



Kinship Care

In this section:

- [VDSS FFY19 Kinship Navigator Grant Program](#)
- [Kinship Exploratory Study and Diversion Practices in Virginia](#)

What is Kinship Care?

Kinship Care is defined in the Code of Virginia as “full time care, nurturing and protection of children by relatives.” When a child must be removed from the home, local departments of social services sometimes place them with a relative to avoid placing them in foster care. This practice is often referred to as “diversion.”

What are some facts about Virginia’s use of Kinship Care?

Preliminary research conducted on Virginia’s diversion practices has found that from July 2016 to December 2017:

- 2,203 children were diverted to kinship care from 1,262 families in 31 agencies
- Between 30-35% of kinship caregivers and the children they cared for were provided services after diversion occurred
- The average length of diversion was 1 to 3 months
- Approximately 60% of children entered foster care within 6 months of diversion

To learn more, see “Kinship Exploratory Study and Diversion Practices in Virginia” in this section.

What is the Kinship Navigator Grant Program?

Kinship Navigator (KN) programs provide information, referral, education, support, and advocacy for kinship families. VDSS received a grant from the Children’s Bureau to develop six regionally-located Kinship Navigator Programs involving 40 localities (33% of the state). To learn more, see “VDSS FFY19 Kinship Navigator Grant Program” in this section.

VDSS FFY19 Kinship Navigator Grant Program

Virginia is a state-supervised and locally administered child welfare system with 120 local departments of social services (LDSS). VDSS received a grant from the Children’s Bureau for \$379,246 dollars for use from October 1, 2018-September 30, 2019. With the grant, VDSS developed six regionally-located Kinship Navigator Programs involving 40 localities (33% of the state). The Kinship Navigator (KN) programs provide information, referral, education and advocacy for kinship families. VDSS’s collaborations with the six chosen local departments are based upon the Kinship Navigator’s federal Children’s Bureau grant associated with the passing of the Family First Prevention Services Act (Family First) on February 8, 2018, where the goal is to identify private (informal) kinship families and to connect them to the Kinship Navigator and local resources. The purpose of services is to provide supports that strengthen the kinship caregivers’ capacity to provide a safe, nurturing home for the child and to help achieve permanency for the child. Additionally, supports and services should assist the kinship caregiver in addressing the effects that maltreatment may have had on the child in their care.

Why is Kinship Care Important?



Challenges Kinship Caregivers May Face

What are some challenges kinship caregivers face?



11

The following Kinship Navigator Programs are currently funded and provide the following services:

1. **Arlington Department of Social Services** is partnering with Alexandria, Fairfax, Prince William, and Loudoun and is providing the following services with their awarded grant funds:
 - Services to kinship caregivers having trouble finding assistance for their unique needs and who may need help navigating the county's service system. Seeks to connect kinship families and form a network of kinship caregivers who can support each other and their changing families.
 - Assists kinship families who need a connection to services, such as childcare, education, health care, and financial help, and are seeking support from professionals or peers. Provides seminars, trainings, and workshops focused on kinship families' needs, as well as support groups for these families.
 - Conducting an evaluation of kinship care engagement within the above jurisdictions. The study shall assess best practices in communication and information sharing with

those kinship families currently in the child welfare system as well as those kinship families in the community who are not connected to the child welfare system and are seeking general information on kinship care service options. The results of this evaluation with Second Chance, Inc. will assist the program in making needed improvements to assist kinship caregivers in all jurisdictions.

2. Bedford Department of Social Services is partnering with Amherst, Appomattox, Campbell, Lynchburg, and Nelson and is providing the following services with their awarded grant funds with a contracted partner(Patrick Henry Family Services):

- Providing Kinship Resource Family Training regionally three times yearly. This will be a five-week course based on established evidence-based curriculums (Pride, Traditions of Caring, and Foster Parent College) but with a focus on the unique needs and concerns of kinship families. The training will result in the kinship families' certification as resource parents, providing that they meet the other requirements for licensure. The training will be open to kin who intend to foster, relative custodians, as well as diversionary families. Dinner will be provided for families before each class. Child care will be provided by volunteers from Patrick Henry/Safe Families. Transportation assistance in the form of gas cards will be provided to support families who are traveling to the training from outside the hosting locality, as needed.
- A support group will be facilitated by Patrick Henry/Safe Families to provide ongoing support and encouragement to the families participating in the Kinship Resource Family training. Any family who is caring for a relative's child or fictive kin is invited to attend.
- Employing a part-time Regional Kinship Navigator who will work with kinship families to ensure that they are connected with the resources available to them, including benefits (TANF, SNAP, Medicaid) and services (including a variety of counseling and respite options, educational support, legal support, mental health support, etc.)

