PROTECTOHIO KINSHIP SUPPORTS

Human Services Research Institute Evaluation Brief July 2016

Kinship Supports

The ProtectOHIO Kinship Supports intervention is a method designed to promote kinship placement as best practice, increasing attention to and support for kinship placements, caregivers, and families. It's purpose is to ensure that kinship caregivers have the support they need to meet the child's physical, emotional, financial, and basic needs. In each of the 16 participating Ohio Public Children Services Agencies (PCSA) a trained Kinship Coordinator serves as an expert resource, and specific activities, assessments, and caregiver support plans are completed by him or her or other designated staff.

Kinship Supports Impact: Outcomes for Children

An evaluation of the Kinship Supports intervention, which compared outcomes for children whose families received intervention services to similar children in PCSAs not implementing the intervention in comparison counties showed promising findings:

- Kinship care was used as a placement option significantly more in PCSAs implementing the intervention.
- Compared to children in **foster care** in comparison counties, children in kinship care and whose families received intervention services experienced more favorable outcomes.
- Compared to children in **kinship care** in comparison counties, children in kinship care and whose families received intervention services experienced more favorable outcomes.

(See next page for more details).

"You can see a complete paradigm shift in how our agency is doing things. The whole agency has shifted toward kinship… We go above and beyond to help relatives maintain the child in their home."

- Kinship Staff

Kinship Supports Impact (continued)

Kinship Care as a Placement Option

Implementation of the Kinship Supports intervention was expected to lead to greater collaboration among PCSA staff and increased use of kin care. An examination of placement setting types used in intervention and comparison county PCSAs found:

- Children placed in out-of-home care in counties implementing Kinship Supports were significantly more likely to be placed initially with kin (i.e., avoid a temporary foster care placement) than were similar children in comparison counties.
- Children placed in out-of-home care in counties implementing Kinship Supports were significantly more likely to spend the majority of their placement days with kin than were similar children in comparison counties.

Kinship Care Versus Foster Care

The evidence-base for kinship care as a placement option is growing, indicating substantial benefits related to kinship care over foster care. It was expected that children placed in kin care and whose families received intervention services would have equivalent or more favorable outcomes compared to similar children placed in foster care in comparison counties. The evaluation found that children placed with kin and whose families received intervention services:

- Experienced greater placement stability (significantly fewer placement moves) than children placed in foster care in comparison counties.
- Reached permanency in significantly fewer days than children placed in foster care in comparison counties.
- Were significantly less likely to experience abuse or neglect after exiting care than children exiting foster care in comparison counties.
- Were significantly less likely to reenter out-of-home care after exiting care than children placed in foster care in comparison counties.

Kinship Care: Intervention Versus Practice as Usual

To assess the impact of the Kinship Supports intervention specifically, the evaluation examined outcomes for children placed with kin and whose families received intervention services compared to children also placed with kin but in comparison county PCSAs that were not implementing the intervention. The evaluation found that children whose families received intervention services:

- Experienced greater placement stability (significantly fewer placement moves) than children placed with kin in comparison counties.
- Reached permanency in significantly fewer days than children placed with kin in comparison counties.

ProtectOHIO: A IV-E Waiver Demonstration

IV-E waivers allow states the flexibility to use federal IV-E dollars, which can normally only be spent on foster care, for a range of child welfare purposes instead. Under this waiver, states are allowed to use federal IV-E funds for prevention and reunification services. This shift in spending from foster care to up-front services is expected to improve safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children and families involved with child protective services.

In October 1997, Ohio became one of the first states in the nation to implement a IV-E Waiver Demonstration. Because of the shared belief among participating PCSAs that this shift in practice would truly increase the safety and well-being of families, the demonstration was named "ProtectOHIO."

In 2012 all participating PCSAs agreed to use their waiver flexibility to implement a Kinship Supports intervention. The evaluation described in this brief covers the intervention from 2012 to 2015.

"ProtectOHIO is a way to revolutionize child welfare. It gets the state out of the way so we can work with families to meet their needs and goals."

- PCSA Director

Caregiver Feedback about Kinship Supports

"I am so grateful for this program! I don't think I could take care of my two grandkids if it wasn't for the kinship program."

"Every county or city in America deserves to have a program like this or similar to this."

"[My kinship worker] was a godsend. She has helped me with this child every step of the way. She helps make it easier, and when I need someone to talk to she's always there for me."

"This is one of the best-created programs for helping families."

