

Kinship Diversion Research Virginia Findings

Summary of Two Studies
Presented to the Commission on Youth, August
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Kinship Diversion Studies

- ▶ VDSS 2009 quantitative study
- ▶ Matt Wade principal researcher
- ▶ ChildTrends and Annie E. Casey Foundation 2011 Qualitative Study
- ▶ Tiffany Allen and Karin Malm principal researchers

Study Definition of Kin Diversion

- ▶ 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 the agency's custody.

Assumptions Guiding Quantitative Study

- ▶ Virginia is last in nation of children placed with relatives in foster care (FC).
- ▶ Local departments divert children from foster care (FC) by placing them with relatives rather than bring them into foster care.
- ▶ Does foster care (FC) diversion account for lower placement of children in foster care (FC)?

Quantitative Study: Research Methods

- ▶ Sample of referral population from 2009.
- ▶ All referrals disposed of if open 1–45 days used – population = 2,168.
- ▶ Statistically significant sample used = 326.
- ▶ Sample stratified across regions and extra 60 cases added to account for lack of response.
- ▶ Workers answered 6 question survey.
- ▶ 361 responses = response rate of 88.9%

Quantitative Study: Survey Questions

- ▶ Did the child come into LDSS custody?
- ▶ Was the child placed in another home on an informal basis?
- ▶ What was caregivers relationship to child?
- ▶ Was the placement arranged as an alternative to FC placement?
- ▶ Did/does the child receive ongoing monitoring from LDSS?
- ▶ Did/does the child receive ongoing services from LDSS?

Quantitative Study Findings p.1

- ▶ 11 of 361 (3%) children came into custody.
- ▶ 42 of 361 (11.6%) were placed in another home informally (diverted from FC).
 - 30 of the 42 children placed with kin (71.4%).
 - 12 of the 42 children placed with “other” (28.6%).
 - Assume 8.3% – 11.6% placed with kin.
- ▶ Statewide Generalizations:
 - For all August referrals, between 179 and 251 children placed with relatives; and
 - For all referrals for 12 months, between 2,148 and 3,012 children diverted to relatives.

Quantitative Study Findings p.2

- ▶ Of the 42 children diverted from foster care, 78.6% were specifically placed informally as an alternative to FC.
- ▶ 61.9% of the 42 children were/are being monitored after diversion.
- ▶ 57.1% of the 42 children were/are receiving services after diversion.

Quantitative Study: Follow-up Questions to Answer

- ▶ Can the numbers of children diverted be verified statewide?
- ▶ Who are the “others” that children were diverted to?
- ▶ What does “monitoring” the child after diversion mean? Purpose? Length?
- ▶ What types of services were provided and for what purpose? For how long?
- ▶ What are the policy implications of these answers and kinship diversion over-all?

Qualitative Study Impetus

- ▶ What are Virginia's current philosophies around using kin as FC prevention?
- ▶ What are Virginia's diversion practices?
- ▶ What is the statewide variation in diversion practices?

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

Qualitative Study Methods

- ▶ Select Diverse Localities: Arlington, Charlottesville, Henrico, Portsmouth, Washington, Wise
- ▶ Conduct 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)

Total participants: 162

Qualitative Study Findings: Kinship 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.

Qualitative Study Findings: Other Types of Kin Diversions

Agencies may work with families who come to DSS attention for reasons other than abuse/neglect:

- ▶ Voluntary entrustments
- ▶ Relinquishment of custody (from relatives)
- ▶ Adoption disruptions
- ▶ Referrals from juvenile court (including truancy cases)
- ▶ CHINS cases

Qualitative Study Findings: Underlying Values Behind Kin Diversion

- ▶ Prevention services should be first option presented to families
- ▶ Agencies should support families staying together
- ▶ FC is seen as last resort and not good for families
- ▶ 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

Qualitative Study Findings:

Why divert?

- Keep foster care numbers down
- Foster care not desired outcome
- Prevent unnecessary court involvement
- Family autonomy/don't want to be involved with CPS
- Some families can't meet licensing requirements
- Some families do not need agency support
- Avoid mandatory timelines when parent no longer in picture

Why not divert?

- No relative immediately available (parent cooperation often dictates this)
- No "appropriate" relative
- Out-of-state relatives
- If relative would be out of jurisdiction and no preventive services available
- Previous prevention /in-home services have been exhausted

Qualitative Study Findings: Using Family Partnership Meetings

- ▶ Occurs when child is being removed from home in many localities.
- ▶ Allows options to be laid out for family.
- ▶ Creates better opportunities to identify family before removal.
- ▶ Encourages partnership among the family/empowers the family.
- ▶ Allows agency to better engage family and facilitate better ongoing communication if another meeting is needed.

