

PRACTICE NOTES

For North Carolina's Child Welfare Workers

From the NC Division of Social Services and the Family and Children's Resource Program

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This publication for child welfare professionals is produced by the North Carolina Division of Social Services and the Family and Children's Resource Program, part of the Jordan Institute for Families within the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

In summarizing research, we try to give you new ideas for refining your practice. However, this publication is not intended to replace child welfare training, regular supervision, or peer consultation—only to enhance them.

Let us hear from you!

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ENGAGING AND SUPPORTING RELATIVE CAREGIVERS

To child welfare agencies, extended family members are indispensable partners when it comes to ensuring safety, well-being, and permanence for children.

When they provide temporary care for young relatives, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other kin often achieve amazing outcomes. Compared to children in nonrelative foster care, children in kinship care:

- Experience fewer placement changes (sources cited in Geen, 2003)
- Are more likely to be placed with siblings (Berrick et al., 1994; Testa & Rolock, 1999)
- Perceive their placements more positively (NSCAW, 2005)
- Have fewer behavioral problems (Conway & Hutson, 2007)
- Visit siblings and parents more often (sources cited in Geen, 2003)
- Have more continuity in family relationships and community ties (US GAO, 1999; LeProhn & Pecora, 1994)
- Are more likely to grow up within the context of their culture and community (Ingram, 1996)

Kinship care is supported not just by the research, but by law. State and federal statutes direct child welfare agencies to notify adult maternal and paternal relatives whenever a child enters foster care (P.L. 110-351), and to consider relatives first when placing children (P.L. 104-193).

Given all this, it's not surprising relative caregivers play a key role in the child welfare system. Today, almost one in four children in the custody of a NC county DSS is cared for by kin (Duncan, et al., 2010).

SUPPORT NEEDS

The results achieved by relative caregivers are all the more amazing when you consider their resources. Although kin caring for

child welfare-involved children face the same challenges as nonrelative foster families, they receive less training, fewer services, and less financial support (sources cited in Winokur, et al., 2009).

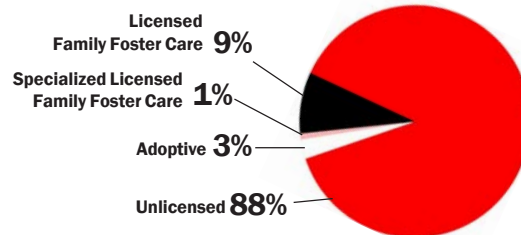
What's more, as a group kin caregivers have traits that can make parenting harder: compared to nonrelative caregivers they are more likely to be older, single, less educated, unemployed, and poor. They also report more health problems and higher levels of depression. When assessing and supporting relative placements, child welfare agencies must consider and address needs such as these (sources cited in Winokur, et al., 2009).

OUR RESPONSIBILITY

Child welfare agencies bear a lot of responsibility when it comes to kinship care. To help them, this issue of *Practice Notes* suggests effective ways to reach out to relatives when children enter foster care and offers ideas for supporting those who provide the invaluable gift of kinship care. ♦

Relative Caregivers of NC Children in Foster Care*

Kinship care plays an essential role in North Carolina's child welfare system. Of the 8,826 children in foster care in our state on November 30, 2010, 23.63% (n=2,086) were placed with relatives. Most of these children were placed with relatives who were unlicensed.



Duncan et al., 2010

*This figure does not reflect the many NC kin caregivers who act as safety resources for their young relatives, preventing their placement in foster care.

REACHING OUT TO RELATIVES WHEN CHILDREN ENTER FOSTER CARE

Adapted from Clunk. & Epstein. (2010, October). Notifying relatives in child welfare cases: Tips for attorneys. *Child Law Practice*.

As we've said, when grandparents and other kin step forward to care for children in foster care, the outcomes can be impressive. Yet even if children aren't placed with them, relatives can still contribute to the safety, permanence, and well-being of children in many ways, including:

- Attending child and family team meetings (CFTs)
- Visiting children in care
- Sharing information (e.g., health)
- Maintaining cultural connections and family relationships

Though these potential benefits are reason enough to identify and reach out to relatives, child welfare agencies have another: the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008.

