

## Site Visit Report: Arizona Kinship Navigator Project

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/management/funding/funding-sources/federal-funding/cb-funding/cbreports/family/>

**Award #: 90CF0049**

**Cluster: Family Connection Grants: Child Welfare/TANF Collaboration in Kinship Navigation Programs**

**Grantee: Arizona's Children Association (<http://arizonakinship.org/>)**

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## Project Description

In 2012, the Children's Bureau awarded seven 3-year grants for the Family Connection Grants: Child Welfare/TANF Collaboration in Kinship Navigation Programs cluster. These kinship navigation projects support connections between family members and children and youth who are in, or at risk of entering, foster care by helping kin caregivers identify and access appropriate and meaningful services. One of these grants was awarded to the Arizona's Children Association (AzCA) to implement the Arizona Kinship Navigator Project (AzKN). Through this project, AzCA proposed to increase the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and youth in kinship care by providing services to formal and informal caregivers. AzKN has five objectives:

- Ensure kinship families have access to the benefits for which they are eligible
- Provide linkages to needed legal services
- Navigate existing community support systems
- Strengthen kinship families involved with the child welfare system
- Enhance other community-based and government responses for kinship families

Project partners include the Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS), Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES), including its Family Assistance Administration (FAA) and Division of Aging and Adult Services; Arizona Grandparent Ambassadors (AGA); Casey Family Programs; the Children's Law Center; Seeds of Hope; and Southern Arizona Legal Aid (SALA). The evaluation is being conducted by LeCroy & Milligan Associates, Inc.

## Need for the Service

Children are placed in kinship homes for a variety of reasons, including abuse, neglect, abandonment, incarceration, AIDS, drugs, homelessness, and chronic illness. These children often have special needs, frequently stemming from significant losses, and they can find it very challenging to trust adults. Being able to remain with kinship families helps reduce the impact of these challenges, but kinship families need support and assistance to provide stable, permanent homes for the children in their care.

Grandparents and other relative caregivers who have taken the responsibility to meet the primary needs of their kin's children frequently experience emotional and social challenges, as well as an inability to access resources to meet their children's needs. Due to their low or fixed incomes, they may not be financially prepared to support the children. Additionally, they may need legal assistance in obtaining custody or guardianship of the children to ensure the children's permanency and safety. Kinship families also need updated parenting information about and assistance in accessing and navigating the many services required to help their families.

## Project Services

AzKN provides kinship families with access to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) child-only grant benefits, legal services, information, referrals, educational and support groups, and activities.

**Access to TANF child-only grants.** Through its partnership with the FAA, AzKN is able to assist kin caregivers in accessing TANF child-only grants. FAA assigns staff to be kinship liaisons to help alleviate any problems kin caregivers may have when applying for TANF child-only grants. FAA has an expedited approval process for the TANF child-only cases in order to determine eligibility within 21 days, as opposed to the normal 45 days. This helps the caregivers receive the benefits more quickly. FAA also offers phone interviews.

AzKN also has a data-sharing agreement with FAA. Every 6 months, AzKN sends a list of all kin caregivers in its program to FAA to determine whether the caregivers are part of FAA's TANF dataset, which includes name, date of birth, zip code, and county. This information helps AzKn measure its effectiveness in helping kin caregivers apply for TANF funds. Of the caregivers participating in AzKN, 42 percent receive TANF grants, while 47 percent never received TANF funds because they were ineligible. Eleven percent of the caregivers are no longer receiving TANF funds because they reached a benefit cap or became ineligible due to their income level. (A benefit cap is when children under age 18 lose eligibility because they have utilized their maximum amount of benefits.) The following chart illustrates how a typical kinship family can receive one of many different financial assistance amounts between receipt of TANF child-only grants, adoption subsidies, and title 8 guardianship subsidies, which is a State program. AzKN primarily works with relative kinship caregivers who are not licensed as foster parents, therefore, the foster care payment rate is not provided. The adoption subsidy is for children who were in foster care and were permanently placed in an adoptive home.

