



Kinship Navigator Services Manual

Adapted from Families First Counseling Services
Kinship Navigator Program Manual

Kinship Navigator Services Overview

Kinship Navigator Services – Goals

- Create a safe, stable, supportive home environment for children
- Keep children within their natural supports
- Understand gaps and delays with service delivery to kinship caregivers
- Maintain and engage kinship caregivers using a strength-based approach
- Increase kinship placements
- Decrease lateral movements

Service Philosophy

Kinship Navigator Services assist kinship caregivers in learning about, finding, and using programs and services to meet their needs. Kinship Navigator Services are structured to meet the needs of kinship caregivers while supporting placement stability, reunification, and child safety. Kinship caregivers are encouraged to vocalize their own needs and goals allowing them to play an integral role in the direction of service provision. Kinship Navigator Services support standards and goals established by the Department of Human Services (DHS).

Service Description

Kinship Navigator Services focus on providing support to the kinship caregiver, tailored to be culturally responsive and supportive to individuals of all race, religion, age, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, social economic status and/or physical or mental health.

Activities include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Assessment of kinship caregiver needs related to identifying the best way to support them and the children in their care.
- Development of a Kinship Care Plan with action steps specific to identified outcomes. This could include such things as
 - Support with identifying affordable childcare;
 - Access to medical, dental, and mental health services;
 - Ensure basic needs are met including clothing, beds/cribs/furniture, food, and gas cards
- Opportunities for parent education including SafeCare
- Support groups providing an outlet for shared communication and emotional support
- Connecting kinship caregivers with supplemental resources such as food assistance, child care assistance, family investment program (FIP), medical insurance, and/or legal aid

Service delivery is targeted toward increasing placement in kinship care, reducing placement in stranger foster care, supporting placement stability, and reducing re-abuse.

Eligibility

Kinship Navigator Services are available during an open DHS service case to kin or fictive kin caregivers with children placed in their care or temporarily residing with them as arranged by the child's parent. As long as there is an open DHS service case and an identified need, there is no limit to the number of referrals for a kinship caregiver to receive Kinship Navigator Services. These services and supports may be provided to kinship caregivers for a maximum of four months.

Referrals

DHS is responsible for making the referrals for Kinship Navigator Services. Once the referral is received, a Kinship Specialist is assigned to the referred kinship caregiver. The DHS worker is notified of case assignment.

Kinship Specialist Training

Kinship Specialists are required to receive a minimum of four (4) hours of orientation training prior to providing Kinship Navigator Services, including but not limited to the following:

- Family Finding
- Importance and values of keeping children in their natural supports, i.e. kinship placement
- Understanding traumatic events, such as removals.

Service Components

Communication and Engagement

The assigned Kinship Specialist makes phone contact with the kinship caregiver within two business days from date of referral. Kinship Specialist will ensure the following occurs during this phone contact:

- Introduction of Kinship Specialist including specialist name, organization name, and referring DHS worker name.
 - Provide contact information to kinship caregivers.
- Explain how Kinship Navigator Services can be a support to the kinship caregivers and what supports are available to them.
- Explain frequency of contact

The Kinship Specialist maintains consistent contact with kinship caregivers to ensure placement stability, engagement, and promote well-being of the family unit.

Kinship caregivers provide signatures documenting their willingness to consent to services and supports provided to them. Ongoing contact occurs no less than twice a month totaling two hours of time. These contacts can occur in the community or in the kinship caregiver home.

Kinship Navigator Services are voluntary, allowing the kinship caregiver a choice in whether they participate with services and/or supports. When a kinship caregiver chooses not to engage and participate in services, the assigned DHS worker is notified.

Contact with Kinship Caregivers

The Kinship Specialist makes phone contact with the kinship caregiver within two business days of the referral.

The Kinship Specialist will complete an in person contact within five business days of the referral with all kinship caregivers referred for services. This should be completed in the kinship caregiver home but if they request another location, this can occur.

