

Kinship Care in Florida: Programs and Research of the Florida Kinship Center

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This paper was developed in response to the Call for Papers for the Grandfamilies Report to examine the needs of grandparents and other relative caregivers. The Call for Papers included a list of ten possible topics to address this issue. To best respond to this call for papers, the Florida Kinship Center at the University of South Florida School of Social Work developed this paper to highlight two main areas: (1) Programs: evidence-based practices designed to meet the diverse needs of relative caregivers throughout Florida; and (2) Research: FKC's innovative research projects, published studies and future research needs.

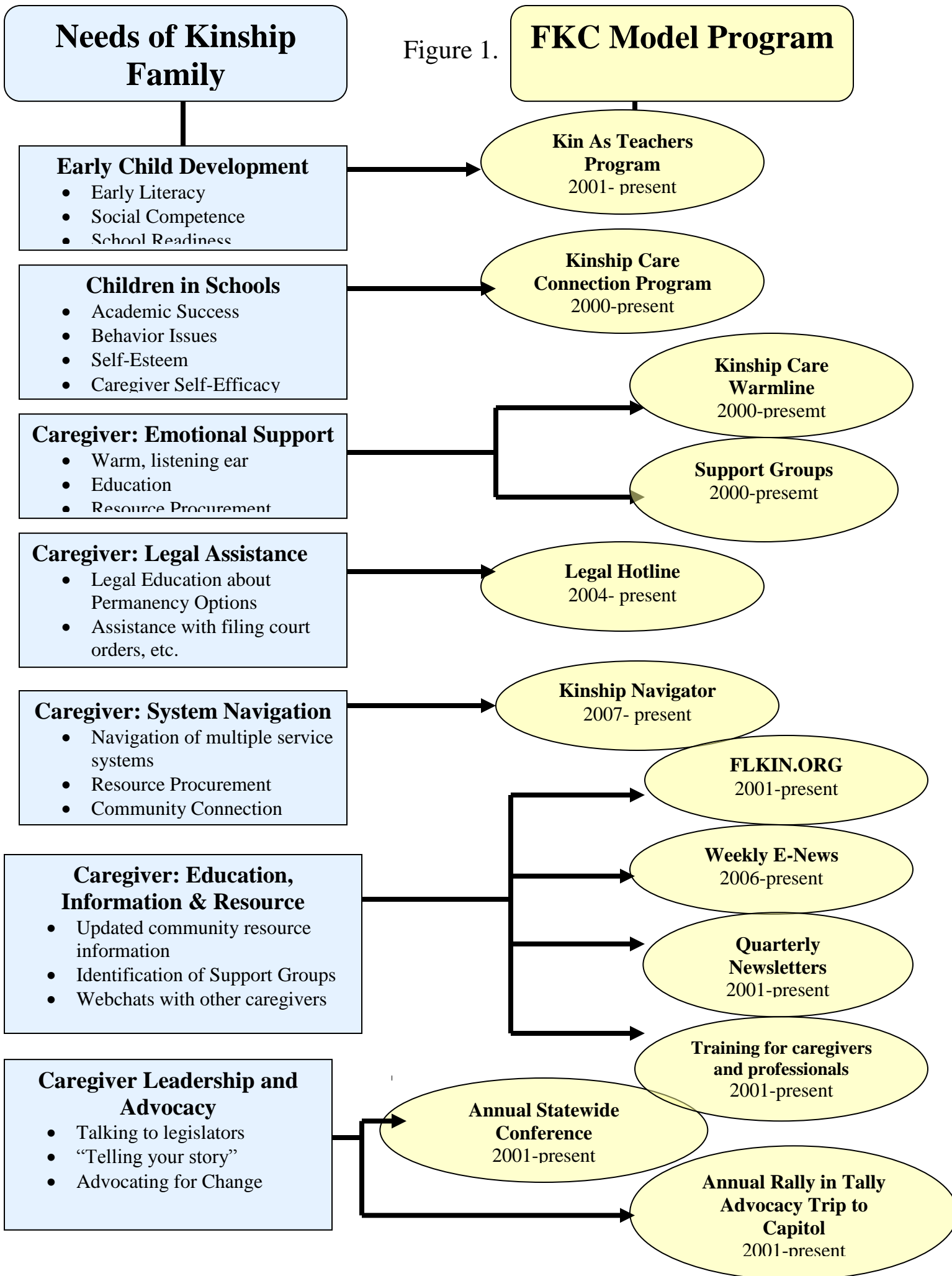
For the past decade, the Florida Kinship Center at the University of South Florida School of Social work has provided expertise in the field of kinship care at the national, state, and local levels. Since its establishment, FKC has been striving to execute best practices in kinship care through the implementation of evidence-based direct service programs and innovative research studies. As one of the nation's leading kinship centers, FKC is inspired to empower, serve and advocate for all kinship families. FKC engages the community to empower the lives of kinship caregivers and their families in the state of Florida through innovative services, education, advocacy, policy practice and research. Funding is provided by grants from the Florida Department of Children and Families, Children's Board of Hillsborough County, West Central Florida Area Agency on

