

# Kinship Strategy: Children's Outcomes

The evaluation team used kinship survey data to explore kinship placement episodes:

1) Looking at where the children were at the end of their kinship placement: **children in the kinship counties were significantly more likely to end a kinship placement episode in the legal custody of kin** than those in other demonstration or comparison counties. However, overall, they were less likely to end by returning home to a birth parent.

2) Kinship placement episodes in the kinship counties were longer than those in the other counties, possibly due to the greater proportion ending in legal custody, a time-consuming process.

3) Children were found to be **very safe during and after kinship placements**; very few children had substantiated or indicated incidents of abuse or neglect, regardless of county

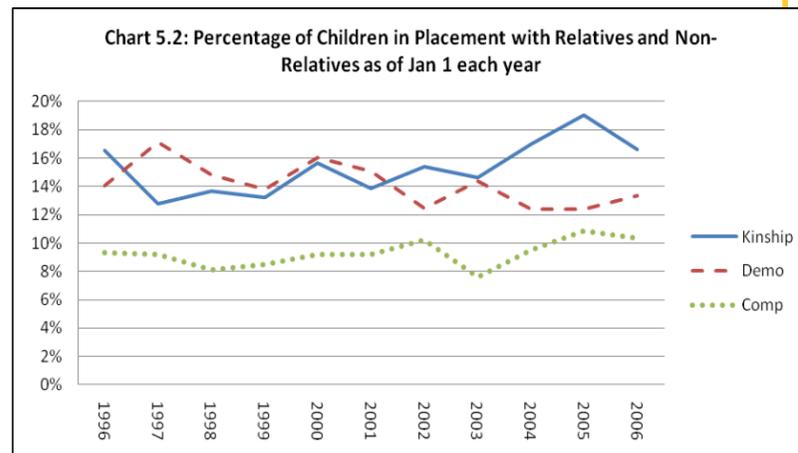
group.

Using SACWIS data, two additional findings emerged:

4) **Kinship counties increased their overall use of kinship caregivers** in cases where they held custody of a child, with higher proportions of children placed with, and exiting to, kinship placement, than the other demonstration and comparison counties. The chart below illustrates the

proportion of children in kinship placements as of January 1st each year of the waiver (until 2006).

5) Compared to the comparison group, **demonstration counties increased exits to kin, more than prior to the waiver, and more in the second waiver period than in the first** (Table 9.3 & 9.4 of Final Evaluation Report).



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This information was gathered from the Comprehensive Final Evaluation Report: Ohio's Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration Project "ProtectOHIO". To view the full report, visit: <http://www.hsri.org/publication/protect-ohio/>

*"The kinship strategy has revolutionized [our] philosophy and practice.... Kinship families are used to prevent custody placement when children must be removed from bio families, kinship families are used to receive legal custody and usually receive financial support to maintain the children in the home. This practice has provided permanency for children more quickly, with more stability, and with less overall cost impact to the agency budget."*

- Kinship county PCSA manager

**The Title IV Waiver enables ProtectOHIO counties to adopt innovative practices, making structural and cultural changes that positively impact child and family outcomes.**



# ProtectOHIO: Kinship Strategy

HSRI Evaluation Brief

Summer 2010

## KINSHIP STRATEGY

- Increase use of kinship placements
  - Increase support to kinship placements
  - Increase emphasis on achieving permanency through kin placements
- ↓
- Improve child outcomes in safety and permanency

## Background of Ohio's Title IV-E Waiver and the Kinship Strategy

In October 1997, Ohio implemented ProtectOHIO, a Title IV-E Child Welfare Waiver Demonstration project. ProtectOHIO experiments with the flexible use of federal IV-E dollars; funds normally allowed to be spent only for foster care can be spent for a range of child welfare purposes, based on the belief that purchasing services upfront will benefit children & families. The intent of ProtectOHIO is to reduce the number of children coming into care, decrease the length of stay in care, and increase the

number of children reunited with their families or placed in other permanent situations.

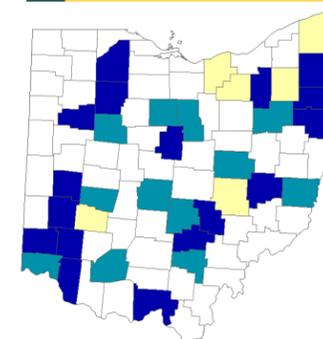
The first ProtectOHIO Waiver demonstration program operated for five years, from October 1, 1997 through September 30, 2002. The waiver was extended into a second phase through September 30, 2009, with an additional short-term extension through July 2010.

In this phase, the 18 participating counties could choose to focus on the use and support of kinship

placements, as one of five distinct 'intervention strategies.' Six ProtectOHIO counties participated in this strategy, intending to increase their use of kinship settings for children who could not remain in their birth homes. These counties collaborated to develop the kinship strategy, as well as a logic model and set of desired outcomes for children and kinship caregivers.

Kinship strategy counties engage in a number of activities including

*(Continued on page 2)*



Kinship = yellow  
 Other demonstration = teal  
 Comparison = blue

## HSRI's Evaluation of Kinship Supports

Since 1998, Ohio has contracted with Human Services Research Institute (HSRI) to conduct a rigorous evaluation of the ProtectOHIO demonstration. Essential to the evaluation is the examination of a group of comparison counties (see Figure in the left sidebar).

