




Supporting Kinship Caregivers

Why relatives are a preferred placement option and how you can support them as a child advocate



“Kinship caregivers play a critical role in helping traumatized children to heal. By maintaining ties to family, community, and culture, children are spared additional losses. Being sheltered in the loving arms of a familiar adult is an invaluable first step on the road to healing.”

-Dr. Sarah Springer, Chair, American Academy of Pediatrics, Council on Foster Care, Adoption and Kinship Care

Training Goals and Objectives

Goal: Learn how to help reduce the barriers to kinship families receiving monthly financial support so that children can thrive in their care.

- Understand strengths and benefits of kinship care
- Understand the unique needs and challenges facing relative caregivers
- Lift the veil on the approval and licensing process and discuss barriers for relatives to becoming licensed
- Examine non-safety exemptions and licensing waivers to increase licensing eligibility for kin
- Build empathy for relatives navigating the child welfare system

CAREGIVER PERSPECTIVES

Grandma Jean

- Previously raised grandkids without state involvement
- Feels insulted to have to jump through hoops to care for her grandbaby
- Trying to balance employment, childcare, and appointments

Great-Uncle Jared

- Poor communication from DCYF on length of time-commitment
- Long delay in learning about resources
- DCYF perceives hesitancy from caregivers
- Housing setup is considered inadequate for licensing



Research shows that children removed from their parents fare better when placed with extended family over nonrelated foster parents.

Corrosive Myths About Families

Myth: “The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.”

Reality: Kin provide unique protective factors to children.

Myth: “It’s their moral responsibility.”

Reality: Love and morals don’t pay the bills.

Myth: “Kinship care is not as stable.”

Reality: Children experience fewer placement changes and are less likely to re-enter foster care.

Children Thrive in Kinship Care

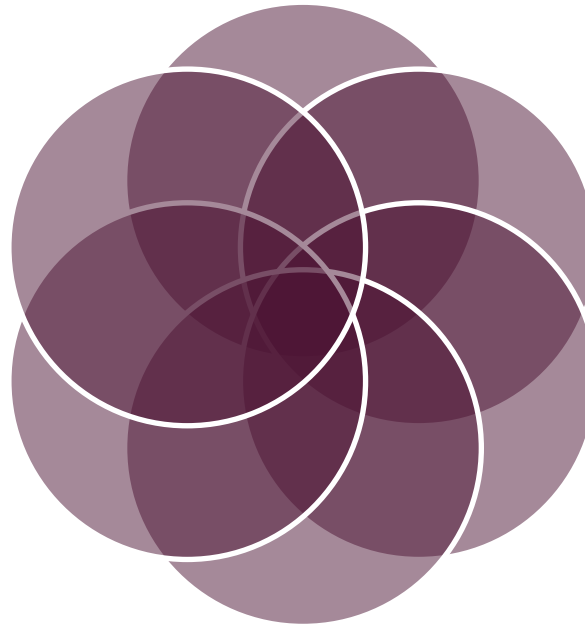
Cultural Identity &
Community Connections

Permanency

Placement
Stability

Safety

Connection
to Siblings



Well-Being

Kinship Care is More Prevalent Than You Think

Nationally, 1 in 11 children live in kinship care at some point in their life



44,000 Washington children lived a grandparent in 2020.
75,000 lived with neither parent

For every child in kinship foster care, there are 20 being raised outside the child welfare system



Who are Kinship Families?

- More likely to be lower income, single, older, and less employed than families in which at least one parent is present.
- 60% + of children in kinship care live below 200% of federal poverty line.

200% Poverty Threshold in 2022

\$27,180-one person

\$55,550-family of four

Poor ≠ Unsafe

It's Hard for Grandfamilies to Get Help

- Circumstances of child's removal creates unique challenges
- System is complicated & time consuming
- Supports to navigate the systems are often out of reach

Supporting them Helps Children Thrive More

- Research shows when kinship families are offered support for learning about available financial and health services, the social and mental health outcomes for children are even better.
- Greater likelihood of parental connection to a child in a relative home, but relatives need help with boundaries, understanding trauma, and managing their own emotional and physical health.

