National Kinship Summit
A Voice for the Nation’s
Informal Kinship Care Community
March 2011

Sponsored by
Child Welfare League of America,
National Kinship Care Advisory Committee,
National Committee of Grandparents for Children’s Rights,
and with Support from the Hagedorn Foundation

A Report on Summit Recommendations
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

“Each family is so complex as to be known and understood only in part even by its own members. Families struggle with contradictions as massive as Everest, as fluid and changing as the Mississippi... Yet, when practical, the preference should be for family.”
— Maya Angelou (1985)

Collaborative partnerships in child welfare always have been a major contributor to the achievement of desired outcomes for families, children and youth, and the communities in which they reside. Such partnerships strengthen the delivery of services and help facilitate a comprehensive and broad perspective on child welfare policy and practice. Collaborative partnerships in child welfare can have many configurations. There is collaboration, for example, across and within child welfare systems, child welfare systems with other human service systems, child welfare systems with families, youth, and communities, and collaboration between child welfare, the private sector, and the legal system.

Similarly, there are many partnerships in the development and delivery of supports and services to children, youth and families in kinship care arrangements. Collaborative partnerships can lead to the identification of gaps in services or the need for attention to a specific child welfare issue or population. The partnership between the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) National Kinship Care Advisory Committee and the National Committee of Grandparents for Children’s Rights (NCGCR) in 2010 resulted in a plan for a National Kinship Summit in March 2011. Collectively, the two organizations focused on a segment of the kinship family population that had not received the same level of attention as families within the formal child welfare system, but represented the largest population of kinship families. That population is the families in the informal system. Kinship families in the informal system became the focus for the Summit. Kinship care is the full-time nurturing and protection of children by relatives, members of their tribes or clans, godparents, stepparents or other adults who have a bond with the child.¹

CWLA National Kinship Advisory Committee

The CWLA National Kinship Care Advisory Committee is a diverse group of individuals representing various experiences and expertise in child welfare and specifically in kinship care practice, research, and policy. Committee members are affiliated with private child welfare agencies, public child welfare agencies, and the social work educational system. Meeting four times a year, the Committee’s agenda includes dissemination of kinship care-related information, hosting special events during CWLA National Conferences, and sponsoring webinars open to the social work community and other stakeholders.

National Committee of Grandparents for Children’s Rights

The National Committee of Grandparents for Children’s Rights is a national organization consisting of a network of grandparents, community leaders, and professionals. The NCGCR promotes advocacy, education, and leadership in matters affecting children and kinship families. Based in Cohoes, New York, the NCGCR advocates and lobbies for legislative changes that protect the rights of grandparents and children. NCGCR provides information, education, support, learning opportunities and opportunity to engage in legislative activities to kinship families and professionals. State-specific kinship population and resources can be accessed from the organization’s web site, www.grandparentsforchildren.org and its toll-free phone line, 888-659-3745.

Pathway to the Summit

Kinship care is generally defined as the phenomenon of relatives (or other individuals with a significant relationship to the family) caring for relative’s children when the parents are unable to do so. There was early recognition that kinship care was not a new phenomenon, but a time honored tradition in many cultures. Kinship care was and continues to be an informal system of care for assuring that children are safe, their well-being needs are addressed, and that family and community connections are preserved.

Several factors contributed to kinship care becoming a formal program within the child welfare system. Those factors, among others, included an increase in out-of-home care in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s, and a decrease in the quantity of non-relative foster
homes available to children who were removed from the care of their parents. Since the 1990’s kinship care services and programs within the child welfare system has been strengthened through Federal legislation, policy, and child welfare standards of practice that emphasize the value of keeping children connected to family. While trends in kinship care in the formal child welfare system now can be tracked through data and research, understanding of the families outside the formal system requires more purposeful attention.\(^2\)

Kinship families in the formal child welfare system have access to support services through exposure and connection to information concerning resources and the assistance of social workers. In contrast, kinship families outside the child welfare system often face similar challenges sometimes without the benefit of the same level of support.

The Child Welfare League of America’s National Kinship Care Advisory Committee (CWLA) and the National Committee of Grandparents for Children’s Rights (NCGCR) joined forces to explore this disparity by bringing together a group of practitioners, policy makers, and caregivers to discuss the issues affecting kinship families in achieving maximum capacity to care for their children and youth. The two organizations planned, with support from the Hagedorn Foundation, “A National Kinship Care Summit: A Voice for the Nation’s Informal Kinship Care Community”. The Summit was held during the 2011 CWLA National Conference.

**Summit Goal, Design and Agenda**

**Goal**

The goals of the Summit were to: (1) educate policy-makers and child welfare practitioners about barriers faced by families in the informal kinship care system, and (2) formulate recommendations for needed and promising policies and practices. Although not a specifically stated goal, the Summit provided a forum for kinship families to speak directly to policy-makers and practitioners about their experience and perspective on the needs of caregivers and children in the informal system. Diversity of experience and perspectives among the

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\(^2\) In this document, reference to “families in the formal child welfare system” refers to those caring for children for whom the child welfare agency has legal custody or some form of oversight. Informal kinship care system refers to the families in which arrangements were made among or between family members without intervention of the child welfare system. These families may or may not be known to the child welfare system, or are not receiving services through the child welfare system.
participants offered maximum opportunity for a balanced and comprehensive understanding of challenges and needs—as well as recommendations for change.

**Design**

The Summit was designed to explore three key issues related to families in informal kinship care arrangements:

- Engaging kinship families by child welfare agencies,
- Increasing kinship family access to support services and benefits, and
- Establishing services tailored to the needs of families in informal kinship arrangements

Summit participants were asked to indicate an interest in one of the three issues. Their selection served as assignment to one of three discussion groups focused on the identified issues.

**Agenda**

The Summit was opened with a keynote address and remarks by David Hansell, Acting Secretary, Administration for Children and Families, and Bryan Samuels, Commissioner Administration for Children, Youth and Families, United States Department of Health and Human Services. The agenda began with a facilitated panel presentation of experts which provided information related to the Summit theme, and provided the context for discussions that followed. The expert and diverse panel included:

- Joseph Crumbley, DSW, Trainer, Family Therapist, and Consultant
- Howard Davidson, Director and Acting Director, Commission on Youth at Risk and American Bar Association, Center on Children and the Law, respectively
- Leonard Feldman, Ph.D. Consultant, The Children’s Home Society of New Jersey
- Linda James Grandparent
• Barbara Kates, Director Maine Kids and Kin, Families and Children Together

• Yali Lincroft, MBA, Policy and Program Consultant First Focus

• Gerard Wallace, ESQ., Executive Director (ret.), National Committee of Grandparents for Children’s Rights, Director, New York State Kinship Navigator Program Panel Facilitator

