



# **Translating Kin-First Commitments Into Practice: Management Strategies for Child Welfare Leaders**

**Authors: Lynda Blancato, Emma Cregg, Megan Toohey**

**Contributors: Teresa Wisner, Alison Kelly, Sara Israelsen-Hartley, Maja Gray**

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**HARVARD Kennedy School**  
Government Performance Lab



For a growing number of child welfare agencies, placing more children with kin while in out-of-home care is a top priority. Agency leaders understand that kin caregivers may provide children a greater sense of stability and belonging, stronger family connections, and preservation of cultural identity.

Federal and state policy increasingly reinforce these commitments to kin-first care. Federal policy has long required that child welfare agencies notify next of kin and consider giving preference to kin when a removal occurs.<sup>1</sup> Recent policy changes at both levels include an expanded range of relationships legally considered “kin,”<sup>2</sup> increased level of financial assistance available to kin,<sup>3</sup> and new incentives to strengthen the array of navigator programs connecting caregivers with financial, legal, educational, and other supports.<sup>4</sup>

Despite these efforts, kin placements are still not the norm in many jurisdictions.<sup>5</sup> This highlights that policy changes — while helpful at establishing conditions to build kin-first systems — are not enough on their own. Local agencies must also embed kin-first commitments in their day-to-day processes and practices.

Yet this implementation can be challenging for several reasons. First, placing a child in a preapproved licensed foster home can often be simpler for a caseworker than initially placing a child with kin. Second, if a child’s initial placement is not with kin, staff may lose momentum around continued kin search. Third, even when a placement is made with kin, limited support for caregivers can lead placements to break down over time.

This publication, which draws on the Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab (GPL)’s direct work with state and local jurisdictions over the past decade, offers child welfare leaders six actionable management strategies with accompanying downloadable resources. These tools can help agency leaders motivate staff, shift perceptions, refine procedures, and reduce barriers to increase kin placements in their jurisdictions.

## **Six Management Strategies to Increase Kin Placements**

1. Measure and communicate the benefits of a kin-first approach
2. Strengthen tools and accountability mechanisms for staff to conduct high-quality searches up front
3. Break down barriers to placement with kin
4. Elevate youth and family voice in the placement process
5. Provide tailored resources and services to support and stabilize kin placements
6. Build momentum around continued kin search when initial placement is not with kin

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## Benefits of kinship care

In a system that has long separated children from their parents, siblings, and other extended family members, kinship care can instead enable children and families to lean on preexisting familial supports in times of crisis. For children who may have experienced the trauma of removal from a parent's care, placement with a relative or fictive kin can help create more consistency and stability by allowing them to be cared for by familiar, supportive adults who may already play active roles in their lives.<sup>6</sup>

*Research indicates that placement with kin is associated with:*

- **Maintained sibling ties.** Sibling groups are more likely to stay together when placed with kin, which can help increase children's sense of stability and well-being.<sup>7</sup>
- **Preservation of cultural identity.** Kinship care can help children maintain strong connections to their cultural heritage and identity.<sup>8</sup>
- **Improved well-being.** Children placed with kin generally experience better behavioral and mental health outcomes compared with children placed in non-kin settings.<sup>9</sup>
- **Greater stability.** Children placed with kin are less likely to experience placement changes while in care, compared with children placed with unrelated foster families.<sup>10</sup> Placement disruptions in foster care are associated with worse educational outcomes and increased behavioral and mental health needs.<sup>11</sup>
- **Reduced reentry rates.** Children placed with kin are less likely to reenter foster care in the future.<sup>12</sup> In cases where children cannot be reunified with their parents, many kin caregivers choose to pursue guardianship or adoption; for instance, in fiscal year 2022, 33 percent of children adopted from out-of-home care nationwide were adopted by relatives.<sup>13</sup>





## STRATEGY 1: Measure and communicate the benefits of a kin-first approach

**Creating regular opportunities to measure kin placement trends and share stories about the benefits of kin-first approaches is critical for raising awareness and cultivating buy-in among front-line staff and supervisors. This is especially important for staff who may have doubts or preconceptions about placing children with kin.**

### Track, review, and discuss kin placement data on a regular basis

Adopting a data-driven approach can help agency leaders prioritize specific challenges for focus and monitoring over time. Key metrics to review regularly include:

- The share of children *initially* placed with kin upon entry to care.
- The overall share of children in care placed with kin.
- The share of children initially placed with kin who remain in that same placement one, three, and six months later (also in comparison to placement stability for children in other placement settings).

Each of these metrics should also be disaggregated by key demographic indicators, including child's age (e.g., under 1, 1–4, 5–12, 13 years and older) and race/ethnicity.

### Use existing meeting and training touch points to continually emphasize the benefits of kinship care

Leaders can shape organizational culture over time by incorporating messaging on the value of kinship care into everyday touch points and meetings with staff. Key messages may include kinship care's association with improved child well-being, greater placement stability, trauma reduction, and stronger ties to family, community, and culture.

Sharing local data on the stability of kin placements may further validate its benefits. While leaders may initially focus on communicating within their own agencies, they may also consider repurposing internal communication resources for interactions with key external audiences, such as courts, community-based organizations, and even kin caregivers themselves.

