



Grandparents Raising Grandchildren and Other Child-Only Issues Webinar Transcript

Regions V, VI, VII, and VIII Tribal TANF 2014 Webinar Series: Addressing the Needs of Children

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Transcribed by Pearl Interactive Network, Inc.

[Female Announcer]: Good day everyone, and welcome to the Office of Family Assistance Regions V, VI, VII, and VIII webinar. Today's presentation is titled "Grandparents Raising Grandchildren and Other Child-Only Issues." Today's presentation is being recorded. Now for opening remarks and introductions, I'll turn the call over to Kisha Russell. Kisha, please go ahead.

[Kisha Russell]: Thank you. Good afternoon and good morning to those of you who are on the west coast. I am Kisha Russell, the TANF Program Manager at the Office of Family Assistance in Region VIII Denver. I, along with my colleagues, Thomas Schindler from Region V, Larry Brendel, Region VI, and Gary Allen, Region VII, are excited that you have joined us, and we hope that you will gain a lot of useful information within the next hour.

Today's webinar will focus on grandparents and child-only issues. Today we are faced with an ever-rising child-only caseload in Tribal TANF. We know that a vast number of child-only cases are grandparents raising grandchildren. Due to the advancement of technology, the world is now different from when grandparents raised their own children.

In talking with some of our Tribal TANF grantees, we found what grandparents need are resources, particularly in addressing behavioral health, navigating the social services system, and with legal issues such as custody. So today, our webinar will aim at providing resources for a wide range of child-only issues on and off the reservation.

This afternoon, we have a distinguished panel of presenters who will lead us in a discussion of many of these issues. Our panel includes, from the National Indian Council on Aging, Randella Bluehouse. Randella is the Executive Director to the National Indian Council on Aging, Inc. Prior to her work in NICOA, she was a Tribal Senior Center Title VI Program Director, Program Development Coordinator for the Inter-tribal Council of Arizona, Inc., Area Agency on Aging Region VIII. She served as a tribal child protective services worker, Native American foster and adoptive recruiter, and managed a tribal youth home.

The past 11 years of her career have focused on aging service coordination and advocacy. Ms. Bluehouse is a native Arizonan and a member of the Navajo Dine Nation. Her maternal clan is the Black Streak Through the Woods People, and her fraternal clan is of the Redhouse People. She was born and raised on the Navajo Nation and now lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Ms. Bluehouse is a 2007 alumna of the New Ventures in Leadership, a program of the American Society on Aging. She has been awarded the Elder Services Award for a Non-Elder for advocacy and commitment to our native elders by the United States Department of Health and Human Services. Welcome, Randella.

We also have from the Native American Professional Parent Resources, Ms. Maria Brock. Maria Tonita Brock is from the Laguna and Santa Clara Pueblos, and also of German and Czech descent. She is currently the director of the Tribal Home Visiting Program. She was a practicing child and family therapist for over 10 years, specializing in working with Native American families who were involved in the child welfare system, and adult substance abuse recovery with an emphasis on early childhood mental health. Her work has been centered on resiliency, holistic wellness, and trauma recovery. We welcome Maria.

And last but not least, from El Paso County Department of Human Services we have Sheryl Sablan and Gwen Oulton. Sheryl has been employed with the El Paso County Department of Human Services for 18 years. She worked as a family preservation worker for 11 years, and for the last seven years as a supervisor in the TANF area. She has, for the past six years, supervised the Family Services Team which works with undocumented and [unintelligible] parents in the relative caregiver child-only program.

Gwen Oulton has been employed by the El Paso County Department of Human Services for 25 years. She has spent time as a caseworker in a variety of areas, which has included adolescent intake, ongoing child protection, family preservation, and kinship. In 2013, she became the supervisor of the Kinship Two Unit, supervising six caseworkers and a case aide. She was responsible for the development of this Kinship Two Unit, which was put into effect through the Title, through IV-E waiver. Welcome Sheryl and Gwen.

Now I will turn it over to Ms. Randella Bluehouse.