Following the expert panel, participants were engaged in group discussions focused on each of the pre-selected issues related to engagement of kinship families, increasing access to services, and establishing tailored services. Each discussion group was provided initial information pertaining to the issue. The tables below provide a summary of the initial information used as a starting point for group discussion (Refer to Appendices A-C for full text).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discussion Group Session A</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Issues and Concerns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engagement with Child Welfare Agencies</td>
<td>Policy and practice related to how child welfare agencies engage kinship families along the continuum of interactions, beginning with initial contact with child protective services to planning for permanence.</td>
<td>Data collection and analysis on trends and patterns related to families in the informal system</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Equity in availability and access to services and supports</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Child welfare staff training</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Outreach and searches for kin</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kinship home approval and licensing</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Parental relationships when parents are incarcerated</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Permanence through subsidized guardianship</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Discussion Group Session B

**Increasing Kinship Family Access to Support Services and Benefits**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discussion Group Session B</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Issues and Concerns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increasing Kinship Family Access to Services and Benefits</td>
<td>Removal of barriers to access to supports and services for families in informal kinship care arrangements</td>
<td>Fragmentation of programs and funding</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Inconsistencies in financial support across states</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Creating equal access</td>
<td>Barriers to use of subsidized guardianship</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Reluctance of families to seek help to identify and access services</td>
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<td>Availability of kinship navigator programs</td>
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<td>Obstacles to, and misinterpretation of eligibility for TANF child-only grants</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Availability of services from diverse systems</td>
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### Discussion Group Session C

**Establishing Services Tailored to the Needs of Families in the Informal System**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discussion Group Session C</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Issues and Concerns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establishing Tailored Services</td>
<td>Attention to the “how” services and supports are delivered to meet the demographic characteristics of families in informal kinship care</td>
<td>Available caregiver training and opportunities for information</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Centralized best practice and research information</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Opportunity for peer-to-peer and other mentoring and support</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Services for targeted populations</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Summit Participants

The Summit participants (approximately 90) represented a range of perspectives. Social workers, child welfare agency administrators and supervisors, advocates, social work educators, and kinship families assured a broad view of the issues identified for discussion. Each discussion group had a mix of individuals with varied perspectives and experiences in kinship care service, program design and the delivery and utilization of services.

Organization of the Report

This report includes key points discussed in each of the three group sessions, policy and practice recommendations, and a vision for the future.

Chapter 2 presents the perspective of participants related to engaging kinship families, increasing kinship family access to services, and establishing services tailored to kinship families in the informal system. Service needs, challenges, strengths, and implications of current research for policy and practice are described.

Chapter 3 presents recommendations from the three discussion groups. There were a large number of recommendations proposed and related to the three discussion issues. The recommendations discussed in Chapter 3 relate to a centralized source of information, research, federal and state systems, and collaboration across systems. Chapter 3 also presents a vision for kinship care to guide future policy and practice.

The CWLA National Kinship Care Advisory Committee members, leadership of the National Committee of Grandparents for Children’s Rights, and the Summit participants worked diligently on March 27, 2012 to share information and examine issues that impact successful outcomes for kinship care giving efforts, and the growth and development of children. The Appendices include a list of Committee members, and others who made the Summit possible. The Appendices also include handouts provided to participants that provide additional information to the reader. It is hoped that the content of this document will be used to enhance kinship care practice and policy and to advocate for sufficient resources to sustain kinship family arrangements.
CHAPTER 2
SUMMIT FINDINGS

A. Engagement of Kinship Families by Child Welfare Agencies

It is recognized that kinship families may have contact with the child welfare agency without becoming formally incorporated into the system. The question that framed the discussion related to how those families are engaged and supported when that contact occurs. Anecdotal information that was shared by the discussion group members indicated concern that kinship families that do not become part of the formal child welfare system do not always receive the same level of supportive information that results in access to needed services. Child welfare agencies must have policies that identify and support relatives or others with a significant relationship to the child and family when a child cannot remain safely with his parents. The critical practice issue is how those families are engaged in identifying caregiver and child-specific needs to assure caregiver capacity and child safety and well-being—as well as assessment of whether the interest of both are best served within the formal or informal system.

Discussion of kinship family engagement centered around consistent and clearly defined policy and practice based on data collection and analysis, equity in service availability and access, staff training and skill development in kinship family outreach and engagement, outreach and searches for kin, kinship family home approval, subsidized guardianship and financial support. The following paragraphs present the main points related to each of these factors.

Policy and Practice

Commonly shared values and philosophy supporting kinship care policy and practice are needed across state and local child welfare agencies, as well as across human service systems through which families may access supports. Simply stated, the values and philosophy related to kinship care policy and practice may differ from one jurisdiction to another, and may not be clearly stated and incorporated into policy and practice. Similarly, for example, have the benefits of placing children with kin whenever possible been identified as a component of the framework for policy and practice? How have the benefits to the child and family informed policy and practice, and
been communicated to staff? When kin are a resource, either prior to or during dependency proceedings, what procedures insure the safety and well-being of children? Answers to these questions, and those related to the demographics of families in the informal system, require the collection and analysis of data that provides insight into trends and patterns related to needs and relevant services.

Does policy support assessment of family and child needs to determine how supports will be accessed, or families informed of available options for support and services? Practice guidelines should direct how families are engaged and involved in the assessment process to determine supports and services. Comprehensive assessment also allows the family and social worker to determine together whether a child and kinship family should be served in the formal or informal system.

Uniformity in policy and practice concerning outreach and notice to kin when it is decided that a child cannot remain with his parents was a point of discussion. Federal policy and guidelines exist that identify the types of information that should be provided in the notice to relatives, and a timeframe for providing notice.\(^1\) The question debated during the discussion related to how this policy is implemented. Is it implemented from a compliance perspective or from a practice perspective that is designed to maximize family engagement, and minimize the trauma that children experience when separated from their parents?

**Staff Training and Skill Development**

Training should be available to staff that highlights the unique strengths, needs, characteristics of kinship families. Skill building on child and family engagement should be a component of training programs and curriculum. Effective engagement requires an understanding of the clinical aspects of kinship relationships, one’s culture, and the impact of trauma when a family is in crisis.

Training should include:

- Kinship care history in the child welfare system,

- Values and philosophy,

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\(^1\) The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 requires notice to grandparents or other adult relatives recommended by the parent within 30 days of a child’s removal from his home. The notice must explain options available to the relative as to the care of the child.
• Supporting legislation, public policy and agency-specific policy,
• Clinical issues related to changes in family member roles,
• Effective use of assessment tools and the participation of the family in the assessment process, and
• Knowledge of resources (e.g., court processes for custody and eligibility for financial assistance) and how to access them.

It was observed by the discussion group that such training is not uniformly available in all jurisdictions. Training specific to the unique characteristics and dynamics of kinship care are needed for child welfare agency social workers to be effective in working with kinship families. The Child Welfare League of America has developed a curriculum titled, Collaborating with Kinship Caregivers: A research to practice, competence-based training program for child welfare workers and their supervisors, that addresses the issues raised here.