**“We take every opportunity to discuss our cases. It’s an ongoing conversation. We believe that we can’t stop talking about kinship placement. We can’t remove this from our focus right now; it can only get better.”**

**— Foster Care Agency Senior Leadership**



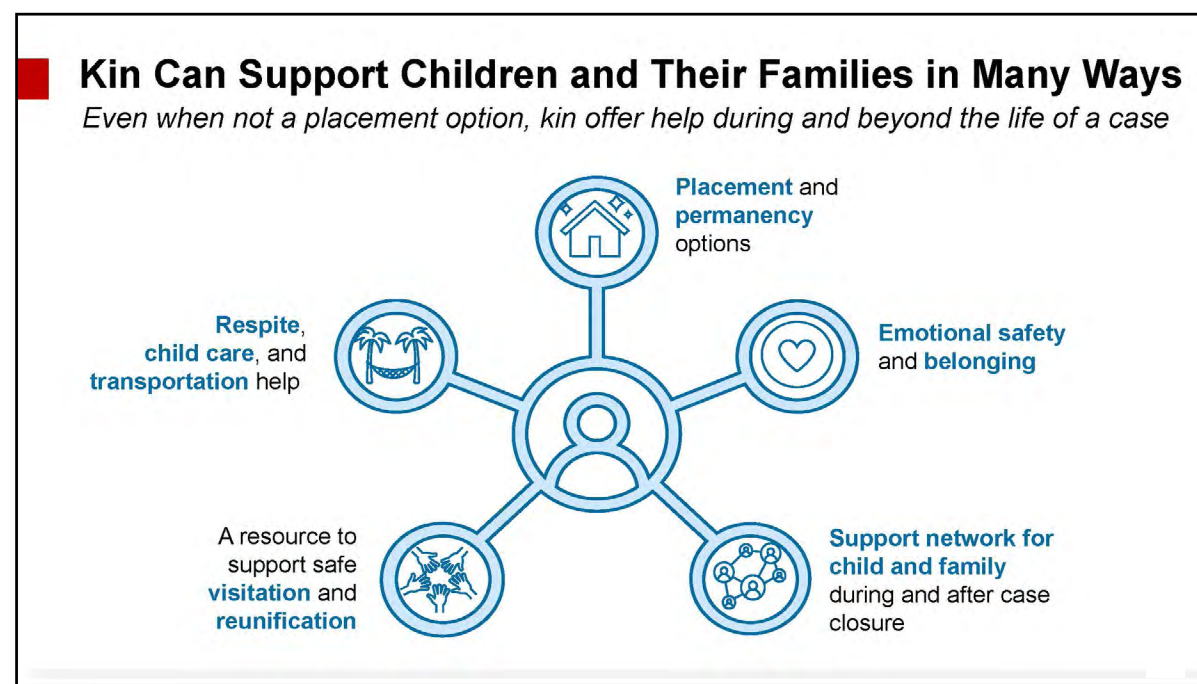
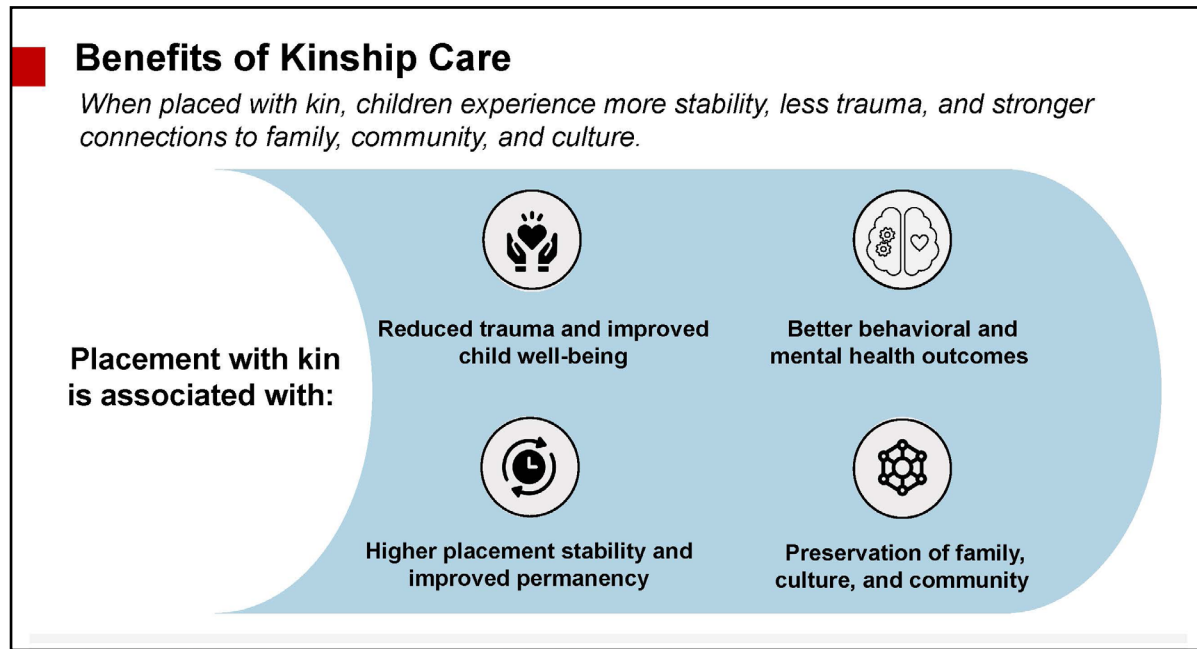
### Share stories to make it personal

When talking about the benefits of kinship care, include local stories of where and how staff have seen the benefits of working with kin. Identify and encourage internal champions like front-line staff and agency leaders to share their success stories as a complement to the quantitative metrics described above.

## Resource: Communicating the Benefits of Kinship Care

Agency leaders can use slides like these to introduce and reinforce the benefits of kin-first approaches with both internal staff and external stakeholders. Leaders can share national research and evidence as well as local stories and data on placement trends.

[Download: Communicating the Benefits of Kinship Care \(PowerPoint\)](#)



## STRATEGY 2: Strengthen tools and accountability mechanisms for staff to conduct high-quality searches up front

For a caseworker, the process of placing a child with a licensed foster family can often be more straightforward than making a placement with kin. Licensed foster families have already passed a background check, completed training or other requirements, and prepared their home to welcome a child or sibling group.

