Presenters: Female Narrator; Tom Oates, Child Welfare Information Gateway; Rosalyn Alber, Washington State Department of Social and Health Services; Laura Dow, Catholic Charities of Central Washington; Mariela Valencia, Catholic Charities of Central Washington

[00:00:00]: Music Introduction

FEMALE NARRATOR [00:00:02]: This is the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast, a place for those who care about strengthening families and protecting children. You’ll hear about the innovations, emerging trends and success stories across child welfare direct from those striving to make a difference. This is your place for new ideas and information to support your work to improve the lives of children, youth, and families.

TOM OATES [00:00:32]: Thanks for joining us here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. I’m Tom Oates and really happy to have you as part of this community. If you are new to the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast, well, we try to connect you to the new programs and partnerships, useful insights and perspectives, and findings happening across child welfare that you can take with you to improve your practice and the work you do to keep family strong and improve the health, safety and well-being for children, youth, and their families. So hey, go ahead and subscribe to the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast to make sure you receive new episodes each and every month. We’re available on Apple podcasts, Spotify, Google podcasts, SoundCloud, and Stitcher. Okay, so we are spending some time diving into the advances in how kinship caregivers are supported. And this is really important - as we all know, child welfare as a whole is placing a greater emphasis on keeping children and youth connected to their families and finding family or relative placement settings.

[00:01:46]: Now, having the luxury of several episodes to spend on this topic, we get the chance to explore situations in communities with unique characteristics. Now it doesn't mean these communities are outliers - as many of you or the caseworkers you work with handle many different types of families and by no means is child welfare a one size fits all type of work environment. So, today we get the chance to look at what's happening in Central Washington State, in the Yakima and tri-cities region. If you're not familiar with the Pacific Northwest, this is about 150 to 175 miles away from Seattle and a much more rural community, a farming community with a large Latinx population. Now, the state has partnered with Catholic Charities of Central Washington for kinship navigator services. And there are some key takeaways here in how to learn about making the community you work with something that you can understand and how to fit in and how to develop trusting relationships.

[00:02:48]: So, we have Laura Dow and Mariela Valencia, who are kinship navigators from Catholic Charities to dive into the Navigator Program and the importance of connections across the community and building trust. And I'd really encourage you to listen deeply to Mariela and her story of her lived experience that she brings with her to create these relationships. But, in this situation here, it's not just about providing a culturally competent navigator program, but what the state itself can and is doing to really support kin families. And that comes from having the state's kinship services come out of the Department of Aging. And also, they have a difference from others in how kinship families are defined. And they support those families through an actual one time stipend to help keep those families that qualify strong. So, we're also joined by Rosalyn Alber from the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services. We dive into the programs and the services, but also the challenges - especially in
dealing with documented and undocumented persons. And we also get their thoughts on what caseworkers who may be unfamiliar with rural Latinx communities should know if they find themselves working in such a community. Alright, let us get to it. Continuing our series on advancements in supporting kinship caregivers with Laura Dow, Mariela Valencia, and Rosalyn from Washington State.

[00:04:14]: Rosalyn, Mariela, Laura, welcome into the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. And Ros, I want to start with you because there are plenty of kinship navigator programs that many states have, but yours in Washington and the one we're talking about specifically is a little different because it's based out of the Department of Aging. So, I'm curious to the benefits that you're seeing by having a kinship navigator program based out of the state's Department of Aging.

ROSALYN ALBER [00:04:44]: So, we're one of the longest standing programs in the country. Since 2005, the Aging and Long-Term Support Administration has received funds from the state legislature to work with informal kinship caregivers. So, we also have a department that deals with those that are formerly involved and I'll speak more about that later. But basically, that just means that we are able to provide resources and services through the aging network to kinship families that might not have received any benefits otherwise. And we have navigators all over the state in 30 of 39 counties and that's how we were able to work with them.