**Approving Kinship Families**

There must be an approval protocol for kin identified as potential caregivers when the family comes into contact with the child welfare system. Whether considered for formal kinship care or considered for an informal arrangement, there is an assessment of caregiver willingness, ability, capability, relationship to the child, and needed supports. It was acknowledged by the discussion group that the approval process should be used to assure a safe and nurturing environment for the child, and address needs and services to sustain the living arrangement. Concern was expressed that the approval process be fully explained to the kinship family and options available to them in the task of caring for the child. Inflexibility in criteria for approval sometimes is a barrier when a kinship family member may have, for example, an old non-violent arrest as a young person.

**Permanency Options for Children**

Reunification is the first permanency option of choice whenever possible and parents have acquired the skills and supports needed to adequately care for their children. Kinship families who are within the formal system and transition out of the system with the child remaining in their physical custody should be informed of all options
that support permanency for the child. Adoption is one permanency option available to kinship families whether within or outside the formal child welfare system. Legal custody is another option. The option that was of particular concern to the discussion group was subsidized guardianship. All of these options involve legal processes, and for families in the informal system cost and knowledge of the process may be a challenge. Subsidized guardianship is available to kinship caregivers when the child is in the custody of the state and the kinship caregiver obtains legal custody. This helps assure stability of the relationship and that the caregiver has resources to provide care to the child. However, this support and benefit is not available to kinship families outside the formal system.

Financial Assistance

The disparity between foster care maintenance reimbursements available to unrelated and kin caregivers in the formal system, and financial assistance to kinship families in the informal system was noted. The observation was made that child-only grants provided by Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) is not equal to what many caregivers in the formal system receive for the care of children. However, adequate financial support may be needed to address similar needs in both categories of kinship arrangements.

B. Increasing Kinship Family Access to Services

The discussion group that focused on kinship family engagement identified areas in which engagement had the potential for enhanced caregiver capacity. Effective engagement is based on shared values, family participation in assessments, skilled and knowledgeable workforce, an approval process tailored to family characteristics, provision of information for decision-making, and access to financial support. It was pointed out that kinship families in the informal system do not always have access to the same level of supports (including information) and services as those in the formal child welfare system. The discussion group that focused on increasing kinship access to supports and services identified key factors for consideration. The factors included:

- Fragmentation of services and funding,
- Inconsistencies in financial support across states,
- Barriers to subsidized guardianship,
• Reluctance by kinship families to seek help,
• Availability of kinship navigator programs,
• Availability of services from diverse systems, and
• Misinterpretation of TANF eligibility.

Observations related to each of these factors are discussed below.

**Fragmented Services and Funding**

It is important for services to be coordinated across child welfare and human service systems. Coordination of services is essential to achieving maximum achievement of service goals and comprehensive supports for the family. This has implications for effective intra-agency communications and communications between the child welfare system and human service systems such as health, mental health, and education. Kinship families who have contact with the child welfare system that results in a decision for an informal living arrangement do not always have information about their eligibility for selected or identified services and how to access them. The connections between services may not be made for families to assure that they and the children and youth are actually engaged in the service or program. One challenge experienced by families, according to the discussion group, is an understanding of how services and programs are structured, and how that structure impacts their access and eligibility.

The unique characteristics of kinship care arrangements and how this dynamic can influence service delivery strategies is not uniformly understood across human service systems. Inflexible and categorical funding streams also influence informal kinship family access and eligibility to supports and services.

Kinship caregiver demographics indicate that many caregivers are older or senior citizens on fixed incomes or with limited financial resources. This demographic suggests opportunity for coordination between federal agencies on behalf of older caregivers. The Assistant Secretary for Aging, Department of Health and Human Services, currently has a mandate to provide education on supplemental security income, medical assistance, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The discussion group felt that education about TANF child-only grants, and grandparent social security
benefits should be added to the required topics. Inclusion of these two benefits in the list of education responsibilities would ensure that all aging services under the Older American Act are knowledgeable about kinship families, thus increasing receipt of benefits by more eligible families.²

**Inconsistent Financial Support across States**

Experiences shared among the discussion group members suggested that a kinship family may be eligible for a TANF child-only grant, but not eligible for SNAP or free lunch school programs. At a minimum, it was identified as a perception that may discourage families from applying for benefits to which they may be entitled. An example was shared to illustrate the difference between states in defining eligibility for TANF. It was noted that in New York State, kinship caregivers must declare that they are charging rent to the minor child in their care in order to receive shelter and fuel allowances. Not doing so reportedly results in lower benefit payments. Similar observations indicated that eligibility requirements vary among the states, and in some instances kinship families were not advised by child welfare staff that they were eligible for the child-only grant. The conclusion was that while states may be able to establish individual criteria for eligibility, child welfare staff across states should be trained on eligibility requirements so that accurate information is provided to families.³

**Barriers to Subsidized Guardianship**

Kin families face many challenges and barriers in providing safe, nurturing and loving homes. A key barrier is a lack of information about services. Another is lack of eligibility for subsidized care. Child welfare agencies should provide accurate and timely information to kinship caregivers, especially in regards to subsidies that might be available. In addition there needs to be a commitment to view services and subsidies in a flexible way in order to provide the greatest level of support. At the national level thorough research is needed for a comprehensive study of these barriers with the goal to develop a set of recommendations to overcome them. This should

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² Under 42 U.S.C. §416(e)(3); CFR § 404.350, grandparents can receive benefits for dependent children when the parents are deceased or disabled and a grandparent applies for benefits at the time they are initially entitled to benefits.

³ Additional information on this topic can be accessed at http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/child-only04/ch2.htm
include authorizing demonstration projects aimed at testing innovative approaches to break through barriers.

**Family Reluctance to Seek Help**

As stated previously, families in the informal child welfare system sometimes do not have the same level of knowledge about available supports and access to services through human service systems. Kinship caregivers assume responsibility for their relative’s children out of a sense of commitment to the family as a whole and specifically to the child. The ultimate goal is to preserve family connections for the child, as well as assure that the child’s needs are being met within a safe and stable environment. Lack of understanding about the child welfare system and frequently communicated misperceptions about the system sometimes create fear that the child may be removed from their care if assistance is needed and sought. A challenge to be addressed is the establishment of mechanisms for information sharing about the structure and services through the child welfare system, and about networks of informal community-based supports and services.

**Availability of Kinship Navigator Programs**

Kinship Navigator Programs are a valuable resource to kinship families. As previously mentioned, kinship families are not always aware of benefits and services available to them or how to access the same. Kinship Navigator Programs address that problem by providing information and referral services. Families contacting a Kinship Care Navigator Program can receive information concerning programs and services such as:

- Medicaid,
- TANF,
- Food assistance
- Child care,
- Child support,
- Health care,
- Specialized kinship services,
• Education, and

• Legal assistance.

