C-1 B. KINSHIP CAREGIVER SUPPORT SERVICES

Washington State and the US Congress have seen the wisdom of and fiscal benefits resulting from support services to unpaid family caregivers in delaying or eliminating premature placement of loved ones in more costly residential facilities. The same principle applies when it comes to kinship caregivers providing care for relative children placed in their care rather than in more costly foster care. This has led to the passage of legislation to support kinship caregivers in their efforts to provide stable homes for displaced relative children.

SE/ALTC coordinates and monitors three programs designed to assist kinship caregivers.

The first program is the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP) serving kinship caregivers 55 years of age and older who provide primary care for children living with them who are under the age of 19. SE/ALTC has contracted with Catholic Family and Child Services (CFCS) to provide information and assistance to this group of caregivers. Respite, support groups, advocacy, referrals to legal clinics and counseling for kin caregivers and the children in their charge are some of the supplemental services available through this program. Federal funding is limited to 10% of the FCSP budget. Each year since its inception, this program has used all of these available funds in service of grandparents and other relatives over 55 who have selflessly taken in their vulnerable relative children.

The second program is the Kinship Caregivers Support Program (KCSP), funded by the Washington State Legislature. CFCS is the contracted agency for this program as well. The program is designed to provide services to adult kinship caregivers of any age who are at the greatest risk of being unable to maintain their caregiving role. Funding is limited and must be dispersed to those kinship caregivers experiencing the most urgent/emergent needs.

The third program is the Kinship Navigator Program. SE/ALTC has again contracted with CFCS to house and supervise this position, dovetailing well with the other kinship programs they administer. The Kinship Navigator provides information and referral to kin caregivers concerning a range of services, resources and supports including:

- Child care
- Legal issues
- Respite care
- Medical, dental, vision, mental health, and chemical dependency services for caregivers and the youth in their charge
- Assistance navigating the education system
- Assistance navigating the child welfare system
- Parenting skills education and training
- Emergency financial assistance
- Caregiver support groups

The Kinship Navigator offers advocacy and follow-up. Navigator services are offered throughout SE/ALTC’s eight-county area.
Referrals for this service often come from SE/ALTC Information Specialists and Case Managers.

In 2010 CFCS obtained a federal grant, entitled Family Connections Demonstration Project, to fund three additional Kinship Navigators in the 8 counties served by SE/ALTC. Two of these navigators served kinship caregivers in the Tri-Cities area and the lower four counties. The third navigator serves kin families living on the Yakama Nation Reservation. In addition to the navigator positions created, the federal grant came with funding similar to KCSP funds to assist kinship caregivers with emergent needs. Having navigators housed in the Tri-Cities and Walla Walla greatly increased the numbers of kinship families served outside of the Yakima Valley.

The Family Connections Demonstration Project is nearing the end of the grant and has decreased funding. This decrease has resulted in having to eliminate the Kinship Navigator position in Walla Walla. The Tri-Cities Navigator is now scheduling one day per month to spend in each of the lower four counties to meet with kin caregivers in those areas.

Challenges in the Kinship Caregiver Support and Kinship Navigator Programs

The following are some of the challenges and barriers to serving kinship caregivers:
- The rapid increase in the number of kinship families
- The limited funding to serve so many in great need

- The expansive territory served by only 2 full-time Navigators
- Language barriers for monolingual Spanish speakers can be daunting
- The general distrust of governmental agencies by these informal families
- How overwhelmed kinship caregivers are when they first begin providing a home for their relative children
- The complicated and confusing regulations surrounding third party custody can be a stumbling block to kin caregivers who have never had to deal with the court system

A Los Angeles Times article in July of 2011 recounted the rapid increase in the number of kinship families across the US. Census data reported shows that the number of kinship family households jumped by 64% in 10 years. It is estimated that for every child in foster care, there are 20 children in relative placement. The economic turmoil our country is currently enduring has added to the numbers and the financial needs of kinship caregivers. One example from Grandview is particularly telling. Grandparents took in their infant granddaughter, providing her a stable home for several years. Last year the grandfather was laid off. As he was reaching the end of his unemployment benefits, he was in danger of losing the family home. KCSP was able to help with a utility bill and clothing for the child. Fortunately, the grandfather was rehired this fall. But without the KCSP help, the home would have been without electricity and the grandparents may have had to look hard at finding another home for their beloved little
grandchild.

