

Kinship Promising Practices

ABA Center on Children and the Law | Generations United

Federal law, policy, and practice is shifting toward a kin-first culture, a child welfare system that consistently promotes immediate kinship placements, helps children in foster care maintain connections with kin, and tailors services and supports for kinship families. To help jurisdictions successfully implement a kin-first culture shift, national kinship technical assistance partners have gathered promising kinship practices from across the country. The following kinship practice examples, organized by seven main topics, can help jurisdictions change policy and practice to promote kin placement and permanency.



Identification, Notification, and Engagement of Kin

1

Identify and engage maternal and paternal kin for placement and support. Federal law requires child welfare agencies to send written notice to any identified relatives within 30 days of a child coming into care and custody of the agency. Kin should be provided resources and tools to engage them in support of the family.

Promising Practice:

Dedicated kinship staff trained to locate, engage, support, and assist kin

Jurisdictions find it beneficial to assign dedicated kinship staff to ensure families and kin caregivers fully understand their options to care for children and support kin caregivers as they work through system requirements and processes.

State Examples:

- **New Mexico** has a Kinship Unit dedicated to supporting kinship placements. Staff work to support family search and engagement efforts, support kin throughout the process of placement, which includes the licensing process, and help kin explore and achieve the most appropriate permanency option. This unit completes genograms, works with tribal and rural communities, trains community providers, and engages nonplacement kin resources to create a support network for the family.
- **New York** requires each county to have a “Kin Champion” who, after training, acts as an onsite advocate for a kin-first culture, provides kinship expertise for colleagues, and supports kin caregivers.
- Other jurisdictions, such as **Florida** and **Connecticut**, also have dedicated staff who assist kin caregivers.

Promising Practice:

Family-finding efforts

Efforts to identify and notify relatives are a federal requirement. However, some jurisdictions have gone beyond the federal requirements by implementing family finding throughout the life of the case or using extra efforts to identify relatives.

State Examples:

- **Pennsylvania** state law requires family finding when a child is accepted for services and then annually throughout the child's involvement in foster care. The state law requires courts, at every stage of a case, to inquire and make a finding on the family-finding efforts made by the agency.
- **Missouri** increased family finding through Extreme Recruitment and 30 Days to Family. Extreme Recruitment is a 12–20-week intensive intervention to identify kin for the hardest to place children by using staff and a private investigator to mine records of the children to identify and locate relatives and kin to be explored for potential placement. Introducing private investigators to the program increased contact with relatives from 23% to 80%. The process involves weekly meetings of the youth's team and follow-up until the youth achieves permanency. 30 Days to Family in Missouri builds off the success of Extreme Recruitment and focuses on entry into foster care rather than focusing on youth once they are deemed hard to place while in care. This program places equal focus on finding maternal and paternal relatives. The goal is primary placement with kin in addition to locating two-to-three backup kinship placements.
- **Ohio** uses [Kinnect to Family](#), a specialized intense family search and engagement program that is similar to Missouri's 30 Days to Family program. Kinnect to Family expands on 30 Days to Family by allowing all foster youth, not just those entering care, to be eligible. The program works with families before children are removed so they avoid foster care entry when possible.

Promising Practice:

Meaningful kin engagement

Federal guidance, [ACYF-CB-IM-19-03](#), emphasizes the importance of meaningfully engaging families and youth, including kin caregivers, by giving them the opportunity to be heard and considering their input in critical decisions that affect their lives. Their ability to participate in all aspects of child welfare decision making can increase engagement and empower families and youth.

State Examples:

- **Hawaii** uses Ohana Conferencing to bring together extended family and hanai family (defined as family formed when children are taken informally under custom and usage into another's home, but not formally adopted), agency staff, service providers, and the support system of the children. This strength-based, solution-focused group conferencing honors the voice of the family and youth in care by creating opportunities for the family to work with the agency to make the best decisions for the safety of the children. The conferencing results in a plan for strengthening the family and exploring possible roles for family members to support the child.
- **Virginia** uses Family Partnership Meetings to explore and discuss the family's needs, strengths, and challenges. These meetings often begin before a child is removed from their parents.

