

# Kinship and Relative Considerations

## Child Placing Agency (CPA) Coalition

Relatives and kinship caregivers, across WA State have made the commitment to care for children and family members that cannot safely remain with birth parents due to a variety of reasons – parent’s death, chemical dependency, mental illness, cognitive impairment and other risks that prevent parents from caring, nurturing or safeguarding their children. Historically, diverse groups take active steps to support families (informal arrangements) and in the early 1990s, child welfare advocates acknowledged the benefits children experience when placed with relatives or kin if out of home placement is necessary (formal care). Today, child welfare best practice models suggest relatives be prioritized as placement and permanency options for children in care.

### **A significant number of relative and kinship caregivers are caring for children through informal (no CPS involvement) or formal (CPS involvement) arrangements.**

- More than 35,000 children in Washington are being raised by grandparents or other relatives. Grandparents comprise the largest percentage of relatives caring for children and most are providing care under informal arrangements, with no support from state funded services.
- During August 2010, 9,359 kinship and relative caregivers received TANF Child-only grants to care for 13,616 children. Some caregivers are able to meet the needs of relative children without additional support; but when surviving on fixed or limited incomes, caregivers may access services to meet the basic needs of children.
- Approximately 37% of foster care placements (formal arrangements) are with relative caregivers. Community partners and relatives cite significant barriers and obstacles that impede increasing the number of children and youth placed or achieving permanence with relatives.

### **Relatives caring for children and youth lead to increased positive outcomes and result in substantial savings in our state budget.**

- Early findings indicate children experience better outcomes living with relatives or kin caregivers. If birth family homes are unsafe or risk factors outweigh protective factors, an alternate living arrangement with family members is in the best interest of a child or youth.
- Significant savings of state dollars can be achieved by diverting children and youth from the foster care system. Early engagement with family members as resources can reduce expenditures in several state budget areas – child welfare, mental health, juvenile rehabilitation, etc.

### **Support strategies that increase opportunities for relative and kinship caregivers to be a resource for children and youth in formal and informal living arrangements.**

- Oppose funding cuts and broad reductions that undermine relative and kinship caregivers’ ability to be resources for children and youth. Significant cuts are proposed for services that increase positive outcomes for children living with relatives and kin – TANF grants, Family Reconciliation Services, Foster Care Assessment Program, sexual assault treatment programs and Working Connections Child Care.
- Caregivers access DSHS services and supports to nurture and safeguard relative children and youth in their care. Relative/kinship caregivers in formal or informal care arrangements often require childcare to remain employed, mental health services to stabilize children in their home, medical care and other services to meet social and developmental milestones
- Although placement with relative or kin is acknowledged best practice, system barriers prevent timely and full utilization of family members as resources for children and youth. Systemic biases, process barriers and unintended obstacles impede relative and kin from being timely resources for children and youth.