

Kinship Caregiver Engagement Unit (KCEU)

2022 Decision Package

The Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) is conducting a pilot in Regions 1 and 2 to reduce the delay in legal permanency (adoption/guardianship) for children by partnering and engaging with families to help them complete home studies (funded at \$500,000 in 2019). This Kinship Caregiver Engagement Unit (KCEU) pilot led to an increase in licensing kinship caregivers and in timeliness for home study completion, resulting in more timely permanency for children.



Implementing the KCEU will enable all kinship providers in Washington State to benefit from this successful program, will lay a foundation for DCYF's implementation of HB 1227, and will reduce the delay in legal permanency (adoption/guardianship) for children.

THE KCEU EXPANSION WILL:

- ✓ Offer targeted, individualized support for kin that increases the timeliness of home studies, improves the ease with which kin move through the home study and licensing process, and improves the outcomes of their licensing experience.
- ✓ Support the mandate in HB 1227 that requires DCYF to conduct home studies within 90 days of placement.

Kinship caregivers lead to better outcomes for children and youth:

Kinship caregivers agree to care for kin child(ren) as an alternative to placement in a foster home. Research indicates that kin placements minimize the trauma associated with home removals while simultaneously increasing the child(ren)'s likelihood of remaining connected to siblings, families of origin, and community. All of which improves the child(ren)'s overall well-being. Compared to children in non-relative foster care, children in kinship care experience fewer behavioral and mental health challenges, lower rates of rebase, and less placement disruption.

Many kinship caregivers are unprepared financially for this growth in their family and for other requirements, such as participating in the home study process, following court ordered services, providing Family Time visitations, etc.

COSTS

21-23 BIENNIUM: \$1.8 MILLION

23-25 BIENNIUM: \$3.7 MILLION

The current home study processes do not meet demands of placement efforts:

- ✓ The application and home study process is extensive due to the critical nature of providing safe, welcoming, and affirming care to vulnerable children and youth. For a kinship caregiver, this process may feel daunting and confusing, especially if they didn't anticipate caregiving.
- ✓ Administrative/engagement tasks to support caregivers take up to 35% of process time. Additional and specialized staffing resources to assist kinship caregivers in navigating the home study process are needed.

DCYF STRATEGIC PRIORITY ALIGNMENT:

- ✓ Eliminate racial disproportionalities and advance racial equity.
- ✓ Safely reduce the number/rate of children in out-of-home care.
- ✓ Create successful transitions to adulthood for youth and young adults in our care.
- ✓ Improve quality and intention of our practice.

Contact

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