

**National Kinship Review**

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**A** SECOND CHANCE<sup>INC.</sup>



# **National Kinship Review**

**News, Networking & Information for  
Kinship Care Professionals & Advocates**

# National Kinship Care Month 2018

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KINSHIP  
IS YOU  
ME & WE

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A SECOND CHANCE<sup>INC.</sup>

## **Recognition for Kinship Care and It's Long Journey**

For more than 2.7 million children in the U.S., kinship care is their saving grace. And because kinship care works, children can thrive, are nurtured, connected to the community and their culture, and are protected when relatives and kin decide and sacrifice to step in when their parents cannot raise them.

But the vision, hope, and opportunity that kinship care brings to the lives of children and families touches everybody. Before the practice of relatives and kin caring for children who may not be their own had a name or was formally recognized by child welfare systems as an alternative form of care, it was impactful. Today, while many more in the system recognize kinship care's power and benefit, more still need to realize that families in crisis have value—and can be solutions and partners in their children's care and decision-making.

Thanks to the relentless push by so many in the field and in Congress, there is now a month set aside to recognize kinship care: that safety net that keeps children who intersect with the child welfare system from being diverted to foster care or institutions. It's up to us to help move the nation to awareness and action in support of kinship and kinship families.

In this Question & Answer (Q & A) interview, these national advocates for children and families reflect on kinship care and September as National Kinship Care Month.

**Q: Kinship care's recognition and acceptance represent a long and tortuous journey. For millions of kinship caregivers and children, challenges persist. From a culturally-based perspective, speak to the importance and impact of National Kinship Care Month?**

*Judge Cheryl Allen, in 2007, became the first African-American woman to be elected to the Pennsylvania Superior Court. The former elementary school teacher turned attorney, was elected to the Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania where she served in Juvenile and Criminal Court. Judge Allen retired from the Superior Court of Pennsylvania in 2015.*



“National Kinship Care Month provides an opportunity to reflect on the tremendous impact that kinship care has had on the child welfare system in nearly three decades. Because of the earnest efforts and dedication of A Second Chance Inc., kinship care has become the rule for children removed from the custody of their birth parents, rather than the exception.

Kinship care was a well-established tradition in the African-American community, long before the creation of the child welfare system. The belief that “It takes a village to raise a child” has survived over the centuries and continues to provide strength and stability to families. While a drug culture, violence, broken homes, poor housing, and substandard public schools, are among the ills that threaten and diminish “the village,” there is hope and a way forward.

We know that when we value, strengthen and preserve families, children can thrive and so can our communities—“the village.” When children are connected to relatives, community and their culture, kinship care, more than any alternative to care, provides the stability, security and continuity of care that they need and deserve when their birth parents are in crisis and unable to care for them.”

***Puneet Sahota, MD, Ph.D.*** is the director of research at the [National Indian Child Welfare Association](#) in Portland, Oregon. An anthropologist and a physician, Dr. Sahota has worked with American Indian/Alaska Native communities for over a decade.



A. "American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) children are more likely to be placed into out-of-home care than children of other ethnic backgrounds. The Indian Child Welfare Act specifies a preference for AI/AN children to be placed with kin first and is viewed as a model for child welfare placement preferences. Kinship care is important for AI/AN children because it facilitates

intergenerational transmission of culture and identity.

The historic traumas experienced by AI/AN communities included forced removal of children from their homes and placement in boarding schools, where they were abused and forbidden from speaking Native languages or practicing traditional culture. These traumas caused a cascade of effects, including loss of identity and mental health challenges. It is healing for AI/AN communities to now be able to have an intergenerational transmission of culture and identity. Kinship care provides this opportunity to AI/AN children, allowing them to be rooted in who they are. A fundamental sense of connectedness—to family, culture, community, and identity—has been shown in recent research to be the most critical factor across multiple studies predicting emotional well-being for AI/AN children and adolescents.”

**Marc Cherna** is director of the [Allegheny County Department of Human Services](#) in Pennsylvania, a position he has held since 1997. A national search first brought Mr. Cherna to Allegheny County to take charge of the county's child protective service agency. He immediately implemented system-wide changes that have resulted in better permanency outcomes for children.



**A.** “In Pennsylvania’ Allegheny County, we are—have been for more than two decades—committed to kinship care when children cannot be safe in their own homes. We know kids do better with those they know and love, so we do all we can to place children with close family or friends. And our statistics confirm this commitment. Currently, 65 percent of kids in our care are placed with relatives, and we have always supported them financially with kinship payments equal to what unrelated foster parents receive. In addition, our long-term partnership with A Second Chance, Inc. ensures these family members have access to expertise and all necessary and appropriate resources.”