In contrast, the steps required to identify and contact kin, share additional details and expectations for placement, and secure the needed approvals can potentially require many more hours in a short period of time. Without intentional efforts to begin identifying and engaging kin early in an investigation, children may be placed, by default, with licensed foster families or in congregate care settings.

### Find and engage family and fictive kin early

When an investigation commences, agency staff can begin documenting contact information for the child's relational network. This can start with something as simple as an emergency contact list. Agency staff can also bring together supportive individuals for family meetings or safety planning. If a removal does occur, identifying this support network early may increase the likelihood that staff can identify and assess kin placement options more quickly. If a removal does not occur, having this identified support network is still important. This network of kin can provide respite to parents or help with transportation, child care, or emotional support.

### Build a kin search checklist for staff

Agencies can create a checklist to guide caseworkers or other staff while conducting a search for kin and to aid supervisors when discussing cases with staff. Agencies with dedicated family-finding staff or other specialized, kin-focused roles may choose to delegate activities on this list across different positions. A kin search checklist may include prompts such as:



- **Conduct a comprehensive search of possible kin relationships.** Focus on both maternal and paternal relationships, as well as an expansive range of potential fictive kin, such as godparents, coaches, parents of friends, neighbors, or others. This is especially important for teenagers who may have strong existing relationships with supportive but unrelated adults.
- **Use a variety of search methods.** Engage directly with parents, children, and kin. Search local child welfare case management and public benefit systems, social media platforms, and other advanced family finding tools.
- **Follow up with contacts multiple times.** People may need more time to be willing or comfortable sharing information about family connections. Contacts may be able



to build on information about existing relationships that other individuals have previously shared.

- **Note any barriers or needs.** What situations may or may not be addressed through the placement process? This could include a caregiver's concrete or financial needs, such as beds, clothing, or car seats; potential placement exemption requests, or individual circumstances that may prevent placement in the current moment but could be opportunities in the future.
- **Thoroughly document search activities.** Using a genogram or a similar tool enables agency staff to more readily build upon prior efforts, particularly in the event of a staffing change or placement disruption in the future.
- **Hold a family team meeting or another family-involved meeting prior to removal.** *See additional details on p. 12.*
- **Consider relevant local agency policies.** Think about any factors unique to the jurisdiction that may be important to consider as staff prioritize kin search.

### Require local director sign-off for all non-kin placements

Leaders can increase accountability for staff to conduct a thorough kin search by requiring local leader sign-off on any placements made in non-kin settings. Such a policy may help motivate staff to address any barriers or provide potential kin caregivers with needed supports before defaulting to a non-kin placement.

This sign-off process may include expectations that staff document efforts made to identify and secure kin placement (e.g., using the ideas described in “Build a kin search checklist” section above) and explain why placement could not be made with kin. Such a process provides leaders the opportunity to intervene if diligent efforts to identify kin have not yet been made. It may also help leaders identify the most common challenges and develop ways to address them.

**"We have seen that the commitment is better from kin caregivers. They aren't caring for the child as a job, they are raising her as their own. They are raising her to become an adult."**

**— Foster Care Agency  
Senior Manager**



## Resource: Family Finding Connections Log

This family finding connections log from Broward County, Florida provides a single, centralized location for staff to document and update all kin search efforts and contact information throughout the life of a case. This tool was created to make sure contact information was preserved during case hand-offs. It also intentionally outlines connections that can be commonly skipped over — like paternal family, sibling parents, and fictive kin relationships.

[Download: Family Finding Connections Log \(Word document\)](#)

FAMILY FINDING CONNECTIONS LOG			
Child(ren)'s Name(s): _____			
Case ID: _____			
CONTACTS			
Relationship to Child(ren)	Name	Address and Phone Number	Brief Notes (e.g., why not pursued/placed, other support roles to play for child/family, follow-up touchpoints, etc.)
<b>MATERNAL FAMILY</b>			
Mother			
Maternal Grandmother			
Maternal Grandfather			
Maternal Aunt			
Maternal Uncle			
Maternal Cousin			
Maternal Other:			
Maternal Other:			
Maternal Other:			
Maternal Other:			
Maternal Other:			
<b>PATERNAL FAMILY (Cut and paste for multiple fathers)</b>			
Father of:			
Paternal Grandmother			
Paternal Grandfather			
Paternal Aunt			
Paternal Uncle			
Paternal Cousin			
Paternal Other:			
Paternal Other:			
Paternal Other:			
Paternal Other:			

FAMILY FINDING CONNECTIONS LOG			
<b>OTHER FAMILY</b>			
Adult Sibling			
Other family:			
Other family:			
Other family:			
<b>FICTIVE KIN</b>			
Stepparent			
Parent of Half-Sibling			
Godparent			
Neighbor			
Neighbor			
Church Member			
School Connection			
Family Friend			
Family Friend			
Parent of Child's Friend			
Other:			
Other:			
Other:			
Other:			
Other:			

## STRATEGY 3: Break down barriers to placement with kin

In many cases when a child is being removed, there is likely a relative or fictive kin who could provide a safe, suitable, and stable placement for that child. Yet many potential caregivers are dropped from consideration from the start.

Staff may disqualify supportive, loving kin caregivers because of expectations around financial or concrete resources, background check policies, or misperceptions that placing children with kin caregivers — who may not appear as qualified as foster families on paper — may lead to more challenges down the road. Rather than allowing these barriers to rule out a promising placement, agencies can proactively put structures and resources in place to address them and help facilitate more placements with kin.

