



Kinship care: Extending care for kids

Posted: July 6, 2012 - 12:00am | Updated: July 6, 2012 - 7:02am

By [The Times-Union](#)

More and more, children are not being raised by their parents. These non-parental caregivers often need some help.

In fact, 2.7 million American children are being raised by family members and close family friends, an increase of almost 18 percent in the last decade, reports the Annie E. Casey Foundation in a Kids Count report titled "Stepping Up for Kids."

And in the last decade, the number of children in kinship care has grown six times faster than the general population.

For African-American children, 1 in 5 spend time in kinship care during some point in their childhood.

A small percentage of the children have been placed with kin as part of state supervised foster care. With help, these arrangements can work well.

Support often needed

The crux of the report is to ask what the state can do to support these often awkward arrangements so that children can grow up as productive citizens.

Generally, children are given up because parents are having difficulties: substance abuse, mental illness, child abuse, neglect, illness, death, incarceration, domestic violence or deportation.

By and large, these are not benign conditions other than having to give up children for employment reasons, such as military deployment or moving for a job.

More than 1 in 4 children in foster care are with relatives. That's preferable in most cases. It minimizes the trauma of being separated from the parents.

Welfare stigma

But the caregivers often need support. People providing this care are more likely to be poor, single, less educated or unemployed than the general population, the report states.

The stigma against accepting welfare has led to few qualifying families applying for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Less than 12 percent of kinship families receive this aid, though nearly all of them are eligible.

And less than half use food stamps, though nearly all are eligible for them, as well.

A low proportion of these children receive Medicaid. And private health care plans often do not cover children in these situations. Provisions are needed in such cases.

It seems there are many programs available for kinship families, but states must participate and efforts must be made to make families aware of them.

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