



Ohio's Fostering Connections Grant: Enhanced Kinship Navigator Project

Executive Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations



I. Executive Summary

Recognizing the importance of kinship caregivers and the challenges they face, each of seven Ohio counties worked with Public Children Services Association of Ohio and Human Services Research Institute, to seek the Fostering Connections grant to develop a Kinship Navigator program. These programs help caregivers access existing supports and services to meet their own needs and the needs of the children in their care. A wide range of services are offered, such as support groups, child and respite care, assistance with court processes, and financial support. The Navigator programs also communicate and collaborate with local providers and other stakeholders to develop effective partnerships and raise awareness of kinship care in the general population.

PCSAO, the project manager regularly promotes best practices and advocates for positive public policy. Over the course of 15 years, Ohio has addressed resources (Child Only TANF) and policy (Grandparent Power of Attorney forms) for informal kin families not in the child welfare system, we have adopted a common sense health and safety kin approval process for families when child welfare is involved, modest financial incentives exist to encourage families to provide permanency to their kin children (Kinship Permanency Incentive program) and child welfare practice for open child welfare kin cases (Title IV-E Waiver ProtectOhio Kin Strategy). Enhancing our prevention, diversion and child welfare open case exit resources for kin caregivers seemed like a natural progression.

The participating counties hired staff, we partnered with our state child welfare training system and others to train the staff to both directly interact with kin caregivers (I&R and case management), convene support groups, do outreach in the community to both connect with kin caregivers and educate formal and informal entities about the needs of caregivers. The caregivers completed Family Needs and Resource Scales with each caregiver to both identify strengths to build on and areas of need, as well as to provide a baseline which was revisited at a later time, and included in the evaluation. The staff also participated in quarterly in-person meetings with all seven grant sites, PCSAO and HSRI, the evaluator. These sessions offered networking, sharing of successes and challenges, training and regular updates on the evaluation. Four of the grant sites were housed in the public child welfare agency, three were housed in community non-profits. Both models worked well with pros and cons of both.

Kin Navigators conducted Community Mapping to identify available resources and build relationships with those entities. They also partnered to expand resources and to improve access to existing resources. The Navigators found that once faith based and community organizations learned about kin families, they were generous and creative to provide support. Efforts were made to create an effective 211 Resource and Referral linkage, but they were largely ineffective despite discussions, training, script writing and even investment of funds. Each county either convened a Local Advisory Group or integrated their LAG with an existing multi-system health and human services group – this helped educate service providers on the needs of kin families, and sometimes helped to make available services more accessible to these families. The State Kinship Advisory Board welcomed the Kinship Navigator grant as a regular part of the agenda and inclusion in policy discussions re kinship families.

The child welfare system actively depended upon the Kin Navigator programs for prevention and diversion of opening a child welfare case, as well as a resource for closed child welfare kin cases. As the Title IV-E Waiver Kinship Strategy for enhanced services for open child welfare kinship cases developed and launched during the course of the Kin Navigator grant, it was interesting to see how the Kin Navigator program either merged with the waiver kinship strategy or served as a resource.

Legal concerns were an ongoing challenge for the kin caregivers served as well as for the Kinship Navigators working to assist them. While the KNs actively worked the system to find avenues of success, it was clear they were working in differing court systems (probate, juvenile and domestic relations); they were managing differing processes; varying fees and costs, and differing court philosophies. Concurrently, as part of the Court Improvement Program, the Ohio Supreme Court's Advisory Committee on Children, Families and the Court undertook a significant study process to examine legal processes for kinship caregivers to attain custody of the children in their care. A draft report is in review at present, it is hoped that recommendations will result in more streamlined, consistent legal and judicial processes and procedures.

Sustainability is a high priority for each of the counties. As each of the counties are part of the Title IV-E Waiver Kinship Strategy enhancing services for open kinship child welfare cases, they hope to prevent and divert kinship families from becoming open cases when safe to do so, they also enjoy having the Kinship Navigator program as a resource for closed child welfare cases. The three grantees that had the Kin Navigator program internal to their child welfare agency have strongly stated they will maintain the Kin Navigator position, albeit without as available extra funds to meet child and caregiver tangible needs. One merged their KN program into their kin unit during the grant. Of the three external Kin Navigator programs, one is bringing it into the child welfare agency, in one community the child welfare agency is investing funds to help maintain the non-profit Kin Navigator program and it is unclear what will happen in the last county. The non-profit agency has already had to end the Kin Navigator staff position, but they hope to continue the support groups and as a multi-service community agency, they expect to serve kin in a variety of ways, along with other members of the community.

