

Adoption Advocate



The Hidden Hurdles and Benefits of Kinship Care and Adoption

BY CHRISTINE TANGEL, LCSW

The Hidden Hurdles and Benefits of Kinship Care and Adoption

BY CHRISTINE TANGEL, LCSW

In the U.S., almost 2.7 million children are currently being raised by kin—family members other than their parents¹. These families have been formed through both formal and informal processes. For the wellbeing of these children and their families, as well as for the professionals who serve them, we must take a more critical look at the current practices of kinship care and adoption.

Before formal adoption policies were established either in the United States or abroad, kinship care was a common practice in most cultures around the world. For centuries, when parents felt unable to raise a child or protect their safety for a period of time or indefinitely, they often reached out to relatives to step in and care for a child or children². This common practice of relying on relatives to help raise children still exists alongside formalized domestic and international adoption and foster care

programs³. However, because of these informal roots, many involved in kinship care and adoption are not receiving the necessary support to make permanent placement for these children secure and successful. Today there is often a gap in understanding how to address the needs of children who have experienced hardship and trauma and a lack of consistency in how to best support and educate families stepping in to care for these children.

The History of Kinship Care and Adoption

Throughout history, kinship care has been prioritized over placement in an orphanage or foster care because of the belief that children are always better off with biological relatives than with non-family members, which has led to legislation and financial incentives to promote kinship care.⁴ In a

¹ Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2022.). *Kinship Care - The Annie E. Casey Foundation*. Annie E. Casey Foundation. Retrieved February 28, 2021, from <https://www.aecf.org/topics/kinship-care>

² Foli, K. (2016). Adoption and Kinship Parenting: A Historical, Cultural, and Legal Perspective. *A Clinical Guide for Advanced Practice Nurses*, 1(2), 22-54.

³ Herman, E. (2012). *Adoption History: Adoption History in Brief*. University of Oregon. Retrieved February 28, 2022, from <https://pages.uoregon.edu/adoption/topics/adoptionhistbrief.htm>

⁴ Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2012). *Stepping up for kids: What government and communities should do to support kinship families*. Policy report. <https://assets.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/AECF-SteppingUpForKids-2012.pdf>

Kinship Adoption refers to the formal process of “the full-time protecting and nurturing of children by grandparents, aunts, uncles, godparents, older siblings, non-related extended family members, and anyone to whom children and parents ascribe a family relationship.”⁵

post-industrialized, global world, kinship care requires rethinking and clarifying the needs of all involved, including articulating proactive steps for professionals to support healthy adjustments and transitions while prioritizing a child’s best interests.

Kinship adoption comes out of this history of formalizing and creating legal systems around caring for children whose parents are unable to do so. Today, organizations and agencies are often called upon to help families formalize kinship care. Domestically, this process often begins by helping birth parents search for a relative to care for a child who is at-risk or who has entered or will enter the foster care system.⁶

How Kinship Care and Adoption Work

Domestic Kinship Adoptions

As of 2020, 27 percent of children who are in foster care waiting for adoption are in kin placements.⁷ In the U.S., the average time children wait to achieve permanency is 32.7 months.⁸ In addition to this population of children in kinship families in the foster care system, there are two other categories of kinship care or adoption: 1) private or informal care, where families make arrangements with or without legal recognition of a caregiver’s status; 2) diversion kinship care, where children who have come to the attention of child welfare agencies end up living with a relative or close friend of the family.⁹ These categories underscore the spectrum of kinship care situations, with many children privately passing from parents to relatives, whereas other children may pass through the child welfare system before being formally adopted by kin, while still others may live with relatives temporarily but end up back in foster care.

It is also common for children and families to move among these three categories. Kinship care and the adoption process can

⁵ CWLA. (2019). *Traditions of Caring and Collaborating Kinship Family Information, Support, and Assessment Trauma Informed Model of Practice*. Kinship Care – CWLA. Retrieved February 28, 2022, from <https://www.cwla.org/kinship-care/>

⁶ Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2019). *Keeping Kids in Families: Trends in U.S. Foster Care Placement*. <https://www.aecf.org/resources/keeping-kids-in-families>

⁷ Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2022). *Kinship Care - The Annie E. Casey Foundation*. Annie E. Casey Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.aecf.org/topics/kinship-care>

⁸ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2021, October 4). *The AFCARS Report*. Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/afcarsreport28.pdf>

⁹ Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2022). *Kinship Care - The Annie E. Casey Foundation*. Annie E. Casey Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.aecf.org/topics/kinship-care>

present a child with multiple non-permanent transitions. For example, consider a child who has lived with a grandmother for periods of time (outside of formal foster care involvement) when the mother was not available, perhaps because of mental health challenges or substance abuse, only to be returned to the mother's care once she is in a more stable situation. In such situations, the parent's mental stability or degree of wellness is left up to the judgment of the parent or grandparent, often a subjective and non-professional assessment. When the mother's health again wavers, and the child's school becomes aware and concerned about the child's living situation, Child Protective Services is often asked to become involved, bringing with it the need to formalize the living arrangement with the grandmother.

