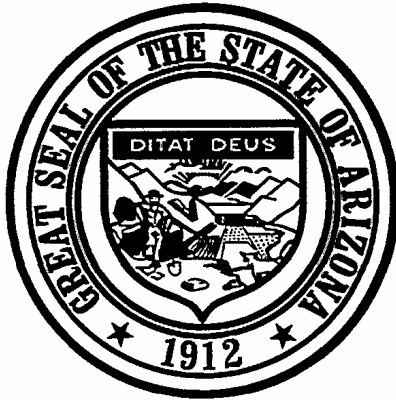


The Arizona Kinship Foster Care Program 2008 Report



The Arizona Department of Economic Security
Division of Children, Youth and Families

Kinship Foster Care

Arizona Revised Statute § 8-514.03, requires the Department of Economic Security (DES) to submit a report regarding the Kinship Foster Care Program, including demographic information, the type of services provided to kinship caregivers, and recommendations for program improvement. This report is submitted in satisfaction of that requirement.

For generations, extended families have played significant roles in the rearing of children when parents otherwise cannot. Kinship caregivers provide love and nurturance in a familiar setting as children remain connected to their families. These children live with people they know and trust, reinforcing the child's sense of cultural identity and positive self-esteem. Children living with kinship caregivers make and sustain extended family connections and continue lifelong family traditions and memories. The extended family are provided opportunities to support the child in building healthy relationships within the family, provide for the child's safety and well-being, and create a sense of stability in the life of a child.

Arizona Kinship Foster Care Program Description¹

Arizona's Kinship Foster Care Program prioritizes relatives as the first placement preference for children in Child Protective Services (CPS) custody who require out-of-home care.

There are two forms of Kinship Foster Care:

Licensed Kinship Foster Care is when a child is placed with a relative who becomes licensed as a foster care provider. As of June 30, 2008, there were 182 caregivers licensed as foster parents and providing out-of-home care for 365 related children.

Unlicensed Kinship Foster Care is when a child is placed with a relative with court approval and the relative does not become licensed as a foster care provider. As of June 30, 2008, there were 1,765 unlicensed kinship caregivers providing homes for 2,777 children.

Non-Financial Services Available to Kinship Foster Caregivers

A variety of services are available to kinship foster caregivers and the children they care for, including:

- **Case management services** - regular contact with the kinship caregiver to assess and identify needs of the child and family and assist in developing solutions.
- **Health care coverage** - children are provided health care coverage through Title XIX (Medicaid) and/or the Division of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) Comprehensive Medical and Dental Program (CMDP).
- **Parent aide services** - contracted and state employed parent aides offer training in family life skills, provide transportation, and supervise visitation with birth parents and their children.

¹ Numbers presented in this report were extracted from the CPS case management system based on a data run completed in July 2008 for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2008.

- **Parent skills training** - training is provided for kinship foster caregivers to enhance their parenting knowledge and skills.
- **Mental health and other supportive intervention services** – referrals are available for kinship foster caregivers and children.
- **Transportation services** – transportation for children to and from medical appointments and other necessary services.
- **Child care subsidy**- supervision and socialization opportunities provided for children.
- **Respite care** – six days or up to 144 hours annually of respite care is available for kinship foster caregivers.
- **Referrals to interdepartmental programs** – programs such as the Division of Developmental Disabilities, Vocational Rehabilitation, Job Service, and community resources for children and kinship foster caregivers are available through DES.
- **Arizona Statewide newsletter** – provides ongoing information, educational opportunities and services that support kinship foster caregivers.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

Kinship foster caregivers are encouraged to apply for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Cash Assistance (CA) to receive financial assistance for children in their care. Of the 3,142 children in kinship foster care on June 30, 2008, 1,151 or 37 percent² were CA recipients in 753 households, averaging 1.53 eligible children per household.

In fiscal year 2008, the average monthly *household* TANF cash assistance payment was \$264.62, which is a two dollar decrease over last year's average monthly household CA payment of \$266.66. An additional 238 children were members of eligible households but were determined *not eligible* for benefits. Of those children, 191 children or 80 percent were benefit-capped³. Benefit-capped children are not eligible for TANF cash assistance regardless of the household in which they reside. An additional 25 children or 10.5 percent were denied benefits due to their receipt of Social Security benefits. The remaining children were denied benefits for other reasons.

