

NJ Kinship Connections

A Publication of the NJ Kinship Legal Guardianship Resource Clearing House



A PROGRAM OF CHILDREN'S AID AND FAMILY SERVICES

Spring 2026

Kinship Navigator Programs Support NJ Families

Essex County Program Now Run by Children's Aid and Family Services

When children are unable to remain with their parents, relatives, or close family friends often step in to provide care. These kinship caregivers—grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, or trusted family friends—play a vital role in keeping children connected to family, culture, and community.

Across New Jersey, Kinship Navigator Programs support these families by connecting them to information, referrals, financial assistance, and legal guidance. While each county operates its program through a local agency, all share the same mission: helping kinship families remain stable and supported.

What the Program Offers
The program offers an annual stipend to those who qualify to help meet child-specific needs, along with connections to valuable community resources. Families are

invited to participate in caregiver events and support groups that foster connection and encouragement. Program staff provide assistance with kinship legal guardianship applications and offer ongoing case management support, including one-on-one guidance tailored to your family's unique needs.

Essex County Update
In Essex County, the Kinship Navigator Program is now facilitated by Children's Aid and Family Services (CAFS). The agency works directly with kinship caregivers to ensure they have the guidance and resources needed to succeed.

The Essex County Kinship Navigator Program serves caregivers who are:

- Raising children ages 0–18, or up to 21 with a disability
- Residing in Essex County
- Caring for children not involved with DCP&P
- Income eligible

For more information, contact Children's Aid and Family Services at 201-225-8844 or Kinship@cafsnj.org

Statewide Support
Families anywhere in the state can call **NJ 2-1-1** to be connected to their county's Kinship Navigator and other support services.

Or call one of the direct number below to connect with the Kinship Navigator program serving your county:

- Essex: 201-225-8844
- Bergen, Hudson, Morris, Passaic, Sussex, Warren: 201-398-9110 ext. 5645
- Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean, Somerset, Union: 1-800-396-4518
- Atlantic, Burlington, Salem, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester: 1-877-569-0350

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CONTACT US

KinKconnect:

1-877-KLG-LINE
(1-877-554-5463)

Email us at:

warmline@kinkconnect.org

Touched by Adoption?

Visit us at NJ ARCH

www.njarch.org

1-877-4ARCHNJ
(1-877-437-2465)

warmline@njarch.org



**IT'S NEVER TOO EARLY
TO THINK ABOUT
SUMMER CAMP**

NEED HELP FINDING A
SUMMER CAMP?

VISIT OUR WEBSITE OR CALL
OUR KINKONNECT WARM-
LINE AT 877-KLG-LINE
(877-554-5463)
FOR A LIST OF CAMPS.



**FOR THOSE WITH
COLLEGE STUDENTS**

**FEDERAL APPLICATION
FOR FEDERAL STUDENT
AID (FAFSA) DEAD-
LINES VARY BY COLLEGE.
CHECK WITH THE
COLLEGES YOUR CHILD IS
APPLYING TO FOR THEIR
DEADLINES.
CONTACT YOUR HIGH
SCHOOL FOR DETAILS.**

NJ Kinship Connections

Good News for Grandparents:

New Study Links Caregiving and Healthy Aging

Many grandparents provide care for their grandchildren and new research suggests this caregiving role may offer benefits for grandparents as well. A recent study published in *Psychology and Aging* followed nearly 3,000 adults over age 50 and discovered that grandparents who cared for their grandchildren performed better on tests of memory and language than those who did not.

These benefits were seen regardless of how often grandparents provided care or the specific activities they did, such as helping with homework, playing, or preparing meals. Grandmothers

who provided care also showed less cognitive decline over time.

While more research is needed, this study adds to growing evidence that meaningful connection, purpose, and engagement, all central to grandparent caregiving, may play an important role in healthy aging.