Promising Practice:

Expanded definition of “relative”

Research shows that placement with kin has several benefits, such as increased permanency, reduced placement moves, improved behavioral health, and increased likelihood of remaining with siblings and staying connected to communities. Remember when thinking about a kin-first culture that both fictive kin and relatives are included in efforts. The definition a jurisdiction uses for “relative” may impact eligibility for services and supports. The definition varies by jurisdiction and sometimes even within the same jurisdiction, based on individual laws and policies. Definitions of “relative” sometimes include only blood or adoptive relatives and may leave out fictive kin, such as family friends, coaches, teachers, or other adults with whom the child has a positive relationship. Approximately 24 jurisdictions have expanded the definition of “relative” to include fictive kin in some or all their child welfare laws and policies. Jurisdictions should strive to include fictive kin in the definition of relative in all relevant laws and policies.

State Example:

- **Virginia** has included fictive kin in their statutory definition of “relative” for purposes of child welfare policies, including licensing requirements. To make notification of “relatives” manageable, policies only require a certain number of fictive kin to be notified. This flexibility is allowed by federal law and allows jurisdictions to be more supportive of all kinship families.



Placement with Kin

2

When children can no longer remain with their parents, a kin-first culture prioritizes placement with kin over other placement options. There are many options for placement with kin. It is important to ensure staff, stakeholders, and kin caregivers understand these options.

Placement options for kin caregivers vary by jurisdiction. In several states, kin caregivers who step up after the child welfare agency has removed the child from their parents have the option to become licensed foster caregivers. There are benefits to all options, including varying financial assistance, eligibility for public assistance such as Medicaid, access to services and supports, and permanency options.

Promising Practice:

Kinship firewall

Several jurisdictions use kinship firewalls to ensure placement with kin whenever possible by treating non-kinship placements as exceptions that require approval by agency leadership. Such kinship firewall policies make placement with kin the presumptive placement option.

State Examples:

- Four jurisdictions, **Tennessee, New York, Connecticut, and Oklahoma**, currently implement some version of a kinship firewall.

- **New York's [firewall policy](#)** requires a high-level review of efforts to achieve a kinship placement before any non-kinship placement is made. This high-level review is required at the child's initial removal and any time there is a placement change into a non-kinship placement.
- **Washington [House Bill 1747](#)**, signed into law in March 2022, was proposed to prohibit the child welfare agency from moving children out of a kin placement unless a court finds a change in circumstances requires a placement change.

Promising Practice:

Written materials to train staff and inform kin of options

Creating written materials about kinship placement options and their various benefits and supports can assist in training staff and can be used to inform kin of their options.

State Examples:

- **Georgia** supplemented their written materials with the development of a kinship website and by creating a short video providing a high-level overview of the kinship foster care approval and payment process, as well as a [video on kinship care](#) generally.
- Other written training materials developed by states include:
 - **Colorado:** [Kinship Care in Colorado Options and Resources Brochure](#);
 - **Texas:** [Kinship Manual](#); and
 - **New York:** [ABA Kin Options Full Options Chart](#).

Promising Practice:

Using data to drive practice and address inequities

Jurisdictions can disaggregate and analyze kin-specific data to drive practice changes and measure improvements.

State Examples:

- **Virginia, Pennsylvania, and New York** use data to encourage kin-first cultures and increase kin placements by informing counties of their kinship numbers based on age, race, and gender, as compared to other counties.
- **Connecticut** uses [disaggregated data](#) by race and placement to identify social determinants impacting kinship placement and offer targeted interventions.
- **New York** posted the [NY Kinship Report](#) online to share data on a variety of kinship variables for the state and by county. Data can often inform and catalyze practice change. It is important to monitor ongoing efforts and achievements in creating a kin-first culture.
- **Pennsylvania** has seen an increase in kinship placements, part of which can be attributed to efforts by the state to inform the counties on their progress to increase the use of kin based on age, race, and gender, as compared to other counties in the state.



Financial assistance for kinship families varies depending on the jurisdiction and placement type.