Qualitative Study Findings: Assessments

- No formal guidelines for assessment type or process for
- Inconsistent assessments and worker confusion over need for assessment
- Ranges from basic criminal and CPS background checks so checks similar to foster parent standards, though not as intense
- Timing of/need for background checks varies:
 - Some workers conduct quick check via local police then follow up with federal check
 - Some report placing child with relative before doing CPS check
 - Some workers report no need for background checks because parent making the placement (depends on reason the child needs to be removed)

Qualitative Study Findings: Open Cases and Agency Monitoring

- ▶ CPS Investigation is always completed.
- ▶ Cases may be opened after investigation completed
 - Not formalized. There may be a number of reasons that cases are continued past the investigation.
 - Ongoing cases may range from 30 days up to 2 years.
 - Workers sometimes uneasy about having to step out of cases due to limited staff resources.
- ▶ Diversions may be fluid
 - In-home services are provided to birth parent and relative and child moves back and forth.
 - Not all diversions end in permanent custody.

Qualitative Study Findings: Service Provision

- ▶ Range of services may be similar to other (in-home) services.
 - Localities vary greatly on availability of services.
 - Localities with less resources = lack of in-home, prevention services.
 - Services generally based on the needs of the child, often identified in the assessment when child first moved to home.
- ▶ Safety Planning
 - Used to list service recommendations for parent
 - Often details plans for visitation
 - Signed by parent and other involved parties
 - Confusion about legal undergirding of safety plan. Parent may think it is legally enforceable, but it is not.

Qualitative Study Findings: Paying for Services

- ▶ Payment for services. Medicaid or kin caregiver's insurance pays for services.
 - Difficult to pay for services if child no longer at risk of coming into foster care by living in safe home with relative.
 - **CSA Funding.** Use of funds not uniform across counties. May be used to fund temporary services to prevent child's entry into foster care.
- ▶ Financial assistance.
 - TANF child-only for relatives, general relief payment for fictive kin. Some one-time emergency assistance available.

Qualitative Study Findings: Reasons for Closing an Ongoing Case

- ▶ Family is self-sustaining
- ▶ Relative obtains custody
- ▶ Low risk in the relative's home
- ▶ Once possibility of reunification does not look likely
- ▶ Child returns home to birth parent
- ▶ Family not willing to participate
- ▶ Case moves to another locality

Qualitative Study Findings: Kin Diversion Practice Challenges

- ▶ No standard policy on kin diversion practice.
- ▶ Inadequate documentation of kin diversion to support appropriate accountability measures.
- ▶ Some localities lack services for kinship
- ▶ Lack of system funding for kin diversion, prevention services.
- ▶ Diversion may hinder reunification efforts due to no mandated timelines.

Qualitative Study Findings: Kin Diversion Practice Challenges

- ▶ 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)
- ▶ Information on custody and service options not consistently available to birth parents and kin
- ▶ Caregivers lack knowledge of, access to adequate services and supports
- ▶ Caregivers lack education and training on how to handle children's issues

Qualitative Study Findings: Kinship Caregiver–Specific Themes

- ▶ **Need for services.** Caregivers generally needed access to benefits and services, and talked less about needing support of the agency in the form of workers or monitoring. Basic needs such as food assistance and monetary assistance was cited as most helpful.
- ▶ **Generational issues.** Health and age of kin caregivers
- ▶ **Transition.** Caregivers need support with expenses to prepare home for children
- ▶ **Education.** Caregivers need training on how to handle children’s behavior and deal with trauma children experienced
- ▶ **Emotional well–being.** Caregivers lifestyles are taxed and they are in need of emotional support

Qualitative Study Recommendations

- ▶ Develop/adopt clear, written state policy guidelines and associated training for kin diversion practice.
 - Include minimum standards for assessment, service provision, safety planning, client education, monitoring, case documentation and data tracking.
- ▶ Provide workers with tools for clients and training on the tools to inform and advise families on benefits and options including: TANF eligibility, Available services, Option to become a kinship foster parent, legal options such as how kin can seek legal custody and birth parents can regain custody.

Qualitative Study Recommendations

- (3) Build in an accountability process to track diversion data statewide through OASIS by including kin diversion in Safe Measures reporting and in the Quality Service Review performance management process.

- (4) Provide custody assistance for relatives who obtain custody.

Diversion: Current Steps and Ongoing Challenges

- ▶ VDSS working on assessment standards and tools for relatives.
- ▶ Increasing policy emphasis on the role of family in diverting children from FC and placing children with relatives in FC.
- ▶ Prevention guidance manual to be issued that emphasizes diversion.
- ▶ Lack of data system ability to track prevention/diversion cases remains an issue.
- ▶ Paucity of services and financial support for relatives taking care of kin children.