

Best Practices to Enhance Kinship Practice

Comprehensive Strategic Planning for Kinship Care Ohio

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Any strong kinship care program must have clear case management procedures to assure a specific, comprehensive and concise focus on kinship caregivers. ProtectOHIO as part of their Title IV-E Child Welfare Waiver has created a manual entitled “Practice Manual for ProtectOHIO Kinship Strategy.” This strategic planning manual outlines information regarding a safety and needs assessment, support plans, a work flow plan that reflects a continuum of practice, home visits, a caregiver handbook, protocol for family team meetings and an outline for training kin. The focus of this publication is on how essential it is to promote kinship placement as best practice, increasing attention to and support for kinship placements, caregivers, and families.

Fulltime Kinship Coordinator Tennessee

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To give the kind of attention needed to make improvements, States and localities highlight having a Kinship Coordinator as a key practice. Tennessee DCS as part of their Kinship Improvement Project, a state and county and training consortium partnership, identified Kinship Coordinators as one of the most important elements to their improving their kinship practice. The coordinators become the focal point to hold all staff accountable for meeting the goals of the kinship care strategic plans. Coordinators help to ensure that barriers to more effective kinship practice are identified early on and develop solutions to overcome these. They serve as the resource person for best practice for relative search and engagement, assessment of kinship homes, expedited placements and kinship support.

Full Disclosure of Options to Kin New York

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Educating caregivers about their rights and the legal options available to them is essential for good case planning efforts. It is important that kin

caregivers know the implications of all their options for the children in their care. Oftentimes, children are diverted to live with relatives without adequate support from the child welfare system. New York through the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) has put together a Kinship Navigator Manual that focuses on the laws and resources related to benefits for kinship caregivers and information for caseworkers on what the legal rights of kin are. It is also a guide for kin caregivers who want to establish legal guardianship and legal permanency.

Kinship Exception Protocol

Pennsylvania

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States and localities that have embraced a Kinship Exception Protocol have seen an increase in the number of kinship placements. This protocol involves confirmation that a diligent search has been conducted and all potential kinship options have been examined. It has resulted in more comprehensive searches for relative options from the beginning of the CPS process. It also allows for a teaming model, for staff to work as a team to consider placement options. Pennsylvania CYF, specifically Allegheny County and A Second Chance, Inc. a non-profit, community-based program in Pittsburgh, PA have seen positive outcomes using this protocol in a public/private partnership.

Expedited Placement Process

New Jersey

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States and localities have reported that having an expedited placement process is very important to enhance and increase kinship care placements. NJ DCF has a protocol called Caregiver Presumptive Eligibility when placing children with kinship caregivers. Presumptive eligibility means that the kinship caregiver preliminarily meets licensing standards and is therefore eligible for resource family care payment on behalf of the child in his or her care, based on the initial assessment, until the home study is completed. NJ has reported that this protocol has had a substantial impact on increasing the numbers of kinship placements in the state.

Kinship Training Improvements

Pennsylvania

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Best practice around training for kin focuses on being responsive to the specific needs of kin caregivers and not a standard curriculum that is more tailored to the needs of foster parents in general. The curriculum should be specialized for kin and therefore relevant and one that will meet state foster parent licensing standards and Title IV-E requirements. Recruiting kin trainers to assist in training kinship caregivers as a support to new caregivers has proven to be effective. Allegheny County has used the Standards for Assessing and Recognizing Kinship Strengths (SARKS) model for kinship training which has been very well received.

Community Resource Supports

California

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New and strengthened partnerships for resource development has been a key element in providing support to kinship caregivers. Multiple partnerships enable child welfare programs to take advantage of resources and supports that already exist but have not been consistently accessed for kinship families. These partnerships are essential for stabilizing kin placements. Family Ties, a program in Monterrey County, California has been establishing community resource supports for 15 years. Their partnership with community agencies has added to their very strong kinship support system. It has been critical to ensure that kin caregivers are aware of resources and can access them easily.

Kinship Improvement Committee

Ohio

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States and localities report that having a standing committee or workgroup for kinship care is very helpful to maintain sustainability around kinship practice. A committee serves to guide best practice and develop needed policies and protocols, evaluate and help disseminate new strategies and support the administrator or kinship coordinator in their role.

Impressive Website

Colorado

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States and localities report positive feedback from kin when they have a web site that is easy to navigate and is rich in information. Colorado DSS has a very good website called the Colorado Kinship Connect.

www.COKinship.org.

The website provides local and statewide information about organizations, programs, and benefits that may be helpful for kinship caregivers. There is a navigation guide highlighting resources for kinship families that is both in English and Spanish. It has brochures, reports, a kinship toolkit, upcoming events of interest to kin caregivers all across the state.