Percentage of Washington children under the supervision of
DCYF in kinship placements

54%

Percentage of kinship families that are licensed?

12%

Comparison of Monthly Stipends

Non-Needy TANF

\$417/ month
+ roughly \$111 per additional child

Household of 3 children =
\$654/ month

Foster Care Reimbursement

\$672-\$810/ month per child at a minimum

Household of 3 children =
\$2,106/month

Lorraine's Story



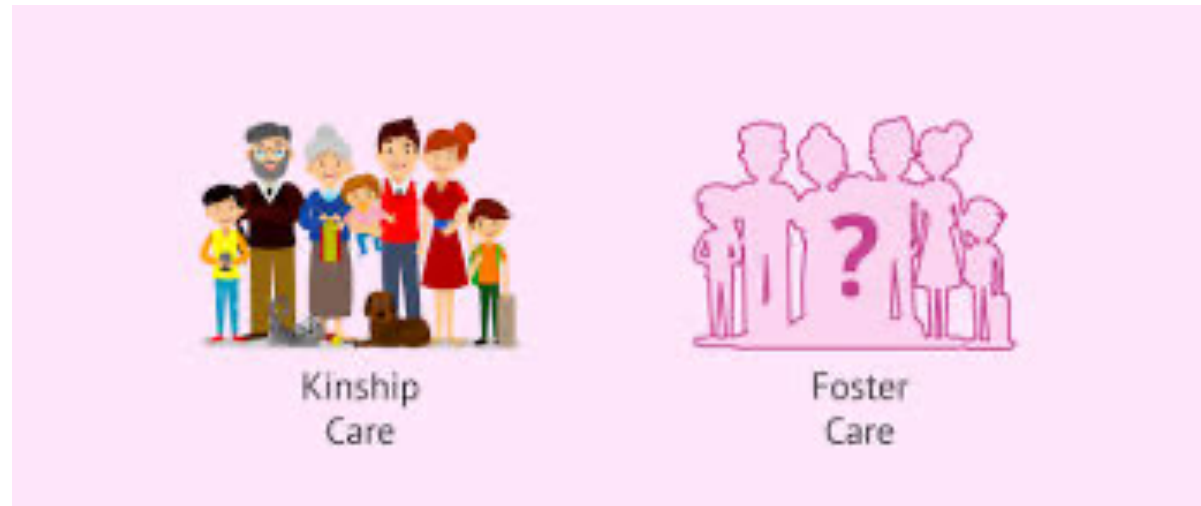


“Children are best cared for by a person they have a relationship with, when the caregiver is assessed as safe and suitable.”

DCYF Policy 45274

Why Prioritize Kinship Families for Placement?

- Unique benefits to children and families
- Reflects our current values
- Federal law
- State policy



HISTORICAL PRACTICE OF SEPARATING FAMILIES UNDER THE GUISE OF CHILD WELFARE

Orphan Trains
1854-1929

Native American
Boarding Schools
1860-1960

Indian Adoption
Project
1958-1967

By 1926, 83% of
school-aged Indian
children were in
boarding schools

Between 1941-1967,
one-third of all Indian
children were
separated from their
families

Overrepresentation of American Indian/Native Alaskan Children in Foster Care

American Indian and Native Alaskan Children

- AI/NA children make up 0.9% of children in the United States but are 2.1% of all children placed into foster care
- Overrepresentation 2.7x greater than their proportion to the population

Caucasian/White Children

- Caucasian/White Children make up 52% of children in the United States and are only 42% of all children placed into foster care.
- Underrepresentation 0.8x lower than their proportion to the population

Placement Priorities for American Indian/Native Alaskan children

Only

17% OF AMERICAN INDIAN CHILDREN IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE LIVE WITH AMERICAN INDIAN CAREGIVERS

