

The Importance of National Kinship Care Month

Kinship care – grandparents, aunts, uncles, other relatives, and family friends – who care for children when parents are unable or unwilling to parent, are an important part of the child welfare response. In fact, the 2.8 million children in kinship families dwarf the 400,000 in foster care. Yet, recognition of kinship families has only recently gained support from many state and federal policy makers.

Education about kinship care is the key to successful policies and practices, and National Kinship Care Month has been a valuable tool in bringing attention to kinship families.

While many organizations have worked tirelessly to gain support and deserve the kinship community's gratitude, promotion of National Kinship Care Month offers an opportunity to institutionalize the tradition of kinship care and to celebrate kinship caregivers and ensure that law makers support them. National Kinship Care Month offers an opportunity cement support by creating a yearly opportunity for personal contact with caregivers.

They are an impressive group. Their stories are compelling. Their sacrifices, persistence, and unconditional love of children are inspiring.

Beginning in 2012, the NYS Kinship Navigator along with the National Committee of Grandparents for Children's Rights (which later became the National Kinship Alliance for Children, and later the Child Welfare League of America have promoted National Kinship Care Month.

Here in New York State, we have hosted annual celebrations since 2015. The 2020 celebration was virtual. The last September in person gathering was held in 2019 (before Covid-19), more than 180 caregivers, law makers, governor's representatives, court and child welfare and mental health and other agency leadership, and many other critical policy makers attended. They together voiced how important it is to hear the stories, meet the caregivers, and learn how to support them.

Other states also hold events in September and have recognized the important strategic advantages to hosting such events.

As more communities celebrate, more momentum builds for action. After so many years of being a voice in the wilderness, kinship care is now approaching appreciation as the central

pillar of child welfare in the nation. Recent federal legislation in aging and child welfare laws show the growing support. Yet more needs to be done on rights and assistance and many other systems have yet to support kinship families.

Please see the other web pages in the National Kinship Care Month section, where you'll find information on the history, examples of resolutions, sample editorials, and other tools.

Celebrate Kinship Families in September!

Sincerely,

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