



Kinship Navigator Replication Manual

Submitted by PCSAO and Seven Ohio
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Connection Grant:
Enhanced Kinship Navigator Program

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Introduction

The future of child welfare is not based on removing children from their homes when problems occur within the family, but helping support kinship families in their personal mission to be there for a child. The goal of any agency working with at-risk children is to provide supportive services for the family in order to keep children safely at home or return them safely as soon as possible. Children deserve to have functional parents to ensure they are given every opportunity to succeed. In the not so distant past, the stance taken by child welfare agencies was to remove the child/ren and place in foster care or a group home/residential setting.

Current child welfare is focused on keeping the family system intact when parents are willing to address problems. If parents are unable or unwilling to make changes in their lives that will keep children safe, the next option is finding a kin caregiver.

This manual will provide a foundation for the implementation of new kinship navigator programs or improvement of existing programs by offering insights and suggestions from Ohio counties that have established successful kinship operations.

Seven counties in Ohio participated in a federal Fostering Connections Grant. These counties have utilized funding for new programs and resources for some kinship navigators established prior to the grant award. Counties participating in the grant are Ashtabula, Crawford, Clark, Hardin, Lorain, Portage, and Richland. Each county has established kinship navigator services unique to their county needs.

Benefits of Living in a Kinship Family Include:

- The child is able to maintain family relationships. If a child is permanently placed outside the family system, he is likely to lose important extended family relationships that may have been healthy and supportive. The child may not have the benefit of an ongoing intergenerational relationship with grandparents, aunts and uncles. In addition, the child may be forced to give up peer relationships with cousins and siblings. If the child is placed within the family system, there is a greater likelihood that these relationships will continue and that the child will benefit from these as he tries to establish a sense of self and forge an identity;
- There is a continuity of culture. In most family systems, there is a shared culture of common attitudes, values and beliefs. Maintaining a child within her own family eliminates the "culture shock" children often face when placed with strangers. The child will maintain a sense of belonging and familiarity. He will be able to "fit in" more easily;
- Using kin or relative as permanent caregivers enhances the likelihood of ongoing openness between the child and the birth family. While there may be some situations where family members may not permit contact due to fear of violence or inappropriate behavior, the foundation of previous family bonds and relationships assists the caregiver in permitting and facilitating ongoing contact. Connections and contact happen more naturally and with less stress and anxiety;
- As children grow and develop, there is a need for ongoing information about the child's background and birth family. For example, the caregiver may need additional medical information should the child develop a condition or illness. A child entering adolescence may desire in-depth information or background knowledge about his race, ethnicity, family heritage or history to assist with the development of a healthy identity. This can lead to greater stability for the child and better ensure their needs are met;
- One of the most critical benefits of kin permanency for a child already living with kin is no more moves! Moves hurt children and each time they must relocate and adjust to a family, they experience trauma. Children who have experienced multiple

moves are likely to be severely and permanently damaged. Their ability to form a healthy attachment is impaired. When the child is maintained in a familiar environment, he is able to continue on with his life without disruption and re-adjustment. In short, children in kin homes experience a greater level of placement stability (Berrick et al, 1994); and

- Children who are able to live with adults whom they know experience a reduced level of trauma and therefore, seem to experience fewer mental health and behavioral problems than those living with non-kin (Berrick et al, 1994). The availability of a relationship with a relative or friend assists the child in coping with the stress of the placement.

Essential Components

Kinship Navigator – Key to Coordination of Services:

The kinship navigator provides kinship caregiver's with: information and referrals, assesses their needs, provide needed training, provide ongoing support, and coordinate other needed services (i.e. support groups, etc.). Kinship Coordinators at a systems level can map community assets to identify current available services, train others in the community to meet the needs of kinship families, outreach to area service providers, and coordinate kinship area services.

Kinship navigator workers coordinate with ODJFS/PCSA to make sure kin caregiver's have access to: medical card, transportation to and from medical appointments, day care eligibility, Ohio Works First, and the Early Learning Initiative. Workers also coordinate with social security to redirect funding for caregiver if applicable.