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Inc.

Figure 1. illustrates the various needs of kinship caregivers in Florida and FKC programs specifically designed to meet these needs. These needs have evolved over the past ten years and interventions have been modified accordingly. While some programs have been implemented in only a few settings in FL due to limited financial support, many of these programs have been replicated in other parts of the state and across the country in the past few years. Research studies on many of these programs are available in the next section of this paper.

Figure 1.

FKC Model Program



FKC Programs: Meeting Kinship Care Needs in Florida

Kin as Teachers (KAT)

Kin As Teachers (KAT) is an early childhood education and family support program for children aged birth-Kindergarten who are raised by grandparents and other relatives. KAT provides education and training to caregivers to help children meet developmental milestones. KAT is adapted from National Parents As Teachers (PAT) Program and is the only program in US to use this internationally recognized curriculum with non-traditional families. Similar to the PAT program, the KAT program aims at addressing the areas of parent knowledge and parenting practices, detection of developmental delays and health issues, preventing child abuse and neglect, and school readiness and success. Evaluation of this program includes the Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME) Inventory and the Parents as Teachers Ages and Stages Questionnaires, Parent Knowledge Survey, Florida Demographic Survey, and others.

Kinship Care Connection (KCC)

KCC is a school-based intervention designed to support kinship families. This program is designed to improve child self-esteem and lessen caregiver burden. KCC provides grandparents and other relatives raising children with (1)

Kinship Care in Florida: Programs & Research of the Florida Kinship Center support groups; (2) counseling; (3) case management; (4) advocacy; and (5) other needed individual intervention. KCC provides children with (1) support groups; (2) tutoring & mentoring; (3) counseling; and (4) other individual interventions. KCC also provides training and consultation to school faculty and staff to help them better meet the needs of kinship families. The Florida Kinship Center has designed and implemented this program for the past 8 years with the assistance of the Children's Board of Hillsborough County and the Hillsborough County School System. Evaluation for the KCC includes the HARE Self Esteem Scale, The Caregiver Self-Efficacy Scale, Brief Cope, Kidscope, and Florida Demographic Survey.

Kinship Care Warmline

The Kinship Care Warmline is a statewide, emotional -support telephone line for grandparents and other relative caregivers throughout Florida. The Kinship Care Warmline is the longest running, "Warmline" of its kind in the US and has been used as a national replication model for AARP, and other national organizations. The evaluation for the Warmline includes: Dunst Family Support Scale, Dunst Family Resource Scale, Florida Demographic Survey, Florida Needs Survey, and other measures.

Kinship Support Groups

The most effective intervention for many kinship caregivers is participating in caregiver support groups and bond with other caregivers who are going through similar experiences. Since the late nineties, FKC has helped to establish a strong network of support groups throughout the state of Florida. Staff facilitates support groups for caregivers and children throughout five counties surrounding the University of South Florida. For support groups throughout Florida, FKC provides training and education to support group facilitators and kinship caregiver leaders to help sustain groups. In 1999, less than ten support groups for grandparents raising grandchildren existed throughout Florida. In 2007, there are more than 100 support groups for kinship caregivers in Florida.

Legal Hotline

Many caregivers face legal challenges that prevent them from accessing services, providing medical care for children, and enrolling children in school. The Legal Hotline provides education and information and referral to caregivers in need of legal assistance. Caregivers access the Legal Hotline through the Kinship Care Warmline. FKC relies on community connections with the Florida Bar Association, the Hillsborough County Association of Women Lawyers, and other legal pro bono and service-oriented programs to help maintain the Legal Hotline.

