

# Children's Defense Fund Help Children Being Raised By Grandparents and Other Relatives and Their Relative Caregivers by Expanding and Establishing Kinship Navigator Programs



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## What are Kinship Navigator Programs?

Kinship Navigator Programs help link grandparents and other relative caregivers, both inside and outside the formal child welfare system, to a broad range of services and supports that help meet the needs of the children they are raising and themselves. They help caregivers navigate the services available to them by providing information, referrals to specialists, and eligibility requirements for certain benefits.

In order to better serve the needs of kinship families, Kinship Navigator Programs are also designed to promote effective partnerships between kinship families and public and private, community and faith-based agencies.

## Why is there a need for Kinship Navigator Programs?

The number of children living with grandparents and other relatives has been growing quickly. Statistics show that 2.24 million children are living with relative caregivers without either parent present, with 1.51 million living with grandparents and 729,000 living with other relatives'. Kinship care has become an important safety net in helping keep children out of the child welfare system and helps children achieve permanency and stability in their lives. It is for these reasons that supporting the needs of kinship families is so important. Kinship Navigator Programs can help do just that.

Relative caregivers report that one of their greatest challenges in raising children is getting accurate information about the benefits and services that are available to their families. Many relative caregivers often are overwhelmed when searching for government services and benefits and may not know about private resources. Having a person or other tools to help guide them through the variety of resources available to them and their grandchildren or other relative children is critical in ensuring that kinship families receive all the support services they need.

## How will Kinship Navigator Programs help kinship families?

Kinship Navigator Programs will link grandparents and other relative caregivers to support groups and respite care programs, and help to get referrals to specialists and find out if they or the children they are raising are eligible for certain benefits. These programs provide information about education, family support services, mental health and substance abuse treatment, child support, housing assistance, child care, and legal assistance, as well as a range of federal benefits such as Medicaid, TANF and others. Program funds also can be used to link caregivers to training and legal assistance to help them perform their caregiver activities and get the support they need. The programs may also promote partnerships among agencies to help them more effectively and efficiently serve kinship families.

## Are states operating Kinship Navigator Programs?

Ohio and New Jersey were the first two states to establish Kinship Navigator Programs that had a broad reach within the state. In other states, Washington, New York, Delaware and Connecticut, for example, important steps also have been taken to establish Kinship Navigator Programs. In Washington, the programs are operated by just over half of the Area Agencies on Aging. Each of them has hired one full time kinship navigator. The Catholic Family Center's Aging and Adult Services in Rochester, New York, contracts with the state Office of Children and Family Services to offer navigator services both through an 800 number and through its website. Connecticut has a kinship specialist available on its 2-1-1 system operated by the United Way of Connecticut. The Delaware Kinship Navigator Program is part of the statewide intergenerational program called Joining Generations. Caregivers can also call a toll-free Delaware Helpline to receive more information about the services available to them. More information on each of these states is included in the Appendix to this Q&A.

There are also other states where programs have been established, sometimes on a pilot basis. The Children's Defense Fund is interested in learning about additional activities underway to establish Kinship Navigator Programs. If you are aware of them, please contact Stefanie Sprow at CDF at 202-662-3568, or [ssprow@childrensdefense.org](mailto:ssprow@childrensdefense.org).

## **How does the *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act* assist kinship families and promote Kinship Navigator Programs?**

The *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008*, (P.L. 110-351), signed into law in October 2008, offers new support to many children in and out of foster care who are being raised by their grandparents and other relative caregivers because their parents are not able to care for them. It offers federal support for the first time to help relatives care permanently for children they have been raising in foster care. It also established a new Family Connection Grants Program that will fund Kinship Navigator Programs and other programs through competitive grants that can help connect children in or at risk of entering foster care to family members. At least \$5 million of the \$15 million in grant funding for the Family Connection Grants will go to create or enhance Kinship Navigator programs. State, local and tribal child welfare agencies and non-profit agencies that have experience serving children in foster or kinship care can apply for the Family Connection Grants. Applications for the first year of grants were due on July 6, 2009, and recipients should be announced prior to September 30, 2009. Funds available for grants in subsequent years will depend on the number and amount of the multiyear grants awarded this year.