Kinship workers also utilize community resources such as; Area Agency on Aging, Catholic Charities, Community Action, Salvation Army, and the 2-1-1 community resource line. Kinship workers are trained in the Ohio Benefit Food Bank, and assistance with filling out ODJFS computerized benefit forms.

Kin caregiver's will be informed how to access legal services. The local kinship navigator has partnered with a local attorney who provides legal services to kin caregivers seeking legal custody, power of attorney, or general legal questions. This will differ from state to state based on the structure of the juvenile and domestic relations court operational structure.

A Family Needs & Strengths Assessment (which can be found in the appendix) is completed upon entry into the Kinship Program and then quarterly thereafter. The following domains are assessed to determine need and improvement in these domains. The following domains will be assessed.

- Finances
- Education/Training
- Employment
- Transportation
- Health
- Housing
- Social Support
- Child care
- Food & Nutrition
- Family Relations

System Linkages/Coordination - County Level Supports:

This component is essential to improve the communication and coordination of service providers. This is accomplished through outreach and a centralized informational and referral mechanism:

Be coordinated with other state or local agencies that promote service coordination or provide information and referral services, including the entities that provide 211 or 311 information systems where available, to avoid duplication or fragmentation of services to kinship care families. Local service agencies need to be made aware of the kinship navigator. This will allow the agency to be comfortable in referring kinship caregivers to the Navigator.

Collaborative Planning: Be planned and operated in consultation with kinship caregivers and organizations representing them, youth raised by kinship caregivers, relevant government agencies, and relevant community-based or faith-based organizations.

Establish information and referral systems that link (via toll-free access) kinship caregivers, kinship support group facilitators, and kinship service providers to (i) each other; (ii) eligibility and enrollment information for federal, state, and local benefits; (iii) relevant training to assist kinship caregivers in care giving and in obtaining benefits and services; and (iv) relevant legal assistance and help in obtaining legal services; and

Promote partnerships between public and private agencies, including schools, community-based or faith-based organizations, and relevant government agencies, to increase their knowledge of the needs of kinship care families to promote better services for those families.

Community mapping is a tool that is developed by local community services providers to identify resources available when a kinship navigator is being proposed. This will benefit both kinship navigator staff and kin caregivers who are seeking assistance for these non-traditional families.

Community mapping would include, but is not limited to, the information provided below.

- Name and address of program/service
- Services available for kin caregivers
- Qualifications to receive program benefits
- Hours of operation

- Individual staff contact information if applicable

211 or 311 is also a resource that may be utilized for kin caregivers. There are resources that these community information systems have researched that could identify more specific needs for kin caregivers.

Based on the research completed for community mapping a local manual should be developed to identify all services that could provide assistance to the kin caregiver in a given community or region. This information could be posted on a website or handbook that could be provided to the kin caregiver during their initial meeting with the kinship navigator staff.

Service Array – Improving Access to Services & Supports:

Legal Services Collaboration

Understanding legal services that can be accessed by kin caregivers is critical in achieving permanency for youth. Kin caregivers are often requesting supportive guidance if they have legal questions that could ultimately lead to better outcomes for youth in their care.

Some counties have Courts that prefer legal custody through Juvenile Court or Domestic Relations Court and others streamline the Guardianship procedures through their Probate Court. State agencies are working to help create a more consistent legal path for kinship families.

Work with your local Courts and see what legal path they prefer for kinship families. Once this legal relationship is set, the kinship navigator may start to receive referrals from their local Courts.

Financial Assistance and Hard Good Supports

Kinship Navigators must promote partnerships between public and private agencies, including schools, community-based or faith-based organizations, and relevant government agencies, to increase their knowledge of the needs of kinship care families to promote better services for those families.

Kinship families are not always aware of the services out there and improved partnerships can help the Kinship Navigators get updated information concerning current services available and streamlined services when available.

Support Groups

Support groups are a key component to the success of a kinship navigator program. The groups provide information regarding community support systems, and also experiences that can be shared among kin caregivers.

