A Review of 10 Kinship and Adoption Navigator Programs

Introduction to OhioKAN Development Program

Under new Federal legislation, states around the country have an unprecedented opportunity to prevent children and youth from entering foster care. The Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018 (FFPSA) allows states to use Federal dollars to fund evidence-based in-home, mental health, substance abuse treatment, and kinship navigator programs. Ohio is maximizing this opportunity by designing and implementing a statewide kinship navigator program beginning implementation on October 1, 2019.

Nationally, adoptive families have voiced a need for post-adoption support services that recognize the lifetime impact of adoption on adoptive families and adoptees themselves. Therefore, the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services (ODJFS) has expanded the FFPSA target population to also include families post-adoption.

The Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services (ODJFS) has partnered with Kinnect, a Cleveland-based non-profit, specializing in strengthening child welfare practices, to facilitate the design process and to lead implementation of Ohio's Kinship and Adoption Navigator program (OhioKAN). The development process includes:

- Researching existing kinship and adoption navigator programs

- Facilitating an implementation science design process with over 80 stakeholders statewide

- Conducting five regional town halls to solicit feedback and data from community partners

- Submitting a final implementation and evaluation plan for the proposed OhioKAN Program to the State

This document summarizes Kinnect's review of kinship and adoption programs.

Programs Selected for Review

FFPSA created a federal Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse to review prevention services programs nationally and to award scientific ratings based on their evidence base. The Clearinghouse is conducting their initial review of programs now that will result in a short list of programs that will be approved for Federal funding.

While the Clearinghouse's evidence review process is underway, Kinnect reviewed existing kinship navigator programs and post-adoption support services both in Ohio and across the nation. Kinnect's review is intended to inform the design process by offering stakeholders examples of how other states have structured their kinship and adoption navigator programs.

The OhioKAN team carefully selected programs for review that would be most informative to the work in Ohio. Because Ohio's child welfare system and programs are state-supervised but county-administered, ODJFS is seeking to design the OhioKAN program with regional hubs to help support implementation and evaluation of the program across 88 distinctive Ohio counties. The OhioKAN team reviewed 5 kinship programs, 4 post-adoption programs, and one program designed to serve both kinship and adoptive families.

- Ohio's Enhanced Kinship Navigator and the Kinships Supports Intervention (KSI) highlight Ohio's current and past history with kinship-specific programs.

- New Jersey's Kinship Cares program and Florida's KIN-Tech program are currently awaiting federal Clearinghouse approval as evidence-based models.

- Washington State's Kinship Navigator program is one of the first pilot programs for kinship navigation in the United States. Moreover, as of December 2018, Washington State is beginning the process to be evaluated by the University of Washington with hopes of being rated as an evidence-based program.

- Post-adoption support programs from New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia are all regionally-based and county-administered, mirroring Ohio's system.

- Wisconsin is a "hybrid state" that shares child welfare administration between the states and counties, but regionally administers post-adoption services statewide.

- In the Adoption and Guardianship Support and Preservation Program (ASAP/GSAP), Tennessee is the only state to have developed a statewide program model to address both the needs of adoptive and guardianship (kinship) families together.

Kinnect's review process drew from information on websites, evaluation reports, program manuals, telephone interviews, and other sources. Table 1 lists the FFPSA review criteria and summarizes how each of the reviewed kinship navigator programs could meet the criteria. The pages that follow provide a synthesis of the programs, highlighting similarities and unique program offerings.

Kinnect

Federal Requirement	Kinship Navigator Program				
	Ohio EKN	Ohio KSI	Florida	New Jersey	Washington
Requirements for Title IV-E Kinship Navigator Programs*					
Coordinated with agencies that provide info and referral services (i.e. 211)	x	x	x	x	x
Planned and operated in consultation with kinship caregivers, youth, and relevant organizations	x	x		x	x
Include info and referral systems that link individuals to eachother; government benefits info; training; legal assistance	x	x	x	x	x
Provide outreach to kinship care families	x	x		x	x
Promote partnerships between public and private agencies	x	x			x
Establish and support a kinship care ombudsman				x	
Support other activies designed to assist kinship caregivers in obtaining benefits and services to improve their caregiving	x	x	x	x	x