Three research questions guide the kinship strategy evaluation: 1) Does ProtectOHIO enable kinship counties to use waiver flexibility to consistently identify and support kin caregivers? 2) Are kinship counties able to increase their use of kinship caregivers? 3) Do children in kinship care in the

kinship counties have better outcomes than those in kinship care in the other counties?

Analyses were conducted at the county and case level, using qualitative and quantitative data collected through interviews, site visits, web-based surveys, and SACWIS.



## Background of Ohio's Title IV-E Waiver and Kinship Supports

(Continued from page 1)

1) identification & recruitment of kin; 2) supportive services; 3) provision of subsidies; and 4) increased communication with caregivers. Additional optional activities include creation of designated staff

positions and use of placement meetings and a team approach.

The kinship strategy counties strongly believe that kinship placement is a promising practice, and that with increased use of and support for kinship placements, children will experience less trauma

and subsequent abuse/neglect, and move to permanency with kin more quickly.

By participating in the kinship strategy, these counties help to build knowledge about kinship placements and the outcomes of children in those kinship placements.

### Definitions:

**Kinship caregivers** are relatives or other adult caretakers who are well known by the child, and who are not licensed foster parents for the child in question.

A **kinship placement** is any length of time that a child spends living with a kinship caregiver.



## Kinship Strategy Implementation

In implementing the kinship strategy, the six participating counties used waiver flexibility to enhance services to kinship caregivers (Table 1). Some hired staff and increased financial support; most purchased goods & services, and felt a noticeable shift in agency culture.

Compared to other counties, the kinship counties more often have designated positions to support kinship caregivers, and these designated workers have more responsibilities, defined in terms of the number of activities handled by the internal or external staff person. Kinship counties also appear more able to provide needed hard goods and services to kinship families; 83 % of kinship

	Counties (n=6)
Hired In-House Staff	2
Purchased Goods and Services	5
Shift in Agency Culture	4
Ongoing Increase in Financial	2

Table 2: What Supports or Services are Available to Kinship Caregivers?

	Kinship (n=6)	Other Demonstration (n=12)	Comparison (n=17)
Very limited	---	17%	41%
Somewhat limited	17%	42%	41%
"Anything and everything"	83%	42%	18%

counties stated that their policy is to provide 'anything and everything' to support kinship placements, versus 42% of the other demonstration and 18% of comparison counties (Table 2). Kinship counties also described other supports provided for kin including newsletters, support groups, social events, and community outreach work.

Kinship county managers, when asked about sustaining the strategy beyond the current waiver period, noted their commitment while voicing concerns about the loss of flexible funding which was used to fund their kinship efforts.

## Kinship Placements in ProtectOHIO

In 2008, using a web-based survey, HSRI collected information about 611 children and caregivers involved in kinship placements in kinship, demonstration, and comparison counties. The survey data provides insight regarding caregiver and child characteristics, as well as other interesting details regarding kinship placements in ProtectOHIO counties.

While 41% of caregivers in the survey were grandparents, caregivers with other relationships were also represented: for example, aunts and uncles (31%) and non-relatives (13%). A significantly larger proportion of caregivers from the kinship

strategy counties were non-relatives, indicating that those counties may have placed children with a broader range of people.

Children included in the survey varied in age, gender, and racial/ethnic identity.

Kinship counties more often utilized the family team meeting intervention than did other counties, in order to identify and recruit kinship caregivers, as well as to support kinship placements. The survey showed that caregivers in kinship strategy counties were significantly more likely to be involved in at least one family



team meeting during the kinship placement than were caregivers in comparison counties.

Many different services and supports are purchased or provided during kinship placements (sidebar). At least one occurrence of service or support was more often provided in demonstration counties than in comparison counties.

### Array of Services & Supports Provided to Kinship Caregivers

- Child care
- Clothing, gas and/or grocery vouchers
- Rental and/or utilities assistance
- Furniture, bedding, appliances, fire extinguisher, or other home needs
- Court filing costs
- Transportation
- School and summer camp related expenses
- Holiday supports
- Mental health assessments, therapy and diagnostics
- Family preservation
- Respite
- Information & referral
- Parent education
- Case management
- Support groups

## The Kinship Caregiving Experience

To explore caregiver perspective on kinship placement, interviews were conducted via telephone with 62 kinship caregivers. Caregivers in the kinship, other demonstration, and comparison counties all describe the experience of kinship caregiving as both positive and challenging.

A majority of kinship caregivers described their experience as positive overall, and 69% felt the placement had been helpful to the child. Most reported a positive relationship with PCSA staff (67%). Caregivers credited their emotional connection to the children, and support from the PCSA, as key factors in maintaining a placement.

*"Thank God for a good caseworker!"*

*"It would have been better if [we] had more support from the agency. But emotionally, it was really great, knowing the kids were with family and not in foster care."*

Caregivers also spoke of family team meeting as a helpful and informative process.

Kinship caregivers described a variety of challenges. Almost a third of the caregivers reported struggling to support their families financially. Caregivers also expressed frustration at not receiving the same financial support as foster parents, difficulty meeting the child's needs, and conflict with the birth parents or the PCSA..

However, almost all those kinship caregivers said they would do it again if needed, despite their struggles.

*"If I can make a positive change in [her] life it's been well worth it."*

