



TOOLKIT

AFRICAN AMERICAN GRANDFAMILIES:

HELPING CHILDREN THRIVE THROUGH
CONNECTION TO FAMILY AND CULTURE

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Photo by Stuart Kandell.



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Toolkit Introduction

It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences.

Audre Lorde, African American writer, feminist, librarian and civil rights activist

Both inside and outside the child welfare system, the probability that African American children will live in grandfamilies is more than double that of the overall population, with one in five African American children living in grandfamilies at some point during their childhood.¹

Over the last few decades, drug epidemics, hurricanes and other tragedies have both created African American grandfamilies and challenged existing ones. The COVID-19 pandemic is the latest such crisis. As of mid-May 2020, African Americans in almost every state collecting racial data have higher rates of infection and death from COVID-19 than whites or Latinos.² Despite these most fundamental threats to health and mortality, African Americans retain their commitment and cultural pride in caring for extended family.

There has been a historic lack of supports and services for African American grandfamilies, particularly supports and services that are culturally appropriate. This absence of supports has become all the more apparent during the COVID-19 public health emergency. The supports and services that do exist often depend on whether the children are in the legal custody of the child welfare system with their kin providing the care or whether they are not at all involved with that system.

While considering these differences in support, this toolkit is designed to give resources and tips to child welfare agencies, other government

agencies and nonprofit organizations, so they can better serve all African American grandfamilies. It will explore some of the unique strengths and challenges of these grandfamilies, which agencies and organizations need to recognize in order to provide culturally appropriate supportive services.

Kinship care is an age-old and traditional practice in African American families. What is new is the creation of institutional support systems to assist such caregivers. African American grandparents have had a historical caregiving role from slavery to the current day. Indeed, they have consistently provided the emotional and financial support needed to ensure the well-being of their grandchildren when parents are working or absent. Professor Sandra Edmonds Crewe states that “understanding African American elders caring for grandchildren is complex and reflects unique cultural, environmental, and institutional factors.”³ In 1939, the eminent sociologist E. Franklin Frazier described black grandmothers as “guardians of generations” in his seminal book, *The Negro Family in the United States*.⁴ Frazier’s book was the first comprehensive study of African American family life, beginning with colonial-era slavery, extending through the years of slavery and emancipation, to the impact of Jim Crow and migrations to both southern and northern cities in the twentieth century. Significant remnants of these latter challenging periods of African American history still resound as segregation and discrimination remain.

While there is a tradition of African American kinship care, factors such as parental substance use and disproportionate incarceration have changed the landscape and needs of these caregivers and children. Given the substantial, expanded and disproportionate number of African American

grandfamilies, understanding how individuals and systems need to provide appropriate and effective services within the current environment is essential. We hope this toolkit provides you with useful resources.

Grandfamilies and Kinship Families – In this toolkit, we use the terms “grandfamilies” and “kinship families” interchangeably to mean families in which grandparents, other adult family members or close family friends are raising children with no parents in the home. These families can be either inside or outside the child welfare system, and the toolkit will distinguish the level of child welfare involvement where it is relevant.

Grandfamily Caregiver or Kin Caregiver – These terms are also used interchangeably in this toolkit. They are used to capture the spectrum of these caregiving relationships, which include close family friends, godparents and other adults who are not technically “related” to the child.

African American – The term “African American” is used intentionally as the focus of this toolkit is on African Americans, meaning Americans of black African descent. The toolkit does not address all of the diverse black populations living in the United States. However, many of the resources and tips in this toolkit will apply to the broader population of black grandfamilies and grandfamilies in general.



Photo by
Tyshaun Graham.

Chapter 1

Understanding and Creating Culturally Appropriate Services for African American Grandfamilies

“Nothing in all the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, civil rights activist

Introduction

This chapter provides recommendations and resources for government agencies and nonprofit organizations to develop and provide culturally appropriate services to African American kinship families. Cultural differences are a fact of life. Recognizing, acknowledging and providing services that address these differences are not. Essential in this helping process is the recognition that African American kin caregivers' cultural context, assets, challenges, needs, and values are deeply ingrained in a discriminatory history of institutional racism that impacts their role as caregivers. Though African American grandfamilies are not new, there are significant cultural and environmental influences that have shaped and affected how our current African American kinship caregivers must now negotiate and navigate their caregiving role.

There are no universally accepted definitions of the concept of culturally appropriate services. These terms suggest some nuances for cultural knowledge and/or service delivery that meet the needs of diverse populations. The following definitions provide context for this Toolkit.

- **Culturally Appropriate** work practices would be non-discriminatory and free of bias, stereotyping, racism and prejudice.
- **Cultural Awareness** is the ability of a person to understand the differences between themselves and people from other backgrounds, especially differences in attitudes and values.
- **Cultural Competence** is a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency or among professionals and enable that system, agency or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations.
- **Cultural Humility** is the ability to maintain an interpersonal stance that is other-oriented (or open to the other) in relation to aspects of cultural identity that are most important to the person.⁵
- **Cultural Intelligence or CQ** is a “globally recognized way of assessing and improving effectiveness in culturally diverse situations.”⁶ Effective cultural intelligence gives one the ability to relate and work effectively within diverse populations and extends beyond just cultural sensitivity and awareness to the

implementation of appropriate, strategic and innovative actions for each targeted group.

Recognizing the changing dynamics of our world and providing culturally appropriate/competent services is a developmental process that is evolving where individuals and organizations are on a continuum of awareness, knowledge and skills. These services must also recognize that the African American community is socioeconomically and culturally diverse, but some cultural norms are prevalent across this diversity as discussed below.

Importance of Religion and Spirituality

The expression of spirituality and religion was critical to the survival of slaves and remains an essential component for many African American kinship caregivers to cope with adversity. During slavery and now, the religious practice provided an outlet for the expression of pain, suffering, anger, humiliation, injustice and more, while still maintaining hope and strength.⁷ Current day African Americans express their faith through multiple religions and spiritual groups including African Methodist Episcopal, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist, Episcopalian, varied Islamic sects, Jewish denominations, Pentecostal, Jehovah's Witness, Seventh Day Adventist, and Buddhism. With these diverse religious practices, kinship care service providers need to recognize how any caregiver addresses their caregiving role through their spiritual lens and limitations that their religion may place upon how they live their daily life (e.g., food preferences, clothing selection, celebrations, counseling, marriage, child discipline, gender roles, workday exclusions).⁸ No assumptions should be made based on African American heritage alone. The socioeconomic status of the caregiver will determine their level of need and support.

Socioeconomic Differences

Though there is a longstanding tradition of African American kinship networks taking care of children, the plight of such a kinship caregiver depends on their socioeconomic status. For African American caregivers who are not living in poverty, their

access to resources and their ability to navigate bureaucracy for the benefit of children in their care is not as compromised.

For caregivers living in poverty, any dependence on the social welfare system may compromise their independence and their ability to provide for their children.⁹ Kinship care provider agencies must focus on not only the availability of resources but how caregivers perceive the benefits of participation in any program support system. This becomes very evident in why some African American caregivers steer away from the financial supports provided through the child welfare system; they do not want people in their "business," or they cannot meet the standards of care that would be required to receive benefits.¹⁰

Relationships Between Birth Parents and Kinship Caregivers

A critical part of provider services requires supporting kinship caregivers in their relationship with the children's birth parents, one of whom is often their daughter or son. Since informal kinship has always existed among African American grandfamilies, the children typically had contact with their parents and other family members who informally co-parented. If the child welfare system becomes part of this family dynamic, kinship caregivers must adhere to new restrictions and constraints on the birth parents' interaction with the kinship family. Child welfare agencies should support the children, birth parents and caregivers while the children are in foster care with the goal of reunification of children and parents. If reunification cannot be a permanency goal, agencies should proactively help families plan for birth parents' post-permanency involvement in the event the kinship caregiver adopts or gets guardianship of the children.

Most children cared for by relatives will likely have some level of contact with their birth parents over time. The integration of the birth parents into their children's lives can present many challenges. Child welfare experts suggest a facilitated process that recognizes the following:¹¹

- Ongoing family issues that impact multiple generations.
- Unresolved familial issues that may impede or derail permanency planning.
- Need for resolution of the issues that led to the placement in the first place.
- Recognition of the feelings of failure by the kinship caregiver and birth parents.
- Need for some kinship caregivers to have another chance at parenting to get it right.
- Role differentiation between kinship caregiver and birth parents.

These kinship care issues must be addressed from a triad-centric perspective: the child/youth, the relative caregiver and the birth parents and the relationships among them. Such a perspective addresses African American multigenerational trauma and recognizes the enduring legacy of slavery and racism that resulted in unfortunate

life conditions separating birth parents from their children. A Second Chance Inc. is one of the few national program models that engages the triad for short- and long-term benefit for all parties.

Effects of Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome

From slavery to now, African Americans have developed adaptive survival behaviors to address racial disparities in the United States. Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS), a theory espoused by Dr. Joy DeGruy from extensive quantitative and qualitative research, is described as a consequence of multigenerational oppression of Africans and their descendants of slavery based on the belief that African Americans were inherently/genetically inferior to whites.¹² This faulty belief evolved into institutionalized racism as it exists today. Understanding PTSS not only explains the residual effects of generations of slavery in the

A SECOND CHANCE, INC.

A Second Chance, Inc. (ASCI), is a nonprofit corporation in Pennsylvania that is designed to meet the unique needs of kinship care families, while providing culturally appropriate services to African American children. Its stated mission is to provide a safe, secure and nurturing environment to children in the care of relatives or close family friends.

ASCI opened its doors in 1994 after recognizing that kinship families needed an approach that was different from the way traditional foster care is provided. ASCI believes that, as a culturally based strength within the African American community, kinship care in the child welfare system is the most respectful way to reduce and eventually eliminate disparities in placements linked to race and ethnicity across the continuum of service. The use of kinship care spans every culture, and as such, is applicable to every child welfare system. ASCI has formalized this tradition through its programs.

ASCI specializes in child welfare-involved kinship families and is able to license 93 percent of its families so that they have access to needed financial support, while providing parents with services to help them regain custody of their children. ASCI also assigns different social workers to work with the caregiver and the parent to ensure that immediate service needs, as well as longer-term reunification and permanency goals, are being met. The Department of Human Services in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania now places more than 60 percent of the children in foster care with kin and achieves permanence in 89 percent of its cases.





CHRISTINE BENSLIMEN, PENNSYLVANIA GRAND VOICE

In her bustling Philadelphia home, Ms. Christine Benslimen, is all of these things—grandmother, aunt, cousin and foster mother—to the four children and youth whom she is raising.

“I just love all of my babies,” gushes Ms. Benslimen whose home and big heart are always open and willing to welcome in one more child or relative if it means keeping them connected to family, out of the system, and in a safe and nurturing environment. Her story is much like that of the children she cares for. At just 10 months old, Christine Benslimen, who is African American, was placed with kin when her young mother couldn’t care for her. The doting, older couple raised Ms. Benslimen as their own. When she turned five, Ms. Benslimen returned to live with her birth mother. The caregivers that she called aunt and uncle, “taught me everything I know about loving, nurturing and disciplining children,” and the power of kinship care. Over the years, Ms. Benslimen has stepped up to “care for plenty of relatives, without any financial or other support.”

But being connected to agencies like A Second Chance, Inc., has taught caregivers like Ms. Benslimen that they aren’t alone on the journey. And her advocacy on behalf of other grandfamily caregivers is transformative. When she first became a member of the GRAND Voices national network of caregivers - which Generations United manages and runs with support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and Casey Family Programs - Ms. Benslimen said, “That’s why I’m so eager to use the GRAND Voices platform. I want to tell other African American caregivers don’t be ashamed to ask for the help that they need, or fear losing their grandchildren to the system because they are struggling.” Whether it is meal planning, medical assistance, finding Pampers, clothes, or car seats, says Ms. Benslimen, help is available for kinship caregivers.

African American community, but the possibility of how age-old adaptive behaviors result in using the strengths of the past to heal the present. She notes that there are some key PTSS behavior patterns in African Americans that may be exhibited:

- **Vacant Esteem:** Insufficient development of primary esteem, along with feelings of hopelessness, depression, and a general self-destructive outlook.

- **Marked Propensity for Anger and Violence:** Extreme feelings of suspicion, perceived negative motivations of others, violence against self, property, and others, including the members of one’s own group, e.g., friends, relatives or acquaintances.
- **Racist Socialization and Internalized Racism:** Learned helplessness, literacy deprivation, distorted self-concept, antipathy or aversion.

These factors may account for some behaviors attributable to African Americans and should be considered when working with African American kinship families.



Photo courtesy of Christine Benslimen.

Intra-Cultural Beauty Issues within the African American Community

Understanding African American cultural norms can help you to better reach, engage, communicate and serve these kinship caregivers. African American kinship families reflect the history of slavery, racism, discrimination, segregation, and disenfranchisement that remain part of American culture. This internal cultural history holds both positive and negative messages about the self-image of these families. Some key longstanding messages stem from a tradition of African Americans adopting Caucasian standards of beauty. Being a light-skinned African American with straight hair and keen facial features (narrow nose, thin lips) was a Caucasian standard of beauty that discriminated against dark-skinned persons with nappy hair, big lips and noses. The more that African Americans looked like white people, the more preferential they were to whites as well as their own community. This representation of beauty is a remnant of slavery where black female slaves were impregnated by their white masters resulting in more Caucasian-looking children who were often allowed to stay within the master's house and received preferential treatment. The "Black Is Beautiful" movement in the 1960s assured African American women and men that their skin, facial features, and natural hair were indeed beautiful and should not be compared with other cultures.

The following descriptions provide some key context about relevant beauty norms in this community. It is important to understand these intra-cultural norms to make sense of potential preferences that some grandparents and other relatives may have among the children they raise. Some older African American kinship caregivers may be more likely to show a preference for the white standards of beauty. Historically, some African American parents and grandparents may have favored their children who most approximated white beauty due to their own internalized prejudices or may have felt compelled to favor these children because of the greater opportunities they were afforded in mainstream white society.¹³

Colorism: This is the "prejudice or discrimination especially within a racial or ethnic group favoring people with lighter skin over those with darker skin."¹⁴ Print and electronic media have perpetuated colorism in their representation of African Americans. Actress Keke Palmer said, "Hollywood highlighted some barriers when it comes to colorism. Growing up, I didn't see people with my complexion at the forefront of being shown as beautiful. I only saw one representation of beauty and that was of a black person with a lighter complexion."¹⁵ Such color preferences also manifested themselves in early African American magazine editions, such as *Ebony* and *Jet*, where only light-skin models were featured on their covers.¹⁶ The "Brown Paper Bag Test" was an extension of colorism by comparing an individual's skin tone to the color of a brown paper bag. If their skin color matched or was lighter than a brown paper bag they were allowed admission or membership privileges to sororities, fraternities, and churches.¹⁷

Good Hair versus Bad Hair: The idea of good hair derived from slavery where black women slaves were made to feel and believe that their naturally kinky hair was bad hair and good hair was straight and flowing like white women. During the 1960s, African American people began to proudly wear their hair in their natural state, and this proliferated in the 2000s. Many individuals of African descent gave up relaxing their hair with chemical straighteners and allowed it to grow naturally. These natural hairstyles vary by the use of braids, hair twists and dreadlocks, which are now common in the African American community and reflect the adoption of non-Caucasian beauty norms.

