

## Children and Family Services Foster Care

Eleven counties received grants for the continuation of existing **Kinship Support Services Programs (KSSP)**. The KSSP programs provide community-based family support services to relative caregivers and the dependent children placed in their homes by the juvenile court and to those who are at risk of dependency or delinquency. The KSSP will also provide post permanency services to relative caregivers who have become the legal guardian or adoptive parent of formerly dependent children.

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. (Child Welfare League of America, January/February 1995)



### 1. What is kinship care?

“Relative” means an adult who is related to the child by blood, adoption, or affinity within the fifth degree of kinship, including stepparents, stepsiblings, and all relatives whose status is preceded by the words “great,” “great-great,” or “grand,” or the spouse of any of these persons, even if the marriage was terminated by death or dissolution. However, only the following relatives shall be given preferential consideration for the placement of the child: an adult who is a grandparent, aunt, uncle, or sibling.

### 2. What are the laws regarding kinship care?

\* When a child is placed in foster care by a county, the county social worker and court must give preferential consideration to certain relatives (grandparent, aunt, uncle or sibling).

\* The court shall order the parent to disclose all known relatives. The social worker shall initially contact the relatives given preferential consideration to determine if they desire the child to be placed with them. Those desiring placement shall be assessed.

\* A relative’s home is exempt from foster home licensure, but

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must be assessed by standards equivalent to licensure and approved by a county social worker. For a relative providing long-term foster care, the court may authorize the relative to provide legal consent for the child's medical, surgical, dental care and education. Social workers and courts must consider specific factors when assessing a relative to decide whether or not to place a child with a relative.

3. Is financial assistance available to help a relative care for a dependent child?

A relative who is caring for a child who is eligible for federal foster care receives a foster care payment each month. This payment is currently about \$425 to \$597 per month, depending on the age of the child.

A relative who is caring for a child who is not eligible for federal foster care receives a welfare payment for the child. This payment currently is at a maximum of \$387 per month per child and adjusted based on numerous factors.

4. What is the Kinship Support Services Program, and are the services available in my county?

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, and suburban communities. Relatives taking care of their kin face numerous challenges: the relative may be aged, in poor health, socially isolated or emotionally unprepared to assume the responsibility for young children, despite how much they love them. The children, often abused or neglected, may have physical or behavior problems that require professional help as well as the nurturing attention of the relative caregiver.

California's Kinship Support Services Program (KSSP) is aimed at helping relatives do the best job they can in raising these children, so the family can remain together. The program allocates funds to create these services in many communities throughout the state. Services provided by these programs can include: support groups, respite, information and referral, recreation, mentoring/tutoring, provision of furniture, clothing, and food, transportation, legal assistance, and many other support services needed by kin families.

Programs that are providing these services, as of November 2004, are listed below. Currently state law limits the eligibility for state funds to start a KSSP to those counties that have 40% or more of their dependent children (those in the custody of the child welfare agency) living with relatives.

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