

# **Report to the Legislature**

## **Kinship Care Oversight Committee**

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Children's Administration  
Program & Policy Division  
PO Box 45710  
Olympia, WA 98504-5710  
(360) 902-8035



Washington State Kinship Care Oversight Committee  
Report to the Legislature  
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## Introduction

The Kinship Care Oversight Committee (Oversight Committee) was formed in 2003 to provide guidance in identifying, supporting, and strengthening kinship care families. The legislature extended the Kinship Care Oversight Committee from 2011 to 2015. Kinship care includes relatives caring for dependent children within the child welfare system as well as relatives caring for children not formally involved with the public child welfare system. The Children's Administration, Economic Services Administration, and Aging & Long-Term Support Administration are the three public administrations that participate in the Oversight Committee. Since its beginning, the Oversight Committee has worked hard to improve life for these families. Achievements include:

- Enhancing collaborations within DSHS administrations to better respond to the needs of kinship caregivers.
- Building close relationships with Area Agencies on Aging and their community partners in connecting kinship care families with available resources and services.
- Providing DSHS with the ability to hear directly from the caregivers.
- Providing a venue for issues of statewide importance to caregivers.
- Providing a statewide voice for local "kinship collaborations." Kinship collaborations are active in Yakima, King, Whatcom, Pierce, and Lewis/Mason/Thurston counties, among others.
- Providing legislators with a better understanding of caregiver issues and encouraging the legislature to pass budget and policy items that positively impact caregivers.
- Building a relationship with the foster parent community as a way of working together for the common goal of better supporting caregivers of children in out-of-home care.

## **Kinship Care Oversight Committee 2014 Recommendations**

The Kinship Care Oversight Committee, comprised of kinship caregivers, child and caregiver advocates, state agency representatives, non-profit services providers, tribes, and legal community representatives, make the following recommendations to the state Legislature for 2015:

- Maintain the Kinship Caregiver Oversight Committee through legislative action; the Committee's mandate is currently set to expire in June 2015.
- Restore all or some of the funding eliminated through TANF means testing for child only TANF.
- Maintain current funding for Kinship Navigators who reach 30 of 39 counties, expanding its program if dollars allow.
- Maintain the Aging & Long-Term Support Administration's (AL TSA) Kinship Caregiver Support Program, Children's Administration's (CA) Relative Support Service Funds, Economic Service Administration's (ESA) Additional Requirements for Emergent Needs (AREN) program, and other financial support services for kinship caregivers.
- Increase efforts to improve regional utilization of CA's Relative Support Service Funds for relatives caring for state-dependent children.
- Work with Children's Administration to increase the number of relatives who are licensed as foster parents to care for dependent children.
- Seek creative ways to provide kinship caregivers with much needed respite care, such as AL TSA's collaboration with Lifespan Respite of Washington's voucher system.
- Continue to build collaborations with the foster parent community, including enhancing Kinship Navigators' connections with the Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention liaisons.
- Continue collaboration building between the Community Service Offices (CSOs), Kinship Navigators, and Children's Administration to connect clients effectively with services.
- Continue discussions about a feedback group for kinship providers similar to the Foster Parent Consultation Team for foster parents.

## What We Know About Kinship Caregivers

Many kinship caregivers are grandparents raising grandchildren. Over the past ten (10) years the Kinship Care Oversight Committee has learned more about the grandparents and other relatives who are raising relative children. The team continues to hear personal stories of the growing challenges faced by relative caregivers, many of whom are aging and facing greater health challenges of their own.

These relatives who stepped in three, five, and ten years ago to provide a temporary safety net for their grandchildren, now are attempting to provide long-term, fulltime care to older adolescents, who experienced trauma in their home of origin. These adolescent children now may have mental health issues and behavioral issues of their own. Relatives continue to step forward each day to ensure the safety and basic well-being of their grandchildren when faced with abuse and neglect, parental drug and alcohol addiction, and mental health concerns.

Caring for family takes more than just love and time; it's also an issue of dollars and cents. According to the Pew Report cited in last year's report, children cared for primarily by a grandparent are more likely to live below the poverty line.

Nationally 7.7 million children—one in ten—were living in the same household as their grandparents and, in most cases, these children were living in their grandparents' home.

Families headed by grandparents come together for different reasons—parental death, substance abuse, military deployment, incarceration, and mental illness. As a result, these families are in every area of the country, of all income levels, of all races, and all ethnicities.

