



KINSHIP CARE SUPPORTS



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WHY IT MATTERS

With an increase in the number of children in foster care, grandparents and other relatives have increasingly stepped in to care for them. Sometimes these arrangements are informal or private, and other times they are made with the involvement of the child welfare agency. Relatives may serve as foster parents and/or legal guardians. Some relevant statistics:¹

Evidence reveals that children in foster care who live with relatives or kin providers experience fewer placement changes, fewer school moves, and are less likely to re-enter the foster care system after reunifying with their parents. Relatives are also more willing to adopt or become permanent guardians when reunification with parents is not possible.

- Thirty percent (approximately 139,000) of children in foster care are placed with a relative. In 2014 over 40 percent of children in relative foster homes were there because of parental substance use.
- In 2016, 7.5 million children were living in households headed by grandparents or other relatives, most often with their parents also present, but most recent data suggest about 2.6 million are being raised in kinship families without their parents present.
- Large numbers of children are diverted from the child welfare system by agency staff or judges to live with grandparents or other relatives. Many receive no help in caring for the child.

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reunification with parents is not possible.³ Living with relatives helps reduce the impacts of abuse and neglect trauma, resulting in better behavioral and mental health outcomes.⁴ Children and youth living with relatives are less likely to run away from their placement, they are more likely to report that they feel “always loved,” they are more likely to live with their siblings and there is greater preservation of cultural identity and community connections when they live with relatives.⁵

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With the passage of the *Fostering Connections Act of 2008*⁶, there have been increased efforts to place children with relative caregivers. Additionally, the act provided for specific supports to relative caregivers to promote permanency. These include:

- **Notice to Relatives When Children Enter Care.** This increases opportunities for relatives to step in when children are removed from their parents and placed in foster care by ensuring they get notice of this removal.
- **Kinship Navigator Programs**⁷. These programs, available through grants, help connect children living with relatives, both in and out of foster care, with the supports and assistance they need.
- **Subsidized Guardianship Payments for Relatives**⁸. Helps children in foster care leave care to live permanently with grandparents and other relative guardians when they cannot be returned home or adopted and offers federal support to States to

assist with subsidized guardianship payments to families for these children, generally to age 18.

- **Licensing Standards for Relatives.** States may waive non-safety related licensing standards for relatives on a case-by-case basis and requires the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to report to Congress on the use of licensing waivers and recommendations for increasing the percentage of relative foster family homes that are licensed.

While it is clear that the outcomes for children who live with relatives are more positive than if they were to live with non-relative foster care parents, the opioid epidemic has impacted the overall numbers of children in foster care and more relatives are being asked to care for children. The vast majority of these relatives are grandparents. Due to the difficult and unexpected circumstances that lead children to be removed from their parent’s care, grandparents often face greater health, mental health, social and financial challenges than those in the general population.

Grandparents and other relative caregivers need support services that provide them with basic needs like *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)* and housing assistance that can ensure food security for their extended family. They also may need access to mental health services for depression, stress, behavioral or emotional assistance for not only the children they care for but for themselves. Many grandparents report feeling incredible guilt when their children’s children come to the attention of the child welfare system and many report having had child welfare involvement themselves as parents. Providing trauma-informed services to help all family members heal from the experience of separation and living with a substance abuse use disorder is needed.

ADVOCATES IN ACTION

“It was not easy for my grandmother to raise a child with serious needs while she was in her early 60s with little support. We need more support for grandparents like her who step up to care for us.”

— Shaheed Morris, raised in a grand family

ACTIONS

- **Prioritize placement for children and youth with relatives.** Consistent with the evidence that children do best in families, children should be placed in the least restrictive, most family-like settings appropriate to their needs. Use “family find”⁹ strategies to locate relatives and remember the father’s side of the family as potential providers. Make sure that relatives receive notice about the child’s out-of-home placement so that they have an opportunity to step in as caregivers.
- **Provide relative caregivers with the services and supports they need.** Many of the children that relatives care for come with high-level emotional, behavioral and/or physical health challenges. Both caregivers and children will need appropriate services to address their issues.
- **Learn about your local child welfare agency’s jurisdiction’s licensing standards for relative caregivers.** Licensing standards may be waived in some instances, making it easier for relatives to provide foster care for their kin and possibly receive financial assistance for their care.
- **Ensure that relatives can access financial assistance to meet children’s needs.** Access to *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)* or participation in other benefit programs like SNAP may be something family members may not know that they are now eligible for given their new family status.
- **Read the Issue Brief on the Guardian Assistance Program (GAP)** to learn more about relatives qualifying for subsidized guardianship payments for these children when they cannot be returned home or adopted.
- **Promote services to grand families through the network of organizations serving older Americans.** For example, all States have access to *National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP)* funds¹⁰ that are used to provide supportive services to children and caregivers in grand families where the caregiver is age 55 or older, regardless of child welfare involvement. The types of services available are support groups, counseling, respite care, training and even direct legal services. Up to ten percent of the program’s funds can be used to help grand families, but most States do not make full use of these funds to support families.¹¹

- **Learn about Kinship Navigator Programs** specific to your community and ensure that relatives caring for children are connected. There have been positive outcomes for those receiving kinship navigator services including higher rates of permanency, lower rates of re-entry and cost savings. There is more information about this support in “Selected Resources.”
- **Help relatives caring for kin understand the complexities of the child welfare system and how to advocate for themselves.** Many caregivers find it difficult and intimidating to interact with the court systems, especially when they have to bring cases against their own family members. Encourage them to be strong and help them identify their strengths and remind them when times are tough that they are not alone and that the benefits to the children they are caring for are great.