"Negroid" Features: Features such as a wider nose and bigger lips were seen as typical for the Negroid race. Like colorism and good hair versus bad hair, these facial features were seen as inferior to the keen features of Caucasians. African Americans with more keen noses and lips were seen as preferential because they approximated white beauty standards.



CROWN Act: Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair provides protection against discrimination based on hairstyles by extending statutory protection to hair texture and protective styles in the Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA) and state Education Codes. The CROWN Act is already law in California, New York, and New Jersey. The legislation has been introduced in more than 20 states.

www.thecrownact.com

Good Hair is a 2009 American documentary film directed by Jeff Stilson and produced by Chris Rock. The film focuses on the issue of how African American women have perceived and styled their hair and their relation to African American culture.

Hair Love is a 2019 American animated Oscar-winning short film was written and directed by Matthew A. Cherry and co-produced with Karen Rupert Toliver. It follows the story of an African American man who must do his daughter's hair for the first time. He struggles with her thick natural locks but succeeds with the help of an online video.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNw8V_Fkw28

Racial Stress and Self Care: Parent Tip Toolkit from the American Psychological Association explores how race-related stress affects caregiving relationships and gives tips for how to mitigate it.

www.apa.org/res/parent-resources/racial-stress-tool-kit.pdf

Stay Woke: The Black Lives Matter Movement is a 2016 documentary that discusses this international activist movement, originating in the African American community, which campaigns against violence and systemic racism towards black people.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=eloYtKOqxeU

Why Develop a Culturally Sensitive Approach to Social Work with African American Clients by Janice Hawkins, Ph.D., LMSW in *The New Social Worker* discusses cultural differences that may impede a social worker's ability to build rapport with African American clients and explains how a culturally sensitive approach mitigates these challenges.

www.socialworker.com/feature-articles/practice/why-develop-a-culturally-sensitive-approach

Working with African American Adoptive, Foster and Kinship Families from AdoptUSKids assists child welfare caseworkers in understanding and engaging historical and cultural aspects of African American clients.

https://adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/working-with-African-American-families.pdf

Chapter 2

Overview of Grandfamilies

I am where I am today because my grandmother gave me the foundation for success.

Oprah Winfrey, African American media executive, actress, talk show host and philanthropist; raised by her grandmother

Introduction

Approximately 2.7 million children in the United States live in grandfamilies or kinship families, meaning families in which grandparents, other adult family members or close family friends are raising children with no parents in the home.¹⁸ An additional 139,000 children, almost a third of all children in the foster care system, are in the legal custody of the system with their kin providing the care.¹⁹

A disproportionate number of children in grandfamilies are African American. While African American children make up 14 percent of all children in the United States, they comprise over 25 percent of all children in grandfamilies and 23 percent of all children in foster care.²⁰ The long history in the United States of slavery, segregation, economic injustice, and institutional racism contributes to this overrepresentation in the foster care system, and likely also contributes to the larger percentage of African American children in all grandfamilies.

In general, grandfamilies, whether inside or outside the foster care system, form because of parental substance use, incarceration, death, teenage pregnancy, poverty, mental illness, and cognitive or physical disability. Some of these factors impact African Americans at higher rates than whites. For

example, African Americans are incarcerated at more than five times the rate of whites, and the imprisonment rate for African American women is twice that of white women.²¹ African Americans are also twice as likely to live in poverty as whites.²² Systemic racism, along with these factors, can result in African Americans having more contact with the child welfare system.²³ As Ms. Carlyn Hicks, an African American Parent Attorney and Certified Child Welfare Law Specialist, powerfully notes: “If you live in a certain zip code, it’s not if CPS (Child Protective Services) knocks on your door, it’s when.” Once child welfare is involved, despite higher rates of substance use among African American mothers than white mothers, services are not often easily accessible or available to African American parents, so their case plans may be negatively impacted, which can cause additional adverse involvement with the child welfare system.²⁴

Whether inside or outside the child welfare system, the dramatically disproportionate numbers of African American children in kinship care do not even include the 7.9 million children in multigenerational households where grandparents and other relatives are the heads of the household, and the child’s parents may also be present in the home or use the home periodically.²⁵ For some multigenerational households, every family member

plays an important role. For other multigenerational families, the parents are not able to parent the child due to one or more of the many factors causing grandfamilies to form. About 26 percent of all African Americans live in multigenerational homes, and anecdotal evidence demonstrates that grandparents act as the parents in many of these families.²⁶

While the disproportionate number of African American grandfamilies is likely a product of the many inequities African Americans continue to face, it is also a reflection of the community's strength and resilience.

Grandfamilies' Strengths

African American grandfamilies have a long and proud cultural tradition of caring for extended family, dating back to their ancestors on the African continent. This strength, along with many others, are well documented in research and show that children thrive in grandfamilies, and specifically in African American grandfamilies. Decades of research comparing the outcomes of children in foster care with relatives to those in foster care with non-relatives demonstrate just how well children fare in kin care. Children in foster care with kin have more stable and safe childhoods with a greater likelihood of having a permanent home.²⁷ About 36 percent of all children adopted from foster care are adopted by relatives and 11 percent of children who exit foster care, exit into guardianships.²⁸ Moreover, children in foster care with kin are less likely to re-enter the foster care system after returning to birth parents.²⁹ These children experience fewer school changes, have better behavioral and mental health outcomes, and are more likely to report that they "always feel loved."³⁰ Children living with kin keep their connections to brothers, sisters, extended family and community, and cultural identity.³¹

Grandfamilies' Challenges

As with their many strengths, African American grandfamilies also share challenges that are similar to those of other grandfamilies. However, unique injustices make African American kinship caregiving that much more difficult.

Child Trauma: The children in grandfamilies are more likely than the general population of children to have social, emotional, physical and behavioral challenges. This is often due to the many traumatic and difficult reasons parents are unable to raise their children. Children have frequently been exposed to drugs or alcohol in utero and many have special needs.³² Unlike white youth, African American youth with behavioral or other challenges are much more likely to end up in juvenile justice facilities. For African Americans, the rate is 383 per 100,000 youth, whereas the same rate for whites is significantly less, at 83 youth per 100,000.³³ Caregivers are typically acutely aware of the disparate treatment by law enforcement and the courts for the African American children they raise.

Caregiver Stress: In addition to that unique stress, kin caregivers may be stressed because they are caring for children at a time in their lives they did not expect to be, and they are often socially isolated from their peers.³⁴ They may feel a sense of shame and guilt about their own adult children who are unable to parent.³⁵

Grandfamily Poverty: Generally, children in grandfamilies are more likely to be poor, with the highest poverty rates among African American children being raised by single grandmothers. About 18.4 percent of children in the general population live in poverty, as compared to 30.5 percent of children whose grandparents are responsible for them and have no parent in the home.³⁶ The percentage of children living in poverty increases even more dramatically for children who live with a grandmother only. About 48 percent of children who live with a grandmother only are poor, and approximately 42 percent of these children are African American.³⁷

Limited Services and Supports: Despite heroically stepping up to raise children that they did not expect or plan to raise, kin caregivers often face challenges accessing critical services for the children. The degree of challenge frequently differs depending on whether or not the child is part of the child welfare system.

- Children with kin in the child welfare system:** For those children in the child welfare system and living with kin, access to services and supports can be easier than for those not in the formal system. The state generally has legal custody of the children in kinship foster care, so caseworkers and judges can facilitate entry into services, like educational enrollment, and benefits such as nutrition assistance. However, the foster care system is not supporting the kin caregivers or the children as they should, despite relying on kin more than ever with a 10-percentage point increase in the last decade. The system often places children with kin as “kinship foster parents” without licensing them or providing the children in their care anywhere near the same level of assistance as children in non-relative foster care. Newly released data compiled and analyzed by *The Chronicle of Social Change* show that the number of children living in a home without a foster care maintenance payment increased by 32 percent between 2011 and 2017, from 81,838 to 108,426 children.³⁸ *The Chronicle* analysts believe these children are primarily, if not exclusively, in kinship foster care with either grandparents, other relatives or close family friends who are not licensed foster parents.³⁹ If kin were fully licensed, long-standing federal law requires that the children in their care receive monthly foster care maintenance payments, services, and a pathway to supported permanency through Guardianship Assistance Programs and adoption subsidies.⁴⁰
- Children raised by kin outside the child welfare system:** Children raised by kin outside of the child welfare system also face access and equity issues. A major reason impacting their access is that many of these children do not have a legal relationship, such as legal custody or guardianship, with their caregivers. They may lack such a relationship for many reasons. Often their caregivers may have difficulty finding an affordable lawyer or they may not want to go through the expense, delay, and trauma of suing the birth parents for such a relationship. Without a legal relationship to

the children or a foster care placement of them, caregivers can have trouble enrolling the children in school, accessing special education services, consenting to vaccinations and health care, obtaining health insurance coverage, and finding affordable housing suitable for the children.

A legal relationship is not required under federal law to access the array of public benefits and income supports that may be available. However, access can be challenging for other reasons. For example, to obtain a Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) child-only grant, which is often the only source of potential ongoing support for the children, caregivers typically have to assign to the state their right to collect child support from the parents. Caregivers often do not want to pose another problem for the parents who are trying to re-parent or the caregivers may fear retaliation from the parents. The federal government allows states to waive that assignment for good cause, but few jurisdictions actually have a clear practice that allows caregivers to access that exemption. TANF and Medicaid for the child are often linked, so restricting access to one can impact the other. Other federal supports, like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or “food stamps,” require caregivers to share a lot of information, including their income. In many cases, it may be retirement income that is too high to qualify for SNAP, even though the children are at risk of food insecurity. Grandfamilies have often not been considered in the design and implementation of these supports, and consequently their unique needs are not met.

These challenges, in addition to grandfamilies’ many strengths, must be considered when striving to support the families. Because African American kinship families are further impacted by their own unique set of strengths and challenges, this toolkit seeks to help agencies and organizations better understand and support them. To access general resources that may be helpful, please visit the websites listed below.



The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) is the national reporting system for children in foster care. Each year, a report is issued on the numbers of children in foster care, including those in foster care with relatives, and the numbers of children exiting the system to guardianships and adoptions.

www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/research-data-technology/statistics-research/afcars

The Brookdale Foundation Group, Relatives As Parents (RAPP) is a national network of support groups and services for grandfamilies.

www.brookdalefoundation.net/RAPP/rapp.html

Grandfamilies.org is a comprehensive one-stop national website for publications, materials, and laws impacting grandfamilies both inside and outside the foster care system.

www.grandfamilies.org

Grandfactsheets.org has fact sheets for each state and the District of Columbia containing specific state information related to grandfamilies, including a comprehensive list of resources and services, including kinship navigator programs.

www.grandfactsheets.org

Generations United is Generations United's website containing resources and publications on grandfamilies, including Generations United's annual State of Grandfamilies reports.

www.gu.org

The Kids Count project — The Annie E. Casey Foundation contains national and state level data on children in kinship care. By kinship care, they mean children outside of the formal foster care system being raised by grandparents, other family members and close family friends with no parents in the home. Children in kinship foster care are reported through AFCARS.

www.datacenter.kidscount.org

Racial Disproportionality and Disparity in Child Welfare Issue Brief by the Child Welfare Information Gateway.

https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/racial_disproportionality.pdf

The U.S. Census Bureau Data Website contains tables with the numbers of children in the United States and some of their demographic characteristics (Table S0901); the numbers of children and some of their characteristics who are raised by grandparents who are responsible for them (Table S1001), and the same information for these grandparents (Table S1002). The data on other relatives are limited, but the general number of "other relatives" responsible for children is available in Table S0901.

Data.census.gov

Chapter 3

Impact of Parental Separation

The truth is that we are now a two-family nation, separate and unequal—one thriving and intact, and the other struggling, broken, and far too often African American.

Daniel Moynihan, sociologist, diplomat and politician

Introduction

African American children being separated from their parents dates back to slavery. Unfortunately, this practice continues as African American children are experiencing increased separation due to several debilitating factors. They include drug epidemics impacting parents who use drugs and then lose their children to the child welfare system, crime within the African American community resulting in children losing their parents to death and/or incarceration, HIV/AIDS where affected parents are too sick to care for their children, and the disproportionate number of African Americans, primarily male, stereotyped and targeted by the police system, a phenomenon recognized by the Black Lives Matter movement. Younger kinship caregivers may be more mindful of these plights, but not necessarily more prepared to deal with the consequences of them. Older kinship caregivers may be lost in the frequent discussion of these matters. For organizations and agencies not to recognize these unique experiences is considered tone-deaf by many in the African American community. This chapter will discuss why African American children are being separated from their parents and what we can do to help reduce the deleterious effects of such separation.

Parental Incarceration

According to Child Trends, approximately one in every 14 children have or have had a parent incarcerated, and the chances are higher for black children, with one in nine having had a parent in prison.⁴¹ These children experience the same wrenching side effects of trauma that experts report now witnessing in immigrant children being taken from their parents at the Mexican-U.S. border. While many of us are appalled at the immigrant children's plight, African American children routinely are separated from their parents through the criminal justice system. It happens as a result of arrest/conviction, incarcerated women given birth behind bars, drug test failures causing probation violations, and court-ordered jailing. The children become major collateral damage, and many are sent to live with family members. It is especially deleterious when mothers are behind bars.

Children with incarcerated mothers are five times more likely to end up in foster care than those with incarcerated fathers.⁴² Like the migrant children, some have the potential to be lost. A *Dallas Morning News* investigation found that children whose parents were behind bars had slept in state offices, run away from foster homes, and in one case, been left to be looked after by a 12-year-old sister. In

most communities, the newspaper reported, “No one in the criminal justice system is responsible for the safety of children whose mothers go to jail.”⁴³ According to a *New York Times* report on data from the mid-2000s, there are over a quarter of a million American children estimated to have a mother in jail, with most detainees awaiting trial and some with minor offenses. Another 150,000 had a mother in prison.⁴⁴ Since that report, the number of incarcerated women has risen.