[Randella Bluehouse]: Good morning, everyone. It is a pleasure to be with you today. I have a presentation, so that's well loaded. We're located in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and our work, the mission of NICOA, is to advocate for improved comprehensive health, social services, and economic well-being for American Indian and Alaska Native elders. The NICOA organizational profile is such that NICOA is a national non-profit membership organization advocating for American Indian elders 55 years of age and older. We have a 13-member board of directors which represent the NICOA membership divided into 12 regions, and one National Title VI grantee association member so that we have a total of 13 board of directors.

NICOA voting members are American Indian elders 55 and older. The elders establish the policy and direction of NICOA. We have a national conference coming in September, September 3-6 in Phoenix,



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Arizona. That is our general meeting time frame of the forum of our elders will be coming together, where our elders will meet. We have about 1500 elders coming from across the country to talk about some aging issues across Indian Country [at the] The Biennial Conference on Aging, NICOA Elder Forum and General Meeting. We also are a sponsor of the Senior Community Service Employment Program. It's a job training program for individuals 55 and older that are looking to go back to work or would like to train in other areas. It's a job training program available here at NICOA.

We have also a grant through the National Minority Aging Organization Technical Assistance Center through the Administration for Community Living, the Administration on Aging. And through this grant we are able to provide resources and information to the aging network about cultural sensitivity issues in working with American Indian/Alaska Native elders. So we're delighted to be a part of this project, and it's ongoing currently. We also have, under the same project a couple of years ago, completed a—I should also mention that we're developing a directory for American Indian elders to provide resources local to their region. There is a national database available, it's called the Elder Locator, through the Administration on Aging. However, there are, there is a gap in that system that does not allow for or has not provided resources on reservation land. So our goal is to fill that gap by providing a database and a directory of resources local to tribal communities on reservation lands. And that's also being paid for under this grant.

We also have a Savvy Caregiver Supplemental Manual for providing care to individuals with dementia and Alzheimer's issues. So those are some of the services we have available through NICOA.

Our Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Project. NICOA recognizes the unique challenges facing American Indian and Alaska Native grandparents raising their grandchildren. They may encounter social isolation, lack of resources, limited knowledge about available benefits. They face legal issues relating to guardianship and economic support, parenting, educational and health issues regarding their grandchildren, as well as their own emotional and health-related and aging issues. Grandparents living on tribal lands may also encounter challenges navigating their own individual tribal governments and social service systems.

And just a little bit about how many grandparents are raising grandchildren. The number is growing: 2.36 million grandparents are raising their grandchildren—1.5 million grandmothers, 64 percent, and 860,000 grandfathers. Thirty-six percent lived with their grandchildren and are responsible for providing their grandchildren's basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing. This information comes from a fact sheet that I will also mention as we move forward, on the web site that we developed for grandparents raising grandchildren and resource and service providers.

Varying information can help grandparents. With the grant from the Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Native Americans, ANA, NICOA developed an online resource. The goal was to create a helpful place for grandparents who find themselves in a difficult situation without knowledge or resources about how to begin raising a child. Conscientious grandparents may find themselves financially and physically challenged to keep up with the demands of a young child. The resource is

designed in a question and answer format that allow grandparents to scan for questions they have or to submit a question if they want. [background conversation] I'm sorry. Okay, we'll move forward.

This is the initial NICOA website. We've re-launched and we've updated our web site, so this is the face of our NICOA web site. We've designed it so that it reaches a variety of individuals. For the elders across Indian Country, they click on that blue key, which is for elders' information. For caregivers, it's that green key in the center. And then for stakeholders, anyone interested in knowing the whereabouts [of] aging services across the country. So that is very simple to use. We know that there is a lack of technology and connectivity to the internet in Indian Country. However, the need to increase that and make that connection is really important for Indian Country. We know that because technology is moving in that direction now. Social Security you have to access online. I think health information and data you have to access online. It uses so many different things that Indian Country really needs to be up with in terms of technology.

