

Ohio Enhanced Kinship Navigator Project

Mid-Grant Brief

June 2011

Human services agencies in seven Ohio counties are currently operating Kinship Navigator programs as part of a demonstration project with funding from a Fostering Connections to Success Act grant. **This Enhanced Kinship Navigator Project aims to directly support kinship caregivers and their families through information & referral, case management, and other services (such as support groups) as well as to build up the community of supports available to those families through outreach and collaboration with community stakeholders.** The Project includes a study of these efforts in order to provide further definition for these types of supports for kinship families and to provide evidence of the supports effect on child and family outcomes.

The seven programs, listed below, began serving families in the winter of 2009/2010; this brief shares the data available regarding their efforts mid-way through the grant period. For more information: www.kinshipohio.org

What have the Kinship Navigators done so far?

From February 2010 to February 2011, the Kinship Navigators documented:

- Case management including initial assessment to **over 334 kinship families** with **549 kinship childrenⁱ**; and
- Information & referral to **370 callersⁱⁱ**.
- In addition, they provided **87 support group meetings, 10 social events** and **12 trainings or skill building events** for kinship caregivers.

In addition to providing direct services to kinship families, information & referral services, the KNs have completed a variety of outreach activities and engaged with other local providers to develop a stronger, broader community of supports for kinship families in their communities, including **88 meetings and 37 presentations**. Many of these were with community providers, churches, or advocacy groups. **Twenty-nine press releases** or other instances of advertising were documented, as well as **distribution of written materials 68 times** (such as brochures or newsletters).

*A **Kinship Navigator** is a person who provides information & referral, case management, or other supports for kinship caregivers and their families.*

***Kinship caregivers** are relatives and non-relatives who have a connection (biological, familial, community, cultural, etc) to a child in their care.*



Enhanced Kinship Navigator Program Sites

Project Management: Public Children Services Association of Ohio

Ashtabula County Children Services Board

Clark County Job and Family Services

Crawford County Job and Family Services

Hardin County Job and Family Services

Lorain County Office on Aging

Portage County Job and Family Services: Family and Community Services

Richland County Children Services Board: City of Mansfield Dept of Regional Community Advancement

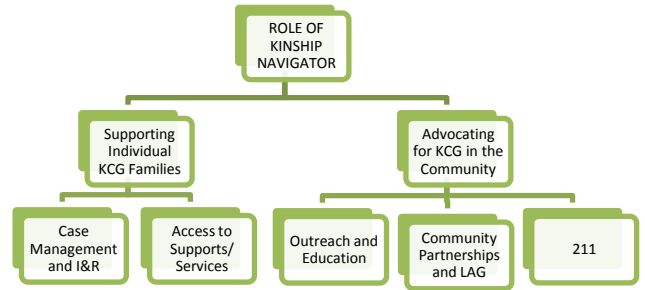


**Human Services
Research Institute**
www.hsri.org

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What are the Kinship Navigator programs like?

- KN programs are built on a foundation of history of supporting kin in Ohio
- Kinship Navigators are located within the child welfare agency in four counties, within contracted agencies in three counties.
- Four of the counties expanded existing staffing with the grant, while three created new positions.



In the seven comparison counties, only four counties have an individual in a similar position to support kinship caregiver.

Who are the kinship caregivers and childrenⁱⁱⁱ?

The primary kinship caregivers (n = 334) served by the Kinship Navigator program are:

- on average 47 years old, but range in age from 19 to 79; and
- mostly white (77 %) though 19% are black, 4% are Hispanic, and less than 1% are multi-racial.

Kinship children (n = 549):

- are 7 years old, on average, but range in age from newborn to 19 years old; and
- are mostly white (67%) though more diverse than their caregivers; 20% are black, 5% Hispanic, and 8% multi-racial;
- about half boys (51%) and half girls (49%);
- had lived with their KCGs for a mean of 645 days, or about 1 year and 9 months at the time of initial assessment; and
- 68% were currently involved or had previously

been involved with public child welfare agencies.

Relationships between the children and their kinship caregivers (n = 549 children):

- The majority of kinship children are related to their kinship caregivers on their mother's side (67%).
- Kinship caregivers involved with the Kinship Navigator programs are most often grandparents (58%) but many aunts and uncles are also represented (21%) as are non-related kin (8%) and a variety of other relationships.
- Long-term plans for children are most often legal custody or guardianship by the kinship caregiver (41% working towards and 27% already have), and working towards reunification (21%). A large number of children have only temporary custody status or are still in the legal custody of their parent(s) while living with a kinship caregiver (21% and 29% respectively; 7% of those are in 'verbal' custody of the kinship caregiver).

The most common service needs of kinship families (n = 334) at initial assessment:

1. Job and Family Services: 83%
2. Medicaid/Healthy Start: 81%
3. Financial/Cash Assistance: 72%
4. Medical care for child: 67%
5. Legal Assistance: 63%
6. Medical care for caregiver: 55%
7. Children Services: 55%
8. Food Stamps: 54%
9. Food: 48%
10. Clothing: 47%

"...without this program I would not even know where to start but with [the Kinship Navigator's] help I was granted permanent custody."

