



KINSHIP CARE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE REPORT



Washington State Department of
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

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Executive Summary

The annual report of the Kinship Care Oversight Committee (KCOC) for the period from September 2023 through December 2024 is mandated by RCW 74.13.621. Established in 2003, the KCOC provides guidance to the Legislature in identifying, supporting, and strengthening kinship care families. For this report, kinship care encompasses both relatives and unrelated individuals raising children. The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF), the Department of Social and Health Services Aging and Long-Term Support Administration (AL TSA), and the Economic Services Administration (ESA) staff participate in the KCOC, along with kinship caregivers, child and caregiver advocates, nonprofit service providers, tribes, and legal community representatives.

Introduction

The Kinship Care Oversight Committee (KCOC) meets monthly to provide a forum to exchange information about state policy changes, local initiatives, and concerns, while monitoring, guiding, kinship care recommendations and implementation activities.

2024 KCOC Achievements

- **DSHS/AL TSA Kinship Navigator Program Achieving Evidence-Based Status:** In September 2024, the Prevention Clearinghouse rated the Washington [Kinship Navigator Program](#) as a Supported Evidence-Based Program.
- **Building Community Partnerships:** Continued to build a collective of community partners that can support and strengthen kinship families.
- **Providing Expert Guidance:** Provided subject matter expert guidance, based on lived and professional experience, on kinship-specific grant projects like Kinship Washington Administrative Codes (WAC) changes, Kinship Navigator, and Kinship Plus evaluations.
- **Offering Feedback:** Provided feedback to various agency initiatives, including:
 - **Kinship Navigator Evaluation** The Kinship Navigator Program Evaluation was conducted to obtain an evidence-based rating from the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse, a federal body that reviews and rates programs for their effectiveness in preventing foster care placements. Achieving a rating—such as “supported” or “well-supported”—is critical because it allows states to claim federal reimbursement under the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) for eligible program expenses.
 - Throughout this evaluation process, the Kinship Care Oversight Committee (KCOC) played a vital role as a lived experience voice. They served as a consistent check-in point to ensure the evaluation remained aligned with the original intent and design of the Kinship Navigator

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Program—a model they helped shape. Their involvement helped maintain program fidelity and ensured that the evaluation reflected the real-world needs and experiences of kinship caregivers.

- **Kinship WACs and new licensing standards.** Attended presentations from the DCYF Licensing Division about potential changes in the new Washington Administrative Codes (WACs). During the session, KCOC members shared feedback on the proposed rules and raised questions based on their lived experience. Once the WACs were made public, the committee was given a direct link to submit formal comments through the public feedback process.
 - **Kinship communication standards,** DCYF partnered with BloomWorks, an outside agency, to improve kinship-related publications by gathering lived experience feedback. BloomWorks presented draft materials to the Kinship Care Oversight Committee (KCOC), who provided input based on their personal and professional experiences. That feedback was then used to revise and strengthen the final publications. Examples of these materials include brochures, guides, and outreach tools designed to support kinship caregivers and improve communication standards across the system. [CWP_0074 Kinship Care: Relatives and Suitable Others](#)
 - **State-funded guardianship program.** In March 2025, the Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP) was centralized to DCYF headquarters. Prior to the centralization, DCYF presented the purpose of this change to the Kinship Care Oversight Committee (KCOC) and invited feedback from the group. The committee responded positively, and the changes were well received.
 - **Child support good cause waivers.** In Washington State, only about one-third of eligible kinship caregivers receive non-needy TANF benefits—roughly \$450 or more per month to support the child or youth in their care. When asked why they don't access these funds, many caregivers say they don't want to cause additional harm to their adult child. That's because when a caregiver receives non-needy TANF, the state (ESA/TANF) is required to pursue child support from the child's parents, which can create tension or hardship within the family.
 - The Kinship Care Oversight Committee (KCOC) has had ongoing discussions about this issue and has worked with ESA to explore ways to reduce or remove this barrier, so more
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- **Assisted in Developing Language for Updated Kinship WACs:** Assisted DCYF in drafting an updated definition of kinship care to be considered when developing the new kinship WACs. While RCW 74.13.600 defines kinship caregivers as blood relatives only, multiple legislation over the past five years looks at kinship caregivers as relatives and suitable persons.