For example, a woman living in the United States wanted to adopt her 11-year-old nephew, who had been living with his grandparents in an African country. The young boy's mother had committed suicide two years earlier, and his father had abandoned the family. When the health of the grandparents began to decline precipitously, the aunt stepped in but was met with multiple layers of red tape, which has kept the child waiting for permanency in a kind of limbo.

International Kinship Adoptions

Since WWII, there has been a steady and increasing number of children joining families through international kinship care, which presents distinct challenges.¹⁰ International kinship adoptions are regulated by the Universal Accreditation Act and Intercountry Adoption Act,¹¹ which ensures that any prospective adoptive family works with a provider that complies with all of the regulations set forth under these Acts and the Hague Convention.¹² There are inevitable wait times for the home study to be completed, USCIS approval granted, and for the adoption to be finalized by the sending country. Though these protections are in place to ensure ethical processes in adoption, they bring complexities—particularly for kinship families.

In the years after World War II, state-run adoption efforts in countries such as Germany, Korea, China, and Guatemala sought to move children away from their homes and families due to the ongoing effects of war, genocide, and poverty.¹³ The names of the countries may change but the steady stream of children around the world who become orphaned persists, and they need alternative caregiving, both through traditional adoption process and through kinship adoption.

International kinship adoptions are further complicated by laws that govern a U.S. citizen's ability to take custody of relative

¹⁰ University of Oregon. (2012). *Adoption History: Adoption Studies/Adoption Science Index Page*. University of Oregon. Retrieved from <https://pages.uoregon.edu/adoption/studies/index.html>

¹¹ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. (2021, June 30). *The Universal Accreditation Act*. USCIS. Retrieved from <https://www.uscis.gov/adoption/immigration-through-adoption/the-universal-accreditation-act>

¹² U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. (2021, June 30). *The Universal Accreditation Act*. USCIS. Retrieved from <https://www.uscis.gov/adoption/immigration-through-adoption/the-universal-accreditation-act>

¹³ Herman, E. (2012, February 24). *Adoption History: Adoption History in Brief*. University of Oregon. Retrieved from <https://pages.uoregon.edu/adoption/topics/adoptionhistbrief.htm>

children and bring them to the United States¹⁴. International kinship adoptions have recently become even more fraught and dangerous for children. As a 2019 report states,

With increased immigration enforcement and children being separated from their parents at the U.S. border, grandparents and other relatives are stepping up to raise many of these children, too. The national data is compelling. Although we do not know how many of these grandfamilies form as a result of a parent's detainment or deportation, we do know that approximately 21 percent of the 2.6 million children in grandfamilies – or 544,000 children – are living in immigrant grandfamilies, meaning the child, the parent(s), and/or the kinship care provider(s) are foreign-born¹⁵

Regardless of who initiates such international kinship care or adoptions, these efforts are often caught in bureaucratic processes that keep children stranded in dangerous situations, reinforcing their experience of dislocation, loss, and the overall disruption of their lives. Indeed, in international kinship adoptions, an adoptive family may have been longing to be united with a relative's child and experience the hurdles of a home study and legal adoption process as a threatening delay of their desire to secure the safety of the child. Timeframes for submitting paperwork and getting approvals are out of the family's control, and securing the financial resources to pay for the adoption may take time. In such

international kinship situations, children can spend significant time in their already short childhoods without a sense of permanency. These bureaucratic hurdles can all undermine a child's sense of safety, emotional well-being, and mental and physical health.

Immigration and Kinship Adoption

Between 2003 and 2013, the U.S. government deported over 3.7 million immigrants to their home countries, and 20 to 25 percent were parents to children who are U.S. citizens.¹⁶ Even more children are at risk of having a parent detained or deported: Between 2009 and 2013, about 5.1 million children lived with a parent who lacked legal immigration status. About 79 percent of these children were U.S. citizens.¹⁷

How Kinship Adoptions Differ

As we consider how best to support kinship care and kinship adoptions – whether domestic or international – it is important to keep in mind how kinship adoption is treated differently than other adoptions. Although the goal for all involved is the creation of a permanency plan for both the child and adoptive family, in many kinship cases there is only a small window of time to offer pre-placement counseling and support.

