



An association of resources and advocacy for children, youth and families

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Kinship Caregiver – MN Updates & System Opportunities

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Minnesota has seen a 30% increase in kinship caregiver placements for children removed from their homes by child protection. This is a positive trend, as we know that statistically children do better and have improved long-term outcomes when placed with kin. Our challenge is that Minnesota's system of care for children and families has not yet shifted to reflect the increase in kinship placements with timely, responsive and uniquely designed supports. Our opportunity is to update policy and funding priorities to meet the needs of kinship caregivers to better support these children and their wider family.

The following stories and data are from a survey of community-based foster care providers and advocates. The qualitative and quantitative data reflects experiences of kinship caregivers:

Kinship Caregiver Snapshots – reflections of statewide challenges

- Sara, who has been caring for her grand-nephew for five months, is still waiting to be licensed by the county. She, like many kinship and relative caregivers, has the added complexity of navigating the relationship (and boundaries) with her grand-nephew's mother, and yet there is no guidance or support offered for this. She is concerned that this lack of support might ultimately lead to her nephew being placed elsewhere.
- Darlene is informally caring for her nephew and has not been able to connect with a county worker who could assist her with formalizing the placement. She is feeling overwhelmed and doesn't know where to find this much-needed support.
- We have a recent example with three separate families – all with three Black Grandmothers wanting to care for their grandchildren. Each of the Grandmothers were not assessed at all by the county and instead each were told "they couldn't be considered" without further explanation. Two of the Grandmothers had relocated to Minnesota so they could be considered (and then were still not considered). Of the three Grandmothers, only one has been considered by the county. Another Grandmother is still fighting to be considered, and the third Grandmother moved back to her home state of Kansas because the county wouldn't consider her, though our organization could not identify any licensing barriers for why she would not be considered.
- Bill and Maggie were told by the county placing agency that they could not be considered for placement for their niece unless they were licensed. The county recommended they license with a private agency, so they proceeded with licensing, but placement has still not occurred, with no understanding if they are being considered.

- Relatives who have been identified later in the process, or who weren't able to be a placement or permanency resource when initially asked by the county, are increasingly needing to "fight" against non-relative foster parents in order to adopt their relative child. Claims about attachment with their current caregiver are used against kin in contested adoption cases.
- Our organization hears stories from many aunts, grandmothers, cousins, siblings, etc. who were told by the placing county that they have been "ruled out" as a placement resource, and no formal home study process or full background study has been completed. Families are not informed of their right to apply at an agency of their choosing to complete the process. They don't know where to turn next.

Reported Kinship Caregiver Challenges - in brief to identify trends

Lack of support/resources/training for Kinship Caregivers

- Kinship caregivers are not able to identify or connect with a county worker for support or resources – especially difficult for caregivers when crisis occurs
- Kinship caregivers who don't receive adequate support sometimes make the tough decision to end the placement, which can lead to tension within the family
- Frequently experience the added complexity of navigating a relationship and establishing boundaries with the child's parent(s), are not receiving support
- Are not made aware of training opportunities, and resources and support are not equitable in comparison to non-relative licensed foster families
- There are significant disparities and inequities in the experiences of kinship caregivers, specifically for BIPOC kinship children and families, especially regarding the access families have to information about the process, systems, and their rights

System complexities create barriers for caregivers

- Inability to complete the complex licensing process while also caring for the relative child in their care

Lack of follow-up or response

- There are kinship caregivers licensed by counties who have not been paid for months
- Kinship caregivers waiting to be licensed and then not hearing anything about whether they are being considered for placement
- Child(ren) are dropped-off with kinship caregiver without any follow-up
- Limited culturally appropriate resources to both parent and child

Considering all kinship caregivers for placement and family involvement

- Family members identifying themselves to the county as a placement option and not hearing anything
- No follow-up for relatives who are ruled out as a potential placement option but who have expressed a desire to be in contact with their relative child(ren)
- Relatives are sometimes not considered for placement due to minor criminal charges in their background
- Paternal relatives often experience even more barriers to engagement and including in care planning for the child in care.

Informal caregivers feel isolated

- Informal caregivers being told that if they want support, they need to get police and child protection involved, but if they do so, they might not be allowed to keep child/children

What percentage of referrals to your organization are from disrupted kinship placements?

- Approximately 25%
- At least 25% each month
- 25% in the Metro and 3% in Greater MN
- Approximately 1-2 referrals each week have kinship placement disruption as a factor
- Approximately 40% of referrals

Data or other observations around the how kinship caregiving can address the inequities represented in our wider child welfare system by engaging more BIPOC kinship caregivers.

- 79% of the youth in kinship care served by our agency were children of color and 57% of relative caregivers were providers of color. (Note: In 2019, 51% of children in the traditional foster care system identified as BIPOC while only 40% of foster caregivers identified that way.)
- Through kinship care, kids are more often placed with families who look like them, instead of being placed cross-racially in a foster home.
- If reunification is not possible, relative providers often become the permanency option.