Unlike foster parents, kinship caregivers do not receive monthly stipends to care for their relative children. Many are on fixed incomes and find themselves paying more for food, utilities, and car maintenance with no increase in funds. Others have had to leave senior housing in order to take in young relatives, incurring moving expenses for which they had never planned. Before the Family Connections grant, the Navigator used to expend all of the KCSP funds before the end of March. Needy families who sought help had to wait for the next fiscal year to start in July. The former scenario of running out of funds before the fiscal year ends looms on the horizon as the money available through the Family Connections grant reduces each year.

The Family Connections grant has also provided funding for additional navigators to serve families spread out over the expansive, eight-county region served by SE/ALTC. Again, this territory is roughly the size of Massachusetts and Connecticut combined. With the rising cost of gasoline and the amount of time necessary to travel to the rural homes of caregivers in far counties, limited funds available for travel expenses are quickly expended.

Because the Walla Walla Navigator position had to be eliminated, travel expenses and time have increased. SE/ALTC is working with the Kinship Navigator to try to minimize some of these costs. Should an emergent need arise between the monthly scheduled visit of the Navigator to Walla Walla, Dayton, Pomeroy, and Clarkston, kin caregivers will be instructed to schedule an appointment with SE/ALTC staff. Staff will verify the caregiver’s identification and make copies of any documentation requested by the Navigator. The copies will be faxed to the Navigator, thereby eliminating the delay that would have resulted from having to mail in required documents.

Assisting monolingual Spanish speaking kin caregivers has become a bit more problematic. The part-time Navigator who served in Yakima and Kittitas counties is no longer employed at CFCS. Kinship Navigator housed in the Tri-Cities is bilingual in English/Spanish and translates for the other navigators by phone. While this is not as beneficial as having a Spanish speaker able to meet face-to-face with kin caregivers, it is better than having to rely on family to translate when they may not fully understand the complex nature of the discussion. Having a navigator who speaks Spanish has been vital as all too frequently, the illegal immigration status of parents results in their American citizen children being left behind in relative care when the parents are suddenly deported.

Many kin families in the Hispanic community are mistrustful of governmental agencies. They often do not reach out for help because of fear of government intrusion into their lives. Or they may be embarrassed at the failure of their own children or relatives as parents and not want agencies to have yet another reason to monitor or judge their family members.
Efforts to reach monolingual and limited English speaking kin caregivers have included interviews with the Kinship Navigator on KDNA, the Spanish language radio station serving the Yakima Valley. Both versions of the KINdred Spirits newsletter are translated into Spanish as well.

The number of Native American kinship families is also on the rise. Their elders can recall in tragic detail the disastrous results of foster placement in the past, where government policy was to place native children in non-native homes. Native children were forbidden to speak their language and perform their cultural practices. Families were splintered and devastated. Children lost sight of who they were and where they came from. Understandably, Native American kin caregivers can mistrustful of governmental interference in their lives. Having a navigator who serves kin families on the reservation has been essential to trying to establish a trust relationship in order to serve this population, some of the poorest of the poor.

Often kinship caregivers take in relative children suddenly. Many have not parented recently; some have never parented. Most are unprepared for the change and problems that come with raising someone else’s child, even a beloved one. The Navigator reports that one barrier to seeking help is how overwhelming the new role of relative caregiver can be. Knowing how and where to go for help with custody paperwork can be just one thing too many to deal with. The children placed often come with emotional scars and needs and can exhibit trying behaviors. Many are special needs children. The effort to find resources to help with these challenges can appear daunting.

A Cornell University study found that grandparents or older relatives agree with these statements:

- Parenting is hard work and grandparenting can be even harder
- Grandparenting a child who’s come out of a crisis is harder still
- Grandparenting when you have less energy than you used to doesn’t help

Fatigue and depression can often be a side effect of parenting the second time around.

Often kinship caregivers must petition the court for a legal form of custody in order to protect the children they are raising. Filing for third party custody can be a confusing and expensive process. Each county has its own procedures, its own set of potentially confusing forms. Having a family court facilitator can help with this, but Kittitas and Walla Walla counties do not have one. Navigators are forbidden to assist with filling out the paperwork as it is tantamount to giving legal advice. However, the Navigator can accompany kin caregivers to court as an advocate and as someone who can help the caregiver to know where to go next in the maze. Navigators can help with obtaining criminal background checks required by courts for third party custody and can make copies of all forms for caregivers.
Meeting the Challenges

The primary Kinship Navigator and the FCSP Coordinator both serve on the Kinship Oversight Committee for Washington State. In doing so, they try to represent the interests of kinship caregivers in rural Eastern Washington. In addition, the Navigator has been an integral part of a Yakima Valley collaboration with representatives from agencies involved with kinship and foster care concerns and including some kinship caregivers themselves. This collaboration, called KINdred Spirits, publishes a bi-monthly newsletter and has been instrumental in starting kinship support groups both in Yakima and the Lower Yakima Valley. The newsletter contains parenting tips, information about programs, and listings of events and activities that may be of interest to kin families. One version of the newsletter is specific to Yakima and Kittitas Valley families while another contains information pertinent to families in the other six SE/ALTC counties.