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State Efforts to Support Kinship Families

Washington state continued to move toward establishing programs and infrastructure to support kinship families:

- **Kinship Navigator Grant:** Awarded for an additional year of funding from the federal Administration for Children and Families to DCYF, in partnership with ALTA, to support the finalization of an evidence-based Kinship Navigator program as required under the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) and to build state infrastructure to support kin. In September 2024, the Prevention Clearinghouse rated the Washington [Kinship Navigator Program](#) as a Supported Evidence-Based Program.
- **Kinship Plus Grant:** Children’s Bureau (CB), Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) awarded to Amara in partnership with DCYF and UW to implement an evidence-based kinship program in King County, providing kinship families with a six-module course for effective shared parenting and referrals to local kinship navigators for support groups. This grant slowed during this time due to Amara agency restructuring. [KinPLUS - Amara](#)
- **New Licensing Standards:** Following the release of the [new Federal Register: Separate Licensing or Approval Standards for Relative or Kinship Foster Family Homes](#), DCYF sought input from the KCOC on the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) chapter, supporting policies, procedures, and a home study process for kinship caregivers, making it easier for kin to get licensed and receive staff support.

Federal Efforts to Support Kinship Families

The Children’s Bureau, Office of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) also sought input from KCOC kinship participants on the topic of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits. This discussion provided caregivers with the opportunity to share their experiences and challenges in accessing TANF services.

KCOC Collective: Creating a Network of Community Partners to Support and Strengthen Kinship Families

During the reporting period of September 2023 through December 2024, the KCOC convened 14 times. The Kinship Care Oversight Committee (KCOC) includes numerous individuals who support informal kinship caregivers — families not involved with the child welfare system. The KCOC has requested that agencies serving the kinship community provide information and resources specific to their services, such as food benefits, kinship legal advocacy, and support groups, to the committee.

These individuals rely on the networking that occurs during KCOC meetings to help support kinship families. Frequently, KCOC members will share a resource or event that sparks an idea for another KCOC member. This

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unique web of kinship-specific resources does not have another forum; thus, the information shared is vital to supporting kinship families across Washington state.

Specific requested topics included:

- TANF benefits – experiences accessing services.
- Legal Services and the legal needs of kinship caregivers.
- Child Support Enforcement and kinship caregivers
- Initial Licenses
- Respite Opportunities
- Education and services needed for children and youth in their care
- Updates from Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)
- Updates about new Kinship Licensing Standards
- Division of Child Support (DCS) impacts kinship families across the state.

Input and Recommendations Sought from Kinship Caregivers Participating in the KCOC

The KCOC's unique ability to elevate the voices and interests of the kinship community is crucial. The committee monitors and consults on the implementation of various state agency initiatives, including:

- Caregiver Support Project – Phase 2 (DCYF)
- DCYF Kin-First Culture Research and Recommendations (DSHS/AL TSA)
- TANF Benefits – Skimming of Services (ESA)
- Diaper Initiative (ESA)
- Legal Services – Addressing the Legal Needs of Kinship Caregivers (LAARK)
- Language Access (DCYF)
- Initial Licenses (DCYF)
- Kin-First Culture Licensing Standards
- Web Content for Caregivers (DCYF)
- Publication Content (DCYF)

This comprehensive collaboration ensures that the needs and concerns of kinship caregivers are heard and addressed, improving the support network available to kinship families across Washington state.

Ongoing Issues Identified by Kinship Caregivers during the KCOC

Several ongoing issues continue to be identified by the KCOC, including:

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- Lack of equity for kinship caregivers who are not part of the formal DCYF system
- Stigma attached to accessing and using services
- Difficulty finding child care
- Difficulty navigating the education system as a kinship caregiver
- Impact of fentanyl on families
- Lack of services
- Financial needs when taking on an additional person in the home
- Challenges faced by kinship caregivers with disabilities
- Child Support as a barrier to financial stability

Subcommittees

Evaluation Sub-Committee

A KCOC kinship navigator evaluation sub-committee was established to inform, guide, and vet evaluation-related materials. During this last reporting period, they continued to provide the Kinship Navigator Program (KNP) Evaluation Team with feedback.

After many years of gathering information and three agencies collaboratively working together, the DSHS KNP was rated a supported evidence-based program by the Prevention Services Clearinghouse. The model that was rated is referred to as the "Washington Kinship Navigator Program" and it uses an intensive case management model to deliver services to kinship caregivers. Traditionally the KNP statewide program was designed as an information, resource, and support program. This is also called INR – information and resources. The biggest difference between the INR model and the rated Washington Kinship Navigator Program is the intensive case management model (formal assessment, information, resources, and follow-up). The traditional INR model does not include formal assessment or follow up after providing the resource to the kinship caregiver. The intensive case management model has been demonstrated to be effective; however it cost twice as much to offer to kinship caregivers because of the additional time given to assessments and follow up case management services. The goal is to implement the intensive case management model statewide over a period of time because additional funding is needed to sustain the evidence based approved model. Having been rated – 50% of the funds expended to provide the services under the rated case management model are reimbursable through Title IV-E. Once the reimbursement system is established for the KNP for the services provided through the intensive case management model the program will become more easily sustainable.