¹⁴ US Department of State. (2014, June 16). FAQ: Guidance on Whether a Primary Provider is Needed in Every Convention Case. Travel.gov. Retrieved from https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/Intercountry-Adoption/adopt_ref/adoption-FAQs/guidance-whether-primary-provider-needed-in-every-case.html

¹⁵ Generations United. (2018). *Love Without Borders Grandfamilies and Immigration*. Grandfamilies.org. Retrieved from <https://www.grandfamilies.org/Portals/0/Documents/Grandfamilies-Report-SQGF2018.pdf>

¹⁶ Migration Policy Institute and Urban Institute (2015). *Health and Social Service Needs of U.S.-Citizen Children with Detained or Deported Immigrant Parents*. Retrieved from <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/health-and-social-service-needs-us-citizen-children-detained-or-deported-immigrant-parents>.

¹⁷ Migration Policy Institute (2016). *A Profile of U.S. Children with Unauthorized Immigrant Parents*. Retrieved from <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/profile-us-children-unauthorized-immigrant-parents>

Much of the education, counseling, and other services and support take place during post-placement, after the child is situated with the adopting relative or family.

In traditional adoption planning, a family will research several organizations, weigh the benefits of several paths, including private, public, and/or the use of an attorney until they settle on a way forward with which they are most comfortable. Kinship families often do not have the luxury of a well-researched path to parenting. Kinship pre-placement often begins with an unexpected phone call from a foster care worker to a family member, who is confronted with a pleading question, such as “Will you take care of your grandchildren?” After that initial phone call and shock that a tragedy or other unexpected situation has occurred, a kinship caregiver must react quickly and prepare for a child or children to suddenly join their family. This lack of preparation reflects, too, the involuntary nature of kinship adoption. It’s rare that adopting family members seek out this process; it often feels placed upon them.

Agencies will typically invite family members to participate in interviews with a social worker, trainings, and other planning meetings. In those initial meetings, instead of hearing, “We have thought about this decision, saved money for a few years, and feel confident in our choice,” a social worker is more likely to hear “they (the children) are waiting for me to come and get them.”

The situations that precede kinship adoption placements vary but often share a certain level of trauma. For example, a relative may receive the news that their loved one has

Kinship families often do not have the luxury of a well-researched path to parenting. Kinship pre-placement often begins with an unexpected phone call from a foster care worker to a family member, who is confronted with a pleading question, such as “Will you take care of your grandchildren?”

died in their home country, or may learn on a phone call from their local child welfare department that their family member has become incapacitated due to severe mental health symptoms or ongoing substance use, or has been incarcerated. Again, the individual or couple has minimal notice or preparation to make a decision to adopt a child or multiple children. To complicate matters further, these soon-to-be adoptive parents are also having their own reactions to the news that a sister, brother, cousin, parent, daughter, or son is in such a difficult situation. Immediately, they are put in a new role and asked to focus on the child or children needing care.

Kinship relatives often voice that the situation does not feel like a choice, and express anger and resentment, and sometimes shame as well. If custody comes to these families through the domestic foster care system, children arrive quickly, preceded by a phone call and then by the child being literally dropped off

To complicate matters further, these soon-to-be adoptive parents are also having their own reactions to the news that a sister, brother, cousin, parent, daughter, or son is in such a difficult situation. Immediately, they are put in a new role and asked to focus on the child or children needing care.

at their door. Even so, permanency may only be reached after years of child welfare service involvement and frequent court hearings, which take an additional toll on the overall mental health of the child and caregivers. For example, a caregiver who has raised their niece since infancy may still be waiting for permanency four years later.

In international adoption the wait for permanency occurs while the child and caregiver are apart. A recent story highlights the traumatic nature of some international situations. A woman living in the U.S. received a call that her sister in the Caribbean had died, only a few months after the sister's husband had passed away. With no other family member able to care for the young girl, her aunt in the U.S. felt it was her duty to adopt her niece. And though her sister had left behind several children, only the youngest was eligible for adoption, as only children under 16 years old are eligible to be placed.¹⁸ The aunt began the

process by investigating the formal and legal steps she needed to take to bring her niece to live with her. She made multiple phone calls to various agencies and paid fees to begin the process. As the aunt was making her way through these steps, she received news from the Caribbean that violence was increasing in her niece's neighborhood, adding pressure to find a way to facilitate the adoption quickly and safely. To make matters even more tense, the aunt then received another shocking phone call. One of her niece's older siblings had been killed.

