

#7



Testimony Presented to the House Committee on Families, Children and Seniors

Kinship Care in Michigan

Alicia Guevara Warren, Director of Kinship Care Resource Center

February 19, 2020

Good morning, Chair Crawford and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to share information about the Kinship Care Resource Center and our experience working with kinship families across the state. I am Alicia Guevara Warren and I am the director of the Kinship Care Resource Center, a community program within the School of Social Work at Michigan State University. We strive to support and empower all of Michigan's kinship families through responsive information and referral services, education and training, and outreach and engagement with caregivers, service providers and communities to ensure that children in kinship families are safe, healthy, nurtured and loved.

The Kinship Care Resource Center was founded in 2002 by Dr. Robert Little, who was a faculty member at the School, to address the needs of kinship families that were revealed through a series of research projects on programs and policies impacting kinship families. Since its inception the Kinship Care Resource Center has supported families by connecting them with information and resources, and over time has had limited capacity due to funding constraints. Today, with the support of—and in partnership with—the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, the Kinship Care Resource Center is operating and developing the state's kinship navigator program.

With the passage of the federal Families First Prevention Services Act, came much more recognition and support for kinship families. The law allows for states to draw down federal dollars to support evidence-based kinship navigator programs. When it was passed, however, not one state had yet developed a kinship navigator program that met the evidence-based criteria outlined in the legislation—and there are still no states that have successfully gone through the rigorous process. To help states eventually access the federal funds, Congress appropriated funding to states to develop, enhance and evaluate kinship navigator programs and encouraged partnerships with third party agencies. In 2019, the MSU Kinship Care Resource Center was awarded funding to develop and launch the Kinship Support program, which includes information and referral assistance through a toll-free number from Kinship Care Navigators, among other activities.

Our navigators are experienced kinship caregivers who strive to ensure that all current and prospective kinship caregivers are supported and connected with resources and services that they need to ensure the well-being of the children they are raising and to care for themselves. Our model is peer-to-peer, where kinship caregivers call and speak with someone who had a similar experience, and we serve all kinship families whether they have a formal placement through child welfare (i.e., foster care) or an informal arrangement outside of the system. To help drive change and broader improvements, our staff also track and share information with the Department regarding the systemic barriers and ongoing

challenges that we hear our families experience. The navigator program is very new having only launched in September and is being evaluated and adjusted as we learn more to better serve kinship families in Michigan. In fact, we have an evaluation team at the University that is helping to ensure that the program will meet the rigorous criteria to draw down the federal funds.

The Kinship Care Resource Center is also working with two local aging agencies to provide respite services to kinship caregivers. The Tri-County Office on Aging and the Area Agency on Aging Region 1-B support programs in Clinton, Eaton, Ingham and Washtenaw counties that allow for us to cover expenses related to various activities and programs for children in kinship families to give caregivers time for respite and self-care. One of the major barriers we encounter with these programs is the age criteria; kinship caregivers must be 55 or older to qualify and many of the relatives we work with are under 55 years of age. However, respite is one of the most requested services.

Lastly, I also wanted to share that last week nearly 30 service providers representing kinship care, foster care, early childhood, adult education, legal assistance and policy came together to launch the Michigan Kinship Care Coalition. Our mission is to be an inclusive network of voices collaborating to strengthen and increase support for kinship families through advocacy, increased education and raised awareness to equip all families to thrive. The Coalition is being led by six core members, including the Kinship Care Resource Center, Michigan's Children, Guidance Center's Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, OLHSA's Grandparents Raising Grandchildren and AFSN.

As you've heard, Kinship families have unique needs and challenges as they work through multiple systems that weren't designed to serve them. Michigan has an opportunity to be a leader and provide the support that is so greatly needed so that all kinship families and the children in their care receive all that they need.

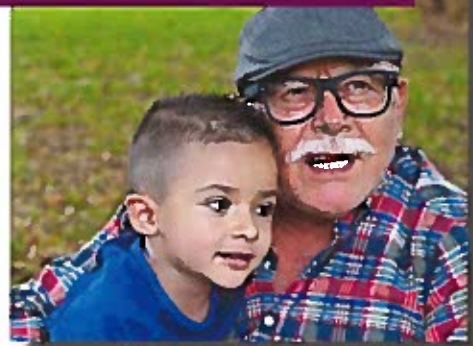
Thank you for the opportunity to share today.



KINSHIP SUPPORT PROGRAM

800-535-1218

The Kinship Care Resource Center (KCRC) is pleased to announce the expansion of Information and Referral Services and the addition of Kinship Navigator Services for current and prospective relatives caring for relative children in the fall of 2019. As a result, KCRC will be implementing the following activities:



- **Coordination of Care:** Helping service provider networks that engage with kinship families collaborate, connect, and coordinate with one another alongside and on behalf of kinship caregivers and the children in their care.
- **Communication, Technology and Information Sharing:** Using newsletters, a website, toll-free phone line, and social media to share resources and provide supports for kinship families.
- **Kinship Navigators:** Connecting trained KCRC staff Navigators to kinship caregivers through phone consultation and community outreach.
- **Group Services:** Providing a calendar of support groups offered throughout the State of Michigan, assessing where the need for new or more groups exists, and supporting group implementation.
- **Training:** For families and professionals who serve kinship families.



When Kinship Caregivers have the knowledge, tools, and resources they need, outcomes for child safety, permanency, and well-being improve. Families are welcome to contact the MSU Kinship Care Resource Center toll-free Information and Referral line during limited hours until full program implementation. Visit www.kinship.msu.edu to receive updates and learn more.



Funded by the State of Michigan Child Welfare Division.

Kinship Care Resource Center
 School of Social Work
 Michigan State University
 655 Auditorium Rd.
 18 Baker Hall
 East Lansing, MI 48824

Phone: **517-355-9600 / 800-535-1218**
 E-mail: kinship@msu.edu
 Website: www.kinship.msu.edu
 Facebook: www.facebook.com/Mikinship



School of Social Work
 MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY



KINSHIP CARE RESPITE PROGRAM

Adults age 55 and older who are full-time caregivers of relative children face many challenges. **It is important for caregivers** to focus on parenting, but also to remember **to take care of their own needs**.

The Kinship Care Respite Program is a resource offered through the Tri-County Office on Aging for Ingham, Eaton, and Clinton county residents.

The Kinship Care Respite Program was developed to provide **rest, relief, and a break from everyday caregiving**. This program will assist the full-time caregiver by helping to arrange and pay for an activity for their child to attend.

Activities* may include:

- Child care • Sports camp • Summer class
- Extra-curricular activities • Afterschool care/activities

Who is eligible to participate in this program?

Kinship caregivers must be:

- Age 55 or older
- Full-time caregivers of children under the age of 18
- Permanently reside in Clinton, Eaton, or Ingham counties

How much does this program cost?

There is no cost to eligible caregivers in the Tri-County Area.

The program is funded by the *Federal Older Americans Act* grant provided to Tri-County Office on Aging through the Michigan Aging and Adult Services Agency.

Contact the **Kinship Care Resource Center** for more information
at **517-355-9600** or email **kinship@msu.edu**
Toll free **1-800-535-1218**

***Funds are capped at \$250 and available to eligible Kinship Caregivers on a first come, first served basis.**