### Differences in Financial Assistance Amounts

AzKN shared the different amounts a family might receive between TANF child-only grants, adoption subsidies, and title 8 guardianship subsidies.

#### **TANF child-only grant**

- \$164/month for one child
- \$220/month for two children
- \$278/month for three children
- \$335/month for four children
- \$392/month for five children

#### **Adoption subsidy\***

- \$590.40/month for a child under the age of 12 years
- \$651.90/per month for a child over 12 years of age

#### **Title 8 guardianship subsidy\***

- \$388.50/per month

\* The adoption subsidy and title 8 guardianship subsidy are calculated on a daily basis rather than a monthly basis by the agency. The amounts presented above for those categories are equal to the daily amount multiplied by 30 (assuming 30 days per month). This was done to allow for easier comparison to the TANF child-only grants, which are provided as a monthly amount.

**Linkages to legal services.** AzKN is able to provide legal services due to its partnerships with SALA in Cochise, Pima (which includes Tuscon), and Pinal counties and the Children's Law Center in Maricopa County (which includes Phoenix), AZ. It offers guardianship clinics, which help inform kin caregivers about the different types of guardianships and assist them with completing title 14 voluntary guardianship papers and obtaining court assistance. AzKN also conducted a one-on-one follow-up clinic for individuals who had complicated situations. The clinic is offered in English and Spanish. AzKN also provides referrals for other legal services, such as writing wills and resolving housing issues. Most kin caregivers are referred to SALA by AzKN, although about 20 percent contact SALA directly. Staff at SALA conduct intake interviews and determine whether each client should be referred to a guardianship clinic conducted by a volunteer attorney or assigned to a SALA attorney for non-guardianship issues. For families who are representing themselves at the guardianship hearings in probate court, SALA will provide a law student or lawyer to review paperwork and attend the final hearing with them.

**Children of Incarcerated Parents (CIP) program.** The AzKN CIP program is offered in Maricopa and Pima counties. CIP provides life-skill programs for youth and caregivers. The youth group follows two evidence-based curricula: "Botvin LifeSkills Training" and "Empowering Children of Incarcerated Parents." These curricula are designed to help youth process their emotions and build skills that lower risk factors

and raise protective factors. The youth group also explores the impacts of parental incarceration on their lives. It provides early intervention services to ensure youth remain out of the criminal justice system. The visitation program helps children visit their parents, which maintains connections and reduces recidivism. AzKN leaders stated that parents are less likely to return to prison when they can see their children. Visitation support is provided through van rides to Perryville (a women's prison) and Lewis (a men's prison). They also offer gas gift cards once a month for other prison visits. AzKN also offers post-release/reunification support to help with the parent's transition back into the child's life. They also help caregivers navigate the criminal justice system. An AzKN representative explained that it can be very confusing for kin families to understand the jail-to-prison transfer process, visitation procedures, and other correctional system processes. The post-release/reunification support services provide information to help alleviate some of the stresses that families may encounter.

**Kinship information sessions.** AzKN provides kinship information sessions in English and Spanish so caregivers can learn about the dependency court process and receive information on what to expect from the child welfare system. For many families, this is their first time being involved in the child welfare system. The families meet with staff from the Department of Child Safety (DCS) kinship support liaison unit, who is dedicated to working with kinship families for the first 90 days of children's placements. Representatives from various foster care licensing agencies also make presentations to the caregivers. Comprehensive Medical and Dental Plan explains health-care issues for children involved in the child welfare system, and Child Care Resource and Referral, a community agency on contract with the State government, assists families in locating child care in the community. Additionally, TANF staff from each agency highlights their own agency's procedures. According to AzKN staff, "This helps kinship families prepare for their walk with child welfare."