Time frame: approximately 18 months after a CPS investigation





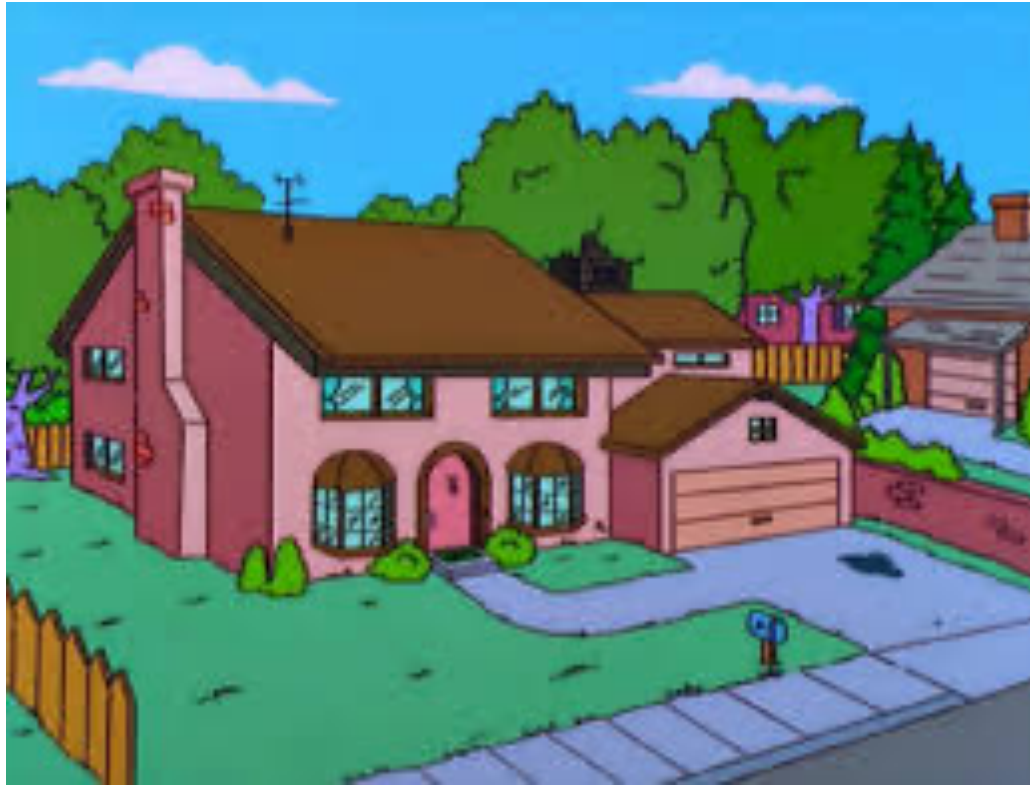
Special Considerations for Kinship Caregivers



Traditional Foster Families	Kinship Families
Decision to become caregiver is planned	Decision is unplanned and in crisis
Preparation for caregiving occurs in advance	Limited preparation for caregiving
Requirements for approval are anticipated	Unanticipated requirements to become licensed or adopt
Limited knowledge of family dynamics	Knowledge of family dynamics
Celebration of a new family	Mixed feelings about loss of parent to child
Strengthens new family relationships	Redefines existing family relationships
No guilt over birth parent problems	Guilt over birth parent problems
Feelings that they are saving the child	Ambivalence about taking over parental role of child
Feelings of loyalty and commitment by assuming legal relationship	Perception that they are betraying birth parent by assuming legal relationship