Ten of the grandparent caregivers were also included in the TANF cash assistance grant, a decrease of 2 or 16.7 percent from last year. The average monthly TANF cash assistance for households that included grandparents was \$248, a \$14 decrease compared to the \$262.06 average monthly TANF cash assistance benefit for households that included grandparents on the TANF grant in fiscal year 2007.

For fiscal year 2008, approximately 59 percent of TANF cash assistance households in the kinship foster care program were headed by grandparents, 27 percent by aunts or uncles, and 14 percent by other relatives. This compares to approximately 61 percent of TANF cash assistance

² Data sources are Arizona Technical Eligibility Computer System (AZTECS) and Children's Information Library and Data Source (CHILDS).

³ Family Benefit Cap: There is no increase in cash assistance for the birth of additional children after the family begins to receive cash assistance, with some limited exceptions.

households headed by grandparents, 27 percent by aunts or uncles, and 12 percent headed by other relatives in fiscal year 2007.

Costs of Care Provided by the Division of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF)

Financial assistance provided to kinship foster caregivers for the children in their care include foster care maintenance payments (for licensed kinship foster caregivers) and personal and clothing allowances (for both licensed and unlicensed relative caregivers).

In State Fiscal Year 2008, the monthly maintenance cost of care for a child placed in Licensed Kinship foster care was \$909.57, in addition each child is entitled to personal and clothing allowances which range from \$.63 to \$2.63 per day depending on the age of the child. Under certain circumstances, both unlicensed and licensed kinship foster caregivers are eligible for special allowances. Special allowances are available for costs incurred by children to attend camp, pay for graduation fees, or assist with diapers, and average \$180 annually.

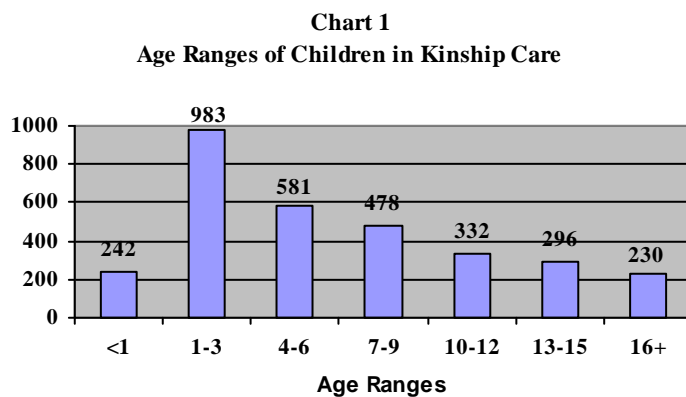
The average monthly maintenance amount does not include expenditures related to CPS case management, child care, or other services provided to support kinship foster caregivers in providing care for children in their homes.

Demographic Data about Children in Kinship Foster Care

As of June 30, 2008, there were 3,142 children placed in kinship foster care, which is 32 percent of the total out-of-home care population of 9,965 children. Of the 3,142 children, 668 were placed with siblings.

As compared to June 30, 2007, there was an approximate 7 percent increase in the number of children in kinship foster care, while the overall number of children in out-of-home placement remained fairly constant.⁴

The average age for children in kinship foster care was 7.1 years, a slight increase from last year's average of 6.7 years. The number of children by age ranges is presented in Chart 1:

