



Taking Care of Kin Who Take Care of Our Children: Understanding the Critical Role of Kinship Care in Child Welfare and How to Better Support Our Kinship Families

Beyond the Bench
Anaheim, CA
December 3, 2015



WHO ARE OUR KINSHIP FAMILIES?



Types of Kinship Care We Are Discussing

Voluntary Kinship Care (informal)

- Child welfare system is/was involved, but **no formal foster care**
 - Child could be with relative through a Probate Court Guardianship or informal arrangement
 - Child welfare system is not involved in placement
 - May be caring for a child with or without legal custody or guardianship

Kinship Foster Care (formal)

- Child placed in foster care with a relative either through **court removal** or **Voluntary Placement Agreement**

NOTE: We are **NOT** discussing **private** kinship care – when there is no child welfare involvement and parents/guardian arrange for care with kin directly

Who is a relative?

For funding purposes, a relative is an adult related to the child by blood, adoption, or marriage within the fifth degree of kinship.

- Mother
- Father
- Stepparents
- Siblings
- Step-Siblings
- Grandparents (great, great-great, great-great-great)
- Aunts and Uncles (great, great-great)
- First cousins
- First cousins once-removed
- Nieces and nephews
- *Spouse of any relative on list (even if divorced or deceased)*
- For placement priority, only includes an adult who is a grandparent, aunt, uncle, or sibling of the child
- Non-Relative Extended Family Members are NOT relatives for funding but can request temporary placement

5

Kinship families are the backbone of our child welfare system

- Hidden in plain sight - kinship families are the largest child welfare system in America
 - Extended family members and close family friends care for more than **2.7 million** children in this country
 - Over the past decade **the number of children in kinship care grew six times faster** than the number of children in the general population
 - **287,996** children in California live in homes with grandparent householders where grandparents are responsible for them - of these children, **80,248** have no parents present in the home.
 - **In California, 19,635** of our state's 63,000 foster children are in kinship placements

Demographics of Kinship Caregivers – national data

- **Senior Citizens:** 15 – 20% of relative caregivers are **over** the age of 60
- **Fixed Incomes:** 39% of kinship households live **below** the federal poverty line
- **Disabled:** 38% of kinship caregivers have a limiting condition or disability
- **Limited advanced training:** Kinship foster parents receive little, if any, advanced preparation in assuming their role as caregivers.

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren – Most Likely to be Among the Hidden Poor

- Federal Poverty Level is a poor measure of poverty – many more kinship caregivers are financially insecure
 - A new report by the UCLA Center on Health Policy Research finds: “Among households in which single older adults are the primary caregivers of their minor grandchildren, 35.3 percent of families had incomes below the FPL, but **72.8 percent had incomes below the Elder Index.**”
 - Same report found “incomes of older couples supporting minor grandchildren were below the FPL in 15.9 percent of families, while **26.7 percent of families had incomes above the FPL but below the Elder Index.**”

Common Challenges for Kinship Families

Stepping Up for Kin a 2012 Report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation finds:

- Kinship caregiver confront financial, health, and social challenges
 - Financial burdens even more severe when kin are already caring for other children, take in large sibling groups, are retired, or are living on a fixed income.
- Many grandparents and other relatives raising children also struggle with feelings of guilt and shame about the family circumstances that led to the caregiving arrangement.
- These challenges are all the more daunting when caring for children who have experienced trauma

WHY DO KINSHIP FAMILIES MATTER?



Relative Placement... It's the Law!



