



WE ASKED:

What's needed to help relative caregivers navigate supports and services for the children they are raising?

The Family Voices United campaign brings together the voices of young people, birth parents, and relative caregivers with lived experience in the child welfare system (collectively known as constituents) to drive change in foster care. Learn more at familyvoicesunited.org and find more resources at grandfamilies.org. We encourage readers to review the “how you can use this paper” outline on the final page.

What are the current opportunities?

Did you know that states now have the option to use federal funds through Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018 to support grandparents and other relatives who are stepping into a caregiver role through Kinship Navigator Programs? Kinship navigator programs provide information, referral, and follow-up services to grandparents and other relatives raising children to link them to the benefits



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A collaborative project of Children's Trust Fund Alliance, FosterClub, and Generations United with support from Casey Family Programs.

and supports that they and/or the children need. These programs must be planned and operated in consultation with kinship caregivers, organizations representing them, youth raised by kinship caregivers, relevant government agencies and community-based or faith-based organizations.

Some key themes that came out of the responses we received to this question:

- Support Groups & Kinship Navigators
- Financial & Child Care Support
- Easily Accessible Resources
- Trauma-informed support for kids and families

“There must be more financial and daycare assistance for families who find themselves in the unexpected position of parenting younger children. **In addition, psychoeducational materials and support groups for these families are essential.** They should have a team of professionals available to them.”

- *Jill, Kinship Caregiver from Colorado*

“Since I was awarded custody through family court I've had to navigate all services by myself. **Support groups have provided assistance with this** and the county has offered special opportunities for my granddaughter and myself. I think family court should also assign assistance to new caregivers.”

- *Caroline, Kinship Caregiver from California*

“I think that relative caregivers and the youth they are housing should be able to access all of the same training and resources that other foster or adoptive parents have. **When I moved in with my aunt and uncle, everyone assumed I was happy and comfortable to be with my family. The reality was that I hardly knew them.** At 14 years old I had only met them a handful of times, and hadn't seen them at all in over 5 years. I would have liked them to go through training to understand their role for me and understand the trauma I was still experiencing, instead of them telling me I should be grateful to be with them instead of a "random family".”

- *Anonymous, Former Foster Youth*

“...Apply wrap-around care that coordinates efforts from one location for all available services and resources with attention given to specific needs and circumstances...”

TECORIA JONES,
BIRTH PARENT



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“In Arizona, the Grandparent Ambassadors have been meeting with the Governor’s office, discussing the merits of creating the Office of the Grandfamily Advocate. **The office would receive information from community resources and the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren federal task force who is charged with identifying and disseminating information designed to help grandparents raising grandchildren. We have had Kinship Navigators who came and went with various grants. The programs and information they gathered would disappear with them.** We need this stable entity in place to assure a consistent, updated flow of information and resources to kinship caregivers throughout our state. ”

- Sherry, Kinship Caregiver & Kinship Support Coordinator from Arizona

“We need a **central information agency that can answer a wide variety of questions about where relative caregivers can go** to get the many types of assistance needed, e.g., legal, medical, educational, mental health, etc.”

- Ellen, Kinship Caregiver from Colorado

“As a family advocate, who works with kinship caregivers, I feel it is important to provide the best services we can. It's sometimes hard for Grandparents to navigate the system when they haven't done it before. **Being there to walk them through each step can help ease the stress they may be feeling.** Whether that's helping them fill out the court paperwork for guardianship, or giving them outside resources to turn to. “

- Rebecca, Community partner from Utah

“**Simply make the information more widely available.** Most Social workers don't seem to be aware of them, and those who don't have any Child Services involved have no idea there is help out there. Advertise it like the Food Stamp and WIC programs, and the earned income tax credit (EITC) is.”

- Cathy, Kinship Caregiver from Missouri

“**Childcare resources that are able to handle the different traumas kids have been exposed to** and the training for childcare providers to be more informed.”