The Kinship Navigator also writes grant applications which have sometimes served to augment KCSP and Family Connections Demonstration funds. In 2011, the KINdred Spirits collaboration secured donations that funded a back-to-school barbeque where school supplies were distributed to kin families. Back packs filled with school supplies were distributed to elementary through senior high students. It was a great success.

The Kinship Navigator works closely with Casey Family Programs to provide educational opportunities for caregivers. Powerful Families and Parenting a Second Time Around (PASTA) classes are offered when trained class leaders are available. Sessions deal with such topics as managing finances, behavior interventions, discipline and guidance, living with teens, raising a special needs child, and rebuilding a family.

In the spring of 2011, the Navigator, in partnership with Casey Family Programs, Catholic Family and Child Services, the Northwest Justice Project, and a volunteer attorney association (VAS), began offering Legal Options Clinics monthly. Attorneys working pro bono in these clinics provide assistance to caregivers with preparing and filing the paperwork necessary to apply for third party custody. In addition, the Navigator has worked out an agreement with the Yakima County Family Court Facilitator who works under the auspices of the Superior Court. Kinship caregivers are able to schedule appointments to receive assistance with filling out and filing third party custody petitions at a greatly reduced fee.

The Yakama Nation has recently hired a part-time Kinship Navigator. CFCS’s primary Navigator is mentoring this new tribal Navigator and has invited her to join the KINdred Spirits collaboration. This will help native caregivers both on and off the Yakama Nation Reservation.

The KINdred Spirits collaboration holds an annual goal-setting retreat. This collaboration endeavors to present a kin caregiver conference annually that includes an educational speaker.
GOAL: KCSP and Navigator services will assist kinship caregivers at risk of being unable to continue to provide care.

OBJECTIVES:
- Navigator will use guidelines on KCSP intake form to assist in determining which caregivers are at highest risk of being unable to continue providing care. **Ongoing**
- Navigator will work with such groups as schools, churches, Casey Family Services, the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and Washington State Children’s Administration (CA) to identify kinship caregivers in need. **Ongoing**
- Navigator will work with KINdred Spirits group. **Ongoing**
- Navigator will allocate emergent funds to qualifying kin caregivers according to State and Federal guidelines. **Ongoing**

GOAL: Awareness of and referrals to KCSP and Navigator will increase throughout eight county region.

OBJECTIVES:
- Navigator will present in-service training to staff in Walla Walla, Benton/Franklin, Kittitas and Yakima SE/ALTC offices once yearly to increase awareness and referrals. **Ongoing**
- Information about KCSP and Kinship Navigation will be disseminated on the Spanish language radio station KDNA in the Yakima Valley. **Ongoing**
- Special emphasis will be placed on reaching Spanish speaking kin caregivers through outreach to Hispanic churches and community groups. **Ongoing**
- The KINdred Spirits collaboration will continue to hold annual retreats to set goals for the upcoming year. **Ongoing**
- The Kinship Navigator will continue to work with the Yakima County Court Facilitator who provides assistance with filling out and filing third party custody paperwork. **Ongoing**
- Legal Options Clinics staffed by attorneys working pro bono will be offered monthly. **Ongoing**
- When certified class leaders are available for PASTA and Powerful Tools classes, the Navigator will promote these classes in the KINdred Spirits newsletters and with flyers given to kin caregivers. **Ongoing**
- Navigator will work together with the Yakama Nation Kinship Navigator to serve kin families living on the Yakama Nation Reservation. **Ongoing**
SE/ALTC staff in Walla Walla, Columbia, Garfield and Asotin counties will assist Navigator to serve kin families in those counties who need to submit documentation for KCSP funds by faxing the required documentation to the Navigator. **Ongoing**

- KINdred Spirits newsletter, containing information pertinent to all eight counties, will be published bi-monthly. **Ongoing**

- KINdred Spirits newsletter will be published in both English and Spanish. **Ongoing**

- Copies will be mailed or emailed to those on existing mailing lists. Mailing lists will be updated as new kin caregivers come forward. **Ongoing**

- Navigator will distribute a client satisfaction survey to kinship caregivers annually. **Ongoing**

- ALTC and interested Advisory Board members will receive the kinship newsletter, KINdred Spirits. **Ongoing**