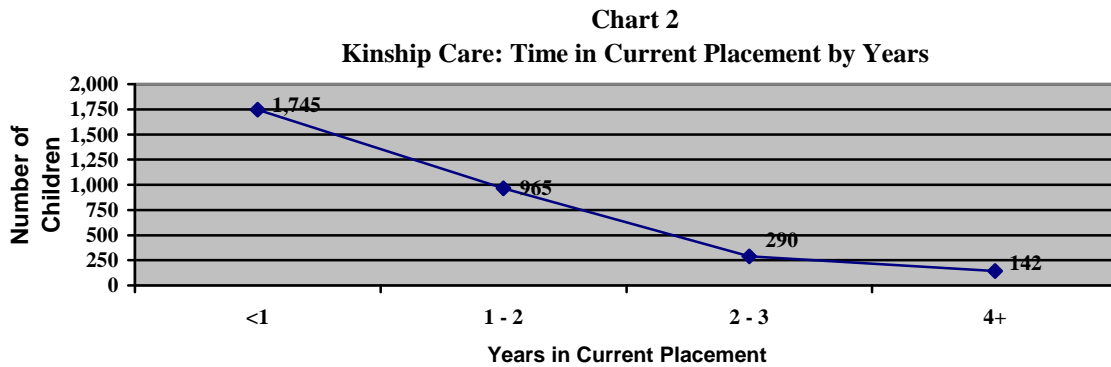


N=3,142

⁴ On June 30, 2007, there were 2,942 children in kinship foster care.

The largest percentage of children, 983 or 31.3 percent, are between one to three years old. There was a significant increase from last year in the number of children in the 13 to 15 year-old range, which increased 21 percent from 244 to 296. Additionally, there was an increase in children in the 16+ age range, which increased from 181 to 230, or 27 percent. No age range reflected a decrease of children in kinship care.

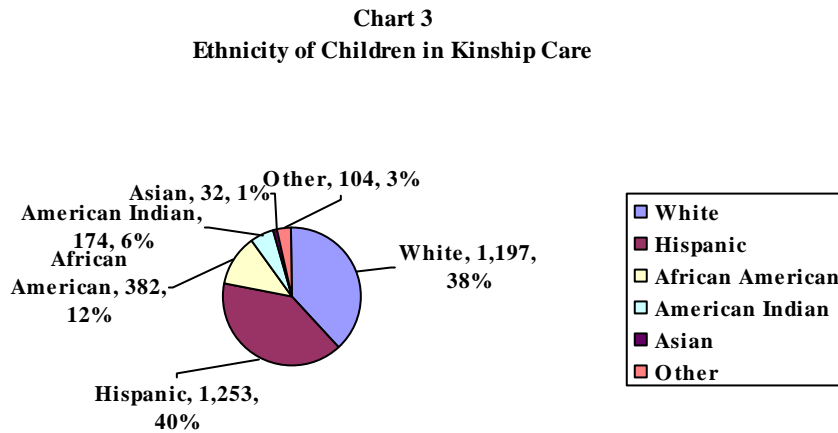
Many children, 1,745 or 56 percent, lived with their kinship foster caregivers for less than a year followed by 965 or 31 percent of the children who lived with their kinship caregivers from one to two years. Children are then reunified, adopted or go to legal guardianship. Chart 2 displays time in placement by years.



N = 3,142

Children placed in kinship foster care spend 65 percent of their out-of-home placement experience with their kinship foster care providers. The average number of children residing in the same kinship caretaker home is 1.6 children.

The ethnicity of children in kinship foster care is displayed in Chart 3. These percentages mirror last year's data, with the exception of a 1 percent increase in the number of African American children in kinship foster care.



N = 3,142

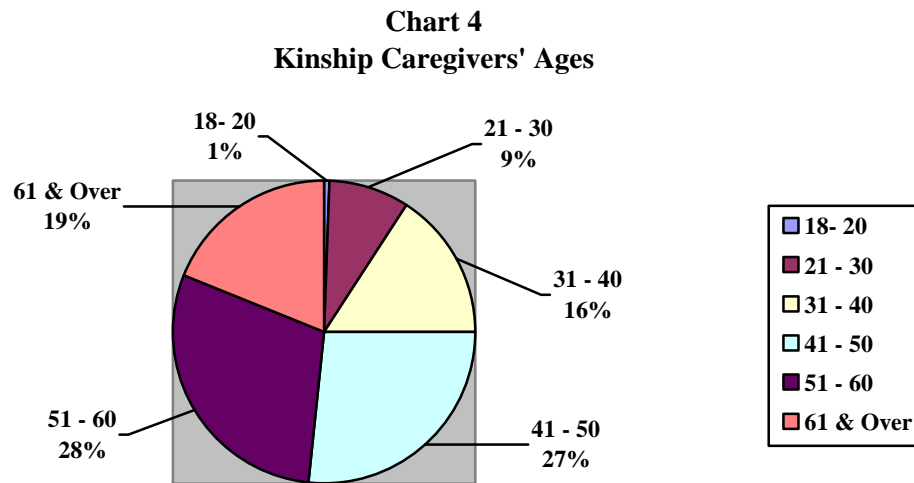
Of children in kinship foster care, 51 percent are female (1,618) and 49 percent are male (1,524).

