

Kin Caregiver Service Needs

Starting a Kin Caregiver Support Service



Learning Community Insights

TOPIC 3 OF 5

Conducting a [community needs assessment](#) can help you both discover and understand the needs of kin caregivers in your community, which are two critical steps to ensuring your new program has the greatest possible impact.

It also can be helpful to understand which services can help meet the needs that your community needs assessment identifies. This resource describes the top services needed by kin caregivers nationwide, shares how those services help, and provides examples of model services successfully implemented across the country.

Top Kin Caregiver Service Needs

Information and Referral (I&R)

- ▶ **Why It's Needed:** Kin caregivers and their families are often [unfamiliar](#) with the various supports and services offered in their communities that could help them.
- ▶ **Model Service:** The [Area Office on Aging of Northwestern Ohio \(AOoA\)](#) [operates a Kinship Navigator Program](#). Their program provides I&R specific to the needs of kin caregivers and their families. In 2024, the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network designated AOoA's program as Exemplary.

Support Groups

- ▶ **Why They're Needed:** [Support groups](#) offer social and emotional support to participants while also providing them with an opportunity to give and receive information, education/resources, and problem-solving assistance.
- ▶ **Model Service:** [Southwest Idaho Area Agency on Aging](#) provides bilingual (English and Spanish) kin caregiver support groups, as well as wraparound services.

Support Group Resources

- ▶ [Grandfamily Support Groups: Seven Tips for Getting Started](#) – two-page tip sheet with links to additional resources
- ▶ [Support Groups: Recruiting, Retention, and Everything in Between](#) – webinar and associated resources

Caregiver Training

- ▶ **Why It's Needed:** Kin caregivers often find themselves interacting with many government systems (like aging, child welfare, disability, education, housing, income and nutrition supports, and Medicaid/Medicare), and developing an understanding of these systems will help them better advocate for themselves and the children they are raising. Trainings on legal/custody issues, accessing public benefits, and school and disability services can provide much-needed information to help families. Additionally, caregivers might appreciate trainings to help them navigate family challenges, such as trainings focused on addressing changing relationship dynamics, dealing with difficult behaviors in children of different ages, and supporting children who have experienced trauma.
- ▶ **Model Services:** A [list of promising kin caregiver training curricula](#) is available from the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network. Other model services include [GRANDfamilies Kinship Care at Children's Service Society of Utah](#); [Kids, Kin 'n Caregivers](#); and the [Kinship Empowerment Program at DC KinCare Alliance](#) – each of which has a caregiver training/education component. In 2024, the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network designated all three of these programs as Exemplary,

Financial Assistance and Discounted or No-Cost Goods and Services

- ▶ **Why They're Needed:** Raising a child (or multiple children) is expensive. Although kinship/grandfamilies form at all income levels, [over 20 percent](#) of children whose grandparents are responsible for them are living in poverty.
- ▶ **Model Service – Financial Assistance:** The Allegheny County Area Agency on Aging (AAA), in partnership with A Second Chance, Inc., runs a grandfamilies stipend program that provides a one-time stipend of \$1,000 to income-eligible kin caregivers who are not involved with child welfare and therefore are ineligible for financial assistance through child welfare. In 2024, USAging recognized the AAA with an [Aging Achievement Award](#).
- ▶ **Model Service – Discounted and No-Cost Goods and Services:** Bexar Area Agency on Aging in Texas, in partnership with San Antonio Threads, provides new clothing and backpacks for children in kinship/grandfamilies, as noted in the profile highlighting their work in [Kinship/Grandfamilies: The Role of Area Agencies on Aging and Title VI Native American Aging Programs](#).

Legal Services

- ▶ **Why They're Needed:** Many kin caregivers encounter roadblocks when they try to enroll the children they are raising in school or consent to health care for the children. To get the authority to take these steps, kin caregivers often need to establish a formal legal relationship with the children (usually custody,

guardianship, or adoption). Obtaining a legal relationship can be extremely confusing or impossible without help and, even with assistance, it is time-consuming and expensive. Without affordable [legal services](#), caregivers may end up draining their savings or retirement accounts, sacrificing any financial footing or safety net they may have had.

- ▶ **Model Service:** The [Kinship Care Project \(KCP\) at the Atlanta Legal Aid Society](#) provides no-cost legal representation to eligible kin caregivers residing in the five counties in and around Atlanta, Georgia. In 2024, the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network designated KCP as Exemplary.

Respite

- ▶ **Why It's Needed:** Kin caregivers need time to take care of themselves and handle other responsibilities. [Respite care](#) provides that – giving caregivers a chance to attend to their own appointments, paperwork, and chores, and/or to socialize, exercise, and relax.
- ▶ **Model Services:** The Southeast Tennessee Area Agency on Aging and Disability (SETAAAD) partners with a local tutoring agency to provide educational assistance to children and time off for kin caregivers. The rural kin caregivers served by SETAAAD report decreased stress levels and improved relationships with the children they raise. SETAAAD is one of five Area Agencies on Aging profiled in [Kinship/Grandfamilies: The Role of Area Agencies on Aging and Title VI Native American Aging Programs](#).