The Kinship Specialist will ensure they provide support for any of the immediate needs identified by the kinship caregiver during initial phone contact. The Kinship Specialist will establish a list of any concrete supports necessary as identified by the kinship caregiver. Kinship caregivers will be allowed the opportunity to choose whether the Kinship Specialist completes entitlement applications alongside them during initial contact or if they prefer to complete these themselves between the initial and follow up contacts. Kinship caregivers may also elect to not complete and submit these forms if not necessary to meet family needs.

The Kinship Specialist will complete a family functioning assessment with the kinship caregiver to determine outcomes of service delivery. An eco map will be developed to assist kinship caregivers in identifying formal and informal supports for themselves and their kinship placements.

The Kinship Specialist completes the eco map utilizing a series of open-ended questions to identify and pull out any supports that could assist kinship caregivers with physical, emotional, or financial support. A copy of the eco map will be provided to the kinship caregivers and the assigned DHS worker. The information gathered from the family functioning assessment, eco map, and kinship caregiver will be used to create the Kinship Care Plan to guide service delivery and supports. A copy of the Kinship Care Plan is provided to the kinship caregivers and the assigned DHS worker.

Kinship caregivers will be offered continued support addressing the need for concrete supports throughout service delivery, including any necessary community resources and other service referrals.

The Kinship Specialist will explain the kinship caregiver payment to all kinship caregivers and provide them with a copy of ***Kinship Caregiver Payment Program*** (Comm. 604). The Kinship Specialist will also discuss the benefits of licensure with all kinship caregivers within 30 calendar days from the date of referral. The Kinship Specialist will provide kinship caregivers with a copy of ***Benefits of Becoming a Licensed Foster Parent*** (Comm. 603).

The Kinship Specialist will continually assess whether contact that is more frequent is necessary to appropriately meet kinship caregiver needs.

Collateral Contacts

Collateral contacts are those who have firsthand knowledge of a family's circumstances and can provide, clarify, or verify information. Information gathered from collateral contacts assist in monitoring any needs identified as well as progress on a case.

The Kinship Specialist should be in direct communication with the **DHS Worker**. Kinship Specialists will notify the DHS worker whether or not the referred kinship caregivers engage and participate with Kinship Navigator Services. In addition, they will also notify the DHS worker of the kinship caregiver's interest or willingness to participate in the licensing process.

The Kinship Specialist should work collaboratively as a team with the **FCS Family Support Specialist** and/or **Intervention Specialist** and **Others** to provide necessary interventions and/or supports to address needs.

Family Interaction

Family interaction planning is key when children are removed from their homes. A copy of the family interaction plan should be made available to the Kinship Specialist in order to assist in identifying any role the kinship caregiver may have to allow for frequent, consistent, and meaningful contact with their family through parent-child interactions, sibling interactions, or interactions with other key supports.

The Kinship Specialist will provide support to kinship caregivers in feeling comfortable and well equipped to facilitate these interactions if they are approved to provide supervision. In an effort to promote and support collaboration between biological parents and kinship caregivers, the Kinship Specialist will collaborate with the DHS worker regarding family interaction planning. This discussion may include:

- Requesting approval for kinship caregivers to facilitate contact between parents and their children
- Addressing any limitations to supervision
- Providing any training to kinship caregivers on what to look for during supervision of interactions
- Understanding expectations of supervision of interactions

Consider the following questions when talking with the DHS worker:

- Is there a current family interaction plan?
 - If yes, can I get a copy?
 - If no, when will one be developed?
- May the kinship caregiver supervise interactions?
 - If no, what are the concerns or barriers to allow this to occur?
- Are you comfortable with the Kinship Specialist working with the kinship caregiver to overcome these barriers?
 - If yes, ask the following:
 - Is there anyone that cannot be at the interaction?
 - Are there stipulations on when and where these can occur?
 - Is there anything else we should know?
- What is the plan for communicating any changes in expectations that may occur to the kinship caregiver and Kinship Specialist?

