

The Arizona Kinship Foster Care 2007 Program Report



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

Kinship Foster Care

A.R.S. § 8-514.03, requires the Department of Economic Security (DES) to submit annually on or before November 1, 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. 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. These children make and sustain family connections and continue lifelong family traditions and memories. The extended family can support children in building healthy family relationships, support the child's need for safety and well-being, and create a sense of stability in the life of a child.

According to the July 2006 AARP article entitled "State Fact Sheet for Grandparents and Other Relatives Raising Children", nationally 8.4% of all children live with non-parent relatives, 4.5 million with their grandparents and another 1.5 million with other relatives such as aunts and uncles. In Arizona, 9.7% of all children, or 96,062, live with their grandparents and another 36,720 children live with other non-parent relatives. Nationally, the number of children being raised by their relatives has shown an increase in recent years, including a 30% increase between 1990 and 2000.

Arizona Kinship Foster Care Program Description

The Kinship Foster Care Program prioritizes non-parent relatives as the first placement preference for children in Child Protective Services (CPS) custody who require out-of-home care. During state fiscal year 2007, 2,942 abused or neglected children were living with relatives rather than in foster homes or group homes.

There are two forms of Kinship Foster Care:

Licensed Kinship Foster Care: when a child is placed with a non-parent relative who becomes licensed as a foster care provider. As of June 30, 2007, there were 177 relatives licensed as foster parents, caring for 293 children. For the previous reporting period, there were 93 relatives licensed as foster parents, caring for 180 children. This represents an increase of 84 relatives, or 90%, who become licensed after accepting children into their care. This increase may be attributed to the Division of Children, Youth and Families' (DCYF') increased efforts to inform relative caregivers about the financial and other benefits of licensing, together with increased capacity to manage inquiries regarding the licensing process.

Unlicensed Kinship Foster Care: when a child is placed with a non-parent relative with court approval and the relative is not licensed as a foster care provider. As of June 30, 2007, there were 1,678 unlicensed relatives providing homes for 2,649 children. Ninety percent of the children living in kinship foster care are placed with unlicensed relative caregivers.

Non-financial Services Available to Kinship Foster Caregivers

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

- Case management services including regular contact with the kinship caregiver to assess and identify any current challenges, and to help develop solutions.
- Health care coverage for the children through Title XIX (Medicaid) and/or the DCYF' Comprehensive Medical and Dental Program (CMDP).
- Parent aide services provided through contracted and state employed parent aides who offer training in "family life skills," provide transportation and supervise visitation with birth parents and their children.
- Parent skills training for kinship foster caregivers to enhance their parenting knowledge and skills.
- Referral to mental health and other supportive intervention services for both the kinship foster caregivers and children.
- Transportation services to access medical and other services for children.
- Child care to provide children with supervision and socialization opportunities.
- Referrals to intradepartmental programs such as the Division of Developmental Disabilities, Vocational Rehabilitation, Job Service programs, and community resources for children and kinship foster caregivers.

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families

Unlicensed kinship caregivers are encouraged to apply for the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance program to receive financial assistance for children in their care. Of the 2,942 children placed with kinship caregivers on June 30, 2007, 1,055, or 36%, were receiving cash assistance in 680 households, averaging 1.55 eligible children per household. Approximately 61% of these households were headed by grandparents, 27% by aunts or uncles, and almost 12% by other relatives.

In state fiscal year 2007, the average monthly household TANF cash assistance payment was \$267 for these families. An additional 270 children were members of eligible households but were determined *not eligible* for benefits. Of those children, 195 children, or 72%, were benefit capped¹. Children who are impacted by the Family Benefit Cap are not eligible for TANF cash assistance regardless of the household in which they reside. Other children determined not eligible for benefits included 17 children who were denied

¹ 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.

due to their receipt of social security benefits. The remaining 58 children were denied for other reasons.

Sixty-four percent of children in kinship foster care are not receiving TANF cash assistance. Through focus groups and interview surveys during this and the previous reporting periods, kinship foster caregivers who were not receiving cash assistance reported: (1) the child would be leaving their care soon to return to the parents so it would not be “worth it” to apply for benefits for such a short period of time, (2) applying for TANF cash assistance would negatively impact children’s parents, (3) experiencing difficulties in the application process and giving up, and (4) not wanting to apply for a public benefit out of personal pride.

State and Federal Legislation Benefiting Kinship Foster Caregivers

The National Conference of State Legislatures issued a report in July 2006 on significant state child welfare legislation enacted during the 2005 calendar year. This report stated that a major focus of state legislatures was on promoting or enhancing kinship care and the use of relatives as providers for children who are abused or neglected. Arizona was noted as one of the states participating in this trend.

