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### **Kinship Navigator Survey Data Summary**

In August of 2019, Generations United sent online surveys to public and private child welfare agencies and other entities that applied for and received federal funding for Kinship Navigators. Kinship Navigator Programs (KNs) in ten states provided detailed responses regarding the structure and function of their programs. Of the respondents, seven are private, nonprofit organizations and three are other entities, such as universities or for-profit companies. The survey collected information on the type and level of assistance these states would find beneficial in further developing these programs. This document outlines the findings of the survey.

#### **Kinship Navigator Populations Served & Staff**

KNs vary nationwide based many factors, including length of time the program has been operational. Of the ten state KNs that completed the survey, six respondents reported serving families both inside and outside the child welfare system, while two respondents reported only serving those families that are affiliated with the child welfare system. Two respondents abstained from answering questions on this topic. Relatedly, seven KNs reported that their program has no limitations on which families can access services, while one reported that only families referred through their state Department of Human Services may access KN services. The area of each state served by KNs varies across the country. Five programs from this sample serve families statewide, while five serve only specific areas within the state. Of this survey's sample, the newest program was set to begin implementation in the next six to nine months at the time of survey completion, while the oldest has been operational for 20 years.

Much like the programs' differing ages, the number of full-time program staff varies widely. Three respondents reported having only one or less full-time staff working on the KN. Four respondents reported two to five full-time staff, and three respondents reported six or more full-time KN staff. Each respondent also reported the number of families their KN serves in a single year, with five programs serving less than 100 families, two programs serving 100-500 families, two programs serving 500-1,000 families, and, lastly, one program serving over 1,000 families. To provide a further breakdown of the families served by these KNs, seven programs reported the racial or ethnic group that comprises the majority of their client base as "White non-Latino/Hispanic," one program reported the majority of their client base as "Latino/Hispanic," and two programs reported their majorities as "Other."

#### **Service Provision**

KNs offer a multitude of services to families. All the KNs surveyed reported providing “access to public benefits and income supports” to families. Other areas of service provision include the following, which address the needs most often reported by families:

- Caregiver training for help with children’s behavioral challenges
- Caregiver training for how to navigate parental substance use
- Health care (including mental health)
- Housing
- Legal assistance
- Respite care
- Support groups
- Childcare
- Navigating boundaries and family dynamics

The above services are offered via a range of modalities, including toll-free phone lines and face-to-face meetings, both staffed by professional service providers and/or kinship caregivers. Another method for providing the above services is a KN website. Survey respondents reported providing the following information on their KN websites:

- Program description and contact information
- Searchable databases of available programs and services
- Downloadable guides, fact sheets, and other resources
- Public benefit application forms

Even with the robust provision of services outlined above, many KNs still see gaps between services families need and what the program can provide. For example, seven survey respondents reported families within their jurisdictions needing higher-level assistance in areas such as housing, childcare, and guardianship services that the program doesn’t have the capacity to offer. Half of all survey respondents reported lack of access to sufficient, reliable funding as a key barrier to providing these services to families. The lack of reliable funding for these KNs creates a shortage of both KN staff and goods and services for families. Source of funding is yet another area where KNs vary across the country. Of the private nonprofit KNs that completed the survey, all but one reported receiving funds from their state or county child welfare agency to support their programs.

### **Program Structure & Collaboration**

Effective outreach is necessary to inform families that KN resources are available. Respondents noted the following outreach methods and strategies as being the most effective:

- Referrals from partner agencies were unanimously identified as effective
- Community events
- Social media
- Website
- Word of mouth

Another critical step in maintaining an effective, sustainable KN is establishing relationships with external groups and organizations to allow for effective referral to services and supports as well as maintaining a safe space that allows for authentic engagement of those with lived experience. All ten survey respondents reported operating in consultation or collaboration with at least one external group. The following are examples of these external groups:

- 2-1-1 or 3-1-1 referral services
- Education systems
- Healthcare providers
- Legal aid
- National nonprofit organizations
- Public or private child welfare agencies
- Public or private aging services
- TANF/income support agencies
- Community-based or faith-based organizations
- Government agencies
- Kinship caregivers
- Organizations representing kinship caregivers and/or young people raised by kinship caregivers
- Children and/or youth raised by kinship caregivers

As a means by which to collect information on the needs of each family, half of the survey respondents reported utilizing a “needs assessment” form or checklist when responding to calls from families.

### **Recommendations of KN Survey Respondents**

It’s crucial that Kinship Navigator programs are well-supported, so they can effectively serve and support kinship families. Survey respondents reported the following supports as being most helpful in continuing provision of services to families:

- National database of all KNs in the U.S.
- Facilitated peer-to-peer learning network for KNs
- Collection of profiles of KNs across the country
- Tip sheets on developing or improving key elements of KNs
- Individualized technical assistance (TA) in developing and/or enhancing KNs
  - Respondents shared that they would prefer this TA to be provided by peer Kinship Navigators, data and computer system professionals, experts in program evaluation, or content experts on grandfamilies policy/program/legal issues
- Training for Social Workers and legal stakeholders
- Opportunities for states to collaborate with one another to meet evidence-based requirements more quickly

On the topic of provision of TA to KNs, two respondents reported that they would be willing to pay for TA and the remaining respondents reported that they would be willing to pay for TA *depending on funding and cost.*

## Concerns with Federal Evaluation Requirements

Seven of the ten survey respondents reported either “agree” or “strongly agree” to the question of whether the KN and its staff is familiar with the federal requirements for KNs, with three respondents abstaining from this question. Respondents reported that, given their knowledge of the federal requirements for KNs, they each anticipate their programs needing one to three years to fulfill all federal requirements. Some concerns that respondents have about meeting the federal requirements include the following:

- The time period of just one year for non-competitive federal KN funds is quite restrictive and does not allow sufficient time for planning
- Evidence-based requirements as enforced by the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse are difficult for KNs to meet
- Lack of clarity in the Clearinghouse’s [Handbook of Standards and Procedures](#)
- Insufficient number of cases to conduct an evaluation with a control group

Four respondents do have available evaluation data on their KNs, while three do not and three abstained from answering. Also, five respondents currently have an evaluation plan in place in an effort to work toward meeting the evidence-based requirements set by the Clearinghouse. Generations United has been and continues to work with Kinship Navigator programs across the country and members of Congress to address the issues outlined in this document. For more information about Kinship Navigator programs, please visit [grandfamilies.org](http://grandfamilies.org) and [gu.org](http://gu.org).