

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

Kinship Care Oversight Committee

RCW 74.13.621
Chapter 4, Laws of 2015

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Executive Summary

The annual Kinship Care Oversight Committee annual progress report covers the period of September 2015 through August 2016 and is required by Chapter 4, Laws of 2015 and RCW 74.13.621. The Kinship Care Oversight Committee (Oversight Committee) was formed in 2003 to provide guidance to the Legislature 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 who are in state custody. The Aging and Long-Term Support Administration (AL TSA), Children's Administration (CA), and Economic Services Administration (ESA) of DSHS are the three public agencies that participate in the Oversight Committee, along with kinship caregivers, child and caregiver advocates, non-profit service providers, tribes, and legal community representatives. The Oversight Committee meets quarterly, providing a forum for participants to exchange information about state policy changes, local initiatives and concerns.

Achievements over the last year include:

- Analysis of data from the Department of Health's 2014 Healthy Youth Survey on youth in kinship care, foster care, and homeless youth.
- Eight tribes were awarded one-year contracts for Tribal Kinship Navigators with funding provided by the 2016 Legislature. The same eight tribes will receive funding from a one-year federal Lifespan Respite Grant to offer culturally-relevant kinship respite in their communities from AL TSA.
- AL TSA contracted with both the Lewis-Mason-Thurston Area Agency on Aging for a new, monthly kinship legal clinic pilot project as well as with Legal Voice for an update of their state legal guide, *Options for Grandparents and Other Non-parental Caregivers*.
- CA hired a full-time Kinship Care Program Manager to oversee the agency's work with caregivers while AL TSA is moving to hire a half-time Kinship Care Program Manager project position to oversee its kinship care programs.
- The 13th Annual statewide *Voices of Children Raised by Grandparents and Other Relatives* Contest was held in spring 2016 and the six winners were honored at the Governor's mansion in July. The contest was dedicated in honor of the late Dennis Mahar, long-time Lewis-Mason-Thurston Area Agency on Aging Director and strong kinship advocate.
- AL TSA, CA, and ESA staff revised the popular DSHS publication: *Grandparents and Relatives: Do you know about the Services and Support*

for You and the Children in Your Care? available in all DSHS-supported languages in addition to English.

2017 Kinship Oversight Committee Recommendations

Looking forward to 2017, the Oversight Committee makes the following recommendations to the Legislature:

- Eliminate means testing for Child-Only TANF.
- Maintain, or expand, current funding for Kinship Navigators, including new Tribal Kinship Navigators.
- Maintain ALTSA’s Kinship Caregiver Support Program, CA’s Relative Support Service Funds, ESA’s Additional Requirements for Emergent Needs (AREN) program and other financial support services for kinship caregivers.

What We Have Learned about Kinship Caregivers

Families headed by grandparents and other relatives are brought together for different reasons, including substance abuse, incarceration, mental illness, child abuse and neglect, parental death, or military deployment. These families represent all income levels, races, and ethnicities. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Stepping Up for Kids* report, (2012) children cared for by kinship caregivers 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.

In Washington state, an estimated 53,000 children are being raised by grandparents and other relatives.¹ For every child placed in out-of-home care with a relative through Washington’s child welfare system, there are about 12 children living “informally” with a relative. According to data from the Children’s Administration, 4,068 dependent children are placed in the home of a relative, representing nearly 46% of all children placed in out-of-home care.²

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

²Children’s Administration FamLink Monthly Metrics Report, August 2016

Over the past thirteen years, the Kinship Care Oversight Committee has learned 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 initially stepped in to provide a temporary safety net, have now become long-term, full-time caregivers. Many of the children in their care have experienced or been exposed to trauma while living with their parents. Many have physical challenges, mental health, emotional, and/or behavioral issues of their own, with some older children engaging in high-risk behaviors. This poses a challenge to relative caregivers who may not fully understand the needs of these children or be able to find sufficient resources to address their needs. In addition, some caregivers are struggling with health challenges of their own.

2016 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.

