



BLUEPRINT *for*

KENTUCKY'S CHILDREN

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ISSUE BRIEF SERIES

The Blueprint for Kentucky's Children is a unified policy agenda for child advocates across the Commonwealth.

Our goal is to make Kentucky the best place to be young.



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KENTUCKY YOUTH ADVOCATES

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Increasing Support for Kinship Families in Kentucky

All children need safe homes, nurturing role models and caring relationships to grow and thrive. Sometimes children cannot stay in their homes with their parents for a variety of reasons such as parental death, military deployment, abuse and neglect, parental substance abuse, mental illness, incarceration, serious physical illness, and disability. During these difficult times, relatives often step in to provide care for these children, known as kinship care. Kinship care is an extremely valuable alternative to traditional foster care as it allows children to retain strong familial bonds, which provide a sense of positive identity, belonging and security.

To assess the challenges facing kinship families in Kentucky, Kentucky Youth Advocates interviewed key leaders, disseminated a survey to 119 kinship support providers, and conducted focus groups with 48 kinship caregivers in the fall of 2013. This issue brief summarizes what we heard and offers recommendations for increasing supports for kinship families.

Children Fare Well in Kinship Care

When children cannot remain safely at home, they fare better when they are cared for by relatives compared to foster care with strangers. Numerous studies show that living with kin minimizes the trauma and loss children feel due to parental

separation. Children living with kin also have fewer behavioral and mental health problems and experience fewer educational disruptions.¹

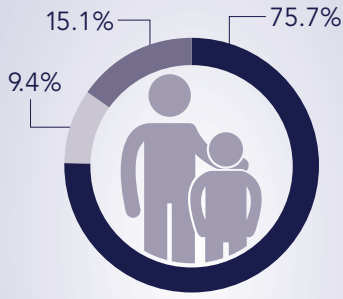
Currently, about 59,000 or 6 percent of all children in Kentucky are being raised by extended family members – one of the highest rates in the nation.² Yet in 2012, only 9.4 percent of children in state-supervised foster care were placed with relatives, far below the national rate of 28 percent.³ One reason for Kentucky's low rate of kinship foster care is the state frequently diverts children who have been abused or neglected into the homes of relatives who volunteer to care for the children as an alternative to foster care placement. National estimates show that kinship caregivers who step up to raise children in lieu of foster care save taxpayers \$6.5 billion annually.⁴

The majority of children in kinship care are living in informal arrangements, meaning they do not have involvement with the child welfare or juvenile court systems and subsequently find fewer supports designed to serve them. Research shows that the overwhelming majority of children and youth do far better in formal kinship care than in non-kin foster care. Yet, very little is known about the experiences of children being raised by kin outside the foster care system. It is likely these children are missing out on the financial assistance and other supports typically offered to non-kin foster parents.



KINSHIP FAMILIES IN KENTUCKY

Only 9.4 percent of Kentucky children in state-supervised foster care were placed with relatives in 2012.



- Foster care with unrelated family
- Group homes or residential treatment facilities
- Kinship foster care

Percentage of Children in Out-of-Home Placement by Type in Kentucky: 2012

SOURCE: Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services, Department for Community Based Services, October 2013.

As of November 2013, more than 10,500 Kentucky children are being raised by relatives as an alternative to foster care with assistance from the Kinship Care Program.

10,558

Average Daily Cost: \$10



Children enrolled in the Kinship Care Program

7,467

Average Daily Cost: \$69



Children in out-of-home care (foster care, group homes and residential treatment)

SOURCE: Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services, Department for Community Based Services, Kinship Care and Foster Care FACTS, November 2013.

Different Types of Kinship Care

Informal kinship care

Arrangements made by the parents and other family members without involvement from either the child welfare system or the family/juvenile court systems.

Voluntary kinship care (diversion)

Children live with relatives and the child welfare system is involved, but the State does not have legal custody of the children.

Formal kinship care (kinship foster care)

Children are placed in the legal custody of the State by a judge, and the child welfare system then places the children with grandparents or other kin.

SOURCE: Excerpted from Child Welfare Information Gateway (2010). "Different Types of Kinship Care." Available at https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_kinshi/f_kinshi1.cfm.

Challenges Facing Kinship Families in Kentucky

While beneficial for children, kinship care can pose considerable financial, legal and emotional challenges for the caregivers. Through interviews with stakeholders, a survey of support providers, and focus groups with kinship caregivers across the state, Kentucky Youth Advocates identified some of the major challenges.

