

Report to the Legislature

Kinship Care Oversight Committee

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Washington State Kinship Care Oversight Committee
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Introduction

The Kinship Care Oversight Committee (Oversight Committee) was formed in 2003 to provide guidance in identifying, supporting and strengthening kinship care families. Kinship care includes relatives caring for children who are not formally involved with the public child welfare system as well as dependent children. The Children's Administration, Economic Services Administration and Aging & Long-Term Support Administration are the three public administrations that participate in the Oversight Committee. Achievements include:

- Continuing collaboration within DSHS administrations to better respond to the needs of kinship caregivers.
- Building close relationships with Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) and their community partners to connect kinship care families with available resources and services.
- Providing a venue for issues of statewide importance to kinship caregivers.
- Providing a statewide voice for the local "kinship collaborations" active in Yakima, King, Whatcom, Pierce and Lewis/Mason/Thurston counties, among others.
- Offering legislators a better understanding of issues kinship caregivers face when caring for relative children.
- Building a relationship with the foster parent community to better support all caregivers of children in out-of-home care.

Kinship Care Oversight Committee 2015 Recommendations

The Kinship Care Oversight Committee, comprised of kinship caregivers, child and caregiver advocates, state agency representatives, non-profit services providers, tribes and legal community representatives, make the following recommendations to the Washington State Legislature for 2016:

- Eliminate means testing for Child-Only TANF.
- Maintain current funding for Kinship Navigators.
- Maintain the Aging & Long-Term Support Administration's (AL TSA) Kinship Caregiver Support Program, Children's Administration's (CA) Relative Support Service Funds, Economic Service Administration's (ESA) Additional Requirements for Emergent Needs (AREN) program and other financial support services for kinship caregivers.
- Develop additional programs similar to AL TSA's partnership with Lifespan Respite of Washington's voucher system to help with respite services.
- Develop partnerships with the foster parent community through connecting Kinship Navigators with the Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention liaisons.

What We Know About Kinship Caregivers

Families headed by grandparents and other relatives come together for different reasons – substance abuse, incarceration, mental illness, child abuse and neglect, parental death and military deployment. These families are from all states, all income levels, all races and all ethnicities. According to the Pew Report cited in the 2013 Kinship Oversight Committee’s report, children cared for primarily by a grandparent are more likely to live below the poverty line. This could be for a variety of reasons but is usually attributed to an unplanned increase in the number of people being supported on a fixed income.

Nationally 7.7 million children, one in ten, were living in the same household as their grandparents and, in most cases, these children were living in their grandparents’ home. In Washington state, an estimated 53,000 children are being raised by grandparents and other relatives.¹ For every one (3,971) child who is raised by a relative and is involved with the formal child welfare system (in out of home care) there are 12 (49,029) children living “informally” with a relative.

According to data from the Children’s Administration, in SFY 2014, a total of 3,471 children were in relative placement. As of September 30, 2015, a total of 3,604 children were in relative placement representing nearly forty-seven percent (47%) of all children placed in out-of-home care.² Relatives are an essential and important resource for children who enter the child welfare system whether for one day or one year.

Over the past twelve (12) years, the Kinship Care Oversight Committee has learned more about the challenges and successes faced by grandparents and other relatives who are raising their grandchildren, nieces, nephews and cousins. Many of these relatives, who stepped in over the last decade to provide a temporary safety net, now have become the long-term, fulltime caregivers. The children in their care may have experienced or been exposed to trauma while living with their parents. These children now may have mental health and/or behavioral issues of their own and some of the older children can engage in high risk behaviors. This poses a challenge to relative caregivers who may not understand the needs of the children and in addition could be struggling with their own health challenges.

In 2014, the Washington State Healthy Youth Survey (HYS) examined at-risk behaviors as well as health related information (e.g. diabetes, oral health,

¹ Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2012). Stepping Up For Kids: What Government and Communities Should do to Support Kinship Families.

