

National Kinship Review
Volume 1, Issue 5
January 17, 2018

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 **A SECOND CHANCE**
INC.



National Kinship Review

News, Networking & Information for
Kinship Care Professionals & Advocates

Across the Nation, Kinship Navigators Continue to Make a Difference

Grandfamilies and other kinship caregivers need people who can provide high-impact ways to connect them to the information, support, benefits, and resources they need. Many of them are abruptly put into the role of caregiver, raising children and grandchildren without time to prepare. In some states, caregivers are fortunate to have professionals who help make the connections they need—they are called kinship navigators.

Back in the 2000s some states passed legislation establishing kinship navigator programs. Some serve as one-stop shops that link caregivers with services such as counseling, housing assistance and short-term financial help. But they aren't in every state. Over the years, state funding for these programs has been unstable. In 2008, Congress passed the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, which included competitive grants for kinship navigator programs. Some states used the money to create new programs, but not all are available statewide.

Today, Pennsylvania, Georgia, New Jersey and Washington are among statewide, state-funded Kinship Navigator Programs.

In New Jersey...

New Jersey's Department of Children and Families staff includes kinship navigators who help caregivers "navigate" a host of support services that are provided by government and private agencies. Caregivers can call 211, a toll-free number in New Jersey, to receive information about the navigator program. This toll-free help lines can be particularly useful in large, rural states in order to assist caregivers in remote locations and who have limited transportation.

In Georgia...

A decade ago, the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) launched its Navigator Program in response to the increasing number of grandparents and other caregivers who assumed responsibility for raising their grandchildren or another relative's children. Here, some 15 kinship navigators located statewide, assist kinship families in identifying and locating resources within their local community. According to DFCS, the program's goal is "to close the gaps and/or delays with service delivery to kinship caregivers. DHS focuses on providing a responsive strength-based supportive role to our kinship families."

In Washington State...

Washington State's kinship navigator program started as a pilot funded by Casey Family Programs and has grown into a successful statewide program that helps grandparents and other relatives raising children find access needed services. Today, kinship navigators support kinship caregivers in 30 counties and in eight tribes across Washington State.

Marking One Year: A Value's-Based Kinship Navigator Program for Allegheny County in Pennsylvania

KINSHIP NAVIGATOR

PURPOSELY POINTING IN A KINSHIP DIRECTION!



When we launched our Kinship Navigator Program on January 30, 2017, referrals came fast. By the end of that first year, kinship navigators had touched over 1,000 cases in our work with Children Youth and Families (CYF) in Pennsylvania's Allegheny County. And they achieved a 90 percent success rate. We purposely placed our nine kinship navigators onsite, at CYF. More kinship navigators are being trained to help meet the demand. Also planned is a pilot "floater process" that allows some navigators to support multiple offices. This year, we will also operate a new Kinship Navigator Program in Arlington, Va.

*In this interview, **Tara Skibiell**, MSW, LCSW, senior vice president for Child and Family Services, shares more about the agency's Kinship Navigator Program in Allegheny County and offers recommendations for other jurisdictions.*

Describe the start-up for the Kinship Navigator Program?

One of the concerns the county had with its kinship care process was the time that it took to place a child in kinship care. It took them 45 steps. That is double the amount of time that it takes to do traditional care or a placement in congregant care. The county is committed to placing children in kinship care, but at the same time, they realized that the process, especially during crisis, was taking too long. The process was a lot for case workers to handle by themselves.

When caseworkers deviate from one of those 45 steps, and things don't go as planned, the focus can shift to traditional settings and foster care, and away from kinship care placement. CYF asked us to step in. We reviewed the placement process, wrote policies and practices, and came up with a plan to place kinship navigators in CYF

offices, not at A Second Chance. We wanted the navigators to have a presence and to help ease the load of caseworkers.

What are among the features and considerations that distinguish ASCI's Kinship Navigator Program from others, particularly when it comes to families?

As a kinship care expert, we bring many unique features to the Kinship Navigator Program. We made our values training a starting point for this work with current CYF case workers. New staff receive it in the onboarding process. The training emphasizes need to value families; their strengths, not their deficits; the need to meet families where they are; and the importance of looking at what's in the best interest of the child from the family's lens.

By placing our kinship navigators inside CYF, they can directly reinforce these values. Our navigators are not working behind the scenes to help clear a caregiver. They are working with case workers, and are present to make sure that valuing families is always the foundation of support and placement.

Our approach to identification and placement is also innovative. We don't just look for one placement, or stop after finding one relative. Our kinship navigators are expected to look for at least two or more kinship options for every child. The purpose is to find others who can serve as supports to the caregiver. It's not good enough to say that we found grandma. We also want to find an aunt, who may be a better placement option. And grandma can help her with babysitting after school. We learned that these kinds of considerations weren't being evaluated at the onset of cases, especially during crisis.