Currently, seven Kinship Care Navigator projects are federally supported through Family Connections Grants from the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008. Some states support Kinship Navigators (e.g., New York, Ohio, California, Connecticut, and New Jersey). The value and benefit of a central point of access for information was emphasized by the discussion group. This is especially true for families in the informal system that may need assistance in gaining knowledge about available supports and how to navigate human service and other system services.

C. Establishing Services Tailored to the Needs of Families in the Informal System

Families in the informal system have many of the same needs as those in the formal system. In the formal system there are social workers and an organizational structure that serves as support (financial and non-tangible), source of information, and connections with other human service systems and community resources, education through training opportunities and legal support. While social workers in the formal system are available to serve as service brokers, advocates, and coordinators of services, families in the informal system more than likely have to assume those roles on their own. The discussion group directed their attention to program design and practice that will support the efforts of caregivers in the informal system. Their ideas are captured in the paragraphs below.

Three essential components of kinship care programs were identified as: (1) centralized source for information on best and promising practices, research, and state programs and funding strategies (2) kinship caregiver mentoring programs, and (3) targeted practice strategies for older caregivers, caregivers with immigrant status, caregivers in rural communities, and kinship families with incarcerated parents. Many of the best practices and program design discussed also are applicable to all kinship families.

Centralized Source of Information

There were several observations covered relative to this topic area. First, there are several resources available for information concerning best practice. The Child Welfare Information Gateway and the CWLA Standards of Excellence for Kinship Care Services were
mentioned as resources. It was noted that the CWLA Standards do not distinguish between formal kinship care and informal kinship care. Currently, one has to go to both web sites to access information—as well as to other sites that may provide guidance in practice. One central point that identifies and directs the individual to all sources of information would be useful.

Secondly, the collection and analysis of data will help in developing a better understanding of the trends and patterns of service needs and resources in the informal population, as well as the demographics. The results of research on outcomes of kinship arrangements in the informal system can inform how programs and services are designed and delivered.

Third, access to what other states are doing to meet the needs of the families in the informal system can be used as a means of measuring one’s own approach to programs and services, and generating new ideas.

**Kinship Caregiver Mentoring**

Child welfare agencies and organizations in other human service and community systems can gain from sharing information and collaboration on services and programs. The same is true for individuals who are kinship caregivers, and for the children and youth in their care. Kinship families and kinship caregivers in particular, in the informal system may not know that there are many families in their community and neighborhoods in similar living arrangements. It is helpful and reassuring to share information and experiences with peers. Such sharing serves as an opportunity for support and for learning. The same principle is applicable to youth and children who have experienced the separation from their parents. Funding and dedication of resources to peer mentoring, mentoring by professionals, leadership training, and support groups in the community have an important place in kinship care programs for families in the informal system.

**Targeted Practice Strategies**

Services and programs should be targeted to the needs of the population served. Kinship care arrangements can be found in all socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic groups, in all regions of the country. How easily services can be accessed depends on many factors such as funding, organizational policy and practice, service availability
and location. Service availability may not be as great in rural areas. Therefore, attention should be focused upon the needs of families residing in rural areas. In such cases, transportation, day care, and cost of gasoline impact access to supports and services.

Although specific statistics were not confirmed during the discussion, it was recognized that there are a significant number of kinship families caring for children whose parents have been incarcerated. The exact number of children in the informal kinship care population with an incarcerated parent could not be determined during the discussion. However, it was noted by one participant that a sampling from the New York State Navigator database indicated that eight percent of 2,982 children in informal kinship care have one or both parents incarcerated. Collecting data that can provide precise insight into this issue would be helpful in identifying and projecting service needs. Having an incarcerated parent presents challenges for maintaining parent-child connections and for addressing feelings of shame, anger or discomfort felt by the children and kinship caregiver. Support strategies for addressing this dynamic should be included in programs.

Immigration and kinship care was considered an important topic. It was noted by the discussion group that kinship caregivers, especially grandparents, who are the primary full-time caregivers for children who are citizens, but who are themselves undocumented may face deportation. This presents special challenges for kinship families in efforts to provide consistency in the care of children and in maintaining children within their family system. Another challenge concerns the access to and use of supportive services. There is an indication that families with undocumented status are less likely to use public benefit programs such as SNAP.

Attention directed toward services that consider the needs of older caregivers was considered important. Older caregivers are more likely to have health concerns, fewer financial resources, be farther removed from current system practices such as those in education and health care. Therefore, consideration must be made to the possible need for respite care, transportation assistance, tutorial assistance for school-age children, and time and resources for attention to one’s own health.

4 Kinship service providers observed that this number may be low due to some caregivers not wanting to admit that a family member was incarcerated.

The observations, experience, and practice wisdom of the three discussion groups (Engaging Kinship Families, Increasing Kinship Family Access to Services, and Establishing Services Tailored to Families in Informal Kinship Care) resulted in policy and practice recommendations. Some of the recommendations are specific to state and local agencies operations, and others are related more directly to changes on the federal system level. The next chapter, Chapter 3, outlines the recommendations within four discrete categories: The end of the chapter presents a vision for the future as proposed by members of the Summit.
CHAPTER 3
SUMMIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings from the Summit discussion groups served as the basis for policy and practice recommendations. Some recommendations were proposed by more than one group. This is not unusual because the three discussion topics are inter-related. Families must be engaged and actively involved in identifying needed supports and services. Engagement facilitates opportunity for increased access to services, and to services specifically tailored to kinship families. The recommendations listed below are assigned to four topical areas. Having identified key findings and formulated recommendations related to the findings, the discussion groups as one unit developed a vision that is articulated at the end of this chapter.

Recommendations

The recommendations focus on:

A. Centralized source of information for kinship families in the informal system, specifically Kinship Navigator Programs in collaboration with TANF and child welfare agencies,

B. Research informed approaches to services,

C. Federal and state functions and systemic change, and

D. Collaboration across human service systems.

A. Centralized Source of Information

1. Establish Kinship Navigator Programs in every state.

2. Include provisions for the development and support of Kinship Navigator Programs in state plans under the Child Welfare Services Program.

3. Include information and referral, cited legal information for self-advocacy, and referrals to supplemental direct services in Kinship Navigator Programs.

4. Advocate for the continuation, expansion and strengthening of the kinship navigator program ahead of 2013 when the Family
Connection Grants need to be reauthorized. Create a centralized point of contact and information using trained staff within child welfare agencies to provide resource and service information to kinship families within the system and those outside the system making inquiries.

This recommendation and its components are related to the discussion topic, “Increasing Kinship Access to Services” and are directed to equal access to information, and ultimately services.