### Dedicate resources to addressing concrete and financial barriers

Families living in poverty are disproportionately more likely to interact with child welfare agencies.<sup>14</sup> The intergenerational nature of poverty also means that many potential kin caregivers already face financial constraints prior to being asked to care for a child or sibling group.<sup>15</sup> When a kin caregiver is asked to take in a child, often on a moment's notice, they may not have the time or immediate resources to secure basic items like children's clothing, diapers and formula, or safety items like carbon monoxide detectors, much less more expensive items like additional beds or car seats.

Their inability to secure these needed items can quickly preclude a placement. Agencies can mitigate this barrier by having basic items available for potential kin caregivers during the home assessment process.



### Case Study

**Broward County, Florida** reserves emergency funds to address concrete needs of relatives and fictive kin who are willing but may not have the resources to take placement. These funds are often used to help families meet home visit requirements — like buying beds, renting a storage unit to store belongings to create more space in a home, or installing a pool lock to ensure a safe environment for children.

In one instance, a family member was willing to care for a sibling group of four but did not have space in their current apartment. The team helped the family secure a larger living arrangement, pay the security deposit, and move. The large sibling group was able to remain together, living with a trusted family member.



## Establish straightforward protocols to request exemptions for prior child welfare or justice system history

People of color, particularly Black Americans, experience higher rates of involvement in the criminal justice system and are often sentenced more harshly for the same offenses than their white counterparts.<sup>16</sup> This population is also disproportionately impacted by the child welfare system.<sup>17</sup> Agencies should be cautious of inadvertently reinforcing systemic bias and perpetuating racial and economic disparities by summarily excluding prospective kin caregivers with prior child welfare or justice system history who would be loving and supportive caregivers.

Children are prohibited from being placed with individuals who have certain prior felony convictions (e.g., violent crimes or crimes involving children).<sup>18</sup> However, in other cases, agencies often have discretion.

Leaders can evaluate situations on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration the length of time that has passed and current implications for a child's safety. Leaders can also provide clear guidance on when to seek exemptions, implementing a simple, straightforward process for completing any necessary exemption paperwork, and sharing examples of completed documentation.

### Case Study

Three siblings were removed from their mother's care in **Michigan**. Their grandmother, who was a present and active support in the children's lives, expressed interest in becoming their caregiver. The caseworker explored this lead but learned that the grandmother had multiple DUIs on her record.

Using a newly implemented process, the caseworker showed that the grandmother's last offense occurred more than 10 years ago, and that she had since completed substance use disorder treatment. The caseworker submitted a request for an exemption because the grandmother had not had any subsequent convictions, nor did these offenses pose a current safety risk to the children. Leadership approved the placement. The children were placed with their grandmother, who could provide them with a safe and loving home.



## STRATEGY 4: Elevate youth and family voice in the placement process

**For many staff members, especially new staff, it can be challenging to have sensitive conversations with parents about the potential removal of their children. As a result, case workers may not engage with parents sufficiently to incorporate their valuable insights and perspectives into decisions.**

**Actively inviting parents, children, and kin to share their perspectives throughout the placement process can preserve dignity, promote mutual respect, and offer children and families a greater sense of control over what is happening. Doing so can also help staff build trust with family members and cultivate a strong network of support for a child that can set a placement up for success.**

### **Train investigative staff to ask about and document family preference**

At the start of all investigations, staff should ask parents with whom they prefer their children live if they must be placed in out-of-home care. Staff should also ask older children with whom they would feel comfortable living temporarily. Teenagers often have independent relationships with mentors, educators, or peers' parents who could serve as supportive and stable fictive kin placements. Even if a removal does not occur, these individuals can help support a family during a crisis.

Agencies should train staff to facilitate these conversations, as well as document and share families' preferences and contacts with other agency staff. Doing so can help expedite future family finding efforts and reduce the number of times parents and children are asked for the same information.

### **Hold family team meetings or other family-involved meetings prior to placement**



Before making removal or placement decisions, agencies should hold a family team meeting or another similar family-involved meeting. This meeting can bring together key individuals in a child's life — including parents, relatives, friends, service providers, and, when age appropriate, the children themselves — to collaboratively discuss next steps, voice preferences around the desired placement setting, and develop a plan to support child well-being.

Holding these meetings prior to a removal can elevate new leads for potential relative or fictive kin placements, including those that may otherwise be impossible to identify through other search methods. Meetings can also create an opportunity to begin addressing any needs that children or kin caregivers may have, and identify roles that family members or fictive kin can play in a child's life even if they are not able to serve as full-time caregivers.

## Resource: Family Conversation Guide

Leaders can share guiding questions and communication tips with staff to help them engage families and children in conversation about their preferences. A few sample questions are below.

[Download: Family Conversation Guide \(Word document\)](#)

### Initial Questions to Identify Family Supports

#### ***Talking with a parent/caregiver:***

- Can you tell me about your family? Who do you go to in your family if you need a hand with child care?
- Have your children ever stayed with other family members?
- How do you celebrate family occasions? Who is there? Do you have any cousins or aunts and uncles you talk with?
- Who would you call if you ran out of gas?
- Do you participate in any activities outside of work? Do you play any sports?
- Are you a member of a religious community?
- Does your child ever have friends over? Do you know their parents?
- Who is your child's emergency contact at school?

#### ***Building rapport with a child/teen:***

- Tell me about your day. What did you do? What classes did you have?
- How long have you been at this school? What do you like about it?
- Are you involved in any sports teams or after school clubs? Who takes you to practice?
- What is your favorite subject? Do you have a favorite teacher or other adult at school that you go to for help?
- What do you do for fun?
- Who does your family spend time with? Does your grandma or aunt ever come around? What about other relatives? Who else is in your family?
- Who do you hang out with in the neighborhood? Do you ever go to your friend's house? Do you know their parents?





