

A relative is a preferred caregiver for children who are removed from their birth parents because such placements help to maintain connections to family and culture. Approximately 5,000 children live in foster care with a relative caregiver, often a grandparent, and tens of thousands of New Yorkers support kin outside of the formal foster care system, with very little access to financial or other supports. Kinship services and the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP) are two important channels through which the State can support relatives who have stepped in to care for children.

Why are Kinship Services and the Kinship Navigator Important?

Kinship services and the Kinship Navigator ensure that caregivers who assume responsibility for a related child have support and can access appropriate services to best provide for the children in their care.

- As of 2014, approximately 20% of New York's more than 18,000 children in foster care were placed in formal kinship foster care arrangements with relatives, with the attendant financial and other supports.ⁱ
 - The Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP) provides a permanency option for these families when neither adoption nor return to family are an option.
- At least 128,000 children in New York are in informal kinship arrangements.ⁱⁱ
 - The Kinship Navigator program helps to connect kinship families to important resources and services to help ensure stability for the children and families.

Make KinGAP More Effective and Reach More Families

KinGAP enables vulnerable children who have been removed from their birth parents, and are placed into foster care with a relative, to remain permanently with relative caregivers when neither return to family nor adoption are an option. However, several issues limit the program's ability to help families:

- KinGAP is funded through the Foster Care Block Grant, unlike adoption subsidies. This means that KinGAP uses funds that were intended to support foster care services.
- KinGAP currently uses a different definition of kin than foster care, so that close family friends and godparents, who may be kinship foster parents, are not eligible for the financial and other supports that KinGAP brings.
- KinGAP subsidies continue until age 21 only if the arrangement was finalized after the child's 16th birthday. New York has extended foster care until age 21, and should do the same for all KinGAP recipients.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2016-2017

- Increase State funding for kinship services to \$2.7 million and for the Kinship Navigator program to \$320,000 to support kinship families and cultivate permanent placements for children with family members.
- Make KinGAP more effective and allow more families to take advantage of KinGAP by: funding it outside of the Foster Care Block Grant; allowing payments to continue until age 21 regardless of age of finalization; and using the same definition of kin for KinGAP purposes as is used for kinship foster care.

ⁱ Kids Count Data Center. NY: Children in Foster Care by Placement Type.

ⁱⁱ Kids Count Data Center. NY: 2013-2015 Children in Kinship Care.