**B. Research that Informs Approaches to Services**

1. Fund and conduct research to explore the challenges unique to kinship families in the informal system to establish trends and patterns. Mine data from child welfare, TANF, and social security, juvenile justice, education, health, and census agencies to obtain a comprehensive profile of families in the informal system.

2. Fund research that will measure service effectiveness and outcome achievement.

3. Establish child welfare agency protocols to track outcomes of kinship families that pass through the child welfare system resulting in informal arrangements.

4. Establish a research agenda to measure outcomes for children and youth in state custody and placed with kin.

These recommendations will lead to services that are evidence-informed and relate to the discussion topic “Establishing Services Tailored to Families in Informal Kinship Care.

**C. Federal and State Functions and Systemic Change**

1. Conduct a review, led by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, of state barriers and restrictions on TANF child-only grants for children being raised by grandparents and other relatives with a view toward increased kinship family access.

2. Make Supplemental Nutrition Allowance Program (SNAP) more available to kinship families by amending the definition section so that recipients of the child-only grant can also receive SNAP (child-specific) when the caregiver does not qualify.
3. Amend Social Security eligibility to allow more children being raised by grandparents or other relatives to qualify as dependents on their relative caregiver’s benefits by adjusting the eligibility prerequisite requiring children to be in the care of a grandparent or other relative caregiver one year before the month they begin receiving retirement, disability or survivor’s benefits. Consider extending eligibility, not only to children living with grandparents whose parents have died or who are disabled, but also to children being raised by grandparents due to parental abandonment, inability, incarceration, or other extraordinary reasons. Consider extending eligibility to similarly situated children who are living with non-grandparent relatives.

4. Expand prosecutorial discretion to include kinship caregivers who are undocumented and caring for children who are citizens and whose parents have been deported or are otherwise unable to care for them to minimize additional trauma experienced by the child.

5. Consider amendment to the immigration law to allow a hardship exemption from removal of a relative that is undocumented and is the sole caregiver of a U.S. citizen or lawfully present children.

6. Consider mandates for local Area Agencies on Aging to use the full 10 percent of their National Family Caregiver Support Program funds toward services for grandparents and other kin raising children.

7. Require training for Administration on Aging, local Area Agencies on Aging staff on available benefits for kinship families through TANF and Social Security.

Consideration of these recommendations will require partnerships and collaboration across child welfare and other social welfare systems. They relate to increased kinship family access to supportive resources.

**D. Collaboration across Human Service Systems**

1. Establish school district protocols that support kinship caregivers in navigating district procedures and facilitate easy transfer of students. Create protocols that will allow children
to attend the same school before moving to the kinship family address whenever possible to, and especially when graduations are within the current school year, encourage continuity of education.

2. Target child care funding to assist caregivers who must have the service to accept new or maintain current employment.

3. Create collaborative initiatives between child welfare and other human service systems (juvenile and adult justice systems, physical health, and mental health) to tailor services to the unique characteristics of kinship families.

4. Restore funding for Mentoring Children of Prisoners programs to continue mentoring opportunities for children and youth with incarcerated parents.

5. Provide federal funding for caregivers to assist children in visiting incarcerated parents. Support the placement of incarcerated parents in facilities near the children to assure visiting opportunity.

6. Create access to special refundable tax credits similar to the Earned Income Tax Credit.

7. Use Community Development Block grant programs to coordinate with the Department of Housing and Urban Development to fund demonstration housing projects specifically for kinship caregivers, including those under the age of 60.

The recommendations highlight the need for coordinated services across systems to facilitate continuity of care and outcomes—and to address identified challenges to families such as children’s timely access to school transfers, coordinated services, children’s continued connections with parents, housing, and financial supports.

**The Vision**

Creating a vision for a program or service provides the pathway to achieving desired outcomes. The Summit participants created the following vision for informal kinship families.

We envision a society in which:
• Grandparents and other kinship caregivers are recognized as being capable of helping children succeed,

• Children from struggling homes will not continue to struggle,

• Kinship families are fully embraced by policy makers, public and private institutions, and faith-based organizations,

• Children who cannot live with their parents reside with kin who have the supportive resources available to them to assure a safe and nurturing environment,

• Resources are dedicated to enhancing the stability and skills of kinship families by engaging them as partners in policy and practice development,

• Kinship families are recognized as an integral part of family life in the United States that strengthen the overall functioning of our society.
The Child Welfare League of American (CWLA) and the National Committee of Grandparents for Children’s Rights (NCGCR) appreciates and acknowledges the generous support of the Hagedorn Foundation.

The time and expertise of the following individuals is greatly appreciated in contributing to the success of the National Summit.

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BREAKOUT SESSIONS
Families in “Informal” Kinship Care Arrangements

SESSION A: ENGAGEMENT WITH CHILD WELFARE AGENCIES

SESSION B: INCREASING KINSHIP FAMILY ACCESS TO SUPPORT SERVICES AND BENEFITS

SESSION C: ESTABLISHING SERVICES TAILORED TO THE NEEDS OF KINSHIP FAMILIES WITHIN AND ACROSS SYSTEMS
SESSION A
ENGAGEMENT WITH CHILD WELFARE AGENCIES

Summit Session Facilitator and Recorder: Jerry Wallace, and Eileen Pasztor

Focus:

The topic area for this session examines how kinship caregivers are engaged with child welfare agencies along the continuum of interactions, beginning with the first encounter that may result in informal placements by child protective services to transitions from child welfare involvement--especially to subsidized kinship guardianship. Critical issues related to kinship family engagement with child welfare agencies will be examined through the lens of the Fostering Connections Act. The Fostering Connections Act addressed some of the long-standing concerns related to the engagement of kin as follows:

• TITLE I—CONNECTING AND SUPPORTING RELATIVE CARE-GIVERS

  Sec. 101. Kinship guardianship assistance payments for children.

  Sec. 102. Family connection grants (Kinship Navigator Programs)

  Sec. 103. Notification of relatives.

  Sec. 104. Licensing standards for relatives.

• TITLE II—IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

  Sec. 203. Short-term training for child welfare agencies, relative guardians, and court personnel.

  Sec. 204. Educational stability.

  Sec. 206. Sibling placement.
Issues and Concerns

1. “Informal” and “Voluntary” Kinship Care – Data are Needed!

The majority of kinship care arrangements occur with no involvement of the child welfare system (informal kinship care). Less than 10% of children living with relatives are in the custody of the child welfare system in formal kinship care arrangements. However, child protective services workers may deflect children to “informal” kinship care without opening a case or providing services. Other kinship care arrangements fall somewhere between formal and informal arrangements and have been referred to as “voluntary kinship care”. These kinship care living arrangements develop with the assistance of child protective services by opening a case, but not taking the child into custody. “Informal” and “voluntary” kinship care arrangements that are arranged by child protection occur without the child welfare caseworker initiating a removal protocol, a court proceeding, and often without services to the parents. A frequent progression of events involves caseworkers asking parents who cannot assume care of their children to identify potential caregivers (family members or other individuals with a significant relationship to the parents or child), contacting the potential caregiver, and approving the potential caregiver for the care of the child. The extent of this practice cannot be determined by a review of Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System (AFCARS) data. However, anecdotal observations and reports of kinship care giving families consistently indicate that such “placements” are common occurrences.