TOM OATES [00:05:30]: You know, you talked about informal families and I want to, I want to bring you right into that, that topic because we have formal versus fictive or informal families. And just for, for our edification and for those who are listening, I'd love for you to be able to clarify at least how the state views - or maybe even better, let me step back and just ask in general about clarifying what an informal family is and how it may be traditional kinship support programs those informal families can find themselves maybe on the outside of certain programs and services. And why that distinction is so important.

ROSALYN ALBER [00:06:10]: Right. Well, in Washington State, we're referring to informal kinship caregivers as those families that have a kinship child that's living with them without any kind of formal placement through the formal child welfare system. So, that would be someone that just has an informal arrangement with the parent or they may have dropped off the child and just never come back - those kinds of circumstances. They may or may not have any kind of formal arrangements through the courts. So, they are impacted oftentimes by needing a lot of resources because they're not involved with the formal child welfare system, so we're able to do a lot of work with them to help prevent that from needing to occur because we're able to give them those resources and supports that they wouldn't normally see.

TOM OATES [00:07:02]: And, thank you for clarifying that because there are different versions of a kinship family is a blood relative versus a fictive family who could be a neighbor or an aunt or uncle who aren't aunts and uncles or a coach or that sort of thing. So, thank you for helping clarify. You know, there's another big difference coming from the state that I want to touch base on and really, you know, we're just a few minutes in this conversation, I think it's important to bring this off from the jump that Washington's kinship support includes connecting services and helping navigate and guide through processes. And that's familiar to many states or jurisdictions. But also, Washington adds an annual caregivers stipend. Can you explain the stipend program? You know, who is it designated for? And then I'm sure this also involves of like, what are the requirements involved to receive the stipend?
ROSALYN ALBER [00:07:57]: Sure. That stipend actually started in Washington State before the kinship navigator program did. It's the kinship caregiver support program funds and that comes, again, through the aging systems. So, that's why we are connected. And we are able to provide those resources in all of the counties in Washington State. The Aging and Long-term Support Administration partners with the local area agencies on aging to provide those resources. And many of those facilities also have the kinship navigator programs, but not all. And those are to help informal families, again, because there are resources available through the formal systems for those that are formerly involved with child welfare. But there aren't any other resources for those outside the formal child welfare system for emergent needs. For example, for rent, utilities, car seats, food, clothing, school supplies - those types of things, just to help stabilize the household. Those are kind of onetime uses, occasional uses, not an ongoing assistance like a TANF grant or things like that.

[00:09:12]: Some of the requirements include if they need to be a caregiver that's related by blood, they also have to be, the child has to be 18 years or younger. They need to have looked for other resources. So, this is supposed to be kind of a last stop effort to help. You know, if there are other resources available, those should come first. And the child can't be involved with, the child can't be involved with the formal child welfare system. There are some income requirements and documentation that needs to be provided to show that the child is actually living with the caregiver. And those things - I could go into more detail, but that takes a while.

TOM OATES [00:09:59]: No, I get it.

ROSALYN ALBER [00:10:01]: That's the nutshell of it.

TOM OATES [00:10:02]: Yeah, and it helps bridge the gap, really, you know, bridging the gap for temporary things. And, you had touched base on many times if it's the first few days and no, I need a car seat. No, we need, maybe it's furniture, maybe it's something that, that helps, again, bridge the gap, stabilize the environment. So, let's dive down deeper a little bit. And you, and thank you for walking me through where the state is and how the state is, is operating. But now I want to kind of dive in a little bit more about this specific community that, that we want to touch base on. So, we're talking about Central Washington. And for those that aren't familiar, this is, this is a rural community, it's a farming community, the tri-cities surround it and really, Yakima is one of the ones where folks who aren't familiar with the state would recognize. And you, in terms of trying to figure out who are we really working with and how can we better understand our community? I know the state conducted some, some fact-finding, really, surveys to identify some of the specific needs of this community. I'm curious to what you found.