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*. 2016 marked the 13th anniversary of the Voices of Children Contest. A celebration of all winners and their families took place at the Governor's Mansion on July 7, 2016, hosted by First Lady Trudi Inslee and staff from Family Education and Support Services. Community partners Twin Star Credit Union and Great Wolf Lodge provided prizes for the six winners. DSHS was once again a co-sponsor and the DSHS Secretary and several Assistant Secretaries helped judge the event. (To read several of the winning essays, see Appendix 1.)
- Governor Inslee proclaimed May 18, 2016 as Kinship Caregiver Day. Since 1995, Pierce County's HopeSparks Kinship Care program has led this annual recognition to honor relatives raising children.
- The Annual Pacific Northwest Caregivers' Conference at Great Wolf Lodge May 13 – 15, 2016 brought together child welfare staff, advocates and both foster and relative caregivers.
- Shelly Willis, Director of Family Education and Support Services received an [Unsung Hero Award](#) by the Children's Trust Fund of Washington and

Seattle's Child, on February 20, 2016, for her tremendous support of kinship caregivers and for being a former kinship caregiver.

- Seattle Aquarium family passes for all kinship caregivers providing full time out-of-home care are currently circulated statewide by Kinship and Tribal Navigators.
- The "We Are Family" annual event sponsored by Children's Administration and the Seattle Mariners, celebrates relatives, foster and adoptive families. 2016's event posted record turn out with 3,358 families attending the afternoon game and 600 attending the morning caregiver recognition celebration.

New Washington State Kinship Data

The 2014 Washington State Healthy Youth Survey (HYS) collected responses about various at-risk behaviors and health-related information from middle and high school youth. A December 2015 analysis examined the similarities and differences of youth living with relatives as compared to youth living in foster homes or with parents. This analysis was supported by ESA, CA, AL TSA, the Department of Commerce, and the WA Dental Service Foundation.³ The data indicated that youth living in kinship care families are vulnerable to substance abuse issues, below average school performance, mental and physical health problems, and poor nutrition. On many measures, these youth did not appear to be as high-risk as those in foster care but were significantly more at-risk than children living with their parents. The residual effect of negative experiences of these youth prior to placement with relatives can likely explain these ongoing challenges. Over the next year, the Kinship Care Oversight Committee and other interested public and private agencies will review the Healthy Youth Survey data to identify options to decrease the risk and increase protective factors for these youth.

Collaborations to Support Kinship Care Families

Regional Collaborations have formed in the past decade to support kinship caregivers in a variety of ways. These include:

- 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 Pierce County Kinship Collaboration

³ Looking Glass Analytics, Risk Factors Associated with Different Living Arrangements: Youth in Kinship Care, Foster Care, Unstable Housing and Homelessness Preliminary findings from the 2014 Healthy Youth Survey, October 2015

The Kinship Care Oversight Committee relies on these collaborations to share information about local resources and events and to raise issues of statewide concern. Each collaboration works to establish and maintain support groups for kinship caregivers and host local events. (For information about local Collaboration activities during 2016, see Appendix 2.)

Legal Options for Kinship Caregivers

- Legal assistance for kinship caregivers is very limited across the state and concentrated in a few counties. One of the Oversight Committee's main goals is to expand access to these services, which are currently limited to King, Thurston, Whatcom, and Yakima Counties. Legal assistance in these counties is focused on educating caregivers about the non-parental (third party) custody process and helping them complete the paperwork for uncontested cases.
 - For example, the Whatcom County Kinship Custody Clinic provides free, monthly legal assistance to relatives and others seeking non-parental custody. The primary partners are the Northwest Regional Council and Law Advocates with assistance from the Whatcom County Clerk's Office and Judicial Officers. In 2016 the Kinship Custody Clinic was expanded to include two attorneys and two legal assistants along with the Kinship Navigator facilitator. More than 180 Kinship Caregivers will be served in 2016.
- To increase kinship legal services in unserved areas, in September 2016, ALTSA provided a \$12,000 grant to the Lewis-Mason-Thurston Area Agency on Aging and their kinship partner, Family Education and Support Services, to conduct monthly legal clinics in collaboration with a local legal provider starting in November 2016. The hope is that these legal clinics can serve as models and help advocates and program planners identify sustainable funding for critical legal services for this underserved population.
- To better educate kinship caregivers about the legal process, ALTSA staff offers a mailed packet with legal and resource information including a consent for health care brochure, a legal guide, a DVD on WA State legal options. ALTSA also contracted with Legal Voice in September 2015 to update its *Options for Grandparents and Other Non-parental Caregivers: A Legal Guide for WA State*. This guide was the first of its kind in the country and will soon be published in its sixth edition.
- CA provides all relative caregivers information about the dependency court process and timeline when a child is placed in their home. Caregivers also receive the child's placement packet containing the Caregiver's Report to the Court and instructions on how to complete and