The evaluation of the Ohio Kinship Navigator Grant, done by HSRI was thorough, illuminating and showed promising results. Reasons caregivers assume the care of their extended family's children are similar to why children get involved in the child welfare system – substance abuse, abandonment, neglect, incarceration, and others issues. Sixty-one percent of kinship children have already had some type of temporary or legal custody at initial service. In terms of plans for future caregiving, thirty percent were expecting reunification, a third were seeking legal custody or guardianship, and a quarter of the children expected to remain with their caregiver who already had custody. Children services was the primary referral source. Most case managed families had an office visit, two home visits and four phone calls, as well as a variety of collateral contacts. Primary needs addressed finances, healthcare, food stamps or pantry visits, clothing for the children and legal assistance with pursuing custody. The evaluation showed a high level of service linkage, discussion among Kin Navigators persistently showed legal needs were the most challenging need to successfully address. Grant funds did provide a resource to assist kin caregivers in flexibly meeting their immediate needs, and use of gift card for Walmart was a

frequent investment, empowering the kin caregiver to directly shop for the child, get clothes or school supplies or even a bed. Family surveys showed a high level of satisfaction by the kin caregiver in getting their needs met; the Family Resource Scale findings showed the same.

The Ohio Kinship Navigator Grant clearly exceeded goals for kin caregivers served either by I&R or case management, support groups held, and for education and outreach activities. The evaluation showed a high enthusiasm for the program by kin caregivers, the Kin Navigator staff, child welfare and community agencies. Revisited Family Resource Scales showed basic needs of the kin family were met by the program. Child outcomes as part of the evaluation were limited, due to SACWIS limitations for open child welfare cases where the child is living with kin, but not in the custody of the agency. The outcome evaluation showed children served by Kin Navigator programs experience far fewer days in child welfare custody than children in comparison county child welfare custody. The outcomes evaluation also showed that children in kin homes served by the Kinship Navigator programs were as safe as children in custody of the child welfare system in comparison counties and that the foster care re-entry rate was significantly lower than children in the custody of comparison counties.

Recommendations as a result of this demonstration grant are numerous – Kinship Navigator programs are valuable and feasible for a healthy child welfare system. Resources should be focused on hiring and preparing Kinship Navigators to assess and assist kinship caregivers to access available resources, as well as to build community relationships with formal and informal entities, which may result in expanded supports as well as more accessible services. Community mapping, to readily locate and refer kin caregivers to needed supports and services is also recommended. It is also recommended the Children’s Bureau consider investing in second iterations of demonstration grants that can then be refined and applied in a broader geographical and systemic manner, to transform a system. It is also recommended focus be given to development of competency based training for child welfare and kinship professionals and kin caregivers, focused on the stressful family dynamics that do not exist for unrelated foster caregivers. Recommendations are made for the court system to streamline affordable kinship custody procedures and to expand legal documentation for informal caregivers beyond grandparents. Finally, the full child welfare system should examine a host of philosophical issues around effective fiscal supports for informal and formal kin caregivers and issues related to reunification efforts with birth families vs. stability and permanency with kin families.

Chapter VII. CONCLUSIONS

VII.A. Original Goals were Exceeded

The Ohio Enhanced Kinship Navigator grant far exceeded the original goals in terms of numbers of kin caregivers served – over 1,000 Information and Referral calls were managed, and over 945 case managed cases (including 1,516 children), and with nearly 250 kin caregivers completing six month followup evaluation surveys.

The KN programs also all convened Support Groups, engaged Local Advisory Boards, and did significant and ongoing community and caregiver outreach.

Clearly, the program was a success. Kin Navigators passionately promote the value of placing children with kin when they cannot stay home, and the value of supporting kin whether involved with the formal child welfare system, or not. The KIDS database shows a high linkage of needed services, as a result of Kin Navigator case management. Reducing governmental intervention for these families is greatly valued, based on the belief that it reduces the trauma for the child.

The Kin Navigator grant was *unsuccessful* in efforts to utilize 211s as a referral source tool – the grantee counties invested time, relationship, training, one county even funds – but very few referrals to the Kin Navigator programs were as a result of 211 interactions.

