



**Report to the Legislature**

**Washington State Kinship Oversight Committee**

Chapter 284, Laws of 2005 –RCW 74.13.620

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Washington State Kinship Care Oversight Committee  
Report to the Legislature

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**Executive Summary**

In its November 2002 Kinship Care Report to the Legislature, the Kinship Care Workgroup proposed 16 high priority recommendations for improving kinship care in Washington State. In response to that report, the Legislature in 2003 enacted SHB 1233, which required the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to create a Kinship Care Oversight Committee. In 2005, the Legislature passed SHB 1280, which continued the Committee through 2010.

Kinship Care Oversight Committee

The Kinship Care Oversight Committee was established in the fall of 2003 and has continued to provide guidance in identifying, supporting and strengthening kinship care families. Membership includes kinship caregivers, child advocates, legislative staff, foster parents, representatives of state agencies, non-profit service providers, tribes and the legal community. Membership varies with new members added on a regular basis. The Committee established sub-committees to address federal and state legislation, conduct public education and awareness, develop the Kinship Navigator project, and explore legal issues kinship families encounter.

Public Education and Awareness

The Kinship Oversight Committee continues to be instrumental in planning and organizing recognition events, conferences and other efforts highlighting the important role of kinship care providers. Events have been held throughout the state, including the Washington State Kinship Care Children's Poetry and Essay Contest, regional Kinship Care conferences, the Native Kinship Care Initiative, the statewide DSHS kinship care staff training, the Foster Parent and Caregiver Annual Conference and Parenting the Second Time Around workshops.

Collaboration and Coordination of Services to Kinship Care Families

The Committee continues to provide recommendations and consultation to the Children's Administration (CA), Aging and Disability Services Administration (ADSA) and Economic Services Administration (ESA) regarding kinship care policy, practice and services. DSHS established an internal DSHS workgroup on kinship care facilitated by representatives from CA, ADSA and ESA. The workgroup reports to the Committee on its activities, and solicits feedback and recommendations.

Recommendations for 2007:

The Committee recommends:

- Continuing to explore funding options for the Kinship Navigator positions and for expansion of the Navigator services into all areas of the state;
- Continuing to expand public education and raise community awareness regarding kinship care issues;
- Expanding kinship caregiver's access to legal information and services;
- Expanding the relative and kinship support services funding for kinship caregivers, available through ADSA and CA;
- Continuing to promote systems collaboration to better serve kinship caregivers;
- Continuing to assess the extent of the respite and crisis care needs of kinship caregivers and expand access to services;
- Continuing to monitor federal legislation that could impact kinship care families in Washington State; and
- Continuing to address the definition of kinship care.

## Background Information

In 2003, the Legislature passed SHB 1233 relating to improving services for kinship caregivers. The bill required the DSHS to establish the Committee to “monitor, guide and report on kinship care recommendations and implementation activities (of the Navigator pilots) and report to the legislature and governor on the status of kinship care issues.”

In 2005, the Legislature passed SHB 1280, which continued the existing oversight committee until 2010 and added language that the Committee is “charged with providing consultation on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the 2002 kinship care report”.

The bill included the following requirements:

### Sec 1

- (1) “Within existing resources, the department shall establish an oversight committee to monitor, guide and report on kinship care recommendations and implementation activities and the Committee shall:
  - (a) Draft a kinship care definition that is restricted to persons related by blood, marriage, or adoption, including marriages that have been dissolved, or for a minor defined as an “Indian child” under the federal Indian child welfare act (25 U.S.C. Sec 1901 et seq.), the definition of “extended family member” under the federal Indian child welfare act, and a set of principles....
  - (b) Monitor and provide consultation on the implementation of recommendations contained in the 2002 kinship care report, including but not limited to the recommendations relating to legal and respite care services and resources;
  - (c) Partner with nonprofit organizations and private sector businesses to guide a public education awareness campaign; and
  - (d) Assist with developing future recommendations on kinship care issues.
- (2) The Department shall consult with the oversight committee on its efforts to better collaborate and coordinate services to benefit kinship care families.
- (3) The oversight committee must consist of a minimum of thirty percent kinship caregivers, who shall present a diversity of kinship families. Statewide representation with geographic, ethnic, and gender diversity is required. Other members shall include representatives of the private nonprofit and business sectors, child advocates, representatives of Washington state Indian tribes as defined under the federal Indian welfare act (25 U.S.C. Sec. 1901 et seq.), and