- Annette, a relative caregiver from Colorado

“Provide them **with resources regarding counseling, medical and psychological.** Birth to three should also be recommended for those who have younger children. Immediate ways to obtain beds, cribs, sheets, clothing - especially if given an infant. **Knowledge of services that can be provided in the home or at school rather than running from appointment to appointment.** Paperwork provided immediately to start the process and make background screenings and home finder process faster. If not then at least provide more financial temp support to families. We spent a lot of money to have our house ready for children to live here according to home finders. Medical knowledge would also be helpful along with info on kids' date of birth/social security numbers. There is just so much more the list goes on and on! “

- Tiffany, Kinship caregiver from West Virginia

“I believe they need to be given **the same support foster parents are given** about programs and resources available to them. “

- Jaqueline, Former Foster Youth from California

“Caregivers need support, from financial assistance, respite care, legal advice and understanding. Our employers need to be aware that we are taking on a responsibility we didn't ask for, and we could just use their compassion when we deal with sick children, school snow days and teacher in-service days. It is so hard, especially for the grandparents who find themselves in this role. I am raising my granddaughter, my son's daughter, and I have had her for 3 years now. I didn't have my own children in full-time daycare, but now I find myself dealing with the expense of daycare while trying to save for retirement. I am overwhelmed, exhausted and so frustrated.”

- *Roberta, Kinship Caregiver from Pennsylvania*

“Systems of care for physical health and behavioral health need to be integrated so that children and caregivers have access to both. Then health care, education, legal and human services need to provide easy access to access medical, financial, education, legal assistance and emotional support. **Caregivers need to be relieved from the burden of negotiating separate siloed systems and providing duplicate information to each system so that they can focus on caregiving.** In my state, no direct financial support for kinship caregivers is available and navigators provide a plan but the caregiver is still responsible for learning and negotiating all the systems.”

- *Lisa, Kinship Caregiver from Colorado*

“Most importantly they should be treated like professionals and provided all the information available about the child's trauma, medical, and educational history to allow them to better understand their needs and what support will be beneficial. Secondly they need team members, a case manager, or licensing worker that they can rely on to provide resources and guidance. They should not be expected to know about every option and how to access them without assistance. **Maybe most important, the providers need to be connected to other relative providers that understand what they are going through and can become a supportive network when their own friends and family do not understand the system.**”

- *Christina, Licensing Worker from Missouri*

“Manual for accessing resources specific to relative caregivers. Also, access to a lawyer who can navigate the system. Relative caregivers are often required to obtain guardianship and pay for a lawyer themselves. This can be costly and difficult to navigate. **Grants available to kinship and relative caregivers only.** Also, support groups for these types of placements as they are different from foster care and adoptive placements.”

- *Elizabeth, Kinship Caregiver and community partner from Tennessee*

‘We should be able to have more say in the court system etc. **We have these kids and know them inside and out - including what is best for them etc.** We should be able to suggest things for these kids without retaliation from CPS, GAL, court etc.’

- *Tammy, Kinship Caregiver from West Virginia*

“...A contact person for every family - to answer the caregivers' questions about how to navigate the system and be able to share what services are and aren't available...”

SUSAN W.,
KINSHIP/RELATIVE CAREGIVER



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"Kinship providers need a one-stop information center to ask questions, present their situation, and get advice on how to act. The biggest problem faced by most kinship providers is that they are unaware of how the "system" works and what is available. **The information center--in whatever form it is created--should include former and current kinship providers, to provide a real understanding** of how lives are affected by taking on traumatized children with limited finances, physical ability, and emotional energy. Then, there should be a discussion of the ridiculous number of forms that must be submitted and how they are created that extend the processing time to receive any benefits that do exist."

- Amy, Kinship Caregiver from Ohio

"Well not everyone has a computer so a **list of services should be given to every family member that gets a child in their care.** Maybe volunteer drivers to help get them from point a to b."

- Michelle, Kinship Caregiver from Ontario

"It would be helpful to **receive regular emails with information about programs and services available to support kinship caregivers.** We live in San Diego but went through the Los Angeles family court system for guardianship and didn't receive any information about the services available in our area. It has taken 2 years for us to find out about some of the services available here and I'm sure there is much we don't know."

- Pam, Kinship Caregiver from California

"I would like to see kinship caregivers receive school lunches, fees and bus transportation free. We don't qualify because of our income. We have shouldered all the financial support for our grandson for 16 years. We are court appointed guardians. Our grandson's mom struggles with substance misuse. We do not receive financial assistance from child support, TANF, SNAP, or Medicaid for our grandson. While we do not mind being responsible it would be great to have this small piece provided. It's just common sense to provide these kiddos and their caregivers school lunches."

- Deborah, Kinship Caregiver from Colorado

"I think empathy and connection go a long way! These relative caregivers often feel isolated and alone in their situations. Our support groups allow relative caregivers to connect with other families like theirs so they know they are not alone. **To have their concerns and experiences validated by other families in the same situation is powerful.** Being willing to go above and beyond your duties to assist these caregivers goes a long way as well, helping them fill out applications, connecting them directly to a resource rather than just handing them a pamphlet helps to make referrals successful."