BRIGHT SPOT

GENERATIONS UNITED (GU), SUPPORTING GRANDFAMILIES UNITED STATES

Generations United (GU) was founded in 1986 by the *National Council on Aging* and the *Child Welfare League of America*. *AARP* and the *Children’s Defense Fund* soon joined in GU’s efforts to promote cooperation and mutual support between generations. In 1997, GU incorporated as its own not-for-profit organization. Inspired by the 1995 *White House Conference on Aging*, the newly recruited board endorsed *Grandparents and Other Relatives Raising Children* as their first major initiative. Since then, GU has worked closely with national and local partners to advance a public policy and awareness building agenda in support of grandfamilies.

The first national expert symposium on grandfamilies was convened in 1997 and marked the first time the issue of grandparents raising grandchildren was explored from a multigenerational perspective. A follow-up symposium was held in 2004 to review progress,

celebrate successes and develop the next action agenda to lead future work. The GU’s *Grandparent Advisory Group* – consisting of national organizations and experts from across the country – has met regularly since 1998 and continues to act as the coordinating body for effort on behalf of grandfamilies. The members also identify emerging issues the families face.

Generations United champions grandfamilies and encourage positive media and progressive policies. Their work with the *American Bar Association* established www.grandfamilies.org. This resource includes every State’s laws, case examples and lessons from the field. It is the one-stop shop for advocates interested in supportive State policies for grandfamilies, including *Fostering Connections*. GU continues to work to shape policies and programs that help support the success of grandfamilies – “because their success means the success of our neighborhoods, our communities and our country.”

To learn more: <http://www.gu.org>

SELECTED RESOURCES

Name	Description
<p><u>Generations United, Raising the Children of the Opioid Epidemic: Solutions and Support for Grandfamilies</u>¹²</p>	<p>This report highlights key solutions and action steps to support grand families raising their kin grandchildren as a result of the opioid epidemic.</p>
<p><u>Guardian Assistance Program (GAP)</u>¹³</p>	<p>The title IV-E <i>Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP)</i> is a formula grant that helps States, Indian Tribes, Tribal Organizations and Tribal Consortia who opt to provide guardianship assistance payments for the care of children by relatives who have assumed legal guardianship of eligible children for whom they previously cared as foster parents.</p>
<p><u>Kinship Navigator</u>¹⁴</p>	<p>This website is designed to help relatives and kin navigate the caregiving system. Services they provide include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to community resources including health, financial, legal services, support groups, training, and emergency funds • An easy way to ask your questions. The <i>Kinship Navigator</i> will answer or link you to the best resource to meet your needs • County guides of resources available to <i>Kinship Families</i> • Access to <i>Kinship Navigator</i> via a toll-free phone number
<p><u>National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP)</u>¹⁵</p>	<p>This program advocates across the federal government for older adults, people with disabilities, and families and caregivers; funds services and supports provided primarily by States and networks of community-based programs; and invests in training, education, research, and innovation.</p>

ENDNOTES

- 1 Source: Generations United. 2016. "State of Grandfamilies 2016: Raising the Children of the Opioid Epidemic: Solutions and Support for Grandfamilies." http://www.grandfamilies.org/Portals/0/2016%20State%20of%20Grandfamilies%20Report%20FINAL_1.pdf.
- 2 Annie E. Casey, *Stepping Up for Kids: What Government and Communities Should Do to Support Kinship Families*. 2016.
- 3 Generations United. 2016.
- 4 Generations United. 2016.
- 5 U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families. (2005). *National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW) CPS Sample Component Wave 1 Data Analysis Report*, April 2005. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families. Retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/cps_report_revised_090105.pdf
- 6 See <http://www.grandfamilies.org/Portals/0/documents/fostering/shortSummary.pdf>
- 7 See "Selected Resources"
- 8 See "Selected Resources"
- 9 See "Family Find Strategies" Issue Brief
- 10 See "Selected Resources"
- 11 Generations United (2016). Raising the Children of the Opioid Epidemic: Solutions and Support for Grandfamilies.
- 12 Report available at: <http://www.gu.org/OURWORK/Grandfamilies/TheStateofGrandfamiliesinAmerica/TheStateofGrandfamiliesinAmerica2016.aspx>
- 13 Guardian Assistance Program, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/title-iv-e-guardianship-assistance>. Also, see Issue Brief, "Guardian Assistance Program."
- 14 Kinship Navigator, <http://www.kinshipnavigator.org/>
- 15 National Family Caregiver Support Program, available at <https://www.acl.gov/programs/support-caregivers/national-family-caregiver-support-program>