Federal law **requires** relatives to be given preference in the placement of foster children:

- States must "consider giving preference to an adult relative over a nonrelated caregiver when determining placement of a child, provided that the relative caregiver meets all of the relevant state child protections standards." **42 USC §671(a)(15)(A)**
- States must "within 30 days after the removal of a child from the custody of the parent or parents of the child, the State shall exercise due diligence to identify and provide notice to all adult grandparents and other adult relatives of the child (including any other adult relatives suggested by the parents)..." **42 USC §671(a)(29)**

Improving Child Welfare Outcomes Hinges on Supporting Kin



Lots of attention being paid to:

- Reducing the number of children raised in congregate settings
- Ensuring every child is raised in a family
- Moving children to permanency as quickly as possible
- Reducing the number of placement changes

Relative Caregivers Support Child Well-Being

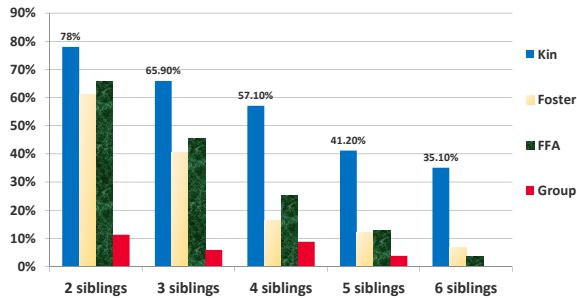
Research has shown that children in kinship care have:

- Fewer prior placements
- More frequent and consistent contact with birth parents and siblings,
- Felt fewer negative emotions about being placed in foster care than children placed with non-relatives
- Less likely to runaway



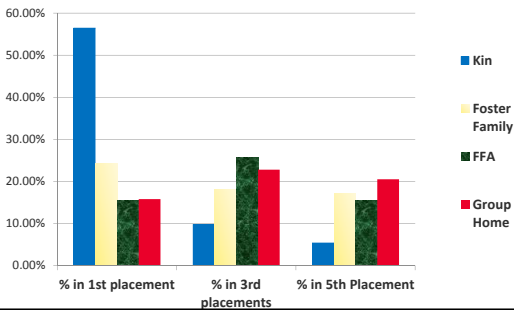
Kin Most Likely to Support ALL Siblings

% of Siblings ALL Placed Together



Kin Provide Greater Stability – Even with Older Foster Youth

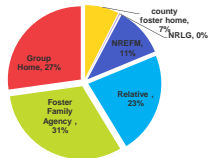
Youth Ages 14 - 17 Still in Care at 12 Months



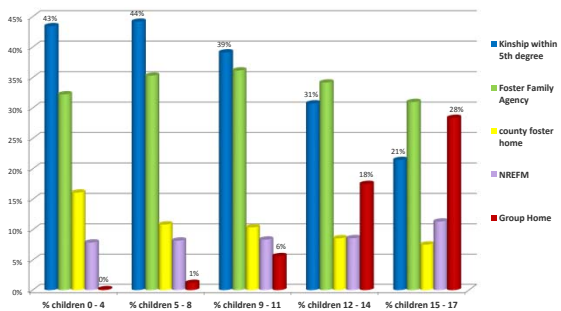
Relatives are key to reducing California's reliance on congregate care

Group home placement is associated with poor outcomes for children and youth:

- Significantly increased risk of arrest (Hernandez, 2008)
- Higher rates of re-entry into foster care after reunification than children who are reunified from family-based care (Barth, 2002)
- Less likely to graduate and more likely to drop-out of school than children and youth in family-based care (Wiegmann et al, 2014)



Children More Likely to Be Placed in Group Home and Less Likely With Kin the Older They Get



HOW ARE OUR KINSHIP FAMILIES SUPPORTED?



What the research says

- Kinship caregivers are “substantially less likely than foster caregivers to receive financial support, parent training, peer support groups, and respite care”
 - Less than 12% receive TANF (even though nearly 100% are eligible)
 - Only 42% receive SNAP benefits
 - Only 42% of children in kinship households receive Medicaid (nearly 100% are eligible)
 - Only 17% of low-income working kinship families receive child care assistance
 - Only 15% of low-income kinship families receive housing assistance

The Story of Farrah, Anne and Naomi



Farrah

- Aspires to be a chef.
- Has experienced severe abuse and neglect. Multiple calls made to child protective services
- Removed from her home and formally placed into foster care with her grandmother.
- Farrah is federally eligible