ROSALYN ALBER [00:11:11]: Yeah. We had some fact finding and surveys we did a number of years ago. And some commonalities with the results were needs were financial support, recreational, social supports for the child, and respite care. They needed finances - over and over again, that was listed. And then for the Latinx population, they needed child's emotional health support, child behavioral health support. And again, that finances. So, it just came about over and over again that people needed support around finances, but also with the child's behavioral and emotional calls, in addition to that.

TOM OATES [00:11:55]: Interesting, especially now. And now I'm very glad you were able to touch base on the stipend program, right, to how, you know, how, how are we bridging the gap? And in some areas
we're finding, I think it's very important for an agency to figure out what is it, is it, is it services or as it tangible goods, as you mentioned, or is it job opportunities? Yeah, go ahead.

**ROSALYN ALBER [00:12:16]:** Oh, sorry. Another issue that came up over and over again is support around legal issues, especially in those populations, because there may be various issues involved with needing some support around legal concerns. So, that was another one that popped up.

**TOM OATES [00:12:37]:** No, no. Thank you. And it does also bridge in what kind of services need to be provided for a community. And so, let me bring in Mariela and Laura. And, Mariela, so now that there's a greater understanding of the community itself, the state, and really specifically, you guys with Catholic Charities who are working on the ground have placed an emphasis on connecting with the community to help, well specifically, for a community that may find themselves as a, let's be honest, it's a minority community within the state of Washington. And how do you start to build that trust with a government agency? So, I'm curious to how outreach and how communication was executed and what does that look like to help build trust?

**MARIELA VALENCIA [00:13:28]:** Well, basically, we have a collaboration with the DSH office and I'll list the other collaborations that we have. For example, medical clinics, McKinney Vento liaison, school districts, the court system personnel. We have community centers that we collaborate with and other caregivers. Both food and clothing banks and counseling professionals. And also, you know, collaboration with family resource centers, churches, social services organizations and of course, Catholic Charities. Parent/child assistant programs. And last but not least, LGBTQ+ organizations such as Helen House in Ellensburg, Washington. So, we collaborate with all these organizations to help our caregivers.

**TOM OATES [00:14:24]:** And, is it having those relationships with those partner organizations, explain to me where that trust then with the families that you're working with, how does having those partnerships or what do you have to communicate to those partners to help build some trust?

**MARIELA VALENCIA [00:14:43]:** Basically we explain, well, I explain what it is that you do to help our caregivers and of course, if they run into someone that is in that position, that we are here to help the community and help these caregivers that are in need of getting assistance, taking care of these children under their care. So, I collaborate with all these organizations and just build relationships with them. And just let them know that we're a non-profit organization that's out there to help the community, and especially the caregivers.

**TOM OATES [00:15:21]:** So, I'm curious after all of this time, what have these activities been able to do to help really strengthen, you know, when you start thinking about connecting with the Latinx community, what examples may come to mind when you think about now that I understand, you know, now that they, they, they come to us when they need something and we're able to provide that kind of support. Give me a sense of what your efforts have actually, when the fruit's being bore, what has come out of that?

**MARIELA VALENCIA [00:15:54]:** Because I have, I been able to help so many Latinx caregivers, basically, when something good happens to them, they, you know, they tell their friends. And especially if it's someone that it's in their same situation - you know, because they already have that, you know, I built that, that foundation with them that they like and trust me, those, those friends are going to be calling
me or asking them, can you give me her information so I can reach out to her. So, I'm building that foundation with the Latinx community where they know that this is a place that they can come to and feel safe and get the help that they need.

**TOM OATES** [00:16:36]: You mentioned that they build trust with you. So, and I want to put a value on that for, for those who may be listening that are in similar situations. Give me a sense, if somebody comes up to you who is like, Hey, I'm, I'm doing a similar work and they come from a different state, you know what's, and they look at you and go, you know, what's the magic or what's the secret to building trust? What do you tell them?