There are many more children with incarcerated fathers; a staggering one in four African American children can expect to have their father incarcerated before they turn age 14. An NAACP criminal justice fact sheet provides some sobering statistics on the overrepresentation and racial disparities of African Americans in jail:⁴⁵

- African Americans are incarcerated at more than five times the rate of whites.
- The imprisonment rate for African American women is twice that of white women.
- African Americans and whites use drugs at similar rates, but the imprisonment rate of African Americans for drug charges is almost six times that of whites.
- Nationwide, African American children represent 32 percent of children who are arrested, 42 percent of children who are detained, and 52 percent of children whose cases are judicially waived to criminal court.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation shed further light on the disparate treatment of African American youth by the juvenile justice system in statistics released January 2020: About 383 per 100,000 African American youth reside in juvenile justice facilities, whereas the same rate for white youth is significantly less, at 83 youth per 100,000.⁴⁶

The Impact of Substance Use

African Americans may be exposed to multiple stressors (e.g., poverty, mental illness, systemic racism) that increase their susceptibility to drug and alcohol use.⁴⁷ This increase has led to an overrepresentation of African American children in kinship foster care. Children of substance users

may have enduring high rates of trauma from the deleterious circumstances their parents may have exposed them to (e.g., drug houses, crime, violence, prostitution, physical abuse, sexual abuse, child abuse/neglect). The residuals of substance use for an African American child coming from or living in high substance use communities are dire:⁴⁸

- African Americans are more likely than white Americans to have an undiagnosed trauma/mental illness that goes untreated and often results in depression, anxiety or bipolar disorder, which increases one’s risk of using drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism.
- Traumatic experiences can lead to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a mental health condition that involves severe anxiety and is associated with an increased incidence of substance use behavior.
- The availability of drugs in low-income African American communities with few economic and academic opportunities can also contribute to early drug use.
- Living in areas marked by crime and violence can cause higher levels of stress and posttraumatic reactions, which can increase the risk for substance use.

The trauma of prior parental substance use does not just go away once a child is removed from their parents and placed in kinship care. Besides the trauma of living in a substance use environment, these children have learned negative and positive coping behaviors to mitigate the pain of abandonment during their time with their parents and in kinship care. Screening youth for substance use is a suggested prevention strategy.

Child Separation and Trauma

The trauma of separation from parents can result in some dire consequences for children such as ongoing mental health issues, increased aggression, poor academic performance, depression, and substance use. The effects are often long-term. While research repeatedly shows that kinship care is best for children who cannot live with their parents, separation from parents is an ongoing issue that kinship families must address.

While there is a general biological response to trauma, research suggests that cultural factors can influence the biopsychosocial experience of trauma and subsequent stress responses. Cultural factors play an important role in each individual's vulnerability to, experience and expression of trauma and response to interventions and treatment. Through differing cultural lenses, a child or family's perceptions of a trauma experience is often quite different from that of a social worker, therapist or counselor. Cultural differences can also exist in beliefs about if, when, and how to resolve traumatic stress symptoms, and about help-seeking and utilization of supportive resources outside their community. Significant cultural variations exist in a child or family's expression of distress. Pain, fear, worry or hyperarousal are sometimes expressed somatically. Traumatic stress reactions can be extremely subdued, can appear to be over-magnified, or can even mimic psychotic reactions. Often, family and cultural factors combine to define what is considered an appropriate reaction to illness or trauma. Some families and cultural groups are less comfortable responding to personal questions about emotional distress. They may think that being distressed means that there is something mentally wrong.

Indeed, many children who are separated from their parents experience trauma and other mental health issues. According to Generations United's 2017 State of Grandfamilies report, *In Loving Arms: The Protective Role of Grandparents and Other Relatives in Raising Children Exposed to Trauma*, children in foster care are at least five times more likely to have anxiety, depression and/or behavioral problems than children not in foster care.⁴⁹ Moreover, one in four alumni of foster care experiences Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and more than half experience at least one mental health issue such as depression, social phobia and/or panic syndrome.⁵⁰

Similar data do not exist for children who were separated from their parents and live in a grandfamily that is not involved with the foster care system. However, the trauma of parental separation is typically very similar.

For African American grandfamilies, the trauma of parental separation can be more complicated than for white grandfamilies. Families living in racially and economically segregated communities must also cope with the effects of historical trauma, intergenerational racism, and higher crime scenarios. According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, "The term complex trauma describes both children's exposure to multiple traumatic events, often of an invasive, interpersonal nature, and the wide-ranging, long-term impact of this exposure. These events are severe and pervasive, such as abuse or profound neglect. They usually begin early in life and can disrupt many aspects of the child's development and the formation of a self."⁵¹

Grandfamily caregivers are typically a vital protective factor for these children who have experienced parental separation and trauma.⁵² These caregivers help reduce trauma and mitigate its impact on children. They provide stability, supportive relationships and an extended family network, all of which align with research-based protective factors that promote resiliency and healing.⁵³

One of the most important things a provider can do is to reframe the question "What's wrong with you?" to "What happened to you?"

Interventions to Help Kinship Families Deal with Parental Separation/Trauma

Kinship provider agencies and community stakeholders can use some of the same strategies that behavioral health providers adopt to reduce the trauma of child-parent separation. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network has suggested some tips for providers to build supportive relationships to address trauma for African American youth:⁵⁴

- **Get to know the community you serve.** Providers should familiarize themselves with the social and historical context, issues and daily

stressors facing the communities where their kinship families live, especially if they do not reside in the same communities.

- **Prioritize engagement and earning trust as essential components of treatment.** Non-African American providers should understand that African American youth and families may approach services with healthy and often well-justified skepticism given their history of possible broken promises. Building trust will take time.
- **Focus on what youth have been through rather than “what’s wrong” with them.** Traumatized urban African American children and youth may often be viewed by schools and other systems in a negative way. Services should be seen as supports to them rather than as something trying to “fix” them. One of the most important things a provider can do is to reframe the question “What’s wrong with you?” to “What happened to you?”
- **Normalize trauma reactions and provide practical tools for coping with them.** Kinship families and their youth often experience ongoing stressors. Providing realistic and concrete ways to manage such stress early in your client-family relationship will facilitate the development of a therapeutic alliance and trust.
- **Support, create and build upon existing positive connections.** To overcome living in a toxic environment or circumstances, building supportive relationships is essential to creating a roadmap to recovery that youth architect for themselves.

Virtual Visitation

As our society continues toward mobility and connectivity, the changing concept of parental visitation moves with it. Job relocations, remarriages, incarceration, tough economic times and more have increased the possibility of parents losing contact with their children. The COVID-19 pandemic presents safety concerns to in-person visitation and the necessity and value of virtual visitation is elevated.

Virtual visitation is easy, involves no or minimal cost or travel time and can create bonds in challenging situations. As the term implies, virtual visitation is a form of child visitation that requires the use of technology to keep in contact with a child. “Virtual visitation,” also known as “Internet visitation” or “electronic visitation,” is still relatively new but growing in popularity as video calling becomes the norm. It may include e-mail, video conferencing, video mail, and instant messaging, and can be detailed as part of a case plan or child custody order. Through technology, kinship caregivers can be helped to facilitate a variety of ways for children in their care to stay connected with their parents, regardless of where they live.

Most child welfare agencies and courts allow virtual visitation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, several states, including Texas, Utah, Florida, and Wisconsin, enacted laws specifically allowing courts to order online or electronic visitation in custody matters.

Virtual visitation can help keep a parent and child connected, though it should not be a permanent substitute for in-person parenting and support. In the case of parents whose contact with their child is safe and/or court allowed, it can help nurture the bond between a parent and child and ease the child’s sense of abandonment. In non-COVID times, provider agencies can serve as the conduit and site for this connection. It is important that parents’ willingness and responsibility to participate in such virtual visitation be assessed by the agency to mitigate against “no shows,” which would be another disappointment for the child.

Virtual visitation benefits can be realized in such simple parent-child interactions as the following:

- Reading a bedtime story
- Helping with homework or a special project
- Sharing childhood accomplishments, such as awards or even losing teeth
- Talking about day-to-day happenings

Technology can also keep parents and children connected by allowing parents to watch their

children's sporting events, piano recitals, and other important occasions live as they are happening.

The following site has secure video calling so that parents and children may have the chance to communicate visually, in addition to speaking, over long distances: www.internetvisitation.org.



Engaging Kinship Caregivers: Managing Risk Factors in Kinship Care is a five-part video training series by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, led by Dr. [Joseph Crumbley](#). The training sessions strengthen the skills of child welfare professionals in supporting families to improve outcomes for children. The series includes a discussion guide to help program directors, supervisors and trainers lead group sessions. The videos and guide can be downloaded at

www.aecf.org/blog/engaging-kinship-caregivers-with-joseph-crumbley

Entangled Roots: The Role of Race in Policies that Separate Families by Elisa Minoff at the Center for the Study of Social Policy.

<https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/CSSP-Entangled-Roots.pdf>

Kinship Care When Parents are Incarcerated: What We Know, What We Can Do by Creasie Finney Hairston for the Annie E. Casey Foundation, is a review of research and recommendations for action.

https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/media/publications/annie_e_casey_foundation_kinship_care_when_parents_are_incarcerated_report_2009.pdf

Race and Class in the Child Welfare System by Dorothy Roberts at the Public Broadcasting Service, analyzes ways in which race affects child protective service caseworkers' decisions to remove children from their parents' homes.

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/fostercare/caseworker/roberts.html>

Relatives Raising Children: An Overview of Kinship Care edited by Joseph Crumbley and Robert L. Little gives information to professionals, agencies, and communities to provide services to kinship families. Although the book is a few decades old, it is still relevant. It examines clinical issues, suggests intervention strategies, examines legal and policy implications and makes recommendations.

<http://drcrumbley.net/books-2>

Chapter 4

Benefits and Strengths of Preserving and Restoring Cultural Identity

“

**The more you know of your history,
the more liberated you are.**

Maya Angelou, African American poet, singer, memoirist, and civil rights activist;
raised by her paternal grandmother

”

Introduction

African American culture in the United States refers to the cultural contributions rooted in the historical experience of African American people. Cultural identity forms during primary socialization and formative years where a child learns how to view the world through their caregivers, surrounding family, extended family members, and close friends. There is power in identity and truth about African American's rich heritage of tribulations and triumphs. It is important to create a landscape that speaks truthfully about where African Americans are, where we come from and where we can go. Such a discussion helps us relate to one another better and have greater self-awareness about our cultural and individual identities.

An African American family's social and cultural interactions reinforce their identity as evidenced by some significant elements:⁵⁵

- Food choices (e.g., soul food)
- Holiday celebrations (e.g., Kwanzaa)
- Age milestone celebrations (e.g., Rites of Passage ceremonies)
- Oral tradition
 - » Spoken Word that uses the same techniques as African American preachers including movement, rhythm, and audience participation.

- » Call and Response which is part of worship in what is commonly referred to as the “amen corner.”
- » Playing the Dozens signifying “trash talk” where people go back and forth to one-up each other.

- Music (e.g., rap, soul music, jazz, hip-hop)
- Clothing styles
- Language and communication styles
- Greetings (e.g., fist bump)
- Hairstyles (e.g., natural, the fade, perming of hair to straighten it)

Benefits of Preserving Cultural Identity

The benefits of helping a child preserve their cultural identity include mental health resiliency, higher levels of social well-being, and improved coping skills.⁵⁶ Cultural identity is a significant part of who each child is and sets the stage for how they acquire core values, socio-dynamic practices and rituals. Such identification also determines how a child interacts with others. Several studies show that having a strong, positive cultural identity leads to:⁵⁷

- Greater self-esteem
- Higher education levels
- Better psychological adjustment
- Improved coping abilities
- Decreased levels of loneliness and depression
- Higher levels of social well-being

Perils of Being African American Today

The long history of racism and resulting segregation has caused some negative responses that imperil African Americans in their daily living. In addition to the long history of discrimination in education, employment, and access to resources, African Americans have had to deal with harassment from formal government agencies and racist citizens by the mere fact of their skin tone. Two notable examples of African Americans being unfairly targeted are the following:

- The stop-question-and-frisk program or stop-and-frisk is a practice of temporarily detaining, questioning, and at times searching civilians and suspects on the street for weapons and other contraband. It has overwhelmingly targeted African Americans.
- Documented response of undue force by police against African Americans, especially males.

The **Black Lives Matter** movement grew out of the disproportionate targeting of African Americans. Black Lives Matter is an international activist movement, originating in the African American community, that campaigns against violence and systemic racism towards black people.

Kinship caregivers need to educate the children and youth in their care about safety measures and appropriate and safe responses to law enforcement. Provider agencies can also help counsel African American children and youth in this regard.

Recommendations for Helping Children Maintain Their Cultural Identity

Unfortunately, when a child can no longer be raised by parents and goes to live with relatives, there can be an interruption in the child's cultural identity development. For example, this interruption is common for children of mixed races, who present as African American and are placed with members of the extended family who are not African American. It is important that kin caregivers, agencies and organizations help these children remain connected with their African American culture, as well as the other cultures in the children's lives.

Kinship service providers and kinship caregivers who are not themselves African American and are raising African American children must learn about the impact of racism and be active participants in supporting each child's strong cultural identity.⁵⁸

The following are a few ideas to help agencies and kinship caregivers:

- Learn about uniquely African American cultural rituals, activities, and preferences.
- Recognize the racial disparities within your own community.
- Recognize the racist behaviors that may happen to family members merely because of their dark skin and empathize with them.
- Provide or consult resources for kinship caregivers to learn about the child's heritage.
- Include the value of cultural identity during court and case planning for the child.
- Ask children and youth about their cultural identity, or if there are any cultural practices or norms that are important to them.
- Ask children and youth about cultural issues many times throughout their time in kinship care as answers can change.
- Collaborate with kinships caregivers to host African American rituals and events.
- Sponsor African American cultural tours locally and nationally.
- Organize a trip to the new National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C.

Key African American Cultural Rituals and Resources that Help Maintain Identity

To help African American children and youth maintain and strengthen their identity, there are events and resources that can help:

- **Family Reunions** are important rituals that promote the endurance of African American extended families and help maintain cultural traditions and celebrate the past, present, and future. The elders are often seen as the keepers of the African American legacy.
- **Juneteenth** is an important yearly commemoration on June 19th of the ending of slavery in the United States.