Kin caregivers may receive financial assistance depending on a variety of factors, including whether the child is in the legal custody of the child welfare system, if the caregiver is a licensed foster parent, the type of permanency outcome achieved, and where the family resides. Generally, kin caregivers caring for children outside of the child welfare system may qualify for public assistance such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Kin caregivers caring for children inside the child welfare system and licensed as a foster parent should be receiving the same foster care maintenance payments and other financial assistance as non-kin foster parents. If the child has achieved permanency with kin and has exited the child welfare system under adoption assistance or the guardianship assistance program (GAP), the child may qualify for an ongoing monthly subsidy. If the child welfare system is involved and the child is eligible, significant financial assistance derives from federal Title IV-E funding, as well as the required state or local funds.

Promising Practice:

Child-only financial assistance

Child-only TANF is available around the country for children cared for by kin outside of the child welfare system. The grant amount, application process, and whether the caregiver's income is considered varies by jurisdiction, but the monthly amount is almost always significantly less than foster care maintenance payments.

State Examples:

- In **Minnesota**, kinship caregivers can access child-only assistance through the Minnesota Family Investment Program, which combines cash assistance with SNAP benefits through a waiver from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Promising Practice:

Additional subsidy for kin

Some states provide an additional subsidy for kin to keep children out of the child welfare system.

State Examples:

- **Illinois** has an [Extended Family Support Program \(EFSP\)](#) that aims to support and stabilize caregivers who have cared for relative children for more than 14 days and have kept the family out of the child welfare system. The EFSP provides support for obtaining guardianship – including assistance with caregiver attorney fees, enrolling children in school, and obtaining the TANF child-only grant, subsidized day care and other benefits. The EFSP also provides cash assistance to support stabilization when necessary.
- **Tennessee** recently passed [Senate Bill 2398](#), effective January 1, 2023, which will provide a monthly stipend to reduce the financial strain on designated relative caregivers who have final custody orders for children in their care. The Tennessee Department of Children's Services will be required to pay the caregivers an amount equal to 50% of the full nonrelative foster care board rate if certain conditions are met.

- **Virginia** has the Relative Maintenance Support Payment Program, which provides an additional \$200 per child per month in TANF funding for kin caregivers who have been certified by the child welfare agency as having kept the child out of foster care.
- The [Kinship Care Subsidy Program](#) in **New Jersey** provides eligible kinship legal guardians \$250 a month, multiplied by the number of eligible children in the home, minus all combined countable income of the eligible children, such as any child support payments.
- In **Louisiana**, specifically listed qualified relative caregivers with legal or provisional custody (or who obtain it within one year of certification) and who have an annual income of less than 150% of the federal poverty threshold may receive \$450 per month for each eligible child as part of the [Kinship Care Subsidy Program](#).

Promising Practice:

Financial assistance for licensed kin foster parents

In most jurisdictions, kin who choose to become licensed foster parents will receive the same financial assistance as non-kin foster parents. Some states have specific programs for kin caregivers caring for children in the legal custody of the child welfare system, who are not fully licensed.

State Examples:

- **California's** [Approved Relative Caregiver \(ARC\) Funding Option Program](#) allows either approved relative caregivers caring for a nonfederally eligible foster child, or relatives who cannot get licensed but care for children under a court-ordered placement to receive per-child, per-month payments, if their county opts into the program. The funding is equal to the amount licensed foster parents receive. If a county has not opted into ARC, kin caregivers receive CalWORKs, California's TANF program, which provides less financial assistance to the families.
- **Arizona, Maine, Nebraska, Michigan, and Washington** equitably support all kin caring for children in foster care, regardless of whether they are licensed or not.
- **Arkansas, Illinois, Iowa, and Ohio** also provide support for nonlicensed kin at a lesser rate.



Emergency Licensing Procedures

4

Emergency licensing, also known as provisional licensing, is a way for child welfare agencies to immediately and safely place children with kin, while the kin pursue full licensure.

Jurisdictions often use emergency licensing to allow a child in their legal custody to be immediately placed with kin. The full licensing process for a home can be lengthy and may encounter delays. Emergency licensure allows the child to be placed immediately with kin, as opposed to waiting until full licensure, resulting in improved placement stability and supporting the notion that the child's first and only placement should be with kin.