**MARIELA VALENCIA** [00:17:03]: Basically, you just be a good listener and, to them, and of course tell them what it is that you can do to help them, but mostly just showing that compassion and care and being a caregiver myself. I feel with me they, they open up a lot more because I can completely relate to what they're going through. But just really being a good listener and, and just answering their questions and just showing that compassion and just look them in the eye. Like, you know, I can do an intake on the phone but my preference would be to see them in person because I like to see people in their eyes and they can see that I am genuinely interested in helping them. And I'm here for them. So, just showing that, that concern and just showing that you really, really are here for them to help them in their situation or in their desperate financial need that they may have.

**TOM OATES** [00:18:03]: Alright, so, before I get into the nuts and bolts of the actual navigator family relationship, if it's okay, Laura, I'd like to kind of pull back and give us a sense of how the program actually got off the ground and how it got started.

**LAURA DOW** [00:18:16]: I can speak to the work that our, the director of our kinship navigator program, Mary Pleger, did. When the program started at Catholic Charities, she started within her local community. So, even though our program serves eight counties, she started where she was in Yakima County as a starting point and then worked to expand to the other programs, or the other counties. And she met with local agencies and partners in similar work to learn from them. So, before starting the work, she first wanted to learn more about the work and then formed a collaboration. So, this included the Department of Children, Youth, and Families, Kacey Family Program, school districts, and other social service agencies. And that collaboration still exists in Yakima. It’s kind of changed and evolved since then. But the importance of community partnerships and collaborations with those community partners can, cannot be overestimated. It’s essential to be able to work with the fellow partners in your community to be able to serve all the needs of kinship caregivers.

[00:19:29]: And another important thing that our program director did is from the beginning, she's always employed bilingual kinship navigators. So, it’s essential to have kinship navigators that speak the language and connect with and serve monolingual kinship caregivers in the language that they speak. But, she also speaks to how having bilingual navigators holds our program accountable to make sure that all the forms we use, all the services we provide are in fact available in Spanish. And I think that helps us build trust in the community. It helps to have a good reputation within our community. And it's a warm hand-off to when we have new employees. So, I am very thankful that when I began this work and had to take over from the previous navigator that I just had to say, hey, I'm the new so-and-so for this program. And they had trust in that previous navigator and now they almost automatically have trust in me. So, building a good foundation for your program and employing navigators that have the heart and the language and the ability to serve kinship caregivers is essential. And so, as your program
grows, that just continues and you can continue the work within the community building that trust and connecting with caregivers.

TOM OATES [00:20:56]: Thank you. And so, Laura, I want to kind of dive into this a little bit more about that navigator/family relationship. Can you give me a sense of maybe how the, how the, how that is structured? Is there, you know, what kind of routine or frequent communications, what are, what are discussed, what are - you know, take me from intake through the relationship.

LAURA DOW [00:21:19]: Sure. So, I would say as kinship navigators, we play a variety of roles and wear any number of hats while working with a family. So, I think first and foremost, kinship navigators are givers of information and knowers of resources. We try to make sure our kinship caregivers know that they can always contact us to ask questions about where to get help here, there, or anywhere. I think we're also counselors, in a big way. We're advocates for our kinship caregiver families, and I think we're friends in a lot of ways. Caregivers are in an isolating experience, usually within their own family, but also within their peer groups. When you're a 70 year-old grandma caring for grandkids, you don't fit in with other, typically retired 70 year-old seniors. And I think that isolation is even more so for our monolingual Spanish only speakers. And so, we do get phone calls and we kind of find out, you know, where they're calling from and what their immediate need is. And then we do an intake to establish them as an official client of our program and then we assess what their needs are, we do a needs assessment. And oftentimes, caregivers don't even know what they need until they've been given a list of all potential services that are available either through our program directly or elsewhere in the community.

