

National Kinship Review
Volume 1, Issue 3
November 17, 2017

[View this email in your browser](#)

 A SECOND CHANCE^{INC.}



National Kinship Review

News, Networking & Information for
Kinship Care Professionals & Advocates

Value the Family: A Prescription for a Nation in Crisis

Decades ago, many veteran child welfare professionals worked alongside families through the heartbreak of the crack epidemic in the 1990s. Today, the opioid epidemic is roaring. It's ushered in what experts describe as the third wave of widespread drug abuse in the U.S. over many decades, following the crack cocaine epidemic and the methamphetamine crisis. Opioid addiction is on the nation's doorstep. It's indiscriminately invading communities and ushering in a flood of children into the system as parental drug abuse hits home. It has left most state child welfare systems burdened, and many families bewildered and fractured. Grandparents are reeling as they struggle to be their family's glue. Usually with little warning, thousands of Grandfamilies find themselves pressed into second acts in life—kinship caregivers for their grandchildren.

"Though I may not have much, my grandchildren are with me and not in the system and we're gonna be all right!" These are the words of a grandmother who just lost her job, but who was determined to provide a home for her grandchildren. Sadly, her her story is a familiar one among grandfamilies. ASCI has seen a rise, in the past year, in the number of cases it received public child welfare agencies in Philadelphia and, to a lesser extent, Pittsburgh. In three years, the caseload in ASCI's Philadelphia office has grown from 180 children and youth to over 900, many under the age of 5. In Philadelphia, from 2014 to

2016, there was an 11 percent increase in this age group. It is now at a staggering 56 percent. In Pittsburgh, the percentage of children under 5 has been steadier, about 48 percent.

Tallying the toll of an epidemic

This is the drug crisis in numbers. Tallying the numbers can be tough when the drug epidemic is fast moving and packing a punch, in communities across the country. But these are initial estimates—in 2016, around 45,000 people died from opioid overdoses. To give a sense of perspective, those who track the toll on lives and in society say that has now surpassed the number of people who typically die each year from gun injuries and in car accidents. In 2014, 2 million Americans either abused or were dependent on prescription opioids. And 1,000 people a day are treated in emergency departments for opioid dependence-related problems.

For those of us in the field, these numbers are sobering. They are also fast becoming child welfare's new normal—and the backdrop for service delivery. Since 1994, A Second Chance, Inc. (ASCI) has answered the call to meet the needs of over 21,000 children throughout Allegheny and Philadelphia, the two largest counties in Pennsylvania. At ASCI, this current wave of drug abuse sweeping through the nation continues to touch our rolls. Since 2015, in our region, the rate of overdoses—from heroine and fentanyl—has continued to creep. Overwhelmingly, those falling victim to drug-related overdoses in Pennsylvania have been White (74 percent) and male (67 percent). In 2016, parental drug abuse (40 percent) was the leading reason that children were placed into care—twice as many since 2014. A similar upswing is occurring nationwide: the percentage of children entering care because of a parent's drug use rose from 22 percent to nearly 30 percent in just five years.

Value Families

No doubt these numbers will continue to swell and paint grim stories. But stay focused. Through this evolving crisis and heartbreak, these things are certain—the families we serve can still triumph and a child always has access to a relative or to kin when parents can no longer care for them. At ASCI, we believe

that families do not lose value, in a crisis—even during one as monumental as the opioid epidemic. The value placed on families and service delivery stays consistent despite the circumstances that bring a child and a family into care.

Most often, factors associated with poverty contribute to children coming in and out of home care, and are linked to child neglect. The decision to terminate parental rights, however, can be complicated and difficult when the reason is drug addiction and substance abuse—a situation that can be hidden and involve the parent’s treatment, recovery and relapse. When children get separated from their parents or when parental rights of sons and daughters are terminated, the prevailing—and misguided—thought about families in the system is that the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree. The research tells us differently; a person’s upbringing doesn’t dictate and determine their addiction.

What works: practicing a values-based approach to service delivery in kinship care. It considers and taps into the strength of the kinship family or triad (the birthparent, the child and the caregiver). When families are valued, it’s possible to see them as a part of the solution and a unit of strength—not the problem—in their care and reunification. Do you value kin? Then demonstrate it. During this rampant drug epidemic, it’s more important than ever. Remember, when families are strong, so are our neighborhoods and communities.