So we're trying to prepare our elders. At our upcoming conference we have a scheduled, an internet café where we're going to have some basic training for individuals who are just learning to use technology. We're hoping that we're able to broaden their awareness and perspective on technology and how to use it. Many of our elders in Indian Country have smartphones. For example, my mother uses a smartphone and is able to check in on her e-mails and send messages and to look for information on search engines, so I know she's equipped to do that, but again, we want to be able to make it so that elders across the country are actually using technology to benefit themselves and to find information across various technological formats.

And I want to mention here that if you click on the upper, there's that green band, you click on the "For Caregivers" section or you go down to "For Caregivers" in the green section and click on that button, it will take you to this page, which is a web site that's designed for caregivers and for service providers. As you can see, on the far right-hand column you're able to sign in on the web site and provide a question or provide a resource. So if you are a service provider, you're a TANF program coordinator, or you have a service that is specific to caregivers or grandparents raising grandchildren, we'd like to know about what resource you have available. If you'd like to, we'd like to have you post your resources and information on this web site, so that whoever comes in will be able to find you based on your location across the country. Very easy to use. You'll be able to look at it and play with it a bit as you go into our web site and explore some of this stuff.

On the right column below that are some fact sheets. We have nine fact sheets that are placed there for people who are curious about or would like to have information about American Indian grandparents raising grandchildren. There's multiple resources there. Again, there's very limited data specific to American Indians raising grandchildren, so a lot of the data that we've collected and put in these fact sheets are general information data for statistical numbers that are available currently on the general population. We were able to gather some information on American Indians, but we're still pulling that information.



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Then on the far left corner of the web site, you're going to see Q and A categories. Individuals that have questions about why are grandparents raising grandchildren. You click on that area and you'll have some questions and answers. Again, because it's a system that is designed to be a discussion platform, people will be able to ask a question, and service providers are welcome to answer those questions. However, what's going to happen is when somebody goes in to answer a question that's listed from one of our community members, of course NICOA will have to check the question to make sure it's appropriate and check the facts before we post it so that again, we want to make sure that the information being placed out there on our web site is accurate, and the information is appropriate for the readers.

So that's the initial page. Then here we have a section when you go into the web site. It talks about the web site. So know that for grandparents raising grandchildren, you'll find questions and answers, comments on this site that have been provided by grandparents raising grandchildren, grandchildren who are being raised by grandparents, social service personnel who are providing help to grandparents raising grandchildren. You don't have to register on the web site if you just want to read what's already there. If you want to ask a question of your own or answer or comment on a question that others have asked, you will be asked to register. So if you want to post something or you want to answer, log in and post that information on our web site. We're going to ask you to create a user name, a nickname or alias, and a password, but you don't have to give your real name. Any questions you ask there will be provided anonymously. So it gives you an opportunity to post the information and to receive information back.

Here is where you sign up. It's very simple. [You] have your user name and you have your e-mail information, and it asks for additional, other information at the bottom which is very simple to register your information [sic]. For social service personnel helping grandparents raising grandchildren, if you want to contribute questions or answers to the site, you will be asked to register. If you would like to include your organization's information on our resource by state page, please respond to the information you'll be asked as part of your registration. If you are willing to be identified as an information source, your input will be tagged with a number that will be linked to your name and source page. We want to be able to make it so that if the caregiver comes onto the web site, they're able to find your resource specific to the state that you're in, so making it so that they're able to access services in multiple levels at various locations across the country. Because we are a national organization, we want to develop a system that can at least reach as many people as possible.

And the project overview basically is, in 2008, the National Indian Council on Aging was awarded a two-year grant through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, ANA. The purpose of the grant was to address the needs of grandparents raising grandchildren in Indian Country. Population demographics suggest that the number of grandparents raising grandchildren is definitely increasing across all social, economic, social, and ethnic groups in the United States. According to the 2000 Census data, 4.5 million children are living in grandparents-headed households, 6.3 percent of the children under age 18. 2.4 million grandparents report that they have grandchildren living with them, and that they are the primary caretakers for these grandchildren. Seventy-one percent of these grandparents are



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under the age of 60, and 19 percent live in poverty. Data through U.S. Census Bureau's 2005-2007 American Indian Community Survey reports that 640,000 skipped-generation grandparents headed families through United States, with families headed by grandparents for which no parent of the grandchildren are present, all with one or more children under age 18. Between 2005 and 2007, the number of grandchildren in skipped-generation families remained consistent at about one million.