- **Economic security** - Kinship caregivers are more likely to be poor, single, older, less-educated and unemployed than families in which at least one parent is present.⁶ Many older kinship caregivers are on a fixed income due to retirement. While relatives feel compelled to step up and care for their kin, they often face financial strains from sudden parenthood and the high cost of raising children. All children who are living apart from their parents can receive cash assistance through Kentucky Transitional Assistance Program (KTAP) child-only funds (as

long as they do not receive Kinship Care subsidies, Supplemental Security Income or child support payments), regardless of the income of their caregivers. However we found that many kinship caregivers are unaware of this opportunity and some might hesitate to apply because they would be required to help the state pursue child support payments from the parents in order to receive assistance.

When they first called my husband and I to take the girls they gave us four hours to pick them up. We did not have diapers, clothes, wipes, and car seats. These were newborns. They called and said you can take them or we are going to separate them. I had just retired and we were on a fixed income and they offered us no help.

– Grandmother raising twins, Fayette County



■ **Coping with children's behavioral and emotional issues due to trauma** – Children who are separated from their parents due to difficult circumstances are often traumatized by the experience. In most cases, placement with family is the best place for children to recover, but children in kinship care due to abuse or neglect are likely to have serious behavioral health needs. Kinship caregivers told us that they face difficulty navigating the available resources to address children's behavioral and emotional issues.

One of my grandsons throws fits but he is getting much better. He would hurt me bad and then break down and say mom and dad are not going to straighten up. They haven't physically touched their mom in months and I hate that.

– Grandmother raising 5 children, Fayette County

■ **Disruption in family relationships** – Kinship families must often navigate strained relationships arising from the circumstances that led to the children's removal from their parents. Many of the kinship caregivers we spoke with voiced shame, guilt or anger around the behavior of the children's parents. At the same time, they struggle with making decisions about how and whether the children could interact safely with and stay connected to their parents.

Children are always going to love their mother and daddies. But you just have to love them steady fast and stay strong. That is what you have to do.

– Grandfather raising 2 children, Jefferson County

■ **Difficulty making educational and health care decisions for children** – Without legal custody or guardianship, it can be very difficult for relative caregivers to obtain health care or complete school enrollment forms, but many do not want or cannot afford a legal relationship with the children in their care. Many times, relatives step in to help stabilize the situation for children on a temporary basis, with the understanding that the parents will resume care once they are able. However, these living arrangements can last for years and often become a permanent situation.

I was raised to not take responsibility but foster and help the parent become a better parent. You always hope that they are going to change.

– Great Aunt raising nephew, Fayette County

■ **Affordable child care and after school care** – Adding to the financial challenges faced by many kinship caregivers, it can be extremely difficult to afford child care and after school care costs. For kinship families with school-aged children, we frequently heard about difficulties finding affordable options for child care during summer break.

I cannot afford daycare. I have a small business and it supported the three of us before we got three more. Daycare for the little one would be the biggest help.

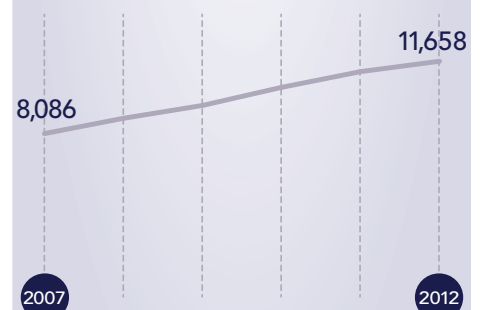
– Grandmother raising 5 children, Fayette County

■ **Interacting with the child welfare system** – Kentucky relies heavily on the practice of diverting children away from the child welfare system into informal placements with relatives, as evidenced by the high number of children in the Kinship Care Program.

Cuts to Kentucky's Kinship Care Program

Up until recently, Kentucky was a national leader in supporting voluntary kinship care arrangements. The Kentucky Kinship Care program offers subsidies of \$300/month per child to relatives caring for children removed from their parents due to substantiated cases of abuse or neglect. A significant increase in the number of families utilizing the program over the past decade, combined with a loss in federal funds and the lingering effects of the recession on the state's budget, resulted in cuts to supports for Kinship Care. The Cabinet for Health and Family Services stopped accepting news applications for the program on April 1, 2013 – meaning about 330 eligible children per month will be denied Kinship Care support.⁵ This is a serious blow to the minimal support system for kinship caregivers in Kentucky and could lead to more children being placed in foster care.

The number of children enrolled in the Kinship Care program increased by 44 percent over a 5 year period, but will decline with recent cuts.



Children Receiving Subsidized Kinship Care: 2007-2012

SOURCE: Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services, Department for Community Based Services.