representatives of the legal or judicial field. Birth parents, foster parents and others who have an interest in these issues may also be included.

(4) To the extent funding is available the department may reimburse non-departmental members of the oversight committee for costs incurred in participating in the meetings of the oversight committee.

(5) The kinship care oversight committee shall update the legislature and governor annually on committee activities.”

### **Kinship Care Families in Washington State**

Kinship care families are a valuable resource to the child welfare system and to the state as a whole. These families care for children when parents are unable to due to a variety of circumstances, including abuse and neglect, economic conditions, illness, substance abuse, incarceration, death or other family situations.

The U.S. Census estimates 86,000 children in Washington State live in households that include relatives, with or without immediate family (parents or siblings) present. The June 2002 Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) report on “Kinship Care in Washington State”, estimates that of those 86,000 children, 32,000 live in households where grandparents and other relatives are the primary caregivers.

Washington State parallels the national trend in the growth in percentage of children in the primary care of grandparents and other relatives. The majority of these arrangements do not involve the state’s child welfare system (there are nine informal kinship care arrangements for every formal arrangement). The formal kinship care families involved with the child welfare system have historically been the primary concern of state policy makers. Yet formal and informal caregivers face significant and similar challenges in successfully caring for their related children.

Survey data collected for the WSIPP report identified the following characteristics of Washington kinship caregivers:

- 73 percent are grandparents
- 87 percent are women
- Their average age is 53, with about a quarter of caregivers over age 60
- 76 percent identify as white, 9 percent as Native American, 9 percent as African-American, 4 percent as Hispanic, and 2 percent as Asian
- 39 percent earn less than \$20,000 per year
- Half are employed
- The average age of the children in their care is nine years

- They have been caring for these children for an average of almost six years.
- About half care for two or more children

Many kinship care families in Washington State choose not to receive benefits or services from the state. Those who do are likely involved with the CA or ESA.

### **Kinship Care Oversight Committee Activities**

The Committee and its sub-committees, which include public education and awareness, navigator, legislative and legal sub-committees, continue to address the four areas identified in the 2002 Kinship Care report: financial needs, service delivery and practice, legal issues, and social services.

The Oversight committee continues to be involved in the following activities:

- Implementation and expansion of the Kinship Navigator services and program;
- Identifying financial resources for kinship care families;
- Planning, organizing and promoting public education and awareness regarding kinship care issues; and
- Exploring legal issues and options for relative caregivers.

### **Identifying financial resources for kinship care families through Support Services Funding**

In the WSIPP survey, financial assistance was determined to be the most significant unmet need of kinship caregivers across the state. This often involves needing assistance in obtaining food, clothing, shelter and transportation.

There continues to be disparity in financial assistance between those receiving TANF grants and those receiving foster care reimbursements. The disparity remains greatest for caregivers receiving TANF grants and caring for more than one related child. Although there have not been changes in the amount of the TANF “child only” grants, there have been some financial supports made available to relatives and kinship caregivers.

Starting in 2001 the Legislature provided \$1,000,000 in TANF funding to the Children’s Administration biennial budget to increase kinship care placements for children at risk of placement into foster care. This money continues to be authorized, available and utilized by CA to increase and support kinship care placements.

Initially, the kinship support funding was only available to those kinship caregivers involved with Children’s Administration, while financial assistance to

meet basic needs for many kinship families not involved with Children's Administration remained unavailable.