Such all-too-common situations are painful, confusing, and frustrating for all involved as they are forced to navigate the bureaucracy. These circumstances can also present significant challenges to building a trusting relationship between an adoption agency and social worker on one side of the system, and the kinship relative(s) on the other.

Further complicating matters is a lack of knowledge and training for home study social workers, who may be comfortable with their standard assessment process but can have difficulty aligning that process with the needs of the kinship relative. Kinship relatives may resist learning about adoption themes or trauma-informed parenting when they have already parented and believe they "already know" the child. They can resent having to follow the formal process when they are focused on helping a family member. In other words, kinship relatives may approach education and counseling as a burden, not a form of support. Building rapport while navigating this dynamic requires clinical skill and specialized training for these adoption professionals.

¹⁸ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. (2021, June 30). *The Universal Accreditation Act*. USCIS. Retrieved from <https://www.uscis.gov/adoption/immigration-through-adoption/the-universal-accreditation-act>

Social workers can also maintain a non-judgmental environment for relatives to share their questions and concerns. They may also consider how best to speak with and educate the family about potential differences in cultural beliefs and practices that might affect the adoption.

As the adoption process proceeds, social workers are tasked with not only responding to particular procedural challenges that may arise for a family, but also proactively preparing the adoptive parents for challenges they are likely to face in their parenting. When these issues arise, the social worker can provide empathy for the relative's new circumstances by assuring them that competent and reliable support is available to support them now and into the future. Social workers can also maintain a non-judgmental environment for relatives to share their questions and concerns. They

may also consider how best to speak with and educate the family about potential differences in cultural beliefs and practices that might affect the adoption. For example, parents may be having difficulty navigating the varying needs of the child as well as other household members who are also having to make their own adjustments. Parents and children alike may have differing expectations about how the adopted child should behave, for instance. One pre-adoptive, kinship parent adopting from the Caribbean described it this way, "At first, I was hesitant about doing all of the trainings. I had to be convinced. But afterward, I realize I had no idea what to expect in terms of attachment. I feel so much more prepared to be his mom."

Some kinship families may willingly reach out for therapy services when they are looking for professional support to help the child and all household members adjust to the new living situation. In such situations, these families are motivated to adopt a relative's child because they do not want to see their relative live with strangers or because they feel a sense of duty. This can be especially true when the prospective adoptive parent/relative has been asked to adopt the child by the birth parent. For this reason, they often maintain some level of contact with birth parents, which requires ongoing support.

Recommendations for Professionals: The Home Study Phase

Research shows that kinship adoption professionals and social workers can support families and children during the home study phase by incorporating a number of interventions.¹⁹ The following are recommendations for professionals seeking to support kinship placement and adoption:^{20 21}

- Discuss the change in family roles with adoptive parents. You might consider asking parents:
 - What will ‘claiming’ this child as your son/daughter and celebrating being their parent mean to your family?²²
 - What losses has this child experienced?
 - How would you like the child to address you?
 - How will you communicate your changing role, as you transition from Aunt or Grandmother to parent?
 - How might this impact other members of the family?
- Explore how affection is expressed in the family and incorporate attachment-building activities.²³
- Encourage a spirit of openness to the adoption transition, perhaps suggesting the writing of an openness agreement to provide clear understanding for all family members.
- Endeavor to understand the specific nature of trauma the child has experienced and

share what can be expected generally for children who experience this circumstance.

- Encourage the family to share what they know about the child’s history or cultural background, especially in terms of attitudes toward dealing with stressors, loss, and grief.
- Support families in the process of blending the children born to the kinship adoptive parents and the kinship adoptive children, directing families to adoption resources that support such transitions.
- Identify a reliable family therapist who is competent in kinship adoption to help families.

With these recommendations, professionals can help reframe the adoption process and the required regulations so that kinship families can find value in the formal support network and successfully complete their adoption. It is equally important to the success of the post-adoption process. When the child joins their family permanently, many of the expectations set earlier will be tested. When a trusting relationship is established from the start, professionals lay the foundation that encourages kinship families to see them as a resource for the rest of their family’s journey. A single kinship mother shared with her social work team, “*Thank you for all of your hard work and support. Our girl is now a pre-school graduate.*”

¹⁹ Madden, E. E., & Aguiniga, D. M. (2017, March). *Achieving Permanency for Children in Care: Barriers and Future Directions*. Upbring. Retrieved from https://upbring.org/wp-content/uploads/Achieving_Permanency_040417.pdf

²⁰ Melina, L. R. (1998). *Raising Adopted Children, Revised Edition: Practical Reassuring Advice for Every Adoptive Parent*. HarperCollins.