So those are some of the data that was collected and is referenced here on the fact sheets and the information on our web site. So again, login information is here. It's easy to log in and to register, and there are questions. When you pose a question, there's a response. The question is posed at the top and then an answer is provided. Again, service providers are welcome to answer questions that are posted there as a part of the community trying to provide services and information back to our community elders. So we open our web site to service providers across the country to put their data, ask questions, respond to some of the questions that are in there, because certainly, there are questions that we're not going to be able to answer but we'll be calling resources to get the information so we can post accurate information on our web site. We look to you as a part of this web site in order to give this some guidance and direction to our community grandparents raising grandchildren.

I just want to thank you for joining in on the call today and wanting to learn more about some of the resources available. We have gone through working out some of the bugs in the system, wanting to make sure that it was accessible in terms of release, so we are going to be talking about this new web site at the NICOA conference next month, September 3-6 in Phoenix, Arizona. So that's pretty much our launch of the web site. We've had it up for a while; there are some bugs that we've had to work out, so now things are working pretty well with the system.

And I want to also acknowledge that the NAPPR organization—we have Maria Brock on the call right now.—their program also helped us to develop this information base, so we want to thank them for their contribution. And if you have any questions, I'd be happy to answer any of the questions you have. My contact information is up on the screen. Thank you.

[Kisha Russell]: Thank you, Randella. Maria, we'll have you go ahead.

[Maria Brock]: Thank you. This is Maria Brock. I'm the Program Director of the Tribal Home Visiting Program at NAPPR. NAPPR stands for Native American Professional Parent Resources, and we're located also in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and I'm so glad that Randella mentioned that we do have a connection because some of the information that I'm going to present was also created in partnership with NICOA, so I hope it's useful to the people that are listening and watching the webinar today.

So our program, I think if there's one thing that I would like the participants to walk away with today is that if they don't know what home visiting is, that they take a few minutes of their busy day to research the home visiting programs that are in their areas or regions that are available to the families that they work with, because home visiting really is a wonderful support to grandparents raising grandchildren as well as all parents.



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Our program uses the Parents as Teachers model, and we've been providing home visiting to the central counties of New Mexico, both on-reservation and off-reservation-living tribal families since 2008. Currently we're serving about 100 families in the central county areas.

So I wanted to show you all a picture of our staff, because it really is our greatest strength, and home visiting is centered around relationships. So just like our tribal communities are centered around relationships, our clans, our families, we really took that to heart when we were building our program and our home visitors and our administrative staff make us who we are and really hold that connection with the families.

Our people, we come from a very strong background of resiliency. As many of you know, the grandparents who are raising grandchildren, it was often an unexpected circumstance that they encountered and sometimes when they're feeling discouraged or feeling overwhelmed, we, as a home visitor, as a service provider, can just remind them of the many generations of people that came before them that are strong and resilient. So that's a hopeful message I'd like to share. And then also our cultures that, coming together, helping each other out when we need, having parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, other family members to rely on, is so important when difficult circumstances arise and people have barriers to caring for their children the way they may have intended.

So again, I just wanted to emphasize that home visiting is really based on relationships, and there are a lot of principles that are aligned in that. If you're not familiar with home visiting, there are different models that are implemented across the country. Our particular program, we start working with families as early as the first day they find out they're pregnant, and we can continue working with families until the child turns five. I have some specific examples about the work that we've done with grandparents raising grandchildren and some of the ways that you might think of connecting the families you work with with home visiting.

So one of the things that we do in home visiting is we provide parent support, emotional support to the parents. Our staff aren't trained therapists, but they are great listeners. We connect families to resources in the communities, which is key for families of grandparents raising grandchildren, as Randella noted. And we provide child development information and parenting guidance or coaching. So really being an in-person, in the home—In a way, most of our families describe their relationship with their home visitor as a part of the family to ask questions, to provide that support and really walk with the parents as their [sic], or grandparents, or whoever is caregiving for that child as the child is growing and developing.