The Committee advocated for and identified how funds similar to the CA relative support funds could assist kinship caregivers not involved with CA. The Committee's continued education and advocacy assisted in securing funding of kinship support services through the Aging and Disability Services Administration (ADSA).

Examples of how the CA and ADSA support services funds are used include utility bill assistance, purchase of groceries and car seats, car repairs and assistance with rent. Although these funds helped to meet many needs, the current appropriation is not sufficient to support other much-needed services, such as respite care, childcare or counseling. Advocating for increasing the current appropriations remains an issue of focus for the Committee in 2007.

### **Kinship Navigator Program**

SHB 1233, enacted by the 2003 Legislature, mandated that the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) collaborate with one or more nonprofit community-based agencies to establish a minimum of two kinship navigator pilot projects. The identified goals were for the Navigator to provide community based support, facilitate access to services, and to provide information and referral to kinship families before situations reach crisis. The pilot was designed, job descriptions developed and the two pilot sites established in collaboration with the Committee. The pilot sites were located in King and Yakima counties. Casey Family Programs provided funding for the pilot project which included an evaluation component.

The pilot Navigator positions and services were continued to December 2005 in order to allow implementation of the state's Navigator program. Through a 2005 budget proviso, the Navigator services have continued in King and Yakima Counties, administered by the ADSA with services provided through contracted providers.

The Oversight Committee continues to provide consultation and advocacy for expansion of the Navigators into other areas of the state. Key components of the Committee efforts include educating the public and private sectors through training on navigator roles and responsibilities, information sharing about resources and needs of kinship caregivers, and sharing the pilot sites evaluation results.

The Committee is dedicated to continuing to educate the public and private sectors about the Navigator program and to continue working cooperatively with the Yakima and King County Navigators. The Navigators can share their knowledge and experience and train on navigator services. The Committee will

continue to explore funding options to expand the Navigator program and further evaluation that includes a cost-benefit analysis. Advocating for expanding the Navigator sites throughout the state remains a priority.

### **Planning, organizing and promoting public education and awareness regarding kinship care**

The Committee continues to be instrumental in planning and organizing various recognition events, conferences and other efforts highlighting the important role of kinship care providers. Some of the events include:

- Washington State Kinship Care Children's Poetry and Essay Contest;
- Regional Kinship Care conferences;
- Native Kinship Care Initiatives including an April 2006 training with sessions covering issues and resources for Native kinship caregivers and staff;
- The Foster Parent and Caregiver Annual Conference;
- Advocacy in Action, two Kinship Navigator trainings for Navigators from around the state, were held in December 2005 in Seattle and Yakima;
- Local family caregiver proclamations in Yakima and Seattle, as well as a proclamation by the Governor; and
- The Statewide kinship care training involving private and public partners held in June 2006.

### **Kinship Care Awards**

The Committee collaborated with private and public partners in sponsoring the 2006 Washington State Kinship Care Children's Poetry and Essay contest. This writing contest for children, ages five through nineteen, honors the relative they are currently living with or had lived with for at least one year. The goal is to recognize the dedication of the more than 32,000 grandparents and other relatives who are raising children in Washington State. The fifty entries submitted are published in the *Voices of Children- Raised by Grandparents and Other Relatives*. Public and private agencies and business provided funding for the contest including Twin County Credit Union, Casey Family Programs, ADSA and DSHS' Division of Child Support.

Of the fifty entrants, six young people, ages from 7 to 16, who wrote about how their relatives took them in and raised them, were honored by Governor Gregoire. Each winner received a certificate signed by the Governor, a \$100 check from the Twin County Credit Union, a journal and tickets to a Mariners baseball game.

The Committee remains committed to this recognition event and is actively participating in planning for the 2007 Kinship Care Children's *Voices of Children* contest.

