

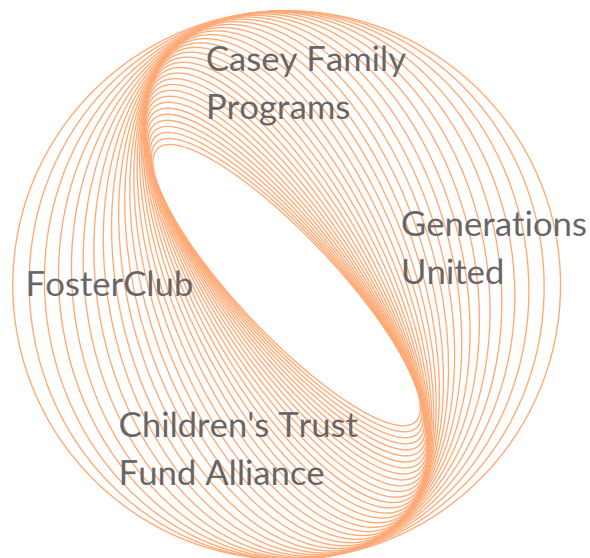


Supporting Kinship Caregivers

*Prioritizing Keeping Young People
Safely with their Families*

Framing

Family Voices United is a collaborative project with the Children's Trust Fund Alliance, Generations United, FosterClub, and Casey Family Programs.



Together, we work to elevate the voice and perspective of **young people, birth parents, and kinship/relative caregivers** (known collectively as **constituents**), to stakeholders, partners and organizations who make decisions about the child welfare system.

IN ORDER TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS THAT BENEFIT CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE, AND FAMILIES, LIVED EXPERIENCE VOICES AND EXPERTISE MUST BE NOT ONLY HEARD, BUT MUST BE CENTERED IN DECISION MAKING.

Share Your Perspective Campaign

Family Voices United launches regular "Share Your Perspective" questions on timely topics relating to child welfare. Currently, the campaign centers these questions around 5 rotating central themes:



Race Equity in Child Welfare



Older Youth & Congregate Care



Supporting Relatives Caring for Children



Expectant and Parenting Youth



Prevention: Strengthening Families & Averting Crises



February 2022 "Share Your Perspective" Question:

"IN AN EFFORT TO KEEP YOUNG PEOPLE WITH THEIR FAMILIES, WHAT SPECIFIC SUPPORTS SHOULD RELATIVES OR KINSHIP CAREGIVERS RECEIVE?"



Identified Priorities from Lived Experience Leaders

On How to Best Support Kinship Caregivers

Advocate for equitable, system-level supports.

Support us to build our community.

Help us meet our basic/ practical needs.

Show us tools to prioritize our wellbeing.

Connect us to support and advice.

Facilitate family environments of unconditional love
and support.



Advocate for Equitable System-Level Supports

Listening to lived experience voices

- Respect for and knowledge of legal rights as relative/kinship caregiver
- Equity with foster parent resources and supports
- Ensure young people are safe through system oversight methods like background checks and follow-up visits
- Individualized plans and resources that meet families specific needs
- Help relatives navigate the system to get young people placed with them
- Support with adoptions processes and implications
- Prioritize transparency and communication

Advocate for Equitable System-Level Supports

Quotes from lived experience voices



Supporting Relatives
Caring for Children

When relatives or kinship is an option, it is crucial to ensure they are on the child's side and will not repeat harmful caregiving...it is important for caregivers to identify and communicate when they are not the best people to deal with particular situations.

-Youth in/from care, Puerto Rico

“

I've been in foster care my entire life, not once was I ever put with my family relatives and so many of my family members have tried.

-Youth in/from foster care, OR

Resources are not always easy to access, especially for families outside the foster care system. We are often left to fend for ourselves.

-Adoptive parent, WA

”

I believe the support given to relative and kinship caregivers should be the same support that's given to foster families...Just because the youth is placed with family does not mean the family will not struggle. When a family grows in size, so does the cost of things.

-Kinship caregiver, TX

“The real opportunity to have individuality with their case. The one size fits all, check the box systems do not allow for healing or growth.”

-Kinship caregiver, RI



Help us Meet our Basic/ Practical Needs

Listening to lived experience voices

- Give kinship caregivers access to child/youth's information and documents
- Make childcare an easy, realistic option
- Support with housing, food and meeting basic needs
- Access to comprehensive, affordable health care for children and families
- Opportunities for economic supports

Help us Meet our Basic/ Practical Needs

Quotes from lived experience voices



Supporting Relatives
Caring for Children

If the community had free childcare or a place where families can go and talk to someone, the system would not get involved.

-Birth parent, NY

“

After being in foster care for 7 years, my biological aunt took me in at 16. We faced several barriers, including transportation, that resulted in my placement with her only lasting a year before reentering foster care.

-Youth in/from foster care, CA

“

In the beginning, we need very basic information about the child. Date of birth, social security #, diagnoses, allergies, special needs, IEP and paperwork to provide safety for the child....I know this sounds very basic but I have seen kinship families that were not given this information.

-Kinship caregiver, PA

”

Help families get universal income programs and quality health care and education.