3. Dickenson Department of Social Services is partnering with Buchanan, Russell, Tazewell, Lee, Wise, Scott and the City of Norton and is providing the following services with their awarded grant funds:

- Providing an information and referral network system that links kinship caregivers to kinship support groups, legal assistance, and benefits, such as TANF, SNAP and Medicaid.
- Providing advocacy for kinship caregivers and youth in schools, court systems, health care, mental health agencies and benefits programs.

- Assisting kinship caregivers in utilizing services to meet the needs of the children they are raising.
- Employing a full-time Kinship Navigator to provide face-to-face meetings in the home to support families and ensure the families' needs are being met.

4. James City County Department of Social Services is partnering with Williamsburg and York-Poquoson and is providing the following services with their awarded grant funds:

- Employing a part-time Kinship Navigator position to ensure kinship caregivers and youth are connected with needed resources including federal, state and local benefits. Provide formal training to Kinship Navigator in the form of computer based courses.
- Collaborating and coordinating with the local Community Action Agency, Williamsburg-James City County Schools, Child Development Resources, Colonial Behavioral Health, Peninsula Agency on Aging, United Way, 9th District Court Services Unit and other private and public agencies to support kinship caregivers.
- Providing training to local community partners on the barriers that kinship caregivers and youth face.
- Linking kinship caregivers and youth to a wide array of services and supports to ensure stability and safety within the home.
- Developing an information and referral system to assist kinship caregivers and youth. Develop information packets and referral database to assist in outreach to kinship caregivers and youth.
- Establishing a Regional Kinship Council and activities may include providing community trainings, establishing a newsletters and providing web-based information to Kinship families in the community to ensure the development of regional Kinship Navigator Program with Williamsburg Department of Human Services and York-Poquoson department of Social Services.

5. Virginia Beach Department of Human Services is partnering with Chesapeake, Portsmouth, Suffolk and Norfolk and is providing the following services with their awarded grant funds:

- Employing a full-time regional kinship navigator position to ensure kinship caregivers and youth are connected with needed resources including federal, state and local benefits.
- Conducting a public forum in each participating locality to explore community strengths and opportunities to build support for kinship families.
- Collecting and analyzing data from information and referral system and case management services to evaluate the kinship navigator program and use data to develop goals for improving and sustaining the program.

- Developing and providing kiosks in each participating locality to assist kinship caregivers and youth with connecting to resources.
- Collaborating and coordinating with local community partners to include, court service units, school and community-based agencies.
- Linking kinship caregivers to a wide array of services and supports to ensure stability and safety within the home.
- Developing an information and referral system to assist kinship caregivers and youth.
- Providing support groups for kinship families in Chesapeake Department of Human Services, Portsmouth Department of Social Services, Suffolk Department of Social Services, and Norfolk Department of Human Services with the assistance of New Found Families.
- Coordinating and collaborating with other members of the regional Kinship Navigation consortium to include meeting face-to-face (NewFound Families, Kin and Kids Consulting, LLC., Chesapeake Department of Human Services, Portsmouth Department of Social Services, Suffolk Department of Social Services, and Norfolk Department of Human Services) to ensure scope of work is completed in a coordinated and collaborated manner and kinship caregivers and youth are provided services in accordance with this scope of work.