### **Foster Parent and Caregiver Conference**

More than 560 people assembled at Ocean Shores September 25-27, 2005 for the 22<sup>nd</sup> annual Foster Parents and Caregivers Conference, “Together We Achieve the Extraordinary - Honoring Those Who Care For and Support Children.” Kinship caregivers were invited and attended the conference. Workshops, specifically for kinship caregivers, were held throughout the 2 ½-day event. The 2005 conference received positive feedback including requests for more kinship specific workshops at the 2006 conference.

Members of the Committee participated in the Conference by serving on the planning committee, presenting workshops and attending the workshops and conference. Public and private member organizations of the committee, including ADSA, Mental Health, and Division of Developmental Disabilities, Casey Family Programs Seattle and Yakima Field Offices and the Washington State Strategy (CA and Casey strategy agreement), provided financial support for this successful conference.

The 2006 Foster Parent and Caregiver Conference is scheduled for September 17 – 19<sup>th</sup> in Spokane. The theme of the Conference “Plant a Dream – Grow a Child” supports the importance that caregivers play in the lives of the children. The workshops will provide information and tools for caregivers as they “Plant a Dream – Grow a Child”.

### **Exploring Legal Issues and Options for Relative Caregivers**

The Committee will continue its advocacy for expanding the legal services projects, currently available in King County, into other areas of the state. Replicating the legal services projects and increasing legal services information available on the internet and printed resources remain priorities. The Committee continues to recommend both ongoing funding of the King County project and new funding to extend the services into other counties. The Committee will continue to explore funding options for these programs.

### **Collaboration and Coordination of Services to Kinship Care Families**

The Committee provides consultation to the CA, ADSA and ESA regarding kinship care policy, practice and services. DSHS has established an internal workgroup on kinship care chaired by representatives from CA, ADSA and ESA. The internal workgroup reports to the Committee on its activities and solicits feedback and recommendations.

## **DSHS Kinship Care Training**

In June 2006 the first statewide Kinship Care Training for staff from CA, ADSA, the Community Service Offices (CSO's), and community partners was held. The web-based training focused on working with kinship providers, resource information and local collaboration and was sponsored by CA, ESA, ADSA, Casey Family Programs and the Washington State University. Approximately 220 DSHS staff and community partners participated in the training with sites around the state connected via web-based video technology.

The overall theme of this cross-division training on kinship care was "Helping Children – Supporting Kinship Families". Topics included: how to complete a public assistance benefits application; the different support services funds available to kinship caregivers; Division of Child Support (DCS) policies affecting kinship caregivers (including medical support and the "good cause" exemption); child care and respite care services available to kinship families; and, best practices in working with shared clients, including service integration initiatives in DSHS Regions 2 (Yakima and surrounding counties) and 5 (Pierce and Kitsap Counties).

## **DSHS Kinship Care Website**

The DSHS Kinship Care Website, <http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/kinshipcare/>, was established in Spring 2006 through the efforts of ADSA, ESA, CA and the Kinship Oversight Committee. The website provides important information for caregivers. Both caregivers and professionals can access information on financial assistance, health care, drug/alcohol and mental health services, child care, foster care, support programs, and information on caring for children with disabilities. Information is updated and added as new resources and information become available.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **Recommendations of the Washington State Kinship Care Oversight Committee**

Seven priorities remain for the Committee for 2007, all of which were included in the original 2002 Kinship Care Report recommendations:

- **Continue to explore funding options for the Kinship Navigator positions and for expansion of the Navigator services into all areas of the state;**
- **Continue and expand public education and raise community awareness regarding kinship care issues;**

- **Expand kinship caregiver’s access to legal information and services;**
- **Expand the relative and kinship support services funding for kinship caregivers, available through ADSA and CA;**
- **Continue to promote systems collaboration to better serve kinship caregivers;**
- **Continue to assess the extent of the respite and crisis care needs of kinship caregivers and expand access to services; and**
- **Continue to monitor federal legislation that could impact kinship care families in Washington State;**
- **Continue to address the definition of kinship care.**

## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

"**CHILD**," "**JUVENILE**," and "**YOUTH**" means any un-emancipated individual who is under the chronological age of 18 years. RCW 13.32A.030

"**CUSTODIAN**" means the person or entity that has the legal right to the custody of the child. RCW 13.32A.030

"**ETHNIC**" means a group designated by customs, characteristics, language, common history and/or racial affiliation.