- **Kwanzaa** is an annual celebration of African American culture held from December 26 to January 1, culminating in gift-giving and focus on daily positive principles of living. For some African Americans, it replaces the Christmas gift-giving.
- **African American Sororities and Fraternities** were created in the early 1900s to provide brotherhood and sisterhood for blacks

attending college. Since blacks were not welcome in the other established Greek Letter Societies, they created their own to provide mutual support, celebration of culture, community service, and networking.

Other African American membership clubs also celebrate African American culture such as the Elks, Masons, Eastern Stars, Boule and more.

No, no, my friend. You are kind, and you mean well, but you can never understand these things as I do. You've never been oppressed.

S. Alice Callahan, *Wynema: A Child of the Forest*, Native American author



Kinship Family: He is an Extension of Me is a video that is part of the Authentic Voices Video Series. It the story of Donaniece, an African American grandmother, who decides to become her grandson's legal guardian at the age of 50. She shares the practical and financial challenges she faces and how she is teaching her grandson the meaning of family. www.youtube.com/watch?v=5vltF6tTmbM

Preserving Our History: Black Documentary Experience is a special documentary that was produced from a compilation of six documentaries in commemoration of 2019 Black History Month. www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHku4IAIGE8

Race and Culture: Tools, Techniques and Trainings: A Manual for Professionals by Sumita Dutta and Reenee Singh is a practical resource for trainers who wish to work with the issues raised by racial and cultural diversity in their own agency settings. This book is intended as an easy guide and a "hands-on" tool for practitioners, academics, and students. Abstract available at <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2010-23823-000>

Strength and Resilience in African American Families is a presentation by Dr. Stephanie Coard, an Associate Professor in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at the University of North Carolina/Greensboro and a leader in the field of resilience. She has several publications that examine how to leverage family and community strengths to support the well-being of children. Most recently, she chaired the American Psychological Association's Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents. She uses her work to urge for a re-framing from risk-focused approaches to resilience-focused approaches to fully support the health and well-being of African American youth. www.youtube.com/watch?v=FeVNVTQYwss

Chapter 5

Strategies for Providing Culturally Appropriate Services

I have learned over the years that when one's mind is made up, this diminishes fear; knowing what must be done does away with fear.

Rosa Parks, Civil Right Activist

Introduction

The African American community is very ethnically, socioeconomically, and culturally diverse. One size does not fit all but represents many. However, understanding some generalized cultural norms will be important to improve services and communication with African American kinship families.

Communication with African American Kinship Families

The Susan G. Komen's website features a guide to *Applying Culturally-Responsive Communication in Black and African American Communities* that focuses on cultural norms and strategies for communication for breast cancer patients.⁵⁹ It offers rich guidance for providers to engage African American kinship families.

Cultural Norm	Description	Agency Strategies for Communication
COMMUNITY AND FAMILY	Extended family is an African American cultural norm where grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, godparents, and close friends are thought of as part of the family. Grandparents hold a special status in the family unit. ⁶⁰	• Include extended family members in outreach and education events. Their inclusion may facilitate decision-making around kinship care roles and support needs.

Cultural Norm	Description	Agency Strategies for Communication
FAITH AND RELIGION	Faith, church, and strong religious affiliations are often central to family and community life in Black and African American culture, especially among the older population.	- Find out about the caregiver's religion or faith and how it helps them relieve stress. - Consider using local clergy to support your engagement message either through their religious bulletins or as part of a kinship care presentation to the community.
RESPECT AND TRUST	Generally, Black and African American families place a strong emphasis on showing respect to elders, but they are not necessarily patriarchal. ⁶¹	- Respect your audience by using formal rather than informal words when addressing or speaking to people and groups. - Do not use professional jargon or acronyms but speak simply and sincerely. - Educate yourself about the demographics of your intended caregiver or audience including their educational and literacy levels. This will demonstrate that you cared enough to understand their circumstances. - Be patient and recognize gaining respect may take time.
PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS	Many Blacks and African Americans prefer personal relationships over formal ones and may take a personal interest in others.	- Share your own background, life stories and pictures, especially if you were raised by a grandparent. This will help you connect. - Learn about the community and its priorities. - Do not assume you are the only person providing this service. Ask about who may already be doing similar work and how you can connect to that group or add additional support. - Find out who you can partner with within the community to engage and support kinship families.
COMPETING PRIORITIES	African American kinship families often face complex social and daily living situations and may prioritize what is an immediate need versus a longer-term need.	Engage caregivers in shared decision-making where they determine, with input from you, what their priorities are. Do not act as their boss!

Strategies for Culturally Competent Organizations and Agencies

The National Center for Cultural Competence suggests the following strategies for organizations and government agencies to become more culturally competent:⁶²

- Have a defined set of values and principles, and demonstrate behaviors, attitudes, policies, and structures that enable effective work cross-culturally.
- Have the capacity to:
 - » Value diversity
 - » Conduct cultural self-assessments periodically

- » Manage the dynamics of differences and cultural interactions
 - » Acquire and institutionalize cultural knowledge, and
 - » Adapt service delivery to diversity and the cultural contexts of communities that are served
- Incorporate these capacities into all aspects of policymaking, administration, practice, and service delivery, and systematically involve consumers, families, and communities.

The implementation of these principles requires each organization and government agency to create infrastructure policies and protocols as described in the table below.

For Organizations and Government Agencies

Goals – What	Implementation Methods – How
PARTNERSHIPS, CULTURE & POLICIES	
Promote a culture of learning about African American children and families.	• Provide reading materials for staff about the history and struggles of African American families, past and present. • Hire diversity consultants as culture-specific healers or cultural brokers, who have in-depth knowledge of the African American kinship community.
Form collaborative partnerships with government agencies and community and faith-based organizations serving kinship families.	• Conduct a needs assessment to identify who is serving African American kinship families in both formal and informal settings. • Conduct a gap analysis to avoid duplication of services. • Review consumer ratings of organizations for culturally appropriate and accessible services to determine if they are suitable partners.
Initiate an assessment of your existing practices and service gaps relative to African American kinship families.	• Perform periodic kinship satisfaction focus groups or listening circles using peer advocates not associated with your agency or organization to maximize candor and honesty. • Create forums and other opportunities for ongoing staff dialogue to reflect on what is and what is not working when serving families.

Goals – What	Implementation Methods – How
Create and implement systems of accountability for cultural competence standards.	• Develop policy on culturally appropriate services that should be included in the personnel manual. • Ensure consequences are provided for staff violating personnel policies on culturally appropriate services.
Engage in advocacy activities that include and incorporate the voices and recommendations of kinship families for policy development.	• Identify, hire, and train African American kinship peers to provide ongoing feedback concerning engagement policies, direct services, literature handout language, etc. • Assess kinship caregivers' knowledge of current environmental trends and events that impact their families (e.g., Black Lives Matter, social media, drugs, community violence, HIV) to assist them in developing strategies and parenting skills to address such.

GENERAL DELIVERY PRACTICES

Follow culturally sensitive engagement and outreach practices, such as participation in local community events.	• Establish a presence in community locations and events that African American kinship caregivers frequent. • Participate in community fairs to promote culturally sensitive services. • Set-up a feedback box for people to provide anonymous feedback on kinship services.
Allow for walk-in appointments.	• Set-up flexible scheduling that recognizes the challenges of caregivers to attend appointments. • Create a Hotline for kinship caregivers to receive immediate help. • Plan and allow for extended family members at appointments and other events.
Be mindful that home visits are not always desirable by the caregivers because of privacy issues, embarrassment about their living quarters, etc.	• Work with caregivers to find mutually agreeable home visit dates and times. • Consider alternative meeting places when a home visit is not required.
Follow a culturally sensitive communication style that emphasizes the African American community's preference for personalized, in-person (rather than written mail and e-mail) communication. ⁶³	• Use a peer kinship advocate to reach out to kinship caregivers by phone. • Send post cards regularly for appointment reminders or event notifications.

Goals – What	Implementation Methods – How
Use culturally relevant screening and assessment tools that are at the appropriate literacy level and have been validated with members of the local kinship community.	• Pilot-test any new assessment tools to determine their appropriateness with savvy kinship caregivers. • Create documents that have a reading level of 6th grade and below; Microsoft Office can assess the reading level of your documents under the “tools” tab.⁶⁴
Identify the best engagement practices for greeting, addressing, and acknowledging caregivers.	• Do not call the kinship caregiver by their first name when you first meet them. • Ask them how they would like to be addressed (e.g., Ms. Mrs., Mr., Dr., or other title).
Provide mechanisms for transportation to appointments at the agency or organization as well as other community supports.	• Consider providing free transportation vouchers or cards based on an incentive system for family participation in agency or organization services. • Connect families with other kinship caregivers for carpooling.

STAFFING PRACTICES

Recruit, mentor, and recognize staff that demonstrate special cultural awareness as assessed by kinship caregivers.	• New hire staff interviews should have questions regarding cultural sensitivity about African American kinship families. • Hire staff from the community to help with engagement and outreach. • At annual meetings, recognize staff that has had success with kinship families. • Identify, recruit, hire, and train kinship family members as part of the staff serving families.
Provide ongoing workforce development and cultural competence staff trainings.	• Require mandatory yearly training hours on the status and conditions of African American kinship families in your community. • Have staff do self-assessments of cultural competence practices through self-ratings.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT & RESOURCE SET-UP

Create a familiar, welcoming physical environment by depicting African American families in workspaces, promotional materials, resources, and artwork.

- Wall hangings, posters, etc. should depict African American families of all types (e.g., kinship caregivers, married couples, single parents).
- Have African American magazines in the reception area.
- Provide literature in the reception area that provides free information on community resources and opportunities beyond direct kinship services.
- Post a large calendar of events that promotes activities that would be meaningful and helpful to kinship families.
- Provide free coupons in the waiting area for community resources (e.g., food, clothing, etc.).

Arrange reception and meeting areas to accommodate large, extended families.

- Set aside a place for children to have toys, games, books, magazines.
- Ensure that the skin color of children depicted in print and any toy dolls reflect the community.



Photo by
Lauren Souther.



MRS. VICTORIA GRAY, ARIZONA GRAND VOICE

Victoria Gray, now age 69, has many years of experience raising her grandchildren and as a licensed foster parent. She and her husband have cared for 41 children as foster parents and have been raising their seven grandchildren since 2007. Mrs. Gray's husband, Gentry Gray, now age 84, retired from his first career at the post office in December 1999. Their first two grandkids came a few years earlier in February 1993 and August 1993. DNA proved that the second child was not their grandchild and the Grays became licensed foster parents to keep the siblings together. Five more grandchildren joined their grandfamily in December 2007, due to their adult daughter's incarceration and history of substance use.

In their new caregiver role, the Grays were unable to get the grandparent stipend from the Arizona Department of Child Safety, which was \$75 a month per child. This meager stipend would have helped to make ends meet, but the Gray's income was too high. "We went back to work," Victoria Gray said. "We needed to keep the budget together." Mrs. Gray said her grocery bill more than doubled once she took in her five youngest grandchildren. "I thought ok, I can feed them this week. But what do I do about next week? We were already dipping into our savings, we took a chunk out of our 401K," she said.

After the Grays became licensed foster parents in 1993, they adopted their grandchildren. As licensed foster parents, they were able to get almost nine times more in monthly state aid than unlicensed kinship caregivers. But there are thousands of other kinship caregivers in Arizona who do not have the option to become licensed foster parents or decide not to pursue licensure and financially struggle while meeting the needs of the children in their care.

While the focus is often on the children, kinship care can take a toll on grandparents and other caregivers, especially as they get older. Older caregivers are more likely to have physical challenges. Mrs. Gray had a knee replacement a few years into her new caregiving role. This limited how much she could play with her grandchildren. "I'm not jumping rope with the girls," she said. "Not unless a paramedic is waiting on the curb with oxygen."

Most recently, the Gray family founded the nonprofit GreyNickel, Inc., which aids kinship caregivers during the critical first days after a child is placed in their home. Through the nonprofit, Mrs. Gray conducts home visits with new kinship families immediately after a child comes into their care. Victoria Gray concedes the foster care licensing process can be "invasive," with background checks and fingerprint requirements. Plus, many families think they'll only be providing care for a short time, so it's not worth the hassle. That's when Mrs. Gray tells kinship families that she'll see them in a few months, when the reality of the situation sets in, reinforced by the lack of financial support.

Working with families as grandparent to grandparent and bringing that experience of what they are going through is powerful. As Mrs. Gray notes, "when meeting with African American grandfamilies and adding the understanding of culture, it helps the reality of the situation. Hearing and seeing someone that looks like them gives them relief and hope that they can survive. Trust is built almost immediately."



In addition to leading her own nonprofit organization, Mrs. Gray is a key member of the GRAND Voices national network of grandfamily caregiver advocates, which Generations United manages and runs with support from Casey Family Programs and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Among her many engagements through that network, Mrs. Gray has been a pivotal voice at national leadership meetings exploring the creation of a 21st century child welfare system. She also serves as a steering committee member with the [Arizona Grandparent Ambassadors \(AZGA\)](#). As a member of AZGA, Mrs. Gray was instrumental in the passage of a 2016 Arizona bill that overturned the “grandmother penalty,” which had prevented countless kinship families from qualifying for Arizona’s Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program.

Due to her tremendous personal caregiving and advocacy work, Mrs. Gray has been recognized with numerous well-deserved awards. In 2017, she received the Brookdale Foundation Grandfamilies Award from [Generations United](#) to honor her work on behalf of kinship families. In 2019, she received a special commendation from the first lady of Arizona for her work helping kinship families, and the following year was honored with the Casey Family Programs Excellence for Children, Kinship Caregiver Award. You can listen to Mrs. Gray’s story in her own words at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcoecmX7Gxk>

When meeting with African American grandfamilies and adding the understanding of culture, it helps the reality of the situation. Hearing and seeing someone that looks like them gives them relief and hope that they can survive. Trust is built almost immediately.

Mrs. Victoria Gray, Arizona Grand Voice

Photo courtesy of Victoria Gray.