² FamLink data, SFY 2014 and September 2015

obesity) of middle and high school youth living with relatives as compared to youth living in foster homes and with parents. The data indicates youth living in kinship care families are vulnerable to substance abuse issues, mental and physical health problems, poor nutrition and below average school performance. On many measures, as a group, these youth did not appear to be at as high risk as those in foster care. However they were significantly more at risk than children living with their parents. The residual effect of negative and traumatic experiences of these youth prior to placement with relatives can likely explain the ongoing challenges faced by the youth and their kinship care families. Over the next year, the Healthy Youth Survey data will be reviewed with the Kinship Care Oversight Committee and other interested public and private agencies to discuss possible options to decrease the risk and increase protective capacities of these youth.

Kinship Care Oversight Committee Activities

The Kinship Care Oversight Committee and its subcommittees meet quarterly to provide advocacy, education and awareness to the community and legislators about the needs of kinship caregivers. A top priority for the Oversight Committee is supporting and promoting the expansion of the Kinship Navigator Program.

Kinship Navigator Program

The Kinship Navigator Program provides information and referral, resources and a small payment to assist relative caregivers in purchasing goods or services needed for that child. Navigators help kinship caregivers locate appropriate housing to fit their expanded family size, explain how to apply for various benefits, advocate on their behalf and help acquire beds, clothes and food for their children. A total of forty-one percent (41%) of the kinship care families served received Basic Food Assistance and thirty-seven percent (37%) of these families received a TANF Child Only Grant.

Kinship Navigators receive regular ongoing training about available resources as well as an annual one-day training coordinated by Family Education and Support services staff. AL TSA facilitates bi-monthly conference calls with the Navigators to provide access to information, subject matter experts and networking opportunities. These activities provide the Navigators with crucial information to connect families with a multitude of community resources including:

- Health, financial and legal services;
- Educational resources;
- Child care;
- Respite;
- Support groups; and

- Emergency funds and how to get basic needs met.

These links and connections can keep children out of the child welfare system by providing better supports for relative caregivers.

The Kinship Navigator Program is administered through ALTSA which contracts with eight (8) of the thirteen (13) local Area Agencies on Aging (AAA). The AAAs provide the services directly or by contract to a local community service organization. The long-term goal of the Kinship Navigator Program is to have Navigators available to serve caregivers in all thirteen (13) AAA service areas in the state. Kinship Navigators are still needed in Clallam, Jefferson, Grays Harbor, Pacific, Kitsap, Snohomish, Island, San Juan and Skagit Counties. Currently the Yakama Nation is supporting a Kinship Navigator. The Colville Indian Reservation (Area Agency on Aging) is in need of a Navigator. (Appendix 1 provides a complete listing of Kinship Navigators and their sponsoring agencies.)

During the last state fiscal year, Kinship Navigators served 1,895 kinship caregivers who were raising 3,053 children and provided 251 presentations to community organizations and state agencies.

One of the members of the Foster Parent Association of Washington State (FPAWS) board of directors is a Kinship Navigator. This relationship encourages the two communities of caregivers to work together on behalf of children in their care.

Advocacy, Education and Awareness

Members of the Kinship Care Oversight Committee plan and organize various recognition events, conferences and other efforts highlighting the important role of kinship care providers. Examples of events and activities include:

- Washington State Kinship Care Children's Poetry, Drawing and Essay Contest, *Voices of Children Raised by Grandparents and Other Relatives*. 2015 marked the 12th anniversary of the Voices of Children Contest. A celebration of all winners and their families took place at the Governor's Mansion on May 19, 2015, hosted by First Lady Trudi Inslee and staff from Family Education and Support Services. Community partners Twin Star Credit Union and the Great Wolf Lodge provided prizes for the six winners. 2015 Voices of Children – Raised by Grandparents and Other Relatives Contest.
- Governor Inslee proclaimed May 20, 2015 as Kinship Caregiver Day. Pierce County's HopeSparks Kinship Care program leads this annual activity to honor relatives raising children.
- Active planning and participation in the Annual Pacific Northwest Caregivers' Conference at Great Wolf Lodge.

