

National Kinship Review
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a *Presents...*
KIN-formative 2017
Highlighting a National View on Kinship Care



January:
Launch of the Kinship Navigator Program

National Connection: To children and families experiencing crisis, trauma and change, access to technology, and medicine can be beneficial and even life saving. But one of the most profound supports may be as simple as a helping hand and knowledgeable guide. For the medical field, patient navigators have been those supports. For many families, kinship navigator programs are becoming that needed support in a complex system.

In Practice: With the launch of our Kinship Navigator program, case workers in Pennsylvania's Allegheny County Children, Youth, and Families (the placing agency) can now have the support from the onset of a case. And for families, having a trained caring kinship navigator on their team means knowing how to connect to needed resources and information, as well as how to play an active role in a child's out-of-home care plan. This kind of collaborative approach helps to empower the entire triad (the child/youth, caregiver and birth family).

February:

Kin-Hearted: The Rhonda D. Wright Healthy Heart Symposium and Luncheon

National Connection: In some African-American families, heart disease has haunted them for generations. But these aren't isolated cases. Heart disease, the nation's number one killer, disproportionately impacts African Americans compared to other races. And among African-American women, only 36 percent know that heart disease is their greatest health risk.

In Practice: With a belief that healthy communities depend on healthy people, we hosts a daylong symposium and dining experience that focuses on health and hearts. This well-attended event included breakfast and lunch, workshops and food and exercise demonstrations, it was open to everyone, and free. The inaugural Kin-Hearted! Rhonda D. Wright Healthy Heart Symposium and Red Hat Luncheon was held in 2016 at The Rhonda D. Wright Family Center on our campus. We hold the event in conjunction with National Women's Heart Week and National Heart Month.

March:

Grandparents to the Rescue

National Connection: These days, thousands of grandparents in cities across the country are finding themselves in an unlikely role, caregivers to their grandchildren, in many cases because the parents are addicted to opiates. As this drug crisis mounts, so have caseloads in the child welfare system, and the strain on grandfamilies and other relatives. Nationwide, nearly 2.7 million grandparents are raising grandchildren, and about one-fifth of them have incomes that fall below the poverty line..

In Practice: ASCI President and CEO, Dr. Sharon McDaniel was among national child welfare leaders, practitioners and scholars invited to testify before the Senate Special Committee on Aging this month. That hearing was titled "Grandparents to the Rescue: Raising Grandchildren in the Opioid Crisis and Beyond." [This is her testimony.](#)

April:

The Opioid Epidemic in Allegheny County

National Connection: The weight of the opioid addiction is on the nation's doorstep. In the past five years, the percentage of children in the U.S. entering care because of a parent's drug use rose from 22 percent to nearly 30 percent. For those working in child welfare systems, such numbers are sobering. They are also fast becoming child welfare's new normal—and the backdrop for service delivery. Pennsylvania's Allegheny County offers a glimpse.

In Practice: Rashage Green, deputy chief counsel for Ranking Member Sen. Robert P. Casey, Special Committee on Aging, came to us to better understand the impact of the opioid epidemic in Pennsylvania and the nation. We delivered a report that talked not only about a wave of addiction but about how it's changing our client rolls. The report revealed that since 2015, 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.

May: Family Permanency Celebration

National Connection: Reunification is the most common permanency goal for children in care. About half of all foster children had a permanency plan that included reuniting with their parents, and about half of them successfully achieved reunification (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2012). But when returning home is not possible, permanency through kinship care and kinship connections are preferred options. Why does this matter? Research shows that youth who emancipate from foster care as young adults from non-kin foster care, typically seek out and achieve birth family connections once they leave state custody.

In Practice: We not only value and support families making permanency decisions, but we bring them together to celebrate, when they do. Whether these families choose reunification, adoption or Subsidized Permanent Legal Custodianship as an option, the child is the beneficiary of these lifetime commitments to family connections, acceptance and love. Every year it is an honor to join with them and recognize the importance of families charting their own path to a forever home.

June:

A Second Chance, Inc. Founders Mark 23 years of Visionary Leadership in Kinship Care

National Connection and Local Presence: In 1994, Founder and President Sharon L. McDaniel, Ed.D., and a dedicated group of 8 staff members, embarked on an unprecedented journey in kinship care called A Second Chance, Inc. Each year they come together to celebrate being pioneers and the impact that work continues to have in the lives of families and a region. More than two decades later, we've grown from 9 staff to over 200 (in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia).

July:

Kin2You™ Training in LA

National Connection: Too often the strength and value of families gets lost in discussions about their care—and when they are in crisis. The value placed on families must stay consistent despite the circumstances that bring a child and a family into care. What works: practicing a values-based approach to service delivery in kinship care. It considers and taps into the strength of the kinship 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

In Practice: The National Team was on-the-ground in Los Angeles County to present our Kin2You™ Values Training to more than 500 staff at the Department of Children Youth and Families. The premise of Kin2You™ training is this: the most nurturing and committed family homes are those with kinship/family connections. The Kin2You™ training is guided by a hierarchy of value for kinship care.

August:

The Power of Community

National Connection: Communities have the potential to help and heal for those who live there. They matter when trying to prevent child neglect and abuse, and they can influence dynamics between children and parents. Communities can also be a

support network and even provide a sense of respite. But for communities and the people in them to fully thrive, they need opportunities and access to resources that educate and empower.

