weekly meetings/check-ins, client review/follow ups
- Client Surveys
 - Multiple follow-up techniques and attempts, colored envelopes, incentives



EXEMPLARY PROGRAM STATUS



A HUGE MILESTONE IN OUR JOURNEY

GOLD STAR STATUS

A NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED PROGRAM THAT EXEMPLIFIES THE WORK WE DO WITH FAMILIES IN OUR STATES

Read more here:

www.gksnetwork.org/resources/exemplary-policies-practices-and-programs/

DUAL STATE PARTNERSHIP

- Quasi-experimental evaluation by Montana State University and University of Wyoming evaluators.

Child Safety

Placement Permanency

Caregiver Well-Being

Access to Resources

EVALUATION

- Kinship placements are increasingly preferred
- Evidence highlights potential positive short and long-term outcomes for kin families
- Family First Prevention Services Act was passed in 2018, recognizing the increased role of kinship families
- Act provides for federal funding of enhanced programs like KNPs that mitigate entry into foster care
- To be eligible for federal funds, KNPs are required to submit their program model for evaluation in the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse
- The Clearinghouse rates program which meet criteria of causal evidence in these categories:
 - promising, supported, well-supported

WHAT WE ARE EVALUATING

- Equivalent comparison groups
 - Variables: Caregiver Age & Race/Ethnicity, SES, Child Age
- Fidelity to service delivery
 - Participants with 75% or greater fidelity score would be included in analysis
- Outcomes for participants
 - Wellbeing of caregiver
 - Use of services with or without navigator
 - Stability and safety

FINAL GOAL

Completed program manual
~ Including evaluation process, program processes,
program forms

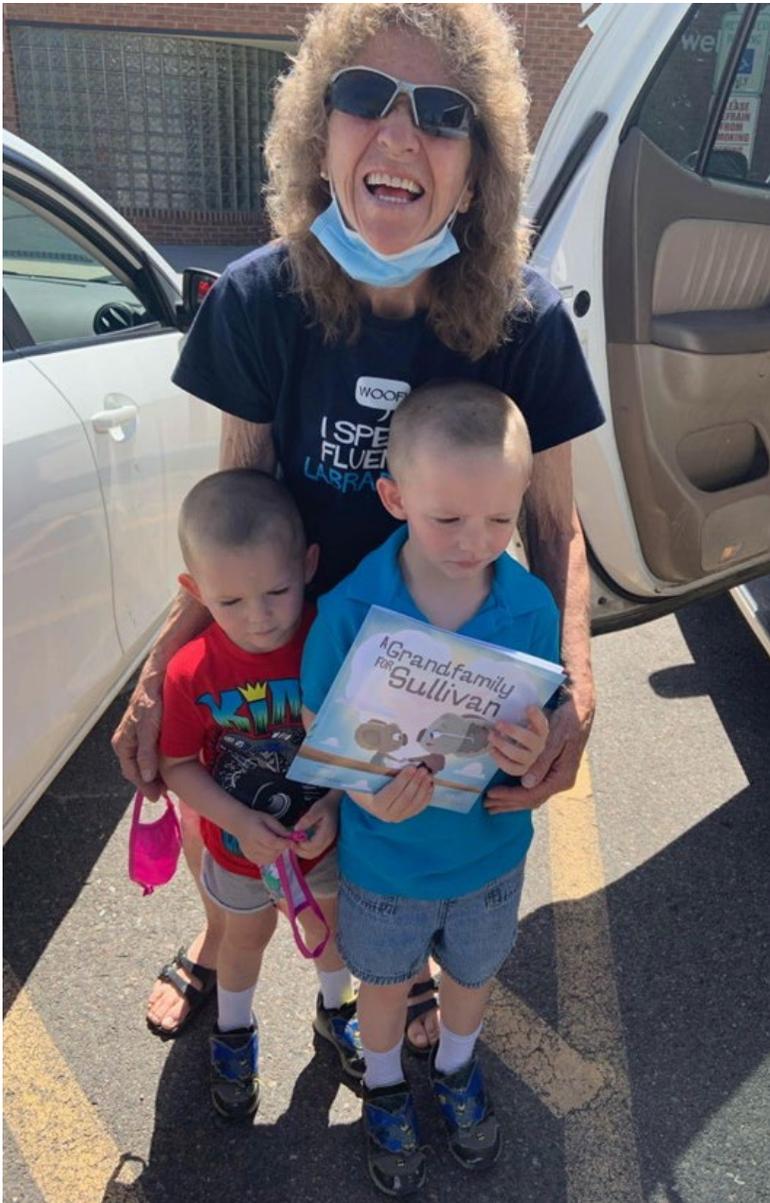
250 participants enrolled in the study– completed to
75% fidelity

Submission of our combined program evaluation to
the Federal Clearinghouse for review

Acceptance/Compliance with Federal Clearinghouse
Standards
~ Access to Title IV-E funding

Provide a program approved by the Clearinghouse
designed for any state to use and build a program
around