- Updates to the [DSHS Kinship Website](#).
- Staff from Family Education and Support Services (FESS), the kinship care provider for Lewis, Mason and Thurston Counties, received the prestigious National Brookdale Foundation Grandfamilies Award at the Generations United Intergenerational Action on a Global Scale national conference on July 24, 2015 in Honolulu, HI.
- Siblings, Linda and Becky Porter, received an [Unsung Hero Award](#) by the Children's Trust Fund of Washington and Seattle's Child on February 20, 2015, nominated by a KCOC participant.
- The Washington State Kinship Care Oversight Committee along with regional kinship collaborations were featured during a national webinar on August, 10, 2015: Child Welfare Peer Kinship Network on Engaging Kin sponsored by Child Focus. A kinship caregiver, three regional coordinators and two DSHS staff presented to an audience of about 75 individuals nationwide.
- Various statewide and local kinship programs were featured in the publication, [Support Matters: Lessons from the Field on Services for Adoptive, Foster and Kinship Care Families, March 2015 by AdoptUSKids](#).
- Provision of various training opportunities for caregivers.
- Continued dissemination of information about guardianship and adoption as permanent plans for dependent children:
 - Eligibility requirements for the Relative Guardianship Assistance Program (R-GAP)
 - Support available through R-GAP in Washington state and
 - Information about Washington state's adoption support program.
- Distribution of Seattle Aquarium family passes for all kinship caregivers providing full time out-of-home care.

Exploring Legal Issues and Options for Kinship Caregivers

There is a statewide legal assistance resource disparity. The longest running kinship legal project in the state is the Kinship Care Solutions Project sponsored by the King County Bar Association. It provides direct representation to low-income relatives and other caregivers in non-parental/third party custody cases through a pro bono panel of trained volunteer attorneys.

In Thurston County, legal information can be found through a self-help legal education kiosk (the first of its kind) located at the Thurston County Courthouse. Information from the Thurston County kiosk also exists on the [Family Education and Support Services Agency Kinship](#) webpage.

The Whatcom County Kinship Custody Clinic has partnered with LAW Advocates and Northwest Regional Council for the last five years to offer a free, monthly

legal assistance clinic to relatives and fictive kin seeking Non Parental Custody. More than 165 Kinship Caregivers will be served in 2015. The Clinic will be honored during the annual fund raiser for LAW Advocates on October 16, 2015. One of the participating Kinship Families will be spotlighted.

In Yakima, a similar monthly legal clinic is sponsored by the Casey Family Programs in partnership with Catholic Family & Child Services. Pro bono family law attorneys assist relatives in completing legal paperwork for third party custody.

The Oversight Committee continues to advocate for the statewide expansion of legal services for relative caregivers now only offered in the few counties listed above. For caregivers in other counties, increased access to legal services information via the Internet, printed materials and DVD resources for kinship caregivers remains a priority.

Children's Administration provides the "Understanding the Dependency Court Process" brochure to help families learn how dependency cases enter and move through the court system. Aging and Long-Term Services Administration distributes legal information packets upon request. The packets contain;

- [Options for Grandparents and Other Non-parental Caregivers – A Legal Guide for Washington State](#) created by Legal Voice (this website will be updated in 2016).
- The DVD: [Legal Options for Grandparents & Relatives in Washington State](#)
- DSHS brochure: [Consent to Health Care for the Child in Your Care](#).

Collaborations to Support Kinship Care Families

The Collaborations listed below have formed throughout the state in the past decade to support kinship caregivers in a variety of ways.

- The King County Kinship Collaboration
- The Yakima Region KINdred Spirits Collaboration
- The Lewis-Mason-Thurston County Kinship Advisory Committee
- The Whatcom County Kinship Partnership Group
- The Whatcom County Family and Community Network
- The Pierce County Kinship Collaboration

The Kinship Care Oversight Committee uses these collaborations to share information, resources and events. Each collaboration works to establish and maintain support groups for kinship caregivers and host local events. The following are other examples of specific local activities:

- Whatcom County Kinship Collaboration included a Summer Caregiver Appreciation Picnic and a Winter Holiday Party honoring relative

- caregivers and children. These events were co-sponsored by Brigid Collins Family Support Center, Children’s Administration local social work staff, Northwest Regional Council and community volunteers.
- Yakima County KINDred Spirits Collaboration celebrated its 10th year. Community agencies partnered to bring quarterly events to area caregivers such as Annual Caregiver Day, Annual Back-to-School Event and the Annual Caregiver Conference. This collaboration provides trainings, support groups and a bi-monthly newsletter.
 - The Lewis, Mason and Thurston Kinship Regional Collaboration was lead coordinator on several statewide events including: Washington State Kinship Caregiver Day at Great Wolf Lodge; National Grandparents Day, a tea hosted by First Lady Trudi Inslee; and Olympia Legislative Advocacy Day where caregivers met with state and regional advocates and legislators. Also in the Spring of 2015, St. Martin’s University nursing students partnered with the Collaboration to develop an “intern practicum” pairing students with medically vulnerable kinship caregivers to provide them with health screenings.