-Kinship caregiver

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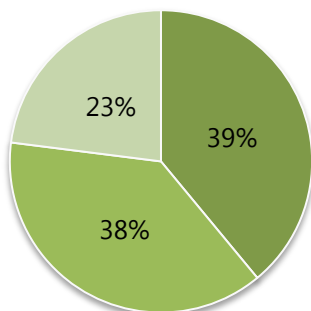


How have the Kinship Navigators strengthened the supports available to kinship caregivers so far?

Local Advisory Groups were established during implementation of the grant and have served a variety of purposes thus far: advising the KN; advocacy for the KN (promotion, PR); community awareness regarding the KN and kinship caregiver needs; and feedback on progress reporting by the KN. These groups include a kinship caregiver or adult who was previously in kinship care in most counties and met quarterly or more often throughout the first 18 months of the project.

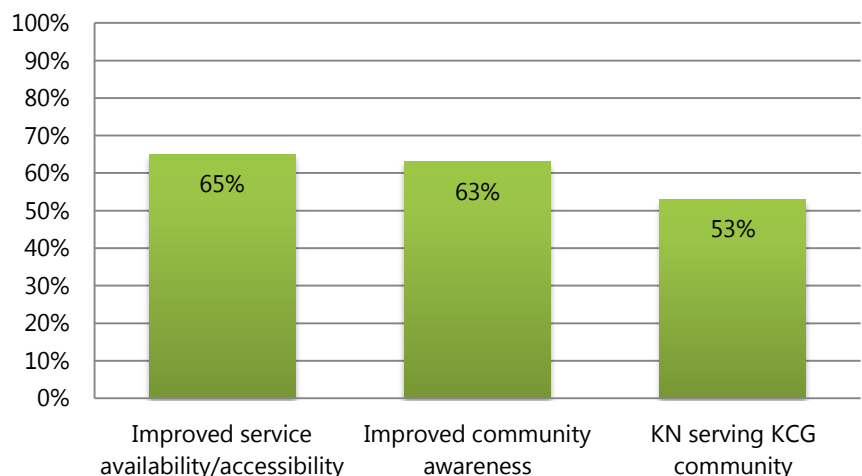
Eighty-eight LAG members and community providers responded to a survey on community building and support availability for kinship families in early 2011; questions covered service availability and the impact of the KN program. As seen in the graph below, 65% of respondents felt the KN is improving service availability/accessibility for kinship caregivers; 63% felt the program is improving community awareness, and 53% feel the program is serving an adequate or large portion of the KCG community.

How available and accessible are services for kinship caregivers in your county?



- Very Available/Accessible
- Moderately Available/Accessible
- Inadequate/Unknown/Didn't Answer

What impact are the Kinship Navigator Programs having in your county?



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Is the program helping kinship families?

Kinship caregiver surveyed (n = 62^{iv}) feel overwhelmingly positive about their experiences with the Kinship Navigator:

- 94% of kinship caregivers feel better after talking to the KN
- 92% felt better able to care for the child(ren)
- 92% felt satisfied with the help they received from the KN
- 86% felt the KN made it easier to be a KCG
- 82% felt their family is healthier now
- 81% felt their family is happier now

Survey answers regarding whether children were able to live with the KCG longer or permanently are the only areas in which the KCG felt the KN did not have as great an effect, often because the KCG already had permanent custody of the child(ren); respondents answered yes 58% and 55% respectively.

"We felt such support from our Navigator- I was feeling very alone and helpless but having her to guide me gave me confidence."

-Kinship caregiver more

What's next?

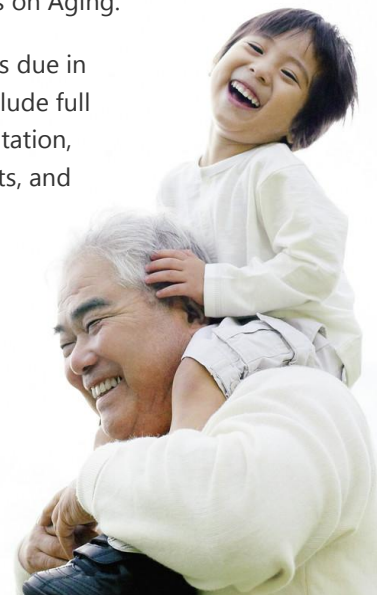
Federal funding for Ohio's Enhanced Kinship Navigator project ends October 1, 2012.

During the second half of the project period the Kinship Navigators will maintain the level of services they are currently providing and continue to work on community outreach, improving legal paths for kinship caregivers, and developing materials that will help others implement similar programs.

The KNs are also working on sustainability plans, and hope to continue providing some, if not all, of the services that are available now after the federally funded project ends. In some counties, the local public children services agencies hope to support these programs going forward. Some programs have also successfully obtained additional funding through Brookdale Foundation grants, by developing 501c3s to generate funding for their support groups, and all work continually to establish

partnerships in their communities that will promote sustainability of their efforts. One way in which the KNs have done this is by leveraging the kinship caregiver provisions in the Older American's Act to engage their local Area Offices on Aging.

HSRI's final evaluation report is due in December of 2012 and will include full analysis of program implementation, outputs, system building efforts, and outcomes for children.



ⁱ These figures include only families with whom initial assessments were complete and who consented to evaluation participation.

ⁱⁱ March 2010 through Feb 2011

ⁱⁱⁱ At time of initial assessment by KN, unless otherwise noted.

^{iv} Some answers missing for particular questions but answer proportions calculated out of total surveys received (could recalculate by question if needed)