



**National Resource Center for
Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning**
at the Hunter College School of Social Work

INFORMATION PACKET: Relative Placements

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Summary of the Issue

In the event that a child must be separated from his/her parents' care it is imperative that family connections are preserved for that child. One such way to ensure that this occurs is through placement of children or youth in a home with a relative caregiver (also commonly referred to as a kinship caregiver). "Keeping children with family members sustains their connection to their family roots; usually they are in close proximity to other relatives, including siblings, which allows them to receive family support that is unavailable or infrequent with non-kin placements." (Whitley & Kelley, 2007, pg. 5) Additionally, relative foster placements may be beneficial as they "may minimize trauma by providing the child with a sense of family support." (Scarcella, Ehrle, & Geen, 2003, pg. 1)

There are three unique types of kinship foster placements for children.

- *Public kinship foster care* refers to situations in which "children are placed in the legal custody of the state, and a child welfare agency places the child with a relative." (Whitley & Kelley, 2007, pg. 3)
- *Voluntary kinship care* occurs when a child is in physical custody of relatives but may be in legal custody of parents (unless legal custody is temporarily signed over by parent to kin).
- *Informal/private kinship care* is most prevalent in our society. In this type of foster placement, family members make decisions about where a child will reside without child welfare involvement and parents are able to retain legal custody of the child. (Whitley & Kelley, 2007)

Placement with relatives is preferable when it is unsafe for a child to remain in his/her home. Yet despite this fact, and although care-giving obligations are similar, kinship foster parents receive fewer services than non-kinship providers. One critique, however, notes that kinship caregivers "receive little or no preparation prior to placement of children in their care, receive limited formal training, lack resources, and have a lack of understanding about the child welfare system." (Christenson & McMurtry, 2007, pg. 126) Furthermore, relative placements are known to be a stable environment in which children can thrive, but the stresses of providing care are intensified because policies and practices fail to provide kin with the necessary services and supports.

Facts and Statistics

- According to 2007 national research findings “2.4 million grandparents report they are responsible for their grandchildren living with them: 29% of these grandparents are African American; 17% are Hispanic/Latino; 2% are American Indian or Alaskan Native; 3% are Asian; and 47% are White. 34% of these grandparents live in households without the children’s parents present. 71% are under the age of 60; 19% live in poverty.” (AARP et al., 2007)
- In 2005, 15.3% of children leaving foster care were exiting foster care to live with relatives. (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2008)
- “Children in kinship homes have fewer behavioral problems, are less likely to reenter care after they’ve gone home or been adopted, and are three to four times less likely to be maltreated than children in traditional foster homes.” (Hurley, 2008, pg. 11)
- “Research has found that a vast majority of children feel loved by their kin caregivers and happy with their living arrangement.” (Shearin, 2007, pg. 35)
- When compared with other relative caregivers, grandparents tend to be less educated, they are more likely to live in poverty, and they are more likely to have health concerns. (Scarcella et al., 2003)
- In 2003 only 29% of grandparents providing kinship foster care received foster care or child-only payments. The percentage was even smaller for other relative caregivers. (Scarcella et al., 2003)
- Despite the fact that all children in relative care are eligible to receive Medicaid, only 47% of children in grandparent care received Medicaid in 2003. (Scarcella et al., 2003)
- “Compared with children placed in non-kin foster care, children placed with kin are less likely to be reunified with their parents... and less likely to be adopted.” (Geen, 2003)
- “Children in kinship homes tend to spend more time in foster care before they are adopted or return to their parents’ home. [This] runs counter to the mandates of federal law and local child welfare policy, which seek to reduce the length of time children spend in foster care” (Hurley, 2008, pg. 11).

Overview of Policies and Legislation

- The Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 “strengthens the role played by tribal governments in determining the custody of Indian children; specifies that preference is given first to placements within the child’s family/tribe, second to other Indian families” (National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice and Permanency Planning, 2002)..)
- “The U.S. Supreme Court Decision, *Miller v. Youakim* (1979) entitled relatives to receive the same federal foster care benefits as those received by non-relative foster parents providing that the kinship placements are eligible for federal reimbursement under...Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. The child must be in the legal custody of the state” (Child Welfare League of America, n.d.).
- The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 “set a standard that agencies be held accountable for outreach to biological families” (Gaska & Crewe, 2006, pg.124). The act mandated that placement be “as close to their communities of origin as possible in the most family-like setting; required reasonable efforts to prevent unnecessary placements and reunify children with their birth parents and or families; established adoption as an alternative permanent plan for children who could not return to birth parents; required that decisions about permanency be made within 18months of a child entering care.” (National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice and Permanency Planning, 2002).
- “The 1989 statutory revision of Social Services Law 392 added the placement of children with relatives... as a permissible disposition to promote family stability... as an alternative to foster care.” (Frankel, 2007, pg. 336)
- The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 (Public Law 104-93, Title V, Section 505) requires that states give preference to adult relatives when it is necessary for a child to be placed outside of his/her home. (Geen et al. 2001))
- The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 requires that kinship caregivers meet the same regulations as non-relatives in order to qualify for Federal funding. Moreover, “in one important way, ASFA recognizes the uniqueness of kinship homes – while the law requires agencies to move to terminate the rights of parents whose children are in foster care for 15 of any 22 months, it makes an exception for parents of children living in kinship care.” (Hurley, 2008, pg. 12)