Kinship Navigator Program

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The Kinship Navigator Program is specifically designed to help the caregiver navigate systems of care, such as the school, child welfare, health care, legal, and other important systems to families involved in caregiving. The Navigator provides education, information and referral, and emotional support. The evaluation for the navigator includes the Dunst Family Support, Dunst Family Resource Scale, Florida Demographic Survey and other measures.

FLKIN.ORG

flkin.org is the FKC website and portal for information and services for caregivers in Florida. The flkin.org site features events calendar, support group locator, and other features designed to assist caregivers. Currently, the flkin.org site is a portal for services and supports for Florida kin caregivers and their families. Maintaining the website is an important way for FKC to share information about its programs and education about community resources to both kinship caregivers and the professionals who work with them.

FKC Newsletter and Weekly E-Newsletter

The FKC Newsletter is published on a quarterly basis and distributed by mail and email and can be accessed on flkin.org. The FKC Newsletter provides information about FKC activities and highlights community resources. The FKC Weekly E-Newsletter provides weekly up-to-date information about community events, support group happenings, and other timely information relevant to

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kinship caregivers. Both newsletters are distributed to over 4000 caregivers and
professionals throughout the Florida.

Kinship Care Training

FKC designs and provides training throughout the state to caregivers and
professionals. The most recent accomplishment of FKC training is producing
training DVDS and online curriculum modules with interactive assessments.
FKC is very excited about the production of the training DVD because it features
caregivers and professionals working together to portray the service needs and
strengths of caregivers as they navigate multiple systems of care.

Annual Statewide Conference and Annual Rally in Tally Advocacy Trip to Capitol

For the past eight years, FKC has organized a caregiver trip to the State
Capitol in Tallahassee to advocate for policy and program issues and to tell their
story to policy makers. It is a great way to get caregivers involved in policy
practice. The Annual Kinship Care Conference provides training and education
for professionals and kinship caregivers. Kinship caregivers enjoy this event
because it gives them an opportunity to learn and connect to other kinship
caregivers in Florida.

Kinship Care Research: Innovative Projects, Published Studies and Future Research Needs

FKC Research and Evaluation provides valid and reliable evaluation methods for all FKC Programs to determine program effectiveness and to inform practice for others to replicate. All of the FKC programs and services are interventions specifically designed to be research based and provide outcomes to better inform practice. As part of a research university, FKC participates in several innovative research projects. To best highlight kinship care research in Florida, innovative research projects, published research studies on FKC Programs, and future research needs are described below.

Innovative Research Projects

National Institute on Health Co-Caregiving, Addiction, and Incarceration Project

In collaboration with USF St. Petersburg and the Sheriffs Office of Hillsborough County, the FKC is testing the hypothesis that the co-caregiving relationship between the biological incarcerated mother and the grandmother caregiver can help predict or explain developmental outcomes of the children. Data collected for this project are gathered in jail and in the home and include in depth interviews, survey instruments, video-taped interactions, and developmental assessments.

Kinship Services Network of Pinellas Evaluation

A unique collaboration of service providers in Pinellas County established a system of care to provide an array of supportive services to kinship families in

Kinship Care in Florida: Programs & Research of the Florida Kinship Center the community. Lead agencies include: Children's Home, Inc., Catholic Charities, and Big Brothers Big Sisters. FKC is the lead evaluator of this effort. Outcome measures include the General Health Questionnaire (GSQ-12), Life Orientation Test (Carver, 1998), Dunst Family Support Scale, and Dunst Family Resource Scale.

Publications

Littlewood (formerly Krisman), K. & Strozier, A.L. (in review). Learning about leaders: Exploring and measuring leadership qualities in grandparents and other relatives raising children. Submitted for review July 21, 2007 to *The Gerontologist*.

Purpose of the study: To describe leadership qualities of grandparents and other relatives raising children, and to determine if the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, 1996, 1999, 2000) is appropriate for assessing transformational leadership for grandparents and other relatives raising children.

Design and Methods: This study used factor analysis to describe leadership qualities and test psychometric properties of the LPI. Subjects were sixty kinship caregivers attending advocacy trips to a state legislature to speak to policy makers about their issues.