"**EXTENDED FAMILY MEMBER**" means an adult who is a grandparent, brother, sister, stepbrother, stepsister, uncle, aunt, or first cousin with whom the child has a relationship and is comfortable and who is willing and available to care for the child. RCW 13.32A.030

"**FOSTER CARE**" means placement of a child by the department or a licensed child placing agency in a home or facility licensed pursuant to Chapter 74.15 RCW or in a home or facility that is not required to be licensed pursuant to Chapter 74.15 RCW.

"**FAMILY FOSTER CARE**" means care and supervision provided on a 24-hour basis for up to six children in the licensed family abode of the person or persons under whose direct care and supervision the child is placed.

"**INDIAN CHILD**" means any unmarried person under the age of 18 who is:

- A. A member of or eligible for membership in a federally-recognized Indian Tribe, or who is Eskimo, Aleut, or other Alaska Native, or a member of an Alaskan Native regional corporation or Alaska Native Village;
- B. Determined or eligible to be found to be Indian by the Secretary of the Interior, including through issuance of a certificate of Degree of Indian Blood or by the Indian Health Service;
- C. Considered to be Indian by a federally recognized or non-federally recognized Indian Tribe or off-reservation Indian/Alaska Native community organization; or
- D. A member or entitled to be a member of a Canadian Tribe or Band, Métis community, or non-status Indian community from Canada.

"**KINSHIP CAREGIVER**" means a person who provides full time care of a related child.

"**KINSHIP NAVIGATOR**" means a person who provides community based support, facilitates access to services and provides information and referral to kinship families.

**"OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENT or CARE"** means a placement in a foster family home or group care facility or placement in a home, other than that of the child's parent, guardian, or legal custodian, not required to be licensed under 74.15 RCW. RCW 74.14C.010

**"PARENT"** means the parent or parents who have the legal right to custody of the child. "Parent" includes legal custodian or guardian. RCW 13.32A.030

**"PARENTING STATUS"** means:

- A. Custodian** - a person appointed by the parent, guardian, or court to provide care for a child.
- B. Guardian** - a person appointed by the court to provide care or to supervise a child.
- C. Parent** - is the prime person responsible for the care of a child and may include:
  - 1. Adoptive parent** - a person the courts grant parental status, rights, and privileges for a child.
  - 2. Birth or natural parents** - the persons, male and female, who conceived and gave birth to the child.
  - 3. Custodial parent** - the parent with whom the child resides.
  - 4. Legal** - a current court order designating a parent's right to the child's custody that may include:
    - a. Joint custody.
    - b. Parenting plans.
    - c. Shared custody.
    - d. Sole custody to one parent.
  - 5. Physical** - the parent(s) with whom the child resides or is found.
- D. Stepparent** - a person, not the child's parent, who is currently married to the child's parent.
- E. Caretaker** - a person who has actual physical supervision responsibility for a child and may include any of the above parenting statuses or a person appointed to provide physical custody.

**"RELATIVE"** includes adult persons who are related by blood or marriage to the child in the following ways:

- A.** Any blood relative, including those of half-blood, and including first cousins, nephews or nieces, and persons of preceding generations as denoted by prefixes of grand, great, or great-great;
- B.** Stepfather, stepmother, stepbrother, and stepsister;
- C.** A person who legally adopts a child or the child's parent as well as the natural and other legally adopted children of such persons, and other relatives of the adoptive parents in accordance with state law;

- D.** Spouses of any persons named in (a), (b), or (c) above, even after the marriage is terminated; or
- E.** "Extended family members," as defined by the law or custom of the Indian child's tribe or, in the absence of such law or custom, a person who has reached the age of 18 and who is the Indian child's grandparent, aunt or uncle, brother or sister, brother-in-law or sister-in-law, niece or nephew, first or second cousin, or stepparent who provides care in the family abode on a 24 - hour basis to an Indian child as defined in 25 USC 1903(4). [RCW 74.15.020](#)

