



KINSHIP CARE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE REPORT



Washington State Department of
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

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Executive Summary

The annual Kinship Care Oversight Committee (KCOC) report for September 2020 through August 2021 is required by RCW 74.13.621.¹ The KCOC was formed in 2003 to provide guidance to the Legislature in identifying, supporting, and strengthening kinship care families. Kinship care includes relatives and unrelated kin raising children. The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) and Department of Social and Health Services Aging and Long-Term Support Administration (AL TSA), and Economic Services Administration (ESA) staff participate in the KCOC, with kinship caregivers, child and caregiver advocates, non-profit service providers, tribes, and legal community representatives.

Introduction

KCOC meets quarterly, providing a forum to exchange information about state policy changes, local initiatives, and concerns and monitor, guide, and report on kinship care recommendations and implementation activities.

Achievements this past year include:

- Revisited the structure of the KCOC, focusing on how best to monitor, guide, and report on kinship care recommendations and implementation activities for the good of all kinship households in Washington.
- Created a collective of community partners that can support and strengthen kinship families.
- Kinship Navigator grant award for an additional year of funding from the federal Administration for Children and Families to DCYF to partner with AL TSA to support implementing an evidence-based Kinship Navigator program as required under the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) and to build state infrastructure to support kin.

KCOC Activities

During the reporting period of September 2020 through August 2021, the KCOC convened three times. During these meetings, DCYF staff discussed how it could best support the KCOC and listened to the feedback and interests of KCOC members. Based on these discussions, specific themes emerged:

Revisit the structure of the KCOC, focusing on how best to monitor, guide, and report on kinship care recommendations and implementation of kinship activities.

- Development of a KCOC Charter to add structure that best meets the needs and interests of the kinship community by focusing on the committee's purpose and goals.
- The Charter can act as a vision helping to crystalize why the KCOC exists and its focus.
- Sample of the draft Charter's goals include:
 - Elevate the voices of all people living in kinship care households and deliver to the Washington State legislature recommendations for service improvements that are equitable, promote equal access, and that advance the well-being, safety, and permanency for all kinship households in Washington State ([RCW 74.13.621](#)).

¹ RCW 74.13.621 can be viewed [here](#).

- Function with a foundational understanding that BIPOC families make up a disproportionate number of the kinship families in our state and that implicit bias and institutional racism exist, overtly and covertly, within all populations and structures.
- Continue to monitor and provide consultation on the implementation of recommendations contained in the [2002 kinship care report](#).
- Create a sub-committee to continue the development of a charter and goals.

Create a collective of community partners that can support and strengthen kinship families.

- Provide an opportunity to network and share information and resources.
 - The KCOC includes numerous individuals who support informal kinship caregivers (families not involved with the child welfare system). The KCOC requested that those agencies serving the kinship community provide information and resources specific to their services (i.e., food benefits, kinship legal advocacy, support groups) to the committee.
 - These individuals rely on the networking that occurs during KCOC meetings to help support kinship families. Frequently, KCOC members will share a resource or event that sparks an idea for another KCOC member. This web of kinship-specific resources does not have another forum; thus, the information shared is vital to supporting kinship families across Washington State.
- Including representatives and agencies that serve the formal and informal kinship care community.
 - Based on data from the Annie E. Casey Kids Count data center and 2020 FamLink data, for every one child in kinship care under DCYF’s supervision, 11 children are being cared for by kin without DCYF’s involvement.² The distinctions between these groups can be fluid, and kinship caregivers may find themselves being described as an “informal” kinship caregiver one day and a “formal” kinship caregiver days later. It is essential for kinship caregiver discussions and recommendations to include and represent both experiences and the unique needs that align with them.
- Elevate the voices and interests of the kinship community.
 - DCYF staff presented information to the KCOC on SB 5151: Child Specific License with a request for volunteers to join a workgroup to develop eligibility and criteria for a child-specific license.
 - Several KCOC members (i.e., kinship caregivers, kinship navigators, agencies who provide services to the kinship community) volunteered to be members of the workgroup. This workgroup will continue its work into the next reporting year.

Kinship Navigator Program Evaluation

The Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) created opportunities for states and tribes to use Title IV-E matching funds for qualifying services aimed at prevention. One of the populations highlighted as needing support were kinship caregivers. In order to use Title IV-E matching funds to support a Kinship Navigator program, the program must be evidence-based and included in the federal Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse. Currently, no Kinship Navigator programs meet the evidence-based standards.

