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National Kinship Review

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Kinship Care Professionals & Advocates

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National Adoption Month 2018

Adoption in Kinship Care: The Celebration is One Part of the
Journey

If you have ever hosted a successful social or holiday celebration, no
doubt you remember the tremendous planning, preparation and even
learning that preceded it, sometimes months or years before the big

day--a wedding, a Bar Mitzvah, a graduation. And, no doubt, your culture and your family, as you define it, played a big part!

For children who deserve a forever home, permanency is that valued and anticipated main event--a celebration, but first a value and right for children and youth. During National Adoption Month in November, and on National Adoption Day, recognizing the linkages that will continue between a child and their grandma, uncle or other relative is cause for celebration for many families. Whether achieving permanency through adoption with family, reunification or subsidized legal guardianship, education and planning are among the things that helped get them to that special day.

Knowledge, Planning and Permanency

For the triad—birth parents, children and caregivers—the way forward in permanency must begin on day one, with information, education and planning. After all, they are the decision makers about permanency, deciding what is best for their children when reunification is not possible. When systems and agencies provide the knowledge needed to make informed decisions about permanency and options, families can also be empowered.

Adoption is one of those permanency options. Almost 90 percent of the children adopted from foster care in the United States are adopted by either their foster parents or their own relatives, with the proportion of kinship care adoptions doubling from 16 percent in 1998 to 31 percent in 2013, based on the most recent federal findings. A 2017 [study](#) conducted by Rebecca L. Hegar and Maria

Scannapieco, two University of Texas, Arlington scholars, is among the small, but emerging bodies of research on kinship adoptions. So far, the findings on kinship adoptions mirror what we know about kinship care's benefits: there are consistently favorable outcomes for children who find permanent homes with their relatives and kin.



Adoption as an Option in Kinship Care

For kinship families, there is no hierarchy or preference or one-size-fits-all when it comes to permanency options, including adoption. Guided by the Adoption and Safe Families Act, the triad decides what is best for them.

This is why educating families about permanency is important and a critical starting point. Opportunities to gather the triad and guide them in working through how a child will leave the system is one approach and an essential part of the permanency continuum. Yes, permanency is a reason to celebrate, but it is not the finish line, or where a family's journey to permanency ends.

Adoption Beyond the Celebration

Valuing family means looking differently at permanency and kinship adoptions. Adoption is not a means to an end. There is more to becoming a forever family than wrapping up the legal process. To help families thrive in permanency and transition back into family life without system involvement, a variety of supports, interventions and sometimes even a lifeline are needed. While these kinds of resources can also ensure positive adoption outcomes for children and their families, it is important to integrate the family in this process. Start by asking them what do they need and want?

Research tells us that children in kinship care experience less trauma and more placement stability. There may be times throughout the kinship journey, however, when remnants of trauma surfaces—as trauma has no expiration date. But when children and families still have a safety net and access to preventative supports that may include trained mental health clinicians and caseworkers, these kinds of resources can make the transition to parents smooth and help diffuse hotspots before they erupt.

At the same time, kinship adoptions can also bring stability to a

child's life and help strengthen their social and emotional connections with their birth parents. As roles change, however, the transition may spark questions like this: how should the child address the uncle who just adopted her? Is he still uncle or is he now dad? How these matters are unraveled and resolved will be different for every family—just like the decisions that they make about adoption and other permanency options.

News & Information You Can Use:

NATIONAL: [Grandparents, facing greater challenges, step up to raise kids](#)

New research from the American Academy of Pediatrics finding: Despite facing more physical and mental health challenges, grandparents raising their grandchildren appear to be coping with the stresses of parenting.

NATIONAL: [We Need Kinship Caregivers, and They Need a Safety Net \(opinion\)](#)

Nearly four decades later, there have been significant steps toward providing needed support for kinship caregivers. But more is needed to ensure that they have adequate finances and other resources to raise children who are not their own — in some cases, from birth to 18.

NATIONAL: [Reinventing Retirement: Raising grandchildren in retirement](#)

Millions of pre-retired and retired Americans are becoming part of a new trend. Unlike other trends, it's one they likely didn't envision for their golden years.

TEXAS: [Grandparents Raising grandchildren push for more state support](#)

The state of Texas counts more than 6,000 children who have been removed from their homes and are now being raised by grandparents. Many grandparents, however, are desperate to make ends meet.

WEST VIRGINIA: [In the Face of Drug Crisis, WV Foster Families Step Up \(Includes audio\)](#)

The drug crisis means West Virginia is in desperate need of foster families. The state Department of Health and Human Resources says the number of children taken into state custody has risen by nearly 50 percent in the last three years - almost all because one or both parents are addicted to drugs.

NEW JERSEY: [Initiative highlights needs of older youth living in foster care](#)

As many as 50 percent of youth who age out of foster care are likely to become homeless. This year, National Adoption Month is providing resources on how the voices of older youth can help professionals ensure “forever families” for teenagers in foster care.

COLORADO: [In Denver child welfare cases, the father isn't “John Doe” anymore](#)

New efforts to find the biological fathers of abused children in Denver have increased the likelihood those kids find permanent homes.

[The Chronicle of Social Change on Family First \(a webinar\)](#)
December 13, 2018

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