



Washington State Youth in Kinship Care & Foster Care

Kinship Care

Over seven million children in the United States live in households headed by kinship caregivers.^{1 2 3} Most of these kinship placements are informal arrangements made without the involvement of the child welfare system.^{4 5} There are two broad types of kinship care. Formal kinship care involves the child welfare system, where youth are placed with relatives but are under the legal custody of the state. Informal kinship care involves family arrangements where youth live with relatives. Informal kinship care can result from both child welfare system diversion, where youth are placed with relatives rather than entering the foster care system or be privately arranged within families without state involvement.^{5 6 7 8}

Informal kinship care is much more prevalent and often helps place youth with family who might otherwise enter foster care.^{2 3 8} In the United States, over half of kinship care arrangements involve youth living with grandparents.⁷ When a minor is removed from home due to abuse or neglect and placed in out-of-home care, federal law requires that the minor be placed in the least restrictive (family-like) setting.⁹ On the continuum of least restrictive placement settings, kinship care is preferred to foster care because it helps maintain a youth's family ties.¹⁰ Kinship care also has been shown to minimize the trauma of being removed from a youth's birth home. Being placed with family members improve youth's well-being, increase permanency, improve behavioral and mental health outcomes, and preserve cultural identity and community connections.^{3 11 12}

Many states across the United States have recently increased support for kinship care placements and caregivers. Some of these supports include providing provisional licenses and waivers to relative caregivers while they wait to obtain a full license, expediting home studies to help secure relative placements, and providing increased financial support to help relative caregivers provide safe and supported homes for youth.¹³ Nationally, 32% of youth in child welfare out-of-home placements are living in kinships care, but there are substantial differences from state to state. These differences range from 47% (Illinois, Hawaii, and Montana) to 4% (Kentucky).⁸ Kinship care offers an important opportunity to keep youth with their families and in their communities. Kinship caregivers should be prioritized and provided high-quality supports and resources that increase their ability to provide a nurturing out-of-home placement that maintains youth's family ties, prevents them from entering foster care, and supports their health and well-being.

Kinship Care in Washington State

The Washington State Department of Children, Youth & Families places children with kinship caregivers over 40% of the time.¹⁴ However, most kinship care arrangements (approximately 80%) in Washington State are informal.² Currently, over 40,000 youth live with a grandparent rather than a parent.⁶ In Washington State, grandparents and other kinship caregivers frequently have lower income levels and rely on fixed incomes, leading them to struggle with financially supporting youth in their care.² Kinship care providers are eligible for some public supports, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Family (TANF) Child-Only Grant, which provides government funds for children in kinship care, and the Kinship Caregivers Support Program (KCSP), which provides state funding for basic needs on a short-term basis.² These financial supports are often less than those provided to foster parents in Washington State.² Many kinship care providers are also not aware of these supports or struggle to access available resources. Informal kinship caregivers in Washington State report that their biggest challenges include inadequate finances and lack of support for youth's emotional and behavioral needs.^{2 15} These challenges can be intensified for relative caregivers caring for youth with special needs, such as youth living with disabilities that require specialized health or behavioral supports.

This fact sheet used data from the 2018 Washington State Healthy Youth Survey to highlight the overrepresentation of youth living with disabilities, LGBTQ+ youth, and youth of color living in kinship care and foster care in comparison to youth living with their parents. The data highlight the overrepresentation of youth of color, youth living with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ youth living in kinship care and foster care in Washington State.



Washington State Department of
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES



Living with Parents

• 95.8% (142,296 Youth)

Living in Kinship Care

• 3.6% (5,410 Youth)

Living in Foster Care

• 0.5% (794 Youth)

Note: Sample size N=148,500. Based upon the HYS Question: Who did you live with most of the time in the last 30 days?

The Healthy Youth Survey

The data used in this fact sheet comes from the 2018 Washington State Healthy Youth Survey (HYS). The HYS is a biannual survey that includes 8th, 10th, and 12th-grade public school students. The survey offers a representative sample of young people in Washington State and provides important details about their health and well-being.¹¹ HYS data are used to guide policy and create programs that support youth and families.

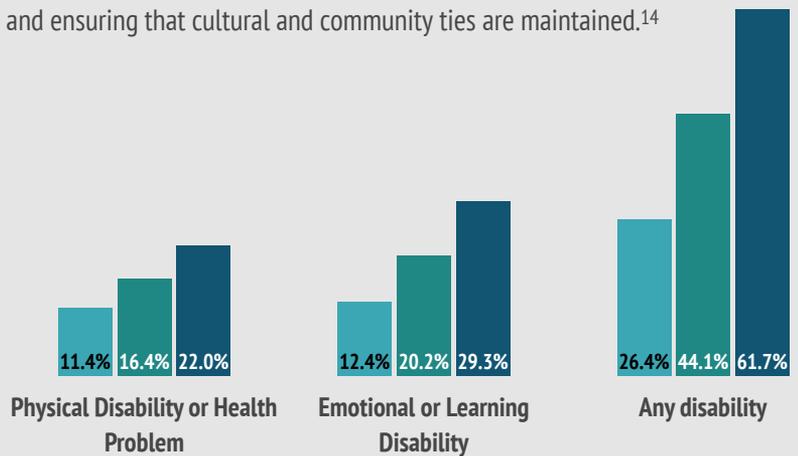
	Living with Parents	Living in Kinship Care	Living in Foster Care
White or European American	50.5%	37.8%	32.0%
Latina, Latino, or Latinx	20.5%	24.0%	26.6%
Asian or Asian American	9.6%	7.6%	6.6%
Multiracial	6.0%	7.1%	4.8%
Unknown Racial or Ethnic Identity	5.2%	7.2%	10.3%
Black or African American	4.0%	7.0%	9.7%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	2.4%	5.5%	5.9%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1.7%	3.8%	4.1%

Racial Disproportionality

- In Washington State, youth of color, particularly Black or African American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander youth are overrepresented among youth living in kinship care and foster care.
- Black youth comprise 13.7% of the United States under 18 population yet make up 22.8% of the youth involved in the child welfare system. American Indian or Alaska Native youth make up less than 1% of the United States under 18 population yet they make up 2.4% of youth involved in the child welfare system.¹⁴
- Youth of color are also more likely to experience multiple out-of-home placements, are less likely to be reunited with their birth families and are more likely to experience congregate care. Prioritizing kinship care for youth of color is important for establishing permanency, reducing entrance into foster care, and ensuring that cultural and community ties are maintained.¹⁴

LGBTQ+ Youth

- In Washington State, LGBTQ+ youth are significantly overrepresented in both kinship care and foster care.
- Many LGBTQ+ youth involved in the child welfare system have experienced rejection from family members or other care providers and have often faced substantial discrimination. Family rejection often poses barriers to permanency for LGBTQ+ youth and decreases their well-being.¹⁶
- Caring for LGBTQ+ youth and working with their families requires an understanding of their unique health and wellness needs. Specialized training and resources for kinship caregivers are crucial to supportively addressing the needs of LGBTQ+ youth and strengthening their health and wellness.¹⁷



Youth Living with Disabilities

- In Washington State, youth in foster care and kinship care are living with disabilities at significantly higher rates than youth living with their parents.
- Compared to youth living with their parents, the rate of youth living with a disability is 2.2 times higher among those living in kinship care and 4.9 times higher among those living in foster care.
- Providing the needed supports and resources for a youth living with a disability can be challenging for many relative caregivers.¹⁵ Kinship care providers for youth living with disabilities often require additional training and support. Providing these resources can enhance relative caregivers' ability and willingness to provide kinship care for youth living with disabilities and prevent their entry into foster care.

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