

FOCUS

Newsletter of the Foster Family-based Treatment Association

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Kinship Treatment Foster Care in Action

—by Susan J. Miklos, DBA, LSW, MSSA

The increasing number and proportion of children in out-of-home care placed in the homes of relatives are among the most important child welfare trends of the decade. The increasing number of children in care and the declining pool of traditional foster families, along with recognition of the benefits of family care, are among the forces that have led to a growing use of kinship care (Hegar & Scannapieco, 1995).

Research has shown that kinship care benefits children in a number of ways that traditional foster homes may not, including the following:

- Kinship care reduces the trauma that children may experience when they are placed with strangers, and it enables children to live with people they know and trust (Mallon, n.d.).
- Children placed with relatives generally maintain connections to extended family, siblings, and community, and this continuity is essential to a child's well-being.
- Kinship care allows children to receive support from extended family that may be unavailable or sporadic in non-kinship placements (Whitley, Kelly, & Williams, 2007).
- Children in kinship care have a more positive opinion of their placement and are more likely than children in non-kinship homes to report that they like their caregiver and that they wish for this to become their permanent home (Conway & Hutson, 2007; Mallon, n.d.).
- Children in kinship care experience fewer placement moves than children in non-kinship care (Webster, Barth, & Needell, 2000).
- Children are more likely to be placed with siblings in kinship care.
- Children in kinship care have fewer behavioral problems, as rated by caregivers, than their peers in other out-of-home care settings (Rubin et al., 2008).



Equipping Treatment Kinship Families

It's a common practice: Relatives step forward to offer their homes, their time, their food, their love to grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and other kin whose parents can no longer care for them. It happens in all cultures and in all locales—big cities, rural towns,

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KINSHIP CARE AND IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

—by Lyn Morland, MSW, MA

As the child and family immigrant population has rapidly increased in this country over the past few decades (one in four children in the United States today is the child of an immigrant), so has the number of immigrant families involved with the child welfare system. Despite these growing numbers, however, recent research in Texas found that the percentage of Latino children of immigrants placed with relatives is smaller than the percentage of children of U.S.-born parents entering kinship foster care. Given the demonstrated advantages of kinship care for most children, this trend may well put children of immigrants at risk for poorer outcomes. Children who are immigrants themselves or who come into the system with special mental health or health needs may be particularly vulnerable.

At the same time, one of the documented strengths of Latino and other immigrants is their social support networks, local and international, that include both close and distant relatives and friends who may be considered family, such as godparents. Given that kin networks are a natural resource for many children of immigrants and given the benefits of kinship care for children, we then need to ask, what are the barriers to placement with relatives for these children?

Most barriers to kinship care for children of immigrants relate to the critical need for services that are responsive to *different cultures, languages, and migration experiences and backgrounds*. Although these often complex and time-consuming services can be challenging for child welfare professionals who are already overscheduled with logistics and deadlines that must be met, there are a number of resources that can help. According to those in the field, the key lies in **identifying these resources and establishing relationships before they are needed**. They are then ready to assist when an immigrant family comes to the attention of the child welfare system.

DIVERSITY OF U.S. IMMIGRANT BACKGROUNDS

Immigrants today arrive from virtually every country in the world and, together, speak hundreds of different languages. The majority of immigrants are from Latin America, with the largest proportion (29% of all immigrants) coming just from Mexico. Over one quarter are from South and East Asia, with smaller but significant percentages arriving from the Middle East and Africa.

Most of the children of immigrants (86%) are U.S.-born citizens, about one third of whom live in mixed status families, meaning that although the children are U.S. citizens, their parents or caregivers may not be. Some of these parents or caregivers may have legal permanent residency ("green card") or refugee,

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asylee, or similar status; others may have temporary permission to stay in the United States; and still others may be undocumented (having either entered the United States without permission or stayed after their visa expired).