## **STRATEGY 5: Provide tailored resources and services to support and stabilize kin placements**

**Kin caregivers rarely have the benefit of significant planning or preparation time, nor access to the same level of supports offered to licensed foster families.<sup>19</sup>**

**Even when existing resources are extended to kin caregivers, the supports and services may not be tailored to meet their unique needs. Caregivers may need help navigating various challenges: the financial burden of caring for children, generational differences as an older caregiver, interpersonal challenges managing relationships with the parents of children in their care, and complex logistics of the child protection and legal systems. These challenges can prevent a placement from occurring or contribute to caregivers feeling overwhelmed, which can lead a placement to break down over time.**

### **Proactively connect families to existing community resources**

Becoming a kin caregiver often occurs suddenly and can be overwhelming. Helping new caregivers access community resources — rather than just informing them of their existence — can go a long way in setting up a new placement for success. Agency staff should proactively make referrals and plan next steps with kin families. Agency management can set expectations by maintaining up-to-date training and resources for front-line staff on community referral sources and available benefits, which may include legal supports, mental health services, diaper banks, respite care, and more.

### **Help new kin caregivers navigate the child welfare system**

Child welfare agencies can make the transition for a new kin caregiver easier by offering key information and resources from the beginning. For instance, agencies can host brief orientation sessions designed for kin caregivers. This is an opportunity for staff to share essential information about navigating the child welfare system, resources on managing family relationships, and expectations for parent visitation.

### **Check in frequently on new kin placements**

Adjusting to new routines as a kin caregiver takes time, and not all needs may be apparent from the start. Formalizing monthly points of contact with kin families can provide them with ongoing emotional support as well as confirm that they have the supports they need. Regularly scheduled check-ins also provide staff with opportunities to follow up on caregiver and child needs and support kin families by proactively addressing challenges that might otherwise lead a placement to break down.

**“Kinship care preserves lifelong connections. This is important because we know that our kids go back to look for family, even when they are with great foster parents.”**

**— Foster Care Agency Senior Manager**

## Resource: Kin Caregiver Resource Guide

Case management staff in **Broward County, Florida**, saw that new kin caregivers struggled to know where to begin accessing benefits and supports and that not all staff could readily provide details of available resources.

With the support of the GPL, Broward County built a kin caregiver resource guide to help new caregivers become aware of their options. Rather than provide a long and potentially overwhelming list of all possible supports, staff limited the guide to two pages, prioritizing the most common needs and supports for new caregivers in the county.

### Download: Kin Caregiver Resource Guide and Template (Word document)

KIN CAREGIVER RESOURCE GUIDE	
<b>Getting Started as a Kin Caregiver in Broward County</b> Becoming a caregiver may feel overwhelming for you or your family at times -- that is normal! When you attend the Family Team Meeting, you will meet your assigned case manager and licensing specialist. They will be your main contacts during your time as a caregiver and are there to help you get connected to supports and services. <i>Questions before the Family Team Meeting?</i> Call the Kinship Licensing Team: (###) ###-####. <p>The questions below are designed to help you start thinking about the immediate needs and other logistical considerations that might be new to you. The four sections below match the categories of caregiver supports on the following pages. You can match your family's needs to the supports that may be available.</p>	
<b>Financial Supports</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Are you aware of financial supports available for child care, and other financial resources?</li><li>Do you know about your option for becoming a caregiver?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Do you understand the process requirements?</li></ul></li><li>Are you aware of any benefits the child is currently receiving (i.e., Social Security, etc.)?</li></ul>
<b>Health &amp; Wellness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>What are the medical needs of the child?</li><li>Does the child have any private medical insurance?</li><li>Do you have access to formula and diapers?</li><li>Do you have access to enough food?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Do you know if the child has any food allergies?</li></ul></li><li>Is the child currently receiving mental health services?</li><li>Would you or your child be interested in counseling or therapy?</li></ul>
<b>Housing, Transportation &amp; Concrete Goods</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Does the child need a crib or bed?</li><li>Does the child need a proper car seat or booster seat?</li><li>What clothes and underwear do you have?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Do you know their clothing and shoe sizes?</li></ul></li><li>Do you need help setting up space for the child?</li><li>Do you have age-appropriate toys and activities?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>What are their interests?</li></ul></li><li>What are the child's routines related to eating, sleeping, and toileting?</li><li>Is there anything you would like more information on?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Diaper, or dietary needs for a young child?</li></ul></li></ul>
<b>Education &amp; Child Care</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>If the child is old enough, where are they currently attending school?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>What supports do you need to keep the child in school?</li></ul></li><li>What school programs does the child participate in?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>What supports do you need to keep the child in school?</li></ul></li><li>Is the child signed up for school lunch?</li><li>Does the child have friends and/or mentors?</li><li>If you are working, what are your child care needs?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Do you know about the county's child care resources?</li></ul></li><li>Who else in your support network can help with transportation?</li><li>Are there people who can help you with transportation?</li></ul>

KIN CAREGIVER RESOURCE GUIDE	
<b>Supports Available to Kin Caregivers in Broward County</b>	
<b>Supports at a Glance:</b> This table lists the types of available supports often accessed by kin caregivers in Broward County, with more details below. Remember, this is a starting place! Talk to your case manager about other needs or referrals you are looking for.	
<b>Financial Supports</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>L1 Board Rate or relative/fictive kin monthly stipend</li><li>Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)*</li><li>Guardian Assistance Program (GAP)</li><li>Social Security (SSI &amp; SSA)</li><li>Temporary cash assistance**</li></ul>	<b>Medical, Mental Health, Nutrition</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Support accessing medical services &amp; prescriptions</li><li>Medicaid</li><li>SNAP* &amp; SNAPed* (food stamps &amp; family nutrition)</li><li>WIC for children up to 5 (formula, milk &amp; baby food)</li><li>Mental health counseling &amp; supports</li></ul>
<b>Clothing, Safety, Shelter**</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Beds &amp; cribs</li><li>Office storefront (clothes, toys &amp; hygiene items)</li><li>Safety items (car seats, smoke detectors, etc.)</li><li>Home storage solutions</li><li>Emergency rental &amp; utilities assistance</li></ul>	<b>School and Child Care</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>School supplies</li><li>Child care subsidy</li><li>Early Learning Coalition (subsidized daycares)</li></ul>

\*You can apply for these public benefits online at Access Florida: <https://www.myflorida.com/accessflorida/>

\*\*One-time additional financial resources, gift cards, and temporary cash assistance may be available on a case-by-case basis.

