

Kinship Guardian Assistance Program (KinGAP)

With the opioid crisis, many more Virginia parents are unable to care for children while they struggle with the effects of addiction. Many relatives would like to take in their family members' children, but due to the costs, may hesitate to do so, or take them in and then later relinquish them. Relatives may have children of their own, or may be grandparents on a fixed income.

In 2008, the bi-partisan Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act passed Congress. Among other things, this act gave states the flexibility to amend their Title IV-e plans to allow federal funds to be used to support relative foster parents who opt to become legal guardians of the child.

Kinship guardians provide one of the best opportunities for children to thrive when their parents are unable to care for them.

- **The burden of kinship care falls most heavily on grandparents** who frequently take on the role of parenting children when their own parents cannot. Many grandparents may be disabled, infirm, or living on a fixed income.
- According to the Annie E Casey foundation, in 2016, 71,000 kids in Virginia lived in the care of grandparents. That's 4% of kids (also the national average). An additional 55,000 live in kinship care with other relatives: 3% of Va kids.
- Nationally, 10% of grandparents live with grandkids (US Census data). 60% of these grandparents are heads of households, and only 1/3 of these households also had one or more of the child's parents living there.
- **Grandparents with children in the home are more likely to be in poverty** and more likely to be unable to work due to illness or disability compared with grandparents who did not live with grandchildren.

Who is eligible?

Despite the numbers above, only a few kinship families would actually qualify for KinGAP payments.

- **In order for a family to be eligible for KinGAP, the child must be related** by blood, marriage, or adoption to the foster parent, have been placed with the relative in foster care for 6 months, and the options of reunification with the birth family or adoption must have been ruled out.
- The relative must demonstrate a commitment to permanently caring for the child.
- While there are many families who take in relative children, **ONLY those children who were first in foster care placement with the kinship guardian would be eligible.** Children who come to live with relatives through other pathways would not be.

Why do we need KinGAP?

While public benefits such as SNAP, Medicaid, and child-only TANF can cover some of the needs of the child, there are other costs associated with raising a child that relatives on a fixed income may struggle to meet. In addition, some sources of funds may be very minimal: **child-only TANF payments, for instance, may work out to less than ten dollars per day.** Families also need support and guidance as they learn how to parent children who are coping with trauma and upheaval in their lives.

How is KinGAP funded?

Title IV-e of the federal Social Security Act provides approximately 50% of the funding for KinGAP for each child eligible. As in adoption and foster care the additional funding is the responsibility of the state or locality.

How can we afford KinGAP?

Without KinGAP, the state is likely to continue to be responsible for payments to support the child in foster care. In 2017, VDSS indicated it could make KinGAP payments with its existing foster care budget. **Under KinGAP, costs will be minimized when the child becomes permanently placed with the relative.**

What do families use KinGAP funds for?

- Respite care
- Day care
- Parenting classes
- School supplies, activity fees
- Clothes
- Furniture
- Costs associated with filing for guardianship
- Driver's education for older children
- Time off from work for court appearances, visits to schools, visits to social services, travel costs (the court with jurisdiction over the child may be far away from the relative's home)

Why does KinGAP matter?

KinGAP provides another means for children to exit the foster care system when adoption is not the best option, yet still providing a permanent placement for the child.

- Through KinGAP, trauma is reduced -- children will no longer wonder where they belong or if someone is going to show up at the door and move them to a new placement.
- Children maintain a relationship with family even if their parents cannot parent them.

KinGAP will give children the assurance that they have a family they belong to, and a place to call their permanent home.

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