For grandparents raising grandchildren, this research offers a hopeful reminder: *the care you give matters, and it may be supporting your well-being, too.*

At KinKconnect, we know that raising grandchildren takes strength, flexibility, and heart. This research reminds us that the love, connection, and commitment you bring every day may be helping you thrive, too.

For more information on the study, check out the article: "Grandparenting is Good for the Brain," published in *American Psychological Association* (January 26, 2026) by Flavia Chereches, MS, and colleagues:

<https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2026/01/grandparenting-good-for-brain>

Grandparents Rock Technology!

Grandparents raising grandchildren use technology every day to support their families, from school portals and telehealth to staying connected with loved ones. Thanks to life experience, patience, and strong problem-solving skills, many grandparents approach technology thoughtfully and with purpose.

Rather than rushing, grandparents tend to learn systems fully, protect their privacy, and use digital tools to strengthen real relationships. These strengths make technology a support, not a barrier, in caregiving.

At KinKconnect, we see grandparents using technology to advocate, organize, and stay connected for the children in their

care. Your skills and persistence matter and they make a real difference.

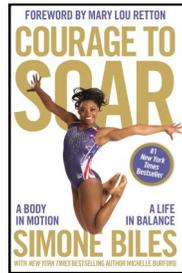
For more information, check out the article: "Why Grandparents Are Secretly Better at Technology Than You Think," by **Scott Grant**, September 23, 2025: <https://mediafeed.org/why-grandparents-are-secretly-better-with-tech-than-you-think/>

Our Library “Kin” Korner Review

Courage to Soar: A Body in Motion. A Life in Balance is the powerful autobiography of Simone Biles, eleven-time Olympic medalists and one of the most influential athletes of our time. Written with the same joy and enthusiasm that she lives her life, Simone takes readers on the journey of her childhood. She begins with the early memories of living with her birth mother, her move to foster care and eventually her adoption by her grandparents.

She shares her honest thoughts on her birth mother and highlights the unconditional support and

love of her grandparents and siblings. She writes, “When it comes to how things turned out, I’m not sorry. I’m part of a beautiful family that is closer and more loving than any I could’ve chosen.”



While the book chronicles Simone’s rise from foster care to Olympic success, ***Courage to Soar*** is not just a story about winning gold medals. It’s

a story about resilience, faith, and the people who believed in her when it mattered most. Simone explains, “It’s how I got there – or more accurately, who got me there – that is most miraculous.”

This inspiring memoir is especially meaningful for youth and families connected to foster care, kinship care, and adoption. Simone’s story is a powerful reminder that beginnings do not define potential and that with support, love, and courage, it is possible to soar.

To borrow this book, please call or email us at: warmline@kinkonnect.org

Simone’s journey continues in the Netflix documentary ***Simone Biles Rising***, which offers an honest look at her decision to prioritize mental health, set boundaries, and lean on trusted supports as she returns to elite competition. For caregivers, the series reinforces the importance of listening, stability, and advocacy, reminding us that true strength includes knowing when to ask for help.



Featured Resource

Creating a Family is a trusted and comprehensive resource for parents and caregivers navigating the complexities of parenting, adoption, kinship care and foster care. Through podcasts, articles, and expert-led discussions, it offers practical guidance, thoughtful insight, and encouragement on a wide range of topics. The content is accessible, compassionate, and grounded in real-life experiences, making families feel supported, informed, and less alone. Creating a Family



is an excellent go-to resource for anyone seeking reliable information and meaningful support on their parenting journey.

Their website has articles on a variety of kinship topics, including:

- *Healing Your History to Help Your Kids Heal Theirs*
- *How to Talk with Our Kids About the Difficult Parts of Their Story*
- *I’m a Grandparent Raising My Grandchild. Where Do I Fit?*

For more information, visit their website at:

<https://creatingafamily.org/>

What Families Should Know about Kinship Adoption

Understanding Kinship Adoption

Kinship adoption occurs when a child is legally adopted by a relative such as a grandparent, aunt, uncle, sibling or by a close family friend (“fictive kin”) who has an established relationship with the child. While some children are formally adopted by kin, many are also raised by relatives through foster care or informal arrangements without adoption.