While basic networking and peer support is valuable, an agenda that brings outside agencies into the group to provide kin caregivers information on how to access services is often an attraction for attendance. Counties have had service providers to give presentations on: Workforce Investment Act (WIA) activities, Prevention Retention & Contingency information (PRC), Bullying, legal discussions around custody and adoption, parenting and discipline, assisting with homework and more.

Arranging for child activities (such as crafts or other fun activities) or just provision of child care will facilitate attendance, and develop cohesiveness with the caregivers and children. Ideas for managing this include use of agency volunteers, or youth hired by WIA.

Some support groups enjoy meals during their meetings, and one county has a potluck at each meeting where families bring side dishes to enjoy. Door prizes and gift cards are another option to bring in kinship families. Kinship families enjoy discussing similar situations and being able to reach out to others to share their personal stories.

Success has also been seen by collaborating with other community service providers (such as a behavioral healthcare provider) to create a cohort of kin caregivers to complete a series of Kinship Caregiver sessions, with a set curriculum including child development issues, parenting, discipline, kin family dynamics and more. A cohesiveness forms for the group, the set of sessions is limited, and caregivers feel accomplished. Of course food and child care continue to be winning elements.

Outreach – Where are those Kinship Families?

Strong outreach to find those kinship families is key to help meet their needs and let them know that there are services in place to help keep their family together. Vast numbers of informal kinship families are out there and trying to survive on their own. The kinship families are shocked to find out how many other families are similar to their own.

Counties in this program have used varying methods of outreach. Outreach methods include: the creation of a kinship care website with regular updates, providing resource guides and other relevant outreach materials, newspaper articles, mass mailings through Job & Family Services, radio ads, advertised support group meetings, referrals by area agencies, county fairs, flyers, newsletters, billboards and many more. Creative outreach methods are critical component to this program.

Collaborative Advisory Group:

A local advisory group should be established to provide the kinship navigator staff information and guidance on how to seek community services for kin caregivers. The advisory group should consist of local service providers who are aware of or provide services that would support these non-traditional families. While some communities form separate local advisory groups, others join an agenda for an existing group such as Family and Children First Councils.

Kinship Navigator Program vs. the ProtectOhio (Ohio's Title IV-E Waiver) Strategy:

Under Kinship Navigator, the kinship family's participation is voluntary;

- Anyone can refer a family to the Kinship Navigator Program;
- Kinship families do not have to have any type of custody to be able to request services from the Kinship Navigator; and
- Kinship Navigator families can continue to receive formal & informal support as their case is not time-limited.

Counties that participate in the Kinship Navigator Project may find that it will enhance their implementation of the ProtectOhio kinship strategy

for open child welfare cases when the child is living with a kin caregiver. In particular:

- ProtectOhio kinship families are assessed using the same Needs Assessment Tool as is used with Kinship Navigator families receiving case management; and a ProtectOhio kinship family may/can be receiving case management or informational & referral from the Kinship Navigator;
- The Kinship Navigator Project may be another resource for kinship families in any of the ProtectOhio counties, if the kinship family resides outside the county where they are getting PCSA services;
- Kinship Navigators regularly gather current information on services available and contact people; and
- Many Kinship Navigator counties have monthly support group meetings and/or newsletters.

Kinship Coordination Competencies/Skills:

All staff performing kinship coordination duties should have a good working knowledge of child welfare practices and value the use of kinship families in child welfare placements. They can be supervisors, case workers, and/or support staff. The sections below indicate the specific competencies/skills that these staff should have, whether or not they hold the title of Kinship Coordinator or simply perform a limited number of the coordination functions.

The following competencies should be acquired prior to the individual taking full independent responsibility for any of the kinship coordination duties. Competencies should be acquired at least by the time core training is completed (one year from position start).