The Washington State KNP supports both formal and informal kinship caregivers and the children they are raising. A kinship caregiver is any individual who steps in to raise a child when the parents are unable to do so. The program is housed outside the child welfare system but serves caregivers appointed through the system

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(formal kinship caregivers) and those who have not been (informal kinship caregivers). Caregivers are connected with trained Kinship Navigators who provide services and support based on their needs.

Service Levels

The KNP offers three levels of services based on the results of an initial intake and screening process:

1. **Information Assistance and Referral:** For needs that can be addressed in a short communication, Navigators provide one-time assistance and educate caregivers about available resources and community services.
2. **Case Coordination:** For caregivers identifying a single area of minimal need at intake, Navigators provide case coordination services to meet that specific need. For example, they might connect caregivers with programs that offer short-term funding for basic needs.
3. **Case Management:** (Evidenced Based Model) For caregivers needing more intensive support in two or more areas, Navigators conduct an in-depth culturally responsive needs assessment in partnership with the caregiver. They then provide case management services, helping caregivers set achievable goals and coordinate access to multiple services, including financial support, peer-to-peer support, and training on trauma and other relevant topics.

For more information about the Washington Kinship Navigator Program Enhanced Case Management Model:

- Website: <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/altsa/kinship-care/kinship-navigator-case-management>
- Phone: (360) 584-2450
- Email: kinshipnavigator@dshs.wa.gov

The Washington State KNP Enhanced Case Management Model is rated as a supported practice. To achieve this rating, at least one study conducted in a usual care setting achieved a moderate or high rating on design and execution, demonstrating a sustained favorable effect for at least six months beyond the end of treatment on at least one target outcome.

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Outcomes with statistical significance areas of the study

Services with Statistically significant Results	Intervention Site	Non-Intervention Sites
Receiving Child-Only TANF	52%	40%
Kinship Caregiver Support Program (KCSP)	29%	26%
Child Placement Disruption (Child Left in the Home)	8%	23%

Caregivers in the intervention sites reported:

- Greater personal wellbeing
- More likely to use support groups
- Were more likely to enroll in Child- Only TANF
- Were more likely to access the Kinship Caregiver Support Program

Children in the intervention sites:

- Had less placement instability
- Had less ER visits during the time assessed.

Overall implication

- Caregiver-focused interventions can improve both caregiver and child outcomes.
- Caregivers in both conditions had greater access to child-only TANF compared to the national average.
- Enhanced navigation may help caregivers find cost-effective resources that prevent ER visits.
- Support groups may enhance caregiver and child wellbeing.

Future funding - Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA).

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The Washington State Kinship Navigator Program (KNP) Enhanced Case Management model received a “supported” rating from the Prevention Clearinghouse. This significant milestone allows DCYF to claim a 50% reimbursement match for the funds spent on this model.

This evidence-based model, however, is not implemented statewide due to funding limitations. The Kinship Navigator Programs that utilize the evidence-based model can now receive a 50% match for state funds spent on services and administrative expenses for families served using the model. The intent from the beginning was for the federal funds received to be reinvested into the Kinship Navigator program to expand services to all eligible caregivers at each site, thereby creating more opportunities and resources for kinship families.

Title IV-E Match Confusion and Clarification

There is often confusion about the federal match because it is commonly believed that DCYF is unable to access Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) funds. While this funding does fall under the FFPSA, it differs from the typical FFPSA funding and does not require the same reporting requirements. Therefore, DCYF can draw down these funds for the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS)/Aging and Long-Term Support Administration (AL TSA). The Kinship Navigator federal match program has different reporting requirements and can be accessed through a process agreed upon by DCYF (the Title IV-E Agency) and DSHS/AL TSA's Kinship Navigator program. A Service Level Agreement (SLA) can be put in place to allow for the necessary exchange of information, enabling DCYF to access the funds on behalf of the KNP and pass them back to DSHS/AL TSA for further use in the Kinship Navigator Program.

Process Challenges and Agency Constraints

DCYF has met multiple times with DSHS/AL TSA to work through the SLA and has amended the state plan, and DCYF is ready to begin to submit allowable reimbursements on behalf of DSHS's KNP.

