

What can we learn from the voices of those involved in kinship care?

THINK OF US. (2024). *KIN, FIRST AND FOREMOST: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND THE PATH FORWARD FOR KINSHIP CARE*

What can we learn from this study?

Research shows that children placed in kinship care settings have better outcomes than their peers in non-kin placements. They experience increased stability due to the continued connections with their communities and families, which help reduce the trauma associated with family separation. This report highlights the voices of youth, parents, and kin who have first-hand experiences of being impacted by the system, as well as frontline agency staff, service providers, and legal professionals who work in the field.

Study details

- **Population:** 529 research participants with kinship care lived experience in California, Indiana, and New Hampshire
- **Data sources:** 124 research sessions (participatory workshops and semi-structured interviews); non-exhaustive literature review
- **Methodology:** Enumerative sampling; grounded theory approach and inductive reasoning
- **Dates:** August 2022 to August 2023

What are the critical findings?

Barriers to kinship care included:

- **Lack of information** on the value of kinship care, including what it is, how it can be implemented, and the range of permanency options that exist for kin.
- **Caseworker bias** on what constitutes a “safe” family, which can exclude LGBTQ+, older, or undocumented kin families. Viable kin placement options can be overlooked due to “apple doesn’t fall far from the tree” narrative.
- **Agency capacity**, such as heavy caseloads and limited resources for kin searches. This can create a default for placing children with known resource families, prioritizing them over kin placements.
- **Approval and licensing requirements**, which often are strict, invasive, and costly, adding an emotional and financial burden to families that can discourage kin from pursuing licensure.
- **Limited access** to financial, medical, basic care, legal, and support (emotional, respite) resources for kin that are readily available to non-relative caregivers.

Why is this important to our work?

Prioritizing and implementing kin-first, kin-friendly policies can result in positive outcomes for children and families. Studies have documented the impact of prioritizing kin placement, which also is supported by a [new federal rule](#) giving states flexibility to adopt kin-specific licensing standards that remove barriers to kin placements. This report further outlines several opportunities to improve the landscape for kinship providers, including: expanding the scope of who is considered kin; increasing training for judges and legal professionals on the value of kinship care; training child protection agency staff on the needs of kin and how to best meet those needs; investing in kinship care families; and implementing accountability that encourages family finding and kinship placements.

To learn more, see: [What should every child protection agency do to ensure that children are placed with kin?](#) and our [Kinship Care Topical Page](#).

This summary synthesizes the findings from a single research study. For additional information, [access the article directly](#) or email KMResources@casey.org