VII.B. Impact on Families, Parents and Children

Families responded very positively about their experience with the Kin Navigator, expressing high levels of satisfaction. The Family Resource Scales show key areas of perceived improvement following the Kin Navigator involvement – especially around those Maslow’s Hierarchy items – food, housing, clothing, healthcare. Not surprisingly, the items with increased stress related to caring for a kin child include more internal desires - time for yourself, extra money, time for socializing and babysitting (child care for work received a neutral review). These life domain outcomes are understandable given that an additional child to care for has arrived in the house.

The Outcomes study provided powerful findings when comparing the Kin Navigator programs with child welfare agencies not involved with the grant:

- Children in Kin Navigator counties, **in the custody of the child welfare agency and placed with kin**, were **more likely to exit agency custody, to legal custody or guardianship** to the kin caregiver than in comparison counties and less likely to be reunified with birth parents.
- **Children in Kin Navigator counties in kinship placements experienced fewer custody days in the custody of child welfare**, than children in kinship placements in comparison counties (it is noted that legal processes for legal custody can be accomplished much quicker than for adoption). *Please note that due to the limited SACWIS documentation for open child welfare kin cases where the child is NOT in the custody of the agency, some of these outcomes compare children receiving Kin Navigator services with all children in agency custody in the comparison counties. The current ProtectOhio Kinship Strategy will greatly improve SACWIS documentation for such cases, facilitating additional outcome comparisons in the future.*
- **The recurrence of maltreatment was slightly lower for children served by the KN program, compared to children in foster care in intervention counties: 20% vs 24%.**
- **The foster care re-entry rates were significantly reduced for children served by the Kin Navigator program, compared to children in foster care in intervention counties: 12% vs. 60%.** The findings from these **analyses indicated that children who received Kinship Navigator services were**

ultimately safer (i.e., had fewer re-reports and subsequent out-of-home placements) than those who were in foster care in the intervention counties.

While the Family Satisfaction Surveys (returned by over 250 families) gave wonderful reviews of the programming, from kin caregivers, little information was collected on birth families or children perspectives. However, **the following information re impact on the children, can be illuminating:**

- The evaluation indicates that basic needs for the family, including the children were met.
- Children in Kin Navigator counties that offered developmentally appropriate child forums during the time the kin caregiver support groups were held, had vibrant attendance and enthusiasm from the children and youth. Ashtabula organized a broad array of activities including crafts, bullying discussions, outdoor activities, etc. and always enjoyed large groups of children and youth attending. Staff indicated the children enjoyed knowing others being raised by kin.
- The children in kin families benefitted from the provision of community donated gifts, event tickets, etc. in all grant sites. Whether it was a more robust Christmas, group trips to see pro baseball (Cleveland Indians), kin day at the county fairs, coverage of normal coming of age items – class rings, prom dress, transitional “totes” full of key independent living items for youth moving into apartments or college dorms – these opportunities helped normalize their situation and create enrichment opportunities. For a time, the Richland County YMCA offered free memberships to kin navigator involved families.
- The Lorain Kin Navigator program had a literacy program for school age children, helping them succeed in school; with a staff paid through outside grant funds, other volunteers helped with the kin students. Other sites did mention that educational issues were a challenge for many caregivers, and they wished for greater collaboration with the schools.
- Kin Navigators did discuss that many of the children had been “parentified” as they had been filling a parental role with their siblings due to the parents’ issues. This caused stress with the kin caregiver re child raising, discipline, etc.

Birth Parent Discussion

The KN program staff discussion of birth families referenced the stress of family dynamics and of course a big issue was the gap of affordable, accessible legal services to deal with custody and other legal issues. At times, there was discussion that intense support of kin caregiver families might shortchange the birth family, especially for those informal families without an open child welfare case. But consensus always returned to the best interest of the child (safety, stability), and while the stress of birth/kin family dynamics always seemed to be more difficult to manage than for placement with unrelated foster care, the value of maintaining children in their own extended family allowed for the ongoing relationship with a bio parent.

Achieving a custody award to the kin caregiver provided permanency for the child, and while the outcomes evaluation showed fewer reunifications with birth parents, the lower recurrence of maltreatment rate and the significantly lower foster care re-entry rate seems to point toward the better solution of stability and permanency with a kin caregiver, while maintaining the opportunity for ongoing contact and relationship with the birth parent.