During fiscal year 2008, 2,218 children left kinship foster care status. Of those children, 95 percent or 2,108 achieved permanency. Of those children achieving permanency, 643 or 31 percent were reunited with their parents, 448 or 21 percent achieved permanent guardianship with their kinship foster caregivers, and 652 or 31 percent were adopted by their kinship foster caregivers. The remaining 365 children achieved permanency with persons other than relatives. This data clearly illustrates the importance of relatives for permanency for children.

Demographic Data of Kinship Foster Caregivers

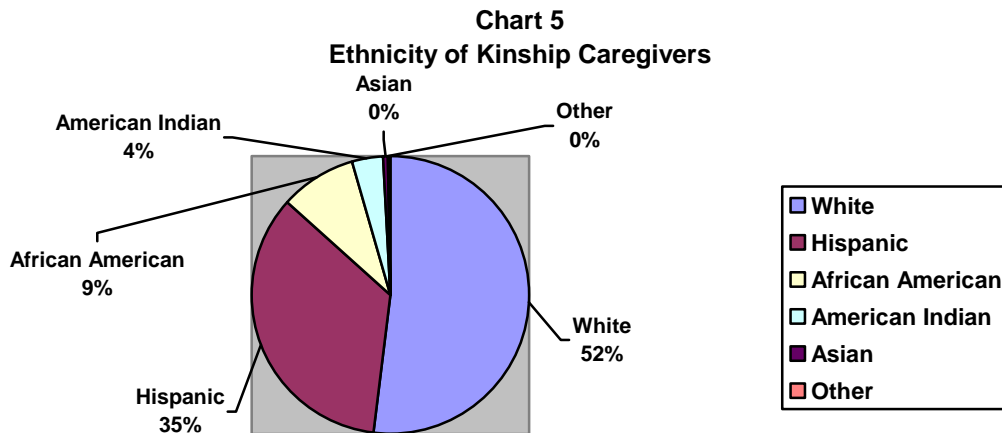
As of June 30, 2008, there were 1,945 kinship foster caregivers. This represents an increase of 90 kinship foster caregivers, or 5 percent over the 1,855 kinship foster caregivers on June 30, 2007.

Individuals between the ages of 41-60 make up the largest component of the kinship foster care providers. Specifically, 596 or 19 percent of kinship caregivers are over age 60 and are often grandparents caring for their grandchildren. There are 20 or .6 percent under age 20; 271 or 9 percent between the ages of 20-30; and 490 or 16 percent between the ages of 30-40.



About 50 percent of the kinship foster caregivers are married, 47 percent are single, widowed or divorced, and the remaining 3 percent are separated.

The majority of kinship foster caregivers, or 52 percent are Caucasian, followed by 35 percent Hispanic and 9 percent African American (Chart 5). A 3 percent increase is noted in the number of Hispanic kinship foster caregivers while other categories remained relatively static compared to last year.



Evaluation of the Kinship Foster Care Program

Evaluation activities related to the kinship foster care program have occurred through surveys and focus groups of kinship caregivers, and through case review. In this manner, information captured reflects both the perceptions and needs of kinship caregivers, and also reveals a measure of the efficacy of the agency in identifying, engaging, and supporting kinship foster caregivers.

In August of 2007, Arizona participated in the federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR), which was conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). In-home and out-of-home cases were randomly selected for review by teams of federal and state case reviewers. The reviews were held in Maricopa, Pima and Pinal counties. The case reviews included interviews with case participants, which included kinship foster caregivers.

