

## Site Visit Report: Kinship Interdisciplinary Navigation Technologically-Advanced Model (KIN-Tech)

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

**Award #: 90CF0050**

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

**Grantee: The Children's Home, Inc. (<http://www.childrenshome.org/programs-and-services/finding-forever-families/kinship-support-services.aspx>)**

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**Last Update: April 2016**

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## Project Description

In 2012, the Children's Bureau awarded seven 3-year grants for the Family Connections Grants: Child Welfare/TANF Collaboration in Kinship Navigation Programs cluster. Kinship navigator programs 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. The Children's Home, Inc. (CHI) in Tampa, FL and its partners received an award to implement the Kinship Interdisciplinary Navigation Technologically-Advanced Model (KIN-Tech). This project includes several innovative program features, including One-e-App (a one-stop, web-based system to apply for benefits), peer-to-peer navigation (support by other kin caregivers), and the Interdisciplinary Teams (coordinated team meetings with experts from various fields).

The following are CHI's key partners for this project:

- Dr. Kerry Littlewood of AAJ Research and Evaluation (the evaluator)
- Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF), Division of Economic Self Sufficiency
- Eckerd Community Alternatives
- Juvenile Welfare Board (JWB) of Pinellas County
- Children's Board of Hillsborough County
- Family Enrichment Center
- Bay Area Legal Services, Inc.
- REACHUP, Inc.
- St. Anthony Hospital Community Parish Nursing Program
- Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, Child Protective Investigations Division
- Pinellas County Sheriff's Office, Child Protection Investigation Division
- Operation PAR, Inc.

## Need for the Service

More than 20,000 children in Hillsborough County live in households headed by grandparents, and approximately 15,000 children live in such households in Pinellas County. Kin caregivers often need support services to meet their families' needs and facilitate the safety, permanency, and well-being of the children in their care. After conducting several focus groups, surveys, and interviews with kin caregivers, child welfare staff, and kinship staff, CHI discovered that caregivers were having difficulties using available technologies to access information and enroll in programs. Additionally, kin caregivers found it challenging to work with multiple systems to access services, and many kinship caregivers are not aware they are eligible for TANF benefits. CHI also identified the following other areas of need:

- Child care
- Financial support
- Medical care
- Educational assistance for children
- Counseling for children
- Support groups for caregivers
- Legal assistance
- Information about program and services

## Project Services

Using a centralized telephone intake line, KIN-Tech accepts self-referrals as well as referrals from child welfare and community-based organizations. The project collects information about kin caregivers by county and by relationship with the child welfare system (formal/informal). Using a standardized decision tree, KIN-Tech staff randomly assign families to the following groups in each county:

- **Usual care** – Includes traditional child welfare services for children who have been adjudicated dependent (i.e., needing the court's intervention due to maltreatment) and placed in the care of a relative by the child welfare system, which is contracted out to community-based organizations.
- **Standard care** – Includes traditional kinship services for informal kin caregivers, such as case management and family support services provided by Children's Home Inc.
- **Enhanced KIN-Tech care services (Pinellas County only)** – Includes peer-to-peer navigation, One-e-Application services, and support from the Interdisciplinary Teams for families in Pinellas County provided by Children's Home Inc.
- **KIN-Tech only (Hillsborough County only)** – Includes peer-to-peer navigation for formal and informal families provided by Children's Home Inc.

See Attachment 1 to view a copy of the decision tree developed by the project.