Grandfamilies Strengths: Children Thrive



Children in All Grandfamilies



7.9 million

Number of children who
live with a relative who is
the head of the household

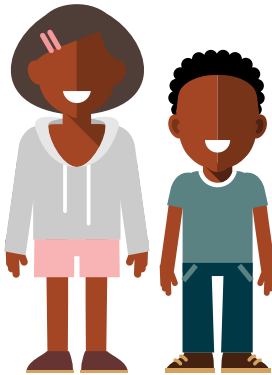
2.7 million

Number of children who
are being raised by a
relative or close family
friend and do not
have a parent living in
the household

139,004

Number of children in foster care
being raised by relatives

African American Children Disproportionately Live in Grandfamilies



Children in the U.S. who are African American

14%

Children in grandfamilies who are African American

25%

Children in foster care who are African American

23%

Heightened Challenges for African American Children in Grandfamilies



Child Poverty

About 48% of children who live with a grandmother only are poor, and approximately 42% of these children are African American



Juvenile Justice

African American youth with behavioral or other challenges are 4.6 times more likely than white youth to end up in juvenile justice facilities

African American Parents More Impacted By Several Factors Causing Grandfamilies to Form



Poverty

African Americans are twice as likely to live in poverty as whites



Incarceration

African Americans are incarcerated at more than five times the rate of whites



COVID-19

African Americans have higher rates of infection and death from COVID-19 than whites



Substance Use

African American parents impacted by substance use are less likely to be able to access treatment and services in their communities

All the data points in these infographics are cited in the introduction or chapter 2 of this report.



Communicating with your African American Patient, part of University of Washington Medical Center Culture Clues™. <http://depts.washington.edu/pfes/cultureclues.html>

Multicultural Counseling Self Efficacy Scale - Racial Diversity Form is a 60-item self-report instrument that assesses the perceived ability to perform various counselor behaviors in individual counseling with a racially diverse client population. For additional information, see <https://www.meta.org/papers/multicultural-counseling-self-efficacy-scale-racia/22574664>

A Practice Guide for Working with African American Families in the Child Welfare System: The Role of the Caseworker in Identifying, Developing and Supporting Strengths in African American Families Involved in Child Protective Services by Maxie Rockymore, MSW for the Minnesota Department of Human Services, Child Safety & Permanency Division. This guideserves to help child protective services caseworkers identify and support strengths of African American families on their caseloads as a means of effective engagement and family intervention. <https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Public/DHS-4702-ENG>

TIP 59: Improving Cultural Competence/ SAMHSA Publications and Digital Products is a guide that helps professional care providers and administrators understand the role of culture in the delivery of mental health and substance use services. It describes cultural competence and discusses racial, ethnic, and cultural considerations. <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/TIP-59-Improving-Cultural-Competence/SMA15-4849>



Chapter 6

Helpful Services

I have discovered in life that there are ways of getting almost anywhere you want to go, if you really want to go.

Langston Hughes, African American poet, social activist, novelist, playwright, and columnist

Introduction

The services listed below are ones that African American grandfamilies are likely to need at one point or another. The information is intended to help give direction to understand and access needed services. It is not a comprehensive list, but rather gives basic information on nationally available programs that are important for grandfamilies.

The services section begins with general information about kinship navigator programs, as they are critical to navigating the many systems that impact grandfamilies. Services are next organized alphabetically into the following categories:

- I. Child Welfare**
- II. Education**
- III. Financial Assistance and Income Supports**
- IV. Health and Nutrition Supports**
- V. Housing**
- VI. Legal and Crime Victim Assistance**
- VII. Supportive Services**

The services below do not exist universally, but it is always worth checking every possibility when needs arise.

Kinship Navigator Programs

Kinship navigator programs assist kinship caregivers in learning about, finding, and using programs and services to meet the needs of the children they are raising and their own needs. They also promote effective partnerships among public and private agencies to ensure African American grandfamilies are served. Starting roughly twenty years ago, some jurisdictions implemented kinship navigator programs, which were shown to be successful in connecting the families to the services and support they need. However, not enough jurisdictions had these programs. Since 2018, federal funds have been available to all states, tribes and territories interested in these programs, and ongoing federal reimbursement is possible for evidence-based kinship navigator programs, thanks to the Family First Prevention Services Act, discussed in chapter 7.

For more information, visit:

www.grandfamilies.org/Resources/Kinship-Navigator-Programs

I. Child Welfare

Black Administrators in Child Welfare (BACW): As a nonprofit membership and advocacy organization, the mission of BACW is to advocate for culturally appropriate services for African American children and families in the child welfare system and to promote the development and support of African American leaders in the field. BACW membership is available to administrators, mental health and juvenile justice professionals who provide services to children and families, and to individuals and students interested in child advocacy.

For more information or to become a member, visit: <http://blackadministrators.org/>

Child Welfare League of America (CWLA): CWLA is a nonprofit membership organization that leads and engages its network of public and private child welfare agencies and partners to advance policies, best practices and collaborative strategies that result in better outcomes for children, youth and families who are vulnerable.

For more information or to become a member, visit: <https://www.cwla.org/>

The Children's Bureau: The Children's Bureau, within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, provides matching funds to states, tribes, and communities to help them operate every aspect of their child welfare systems - from the prevention of child abuse and neglect to the support of permanent placements through adoption and subsidized guardianship.

For more information and to subscribe to the Children's Bureau free newsletters, visit: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/programs/state-tribal-funding>

National Association of Black Social Workers (NACSW): The NACSW, comprised of people of African ancestry, is committed to enhancing the quality of life and empowering people of African ancestry through advocacy, human services delivery, and research.

For more information or to become a member, visit: <https://www.nabsw.org/>

National and State Child Welfare Organizations and Agencies: Each state operates a child welfare agency, which are known by an array of names. They work to prevent child abuse and neglect, oversee foster care, and support permanent placements for children in foster care.

For a link to each state's child welfare agency website, and national organizations and other child welfare resources, visit: www.childwelfare.gov/organizations/

A Second Chance Inc. (ASCI): ASCI is a nonprofit corporation whose mission is to provide a safe, secure, and nurturing environment to children in kinship care within the child welfare system. ASCI is the largest provider of kinship support services to all of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, where it is headquartered. It also provides kinship services in several other counties in Pennsylvania.

For more information, visit: <https://www.asecondchance-kinship.com/>

II. Education

Child Care and Early Childhood Programs: The Office of Child Care in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services administers the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). CCDF helps low-income families obtain childcare so they can work or attend training/education.

For a list of childcare agencies, visit: www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ccb/

Head Start: Head Start/Early Head Start is a federal program that promotes school readiness of children ages birth to 5 from low-income families.

To find an Early Head Start or Head Start, visit: <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/HeadStartOffices>

Center for Parent Information & Resources: A hub of information and products created for the network of Parent Centers serving families of children with disabilities. Early intervention and special education services are available to all children in the United States age birth to 18. If a grandfamily caregiver would like to access a parent center, they should

not be discouraged by their name. “Parent” includes other adult family members.

To find a local parent center: <https://www.parentcenterhub.org/find-your-center/>

Educational Scholarships for Youth In Foster and/or Kinship Care – Sample Listing:

- Adopted/Foster Child/Orphan Scholarships www.scholarships.com/.../adopted-foster-child-orphan
- College Scholarships and Support for Higher Education <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/outofhome/independent/support/education/>
- Great Scholarships for Adopted Students <https://www.top10onlinecolleges.org/scholarships-for/adopted-students/>
- Private Scholarships for Foster Youth – Foster Care Newsletter. <http://foster-care-newsletter.com/private-scholarships-for-foster-youth/>
- Scholarships for Foster Kids www.collegescholarships.org/scholarships/foster.htm

State Education Offices: Contact information for each state’s education agency and special education agency.

For local information, visit: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/contacts/state/index.html>

Scholarships for African American Students/

Fastweb: The scholarships in this directory are typically awarded through schools from notable African American advancement organizations, such as the NAACP, sororities, fraternities, and foundations.

For more information, visit: <https://www.fastweb.com/directory/scholarships-for-African-American-students>

United Negro College Fund (UNCF): UNCF is the nation’s largest private scholarship provider to minority group members. Each year, they award more than \$100 million in scholarships to students attending more than 1,100 schools across the country, including the prestigious network of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs).

For more information, visit: <https://uncf.org/scholarships>

III. Financial Assistance and Income Supports

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program

(LIHEAP): LIHEAP is a federal program designed to assist households with low incomes meet their immediate home energy needs.

For more information, visit: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ocs/resource/liheap-fact-sheet-0>

Social Security: Children may be eligible for Social Security if their parent is collecting retirement or disability insurance benefits. If one of the child’s parents has died and was fully insured when he or she died, children may be eligible for survivor’s benefits. Kinship providers can apply for benefits on behalf of the child based on the work record of the child’s parent. Grandchildren may also qualify based on their grandparents’ (but not other kinship caregivers’) work record.

For more information, visit: <https://www.ssa.gov/people/parents/>

Supplemental Security Income (SSI): SSI provides cash benefits to eligible adults and children with disabilities that seriously limit their activities.

To see if a caregiver or specific child may qualify, visit the disability planner on the Social Security Administration website: www.ssa.gov/planners/disability/

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF):

The first of four purposes of the TANF program is to provide assistance to needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives. TANF is critical to supporting grandfamilies through both family and child-only grants. These monthly grants are often the only source of ongoing financial assistance for grandfamily caregivers to help meet the needs of children they did not plan or expect to raise.

For more information, visit: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/programs/tanf/about>

A fact sheet containing contact information for TANF in each state, which may be known by a different name depending on the state: www.gu.org/resources/grand-resources-tanf/

An extensive policy brief by Generations United explores the importance of the TANF program to grandfamilies and how states, tribes and localities can make this vital program more accessible: www.gu.org/app/uploads/2018/05/Grandfamilies-Report-TANF-Assistance-Policy-Brief.pdf

IV. Health and Nutrition Supports

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services: Health insurance coverage is available to eligible children being raised by grandparents and other relatives.

For additional information, visit: <https://www.insurekidsnow.gov/>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Center for Mental Health Services (SAMHSA):

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) collects information on thousands of state-licensed providers who specialize in treating substance use disorders, addiction, and mental illness.

For additional information, visit: <https://findtreatment.gov/>

Nutrition Supports:

- **The National School Breakfast and Lunch Programs** provide free or low-cost meals to eligible students. The child's schoolteacher or principal should have an application.
- **The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)** provides low-income children with nutritious meals when school is not in session. Free meals are provided to all children 18 years old and under at approved SFSP sites. visit www.whyhunger.org/findfood to locate sites using an online map.
- **The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)** formerly known as "Food Stamps" provides vital nutrition support. To find local offices, the state hotline, and each state's

application, visit www.fns.usda.gov/snap/applicant_recipients/apply.htm

- **The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)** is a public health nutrition program providing nutrition education, nutritious foods, breastfeeding support, and healthcare referrals for income-eligible women who are pregnant or post-partum, infants, and children up to age five. For more information, visit www.fns.usda.gov/wic/wic-eligibility-requirements or www.nwica.org/wic-basics#row-states

The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program: The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program gives pregnant women and families, particularly those considered at-risk, necessary resources and skills to raise children.

For more information visit: <https://mchb.hrsa.gov/maternal-child-health-initiatives/home-visiting-overview>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Minority Health: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Minority Health improves the health of racial and ethnic minority populations through the development of health policies and programs.

For more information, visit: <https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/>

V. Housing

Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) Local AAAs may have funds available through the Older Americans Act for older grandfamily caregivers to help with home modifications and repairs.

To find an AAA, visit: <https://eldercare.acl.gov/Public/Index.aspx>

Generations United: Grandfamilies have many housing needs and challenges. Responses include almost twenty specially designed housing programs for grandfamilies with services on-site. Generations United has been working for twenty years on

grandfamilies' housing needs and they focused their 2019 State of Grandfamilies Report on these issues.

For information about grandfamilies' housing needs and responses, including the specially designed housing programs, visit: www.gu.org/resources/a-place-to-call-home-building-affordable-housing-for-grandfamilies/ and <http://grandfamilies.org/Topics/Housing>

Section 504 Home Repair Program This program, also known as the Single Family Housing Repair Loans and Grants program, is managed through the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It provides loans to very-low-income homeowners to repair, improve or modernize their homes or grants to age 62+ very-low-income homeowners to remove health and safety hazards.

For more information, visit: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/single-family-housing-repair-loans-grants>

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development: There are a number of housing programs that may help grandfamilies with subsidized housing, including "Section 8" housing vouchers and Family Unification Vouchers.

To learn about programs in each state, visit: <https://www.hud.gov/states>

VI. Legal and Crime Victim Assistance

Crime Victim Services: Crime Victim Services is a resource from the Office for Victims of Crime in the U.S. Department of Justice. Its directory helps crime victims and service providers find nonemergency crime victim service agencies in the United States and abroad.

For the directory, visit: <https://ovc.ncjrs.gov/findvictimservices/>

Family Violence Prevention Services: Services provided can include helping victims of domestic violence find safe shelter, community outreach and education, crisis counseling, victim advocacy, legal aid, transportation, and support groups.

For a contact list of state administrators, visit: www.acf.hhs.gov/fysb/resource/fvpsa-state-administrators-list-2020

Justia: General legal questions can be posted free on this website for attorneys to answer. Visit the Justia site to post a question.

For more information, visit: <https://www.justia.com>

Law Clinics: Some law schools operate clinics that serve grandfamilies. Contact local law schools for more information.

Legal Aid: Grandfamily caregivers may be able to receive free legal advice by contacting the Legal Aid organization in their city or state.

For more information, visit: <https://www.lsc.gov/what-legal-aid/find-legal-aid>

National Disability Rights Network (NDRN): NDRN is the nonprofit membership organization for the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy (P&A) Systems and Client Assistance Programs (CAP). There is a P&A/CAP agency in every state and U.S. territory as well as one serving the Native American population in the four corners region. Collectively, the P&A/CAP network is the largest provider of legally based advocacy services to people with disabilities in the United States.

For more information, visit: www.ndrn.org

State Locator: www.ndrn.org/en/ndrn-member-agencies.html

State Bar Associations: Every state has a bar association, which is an organization that can provide information about attorneys and legal resources in the state. Some attorneys provide free services (called pro bono services) for nonprofit organizations or people who cannot afford typical legal fees.

The American Bar Association website lists state bar associations: https://www.americanbar.org/groups/legal_services/flh-home/flh-bar-directories-and-lawyer-finders/

VII. Supportive Services

The Brookdale Foundation Group, Relatives As Parents Program (RAPP): The Brookdale Foundation Group has had a national network

of support groups and services for Relatives As Parents (RAPP) since the 1990s.