Results: Results indicate that grandparents and other relatives view themselves as leaders, as scores on all of the LPI's five subscales were higher than 350,000 managers and non-managers assessed by Kouzes and Posner. The principal axis factor analysis with varimax rotation extracted a five factor solution, (similar to the Kouzes & Posner 5 factor solution). The solution had good internal consistency and split-half reliability was robust.

Implications: It appears that the LPI is a promising measure for use with kinship caregivers. More interventions are needed to foster the important quality of leadership among kinship caregivers.

Strozier, A.L., & Krisman, K. (2007). Capturing caregiver data: An examination of kinship care custodial arrangements. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 29(2), 226-246.

In order to examine the experiences of both formal and informal kinship caregivers, this study presents data from June 2003 to October 2005 from the Kinship Care Warmline, a statewide emotional support, education, and information and referral telephone line in Florida. This study addresses the following three research questions: (1) What are the demographics and basic needs of a large group of kinship caregivers in a Southern state? (2) Do kinship caregiver and children demographics differ

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by formal versus informal custody arrangements? (3) Do the needs identified by kinship caregivers differ significantly by formal versus informal custody arrangements? The following differences were found between formal and informal kinship caregivers: income, relationship to child, child's age, number of children in care, and length of time in care. Both formal and informal kinship caregivers expressed similar needs. Significant differences were found between informal and formal caregivers for the need for more information about available resources and the need for counseling for their children. Both informal and formal caregivers felt particularly strong about the need for more information about resources. This supports the operation of the Kinship Care Warmline for those caregivers in need.

Strozier, A., McGrew, L., Krisman, K., & Smith, A. (2005). Kinship Care

Connection: A school-based intervention for kinship caregivers and the children in their care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 27, 1011-1029.

Whereas child welfare has championed efforts in kinship care practice, policy, and research, there is a growing need for other systems of care, specifically the school system, to improve the ways in which kinship care families are supported. This study highlights outcomes from the Kinship Care Connection (KCC), an innovative school-based intervention designed

Kinship Care in Florida: Programs & Research of the Florida Kinship Center to increase children's self-esteem and to mediate kin caregiver burden.

Current issues regarding the status of kinship caregiving families involved in the school system are highlighted using quantitative data and case studies based on: (1) 34 caregivers participating in support groups and case management services, including counseling, advocacy, and resource procurement, and (2) 63 children participating in tutoring, mentoring and counseling, advocacy, and resource procurement. Two case studies describing the familial experience in KCC will detail the process evaluation related to this intergenerational intervention. Results indicate increased self-esteem in children and mediated kin caregiver burden for families participating in the KCC. Implications for social work practice include suggestions for ways social workers and the school system can better support kinship caregiving families.

Smith, A., Krisman, K., Strozier, A.L., & Marley, M. (2004). Breaking through the bars: Exploring the experiences of addicted incarcerated parents whose children are cared for by relatives. *Families in Society: The journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 85, 88-95.

Researchers conducted a series of open-ended semistructured interviews with 25 incarcerated men and women who received substance abuse treatment while their children were being cared for by relatives. Research

Kinship Care in Florida: Programs & Research of the Florida Kinship Center questions were developed on *the* basis of *the* gaps in knowledge identified in *the* available data on addicted incarcerated parents whose children are in kinship care. Respondents in this study were asked questions designed to explore issues such as parent-child bonding, relationships with caregivers, and *the* impact of drug abuse and incarceration on *the* family. Results of this study indicate that there is a need for a multidisciplinary, wraparound approach to designing services for affected parents, children, and caregivers.

Strozier, A.L., Elrod, B., Beiler, P., Smith, A., & Carter, K. (2004). Developing a network of support for relative caregivers. *Children and Youth Services Review, 26*, 641-656.

As kinship care arrangements become more common, providing services that address the needs of both relative caregivers and the children in their care is a growing concern for social workers and other family-service professionals. This study describes a sample of kinship caregivers who received computer training. The study presents quantitative and qualitative data regarding the effectiveness of the computer-training program which was designed to benefit kin caregivers by improving self-efficacy, enhancing career skills, augmenting social support and increasing confidence in their ability to help educate the children in their

Kinship Care in Florida: Programs & Research of the Florida Kinship Center care. Forty-six kinship caregivers completed The Caregiver Computer Efficacy Scale (a 20-item instrument using a one-directional five-value Likert scale) before and after an 8-week computer-training course. Qualitative data was also collected during and after training sessions. The results indicate that this intervention was effective and can be used with kinship caregivers to increase self-efficacy, teach computer skills, enhance social support and build common ground between children and caregivers.