The importance of kinship care to child stability has become even more pronounced with the progression and severity of the opioid epidemic in Allegheny County. About 40 percent of children referred to our child welfare agency last year were referred because of an opioid-related incident. The critical role kin play in our society cannot be underestimated and deserves to be spotlighted during National Kinship Care Month.”

**Stefanie Sprow** is the deputy director of Child Welfare and Mental Health at [Children's Defense Fund](#). She has worked to enact and implement several federal laws to improve outcomes for children, including the Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018, the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014, and Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008.



**A.** National Kinship Care Month is an incredible opportunity to elevate the important role kin play in supporting children and families. While kin can play various roles in a child’s life, one of the most important is the role they play in providing love and safety to a child during times of crisis. Across the country kin selflessly sacrifice to provide a safe haven for children whose parents cannot care for them, and the majority do so without getting any formal assistance or supports and services. Children of color are more likely to be raised in kinship families than their white counterparts, making it especially challenging for kinship families of color to get the critical services and supports they need to care for children.

The recently enacted Family First Prevention Services Act provides unprecedented opportunities to better support kin who are stepping in to care for children, and kinship advocates need to be proactive in encouraging their state to make these new reforms a reality and keep children safely with family.

**Charles E. Lewis Jr., Ph.D.** is president of the [Congressional Research Institute for Social Work and Policy](#). A professional social worker and professor, Dr. Lewis has been a strong advocate for children's mental health as president of the Mental Health Association of the District of Columbia and has published extensively about the need for early detection and treatment to reduce the overrepresentation of African Americans and Latinos in the criminal justice system.



**A.** “National Kinship Care Month is a time we must focus on creating solutions for children and their familial caregivers. Thanks to A Second Chance, Inc. for calling on us to do this.

For millions of children, particularly those with incarcerated parents, the importance of kinship care cannot be overly appreciated. Children whose parents are sentenced to jail or prison experienced high levels of trauma and disruptions in their lives. For children with mothers behind bars, it is particularly painful. Often the responsibility for caring for these children falls on the grandparents, most often grandmothers. Current policies do not provide adequate resources—public assistance and housing—to compensate relatives who care for their related offspring. This needs to change.

Social service agencies and policymakers should advocate for greater governmental support for kinship caregivers because research has found the children entrusted to them to be at greater risk for poor outcomes because of the lack of stability in their lives. Recent estimates show that about 10 million American children (1 in 28) have a parent who experienced incarceration. This is a problem that needs to be addressed.”



## News & Information You Can Use:

**NATIONAL:** [“Kinship Care: What Child Welfare Professionals and Kin Caregivers Need to Know”](#) (Webinar)

This free session on Oct. 16, from 2-3 p.m. EDT, will highlight lessons from the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s work on helping relatives navigate the emotional challenges of raising kin. [To register.](#)

**NEW YORK:** [Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency: Caregiving requires self-care](#)

The Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency recognizes September as National Kinship Care Month. Self-care is critically important to avoid "compassion fatigue."

**COLORADO:** [Colorado Launches Two Generation Approach to Family Services](#)

Two Generation (2Gen), a new initiative by the state, may offer a new intergenerational approach to services for families facing poverty, incarceration and foster care.

**NATIONAL:** [Raising the Children of the Opioid Epidemic](#) (Report)

Children who are removed from their parents' care by the child welfare system because of substance use and put in foster care are now more likely to be placed with relatives than non-relatives according to a newly updated report from Generations United-“Raising the Children of the Opioid Epidemic: Solutions and Support for Grandfamilies.”

**SOUTH CAROLINA:** [Program allows inmates to record themselves reading books for their children](#) (Video)

A new program at a correctional facility in South Carolina is allowing inmates to record themselves reading books for their children, allowing them to strengthen the connection to their loved one.

**KENTUCKY:** [Connecting Kentucky Families: New Initiative Offers Virtual Support for Adoptive/Foster Parents](#)



Being a kinship caregiver can be challenging without a helping hand. Researchers at the College of Social Work Training Resource Center say their online pilot, the Adoption Support for Kentucky – Virtual Interaction Program, can be a support for caregivers who are unable to attend traditional meetings.

**[www.asecondchance-kinship.com](http://www.asecondchance-kinship.com)**