



PCSAO, Seven Counties Awarded Kinship Navigator Grant

As part of implementing the Fostering Connections to Success Act, Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO), in collaboration with seven Ohio counties and the Human Services Research Institute, received a \$705,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to demonstrate the effectiveness of Kinship Navigator Programs in high need areas.

Kinship Navigator programs guide grandparents and other relatives who are raising children in their extended families to services within their community. They provide information, referral, and follow-up services to relative caregivers to link them to the benefits and supports that they or the children need. Each of the seven county agencies involved will provide enhanced Kinship Navigator services to a broad population of kinship caregivers, regardless of their involvement with the child welfare system. Those agencies include Ashtabula Children Services, Clark Children Services, Crawford Children Services, Hardin Children Services, Portage Children Services, Richland Children Services, and Lorain Office on Aging.

Crystal Ward Allen, PCSAO executive director, said, "We are excited about this opportunity to better serve kin caregivers. Research with these and other Ohio counties show that enhanced supports to relative caregivers, before they get deeply involved with the child welfare system, diverts these children and families from traumatic and costly unrelated foster care. Furthermore, children fortunate enough to be cared for by safe kin caregivers have better outcomes than their peers in unrelated foster care."

Through the grant, Kinship Navigator programming will be built on both experience and evidence and will include:

- Increased kinship navigator staffing and community outreach efforts.
- Improved information about access to needed services and supports for kinship families, especially legal assistance, support groups, financial assistance and respite care.
- Strong system-level collaboration planning via local and state advisory groups, creating effective interagency partnerships to strengthen and sustain the service delivery system supporting kinship families.

Beyond providing enhanced services to kinship families, Allen said the grant "will include rigorous process and outcomes evaluation which will also inform improvements for child and family outcomes.

"As Ohio communities and families manage stressed budgets, we must ensure each and every investment and intervention is effective. Through comprehensive evaluation, these grants will further our knowledge base for ensuring children have the opportunity to grow in safe, familiar homes."

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