

Kinship Care

Kinship care is the most desirable out-of-home option for children who cannot live with their parents. Kinship care preserves families, provides children with greater stability, creates a sense of belonging, and enhances a child's ability to identify with and maintain their family's culture and traditions. "Kin" can be blood relatives, or can be a non-relative who has a bond with the child and/or family. Kinship relationships are established through informal arrangements, legal custody, guardianship, and kinship adoption. Whomever creates this arrangement, and however it is created, kin caregivers make a voluntary, courageous, and life-changing commitment to devote their lives to children in their care.

Kinship Caregivers:

- Meet the basic day-to-day needs of the children and work with the family's social worker during the time that the family's case is open for services.
- Are notified of and attend meetings related to the child(ren).
- Receive monthly visits from the child's case worker as long as the case remains open.
- Enjoy the rewards that come from helping youth maintain family connections and a healthy perspective on life.
- Receive all pertinent information about the child(ren), and updates as we receive them.

Children in Need

Children entering kinship care are victims of abuse, neglect, and/or dependency. Prior to considering foster care for children who are unsafe in their own homes, GCCS works with birth parents to identify kin with whom their child(ren) might reside. Leaving a parent's home (even if they are not safe there) is a disruptive and traumatic experience for a child. The next best place for them to be is with someone they know, or someone their parents identify to care for them. Kinship care minimizes the disruption experienced by children in such cases, and allows them to maintain and preserve connections to their family and/or culture. Like children entering foster care, children in kinship care may also struggle with emotional and/or behavior challenges. These children have often also led traumatic, chaotic lives and have rarely experienced the stability of daily meals, clean clothes, help with homework or many of the things most of us take for granted. They, too, need guidance, nurturing, and a stable environment where they can feel protected and safe.

Kinship Caregiver Identification

Kinship caregivers are usually identified by birth parents, who have a right and an obligation to work with GCCS to create a plan for their child(ren). Sometimes, kinship caregivers are sought out by GCCS staff when birth parents are unwilling or unable to identify prospective kinship caregivers. A kinship caregiver can be a relative, friend, or neighbor who assumes the full-time, daily care of a child not born to them. Kinship caregivers have the option of becoming trained and licensed as foster parents, but are not required to do so.

Next steps include:

- Meeting with the child's caseworker from Guernsey County Children Services to determine if you are, indeed, interested in becoming a kinship caregiver for a specific child or sibling group.
- Completing a kinship family assessment with the Kinship Coordinator from GCCS.

- Getting fingerprinted as part of a legally-required criminal background check that must be run on all applicants.
- Kinship care often includes receiving Temporary or Legal Custody of the child(ren) in your care. The assessment and approval process can take up to several weeks.

Resources

As a kinship caregiver, you are part of a community that will support you as you provide kinship care to children into your home. GCCS has a variety of resources to help make the experience rewarding for both you and the child. These may include:

- Ohio's Kinship Permanency Incentive Program, which offers financial support to kinship caregivers who have obtained Legal Custody of a child
- Monthly Support Groups through GCCS, where you can share and learn from other kinship caregivers who are going through the same things that you are
- Independent Living services for older youth (life skills education and enrichment activities)
- Summer camp programs
- Monthly newsletter with information helpful to kinship caregivers
- Information and referral services
- Linkage to community resources
- Limited access (when available) to emergency assistance

If you are interested in learning more about kinship care through Guernsey County Children Services, please call **740-439-5555**.