- *Shawntae, Community Partner from Utah*

"I am a traditional foster parent, but I also teach the class that relatives in my state need to get licensed as relative/kinship caregivers. Many of them are floored to learn how the system works and what rights they have as a member of the team. **Relative caregivers need information and support to not only help them care for their kin, but themselves as well.** Many are grandparents living on a fixed income. All of them are sacrificing something to step up and care for their relative - they deserve as much respect as any other member of the team."

- *Jamie, Community Partner from Missouri*

"Relieving the financial burden of taking care of extra children. Also, **assistance with transportation to appointments/meeting or respite.** Jobs don't understand the extra demands of having a child in the system. The time off work and constant meetings are necessary but very stressful on top of already stressful situations. We have at least 4 appointments a month and that's a good month. Even a 20 minute appointment takes more than an hour out of the work day and that's only one kid. **Having mental health professionals more accessible to the family would also be beneficial.** Kids have been through a lot. "

- *Tabitha, Kinship Caregiver from North Dakota*

"A place to combine resources because help is hard to find. I raised my grandson over 5 years before I heard about TANF! **More financial help for kinship care; equal to what foster parents receive.**"

- *Beverly, Kinship Caregiver from Kansas*

“Tutoring and educational support, tools, assistance for activities, i.e. sports.”

- *Christine, Kinship Caregiver from California*



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“They need a clear path of resources since day one explaining what acronyms mean and what benefits mean. **I suggest an easy to reach information database via touch screens at designated computers in public libraries.** The authorities giving custody to these relatives should explain them in what kind of category they are: (custody, guardianship, adoptive, formal, informal) so they can look it up under these categories, what services are available in the community. The ultimate goal should be not to have different categories at all, but a leveled playing field where all receive the same benefits, all the benefits possible.”

- *Maty, Community Partner from California*

“A ONE STOP Center would be the perfect start for caregivers so that when they get their relatives there is someone who can guide them through the process of where they can get the assistance they desperately need. Also what is needed is that **Relative Caregivers receive some sort of financial assistance** for the children we take in. (TANF/Medicaid/SNAP) As grandparents we did not budget our retirement to raise our grandchildren. Some grandparents are living on a limited budget and cannot afford the grandchildren, but take them in making huge sacrifices by cutting their meds in half to be able to provide food and clothing for these children. Even when services are available, if the Kinship Caregivers do not know about them and where to call, then that money is not used for what it is intended to be used!

- Mercedes, Kinship Caregiver from Texas

“I believe easier access to a centralized resource information source would be beneficial. Many times we caregivers have no idea what resources may be available and no easy place to look for this information. As a grandmother raising a baby, now a toddler, I had difficulty trying to learn what if any programs may be available to help with daycare, and what if **any programs maybe available to meet and talk with other relative caregivers in similar situations**. I actually helped start a local Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support group and we now meet two times a month. But it is difficult to find out about programs, groups and resources that may be beneficial to us.”

- Joanne, Kinship Caregiver from Pennsylvania

Looking for more info?

Check out these resources:

www.grandfactsheets.org

www.grandfamilies.org

www.gu.org/explore-our-topics/grandfamilies/

www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f-kinshi/



Listen to our Podcast Episodes featuring a young person, birth parent and kinship caregiver!

<https://familyvoicesunited.org/voices/family-voices-podcasts>

Supporting Kinship Families Episode:

<https://www.familyvoicesunited.org/voices/podcast/family-voices-supporting-kinship-families>



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How to use this paper

Our hope is that young people, parents and relative caregivers with lived experience in the child welfare system, community organizations, state Family First implementation teams, child welfare agencies, policymakers and other stakeholders will use this document to inform discussions about how to maximize support to families. If you are interested in using the quotes or perspective contained in this document or if you would like to bring young people, parents and relative caregivers to your event or project, email the Family Voices United team at info@familyvoicesunited.org or call 503.717.1552.

About the Family Voices United campaign

The Campaign elevates the voices and perspectives of young people, parents, and kinship caregivers, collectively known as family voices or “constituent voices”. Individuals with lived experience in the child welfare system are currently sharing their stories and expertise to educate, inform and transform the systems that serve children, youth and families - both in policy and practice. With new federal legislation - the Family First Prevention Services Act - states, tribes, and territories have new opportunities to implement changes that many constituents have identified are needed to fully support keeping children safe in strong, supported families.

Join the movement! Sign up at FamilyVoicesUnited.org