
Promising Practice Fact Sheet – Child-Only TANF/Kinship Care Families First Kinship Care - Tennessee

Program

Description: Tennessee’s Families First Kinship Care (FFKC) is a pilot program that began on April 1, 2005 to give additional financial assistance to relatives receiving a Families First child-only TANF grant to keep children with relatives instead of entering the state’s foster care system. It operates in three regions in the state on a very limited basis.

Target Population: Relative caregivers receiving a TANF child-only grant with household countable income at or below 200% FPL.

Goals: To prevent a child from entering into state custody when a relative is willing to care for the child but is not financially able to continue caring for the child.

Caseload Data: 225 children, capped since 2007 due to budget constraints.

Cost: This is a TANF funded program. Cost information is unavailable but program budget was cut in 2007.

Evidence: Descriptive data only. This program has not been evaluated.

Assessment: A case manager working for a contracted service provider agency uses the Comprehensive Kinship Assessment for this program.

Eligibility:

The child must be:

- under age 18 (or age 19 if still in high school or attaining equivalent credential);
- be at risk of coming into state custody; and
- receiving child-only TANF.

The caregiver must:

- submit to a home assessment, which includes criminal background check and child abuse and neglect registry for adults in the home;
- apply for the child-only TANF grant if not already receiving it; eligibility for the child-only grant must be maintained for all children receiving the FFKC payment;
- be primary caregiver of the child;
- must comply and cooperate with referral to child support enforcement for both parents, unless granted a good cause exemption; and
- sign a statement saying the child they are caring for is at risk of entering state custody (this statement is not an admission of any wrong-doing).

In addition:

- Countable income for the child, plus the child-only grant for one child must not exceed the FFKC amount for the child plus the child-only grant amount for one child. For example: income for child age 0-11 must be below \$300/mo. (\$160 FFKC + \$140 child-only grant) or income for child age 12-18 must be below \$330/mo. (\$190 FFKC + \$140 child-only grant); and
- Biological parent must not reside within the home where child is in care of caregiver.

- FFKC families can receive support services from the Relative Caregiver Program (RPC) but cannot receive financial assistance such as the one-time emergency benefits or start-up assistance from RPC.

Services Overview:

- The program is currently available in only three regions - Davidson, Shelby and Upper Cumberland.
- The Department of Human Services (DHS - the TANF agency) refers families to the Department of Children's Services (DCS – the child welfare agency). DCS staff in the Child Protective Services division determine eligibility for the payments.
- DCS administers this program and gives \$160 a month for children 0-11 years old and \$190 a month for children 12-18 years old in addition to the monthly child-only grant.
- The child-only grant is \$140/month for 1 child; \$192/month for 2 children; \$232/month for 3 children, etc.

Findings:

- According to Betty Smith of DCS, this program was capped because the state did not have enough money to provide the stipend payment to all child-only cases (potentially 20,000 children). The original 225 children in the pilot continue to receive the monthly stipend.

Implications for Policymakers and Program Developers to Consider:

- In Tennessee, the child welfare agency takes a more active role in working with informal caregivers.
- FFKC is a partnership between Tennessee's TANF (DHS) and child welfare (DCS) agencies which believes that placement with relatives is the preferred arrangement for children at risk of removal from the home.
- Both agencies also recognize that kinship families need additional financial support beyond the child-only TANF grant.

Resources: www.grandfactsheets.org/doc/Tennessee08.pdf; www.tennhelp.com/RelCareGiver/money

Contacts: Robert L. Matthews, Director of Kinship Support Network, Tennessee Department of Children's Services, 615-253-2342, Robert.l.matthews@state.tn.us
Betty Smith, Program Coordinator, Department of Children's Services, 615-253-2397, Betty.Smith@tn.gov