²¹ Creating a Family. (2016, February 3). *Special Challenges of Kinship Adoption*. Creating a Family. Retrieved from <https://creatingafamily.org/adoption-category/special-challenges-of-kinship-adoption/>

²² Melina, L. R. (1998). *Raising Adopted Children, Revised Edition: Practical Reassuring Advice for Every Adoptive Parent*. HarperCollins.

²³ New York State Office of Children and Family Services. (2011). *Kinship Guardianship Assistance and Practice Guide*. Retrieved from: http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/kinship/KinGAP_Practice_Guide.pdf

Achieving Permanency

A common theme in kinship adoption is the expectation by both professionals and parents for a smooth(er) transition for their relative, reflecting a lack of awareness of the delicate and complex nature of kinship adoption. Parents will often make such comments as,

“I too immigrated to the U.S. so I can use my experience to support this child.”

“I know this child. We already have a relationship, so that’s all he/she needs to help them adjust.”

These are well-meaning thoughts, but they often fall short of what children – and the parents themselves – need in order to make a secure transition into this new family situation.

Additional parts of the post-adoption puzzle of adjustment require all involved to process the grief and loss of the birth parent. Both parents and children will be mourning the loss (both physical and/or emotional) of the birth parent. How this process is experienced and expressed will depend on the family and cultural customs. Filling in the narrative will be the work of the adoptive parent to help the child or children continue the grieving process.

There are the additional layers of grief involved in kinship adoption, including how children come to terms with the loss of their former home environment and their friends or other relationships. If a move from one community (city, state, or country) to another happens, the child can also experience a general sense of dislocation.

When parents give themselves room to experience and voice ‘big feelings’ about the challenges, they not only alleviate their own emotional turmoil but also model a productive way for the child and any siblings to process their respective feelings.

The adoptive parents, too, experience loss – of the prior relationship with the child and birth parents and /or loss of what they had wanted/known their family to be. All of this loss can add stress to the transition and exacerbate a sense of trauma for all involved.

For professionals, the post-adoption work with the kinship relative should include making space for the individual family members to name and process their negative emotions. For instance, it is common for adoptive parents to express – directly or indirectly – some degree of resentment and anger towards the birth parents for not being able to raise their child. It is important for a social worker to help the relative express these feelings in an appropriate space, such as in a support group, or in a one-on-one counseling session. It is also important to help the relative feel empowered to assert some control and make choices in their own and the child’s best interest.

Professionals may also consider emphasizing explicitly with adoptive parents the reality that becoming a parent when they were not

expecting to is a major life change. Fostering communication will help parents adjust; indeed, clear and direct communication that comes from a place of empathy, curiosity, and caring can benefit all household members when the child joins the family. When parents give themselves room to experience and voice 'big feelings' about the challenges, they not only alleviate their own emotional turmoil but also model a productive way for the child and any siblings to process their respective feelings. Indeed, kinship parents who are given the support by professionals to address these feelings toward and connection with their relative can fare better emotionally. After attending a support group, one couple parenting their granddaughter due to their daughter's struggles with substance abuse said, "Thank you for seeing us as a family. We still have hope for our daughter and we don't like being written off as a 'dysfunctional family.'"

Professionals can also help parents understand how additional supports can benefit their new family unit. Educational resources, therapy, and connections to community groups can offer families valuable resources for all involved. It is especially important to remind families that the newly adopted child has experienced multiple traumas, including the death or incapacitation of a parent, disruption of home/community/culture and possibly a prolonged sense of fear or threat to their own safety. Parents should not be expected to help the child navigate this healing alone, but should feel the support of their adoption community.

When it comes to helping children cope and adapt to their new family, adoptive parents

will benefit from understanding how their adoptive child will need support and guidance as they understand their complex identity as an adoptee. If there is any cultural change, that too must be acknowledged and accounted for. Children of any age rely on rituals and traditions to anchor their sense of identity and how they belong; when adoptive parents consider a child's past family traditions important, they can help the child transition in a more positive way. For example, Mother's Day or birthdays will now hold more complicated meaning. The adoptive parent may be accustomed to a family celebration or the offering of gifts. A child may prefer to ignore a special birthday or on a holiday may want to acknowledge their birth mother, a foster mother, and/or their new adoptive parent.