Anne

- Aspires to be a chef.
- Has experienced severe abuse and neglect. Multiple calls made to child protective services
- Removed from her home and formally placed into foster care with her grandmother.
- Anne is NOT federally eligible

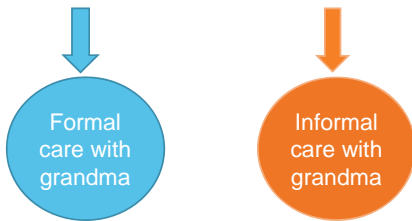


Naomi

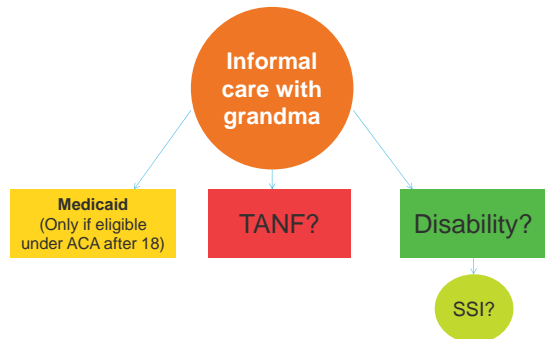
- Aspires to be a chef.
- Has experienced severe abuse and neglect. Multiple calls made to child protective services
- Naomi's grandmother has taken her at the urging of a social worker.
- There is no foster care placement and no VPA.

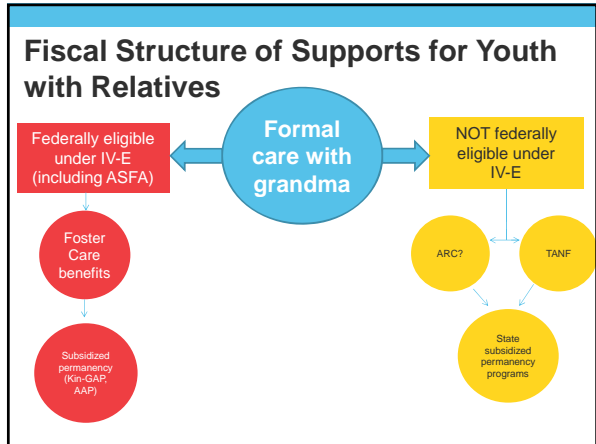
Fiscal Structure for Youth with Relatives

Youth
(Abused, Abandoned,
or Neglected)



Fiscal Structure for Youth with Relatives







Federal Foster Care Benefits: Financial Eligibility

To receive **federal** foster care benefits, the youth must meet the 1996 AFDC criteria **in the home of removal** in the month of removal or one of the six months prior to removal

In 1996, income limit for a family of 3 to qualify for AFDC was \$723**

BY CONTRAST: The income limit for the **same** family to qualify for cash assistance today is \$1,169**

What that means: a child can be removed from a parent receiving welfare benefits and **STILL** not qualify for federal foster care benefits

IMPORTANT: Federal test has **nothing** to do with the needs of the child or the needs of the relative where the child is placed

** California income eligibility limits

Little Known Facts re Federal Eligibility

- Federal eligibility is a **one-time determination** done at removal
- Federal eligibility does **not** depend on the type of placement
 - A youth who is not federally eligible in a relative home, is also not federally eligible in a group home
- Eligibility for federal foster care benefits is distinct from meeting federal home approval standard
 - A relative in California who meets federal home approval standards is still denied foster care benefits when the child does not meet the 1996 welfare standards
- Only about 40% of youth nationwide are eligible for federal foster care benefits (in FY2011), down from 54% in the mid-1990s.