* Requirements per Title IV-E Program Instruction

Kinship Navigator Support Services*					
Financial Supports	x	x	x	x	x
Training or Education	x	x		x	x
Support Groups	x		x	x	x
Referrals to Social, behavioral, or health services	x	x	x	x	x
Assistance with navigating government and other types of assistance, financial or otherwise	x	x	x	x	x

*Requirements per Title IV-E Handbook of Standards and Procedures

Kinnect

Federal Requirement	Kinship Navigator Program				
	Ohio EKN	Ohio KSI	Florida	New Jersey	Washington
Child and Family Eligibility					
Formal Kinship Caregivers	x	x			
Informal Kinship Caregivers	x		x	x	x
Kinship Navigator Program Requirements					
Book or manual that describes how to implement or administer the practice	x	x	x	x	x
Target outcomes: - child safety, permanency, well-being - adult well-being - access & referral to services - satisfaction with programs & services		x		x	
Program Priorities					
Programs/services rated by other clearinghouses		x			x
Programs/services evaluated as part of any grants supported by the Children's Bureau			x		
Programs or services that are in active use	x	x		x	x
Programs or services that have implementation supports, for example: - implementation manuals or frameworks - fidelity-monitoring tools - training programs, coaching programs, etc	x	x		x	
Evidence Requirements					
One or more rigorous studies (with comparison group)		x		x	
Positive effects on one or more target outcomes		x			
Published in peer-reviewed journal or publicly available report		x		x	

Program Funding and Administration

Age of Programs

The programs reviewed vary from 7 to 26 years old: kinship navigator programs seem to have started as pilot projects for a few years before becoming permanent, whereas the adoption programs appear to have been established as permanent from the onset.

Funding

Most programs seem to have between half a million and $4 million in funding that is generally jointly state and federally funded. Florida's pilot program for KIN-Tech was federally funded altogether, while Washington State and Pennsylvania are currently entirely state-funded. Wisconsin's Post Adoption Resource Centers, are currently working with the least amount of state funds at $225,000 for FY2018.

Administration

States vary widely in how they administer child welfare programs. Some states, including Ohio, are state-supervised and county-administered; other states, such as Washington, are both supervised and administered by the state supervised. States that have county administration admit that they often have a high level of variability in the services and programs provided across a state.

Program Service Offerings

Each of the programs reviewed offered different types of services to kinship and adoption families. All the states except for Ohio house their kinship programs in established nonprofits and/or affiliate agencies outside of (external to) the state or county child welfare system. Several services were offered in half or more of the programs reviewed:

- All 10 programs link kinship families to local, state, and national resources and offer immediate information and referral services to families.

- Nine programs have support group available for children, teens, and parents/caregivers.

- Eight programs had an adoptive parent or kinship caregiver training offering pre-adoption/guardianship and/or post-adoption/guardianship trainings for families.

- Seven have a case management component for families to utilize.

- Seven used either 211 or had independent warm line or information lines specifically for adoptive and kinship families in their state.

- Six offered formalized social events for adoptive and/or kinship families through their programs and contracted agencies.

- Six had home-based counseling services and/or made home visits to families using their services.

- Half the programs conducted outreach to both families themselves and professionals in the community.

Some programs also offered unique services that were designed to meet the needs of families in their communities.

- Four programs utilized a Needs Assessment leading to a Family Support Plan in their case management sequence with families.

- Two programs have crisis intervention services specifically available for adoptive and/or kinship families. Tennessee's ASAP/GSAP program offers crisis intervention with on-call adoption competent therapists 24/7.

- Both of Ohio's Enhanced Kinship Navigator Programs developed Local Advisory Groups (LAGs) in each participating Ohio county to provide guidance in developing the Kinship Navigator services in that county. The LAGs also facilitated Community Mapping conducted by community stakeholders to explore each county's resources, strengths, and challenges and to strengthen relationships between community stakeholders serving kinship families.