The project has several key components:

- **One-e-App.** KIN-Tech contracted with JWB in Pinellas County to utilize the One-e-App software developed by Social Interest Solutions. JWB received a license to use the tool and provided training for the app. This software helps capture information on the complex needs of kin caregivers and offers caregivers a one-stop shop for public benefits. One-e-App assists kin caregivers with determining benefit eligibility, which allows the kinship navigators more time to build relationships and provide emotional support. The kinship navigators use tablets or ultraportable laptop computers to work side-by-side with kin caregivers to use the One-e-App and provide any technological assistance needed.
- **Peer-to-peer navigation.** Peer-to-peer navigation is provided by kinship navigators who are grandparents or other relatives hired by CHI to connect kin caregivers to resources and services and help them navigate the various systems (e.g., child welfare, TANF, education). As fellow kin caregivers, the kinship navigators also provide peer support and encouragement and help empower the caregivers to advocate for themselves. It is important that kin caregivers know that they are not alone.
- **Interdisciplinary Team (Pinellas County).** The team works with high-risk families who have multiple needs. While professionals from different disciplines often work with the same families, they sometimes operate in "silos." This separation results in duplication of efforts with clients who receive misinformation or "fall through the cracks." Individuals on the team have expertise in their own fields and a willingness to work and coordinate services with others operating from different perspectives. They provide a collaborative infrastructure that allows service providers to work together to solve problems and connect kin caregivers to the resources and services they need. These teams also give kin caregivers opportunities to speak with experts working together for a common purpose. The Interdisciplinary Team is made up of representatives from the TANF, child welfare, legal, education, and health service sectors. This intervention was tested as part of the KIN-Tech enhanced model in Pinellas County.

# Site Visit Report: Kinship Interdisciplinary Navigation Technologically-Advanced Model (KIN-Tech)

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## Target Population

KIN-Tech's target population is 1,000 kin caregivers in Pinellas County and 500 kin caregivers in Hillsborough County. Caregivers can be served regardless of their involvement with child welfare or other systems.

## Dissemination

KIN-Tech's project leaders meet routinely with partners to update them on their progress. They also work closely with the lead evaluator to provide updates to stakeholders at the national, State, and local levels. At the time of the site visit, KIN-Tech leaders had conducted over 20 dissemination activities. For a list of dissemination activities, see Attachment 2.

## Sustainability Plan

KIN-Tech secured matching funds for the first 3 years of the project from local county child welfare agencies and the United Way. They are continuing to seek other opportunities through public and private funding. CHI is working with its funders, the evaluator, and KIN-Tech staff to integrate lessons learned into their standard of practice and to incorporate key project positions into previously existing programs even after the Federal grant ends in September 2015.

CHI also plans to connect with Area Agencies on Aging that offer funding opportunities through the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP). NFCSP allows State Area Agencies on Aging to use up to 10 percent of their funding to support grandparents and other relatives age 55 and older who are raising children.

As a result of dissemination activities with stakeholders at the State and local levels, CHI is planning to expand its efforts in the Orlando, FL area. CHI also is disseminating information about lessons learned as a way to reach out to funders in other domains, such as health.

## Site Visit Details

The site visit occurred on March 26, 2015, at CHI. The following is a list of attendees:

### CHI

Larry Cooper, project director  
Annette Royal, program supervisor, kinship care  
Clara Spencer, kinship navigator  
Missy Saffold, kinship navigator

### Partners

Brian Bostick, executive director, Eckerd Community Alternatives (Circuit 6)  
Laura Ankenbruck, attorney, Bay Area Legal Services  
Jennifer Artiaga, senior contract manager, JWB  
Robert Davis, program manager, FEC  
Karen Clark, senior human service program specialist, DCF Division of Economic Self Sufficiency  
Kerry Littlewood, principal investigator, AAJ Research and Evaluation

The site visitor also observed a kin caregivers support group at CHI that was attended by over 30 kin caregivers and their children. The presentation for that session was titled "Getting the Right Education for Your Child."

The project director shared a journal article titled "Grandfamilies Outcome Workgroup's (GrOW)" from *The Contemporary Journal of Research, Practice and Policy*. This article describes support groups across the country for grandparents raising their grandchildren, including those conducted by CHI. To view the article, visit <http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=grandfamilies>.