For more information on the Act and its provisions to help children raised by grandparents and other relatives, see [www.childrensdefense.org/FCSIAAguide](http://www.childrensdefense.org/FCSIAAguide). For more detail on the Family Connection grants, see <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/grants/pdf/HHS-2009-ACF-ACYF-CF-0078.pdf>.

## **Who can receive the Kinship Navigator Program grants?**

Only state, local or tribal child welfare agencies and non-profit organizations with experience working with children in foster care or kinship care may receive the Kinship Navigator Program grants. These agencies, however, may collaborate with other agencies in the states that can assist relative caregivers and the children they are raising. Other state agencies may not receive the grants but may work in partnership with the child welfare agency in their state.

## **Who will administer the federal Kinship Navigator Program?**

The Secretary of Health and Human Services will administer the Family Connection Grants that will enhance and create Kinship Navigator Programs.

## **How will the Family Connection Grants fund Kinship Navigator programs?**

The Family Connection Grants are funded through a mandatory appropriation of \$15 million for each fiscal year between 2009 and 2013, of which \$5 million per year must be used to fund Kinship Navigator programs.

Grantees must contribute 25 percent of the total grant amount in the first and second years of a grant and 50 percent in the third year. This declining federal match is intended to get the grantee to increase its investment in the program and to continue it after the federal dollars are no longer available. Up to 50 percent of the grantee's contribution may be in-kind contributions, including plant, equipment or services.

## **How can I find out what organization, if any, in my state has been awarded a Family Connection Grant to establish or expand a Kinship Navigator Program?**

No grants have been awarded yet and applications are currently being reviewed. The anticipated date for the award announcements is September 29, 2009. The Family Connection Grants will be awarded by the Children's Bureau in the Administration on Children, Youth and Families in the U.S Department of Health and Human Services. You can check their website periodically at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/>. To view current state status, visit <http://www07.grants.gov/search/search.do> and type in "HHS-2009-ACF-ACYF-CF-0078" in the "Search by Funding Opportunity Number" box. The Children's Defense Fund ([www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org)), Generations United ([www.gu.org](http://www.gu.org)), and GrandFamilies of America ([www.grandfamiliesofamerica.org](http://www.grandfamiliesofamerica.org)) will also be tracking the award of these grants, so you might also check their websites periodically.

## How must the federal Kinship Navigator Program grants be used?

Kinship Navigator Programs funded by Family Connection Grants must assist kinship caregivers in finding, learning about and using services that help them meet the needs of the child and the caregiver.

A Kinship Navigator Program shall:

- Coordinate with other state or local agencies that promote service coordination or provide information and referral services, including the entities that provide 2-1-1 or 3-1-1 information systems where available, to avoid duplication or fragmentation of services to kinship care families;
- Be planned and operated in consultation with kinship caregivers and organizations representing them, youth raised by kinship caregivers, relevant government agencies, and relevant community-based or faith-based organizations;
- Establish information and referral systems that link (via toll-free access) kinship caregivers, kinship support group facilitators and kinship service providers to (i) each other; (ii) eligibility and enrollment information for federal, state and local benefits; (iii) relevant training to assist kinship caregivers in care giving and in obtaining benefits and services; and (iv) relevant legal assistance and help in obtaining legal services;
- Provide outreach to kinship care families, including by establishing, distributing and updating a kinship care website, or other relevant guides or outreach materials; and
- Promote partnerships between public and private agencies, including schools, community-based or faith-based organizations and relevant government agencies, to increase their knowledge of the needs of kinship care families to promote better services for those families.

Kinship Navigator Programs also may establish and support a kinship care ombudsman with authority to intervene and help kinship caregivers access services. They also may support any other activities designed to assist kinship caregivers in obtaining benefits and services to improve their care giving.

## How will we learn about the effectiveness of the Kinship Navigator Programs funded under the Family Connection Grants?

In order to assess progress in improving children's safety, permanence and well-being, the Family Connection grantees will need to participate in rigorous evaluations conducted by the Children's Bureau in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. These evaluations will assess the impact on outcomes of the services and activities provided through the grants, including those that fund Kinship Navigator Programs. Through these evaluations, the Children's Bureau will assess which programs are most effective and efficient at helping children and which will help support states to implement evidence-based practices that produce positive outcomes for children and families.