VII.C. Partner Organizations Discussion

The formal child welfare agency frequently utilized the Kin Navigator program as the grant proceeded; clearly it was perceived as a prevention and diversion resource, a source of community resource expertise for open cases, and an exit resource for closing kin caregiver cases. Since the ProtectOhio Waiver Kin Strategy launched in the last year of the grant, it will be interesting to watch how these seven counties integrate and continue their Kin Navigator services (already Clark has integrated KN into their expanded

Kinship Unit, and Lorain Children Services is investing \$30,000/year with the external, Office on Aging KN partner).

The grantee site Courts processes were reported to improve over the course of the grant, but legal concerns remained a significant challenge. It will be interesting to see what recommendations and procedural improvements come from a result of the Ohio Supreme Court examination of improving kinship legal processes.

Faith and Community based organizations proved to be a ready and willing partner to help meet the needs of kinship families, once they became aware. While these organizations donated generously with goods, tickets, guest speakers and even volunteers, the activities of the Kin Navigator working hard on outreach and awareness, as well as clarity in opportunity and logistical framework are at risk, given that grant funds helped ensure staffing.

VII.D. Implementation Reflections

This report is designed to help the Kinship Navigator programs be as effective as possible during the final months of the grant period and to foster successful continuation and/or replication of Kinship Navigator programs in the future. Noteworthy progress has occurred in six key areas; these are summarized below, along with recommended next steps.

- ★ *Training and Community Orientation:* Regardless of the experience of individuals selected to serve as Kinship Navigators, these individuals should receive training on the role and responsibility of the Kinship Navigator. Further, it is important that child welfare staff and other community partners receive an orientation regarding the Kinship Navigator program and referral process.
- ★ *Structure of the Kinship Navigator Program:* Two viable structures have been implemented in the seven Ohio counties: *internal* Kinship Navigators who are located within the child welfare agency and *external* Kinship Navigators located within local provider agencies. These two approaches will continue to operate and evolve, and evaluators will continue to explore whether these two structures result in different outputs and outcomes for kinship families.
- ★ *Services to Individual Kinship Caregivers:* Kinship Navigator programs reached out and served a large number of individual kinship families by providing I&R, case management, and support group facilitation. This has been a primary focus of the program and represents a real success.
- ★ *Supports and Services:* Under this grant, the Kinship Navigators have had expanded capacity to help individual caregivers access a variety of services and supports, which in turn enables caregivers to continue to care for children.
- ★ *Outreach:* In the first half of this grant, Kinship Navigators conducted numerous outreach activities to inform and educate the community about the services provided by the Kinship Navigator program. Further efforts should be made in this area, to not only spread information more thoroughly but also to generate community support at both policy and service delivery levels.
- ★ *Local Advisory Group:* The LAG can be a very useful component of a Kinship Navigator program, but, in the first half of the grant, this component appears to have been underutilized. Counties seem to lack clarity regarding the primary role and function of the LAG.

Chapter VIII. RECOMENDATIONS

VIII. A. Recommendations for Future Program Managers

As Project Manager of the Ohio Enhanced Kinship Navigator grant, PCSAO was extremely impressed with the passion and dedication of the professionals that developed their local programming using the basic Kinship Navigator program model - I&R, Case Management, Support Groups, Community Outreach and Resource Building, Local Advisory Boards. It is clear that kin caregivers are dedicated and willing to provide safety and care for their extended family's children, but that they need assistance – assistance navigating and accessing available resources, support and awareness of other kin families, often just someone to talk to and acknowledge their challenges. The caregivers also need folks to help with community resource development advocacy, and in learning how to advocate for themselves.

It is recommended future project managers ensure Kin Navigators receive good basic training about the benefits and challenges that kin families experience, especially around family dynamics with the birth parent. It is also critical that these staff receive training in *community mapping*, in order to have a ready grasp of available resources for kin families – what, where, when and how to access them, and how to encourage building community assets. The Kin Navigators should work within a strength based philosophy of identifying / building on strengths, and facilitating problem solving by the kin caregivers, not solving their problems.

Outreach to the community is critical – both to bring awareness of service to kin caregivers; but also to create understanding and awareness to community service providers and organizations. Many faith and community organizations will readily offer valuable supports when they get an understanding of needs; both informal and formal organizations will identify resources that are unique to their context, and might not be requested but would be valuable. An example is a faith based group that created a regular respite opportunity for kin families – the volunteers underwent background checks, training, they had a nurse that regularly volunteered, they put together a nutritional program. This regular group respite opportunity was greatly appreciated by kin caregivers, especially those that were caring for special needs children. Of course awareness of kin caregiver issues by formal service providers will also assist caregivers in accessing available services more easily.