Monthly Cash Stipends		
<b>L1 Board Rate</b> Kin caregivers can apply for a Level I License. Once approved, you will receive a monthly board rate for each child you care for. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>\$\$ for each child aged 0-12</li><li>\$\$ for each child aged 13-17</li></ul> Currently, with an approved home study, caregivers can receive this monthly payment, while waiting for licensing approval (available for up to six months).	<b>Relative and Non-Relative Fund</b> If a kin caregiver does not decide to pursue licensing in the first six months, they can continue to receive monthly support from the Relative and Non-Relative Caregiver Parity Fund if the child is adjudicated dependent: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>\$\$ for each child aged 0-5</li><li>\$\$ for each child aged 6-12</li><li>\$\$ for each child aged 13-17</li></ul>	<b>Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)</b> Families can apply for TANF through Access Florida while waiting for licensing, or if not planning to pursue licensing. Only the child's income and assets are counted when determining eligibility. *Note: TANF requires putting the birth parent(s) on child support. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>\$\$ for 1 child</li><li>\$\$ for 2 children</li><li>\$\$ for 3 children</li><li>\$\$ for 4 children</li></ul>

**Additional Financial Supports**

- Guardian Assistance Program (GAP) Benefits:** Looking forward, if the child(ren)'s case closes, you accept permanent guardianship, and you have already received six consecutive L1 Board payments, you are entitled to Guardian Assistance Program (GAP) financial benefits that match your current L1 monthly amount. \*Both GAP & EGAP include a tuition waiver & Medicaid benefits.
  - Regular GAP:** If the case closes permanent guardianship at age 0-15, you are entitled to regular GAP, which is the amount of your L1 Board Payment up until the child is 18.
  - Extended GAP:** If the case closes permanent guardianship at age 16 or 17, you are entitled to Extended GAP (EGAP), which is the amount of your L1 Board Payment up until the child is 21.
- Social Security Benefits:** If the child is currently receiving Social Security benefits, you can begin receiving them as their caregiver. You will need to take the court order/letter of custody to the Social Security Office to become the payee.
  - SSA** (Survivor benefits in case of death): If the monthly SSA death benefit amount being paid by Social Security is less than the monthly L1 board rate, you can apply for both.
  - SSI** (Disability benefits): Since you cannot receive SSI and L1 board benefits at the same time, we recommend you choose the one that pays the higher monthly rate. This is usually the SSI benefit amount but varies by child.

## Resource: 30-Day Kin Caregiver Calls

After working with the GPL, staff in several **Michigan** counties implemented a process where they would call all new kin caregivers at the one-month mark to better understand and follow up on their priority needs.

Staff found this process to be a helpful accountability mechanism and a way to ensure earlier promised supports were not forgotten. Additionally, caregivers appreciated the chance to speak with someone about their experience. Having this feedback loop with caregivers also helped to inform future approaches for strengthening support for kin.

### [Download: 30-Day Kin Caregiver Calls \(Word document\)](#)

30-DAY KIN CAREGIVER CALLS	
<b>PROCESS DESCRIPTION</b>	
<b>Objectives of Kin Caregiver Calls:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Act as an additional touch point to ensure kin caregivers have received all required supports</li><li>• Identify and track any unmet needs</li><li>• Collect feedback to identify trends around the priority needs of kin caregivers</li></ul>	
<b>Instructions:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Step 1   Selecting the caller:</b> Calls should be comp involved in the case (e.g., a supervisor, health liaison to feel more comfortable providing feedback on the s caseworker.</li><li>• <b>Step 2   Identifying caregivers to call:</b> Review info in the previous month and reach out to caregivers by have passed.</li><li>• <b>Step 3   Reach out to caregivers:</b> The caller should with each caregiver and allow time for caregivers to The caller should fill in the <a href="#">spreadsheet</a> with caregiv or additional steps to take. The caller should try to re leave a message or text if they do not get a respons</li><li>• <b>Step 4   Follow up:</b> The caller should pass on any r unmet needs to the caseworker. Keep any issues nd resolved. The caller should follow up with casework taken.</li></ul>	
<b>Tracking trends:</b>	
The <a href="#">caregiver call spreadsheet</a> contains important informa Managers may wish to review the spreadsheet on a quarter	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Priority areas of unmet need for kin caregivers</li><li>• Processes or services which kin caregivers may stru</li><li>• Feedback on the support and communication kin ca</li></ul>	

30-DAY KIN CAREGIVER CALLS	
<b>CALL SCRIPT</b>	
<i>[Note: The questions can be adjusted to reference additional services or local providers]</i>	
Name of kin caregiver:	Date of call:
<b>Introduction:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• My name is [NAME], I work as the [ROLE] with the Michigan Department of Health &amp; Human Services. I'm calling as I know you have recently taken placement of [CHILD(REN)'S NAME(S)].</li><li>• We realize that the first month of placement is often overwhelming. There is often a lot to do and lots of new information provided to new caregivers.</li><li>• I wanted to make sure you have been getting access to the support you need and to check if there are any areas where you need additional support.</li><li>• I'm going to ask a few questions about the support you and the child have been provided.</li></ul>	
<b>Introductory question</b>	
How is the placement going? Have there been any issues that you want additional support with?	
Notes:	
<b>Child supports</b>	
Were you provided with up-to-date information on the child, including medical, mental health, and/or behavioral needs at the time of placement? Were you provided any prescribed medication?	
Information received? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Prescribed medication received? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Notes:	
If you have requested or advocated for services for the child(ren), has the caseworker set up those services?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A	
Notes:	
What services are the child(ren) receiving? Are there additional supports/services needed?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Counseling <input type="checkbox"/> CMH Wraparound <input type="checkbox"/> Supportive Visitation	
<input type="checkbox"/> Tutoring <input type="checkbox"/> Physical Therapy <input type="checkbox"/> Early On	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other service(s) being received: _____	
Are additional services needed?	