## What Other Sources of Funding Might Be Available for Kinship Navigator Programs?

It is not possible to offer specific sources of funding other than the Family Connection Grants, which will soon be awarded. However, in exploring sources in your own communities, it might be helpful to consider the following:

- State funds used to assist kinship families or various resource and referral activities in the state;
- A new pilot initiative in the state funded with state dollars;
- Area Agencies on Aging;
- Community foundations that have supported local child welfare efforts of activities to support grandparents and other relatives who are raising children;
- United Way of America's 2-1-1 system in states and communities;
- Other statewide help lines that might be willing to add specific resources on support for children in kinship families and their caregivers;

Please let the Children's Defense Fund know about other useful funding sources you have found. Please contact Stefanie Sprow at 202-662-3568 or [ssprow@childrensdefense.org](mailto:ssprow@childrensdefense.org).

# APPENDIX

## Kinship Navigator Programs: A Look at Services in Selected States

(If you are familiar with Kinship Navigator Programs operating in your state, please contact Stefanie Sproh at 202-662-3568 or [ssproh@childrensdefense.org](mailto:ssproh@childrensdefense.org))

Since 2001, there have been Kinship Navigator Programs established in a number of states to help support kinship families. Ohio and New Jersey were the first states to establish statewide programs, and since then other states have established Kinship Navigator Programs, including, but not limited to Connecticut, Delaware, and Washington. These programs are sometimes supported by Area Agencies on Aging, organizations of kinship families, or private non-profit organizations. Some of these have been pilot programs or programs directed to only certain communities. A number of states with Kinship Navigator Programs are described below:

### NEW JERSEY

- **Name of program:** Kinship Navigator Program
- **How is it administered:** The New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Family Development, provides leadership and supervision of New Jersey's Kinship Navigator Program.
- **Is the program statewide:** Yes
- **What does the program provide:** Provides the opportunity for relatives who have a child in their care to easily access information regarding assistance and services available to them in each of the New Jersey counties. These services include: information and referral, child care subsidies, legal guardianship, and help obtaining short-term or one-time expenses such as furniture, moving costs, housing, legal services, and respite care. The kinship navigator also provides families with technical support and guidance through the process of Kinship Legal Guardianship if they wish to make a legal commitment to the child. Some of the services available to caregivers have income and age requirements and caregivers need to reapply for these services every year. In November 2008, the NJ Kinship Navigator Program partnered with 2-1-1 to take calls from prospective caregivers, screen for services, and then sends the preliminary information provided by the caregivers to the responsible Kinship agency via email. One of the benefits of this new system is that it provides kinship caregivers and their children access to a live case worker, in the event of an emergency, evenings and weekends. The operators provide telephone numbers, addresses, and websites for accessing other possibilities for assistance.
- **Who is served:** Grandparents, aunts and uncles, siblings and others who have taken on the responsibility of caring for their related children.
- **Eligibility:** Eligible caregivers must be taking responsibility for caring for a related child and be able to prove that they are related to the child or have legal guardianship of the child residing in their home. Every kinship caregiver is eligible for the Navigator services, but specific services like the Child Care Subsidy Program, Wrap Around Program, and the Kinship Legal Guardianship Program have income eligibility requirements. The eligibility requirements are accessible from their website (<http://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/dfd/programs/knp/>). Caregivers can see if they qualify for other assistance programs in New Jersey, such as food stamps, by visiting the NJ HELPS website (<http://www.njhelps.org>) and answering a series of questions about their household, income, and expenses.
- **How is it funded:** State dollars, however they are exploring the possibility for applying for Federal dollars
- **Is the program established in state policy:** Yes, N.J. Stat. §30:4C-90
- **For further information:**
  - Contact Information: 2-1-1
  - NJ Department of Human Services, Division of Family Development: P.O. Box 716, Trenton, NY 08625-0716
  - Program Web Site Address: <http://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/dfd/programs/knp/>
  - Susan Chermak, Director of Kinship Services: 609-588-2171 or [susan.chermak@dhs.state.nj.us](mailto:susan.chermak@dhs.state.nj.us)