So the way we got involved and even knowing that this population was important and in need, was primarily from my background as a therapist and working with tribal social services agencies. I had so many families on my caseload where this was an issue and really trying to support the needs of the grandparents when these unexpected circumstances came up.



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So in 2011, when we were in the planning phase for this home visiting program, in partnership with NICOA, we held two forums, grandparents raising grandchildren community forums, one in Albuquerque and one in the pueblo of Acoma. All together we had over 200 attendees. And some of the key themes that came up from these forums were the issue around respect for elders, that this is a strong value in our communities and our cultures, but it's not always consistently being demonstrated. And how is that? It can be something as specific as "I can't get my grandkids to listen to me," like a discipline-type issue, but even larger family systems issues around respect came out.

Another issue was the generational gap that these grandparents hadn't raised young children in a number of years and many things had changed for them. School systems have changed; communication like Randella spoke of—the internet, smartphones, all those things, texting—a lot of things were not necessarily familiar to the grandparents.

Thirdly was legal resources. That was a really big issue for the grandparents. And then the need for language and cultural preservation as they're raising their grandchildren, and trying to keep their families strong through whatever the situation was that caused the grandparents to need to raise their grandchildren.

Another issue that came up was the health and well-being of the grandparents. Many of our grandparents are not that old. They're in their 40s and 50s, maybe even their 30s. Actually, if we have a very young parent who is not able to care for the child or who they are co-parenting like with a team parent, but some of our grandparents are over 65, in their 70s, raising many of their children's children. So they've got several grandchildren from several different families that they're raising.

And the stress was another issue that came up as that was an impacting the grandparents' well-being, not just their physical, meaning if they had a heart condition or diabetes, but also their mental and spiritual well-being, and that we need to consider that when we're supporting these families.

So specifically, how can home visiting support grandparents raising grandchildren? A couple of the families we've worked with, we have been one of the stable providers during the transitions of, changes that were happening in the family. So we have a home visitor who worked with the mother, and that mother knew she was—she was an adult, she was in her 20s—she knew that she may not be able to care for her child. So from the very beginning, the home visitor also invited the grandmother to come to the home visiting sessions, and they worked together, and as the mother had predicted, she needed to get more stability in her life, and she ended up, when the baby was two months old, giving her to her mother to care for. And our home visitor was very seamlessly able to keep working with that family.

We can also go to the homes. Many of our service providers, the families have to come to them. But we have the privilege of going to people's homes, so we can often keep track of families when other people lose track of them. We're an in-home resource for child development, like I mentioned before, and child-rearing information. Many of the grandparents that we talk to, their adult children were having some type of mental health, substance abuse, legal/incarceration issues; that's why the parents are



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raising the grandchildren. In some circumstances, we had some grandparents in our case load whose adult children had committed suicide or had passed away because of an accident or some other situation. So, not only are they dealing with the mental and emotional stress of their own child life problems, or loss and grief over that adult child; they're also then burdened with the stress of raising young children which they may not have done in a while [sic]. So to have a home visitor who can come and say, this is normal for a three-year-old, or this is normal for a two-year-old, here's the problem to solve—your one-year-old's biting, let's talk about what you can do to teach her not to bite. Those type of things have been extremely appreciated by the grandparents we've worked with.

Thirdly, we know that the earlier the developments are impacted very strongly when there's attachment disruption and family trauma. And so the home visitor can really work with the caregiver, whether that's the grandparents or another kin, to help support that attachment bonding, help them understand any kind of grieving or loss the young child might be going through, how that's being expressed, and then connect them to resources if needed.

And lastly, our home visitors do provide concrete resource connections to the families we work with. Income support. We can go with them to their appointments. Medical appointments for the children. Sometimes the children need help with special education or other therapy services if they're having any developmental concerns. Legal appointments. All those things, we can be the person who can walk with that grandparent as they're navigating all these different systems.