Among this federal law's many provisions are several that direct child welfare agencies to notify relatives when children enter foster care. Though North Carolina law and policy fully reflect these requirements, change in practice and policy at the county, unit, and worker level can take time.

This article offers practical suggestions for meeting policy and legal standards for (1) searching for and (2) giving adequate notice to extended family when children enter foster care in North Carolina.

SEARCHING DILIGENTLY

The extent to which agencies search diligently for relatives will be assessed as part of NC's next federal Child and Family Services Review; failure in this area could negatively impact our state's performance on the CFSR or result in the loss of at least a portion of our state's Title IV-E payments. To ensure you meet Fostering Connections' "due diligence" requirement:

Get started early. Start identifying and notifying potential relative car-

egivers as soon as the child enters your agency's custody. This may mean conducting interviews on the day of removal and exploring potential relative caregivers prior to removal.

Ask the parents to identify other relatives for the agency to contact. In North Carolina, child welfare agencies must contact all adult relatives and kin suggested by parents, as well as adult maternal and paternal: grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, great grandparents, nieces, and nephews.

Cast a wide net. Interview household members, friends, family members, and other knowledgeable people (e.g., teachers, health professionals, child care providers, clergy) to develop a list of possible adult relative caregivers.

Use the FPLS. Fostering Connections authorizes child welfare agencies to use the Federal Parent Locator Service (FPLS), a database that collects and updates information to enforce child support obligation. Using the FPLS you can obtain the absent parent's social security number, information on the parent's employment income and benefits, and information about assets or debts owed. Fostering

Connections intends child welfare agencies to use this information to find and potentially place the child directly with the absent biological parent or, alternatively, to contact the absent parent to help identify relatives.

Develop checklists to ensure consistency. To ensure everyone in your agency asks similar questions and conducts a sufficient relative search for each child, develop a checklist of questions to ask during interviews and a standard list of people to interview. See below for sample questions.

Document your efforts to identify and notify relatives. It is a good idea to create a checklist of ways to identify maternal and paternal relatives. Leave enough space on the checklist to take notes on your efforts. Keep the checklists and notes in the child's file. Documenting your efforts in this way may help prevent delays in achieving permanency for the child if a relative arrives late in the case, claiming not to have known the child was in care and wanting to be part of the child's life.

GIVING ADEQUATE NOTICE

The US Children's Bureau urges agencies to notify relatives **in writing** when children enter foster care. *cont. p. 3*

Sample Questions

Here are some questions for conducting a comprehensive interview regarding the child's background. (This is not an exhaustive list.)

1. Who does the child live with? What is the relationship of the child to these household members?
2. How long have these household members lived with the child?
3. Do you know any other relatives of the child on both the mother and father's side? What is their contact information?
4. Does the child have any siblings, half-siblings, or step-siblings? What is their contact information?
5. Does the child's family have any close friends? Do you know their contact information?
6. How would you describe the child's relationship with these relatives and close family friends?
7. Does the child have any health issues? Are there any we should be immediately aware of, such as asthma or anemia?

Source: Clunk & Epstein, 2010

This gives relatives a chance to review and digest the information and ask questions. Consider using or adapting the sample letter on this page for this purpose. Other best practices related to giving adequate notice include:

Ensure relatives understand the notice. It may be necessary to provide both English and Spanish (or other language) versions of the written notice, accommodate a relative with a disability, or make other reasonable accommodations for the relatives (e.g., provide an interpreter to explain the notice and answer any questions).

Document notification efforts in writing. In the checklist recommended above, include items and space to document notification as well as identification efforts.

Include all required information in the notice. For a list of all required information, consult North Carolina's children's services policy manual: <http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-10/chg/CSs1201c4.pdf>.

Give notice within 30 days to all adult maternal and paternal grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, great grandparents, nieces, and nephews.

Keep in touch. Although it is not required by law, it is a good idea to keep relatives informed and engaged throughout the case. Doing so can really benefit the child, especially if a change of placement is ever needed.

CONCLUSION

By following the law and identifying and notifying adult relatives when children enter foster care, child welfare professionals further the child's best interest by inviting relatives to play an important role in the child's placement and life. ♦

Adapted from Clunk, K. M. & Epstein, H. R. (2010, October). Notifying relatives in child welfare cases: Tips for attorneys. *Child Law Practice*, 29(8), 113-123.

