

SPOTLIGHT ON

Family Resource Center

INNOVATION

Highlands Family Success Center – Parent Café Model (New Jersey)

The Highlands Family Success Center (FSC), located in Passaic County, is a welcoming, strength-based hub where families connect, learn, and grow. Guided by the belief that every family has unique strengths, the FSC supports families to “thrive, not just survive.” Its kinship-focused programs are community-based and delivered in trusted environments, making services accessible and inclusive for grandparents and other kin caregivers raising children whose parents cannot.

Organization Profile

The Highlands FSC provides supports for kin caregivers and grandfamilies, including workshops, peer support, and family outings. The center intentionally designs its services to reduce isolation and strengthen resilience, with leadership that understands kinship families firsthand—Program Lead Heather Saraceni herself grew up in a kinship household.

Quick Facts

Founded
2015

Location
Passaic County, New Jersey
(suburban)

**Number of Kin Caregivers
Served Annually**
50

**Race/Ethnicity of Overall Population Served
Annually Across All Programs – 908 People**

- ▶ 2% Asian
- ▶ 5% Black
- ▶ 12% Hispanic/Latino
- ▶ 69% White
- ▶ 5% Other – Mixed

Collaborating for Impact

The following partnerships expand reach and reduce costs, making kinship-focused programming both sustainable and replicable.

- ▶ **New Jersey Kinship Navigator Program** – Partnership to design and deliver Parent Cafés
- ▶ **Kinship Navigator Program at Care Plus New Jersey, Inc.**
- ▶ **AARP** – Collaboration on the 6 Pillars of Brain Health program
- ▶ **Local community organizations** – Provide food, space, and child care for Cafés

Program Innovation & Results

Parent Café Model

Parent Cafés are structured, research-informed gatherings where kin caregivers build protective factors through peer support, reflection, and shared storytelling. Delivered in a three-part series, each session includes dinner, child care, and small incentives (books, journals, gift cards). Interactive activities such as “listening partner” exercises encourage openness, honesty, and respect.



The FSC also hosts family outings, such as a 2025 zoo trip attended by 120 participants, which strengthened intergenerational bonds and gave families a shared positive experience.

At a Glance

- ▶ **Annual Program Cost:** \$12,500
- ▶ **Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Staff:** Shared staff with FSC & Kinship Navigator Program (KNP) → 2 FSC staff + 5 KNP staff + child care staff
- ▶ **Duration/Dosage:** Three-part Parent Café series (weekly sessions) + annual family outing
- ▶ **Evidence-Based / Research-Based:** Be Strong Families Parent Café model; Strengthening Families Protective Factors framework
- ▶ **Formal Curriculum:** Parent Café certified training
- ▶ **Staff Training Required:** Parent Café facilitation, Standards of Quality, Protective Factors

Program in Action: “I Am Not Alone”

At the conclusion of nearly every Parent Café, participants share the same realization: “I am not alone.” One grandparent reflected: “I felt like part of a family. Learning from others is a powerful way to cope.” Another added: “It was very nice finding out other people have the same problems.”

This consistent feedback underscores the Cafés’ ability to reduce isolation, normalize struggles, and build authentic community among kin caregivers.

What They’ve Learned

- ▶ Openness and honesty are foundational for building trust.
- ▶ Leadership’s lived experience deepens connection with families.
- ▶ Staff vulnerability and storytelling invite families to share more freely.
- ▶ A consistent, nonjudgmental presence builds confidence and engagement.
- ▶ Food, child care, and small incentives make participation possible and welcoming.

Results & Replication

Evaluation

Attendance tracking and post-session surveys confirm that families feel more supported, less isolated, and better equipped with protective factors. Many participants return or bring friends to future Cafés.

Replication Potential

- ▶ Parent Cafés tailored to kin caregivers are low-cost, high-impact, and scalable nationwide.
- ▶ AARP’s 6 Pillars of Brain Health partnership shows how national resources can enrich local programming.
- ▶ Family outings extend relational learning, create joy, and reduce caregiver stress.

This spotlight is part of a national series celebrating innovation in Family Resource Centers serving kinship/grandfamilies. To learn more about how Family Resource Centers support kinship/grandfamilies, see [Family Resource Center Services and Supports for Kinship/Grandfamilies](#), a resource created by the National Family Support Network and the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network.

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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