



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 2021 through August 2022 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), the Department of Social and Health Services Aging and Long-Term Support Administration (AL TSA), and the 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

The KCOC has historically met quarterly, providing a forum to exchange information about state policy changes, local initiatives, and concerns. The KCOC monitors, guides, and reports on kinship care recommendations and implementation activities. This year the KCOC shifted to a monthly meeting.

This past year, KCOC:

- Revisited the structure of the committee, 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.
- Continued to build a collective of community partners that can support and strengthen kinship families.
- Provided subject matter expert guidance (i.e. Lived experience and professional expertise) on kinship specific grant projects (i.e. Kinship Navigator and the Kinship Plus evaluations)
- Continued to provide specific presentations as requested by the kinship community (i.e. health care, child care, legal advocacy)
- Provided feedback to various agency initiatives (i.e. Kinship Navigator Evaluation, State funded guardianship program, child specific licensing, child support good cause waivers).

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

KCOC Activities

During the reporting period of September 2021 through August 2022, the KCOC convened 12 times. During these meetings, DCYF, AL TSA, and ESA staff discussed how they could best support the KCOC and listened to the feedback and interests of KCOC members. Discussions included:

Revisiting the structure of the KCOC.

- KCOC met only quarterly and felt that there is so much going on in the kinship world it's difficult to comfortably complete the agenda quarterly. After much discussion, it was decided meeting monthly would allow for more discussion and input from the kinship community.
- KCOC meets the 3rd Thursday of the month from 1-4 pm. (unless otherwise agreed upon due to holidays).
- There was little interest in developing a charter for the KCOC. Out of that discussion came a request to examine how the agenda is being developed. Current practice is agendas are developed by asking the body if there are other topics or issues related to kinship for the next meeting. Participants are encouraged to share verbally, in chat, or a subsequent email with their thoughts. During this next year, the KCOC will look at different ways to develop the monthly agendas.

Continuing to build a collective of community partners that can support and strengthen kinship families.

- The hallmark of excellence with the KCOC body is the space for kinship families to express their voices and views to the community partners who provide services to kinship families.
- Time is left on each agenda for community partners to share about supports for kinship families followed by kinship caregivers input and experiences with the different community partners.
- We continue to recruit new members to the KCOC. There is always a need for more kinship caregivers to participate in the meetings. DYCF has reached out to the agencies who provide direct services to the kinship community to recruit families' members. This has only been met with limited success.

Providing subject matter expert guidance (i.e. Lived experience and professional expertise) on kinship specific grant projects (i.e. Kinship Navigator and the Kinship Plus evaluations)

- The KCOC creates a venue to elevate the voices and interest of the kinship community.
- State and community agencies value and make use of the input from the kinship community on grant projects.
- The KCOC body created a subcommittee that provides subject matter guidance to the Kinship Navigator Evaluation and the Kinship Plus evaluation.

- Kinship Navigator Evaluation - DCYF receives funding 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 support. The KCOC has provided guidance on the Kinship Navigator evaluation for the last 4 years.
- Kinship Plus grant – This grant was awarded by the federal Administration for Children and Families to AMARA in order to partner with DCYF and the University of Washington (UW) on implementing an evidence-based kinship program in King County only. Among other things this grant will provide kinship families with a 6-module course for parents and caregivers to effectively engage in shared parenting. Families will be referred to local kinship navigators for support groups. The KCOC has heard presentations on the goals of the grant, participated in an advisory board, and has offered KCOC members to assist in the development of grant tools.

Continued to provide specific presentations as requested by the kinship community (i.e. health care, child care, legal advocacy)

Meeting topics this year have included:

- Health Care Authority – including how to access medical services for your kinship child
- Alliance Kinship Support Groups
- Child Specific Licensing
- Clarification between the different types of services available in the kinship community
- OSPI services for kinship families.
- ESA transforming case management initiative.
- CaRES Alliance Kinship Services
- Narcan
- Kinship Caregivers – What’s in a name? Informal vs Independent Kinship Caregivers. Kinship caregivers not affiliated with the child welfare system prefer to be called ‘independent kinship caregivers.’”

Provided feedback to various agency initiatives (i.e. Kinship Navigator Evaluation, state funded guardianship program, child specific licensing, child support good cause waivers).

The KCOC Committee served as a sounding board for many agency initiatives such as:

- **DCYF**
 - Child -specific licensing for Kinship Caregivers
 - Presented information to the KCOC.
 - Recruited members from the KCOC to provide input in rule and policy development of the Child Specific License.