Arizona Laws 2006, Chapter 247, effective September 21, 2006, revised the order of placement preference for children requiring out-of-home care from a parent or relative to a parent, grandparent, or another member of the child’s extended family, including a person who has a significant relationship with the child. When a child is not placed in one of these least restrictive settings within 60 days after removal, the Juvenile Court is required to determine why such placement is not in the child’s best interests. Implementation of Laws 2006, Chapter 247, better ensures that CPS specialists are diligently identifying, engaging and assessing grandparents, other extended family members, and significant others, as potential placements for dependent children throughout the life of a case.

The Kinship Caregiver Support Act (S. 661 and H.R. 2188) was introduced on February 16, 2007 in the U.S. Senate by Senators Clinton (D-NY), Snowe (R-ME) and Cochran (R-MS) and a companion bill was introduced on May 7, 2007 in the U.S. House of Representatives by Representative Davis (D-IL) and Johnson (R-IL). Both bills: establish a Kinship Navigator Program to assist grandparents and other relative caregivers in locating needed services and supports for children placed in their care and for themselves. The Act also: gives states the option to use their Title IV-E foster care funds to provide payments to grandparents and other relatives who have assumed legal guardianship under certain circumstances; expands eligibility for the Foster Care Independent Living Program for youth exiting foster care to adoption or legal guardianship; requires within 60 days of a child’s removal from the custody of their parent, the state give notice to all adult grandparents and other adult relatives of the child’s removal, except in cases of domestic violence; and, allows states to create separate licensing standards for relative foster parents as long as the standards protect

children and include formal background investigations of potential caregivers. As of the date of this report, these bills have not passed Congress.

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 includes foster care maintenance payments (for licensed kinship foster caregivers) and personal and clothing allowances (for both licensed and unlicensed relative caregivers).

The average monthly maintenance payment for a child placed in *licensed* kinship foster care is \$972, in addition to an average monthly payment of \$32.30² for personal and clothing allowances. This reimbursement is the same for children placed in out-of-home care with non-related foster parents. The average monthly payment for children placed with *unlicensed* kinship foster caregivers is \$32.30 for personal and clothing allowances. Under certain circumstances, both unlicensed and licensed kinship foster caregivers are eligible for special allowances for children in their care averaging up to \$180 annually to be used for summer camp attendance, graduation fees, diapers and other special needs.

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

Subsidized Guardianship

Five hundred and ninety-seven kinship foster caregivers obtained legal guardianship for the children in their care this year and were approved for guardianship subsidy. This year 96% of all guardianships for children in out-of-home care were by relatives and the majority of the relative guardians are grandparents (85%). Most guardians receive TANF cash assistance for children in their care plus an average monthly subsidized guardianship payment of \$296.

Subsidized Adoption

Six-hundred and fifty-four of the 944 children, 69%, adopted this year were adopted by relatives. The vast majority of these adoptions were approved for adoption subsidy maintenance payments at an average monthly subsidized adoption payment of \$689 per child.

Legislated Financial Benefits for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Laws 2006, Chapter 350, appropriated \$1,000,000 to assist grandparents in Arizona who are raising their grandchildren and funding was reauthorized for state fiscal year 2008. This appropriation provides payments to grandparents of up to \$75 per month per

² The monthly average for personal and clothing allowances was based upon an average of personal and clothing allowances for children ages 1-9. This age range was selected since 67 percent of children in kinship care are under age 7.

grandchild to be authorized on an on-going basis, with a review and re-authorization process after six months. In addition to this monthly payment, a one-time reimbursement of up to \$300 per grandchild may be authorized to cover costs associated with the transition to the grandparents' home, for example, the purchase of a bed. Special efforts are made to make this benefit available to grandparents with low incomes, those who live in rural areas, and those who are minorities. While the majority of grandparents and their grandchildren served by the program are not involved in Arizona's child welfare system, 29 grandparents participated in this program this year, who were caring for 64 children impacted by abuse and neglect. The total amount of expenditures for these children was \$42,500 for an average of \$664 per child. The remaining expenditures were made on behalf of grandparents who were not involved in the DCYF child welfare system.