If using emergency licensure, look at your jurisdiction's definitions of "relative" and "kin" to ensure that non-blood related significant persons are also eligible to provide this type of placement. Agencies tend to be risk-averse, which can deter placement with kin and negate the benefits and importance of immediate kin placements. To effect a culture shift and increase the use of immediate kinship placements, jurisdictions should explore ways to license more kin rather than focusing on reasons to deny them licensing.

In most jurisdictions that use this process, children are immediately placed with kin after a safety assessment is completed. The kin then must complete full licensure within a specific time period (60, 90, or 120 days). Some states do allow for a limited extension of this time period.

Promising Practice:

Expedited background/ fingerprint checks

While traditional background checks and finger printing may take several days or longer, some jurisdictions are looking for ways to speed up this process.

State Examples:

- **Connecticut's** Criminal History Request System uses a global security company, in close partnerships with local law enforcement, to provide background history results within hours, as opposed to days.

Promising Practice:

Private agency support

Kin caregivers may require specialized attention and kin-specific supports in ways that traditional foster family homes do not. To help provide kin-specific services, such as emergency licensing or expediated licensure, some jurisdictions rely on private agencies. Private agencies may have an increased capacity to work closely with kin to help them achieve full licensing within the required time period.

State Examples:

- In **Louisiana**, the public agency conducts initial safety and background checks for kin and then seeks the assistance of private agencies to help them complete the requirements for full licensure.
- In **Pennsylvania**, A Second Chance is a nonprofit organization that partners with county child welfare agencies to provide family finding, kinship emergency services at initial placement, kinship family assessments, training for kin caregivers to meet licensing requirements, and permanency planning.

Promising Practice:

Financial assistance during emergency license

Traditionally, only kin who are fully licensed receive the maximum financial assistance. However, a benefit of emergency licensure can be to provide financial assistance while kin are pursuing full licensure.

State Examples:

- **Tennessee** uses state dollars to pay a care rate per child/per day. For states where this is not an option, kin must be made aware and encouraged to apply for public benefits – including TANF child-only grants and Medicaid. These benefits will help support the family while the kinship caregiver is pursuing full licensure.
- In **Oklahoma**, if full licensure is not achieved within 60 days of placement and the delay is due to the agency, policy dictates that the state immediately support the kinship caregiver with the full foster care maintenance payment rate.



When kin become fully licensed, they are eligible for financial assistance and support to be long-term placement resources. Additionally, full licensure is required for federal guardianship assistance (also known as GAP) to be a permanency option.

Jurisdictions have varying licensing requirements, such as background checks, health checks, home safety assessments, references, and training. These licensing requirements can be confusing, take a long time, and are often geared toward traditional foster family homes. To increase licensing of kin, several jurisdictions have implemented kin-specific supports or paths toward licensure.

Promising Practice:

Dedicated kin staff or kinship champions

To increase kinship placements, at least eight jurisdictions (Washington, Florida, North Carolina, Georgia, Hawaii, Connecticut, Virginia, and New York) have seen success by creating kin-specific units or specialized staff to assist in finding kin placements, kinship licensing, and kinship permanency. These staff are trained on kin-specific processes and practices so they can promote a kin-first culture and be a resource for kin caregivers.

State Examples:

- **Washington** has a “Kinship Caregiver Engagement Unit (KCEU),” which is almost a concierge kinship licensing unit that provides one-on-one assistance to kin caregivers through the licensing process. The unit contacts kin caregivers 48 hours after placement to discuss needs, connect to resources, and help early in the process before the child’s case is transferred to a foster care worker. The KCEU is in its early days, with a set of accompanying administrative code changes and an electronic portal rolling out in fall 2022.
- **Florida** has a specialized team that within 48 hours of placement walks families through the licensure process and the various benefits and requirements of the state’s Level 1 or Level 2 licensing options.
- **North Carolina** is piloting a program to license kin as therapeutic foster parents in three counties through partnerships with private agencies. For more information on this pilot program, please see this [handout](#).
- In **Connecticut**, the foster care division is split into traditional foster care workers and kinship licensing workers. The kinship licensing workers assist kin caregivers with licensing, and training for licensing, while fostering a kin-first culture.