These differences in migration backgrounds profoundly affect immigrant families' eligibility for and access to basic health and human services. In addition, English proficiency, cultural expectations, and previous experiences with governments affect the ways in which immigrants interact with larger U.S. systems. Many immigrants, particularly the undocumented, fear government services because of their experiences here as well as in their home countries. In a few states, such as Arizona, legislation has been passed that requires government agencies, including child welfare, to report the legal status of clients, which could lead to their deportation. Other states, such as California, keep health and human services separate from immigration enforcement, although fear still often keeps family members from coming forward to assist their children or to obtain services for them. In addition, immigrant families often maintain busy schedules while juggling the demands of caring for children, adjusting to a new culture, learning English, and working long hours to become economically stable, which may further limit their time and capacity to become relative placements for children.

RESOURCES FOR IDENTIFICATION AND ENGAGEMENT OF KINSHIP CARERS

As soon as a child and family become known to the child welfare agency, and throughout the life of a case, the agency should work to identify and engage relatives as resources. This includes conducting an extensive search for appropriate kin placements inside the United States as well as in other countries. There are a number of resources that can help support increased opportunities for relative placements.

Partnerships with Immigrant and Refugee Services

Inside the United States, it can be helpful in many ways to establish or expand partnerships with state and local immigrant and refugee services. These services can help child welfare agencies reach out to and communicate with immigrant communities in culturally and linguistically responsive ways. Because community leaders and service providers are generally trusted by immigrants, they can help community members learn about kinship foster care as well as help family members come forward to provide care. These agencies can also provide training to child

welfare agencies about the cultures, languages, and migration backgrounds of their communities and can often provide access to interpreters and a broad range of culturally and linguistically responsive services, as needed, such as legal assistance, mental health, or family support programs.

State Refugee Coordinators can be resources regarding immigrant and refugee communities in most states, providing contact information for community organizations and leaders and for any local cross-sector immigrant service forums that may be helpful. They can also provide information about their state's federally funded Unaccompanied Refugee Minor programs that provide culturally and linguistically responsive foster care to certain unaccompanied refugee and immigrant children and youth (<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/about/collaborations-and-partnerships>).

According to Sai-Ling Chan-Sew, a veteran of serving immigrant families in a California child welfare system, community agencies can help provide a culturally and linguistically responsive assessment of children and families as well as ensure that kinship families understand the services and support that therapeutic foster care provides. She notes that "many new immigrant families may want to help care for a child relative, but due to time and financial constraints, may not feel able to. Families may also have members without resident status and may be reluctant to be involved with any workers from the public system, including child welfare." She reminds us that all immigrant families have the potential to provide a loving home for their relative children, particularly when services are responsive to their culture, language, and migration contexts.

International Family Finding and Case Management

Several organizations are ready to assist child welfare workers in their search for relatives outside the United States. Some organizations can also help with a thorough assessment of placements through background checks and international home studies as well as providing services and follow-up reports. The International Social Service–United States of America Branch (ISS–USA) provides international case management in more than 120 countries on a broad range of child welfare issues, including relative tracing and family notification, background checks and home studies, post-placement supervision, visitation, mediation, and document tracing (<http://www.iss-usa.org/>). The International Committee of

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MANY NEW IMMIGRANT FAMILIES MAY WANT TO HELP CARE FOR A CHILD RELATIVE, BUT DUE TO TIME AND FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS, MAY NOT FEEL ABLE TO.

the Red Cross (ICRC) can be particularly effective in reuniting family members separated by war, conflict, disasters, and migration (<http://familylinks.icrc.org/>). Some Family Finding agencies are now providing international searches, in addition to U.S. searches, based on the ICRC model.