Now, with navigators, responsibilities can be split. While the case worker is with the child, the kinship navigator is using our assessment tools and asking relatives probing questions so that they can recommend the best placement.

Who are the kinship navigators?

We hired some of our strongest and most seasoned staff with transportation and program experience. With their breadth of knowledge about things like licensing and transportation and permanency, they are well suited to answer questions and tell families what to expect during the process. For families, getting information and the correct information, from day one, is critical. When they don't, it can lead to frustration, disruption and possibly a family not making informed decisions about placement.

After a year, how has offering a kinship navigator program in Allegheny County improved outcomes for children?

We are in the process of evaluating our year-end, outcomes data, including looking at permanency. We want to see if there has been a reduction in the length of stay when a kinship navigator is involved, and if they were able to get to a permanency option? Of the 1,002 cases kinship navigators have touched, most of the initial referrals have been sustaining placements. Only a handful of these cases needed a second navigator referral to find more placement options and more support. Based on just these things, the data is pointing to positive outcomes.

Kinship navigators operate within a larger and complex continuum of care. What factors contribute to their success in helping achieve permanency for children and connections with relatives?

The correct staff is critical. It takes a really unique person, who in a moment of crisis, can work quickly to identify a bond and a relationship with a birth parent or even a kinship caregiver. Navigators are talking to people that they have never met and are asking very intimate questions in order to make an informed recommendation on placement. You also have to have people who are incredibly caring and charismatic, and who can convince families who are frustrated, that they are there to help them. Our work must always be family-focused and driven by the family, especially when it comes to placement.



Tara Skibiel, MSW, LCSW, the senior vice president for Child and Family Services, worked to develop the agency's Kinship Care Navigator Program.

These are some recommendations to support a successful Kinship Navigator Program in your jurisdiction:

- Adopt a values-based model of care for working with families, and make it a part of the on-boarding and training process for caseworkers and other staff.
- Provide starter kits so that families can have immediate access to the basic resources they need. In Allegheny County, these starter kits include a Wal-Mart gift card, toiletries, hygiene products, and other basic items to help a child from day one.
- Make sure that your Kinship Navigator Program is in alignment with the entire placement process. It's not good enough to look at the kinship navigator process if there is a caseworker process that is not aligned with the best approach for supporting families.
- Evaluate your program. We worked closely with Allegheny County on data collection; it helped us to identify areas for improvement.

- Approach every child's case as a team that moves through the continuum of care to placement. Caseworkers and kinship navigators must be a part of that team.

State and International Kinship Care News Roundup:

NEW JERSEY: [New Jersey Governor-Elect Taps Christine Norbut Beyer to Head Child Welfare Agency](#)

New Jersey Governor-Elect Phil Murphy (D) has nominated Christine Norbut Beyer, a senior director for Casey Family Programs, to lead the New Jersey Department of Children and Families.

NEW YORK: [Parents With Disabilities Face an Uphill Battle to Keep Their Children](#)

Child removals due to disability are increasingly common, but parents have begun to fight back. Nearly one in 10 children in the United States is at risk of being removed from their home by a child welfare agency simply because their parent has a disability.

MONTANA: [Montana's Dubious Distinction: Child Removal capital of America](#) (Commentary)

Dr. Kenneth Cairns laments the failure of so many of his fellow physicians to provide the right kind of help to mothers suffering from addiction. "The doctors can't get past their own feelings of contempt for the mothers."

MINNESOTA: [Fight of their lives: White Earth leads way in opioid battle](#)

After suffering great loss of life and livelihood on the White Earth Reservation, leaders there have taken a leading role in tackling the opioid epidemic with model pilot programs for the state.

CALIFORNIA: [What's the Future of LA's Foster Care System?](#) (Interview)

There are more than 30,000 children in the Los Angeles County foster care system, and the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is tasked with taking care of them and the welfare of other kids in the region. Bobby Cagle, DCFS' new director talks about his new role as DCFS

director.

KENTUCKY: [Local woman continues efforts to restore kinship care](#)

“We’re building momentum and support,” said Norma Hatfield, a grandmother who plans to walk the halls of the state capitol everyday to lobby for the return of kinship care. She has also collected statements of support and stories from other grandparents who are raising children.

UNITED KINGDOM: [The Enjoyment Rewards of Fulfilling a Custodial Grandparenting Role in the Lives of Grandchildren Removed from their Parents’ Care](#) (Research)

Is enjoyment the reason that grandparents choose to raise their grandchildren? In this study, researchers explore the impact of kinship care on the health and wellness of grandfamilies in the journal Child Care in Practice.

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