**Connections to community support systems.** The kinship navigators connect caregivers to various systems. One of the navigators stated, "We don't advocate for the caregivers, but we help caregivers find their voice so that they can advocate for themselves and not feel overwhelmed." The navigators may accompany caregivers to behavioral health appointments, child and family team meetings, school individual education program meetings, and juvenile or dependency court hearings. They connect families to tangible resources, such as diapers from the Diaper Bank of Southern Arizona, clothing vouchers, and rent and utility assistance. Through their partnership with a local church, the navigators obtain vouchers to Payless ShoeSource.

The kin caregivers are also connected to two grassroots advocacy organizations: Arizona Grandparent Ambassadors (AGA) and the Central Arizona Kinship Coalition. It is very rare to have even one kinship advocacy organization in a State; Arizona has two organizations that are very active in communicating with kin caregivers and their State legislators. AGA is an advocacy and support network for grandparents and other kin caregivers who are raising a relative's children. It has local and regional kinship support groups and sponsored outreach summits to help caregivers learn more about AzKN and educational and training opportunities. The Central Arizona Kinship Coalition comprises of eight community service agencies that meet monthly to work primarily with kinship families. The Coalition shares information with the kin caregivers participating in the project about any upcoming events, new community resources, and advocacy goals for the year. The Coalition also teaches the kin caregivers how to advocate at the local, State, and national levels. The coalition works to strengthen and educate the community regarding kinship dynamics and advocate for the needs of kinship families.

**The KARE Center.** AzKN's Kinship and Adoption Resources and Education (KARE) Family Center is a partnership with Casey Family Programs (CFP). The KARE Center offers a full continuum of services, including CFP-led intensive case management, family finding, and family group facilitation meetings. It also offers training through what is affectionately known as the "KARE College." The KARE College provides monthly workshops on topics based on caregiver needs, such as how to complete taxes, guardianship and adoption, and trauma-informed care for children.

**Support groups.** AzKN provides 13 support groups for kin caregivers in Spanish and English. All the support groups provide child care, including therapeutic child care in Maricopa County. In the rural areas, the project offers KARE College and the peer support groups together.

**Website and help line.** AzKN established a website (<http://arizonakinship.org/>) that provides information on local resources, State and Federal benefits, legal rights, and permanency options.

The Division of Aging and Adult Services established a caregiver resource line in August 2012. The help line is not dedicated solely to kinship-specific services; it offers general information and referrals for the care of elders, children with special needs, and adults with disabilities, as well as kinship caregivers. The caregiver advocate volunteers, who receive call transfers from the toll-free line, help caregivers make informed decisions to better care for their loved ones. Kinship navigators trained the volunteers on the needs of kin caregivers.

To view additional information about AzKN, see attachment 1.

### **Project Staff**

The following are the project staff for AzKN:

- Julie Treinen, program director
- Ana Pineda, program coordinator
- M. Joy Williams, family group coordinator
- Pam Harris-Williams, office manager
- Renea Jackson, supervisor
- Caryl Marie Brendle, kinship navigator
- Brenda Ives, kinship navigator
- Caryl Marie Brendle, kinship navigator
- Michele Closset, kinship navigator
- Rosy Marquez, kinship navigator
- Maria Avila, kinship navigator
- Beth Lizarranga, kinship navigator
- Rebecca Fealk, kinship navigator

They also have eleven child care and special services instructors.

### **Target Population**

The project hopes to serve a minimum of 3,000 grandparents or other relatives and the children in their care. The kin families must reside in Maricopa, Pima, Pinal, or Cochise counties. At the time of the site visit, AzKN had served 3,135 individuals.

### **Dissemination**

AzCA plans to present information and findings to stakeholders, such as researchers, policymakers and practitioners on national, State and local levels, throughout the life of the program. From October 13, 2013, to March 31, 2014, AzKN conducted more than 60 dissemination activities. See attachment 2 for additional details on the project's dissemination activities.