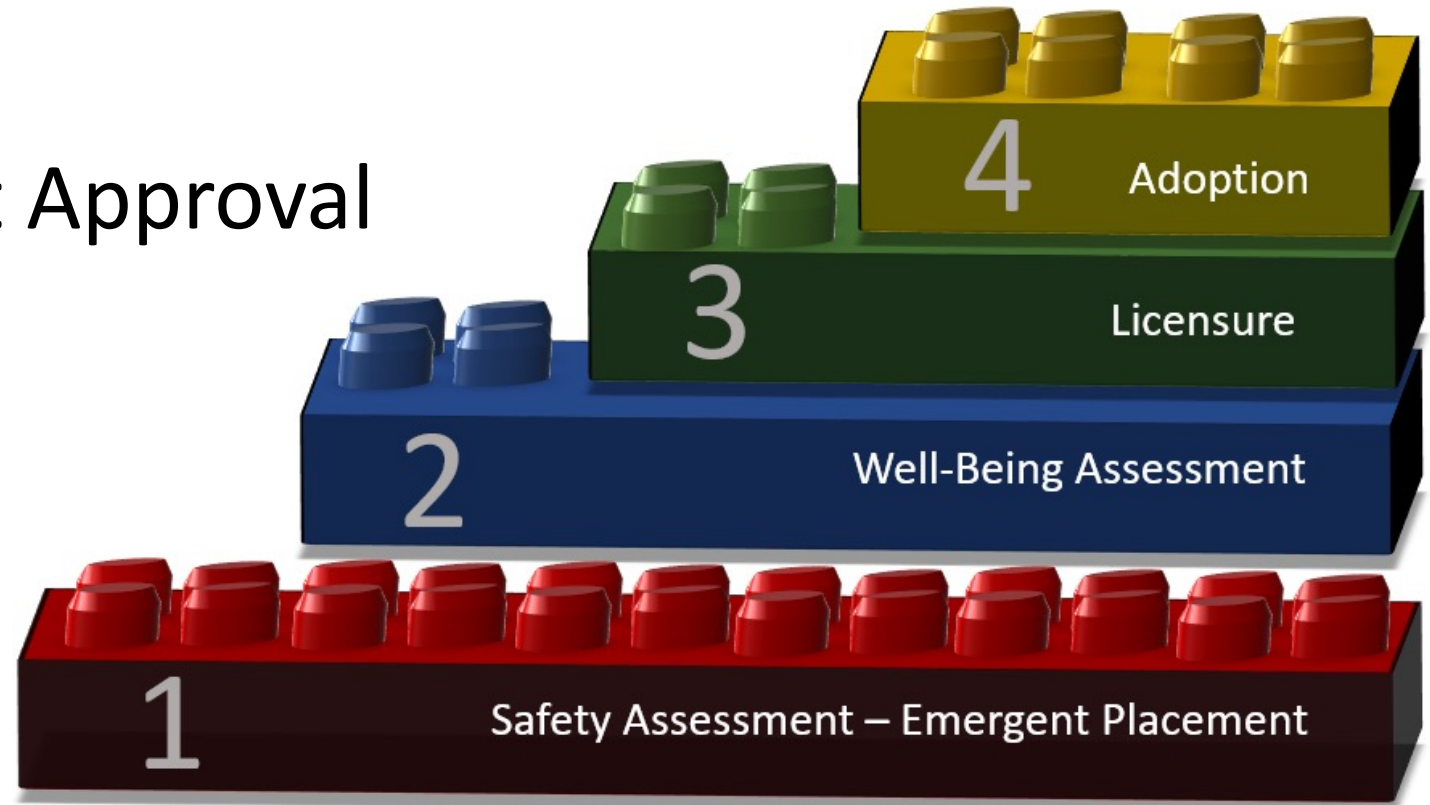
Background on Licensing



Basic Federal Licensing Requirements

- Adult caregiver 18+ years old
- Background check
- Basic home assessment
- Certification of “appropriate knowledge and skills to provide for the needs of the child” (Training)

4 Tiers of Placement Approval and Licensing



Multiple Pathways for Relatives



Relative who does not get a license and doesn't want to adopt



Relative who wants to adopt, but does not get licensed




Relative who wants to be licensed




Relative who wants a license and to adopt or seek guardianship

If Grandma Jean is safe
enough to raise her
grandkids....



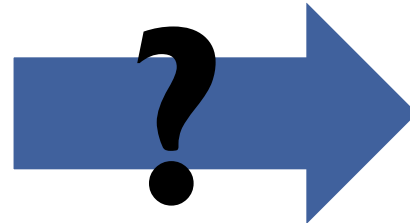
Initial Home Study
and Placement

Approved




Adoptive Home
Study and Adoption

Approved



why isn't she safe
enough to pay?