Additional Kinship Care Supports

Training and Online Services

The Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence is Children’s Administration’s comprehensive statewide training partnership established in 2012. The Alliance is dedicated to developing professional expertise for social workers and enhancing the skills of foster parents and caregivers working with vulnerable children and families.

The Alliance developed competencies for licensed foster parents and unlicensed relative caregivers. Training opportunities include classroom, online workshops, webinar, video and Netflix to allow for greater caregiver access. The workgroup continues to identify continuing education curriculum specific to the needs of caregivers. The importance of flexibility, availability and accessibility are primary considerations of the group.

DSHS Kinship Care Website

The Aging and Long-Term Support Administration (AL TSA) hosts and manages the [Kinship Care Website](#). This site was established in Spring, 2006 through the efforts of AL TSA, the Economic Services Administration (ESA) and the Children’s Administration (CA) with feedback from the Kinship Care Oversight Committee.

The website provides important information to kinship caregivers and professionals on financial assistance, health care, drug/alcohol and mental health

services, child care, foster care, support programs and caring for children with disabilities, as well as related news items.

Children's Administration

Foster Care and Caregiver Website and Listserv

The Children's Administration continues to serve caregivers through information available on its [Foster Parenting & Relatives Caring for Kids](#) webpage. The website underwent a significant redesign which provides enhanced information and is more user friendly for caregivers. Updated information, news, policy information, placement supports, staff contact information and training information all are available to support caregivers.

The Listserv delivers information to both licensed and prospective foster parents, relative caregivers, DSHS and child placing agency staff, community partners and interested child welfare stakeholders. The monthly Caregiver Connection is one of the communications sent out through the Listserv. Information is sent out to over 9,400 subscribers

Concrete Supports

In addition to Relative Support Service Funds, CA revised the Clothing Voucher Policy for Children in Out-of-Home Care in August 2015 to include clothing vouchers and/or reimbursement for unlicensed caregivers.

The Children's Administration revised R-GAP policy in September 2015 to include changes outlined in Public Law 113-183. In addition to a monthly subsidy for eligible children and their relative caregivers, R-GAP provides for non-recurring costs up to \$2,000 to finalize the legal requirements needed to establish relative guardianships and allows for successor guardians, if named in advance, to receive R-GAP in the event the relative guardian becomes incapacitated or dies. The successor guardian does not need to be a relative.

Appendix 1

Washington State's Kinship Navigators Serving Grandparents and Relatives Raising Children

Central Washington

- **Chelan, Douglas, Okanogan, Grant, Lincoln and Adams Counties:** Catholic Family and Child Services, **Kinship Navigator:** Autumn Carlson, acarlson@ccyakima.org, 509-662-6761 or 1-800-261-1094

Southwest Washington

- **Clark, Cowlitz, Klickitat, Skamania, Wahkiakum Counties:** Children's Home Society, Southwest Washington Region, **Kinship Navigator:** Tammy Bedlion, Tammyb@chs-wa.org, 360-695-1325 ext. 4214

Eastern Washington

- **Ferry, Pend Oreille and Stevens Counties:** Rural Resources Community Action, **Kinship Navigator:** Art Mathew, amathew@ruralresources.org, 509-684-3932
- **Spokane County:** Elder Services - Spokane Mental Health **Kinship Navigator:** Anna O'Connor, avictor@smhca.org, -458-7450 ext. 3100
- **Whitman County:** Rural Resources, **Kinship Navigator:** Andree Marcus-Rader, arader@ruralresources.org, 509- 332-0365

