A new KIDS COUNT® report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation reveals that in the U.S. in the last decade, there has been an 18 percent increase of children raised by grandparents and other relatives or close family friends. This tradition, known as kinship care, helps protect children and maintain strong family, community, and cultural connections.

This national report indicates that 4 percent or 164,000 of Florida’s children are in public and private kinship care. Also presented, 43 percent of children in foster care in Florida are in kinship foster care, placed with a relative but remain in legal custody of the state. Many kinship caregivers take on this responsibility without government assistance. Others, who struggle to meet the basic needs of children, must rely on government and community programs for additional support.

The new report, Stepping Up for Kids: What Government and Communities Should Do to Support Kinship Families, states that regardless of where kinship families turn for help, they share two fundamental challenges: the emotional, physical, and financial strain of raising children who have experienced the trauma of parental separation; and the limitations of government systems that do not adequately understand or meet the unique needs of extended families. It also highlights recommendations for states and communities to take advantage of existing federal funding for these families, and to strengthen them and help their kids flourish, avoiding greater costs down the road.

Florida KIDS COUNT is pleased to share kinship care resources available through partners in our USF College of Behavioral & Community Sciences: the Florida Kinship Center and the Florida Center for the Advancement of Child Welfare Practice.

“Frequently, kinship caregivers report feeling isolated from friends and family, and feeling unsupported at a time when they are likely to need greater social support,” said Florida Kinship Center Director Dr. Anne Strozier in a recent paper published in Children and Youth Services Review (34/5). The paper, The effectiveness of support groups in increasing social support for kinship caregivers, focuses on the social support that grandparents and other relatives often seek to assist them in coping with their increased responsibilities and stress in raising children they did not plan to raise.

The Florida Kinship Center, housed within the USF School of Social Work, has several programs that benefit relative caregivers across the state. The Kinship Care Warmline (1-800-640-6444) provides emotional support, information and referrals for caregivers statewide through linking caregivers to community resources such as support groups, child care, health care, transportation, and financial assistance. The Center develops, maintains, and strengthens the Florida Kinship Advisory Board and the Florida Kinship (FLKIN) Support Group Network, a resource for more than thirty kinship care support groups across the state.

Florida’s Center for the Advancement of Child Welfare Practice provides resources to state child welfare professionals and stakeholders. The Center supports Florida’s child welfare community in achieving practice excellence and helping keep kids safe. A knowledge library is maintained and provides a wealth of resources, including a complete listing of Relative Caregiver Resources.

“KIDS COUNT seeks to enrich local, state, and national discussions concerning ways to secure better futures for all children,” said Florida KIDS COUNT Director Susan Weitzel. “We join Casey Foundation’s President and CEO Patrick McCarthy to urge state policymakers to make crucial benefits and resources available to kinship families so that children can thrive and have the best opportunity at becoming successful adults.”

The report will be available May 23 at 12:01 a.m. EDT on www.aecf.org/kinship. It also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of indicators of child well-being.