So we use a couple of engagement strategies for grandparents, because one of the things we found and, it's not something we've figured out 100 percent, is that it's difficult for us to find the grandparents, and difficult for them to find us sometimes. So currently on staff we have a home visitor who was a grandparent raising her grandchildren, and circumstances have changed so she no longer needs to provide that care, but for a number of years she was the primary caregiver for her own grandchild, so she has that life experience that she can share.

We do a lot of outreach to the tribal social services programs. They seem to be the ones that know which families have young children and are in that special circumstance. We specifically outreach to “grandparents raising grandchildren” in all of our materials, so we try to use those words a lot. And we do our best to reduce barriers to participate, meaning if a grandparent isn't comfortable meeting at her home, we can meet her at a McDonald's, or we can meet her wherever she is comfortable. We try to make Saturday appointments and evening appointments available for families that are working, or aren't able to meet during the day, as well. So things like that we try to take into consideration with our service provisions.

So we know that grandparents raising grandchildren can be isolated, not just geographically if they live out in a rural area, but also socially, especially if the family is going through a lot of stress or upheaval. They may not have been connected to any agencies prior to the transition of caring for their grandchildren, and often we've heard that by the time they found out about services, they felt like it was very late. We hear, "Oh, I wish I would have known about that last year." So for us as a program, we try



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to keep improving our outreach as much as we can, to get the word out about home visiting, and to get caregivers connected to home visiting sooner than later.

One of the things that we've experienced is the shifting nature of the grandparents who are raising their grandchildren, their relationship with their own children or the parents—that sometimes the grandchildren are going back and forth in a rapid cycle of care between the parents of the grandparents, back to the parents, back to the grandparents—back and forth so quickly that it's hard for us to get a foothold of who's caring for the children, what does that look like. And then if, for example, substance abuse is a factor in this, maybe the grandparents really do want the parent to take responsibility. When the parent is functioning well and sober that's happening, but as soon as there's a relapse, it kind of all goes back on the grandparents' shoulders again.

So that can get in the way of our home visitors connecting with the right people at the right time. And what we found works best is to really connect with those two generations of caregivers from the beginning, for us to talk with Mom or Dad and the most involved set of grandparents, and really make an inviting environment for the grandparents to participate in the home visits as well as the groups. We do have monthly social groups for all of our clients, and we try to open the door to other family members that are important to that child, whether it's a grandparent, or an aunt, or older sibling, and at least establish a rapport between the home visitor [and] other family members, so if there some kind of family change or transition, the home visitor will have connected with some other adults in the family to keep the services moving smoothly forward, even if there's changes is who's providing the primary caregiving.

I don't know if right now is the appropriate time for questions or not, but I am definitely open for questions, either now, or people can email me or call me. Here's my information. We also have a website: it's www.nappr.org. And if you go to the tribal home visiting page, we have a short video that shows you what a home visit is, as well as some other information about our program and home visiting in general. So I want to express my thanks to the people that coordinated this webinar and my gratitude for inviting me to participate.

[Kisha Russell]: Thank you. We will wait and have questions at the end. So now we'll turn it over to Cheryl and Gwen.

[Sheryl Sablan]: Good afternoon, this is Sheryl Sablan along with Gwen Oulton, and we're from El Paso County in Colorado Springs, Colorado. We'll be talking about the programs and services that we provide to our community in relation to kinship services. Gwen Oulton is going to start this process.

[Gwen Olton]: Hi. As stated in the introduction, the Kinship Two Unit was established in 2013—oh, I'm sorry, we're supposed to say we don't have access to—(Switch our slides. Thank you).—It was decided that in El Paso County, we wanted to focus on removing children from foster care and placing more with kin. So they did establish the Kinship Two Unit which is funded through the IV-E Waiver. We've served an additional 100 families thus far this year. We've provided ongoing support in the month of July to an



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additional 155 families. And we've certified approximately 15 families, meaning they have qualified as foster parents. (Oh, you can go ahead and put up all the bullets.)