Smith, A., Strozier, A.L., & Chafin, I. (2000). *Kinship Care in Hillsborough County*.

Hillsborough County: Children's Board of Hillsborough County.

Retrieved online on June 1, 2007 at

<http://www.childrensboard.org/downloads/PDF/kinshipcare.pdf>

This report, *Kinship Care in Hillsborough County, Florida*, presents the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of Dr. Aaron Smith, Dr. Anne Strozier, and Iris Chaffin, MSW of the USF School of Social Work based on their work since February 1999. Section I, the Introduction, contains discussion about the background, purpose, partners, and processes of the analysis. Section II, *Kinship Caregiving Families*, describes the characteristics, perceptions, and changing profile of these families based on a review of the literature and data gathered from this research project. Section III, *Support Services*, includes the results from 18 structured interviews with

Kinship Care in Florida: Programs & Research of the Florida Kinship Center service providers in Hillsborough County and a list of services available to kinship caregiving families in Hillsborough County. Finally, in Section IV, are the conclusions, recommendations and final comments by the researchers. The recommendations should be of interest to providers and funders of services to kinship caregiving families.

Future Research Needs

Valid and reliable data on informal (private) kinship care families

FKC work throughout Florida provides a unique opportunity to explore the resource needs and family support to those families who are not involved or have limited involvement with the child welfare system. More research is needed on what works best for these families and how to best support them.

Child welfare policy interpretation and implementation

State child welfare agencies and local dependency courts interpret and implement policies such as the Adoption Safe Families Act very differently. More research is needed on how the law and courts not only influence the availability of support and resources to kinship families through the interpretation of ASFA, but also the disparity of acceptance or rejection of kinship care as a legitimate resource in communities. In terms of implementation for example, private agencies in Florida who are involved with community-based care are implementing child welfare services through state contracts with varying degrees of funding and support. Research needs to document, compare and

Kinship Care in Florida: Programs & Research of the Florida Kinship Center assess the different approaches that private and public child welfare agencies are using to serve kinship care families.

System coordination in kinship care: Is it possible?

Kinship families are involved with multiple systems of care, such as child welfare, early child education, health care, schools, aging, and others. These systems have established their own practices and policies on how to best support kinship families. Most of these systems work in isolation and fail to collaborate on research and practice. Future research should use a multidisciplinary perspective to identify gaps in knowledge and investigate how to best serve kinship families.

Families affected by incarceration

Although more research has been done on how families are affected by incarceration, few studies have examined (1) the variation in the amount of family support available to families involved with the criminal justice system; (2) the identification of the best ways to support child development, attachment, and permanence while the parent is away, (3) the dynamics, roles, and responsibilities of complex familial relationships, and (4) the impact of substance abuse on families affected by incarceration.

More information on co-caregiving relationships

The National Institute on Health Co-Caregiving, Addiction, and Incarceration Project begins to explore how caregiving relationships affect early

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child development. More research is needed on relationship dynamics and how these influence child development. Paramount to this research is an examination of the diverse roles and responsibilities biological parents play and how these are perceived and experienced by other members of the extended family.

Kinship care with families involved in the military

Since 2004, many families have been more intimately involved with parents deployment overseas, extended duties, and the death of a parent. Little is known about the unique experiences these families face and what type of support is available to them. A closer examination of the experiences of these families will be important to future program and policy development.

Conclusion

This report highlighted the innovative programs designed to meet the needs of grandparents and other relatives raising children in Florida. Only a summary of each FKC program was provided, but extensive materials are available upon request. This report also highlighted the research and evaluation conducted at the FKC. Although only a few future research needs were identified, research on kinship care is strongly needed to better understand the diverse experiences of families. Several publications are available that describe FKC research work in greater detail. For more information or PDF files of these studies, please contact FKC Director, Anne Strozier, Ph.D., MSW at strozier@cas.usf.edu.