- Foster care continuum of care - requested feedback from the KCOC body.
- State Funded Guardianship Assistance Program - requested feedback from the KCOC body.
- Discussion about Naloxone - requested feedback from the KCOC body.
- Kinship Caregiver Engagement Unit
 - Presented information to the KCOC.
 - Provided clarification between the difference between the KCEU and Kinship Navigators. It's important the two programs work together.
- **DSHS/AL TSA**
 - Kinship Navigator Program
 - Discussions about future sustainability of the case management model
 - Discussion included concern about the lack of funding for the kinship navigator program since 2009.
 - Kinship Caregiver Support Program (KCSP)
 - There is a policy restriction on the use of the KCSP funds that prohibit non-relatives (i.e. godparents, close family friends, etc.) from accessing funds for a kinship child in their care.
 - KCOC expressed concern in the disparity of services this policy creates.
- **ESA**
 - Child support Enforcement Good Cause Waiver
 - Child support is a barrier to financial stability in kinship homes. Financial support for unlicensed and independent kinship caregivers can be obtained through ESA and the TANF child only grant.
 - Many kinship caregivers, while eligible for the much needed TANF, child only grant, do not apply for the services. The typical reason is, because their adult children would be assessed for child support. This can result in emotional and physical safety concerns for both child and caregiver. So instead of accessing financial support to stabilize the home caregivers do without.
 - ESA has been a wonderful community partner and heard the concerns of the kinship caregivers and has been working diligently to create an easier good cause process. While the KCOC's preference would be to mimic that of DCYF's which is to wave collection automatically in nearly all circumstances. ESA developed an easier good cause form and process.
 - This resulted in a smaller committee being formed of kinship caregivers, kinship navigators, DCYF staff, DSHS staff, and ESA staff.
 - Purpose of the group was to develop an easier method/process for kinship families to request good cause exemption from child support enforcement.

Subcommittees

1. Evaluation Sub-Committee

A KCOC kinship navigator evaluation sub-committee was established to inform, guide, and vet evaluation-related materials. During this last reporting period this subcommittee was used to provide subject matter expert and lived experience feedback to two different evaluations:

- Kinship navigator evaluation – ALISA, DCYF, and UW (Partners for our Children)
- Kinship Plus - Amara, DCYF, and UW (Partners for our Children)

A. Kinship navigator evaluation:

- During this reporting period, the KCOC continued to be updated and provided with updates on the kinship navigator evaluation.
- In May 2022, the KCOC subcommittee reviewed the implementation manual of the kinship navigator case management model. The subcommittee provided feedback to the research team and those recommendations were incorporated in to the implementation manual as requested.
- The UW 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, the Ohio Kinship Navigator Program was awarded the rating of evidence-based, but their program only provides services to the formal kinship families. The Washington State model provides services to both formal and informal families.

B. Connections for Kinship Families Project - Kinship Plus

- Amara partnered with the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) and the University of Washington School of Social Work (UWSSW) for a five-year federal grant to support children and families experiencing out-of-home placement with a kinship caregiver. This is one of five partnerships across the country chosen to implement this program.
- The grant is still in its first year of planning and recruited KCOC members to assist with the planning and development.
- Amara also recruited members from the KCOC to participate in an advisory board. Their intent was to gain lived experience input from kinship caregivers while developing programs to support kinship families.
- Amara has been deliberate in the development of the Kinship Plus program in that they are not creating a Kinship Navigator Program. The Kinship Plus program partners with the Kinship Navigator program in its service delivery area.
- **The Kinship Plus program's goals are to:**

1. Increase the well-being of children in formal kinship care and their caregivers by forming an innovative, hybrid preparation and support model between DCYF and Amara;
2. Improve parent engagement and parent-caregiver relationships by promoting shared parenting principles that are centered on what is best for each child; and
3. Utilize current partnerships and existing kinship and family support services in King County by developing a centralized network of services that promote kinship caregiving whenever possible.

2. 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:
 - **Barriers and solutions for financial stability and access of TANF Child Only Grants as related to Child Support Collections** – as discussed above child support is a barrier for kinship families in accessing TANF, because of the child support burden it places on the adult children. The subcommittee established a work group to address the issue.
 - **Barriers to Legal Aid.**
 - This resulted in funding from the legislature in January 2022 to create a hotline where kinship caregivers can receive free legal advice.
 - The LAARK program will launch in Nov. 2022.
 - **Kinship Navigators** - Increased funding for additional kinship navigators for counties that do not have a kinship navigator.
 - **Independent/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 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.
 - **Kinship Navigator Case Management Model** - As the Kinship Navigator Evaluation comes closer to completion, discussion of implementation of the model across the state has begun. The new case management model is making a difference and caregivers are accomplishing goals, accessing more services, and

keeping children not involved with DCYF from entering the formal child welfare system. While all of this is fantastic, there is a concern that the new case management model takes twice as long to work with a family. The kinship navigators are already at capacity and it is unclear if the new case management model can be sustained without additional funding.

The Future of KCOC

In 2023, the KCOC will continue to:

- Hold monthly KCOC meetings to collaborate and coordinate services to benefit all kinship care families in Washington.
- Hold meetings for the two existing sub-committees (Kinship Evaluation and KCOC legislative subcommittee) to provide feedback on the grant work.
- Review the final data prior to submitting Kinship Navigator Evaluation to the Title IV-e clearing house.
- DCYF will recruit additional KCOC members focusing on kinship caregivers, mindful of the saying “nothing for us, without us.”
- Create a steering committee to assist in the development of monthly meeting.
- Be a place for kinship families to express their views on their needs and challenges.
- Promote the need for services for both the formal and the independent kinship caregivers.