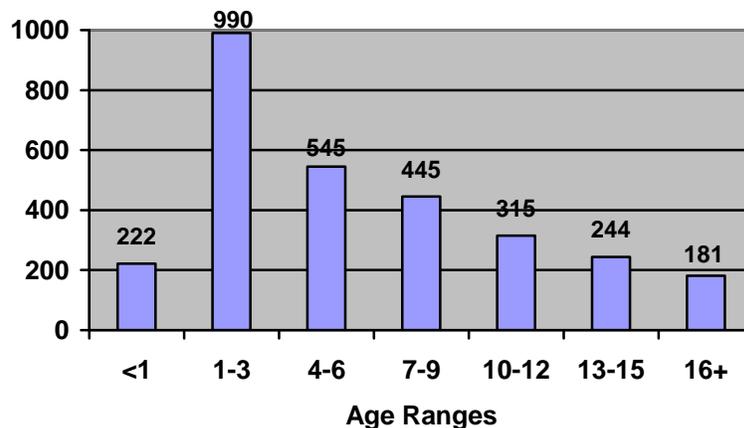
Demographic Data about Children in Kinship Foster Care

As of June 30, 2007, of the 9,820 children placed in Arizona living in out-of-home care, 2,942, or 30%, were placed in kinship foster care. Of these children, 706 were living with their siblings.

The average age for children in kinship foster care is 6.7 years, unchanged from last year. The number of children by age ranges is presented in Chart 1:

Chart 1

Age Ranges of Children in Kinship Care



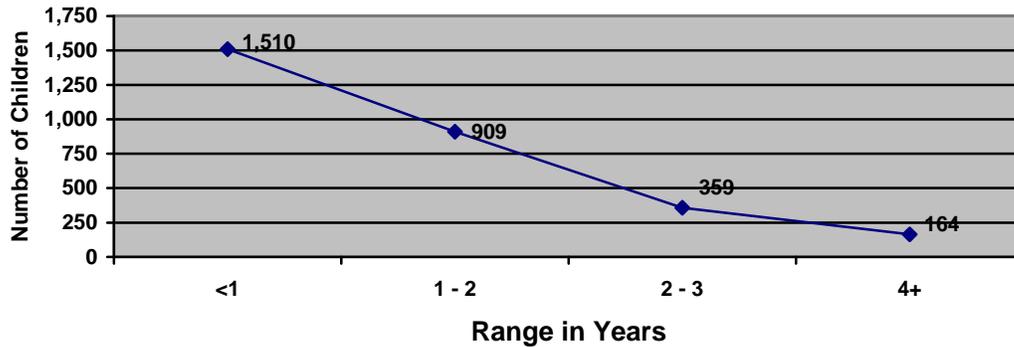
N=2,942

The largest percentage of children, 990 or 34%, fall within the 1-3 year old age range. Compared to last year, this represents an increase of 285 children or 40%, between the ages of 1-3 year olds. The largest decline in the number of children living with kinship caregivers was children ages 4-6, which decreased by 219 children, or 29%.

Many children, 1,510 or 51%, lived with their kinship foster caregivers for less than a year followed by 909 or 31% of the children who lived with their kinship caregivers between one to two years. Chart 2 displays time in placement by years.

Chart 2

Kinship Care: Time in Current Placement by Years



N = 2,942

Of all children in kinship foster care, 42% were placed with their kinship caregiver at the time of removal from their homes due to abuse and neglect, and an additional 55% were placed within 30 days of removal. Children placed in kinship foster care spend 75% of their out-of-home placement experience with their kinship foster care providers.

The majority of children, 39%, in kinship foster care are Hispanic. Compared to last year, the number of Caucasian children decreased by 15%, while the number of children of other ethnicities increased by: 3% for American Indians, 4% for African Americans, 3% for Hispanics, and 4% in the “other” category.

Seventy-six percent of the children (2,192) reside with their kinship foster caregivers in urban areas (51% in Maricopa County and 25% in Pima County) while the remaining children, 709, or 24%, reside in rural areas.

During state fiscal year 2007, 2,464 children left kinship foster care status. Of those children, 97%, or 2,380, achieved permanency: 783 (33%) were reunited with their parents, 18 (<1%) were placed with other relatives, 944 (40%) were adopted, and an addition 635 (27%) achieved permanent guardianship.

Demographic Data of Kinship Foster Caregivers

As of June 30, 2007, there were 1,855 kinship foster caregivers. The majority of these kinship foster caregivers were grandparents or great grandparents (59%), followed by aunts and uncles (24%), and 12% are other relatives.

Approximately 53% of kinship foster caregivers were married, 43% were single, widowed or divorced, and the remaining 4% were separated.

Fifty-one percent of kinship foster caregivers in this reporting period are Caucasian, 35% Hispanic, 9% African American, 3% American Indian, and the remaining 2% are “other” or their ethnicity was “not identified”.

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 servicing kinship foster caregivers.