Support Groups are valuable – for networking and socializing, respite and topical learning. Food and child care seem to be key ingredients for success. Encouraging responsibility by the kin caregivers for planning the agenda and perhaps identifying Chairs or Officers will promote engagement. One grant site also had very good luck in crafting their support group as part of an eight week curriculum offering training including child development, positive discipline, healthy lifestyles, managing family dynamics, etc. Not only did the caregivers learn a lot, but they created a community and some relationships that were sustained past the eight weeks.

VIII. B. Recommendations for the Children's Bureau

Funding limited demonstration grants are valuable; but if just focused on limited jurisdictions for a short time, it is very difficult to achieve sustainability. This Ohio grant demonstrated many things; including the value of I&R and limited case management to prevent/divert kin caregivers from formal child welfare involvement, and the value of community mapping to identify and build community resources.

It is recommended the Children’s Bureau invite current grantees to submit evolved lessons learned and to morph their original program into a transformational application, moving statewide or at least to a broader jurisdiction. While replication from one community to another is valuable, the potential for a current grantee to revise and scale a program broader is a challenge worth considering. Thus, a demonstration grant is not just expected to sustain as is, but is given the opportunity to select the aspects of the grant that are critical, and can be integrated statewide on a broader systemic application.

Transformation is not achieved in three years – but that is a good frame time to assess, refine, and propose a broader, systemic transformational change – with grant support.

It is also recommended the ***Children’s Bureau support development of training for both child welfare/kin navigator professionals and kin caregivers, dealing with family dynamic stresses present with kinship care***. Competency based training has been developed for unrelated foster and adoptive caregivers, but the family dynamics are different when the caregiver is kin. It is recognized that kin may be more willing to accept guardianship rather than support a termination of parental right process to free the child for adoption, but less work has been done about assisting the kin caregiver with the occasional or frequent clashes over parental authority, daily decision making, or volatile crisis management.

Finally, the ***Children’s Bureau should continue to track, evaluate and advocate for changes regarding issues of kinship permanency and effective fiscal support, as discussed in the broad recommendations below***. Also, the Title IV-E ProtectOhio Waiver Kinship Strategy is a prime example of cutting edge child welfare practice to watch to promote best practices, lessons learned, effective training and more. Those 18 counties are dedicating resources toward agency structure, enhanced kin caregiver services, training and manualized practice and better SACWIS documentation.

VIII. C. Recommendations for the Child Welfare Community

Offering a full continuum of kinship services and supports is critical to a healthy child welfare system.

A Kinship Navigator program can safely prevent and divert cases from becoming formal child welfare cases with significant intrusion into a family’s life, significant case management and administrative burdens, often with added court involvement. ***The program can also serve as a resource for child welfare kinship cases that close***, with the child remaining in the home of the kin caregiver. There is great benefit to supporting these families informally, rather than bringing them into or maintaining them in the formal child welfare system.

Due to scarce resources, it is recommended that the Kin Navigator focus on community mapping of a region, information and referral for kin caregivers of available resources, and select / limited case management. The Kin Navigator can also serve as an ambassador to others in the child welfare agency about the value of supporting kin caregiver; raising awareness to other service providers and community organizations about kin challenges; assisting volunteer efforts for kin families.

Legal processes for kin when a child is NOT in child welfare custody, should be streamlined. As part of the Court Improvement Program, the Ohio Supreme Court has examined legal processes and procedures for kin families and found them to be inconsistent across jurisdictions, inconsistent between courts (juvenile vs. probate vs. domestic relations), inconsistent in application of case law precedence and extremely complicated for lay people such as kinship caregivers. Meanwhile, kin caregivers and the

professionals assisting them (such as Kin Navigators) must diligently work to develop feasible processes in their community. Within the Ohio Kin Navigator grant sites, court fees ranges from \$45 for pro se court filing fees, to over \$2,000/legal representation for kin caregivers regardless of which court or county they are dealing with. Kin caregivers themselves can rarely afford to hire legal representation, and are often faced with continuing volatile situations with the child's unstable parent, or entering the intrusive world of child welfare. Ohio does have Grandparent Power of Attorney and Caregiver Authorization Affidavits to facilitate grandparents' ability to enroll the child they are raising informally in school and participate in educational decisions, and to access emergency and routine physical, dental and behavioral healthcare. ***These forms – POAs and CAAs - should be extended to other relative caregivers in Ohio, and considered in states that do not have such forms for informal caregivers.***

