

**SPOTLIGHT ON**

**Family Resource Center**

**INNOVATION**

**Connections Family Resource Center –  
Kinship and Grandfamilies Programming  
(Virginia)**

Connections Family Resource Center (FRC), based in Manassas, Virginia, serves as a trusted hub for families. Their model stands out for elevating the voices of caregivers themselves: a lived experience (LEX) coordinator—who is a kin caregiver—leads outreach and programming, ensuring services are designed and delivered by those who have walked the path themselves.

**Organization Profile**

Connections FRC is rooted in the community and emphasizes mutual aid, trust, and relationship-building. Through a mobile FRC presence, peer support groups, and collaborative partnerships, Connections reaches families in their neighborhoods and reduces stigma by making support feel natural and welcoming.

**Quick Facts**

**Founded**  
2023

**Location**  
Manassas, Virginia  
(suburban/urban mix)

**Number of Families Served  
by Kinship Programs  
During the Past Year**  
Approximately 45

**Race/Ethnicity of Overall Population Served  
Annually – 1,000 Families**

- ▶ 5% Asian
- ▶ 20% Black
- ▶ 65% Hispanic/Latino
- ▶ 10% White
- ▶ 0.5% Other

**Collaborating for Impact**

The following collaborations extend the reach of Connections; enhance peer support opportunities; and bring practical resources like food, space, and training into the community.

- ▶ **Families Forward Virginia** – Training, technical assistance, and statewide network connections
- ▶ **Circle of Parents National Network** – Shared curriculum and peer learning
- ▶ **Local partners** – NVFS (Northern Virginia Family Services), Parks & Recreation, community shelters, and food providers

## Program Innovation & Results

### Kinship/Grandfamily Services

Connections FRC offers a range of services to strengthen kin caregivers and grandfamilies, with a special emphasis on peer support, mutual aid, and lived experience leadership. Programs include:

- ▶ **Circle of Parents Support Groups** – Weekly peer-led groups facilitated by kin caregivers themselves
- ▶ **Families Helping Families Mutual Aid Model** – Volunteer-driven exchange of child care, meals, and emotional support
- ▶ **Mobile Outreach** – Taking FRC services to neighborhoods and community spaces
- ▶ **Parenting and Caregiver Workshops** – Trauma-informed sessions teaching practical skills
- ▶ **Concrete Supports** – Food distribution, connections to shelter, and utility assistance

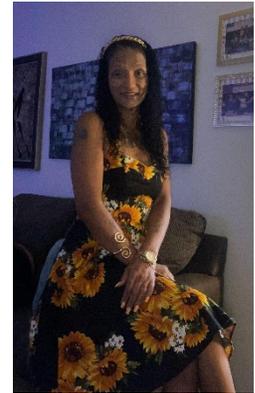
### Innovation #1: Mobile FRC Outreach

Connections FRC removes barriers by taking Family Resource Center services out into neighborhoods and community spaces. Staff and kinship leaders partner with schools, shelters, and Parks & Recreation to show up where families already gather—offering food, information, and relationship-building. This visibility reduces stigma and helps caregivers connect to services in ways that feel natural and accessible.

For example, Connections FRC held a fun, community-wide event at a local mobile home park, bringing family engagement directly to the families who live there by setting up their RV, playing music, and offering food prepared by a family leader who lives in the mobile home park. They also invited multiple local nonprofit community partners that provide family education and clothing, making the event a “one-stop shop” for residents to learn how to get help from a variety of providers, rather than having to seek out several organizations individually. At typical events such as this, Connections FRC serves over 150 individuals, all of whom are able to sign up on the spot for supports to meet their needs.

## Innovation #2: Co-Design with Kinship Leaders

Connections FRC's model centers a lived experience (LEX) coordinator – Shaumbay Fuller, a grandmother raising her grandchildren – who helps identify what the community needs most. This co-design process ensures that programming is built with and for kinship families. From choosing group topics to shaping outreach strategies, the LEX leader's perspective guarantees that services reflect real lived experience and respond directly to community priorities.



### At a Glance

- ▶ **Annual Program Cost:** ≈\$30,000
- ▶ **Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Staff:** LEX coordinator contractor and volunteer-driven mobile FRC
- ▶ **Duration/Dosage:** Weekly Circle of Parents sessions + ongoing mobile outreach
- ▶ **Evidence-Based / Research-Based:** Circle of Parents framework; Protective Factors model
- ▶ **Formal Curriculum:** Circle of Parents peer support curriculum
- ▶ **Staff Training Required:** LEX coordinator trained in Circle of Parents, trauma-informed practice, and protective factors

## Program in Action: Peer-Led Change

One grandmother raising her grandchildren shared how the Circle of Parents group became her lifeline: “I came in thinking I was the only one, and I walked out realizing I had a family of support.” With peer facilitators who share their lived experience, families feel immediately understood, accepted, and empowered. The Families Helping Families model extends that connection into daily life, with parents swapping child care, cooking meals, and showing up for each other.

## What They've Learned

- ▶ Lived experience leadership transforms trust and engagement.
- ▶ Peer-led models reduce stigma and create authentic relationships.

- ▶ Meeting families in their own neighborhoods removes access barriers.
- ▶ Families thrive when supports blend practical aid with peer connection.

## Results & Replication

### Evaluation

Qualitative evaluation – through feedback surveys and peer reflection – consistently demonstrates that kin caregivers feel less isolated, more supported, and more confident in their caregiving role. Families Helping Families has shown an especially high impact in reducing stress through shared meals, child care, and practical aid.

### Replication Potential

- ▶ Circle of Parents peer support model tailored for kinship families
- ▶ Lived Experience Coordinator model with stipend-based leadership
- ▶ Families Helping Families mutual aid approach
- ▶ Mobile outreach to neighborhoods to normalize support-seeking

*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.*

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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).

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