SAMPLE NOTICE LETTER

Reprinted from FosteringConnections.org

Dear (RELATIVE),

I am contacting you because you have been identified as a relative of (child's name) who was born on (DOB) and is now in the custody of (insert agency). I am a (INSERT TITLE) for the (INSERT AGENCY).

We recognize that relatives play an important role in the lives of children, especially those who must be temporarily cared for by someone other than their parents. Children do better when they are placed with or able to stay connected in other ways to people who know and care about them. Children who are able to stay connected to their extended family and culture experience more stability and less trauma than those who are not connected.

We are contacting you to see if you are interested in being considered as a temporary home for or otherwise staying in contact with (CHILD'S FIRST NAME) while (s/he) is in our custody. In the next few days, I or someone from my agency will call you to review your options for helping to care for (CHILD'S FIRST NAME). For example, you may want to offer a temporary home for (CHILD'S FIRST NAME) so (S/HE) does not need to be in foster care or to apply to be a foster parent for (CHILD'S FIRST NAME). Should permanent care later be necessary for (CHILD'S FIRST NAME), there may be various opportunities for guardianship or adoption. More information about your options is attached.¹

If you are not able to provide a temporary home for (CHILD'S FIRST NAME), there are other ways for you to stay involved in (HIS/HER) life and offer important family connections. You might visit regularly, arrange regular weekend or holiday visits at your home, or offer to transport (CHILD'S FIRST NAME) to and from school, doctor's visits or other activities.²

Keeping (CHILD'S FIRST NAME) connected to family (AND THEIR TRIBE) is important. Please get in contact with us so you don't lose the opportunity to connect with (CHILD'S FIRST NAME) now or in the future. We will call you in the next few days to explore your options, but feel free to contact me sooner at (PHONE/CONTACT INFO). I also ask that you share with me names and contact information of other relatives you think may be interested in connecting with (CHILD'S FIRST NAME).³ Thank you.

Sincerely,

¹ To comply with federal law, notice **must**: 1) explain the options the relative has under federal, state, and local law to participate in the care and placement of the child, including any options that may be lost by failing to respond to the notice; 2) describe the requirements to become a foster family home and the additional services and supports available in such a home; and 3) describe how the relative guardian may enter into a guardianship assistance agreement with the agency if the state has taken the option to operate a Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP). It is suggested that you provide all of this information in an attachment. Wyoming, for example, has provided much of this information in Q&A format as an attachment to its notice letter. Kansas attaches a brochure of the supports available in the community.

² Some states have designed response forms that go into detail about what activities relatives may participate in and allow them to check the boxes of activities that they would be interested/willing to participate in for the child.

³ Some states provide a form for the relative to fill out that specifies the name and contact information for other relatives who might be able to provide care for the child. For further information on the Identification and Notice to Relatives, please contact Beth Davis-Pratt from the Children's Defense Fund at edavis-pratt@childrensdefense.org



CLEARING THE HURDLES: PROMISING PRACTICES IN SUPPORTING KINSHIP CAREGIVERS

Kinship caregivers are increasing in numbers, providing key relationships for children when their parents can't take care of them. Helping children thrive in these placements is important, yet connecting families to the supports they need can be a challenge. Following are some of the hurdles encountered, along with promising practices that child welfare agencies are using to support relative caregivers.

HURDLE I

FAILURE TO CONNECT TO SERVICES

Most relative caregivers do not receive support from social service agencies. In itself this is not a bad thing, except in cases where eligible kinship families need support but fail to connect to services and the well-being of one or more family members suffers as a result.

Even when they do know about services, kinship caregivers may not seek out support from child welfare agencies. Their reasons may include:

- Perceived stigma of public assistance
- Fear that asking for help may put the children's ability to stay in their care at risk
- Concern involvement with the agency will jeopardize their relationship with the children's parents
- Belief that DSS involvement will burden them.

PROMISING PRACTICES

1. Targeted outreach efforts in local communities. To reach relative caregivers and other eligible individuals, some agencies have added new service delivery locations in schools, churches, or community centers to increase access and reduce stigma. Enabling relative caregivers to apply for benefits in a North Carolina Department on Aging office or a school (or even by phone or mail) may increase the extent to which they receive needed services.

