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Commentary on "Grandparents in Kinship Care: Help or Hindrance to Family Preservation"

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What is sometimes considered to be the latest trend may not actually be the latest trend. By its formal definition, kinship is not a new phenomenon to families of color. My husband's family over 35 years ago provided kinship care for family members and continues that type of family preservation today. At the age of 21, I became the guardian of my 7-year-old niece, and only recently did I realize that I, too, was a kinship provider. In both instances, responding to a family crisis was not seen as an unnatural process, or that, as a result of our response, we were creating a non-traditional family structure. The natural thought was not to include child welfare services in the process. This authenticity of family connectedness has always been at the very core of family preservation within and outside the realm of child welfare.

The author emphasized that kinship networks are everywhere, and, although prevalent in African American communities, they are certainly not restricted to any one race or ethnicity. The author describes kinship caregivers as members of tribes or clans, godparents, stepparents, or any adult who has a kinship relationship with a child.

About one-third of the 150,000 children in foster care are living with relatives (Child Welfare League of America, 2007). The availability of kinship care has caused it to become a common placement solution for children receiving child welfare services (Child Welfare League of America, 2007). According to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) 2010 Annual Data Book, during fiscal years 2009 and 2010, kinship caseworkers had the highest daily caseload of all caseworkers, and “of the 27,304 children in DFPS substitute care on August 31, 2010, 8,914 children were placed in kinship care” (p. 50).

Child welfare agencies are finally establishing formal relationships with extended family, allowing them the opportunity to become a part of the process. Recognition of these relationships is long overdue. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, more than 4.5 million children in the United States are living in grandparent-headed households—a 30% increase from 1990 to 2000—and an additional 1.5 million children are living in households headed by other relatives (Child Welfare League of America, 2005). Kinship placements bring a realness that naturally supports and encourages reaching the child's goal of permanency in a home. The addition of financial resources has narrowed the gap that once prevented the success of such placements. Kinship caregivers are in need of assistance with daycare, and the availability and access to educational, legal, physical and mental health services. In 2005, the Kinship Caregiver Support Act established the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program, providing federal assistance to states for subsidized

guardianship programs to assist relative caregivers and their children (Child Welfare League of America, 2005).

Having worked as a Child Protective Services caseworker, the permission to acknowledge these relationships is a relief for caseworkers who, for years, may have had to negotiate with managers and the courts to validate the significance of kinship connections.

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