

EXCERPTS from draft report from ChildTrends

For COY – 10/18/11

Study Definition

•Kin diversion is defined as the child welfare agency *facilitating* the placement of children with relatives when the child cannot remain safely at home with their parents. Without the presence of an appropriate relative to care for the child, the child would be brought into agency custody.

Assumptions to Guide the Research

- Assessing safety and stability
- Services and supports for children, birth parents, and kin
- Family awareness of options
- Birth parent rights
- Data tracking

- Cultural sensitivity

Methods - Total participants: 162

Diverse Localities:

Arlington, Charlottesville, Henrico, Portsmouth, Washington, Wise

Interviews and focus groups with:

- Child welfare administrators (8)
- Kinship caregivers (21)
- Investigative/CPS caseworkers (53)
- Prevention and family preservation workers (6)
- Foster care caseworkers (37)
- Supervisors (23)
- Judges or judicial personnel, attorneys, CASAs (14)

Kin Diversion Prevalence

- **In all localities, kin diversion practice is always considered first (if appropriate relative available) and does not differ due to the severity of abuse/neglect, age of the child, or any other factors.**
- **Localities range from kin diversion/no licensure of relatives to kin diversion/some licensure of relatives (up to ~30% relative foster parents).**
- **Kin diversion does not appear to be a tactic to avoid the provision of in-home services for the birth parent before removal. Primary goal is most always reunification.**
- **Diversion terms used by localities:**
 - parental placement, relative placement, prevention, kinship, voluntary placement

Underlying Values Behind Kin Diversion

- **Prevention services should be first option presented to families**
- **Agencies should support families staying together**
- **Foster care seen as last resort and not good for families**
 - In some localities, foster care not offered as option to some kin because workers cannot conceptualize kin as foster parents.
 - Foster care appropriate only after all other preventive options sought
 - Child feels the difference between foster care involvement and no foster care involvement
 - Public agency is intrusive
- **Families should have some type of support from the agency (if needed) if they step up to care for their relatives**
 - Workers support the idea of approving kin as foster parents but often don't think it's a possibility

Information Typically Presented to Triad at Decision Point

- **Child's needs.** Discussion of child's needs and transition into home
- **Maintaining boundaries.** Information about maintaining boundaries with birth parent
- **Financial resources available to support placement**
 - In some instances, this *may* include discussion about foster care payment vs. TANF payment/general relief payment
- **Services.** Other services and benefits available to support placement
- **Visitation.** Between birth parent and child and also siblings
- **Planning.** Discussion of possible length of placement
- **Legal custody.** Discussion about options available through courts as well as possibility of foster care
 - Foster care not consistently mentioned as option
 - In some instances, families have to request to be foster parents, and this request may not be granted

Challenges with Current Kin Diversion Practice

- No standard policy on kin diversion practice
- Inadequate documentation of kin diversion cases to support appropriate accountability measures
- Some localities lack adequate services to serve kinship triad
- Lack of adequate system funding for kin diversion and overall prevention services
- May hinder reunification efforts due to no mandated timelines
- Nonrelatives not eligible for benefits, e.g., Medicaid, food stamps, day care, financial benefits
- Family dysfunction and other family issues (i.e. families may need mediation services)
- Quality Information on custody and service options is not consistently available to birth parents and kin
- Caregiver knowledge of, access to adequate services and supports
- Education and training of kinship caregivers to handle children's issues