## OHIO

- **Name of program:** Kinship Caregiver Navigator Program
- **How is it administered:** By local children's service agencies or private agencies in the county.
- **Is the program statewide:** Although at one time 78 of 88 counties had Kinship Navigator Programs, fewer than 20 counties currently have Kinship Navigator Programs as a result of budget cutbacks.
- **What does the program provide:** Information and referral to agencies that provide health support, educational services, financial resources, child care, legal services, support groups and respite. The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services also created the Ohio Resource Guide for kinship caregivers (<http://www.odjfs.state.oh.us/forms/file.asp?id=47881>)
- **How is it funded:** County agencies appropriate funds for the program. Ohio's Kinship Navigator Program was funded with \$3 million of TANF funds each year of the biennial state budget up until 2006, which was when the dedicated funding was removed from the budget. Funding was then left to the discretion of the county agencies. With the earmarked funding, 78 of 88 counties had identified navigators. Currently fewer than 20 counties have maintained their Navigator Programs. The Ohio Department of Job & Family Services does not track these programs any more.
- **For further information:** Kristen Burgess, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, 614-752-1329 or [Kristen.burgess@jfs.ohio.gov](mailto:Kristen.burgess@jfs.ohio.gov).

## WASHINGTON

- **Name of program:** Washington State Kinship Navigator Program
- **How is it administered:** More than half of the 13 Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) have contracts with the state's Aging and Disability Services Administration. Each AAA is able to hire one full-time kinship navigator to serve as the one-stop shop professional.
- **Is the program statewide:** No. Currently 30 out of 39 counties are covered, leaving two Indian reservations, which are covered by AAAs, and the remaining nine counties are not served.
- **What does the program provide:** Connects grandparents and other relative caregivers with community resources, such as health, financial, legal services, support groups, training and emergency funds. The principal duties and responsibilities of kinship navigators are: being knowledgeable about relevant federal, state and local benefits; explaining to caregivers how to apply for federal and state benefits; reaching out to kinship families, especially those in geographically isolated and ethnic communities, and identifying those who are not involved in the Kinship Navigator network or are in need of additional services; developing strong collaborative working relationships with other groups and agencies that work with kinship families; and proactively mediating with state agencies or service providers to ensure caregivers are receiving the services for which they are eligible. The Kinship Navigator services help kinship families establish or maintain greater self-sufficiency and long-term stability needed to keep their children out of foster care.
- **Who is served:** Relative caregivers who are 18 years of age and older and who are raising related children. These families may either be involved with or not involved with the child welfare system.
- **How is it funded:** State general funds
- **Is the program established in state policy:** No. Guidelines are set by RFP.
- **For further information:** Contact Hilari Hauptman at the Aging and Disability Services Headquarters/Department of Social and Health Services at 800-422-3263 or [hauptm@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:hauptm@dshs.wa.gov) for general information about support groups and Kinship Navigators.

## NEW YORK

- **Name of program:** New York State (NYS) Kinship Navigator
- **How is it administered:** The NYS Kinship Navigator is operated by Catholic Family Center's Aging & Adult Services located in Rochester, NY.
- **Is the program statewide:** Yes
- **What does the program provide:** Provides information, resources and comprehensive services that address the multiple needs of kinship caregivers. The NYS Kinship Navigator has a toll-free number (1-877-454-6463) that can connect caregivers to a kinship specialist. The NYS Kinship Navigator provides: fact sheets on laws and resources; information on forums and events for caregivers and service providers; information on kinship

legal issues; access to official records; resources on kinship, aging and youth services; eligibility information for public assistance for foster care, tax credits, child care, respite and specialized assistance. There is also a "County Resources" section of the NYS Kinship Navigator's website that allows caregivers to find information and assistance specific to their county. The NYS Kinship Navigators are currently fighting budget cuts that are threatening to cut funding designated to Kinship Navigator Programs.

