

# Identifying Local Champions



**Key takeaways from the third of five sessions for social service professionals who want to improve outreach to kin caregivers**

**Experts:** **Teresa English** is the program administrator of the Shelby County Relative Caregiver Program, based in Memphis, Tennessee. **Marsha Rose** is the supervisor of the Kinship Navigator Program for the Area Office on Aging of Northwestern Ohio. Both of the programs were designated as Exemplary by the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network.

**Why This Topic Is Important:** Identifying and connecting with public and private community organizations can be challenging, but community partners can help promote, enhance, and support the work of social service professionals serving kinship families.

## How to Identify Local Champions

- ▶ **Make a “wish list” of resources and services that your families need but your program does not provide.**
  - For example, you may frequently encounter clients who would benefit from mental health services, respite, recreational support, tutoring, or food.
  - Find local entities that can address these needs (or others). Seek partnerships that ensure that families have access to the services and supports most relevant to them.

*“You have to look at agencies that may have a common interest and investment, whether it be from the caregiver aspect or from serving the kids.”*

– Marsha Rose

- ▶ **Identify local organizations or companies that can offer new resources or enhance the services you provide, and that are *also* a good fit for your families.**
  - Look for programs and services that will not complicate kinship families' lives in terms of location, participation requirements, etc.
  - For in-demand programs and services, try to arrange for reserved/priority slots or special consideration for your kinship family referrals.
    - ◆ Example
      - In the past, the Shelby County Relative Caregiver program recommended mental health services, but left it to caregivers to make the arrangements. Now, partnering with the Center for Youth Advocacy and Wellbeing, the program—with families' okay—sets up the services for kinship families in need of mental health counseling.
  - See if there is something beneficial—a service, a membership, an event—that the prospective community partner might be willing to provide for your clients at no cost or at a discount.
- ▶ **Seek sponsorships for big events.**
  - Local utility companies, grocery stores, sports organizations, and churches can be ideal partners since they have broad constituencies in the community.
- ▶ **Arrange a meeting and prepare your pitch.**
  - Pinpoint the best contact person at the organization or company. Is there a Community Outreach or Public Relations person on staff? If not, then aim as high up the executive ladder as possible.
  - Tell them what your organization does and what you would like to do. Appealing to their charitable and civic sensibilities, explain how their contribution will benefit the clients and the community at large (the dividend). Be sure to mention any special recognition or publicity you can provide in exchange for their contributions. For example, offer to include their logo in your newsletter or on your website.
- ▶ **Make an explicit “ask.” Offer suggestions as to how they can help.**
  - “Really, guys, **make the ask**,” says Marsha. “We had a private donor that donated 40 family [Toledo Zoo] memberships to our program a couple of years ago. And then when those memberships were expiring, the zoo

contacted me. Their membership office said, ‘Well, we don’t have a private donor, but we want to provide you with those 40 memberships.’ And I said, ‘Well, this is great,’ but I asked if they’d be willing to sponsor more. And they did!”

▶ **Share your informational materials.**

- Include prospective and committed community partners in newsletter distribution, email blasts, and other communications to build awareness about your services and how they benefit the community.
- Ask community partners to help promote your services to their members/clientele. Make it easy for them by providing what they need (a flier, a logo, a blurb, a social media post to copy or share).

▶ **Attend local community events that are likely to attract potential clients and community stakeholders.**

- Take note of people you meet who have lived experience with kinship families. They can become champions of, and ambassadors for, your programs.
- Meet other community agencies that are interested in sharing resources and connecting with and supporting other programs.

▶ **Consider forming a Community Advisory Board.**

- Teresa’s organization established an advisory board that includes social service professionals, kin caregivers, educators, and representatives of private companies in the community. Board membership bolsters outside organizations’ commitment to your mission and brings additional perspectives to your work.
- Invite representatives from organizations and systems that also serve kin caregivers, such as Area Agencies on Aging, income support programs, school districts, child welfare, housing, legal services, early childhood services, respite services, and others. Your board should also include individuals with lived experience in kinship families.

▶ **Keep your local news media apprised of major developments and events.**

- Make phone calls and send news releases and newsletters to local media to encourage coverage. For major developments, consider hosting a news conference.
- Television news loves visuals. Invite and encourage local TV to cover your events, especially those that include activities that are fun to watch.

- Try to cultivate a relationship with specific reporters and/or editors.

## Other Thoughts

- ▶ **Provide appropriate multilingual materials if your community is diverse.**
  - A kinship navigator in Oregon says that translating program materials into Spanish and Apache has helped her connect with overlooked kinship families.

## Resources

- ▶ Learn more about the [Shelby County Relative Caregiver Program](#) and see the work it is doing in conjunction with the University of Tennessee. To discover why they earned the Exemplary Program Designation from the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network, read the [Network's profile](#) of their work.
- ▶ Learn more about the [Kinship Navigator Program at the Area Office on Aging of Northwestern Ohio](#) and see more examples of the organization's work. Check out the Kinship Navigator Program's popular "[Parenting Smarts](#)" [resource guide](#). Read their [program profile](#) to understand why they earned the Exemplary Program Designation from the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network.
- ▶ Visit the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network's Resource Library at <https://gksnetwork.org/resources/>.

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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](http://www.GKSNetwork.org).

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