Approved Relative Caregiver Funding Option Program



Eligibility for ARC



Criteria for relatives to receive assistance:

1. Child must be placed through a **county that has opted into** ARC (once a county opts in, participation in ARC is continuous until county opts out or funding for ARC is reduced)
2. Home must **meet approval standards**
3. Child placed with approved relative **in California** (NOTE: ARC can be paid when youth placed out of county)
4. Child must have been removed from the home and under **CWS or Probation jurisdiction**. Includes:
 - Youth with suitable placement orders through probation
 - Non-minor dependents
 - Youth placed through a Voluntary Placement Agreement
 - Undocumented youth
5. Child is **not eligible for federal financial participation**.

Disconnect Between Policy Preference for Relative Caregivers and Funding Available

- Three identical youth receive different funding depending on being in formal care, the child's federal eligibility, and the county decision to participate in ARC

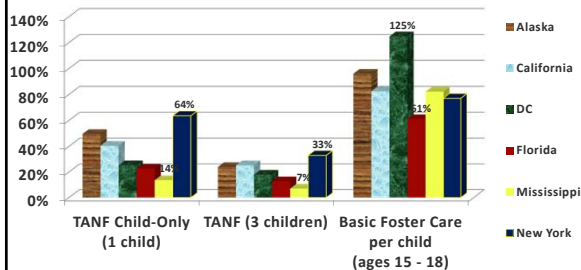
| | |
|---|---|
| Farrah: if federally eligible and placed in foster care with a fully approved relative | Minimum of \$859 (CA foster care benefit) |
| Anne: not federally eligible and placed in foster care with a fully approved relative | \$859 (ARC benefit – if county opted into ARC) \$387 (CalWORKS if county has not opted into ARC) |
| Naomi: living with relative outside foster care | \$387 (CalWORKS aka TANF) |

Inequities Exacerbated for Children with Special Needs

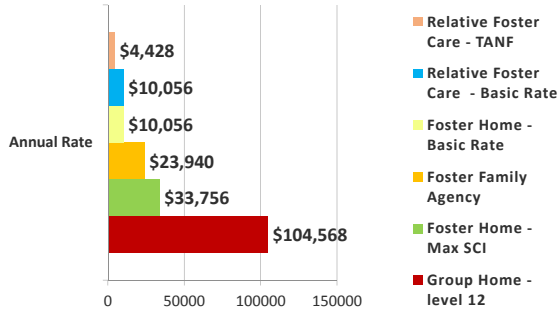
| | Farrah - federally eligible and placed with grandma | Anne- NOT federally eligible placed thru ARC County with grandma | Anne- NOT federally eligible and placed thru County that did NOT opt into ARC with grandma | Naomi - NOT in foster care with grandma |
|--|---|--|--|---|
| Child with severe emotional disturbance and qualifies for Specialized Care Increment | \$1,400 (LA County rate) | \$859 | \$387 | \$387 |
| Child with autism who is a regional center consumer | \$2,265 - \$3,265 | \$859 | \$387 | \$387 |
| Youth who is parenting | \$1,270 | \$1,246 | \$636 | \$636 |

Reliance on TANF to Support Kinship Families Sets Families Up to Fail

TANF child-only vs. TANF 3-child grant vs. Basic Foster Care Rate as a % of the Estimated Cost of Providing for the Needs of a 15 – 18 Year Old



Huge Expense to States if Family Placements Fail and Children Are Placed in Group Care (California Example)



UNMET SERVICE AND SUPPORT NEEDS OF KINSHIP CAREGIVERS



Kin Have Different Needs

Different Needs

- o Kin, generally, have fewer financial resources
- o Kin are recruited in a crisis situation, after the child has been removed, and are not given a chance to prepare financially, emotionally or logistically
- o Kin are more likely to need child care
- o Kin often need counseling to help them deal with birth parents, feelings about parenting again, and their new relationships with their related children
- o Older caregivers, many of whom are kin, are more likely to need help meeting children's educational needs and providing recreational services



CA Law: Same Services Available to All Foster Families

Child welfare services may include, but are not limited to, a range of **service-funded activities**, including:

- case management,
- counseling,
- emergency shelter care,
- emergency in-home caretakers,
- temporary in-home caretakers,
- respite care,
- therapeutic day services,
- teaching and demonstrating homemakers,
- parenting training,
- substance abuse testing, and transportation.