Foster Care License

Denied

LICENSING BARRIERS

Personal Barriers

- Training and paperwork is too time consuming
- Don't understand the paperwork or the value of benefits from licensing
- Intrusive application– don't want to be judged and worried about rejection
- Health assessment from a Primary Care doctor
- Home doesn't meet standards/requirements
- Can be expensive
- Believe this is short-term/temporary placement

Bureaucratic Barriers

- Criminal history of someone in the home
- Previous child abuse/neglect findings
- “Character and suitability”
- Social workers don't pursue waivers
- Stranger foster care is easier

Non-Safety Exemptions and Licensing Waivers for Kinship Families

Federal law explicitly permits child welfare agencies to waive on a case-by-case basis nonsafety licensing standards for relative foster family homes.

42 U.S.C. § 671 (a)(10) (2018)



Relative Non-Safety Exemptions for Kinship Licensing allowed under the Washington Administrative Code

- Dual license capacity (childcare and foster care)
- Applicants must be 18 years of age and income requirement may be exempted
- May be eligible for DCYF to pay for recommended evaluations
- Bedroom requirements
- Bedroom sharing
- Using bottled water while waiting on approval of well water
- Education home schooling (this is rarely approved)

Resources and Financial Support for Unlicensed Relatives

- Non-Needy TANF
- Free & Reduced Lunch
- Relative Support Service Funds
- Concrete Goods
- Child Care
- One time \$200 clothing voucher
- WIC, Medical/Dental Coverage
- Mileage Reimbursement
- Clothing and Grocery Vouchers
- Federal Tax Credits
- Limited Respite Care

Does licensing matter?

- ❖ Increases the financial resources, education, and supports which leads to greater stability and outcomes for the kids
- ❖ Can help identify any future barriers to legal permanency with the relative
- ❖ **To be eligible for the Relative-Guardianship Assistance Program fund (R-GAP) the relative must be licensed for a period of at least six consecutive months prior to executing the guardianship**

Suggestions for Supporting Relatives

- Offer resources and supports up front
- Recognize that kinship caregivers may have multiple adverse experiences of their own, such as:
 - Grief and loss regarding the child's parents
 - Isolation from their own peers
 - Role change and more experiences
- Lend them an ear
- Be willing to share service information and support multiple times and in multiple formats
- Keep asking kinship caregivers what support they need – this will change over time

Other Ways to Support Kinship Caregivers

- Remind them about the opportunity to submit a caregiver's report prior to a court hearing
- Help create childcare backup plans for relatives who work or if they become ill
- Don't forget about active efforts required by ICWA!
- Support relatives in developing a new parenting toolbox
 - <https://alliancecares.org/kinship-caregivers/> Provides assistance with the financial, legal, and emotional issues of raising a relative's child
 - Alliance for Child Welfare Website: Free online trainings designed for relatives <https://risewiththealliance.org/programs/development-and-support-for-caregivers/>
 - Discuss in-home support for child-specific emotional or behavioral needs

LEGISLATIVE CHANGES IN 2022

HOUSE BILL 1747 – Relative Placements

- Instructs the department to discuss guardianship as a permanent option as an alternative to termination of parental rights and adoption.
- Includes new language that no child placed with in a kinship placement may be moved unless the court finds a change in circumstances necessitates it by law.
- Effective June 9th, 2022.

SENATE BILL 5151 – Relating to foster care licensing

- Gives DCYF the authority to issue a child-specific license to a relative.
- Must meet all minimum licensing requirements for foster family homes.
- Considered a full license except that the relative may only receive placement of specific children.
- Specific rules are not yet solidified. DCYF is currently seeking input in the development of this license.

“The more healthy relationships a child has, the more likely he will recover from trauma and thrive.

Relationships are the agents of change and the most powerful therapy is human love.”

Dr. Bruce Perry





Kati Brown, MJ

Walla Walla Child Advocates

KLBrown@co.walla-walla.wa.us

509-520-0637