KINSHIP FAMILIES IN KENTUCKY

High caseloads and a lack of resources within the child welfare system means that when case workers secure kinship care for children, there are few supports available to ensure those placements are successful. Additionally, there are inadequate efforts to track outcomes. Kinship caregivers also report a frustration over their lack of rights and inability to voice their concerns for the well-being of the children within the court system.

Where else could they go? It was either us or a foster home. When you have a loving family that wants to take them in and support them there has to be something to support that.

*– Grandmother raising 3 children,
Kenton County*

Recommendations

Kentucky's strong family values are exemplified by the thousands of relatives stepping up to care for children in their family. With the number of children being cared for by kin nearly doubling over the past decade, we can't afford to let these families go unsupported.⁷ There are a number of steps Kentucky can take to increase supports for the rising number of kinship families across the Commonwealth.

■ **Restore funding for the Kinship Care Program.** Kentucky families want to be able to take care of their own. For many grandparents and relatives, monthly support through the Kinship Care Program makes it possible for them to afford the expense of caring for a child, or several children. The average foster care placement costs the state \$70/day, compared to \$10/day for Kinship Care. Recent cuts to Kinship Care will force more children into the foster care system because their relatives simply cannot

afford to take them in. Placement with family promotes success and is a good investment.

■ **Enact education and health care consent laws.** To ensure children in kinship families have access to education and health care, 23 states have enacted health care consent laws and 14 states have enacted education consent laws that allow kin caregivers to access these services for the children in their care without the need for legal custody or guardianship.⁸ Such laws allow a caregiver to complete an affidavit, under penalty of perjury, that they are the primary caregiver of the child, and then by presenting the form they can consent to health care treatment or school enrollment. Consent laws should protect parents' rights by explicitly stating the parents' right to rescind an affidavit at any time and by specifying that the affidavits do not give the caregiver legal custody of the child.

■ **Ensure kinship families have access to existing supports.** In addition to KTAP child-only payments, which all children being raised by relatives are eligible to receive, potential benefits for kinship families include the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP formerly known as food stamps), the National School Lunch Program, Social Security, Medicaid, Kentucky Children's Health Insurance Program (KCHIP), child care, housing assistance, legal services, and respite care. Also, a number of support groups coordinated by Family Resource and Youth Services Centers (FRYSCs), Cooperative Extension Offices, and faith-based organizations operate throughout the state. Kentucky can coordinate efforts among public agencies to educate state workers and families about eligibility requirements and available benefits through the existing kinship navigator program.

■ **Inform kinship caregivers of licensing options.** Kinship caregivers in Kentucky have the option of becoming licensed as a foster care provider – giving them access to the same training, financial assistance, and support services that non-kin foster parents receive. Kentucky licenses kinship caregivers at a far lower rate than most other states, likely due to the alternative financial assistance available through the Kinship Care Program. Kinship caregivers also reported that child welfare workers did not inform them that kinship foster care is an option. With the loss of the Kinship Care Program, it is especially important to reassess state policies and practices to ensure that relatives know about this option and waive licensing requirements for kinship families that do not directly impact child safety.

■ **Track outcomes for children placed with relatives.** In order to assess whether existing supports are meeting the needs of children who are removed from their homes and placed with relatives, the Cabinet for Health and Family Services should collect data on how often children are diverted into kinship care and how they are faring.

Conclusion

With the current moratorium on the Kinship Care Program, Kentucky's system of support for kinship families is at a crossroads. In addition to financial assistance, all kinship families, regardless of whether they are involved with the child welfare system, need access to support services designed to meet their needs. With the growing number of children being raised by grandparents and other relatives, Kentucky needs to reform support systems that were designed with traditional nuclear families in mind. Smart investments and thoughtful policies that address the needs of kinship families will prevent more children from being placed in foster care and ensure that they have the opportunity to thrive and succeed as adults.

BLUEPRINT FOR KENTUCKY'S CHILDREN



Children diverted into the homes of relatives due to child abuse or neglect, receiving financial assistance from the Kinship Care Program: May 2013