These service-funded activities shall be available to children and their families in all **phases of the child welfare program** in accordance with the child's case plan and departmental regulations. WIC 16501.



In Practice, Kin Receive Fewer Services

“State policies indicate that kin are generally eligible to receive the same services as non-kin foster parents. However, past research has clearly shown that in practice, kin foster parents and the children in their care receive fewer services. Kin are offered fewer services, request fewer services, and receive fewer services.”

| Service | Non-Kin | Kin |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Respite Care | 23% | 16% |
| Support Group | 40% | 9% |
| Training | 76% | 13% |
| Specialized Training | 71% | 17% |
| Child Care | Less than 10% | Less than 10% |
| Mental Health Services | 48% | 28% |
| SW Contact within last month | 81% | 73% |
| Average # of Services on 0 to 6 Scale | 2.3 | 0.53 |

Why do Kin Receive Fewer Services?

- **Legal Barriers:** Some services are simply denied to kin families
 - Foster youth services
 - Specialized care increments
- **Cultural Barriers:** Misperceptions and mistrust between child welfare and kin
 - Respite care
 - Mental Health Services
- **Design Barriers:** Services/service delivery not tailored to the needs of kin
 - Training
 - Child care
- **Implementation Barriers:** Misinterpretation of law or failure to communicate about what the law requires
 - Reimbursement for Transportation to School of Origin
 - Child Care

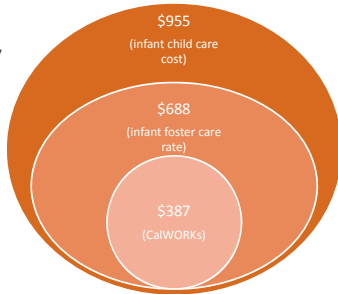
Respite Care



- Respite care is especially important for caregivers who (as is typically the case for relatives) were **unable to plan** ahead for new responsibilities.
- In a national survey (NSCAW II), 23% of nonrelative foster parents found to receive respite services, compared with **16% of kinship caregivers**.

Child Care: Cost

- Caregivers (especially relatives) work full-time.
- Market-rate cost is prohibitive.



Child Care: Accessing Subsidies

Barriers

- **Complex system** – need referral support
 - Lack of **"emergency"** child care options
 - Misguided interpretations &/or fewer accommodations for children placed with relatives and other foster parents
- In LA County, only **one in eight foster children (0-5)** attend a public early care & education program.

Policy strategies in California

- Categorical eligibility...✓
- Prioritized enrollment...✓
- Family fee exemptions...✓
- Supplemental foster care funding...✗



Child Care: Quality

- The most vulnerable children are least likely to access high-quality care



41

Educational Supports

- **Kin Tend to Need More Support in Meeting Educational Needs:** Studies note that older caregivers, many of whom are kin, tend to need more support in meeting children’s educational needs.
 - Youth placed with relatives are NOW ELIGIBLE for foster youth services
 - Youth who receive AFDC-FC - OR – ARC are eligible for transportation stipends to stay in the school of origin

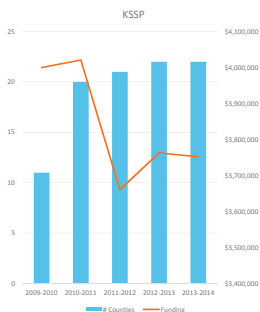
42

Kinship Support Services Programs

“One of the main barriers to kin accessing services is knowledge; because most kin lack experience with the child welfare system, they do not know where to look for or how to access community resources.”

KSSPs & Realignment

- The number of counties providing KSSPs has remained steady at 22.
- Overall funding has decreased from \$4M pre-realignment to \$3.75 million in 2013-2014.
- Nearly 1/3 of counties with KSSPs have cut funding by 15% or more (including 3 counties that have cut funding by more than 30%).