All staff performing kinship coordination functions should have the following competencies:

- Ability to engage families to elicit, gather, evaluate, analyze and integrate pertinent information to determine a kinship family's capacity to meet safety and quality of care needs for the child; determine strengths, concerns and support needs;
- Ability to serve as a liaison between the PCSA and community when organizing and accessing PCSA and community services and information for families according to their unique and individual needs; ability to connect kinship families to

- information and services that the family specifically needs, even across county lines when appropriate;
- Ability to interact and collaborate with various and diverse families, internal staff and community partners;
 - Ability to respect culture and diversity of families; to engage and to support kinship caregivers and children; to promote placement stability and positive permanency outcomes;
 - Ability to provide education and advocacy on behalf of kinship families; and
 - Strong empathy and understanding of the unique role, needs and challenges of kinship caregivers.

In addition, Kinship Coordinators should be skilled in the following areas:

- Collaborating with service providers in their geographic area to maintain current knowledge of available resources and to help find ways to streamline services and reduce lag time in service provisions, as needed; and
- Keeping informed about relevant kinship care giving resources and referral contacts in agencies outside their counties, since kinship caregivers may live outside the county.

Training for Kinship Coordination Staff

Training for Kinship Coordinators should be viewed as an ongoing process. Ongoing training opportunities should be identified by the Kinship Coordinator and the supervisor/director overseeing the Kinship Strategy process, regardless of the experience level of the coordinator. Kinship Coordinators should attend and look for any relevant training opportunities such as training through the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program (OCWTP). PCSA management in collaboration with Ohio Department of Job & Family Services (ODJFS) should be involved in developing an ongoing training plan for Kinship Coordinators.

To ensure consistency in ProtectOhio Kinship Strategy practice, initial training for Kinship Coordinators should address all components of this manual. As appropriate, the training should draw upon relevant skill-building materials and activities related to the competencies listed.

Since working with kinship caregivers is a topic addressed in the Caseworker Core Modules Training for all new PCSA staff, any training on the practices described in this manual could be integrated into existing training opportunities and/or staff

orientations. Any staff with responsibility for any kinship coordination duties should receive initial training on the following topics:

- Orientation to the Protect OHIO Waiver
- Kinship Strategy Overview, including education on all forms (Kinship Home Assessment Tool, Needs Assessment – Family Resource Scale, Support Plan, and Kinship Handbook)
- Family Search and Engagement & completing genograms – This area is critically needed to help ensure that workers know all the tools and resources available to locate kinship members
- Education on the services available
- Special attention to visits in kinship homes to help assess any possible services the kinship family may need to help deflect any future concerns that arise; and to address:
 - Resource management
 - Relative dynamics (conflict & loyalty)
 - Visitation struggles
 - Difficulty managing child behaviors
 - Knowing what to tell the child about the future
 - Difficulty assisting with reunification if the kinship family does not feel it is in their best interest.

Once trained, Kinship Coordinators should be able to help train other agency staff who perform kinship coordination duties, especially regarding the kinship strategy data collection process and ways to give special attention to kinship caregivers' needs. This training should be conducted on an ongoing basis, so the workers fulfilling the kinship coordination role will be fully updated on current resources that are available to kinship caregivers.

Regular meetings of Kinship Coordinators within an agency or at the regional or state level will reap benefits with shared updates and ideas, concerns, and problem solving.

Evaluation, Data Tracking

In order to understand how the Kinship Strategy is implemented and assess whether the Kinship Strategy has the desired impact, tracking information about the caregivers, children, dynamics of the cases, and services needed and successfully accessed is essential. This information is also valuable when seeking funding and partnership from other entities.

County Profiles

Richland County

The Richland County Kinship Navigator has strived to provide local kin caregivers supportive services in an effort to provide stability and permanency for youth in our community. Kinship services have become part of the local culture for Children Services staff, and they are active in supporting kinship services. Some of the efforts to improve service delivery are described below, and Richland County is grateful to have the Fostering Connections grant to enhance all aspects of service delivery to kinship families. The grant was submitted by PCSAO and seven counties in the state. The grant provided \$548,181.49 of funding for local kinship services over a three-year period. Data was collected via the KIDS data system. This information will provide the federal government information on how the grantees improved services for kin caregivers.