County	# of Children	% Living with Grandparents	White	Black or African American	Hispanic	Other
Kentucky	11,491	63.3%	81.0%	17.3%	1.1%	0.6%
Adair	15	53.3%	86.7%	13.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Allen	39	46.2%	97.4%	2.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Anderson	57	35.1%	98.2%	0.0%	1.8%	0.0%
Ballard	6	16.7%	83.3%	16.7%	0.0%	0.0%
Barren	48	47.9%	95.8%	4.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Bath	67	29.9%	95.5%	3.0%	0.0%	1.5%
Bell	127	32.3%	94.5%	5.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Boone	176	39.2%	93.8%	1.1%	1.1%	2.3%
Bourbon	81	46.9%	87.7%	12.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Boyd	151	23.8%	96.7%	3.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Boyle	64	42.2%	62.5%	34.4%	1.6%	1.6%
Bracken	26	19.2%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Breathitt	83	36.1%	96.4%	3.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Breckinridge	24	20.8%	95.8%	4.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Bullitt	181	31.5%	96.1%	1.7%	0.6%	1.7%
Butler	21	38.1%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Caldwell	30	33.3%	86.7%	6.7%	6.7%	0.0%
Calloway	47	25.5%	97.9%	0.0%	0.0%	2.1%
Campbell	215	26.0%	94.4%	4.7%	0.0%	0.9%
Carlisle	8	50.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Carroll	26	42.3%	96.2%	3.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Carter	183	37.2%	97.8%	1.1%	1.1%	0.0%
Casey	24	29.2%	91.7%	8.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Christian	64	35.9%	57.8%	42.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Clark	84	54.8%	88.1%	11.9%	0.0%	0.0%
Clay	73	58.9%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Clinton	18	50.0%	94.4%	0.0%	5.6%	0.0%
Crittenden	24	12.5%	95.8%	4.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Cumberland	3	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Daviess	163	39.9%	76.1%	20.2%	2.5%	1.2%
Edmonson	19	36.8%	94.7%	0.0%	5.3%	0.0%
Elliott	51	39.2%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Estill	51	35.3%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Fayette	663	38.3%	54.9%	42.4%	1.7%	0.8%
Fleming	56	21.4%	89.3%	8.9%	1.8%	0.0%
Floyd	112	34.8%	96.4%	0.9%	1.8%	0.0%
Franklin	56	44.6%	78.6%	17.9%	1.8%	1.8%
Fulton	5	20.0%	60.0%	40.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Gallatin	36	36.1%	91.7%	8.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Garrard	55	21.8%	96.4%	3.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Grant	100	35.0%	93.0%	5.0%	1.0%	1.0%
Graves	26	57.7%	69.2%	30.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Grayson	62	24.2%	96.8%	0.0%	3.2%	0.0%
Green	27	29.6%	92.6%	7.4%	0.0%	0.0%
Greenup	156	26.9%	99.4%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Hancock	5	40.0%	60.0%	20.0%	0.0%	20.0%
Hardin	142	38.7%	66.9%	30.3%	0.0%	2.8%
Harlan	113	40.7%	85.0%	9.7%	5.3%	0.0%
Harrison	43	46.5%	83.7%	9.3%	4.7%	2.3%
Hart	45	28.9%	77.8%	13.3%	8.9%	0.0%
Henderson	47	51.1%	70.2%	29.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Henry	43	46.5%	90.7%	4.7%	4.7%	0.0%
Hickman	0	-	-	-	-	-
Hopkins	54	38.9%	79.6%	20.4%	0.0%	0.0%
Jackson	47	40.4%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Jefferson	2,563	33.6%	52.2%	46.3%	0.9%	0.6%
Jessamine	111	29.7%	91.0%	3.6%	4.5%	0.9%
Johnson	63	42.9%	98.4%	1.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Kenton	392	33.4%	85.7%	9.7%	2.0%	2.6%
Knott	143	41.3%	96.5%	2.8%	0.7%	0.0%