-Birth Parent, NY

”



Connect us to Support and Advice

Listening to lived experience voices

- Provide ongoing trainings
- Create advice hotlines
- Make parenting classes accessible
- Address barriers to resources
- Facilitate peer connections
- Provide resource guides

Connect us to Support and Advice

Quotes from lived experience voices



Supporting Relatives
Caring for Children

They should receive training on how to support children coming from traumatic situations...I struggled with mental health and that made me scared to open up to my aunt. If she had training on how to deal with children who had experienced something like my brothers and I did then we would have been able to open up and receive extra help for what we were going through.

-Youth in/from foster care, CA

“

We need less red tape when trying to get additional resources!

-Kinship caregiver, UT”

“

More training specific to attachment and trauma, a resource list of therapists that specialize in trauma and adoption in your area.

-Kinship caregiver, PA

“

Parenting classes, advocates, support services that we can call anonymously about questions, food support, job support, parenting groups for all genders and roles.

-Birth parent, AK

PRIORITY #4



Supporting Relatives
Caring for Children

Support us to Build Our Community

Listening to lived experience voices

- Build co-parenting skills and resources
- Support visitations with family, especially siblings
- Find positive extracurriculars that promote belonging
- Ensure cultural relevance in supports, resources, and placements

Support us to Build Our Community

Quotes from lived experience voices



Supporting Relatives
Caring for Children

The saying of "it takes a village to raise a child" is very true. I feel that my parents couldn't find their village...I watched them struggle with incarceration, abuse, and neglect while they both self-medicated with drugs and alcohol rather than having the support of loved ones, a forgiving and caring community, and lack of understanding that it is perfectly ok to ask for help and receive mental health care/ treatment.

-Youth in/ from foster care, VA

“

Promote coparenting.

-Kinship caregiver +
birth parent, VA

Consider Native
American foster
homes and be
culturally responsive.

-Community partner,
CO

”

I think it will be best for kinship caregivers or relatives to have a space where they can interact and share with other families about what they are experiencing, a space where they can ask for advice from other families and build a supportive community

-Youth in/from foster care, CA



Show us Tools to Prioritize Our Wellbeing

Listening to lived experience voices

- Trauma-informed care is essential
- Behavioral health supports are necessary
- Offer addiction supports for families
- Make therapy accessible- both family and individual
- Normalize mental health support

Show us Tools to Prioritize Our Wellbeing

Quotes from lived experience voices



Supporting Relatives
Caring for Children

More therapeutic rehabilitation resources for parents struggling with addiction. Not just force classes on someone and think there will be a successful outcome, but more FAMILY therapy offered, as a whole.

-Birth Parent, IN

“

A child's trauma doesn't go away or get put on pause just because they are placed with someone they know, and a lot of times it can make it worse if they aren't getting the right supports

-Youth in/from
foster care, VT

”

I am a former foster youth who is now a kinship provider...the kindest thing my caseworker has done for us is to clarify that there may be a longer timeline than we may have anticipated, and being clear about what to expect.

-Kinship caregiver + youth in/ from care, ID

There are so many times where children go to a family member and the placement fails because the child might have behavioral issues.

Well, if their relative had the proper training and support, they would be more equipped to handle escalations. They should be required to have trauma informed care training so they look beyond the behaviors, and teach them coping skills to teach the children

-Youth in/from care + kinship caregiver, TX



Facilitate Family Environments of Unconditional Love and Support

Listening to lived experience voices

- Practice patience
- Ensure safety
- Identity-affirming placements
- Find joy together
- Healthy, transparent communication

Facilitate Family Environments of Unconditional Love & Support

Quotes from lived experience voices



Supporting Relatives
Caring for Children

Help build connection through fun, laughter, and bonding
finding joy...having a conversation with the kinship relative on
how to support healthy parents and relationships

-Birth parent, WA

“ —

Most of the time there are lots
of miscommunications where
the young people don't know
how to express themselves
and the relatives don't know
how to receive it.

-Youth in/from foster care, FL

— ”

Honestly treat us like family...whenever we feel like part of the
family it makes things a lot easier for us to cope with being
away from everything we went from knowing and loving

-Youth in/from foster care, SC

Some caregiver tools are creativity, patience, active listening,
adaptable thinking and transparent communication. It is easier to
care for yourself and others when you have nothing to hide, when
you can be yourself, authentic...Really strong opinions about
lifestyle, sexuality and identity can be stressful and unfavorable for
the child's personal development...the best thing a caregiver can do
is provide a safe environment for growth and positive self-
experimentation.

-Youth in/from foster care, Puerto Rico

How to Use this Report

Share with your Networks

The themes and priorities from this report can help others gain further insight into the child welfare system from the perspective of those who have lived experience. It may also help those in your networks to better support constituents in their work.

Elevate to Policymakers

The people making laws and decisions must hear from those who have experience with the systems they impact with their actions. Nothing about us without us.

Highlight to More Lived Experience Leaders

Creating community amongst lived experience leaders starts by sharing stories and identifying common experiences. Please share this report with constituents you work with or others in your networks with lived experience.

THANK YOU TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE, BIRTH PARENTS & KINSHIP CAREGIVERS FOR ANSWERING OUR "SHARE YOUR PERSPECTIVE" QUESTION, AND FOR PROVIDING YOUR LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERTISE TO THE FIELD OF CHILD WELFARE.

Contact us:

www.familyvoicesunited.com

info@familyvoicesunited.com



@family_voices



@familyvoicesunited



@familyvoicesunited