According to data from the Children's Administration, in CY 2013, a total of 7,112 children were placed with relatives. In CY 2014 to date, a total of 7,139 children were placed with relatives. Relatives are a valuable resource for children who enter the child welfare system for one day or one year.

Data from the 2010 U.S. Census shows the number of children living with relatives in Washington state is much higher than in other states.

- 123,390 children under age 18 live in homes where the householders are grandparents or other relatives (7.8 percent of the children in the state).
- 37,371 children live in homes with grandparent householders where grandparents are responsible for them.
- 40,305 grandparents are the heads of households and are responsible for their grandchildren living with them.

- 66 percent of those grandparents are Caucasian; 5 percent are Black; 7 percent are Asian; 5 percent are American Indian or Alaska Native, and 12 percent are Hispanic.
  - 42 percent of these households do not have the parents of the children living in the home.
  - 65 percent of caregivers are under age 60.
  - 14 percent of caregivers live in poverty.
- The 2012 Washington State Healthy Youth Survey (HYS) for the first time examined the risky behaviors of middle and high school youth living with relatives as compared to youth living in foster homes and with parents. The valuable related data indicates youth living in kinship care families are quite vulnerable in terms of depression, use of substances (tobacco and alcohol), or suicidal ideation. Even though on many measures (but not all) these youth did not score as high as those in foster care, as a group, they were significantly more at risk than children living with their parents.

In 2014, the HYS will again repeat the questions of youth living with relatives as well as acquire even greater health status information not yet ever collected in our state. Behavioral Health and Service Integration Administration/DSHS collaborated on the new kinship questions which were reviewed by national researchers and within the department. The questions were piloted with older youth through the DSHS Passion to Action Youth Advisory Board and adopted by the Washington state HYS committee. Over the next year, all of the Healthy Youth Survey data from 2012 and 2014 will be reviewed and shared with the Kinship Care Oversight Committee as well as DSHS Kinship Workgroup to determine best next steps to decrease the vulnerable status of these youth.

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

The Kinship Care Oversight Committee and its subcommittees provide advocacy, education, and awareness to the community and legislators about the needs of kinship caregivers. The Kinship Care Oversight Committee continues to meet quarterly. Promoting and supporting the Kinship Navigator Program across the state remains the priority recommendation from the Oversight Committee.

#### **Kinship Navigator Program**

Grandparents and relatives who are raising children are often unaware of available supports. The Kinship Navigator Program provides information and referral, resources, and a small payment to assist relative caregivers in purchasing goods or services needed for that child. Navigators help kinship caregivers locate appropriate housing to fit their expanded family size, explain how to apply for

various benefits, advocate on their behalf, and help acquire beds, clothes, and food for their children. A total of thirty eight percent (38%) of the kinship care families served received Basic Food Assistance and thirty one percent (31%) of these families received a TANF Child Only Grant.

Kinship Navigators receive regular training throughout the year to expand the Navigators' knowledge about resources. The Navigators' knowledge provides a crucial link to help connect families with a multitude of community resources:

- Health, financial and legal services;
- Support groups; and
- Emergency funds.

These links and connections create more stable environments to help keep children out of the child welfare system and provide better support for relative caregivers.

The Kinship Navigator Program is administered through ALTSA which contracts with eight of the thirteen local Area Agencies on Aging (AAA). The AAAs provide the services directly or contract out the service(s) to a local community service organization. ALTSA facilitates a bi-monthly conference call with the Kinship Navigators to provide access to information, subject experts, and create networking opportunities. An in-person, one-day training is conducted for all navigators and is coordinated by staff with Family Education and Support Services.

The long-term goal of the Kinship Navigator Program is to have Navigators available to serve caregivers in all 13 AAA service areas in the state. Counties which do not yet have Kinship Navigators include Clallam, Jefferson, Grays Harbor, Pacific, Kitsap, Snohomish, Island, San Juan, and Skagit Counties. Currently the Yakama Nation is supporting a Kinship Navigator. The Colville Indian Reservation (Area Agency on Aging) is in need of a Navigator. (Appendix 1 provides a complete listing of Kinship Navigators and their sponsoring agencies.)

During the last state fiscal year, Kinship Navigators served a total of 1,854 Kinship Caregivers who were raising 3,138 children. They provided 245 presentations to community organizations and state agencies such as DSHS.

In partnership with the Foster Parent Association of Washington State (FPAWS), a Kinship Navigator now participates on its board of directors. The common goal of FPAWS and leaders in foster and kinship care is for the two communities of caregivers to work together more closely for the common good of children in their care.