[00:22:58]: So based on that needs assessment, we work with them and try to set some concrete goals and do varying levels of case management with them - which could include the funding of our program, the kinship caregiver support program, if they're eligible for the financial assistance. But it could be just getting the kids enrolled in school or getting access to health insurance for the kid. Or it could be just finding out locations where they can get more food resources or clothing resources. And then kind of after assessing the program in that one big way, we stay in touch with them as needed for any goals that they're working on. But the way that our funding works is typically, families are eligible once per year. And so, we do typically at the very least follow up with families every year. But like I said, we try to be available as an ongoing resource. We hope to hear from our caregivers more often than that, whenever we can be of assistance.

TOM OATES [00:23:58]: Yeah. You brought up a list of very different, you know, a range of needs that a family can come to you with. I'm curious if there's anything out of all of those needs, what may be the most common that you've found?

LAURA DOW [00:24:13]: I would say some of the most common needs or questions, specifically for the rural Latinx community is applying for services and getting financial support. Whether that's accessing public benefits or just our kinship caregiver funds to support the emergency basic needs of the kid. I would say another big need or common question is legal help. Kinship caregivers don't typically understand all the legal options - or non-legal options - available to be able to prove that they have kids in their care that were not born to them. And the proof of that kinship care is access to a lot of things. But they usually have to prove that they have the kids in their care to get access to food benefits or health insurance or lots of things. And kinship caregivers come to us with no documentation from the biological parent or they come to us with the kids already adopted. So, we kind of see a full range of situations and we try to make sure that they know what their options are. We get a lot of questions
about medical and insurance support for the rural Latinx community and that often depends on their eligibility or documentation status. And we see a lot of language barriers for our monolingual Spanish speakers, so, a big thing that we do with kinship navigators is we, for bi-lingual navigators, we try to be just one less language barrier in their lives and we help make connections and calls for them or help them figure out who in, who in their family or who in their life could help them communicate with organizations that may or may not have a Spanish speaker available for them.

**TOM OATES** [00:26:07]: You brought up something that I kind of want to dive a little deeper on because it may be a situation that many other folks who are listening find themselves in - so, I'm curious how you navigate things or how differently you may navigate things when working with families that are undocumented or undocumented individuals.

**LAURA DOW** [00:26:27]: I do think that that aspect of someone's experience is essential to understand if you're working with the rural Latinx community and we're not always aware of a kinship caregivers documentation status. It's not a requirement for our program or for the eligibility of our services. That's not a question we ask our caregivers, but they often will disclose that information to us. It's a big barrier in terms of accessing public benefits or going to a court house or anywhere where they feel like that they may not feel comfortable going as an undocumented citizen. And so, when we share resources or when we tell families about services, we try to be educated on what's available if you're undocumented or not. So, it takes extra work on our end to be aware of eligibility requirements so that we're not sending them to a resource that they can't access or that they're going to hit another barrier or they're going to be faced with an uncomfortable question. So, we do our best to set caregivers up for success to access resources, whether that's anticipating a language barrier or a concern regarding documentation status.

[00:27:49]: But in more general terms, we're thinking are they going to have a barrier because they don't have access to a computer or internet. Is there a barrier because they don't have access to a car or transportation? And that goes for all of the caregivers we serve. We try to be aware of what barriers might be in their way. And we anticipate those for our caregivers so that they don't have to re-explain their struggles to us. We've kind of already thought through what might be a problem for them and we help them be creative in solving those concerns.

**TOM OATES** [00:28:23]: And it goes back to something extremely valuable that Mariela discussed, which is about building that trust for someone to kind of turn around and say, hey, here's my situation and here's what I need. And you both said sometimes the caregiver may not be sure what their needs are, but the more they're willing to talk and the more they're willing to discuss - and that comes from establishing that trust. So, for those who are listening, take it from Mariela and Laura about looking somebody in the eye and, and putting together, hey, what's the difference between, you know, you guys getting what you need and not, let's find that out. And that's what we're dealing with, not necessarily paperwork or checking the box. So, let's explain a little bit more about the environment that you guys are operating in because many of our caseworkers may find themselves in similar situations, whether they work in a very large and diverse area or a smaller area, a rural community, a Latinx community. I'm curious, Laura, of some of the characteristics of this community that those who may be unfamiliar with but find themselves working with, should be aware that maybe they generally wouldn't be.

