

## Leveraging Family Resource Centers to Support Kinship Families



**Key takeaways from learning collaboratives in three states that explored increased collaboration between kinship navigators and Family Resource Centers**

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### Expert Partners

- ▶ **National Family Support Network** – a membership organization that is composed of state Family Resource Center (FRC) networks working together within a collective impact framework to ensure coordinated care for families
- ▶ **Alabama Network of Family Resource Centers** – a membership organization of FRCs that provide services designed to protect children and strengthen families
- ▶ **Minnesota Community & Family Resource Network** – created to develop, launch, and implement FRCs based on community need and driven by community partners working in collaboration with governmental agencies
- ▶ **Ohio Family Support Network** – a membership organization that encompasses a wide variety of community- and government-based service providers that share expertise and resources and develop collaborations in the interest of family support

### Why This Topic is Important

Families in which grandparents, other relatives, or close family friends are raising children whose parents cannot – known interchangeably as grandfamilies, kinship families, and kinship/grandfamilies – face many challenges when accessing services. The fragmentation of services, lack of awareness of services, and isolation often prevent families from accessing needed supports. FRCs provide resources and support, including service navigation, that can have an enormous, positive impact to smooth what can be a sudden transition to living in a kinship family.

The Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network (Network) partnered with the National Family Support Network (NFSN) to host learning collaboratives that sought to enhance the connection between Family Resource Centers and kinship navigators. The idea was to identify and address challenges in three selected states that provide services in urban, rural, and underserved communities: Alabama, Minnesota, and Ohio.

## What are Family Resource Centers?

Family Resource Centers (FRCs) are community-based resource hubs where families can access support to promote child safety and child and family well-being. There are more than 3,000 FRCs around the country. As conveniently located community or school-based hubs, they bundle and co-locate many services, such as home visiting, parenting education, health screenings, childcare resources and referrals, playgroups, family counseling, government benefits screening, healthy eating and living activities, and food pantries. FRC activities and programs, typically provided at no or low cost to participants, are developed to reflect and be responsive to the specific needs, cultures, and interests of the communities and populations served, assuring accessibility and relevance. FRCs may provide these resources directly or may help families navigate access to them.

## What are Kinship Navigators?

[Kinship navigator programs](#) offer information, referrals, and follow-up services to kin caregivers to link them to benefits and services that can support them and the children they are raising. Some programs provide robust case management, concrete goods, and other supportive services to the families, while others may be limited to information and referral services. Kinship navigator programs are most helpful when they serve all kinship families, regardless of child welfare involvement. However, because the majority of kinship families have no involvement with the child welfare system, it is particularly important to serve those outside that system.

## How FRCs and Kinship Navigators Can Collaborate

- ▶ **Increase awareness of kinship-serving organizations and their services.**
  - One agency or organization can host a meeting between the FRC network and kinship navigator agencies to begin the collaboration process. At the meeting, all present agencies and organizations can have the opportunity to explain what they provide to support kinship families and how they can help the families navigate multiple systems.
  - Working together or separately, the agencies and organizations can identify other agencies and organizations that provide resources to kinship families,

including a wide variety of family-oriented entities, such as state and local government agencies, family courts, schools, and others.

- Create strategies to share regularly updated information across organizations. Shared information should include how families can access services. It is also helpful to create common terminology, share brochures, develop cross-agency informational packets, develop/leverage web-based service directories or event calendars, and host staff orientations and trainings.
  - Examples
    - ◆ The Ohio Family Support Network and OhioKAN agreed to host Lunch and Learn sessions that include the Area Office on Aging, libraries, larger area employers, and schools to share how to better support kinship families.
    - ◆ The Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR) is adding Family Resource Centers and their services to their online statewide Resource Directory. DHR has agreed to train FRC staff on how to use this resource so that both agencies can enhance their referrals for kinship families.
- ▶ **Document the challenges kinship families are experiencing.**
  - Each participating agency and organization should engage kinship families as key informants of their challenges, both at the outset of the collaboration and as a regular strategy.
  - Work together to inventory the challenges kinship families in your community are experiencing.
  - In partnership, determine which challenges to address first. Which challenges are most negatively affecting family access to services?
  - As a group, employ intentional strategies to [elevate the voices](#) of kinship families from an array of backgrounds to address systemic inequities in service delivery.
    - Example
      - ◆ The Minnesota Community and Family Resource Network is hosting family focus groups to identify their challenges and brainstorm solutions. The Minnesota Department of Children, Youth and Families' kinship navigators will join these groups.

