

# Kin-First Culture

Building a **Kin-First culture** within child welfare promotes kinship placements, helps children maintain connections with their families, and tailors services and supports to the needs of kinship families.

Leadership is a key ingredient to nurturing a Kin-First culture. Leaders at all levels can promote the belief that children belong with family, ensure that resources, tools, and training are aligned with the underlying values of a Kin-First culture, and hold all levels of the agency accountable for prioritizing placement with and connections to kin.

## ROLE OF THE SUPERVISOR

- Provide clear expectations and co-define what Kin-First success looks like with your team.
- Encourage workers to identify kin early and support the importance of placing children with kin as soon as possible.
- Ensure that workers understand the benefits of kinship care for children: stability, minimizing trauma, continuity of care, and cultural preservation.
- Demonstrate that you value the importance of keeping children connected with kin while in care, including with maternal, paternal, and fictive kin.
- Encourage workers understand and offer options to kin.
- Ensure that workers utilize the Kin-First Practice Quick Guide to incorporate best practices.
- Get into the habit of saying, "Tell me about the people who care about (the child)" during each case conversation with the worker.
- Ask to see completed genograms and Safety and Support Circles that the worker co-created with family.
- Use written policies and other learning opportunities with staff to assist with any necessary culture shifts.



## CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Work to ensure the families you serve are supported equitably across race and ethnicity.
- Take steps to address any differences in treatment and support across races and ethnicities.
- Support non-English speaking families in your community.
- Train workers to be culturally sensitive when engaging kinship caregivers, particularly in communities where family and kinship roles may differ.
- Engage people with lived experience, including birth parents, kin caregivers, and youth from overrepresented communities as part of your efforts to advance race equity and develop kin-centered practices.
- Take steps to address any disproportionality in your kinship rates.
- Collect and analyze disaggregated data about the use of kinship placements, kin who successfully complete foster home approval, kin who are denied a foster home approval, and exits to kinship permanency across races and ethnicities.

## Reflective Supervision Questions for a Kin-First Culture

How does the family dynamic change when a relative becomes a caregiver, and how do you approach understanding their unique needs?

What challenges or strengths have you noticed in the kinship placement, and how can we support both the child and the caregiver in addressing these?

How are you ensuring that the voice of the kinship caregiver is being heard and respected in case planning?

What strategies have you used to help kinship caregivers navigate their role, and what additional resources could they benefit from?

How do you think the child is adjusting to the kinship placement, and how can we ensure they are receiving adequate emotional and psychological support?

How are you managing your own feelings and biases about kinship placements, and how do these influence your work?

## **IDENTIFICATION, NOTIFICATION, AND ENGAGEMENT OF KIN**

- Support diligent search procedures and policies to establish how kin are identified, notified, and engaged as soon as a child comes to the attention of the child welfare agency. This identification and engagement process continues throughout the life of the case until permanency is achieved.
- Ensure that workers include both the maternal and paternal side of the family.
- Support workers in developing a robust family network and actively participate in Family Partnership Meetings, ensuring that families are able to make decisions about the placement of children and the role of kin in supporting the family system.
- Ensure non-English speaking kin are engaged and informed.
- Encourage workers to engage kin consistently as supportive resources for families, even when kinship placement is not an option.
- Ensure your agency's practices and policies acknowledge the changing dynamics in families when kin step up to care for a related child.

## **PLACEMENT WITH KIN**

- Establish targets for the percentage of children placed with kin as first placement and subsequent placements and utilize the Kin-First Now Dashboard to monitor.
- Encourage workers to place with kin whenever possible and to complete through Exception Reports when unable to place with kin.
- Ensure that the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) placement requirements are followed.
- Provide written materials and the Kinship Care Brochure to workers so that they may discuss all options with kin. Workers should be able to fully explain the legal and financial details and implications of each option.
- Utilize written pamphlets about the Voluntary Parental Child Safety Placement Program for parents and caregivers.
- When children enter foster care, utilize the kinship waivers to ensure a child's first placement can be with kin and do not require families to complete the entire approval process before placement.

## **SUPPORTIVE SUPPORTS AND BENEFITS**

- Ensure agency's policies, procedures, and resources support kinship families with immediate needs (e.g., help filling out required paperwork, navigating the licensing process, and obtaining car seats or cribs).
- Support policies, financing, and practices within your agency for supporting kinship families with their long-term needs
- Encourage workers to coordinate with other departments and agencies to see what services and programs are being offered across your jurisdiction to kinship families.
- Ensure workers are able to help kin understand available services and benefits; don't act solely as a referral source.

## **APPROVAL OF KIN AS A KINSHIP RESOURCE FAMILY**

- Consider waivers for non-safety standards and assist kin in meeting requirements.
- Provide training tailored to kinship families and their strengths and needs. Include those with lived expertise, such as kin caregivers or youth placed with kin, in the development and delivery of the training.
- Utilize preventative services funding categories to assist kin with needs.
- Utilize written materials, specifically about permanency options for kin, to assist with informed decision making and ensure families are choosing the best option for their individual circumstances.

## **PERMANENCY AND POST-PERMANENCY SUPPORTS**

- Collect data on how long children that exit to kin remained in care.
- Recognize the complex relationships within families, and ensure families are choosing the best option for their individual circumstances.
- Ensure that relatives know they may seek custody and be eligible for the KinGAP assistance program.
- Collect data on kinship adoptions.
- Consider services kinship families will need to access after a child leaves foster care. Are these services delivered by staff who are trained on meeting the unique needs of kinship families?
- Assist families in identifying Benefit Programs, such as Medicaid, and other supports like free and reduced school lunch.

## References

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