For more information, visit:

www.brookdalefoundation.net/RAPP/rapp.html

NEW YORK CITY'S GRANDPARENT RESOURCE CENTER

As part of the Brookdale Foundation Group's RAPP network, the New York City (NYC) Department for the Aging's Grandparent Resource Center (GRC) has for decades been providing supportive services to grandfamily caregivers who are raising grandchildren and other young relatives within the five boroughs of NYC. The GRC offers advocacy and case assistance, as well as making referrals to appropriate community-based organizations. In order to best serve the neediest of kinship caregiver families, the GRC expanded in 2014 to be a part of the Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety (MAP) to build stronger neighborhoods within designated New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) developments. Through this initiative, grandfamily caregivers receive kinship education, trainings, and peer support on how to raise children again in today's urban society.

Among the services provided are two grandparent support groups, both consisting primarily of African American kinship caregivers, which meet in NYCHA housing developments. One is in the Queensbridge Houses, the largest public housing development in the country. The other is in Ingersoll Houses, where approximately 25 African American caregivers get together for bi-weekly support group meetings. These caregivers discuss a variety of things, such as health issues that historically plague African Americans (e.g., hypertension, diabetes, heart disease), and also discuss solutions such as exercise and a good nutrition plan for their families. The caregivers even started a grandparent cookbook with their favorite African American dishes, along with having a "potluck" luncheon where the caregivers all brought their favorite dishes. As food is a big part of African American culture, it is important to find time to instill good healthy cooking principles, but not lose the distinctiveness of African American cuisine.

The support group facilitator is an African American male, Mr. Frank McCrea, with a master's degree in public administration. He knows firsthand the experiences that the participants' children may experience growing up. During the support group sessions, he stresses the importance of teaching children good communication techniques for some of the situations they may experience in their lifetimes. He often brings in specialists (such as the Civil Complaint Review Board) who explain ways African American children can respond to authorities. Mr. McCrea strives "to teach the caregivers how to show their children the importance of assimilating into society, as unfair sometimes as it may be, without losing their sense of African American identity."



Cooperative Extension Services: Extension offices in land-grant universities provide many services to their communities. While most people associate Cooperative Extension with 4-H, it also supports childcare, budgeting, nutrition, gardening, food storage, and youth and grandfamily support.

For more information, visit:
<https://impact.extension.org>

Faith-Based Organizations: Fundamental supports in African American communities are provided by faith-based organizations, churches, and other houses of worship.

To locate black protestant churches, visit: <https://theblackchurches.org>

For an AARP toolkit for African Americans/Faith-Based Initiatives, visit: <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/home-and-family/voices/black-community/faith-based-initiative-tool-kit-2017-aarp.pdf>

Hogg Foundation - African American Faith-Based Education and Awareness: This initiative educates African American faith communities about mental health, wellness, and recovery, and builds on the unique strengths of churches and other faith-based organizations to identify and connect congregants with local behavioral resources for treatment and support. An additional goal is to support faith leaders in addressing their own mental wellness.

For more information, visit: <https://hogg.utexas.edu/initiatives/African-American-faith-based-education-and-awareness>

National Family Caregiver Support Program: The Administration for Community Living (ACL) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services funds state aging departments to provide five categories of supportive services to grandparents and other relatives age 55+ who are raising children, in addition to other family caregivers. These services are provided through Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) or nonprofit organizations with whom they contract.

Services can include:

- information to caregivers about available services
- assistance to caregivers in gaining access to the services
- individual counseling, organization of support groups, and caregiver training to assist the caregivers in the areas of health, nutrition, and financial literacy and in making decisions and solving problems relating to their caregiving roles
- respite care to enable caregivers to be temporarily relieved from their caregiving responsibilities
- supplemental services, on a limited basis, to complement the care provided by caregivers

These categories are written in law to be flexible and respond to the needs of the caregivers in the area being served. The fifth category, supplemental services, is particularly broad and has been used for legal assistance and direct payments.

For more information visit: <https://acl.gov/programs/support-caregivers/national-family-caregiver-support-program>

National Urban League (NUL): The NUL is an American service agency that was founded to eliminate racial segregation and discrimination and to help African Americans and other minorities participate in all phases of American life. As an historic civil rights and urban advocacy organization with 90 affiliates serving 300 communities, it provides direct services nationwide.

For more information, visit: <https://nul.org>

OIC of America-Helping People Help Themselves:

The mission of OIC is to provide quality education and training services through a national network of local affiliates that enable economically disadvantaged and unemployed people of all races and backgrounds.

For more information, visit: www.oicofamerica.org

Respite: Whether it is Lifespan Respite or another program, the National Respite Locator Service

can help locate local services. Many of these respite programs are aimed at providing respite to caregivers of older individuals, but many also serve grandfamilies.

To find a local program, visit: <https://archrespite.org/respitelocator>

Additional Website Resources

www.grandfamilies.org – A comprehensive one-stop national website for publications, materials, and laws impacting grandfamilies both inside and outside the foster care system.

www.grandfactsheets.org – Fact sheets for each state and the District of Columbia containing specific state information related to grandfamilies, including a comprehensive list of resources and services, including kinship navigator programs.

www.gu.org – Generations United’s website containing resources and publications on grandfamilies, including Generations United’s annual State of Grandfamilies reports.

Conclusion

Programs and services for African American grandfamilies are available in many service systems, yet these programs and services often do not tailor their outreach and support to them. Grandfamilies may read “parents” and think that certain supports do not include them. For these reasons, kinship navigators are critical. They help African American grandfamilies “navigate” these many systems. Local knowledge is invaluable and sometimes that knowledge has to be combined with advocacy in order to access available services. This chapter will hopefully help grandfamilies, and the people who serve them, find support.



Photo courtesy
of Bridge Meadows.

Chapter 7

Federal Child Welfare Laws That Prioritize and Support Relative Connections

The question is not whether we can afford to invest in every child; it is whether we can afford not to.

Marian Wright Edelman, African American activist for children's rights

Introduction

There are several federal child welfare laws that specifically impact grandfamilies of all races and ethnicities, including African Americans. They encourage the placement of children with relatives and strive to support them through programs such as kinship navigators and guardianship assistance.

By encouraging children to be placed with kin, these laws support important cultural connections and other positive outcomes for children. Given the

overrepresentation of African American children in foster care, these laws make important strides in keeping African American children with their families. This chapter highlights a few of these laws. Other federal laws and programs impacting families are addressed in chapter 6.

Indian Child Welfare Act

The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) was enacted in 1978 in response to the troubling practices of public and private child welfare agencies. At that time,



TIMELINE

unnecessary removal of large numbers of American Indian and Alaska Native children from their homes was commonplace. This frequently resulted in the placement of these children in non-family, non-Indian homes far from their tribal communities. ICWA is considered the gold standard of child welfare law and puts great emphasis on keeping children connected with their culture. The parallel toolkit for American Indian and Alaska Native grandfamilies contains extensive information about this important law.

ICWA laid the groundwork for the importance of placing children with their families and tribes. About twenty years later, the value of these family connections was explicitly extended to all children in federal law.

Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act

This federal law, enacted in 1996, requires that states, as a prerequisite for receiving funding for child welfare services, “consider giving preference to an adult relative over a non-related caregiver when determining placement for a child, provided that the relative caregiver meets all relevant state child protection standards.”⁶⁵ All states currently mandate either through law or policy and practice that child welfare agencies give preference to fit and willing relative caregivers.

Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act

In October 2008, The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Fostering Connections Act) unanimously became federal law. It further acknowledges the important role grandparents and other relatives play in the lives of children.

Among the many aspects of child welfare that the law affects, there are several key provisions impacting grandfamilies:

- Requires that child welfare agencies identify and notify adult relatives when children enter foster care.

- Gives states, tribes and territories the option to use funds through Federal Title IV-E of the Social Security Act (Title IV-E) to finance guardianship assistance programs (GAP) that enable children in the care of grandparents and other relatives to exit foster care into permanent homes. GAP gives children a permanency option when reunification with their parents and adoption are not possible. It is an option that responds to cultural considerations and possible changes in family dynamics that may not be appropriate or desirable for some kinship families. As of March 2020, 40 states, the District of Columbia, 14 tribes or tribal consortia, and Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands have been approved by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Children’s Bureau to implement GAP.
- Requires child welfare agencies to make reasonable efforts to place siblings together, whether in foster care, kinship guardianship or adoptive placements. Siblings who are placed in the same home as a child eligible for Title IV-E guardianship payments may also receive GAP support even if they are not otherwise eligible.
- Gives child welfare agencies the option to grant variances or waive non-safety related foster family home licensing standards for relatives.

Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act

This 2014 Act makes a number of reforms to child welfare law, including calling for the implementation of a “reasonable and prudent parent” standard that allows caregivers to make daily decisions for children in their care, so children in foster care can have typical growing-up experiences. Thoughtful and culturally appropriate implementation of this standard helps African American children remain better connected to their communities by allowing them to take part in cultural activities, sleep overs, and the like without getting the approval of the child welfare agency.

This law also builds on the Fostering Connections Act, by containing an important provision allowing “successor guardians” to be named in the GAP

agreement. If named, the successor is able to step into the guardian's shoes upon their death and continue to receive the monthly assistance for the care of the child. Unlike the original guardian, the successor does not have to be related to the child or be a licensed foster parent. Until this reform, a child who was receiving Title IV-E guardianship assistance would lose eligibility and revert to the foster care system when their guardian died or was otherwise unable to care for them.

Family First Prevention Services Act

The Family First Prevention Services Act (Family First) became federal law in February 2018. Family First is a landmark child welfare law that aligns with the principle that children do best in families. For the first time, Family First allows federal child welfare funding to be used to **prevent** children from entering foster care by providing evidence-based services and programs to parents, children, and kinship caregivers. The law also provides for ongoing federal reimbursement for evidence-based kinship navigator programs that link caregivers and children to services and support.

The following provisions mention kinship caregivers specifically and are designed to better support them, as well as the children they are raising:

Prevention services and programs: Federal child welfare dollars may now be used for up to 12 months of evidence-based services and programs to prevent children from entering foster care by supporting the triad of generations in grandfamilies - children, kinship caregivers, and parents. The children can get services if they are "candidates" for foster care who are at imminent risk of entering care and can safely remain at home with parents or with kinship caregivers. These services extend to children whose adoption or guardianship is at risk of disruption or dissolution.

Kinship caregivers or parents of the children can also get services if they are needed to prevent the children's entry into care.

Children and families can receive these services more than once if the child is again identified as a candidate for foster care.

The prevention services and programs include:

- Mental health treatment
- Substance use prevention and treatment
- In-home parent skill-based supports

To qualify for reimbursement, the services and programs must be found by a new "Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse" to meet promising, supported or well-supported evidence-based standards. To see which services and programs are currently eligible to receive reimbursement, see <https://preventionservices.abtsites.com/>.

Kinship navigator programs: States, tribes, and territories can receive ongoing federal reimbursement for up to 50 percent of their expenditures to provide kinship navigator programs, which link caregivers to services and supports for themselves and the children they raise. To obtain reimbursement, certain federal criteria must be met, including that the program must meet evidence-based requirements as determined by the Title IV-E Clearinghouse. No kinship navigator program has currently been found by the Clearinghouse to meet these standards. Once included in the Clearinghouse, that program and other jurisdictions following its model, will be able to access this ongoing federal support. This support is considered an entitlement, and is not limited by a dollar cap. Furthermore, this support will be available regardless of whether the children for whom the services are being accessed meet certain income eligibility requirements for Title IV-E foster care funding. See Chapter 6 for more information about these important programs.

Licensing standards for relative foster family home: Building on the 2008 Fostering Connections Law, which allows jurisdictions to grant variances or waive non-safety licensing standards for relatives, this law seeks to break down licensing barriers so that relatives may become fully licensed foster

parents. If fully licensed, the children in their relatives' care can receive ongoing foster care maintenance payments, as all children in non-relative foster care receive. Pursuant to this law, HHS identified National Model Foster Family Home Licensing Standards and "relied heavily" on Model Family Foster Home Standards developed by NARA, Generations United and the American Bar Association. The jurisdictions have reported back to HHS with comparisons of their licensing standards with the National Model and have identified and addressed inconsistencies, in addition to reporting back on their use of federal waiver authority.

Family connections for children in group care:

If children need to go into the legal custody of the child welfare system, the law encourages the placement of children in foster care in the least restrictive, most family-like settings appropriate to their needs by not allowing the use of federal funds for inappropriate group placements. Federal funds may only be used for a few specific types of group placements, including qualified residential treatment programs (QRTPs).

An important component of the appropriate use of QRTPs is the need to maintain family connections. To be considered such a program, the program must facilitate outreach to the child's family members, including siblings and close family friends, and the child's family must be a part of the child's treatment, including family-based support for at least six months post-discharge. As part of the assessment to determine if a QRTP placement is necessary, the placement preferences of the family must be considered, and children must be placed with their siblings unless it is not in their best interest. If the placement preferences of the family are not followed, the reasons must be documented as part of that assessment process.

Other Provisions: This law also reauthorizes the Adoption Incentives Program; allows states the option to receive federal support for foster youth up to age 21; promotes educational stability for children and youth in foster care, guardianship and adoption; requires health care coordination for children and youth in foster care; and extends federal support for training of professionals and caregivers working with children in the child welfare system.

RESOURCES ON THE INDIAN CHILD WELFARE ACT

- **ICWA Online Training** – The National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) provides an online training course that provides basic information on the requirements of ICWA and tips on how to implement the requirements in practice. The ICWA Online Training is designed for social workers, attorneys, family members, and students. The training uses non-legal language to make the training more accessible and is designed so participants can go at their own pace. Simulated case examples are used to provide real-life examples of how ICWA may be applied. You can find more information about the training at <https://www.nicwa.org/online-icwa-course/>.
- NICWA also offers other types of training, such as *Cross Cultural Skills in Indian Child Welfare and Positive Indian Parenting*. You can find a description of many of these trainings at <https://www.nicwa.org/training-institutes/> and how to request or participate in a training.
- **NICWA Publications** — NICWA's website at www.nicwa.org contains publications geared toward child welfare and family members. Examples of publications are (1) *How to Find Free and Low Cost Legal Services*, (2) *The Indian Child Welfare Act: A Family's Guide*, (3) *Frequently Asked Questions*, (4) *List of Designated Tribal ICWA Agents* (contacts for tribal



child welfare programs), (5) *A Family's Guide to the Child Welfare System*, and (6) *Tracing Native Ancestry: A Guide to Responding to Inquiries*. NICWA publications also include policy and practice issues in child welfare.