The current local kinship navigator is operated under a contract with the City of Mansfield Department of Community Advancement (DRCA) and the Urban Minority Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Outreach Program, (UMADOP). Both programs provide services to kinship families in Richland County. The focus will be to seek community resources for these non-traditional families who often struggle on a fixed income.

Kinship caregivers at times have difficulty understanding what resources are available in the community, how to navigate those systems, and how to effectively advocate for the children they are caring for, in order to get their needs met. The support provided by the local kinship navigator provides necessary support to address the concerns that many caregivers are often faced with.

Similar to the kinship navigator that is operated by the City of Mansfield DRCA, the UMADOP program will collaborate with DRCA to assist more kin caregivers in our community.

Kinship workers coordinate with Richland CDJFS to make sure clients have access to, medical card, transportation to medical appointments, day care eligibility, Ohio Works First, and the Early Learning Initiative. Workers also coordinate with social security to redirect funding for caregiver if applicable. Kinship workers also utilize community resources such as; Area Agency on Aging, Catholic Charities, Community Action, Salvation Army, and the 2-1-1 community resource line.

Kinship workers are trained in the Ohio Benefit Food Bank, and assistance with filling out ODJFS computerized benefit forms.

Clients will be informed how to access legal services. The local kinship navigator has partnered with a local attorney who provides legal services to kin caregivers seeking legal custody, power of attorney, or general legal questions.

A Family Needs & Strengths Assessment is completed upon entry into the Kinship Program and then quarterly thereafter. The following domains are assessed to determine need and improvement in these domains. The following domains are assessed.

- Finances
- Education/Training
- Employment
- Transportation
- Health
- Housing
- Social Support
- Child care
- Food & Nutrition
- Family Relations

There are many factors that cause children to go into the care of Kinship caregivers. These include parental substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, child abuse or neglect, incarceration, poverty, death, HIV/AIDS, abandonment, family violence, unemployment, homelessness, the lack of adequate childcare, mental health problems, divorce, and military deployment.

Many children thrive in kinship care. Children living with relatives maintain connections to their family members, traditions, and identity. In many cases, kinship care giving enables sibling groups to remain intact. The children are able, to a greater extent than foster children not in kinship care, to maintain relationships with their birth parents and other family members. Evidence also suggests that children in kinship care have more stable living situations than those in 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. Not only are children in kinship care usually familiar with their caregivers and therefore less traumatized by moving into kin care but often also express feeling loved.

Challenges faced by kinship care families vary significantly depending on their legal relationships and needs. Some families need assistance obtaining counseling; others need help obtaining mental health

services, transportation, medical/dental assistance, financial assistance, affordable housing, day care, respite care, custody issues, and educational needs.

Kinship caregivers, at times, have difficulty understanding what resources are available in the community, how to navigate those systems, and how to effectively advocate for the children they are caring for, in order to get their needs met. The support provided by the local kinship navigator provides necessary support to address the concerns that many care givers are initially faced with.

Portage County

Portage County Department of Job and Family Services chose to contract with Family and Community Services, Inc. as contract sub-grantee as a result of being one of the seven participating counties, along with PCSAO, and HSRI selected for Enhanced Kinship Navigator Grant.

Located in Ravenna Ohio, Family and Community Services, Inc. is a full service social service agency with a focus on meeting basic needs. Family and Community Services, Inc. (FCS) is a 501©3 non-profit agency, and also had been advising and operating a support group for Kinship Caregivers under the umbrella of services prior to the contract award. By partnering with a non-profit, Kinship clients in Portage County were also able to benefit from a small Attorney General grant which was used to fund activities for the support group and partially fund a lending library. Support group meetings were offered monthly, with average attendance of ten to fifteen participants.