"I could not have survived without the kinship program. They are there to help you help the kids. I felt 100% supported."

Kinship Supports Practice Model

The practice model for Ohio's Kinship Supports intervention includes the completion of several tools for each kinship family. Prior to or at the time a child is placed, two kinship specific assessments are used to ensure that kinship caregivers can support the children in their care. First, a kinship home assessment evaluates the caregiver's ability and willingness to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of children placed in his or her care. Second, a needs assessment is used to identify the services and supports the caregiver needs, as well as the strengths and resources of the kinship family. A caregiver support plan is developed in accordance with the needs assessment, and the needs assessment is subsequently updated on a quarterly basis to ensure that services and supports continue to address changes in the family's needs over time.

While the model includes prescriptive elements, including tools, trainings, and indirect work that should occur, there is considerable flexibility in staffing structures and roles related to the interventions. Three overarching staffing structures are used in Ohio:

Two-worker approach: In this model, ongoing caseworkers follow the traditional model of working with both parents and kin caregivers, and there is also an additional trained staff member or unit who provides kinship-specific support to all kin caregivers.

One-worker approach: In this model, a trained staff member acts as a kinship expert within the PCSA; however, the ongoing caseworker assigned to the case is the primary source of support for both biological parents and kin caregivers. Within this model, caseworkers are specially trained on the intervention, and may be a part of a specialized kinship unit.

Hybrid approach: In this approach, designated kinship staff may act as an additional, kinship-specific resource for caregivers on a case-by-case or as-needed basis, depending on staff capacity or the level of caregiver need. Caregivers may have varying experiences of the intervention within the model; it is likely that higher-need kinship caregivers are in contact with two PCSA staff (both the designated kinship staff and an ongoing caseworker), whereas other caregivers are supported by their ongoing caseworker only.

Kinship Supports and the Courts

Because the courts are integral child welfare partners, demonstration PCSAs dedicated time and energy toward educating judges and court representatives about both the importance of least restrictive placements and, more specifically, the ProtectOHIO Kinship Supports intervention. These education efforts included tailored presentations and collaborative meetings in addition to regular, ongoing communication.

In the majority of PCSAs, courts and judges were perceived as supportive of kinship placements and the Kinship Supports intervention. While each county's courts have different practices and policies regarding custody status when children are placed with kin caregivers, demonstration PCSAs reported that courts increasingly relied on kin caregivers as the waiver progressed.

Caregiver Perspective on Kinship Supports

Throughout the evaluation, focus groups were conducted with caregivers receiving the Kinship Supports intervention. Overall, caregivers perceived the relationship with a staff person with specific expertise and training around kin caregiving to be the primary strength of the intervention.

While there was variability in the strength of the relationship, caregivers indicated satisfaction with kinship staff who they viewed as accessible and approachable, supportive and understanding. Caregivers addressed the ease and timeliness of services, and reported that without this relationship, interactions with child welfare seem invasive and that they in turn are hesitant to ask child welfare for services or hard goods. Caregivers indicated that the supportive relationships, combined with prompt services and supports, are important not only to meet their physical needs, but also to allow them to focus on caretaking and maintaining their other professional or personal roles, contributing to the overall stability of the placement.

Kinship Supports: Lessons Learned

The evaluation of Ohio's Kinship Supports intervention found that implementation of the model was associated with increased use of kin care as a placement option. This finding, taken together with the results showing that children placed with kin caregivers experienced more favorable outcomes than children in foster care, is a compelling reason for a continued examination of kinship related interventions.

The implementation of Ohio's kinship model within the context of a IV-E Waiver Demonstration allowed PCSAs to address the lack of services available for kinship caregivers often seen within the child welfare system. The waiver allowed PCSAs to use federal IV-E dollars to systematically change staffing and practice policies, and provide caregivers with services and supports they may not have been eligible for under the traditional federal funding approach.

Nationally, the use of kin care as a placement option by child protective services is growing, though there remains a dearth of evidence about the staffing and practice strategies designed to support kin. The favorable outcomes associated with Ohio's kinship model merit additional exploration of the benefits of kinship care and related interventions.

Additional Information: For more detailed information related to the findings presented in this brief, please see the ProtectOHIO Third Waiver Period Final Evaluation Report: *www.hsri.org/project/evaluation-of-ohio-title-iv-e-waiver/publications*.

"The community-wide impression of Children Services seems to have improved since the implementation of Kinship [Supports]. Every time we go out to homes to work with kinship families, we are advocating for them."

- Kinship Coordinator

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