**LAURA DOW** [00:29:45]: Well, I can speak to the rural Latinx community in the counties we serve which, our specific program serves eight counties in Central and Eastern Washington. And, our area does have a large agricultural and migrant community, so a different situation than you would find like an urban or
inner-city areas. Many of our rural Latinx kinship families work in the agricultural industry, which means their employment is seasonal and often depends on the weather. So, when we work with our caregivers, they often have inconsistent income. Sometimes they will request the financial assistance of our program during a certain time of the year - in the winter, when they know that their work within the field is not available. They have earlier hours, they have long hours, and they work hard, and they’re exhausted just from the work that they do, let alone from the work that they do, caring for the children in their care.

[00:30:47]: The hours they work make it difficult to access other supports and food banks, and it limits their availability for activities or further community connection. But in the rural communities that we work in, it’s important to remember that families often choose to live in rural areas for a reason. So oftentimes, our rural families are very independent and they take care of their family and they don’t often reach out for assistance. So, they, one, don’t know that assistance exists, and two, may be hesitant to reach out for it. So, sometimes it’s very challenging in our more outlying counties to reach those rural families. And it’s even more important to build that trust so that they do feel comfortable reaching out when they’re in a rural area so they don’t have to reach out. And I think our rural Latinx families are typically bigger families, often times with a lesser income. And we often see language barriers, as well as unique experiences that maybe other kinship caregivers aren’t dealing with - family members that have been deported or family members that are undocumented, which is just important to be aware of when you’re serving them and sharing resources with them and just being sensitive to their situation. I think Mariela can speak to more experiences of our, and characteristics of the community that we serve. I appreciate that Mariela has an immediate connection with the community we serve with her own cultural experience and her own experiences as a kinship caregiver.

MARIELA VALENCIA [00:32:36]: Thank you, Laura. For me, the Latinx community has a high sense of work ethic. They will often put off doing appointments due to their work, at least until their, their work slows down. Or because some of the Latinx community work as seasonal jobs, as Laura indicated, they may work in orchards or food warehouses and they prioritize work and start to schedule appointments once they have completed the fruit pick, sorry, fruit picking season. And I just want to add that I myself am a migrant worker. My, my dad, basically when I was seven and my brothers, we would, he would wake us up like at 3:30 in the morning to be orchard by 4:30 and be ready to start picking cherries if that's what we were picking. So, doing this type of work has taught me the importance of having an education and to change the family tree and to have a strong work ethic. And in helping these caregivers, I have ran into clients that will say, you know, I'll call you when I'm ready to come in because right now it's important for me to work.

TOM OATES [00:34:00]: And you brought up the idea of having a large family or having a tight knit community. And Mariela, Mariela, when we were talking earlier, you had mentioned about like word of mouth in terms of establishing trust. So, any relationship that you are able to develop, even if it's not with a kinship caregiver, but with somebody who has a connection to somebody - that word of mouth is valuable. So, having the relation, so I, what I'm trying to hope is somebody listening understands it's not necessarily, yes, it's important of course, to have those relationships with the caregivers, but just having that relationship in that community. Because when we're talking with our friends or our family members about maybe some of the things that we're struggling with, if somebody recommends, Hey, you should talk to Mariela, she helped a neighbor of mine and whatever that turns into, but that's where I think having those strong relationships can help make sure that there's a connection to those services. And so, Mariela, does that mean I'm not sure if you've had people call you up and say, hey, by the way, So-and-
so gave me your name or I heard. But I'm curious if my assumption - so, check me if I'm wrong - is correct.