Opinions of Kinship Foster Caregivers and DCYF Improvement Activities

Arizona was selected in November 2004 by Casey Family Programs to participate in the “Breakthrough Series Collaborative” on Supporting Kinship Care. A pilot site in District II (Pima County) was selected for this initiative, and successful strategies and lessons learned from this initiative are being “spread” throughout Arizona.

The goals for this initiative include: (1) exploring family relationships with kin as a resource to help meet the needs of children and families; (2) supporting permanency; (3) supporting connections between children and their kin; (4) implementing kin-competent services; (5) collaborating with community partners; and (6) training child welfare staff in the specific skills and competencies required to effectively work with children and their kin.

This year, kinship foster caregivers in Pima County were interviewed and focus groups were held in three other DCYF Districts to obtain recommendations for kinship care program improvement. Based upon these interviews and focus groups, the majority of the kinship caregivers indicated general satisfaction with the services they received, and increasing satisfaction with the length of time the case was open. Common areas of concern were identified and DCYF’s improvement activities to address these concerns include:

- Caregivers had little understanding of the court system or of the importance of permanency for children.
 - *To address this concern, DCYF created and distributed Permanency Information Sheets to kinship foster caregivers and encouraged kinship foster caregivers to attend the “Guardianship versus Adoption” presentations which are presented monthly in both English and Spanish.*

Caregivers felt that the agency did not involve them in the case.

- *To address this concern, CPS specialists were provided training and the DCYF's Child Welfare Policy Manual was revised to further emphasize family involvement.*
- Caregivers were struggling financially.
 - *To address this concern, a resource specialist is sent out to visit new kinship foster caregivers to advise and assist them in getting any available financial assistance, and, additionally CPS specialists are advised to explain foster care licensure to the caregivers and to encourage them to apply for licensure for additional financial support.*
- Caregivers felt there were not enough hours in the day to accomplish what they had to for the children in their care.
 - *To address this concern, caregivers are encouraged to take advantage of all supports available, both formal and informal, and CPS specialists help connect them to these supports.*
- Caregivers needed to share their stories with others who were also caring for children impacted by abuse and neglect.
 - *To address this concern, caregivers are encouraged to attend support groups at available kinship support centers. DCYF established a telephone support function for caregivers who could not attend events at these centers.*

Major Accomplishments in State Fiscal Year 2007

- The DCYF and community partners developed and enacted a Kinship Care Coalition Charter in Maricopa County, including DES and a coalition of agencies who support kinship caregivers.
- Community partners developed a training curriculum to provide to new CPS specialists attending the Child Welfare Training Institute (CWTI) and a Train the Trainers training was held for teams of community kinship professionals and kinship caregivers. The training that was developed will be provided through the CWTI and will be provided to current CPS specialists throughout Arizona.
- There number of licensed kinship caregivers significantly increased, which will result in additional supports provided to those families.
- Through the Breakthrough Series Collaborative on Supporting Kinship Care, kinship-focused projects were “spread” across Arizona.

Recommendations for Program Improvements

Since its inception, the Kinship Foster Care Program has provided relatives caring for children impacted by abuse and neglect with the supports they need to help meet the protective, developmental, cultural and permanency needs of children in their care. The following recommendations for program improvement represent a continuation of ongoing efforts to improve the kinship care program in state fiscal year 2008:

- Increase the placement of children with kinship foster caregivers through earlier identification of potential kinship placements and through increased facilitation of Team Decision Making and Family Group Decision Making processes.

Team Decision Making and Family Group Decision Making are decision-making processes that are used to bring family members, CPS staff, service delivery professionals, community members and others together to assist the family in determining what plan of action is in the best interests of their children. Team Decision Making focuses on placement decisions and Family Group Decision Making most often focuses on achieving a permanency plan for a child.

- Increase the number of kinship foster caregiver households who receive TANF cash assistance through increased training of DES staff, improved integration of services across DES Divisions, and increased efforts to inform and educate kinship caregivers about the potential availability of TANF cash assistance.
- Increase CPS staff understanding of and appreciation for the difficult role of kinship foster caregivers through increased training to both new CPS specialists provided through the Child Welfare Training Institute, and to ongoing CPS specialists as part of Advanced Training, including utilizing kinship caregivers as presenters and trainers.
- Increase kinship foster caregiver's understanding of and help them to navigate the child welfare system and court processes and increase their understanding of permanency planning options through training, written information, trainings, and face-to-face contacts with kinship foster caregivers.
- Identify barriers to licensing of kinship foster caregivers and explore options to resolve identified barriers.
- Investigate the viability of providing expanded respite services for kinship foster caregivers.
- Continue to "spread" throughout Arizona the Casey Family Programs Breakthrough Series on Supporting Kinship Care.