The unique relationship with FCS, built on many years of working together successfully, allowed FCS to provide a full time Kinship Navigator who was charged with providing case management services to families with and without formal children services involvement. The Kinship Navigator assisted kin caregivers in navigating social service entitlement programs, as well as local resources intended to stabilize to kinship placement and reduce involvement with the child welfare system. The GRAND program, (Guardians Raising and Nurturing Dependents) served 243 kinship children, and responded to over 200 inquiries that did not rise above the level of information and referral. The Kinship Navigator facilitated the support groups, maintained electronic documentation in the Kinship Information Data System (KIDS), and coordinated marketing such as billboards, press releases, and bus posters. The Kinship Navigator promoted the program to the

social service community, as well as the courts. A Local Advisory Group was assembled for the term of the grant and participants were members of the kinship caregiver community, local social service agencies, child welfare and benefits administration at JFS, mental health, juvenile court and the legal system. The LAG provided consultation and relationship building to occur.

Portage County JFS remained the fiscal agent for the grant, and FCS invoiced costs associated with the contract. By partnering with a nonprofit, PCDJFS was able to contain staffing costs, and utilize a flexible pool of funds intended for short term crisis stabilization. Unexpected child care costs were the most requested expense, as the expensive nature of this service was cost prohibitive to even the most prepared kin caregiver. A variety of other needs were able to be met, such as rent assistance, clothing, car repairs, diapers and gasoline assistance to facilitate parent/ child visits, for example. The Kinship Navigator facilitated all requests and quotes for service, and submitted these to PCDJFS for approval. The Kinship Navigator ensured that paid services were delivered to families.

Ashtabula County

Ashtabula County Children Services Board has been committed to working with kinship families for a number of years. Prior to receiving the Kinship Navigator grant, Ashtabula County Children Services Board employed one case worker to assist kinship families. This worker provided referrals for services and completed home studies for KPI eligibility. Kinship services at that time were only provided to families who had children formally placed with them through Children Services or the Court.

When the opportunity to take part in the Fostering Connections/Kinship Navigator grant was presented, we were very excited to be one of the seven participating counties along with PSCAO. We saw this grant as an opportunity to expand the work we were already doing with families.

As a result of the grant, we began working with all kinship caregivers in the county, regardless of Children Services involvement. We reached out to kinship families in the county through the use of newsletters, billboards, commercials and brochures. We were able to provide more direct services by hiring a part-time kinship case worker to work alongside our existing full-time worker. Since the beginning of the grant, these workers have assisted well over 350 families. The grant

also allowed us to provide more assistance to families in terms of financial and hard goods needs. For example, purchase orders for food and clothing were provided as well as beds, car seats, and other household items that may have been needed to care for the child. To offset the cost of filing for custody in this county, we provided \$100 Walmart gift cards to families who filed for custody in their own. The grant provided was an opportunity to begin a Kinship Support group for the families and children. The group meets once a month and has separate activities for the adults and the children. Our agency provides the meeting room and arranges for a speaker and childcare activities.

Collaboration the others in the community was also an important piece to the grant. Kent State Ashtabula partnered with us in creating television commercials to run on our local cable network. A group of nine local churches "adopted" the kinship children as their project and raised money to assist kinship families in providing extra-curricular activities for their children. Our Family and Children First Council was our local advisory group for the grant and supported our outreach efforts as well. And finally, the grant provided us an opportunity to educate our local schools and Juvenile Court about the overwhelming benefits to children placed in kinship care versus foster care and the issues kinship caregivers face when trying to navigate their systems.

Although the grant period is over, we continue to be committed to offering services to our kinship families. Without the financial support of the grant, we will not be able to maintain the same level of direct services as we did with the grant; however, all kinship families in the county will be provided with information and referrals as needed and provided information about the kinship support group. All families who wish to be on our mailing list will also receive a monthly newsletter about the support group and other opportunities for family activities in the county. Those kinship families who are involved with Children Services by having a child formally placed with them will receive services as part of our Protect OHIO Kinship Strategy.

Ashtabula County Children Services recognizes and supports kinship care as the best alternative for children who cannot remain with their birth parents. The Fostering Connections/ Kinship Navigator grant allowed us to expand the work we were already doing and enhance our services to all kinship families in Ashtabula County.