The nation’s crack epidemic was fraught with punitive policies and practices that also punished and alienated the abuser and families. They didn’t help to make them whole. As we grapple with a new drug crisis, the field has the chance to chart a new narrative that values the family—and informs policy and practices to better meet the needs of the kinship triad touched by substance abuse. Let’s work together to create this change.

Consider these recommendations:

- Family-based and in-home clinical services that not only address substance abuse, but mental health issues that often accompany addiction.
- Make drug and alcohol treatment accessible, not just available through outpatient and in-patient care. This will encourage participation and

compliance. In addition, providing supports like transportation services and childcare services while parents receive outpatient treatment will also help to increase participation.

- Make visitations for birth parents more flexible. Often parents dealing with drug and alcohol concerns are also juggling mandatory schedules and requirements that may conflict with scheduled visitation with their children.
- Offer a support group for caregiver's who caring for the children of a birth parent experiencing drug and alcohol issues.
- During the addiction process relapse is an anticipated component of the march to recovery. And each person's experience is different. That's why providing a strength-based and tailored plan is needed. It would not encourage addiction, rather it would help ensure that if a parent experiences a relapse, there is a plan in place to care for their child (placement with relatives and kin)—and reduce the risk of trauma.
- Build partnerships with AI-non/Alateen (and similar groups) to provide education and support to all members of the kinship triad, when one of them is experiencing addiction.
- Enhanced education around substance abuse and addiction for families, staff and the community, with an emphasis on prescription medication, available resources and more.

SPECIAL REPORT: Watch Out For Phone Scams!

As ASCI services the kinship triad (birth parents, caregivers and children), we want to make sure that our grandfamilies (older Americans) are aware of scams and predators that can target them.

Con artists steal \$3 billion from Americans through financial frauds every year. These con artists often call unsuspecting older Americans pretending to be from the IRS and demand payment. Others claim that a loved one is in trouble in a foreign country in need of rescue. Some have even found ways to show up on your caller ID as your church or another local business to get someone to answer.

I do not want these con artists to get one more penny from hard-working Pennsylvanians. To help stop con artists in their tracks, the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging operates a hotline (1-855-303-9470) that Pennsylvanians can call to report instances of fraud and scams – even when the fraudsters are not successful. Information you share may help law enforcement officials with ongoing investigations. For example, information reported to the hotline in 2015, which was shared with law enforcement, helped bring legal action against two con artists who were involved in a scheme which posed as the Internal Revenue Service.

Information is only one aspect of preventing frauds from taking place. That is why I also support legislation and ongoing efforts to give law enforcement officials the tools to prosecute con artists, encourage financial institutions to help ensure seniors do not fall victim to financial fraud, and ensure telephone companies have the power to help stop crooks from covering up their real phone number.

I hope you will consider joining me in stopping these con artists by reporting information to the hotline. Every piece of information helps.

Tips you can use to avoid phone scams:

- Con artists force you to make decisions fast and may threaten you
- Con artists disguise their real numbers, using fake caller IDs
- Con artists sometimes pretend to be the government (e.g. IRS)
- Con artists pressure you not to call friends and family
- Con artists try to get you to provide them personal information like your Social Security number, or account number
- Before giving out your credit card number or money, ask a friend or family member about it!

Guest Contributor: Rashage Green is the deputy chief counsel for Ranking Member Robert P. Casey, Special Committee on Aging, United States Senate

Kinship Care in the News

[U.S.: An interview: What's on the mind of Trump's new child welfare official](#)

[KANSAS: More children are being removed from homes with drug abuse](#)

[OHIO: New Research: Laboratory screenings of children entering care. What the findings reveal](#)

[WEST VIRGINIA: Grandfamilies in West Virginia: How they are coping \(A three-part radio series\)?](#)

[U.S.: New Report touts growing need for kinship care as foster care capacity shrinks in more states](#)

[KENTUCKY: The U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear an appeal from the state of Kentucky in a case about kinship care that may have long-term impact across the United States.](#)

[WASHINGTON, DC: What the Senate's Child Welfare Oversight and Accountability Act of 2017 could mean for kin.](#)

[U.S.: Does parental substance use always engender risk for children? Find out in this new report.](#)

[MISSOURI: A school district launches the Kinship Families Network as a resource for caregivers](#)

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