In a sample of 3,351 children drawn from the New York State Kinship Navigator’s Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) database, 1,843 had past or current involvement of child protective service; of which 343 were placed in the custody of kin pursuant to neglect proceeding (commonly called voluntary placements) and 76 were place with kin who were foster parents. The remaining 1,424 (42%) were placed “informally”.

2. Diversion (Voluntary Placements): Proceedings Started, Using Kin as a Resource But Not as Foster Parents Services

A recent analysis of 1,308 children in formal kinship care using the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW) showed that children in kinship care placements received significantly less oversight, services, and financial assistance. However, the lack of oversight, support and services is even greater for
children in voluntary and informal kinship care arrangements (Sakai, Lin, & Flores, 2011). Summarizing concerns, Rob Green has written:

“A related concern centers on when it might be appropriate for child welfare agencies to divert children from the foster care system by using voluntary kinship care placements. The aforementioned issues relating to equity in financial assistance apply in these cases, but just as important, these children may effectively be excluded from public agency supervision, from the specialized health and mental health and school-related services that might be available through foster care, and their parents are denied the services they may need in order to effectively reunify with their children. At the same time, voluntary kinship care placements may benefit children and caregivers by preventing the stigma and intrusion of child welfare system and juvenile court involvement. Not a single study to date has examined voluntary kinship care placements in depth.” (Green: http://www.urban.org/uipress/publications/210869.html)

Moreover, the use of this placement option underscores the uneven use of kinship foster care from state to state and the uneven opportunity for kin to become foster parents. The lack of supervision may contribute to recidivism and disruptive intrusions by parents, as well as to unjustified financial hardships. (Geen Evolution future of children p. 135.)


Fostering Connections section 474(a) (3) (B) permits states to provide training on kinship issues. The Administration for Children, Youth, and Families (ACYF) has not compiled information on how states are using the authority to claim allowable costs for short-term training at transitional rates of Federal Financial Participation (FFP) for the new categories of trainees receiving short-term training, as allowed

1 ACYF provided instructions to States on the need to amend their title IV-E training plans to incorporate any such training that they intend to provide. In addition, there is a new form to be used in submitting quarterly claims for the title IV-E program that asks for training costs associated with these new categories of trainees to be reported separately (see ACYF-CB-PI-10-14). Information on the short-term training provision can also be found in section L of ACYF-CB-PI-10-11 (http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/policy/pi/2010/pi1011.htm#sectl).
under section 474(a)(3)(B) of the Act. But, the provision of training is a core element in tailoring the response of child welfare agencies to the kinship community.

A primary concern related to training for caseworkers is the ambivalence that some child welfare caseworkers have towards kinship families. Perhaps real issues addressing this dilemma are played out in how caseworkers define the role and value of kinship care as a central child welfare service. From a 2004 article (Peters, 2005):

“[W]orkers uncertainty about agency policy was identified repeatedly as a factor which inhibited workers from engaging with kin as warmly, collaboratively, and as productively as workers wished they could or should. Even more fundamental than workers’ confusion about confidentiality with kin was their confusion about how kin are defined. “Are parents of now divorced parental partners kin?” Beyond such definitional issues, workers also pointed out that different, yet unarticulated standards were applied to kin and foster home placements. While the minimum requirements for a foster home are clearly articulated in licensing guidelines, kinship homes in this State do not need to be licensed. As a result, workers observed that traditional foster care placements are held to a higher standard while kin homes are held to a lower [standard] but there is no defined standard of what is or is not good enough. Knowing this difference, therefore, does not answer the question asked by several workers: How far do we lower the bar for placement with kin, compared to foster care? And how do I know how far to lower that bar?”

These questions reflected a general theme regarding the lack of clarity and structure regarding kinship placements. There is less clarity in our policy and procedure regarding kin placements than regular foster care. Similarly, another caseworker struggled with having less structure in terms of DHS policy and procedures. It appears that there are lower standards with kin, but what are those standards, specifically? The author also noted that staff who had been with the agency for a longer period of time wanted some commitment from the administration to kinship foster care, rather than seeing it as just another “fad.” The author recommended systemic

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2 Continuing evolution of amendments to the standards for kin and un-related foster parents reflect the ambivalence associated with kinship care.
resolution of agency ambivalence about kinship foster care, stemming from unresolved issues around family collusion, multi-generational challenges, triangulation, and issues with confidentiality, to name a few. Clearly, policies and practices related to kinship care are uneven and contradictory.

4. Notification: Is “Due Diligence” working? Is the search reaching the best relatives?

Fostering Connections Section 103 requires title IV-E agencies to have a mechanism in place to exercise due diligence to identify and notify all adult relatives of a child’s removal from his or her parents within 30 days of that removal (subject to exceptions due to family or domestic violence) (section 471(a)(29) of the Act). Section H of ACYF-CB-PI-10-11 states that “The title IV-E agency may determine the method to use to provide relative notification of a child's removal, as long as that notification meets the specifications of the provision outlined above.”

ACYF is preparing a report on how effectively the “due diligence” standard is increasing access to foster care, and may answer some critical questions. For instance, to what extent are the best relative placements identified, are out of state and out of country kin receiving notice, how many states are using “written” notice? Underscoring the need for the enactment of a higher standard of notice was the diversion of kin to voluntary placements and informal placements that are less costly. The realities of such practices reflect a largely unsettled debate regarding children in kinship foster care versus children in informal kinship. Notification and placements are part of this discussion.

5. Qualifying For Certification (Approval and Licensing): Obstacles And Answers

Fostering Connections Section 471(a) (10) permits the title IV-E agency to waive, on a case-by-case basis, a State/Tribal non-safety licensing standard for a relative foster family home. A title IV-E

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3 The notice must specify that the child has been or is being removed from the custody of the parent, the relative’s options to participate in the care and placement of the child (pursuant to Federal, State and local law), any options that may be lost by not responding to the notice, the agency’s requirements for becoming a foster family home and the additional services and supports for children in foster family homes. If the title IV-E agency has elected to operate a title IV-E guardianship assistance program, the notice also must describe how a relative guardian may receive such assistance on the child’s behalf.” (http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/policy/pi/2010/pi1011.htm#seoth)
agency has the discretion to determine what constitutes a non-safety standard for the purpose of meeting this requirement. A state or tribe also has the discretion to establish licensing standards as long as they are applied equally (see ACYF-CB-IM-01-05). While the title IV-E agency has discretion to establish licensing standards and to determine which licensing standards are considered non-safety standards, the agency must still adhere to the federal requirements under section 471(a)(20) of the Act concerning criminal background and child abuse and neglect checks for relative foster and adoptive parents, and guardians, and disqualifying crimes. (http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/policy/pi/2010/pi1011.htm#secth).