6. Wythe Department of Social Services is partnering with Bland, Bristol, Carroll, Galax, Giles, Grayson, Montgomery, Pulaski, Radford, Smyth, and Washington and is providing the following services with their awarded grant funds:

- Employing a full-time Kinship Navigator Specialist to ensure kinship caregivers and youth are connected with needed resources including federal, state and local benefits. Assist Kinship Navigator Specialist with mileage reimbursement to provide support to Kinship families in the community.
- Collaborating and coordinating with the local community partners to include, Legal Aid, public schools, health department, private counseling services, faith-based entities, non-profits, court services, community services boards, parent education programs and child abuse prevention coalitions.
- Developing and implementing outreach materials including fliers, brochures and establish a social media network to assist in educating and providing support to kinship caregivers and youth.
- Linking kinship caregivers and youth to a wide array of services and supports to ensure stability and safety within the home.
- Developing an information and referral system to assist kinship caregivers and youth.

- Seeking and utilizing volunteers to establish a network of support for kinship caregivers and youth.
- Collecting data to assist with measuring outcomes of Kinship Navigator program.
- Assisting Kinship families with resources in the community for legal consultation and provide financial support for legal fees.
- Providing training to Kinship Navigator Specialist in the form of conference attendance to enhance delivery of Kinship Navigation services.
- Using the Family Partnership Meeting model to engage families and community supports/services to develop a service plan that is family strength-based with measurable goals and outcomes that result in family stabilization and preservation. The Kinship Navigation Specialist will be available to provide guidance, information and referrals, and face-to-face case management services tailored to each family's unique circumstances.

7. Virginia Department of Social Services is partnering with our internal Division of Community and Volunteer Services and 2-1-1 VIRGINIA services and is providing the following services:

- Providing specialized information and referral services to Kinship Guardians (hereafter referred to as "Customers") who contact 2-1-1 VIRGINIA directly or through the Kinship Navigation toll free number 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.
- Establishing a dedicated toll free number to be ported through the 2-1-1 VIRGINIA Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) system with a dedicated message that shall identify Kinship Navigation prior to connection with a Contact Specialist.
- Reviewing and updating existing agency program listings in the 2-1-1 VIRGINIA Resource Database for Customers, in accordance with the Database Style Manual, the Database Inclusion/Exclusion Policy, and the Alliance of Information and Referrals Systems (AIRS) accreditation standards.
- Identifying new agencies providing services to kinship families through outreach services and coordination with VDSS Division of Family Services. Facilitate voluntary entry into the Resource Database.
- Modifying the 2-1-1 VIRGINIA Database to capture kinship family demographic information specific to Kinship Navigation.
- Collecting data to include, but not limited to, met and unmet needs, types of needs requested, and geographic location.