Many child welfare agencies, especially those located in U.S. border states, are working together with foreign embassies. For example, the Orange County, California, Social Services Agency (SSA) has established a strong relationship with the Mexican Consulate there. Raquel Amezcua, who helped develop a toolkit that supports the SSA's work with the Consulate, describes the broad range of services that the Mexican Consulate provides. These include conducting in-depth searches for relatives in Mexico; helping parents in the United States communicate with their relatives regarding placement; providing a preliminary assessment of relatives in Mexico; and maintaining ongoing

communication between the Mexican and California child welfare agencies regarding case progress. It is important to note that the relationship with a Consulate must be established prior to working together, generally through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The Migration and Child Welfare National Network website provides links to a number of MOUs that can be used as models for other jurisdictions (<http://research.jacsw.uic.edu/icwnn/state-specific-resources/>).

By proactively identifying local and international resources that can assist immigrant populations, and by establishing relationships with them early on, child welfare professionals can continue to build services that are responsive to the different cultural, linguistic, and migration backgrounds of today's children and families. Providing more opportunities for kinship care for children of immigrants is a critical step in the right direction.

The Migration and Child Welfare National Network (MCWNN) provides free technical assistance on this and related topics, including online toolkits that directly support child welfare practice with immigrant children and families (www.mcwnn.uic.edu).

Resources

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- Raquel Amezcua, LCSW, retired social worker from Orange County, California; currently a consultant for Casey Family Programs and the Walter S. Johnson Foundation
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- Sai-Ling Chan-Sew, LCSW, retired children's mental health director for San Francisco and founder of the Chinatown Child Development Center
- Alan Dettlaff, PhD, University of Illinois at Chicago, Cochair, Migration and Child Welfare National Network (MCWNN)
- Yali Lincroft, MBA, Program Officer, Walter S. Johnson Foundation; Cochair, Migration and Child Welfare National Network (MCWNN)
- Gretchen Test, MSW, Senior Associate, Child Welfare Strategy Group, Annie E. Casey Foundation



The following list of resources on kinship is provided courtesy of ChildFocus, Inc.

Kinship Process Mapping: A Guide to Improving Practice in Kinship Care

Kinship Process Mapping is a tool that your agency can use to assess its practices with identifying, approving, and supporting kin for children who cannot safely live with their parents. This Guide outlines a step-by-step process to prepare for, conduct, and analyze the results of kinship process mapping sessions.

<http://www.aecf.org/~media/Pubs/Topics/Child%20Welfare%20Permanence/Kinship/KinshipProcessMappingGuide/KinshipProcessMappingGuide.pdf>

Kinship Process Mapping: A Guide to Improving Practice in Kinship Care (Executive Summary)

<http://www.aecf.org/~media/Pubs/Topics/Child%20Welfare%20Permanence/Kinship/KinshipProcessMappingOverview/KinshipProcessMappingOverview.pdf>

The Kinship Diversion Debate: Policy and Practice Implications for Children, Families and Child Welfare Agencies

This report explores perspectives "for" and "against" diversion and identifies critical components that should be in place whenever agencies practice kinship diversion.

<http://www.aecf.org/~media/Pubs/Topics/Child%20Welfare%20Permanence/Kinship/KinshipDiversionDebate/KinshipDiversionDebate.pdf>

Kinship Adoption: Meeting the Unique Needs of a Growing Population

This issue brief explores how kinship adoption differs from adoption by foster parents, and recommends policies and practices agencies should consider to best support kin families who adopt.

http://childfocuspartners.com/wp-content/uploads/CF_Kinship_Adoption_Report_v5.pdf

Stepping Up for Kids: What Government and Communities Should Do to Support Kinship Families

This report summarizes the latest data and research on kinship care for children inside and outside the child welfare system.

<http://childfocuspartners.com/wp-content/uploads/SteppingUpForKidsPolicyReport2012.pdf>

Improving Foster Care Licensing Standards around the United States: Using Research Findings to Effect Change

This review of foster care licensing standards in all 50 states and D.C. includes recommendations to improve the licensing of all foster parents, including relatives.

http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/child_law/FC_Licensing_Standards.authcheckdam.pdf

Grandfamilies.org

Grandfamilies.org serves as a national resource on state laws and policies that support kinship care.

www.grandfamilies.org

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