² Data from the Annie E. Casey KIDS COUNT data center available at <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/>, and the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting Systems; INFOFAMLINK Relative Versus Non-Relative Placements, January 29, 2020. Data reflects the number of children in out-of-home care as of January 29 of the indicated calendar year.

In May 2018, the United States Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Children, Youth, and Families (ACYF) issued a program instruction announcing a new grant opportunity to support states in their ability to enhance, evaluate, and develop Kinship Navigator programs that meet evidence-based standards.

DCYF, in collaboration with ALTSA and the University of Washington's Partners for Our Children, has applied for and was awarded funding for Federal Fiscal Year's 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021. The funds are being used to strengthen and support the evaluation of Washington State's Kinship Navigator program to meet the evidence standard and develop and support infrastructure that serves all kinship families regardless of involvement with DCYF.

Subcommittees

Kinship Navigator Sub-Committee

A KCOC kinship navigator evaluation sub-committee was established to inform, guide, and vet evaluation-related materials. In 2018 and 2019, the sub-committee provided vital feedback that helped shape a needs assessment implemented in two Kinship Navigator pilot sites. In 2020, the sub-committee did not meet because of COVID-19.

The subcommittee has continued its valued oversight of the evaluation during this reporting period by reviewing the Kinship Navigator Pilot Program Trainer Manual. The purpose of the manual is to assist providers in implementing the Kinship Navigator Pilot Program in their area. The manual's content was developed through observations, interviews, discussion with project staff, focus groups, and surveys with kinship caregivers. The manual describes the program's background, philosophy, and implementation steps offering a solid framework for developing a kinship navigator program. After reviewing the manual, the sub-committee provided feedback on detailed areas that needed additional clarification and identified additional items missing that would add to understanding the kinship navigator program. This review was a heavy lift for all involved. The kinship evaluation team (DCYF, ALTSA, and UW) have expressed their gratitude to the sub-committee for their dedication to this evaluation.

Additionally, during this reporting period, the University of Washington researcher continued to update the full KCOC meeting on their progress with the evaluation. The researchers have presented survey findings and preliminary results of data to the KCOC. To date, no state has been awarded the moniker of evidence-based, but Washington state is poised to apply in the upcoming year.

Kinship Legislative Sub-Committee

Kinship Legislative Subcommittee meets nearly monthly, providing a forum to elevate considerations for future policy development to support kinship providers. Additionally, the subcommittee monitors and interprets bills, both federal and state, and policies and procedures that impact the welfare of kinship families.

While an excellent place for exploration and considerations of future legislation, the subcommittee understands the limitations and lack of ability to submit legislation recommendations on behalf of an agency. However, agencies that serve the kinship community participate and listen in the meetings.

Themes that have been discussed this year include:

- TANF Child Only Grants
 - Financial support for unlicensed and informal kinship providers (increase child-only TANF grant, clothing vouchers, financial supports for informal providers when a child is not dependent...).
 - TANF child-only grants should be the same for each child in the home (using the individual child rate, which is currently \$417).
 - Rebrand the child-only TANF grant to address social stigma issues attributed to biases about 'welfare.'
 - Expressed concern that TANF should provide more information upfront to kinship caregivers regarding good cause exemptions for the pursuit of child support.
- Kinship Navigators - Increased funding for additional kinship navigators for counties that do not have a kinship navigator.
- State Park Passes – RCW – 79A.05.065 – Foster Home Camping Program
 - Washington resident foster parents and registered relative foster caregivers who camp with the children in their care are entitled to free campsites and day-use entry in Washington state parks.
 - The Foster Home Camping Program is limited to licensed foster family homes and kinship caregivers with children placed through the formal DCYF child welfare system and excludes informal kinship caregivers.
- Informal Kinship Caregiver – Lack of overall parity in supports provided to licensed foster parents (informal kinship providers step in to avoid a dependency, and when a parent realizes they cannot support the child, however, overall informal Kinship providers feel the state does not support kinship providers in these arrangements despite the fact that they are often in the best interests of the child, etc.)
- Uniform Guardianship Act – additional funding for more training for kinship caregivers to better understand the new rules.

The Future of KCOC

In 2022, DCYF will continue holding quarterly KCOC meetings to collaborate and coordinate services to benefit all kinship care families in Washington. The two existing sub-committees (Kinship Navigator Evaluation and KCOC legislative subcommittee) will hold additional meetings as requested. We plan to continue collaborating with a small group of representatives of KCOC members to establish a charter and goals and then bring the recommendation back to the whole KCOC body. Also, DCYF will recruit additional KCOC members focusing on kinship caregivers, mindful of the saying “nothing for us, without us.”