The Kinship Specialist will devise a plan to communicate expectations to kinship caregivers and ensure they understand the plan. The Kinship Specialist will continue to provide support and understanding to kinship caregivers as they navigate their role supervising family interactions.

Eco Maps

An eco map is completed in collaboration with the kinship caregivers within the initial 30 days of service delivery. This process allows kinship caregivers the opportunity to identify information and formal supports available to them. The Kinship Specialist will utilize targeted

questions to assist in the identification of these supports. A copy of the eco map is provided to the assigned DHS worker and the kinship caregivers.

Family Finding

Family Finding means strategies to find and engage kin and fictive kin of children living in foster care and establishes lifetime network of support for children and youth who are disconnected or at risk of disconnection through placement outside of their home and community. The process identifies family members and other supportive adults, estranged or unknown to the child, especially those who are willing to become a permanent connection for him/her.

Kinship Care Plan

The Kinship Care Plan is developed with the kinship caregivers during the initial 30 days of service delivery. The Kinship Specialist ensures kinship caregivers are active in the process and have a voice in developing their specific goals. Kinship caregivers should be encouraged to vocalize how services and supports can be of benefit given their specific strengths and needs.

A copy of the Kinship Care Plan is provided to the kinship caregivers and goals are reviewed regularly to assess for progress and/or fluctuating needs. A copy of the Kinship Care Plan is also provided to the assigned DHS worker.

Ongoing Service Activities

Emotional Support

Kinship Specialists collaborate and partner with kinship caregivers to provide them support and encouragement as they facilitate communication and work to maintain healthy relationships with birth parents.

Kinship Specialists support and educate kinship caregivers on how transition can have an impact on family routine, how children may react and behave as they adjust to these transitions, and changing family roles. Kinship Specialists also work to facilitate communication between team members and the kinship caregivers to ensure that all parties receive advance notice of the timeline when transition is imminent. Kinship Specialists help ensure kinship caregivers understand their role during this transition and once the children return home.

Once children return home, the Kinship Specialist should reach out and offer the kinship caregiver a meeting for additional support prior to ending Kinship Navigator Services. Kinship caregivers have the option to participate or decline the additional meeting.

Information and Referrals for Assistance

Kinship Specialists are encouraged to establish relationships with local community services and supports and participate in local community meetings to become aware of available resources. As much as possible, provide kinship caregivers with a list of local services, supports, and resources available in their county of residence. Kinship Specialists should connect kinship caregivers to these community resources.

Parent Education

Kinship Specialists provide information on opportunities for parent education on a variety of topics including SafeCare and other appropriate curriculums.

Support with Entitlement Applications

All kinship caregivers are provided the opportunity for the Kinship Specialist to assist them in completing and submitting entitlement applications as appropriate. This support includes, but is not limited to the following:

- Provision of the actual forms/documents
- Assistance in completion of forms/documents
- Education on program requirements and qualifications
- Assistance in submission of forms/documents

Access to Medical, Dental, and Mental Health Services

Kinship Specialists should collaborate with the assigned Family-Centered Services (FCS) Family Support Specialist (FSS) to understand medical, dental and mental health needs that exist for the children. Kinship Specialists ensure the children obtain a physical upon entry to assess for any medical needs. Kinship Specialists provide assistant with coordinating efforts between the birth family and kinship caregivers to obtain medical care, when necessary. Kinship Specialists can provide support to kinship caregivers in scheduling, organizing, and arranging transportation for these appointments when needed.

Kinship Specialists may provide kinship caregivers with training and support in planning for safe responses to emergencies. Emergencies include accidents, serious illnesses, fires, and natural and human-caused disasters. Kinship Specialists provide education and support regarding appropriate medical responses, including ensuring kinship caregivers have access to the any specialized medical training and support as needed to meet the needs of children in their care.

Access to Legal Assistance

Kinship Specialists may refer kinship caregivers to Iowa Legal Aid for assistance with legal representation and advice. When available, Kinship Specialists provide kinship caregivers with names of local attorneys who provide discounted or free legal services to kinship caregivers.