## **STRATEGY 6: Build momentum around continued kin search when initial placement is not with kin**

Many agencies encourage or require staff to continue efforts to move children into placements with kin if they are initially placed in other settings. In practice, however, continued search for kin can lose momentum once children are deemed safe in a placement. Additionally, critical information around prior search efforts may be lost during case hand-offs, and new caseworkers may face competing, added responsibilities that make it challenging to find time to continue search efforts and reach out to kin.

### **Use every point of contact with the family as a kin search opportunity**

Building out a child's support network and finding a kin placement may take time. Formalizing expectations and supports for staff to keep asking, searching, and collaborating can uncover additional opportunities to make a placement with a relative or fictive kin possible. Parents may need more time before they are willing to share family connections, children may need another chance to share where they feel safe, and current contacts' life situations may change. Relatives or family friends unable to care for children at the time of an initial placement may change their minds when given additional information, time for consideration, or support.

Family team meetings, initial conversations between parents and foster caregivers, and visitations are all opportunities to ask again or reframe questions around relatives and fictive kin. Agency leaders can provide staff with training in navigating follow-up conversations as well as lists of questions to use when following up with parents and children (when age appropriate). Leaders can also add checkpoints to existing forms or regular review processes to confirm that staff have asked parents and children about other members of their support network.



**“Our managers make sure their supervision is family focused. We should be asking those questions for as long as the child is in out-of-home care. Just because we’ve had that conversation once and it wasn’t a good time, does that mean the conversation ends? It does not. This is something that we have to revisit. Our children are worth that conversation.”**

**— Child Welfare Agency Regional Leadership**

## Create accountability for follow-up through a structured case review process

Agencies can implement a regular case review process that brings together key stakeholders — including county leaders, child protective services and foster care supervisors and caseworkers, and other key personnel like family finding specialists — to identify challenges, elevate effective practices, and regularly follow up on progress made toward securing kin placements in cases where children are not initially placed with kin. This process can simultaneously:

- Build accountability for continuing efforts to move children into kin placements by discussing recent search efforts.
- Elevate and reveal potential leads for kin placement.
- Create opportunities to brainstorm and align on action steps for each case.
- Help leaders recognize how existing policies and practices may need to be adjusted to maximize kin placements.



### Case Study

In one situation in **Michigan**, a teenager's adoptive parents died, and he was immediately placed with a resource foster family. When his case was discussed as part of the case review process, a caseworker shared that they asked the youth about where he hoped to live and learned about a neighbor who had been close to the family.

Having the case review process in place enabled leadership and staff to more quickly work through the required administrative steps and supplemental court approvals. They followed up when progress stalled in order to authorize the neighbor as a fictive kin placement. They also provided resources, which allowed the teen to move back into a familiar home in a familiar neighborhood.

## Resource: Non-Kin Placement Case Review

Leaders can use this slide deck as a template for structuring regular collaborative reviews of recent non-kin placements. It also provides discussion prompts for brainstorming potential action items in each case to make placement with kin possible.

[Download: Non-Kin Placement Case Review \(PowerPoint\)](#)

### Our goal: Review cases to enable as many children as possible to live with kin while in out-of-home care

#### Why are we focused on kinship care?

Children placed with kin may:

- Maintain stronger connections to family, community, and culture
- Experience less trauma
- Have better behavioral and mental health outcomes
- Experience better placement stability and fewer placement changes
- Be less likely to reenter care

#### [Previous Month]'s Placements:

[#] removals and [#] children placed with kin

**[#]% of children placed with kin in [previous month]**

#### Case review goals:

- 1) Highlight effective search practices used by staff, even in cases where children were not initially placed with kin
- 2) Identify challenges encountered in each case, discuss strategies for continuing to pursue kin placement, and assign next steps
- 3) Follow up on cases with existing leads and support ongoing search activities to enable children to live with kin in the future

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### Children not placed with kin during [previous month]

Child name(s)	Case ID	Age	Race	Sex	FTM?	Genogram?	Placement type	CPS Supervisor	Date for follow-up
Ex. Jane Smith	123456789	2	BI	F	Yes	No	Foster home	Greg Williams	9/15

#### Questions to consider:

1. **Kin search practices:** What did the team do well to proactively identify potential kin placements?
2. **Placement options:** Were there any potential relative caregivers identified who were not able to take placement? What prevented placement? Is there anything that the team can do now to overcome these barriers?
3. **Supporting ongoing search:** What actions has the team taken to support subsequent search in this case? Are there any ongoing leads for possible kin placement? What is being done to continue pursuing these?

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## Notes

1. U.S. Congress, House, "Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996," HR 3734, 104th Cong., *Public Law 104-193*, Aug. 22, 1996, Title V, Sec. 505, (pp 174), <https://www.congress.gov/104/statute/STATUTE-110/STATUTE-110-Pg2105.pdf>.

2. For example, in 2022, [Michigan](#) expanded the legal definition of relative to include fictive kin; Julia J. Eger, "Legally Recognizing Fictive Kin Relationships: A Call for Action," *American Bar Association Child Law Practice Today*, March 1, 2022, [https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public\\_interest/child\\_law/resources/child\\_law\\_practiceonline/january-december2022/fictivekin/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_interest/child_law/resources/child_law_practiceonline/january-december2022/fictivekin/).