Attachment 1

2002 Kinship Care Report Recommendations and Status Report

<b>High Priority/Short-Term Recommendations</b>	<b>Status</b>
Provide full TANF payment for second child in kinship family	TANF budget constraints preclude pursuit of this goal.
Strengthen Relative Search Process	Requested relative search positions were not included in the budget. CA policy has been revised. Ongoing exploration of search engines/options continues. Policy has been incorporated into the kinship/relative care framework.
Create kinship navigator positions	Pilot project was implemented in 7/04. Budget Proviso continued the 2 positions in Seattle and Yakima and the navigators continue to provide services to kinship families. No additional Navigators were added in the 2006 budget.
Implement aggressive public education and awareness campaign on kinship care issues	Ongoing public education and awareness campaign via various endeavors.
Improve the delivery of TANF benefits to relative caregivers	A DSHS kinship web page was released in Spring 2006. A June statewide video training involving 11 sites promoted greater systems collaboration and cross training on resources, benefits and services.
Create a educational/medical consent waiver	Medical consent Bill (SHB 1281) passed the 2005 legislature but did not include educational consent. Mental health consent bill (HB 3139) passed the 2006 legislature.
Establish a legal services pilot project	The King County Legal Services project has been established and continues to provide services to kinship families within King County.
Create a statewide respite care inventory	The Respite & Crisis Care Coalition of Washington (RCCCWA) completed a statewide survey of respite needs.
Establish support services fund for relative caregivers	Support services funds are established in CA for those caregivers involved with CA. ADSA has support services funds for those caregivers not involved with CA. 2006 budget increased the allocation for ADSA funds.

Support Lifespan Respite Act of 2002 and position state to receive funding	Coalition activities are orienting towards the federal bill, should it pass. Lifespan respite has bi-partisan support. If it passes WA state could compete for funds. RCCCWA is encouraging development of local lifespan respite coalitions.
<b>High Priority/Long-Term Recommendations</b>	<b>Status</b>
Provide full TANF payment for all multiple-child kinship families	TANF budget constraints preclude pursuit of this goal.
Promote systems collaboration	A DSHS kinship web page was released in Spring 2006. A statewide video training involving 11 sites promoted greater systems collaboration and cross training on resources, benefits and services. The internal DSHS kinship care group continues to meet on a regular basis.
Provide GAL/CASA services	No formal action steps have been developed to address this.
Provide respite care services for relative caregivers	RCCCWA continues to work on this issue.
<b>Medium Priority/Short-term Recommendations</b>	<b>Status</b>
Increase oversight and accountability for non-parent caregivers on TANF	ESA is in the process of strengthening the background check process for non-parent caregivers applying for child-only TANF grants.
Incorporate kinship families in Special Children Health Care Needs pilot	No formal action steps have been developed to address this.
Fund legal information packet and website	ADSA provided funding for the 4 <sup>th</sup> edition of the NW Women's Law Center Legal Guide for Relatives Raising Children. The NWJP has an extensive legal website at <a href="http://www.washingtonlawhelp.org">www.washingtonlawhelp.org</a> that includes kinship related legal information and documents.

<b>Medium Priority/Short-term Recommendations</b>	<b>Status</b>
Educate judges and attorneys about kinship care issues	No formal action steps have been developed to address this. The Children of Incarcerated Parents Oversight Committee, including representatives from the judiciary and law enforcement, has also identified the need to educate these professional communities.
Support statewide Unified Family Court	No formal action steps have been developed to address this.
<b>Federal Recommendation</b>	<b>Status</b>
Amend National Family Caregiver Support Program/Older Americans Act	Recommendations were made at the 2005 WHCOA by national kinship advocacy groups to provide greater support for kinship caregivers.