MARIELA VALENCIA [00:35:20]: It is correct. You know, sometimes I'll get calls and I'll say, I'm just curious to know who referred you to me. I've done - since I've been in my position - I've done two radio interviews with a very prominent Spanish radio station, which really reaches out to the Latinx community. I feel like my, my clients are my, my ambassadors, you know, because I've done such a really good job - and as well as Laura - working with the caregivers that we work with. They, they're very appreciative of what we've done for them. So, you know, they, they're going to promote our program, especially if they find someone that can certainly use our services. So, it's like a snowball effect when you help someone and they feel really good about what you've done to help them - Latinos love to talk. So, they are going to tell their neighbors, their friends, and you know, and if you, if they tell like an older person, you know, they're retired. So, all they have to do all day is to talk to their friends. Like my mom, she'll talk, tell everybody what's going on in the family or my daughter's doing this and she helped this person with that. So they're very, very good networkers basically. Yeah.

TOM OATES [00:36:43]: Your, your own PR firm. That hopefully one day if they and you do a good enough job, you'll both be out of work. So Ros, Laura, and Mariela, I want to kind of bring the entire group back in because I know there have been, also some fact finding and surveys to follow up on, on if this, this approach is working within this community. And so, when we were discussing before we were recorded, that there had been some early evaluation indicators and they've, they pointed to higher satisfaction rates or increases in folks ability to, to just cope with parenting and even improvements in health and overall enjoyment of life. I'm curious if what the data starts to point toward. If you've actually seen real life examples of that and what that kind of looks like among families.

ROSALYN ALBER [00:37:40]: I guess I can talk about that for a moment. Some of the data that we've been looking at is showing that there's an increase in accessing resources. There's definitely an increase in client satisfaction and participation in programs. Client health and the caregivers health has increased. They're getting more supports and more resources available. So, those are some of the initial finds that are really encouraging. I don't know if Mariela or Laura has anything to add to that.

TOM OATES [00:38:21]: Guys, when you, when you, when you think of what Ros has said, is there maybe an individual or a story of somebody you worked with that where this kind of comes to mind?

LAURA DOW [00:38:30]: I think I've seen our work show its own success in a lot of ways. Sometimes I've seen relief from caregivers just after simply meeting with them. Because when a kinship caregiver can meet with a kinship navigator that understands the kinship relationship, they finally have someone they can speak to about their situation that understands their situation. There's so many places that they go to that sometimes it's difficult for them to explain that they're a grandparent raising a grandchild or they're an aunt who has taken in a niece or nephew. And, and they don't always have an outlet kind of talk about their situation. So, sometimes I know that our caregivers feel better just after talking to us and having an outlet to just kind of of express their frustration or, or joy. These caregivers are very joyful to have these kids in their life in the way that they have them.

[00:39:37]: And any little bit of help that we can offer or services that we connect them to does reduce their stress, which improves their health and helps them be better parents to the kids in their care. But I think some of the huge celebrations I've seen in working with caregivers is one of my caregivers was successful in getting legal third-party custody of her grandchild. The biological dad was deported, had
never even met his son. And that was the caregiver’s son. And so, they were fighting for custody against the biological mom. And after getting custody, I was with her in court and she gave me a hug. And just knowing that she had that legal protection for her grandson opened her mind and time and energy to focus on so many other things for that child because she no longer has to worry about just simple safety of her grandson.

[00:40:37]: Another caregiver that I worked with who had her nephews in her care because her sister passed away was really struggling financially. They were not yet connected to food assistance. Her husband was working limited hours because she has her nephews in her care. She has not been able to work herself and just through some limited coaching through our program, she was able to get access to food assistance and cash assistance and health care for the children and child care for the children. And she was extremely thankful for the work that her navigator did. But it was all her, she just needed someone to kind of point her in the right direction and make her aware of what was available and to help navigate any barriers. So, we see successes every day at all sorts of levels, whether it's just the success of being a listening ear for these kinship caregivers or something as big, as important as getting legal protection of the kids in their care. I'm sure Mariela has her own success stories to share.