## **Advocacy, Education and Awareness**

Members of the Kinship Care Oversight Committee work to increase awareness of kinship care issues and are instrumental in planning and organizing various recognition events, conferences, and other efforts highlighting the important role of kinship care providers.

Examples of events and activities which honor and support relative caregivers include:

- Washington State Kinship Care Children’s Poetry, Drawing, and Essay Contest, *Voices of Children Raised by Grandparents and Other Relatives*. 2014 marked the 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Voices of Children Contest. A celebration of all winners and their families took place at the Governor’s Mansion, hosted by First Lady Trudy Inslee and staff from Family Education and Support Services;  
[2014 Contest Winners: Voices of Children-Raised by Grandparents and Other Relatives, Press Release](#)
- Each May, a Proclamation by the Governor to honor relatives raising children;  
[Governor Inslee Proclaims May 21, 2014 as Kinship Caregiver Day](#)
- Active planning and participation in the Annual Pacific Northwest Caregivers’ Conference at Great Wolf Lodge.
- Updating the [DSHS Kinship Website](#);  
Highlights include:  
[Child-only TANF Policy change for Kinship Caregivers living on retirement Income coming November 1, 2014 \[English\]](#)  
[Child-only TANF policy change for Kinship Caregivers living on retirement income coming November 1, 2014 \[Spanish\]](#)  
[New Washington State Lifespan Respite Voucher Program now available!](#)  
[National Grandparents Day Celebrated with WA’s First Lady, Mrs. Trudy Inslee](#)  
[When Kin Step In, by Judy Lightfoot, Crosscut.com, September 3, 2013](#)
- Provision of various training opportunities for caregivers;
- Dissemination of information about guardianship as a permanent plan for dependent children:
  - Eligibility requirements for the Relative Guardianship Assistance Program (R-GAP) and
  - Support available through R-GAP in Washington state.



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

The Oversight Committee continues to advocate for the expansion of legal services for relative caregivers that are now only offered in a few counties across the state. Increasing legal services information available on the Internet along with printed and DVD resources for kinship caregivers remain a priority.

The Economic Services Administration is preparing a “legal options” handout for caregivers to be distributed at CSOs. Children’s Administration provides the brochure “Understanding the Dependency Court Process” to help families learn how dependency cases enter and move through the court system. Members of the Oversight Committee share these materials in their work with caregivers.

The longest running kinship legal project in the state is the Kinship Care Solutions Project sponsored by the King County Bar Association. It continues to provide direct representation to low-income relatives and other caregivers in non-parental custody (also known as third party custody) cases. Caregivers receive referrals to a pro bono panel of trained volunteer attorneys who receive comprehensive training and ongoing mentoring through the project.

In Thurston County, legal information can be found through a self-help legal education kiosk (the first of its kind) located at the Thurston County Courthouse. Information from the Thurston County kiosk also exists on the [Family Education and Support Services](#) Agency Kinship webpage.

Whatcom County continues to provide a free, monthly Kinship Non-Parental Custody Clinic which began in July 2010. This service is a collaborative effort between LAW Advocates of Whatcom County and the Northwest Regional Council.

In Yakima, a similar monthly legal clinic was created through the sponsorship of the Casey Family Programs. It utilizes pro bono family law attorneys to assist relatives in completing legal paperwork for third party custody.

### **Collaborations to Support Kinship Care Families**

Collaborations have formed throughout the state in the past decade to support foster parents in a variety of ways. These collaborations include:

- The King County Kinship Collaboration
- The Yakima Region KINdred Spirits Collaboration
- The Lewis-Mason-Thurston County Kinship Advisory Committee
- The Whatcom County Kinship Partnership Group
- The Whatcom County Family and Community Network
- The Pierce County Kinship Collaboration

The Kinship Care Oversight Committee continues active work with these collaborations to share information, resources, and events. Each collaboration works to establish and maintain support groups for kinship caregivers, establish and hold honoring events and time-specific events such as Caregiver Day, and back-to-school events. The collaborations host trainings for caregivers and build community outreach efforts. The following are other examples of specific local collaboration activities:

- King County employs a coordinator who directs their Kinship Collaboration
- The Kinship Navigator with the Thurston-Lewis-Mason County Kinship Advisory Committee collaborated with the local United Way and several banking institutions to develop and launch a “Bank ON” fiscal literacy program that helps caregivers to open and maintain bank accounts.
- The Whatcom County Kinship Partnership activities included administration of the Kinship Respite Care Program offering supervised activities for children while giving relative caregivers much needed respite. The Whatcom County Partnership also supported the Kinship Custody Clinic which offers free monthly legal clinics for relative caregivers seeking non-parental custody.
- The Yakima Regional KINdred Spirits sponsored kinship social and appreciation events, trainings and support groups, and an annual conference for kinship and foster parents. Staff provides a newsletter, and one caregiver runs a clothing bank.