Kinship care plays a significant role in the child welfare system. Federal data show that roughly one-third of adoptions from foster care are finalized by relatives, and many more children are being raised by kin outside of formal adoption. Grandparents make up

the majority of kin caregivers, and often step up in times of crisis such as parental illness, addiction, incarceration, or death.

Benefits and Strengths

Research consistently shows that kinship placements can provide stability and continuity during difficult transitions. Children placed with relatives often experience reduced trauma and greater emotional stability, stronger connections to siblings, culture, and community, and greater placement stability with fewer disruptions. Maintaining familiar relationships can help children preserve their sense of identity and belonging.

Unique Challenges

Kinship adoption often happens quickly and unexpectedly, leaving caregivers little time to pre-

pare emotionally or financially. Many steps into parenting roles during moments of family crisis, while also managing their own grief or stress.

Unlike traditional adoptive parents, kin caregivers may not have sought out adoption, and the required training or legal processes may feel overwhelming or unnecessary. Navigating boundaries and contact with birth parents, who are also family members, can add additional complexity.

Practical Considerations

The legal process and costs vary depending on whether the adoption occurs through foster care, private domestic adoption, or internationally. While foster care

adoptions are typically low- or no-cost, private and intercountry adoptions may involve legal, home study, and travel expenses. Even in kinship situations, working with qualified adoption professionals is strongly recommended.

Resources and Support

Resources and supports are available at the state and national level. In New Jersey, please reach out to KinKconnect at warmline@kinkconnect.org for help finding resources to support your family. To read the full article, *Kinship Adoption: Benefits, Challenges, and Practical Considerations* by Elisa Rosman, PhD, MA, visit the National Council For Adoption website: <https://adoptioncouncil.org>

*"When young people must enter foster care, kinship placements with relatives or close family friends can provide a sense of continuity: connections to history, culture and community. While these placements offer many benefits, they come with unique challenges as caregivers quickly assume new parenting duties, navigating relationships with the children in their care and birth parents while guiding these children through the pain of separation."- Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2025**

<https://www.aecf.org/blog/equipping-kinship-caregivers-for-success>

Cost-of-Living Adjustment Information for 2026

Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits for 75 million Americans will increase 2.8 percent in 2026.

The 2.8 percent cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) will begin with benefits payable to nearly 71 million Social Security beneficiaries in January 2026. Increased payments to nearly 7.5 million SSI recipients will begin on December 31, 2025. (Note: Some people receive both Social Security and SSI benefits.)

Read more about the [Social Security Cost-of-Living adjustment for 2026](#).

The maximum amount of earnings subject to the Social Security tax (taxable maximum) will increase to \$184,500.

The earnings limit for workers who are younger than full retirement age (see [Full Retirement Age Chart](#)) will increase to \$24,480. (We deduct \$1 from benefits for each \$2 earned over \$24,480.)

The earnings limit for people reaching their full retirement age in

2026 will increase to \$65,160. (We deduct \$1 from benefits for each \$3 earned over \$65,160 until the month the worker turns full retirement age.)

There is no limit on earnings for workers who are full retirement age or older for the entire year.

In late November 2025, Social Security COLA notices will be available online to most beneficiaries in the Message Center of their [my Social Security](#) account.

For more information on the Cost of Living increase visit: <https://www.ssa.gov/news/en/>

Family Connects NJ Supports Families with Newborns

Family Connects NJ is a statewide program that offers families a free, voluntary home visit from a specially trained registered nurse within the first two weeks after a child joins their family.

The program is open to all New Jersey families with a newborn, including those welcoming a child through birth, adoption, foster or resource care, or kinship caregiving, as well as



families experiencing stillbirth or the loss of a newborn.

During the home visit, nurses assess the health and well-being of both the baby and the parents, answer questions, and offer guidance on newborn care such as feeding and sleeping. Nurses also connect families to helpful community

resources based on their individual needs.

