

OKLAHOMA KINSHIP NAVIGATION SERVICES – FAMILY KINNECTIONS

GRANT 90CF0047

THE FAMILY KINNECTIONS PROGRAM

- NorthCare Community Mental Health Center was awarded the CB Family Connections grant in September 2012, and through this funding established a kinship navigator program, Family KINnections. This project was undertaken in partnership with the Oklahoma Department of Human Services and the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center (the independent evaluator). It ended in September 2015.

- Two Primary Goals of Family KINnections:
 - To implement Kinship Navigation as a mean to increase the stability and permanency of kinship foster care placement and increase child well-being
 - To promote effective partnerships among public and private agencies to ensure kinship caregiver families and the community is better served.

- Family KINnections served kinship caregivers in Oklahoma County where there is formal Child Welfare involvement meaning the kinship children are placed in the home through the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS)
 - Removal rates for children in the state of Oklahoma were rising – there was an 11% increase from SFY12 to SFY13
 - Beginning of SFY14 – 10,233 children were in care

- OKDHS prefers to place children in kinship family care when possible which means kinship placements are also on the rise. Unlike traditional foster homes, these families are not expecting to have a child placed with them and are usually unprepared.
 - Kinship foster parents must go through the same approval process as traditional foster parents including time consuming tasks such as a thorough home study, fingerprints and background checks, and 27 hours of training.
 - Unlike traditional foster homes, they must complete these requirements while the children are in the home, and they are not provided with child care.
 - Monthly foster care payments are not available until the home has been approved and this process can take months

- Family KINnections provided home-based care coordination through direct care staff positions called Community Resource Specialists (CRS). The CRS was involved with the family at whatever level is necessary to aid the kinship parent in providing stability and the best possible environment for the child. A major initial goal was to assist the family in working through the approval process in partnership with OKDHS.

NEEDS OF THE FAMILIES AND SERVICES PROVIDED

- Families report that they need assistance with learning about the process and legal system, money for necessities, having someone to talk to, and having time to spend with their families. Family KINnections is able to assist families with these issues. Specifically, families served by the program report over time that their need for finding someone to talk to and being able to do things they enjoy and with their families are being better met than their counterparts without Family KINnections services.
- Since beginning to serve families in the beginning of 2013, Family KINnections has served 561 kinship foster children in Oklahoma County.
 - Demographic information was available on the subset of families who agreed to participate in the evaluation of the service.
 1. The composition of those families varies, but the mean age of the caregiver was 42 years, with the majority being white (56%). Twenty six percent identified as African American, and 10% Native American. Approximately half of the caregivers were not married, and 50% were employed, with an additional 24% reporting being a full-time homemaker. The average number of foster children in the home was about 2, with a range of 1 to 4. Grandparents and Aunts/Uncles comprised most of the kinship placements about 25% each), followed by family friend (19%).
 2. The mean age of the children in care being seen by Family KINnections was 5 years, with a fairly even gender split. Race matched the caregivers' distribution.
- Family KINnections was able to shorten the time for approval as a foster home by about 60 days. This means that families can start receiving their subsidy sooner.
- Family KINnections also was successful in maintaining placements for the children. Families in the services as usual group were **8.7 times more likely** to change placements than those in the Family KINnections condition.
- The **total direct costs of the Family KINnections program were \$1,866.97 per new family**, and the **total direct costs of the Family KINnections program are \$825.91 per family served**.
 - *Please note that families remain engaged in services for varying lengths of time, and the frequency of contact is dependent on the family's need. For example, for some families, more frequent contact may be necessary while the caregivers are meeting the requirements for approval as a foster home. Once they have been approved, visits may decrease. Other families may need more support and have more contact with the CRS.

Family KINnections is able to alleviate stress for the caregivers by providing them information about the system and providing them with concrete resources at a critical time when the children are just placed in the home. We believe that this early contact and support helped to stabilize placements and improve child well-being. Results from our qualitative data from

interviews with families and DHS staff suggest that this program was able to meet many of the concrete and support needs of the foster parents, thereby reducing stress and stabilizing placements for children.