

A relative is a preferred caregiver when children are removed from their birth parents because such placements help to maintain connections to family and culture. Tens of thousands of New Yorkers have stepped in to care for kin, often under difficult circumstances. Most of the caregiving arrangements fall outside of the formal foster care system, leaving many caregivers without ready access to financial and other supports. Specifically, between 2012 and 2015, approximately 6,440 children entered foster care with a relative caregiver, often a grandparent, while more than 8,200 entered into direct custody with a relative.¹ Thousands of other New York children have been taken into kin care under less formal caregiving arrangements. Kinship services and the Kinship Navigator are two important channels through which the State can support relatives who have stepped in to care for children outside of the foster care system.

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. Two issues facing New York and the nation make investment in these supports of critical importance this year: the rise in parental opioid use, and the new federal administration's pledge to dramatically increase deportations.

- Hundreds of thousands of children in New York are in informal kinship arrangements,² and the number of children entering into direct custody arrangements with kin has been steadily increasing over the last five years.³
- Parental opioid abuse has led to a substantial increase in the number of children entering foster care, and being cared for by kin across the nation.^{4,5} While the data in New York is incomplete, we have heard from some counties that they are experiencing an increase in child welfare involvement due to parental opioid use.
- The new federal administration has pledged to dramatically increase deportations. This means that all of the children in the more than 200,000 NY families in which one or both parents is unauthorized are at risk of separation from their parents due to immigration detention or deportation.⁶
 - There is considerable risk that children separated from parents due to parental deportation will end up in foster care. In 2011, an estimated 5,000 children nationwide were placed in foster care because one or both of their parents had been deported. Providing kin caregivers information and supports might enable more of these children to remain safely with kin.
 - Many of the children separated from parents due to immigration detention or deportation will be taken in by kin, who will, in turn, need kinship supports.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2017-2018

- Maintain State funding for kinship services at **\$2.3 million** to ensure that families have access to services.
- Expand a *permission to contact* procedure so that the Kinship Navigator can better connect kinship families to services. Support this implementation by increasing funding for the Navigator by \$89,500 to fund a full-time in-take professional and support training of social services staff, bringing total funding for the Kinship Navigator to **\$410,000**.

¹ *New York State Office of Children and Family Services*. (2016). Admissions to Foster Care By Initial Placement Setting 2012 - 2015.

² *New York State Kinship Navigator*. NYS KinCare Summit 2014 Recommendations.

<http://www.nysnavigator.org/pg/professionals/documents/2014KincareSummitOctober232014Final.pdf>

³ *New York State Office of Children and Family Services*. (2016). Admissions to Foster Care By Initial Placement Setting 2012 - 2015.

⁴ *Administration for Children and Families*. (2016, Oct. 27). Number of children in foster care increases for the third consecutive year. Retrieved: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/media/press/2016-number-of-children-in-foster-care-increases-for-the-third-consecutive-year>

⁵ Wiltz, Teresa. (2016, Nov. 2). Opioid epidemic puts more children in grandparents' care. *Pittsburg Post-Gazette*.

<http://www.post-gazette.com/aging-edge/aging-edge-reports/2016/11/02/Why-more-grandparents-are-raising-children/stories/201611020179>

⁶ *Migration Policy Institute*. Profile of the Unauthorized Population: New York.

<http://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/unauthorized-immigrant-population/state/NY>