Family Connects NJ is being phased in statewide and may not yet be available in every county. Families are encouraged to check availability in their area: www.familyconnectsnj.org

By providing early support in the comfort of home, Family Connects NJ helps families start strong during an important life transition.

Small Moments, Strong Families:

Ways to Connect

- * Make a favorite family recipe together— share the story behind it
- * Start a memory jar and fill with happy moments and little notes
- * Have a picnic outside or even in the living room
- * Share stories and pictures about family traditions (old and new)
- * Have a **YES** day
- * Visit a local park
- * Go to the library
- * Watch a movie with snacks and pajamas
- * Breakfast for dinner – pancakes, eggs, and smiles



IT'S THE SIMPLE MOMENTS THAT MEAN THE MOST



NJ KINSHIP LEGAL GUARDIANSHIP
RESOURCE CLEARING HOUSE

WWW.KINKONNECT.ORG

A PROGRAM OF CHILDREN'S AID AND FAMILY SERVICES

WWW.CAFSNJ.ORG

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South Orange, NJ 07079

KLG Warmline: 877-KLG-LINE
877-554-5463

E-mail: warmline@kinkonnnect.org
Visit us at: www.kinkonnnect.org

Founded in 1899, Children's Aid and Family Services is one of northern New Jersey's leading non-profit human service agencies. Our mission is to empower individuals, strengthen families, and support healthier communities.

DISCLAIMER

While NJ Kinship Legal Guardianship Resource Clearing House (KinKonnnect) or Children's Aid and Family Services makes every effort to present accurate and reliable information, neither KinKonnnect nor Children's Aid and Family Services guarantees the completeness, efficacy or timeliness of such information. In addition, reference herein to any specific product, process, service, organization, or viewpoint does not constitute or imply endorsement, recommendation or favoring by KinKonnnect or Children's Aid and Family Services.



Affordable health coverage. Quality care.

Affordable health coverage. Quality Care.

NJ FamilyCare, a federal and state-funded health insurance program created to give qualified New Jersey residents of any age access to affordable health insurance. NJ FamilyCare is for people who do not have employer insurance. That means qualified NJ residents of any age may be eligible for free or low-cost healthcare coverage that covers doctor visits, prescriptions, vision, dental care, mental health and substance use services, and even hospitalization.

Navigate the online NJ FamilyCare application with:

- New menus, subheadings and smart technology
- Applicants can register to:
- Save partially completed applications
 - View submitted applications
 - Receive future Medicaid notifications electronically.

The entire application process can be completed online at <https://njfamilycare.dhs.state.nj.us/apply.aspx> or call **1-800-701-0710**; multi-lingual operators are available.

Who is Eligible?

NJ Family Care includes: children, pregnant women, parents/caretaker relatives, single adults and childless couples. Financial eligibility will be determined by the latest federal tax return which, when filed, will be electronically verified.

Children under 19 are eligible with higher incomes up to 355% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) (\$9,512/month for a family of four). Parents still need to renew the coverage each year. Children can qualify regardless of their immigration status.

Adults age 19-64 with income up to 138% FPL (\$1,800/month for a single and \$2,433/month for a couple). In general, immigrant adults must have Legal Permanent status in the U.S. for at least five years in order to qualify for NJ FamilyCare. Some immigrant adults can qualify if they are lawfully present, regardless of when they entered the U.S. (refugees and asylees, and others.) Immigrants ages 19 and 20 who are lawfully present and have very low income (\$509/month for a single person and \$805/month for a family of 2) can also qualify.

Pregnant Women up to 205% FPL (\$5,493/month for a family of four). Pregnant women who are lawfully present can qualify regardless of the dates they entered into the U.S.

People over 65, blind or permanently disabled, including long term care, please visit: <https://www.nj.gov/humanservices/dmahs/clients/medicaid/abd/index.html>

For more information, please visit <https://njfamilycare.dhs.state.nj.us/>