- New Jersey's Kinship Cares created a Kinship Advisory Council comprised of kinship caregivers to provide feedback to the program, plus enabled kinship caregivers to plan social events, brainstorm workshop topics, and help with developing local resources.

- New York's Adoptive and Foster Family Coalition of New York (AFFCNY) runs an adult adoptee support group recognizing the lifetime impact of adoption.

- Virginia assists adult adoptees in searching for their birth families and seeking reunion.

- Two programs are parent-led and/or services are provided by those with lived experience AFFCNY and Adoptive Family Preservation at United Methodist Family Services in Virginia.

- Two programs provide training opportunities that are trauma-informed (AFFCNY and The Children's Home Society of Virginia).

- New Jersey's Kinship Cares program utilized ombudsmen to enhance their kinship navigator program. Six professional ombudsmen (both male and female) work "closely and intensely" with families for longer periods of time than the traditional kinship navigation program that existed for New Jersey (i.e. 6-months in enhanced versus 1

month in traditional). The ombudsmen implement support groups, caregiver trainings, and children's groups.

- In addition to other services, Tennessee's ASAP/GSAP program offers equine therapy, retreats, and family camps.

- Washington State offers mediation and hands-on navigation services: the kinship navigator actually goes to different community locations with kinship families to help advocate and to model self-advocacy skills.

Current Evidence Base of Kinship Navigator Programs

- Florida's KIN-Tech and New Jersey's Kinship Cares programs will be first to be reviewed by the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse in 2019.

- Ohio Kinships Supports Intervention (KSI) has been submitted to the California Clearinghouse for Child Welfare and is awaiting a scientific rating based upon one study of the program.

- Washington's Kinship Navigator Program was submitted to the California Clearinghouse in 2009, but was not rated at that time because they had not had a formalized study. The University of Washington began an evaluation December 2018 with hopes to be rated as evidence-based by the IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse.

For the six remaining researched programs, it is unknown whether they are seeking evaluation or how the new FFPSA legislation will affect their trajectory towards evidence-based status in the future.

Implementation Support Materials

As part of the requirements to receive Federal funding for Kinship Navigator programs, programs must have manuals, and programs with implementation documents available are prioritized. As of May 2019:

- Ohio's Enhanced Kinship Navigator has a Replication Manual and Implementation Report from 2012.

- Ohio's Kinship Supports Intervention has a Practice Manual for the ProtectOHIO Kinship Intervention from July 2011. Additionally, there is a Practice Manual for ProtectOHIO Kinship Strategy from July 2011.

- Washington State's Kinship Navigator has a Pilot Project Replication Manual and Final Pilot Evaluation Report both from December of 2005.

- New Jersey's Kinship Cares program has a programmatic implementation guide called Understanding and Implementing CHSofNJ's Kinship Cares Enhanced Navigator Model from 2019 which is publicly available online.

- Florida has program materials available for a fee. More information is available at https://mykinship.org

Recommendations and Lessons Learned from Existing Kinship Navigator Programs

New Jersey, Washington, and Ohio offered program recommendations for the program evaluations they each conducted in 2019, 2005, and 2012. Post Adoption Support Programs did not have manuals and were not evaluated in the same way as the Kinship Navigator programs. Therefore, only recommendations from Kinship Navigator programs are reflected here.

- Services that reflect the demographics of the families being served and the varied geographic locations where families are. For example, ombudsman and other staff should be bilingual in English and other languages appropriate to the area being served.

- Any program responding to the needs of kinship families should be prepared offer "concrete, emotional/behavioral, and health needs [supports]" to both kinship caregivers and children.

- Transportation services should be added to the program budget when serving kinship families.

- Frequent crisis situations may occur when serving kinship families, so kinship programs should be prepared to offer help in those situations.

- Advisory groups should include kin caregivers and local community partners to offer feedback on project operation.

- Grouping kinship and adoption together may be positive because separation could block families from accessing services and potentially from moving from guardianship and/or custody towards adoption (as determined by each individual family).

- Cost-benefit of the programs should be evaluated to demonstrate the economic effectiveness of funding a Kinship Navigator program.

- Post-adoption services should be continued into adulthood.