- **Who is served:** All relative caregivers caring for a relative's child. This program also provides information to professionals and non-caregivers as a means of educating the public of the services available.
- **How is it funded:** NYS Office of Children and Family Services
- **Is the program established in state policy:** No
- **For further information:**
  - Mailing Address: 30 N. Clinton Avenue, Rochester, NY 14604
  - Kinship specialist available Monday through Friday between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. at 1-877-454-6463
  - Website: <http://www.nysnavigator.org/>
  - Rachel Pellegrino: 585-232-1840 ext. 319.

## CONNECTICUT

- **Name of program:** Kinship Navigator, 2-1-1 United Way of Connecticut
- **How is it administered:** The State of Connecticut and Connecticut United Way
- **Is the program statewide:** Yes
- **What does the program provide:** 2-1-1 is an integrated system of help via telephone. It is a single source for information about community services, referrals to human services and crisis intervention. It is accessed toll-free from anywhere in Connecticut by dialing 2-1-1. It operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Multilingual call specialists and telecommunications devices for the deaf (TDD) access are available. Grandparent or relative caregivers can call 2-1-1 at any time and speak with a specialist who can help them find kinship resources, information, different options of services, and locate programs and services in that person's area. 2-1-1 also has a Kinship Navigator website (<http://www.211ct.org/focus/kinshiplist.asp>) designed for relative caregivers that connects caregivers to helpful resources and services. Through this website caregivers can find information by searching through the different service categories and service terms listed. From the list of services provided on the website, the caregiver can then select certain items to narrow their search (city vs. statewide, age, gender, etc.) and can find more information on the program they are looking for, including contact information and a description of the service. Some of the service categories listed on this website include information and resources on adoption, advocacy, child care, financial assistance, health care, legal help, education issues, Hotlines and Helplines, respite care, transportation, support groups and many more. The Kinship Navigator is also charged with informing relatives about the procedure to become a licensed foster parent and the array of state services and benefits for which they may be eligible, including the subsidy program.
- **Who is served:** All relative caregivers
- **How is it funded:** Connecticut Department of Social Services and United Ways
- **Is the program established in state policy:** Yes, Conn. Gen. Stat. § 17a – 98a (2008)
- **For further information:**
  - For immediate help, dial 2-1-1 anywhere in Connecticut to speak with a specialist and to locate services.
  - If you are outside of Connecticut: 1-800-203-1234
  - For online assistance or for more information: <http://www.211ct.org/focus/kinshiplist.asp>
  - For administration information: 860-571-7500

## DELAWARE

- **Name of program:** Delaware Kinship Navigator Program
- **How is it administered:** The Delaware Kinship Navigator Program is part of Joining Generation, which is administered through the Division of Services for Aging and Adults with Physical Disabilities.
- **Is the program statewide:** Yes
- **What does the program provide:** Assists relative caregivers by providing them with information regarding services they (or the children they are caring for) may be eligible for, as well as supporting them in accessing

those services. The Delaware Kinship Navigator Program is part of the statewide intergenerational program called Joining Generations. Joining Generations focuses its resources on providing support to grandparent and other relative caregivers. There are several different programs that operate within Joining Generations that provide services similar to those of a Kinship Navigator, including support, education and information groups for relative caregivers, and a Kinship Care Program. The Kinship Care Program assists caregivers during the 180 days transition period when a child initially moves into the caregiver's home. Caregivers can also call the toll-free Delaware Helpline at 1-800-464-4357 to receive more information about the services available to them.

- **Who is served:** Grandparents or other persons aged 55 or over who are raising another person's children
- **How is it funded:** Older Americans Act
- **Is the program established in state policy:** Yes. Del. Code Ann. tit. 31 § 356
- **For further information:** The Family & Workplace Connection, at 302-479-1588 or 888-546-7449
  - For further information on Joining Generations: Contact Carol Boyer, from the Delaware Health and Social Services Division of Services for Aging and Adults with Physical Disabilities, 302-255-9390 or 1-800-223-9074.

**For more information on Kinship Navigator Programs,  
contact Stefanie Sprow at [ssprow@childrensdefense.org](mailto:ssprow@childrensdefense.org) or (202) 622-3568**

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<sup>i</sup> Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, "Family Connection Discretionary Grants." To view the announcement please visit, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/grants/pdf/HHS-2009-ACF-ACYF-CF-0078.pdf>