In some cases, especially with international kinship adoptions, cultural or language barriers between the professional and family can add even more stress to the transition. In a recent case, a couple wanted to adopt their 16-year-old niece from India. They were very concerned about the girl's safety given bombing that was occurring in her community. As the couple waited anxiously to complete the adoption before the girl's next birthday, which would have made her ineligible, they were grappling with new adoption concepts and how to parent a child with trauma, which was different from what they understood parenting to mean. The social worker's responsibility was to convey how the young girl was dealing with multiple losses – her parents, siblings, and friends – and provide suggestions for how the couple could help this child process her grief.

Common Myths in Kinship Adoption

Myth

Knowing the child will make parenting them easier.

Kinship families need less support.

Kinship adoption is easier than other forms of adoption.

Reframe

There will be benefits to having an established relationship. However, navigating the trauma that led to their adoption will be complex, as will transitioning into new family roles and navigating relationships with birth family.

In some ways these families may need more support, as they did not anticipate or plan for this adoption. Both parents and children will need to address their feelings towards their family. Other family members may not be supportive of the adoption plan.

In international adoption, all of the same laws apply, whether you adopt a relative or a non-relative. Domestically, kinship parents may have additional challenges of establishing legal rights if they first began caring for the child informally.

A Hopeful Future for Kinship Adoption

Together we can move forward knowing that there is a need for more attention and awareness around how best to support kinship arrangements so that the children and families involved are set up for success. This shift in awareness begins with keeping in mind the informal roots of kinship adoption and the need to be sensitive to this history.²⁴

It is also important to consider kinship adoption as a form of transition. The process is not linear, and it takes time. The child experiences an individual transition from one

living situation to another, and from one family to another. Even daily transitions from home to school, for instance, can bring reminders of the past or intense emotions associated with trauma. Families, too, experience transitions from one phase of the adoption process to the next, as well as the more general new journey of parenting. Families will be best served by adoption organizations that can tailor their pre- and post-adoption support to the needs of individual kinship families. This formalized, informed support system will also help alleviate the burden of bureaucracy. The more that all involved understand the regulatory steps and guidelines, the more efficient the process will become.

²⁴ Foli, K. (2016). Adoption and Kinship Parenting: A Historical, Cultural, and Legal Perspective. *A Clinical Guide for Advanced Practice Nurses*, 1(2), 22-54.

Families will be best served by adoption organizations that can tailor their pre- and post-adoption support to the needs of individual kinship families .

Further, professionals will benefit from seeking out support themselves to understand both the state/country regulations as well as any cultural biases that may impact the situation. The more professionals develop expertise in the nuances that make kinship

adoption unique, the better they can facilitate the necessary transitions for families with empathy and understanding. Such facilitation may also include utilizing resources in state databases such as the *Kinship Navigator* tool that offers helpful resources for both professionals and families.^{25 26}

Despite the real challenges to both domestic and international kinship adoption, there is reason for hope. As adoption agency professionals, intermediary social workers, and other counselors become more knowledgeable about how to best facilitate transitions for kinship families, the smoother those transitions to permanency will become.

²⁵ Family First Virginia. (2022). *What is Kinship Care?* Virginia Department of Social Services. https://www.dss.virginia.gov/family_first/prevserv/kinship_nav.html

²⁶ Kinship Navigator Programs. (2020). *Resources > Kinship Navigator Programs*. Grandfamilies.org. Retrieved from <http://grandfamilies.org/Resources/Kinship-Navigator-Programs>

Originally published in 2022 by National Council For Adoption. Reprinting or republishing without express written permission is prohibited.

National Council For Adoption
431 N Lee Street
Alexandria, VA 22314



AdoptionCouncil.org
ncfa@adoptioncouncil.org
(703) 299-6633

The Hidden Hurdles and Benefits of Kinship Care and Adoption

BY CHRISTINE TANGEL, LCSW

About the Author

Christine Tangel is a licensed clinical social worker with over 15 years of experience working with children and families in New York City. She has provided direct service and supervision in various aspects of child welfare, including preventive services and foster care. Currently, Christine is the Director of the Pre & Post Adoption department at Spence-Chapin Services to Families and Children, where she supervises clinical services, home study assessments and community engagement events, as well as, providing therapeutic intervention for members of the adoption constellation, and facilitating trainings on adoption and permanency related themes.



This issue of the *Adoption Advocate* was edited by Ryan Hanlon and Elise Lowe.