There is no requirement in the Act for an expedited licensing procedure.

Once kin become a resource for placement, they must fulfill state requirements for status as a foster parent in order to qualify for federal-funded payments and for a kinship guardianship subsidy. While Fostering Connections eases the burden for qualification, states may choose standards for certification/licensing that still dissuade kin from seeking to become foster parents. For instance, no placement until certified/licensed, certification/licensing trainings that are onerous (e.g., distance, time to complete) and the fear of removals from kinship homes.

6. Incarcerated Parents: Access and maintaining parental relationships

Across the country, “More than 1.7 million children have a parent who is incarcerated, with the majority of these children cared for by relatives.” The numbers of women who are being sent to prison has increased over the past decades with devastating consequences for children and families. According to a report commissioned by the Institute for Women and Criminal Justice:

“Women are the fastest-growing segment of the prison population, surpassing male prison population growth in all 50 states. These trends have profound consequences for communities, families and the women themselves. The

report finds that the rise in the female prison population has been punctuated by growth spikes that reached higher, lasted longer and often began earlier than those affecting men.”

There are no known national surveys or child welfare studies of how many children with such parents are in informal kinship or in kinship foster care. Even child welfare agencies across the country do not know how many children in foster care have an incarcerated parent. However, a sampling from the NYS Navigator ETO database shows that 8.4% of 2,982 children in informal kinship care have one or both parents incarcerated.

Children in kinship care with incarcerated parents face extraordinary challenges:

When asked what particular difficulties children of incarcerated parents face, caseworkers identified the embarrassment of having an incarcerated parent; infrequent visits; anger because of their parent’s choices; being cut off from family; not being able to see their mother when they would like; having to communicate through letters; difficult emotions when incarcerated parents do not want them to visit; and the painful emotions of saying goodbye at the end of a visit. One caseworker felt that children of incarcerated parents faced the same issues as other children in foster care.

Children may have unrealistic “myths” about their parents or may harbor extraordinary anger. They may feel isolated due to the negative response by many who learn of their incarcerated parent. They may be aware that some adults and peers believe that they will engage in criminal activity themselves, although there is no evidence to support this concern.

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7 Kinship service providers speculate that this number is low, due some caregivers not wanting to admit the incarceration of the family member. See also, “More than 90 percent of primary caregivers interviewed in the study were close relatives of the incarcerated mother and her minor children (also known as kinship caregivers). Childhood Disrupted: Understanding the Features and Effects of Maternal Incarceration, Volunteers of America (November 2010) p. 9; http://www.voa.org/Childhood-Disrupted-Report.
Dr. Joseph Crumbly has presented on a program of interventions specially designed for these kinship families. At the New York State 2010 Kinship Summit, participants saw the need for more focus on providing supports to children who are at risk because of parental incarceration and were enthusiastic about implementing the scripts and program actions outlined by Dr. Crumbley.

More attention to children with incarcerated parents, more data, and more tailored programs are possible recommendations. 9

7. Exiting: Subsidized Guardianship, a path to "legal" permanence?

Fostering Connections: Section 101(a)(1)(B)(iv) states “that the State will pay the total cost of nonrecurring expenses associated with obtaining legal guardianship of the child, to the extent the total cost does not exceed $2,000.”

After kin exit the foster care system and become kinship guardians, the rights of parents remain intact and kin are vulnerable to petitions by parents, often repeated over many years. As a result, subsidized kinship guardianship programs permanently remove kinship children from foster care, but as a result many are concerned that not enough support is provided to families once they assume guardianship to ensure that this living arrangement is truly permanent. Kinship families leaving the foster care system enter the informal kinship system where they find themselves with little to no access to free legal assistance such as assigned counsel, legal services programs, court or local bar pro bono, and community-based programs. The result is that kinship guardians, like other “informal” kinship caregivers, have little understanding of their legal rights regarding their care and custody of children and even less opportunity to protect their interests as custodians of children. In all informal kinship legal arrangements (whether with or without court orders, with legal custody or guardianship, with adoption, or with kinship guardianship) the care is private and not monitored by the state. Kin, who start with fewer legal rights than parents and resources, also find that they are not only on their own, but are not able to assert the best interests of children.

Kinship guardianships, where parents’ rights are not terminated, need additional supports to sustain permanency. Post guardianship services should be available for all who need them.

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SESSION B
INCREASING KINSHIP FAMILY ACCESS TO SUPPORT SERVICES AND BENEFITS

Summit Session Facilitators and Recorder: James Gleeson, Zelma Smith, and Cassaundra Rainey

Focus:
Considerable progress has been made in supporting formal kinship care arrangements, but a number of concerns remain. And, little progress has been made to remove barriers to access to supports and services for informal kinship care arrangements.

Issues and Concerns

1. Formal kinship caregivers tend to receive fewer support services than foster caregivers. For example, formal kinship caregivers are less likely than foster parents to receive specialized services and special service fees to support the care of a child, regardless of the complexity and severity of the child’s special needs.

2. The level of financial support available to kinship caregiving families is not dependent upon the needs of families and children, and there are inconsistencies across states. In some states, thousand of abused and neglected children are deflected from state custody to informal kinship care arrangements, while in others similar children are taken into state custody and considered formal kinship care. When children are taken into state custody and the kinship home is licensed as a foster home, in nearly all states these homes are eligible to receive the full foster care subsidy, which is two to four times the TANF grant (and more depending upon the number of children in the home and age of the children). Yet the needs of children in unlicensed homes may be as great or greater than those in licensed homes. Anecdotal information as well as research findings (Testa, Bruhn, & Helton, 2010) suggest that licensing standards or the licensing process itself tend to screen out families with lower incomes, and these are the families that could most benefit from the higher level of financial support.
3. The federal government no longer allows the reimbursement of administrative costs of serving children in unlicensed kinship homes. This serves as a disincentive to placing or keeping children with kin who provide safe and nurturing homes but are unable to meet licensing standards, and serves as a disincentive to child welfare systems to provide services to children in unlicensed kinship homes and their families, when these arrangements do occur.

4. While the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act now allows states the option of claiming federal IV-E matching funds to support subsidized guardianship arrangements, only kinship care of children who are in the custody of the child welfare system and living in kinship homes that are licensed as foster homes are eligible. States are less likely to provide subsidized guardianship if the cost of this permanency option falls entirely on the state.

5. The majority of children living with kin never come to the attention of the child welfare system, yet many of these families and the children in their homes have needs that are equivalent or exceed those of children and families that have the child welfare system in their lives. Many of the families in these informal kinship care arrangements are reluctant to seek help or are unable to identify or access the services that they need.

