

Webinar Wrap-Up: Assessing Kin Caregiver Needs

This [webinar](#), presented in October 2024, focused on assessment tools that enable agencies to match kinship families with the resources and supports they need.

Case Example 1: Washington State Department of Social and Health Services

The Washington State Kinship Navigator program has been identified as a “supported program” by the [Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse](#). The program provides a tiered level of service to families based on the results of an initial intake and screening process.

Best Practices:

- ▶ Allow plenty of time to get a comprehensive picture of a family’s needs. The intake and screening conversation may be the first time families have an opportunity to reflect on the totality of their needs. Rosalyn Alber, Kinship and Lifespan Respite Program Manager, says their state assessment tool can take up to 90 minutes to administer.
- ▶ Use a checklist of all available supports and services to document needs, rather than relying on family members to mention areas where they’re struggling. Families “don’t know what they don’t know” and may not recognize the range of supports available to them. [Washington State’s assessment](#) includes a checklist featuring support for everything from car repairs to behavioral health, with four frequencies of use: [assistance] used in past 12 months; currently use; don’t currently use, but need; don’t need at this time.
- ▶ Enlist the family’s help in setting achievable, measurable goals within a three-month to six-month timeframe (included on pages 22-27 of the assessment tool). These short-term “wins” allow families to experience relief and support right away.
- ▶ Use a [fidelity tool](#) to ensure that every family receives consistent intake services, that paperwork is complete, and that follow-ups are made at prescribed intervals (slide 14).

Case Example 2: Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe

The Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe has had a kinship navigator program since 2016. Activities that are an integral part of traditional tribal culture, like cedar and wool weaving or drum and rattle making, are incorporated into the program. The kinship navigator program is housed in the Children & Family Services building and offers wraparound services, including a maternal home visiting program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), as well as medical, mental health, and substance abuse treatment services. Cheryl Miller, Director, Children & Family Services, describes her team’s efforts to meet families where they are and to look for ways to include them rather than exclude them when a little assistance could help them meet program criteria.

Best Practices:

- ▶ Tailor an existing assessment tool to reflect constituents' needs. The [Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe's assessment](#) is a customized and culturally appropriate version of the Washington State assessment tool.
- ▶ Use an abbreviated tool in a small community where many families are already known to the agency or in situations where a more robust assessment might leave clients feeling overwhelmed. Consider removing questions that might reinforce the stigma and fear associated with asking for help.
- ▶ Get feedback on assessment questions from relative caregivers. Asking for feedback grounded in lived experience is one important strategy for ensuring tools and services are culturally competent and reflective of community norms.
- ▶ Complete the assessment together as part of a conversation. Remember, too, that this is just the first of—hopefully—many conversations with families. The goal is to use this initial connection as the foundation for a long-term relationship, so the emphasis should be on building trust, communicating acceptance, and welcoming families into the program.

Case Example 3: Bloom Works

Bloom Works partners with governments and nonprofits to meet digital service needs, using qualitative research to develop solutions and recommendations centering people's lived experience. They have worked with national agencies and nonprofits to improve child welfare services across the nation. Bloom Works has worked on national standards for kin placement and helped Washington State develop a kin-first culture. Asad Bandiali, UX Researcher, describes the development of a tool to assess and approve kin caregiver homes for placement. This tool is part of the [Kin-Specific Foster Home Approval Model Standards](#) and was designed to reduce barriers to the licensure of kin caregivers as foster families.

Best Practices:

- ▶ Two sets of questions were created: one to assess a kin caregiver's ability to meet the needs of the children, and one to assess the physical safety of the home.
- ▶ Three templates were designed:
 - A [kinship caregiver assessment form](#) that is filled out by staff was designed for ease of caregiver understanding, as it is administered through conversations with caregivers. Specifically:
 - Items are written to sound conversational: "What are your preferred methods of communication?"

- Examples are included to increase understanding: “What would help you with the children’s transportation needs? Examples: Car seat, bus or train token/card, etc.”
 - Annotations help the professional administering the assessment to understand a question’s core purpose. For example, there is an annotation describing what constitutes an “insect infestation” and another focused on appropriate sleeping arrangements, both ideal and temporary. Perfect practice by families is not required.
- An agency training guide provides guidance on the assessments’ use.
 - To ease the effort involved in customization, Bloom Works created an assessment “Question Bank.” These questions can be used by agencies to customize their assessment to reflect the needs, strengths, and cultures of their community.

Spotlight

Don’t miss the lovely exchange between kin caregivers Robyn Wind and AnnaMarie White, who describe the assessment process from the perspective of their own lived experiences (beginning at 40:00).

The Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network: A National Technical Assistance Center (Network) helps government agencies and nonprofits in states, tribes, and territories work across jurisdictional and systemic boundaries to improve supports and services for families in which grandparents, other relatives, or close family friends are raising children whose parents are unable to do so. For more information, please visit www.GKSNetwork.org.

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