### **Sustainability Plan**

AzCA is still working on its sustainability plan, but it continues to seek additional funding through philanthropic giving and foundation grants. It is also having discussions with DCS and FAA to determine how their partnership can be continued. DCS reported that it will continue to work with AzCA and the other partners.

FAA also is willing to sustain the kinship liaison partnership with AzCA. The project's kinship liaisons are FAA staff, and it would not require additional funding for them to continue providing support. Their duties would blend in with their other TANF duties to facilitate the application process.

The partners appear to be enthusiastic about combining their assets to reach and serve kinship families. However, they need to continue to search for ways that they can support the effort through cost neutral efforts.

At the time of this site visit, AzCA was applying for a Children's Bureau family group decision-making (FGDM) grant using a random control trial methodology. The kin caregivers receiving services through AzKN would be the target population. Some caregivers would be assigned to the FGDM treatment group, and the others would be a part of the control group. AzCA wants to determine if adding an FGDM component to AzKN will yield better outcomes for kin families. [Editor's note: AzCA was awarded the FGDM grant in October 2015.]

### **Site Visit Details**

The virtual site visit occurred on March 18 and April 1, 2015. On March 18, a 2-hour conference call was held with the following project staff, evaluators, partners, and kinship ambassadors:

#### **AzCA**

Julie Treinen, program director  
Joslyn Carlson, grants manager  
Lori Riegel, development director  
Pam Harris-Williams, office manager  
Renea Jackson, supervisor  
Harriet Earley, compliance, performance, and quality improvement coordinator for performance evaluation  
M. Joy Williams, family group coordinator  
Brenda Ives, kinship navigator  
Caryl Marie Brendle, kinship navigator  
Michele Closset, kinship navigator  
Maria Avila, kinship navigator  
Beth Lizarranga, kinship navigator  
Rebecca Fealk, kinship navigator

#### **AzKN Partners**

Laura Jasso, Arizona Grandparent Ambassadors  
John Bowen, DES  
Thomas Britt, DES  
Beverlee Kroll, DCS  
Michele Schmidt, LeCroy & Milligan Associates, Inc.

On April 1, the second conference call was conducted for 1 hour and 15 minutes with the individuals from the previous call plus the following other staff and partners:

#### **AzCA**

Renea Jackson, program supervisor

#### **AzKN Partners**

Mark Schwartz, DCS  
Lori Devine, DCS  
Sherry Griffin, Benevilla Family Resource Center  
Carole Punske, Casey Family Programs

## Lessons Learned

### Unique and Innovative Features

AGA and the Central Arizona Kinship Coalition teaches kin caregivers participating in the project about how to advocate on the State and national levels. The organizations took the caregivers to State-level briefings, and the caregivers participated at the National GrandRally for Grandparents and Other Relatives Raising Children, which was held in Washington, DC and was sponsored by AARP, Generations United, and the Child Welfare League of America.

AzKN offers preemployment support for youth in kinship care between the ages of 11 and 17 in Pima County. The youth plan AzKN family events, such as family appreciation day, Christmas parties, and a back-to-school bash. They learn job skills, are evaluated on their performance, and receive stipends based on their performance. Due to the popularity of this program, there is a waiting list for youth to get into this program.

Other unique and innovative features of the project that were previously discussed in this report are the KARE Family Center, the CIP program, and the assistance provided by FAA liaisons to families applying for TANF benefits.

### Successful Strategies

According to AzKN leaders, one of the project's successful strategies is its outreach activities. AzKN uses a variety of methods to reach its target audience. One medium is the website for Arizona Kinship Support Services, which is how the agency refers to the AzKN project. The website provides information on education and training, how to find support groups, and resources in their area. The site (<http://arizonakinship.org/>) generates an average of 908 unique visitors each month, with approximately two-thirds (66 percent) being new visitors and one-third (34 percent) being return visitors. AzKN also hosts outreach events in the community during which project staff and kin caregivers serve as volunteers to staff the booths. The caregivers share information about the kinship navigator program and describe what it is like to be a kin caregiver. The project also utilizes the previously described Caregiver Resource Line and other media sources, such as television, radio, print, billboard signs, and Facebook, to reach clients or potential clients. Table 1 provides additional detail about AzKN referral sources.