Southeast Washington

- **Asotin, Benton, Columbia, Franklin, Garfield, Kittitas, Walla Walla and Yakima Counties:** Catholic Family and Child Services , **Kinship Navigators:** Mary Pleger, mpleger@ccyakima.org or Lorena Ortega, lortega@ccyakima.org (Spanish Speaking) 509-965-7100 or 800-246-2962
- **Yakama Nation:** (Position funded by the Yakama Nation), **Kinship Navigator:** Jenece Howe, jhowe@yakama.com, 509-865-5121 ext. 4878

Puget Sound

- **King County:** Catholic Community Services, **Kinship Navigator:** Lulit Merid, Lulitm@ccsww.org, 206-328-5951 or 206-328-5787 (Kinship Intake Line)
- **Lewis, Mason and Thurston Counties:** Family Education and Support Services **Kinship Navigator:** Lynn Urvina, Lynn@FamilyESS.org, **Spanish-speaking Navigator Assistant:** Rosa Venancio, Rosa@FamilyESS.org, 360-754-7629 or 1-877-813-2828
- **Pierce County:** HopeSparks, **Kinship Navigator:** Rosalyn Alber, ralber@hopesparks.org, 253-565-4484 ext. 112, **Kinship Navigator:** knyland@hopesparks.org 253-565-4484 ext. 134
- **Snohomish County:** Stillaguamish Senior Center, **Kinship Resource Person:** Amy Dennis, kinship@stillycenter.com, 425-248-5516

Northwest Washington

- **Whatcom County:** Northwest Regional Council (AAA), **Kinship Navigator:** Laina Berry, berryls@dshs.wa.gov, 360-676-6749

Washington State

- **State contact:** Hilarie Hauptman, Aging & Long-Term Support Administration, DSHS Hilarie.Hauptman@dshs.wa.gov, 1-800-422-3263 or 360-725-2556

Kinship Care in Washington State Website: www.dshs.wa.gov/kinshipcare

Appendix 2

2015 Kinship Caregiver Oversight Committee

Teri Aguilera-Flemming	Kristie Lund
Rosalyn Alber	Fai Matthews
Gerri Barsh	Lulit Merid
Tammy Bedlion	Ron Murphy
Laina Berry	Anna O'Connor
Tom Berry	Sara Pennington
Autumn Carlson	Ann Phillip
Barbara Clark	Karen Pinkham
Amy Dennis	Mary Pleger
Akelia Farve	Linda Porter
Lauren Fredrick	Deanna Potter
Barbara Giachetti	Deborah Ray
Hilarie Hauptman	Helen Sawyer
Jesie Holden	Katy Smith
Amy Holland	Melinda Trujillo
Jenece Howe	Margaret Turner
Monica Jenkins	Lynn Urvina
Kathleen Keenan	Lynne Van Horn
Laurie Lippold	Rosa Venancio
Jennifer Louch	Meri Waterhouse
Gilda Lyons	Shelly Willis

Appendix 3

Voices of Children Contest Excerpts From 2015 Contest Entries

“I do not live with Mom or Dad, Dad lives in Florida and Mom is kind of sick. I live with Sara and Ole, they are my Aunt and Uncle. I love living with them because they do fun stuff! They help me how to talk. They take care of me when I am sick. ☹ I love to ☺ and to go out to dinner with them. They help me with my homework. I go in first grade.” *Debra, age 7*

“Living with my uncle Rick and Cheri really makes me happy. When I first moved in, my last name was different, Rick and Cheri went to see a judge and changed to Holden. I was happen when this happened. We have 2 dogs (Shasta and Shadow) and 3 cats (Lily and Luke and Jarvis). I love living with Rick and Cheri.
Isabella, age 5

“Life Old & New Side

Listening to their arguments, hearing hurtful words crying in the back seat, Starting out the fogged up windows of the grey mini van. Wondering to myself if it was going to live this way forever, It was all a mystery. I felt myself die more and more inside each day. Until I looked into your beautiful brown eyes. I connected like you were my one and only Being able to rest my head at night with no worries whatsoever. Eating the warm peaches and cream oatmeal, those crisp, cold September mornings. Going to School knowing I had a house to come back to. Having a shoulder to cry on when I was faced with challenges just being able to be with you and have your loving heart rub off on me, is how I wish I could live my life forever together.” *Myla, age 15*