## Lessons Learned

### Unique and Innovative Features

KIN-Tech kinship navigators are trained to help families with the TANF application process. This assistance is very important because DCF no longer uses a face-to-face application process and requires the use of the web-based system, which has shortened the eligibility determination process from 45 days to 20 days. With this new online-only process, it is essential that kinship navigators are competent in the online application process and are available to provide support in case caregivers have questions or are not sure about how to complete the application process. Also, if the client does not have a computer, they will have to go to a social services office or community facility that has a kiosk where they can complete the application.

Additionally, the KIN-Tech website includes a link to the DCF portal. (To see that section of the project's website, visit [http://www.childrenshome.org/programs-and-services/finding-forever-families/kinship-support-services/kinship\\_link\\_apply-for-public-benefits.aspx](http://www.childrenshome.org/programs-and-services/finding-forever-families/kinship-support-services/kinship_link_apply-for-public-benefits.aspx).) The project website includes links to online trainings about DCF's Automated Community Connection to Economic Self Sufficiency (ACCESS) system and information about applying for food and cash assistance programs and Medicaid.

Table 1 details the maximum monthly TANF benefit a family may receive based on family size and shelter obligation (e.g., rent payments). Table 2 details the monthly payments for foster care and DCF's Relative Caregiver program, which provides payments for children who are adjudicated dependent by the State and placed with a relative.

**Table 1**  
**Maximum TANF Child-Only Benefits**

| Family size | Family has no shelter obligation (lives rent free) | Monthly shelter obligation is \$50 or less | Monthly shelter obligation is more than \$50 |
|-------------|--|--|--|
| 1           | \$95   | \$153                                      | \$180  |
| 2           | \$158  | \$205                                      | \$241  |
| 3           | \$198  | \$258                                      | \$303  |
| 4           | \$254  | \$309                                      | \$364  |
| 5           | \$289  | \$362                                      | \$426  |

Source: Florida Department of Children and Families. (2016). *Temporary assistance for needy families (TANF): An overview of program requirements*. Retrieved from <http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/programs/access/docs/TANF%20101%20final.pdf>.

**Table 2**  
**Monthly Payments for Foster Care and Relative Caregiver Placements**

| Child's Age              | Foster Care | Relative Caregiver Program |
|--------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|
| Birth through 5 years    | \$439.25    | \$242.00                   |
| 6 years through 12 years | \$450.52    | \$249.00                   |
| 13 years and up          | \$527.31*   | \$298.00†                  |

\* Foster care payments may extend through age 21.

† Relative Caregiver program payments extend through age 18.

Sources: Florida Department of Children and Families. (2014). *New extension of care program - for foster parents*. Retrieved from <http://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/independent-living/myfuturemychoice-fp>; Florida Department of Children and Families. (2014). *Temporary cash assistance (TCA)*. Retrieved from <http://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/access-florida-food-medical-assistance-cash/temporary-cash-assistance-tca>.

### Successful Strategies

Employing kin caregivers as kinship navigators was a successful strategy for KIN-Tech. The kin caregivers are willing to open up more to the peer kinship navigators because they have gone through similar experiences. The kinship navigators assist the caregivers with applying for TANF funds and other support services, ensure the caregivers receive necessary information, and advocate for them. As one kinship navigator stated, "We are like pit bulls; we don't give up."

Assembling a group of partners with a rich history in serving kinship families has been a critical factor to the success of KIN-Tech. The Family Enrichment Center, Eckerd Community Alternatives, and Bay Area Legal all have expertise in serving and working with kin families. JWB has a strong interest in this population and was interested in testing this kinship model so that it could provide local funding through the project.

### Challenges

The project has had several challenges related to the application process for TANF benefits. DCF's website and the One-e-App were not totally compatible with each other, and there was no bidirectional sharing of information. Therefore, KIN-Tech now only uses the DCF portal.

