

## National Kinship Care Month in New York State

In addition to the national effort to recognize National Kinship Care Month, the NYS Kinship Navigator has focused resources and done outreach to create a vibrant and celebratory advocacy cause supporting kinship families in New York, and has succeeded in its core strategy of raising awareness among policy makers about the great work being done by kinship caregivers. The awareness has been critical to successful advocacy for reforms, and as of May 2021, New York has legislated and advanced via regulations and policy changes many reforms favoring kinship families. Pending the Governor's signature is a new law defining who are kinship caregivers.

Started in 2006, the NYS Kinship Navigator has provided leadership for the NYS KinCare Coalition and their joint efforts have resulted in numerous statutory changes, as well as child welfare and temporary assistance regulations and policy directive. With this experience in dealing with the legislature, the NYS kinship community felt confident that they could approach the legislature with this simple request. With the help of a federal Children's Bureau demonstration project grant, the Navigator was able to spend time coordinating and spearheading the effort. This grant provided funds for numerous coalition building and advocacy efforts.

The NYS Kinship Navigator and its director Gerard Wallace, Esq (now retired), who was also volunteer director of the National Committee of Grandparents for Children's Rights, led the effort to declare September as Kinship Care Month.

In October 2013, the Navigator hosted a statewide KinCare Summit, and published a report making recommendations for further improvements. One recommendation was the establishment of September as Kinship Care Month and included a sample resolution. That sample, drafted by the director, became the source for congressional and other state resolutions/declarations

Beginning in January 2014, the Navigator and NYS KinCare Coalition members met with legislative leadership. In both the Assembly and Senate, representatives listened and soon agreed to pass resolutions. In both house in March where on the floor of the chambers, the Navigator's director and invited kinship caregivers received an standing ovation as the resolutions were passed. The advocacy was supported by Kinship Navigator staff, especially program manager Rae Glaser.

In August 2014, the Navigator's director met with the state child welfare (Office of Children and

Family Services) commissioner and later that month with senior representatives of the Governor, and on September 2, Governor Cuomo declared September as Kinship Care Month. Soon afterwards, the NYS Office of Children and Family Services commissioner and senior staff attended a September celebration of Kinship Care Month. OCFS purchased and handed out over 5,000 yellow ribbon pins that said “Kinship Care Month” on them – and the kinship community was able to wear them proudly as an emblem representing the month.

Over fifteen events were held across the state by local kinship care organizations. Ranging from picnics to celebration events, local kinship groups promoted the passing of kinship care month in style. Later that month, at the Child Welfare League of America National Kinship Conference, leadership agreed to work nationally to have other states pass resolutions, with the ultimate aim of a national proclamation.

Since 2015, the NYS Kinship Navigator team has hosted yearly luncheons in Albany, first at the NYS Institute of History, then at the NYS Bar Association headquarters, and in 2019 at the local Marriott Hotel. Changing the site as attendance grew, with over 180 attending the 2019 celebration. In 2020, due to the Covid-19 restrictions, the event was held virtually and hosted by the new director Rae Glaser. As of the date, the NYS Legislature is scheduled to pass resolutions before the end of the session and its Senate Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins will host a celebration in her home district along with Senator Mayer. Also, the upcoming September 2021 event may again be an “in person” event.

Each celebration presented awards to caregivers and advocates. Advocates include the current NYS Senate leader Senator Stewart-Cousins, Office of Children and Families Services Commissioner Sheila Poole, Office for the Aging Director Greg Olsen, legislators Andrew Hevesi, Ellen Jaffee, Diane Savino, and others. See complete list on this web site.

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