DON'T TAKE OUR WORD FOR IT

- Helped to get my granddaughter clothes and shoes. Gave me resources that were extremely helpful in gaining permanent guardianship of our granddaughter and has been very helpful with some of the questions that have come up since then.
- They were kind. They helped me find the resources I needed to better care for my grandchildren. They were an ear to listen to my worries about the past and the future.
- Just listened to me, that was something that was very important. Just my feelings and what I had to say.
- Assisted me with paperwork and guided through processes. Explained everything so that I felt positive about the future.
- She went to work the same day I spoke with her and little by little things got better and a huge weight was lifted from my shoulders. My family and I could never thank her enough for fixing our issues.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF – THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

- How does it look like for your program? For your State?
- What do your demographics look like? County to county? State to state?
- Would a dual approach work for your program?
- What does funding look like for you? What are your resources/logistics?
 - Incentive funding
 - Colored envelopes for surveys
- Staffing – new processes (case management, I & R)
- Rural state enrollment, what does that look like?

CONTACT INFO



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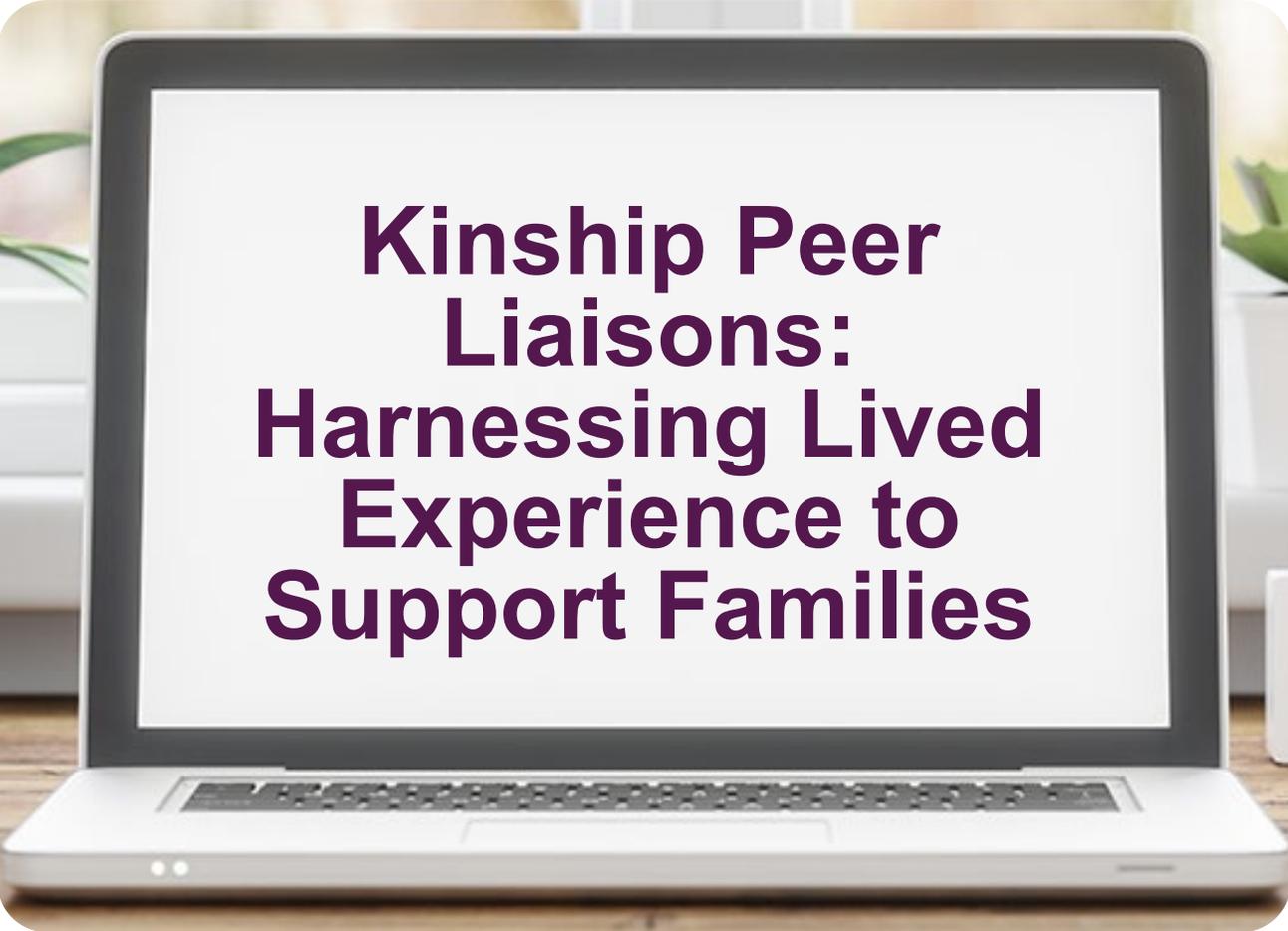


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Join Us for our Next Webinar!



**Kinship Peer
Liaisons:
Harnessing Lived
Experience to
Support Families**

Wednesday, March 18, 2026

2:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. ET

Register Here



Connect & Access Support

Request assistance

We will add you to our monthly newsletter list, unless you ask us not to. To see past issues: www.gksnetwork.org/the-network-connection-newsletter/

For the latest updates, follow the Network on [LinkedIn](#)





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