



## Promoting Strong Families through TANF

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program plays a key role in promoting strength and stability for families experiencing poverty. By helping families to meet their basic needs, obtain employment, and nurture healthy family relationships, TANF programs can foster long-term family wellbeing and economic independence. States have significant flexibility to use TANF funds to address unique family needs and accomplish any of the four purposes of TANF, including:

1. Assisting families so children can be cared for in their own homes or the homes of relatives;
2. Reducing the dependency of parents in need by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage;
3. Preventing pregnancies among unmarried persons; and
4. Encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.<sup>1</sup>

Supported by the Office of Family Assistance's Peer-Based Training and Technical Assistance (PeerTA) contract, this is one part of a series of briefs that highlight innovative and strategic ways that states are leveraging TANF funds to strengthen families and communities by building capacity for self-sufficiency and economic independence. Other parts of this brief include spotlights on healthy relationship initiatives, child protective services prevention, stress management supports for mothers, and connections between TANF & WIC. For additional information on the TANF program and its legislative framework, please refer to the Office of Family Assistance's TANF Laws and Regulations page.

## Kinship Navigator Programs

Across the United States, nearly 2.5 million children are being raised by grandparents or other kin, either formally through the child welfare system or informally through private family arrangements.<sup>2</sup> Certified kinship caregivers, trained and approved by a child welfare agency, are part of a formal program and receive monthly payments to help cover the children's needs. By contrast, private and uncertified kinship care families may not have access to monthly foster care maintenance payments or other supports that certified caregivers receive.

To assist these family arrangements, kinship navigator programs (KNP) offer information, referrals, and follow-up services to kin caregivers to connect them with benefits and services that they or the children in their care may need. Kinship navigator programs help agencies and providers focus directly on the needs of families headed by relatives and provide a structure for educating them about the systems they must navigate for support.

Kinship Navigator Programs respond to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Purpose 1: "Assisting needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes or the homes of relatives." They can also help caregivers apply for public benefits such as TANF cash assistance, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Medicaid coverage for the child or children in their care.

## Effectiveness of Kinship Navigator Programs

Children receiving kinship care benefit from the care and affection of someone they know and from the preservation of important attachments, family ties, and relationships.

- A 2013 review of thirteen studies examining services for kinship care families found that KNPs, as well as support groups and legal assistance, had positive results for kinship families.<sup>3</sup>
- Kinship navigator programs have been found to improve the permanency of child placements.<sup>4</sup>
- Research illuminates that kin caregivers find KNPs to be helpful both for themselves and for the children in their care by providing information, resources, mutual support and decreasing isolation.<sup>5</sup>
- Satisfaction among kin caregivers participating in KNPs is high.

## Louisiana's Kinship Navigator Program

Out of Louisiana's 1,600 relative caregivers, only 600 are certified Kinship Caregivers.<sup>6</sup> In 2020, the Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services Developed the Kinship Navigator Program to increase resources and information for kinship caregivers. Then in 2021, the Louisiana Kinship Navigator Program launched the Louisiana Family Resource Center pilot program to better and more comprehensively meet the needs of informal kinship caregivers.

The Kinship Navigator Program is now a partnership between Methodist Foster Care and the Louisiana Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS), which assists kinship caregivers through the certification process and allows relatives who care for children in DCFS custody to access the supports and services available for certified Kinship Caregivers.

### Goals & Services Provided

The Louisiana KNP has three primary goals:

- Improve both child and caregiver well-being
- Increase support to kin caregivers statewide by improving access to information, services, and resources across the state
- Improve the odds that children can achieve safety, permanence, and well-being when placed with a kin caregiver

The Louisiana KNP assists kinship caregivers in locating resources and support that enable them to continue providing care to relative children in their homes. In doing so, it reduces or prevents maltreatment of those children and prevents placement disruption and/or entry into the state foster care system. The program runs out of nine Family Resource Centers across Louisiana. It provides a range of services such as:

- Kinship Caregiver Certification
- Support Groups
- Resource Brochures
- Assistance Programs
- 2-1-1 hotline

### Program Funding

Louisiana's statewide Kinship Navigator Program is funded through TANF state block grant funds from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families. The Department of Children and Family Services' Kinship Care Subsidy Program (KCSP) also provides cash

assistance of \$450 per month for each eligible child who resides with a qualified relative other than a parent.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Office of Family Assistance. (2024). *About TANF*. <https://acf.gov/ofa/programs/tanf/about>

<sup>2</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (n.d.). *Kinship care*. <https://www.aecf.org/topics/kinship-care>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0190740913003393> Lin, C.H. (2014). Evaluating services for kinship care families: A systematic review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 36, 32-41. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chidyouth.2013.10.026>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0190740921003273> Lee, D.H.J., Huerta, C. & Farmer, E.M.Z. (2021). Kinship navigation: Facilitation permanency and equity for youth in child welfare. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 131. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chidyouth.2021.106251>

<sup>5</sup> Casey Family Programs. (2023). *What are kinship navigator programs?*. <https://www.casey.org/what-are-kinship-navigators/>

<sup>6</sup> Louisiana Foster Care Support Organization. (n.d.) *Kinship care maintains family*. <https://www.louisianafostercare.com/kinship-care/>

<sup>7</sup> Department of Children & Family Services. (n.d.). *Kinship care subsidy program (KCSP)*. <https://dcfs.louisiana.gov/page/kcsp>

**PeerTA.** Sponsored by the Office of Family Assistance (OFA), PeerTA provides individual and group technical assistance and other supports to help Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) implement best practices and ensure compliance with TANF statutory purposes. PeerTA is led by MEF Associates and The Adjacent Possible.