submit this report for the child's review hearings. Social workers provide advance notice of court hearings so caregivers can plan to attend. Information related to the legal process is also available for caregivers on the Children's Administration website and in the monthly Caregiver Connection newsletter.

AL TSA's Benefits and Services for Kinship Caregivers

The resources provided by AL TSA focus primarily on those kinship care families (which represent more than 90 percent of the total kinship care population) who are not involved with the child welfare system.

Kinship Navigator Program and Concrete Supports

The Kinship Navigator Program provides information, referral, resources, and support to relatives raising children. Navigators help kinship caregivers locate appropriate housing to fit their expanded family size, explain how to apply for various benefits (e.g., TANF, Food Assistance, Apple Health, special needs services), advocate on their behalf. They also are the critical link to the Kinship Caregivers Support Program which assists low-income caregivers with short-term financial support to meet urgent needs; purchasing goods (e.g., beds, clothes or supplies) for the children they are raising. These links and connections help keep children out of the child welfare system by providing greater stability and crisis interventions for kinship caregivers. During SFY 2016, Kinship Navigators served 1,886 kinship caregivers who were raising 3,352 children and provided 237 presentations to community organizations and state agencies.

AL TSA contracts the Kinship Navigator Program with nine of the thirteen Area Agencies on Aging (AAA). The 2016 Legislature funded a Tribal Navigator initiative for one year which enabled eight tribes (Samish, Quileute, Makah, Lummi Nation, Yakama Nation, Colville Indian Reservation, Shoalwater Bay, and Port Gamble S'Klallam) to develop a plan and receive funding for SFY 2017. A half-time position was also supported to guide this and other kinship programs administered by AL TSA. Kinship Navigators are still needed in Clallam, Jefferson, Grays Harbor, Pacific, Kitsap, Snohomish, Island, San Juan and Skagit Counties. (For a listing of Kinship and Tribal Navigators see Appendix 3.)

DSHS Kinship Care Website

AL TSA hosts and manages the [Kinship Care Website](#). The website provides important information to kinship caregivers and professionals on financial assistance, legal, health care, drug/alcohol and mental health services, child care, support groups, resources for caring for children with special needs, tips on raising relative children, as well as related news items.

CA's Benefits and Services for Relative Caregivers

The Children's Administration prioritizes placement of children entering out-of-home care with relatives and other significant adults known to the family. Specific recruitment searches through data-enhanced search software assists in locating family members. Family members are also invited to attend the Family Team Decision Making (FTDM) meetings to offer supports for the children and family.

Relative caregivers with dependent children placed in their home can access the same supports and services available to foster parents. Medical/dental/counseling and therapeutic services are available through Apple Health Core Connections.

Training and Online Services

The Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence is the Children's Administration's comprehensive, statewide training partnership. The Alliance provides professional training for social workers and skills development and enhancement for foster parents and caregivers working with vulnerable children and families.

Training opportunities include classroom, online workshops, webinar, video and Netflix to allow for greater caregiver access. The Alliance continues to identify continuing education curricula specific to the needs of caregivers.

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](#) webpages. The website underwent a significant redesign. Updated information, news, policy information, placement supports, staff contact information, and training information are all available to support kinship caregivers who have children placed in the home.

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 a communication delivered through the Listserv. Information is sent out to over 9,200 subscribers.

Supports through Foster Care Recruitment and Retention Contractors

Both Olive Crest and Eastern Washington University help the Children's Administration in supporting caregivers. These contractors offer support services to relative caregivers with dependent children placed in their home. Their websites offer information about services, supports, and training. A new relative/kinship Facebook page serves caregivers in navigating the child welfare system and offers information and advice from experienced caregivers.