Even in jurisdictions with kin-specific staff or units, it is important that all staff understand the importance of kin, the nuances of kinship placement and permanency options, and the various public benefits, supports, and financial differences. Staff appreciate short lists, easily accessible packets of information, and access to someone with in-depth kinship knowledge as a resource.

- **Connecticut** has found it is worth taking extra time to train staff in small groups to increase understanding and allow for questions. The state has also moved its training online and has seen an increase in staff participation and capacity to offer more trainings.

Promising Practice:

Waivers and exceptions for kin

Federal child welfare law allows jurisdictions to waive or create variances or exceptions for non-safety licensing requirements for relatives, to allow for increased licensed kinship placements. Several jurisdictions (Nevada, Georgia, Texas, Florida, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Iowa) routinely waive certain non-safety criteria for kin that would not normally be waived for non-kin foster families.

Jurisdictions have a lot of flexibility to define “safety” and “non-safety” and can waive non-safety licensing standards as they see fit, provided they do not waive any of the specific requirements of the federal Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act. The types of non-safety criteria being waived include sleeping arrangements, such as bunk beds or number of rooms; income requirements; training timeframes; and crimes not included in the Adam Walsh Act. Often jurisdictions have specific procedures for these waivers that either require county agency or state agency approval.

State Examples:

- **California** passed CA Bill SB354, effective in 2022, that broadens the list of criminal convictions that qualify for exemptions for licensing kinship foster homes if the court finds that placement does not pose a risk to the health and safety of the child, allows case-by-case waivers of financial requirements for kin caregivers, and allows for child-specific approval for kin caregivers.
- **New Jersey** allows local area managers to give a verbal waiver for emergency placement where there is a history of criminal conviction for crimes not included under the Adam Walsh Act. Following the verbal waiver there is a follow-up conference with the director of the child welfare agency within one business day to continue the presumptive eligibility.

Promising Practice:

Child-specific or two-tier foster home licensing standards

Child-specific licensing and two-tier licensing standards are approaches child welfare agencies use to support expedited placement of children with kin and avoid unnecessary placements with non-kin while kinship caregivers become licensed.

Kinship caregivers often become foster parents due to the removal of a specific related child, rather than as a preplanned choice to pursue the role of foster parent. Therefore, unlike typical foster families, kin caregivers are usually not licensed before being called on to care for a child(ren). Child-specific licensing allows a kinship placement to become licensed only to care for a specific child with whom they have a kinship relationship, but not any other child.

State Examples:

- **Utah** administrative code R501-12-15 allows a kinship caregiver applicant to be licensed for the placement of a specific foster child or sibling group, recognizing the importance of preserving family and cultural connections for children in foster care. The regulation also allows for

emergency placement with a probationary license and waiver of non-health or safety related licensing requirements.

- **Washington** recently passed [SB 5151](#), which will allow relatives or suitable persons to be licensed to care for a specific child/sibling group by meeting minimum qualifications set out in child-specific licensing standards that are under development.

Two-tiered licensing standards have been developed by some states to distinguish between requirements for kinship foster home applicants and non-kinship applicants. The difference between the two tiers is often the availability of a waiver of non-safety related requirements.

- **Florida's** state regulation Chapter 65C-45 provides for a two-level foster care licensing structure. It provides child-specific licensing for kinship caregivers under level I licensure and allows for waivers of non-safety related requirements set forth for level II non-child specific licensure. However, Florida's level I licensure provides a lower level of financial and other supports to caregivers.
- In **New Jersey**, under administrative code N.J.A.C. 10:122C, all foster parents must meet level I licensure requirements, however level II requirements can be waived on a case-by-case basis for a specific child(ren) in a kinship placement. Additionally, a child may be placed with a kinship caregiver prior to a license being issued under certain circumstances.

Promising Practice:

Kin-specific training requirements

For various reasons kin caregivers experience the foster care system differently than traditional foster parents. Acknowledging these differences, several jurisdictions provide kinship caregivers with kinship specific training, which addresses things like family dynamics and can be tailored specifically to each family's needs. Often these kin-specific trainings are more accessible and shorter.