In Practice: We choose to live, work and play in Pittsburgh's Homewood community. And we regularly give back to those we call neighbors—and they give back to us. Our summer Community Day is just one expression. Open to all, the celebration included food, fun, good music, games and giveaways—and the opportunity to build strong bonds.

September: Project AWAKE Kickoff!

National Connection: We know that when families with mental health needs come into the child welfare system, delivering services and providing care requires coordination and diligence. Mental health systems and child welfare systems operate separately and differently, but for the sake of the family in care, it's important that they aren't left out of decision-making processes. When families aren't educated about mental health care, they can't make informed decisions or be empowered about their care and plans. Coordination and collaboration must begin at intake and continue throughout the life of a family's involvement with the system, and into aftercare.

In Practice: We developed Project AWAKE (Awareness, Wellness, Acceptance, Knowledge and Empowerment) to fill the gap in culturally sensitive mental health care for kinship families. AWAKE provides support through education and advocacy.

October: Dining with Kin in the Community

National Connection: There's truth to the adage, "you are what you eat." Look at the typical American diet: most of the calories people take in come from solid fats and added sugars; refined grains; sodium; and saturated fat. But the research is clear, healthy food and nutrition impact health and well-being.

In Practice: In our community, we designate days to dine with kin. It's a time of fellowship and fun, and awareness about conditions that concern them most—

hypertension and diabetes. We engage them in activities and projects for preventing these and other chronic diseases. Caregivers and those in the community are invited to come and discuss cooking and eating healthy with experts in nutrition. There are cooking stations where they can try their hand at making healthy dishes, do taste tests and chat about how to eat healthy on a limited budget. Dining with Kin also offered a Zumba class to show that exercise can be fun.

November:

“All in the Family” Webinar with Alliance for Children’s Rights

National Connection: Released this month, the [State of Grandfamilies report from Generations United](#), provides some of the latest data on kinship families. The numbers are climbing: 30 percent (127,819) of children in foster care are being raised by relatives. This represents a 6 percent increase since 2008. The demand for kinship care will require stepped up advocacy, education and awareness for both practitioners and families.

In Practice: Our National Team had an opportunity to educate listeners and viewers about the work being done to reform foster care systems so they can be kin-first. We began that work two decades ago in Pennsylvania’s Allegheny County. The team spoke during a national webinar in Los Angeles hosted by the [Alliance for Children’s Rights](#). The webinar focused on policies and practices to increase the number of kinship placements and enhancing support for families.. [Watch the webinar.](#)

December:

Breakfast with Santa

National Connection: [Rachel Schumacher’s report](#) from the Children’s Services Council speaks to the importance of community-based social networks to build and support family interest and engagement over time. Schumacher said this is how we get children and families to thrive. Specifically, these activities not only help engage families, they help them build confidence and needed connections with other families. As these kind of caregiver networks develop, “indices of social cohesion are emerging and represent the foundation upon which a supportive community can be built where children will thrive.”

In Practice: Our annual Breakfast with Santa is a much-anticipated annual event for our children and caregivers (and staff) at both the Pittsburgh and Philadelphia offices. The children are treated to a wonderful meal with Santa, play games and receive a bounty of toys and gifts, but this festive event is also for their caregivers. When they are here for Breakfast with Santa, caregivers have a chance to meet and network with each other. Our caregiver enrichment series, SARKS™ (Standards for Assessing and Recognizing Kinship Strengths) is what we use to encourage and support family-centric activities and forge new relationships. For some caregivers, the experience lets them know that they are not alone



LET US CHERISH THE VALUE
THAT **KINSHIP ADDS TO OUR
LIVES EACH DAY.**



*Warmest thoughts and
Best Wishes
for a Wonderful Holiday
and a very
Happy New Year!*

State Kinship Care News Roundup:

PENNSYLVANIA: [As Children Are Left Behind By Opioid Crisis, Foster System Increasingly Turns To Family For Care](#)

National news coverage of the opioid crisis is also bringing kinship care and the plight of grandfamilies into the spotlight: “Research from the Pittsburgh-based agency A Second Chance, which handles Allegheny County’s kinship care

cases, shows that clients have performed better than the average American foster child on a host of measures. For example, they're more likely to graduate high school, less likely to experience teen pregnancy and stand a greater chance of being reunified with their parents.”

OHIO: [Opioid epidemic heightens need to bolster kinship care support in Ohio](#)

J.D. Vance, author of the bestselling "Hillbilly Elegy," knows the power of kinship care. When drug addiction rocked his parents' lives, he says, "many of my relatives stepped up to fill gaps." Today, he's an advocate for kinship care and serves as the honorary chairman of Our Ohio Renewal, a nonprofit dedicated to finding solutions to Ohio's opioid crisis.

INDIANA: [Opioids' impact on children and families](#)

As the opioid problem drives a growing number of children into the system, local officials turn to kinship care placements and to the University of Indiana for help in responding to the crisis.

HAWAII: [Relative Growth: Three States Increasingly Rely on Kin for Kids in Foster Care](#)

Hawaii is among the few states that have managed to significantly grow the role of relatives in their foster care system.

NEW YORK: [New York Expands Funding Access for Close Kin Who Become a Child's Legal Guardian](#)

Godparents, step-parents, the adoptive parents of half-siblings, neighbors and other kinds of kin will be eligible for new subsidy in kinship guardianship agreements.

CONNECTICUT: [Judge simplifies path for DCF to end court oversight](#)

Certain staffing and caseload levels for social workers at the Department of Children and Families will be a step toward ending the court's quarter-century oversight of the agency under a consent decree.

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