Concrete Supports

Relatives caring for dependent children can request short-term help through the Relative Support Service Fund, which provides supports to help a caregiver accept placement of a child or to help maintain the child's placement. The Children's Administration also provides a clothing voucher or pre-approved reimbursement for licensed and unlicensed caregivers with a dependent child placed in their home.

The Children's Administration provides the Relative-Guardianship Assistance Program (R-GAP) for dependent children who have a guardianship established with a relative. In addition to a monthly subsidy, R-GAP covers non-recurring costs up to \$1,500 to finalize the legal requirements necessary to establish the relative guardianship. It also 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.

ESA's Benefits for Kinship Caregivers

ESA continues to provide cash assistance (Child Only TANF grants), food assistance, and subsidized child care (Working Connections Child Care) to caregivers who qualify. In addition, recipients of Child Only TANF are eligible for one-time emergency assistance for shelter-related expenses – the Additional Requirements for Emergent Needs or AREN program.

In coordination with the Children's Administration, ESA offers the Concurrent Benefits program for children temporarily placed in out-of-home care. This program allows a caregiver to receive a Child Only TANF grant for a child, while the biological parent continues to receive a full family TANF grant in support of his or her reunification efforts.

New in 2016, ESA is experimenting with providing employment and career services for older dependent youth in TANF households, including Child Only TANF households. The Rainier Community Service Office is the site for this pilot, in collaboration with the Seattle/King County Workforce Development Council and Seattle Goodwill.

Appendix 1

Voices of Children – Raised by Grandparents and Other Relatives Contest

Excerpts from 2016 Contest Entries

Ever since I got adopted by my grandparents, I have had a roof over my head, good meals and clean clothes on my body every day. But most importantly I have love and a good family.

My grandma helps me keep on track for homework, studying and chores. Even when she pops her top, gets really mad and starts yelling, I know she still loves me. Grumpy grandpa's grumpy a lot but deep down in his heart I will always have a place.

Gramma says you need to learn something new every day. They're always trying to teach us new stuff, and how to be better people. One of the many things I love about my grandparents is that they let me see my mom and didn't separate me and my siblings. In fact, we even got to meet our oldest brother for the first time last summer.

My grandparents give us all that we need. Even though they might not be the perfect grandparents, or the funnest, they are all I need, and all I want. I wouldn't trade anything for them. Someday I'll get to live with my mom again, but until then, I love my life here.

-Xena, age 12

What They Wanted – What We Got

They wanted: grandchildren born health and happy.

They wanted: to be able to put a few dollars away for retirement.

They got: bills taking care of children that weren't theirs.

They wanted: to have grandchildren on weekends and holidays and spoil rotten then send home.

They got: three of us all the time to parent and teach and discipline and fight.

They wanted: temporary custody so mom could go to rehab then we could go home.

They got: full custody with no end in sight.

They wanted: to be able to retire and spend time together, to relax and enjoy life.

They got: to retire early to take care of us; doing homework, and conferences, and carpools, and PTA.

They wanted: laughter and hugs and love.

They got: scowls, and muttering, and disrespect, and theft, and attitude.

They wanted: peace, and calmness, and order.

They got: chaos, us always fighting with each other, and our stuff left everywhere constantly.

They wanted: appreciation for what they were providing.

They got: I want cell phones, laptops, notebooks, name brand clothing, and more and more and more.

They wanted: “you’re the best grandma and grampa ever.”

They got: “you’re not fair, this sucks, and I hate living here.”

What we got: unconditional love, and everything we ever needed, and a chance to grow up and have a good life without drugs, without alcohol, without abuse or neglect. We were lucky. We got them.