In El Paso County, we don't only serve grandparents; we also serve kin, and kin-like families. And a kin-like person, or kin, do not have to be a blood relation. It can be anyone ascribed by the family, or identified as having a significant relationship with either the family or the child. All of our referrals come from child welfare. Once the referral is made, the referral is assigned to one of the twelve case workers in the kinship unit. They go out and do what we call a Safety and Permanency Assessment. During that assessment they're looking at the family's history—any kid of substance abuse, any criminal history. They're discussing finances with the family, and we're constantly talking about permanency goals. The families are informed that they have the choice of formalizing the permanency goal, which means being certified or adopting; the other option is working with our Family Services Team and receiving the child-only grant through TANF, which in our county is \$128 per month per child. If they're certified, they do not qualify for that; the case would remain open in child welfare. And we give the relatives the chance to decide on what they feel is most appropriate for their family.

(We can go to the next slide, Planning for Permanency. Thank you.) El Paso County has worked with the Annie E. Casey Foundation for the last two years, and Annie E. Casey Foundation is dedicated to improving child welfare outcomes. They consult all over the county. El Paso County has been working with them off and on over the years, but the latest, for the past two years, we've been focusing on a project called Family Matters. One of the problems that they saw with our county was that we had a high rate of children in foster care or residential treatment centers, so their recommendation was that more kinship placements are provided with higher level of financial support, and that's when our unit, Kinship Two Unit, was established. We have not certified as many families as we had expected. As stated previously, we certified 15 over the year. What we're finding is that kin relatives, they don't want to go through all the training and the requirements in order to be certified. So a lot of times they're okay with receiving permanent custody, what we call "allocation of parental responsibility," and just receiving the TANF Child-Only grants. Although we do try to encourage permanency, especially for the younger children, we talk about adoption being the ultimate permanency plan, but they do have the option. Then we also have the Relative Guardian Assistance, which we call RGAP, and that is a program when adoption has been ruled out. It primarily applies to adolescents for whatever reason they decided they do not want to be adopted. And if they're older children, we can look at the RGAP program; they would receive the same subsidy as the adoption.

I think Sheryl Sablan is going to go ahead and talk about the challenges now, so we can go ahead and switch slides.

[Sheryl Sablan]: Okay, so for the challenges for kinship caregivers, our other two presenters also spoke about some of the challenges. And one of the main things is finding kin families. Sometimes parents, they don't want to disclose the information to their current child welfare workers or they don't want to let the absent parent know what's going on currently. The kinship workers on the child welfare side of



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our house—the family engagement workers—what they'll do if there is a court involvement, they'll attend the first hearing; they review the relative resource affidavits with the family. And if the family identifies Native American heritage, that information is gathered, and our county attorney office is responsible for notifying the tribe.

Another challenge that our kinship caregivers have is just the lack of resources, the lack of money. We have families that grandparents that are on fixed income, whether it's their retirement, or they're on disability, sometimes they have to move into a larger residence. If they were living in a senior housing area, they might have to move. If they're on housing, they're going to have to let their case managers know that they're going to be having additional family members move in with them. Also, a lot of times with transportation—the children have a lot of appointments when they're involved with the child welfare system, whether it's attending visitations with their parents, having therapy appointments. If they're lacking [in] their medical needs, their grandparents have to take them to these appointments. So there's a lot of things that's just put on the caregivers that they weren't expecting.

Child care is a big issue here, and it probably is elsewhere. We have a Colorado Child Care Assistance Program. A lot of our families, unfortunately, are not eligible for that just based on the income guidelines, and so with our TANF Child-Only program, we can assist them with the child care.

Sometimes our families, they need just some time for themselves. The respite is really important for them. And we have in Colorado Springs—I think we're kind of fortunate—we have two respite programs here in town, and one of them is specific for children with special needs. And so they can take their grandchild there so that they can have some time to themselves.

Our kinship support workers, they work with the families for a period of time while the child welfare worker is working with the families, the biological parents are working on their treatment plan. And a lot of times, the kinship support workers, they're there to help the grandparents and other relatives kind of just—they're their sounding board when they don't know what's going on. They're available for crisis intervention. They can provide some life skills. They do a lot of referrals to resources in the community. We have a community basement, a hub agency that we work closely with. So, we do try and make sure that our relative care givers are taken care of.

