

Kin First



Keeping Families Together



THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION



AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF
JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES
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1 The Importance of Kin

- Kin can maintain and preserve family relationships and connections.
- Kin can mitigate trauma caused by removal.
- Kin can reinforce a child's sense of identity and culture.
- Kin can serve as excellent placement and visitation resources. Kin placements are more stable, allow for more frequent family visits, and help keep siblings together.
- Kin are more likely to be a permanent home through adoption or guardianship when reunification cannot be achieved.

2 Identifying, Engaging and Informing Kin

- Identification, location and engagement of maternal and paternal kin should start as soon as the agency begins working with a family. This includes inquiring about Native American or Alaska Native ancestry so that the Indian Child Welfare Act can be followed.
- Good casework practices, including interviewing the child, typically result in identification of a child's extended family network. Internet searches can complement conversations with family to locate kin.
- All options to be involved in the child's life must be explained to kin early.
- The agency should document efforts to identify, notify and engage kin including: who was contacted, relationship to the child, willingness to be a placement option or assist in other supportive role.

3 The Role of the Court

Court oversight is critical to achieving best practices and improving permanency outcomes. Judges can ask the following questions to create an expectation for a kin first culture:

- What is preventing a kinship placement now?
- What reasonable efforts were made to place siblings together?
- Ask the agency at each and every hearing: What efforts has the agency made to identify and locate kin? What efforts have been made to engage kin beyond a notice letter so that they may be part of a child's life?
- Ask the parents and child(ren) at first and all subsequent hearings to give the court information about their important family connections.
- Has the agency explained all possible placement options to kin (i.e. guardianship, adoption, foster care, etc.)?
- Order a visitation plan not only for parents, but for siblings and relatives so children can maintain family connections.
- Inquire as to whether or not the Indian Child Welfare Act applies and ensure the agency makes efforts to identify appropriate placements.

4 Judicial Licensing Considerations

- Does your state require relatives to be licensed foster parents in order to care for children in state custody?
- Are licensing waivers used in your jurisdiction?
- If relatives are not licensed, the court should ask why. Is it by the relative's choice? Do the relatives fully understand all of their placement options? Is there an environmental barrier that can easily be fixed or waived (i.e. family needs a new bed or fire extinguisher, etc.)?
- Do kin have the services and supports needed to meet the unique needs of the children placed in their home?
- Ultimately, it is up to the agency to determine whether or not a relative can be licensed. The court cannot order a home to be licensed, but can inquire and provide oversight as needed.