




Kinship Care Insights

Kentucky Youth Advocates (KYA), in partnership with Casey Family Programs, hosted two focus groups in April 2025 with Jefferson Service Region frontline DCBS staff. These focus groups aimed to gather insights from DCBS staff to better understand the benefits of kinship care, particularly for Black and Latinx children placed with relatives or fictive kin of color, as well as the barriers these caregivers face in becoming approved placements. Participants also identified potential policy and practice changes to improve access and support for kinship caregivers of color.



Benefits of Kinship Placement

Focus group participants described several ways kinship placements, particularly with Black and Latinx relatives or fictive kin, can benefit children placed in their care, including:

- **Stability and Continuity**
 - Children experience less trauma when placed with relatives or familiar adults.
 - Helps maintain ties to schools, churches, and communities.
- **Cultural Preservation**
 - Placement with Black and Latinx kin helps preserve language, culture, and heritage.
 - Minimizes discomfort associated with entering a home from a different cultural background.
- **Stronger Family Bonds**
 - Kinship placements increase the likelihood of maintaining family visitation and lifelong connections.
 - Children feel more loved and understood by family than by strangers.
- **Trust and Commitment**
 - Kinship caregivers are often more dedicated to the child's well-being and reunification.
 - Kinship placements are likely to transition to a permanency option if reunification is not possible.

These benefits identified by staff reflect what [current research](#) consistently shows: children in kinship care experience greater stability, cultural continuity, and stronger family connections compared to those placed with non-relatives.

Barriers and Gaps in Kinship Care for Black and Latinx Families

Participants identified multiple challenges that can prevent Black and Latinx caregivers from becoming approved kinship placements. These challenges fell into four main categories:

Access and Systemic Barriers

- **Financial and Eligibility Barriers**
 - Ineligibility for KTAP or child care subsidies due to income or work requirements.
 - SSI income or multigenerational households can prevent eligibility for financial assistance.
 - Fear of child support requirements discourages formal placements.
- **Systemic and Organizational Barriers**
 - Limited access to technology and online platforms for required paperwork.
 - Fear of CPS involvement and misunderstanding of the caregiver role.
 - High caseloads in Jefferson County limit worker support and response time.

- **Documentation and Legal Barriers**
 - Lack of paternity establishment or immigration documentation delays services.
 - Lengthy ICPC process for out-of-state relatives.
 - Restrictions tied to subsidized housing or shared bedroom arrangements.

Cultural and Language Barriers

- **Language Access Issues**
 - Phone interpreters are often inconsistent and struggle with certain dialects.
 - The certification process for bilingual staff is slow and undercompensated.
- **Cultural Misunderstandings**
 - Some staff exhibit cultural insensitivity or make offensive comments.
 - Cultural discipline norms conflict with DCBS standards, especially around corporal punishment.
- **Disconnect with Services**
 - Staff sometimes misunderstand how cultural norms can impact caregiving.
 - Black and Latinx families often face specific barriers tied to language, diet, hygiene, and religious practices.

Bias and Disproportionate Impact

- **Racial and Familial Bias**
 - System bias favoring maternal relatives or excluding paternal families if the father is not listed or immediately known.
 - Lack of unified understanding of who is considered a potential fictive kin caregiver.
- **Age and Income Bias**
 - Courts are skeptical of older caregivers or young adult siblings seeking custody.
 - Bias against low-income families, especially those in subsidized housing.
- **Systemic Surveillance Bias**
 - Overreporting of BIPOC families by school staff compared to white, affluent families.
 - Stigma of CPS involvement leads families to avoid DCBS altogether.

Gaps in Support and Training

- **Limited Ongoing Support**
 - Kinship navigator support is short-term and not always available after placement.
 - Caregivers often left without assistance after initial approval.
- **Inadequate Education for Caregivers**
 - Required trainings do not address caregiver concerns like trauma response or reunification.
 - No feedback loops to improve training based on caregiver needs.
- **Inaccessible Resources**
 - Families struggle with systems like KY FACES or kynect due to literacy, tech access, or workload.
 - Limited availability of trainings or caseworker meetings outside standard hours to accommodate family needs.

Solutions and Opportunities

Based on recommendations from DCBS staff, and/or identified best practice, the following opportunities were identified to improve kinship placements with specific considerations for Black and Latinx caregivers:

- **Ensure Consistent Application of Fictive Kin Definition**
 - Clarify a department-wide definition of fictive kin caregiver based on the definition in [KRS 600.020\(28\)](#) and [KRS 199.011\(10\)](#).
 - Create guidance and example scenarios to help caseworkers understand and apply the definition consistently across the region and commonwealth.
 - When questions arise about the definition, ensure staff have access to technical assistance or designated contacts for support.
 - If a problem with the definition remains, review denials of fictive kin due to the definition and discuss with Central Office.
- **Access to Services and Supports**
 - Develop a process (such as a checklist or audit) to help caseworkers and DCBS leadership track which services and supports kinship and fictive kin caregivers are utilizing within the first 90 days of placement, in order to identify benefit gaps and guide targeted outreach or follow-up.
 - Clearly communicate current limitations in supports like KTAP and RFKPSB for fictive kin, and respite care for kinship caregivers with custody, and explore long-term policy solutions to expand access and ensure equitable support across all caregiver types.
 - Identify mechanisms to build access to community-based supervised visitation support.
- **System Coordination and Disparity Tracking**
 - Identify and address potential barriers related to child support enforcement that may discourage kinship caregivers from accepting placement or create confusion about their role in the process.
 - Track placement data by caregiver type and child demographics, including age, race, and gender, to better identify and address disparities in kinship placements.
 - Ensure the Kinship Navigator(s) connects regularly with community partners to grow a network of referrals for services.
- **Community Partnerships**
 - Build meaningful relationships with local Black and Latinx serving organizations and faith-based groups to support both community engagement and staff development.
 - Collaborate with these organizations to offer cultural responsive and bias training for DCBS staff.
 - Host joint information sessions to help community partners better understand DCBS roles, services, and processes.
 - Establish a visible DCBS presence in trusted community spaces to strengthen relationships, increase accessibility, and build trust.
- **Staff Training and Hiring**
 - Improve and regularly update cultural awareness and bias training, including bias against paternal families.
 - Hire more diverse, bilingual staff with fast-tracked certification.
 - Complement online trainings with hands-on, scenario-based sessions.