

SUPPORTING & ENCOURAGING PLACEMENT WITH RELATIVE CAREGIVERS

SUMMARY

Kinship placements allow children in the child welfare system to be placed with family members. This can greatly improve their experience in foster care, keeping them closer to their communities and loved ones. While there are benefits to kinship care for the child, kinship caregivers may also face challenges, which can sometimes prevent or disrupt placement.

BACKGROUND

When a child is removed from their home, they can be placed in a foster home or a group facility, but the preferred placement is with someone with whom the child already has a strong relationship. This is called kinship care.

What Is a Kinship Caregiver?

There are several qualifications needed for someone to serve as a kinship caregiver. They must have:

- A significant relationship with the parents or child;
- A shared history during which the caregiver has observed the child's development; and
- Knowledge of the child's family composition, dynamics, experiences and values.

The kinship caregiver is not required to be related to the child. A kinship caregiver who is not related to the child is known as a "fictive" kinship caregiver. Individuals who could be kinship caregivers include grandparents, aunts, uncles, godparents, family friends, counselors or teachers. In FY 2021, approximately 39% of children in foster care in Texas were placed with kinship caregivers.¹

Benefits to Children

There are many benefits for a child when they are placed with a kinship caregiver rather than placed in a traditional foster home. These benefits include:

- The child will experience less trauma and have a greater feeling of stability;
- Sibling groups are more likely to stay together;
- The child is more likely to remain within their community of origin, typically allowing them to remain in their school and maintain connections to their cultural identity; and
- Once a child in kinship care exits the foster care system, they are less likely to re-enter.²

Barriers to Kinship Care

While there are significant benefits to kinship care, kinship caregivers also face many challenges, which can sometimes prevent or disrupt placement. Challenges include:

Funding: While Texas does provide financial support for some kinship caregivers, the funds may only be paid for up to 12 months. Kinship caregivers who are not licensed receive \$12.67/day*, which falls

¹ Source: https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/About_DFPS/Data_Book/Child_Protective_Services/Placements/Substitute_Care_on_Aug_31.asp.

² Source: http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/handbooks/CPS/Resource_Guides/Services_to_Kinship_Caregivers_Resource_Guide.pdf.

substantially short of the cost of raising a child and is less than half of the daily rate for licensed foster parents. This compares to licensed foster parents, who receive at least \$27.07/day.³ If kinship caregivers obtain permanent managing conservatorship of a child, they may request a \$500 annual reimbursement for up to three years.⁴ Licensed foster parents who adopt children are eligible for monthly payments of around \$400/month until the child's 18th birthday and reimbursement up to \$1,200 per adoption.⁵ Kinship placements may also occur unexpectedly, and caregivers may have little time to prepare to receive a child or sibling group. This can compound the financial burden placed on them.

Licensing challenges: Kinship caregivers can get licensed by the state, which makes them eligible to receive many more benefits. These benefits include additional financial support and more robust case management to help them access services, manage challenging behavior, etc. However, the process to become licensed is time consuming, requiring at least 20 hours of annual training, an in-depth home evaluation, a fire inspection and greater caseworker involvement. This enhanced scrutiny can deter caregivers from pursuing a foster care license in spite of the additional benefits offered.⁶

Childcare: Subsidized childcare may be available for kinship caregivers, but can take a long time to set up and is dependent on the caregiver's employment status, the age of the child and what other assistance the caregiver receives.⁷

POLICY POSITION

Texas CASA supports funding and policies that further support and encourage placement with relative caregivers.

Current Position:

Texas CASA joins Casey Family Programs, the Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services, the Department of Family and Protective Services and advocates with lived experience in the child welfare system in making the following policy recommendations to support kinship caregivers:

1. Increase the daily reimbursement rate for kinship caregivers.
2. Allow kinship caregivers, regardless of whether they are licensed, to receive the maximum daily reimbursement rate.
3. Increase one-time funding and access to concrete services, such as diapers, beds and clothing, especially early in a placement.
4. Streamline the process and requirements for accessing childcare and respite care for kinship caregivers so that it is more readily and more widely available.
5. Support the expansion of Kinship Navigator programs, which help provide caregivers with information, education and referral to a wide range of services and supports.
6. Streamline and improve the licensing process to allow more kinship caregivers to become licensed foster parents and receive full state and federal foster care benefits.

If you have questions or concerns related to this or any other Texas CASA legislative priority, please email: publicpolicy@texascasa.org.

³ Source: https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Doing_Business/Purchased_Client_Services/Residential_Child_Care_Contracts/Rates/default.asp.

⁴ Source: https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Kinship_Care/default.asp.

⁵ Source: https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Adoption/adoption_assistance.asp.

⁶ Source: https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/adoption_and_foster_care/get_started/requirements.asp.

⁷ Source: https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/handbooks/cps/files/CPS_pg_8235.asp.

*New rate beginning September 1, 2022