The other ways that we do for some of our grandparents [sic], our great grandparents, is just worrying about their health and their age. And so, we provide support and referrals to other community agencies that serve seniors, and that includes our adult financial programs here at the department, adult protective services, the area Agency on Aging, and other non-profits.

And I think another thing that our families, our caregivers, need assistance with is just that long-term backup plan. A lot of times they think that they're just going to have the children for a really short period of time, and it turns out that they may have to care for the child longer, and maybe even until they reach adulthood. So that's another thing that we really try to support them on with services [sic], whether it's within our agency or out in the community.

(Next slide please.) So the Family Services Team is the program on the TANF side of kinship services. We serve approximately 500 families right now. There are three case workers and five technicians, and three of the technicians, they're dedicated to working only with relative caregivers. What our case workers do is they take a holistic approach to the family. They look at, what does the relative need to maintain the child in their home? So it could be financial services. It could just be support, listening to them. It could be referrals to various agencies that are in the community. And they advocate for them. Part of the thing that I like about this program is because they work closely with the technicians that if a relative caregiver is having any kind of an issue, that we're there to support them through the life of the TANF case, so it's not, they're just going to work with them for six months and they're done. With the grandparent Child-Only cases, there is no 60-month time limit, so they work with the family until their children are 18.

We do have support groups here and there in the community. We have one where our county contracts the local Head Start office to facilitate a relative support group. We also have with our community mental health agency, they have a therapeutic support group, and through NAMI, the National Alliance for Mental Illness, they also provide support groups for our families.

Our case workers, they're available to provide family preservation services as well, something that Maria talked with home visiting. They can go into the home and address issues that's going on, whether it's behavioral issues, whether the child is having some problems with school. They can attend school staffings. They also can provide some life skill services for them.

For the resource information in Colorado, we have a Colorado Kinship Connection which is a website that anyone can go on and find out other resources just in the state of Colorado, what's available for kinship providers. Also, here in El Paso, both units, the Kinship Assessment Unit and the Family Services Team, we have informational lines so that anyone can call to get additional information regarding raising relative children.

Some of the other things that we've done is, if the family's not engaged with the child welfare system and they want a more legal relationship, we have the documents for filing for guardianship through probate court. So we have just that packet for the families to file on their own because a lot of times they might have started off as an informal placement or just have a power of attorney. And I think as the children get older, and the children need to get other services in place for themselves, especially high schoolers, it's just beneficial for everyone overall that the relatives have some type of legal relationship with the child.

A couple of other resources that we use here in El Paso County: There's the Denver Indian Resource Center that we can also access for additional information. We do a quarterly newsletter that has useful information for families that we serve. And also, just upcoming events.

And one of the things that we've been trying to do every year around Grandparents Day is to have a grandparent event, and so this year—it was just solely for the grandparents—and this year we decided



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to have a picnic, and so that included everyone, kids and caregivers. And so we had about 300 in attendance and it went really well. And so, I think that's going to be our new big activity for them.

And that's what we have about our programs. Our contact information is on this page. Also, I did want to say thank you to the organizers of this webinar for including us in this. Thank you.

[Male Announcer]: Thanks so much. At this time, we'd like to open up questions, so for participants, you'll see in the center of your screen is a Q&A box. If you have questions, please type them in, and we'll direct them to the appropriate speaker. So we'll give folks a few minutes to type in their questions.

Okay, we've had a few comments, but no questions I believe, so we'll give folks one more minute just to make sure someone's not typing in a very long question.

And yes, the PowerPoints used today as well as an audio transcript of today's webinar will be available on the OFA's Peer TA Network probably in the coming weeks, and we'll send out an announcement when those materials are available.

Okay, if there's no further questions, and no other closing contents from regional staff, I think we can go ahead and end this webinar. Thanks so much to our speakers, and thanks, everyone, who participated.

[Female Announcer]: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your participation. This does conclude today's conference.