State Examples:

- **Arkansas** created a four-day kin-specific training modeled after the non-kinship licensing training that requires nine weeks to complete. This training program, called "Arkansas Kinship Pride Connect," is customized to include kin-specific needs and is given virtually or in-person.
- **Hawaii** created their kin training after soliciting feedback from caregivers through focus groups. The result is a separate kin training with reduced required hours, trauma-informed content, and online availability.
- In **Florida**, kin complete a two-hour basic kinship training followed by training that is customized to the family's needs.



When kin are caring for children involved in the child welfare system for whom reunification with parents is no longer possible or in their best interests, there are different options for permanency with kin.

Promising Practice:

Written materials and trainings about permanency options

Written materials specifically about permanency options for kin can assist with informed decision making and ensure families are choosing the best option for their individual circumstances.

State Examples:

- **North Carolina** developed a [Foster Care and Beyond Kinship Care flyer](#) for kin caregivers.
- **New York** requires kin caregivers to receive the state's [Know Your Permanency Options: The Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program Brochure](#).
- **Maine's** new publication, [A Guide to Kinship Care & Minor Guardianship in Maine](#), provides an overview of the options and concrete steps to pursue guardianship.
- **New Mexico's** child welfare agency partnered with Generations United and the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law to create an [adoption and guardianship comparison chart](#). Similar charts have been and can be created for other jurisdictions, thanks to support from the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption (contact Generations United at gu@gu.org for more information).
- **Virginia** created a brochure, [Kinship Care: Exploring options for relatives and close family friends of children in foster care](#).
- **New Mexico** and **Vermont** offer annual trainings for kin caregivers that include resources for caregivers and information about GAP as a permanency option.
- **Florida** uses a peer-to-peer approach to help families better understand the tangible benefits and long-term supports of guardianship assistance.

Promising Practice:

Increase use of kinship guardianship assistance

Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP), also known as subsidized guardianship, is a permanency option created in federal law to provide permanency with kin without requiring termination of parental rights and adoption. Most jurisdictions offer this type of guardianship as an option for kin caregivers if reunification and adoption are not in the best interests of the child. Federal law sets out the minimum eligibility requirements for GAP; however, jurisdictions are allowed to create additional eligibility criteria beyond the federal requirements. To increase use of GAP, jurisdictions should remove any extra eligibility criteria beyond federal requirements.

State Examples:

- **New Mexico** recently removed their age limit for children.
- **Alabama** eliminated state law requiring written parental consent for guardianship.

- **Washington** is prioritizing guardianship assistance through the passage of [House Bill 1747](#), which requires their Department of Children, Youth and Families to prioritize guardianships over termination of parents' rights when children are placed with kin.
- To increase eligibility, at least **27 jurisdictions** have state funded guardianship assistance for children who are not IV-E eligible (AK, AR, CA, CO, CT, DC, HI, ID, IL, LA, MA, MD, ME, MI, MO, MT, NE, NY, NJ, OK, PA, RI, SD, TN, TX, VT, WI). For more information about best practices for Kinship Guardianship Assistance, see [Guardianship Assistance Program \(GAP\): Barriers and Key Considerations](#).

Promising Practice:

Post-permanency supports

Post-permanency services and supports should be provided to assist kin caregivers after they adopt or enter into guardianship or custody to prevent disruption and maintain these permanent homes. When children exit care to an adoptive home or guardianship the safety net and supports provided by the child welfare system often abruptly end. If properly supported as soon as an issue arises, stability can be maintained for the child and the family.

State Examples:

- **Michigan** has tied post-guardianship supports to their post-adoption support program, allowing kin caregivers who receive guardianship assistance to access additional supports after they have been granted guardianship.
- **Pennsylvania** took a similar route and offers post-adoption and post-guardianship support, which includes case advocacy, respite care, and support groups.
- **Maine** provides post-permanency supports to kin caregivers through [Adoptive & Foster Families of Maine, Inc. & the Kinship Program](#).
- **Ohio's** Department of Jobs and Family Services oversees [OhioKAN](#), a statewide kinship and adoption navigator program organized into regional offices offering support specific to a family's location and individual circumstances, including post-permanency. OhioKAN staff maintain a comprehensive information hub of all resources and programs available statewide. Staff use the information hub to provide one-on-one support to help families develop personalized resource plans specific to their needs and provide follow-up to ensure they receive their eligible supports.