Case Management

Case management serves as a means for achieving placement stability through advocacy, communication, and connection with resources and services.

Concrete Supports

Kinship Specialists may provide support in meeting basic needs as identified through the Kinship Care Plan. Examples of approved concrete supports include:

- Cribs/beds/mattresses
- Bedding/sheets/blankets
- Dressers/tables/chairs

- High chairs
- Car seat/booster seat
- Household safety kits/cabinet locks/gates
- Diapers/pull ups/wipes
- Clothing/shoes/boots/coats
- Utility payment/partial payment
- Temporary housing assistance
- Food/grocery
- Toiletries

Receipts or copies of receipts for purchases of concrete supports are required for reimbursement by DHS. Contractors must complete the Agency-developed monthly report documenting how funds were expended and track on all expenditures. The monthly report, GAX, and copies of receipts must be submitted to DHS monthly for reimbursement.

Support Groups

Kinship support groups allow additional time for education and fostering peer-to-peer relationships among kinship caregivers, including training opportunities. Kinship caregivers in attendance are encouraged to exchange contact information and develop supportive relationships amongst themselves.

Kinship Navigator Services provide kinship caregivers support in training to ensure their ability to care and support the children placed in their home. This can be achieved through regular or monthly support groups, newsletters, and use of technological advances. Technology may be used to create online support groups, access to websites for resources and information specific to kinship caregivers, and through the development of an online peer-to-peer community. Kinship caregivers are provided with additional opportunities for local training as it becomes available.

Attendance at Additional Meetings

Solution Focused Meetings (SFMs)

Kinship Specialists may participate in SFMs if the family invites and consents to their attendance. The Kinship Specialist attends as a support for kinship placements. The Kinship Specialist may assist kinship caregivers in communicating their strengths and needs. Kinship Specialists may provide the team information regarding Kinship Care Plan goals and service targets. Team members may utilize this time to communicate to the Kinship Specialist and kinship caregiver items they would like addressed through services and expectations for family interactions.

Juvenile Court Hearings

Kinship Specialists may attend Juvenile Court hearings alongside the kinship caregivers involved with Kinship Navigator Services. Kinship Specialists will act only as emotional support to kinship caregivers in these instances and will attend only when requested to do so by the kinship caregiver.

Case Closure

Kinship Navigator Services may be provided up to a maximum of four months. Cases served through Kinship Navigator Services will close successfully when the following occurs:

- Children are returned to their parental home, or
- Kinship caregivers successfully complete TIPS-MAPP coursework and become licensed, and/or
- Kinship caregivers and the Kinship Specialist agree the appropriate level of support and resources to successfully maintain the kinship placement without continuation of services is met.
 - When this occurs, the Kinship Specialist and kinship caregivers will establish and implement an aftercare plan to ensure continued positive outcomes and access to necessary services can continue at the close of the Kinship Navigator Services case.

When the Kinship Navigator Services case closes, a termination summary is completed and provided to the assigned DHS worker and the kinship caregivers within 10 business days from case closure.

Collaboration Process with Recruitment, Retention, Training and Support (RRTS) Contractor

- Kinship Specialists will assist kinship caregivers who are interested in becoming licensed foster/adoptive parents with the RRTS application process.
- Kinship Specialists may assist kinship caregivers in completing the inquiry form with the orientation process.
- The RRTS Contractor will follow up with the Kinship Specialist if any of the kinship caregiver's application process documents are incomplete or if record check evaluations are missing.
- The RRTS Contractor assigns a Caseworker if the kinship caregiver selects a pre-service class or if DHS waives classes.
- The Kinship Specialist and the RRTS Caseworker will communicate by phone, email, or in-person to discuss any licensing concerns.
- If the kinship caregiver becomes licensed while Kinship Navigator Services are open, the Kinship Specialist and the RRTS Caseworker will meet to ensure a smooth transition to RRTS.