

## Kinship Supports and the Courts

Because the courts are integral child welfare partners, demonstration PCSAs dedicated time and energy toward educating judges and court representatives about both the importance of least restrictive placements and, more specifically, the ProtectOHIO Kinship Supports intervention. These education efforts included tailored presentations and collaborative meetings in addition to regular, ongoing communication.

In the majority of PCSAs, courts and judges were perceived as supportive of kinship placements and the Kinship Supports intervention. While each county's courts have different practices and policies regarding custody status when children are placed with kin caregivers, demonstration PCSAs reported that courts increasingly relied on kin caregivers as the waiver progressed.

## Caregiver Perspective on Kinship Supports

Throughout the evaluation, focus groups were conducted with caregivers receiving the Kinship Supports intervention. Overall, caregivers perceived the relationship with a staff person with specific expertise and training around kin caregiving to be the primary strength of the intervention.

While there was variability in the strength of the relationship, caregivers indicated satisfaction with kinship staff who they viewed as accessible and approachable, supportive and understanding. Caregivers addressed the ease and timeliness of services, and reported that without this relationship, interactions with child welfare seem invasive and that they in turn are hesitant to ask child welfare for services or hard goods. Caregivers indicated that the supportive relationships, combined with prompt services and supports, are important not only to meet their physical needs, but also to allow them to focus on caretaking and maintaining their other professional or personal roles, contributing to the overall stability of the placement.

## Kinship Supports: Lessons Learned

The evaluation of Ohio's Kinship Supports intervention found that implementation of the model was associated with increased use of kin care as a placement option. This finding, taken together with the results showing that children placed with kin caregivers experienced more favorable outcomes than children in foster care, is a compelling reason for a continued examination of kinship related interventions.

The implementation of Ohio's kinship model within the context of a IV-E Waiver Demonstration allowed PCSAs to address the lack of services available for kinship caregivers often seen within the child welfare system. The waiver allowed PCSAs to use federal IV-E dollars to systematically change staffing and practice policies, and provide caregivers with services and supports they may not have been eligible for under the traditional federal funding approach.

Nationally, the use of kin care as a placement option by child protective services is growing, though there remains a dearth of evidence about the staffing and practice strategies designed to support kin. The favorable outcomes associated with Ohio's kinship model merit additional exploration of the benefits of kinship care and related interventions.

**Additional Information:** For more detailed information related to the findings presented in this brief, please see the ProtectOHIO Third Waiver Period Final Evaluation Report: [www.hsri.org/project/evaluation-of-ohio-title-iv-e-waiver/publications](http://www.hsri.org/project/evaluation-of-ohio-title-iv-e-waiver/publications).

*"The community-wide impression of Children Services seems to have improved since the implementation of Kinship [Supports]. Every time we go out to homes to work with kinship families, we are advocating for them."*

*- Kinship Coordinator*

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