- The Kinship Caregiver Support Act was introduced in 2007. If enacted, this legislation will establish a kinship navigator program, and a kinship guardianship assistance program. In addition, it will require child welfare agencies to notify relatives of a child’s removal within sixty days. It will also allow states to establish separate foster parent licensing standards for relatives. (Children’s Defense Fund, n.d.)

Model Programs and Promising Practices

▪ According to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), the state of **Georgia** “is regarded as a model for developing successful joint ventures among ACF, state and private agencies to address the needs of grandparent caregivers” (Whitley & Kelley, 2007, pg. 7). In restructuring their services and coming up with new initiatives, they have established Kinship Care information centers, created support groups, provided public education services, hired grandparent liaisons, offered legal outreach services, and introduced two new cash assistance programs (Whitley & Kelley, 2007).

▪ The Aging Services Division of the Department of Human Services in **Oklahoma** has implemented new initiatives to provide services to kinship caregivers. Relative caregivers are invited to attend an annual conference addressing legal, educational, and relational issues as well as providing information about the child welfare system, permanency options, Medicaid, food stamps, and child support. A handbook with information and resources is also provided to kinship caregivers. In addition to having support groups, Oklahoma supplies kinship providers with vouchers for respite services through the Respite Resource Network. (Geen, et al. 2001).

▪ “The Department of Human Services in **El Paso County, Colorado** has integrated its TANF and child welfare agencies in a way that addresses the needs of individual kinship care families.” Specialized Kinship Care teams are trained to assess the needs of families - including assessing safety concerns, financial needs, and foster parent licensing. TANF funds are available and are provided to both formal and informal kinship foster families, as are other services. “The amount of the financial assistance is determined according to the needs of the individual family and can be as high as the foster care maintenance payment.” (Children’s Defense Fund, 2005).

▪ The Catholic Family Center's Kinship Care Resource Network in **New York** aims to “improve family stability and overall family well-being within the individual kinship care family system” (Kinship Care Resource Network, n.d., “about us”). The organization provides the following

cost-free services: information and referrals, case management, education and workshops, counseling, support groups, legal assistance, financial counseling services, and activities for children and families (Kinship Care Resource Network, n.d.).

▪ The Brookdale Foundation’s Relatives As Parents Project (RAPP) in **New York** “is designed to... promote the creation or expansion of services for grandparents and other relatives who have taken on the [parenting] responsibility” (Brookdale Foundation, n.d.). The program’s goals are to construct replicable models of service, to offer support groups, and to offer services such as child care, mental health, family services, education, legal assistance, and health care to kinship caregivers and youth (Brookdale Foundation, n.d.).

Websites

While the Internet is rich with resources about kinship care, the websites listed below can be easily navigated and provide information in a manner that is clear and concise. The facts, tools, referrals, and resources are pertinent to social service agencies, states, and tribes. Furthermore, the material is relevant and practical to kinship care providers and the youth in their care.

www.childwelfare.gov – This website, known as the Child Welfare Information Gateway, offers important information for kinship caregivers about adoption, out-of-home care, supporting and preserving families, and child abuse and neglect. The resources provided are abundant and the site offers training and technical assistance to states and child welfare agencies, as well.

www.nrcfcppp.org - The National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning's website offers plenty of information and resources with which "to help... institutionalize a safety-focused, family-centered, and community-based approach to meet the needs of children, youth and families." To name a few examples, the NRCFCPPP's website offers information for the training of kinship caregivers and highlights legislative enactments relevant to kinship care.

www.grandfactsheets.org – This website provides state-specific fact sheets for kinship caregivers raising children. The fact sheets offer data and information about support services, local programs and resources, public benefits, state laws, and foster care policies relevant to kinship care providers.

www.nysnavigator.org – "The NYS Kinship Navigator website provides: fact sheets on laws and resources, answers to frequently asked questions on kinship care, county guides on kinship caregiving, forums for caretakers and service providers," and information about legal rights, public assistance eligibility, foster care, tax credits, respite, and childcare.

www.aarp.org/families/grandparents - The American Association of Retired Persons' Grandparent Information Center aims to "ensure that grandparents and grandchildren have access to resources that strengthen their health, finances and family connections." Their website supplies information, resources, and referrals for grandparents raising grandchildren, provides articles and fact sheets, and features "a searchable, online database that connects grandparents raising grandchildren... with local supportive services and programs."

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