A related challenge is that caregivers often do not have access to a computer or have limited abilities using computers, including navigating the Internet. Kin caregivers can use computers at the DCF ACCESS office, but may still need help navigating the system. The kinship navigators can provide additional assistance to the caregivers by helping them apply while using a tablet or ultraportable laptop. The kinship navigators have been trained on DCF's online application process and know areas of particular concern to caregivers. They are trained to help caregivers accurately complete the applications.

Kin caregivers and kinship navigators also experienced other issues with the online application process, such as data disappearing when the connection is lost (e.g., through a system shutdown, lost internet connections, or other computer issue). They then need to start over. The application completion time can often take over an hour depending on the number of children and family members in the household and the volume of responses required.

KIN-Tech's project director and kinship navigators revealed it was difficult for many caregivers to meet the requirement for compliance with child support enforcement, which is a requirement for acquiring TANF benefits. Informal kin caregivers may feel reluctant to submit the parents' names to the child support enforcement agency or to apply for TANF funds for fear that the parents may retaliate and take the children from their care. The kinship navigators try to provide information and support to help them through the process.

Many kin caregivers are in need of early child care services so they can go to work or receive respite, but the community lacks access to subsidized child care for informal caregivers. Many caregivers were not eligible for Head Start due to its employment requirement. Other challenges include long waitlists, a lack of communication about available slots for child care or Head Start, and kin caregiver incomes being over the limit for receiving subsidies. The Early Learning Coalition reported that there were over 1,700 children on the waiting list for subsidized child care in Pinellas County. One kinship navigator reported that a kin caregiver had to pay \$800 per month for child care.

# Site Visit Report: Kinship Interdisciplinary Navigation Technologically-Advanced Model (KIN-Tech)

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Finally, while the KIN-Tech project director has developed strong partnerships with DCF and other child-serving agencies, there is still a system of silos. To overcome this obstacle, KIN-Tech has monthly community collaborative meetings and has identified liaisons in various agencies to help kin caregivers maneuver through the systems. Another challenge for caregivers is access to information and services due to having no power of attorney or no legal custody of the children.

## Evaluation

To determine the implications of these interventions, KIN-Tech and its evaluator designed a rigorous two-phase randomized controlled trial that includes both process and outcome evaluations. The evaluation will assess the effectiveness of the project in helping kin caregivers identify and access appropriate and meaningful services to achieve and sustain permanency. It will also evaluate how the collaborative approach to social service programs, particularly between child welfare and TANF, influences outcomes related to the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families.

## Preliminary Findings

As of March 26, 2015, KIN-Tech served more than 1,100 kin caregivers, of which 67 percent were grandparents, 17 percent were aunts or uncles, 2 percent were siblings, 2 percent were cousins, 2 percent were fictive kin, and 9 percent were other relatives. Nearly half (49 percent) of these caregivers were White, 43 percent were African-American, 3 percent were Hispanic, and 5 percent were other or refused.

An interesting finding noted by the project evaluator is that the peer-to-peer navigators require approximately 10 times more supervision than professional family support coordinators who have a BSW or MSW. Additionally, the peer navigators were completing fewer tasks per family (10) than professional family support coordinators (20). This could mean that kinship navigators concentrated on tasks they were comfortable with or that they did not have as extensive a set of skills as the professional family support coordinators. It also could mean that the peer navigators were better able to assess what the kin caregivers needed and concentrated their efforts on just those necessary, doable tasks. This finding will be further investigated in the final report.

## Cost Effectiveness

The project director also analyzed the cost effectiveness of KIN-Tech's work. Preliminary results indicate that the project is a low-cost program that delivers a high return on investment. The final cost analysis will be available with the final project report.

## Attachments

1. [KIN-Tech Intake Process and Decision Tree](#)
2. [KIN Tech Dissemination Activities](#)
3. [Kinship Services Network Kinship Interdisciplinary Navigation Technologically-Advanced Model \(KIN-Tech\)](#)



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