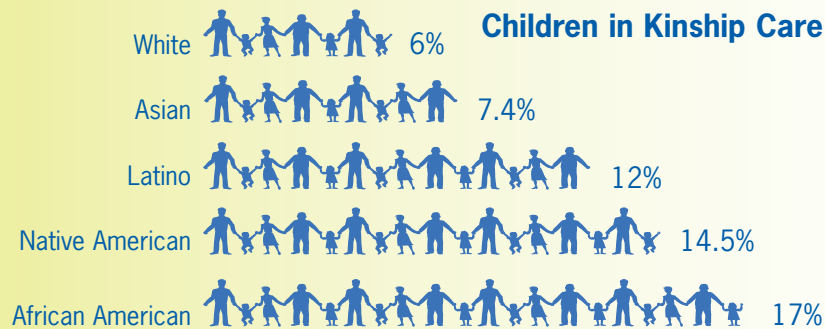


2005



Basic Data: Kinship Care

Overview. More than six million children in the US live in households headed by relatives¹ other than their parents who provide full-time care, nurturing and protection. Of these, 4.5 million are cared for by their grandparents. By conservative estimates, these caregivers are saving taxpayers more than \$6.5 billion per year in federal foster care costs.²



Precipitating Reasons for Kinship Care. Grandparents and other relatives become surrogate parents because of the physical and functional absence of parents caused by poverty, lack of affordable child care, homelessness, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, child abuse or neglect, incarceration, death, HIV/AIDS, abandonment, family violence, unemployment, mental health problems, divorce, and military deployment.

Vulnerability to Poverty. Grandparent-maintained families are more likely to live in poverty and to be uninsured than parent-maintained families. Sixteen percent of children living in homes with at least one parent live in poverty³, while 20% of children in relative-headed homes are impoverished⁴. Ten percent of children living with at least one parent lack health insurance⁵, while 27% in grandparent-maintained homes have no such coverage⁶.

Kinship Care as a Family Asset

Keeping Families Together. Placing children with grandparents helps to maintain healthy connections to the family and its traditions. In many cases kinship caregiving enables sibling groups to remain intact. Children that are cared for by kin are able, to a greater extent, to maintain relationships with their birth parents and other family members.

Benefiting Children. Children in kinship care have more stability in their living situation than they have in a non-kin foster care placement. Children placed with kin by the child welfare system are less likely to experience multiple placements, and are more likely to stay within the same community and school system.

Utilizing and Preserving Cultural Values. Historically, families of color especially have offered care to children in the extended family, providing culturally-specific care that maintains the child's connection to the cultural norms and practices that inform his or her identity.

¹ U.S. Census 2000 SF1, table P28, Relationship by Household Type for Population Under 18 Years.

² 2000 Green Book, Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives. The figure is determined using the Federal share of the average Foster Care payment times a hypothetical number of 1 million children. So, if one million children were to enter they would cost the Feds \$6.5 billion.

³ U.S. Census Bureau. Current Population Survey (CPS) March 2002, Detailed Tables for Current Population Report, pp. 20-547. Table C-4.

⁴ Lugaia, T. & Overturf, J. (February 2004.) Children and the Households They Live In: 2000. U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Special Reports. CENSR-14. U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, D.C.

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau. Current Population Survey (CPS) March 2002, Detailed Tables for Current Population Report, pp. 20-547. Table C-3.

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau. Current Population Survey (CPS) March 2002, Detailed Tables for Current Population Report, pp. 20-547. Table C-4.



Challenges of Kinship Care

Legal status. Forty percent of kinship caregiving relationships last for more than five years⁷, yet most relative caregivers do not seek adoption or legal custody for a host of reasons. Less permanent or informal arrangements may limit a relative caregiver's ability to access medical, educational, or financial services to meet children's needs. Permanent subsidized options as alternatives to adoption often are unavailable.

Housing adequacy. Relative-maintained families often begin caring for children without warning or preparation. Difficulty accommodating children in their current residence takes a number of forms: it may be too small to accommodate one or more children; older relative caregivers may be living in senior housing where children are not allowed and they can face eviction; or the presence of additional children may violate private lease agreements.

Access to services. The availability of resources, programs and services vary on a state-to-state basis. Lack of information about programs, poor transportation, long waiting lists and skepticism about social service agencies often prevent caregivers from accessing these services.

Health care. Thirty-three percent of children living in grandparent-maintained homes lack health insurance compared to 13% of children in homes maintained by parents.⁸ Relative caregivers may be unable to include the children they raise on their private insurance or access other care because they have not chosen to seek legal adoption.

Educational involvement. Because school policies are geared towards nuclear families, kin caregivers may have difficulty enrolling children in school, being afforded rights as a participant in the Individual Education Plan process for children with disabilities, and being included in regular communications and activities, such as parent-teacher meetings.

Supports for Kinship Caregivers

Subsidized Guardianship Programs. Currently 34 states and the District of Columbia have subsidized guardianship programs whose purpose is to provide income support to relative caregivers and permanency for the children in their care without terminating parental rights.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). In many states TANF is the only financial assistance available through child-only grants or as foster care payments for those relatives who serve as foster parents.

Access to Health Services & Education Systems. At least 24 states have medical consent and six have educational consent laws that allow relatives to provide varying forms of proof that they are the child's primary caregiver. This enables the caregiver to perform all the parental functions associated with medical and educational institutions, including access to confidential information and parental rights.

Programs Available on the State and Local Level. Numerous promising practices respond to the needs of kinship care families—including special housing facilities, information and referral services, respite care, and support groups. Generations United houses the National Center on Grandparents and other Relatives Raising Children. Information on a wide array programs can be accessed through their website (www.gu.org). Additionally, 51 state fact sheets containing the most up-to-date state information related to kinship care can be found at <http://www.gu.org/projg&ostates.htm>

Resources: The following organizations have networks, referrals, and publications supportive of Kinship Care.

American Association of Retired People www.aarp.org
 Brookdale Center www.brookdale.org
 Children's Defense Fund www.childrensdefense.org
 Child Welfare League of America www.cwla.org
 Generations United www.gu.org

In addition, many local Area Agencies on Aging are active in supporting elders in care-giving roles. These can be located through the N4A website: www.n4a.org

⁷ Roe, Kathleen M. and Meredith Minkler, "Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: Challenges and Responses," in *Generations: Journal of the American Society on Aging*, Vol. XXII, pp. 25-32.

⁸ Bryson, K. & Casper, L.M. (1999). *Coresident Grandparents and Their Grandchildren: Current Population Reports, Special Studies*, pp. 23-198. Washington, DC: U.S. Bureau of the Census.