**Table 1**  
**Referral Sources**

Referral Source	Percent
DCS staff	42%
Schools	22%
Navigators (word of mouth)	13%
Other social service	9%
Other AzCA	4%
AKSS website	3%
Other	8%

AzKN purchased two minivans for use in Pinal and Cochise counties, which are both rural areas. The van is an office on wheels and allows the kinship navigators to visit the caregivers' homes to conduct intake and provide information and referral services. Another successful outreach effort is offering "in-day schedules" where the kinship navigators work on a rotating schedule and accept all incoming calls and walk-ins. This allows them to assist kin families effectively by identifying their immediate need and connecting them to the appropriate resources. The project also has bilingual staff to meet the needs of Spanish-speaking families.

AzKN's child care for caregivers has proven to be indispensable. Kin caregivers often feel isolated from others because they lack child care, which limits how frequently they can participate in support group meetings or class.

### Challenges

In the first year of the grant, AzKN excelled in outreach and marketing, but this caused the project to become overwhelmed by the number of referrals it received through walk-ins, phone calls, web inquiries, and word of mouth. Each kinship navigator had an average of 200 families per month. This required the leaders to reorganize the intake processes to better meet the needs of kinship families.

The DCS kinship placement list posed another challenge for AzKN. The project exceeded its expectations in reaching kinship families, which meant that it had more families to serve than anticipated. It received an average of 102 children per month in Pima County and 228 children per month in Maricopa County. AzKN is developing ways to handle the large volume of cases. It is providing more information and referrals rather than taking on every family.

Although the kinship information sessions are scheduled at various days and times throughout the week, attendance in Maricopa County has been lower than anticipated. Project leaders suspect that the caregivers may be overwhelmed by the responsibilities of caring for their kin children and are not able to attend in person. Therefore, the project is considering developing a video so that caregivers can receive the information at home or work.

### Evaluation

The evaluation assesses a variety of issues, including organizational and staff training, collaboration, advocacy, outreach, kinship navigator referrals, and kin caregivers' utilization of services and resources. The evaluation also includes a rigorous outcome evaluation designed to assess the impact of AzKN on the long-term permanency, safety, and well-being of children and youth in kinship care. Items being studied include the services and supports provided to participants, changes in participants' engagement with the system, and participants' service utilization.

### Preliminary Findings

The following data are for the period of October 1, 2012, through September 16, 2014. During that time, AzKN served 3,135 kin caregiver households. Most caregivers (57 percent) were grandparents. See table for addition details about the caregiver relationships.

**Table 2**  
**Caregiver Relationship to Child**

<b>Relationship</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Grandparents	57%
Aunts/uncles	19%
Non-relatives (fictive kin)	6%
Siblings/step-siblings	3%
Great grandparents	3%
Great aunt/uncles	2%
Cousins	2%
Other (e.g., foster/adoptive grandparents, godparents)	6%
Unknown	2%

Most caregivers (86 percent) were females, with an age range of 18–91. The average age of all caregivers was 50. See table 3 for information about caregivers' races and ethnicities.

**Table 3**  
**Caregivers' Race/Ethnicity**

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Hispanic/Latino	47%
White/Caucasian	34%
African-American	9%
American Indian/Alaska Native	1%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1%
Other (e.g., multiracial, Asian)	2%
Unknown	3%

The caregivers represented 20 different Native American Tribes, with many being from the Tohono O'odham Nation, the Pascua Yaqui Tribe, and the Navajo Nation.