MARIELA VALENCIA [00:41:47]: Well, I've seen increased hope in the caregivers, you know, that I work with. I myself have received handwritten notes and cards from caregivers. And as you already know, I'm also a caregiver. My sister became a drug addict and I had to take custody of her two children, an eight year-old and a 15 year-old. I found myself struggling financially and I reached out to the welfare office and I qualified for TANF and food stamps, which was great. However, I was, it was my counselor at Catholic Charities who told me about the kinship program. And she said I was a perfect candidate since I was taking care of my new, my two nephews. And of course, I qualified. And, as you know present day, I'm a kinship navigator and I now work with caregivers, you know, and completely relate to them. And I'm a strong believer in the kinship program, I'm very grateful for the help that they gave me in the time that I was really struggling financially. And I have, I now feel that I have the emotional support thanks to the kinship program.

[00:43:06]: And that's why I'm saying when I sit down with these caregivers, they, they blossom in front of me when I tell them that I’m in their same situation. So, I feel like I really, really, really have a good connection with the clients that I work with because they can see the sincerity in my eyes, because they were both - sometimes we shed a tear or two because we can completely relate. So, I enjoy what I do and I enjoy helping these caregivers, putting them in a better financial position and steering them in the resources that they need to help them have a better quality of life and put their mind at ease. And just like Laura, you know, I, I help a lot of caregivers with minor guardianship and I’ve had clients, when we step out of the courtroom, just out of, out of nowhere, just give me a big hug and they are so appreciative that I’m there to, to help guide them and just give them the emotional support that they need while they’re seeking minor guardianship of the kids that they’re taking care of.

TOM OATES [00:44:16]: Mariela, thank you so much for, for sharing and thank you for the work you're doing and really giving of yourself, not only of your time and your profession, but emotionally. And I think this is something that folks who are listening, we are in the middle of our series of episodes focused on advances in supporting kinship caregivers. And one of the themes I think we’re going to hear over and over again is recognizing not just the, the tangible needs, right? Services for - and these are important - of food and the environment, and if it is that car seat. But also understanding the emotional, really at times shift or upheaval or massive change that these caregivers are asked to do. Unlike a resource family that has chosen to do this. And as much as, as, as family members will embrace their,
their nieces or nephews or grandchildren, there is a shift in emotion that they need to be able to cope with and, trying to figure out how to cope with that is just as important as, as food on the table or making sure medical care is there.

[00:45:36]: And so, this is one of those general advancements that I'm hearing and lucky enough to, to, to listen to all of these stories and all of these jurisdictions. And what Mariela and Laura have just shared over the past few minutes in their examples - I want folks to take away the amount of talking about emotion versus the amount of talking about services. And they were both there. But the emotion was, was the support that I think may, well may be changing, but previously may have been unrecognized or underserved, that we're starting to - at least hearing the examples from, from Washington - we're starting to see more of. Laura Dow, Mariela Valencia, Ros Alber - thank you guys so much for your time for the work you are doing. And we really appreciate your sharing your stories and your experiences with us here on the Child Welfare Gateway Podcast.

MARIELA VALENCIA [00:46:39]: Thank you.

TOM OATES [00:46:32]: Hey, so look out in an upcoming episode, we will return to Central Washington, but focus on the work of the Port Gamble S’Klallam tribal child welfare services approach to kinship support, and how consolidation has led to improved outcomes for their families. Now every episode of the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast is available on Apple podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, Stitcher and SoundCloud. And you can also find all the episodes on childwelfare.gov, just search podcasts. Each episode - including this one - has additional resources and information for you surrounding kinship support, including reports or tools for families, previous episodes and the Information Gateway podcasts. Now on this episode page, we’ll also put up links to the It’s All Relative: Supporting Kinship Video series and discussion guides from the Child Welfare Capacity Building Center for states.

[00:47:35]: Thanks so much to Laura Dow, Mariela Valencia, and Ros Alber for taking the time and sharing with us all of what they’re doing, what they're learning, and what you can take away from their work, supporting formal and informal kinship families out in central Washington. And of course, my thanks to you for joining us here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. Once again, I'm Tom Oates, have a great day.