

# Lessons from the Field: Overcoming Transportation Barriers in Supporting Kinship/Grandfamilies



## Introduction

Kinship/grandfamilies have a well-documented need for reliable and affordable transportation. The [2021 State of Grandfamilies report](#) identifies transportation as a significant barrier that kin caregivers face in their efforts to access needed services. Area Agency on Aging (AAA) and Title VI Native American Aging Program (Title VI program) respondents to a [2022 topical poll](#) by USAging for the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network: A National Technical Assistance Center (Network), concur. More recent publications by [Casey Family Programs](#), [Generations United](#), and Think of Us also support this conclusion.

This set of case profiles builds upon the work of a learning community hosted by the Network and USAging for AAAs and Title VI programs interested in starting new kin caregiver supportive services at their organizations. Lessons learned from the learning community can be found [here](#).

Two of the challenges learning community participants discussed included the distance between kin caregivers and services (particularly in rural areas) and the need for better transportation options. Among the potential solutions they considered were bringing services to kin caregivers, partnering with transportation providers, and offering gift cards for gas. Examples of agencies that have implemented solutions such as these are profiled in this document. While learning community participants felt that virtual services were not a viable option in their communities due to limited or non-existent internet access, programs in other communities, where reliable internet is available, may wish to consider virtual services.

Solutions to other challenges identified by learning community participants (i.e., outreach to kinship/grandfamilies, limited funding, and limited staff to care for children while kin caregivers are receiving services) are highlighted in [another case profile set](#). It is our hope that sharing these case profiles will encourage AAAs, Title VI programs, and others to explore innovative ways to expand or enhance supports that meet the needs of kinship/grandfamilies.

## Bringing Services to Kinship/Grandfamilies

### Senior Connection, Worcester, MA

The National Institute for Health Care Management Foundation estimates that nearly 80 percent of rural Americans have [limited access to medical services](#). Many also [do not have computers or reliable internet access](#), making it difficult for them to learn about new services. Bringing services directly to caregivers saves them time on transportation while also supporting their health. To make this a reality, some programs provide mobile services. Another option to consider is to provide services in places kinship/grandfamilies are already going, such as in or near school buildings.

Senior Connection launched a mobile Care Express bus service in October 2023. The Care Express bus currently visits 61 cities and towns in Central Massachusetts and provides information and referral (including kinship navigation); medication management education (including teaching kin caregivers how to secure their medications from the children they are raising); and health, dental, and vision screenings for older adults (including kin caregivers) and children in kinship/grandfamilies.

To maximize their reach while minimizing costs, Senior Connection partners with local community-based organizations (including Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Services, Quinsigamond Community College's Dental Clinic, and UMass Memorial Health), which provide donated equipment or supplies and pro bono clinicians or student interns to staff the bus.

In 2024, the Care Express bus, in conjunction with Senior Connection's Grandparents Raising Grandkids Resource Center (which operates the bus), supported more than 300 kinship/grandfamilies.

To fund the bus, Senior Connection uses Older Americans Act (OAA) Title III funds and grants from private foundations. In the future, they hope to pursue state funds and/or bill Medicaid.

When asked how other organizations might replicate their service, Senior Connection's Vice President and Chief Strategy Officer Ethan Belding suggested starting by assessing how many kinship/grandfamilies reside in the community and which organizations are currently helping them or could potentially help them. Next, Belding recommends establishing a network of partners who agree to provide the various services needed by kinship/grandfamilies in the community. Knowing how many kinship/grandfamilies are in the community and having an established network of providers, Belding said, is "crucial" for fundraising because it shows funders that there is

both a need and a network of providers who can meet the need. As for potential partners, Belding suggests reaching out to councils on aging, health care providers, colleges and universities, faith communities, and others.

Olympic Area Agency on Aging (O3A) in Port Townsend, WA, also brings services to kin caregivers throughout their rural service area. In 2024, both O3A and Senior Connection (then the Central Massachusetts Agency on Aging) received USAging's prestigious Aging Innovation Award. Descriptions of both these programs can be found in this [video](#).

## **Partnering for Transportation and Gas Gift Cards**

### **The Title VI Program of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma**

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma is almost 11,000 square miles. It can take up to 2.5 hours to travel from the community of Page in the east to Tupelo in the west, and even longer from the city of Idabel in the south to Hoyt in the north. To bring Tribal elders (including kin caregivers) to the Title VI nutrition program for no-cost meals (paid for by OAA Title VI funds) or celebrations, the Title VI program partners with Tribal Transit (the Tribe's public transportation provider), which offers a bus specifically for this purpose. Children in kinship/grandfamilies can accompany kin caregivers on the bus as space permits. The children also can receive no-cost meals at the nutrition program, which are paid for by the Choctaw Nation.

Through their partnership with Tribal Transit, the Title VI program also secures no-cost transportation to medical appointments for older Tribal members (including kin caregivers). Gas vouchers are provided when Tribal Transit is unable to accommodate an older adult's medical transportation needs.

Through an application process, the Title VI program additionally offers gift cards to older Tribal members (including kin caregivers), which can be used to offset the cost of transportation, food, clothing, and other needs older Tribal members may have.

To replicate these services, Title VI Grant Program Manager Jana Underwood recommends reaching out to your Tribe's transportation provider.

## **Conclusion**

Distance and transportation can be significant challenges for both kin caregivers and the programs that serve them. Using transportation to bring kinship/grandfamilies to services or to bring services to the families can be a highly effective way to overcome these difficulties.

## For Additional Resources

Learn about more innovative kinship/grandfamily services and find tools for developing your own by visiting the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network's [Resource Library](#).

---

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](http://www.GKSNetwork.org).

*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.*

The Network is a project of  
Generations United.

**generations  
United**

Because we're stronger together®

©Generations United and USAging, 2026