County	# of Children	% Living with Grandparents	White	Black or African American	Hispanic	Other
Knox	124	41.9%	98.4%	0.8%	0.8%	0.0%
LaRue	41	36.6%	75.6%	9.8%	14.6%	0.0%
Laurel	195	45.1%	99.5%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Lawrence	78	34.6%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Lee	49	36.7%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Leslie	41	34.1%	90.2%	4.9%	2.4%	0.0%
Letcher	149	34.9%	99.3%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%
Lewis	74	31.1%	98.6%	1.4%	0.0%	0.0%
Lincoln	58	51.7%	96.6%	3.4%	0.0%	0.0%
Livingston	10	30.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Logan	19	26.3%	94.7%	5.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Lyon	3	66.7%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
McCracken	67	37.3%	77.6%	20.9%	0.0%	1.5%
McCreary	113	59.3%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
McLean	22	40.9%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Madison	230	45.2%	90.0%	9.1%	0.4%	0.4%
Magoffin	75	50.7%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Marion	23	39.1%	78.3%	17.4%	4.3%	0.0%
Marshall	28	42.9%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Martin	92	30.4%	98.9%	0.0%	0.0%	1.1%
Mason	33	39.4%	78.8%	21.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Meade	59	52.5%	93.2%	6.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Menifee	39	53.8%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Mercer	55	30.9%	94.5%	3.6%	1.8%	0.0%
Metcalfe	15	33.3%	60.0%	26.7%	13.3%	0.0%
Monroe	26	57.7%	96.2%	3.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Montgomery	102	29.4%	97.1%	2.9%	0.0%	0.0%
Morgan	60	21.7%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Muhlenberg	43	20.9%	93.0%	4.7%	0.0%	2.3%
Nelson	76	38.2%	81.6%	17.1%	0.0%	1.3%
Nicholas	49	24.5%	98.0%	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%
Ohio	43	23.3%	97.7%	2.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Oldham	25	40.0%	76.0%	20.0%	0.0%	4.0%
Owen	28	17.9%	85.7%	10.7%	0.0%	3.6%
Owsley	32	59.4%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Pendleton	59	40.7%	96.6%	0.0%	1.7%	1.7%
Perry	249	38.6%	97.2%	2.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Pike	146	30.8%	96.6%	3.4%	0.0%	0.0%
Powell	59	39.0%	98.3%	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%
Pulaski	161	49.1%	99.4%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Robertson	4	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Rockcastle	104	38.5%	99.0%	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Rowan	80	35.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Russell	45	66.7%	88.9%	0.0%	11.1%	0.0%
Scott	137	48.9%	81.8%	9.5%	8.8%	0.0%
Shelby	70	31.4%	75.7%	22.9%	1.4%	0.0%
Simpson	27	25.9%	85.2%	11.1%	0.0%	3.7%
Spencer	37	40.5%	91.9%	8.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Taylor	59	42.4%	93.2%	6.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Todd	16	37.5%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Trigg	18	16.7%	94.4%	5.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Trimble	9	66.7%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Union	10	40.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Warren	186	30.6%	81.2%	15.1%	0.0%	2.2%
Washington	26	23.1%	96.2%	0.0%	3.8%	0.0%
Wayne	92	54.3%	95.7%	0.0%	4.3%	0.0%
Webster	11	9.1%	72.7%	18.2%	0.0%	9.1%
Whitley	185	37.8%	97.8%	0.0%	1.1%	1.1%
Wolfe	56	44.6%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Woodford	55	29.1%	85.5%	12.7%	1.8%	0.0%



KINSHIP FAMILIES IN KENTUCKY

Endnotes

- 1 Annie E. Casey Foundation (2012). *Stepping Up for Kids: What Government and Communities Should Do to Support Kinship Families*. Available at <http://www.aecf.org/KnowledgeCenter/Publications.aspx?pubguid=%7b642BF3F2-9A85-4C6B-83C8-A30F5D928E4D%7d>. Accessed December 2013.
- 2 Annie E. Casey Foundation (2013). *KIDS COUNT Data Center*. Available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/7172-children-in-kinship-care#ranking/2/any/true/1218/any/14208>. Accessed December 2013.
- 3 Data on Kentucky children in state-supervised foster care placed with relatives for calendar year 2012 obtained from the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services, October 2013; national data for fiscal year 2012 obtained from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau's AFCARS report, November 2013.
- 4 Generations United (2012). *Grand Successes: Stories of Lives Well-Raised*. Available at <http://www.gu.org/RESOURCES/Publications/GrandSuccesses.aspx>. Accessed December 2013.
- 5 Musgrave, B. "Grandparents urge state to reconsider cuts to child care assistance programs." *Lexington Herald-Leader*. May 21, 2013. Available at <http://www.kentucky.com/2013/05/21/2648444/grandparents-urge-state-to-reconsider.html>. Accessed December 2013.
- 6 Annie E. Casey Foundation (2012). *Stepping Up for Kids: What Government and Communities Should Do to Support Kinship Families*. Available at <http://www.aecf.org/KnowledgeCenter/Publications.aspx?pubguid=%7b642BF3F2-9A85-4C6B-83C8-A30F5D928E4D%7d>. Accessed December 2013.
- 7 Data for 1999-2011 from *Stepping Up for Kids: What Government and Communities Should Do to Support Kinship Families* at <http://www.aecf.org/KnowledgeCenter/Publications.aspx?pubguid=%7b642BF3F2-9A85-4C6B-83C8-A30F5D928E4D%7d>, and data for 2011-2013 from the KIDS COUNT Data Center at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/7172-children-in-kinship-care?loc=19&loct=2#detailed/2/any/false/1218/any/14207,14208>. Accessed December 2013.
- 8 Beltran, A. (2013). *State Educational and Health Care Consent Laws: Ensure that children in grandfamilies can access fundamental services*. Generations United. Available at <http://www.gu.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=IRkP0DcDAi8%3d&tabid=157&mid=606>. Accessed December 2013.

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