Kinship Legislative Sub-Committee (KLSC)

Meetings and Purpose: The Kinship Legislative Sub-committee (KLSC) meets about monthly, providing a forum to elevate considerations for future policy development to support kinship providers. Additionally, the KLSC monitors and interprets both federal and state bills, policies, and procedures that impact the welfare of kinship families. This sub-committee is led by a non-state employee to reduce conflicts and limitations of bureaucracy. Laurie Lippold led this committee this year and has been passionate about ensuring kinship caregiver's voices are heard by state agencies to improve outcomes for children in Washington state.

Leadership Transition: This year, Laurie Lippold announced her retirement, and Kim Justice will be stepping into Laurie's role as facilitator moving forward into 2025.

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Legislative Limitations: While an excellent place for exploration and consideration of future legislation, KLSC acknowledges its limitations and lack of authority to submit legislative recommendations on behalf of an agency.

Budget Challenges: The KLSC was aware of the budget forecast this year, which limited discussions on supporting additional services for kinship caregivers.

Future Considerations: The KLSC continues to identify issues that should be considered in better fiscally forecasted years like:

- **Financial Stability and Access to TANF Child Only Grants:** Addressing barriers and finding solutions.
- **Legal Aid:** Securing additional funding for LAARK to hire more legal staff.
- **Kinship Navigators:** Increasing funding for additional kinship navigators in counties that currently lack this support.

The Future of KCOC: Building a Stronger Support Network for Kinship Families

In 2025, DCYF will continue holding monthly KCOC meetings to collaborate and coordinate services to benefit all kinship care families in Washington. The two existing sub-committees (Kinship Evaluation and KCOC Legislative Subcommittee) will hold additional meetings as needed.

KCOC members will maintain their focus on kinship caregivers and continue to remind agencies of the saying, “Nothing for us, without us.”

Goals for 2025

- **Enhance Collaboration:** Strengthen partnerships with community organizations and state agencies to ensure comprehensive support for kinship families.
- **Expand Resources:** Increase access to resources and services, including financial support, legal advocacy, and childcare assistance.
- **Improve Communication:** Develop clearer communication channels to keep kinship caregivers informed about available resources and policy changes.
- **Advocate for Equity:** Continue advocating for equitable treatment and support for all kinship caregivers, including those not part of the formal DCYF system.

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- **Address Stigma:** Work to reduce the stigma attached to accessing and using services by promoting awareness and understanding of kinship caregiving.
- **Support Education:** Assist kinship caregivers in navigating the education system to ensure the academic success of children in their care.
- **Focus on Health and Safety:** Address the impact of fentanyl and other substances on families and provide necessary health services.
- **Streamline Processes:** Simplify the processes for obtaining financial support and accessing services to reduce barriers for kinship caregivers.

Final Summary for the KCOC Legislative Report

In 2025, the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF), the Department of Social and Health Services Aging and Long-Term Support Administration (AL TSA), and the Economic Services Administration (ESA) staff, in partnership with the Kinship Care Oversight Committee (KCOC), are committed to advancing the support and advocacy for kinship care families across Washington. By maintaining the focus on the principle “Nothing for us, without us,” KCOC will ensure that kinship caregivers remain central to decisions and initiatives aimed at strengthening their vital role.

The goals for 2025 aim to deliver meaningful, measurable outcomes that improve the lives of kinship families. Through enhanced collaboration with community organizations and state agencies, KCOC seeks to create a more unified support network. Expanding access to critical resources, such as financial assistance, legal advocacy, and childcare, will alleviate burdens on caregivers while clear, consistent communication channels will ensure that caregivers stay informed of resources and policy changes that affect them.

Equity remains a cornerstone of the KCOC mission, with continued advocacy for equitable treatment for all kinship caregivers—especially those operating outside the formal DCYF system. Efforts to reduce stigma will foster greater acceptance of kinship caregiving, while educational and health initiatives will prioritize the academic success of children and address the impact of substance abuse on families. Finally, by streamlining processes, the barriers to accessing services and financial support will be minimized, empowering caregivers to focus on providing stable, nurturing environments.

These goals collectively aim to create a more inclusive, effective, and supportive framework for kinship families, ensuring that the children in their care thrive and kinship caregivers are equipped with the tools and resources they need. Together, DCYF, AL TSA, ESA and KCOC will

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continue to prioritize the well-being of Washington's kinship families, delivering on the promise of permanency, equity, and opportunity for all.

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