

CHILD WELFARE FACT SHEET

December 2016 Update

FOCUS ON KINSHIP CARE

Kinship care is the full-time care, nurturing, and protection provided to a child by a relative or family friend. Most children living with kin are in informal arrangements established within families. Children can also be placed with kin by state child welfare agencies when they cannot safely live with their parent(s).

Rhode Island's Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) defines kin broadly beyond relatives to include adults who are part of the child's support system, such as a close family friend, neighbor, or member of the child's community.¹

For children removed from their homes because of abuse or neglect, placement with kinship caregivers is often the best option for ensuring that they are able to maintain familial and community connections and minimize the trauma of being separated from parents.^{2,3}

Under the federal *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Fostering Connections Act)*, state child welfare agencies are required to notify kin when children are removed from a home and make efforts to place siblings together. The *Fostering Connections Act* also provides funding for states offering kinship guardianship assistance payments.⁴

HOW MANY CHILDREN ARE IN KINSHIP CARE?

	Children in Public and Private Kinship Care* 2014-2016		Foster Children in State-Supervised Kinship Foster Care** 2014	
	NUMBER	% OF ALL CHILDREN	NUMBER	% OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE
Connecticut	18,000	2%	1,137	29%
Maine	5,000	2%	572	31%
Massachusetts	37,000	3%	2,540	26%
New Hampshire	8,000	3%	104	12%
Rhode Island	7,000	3%	636	35%
Vermont	4,000	3%	372	33%
United States	2,562,000	3%	120,334	29%

Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center, datacenter.kidscount.org

*Children are considered to be in kinship care when all of the following conditions are true: a parent is not present in the household; the child is not a foster child to the householder; the child is not a housemate/roommate/boarder with no relatives in the household; the child is not a householder; and the child is not a spouse or unmarried partner of the householder. The analysis excludes group quarters population.

**Youth are categorized as being in foster care if they entered prior to the end of the current fiscal year and have not been discharged from their latest foster care stay by the end of the current fiscal year. Placement type is the setting in which the child was living at the end of the fiscal year.

Kinship caregivers often are isolated and lack information about the services, resources, benefits, and laws available to support their financial stability and their ability to deal with the emotional and functional stresses that come with caring for a child who has been placed with them due to child abuse or neglect. Additionally, kinship caregivers can face barriers in gaining the legal authority to access health care and enroll their children in school.^{5,6}

Financial Support

Nearly all children in kinship care are eligible for cash assistance through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) regardless of their household’s income level, yet children in informal custody arrangements are much less likely to receive these payments. Additional financial benefits that may be available to kinship families include foster board payments, housing assistance, child care assistance, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, and health insurance coverage.^{7,8,9}

Other Support Services

Kinship families can also benefit from support services to address the many challenges that are common when a child is placed in a new home. Children placed in kinship care often have experienced trauma and sudden separation from their birth parents. Children and their kinship families can benefit from services such as individual and family counseling. For kinship caregivers, participation in support groups and training programs, as well as having access to respite care (short-term care of a child for a few hours or days to provide relief for the caregiver) can strengthen their capacity to provide care.^{10,11,12,13}

Recommendations:

- Strengthen kinship families by providing access to treatment and support services such as mental and physical health care, family and individual counseling, legal assistance, child care, and housing supports.
- Provide information, support, and referrals to kinship caregivers to ensure that they are connected to health insurance coverage, TANF, SSI, child support payments, kinship foster care payments, and other benefits for which they may be eligible that can help improve their financial stability.
- Using the prudent parenting standard, support kinship caregivers in making educational and medical decisions for children in their care.
- Help kinship caregivers understand the permanency process and the options they have for becoming permanent caregivers through adoption or guardianship if reunification with the child's birthparent(s) is not possible.

References:

¹ State of Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families. (July 29, 2016). *Foster care and adoption regulations for licensure*. Retrieved December 16, 2016, from www.dcyf.ri.gov

^{4,8,13} Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families. (Revised November 16, 2009). *Kinship care. (Policy 900.0025)*. Retrieved October 21, 2015, from www.dcyf.ri.gov

^{2,6,7,10} KIDS COUNT. (2012). *Stepping up for kids: What government and communities should do to support kinship families*. Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

³ KIDS COUNT. (2015). *Every kid needs a family*. Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

⁵ American Association of Retired Persons. (n.d.). *About Grandfacts*. Retrieved November 13, 2015, from www.aarp.org

^{9,11} U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children’s Bureau. (2010). *Kinship caregivers and the child welfare system*. Washington DC: Child Welfare Information Gateway.

¹² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children’s Bureau. (2012). *Working with kinship caregivers*. Washington DC: Child Welfare Information Gateway.



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