6. It is unconscionable that we would allow so many informal kinship caregiving families to live in dire poverty and experience food insecurity, lack of health insurance and lack of access to good quality medical care for members of their family. The benefits of living with kin are clear, yet we fail to ensure that basic levels of financial and material supports are available to many of these families.

7. The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 funded a limited number of demonstration projects to test the effectiveness of various Kinship Navigator programs designed to help kinship caregiving families (particularly informal kinship care) navigate the fragmented and complex system of supportive services and benefits that families may be eligible to receive. At this point in time, navigator programs are not universally available and it is not clear that the programs that do exist are providing aggressive outreach to the most hidden kinship care giving families, in order to engage
them in services that they may need.

8. Lack of uptake of the TANF child-only grant by informal kinship caregivers is only partly explained by kinship caregivers’ and human services professionals’ lack of knowledge of eligibility criteria. Bureaucratic obstacles and misinterpretations by staff who determine eligibility are barriers in many jurisdictions. For some, family dynamics and conflict between family members over financial resources and custody of the child becomes an even bigger barrier to receiving the child-only grant (For instance, parental claims for benefits including children who are actually living with relatives). Therefore, navigator programs need to advocate for kinship families and provide mediation, family meetings, and family group conferencing to address the barriers that prevent some families from receiving the benefits they need to be successful.

9. Lack of access to supportive services is particularly grave for informal kinship care and complicated by fragmentation of programs and funding and the rigid eligibility criteria associated with each program. For example:

a. While 67.5% of grandparents with primary responsibility for raising their grandchildren are younger than 60 years of age (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008), many services for grandparents raising grandchildren are available only for caregivers 60 years of age and older.

b. There are no uniform definitions of relative – each state has its own definition of relative and criteria for what constitutes kin yet this definition influences access to federal funds (TANF, IV-E) and tends to exclude some relatives and fictive kin who are “family”.

c. The Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) defines conditions for immigrant entrance and deportation from the United States. The Department of Homeland Security’s 2012 goal is to deport all undocumented immigrants. This could clearly affect grandparents and other relatives raising children. INA provides a hardship exception that cancels the deportation of aliens “where removal would result in exceptional and extremely unusual hardship to the alien’s spouse, parent or child who is a citizen of the United States or an alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence.” Because the hardship
does not apply to grandparents and other relatives raising children, thousands of kinship caregivers who lack authorization to be in the US will be deported thus causing a significant hardship on kinship families and the children they raise; and, since most kinship caregivers lack legal custody of the children in their care, the children would most likely be placed in foster care (Zug, 2009).

Policymakers can take some comfort in understanding that not all families involved in kinship care need the same level or type of support or services. It is important for human service professionals to remember that families know best what they need. The cost-benefit of services and supports is maximized when human service professionals work with families involved in informal and formal kinship care to assess their specific needs and to identify with them what services and supports most directly address these needs.
SESSION C
ESTABLISHING SERVICES TAILORED TO THE NEEDS OF INFORMAL KINSHIP FAMILIES WITHIN AND ACROSS SYSTEMS

Summit Facilitators and Recorder: Anne Strozier, Rolanda Pyle, and Charlene Ingram

Focus:

Although kinship caregivers in informal arrangements have similar needs as caregivers in other living arrangements (foster care and formal kinship care) intended to provide a safe and supportive environment for children, how those needs are addressed may require a different approach (Goodman, Potts, Pasztor, & Scorzo, 2004). Kinship caregiver needs have been documented, to name a few, as financial support, legal assistance, medical care, respite care, and peer and social support. Additionally, service design and delivery deserves consideration of the pre-existing relationship between the child and caregiver, and caregiver and parent. The level of services provided to kinship families in informal arrangements is not consistent with the level of services provided to families in formal arrangements (Gibbs et al, 2006; Goodman, et al., 2004; Goodman, Potts, & Pasztor, 2007). While this may be the broader issue, how services and supports, when provided, are tailored will have an impact on the families and the desired outcomes for services.

Issues and Concerns

1. Training and other opportunities for information for kinship caregivers does not always consider and address the unique qualities of the arrangement. While training may be offered and available (and required in formal kinship care), it often is the same training available to certified foster parents and does not address the issues related to caring for a family member. Some of these issues concern legal relationships, rights and responsibilities; managing redefined roles within the family; and understanding and dealing with clinical issues such as loss and split loyalties (Crumbley & Little, 1997). There are kinship training curricula designed for caseworkers, but it is not certain how caregiver training opportunities and programs are specific to information that is most useful to kinship caregivers, and the consistency in which these are available and accessible.
Additionally, accessible training and information for caregivers in rural communities may be a challenge when distance and transportation become issues.

2. Caregivers in informal kinship arrangements are not always aware of services available to them or how to access them. For some, there is the fear that accessing services from human service providers and entitlement programs may result in the removal of the child in their care. This may be a contributing factor to indications that compared with foster parents, kinship caregivers are less likely to ask for public assistance and services (Ehrle and Clark, 2001). These same human service systems may not understand kinship care and experience difficulty in delivering services that consider kinship family dynamics and issues. This raises the issue of interagency collaboration and child welfare agency policy and practice related to engaging other systems in providing support to kinship families.

3. The concept of mentoring and peer support has been incorporated into child welfare practice. Many agencies offer mentoring for youth, and parent support groups. A 2004 article that synthesized and evaluated existing research up to that point in time suggested that there was some limited evidence that grandparent caregivers benefited from support groups (Cudeback, 2004). There should be recognition that kinship caregivers experience stress in dealing with challenges related to changes in life style (such as less free time), additional budget requirements, change in their role in the family as the primary caregiver, and navigating the educational and health systems that have changed since parenting their child. Caregivers and youth in informal arrangements should have access to support groups and mentoring by peers who share or have shared the same experience and challenges. At the same time, parent support groups should consider that some participants may have children living with relatives and include this perspective in their support activities and discussions.

4. A comprehensive definition of the informal kinship population is needed. Many of the families in this living arrangement are not known to child welfare and other human service systems. The question becomes “Who are the families?” Information about families in formal kinship care is more readily available, although more research is needed. It is known that many kinship caregivers who are grandparents are younger than age 60.
The challenge to continued service development and delivery will need to focus on the age of caregivers. Younger kinship caregivers (e.g., caregivers in the middle age range) may need services tailored to their life stage and related tasks.

This is a short list of issues, but focuses on several critical issues:

• Providing training, informational, and educational opportunities that are designed to address the unique characteristics of the kinship caregiver and children and their needs,

• Facilitating interagency collaboration and coordination, and the education of other human service systems to kinship care, and

• Understanding the informal kinship family population and assuring that services and supports recognize the younger caregivers.
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