Respite Resources

- ▶ [Compassion Fatigue: Supporting Kin Caregivers Who Feel Overwhelmed](#) – two-page resource with links to additional resources
- ▶ [Toolkit for Starting a Kin Caregiver Respite Program](#) – tips and links to no-cost resources

Suggested Readings

Kin Caregiver Supportive Service Examples

- ▶ [Aging Innovations & Achievement Awards Showcase: Honoring Successful Initiatives of USAging Members](#), by USAging (see pages 17, 31, and 32 for kin caregiver supportive service descriptions)
- ▶ [Central Massachusetts Agency on Aging Hosts 1st Ever Grandparents Back-to-School Fun Fest](#), from Spectrum News 1

- ▶ [Elevating Exemplary Kinship Programs and Practices](#), from the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network (Network)
- ▶ [Exemplary Kinship Program: Kinship Navigator Program – Area Office on Aging of Northwestern Ohio \(AOoA\)](#), from the Network
- ▶ ['Gramping' Event Tightens Family Bonds](#) (2 ½ - minute video), from the County of San Diego's YouTube channel
- ▶ [Kinship/Grandfamilies: The Role of Area Agencies on Aging and Title VI Native American Aging Programs](#) (report), from USAging and the Network
 - Also [The Important Role of Area Agencies on Aging and Title VI Native American Aging Programs in Serving Kinship/Grandfamilies: Research, Resources, and Strategies for Success](#) (57-minute recorded webinar about the report), from USAging and the Network
- ▶ [Reinforcing a Strong Foundation: Equitable Supports for Basic Needs of Grandfamilies](#), by Generations United
- ▶ [Southwest Idaho Area Agency on Aging's Kinship Program: A Holistic Support for the Whole Family](#) (14-minute video), from USAging and the Network

Resources: Program/Service Development Guides

Resource for Starting a Children's Tutoring Program

- ▶ [Toolkit for Tutoring Programs](#), from the National Student Support Accelerator

Resources for Starting a Kin Caregiver Support Group

- ▶ [Grandfamily Support Groups: Seven Tips for Getting Started](#), from the Network
- ▶ [Kinship Care Resource Kit for Community and Faith-Based Organizations](#), from the Children's Defense Fund (see pages 7-10)
- ▶ [Maintaining Connection with Digital and Telephone Support Groups During the Time of the Coronavirus](#), from the American Foundation for the Blind (*though written for a different population, the article provides good guidance on a low-tech, distance support group option*)
- ▶ [Support Groups: Recruiting, Retention, and Everything in Between](#) (90-minute recorded webinar), from the Network

Resources for Starting Kin Caregiver Training/Education

- ▶ [Kinship Care Resource Kit for Community and Faith-Based Organizations](#), from the Children's Defense Fund (see pages 24-27)

- ▶ [Relevant Trainings \[curricula\] for Kin Caregivers and Those Who Work with Them](#), from the Network

Resources for Starting Kin Caregiver Respite

- ▶ [Federal Funding and Support Opportunities for Respite](#), from ARCH National Respite Network and Resource Center
- ▶ [Kinship Care Resource Kit for Community and Faith-Based Organizations](#), from the Children's Defense Fund (see pages 12-15)
- ▶ [Self-Directed Respite Voucher Guide](#), from ARCH National Respite Network and Resource Center
- ▶ [Volunteer Respite Manual: Creating Valuable Options for Family Caregivers](#), from ARCH National Respite Network and Resource Center

Resources for Starting a Mentoring Program

- ▶ [Chapter 22. Youth Mentoring Programs](#), from the Community Tool Box available from the Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas
- ▶ [Resources for Mentoring Programs](#), from the National Mentoring Resource Center

Resources for Starting to Provide Legal Aid

- ▶ [American Bar Association's Center for Pro Bono](#) (many of the materials are available at no cost to non-members)
- ▶ [Legal Services Corporation](#) (according to their website, they are "the single-largest funder for organizations providing civil legal aid to low-income Americans")
 - See also the Legal Services Corporation's [Provide Legal Services](#) webpage

Rural, Transportation, and Low-Tech Resources

- ▶ [Developing Rural Relatives as Parents Programming: Promising Practices: A Collection of Practice Wisdom from Across Rural America](#), from the University of Maine
- ▶ [How to Start a Volunteer Transportation Program](#) (16 ½ - minute video), from the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center's YouTube channel
- ▶ [Maintaining Connection with Digital and Telephone Support Groups During the Time of the Coronavirus](#), from the American Foundation for the Blind (*though*

written for a different population, the article provides good guidance on a low-tech distance support group option)

- ▶ [Title VI Chat Recording from August 15, 2024](#) (56-minute recorded webinar), from the U.S. Administration on Aging's Office for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian Programs' YouTube channel (*the webinar covers a partnership between the Olympic Area Agency on Aging and the Quileute Title VI program to run a Mobile Assistance Van (MAV) that brings food, supplies, Information & Referral, and kinship navigation to rural parts of western Washington state*)
 - See also the [Olympic Area Agency on Aging's webpage](#) and a [video about the MAV program](#)
- ▶ [Toolkit for Operating a Rural Transportation Voucher Program](#), from the Research & Training Center on Disability in Rural Communities at the University of Montana

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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