CONTINUUM OF CARE REFORM



How is CCR related to support for kinship families?

- **Goals of the Continuum of Care Reform:**
 - Ensure that youth in foster care have their day-to-day physical, mental, and emotional needs met; that they have the greatest chance to grow up in permanent and supportive homes; and that they have the opportunity to grow into self-sufficient, successful adults.
 - Move away from the use of long-term group home care by increasing youth placement in family settings and by transforming existing group home care into places where youth who are not ready to live with families can receive short term, intensive treatment

Kinship families are the key to achieving the goals of CCR – and supporting these families is the only way to get there

How will the CCR goals be achieved?

- AB 403 – legislation sponsored by CDSS to carry out the vision of the CCR Recommendations submitted to the legislature in January 2015 (at http://www.cdss.ca.gov/cdssweb/entres/pdf/CCR_LegislativeReport.pdf)
 - Eliminates group homes and replaces with Short Term Residential Treatment Facilities
 - Expands the role of Foster Family Agencies and specifies core services that each FFA must be able to provide
 - Creates Child and Family Teams for each child in foster care and at-risk of foster care to inform process of placement and services
 - Requires all families to be approved through Resource Family Approval process (starting January 2017) and for existing families to become approved through RFA standards (by 2019)

Resource Family Approval

- AB 403 doesn't make significant changes to the existing Resource Family Approval process that is underway – but DOES require that RFA be implemented statewide by January 1, 2017
- Resource Family Approval changes the current home approval process primarily by requiring all families to have:
 - Permanency Assessment
 - Applicant must complete caregiver training – applies to ALL resource families including relatives
 - Applicant must complete psychosocial assessment, which must include risk assessment

Resource Family Approval: Risks and Opportunities

- **Risks**
 - RFA training requirements aren't implemented in a way that accommodates needs of kin
 - Risk assessment used to screen out families who should be approve
- **Opportunity:** Resource Families Qualify for EQUAL funding
 - Welf. & Inst. Code 16519.5(m): "A child placed with a resource family shall be eligible for AFDC-FC payments. A resource family shall be paid an AFDC-FC rate pursuant to Sections 11460 and 11461."
 - Inclusive of specialized care, dual agency rate, clothing allowance, and/or infant supplement
 - Applies to RELATIVES and non-relatives

\$17.8 million for foster parent recruitment and retention

- Through the budget, the Legislature authorized \$17.4 million for foster parent recruitment and retention activities at the county level for activities like
 - Staffing to provide and improve direct services and supports
 - Additional funding to provide for exceptional child care needs not covered by the caregiver-specific rate
 - Child care
 - Intensive relative finding, engagement and navigation efforts
 - Emerging technologies, evidenced-informed and other nontraditional approaches to outreach to potential foster homes and relatives

Looking Ahead



“Kinship caregivers are often required to provide the same nurturance and support for children in their care that non-kin foster parents provide, with fewer resources, greater stressors, and limited preparation. This situation suggests that kinship care policies and practices must be mindful of and attentive to the many challenges kin caregivers face.”

-- Rob Geen, "The Evolution of Kinship Care Policy and Practice"

Adequately Supporting Relatives Strengthens Our Child Welfare System

- Relatives are the backbone of our child welfare system – both in supporting children that come into care and enabling children to avoid foster care
- Adequately supporting relatives is critical to the health of our system:
 - Improves child well-being
 - Increases placement stability
 - Reduces reliance on restrictive congregate care settings
 - Enhances permanency
 - Improves child safety

Change is on the horizon

- But we have to make sure that relatives are accounted for in these reforms in concrete and meaningful ways
 - Continuum of Care Reform (AB 403) and implementation activities
 - Full implementation of Resource Family Approval
 - Foster Parent and Relative Recruitment, Retention and Support Program (\$17.8 million in 2015 state budget)
 - Waiver counties
 - Realignment growth funds
 - Creating parity for 602 foster youth

Sharing & Questions?