"Provide information about assistance to other service providers who are likely to be in contact with grandparents and other kin...partnering with community centers or other local places like libraries, grocery stores, hair salons, and churches where families frequent can serve as an effective way of communicating with kin who are not currently aware of or utilizing all of the available services and resources. In addition, written information should be available to social workers at hospitals, Juvenile and Probate Court, counseling offices, or other places where kin might access services. Lastly, families need to know that they can ask for and even expect services for the children in their care" (Lorkovich, 2001). Use inclusive language

in brochures, websites, and handouts to reflect the role of relatives. Outreach materials that refer only to services for "parents" may be overlooked by kinship caregivers (Ehrle & Geen, 2002).

The Philadelphia Society for Services to Children is a prime example of innovative outreach—they developed a curriculum that brings workshops to caregivers in their places of employment.

2. Build relationships with kinship caregivers. Gain kinship caregivers' trust by:

- Approaching kin with helpful intentions
- Acknowledging kinship caregivers' emotions—ask about their needs, desires, and questions
- Listening for and paying attention to their perceptions of the child welfare agency and your role
- Presenting agency services as additional resources that will fit with the supports they already have in place. (Cimarrusti et al., 2000)

Word-of-mouth among caregivers in the community can help spread complimentary information about DSS and the services it provides.

HURDLE II

POOR PREPARATION

Kin may feel unprepared for their role as caregivers and often need help identifying needs. Caregiving can bring added joys to a grandparent or other relative, but can also strain finances and relationships. Many relative caregivers experience major changes in future plans, daily activities, and social support. They may find that parenting expectations have changed since they parented their own children. Many are not sure of their legal role or responsibilities in making decisions on behalf of the child. Others are unprepared in terms of physical space or furniture needed to care adequately for a child.

As soon as relatives begin thinking about having the child placed with them, child welfare professionals should thoroughly discuss all options with them. This conversation should occur during the kinship care assessment. Although first and foremost assessment tools, NC's initial (DSS-5203) and comprehensive (DSS-5204) kinship assessments are also useful for talking with kin care providers about their short- and long-term plans and support needs. To learn more, go to: <http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-10/man/CSs1201c4.pdf>.

PROMISING PRACTICES

1. Anticipate caregiver questions. Be proactive—share with caregivers typical questions from kinship care-

givers regarding legal and other issues. The tip sheet on page 5 gives examples of common questions.

2. Let them know their options. Give complete and accurate information. “Knowing about the advantages and disadvantages of legal custody, becoming a licensed foster home, or adoption as soon as possible helps kin caregivers to make better choices earlier and provides informed consent. Hopefully this also means that children move to permanency sooner” (Lorkovich, 2001).

3. Partner with other agencies to provide kinship caregivers with respite options, mentors or tutors for children, and tangible supports such as beds, toys, and clothing for children newly arrived in the household. Increasing caseworker access to flexible funds enables them to help caregiving relatives afford the initial costs of welcoming children into their homes. Agency investments of this kind can really pay off in the long run, both in terms of child outcomes and costs to agencies.

4. Offer foster parent training. Relative caregivers benefit from the same kind of training licensed foster parents receive. Information about child development, parenting, and taking care of oneself is valuable preparation for kin in the day-to-day realities of caregiving. However, agencies may need to make an extra effort to ensure that training materials are inclusive and speak to the concerns of kin caregivers. See *Training Matters*, vol. 12, no. 1 for learning resources related to culturally competent practice with kin caregivers.