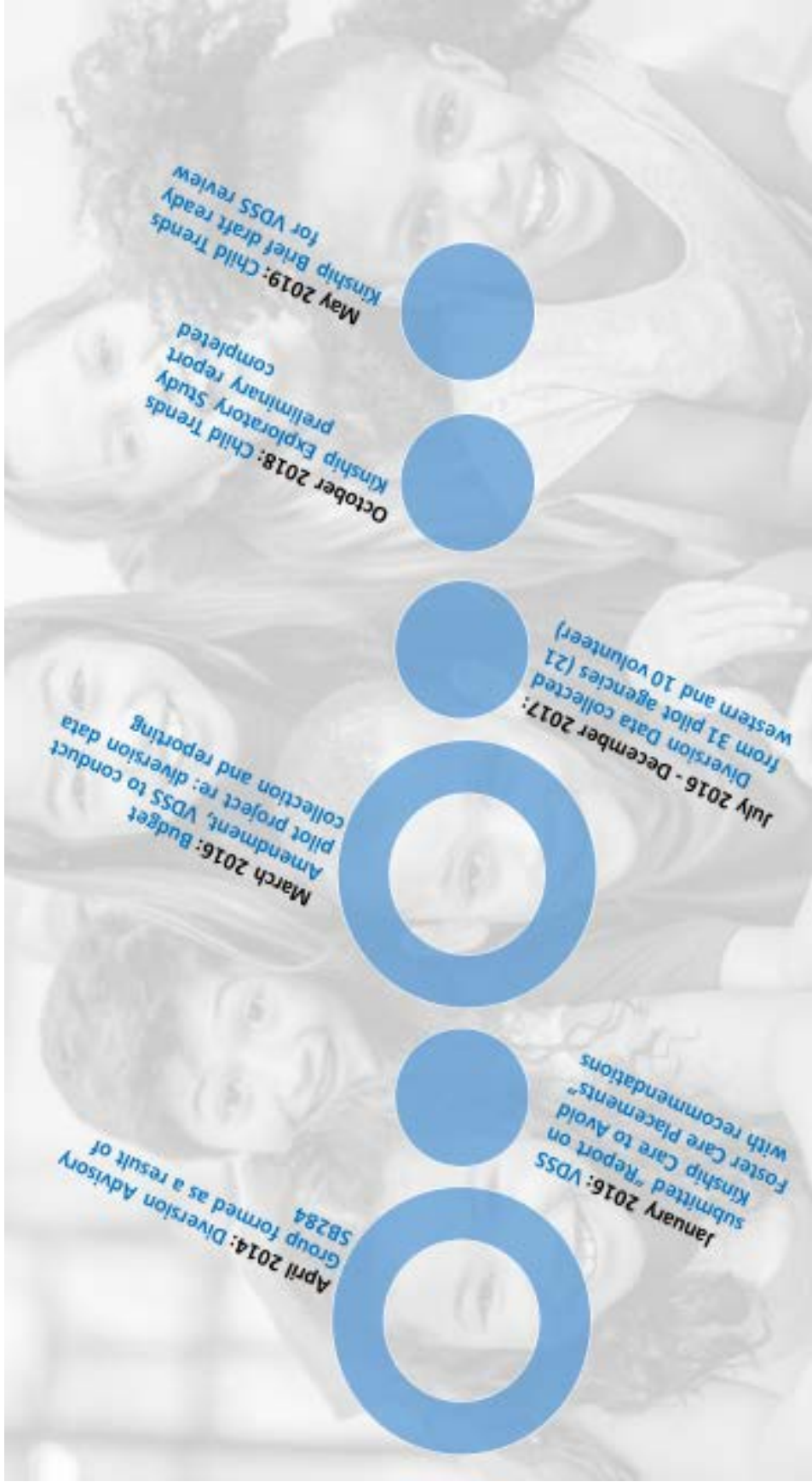
KINSHIP EXPLORATORY STUDY and DIVERSION PRACTICES IN VIRGINIA

Background Information: Local Department of Social Services (LDSS) have acknowledged that they practice a form of “diversion”, meaning placement of a child(ren) with a relative or fictive kin to avoid foster care. Anecdotally, LDSS acknowledge the practice varies throughout the state as there has not been dedicated resources, support, and guidance to LDSS as it relates to diversion to include standards and expectations. The work that has been completed around diversion has been meaningful although the end results require a more in depth analysis. There are opportunities to explore more and build on what we know by being intentional in our work to establish diversion practice standards. Child Trends, a national non-profit research organization, in partnership with Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS), conducted research with 31 pilot LDSS from July 2016-December 2017.

Here are some of the findings from the pilot series preliminary data:

- 2,203 children were diverted to kinship care from 1,262 families in 31 agencies
- The primary reason for LDSS involvement was parent substance abuse
- Between 45-50% of caregivers were the child’s grandparent(s)
- 35% of cases provided services to the parent before diversion, and close to 35% of parents received services after diversion occurred
- Between 30-35% of kinship caregivers were provided services after diversion occurred
- Between 30-35% of children were provided services after diversion occurred
- Between 70-80% of children did not have custody determined
- The average length of diversion was 1 to 3 months
- Approximately 60% of children entered foster care within 6 months of diversion

Next Steps: Child Trends will share completed findings with VDSS in May 2019. VDSS will use this report to inform the previous work put forth by the Diversion Advisory Group and provide new recommendations for practice standards and expectations around diversion, in addition to considerations for enhanced regulatory support. This work is timely as Virginia is currently developing an in-home practice model as the foundation for a robust Prevention Program.



April 2014: Diversion Advisory Group formed as a result of SB284

January 2016: VDS submitted "Report on Kinship Care to Avoid Foster Care placements" with recommendations

March 2016: Budget Amendment, VDS to conduct pilot project re: diversion data collection and reporting

July 2016 - December 2017: Diversion Data collected from 31 pilot agencies (21 western and 10 volunteer)

October 2018: Child Trends Kinship Exploratory Study preliminary report completed

May 2019: Child Trends Kinship Brief draft ready for VDS review