RESOURCES ON THE FOSTERING CONNECTIONS ACT

- **Detailed Summary of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption Act AND Short Summary of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption Act**, in addition to other resources. www.grandfamilies.org/Resources/Federal-Laws/Fostering-Connections

RESOURCES ON THE STRENGTHENING FAMILIES ACT

- **Implementing the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act to Benefit Children and Youth**, in addition to other resources. www.grandfamilies.org/Resources/Federal-Laws/Strengthening-Families

RESOURCES ON THE FAMILY FIRST ACT

- **The Family First Messaging Toolkit** by the Annie E. Casey Foundation is designed to help child welfare leaders and advocates talk about how the Family First Act can improve outcomes for children and families. The toolkit offers talking points on the benefits of the law and tips for media interviews. <https://familyfirstact.org/resources/communication-toolkit>
- **Implementing the Family First Prevention Services Act — Technical Guide** by the Children's Defense Fund in partnership with the American Academy of Pediatrics, ChildFocus, FosterClub, Generations United, Juvenile Law Center, and NICWA is a question-and-answer-style resource containing commonly asked questions about the many important provisions in the law. www.childrensdefense.org/policy/policy-priorities/child-welfare/family-first/implementing-the-family-first-prevention-services-act/
- **New Opportunities for Kinship Families: Action Steps to Implement the Family First Prevention Services Act in our Community & Leveraging the Family First Prevention Services Act to Improve Use of Title IV-E GAP** are two publications addressing the Family First Act, developed by the ABA Center on Children and the Law, Children's Defense Fund, and Generations United, with support from Casey Family Programs. www.grandfamilies.org/Publications
- **Model Family Foster Home Licensing Standards** – Resources concerning the licensing of relatives as foster parents, including links to the NARA and National Model Family Foster Home Licensing Standards. www.grandfamilies.org/Resources/Foster-Care-Licensing
- **Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse** contains a list of prevention services and programs and kinship navigator programs that has been reviewed for inclusion, along with its rating of promising, supported, well-supported or currently does not meet criteria for evidence-based standards. <https://preventionservices.abtsites.com/>
- Additional resources on the Family First Act available at www.grandfamilies.org/Resources/Federal-Laws/Family-First

Chapter 8

Advocacy

Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.

President Barack Obama, 44th President of the United States; raised by maternal grandparents

Introduction

Advocacy means supporting a cause or issue to bring about change and help others. You are an advocate when you support a cause or speak in favor of an issue. Anyone can be an advocate. You do not have to be an expert. Your personal experience is invaluable. It may be your experience as a member of kinship family and/or your experience as a professional serving kinship families. The challenge is how to get your issues heard.

For advocacy to be effective, it is important to learn how to identify issues of concern and issues that can prevent your advocacy efforts from being successful. Change is more likely to occur if needs are expressed in a clear way to the people or organizations that make decisions. Later, after issues of concern have been identified and communicated, you will need to engage in a process to identify potential solutions.

Efforts to improve the quality of life for African Americans are as old as the United States, from abolitionists seeking to end slavery to now. Advocacy and activism within, about, and for the African American community has a rich cultural history. Most notable is the American Civil Rights

Movement (1946-1968) involving a diversity of approaches including lawsuits, public information/ education campaigns, lobbying of the federal government, and mass direct action. These strategies resulted in substantial local and national changes and policies that have improved equal rights for African Americans. A current example of such advocacy is the *Black Lives Matter* movement to end racial profiling and violence upon the African American community from the criminal justice and other systems.

In advocacy efforts to support grandfamilies, it makes sense to apply the principles of these past and current advocacy movements along with best practices of researched advocacy models. Indeed, the past and present change movements emphasize to African American grandfamilies that positive government and community change can be promoted through their own hands.

The why, what, who, where, when, and how of advocacy:

In advocacy, it is important to know:

- Why your voice matters
- What you want to achieve or change

- Who you need to educate or ask for support
- Where to get helpful information and resources to make your case
- When and how to advocate

Why does your voice matter?

- Your experiences are valuable and can be used to improve things! No one knows as much about your lived and/or professional experience.
- You know when something is or is not working. If you do not tell people who have the authority to make decisions about a situation that you are unhappy with, they will assume everything is all right or possibly make changes that do not address your concerns or may make things worse.
- You have ideas on how to make things better! By speaking out, you may find that you are not alone.

What do you want to achieve or change?

Advocacy is aimed at bringing change. Advocacy challenges service systems and the broader community to respond genuinely to meet the needs of people.

Advocacy and promoting the needs of your community can:

- Open doors to participation
- Right the wrongs of the past and present
- Change the balance of power
- Address injustice
- Improve services
- Alter attitudes and values⁶⁶

Question: What do I/we want to achieve/change for African American grandfamilies?

Who do you want to educate or ask for support?

Who to educate is determined by first discovering how aware the public in your community is about grandfamilies. Right now, there are probably only a few people in your community who know the challenges that grandfamilies face and how to do something about it. Public awareness is creating

an environment for educating the members of your community about the needs of grandfamilies. Once people are aware of the challenges and want to address them, they can work together to make reform.

Key audiences:

- Advocates determine who needs to become aware
- People who can bring change are leaders
- Leaders can be informal, formal, appointed, or inherited
- Specific key leaders who may need to become aware include:
 - » Media
 - » Federal lawmakers
 - » State and local legislators
 - » Judges/court systems
 - » Federal, state, and local government agencies and their leaders - e.g., aging services, child welfare, education, health care, housing, and income support
 - » Community-based organizations and leaders
 - » Faith-based organizations and leaders
 - » Universities and others in the research community
 - » Foundations and other funding sources
 - » Additional influencers- consider who are other major voices in your community? Law enforcement? The business community?

In order to communicate your message to key audiences, your first step must be to build trusted relationships with that audience. When the audience is new, how do you go about building those relationships?

How to enter the African American community for information and to provide assistance: In order to work effectively in the African American community, an advocate must first understand how and if that particular neighborhood is organized to support grandfamilies. All African American communities are not organized the same way. Each neighborhood often has its own network of relationships and hierarchy of leaders that they tap

into for support. Often, these are informal networks or leaders who are not housed in a physical location or building with a sign, label or a title. It may just be the block captain, the local community organizer or other non-agency influential person. There are often unspoken leaders and groups whom many neighborhood members listen and turn to for advice, guidance, and sanction for proposed advocacy interventions. It is essential for an advocate to understand the social organization of the targeted groups in order to identify the bridge leaders for connections. As in the Civil Rights Movement, the focal point for social, economic, and political African American organization and advocacy is often centered around the church or other religious institution. Consequently, it is important for advocates to identify, connect, and run advocacy ideas through the recognized African American community leaders and institutions.

Building relationships:

- Work your existing connections to be introduced to new audiences.
- Present yourself as a resource to that new audience.
- Be responsive and helpful. If you do not have what you need on hand, never guess or invent. Those actions will lose your credibility. It is much better to follow-up later with the correct piece of information.
- Affirm the positive and emphasize points of commonality.
- Confront and manage conflicting opinions.
- Use honey, rather than vinegar, in conveying your points.
- Manage unresponsive relationships through persistence and strategic approaches, which can include leveraging media attention.

Media: The most important audience for any advocacy work is undoubtedly the media. Public policy reform takes getting broad attention from the communities most affected and stories that stir policymakers and decisionmakers.

Media relations can be described as interactions with editors, reporters, and journalists, and is a strategy that many organizations and people use to advance their cause.

Making a Pitch and Responding to Reporters:

- When you make a pitch for a story, do it by email and then follow up with a phone call. Include why the story is timely and relevant. Try to make a connection to other current events – e.g., the opioid epidemic, the COVID-19 crisis.
- When a reporter calls you, interview them:
 - » Find out their purpose and deadline
 - » Ask to take 30 minutes to gather information and call them back
 - » Get the correct spelling of their name, phone number, and media organization they represent
 - » Call the reporter back—honor your commitment
 - » Try to have all information on hand
 - » Ensure you follow-up as promised

Being a Resource to the Media:

- Introduce yourself to target media
- Develop a sense of the kind of stories that interest your contacts
- Make yourself readily available and follow-up promptly
- Be dependable
- Share helpful resources
- Contact the reporter and/or submit a letter to the editor to correct stereotypes or misinformation

How Social Media Can Elevate your Profile for Traditional Media:

- Most reporters are now required to be on social media for work
- You can use social media, especially platforms like Twitter and LinkedIn, to highlight the work you are doing and connect with other people
- You can find reporters' Twitter profiles linked in many articles and retweet, like, or tweet at them.
- Often reporters and editors will have the direct messages open to everyone or their emails in their bios to easily connect with them

Once positive media stories are in your community, advocacy for policy or programmatic reform is much easier. The key audiences will be aware and open to hearing your advocacy.

Federal, State and Local Policymakers: Like working with the media, many of the same principles apply to federal, state, and local policymakers. These leaders and their staff are often on tight deadlines, and one of the most effective things you can do is be seen as a helpful resource to them. Be readily available and follow-up promptly. Many federal and state staff to policymakers have “go to” local program leaders, caregivers, and families whom they rely on for direct, practical feedback. Become one of those experts. They need to hear from the people who live these experiences and work directly with African American grandfamilies. You do not need to ask policymakers for specific public policy or program changes, rather you can let them know what works and does not work in the communities they represent.

When approaching a U.S. Representative or Senator’s office, remember that they each have local offices nearer to where you live or work. You do not have to directly approach the Washington, D.C. office if you do not want to, as staff in the local offices will share your stories, strengths, and challenges with their “boss.” You can reach out to the local or DC office in the way you feel most comfortable – phone call, email or in-person. If you set up a meeting, do not feel short changed if the Member of Congress does not meet directly with you as they rely heavily on their staff. Be prepared for your meeting with short talking points you want to address and leave them with a way to contact you, along with any written information you wish to share. Do not hesitate to reach out to the Member of Congress’ “scheduler” to invite the Member to an

important community event where many caregivers will be present and can share their stories. Policymakers love these stories and rely heavily on them when advocating for reform.

Your governor, large city mayor, relevant federal and state child welfare, aging, education, health, housing, and income support leaders operate in much the same way as federal policymakers. However, other state and local policymakers, including state legislators and mayors, city and county council members representing smaller cities and rural areas, often have few, if any, staff. Do not let that stop you from approaching these policymakers in a way that is comfortable to you.

Contact information for many federal, state, and local leaders can be found in the resource section of this chapter.

Where do you go to get helpful information and resources to make your case?

Knowing where to get information to share with key audiences to make advocacy points is critical. We hope this toolkit and its resources provide you with those sources of information. Remember that you are an expert either as a professional serving the families and/or as a member of a kinship family.

One of the most important resources is lived experience. If you do not have that experience yourself, you have ready access to it. Grandfamilies themselves are vitally important to making reform. Knowing specific law or putting forth detailed policy change is not as important as understanding the community’s needs, strengths, and ideas of what will help. Sharing personal stories from grandfamilies will move the dial of reform.

Photo courtesy of
Children’s Defense Fund.





SHARING YOUR PERSONAL STORY

While this chapter of the toolkit also generally applies to grandfamily-members who act as advocates, the following is exclusively tailored to grandfamily-members who share their own personal lived experiences as part of their powerful advocacy.

Sharing your life experience and your strengths and challenges is the single most effective way to make change. Policymakers want to hear directly from you, the grandfamily members. Your stories are the ones they repeat to the media and other policymakers when trying to achieve reform. So, how do you do this effectively and safely?

When sharing your story to make public policy or program reform, you must do it strategically. “Strategic Sharing” is a concept on which Casey Family Programs has written and trained. It essentially means making strategic choices about how to tell your life stories so that your voices can be heard, your message is effective, and your well-being is protected. Although focused on those who have had involvement with the child welfare system, the principles of “strategic sharing” are equally applicable to those children and families outside the system.

As a family member who is about to engage in advocacy work, you should first consider a few questions and then develop rough talking points about what you want to cover:

- What is the purpose of sharing your personal story?
- What do you want the audience to take away?
- Which parts of your story do you not want to share? Protect yourself from what may harm you emotionally.

This last point is very important. You do not have to share everything. Prepare yourself for how to answer questions that you do not want to answer. The most difficult kind of public speaking is the kind you are about to embark on. Sharing your story takes courage, strength, and preparation. Remember your objective - *“I am doing this because I want to help others like me.”*

All advocates—whether a grandfamily-caregiver, an adult raised by a grandfamily-caregiver, a youth in a grandfamily-member’s care or a birth parent – should consider that your story is also the story of other members of your family. Be mindful of how much you share about other family members and, if possible, ask their permission and feedback on what you plan to share.

For caregivers and parents speaking about children, remember that the information you may be sharing about the children you are raising could follow them. If developmentally appropriate, discuss it with them beforehand to make sure it is alright with them.



In very general terms, when sharing your story, you will want to discuss:

- The very basics of why you are raising your grandchildren or other kin children; why you were raised in relative care; and/or why you were not able to raise your own children
- How the situation impacted you and your family
- Challenges you have faced
- Services or programs that helped
- Services or programs that would have helped
- How the family is doing now

You do not need to ask for specific public policy or program changes, rather you should let your audience know what would have helped so they can develop solutions with your input. You are not expected to be a public policy expert, you are an expert in your family. That expertise is truly yours and yours alone. It is invaluable.

SOCIAL MEDIA, STORYTELLING, AND LIVED EXPERIENCE

A specific way to engage African American youth is through social media. Social media is a useful tool in youth engagement in advocacy for grandfamilies. While there are unique considerations regarding youth privacy—not to mention trying to keep pace with new platforms—grandfamily advocates can harness the instant nature of communicating through social media to keep youth and families informed and engaged.

While not synonymous with social marketing, encouraging youth social media can help with social marketing efforts. Further, having youth develop their own video content or tweets about their stories and lived experience in grandfamilies can lessen the stigma associated with relative placements. Ownership of storytelling also signals that youth are not merely tokens in advocacy but truly valued to signal what is needed in their own care. This emphasis on valuing lived experience is essential to connecting with youth.

The type of social media platforms you use and how they are used should reflect community values and be accessible to the greatest number of youth and families. Pay attention to agency policies regarding the use of social media for youth in out of home care and be willing to accommodate different types of users and platforms. Social media is powerful and persuasive so be careful about how you message. Do not be afraid to ask questions about the strategies being used in social media to advance your advocacy.



When and how do you advocate?

Advocates start by asking a few important questions:

- What are the barriers and benefits to your audience thinking, feeling or acting on your issue?
- What changes in attitude and behavior do you want to motivate in your audience to meet your goal?
- Based on what you know about what your audience needs to hear to think, feel or act, what are the three most compelling sentences you could use to motivate the audience? (These are your messages or talking points.)