-Beverly, age 17

What a Blessing it is to Have Relatives

My aunt and uncle are one of a kind
I love them so much
I’m glad they’re mine
They lift me up
Through my ups and downs
I am so thankful to have them around
Life is not perfect
Its full of many shapes and colors
But I’m glad to know that we have each other
To have this peace
To have a place to call home
With my aunt and uncle by my side
I’ll never be alone
They’ve been there for me
Through thick and thin
Their love is so strong
They don’t have to pretend
I appreciate my relatives
Mine are as special as can be
I love my aunt and uncle very much
Thank you God for giving them to me.
-Esther, age 17

Appendix 2

2016 Highlights of Kinship Regional Collaborations

King County Kinship Collaboration

Approximately 200 caregivers, children, volunteers and provider representatives came together at a local community center for a Kinship Resource Fair in the spring of 2016. There were activities for children, free refreshments and door prizes, and an opportunity to see the Seahawks-themed "12th Lambo" Lamborghini!

The 7th annual camp, *Kinship Camp*, at YMCA Camp Colman, took place in September, 2016. Eighteen kinship families and ten volunteers spent one night and two days doing activities that included crafts and relaxation for the caregivers; fort building and archery for the kids; and campfire, S'mores, skits and bingo with the whole family.

Yakima County KINDred Spirits Collaboration

This longstanding Collaboration celebrated its 11th year. Community agencies partnered to bring quarterly events to area caregivers such as the Annual Caregiver Day, the Annual Back-to-School Event, and the Annual Caregiver Conference. This collaboration also provides trainings, support groups and a bi-monthly newsletter.

The Lewis, Mason and Thurston Kinship Regional Collaboration

As a result of the work the Kinship Navigator, Lynn Urvina, has done with the national organization, Generations United (GU), she was interviewed by the Associated Press for an article published in newspapers and on the GU website on Grandparents Day (September 14, 2015). Ms. Urvina was also interviewed on the local Evergreen State College Radio Station, KAOS, for Grandparents Day. The Spanish-speaking Navigator, Rosa Venancio, represents the needs of kinship caregivers as a member of the Latinas Advocates and the Latino Equity Network of Washington State. The Collaboration also partnered with a local group at Jubilee Retirement Community to provide holiday gifts for over 100 kinship children and gift cards for their caregivers in December 2015.

The Lewis, Mason and Thurston Kinship Regional Collaboration was also the lead coordinator on several statewide events including: Kinship Advocacy Day at the Washington State Legislature (February 17, 2016), Washington State Kinship Caregiver's Day at Great Wolf Lodge (May 18, 2016), and the Statewide 13th Annual Voices of Children Raised by Relatives Contest for youth being raised by Grandparents and Other Caring Relatives.

Appendix 3

Washington State's Kinship/Tribal Navigator Programs

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
Spanish-speaking Navigator Assistant: Deysi Romero
dromero@ccyakima.org, 509-662-6761 Ext. 3052

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 – Frontier Behavioral Health
Kinship Navigator: Anna O'Connor, avictor@smhca.org
509-458-7450 ext. 4
- **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 Navigator: Mary Pleger, mpleger@ccyakima.org,
Spanish-speaking Navigator Assistant: Lorena Ortega
lortega@ccyakima.org
509-965-7100 or 800-246-2962

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
Kinship Navigator: Pati West, pwest@hopesparks.org,
253-565-4484
- **Snohomish County:** Senior Services of Snohomish County
Kinship Navigator: Amy Dennis, adennis@sssc.org, 425-265-2287

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

Northwest Washington

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

Primary Contacts for Tribal Kinship Navigators

- **Colville Confederated Tribes**
Marietta Grunlose
Marietta.Grunlose@colvilletribes.com
- **Lummi Nation**
Topsy (Adele) Kinley
TopsyK@lummi-nsn.gov
- **Makah Tribe**
Maureen Woods
maureen.woods@makah.com
- **Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe**
Donna Jones
DonnaJ@Pgst.nsn.us
- **Quileute Tribe**
Lisa Hohman
lisa.hohman-penn@quileutenation.org
- **Nicole Earls**
nicole.earls@quileutenation.org
- **Samish Indian Nation**
Michelle Johnson
mjohnson@samishtribe.nsn.us

- **Shoalwater Bay Tribe**
Kathirine Horne
khorne@shoalwaterbay-nsn.gov
- **Yakima Nation**
Doris Peter
yinnws@Yakama.com
- **Laretta Smiscon**
lsmiscon@Yakama.com

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