



Advancing a
Kin-First
Culture

Discussion
Guide

JULY 2022

**SAFE
STRONG
SUPPORTIVE**

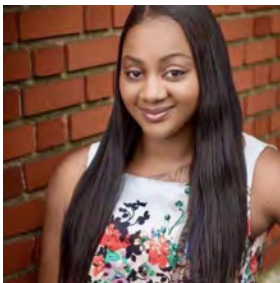
safe children | strong families | supportive communities

Contents

This action-oriented guide includes short, dynamic videos, discussion questions, and key resources and tools for child welfare leaders and stakeholders to:

- Explore the fundamental components of a kin-first culture and how that philosophy is translated into good practice and agency policy;
- Understand the full range of resources and supports that kin families need from the government and their communities; and
- Hear from kinship caregivers with lived expertise about what changes they would like to see child welfare agencies and communities make that would improve lives.

Meet the experts



SONIA EMERSON
Senior Program Associate,
Child Focus



ADRIAN MCLEMORE
Program Officer, The Annie
E. Casey Foundation



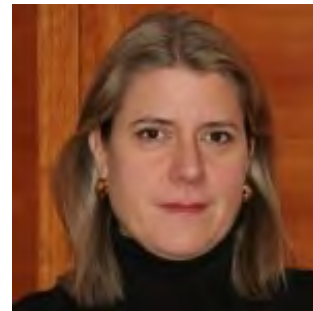
SIXTO CANCEL
Chief Executive Officer +
Founder, Think of Us



**VANNESSA L.
DORANTES, LMSW**
Commissioner, Connecticut
Department of Children &
Families



MICHAEL WILLIAMS
Deputy Commissioner,
Connecticut Department of
Children & Families



ANA BELTRAN, JD
Director, Grandfamilies &
Kinship Support Network: A
National Technical
Assistance Center,
Generations United

Building blocks for a kin-first culture

“Knowing your culture, knowing where you come from, and knowing your connections really matters to children. Children and youth do really well when they have that connection to family and their past.”

-Ana Beltran, Director, Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network:
A National Technical Assistance Center

A kin-first culture prioritizes young people’s connections with kin or [chosen family](#) to promote a sense of belonging and connection to family history and culture. When the decision is made to remove a child from their home, kin should be the first option for placement.

Learn from experts by viewing video one at <https://www.casey.org/ending-need-for-group-placements/?section=le2> and exploring the discussion questions and additional resources below.

Discussion questions

1. What does a kin-first culture look like? Have you achieved this in your agency?
2. What are key values and beliefs that the agency must embrace to have a kin-first culture?
3. What steps have you taken to fully engage young people and their families in naming and identifying chosen family and honoring their own definition of kin?
4. How does prioritizing a kin-first culture help prevent the need for group placement?
5. How can creating a kin-first culture support your agency’s race equity goals?
6. What efforts should your agency make to restore relationships with communities that have been harmed by systemic racism and bias, particularly Black and American Indian/Alaska Native communities, in order to form trusting relationships with kin?

Resources

- [wikiHow for Creating a Kin-First Culture](#) (Grandfamilies.org)
- [Why should child protection agencies adopt a kin-first approach?](#) (Casey Family Programs)
- [How can we ensure a child’s first placement is with family?](#) (Casey Family Programs)
- [What are some examples of effective family search and engagement?](#) (Casey Family Programs)
- [A reason, a season, or a lifetime: Relational permanence among young adults with foster care backgrounds](#) (Annie E. Casey Foundation, Chapin Hall Center for Children)

Critical supports for kin families

“If we get a ‘no’ or we get a ‘maybe’ or an ‘I don’t know if I can do this’, I think it’s beholden on an agency to help that kin placement have what they need to care for that child.”

-Adrian McLemore, Program Officer, The Annie E. Casey Foundation

Kin families should have culturally appropriate, community-based services and supports that are tailored to their unique needs but are also equitable to resources provided to foster parents. Children, along with their family and social and community networks, should be included in planning, decision-making, and service provision.

Learn from experts by viewing video two at <https://www.casey.org/ending-need-for-group-placements/?section=le2> and exploring the discussion questions and additional resources below.

Discussion questions

1. How does your agency engage young people and kin to understand their needs?
2. How does your agency support and strengthen relationships between parents and kin caregivers?
3. What culturally appropriate, community-based services and supports are available to kin families across your service continuum? Are they meeting the needs identified by families?
4. What options are available to support kin caring for young people with therapeutic needs?
5. How do you ensure equity among your kinship and foster parents regarding services and supports?
6. How are you eliminating licensing barriers for kin?
7. What has your agency done to help your workforce understand the unique needs of:
 - a. Kin compared to foster parents (non-kin)?
 - b. Families of color?
 - c. Other families with specific needs?
8. How is your agency engaging the community in developing supports for kin families?

Resources

- [Reinforcing a Strong Foundation: Equitable Supports for Basic Needs of Grandfamilies](#) (Generations United)
- [Kinship Therapeutic Foster Care Toolkit](#) (Family Focused Treatment Association)
- [How can we prioritize kin in the home study and licensure process, and make placement with relatives the norm?](#) (Casey Family Programs)
- [What are kinship navigator programs?](#) (Casey Family Programs)

Roadmap for change

“When you recognize that your race and equity work is deleteriously impacting families of color, you have to put in firewalls to ensure that the same things afforded to white families are implemented and expected for all families.”

-Vanessa Dorantes, Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Children & Families

Child welfare systems were not originally designed with kin families in mind. In order to advance transformation of mind-set, policy and practice, agencies must reimagine typical approaches and design new processes and solutions with full participation and diverse perspectives of families and kin caregivers.

Learn from experts by viewing video three at <https://www.casey.org/ending-need-for-group-placements/?section=le2> and exploring the discussion questions and additional resources below.

Discussion questions

1. What agency processes should be reexamined to ensure that they address the needs of young people and their kin?
2. In what ways do your placement priorities and licensure/approval policies align with the gold standard principles of the [Indian Child Welfare Act \(ICWA\)](#) by prioritizing placement for all children within their extended families and communities?
3. What expectations do you set for exploring the paternal *and* maternal side of a young person’s family, as well as important connections that are not related by blood, marriage, and adoption?
4. What opportunities currently exist to partner with grassroots community organizations that kin families trust, while also helping traditional child welfare providers build and strengthen their kin-first practice?
5. How have you disaggregated your data to understand kinship trends by race and ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, language, and other relevant youth and family characteristics?
6. What benchmarks and outcome goals will help your agency assess and improve your kinship practice? What percentage of children are in licensed kin placements now, and how much will you seek to increase that percentage in a year? Two?
7. What could be possible if your agency redirected the resources spent on group placements to kin families?

Resources

- [Supporting Kinship Caregivers Training Series](#) (Dr. Joseph Crumbley)
- [How did A Second Chance Inc. transform kinship care in Allegheny County?](#) (Casey Family Programs)
- [User’s guide to essential kinship data](#) (Annie E. Casey Foundation)
- Toolkits for working with families (Generations United):
 - [Working with American Indian and Alaska Native Families](#)
 - [Working with African American Families](#)
 - [Working with Latino Families](#)