### **Additional Kinship Care Supports**

#### **Training and On-line Services**

The Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence is Washington state’s comprehensive statewide training partnership. Established in 2012, the Alliance is dedicated to developing professional expertise for social workers and to enhancing the skills of foster parents and caregivers working with vulnerable children and families.

Within the Alliance, education and training opportunities are available for foster, adoptive, and non-licensed relative caregivers statewide.

Kinship caregivers are able to access all training provided through the Alliance. This includes all classroom training, self-directed online workshops, and online video trainings. Some training has been developed that is specific to the needs of kinship caregivers.

The Alliance developed competency needs for licensed foster parents and non-licensed relative caregivers. An existing workgroup is now developing the continuing education curriculum specific to the needs of caregivers. The

importance of flexibility, availability and accessibility are primary considerations of the group.

The Department of Social and Health Services, Kinship Services, offers a number of opportunities for kinship caregiver training and online information and referral to services.

### **DSHS Kinship Care Website**

The Department of Social and Health Services provides a link and manages the [Kinship Care Website](#). This website was established in Spring 2006 through the efforts of the Aging and Long-Term Support Administration (AL TSA), the Economic Services Administration (ESA), and the Children's Administration (CA), with feedback from the Kinship Care Oversight Committee.

The website has become increasingly important in providing information to caregivers and professionals who 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, as well as related news items. The number of people accessing the website has grown every year. Other statewide websites such as [Within Reach](#) and [Child Care Aware of Washington](#) also have links to this statewide kinship webpage.

### **Children's Administration Foster Care and Caregiver Website**

Children's Administration continues to serve caregivers through information available on its [Foster Parenting & Relatives Caring for Kids](#) webpage. Updated information, news, policy information, placement supports, staff contact information, and training information all are available to support caregivers. An updated website is under construction and will go live in December 2014.

### **Children's Administration Foster Parent and Caregiver Listserv**

This [Listserv](#) delivers timely information to licensed foster parents and relative caregivers. It also delivers the monthly Caregiver Connection which for more than eight years has been providing information of interest to caregivers. The Listserv currently delivers information to over 9,000 subscribers and is the second largest Listserv operated by the department.

## Appendix 1

### Washington State's Kinship Navigators Serving Grandparents and Relatives Raising Children

#### Central Washington

- **Chelan, Douglas, Okanogan, Grant, Lincoln, and Adams Counties:** Catholic Family and Child Services, **Kinship Navigator:** Autumn Carlson, [acarlson@ccyakima.org](mailto:acarlson@ccyakima.org), 509-662-6761 or 1-800-261-1094.

#### Southwest Washington

- **Clark, Cowlitz, Klickitat, Skamania, Wahkiakum Counties:** Children's Home Society, Southwest Washington Region, **Kinship Navigator:** Tammy Bedlion, [Tammyb@chs-wa.org](mailto:Tammyb@chs-wa.org), 360-695-1325 ext. 4214

#### Eastern Washington

- **Ferry, Pend Oreille and Stevens Counties:** Rural Resources Community Action, **Kinship Navigator:** Art Mathew, [amathew@ruralresources.org](mailto:amathew@ruralresources.org), 509-684-3932
- **Spokane County:** Elder Services - Spokane Mental Health **Kinship Navigator:** Anna O'Connor, [avictor@smhca.org](mailto:avictor@smhca.org), 509-458-7450 ext. 3100
- **Whitman County:** Rural Resources, **Kinship Navigator:** Andree Marcus-Rader, [arader@ruralresources.org](mailto:arader@ruralresources.org), 509- 332-0365.