3. For example, in 2023, [North Carolina](#) introduced new financial assistance for unlicensed kinship caregivers but at lower rates than foster care maintenance payments provided to licensed foster families; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, "Separate Licensing Standards for Relative or Kinship Foster Family Homes," *Federal Register* 88, no. 30, (February 14, 2023), 9411, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/02/14/2023-03005/separate-licensing-standards-for-relative-or-kinship-foster-family-homes>.

4. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, "Information Memorandum: NEW LEGISLATION – Public Law 115-123, the Family First Prevention Services Act within Division E, Title VII of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018," Log No: ACYF-CB-IM-18-02, April 12, 2018, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/im1802.pdf>; Congressional Research Service, "Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA)" by Emilie Stoltzfus, February 9, 2018, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN10858>; Casey Family Programs, "What Are Kinship Navigator Programs?," Casey Family Programs, November 26, 2018, <https://www.casey.org/what-are-kinship-navigators/>.

5. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, "The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System Report," May 9, 2023, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/afcars-report-30.pdf>; The national placement rate with kin is 34% as of federal fiscal year 2022, the most recent year for which [national data](#) are available. State placement rates with kin ranged from, for example, 53 percent in West Virginia and 50 percent in Arizona, to below 10 percent in other states. However, these figures may not fully reflect current trends for several reasons. In recent years, many states have been actively prioritizing efforts to increase placements with kin. Each state determines its own definition of "relative," and some do not include fictive kin in this category; states may also report data differently based on a caregiver's licensure status. See <https://www.gksnetwork.org/kinship-data/> for further explanation.

6. Heidi Redlich Epstein, "Kinship Care is Better for Children and Families," *American Bar Association Child Law Practice Today*, July 1, 2017, [https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public\\_interest/child\\_law/resources/child\\_law\\_practiceonline/child\\_law\\_practice/vol-36/july-aug-2017/kinship-care-is-better-for-children-and-families/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_interest/child_law/resources/child_law_practiceonline/child_law_practice/vol-36/july-aug-2017/kinship-care-is-better-for-children-and-families/).

7. For example, in [Illinois](#), among children who entered care in 2022 in large sibling groups (3 or more siblings), 58 percent of children initially placed in kinship homes were placed together with all of their siblings. This contrasts with only 11 percent of children who were placed together with all their siblings when initially placed in homes with unrelated foster families; Fred Wulczyn and Emily Zimmerman, "Sibling Placements in Longitudinal Perspective," *Children and Youth Services Review* 27, no. 7 (July 2005): 741-63, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2004.12.017>.

8. Ann Schwartz, "'Caught' versus 'Taught': Ethnic Identity and the Ethnic Socialization Experiences of African American Adolescents in Kinship and Non-Kinship Foster Placements," *Children and Youth Services Review* 29, no. 9 (September 2007): 1201-19, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2007.05.006>; Catherine Roller White et al., "Ethnic Identity Development among Adolescents in Foster Care," *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal* 25, no. 6 (August 26, 2008): 497-515, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-008-0140-2>.

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10. Carolien Konijn et al., "Foster Care Placement Instability: A Meta-Analytic Review," *Children and Youth Services Review* 96 (January 2019): 483–99, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.12.002>; Jennifer Osborne et al., "Placement Stability among Children in Kinship and Non-Kinship Foster Placements across Multiple Placements," *Children and Youth Services Review* 126 (July 2021): 106000, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2021.106000>.

11. Elysia V. Clemens et al., "The Effects of Placement and School Stability on Academic Growth Trajectories of Students in Foster Care," *Children and Youth Services Review* 87 (April 2018): 86–94, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.02.015>.

12. Tessa Bell and Elisa Romano, "Permanency and Safety among Children in Foster Family and Kinship Care: A Scoping Review," *Trauma, Violence & Abuse* 18, no. 3 (2017): 268–86, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26638181?seq=12>; Emily Smith Goering and Terry V. Shaw, "Foster Care Reentry: A Survival Analysis Assessing Differences across Permanency Type," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 68 (June 2017): 36–43, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.03.005>.

13. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System Report," May 9, 2023, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/afcars-report-30.pdf>.

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15. Robert Lee Wagmiller and Robert M. Adelman, "Childhood and Intergenerational Poverty: The Long-Term Consequences of Growing up Poor," National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University, November 2009, <https://doi.org/10.7916/D8MP5C0Z>.

16. Ojmarrh Mitchell, "A Meta-Analysis of Race and Sentencing Research: Explaining the Inconsistencies," *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 21, no. 4 (2005): 439–66, <https://nij.ojp.gov/library/publications/meta-analysis-race-and-sentencing-research-explaining-inconsistencies>; Elizabeth Hinton, LeShae Henderson, and Cindy Reed, "An Unjust Burden: The Disparate Treatment of Black Americans in the Criminal Justice System," Vera, May 2018, <https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/for-the-record-unjust-burden-racial-disparities.pdf>.

17. Hyunil Kim et al., "Lifetime Prevalence of Investigating Child Maltreatment among US Children," *American Journal of Public Health* 107, no. 2 (February 2017): 274–80, <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2016.303545>; Elisa Minoff and Alexandra Citrin, "Systemically Neglected: How Racism Structures Public Systems to Produce Child Neglect," Center for the Study of Social Policy, March 2022, <https://cssp.org/resource/systemically-neglected/>.

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19. United States Government Accountability Office, "Child Welfare and Aging Programs: HHS Could Enhance Support for Grandparents and Other Relative Caregivers," by Kathryn A. Larin, July 2020, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-20-434.pdf>.



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