The issue of birth family reunification efforts and permanency with kin caregivers is evolving. When should kin be awarded custody? How long should the child welfare system stay involved? It is in the best interest of the child to facilitate a prompt custody change to a safe relative and back out, or should a full reunification effort with the birth family ensue? Should temporary placement with kin and parent/custodian go back and forth? Do moves among relatives have the same traumatic effect as moves among unrelated caregivers; or does the preservation of birth parent ties mitigate such trauma? ***These issues should be further evaluated specifically considering reunification success rates, child stability, trauma impact and long term outcomes after the age of majority for the youth raised by kin.***

Practice for open child welfare cases when the child is living with kin caregivers, is also evolving. Not only are the questions in the paragraph above critical, but having a shared focus on child well being, caregiver support and ongoing family dynamics, and family reunification is evolving. The Title IV-E ProtectOhio Waiver Kinship Strategy is dedicating resources toward agency structure, enhanced kin caregiver services, training and manualized practice and better SACWIS documentation. This should be carefully watched to incorporate best practices, lessons learned, effective training and more.

Fiscal support of kin caregivers is being debated in Ohio. Early on, it was clarified that Ohio children living with relatives were eligible for Child Only TANF cash assistance, without time limits or work requirements, and without regard to judicial custody status. While the benefit for one child is fair (\$268/month), the extra for siblings is incremental (about \$90/month/sibling). ***Increasing the TANF cash benefits for siblings groups is recommended.***

Kin caregivers are subject to the same work related, subsidized child care eligibilities as birth parents/custodians. While the cost of child care is exceedingly high for all, it is especially a stress for a caregiver that did not plan to have a child, and has set income and expenses - when an infant or toddler suddenly arrives and require full time child care in order for the caregiver to remain in the workforce. ***It is recommended that work related subsidized child care eligibilities follow the same policy as Child Only TANF*** – it is based on the child's income alone, not on the caregivers' income. Of course, to address concerns that wealthy individuals may unnecessarily qualify, an upper limit cap is suggested – perhaps at each states' SCHIP income eligibility.

How should States support children living with kin when a court has officially awarded judicial custody?

- Since 2006, Ohio has the Permanency Incentive (KPI) Program, providing modest incentive payments for up to three years, to kin that have received judicially awarded custody; KPI is irregardless of child welfare involvement, it does require a health and safety approval process, the caregiver income cap is set at 300% of

the federal poverty level, and it is an affordable state strategy - \$4 Million/year is supporting nearly 8,000 children in safe, permanent kinship homes. The payments are in addition to Child Only TANF. KPI has been very effective, with a high level of stability, excellent safety outcomes, and minimal governmental intrusion. *KPI should continue, and Ohio should consider extending the payments beyond three years.*

- *Ohio is now debating the best interest aspect and affordability of the Title IV-E Guardianship Subsidy (KGAP). This program would potentially support many fewer Ohio children, as it requires the child to be in the custody of the agency, and placed with that relative caregiver for a minimum of six months. Given that many Ohio jurisdictions facilitate early temporary custody directly to the kin caregiver, often with continuing protective services (believing that less governmental intrusion is in the child's best interest), these children would not be eligible. It is also noted that the biggest need for ongoing support is for sibling groups of children, which are more likely to land in the child welfare system, as kin caregivers may successfully integrate one child into their home, but the stress of a sibling group is too much without additional fiscal support. It is recommended Ohio create KGAP policy specifically focusing on sibling groups that are in the custody of the child welfare system, allowing for children who may enter custody at differing times. KPI should continue as is, so as not to incent families, agencies or courts to bring or maintain children in foster care custody, just to make the family eligible for additional fiscal supports.*

Summary

The prevalence of children being raised by grandparents and other kin has greatly increased in recent decades, and the evidence of improved child wellbeing for children being raised in safe, familiar kin homes vs. unrelated foster care has also been proven. Program managers, the Children's Bureau, and the Child Welfare Community (including legal and judicial representatives) should continue to evolve policy, practice and supports for all kin caregivers – informal, formal with child welfare services whether in custody or under protective supervision of the child welfare agency, and for those kin families where judicial custody (legal custody, guardianship or adoption) has been finalized. Of course outcomes of evolving practice, policy and supports should be tracked and evaluated in order to inform the field ongoing.