General Kin Support

7

Regardless of placement or permanency type, kin caregivers face unique challenges and may need different support than traditional foster families.

Promising Practice:

Support for kin caring for children with increased needs

Several jurisdictions support kin caregivers who are caring for children with increased needs by developing targeted tools and resources.

State Examples:

- Dr. Joseph Crumbley has created a [video series](#) on specific challenges kin caregivers face. To determine kinship families' unique needs, consider using a needs assessment tool.

- **Virginia** uses such a tool to assess which families need additional financial support for children with increased needs.
- **Colorado** uses this [needs assessment tool](#) to determine supports for kin families.

Promising Practice:

Kinship navigator programs

Most jurisdictions have kinship navigator programs, which help caregivers navigate the many systems that impact them, help connect them to services, and support their access to public benefits. Ideally, these programs should serve all kin caregivers, regardless of child welfare system involvement. Jurisdictions may choose to serve only kin caregivers outside the child welfare system, only kin caregivers within that system, or both.

State Examples:

- In **Georgia** all kin who care for children involved in the child welfare system are referred to the kinship navigator program for intake and needs assessment. When a kin caregiver finishes working with the navigator the caregiver completes a survey to determine if their needs were met, their level of understanding of what kinship care is, and the quality of kinship care being provided.
- **Washington's** kinship navigator program, a 20-year-old program, is for kin in and outside the child welfare system and is jointly managed with their department of aging and child welfare agencies. Washington is also piloting and evaluating an enhanced kinship navigator program. The program's [website](#) includes videos on the [community of kinship care](#) and [navigating kinship care](#).
- **Florida's Children's Home Network** has a kinship navigator program for kin caregivers who are either inside or outside the child welfare system. The program's unique features include a single e-application, peer-to-peer support, and interdisciplinary team support for kin caregivers.
- **Maine, Montana, Vermont, and Wyoming** are working together as part of a Kinship Navigator Collaborative with support from Generations United, Casey Family Programs, and the University of Washington, to develop a Kinship Navigator Program model with an evaluation.

Promising Practice:

Websites and apps with information, supports, and resources for kin

Several jurisdictions have created websites and phone apps to easily provide updated information, supports, and resources to kin.

State Examples:

- **Hawaii** has a [resource family app](#), which is used to build a support network for kin caregivers. The app connects kin caregivers to mentors and other kin caregivers and provides access to the state's kinship navigator warmline to ask questions.
- **Georgia** has created a [website](#) with information and a [video](#) on kinship care generally.

Promising Practice:

Public-private/ community partnerships and legal services

Supporting kin caregivers involves engaging and partnering with several different stakeholders, including courts, community-based service providers, and other public agencies.

State Examples:

- As part of their Kinship Navigator services, **New Mexico** has a contract with statewide legal agencies and relative success centers to provide legal services to kin caregivers.
- **Alabama's** iCAN initiative connects county child welfare agencies and courts to work together to improve outcomes for children, with a special focus on improving kinship practices.
- **Colorado's** Rocky Mountain Children's Law Center (RMCLC) is partnering with the city of Denver to provide workshops on Kinship Legal Options for kin caregivers. It is also piloting a limited representation legal model through which RMCLC attorneys will support kin caregivers by reviewing documents to be submitted to court.
- **Michigan's** kinship navigator program, the [Kinship Care Resource Center](#) (KCRC), is a program of the School of Social Work at Michigan State University. KCRC participates in the Michigan Kinship Care Coalition, a cross-systems collaboration advocating for, educating, and raising awareness about kinship care. Partners include the Guidance Center, Michigan's Children, Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency, and Fostering Forward Michigan. The Coalition is divided into three committees: communications, policy and advocacy, and mobilizing the field.
- In 2008, **Massachusetts** legislation created a permanent 15 member [Commission on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren](#), which fosters collaboration between entities working on kinship issues, acts as a liaison between government and private interest groups, and assesses programs and practices of state agencies for their impact on grandparents raising grandchildren.



This resource was developed in partnership with the ABA Center on Children and the Law and Generations United, with support from Casey Family Programs. Visit www.grandfamilies.org for more resources.