Kinship foster care questions covered in the federal review included:

- Was the child’s current or most recent placement with a relative?
- Is (or was) this placement stable and appropriate to the child’s needs?
- If the answer to either of the first two questions was no, did the agency make concerted efforts to identify, locate and evaluate maternal relatives as potential placements for the child, with the result that maternal relatives were ruled out as, or were unwilling to be, placement resources?
- If the answer to either of the first two questions was no, did the agency make a concerted effort to identify, locate and evaluate paternal relatives as potential placements for the child with the result that paternal relatives were ruled out as, or were unwilling to be, placement resources?

Based upon the answers to the above questions, the CFSR review team could rate kinship foster care as either being a strength or as being an area needing improvement (or not applicable). Data from the 2007 federal review indicated that the majority of cases reviewed for kinship care were rated as strength. Seventy-three percent of the cases reviewed were rated strength on kinship care.

Program Enhancements:

During fiscal year 2008, the Division of Children, Youth and Families strengthened the Kinship Foster Care Program in the following ways:

- During fiscal year 2008, 32 percent of the out of home population were in kinship foster care placements, as compared to 30 percent of the out of home population in fiscal year 2007. This increase is attributed, in part, to the earlier identification of potential kinship placements and the use of Team Decision Making and Family Group Decision Making in the placement identification and selection. These processes bring together family members, CPS staff, service delivery professionals, community members, and others to assist the family in determining the plan of action that is in the best interests of their children.
- The Division's Child Welfare Training Institute has enhanced the curriculum for new case manager training by including additional information on the importance of connecting kinship foster caregivers with needed financial resources and non-financial supports. Training is also focused on improving the integration of services across Department divisions, as kinship caregivers may receive supports through programs administered in several divisions.
- The Arizona Statewide newsletter is now sent to kinship foster caregivers, in addition to foster and adoptive parents. This bi-monthly newsletter now includes articles with information specifically focused on kinship care, permanency planning, trainings opportunities, and support groups in the communities.
- The toll-free 1-877-KIDSNEEDU home recruitment and information line assists kinship foster caregivers who are interested in becoming licensed as foster parent. A recruitment specialist talks with kinship foster caregivers and provides them with information on foster parent orientations and the licensing process.
- The Division and contracted home recruitment, study and supervision agencies (HRSS) provide respite care services to licensed and unlicensed kinship care providers. Caregivers may receive 6 days, or up to 144 hours of respite care services annually. The Division continues to make efforts to locate and inform kinship providers of additional respite services.
- The Division recently revised its Child Safety Assessment, Family Strengths and Risks Assessment and Case Planning (CSA/SRA/CP) process. This revised process requires

significant family engagement for gathering sufficient information to inform decision making. When children are removed, this process guides the CPS case manager in locating and assessing potential relatives for placement. In addition, the Team Decision Making (TDM) and Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) processes rely heavily on kinship involvement when making placement and permanency decisions for children.

- The Division was actively involved in an event entitled “Kinship University,” which was held on November 14 and 15, 2008. The theme of this event is “Coming Together for Kinship Care.” Workshops for this event included such topics as “How to get Financial and other Resources for your Family Needs” and “Taking Care of Caregivers.” Positive feedback was received from kinship caregivers as a result of the forum.

Recommendations

The recommendations below will strengthen the Department’s support of kinship foster caregivers. In addition, the recommendations support programmatic and fiscal accountability for implementing the federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (HR 6893), which was signed into federal law on October 7, 2008. This legislation expands federal supports for kinship foster caregivers, provides states with the option to use federal Title IV-E funds for kinship guardianship payments for children raised by relative caregivers, and clarifies that states may waive non-safety licensing standards for relatives who wish to become licensed foster parents. Most of the provisions of this bill are effective October 1, 2010.

- It is recommended that the Division continue to encourage and assist kinship foster caregivers in the foster home licensing process. Kinship foster caregivers who become licensed as foster parents receive additional financial supports to assist in providing 24/7 out of home care to related children who are wards of the juvenile court. The Division will follow-up with kinship foster caregivers who pursue foster home licensure to identify and alleviate barriers they may face in the process.
- It is recommended that the Division continue to increase supports provided to both kinship foster caregivers and the case managers who interact with these caregivers. This effort will focus on enhanced communications with case managers regarding resources available to kinship foster caregivers, updated information pamphlets and printed materials regarding the Kinship Foster Care Program, and follow-up contacts with kinship foster caregivers throughout the state.