#### Southeast Washington

- **Kittitas and Yakima Counties:** Catholic Family and Child Services, **Kinship Navigator:** Mary Pleger, [mpleger@ccyakima.org](mailto:mpleger@ccyakima.org), 509-965-7100 or 800-246-2962
- **Asotin, Benton, Columbia, Franklin, Garfield and Walla Walla Counties:** Catholic Family and Child Services, **Kinship Navigators:** Rachel Lewis, [rlewis@ccyakima.org](mailto:rlewis@ccyakima.org), 509-946-4645 or 888-586-7418 or Aurora Leon, Spanish Speaker, [aleon@ccyakima.org](mailto:aleon@ccyakima.org), 509-946-4645 or Mary Pleger, [mpleger@ccyakima.org](mailto:mpleger@ccyakima.org), 509-965-7100 or 800-246-2962
- **Yakama Nation:** (Position funded by the Yakama Nation), **Kinship Navigator:** Jenece Howe, [jhowe@yakama.com](mailto:jhowe@yakama.com), 509-865-5121 ext. 4878

#### Puget Sound

- **King County:** Catholic Community Services, **Kinship Navigator:** Lulit Merid, [Lulitm@ccsw.org](mailto:Lulitm@ccsw.org), 206-328-5951 or 206-328-5787 (Kinship Intake Line)

- **Lewis, Mason and Thurston Counties:** Family Education and Support Services **Kinship Navigator:** Lynn Urvina, [Lynn@FamilyESS.org](mailto:Lynn@FamilyESS.org), **Spanish-speaking Navigator Assistant:** Rosa Venancio, [Rosa@FamilyESS.org](mailto:Rosa@FamilyESS.org), 360-754-7629 or 1-877-813-2828
- **Pierce County:** HopeSparks, **Kinship Navigator:** Rosalyn Alber, [ralber@hopesparks.org](mailto:ralber@hopesparks.org), 253-565-4484 ext. 112, **Kinship Navigator:** Sheila McCann, [smccann@hopesparks.org](mailto:smccann@hopesparks.org), 253-565-4484 ext. 134

### **Northwest Washington**

- **Whatcom County:** Northwest Regional Council (AAA), **Kinship Navigator:** Laina Berry, [BerryLS@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:BerryLS@dshs.wa.gov), 360-676-6749

### **Washington State**

- **State contact:** Hilarie Hauptman, Aging & Long-Term Support Administration, DSHS [Hilarie.Hauptman@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:Hilarie.Hauptman@dshs.wa.gov), 1-800-422-3263 or 360-725-2556

**Kinship Care in WA State Website:** [www.dshs.wa.gov/kinshipcare](http://www.dshs.wa.gov/kinshipcare)

## Appendix 2

### 2014 Kinship Caregiver Oversight Committee

Teri Aguilera-Flemming	Kristie Lund
Rosalyn Alber	Fai Matthews
Gerri Barsh	Lulit Merid
Tammy Bedlion	Ron Murphy
Laina Berry	Anna O'Connor
Tom Berry	Sara Pennington
Barbara Clark	Ann Phillip
Amy Dennis	Karen Pinkham
Chelsea Fanara	Mary Pleger
Akelia Farve	Linda Porter
Lauren Fredrick	Deanna Potter
Barbara Giachetti	Deborah Ray
Hilarie Hauptman	Jennifer Santillan
Jesie Holden	Helen Sawyer
Amy Holland	Katy Smith
Jenece Howe	Paula Steinke
Monica Jenkins	Melinda Trujillo
Kathleen Keenan	Margaret Turner
Cara Lauer	Lynn Urvina
Lyman Legters	Lynne Van Horn
Laurie Lippold	Rosa Venancio
Jennifer Louch	Meri Waterhouse
Gilda Lyons	Shelly Willis

## Appendix 3

### Voices of Children Contest Excerpts From Winning Entries

“I am happy to be raised by my gramma because she’s not only the best gramma ever but shes the best mom ever too. She also plays games, we bake, we do lots of fun things to. We read the Bible together.” *Journey, age 7*

“Not so long ago there was a little girl who lives in a not so nice world. She was abandoned several times by her mother. She was left with her grandmother several other times. She was forced to care for her infant sister by changing diapers and feeding her. She was beaten, had bruises all over, locked in closets and had a little to eat. She now belongs to a family. She has learned to love herself and the people she cares about. That little girl was me. I have a new name now and a new life in a happy world.” *Courtney, age 11*

“I came to live with my Grandma when I was a month old. I don’t remember much when I was that young so I believe everything was good. Since I have been getting older we do have our ups and our downs. Mostly about schoolwork. She wants me to do good and get a good education. I can talk about many things she always listens and gives me good advice. She spoils me in a good way. I know she will always be there for me at the end of the day. I sleep well.” *Jeremiah, age 13*

#### ***Nondiscrimination Policy***

*The Department of Social and Health Services does not discriminate and provides equal access to its programs and services for all persons without regard to race, color, gender, religion, creed, marital status, national origin, or sexual orientation.*