Nearly half (48 percent) of the caregivers had some form of legal relationship with the children in their care at the time of intake, and 42 percent had no legal relationship at that time. There were data collection errors in this category for 10 percent of the cases.

Of the 4,988 children residing in the kin caregiver homes, 39 percent had no current DCS involvement (informal arrangement), and 38 percent had current DCS involvement (formal arrangement). Information on DCS involvement was not provided by the caregiver for 23 percent of the children. Of the children and youth in informal care, 60 percent were being cared for due to reasons that could lead to a DCS investigation. Because kin received assistance and provided care, these children did not enter the child welfare system.

### **Baseline Survey**

AzKN administered a baseline survey from May 2013 to February 2015 to ascertain clients' needs. The baseline survey was only administered to the 94 caregivers who had a case opened during that time. Additional caregivers contacted the project during that time, but many of them (1) only needed information and did not require a case to be opened or (2) declined to participate in the study.

The survey identified the following as the top baseline needs:

- 1) Saving money for the future
- 2) Having time to take care of self
- 3) Having money to buy necessities and pay bills

Thirty caregivers completed the follow-up surveys between 6 and 21 months after the baseline. Results of this survey showed increased needs for paying for special needs for their child, having a job that they enjoyed, and having someone to talk to about their child. There were decreased needs for paying for their utility bills, having time to take care of self, and finding future care for their children. To view the baseline and results of the needs finding survey, refer to attachments 3 and 4.

### **Cost Savings**

The AzKN evaluators assessed the cost savings to DCS as a result of the project. The project estimates that DCS saves \$4.4 million annually on case management for the more than 1,800 children involved with the project who may have been diverted from entering formal foster care. The project also analyzed the cost savings for youth who entered formal kinship care but likely would have otherwise entered congregate care (see table 4).

**Table 4**

**Cost Savings When Youth in Formal Kinship Care Are Diverted From Congregate Care**

Age	Number of Children	Monthly Cost Savings	Annual Cost Savings
8–11 years	1,226	\$4,064,190	\$48,770,280
12–17 years	607	\$2,012,205	\$24,146,460
Total	1,833	\$6,076,395	\$72,916,740

**Note:** Case management costs \$203 per month per child. This includes the cost of the case manager but not case management or administrative overhead costs.

Additionally, the project determined the cost savings if youth who entered informal kinship care had entered formal foster care (table 5) or if they had entered congregate care (table 6).

**Table 5**

**Cost Savings When Youth in Informal Kinship Care Are Diverted From Family Foster Care**

Age	Number of Children	Monthly Cost Savings	Annual Cost Savings
8–11 years	898	\$606,150	\$7,273,800
12–17 years	481	\$324,675	\$3,896,100
Total	1,379	\$930,825	\$11,169,900

**Note:** Family foster care costs \$675 per month per child. This does not include costs for case management, support services, or monthly allowances.

**Table 6**

**Cost Savings When Youth in Informal Kinship Care Are Diverted From Congregate Care**

Age	Number of Children	Monthly Cost Savings	Annual Cost Savings
8–11 years	898	\$2,976,870	\$35,722,440
12–17 years	481	\$1,594,515	\$19,134,180
Total	1,379	\$4,571,385	\$54,856,620

**Note:** Congregate care costs \$3,315 per month per child. It does not include costs for case management, support services, or monthly allowances.

Tables 5 and 6 are estimates of costs for the same populations of children in two different sets of outcomes and should not be added together.

To view a PowerPoint presentation regarding the evaluation design and findings, refer to attachment 3.

**Attachments**

1. [Arizona Kinship Support Services, AKSS \(PPT\)](#)
2. [Effective Dissemination Worksheet for CB Discretionary Grant Dissemination Planning](#)
3. [Arizona Kinship Support Services Evaluation Highlights: FY 1–2 \(PPT\)](#)
4. [Semi-Annual Progress Report for September 30, 2014, to March 31, 2015: Appendix B: Evaluation Activities](#)



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