An advocate has vision to see beyond the problem and can give this vision away to others so they can eventually take ownership and responsibility for pursuing change. Creating a feeling of ownership with allies will make or break a grassroots advocacy effort.

Successful advocates must:

- Respect the community and its traditions
- Respect African American history and culture
- Know the struggle of grandfamilies and translate that for others
- Not blame, shame, or negatively criticize the community
- Be able to enlist the help of others

Successful advocates should:

- Create an atmosphere of mutual learning
- Have patience
- Be good listeners

- Carry the vision for a better future
- Identify mutual values:
 - » Develop an outline of the issues you are seeking to change—create the vision
 - » Add key supporters
 - » Identify and network with community resources (programs, people, funders, etc.)
 - » Define the challenges of grandfamilies and how to decrease them
- Determine objectives:
 - » Plan
 - » Identify what success is and evaluate results
 - » Refocus on new goals when ready
- Count on change:
 - » Be flexible—it will take time
 - » Take care of self
 - » Work to build longevity
 - » Regroup as needed
 - » Praise allies who help and celebrate success
- Follow-through:
 - » Leave a legacy for others to learn from
 - » Recognize the efforts of all
 - » Know that there will be new advocates and new challenges
 - » Acknowledge that grassroots advocacy is from the people - let the people decide how to use what was learned

By considering and implementing the five advocacy steps in this chapter, and effectively and thoughtfully leveraging the powerful stories of grandfamilies themselves, you will make change. It may take time, but it will eventually happen.



Boulder Advocacy, a program of the Alliance for Justice. This organization provides nonprofits with the knowledge they need to become confident advocates. They offer webinars, trainings, resources and one-on-one technical assistance to nonprofit organizations. <https://bolderadvocacy.org/> or 1-866-NP-LOBBY.

Examples of Child Welfare and Aging Advocacy Toolkits:

- **North American Council on Adoptable Children.** [Adoption Assistance Advocacy Toolkit](#)
This resource outlines a plan of action to advocate for adoption subsidies. It provides guidelines for talking to legislators in person, over the phone, and through the mail as well as holding events and building coalitions. The toolkit is divided into sections on *Responding to a Proposed Cut* and *Planning for the Future* so advocacy efforts can be short- and long-term. It includes factual talking points, as well as emotional testimonies from families that show the personal impact of receiving help. <https://www.nacac.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/advocacytoolkit.pdf>
- **Kentucky Youth Advocates.** [Family First Act Communications and Advocacy Toolkit](#)
This toolkit provides an overview of the Family First Act, describes how it will affect each specific community, and provides tips for communicating its purpose and impact to others. Specific sections show how to tailor messaging to different audiences such as legislators and child welfare agencies and how to highlight Family First's connections to the opioid crisis and kinship care. It has sample social media posts and hashtags that can be customized for different stakeholders to use. <https://kyyouth.org/family-first/>
- **Foster Coalition.** [Be a Foster Care Social Advocate](#)
While this is not a full advocacy toolkit, it is a detailed list of ready-to-use social media posts that advocates can share. Most posts include links to other resources with statistics and testimonies. <http://www.fostercoalition.com/be-a-social-advocate-for-foster-care>
- **National Council on Aging.** [Advocacy Toolkit: Recess 2020](#)
One of NCOA's many toolkits, this resource provides guidance on effectively contacting legislators during House and Senate recesses. It includes a list of 5 ways to connect with lawmakers with links to guides on hosting site visits or attending town halls. The toolkit outlines talking points on key pieces of legislation and a sample thank you letter to send after a visit. <https://www.ncoa.org/public-policy-action/advocacy-toolkit/toolkits-by-topic/advocacy-toolkit-recess-2020/>

Find your Governor. The National Governors Association has contact information for each governor. www.nga.org/governors/addresses/

Find your Mayor. The U.S. Conference on Mayors has contact information for many mayors around the country. www.usmayors.org/mayors/

Find your State Legislator. The Library of Congress has a clickable map with links to each state legislature's website. On those sites, you should be able to locate contact information for your legislator. www.congress.gov/state-legislature-websites



Find your U.S. Representative and U.S. Senators. To find a U.S. Representative who represents where you live or the location of the program where you work, type your zip code into the box on this website www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative. It will give you the contact information you need. The same information is available for the two Senators representing your state at www.senate.gov/general/contact-information/senators_cfm.cfm

Generations United's GRAND Voices network.

This national network of kinship caregiver advocates raise their voices in support of all grandfamilies around the country. The network is supported by Casey Family Programs and the [W.K. Kellogg Foundation](#). The W.K. Kellogg Foundation invested funds specifically to elevate and strengthen the voices of African American and American Indian and Alaska Native Grandfamilies as part of the network. Generations United is working on this initiative in partnership with the [National Indian Child Welfare Association \(NICWA\)](#) and [A Second Chance, Inc. \(ASCI\)](#). GRAND Voices has 70 current members in 44 states, the District of Columbia and 11 tribes. To see the members, visit www.gu.org/explore-our-topics/grandfamilies/grand-network/.

"That's why I'm so eager to use the GRAND Voices platform. I want to tell other African American caregivers don't be ashamed to ask for the help that they need, or fear losing their grandchildren to the system because they are struggling."

**Ms. Christine Benslimen,
Pennsylvania GRAND Voice**

Hands-on Social Marketing: A Step-by-Step Guide by Nedra Kline Weinreich, Sage Publications. <https://sk.sagepub.com/books/hands-on-social-marketing-2e>

National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is a nonprofit membership organization with more than a half-million members and supporters. They advocate for civil rights, leading grassroots campaigns for equal opportunity and conducting voter mobilization. The NAACP has many advocacy resources available at <https://www.naacp.org/federal-advocacy-resources/>, including two-page political activity guides for churches and nonprofits and a "tools book" for federal advocacy. <https://live-naacp-site.pantheonsite.io/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Tools-book.pdf>

National Association of Blacks In Criminal Justice (NABCIJ) is a nonprofit membership organization that is dedicated to improving the administration of criminal justice, with a goal of achieving equal justice for blacks and other minorities, see www.nabcj.org. The NABCIJ also offers prestigious scholarships to high school seniors, see <https://nabcj.org/thurgood-marshall-scholarship>.

Promoting Health in Multicultural Populations: A Handbook for Practitioners by Robert M. Huff and Michael V. Kline, Sage Publications. <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/health-promotion-in-multicultural-populations/book237727>

Strategic Sharing guide by Casey Family programs and Foster Care Alumni of America. http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/download/StrategicSharing.pdf

Recommendations

The recommendations in this section are intended as suggestions for reforms that will support African American grandfamilies.

The recommendations fall into three categories:

- Practices that agencies and organizations can implement immediately
- Policies and practices that African American grandfamilies and advocates who work with them can encourage policymakers to implement
- Data collection recommendations for agencies and advocates

Some of these recommendations may not fit the needs of your community. Always let your own community needs, as informed by the grandfamilies themselves, guide any effective advocacy and reform work.

Generations United and its national partners will also pursue these recommendations as they aim to support a broad array of African American grandfamilies throughout the country.

Practice Recommendations for Child Welfare and Other Service Providers:

- **Authentically engage African American kinship caregivers, birth parents, and young people** in the design and implementation of services that impact them. This includes hiring and training them to provide services and supports to peers.
- **Ensure that services are based in cultural beliefs, teachings, customs, and traditions and are aligned with trauma-informed care** for all African American family members in the kinship triad of parent, caregiver, and child.
- **Conduct an interagency, community-wide assessment using data as recommended below to identify racial disparities in serving all families, including grandfamilies.** As part of the assessment, consult with the African American community to consider and address

the practices and policies that could contribute to the racial disparities.

- **Create and implement an interagency, community-wide plan with the help of the African American community to address racial disparities and their causes as identified in the assessment.**
- **Provide training and tools for staff to identify and address their own implicit and explicit racial biases.** Work with African Americans to provide this training and tools.
- **Use proven tools to provide training and direction to child welfare workers so they can better serve African American grandfamilies.** When child welfare caseworkers make referrals to other providers, they should ensure the providers have a full understanding of the client's cultural background, especially how culture affects beliefs about health, parenting, and behavior. The providers should be able to use strategies found to be effective with African American grandfamilies like those developed by Dr. Joseph Crumbley and noted in chapter 3.
- **Expand access and availability of child welfare services within African American communities.** Research shows that many African American birth parents do not have access to services and supports in their communities.⁶⁷ To help expand the access and availability of services within a particular community, agencies can determine how they can increase availability and usage, such as offering different locations, collaborating with community and faith-based organizations, expanding service hours, and addressing obstacles to attendance such as child care and transportation.
- **Develop lists of culturally competent African American therapists, counselors, and other service providers** so agencies and organizations can readily refer families to peer providers.

- **Use the Usborne Scale to measure children's sense of cultural identity.**⁶⁸ This tool can be used by child welfare agencies and other organizations serving the children in African American grandfamilies. In one study, former foster youth averaged a score 4.5 points lower than non-former foster youth. The Scale explores the relationship between cultural identity and both self-esteem and well-being, which are consistently mediated by self-concept clarity.
- **Implement fully the reasonable and prudent parent standard** established by the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 and raise cultural identity as part of that standard during court and case planning.
- **Organize support groups for caregivers in African American communities** and ensure that they are led by peers who have first-hand experience with the caregivers' strengths and challenges.
- **Establish robust kinship navigator programs** that link African American caregivers and the children they raise whether inside or outside the foster care system with much-needed culturally appropriate services. Federal funding now exists for these kinship navigator programs, but many states are struggling to develop programs that meet the criteria for ongoing funding.
- **Provide prevention services and post-permanency supports to African American grandfamilies** by leveraging Title IV-E federal funding available through the Family First Act.
- **Do not deny prevention services to grandfamilies** simply because the appropriate services they need are not currently eligible under the Title IV-E program. Also, **do not require kinship caregivers, birth parents, and children to accept services that are not culturally appropriate**, especially if they have concerns that the prevention services being offered will either be ineffective or possibly harmful.
- **License more relatives as foster parents** by addressing barriers in state licensing standards;

providing tailored training to grandfamilies; using federal authority to grant variances and waive non-safety related licensing standards for relatives; and providing needed items such as beds or fire extinguishers.

- **Use inclusive language and images in outreach materials.** Do not limit materials to "parents" when other caregivers are included too. Use images of African American grandfamilies in the materials and reach out through trusted community-based and faith-based organizations.

Policy and Practice Recommendations for Advocates:

- **Hold the child welfare agency accountable to implement the practice recommendations above.**
- **Work to ensure that the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse includes a kinship navigator model** that serves all grandfamilies regardless of child welfare involvement.
- **Advocate that evaluations for prevention services, post-permanency supports, and kinship navigator programs consider African American culture and needs.**
- **Encourage the Title IV-E Clearinghouse to take these cultural considerations into account** when reviewing services and supports and determining whether they meet evidence-based standards.
- **Educate the ten states that have not yet taken the federal option to offer a Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP)** about the many benefits of doing so, including its importance as a permanency path for African American children for whom adoption and reunification with their parents are not options. As of May 2020, the ten states without GAP are Arizona, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Ohio, Mississippi, North Dakota, South Carolina, Utah, and Wyoming.
- **Advocate to improve access to Temporary Assistance for Needy Family (TANF) child-only grants and to increase their dollar amounts** so grandfamily caregivers can meet the needs

of the children they did not plan or expect to raise. Access may be improved through simplified TANF child-only application forms; more community outreach and education; and use of the good cause exemption allowing caregivers not to assign child support collection to the state.

- **Work to enact right to culture legislation for children in foster care in each state.** There are only four states - California, Colorado, Hawaii, and Pennsylvania - providing a right to cultural heritage activities for children in foster care.⁶⁹ As explored in chapter 4, cultural identity for children has many benefits, including mental health resiliency, higher levels of social well-being, and improved coping skills.
- **If the state has codified a child in foster care's right to their cultural identity and heritage, use it as a tool to ensure accountability in case plans.**
- **Advocate for protection against discrimination based on hairstyles and hair texture** by enacting the CROWN Act. The CROWN Act is already law in California, New York, and New Jersey, and has been introduced for consideration in more than 20 state legislatures. See www.thecrownact.com/

Data Collection Recommendations for Agencies and Advocates:

- **Collect more data on grandfamilies who are not involved with the child welfare system,** including their race data, to inform services and supports. Currently, only limited data exist. The U.S. Census Bureau collects data on grandparents who self-identify as responsible for grandchildren. Similar data are available for the grandchildren of grandparents who are responsible for them. Both data sets include broad racial and ethnic breakdown, but do not include racial and ethnic breakdown within categories such as poverty and disability. This information is critical to informing services and supports and identifying racial disparities. Absolutely no racial or demographic data are publicly available for other relatives, such as aunts or uncles, or the children they raise.
- **Collect additional data on children in foster care with relatives and determine the following for each category:**
 - » **Children who are diverted from the child welfare system -** many state child welfare agencies are removing children from homes, finding relatives or kin, and then diverting those children with little or no supports. No federal data are collected from states on these children. Agencies “divert,” despite the fact that they have placement and care responsibility. We need to capture these large numbers of diverted children to better understand this population, and whether they eventually enter foster care. Disparities will likely emerge when we identify the race of these children who are not supported by the system.
 - » **Children who exit foster care to guardianship or adoption -** AFCARS data exist on the percentage of children exiting foster care who achieve these permanency goals, but not on their race. Information on race will inform policy and program responses to possible disparities.
 - » **Children who are reunified with their parents -** AFCARS data are reported for this category, but it is not reported by race. Again, information on race will inform policy and program responses to possible disparities.
 - » **Children who are in the legal custody of the child welfare system with unlicensed kin and receive no foster care maintenance payments -** AFCARS does not report how many children are with unlicensed kin or their race. Disparities will likely emerge when we identify the race of these children who are not supported by the system.
- **Analyze the racial data of grandfamilies both inside and outside the foster care system to inform the assessment and plan noted above to address racial disparities.**

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For over twenty years, **Generations United's National Center on Grandfamilies** has been a leading voice for families headed by grandparents, other relatives and close family friends. Through the Center, Generations United leads an advisory group of organizations, caregivers and youth that sets the national agenda to advance public will in support of these families. Center staff conduct federal advocacy, provide technical assistance to state-level practitioners and advocates, and train grandfamilies to advocate for themselves. The Center raises awareness about the strengths and needs of the families through media outreach, weekly communications and awareness-raising events. It offers a broad range of guides, fact sheets and tools for grandfamilies, which cover issues from educational and health care access to financial and legal supports and can be found at www.gu.org and www.grandfamilies.org.



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