5. Provide support groups or peer mentors. Meeting and talking with others who understand firsthand the joys and struggles of kinship caregiving can reduce feelings of isolation and give relatives emotional and practical support. Examples and resources:

- Forsyth County DSS’s *Relatives as Parents Program* (RAPP) is an educational and support group for grandparents and relatives who are primary caregivers for their children’s children or other relatives. RAPP provides caregiver support groups, educational programs, referral services, and networking. For more information, visit the RAPP website (www.forsyth.cc/DSS/relatives_parents.aspx) or contact Teresa Bryant (336/703-3744; bryanttc@forsyth.cc).
- Rhode Island’s *Grand Divas*, a group of “mature” female caregivers raising children who are not their birth children, provide mutual support and run a kinship helpline with the Rhode Island Partnership for Family Connections. Friendship, fellowship, advocacy, and learning activities keep this group’s membership growing. To learn more call 401/780-2255.
- *Statewide*: The NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (www.ncpapa.org) offers support to kin who

TIP SHEETS FOR KIN CAREGIVERS

Taking Responsibility for the Children

Ask the child welfare worker:

- Who has legal custody of the children?
- What rights and responsibilities does legal custody give in this State? Physical custody?
- May I receive a copy of the signed voluntary placement agreement? (when applicable)
- May I be involved in developing the service plan and receive a copy of the plan?
- Will I or the children have to go to court?
- Who is responsible for enrolling the children in school, obtaining health insurance, granting permission for medical care and obtaining it, signing school permission forms, etc.?
- Will someone from child welfare services visit my home on a regular basis?
- What are the requirements for me and my home if I want the children to live with me?
- Are the requirements different if the children are with me just temporarily?
- What services are available for me and for the children, and how do I apply?
- Are there restrictions on the discipline I can use (such as spanking) with the children?
- What subsidies or financial assistance is available? What do I need to do to apply?
- Am I eligible to become a licensed foster parent and receive a foster care subsidy?

Long-Term Arrangements

Ask the child welfare worker:

- What is the current permanency goal for each child? (Siblings may not have the same goal.)
- What are options for the children if they can never return to their parents?
- What are my options if the children cannot return to their parents?
- Under what circumstances can I receive a subsidy to help pay for the children’s care?
- Will the legal arrangement be affected when the children turn 18?
- How will the child welfare agency continue to be involved with my family?

Source: USDHHS, 2005



Helpful
Tips

CLEARING THE HURDLES from p. 5

have adopted or are current or former foster parents licensed by North Carolina. The NC Cooperative Extension (www.ces.ncsu.edu) also provides workshops and programs for grandparents and other relatives raising children.

HURDLE III

CONFUSION ABOUT ELIGIBILITY

Child welfare professionals and families may lack information about assistance programs and eligibility. Eligibility requirements and the application process for a variety of public services can be confusing. As a result, kinship caregivers are not always offered the full range of benefits for which they may be eligible. In addition, some who apply for public assistance are mistakenly denied benefits (Ehrle, 2002).

PROMISING PRACTICES

1. Train child welfare and Work First (TANF) workers on eligibility for services most needed by kinship caregivers such as child care, housing, food stamps, and legal consultation (Ehrle & Geen, 2002). Include eligibility issues unique to grandparent caregiving (Scarella, et al., 2003). Increase staff understanding of common barriers for kinship caregivers and how to advocate for and help caregivers navigate the system (Lorkovich, 2001). Use tip sheets, such as those in this issue, to help staff and families understand the array of financial and legal resources that can assist kinship caregivers as they provide care and fulfill responsibilities on the child's behalf.

Nearly all children in kinship care are eligible for TANF

child-only grants, yet these resources are underutilized. With training, staff can increase the number of families benefiting from this resource.

2. Develop dedicated staff members with expertise in kinship care issues and service navigation. Bellefaire

JCB's Kinship Adoption Project in Ohio used trained kinship care coordinators

as a resource to other staff within the agency, helping case managers link families to resources and troubleshoot challenging situations involving kinship care (Lorkovich, 2001). Several states provide staff positions, termed "Kinship Navigators," to serve as advocates and educators for caregivers, provide consultation and training about kinship issues to service providers, and collect data for program evaluation and design. Increasing the expertise available to co-workers can improve an agency's capacity to serve kinship families.

CONCLUSION

Supporting kinship caregivers helps ensure stability for children. While it may not be a caregiver's first thought to seek help from social services, agencies should try to ensure every caregiver knows helpful services exist and how to access them, should the need arise. Agencies' improved efforts to reach out to relative caregivers is key in attaining this goal, as is helping caregivers identify needs and providing them with comprehensive and accurate information about services, resources, and options. ♦

Collaboration with Work First staff can be essential in supporting relative care providers.



INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO SUPPORTING KINSHIP CAREGIVERS

In 2008, Chatham County DSS began using a new practical, family-centered strategy to support its work with kinship families. The agency currently pays kinship families

half the foster care board rate for six months, from the time they turn in an application for licensure with the intent to take MAPP until they are licensed within that six month period.

Chatham DSS plans to open this up to kinship providers who have an "undocumented" immigration status (i.e., they lack necessary documents for permission to live or work in the country). This expansion would enable these relatives to take MAPP, be assigned a licensing worker (to receive the same support that licensed homes receive), and receive half the foster care

board payment until the family achieves reunification and/or permanence for the child.

Though payments of this kind are an additional "up-front" expense to the county, they allow children to remain in their home community. In the long term, this strategy may reduce costs by decreasing the need for out-of-county or private agency placements. In addition, by facilitating partnerships between caregivers and birth parents, agencies could ultimately reduce the time children spend in foster care.

Support for kinship caregivers is part of a larger foster parent recruitment effort in Chatham county, and may reduce or eliminate some key barriers to foster home licensing and permanency for children.

To learn more, contact Jamie Bazemore, Placement Services Supervisor, Chatham County DSS; (919) 642-6985; jamie.bazemore@chathamnc.org.

KINSHIP CAREGIVER BENEFITS CHECKLIST

Are relative caregivers and children receiving the support they need?

CASH BENEFITS

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

“Work First” in North Carolina

1. Child-only TANF: Nearly all children in kinship care are eligible for child-only grants. Consider only the needs and income of the child. Since few children have income or assets of their own, almost all relative caregivers can receive a child-only grant on behalf of the children in their care.
2. TANF family grants: caregivers need to meet the state’s TANF definition of a kin caregiver to apply for benefits. Time limits and work requirements are associated with family grants, thus they may not be appropriate for retired relative caregivers or those who need longer term assistance.

Foster Care Board Rate

Relative caregivers who are licensed foster parents taking care of children placed with them by their local child welfare agency or court may be eligible for payments.

Adoption Subsidy

May be available to relative caregivers who adopt the children in their care.

Old-Age Survivors and Disability Insurance (OASDI)

Children being raised by grandparents may be eligible for social security dependent benefits under OASDI if the child’s parent is collecting retirement or disability insurance benefits or if the parent was fully insured at the time of his or her death. Caregivers can apply for benefits on behalf of the child based on the work record of the child’s parent, or if not receiving these benefits, may qualify for dependent benefits based on his or her grandparent’s work record. Generally the grandparent must be raising the child because the child’s parents are deceased or disabled, and the child began living with the grandparent before age 18.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

May be available to children or caregivers who are disabled. This is also available to anyone over age 65. This is an important source of assistance for grandparents and other relatives raising children who are blind or who have other serious disabilities. This program, administered by the U.S. Social Security Administration (SSA), provides a cash benefit to the child. Child must meet age, disability, income, and asset criteria.

Social Security

If a child’s parent or parents are deceased and were insured through the Social Security system at the time of death, the kin caregiver is eligible to receive a Social Security payment on the child’s behalf.

Child Support

Until a court has terminated parental rights, a parent generally remains financially responsible for his or her children. A child support enforcement agency may assist grandparents and other relative caregivers in obtaining child support on behalf of the children in their care. Amount of support is based on child’s needs and resources and ability of the parent to pay. Kinship caregivers who receive federally funded foster care payments or TANF may receive only a small portion of child support collected, as most of the support goes to helping the state recoup the costs of providing assistance.

Veteran’s Benefits

Survivor’s benefits, disability benefits, educational benefits, etc. may be available to relative caregivers who are veterans or caring for child survivors of deceased veterans. <http://www.vba.va.gov/VBA/>

TAX CREDITS

Earned Income Tax Credit

May be available for certain low or moderate income relative caregivers who are working. This tax credit is refundable so that even workers who do not earn enough to pay taxes can get cash from the IRS. Credit amount depends on income earned and number of qualifying children in the family.

Child Tax Credit

May be available to some grandparents and relatives raising children. Age limits for dependents.

Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit

May be available to kinship caregivers who incur child care expenditures in order to work.

continued page 8

BENEFIT CHECKLIST from p. 7

SUBSIDIZED CHILD CARE

Infants and pre-school age children	North Carolina's Division of Child Development uses a combination of state and federal funds to provide subsidized child care services to eligible families through a locally administered, state-supervised voucher system. Local DSS agencies have information about subsidies and eligibility.
Before school and after school care for school-aged children	Many school districts offer reduced program rates depending on a family's income and need.

FOOD ASSISTANCE

Food Stamps	Available to families with incomes below a certain level. The entire household's income is considered, and the relative children can be included in family size for determining benefit amount. A caregiver cannot apply for food stamps for the children only. Application for food stamps is generally made at the same office where TANF (Work First) applications are made.
WIC (women, infants, and children)	Infants and children up to age 5 are eligible. They must meet income guidelines, a State residency requirement, and be individually determined to be at "nutrition risk" by a health professional. A person who participates or has family members who participate in certain other benefit programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Medicaid, or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, automatically meets the income eligibility requirement.

HEALTH CARE

Medicaid or Other Health Coverage	Medicaid is a health insurance program for low-income individuals and families who cannot afford health care costs. Medicaid serves low-income parents, children, seniors, and people with disabilities. Medicaid is a little different, depending on who you are and your situation. To determine whether they or the child they are caring for are eligible for Medicaid, relative caregivers should consult their local county DSS. This eligibility chart may also be helpful: http://www.ncdhhs.gov/dma/medicaid/basicmedelig.pdf .
Mental Health Services	To determine whether North Carolina relative caregivers and/or the children they care for are eligible for publicly funded services for mental health, developmental disabilities and substance abuse services, contact your Local Management Entity (LME); a list of LME contacts can be found at http://www.ncdhhs.gov/mhddsas/lmedirectory.htm .

EDUCATION

Does the McKinney-Vento Homelessness Assistance Act apply? (42 U.S.C. 11435(2))	If so, the school must enroll the child without paperwork.
Special Educational Needs	Does the child have a physical, emotional, or learning disability that impairs school performance? If so, has the school recognized the disability and conducted assessments? If not, the caregiver can request evaluation and an IEP (Individual Education Plan) under the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act).

TRANSITION SERVICES FOR OLDER TEENS

If the youth is 14+ and deemed dependent...	He or she may be eligible for transition benefits, college tuition, etc.
If the youth is 14+ and disabled...	Transition services should be provided through the school and the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation.

Sources: American Bar Association, (n.d.); Children's Defense Fund, 2004 ; USDHHS, 2005; USDA, 2009

THE RISE IN KINSHIP ADOPTION

Reprinted from *CB Express*, July/August 2010, Vol. 11, No. 6 (<http://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov/>)

A new issue brief created by ChildFocus and the North American Council on Adoptable Children, *Kinship Adoption: Meeting the Unique Needs of a Growing Population*, was developed to draw attention to and explore the needs of children adopted by their relatives. The issue brief points out that the number of children in foster care finding permanent homes with relatives is steadily growing—up from 21% in 2000 to 30% in 2008. The authors look at why this trend persists and how agencies can promote and support kinship adoption.

Why is kinship adoption on the rise? The authors point to:

- Increased recognition of the benefits of kinship care for children
- State and Federal preferences for kinship care
- Placement with kin to keep children out of foster care
- Recognition that relatives will adopt if it is in the best interests of the children

According to the brief, benefits of kinship adoption include kinship caregivers' unique knowledge about the child and the family dynamics and the greater likelihood of children maintaining some kind of connection with their birth parents, if desired.

How can agencies best support kinship adoption? The authors point to the need to:

- Fully prepare kinship families for the adoption
- Approach the assessment and training differently with kin than with unrelated prospective families
- Ensure postpermanency services are open to kinship families
- Develop kinship competence in staff to overcome general assumptions
- Educate families on flexible kinship licensing policies.

The full issue brief is available on the ChildFocus website: <www.childfocuspartners.com/pdfs/CF_Kinship_Adoption_Report_v5.pdf>.



Studies suggest many kin can and will adopt if they receive accurate info and are reassured about ongoing payment subsidies, the continued role of birth parents in children's lives, and the option to leave children's birth names intact.

(Geen, 2003)

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