▶ **Identify and prioritize collaboration opportunities.**

- Identify ways your organization can collaborate with others to address the primary challenges kinship families are experiencing, such as co-hosting information and resource events to increase collaboration across community organizations and co-hosting kinship family support events that bring kinship families together with service providers.
- Prioritize collaboration opportunities that will have the most impact and are the easiest to do.
  - Example
    - ◆ The Minnesota Learning Community prioritized addressing the fragmentation of services after deciding that it is the challenge most negatively impacting kinship families. They will work with the state's Kinship Community of Practice to develop strategies that increase warm hand-offs between service providers and identify additional solutions to this challenge.

▶ **Create and track common goals.**

- Create goals that the FRCs, kinship navigators, and other kinship providers can work toward together.
- Develop and implement a sustainable strategy to track progress toward goals, revising or adding goals as needed based on group determinations. Strategies might involve shared tracking sheets that identify who is accountable for facilitating action steps toward each goal, scheduled check-in meetings, etc.
  - Example
    - ◆ The Alabama Learning Collaborative has decided to meet at least quarterly to identify challenges they are facing in reaching their common goals, brainstorm solutions, capture successes, and explore new collaborative opportunities.

▶ **Develop strategies to strengthen and expand collaborations.**

- Develop communication strategies to keep collaborative partners and other key stakeholders apprised of your goals and the progress you are making.
- Invite other organizations providing services to kinship families to your check-in meetings and ask them to present on their organization.

- Invite kinship families to share their perspectives and lived experience expertise in multiple settings to inform culturally responsive programs and services.
- Include an array of partners in efforts to improve kin supports.
  - Example
    - ◆ The Ohio Learning Collaborative has identified a multitude of strategies to more actively engage various entities and partners that provide services to kinship families, including the legal aid society, schools, and the Area Office on Aging. Some of their strategies include creating and disseminating informational packets, presenting at the Guidance Counselor Conference, extending invitations to present at Lunch and Learn sessions, issuing invitations to join Advisory Groups, etc.

## Resources

### Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network Resource Library

- ▶ [Family Resource Center Services and Supports for Kinship/Grandfamilies](#) – a fact sheet offering a comprehensive overview of how FRCs support kinship families, created in partnership with the National Family Support Network
- ▶ [GrandFacts: Fact Sheets](#) – for each of the 50 states, multiple territories, and several tribes, these resources contain jurisdiction-specific data and programs, and information about public benefits, educational assistance, legal relationship options, and laws
- ▶ [Exemplary Kinship Programs in Action](#) – a recorded webinar highlighting some of the first programs to be deemed exemplary by the Network
- ▶ [Elevating Exemplary Kinship Policies, Practices, and Programs](#) – a description of the Exemplary designation and process, as well as links to profiles of all of the programs that earned that designation
- ▶ [Tips to Include Kinship/Grandfamilies in Programmatic Decision-Making](#) – guidance to help programs engage individuals with lived experience when creating and enhancing programs and services
- ▶ [Reaching and Serving the Array of Kinship/Grandfamilies in Your Community](#) – strategies for serving more kinship families
- ▶ [Toolkit for Starting a Kin Caregiver Respite Program](#) – a practical guide for launching caregiver respite services

- ▶ [Overcoming Barriers to Connecting with Kinship Families](#) – key takeaways from a learning community session held in 2024 for social service professionals who wanted to improve outreach to kin caregivers
- ▶ [Grandfamily Support Groups: Seven Tips for Getting Started](#) – ideas to help programs establish a support group for caregivers

## National Family Support Network

- ▶ [FRCs Supporting Grandfamilies and Kinship Navigation](#) – recorded webinar that illustrates how FRCs support kinship/grandfamilies
- ▶ [Kinship Collaboration Planning Tool](#) – a template to aid FRCs, kinship navigators, and other kinship service providers in collaborative efforts to identify kinship family challenges and collaboration opportunities and to develop common goals
- ▶ [FRC Learning Hub](#) – access point for learning more about Family Resource Centers

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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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