
Promising Practice Fact Sheet – Child-Only TANF/Kinship Care Relative Caregiver Program - Tennessee

Program

Description: The Relative Caregiver Program (RCP) was created by the Tennessee General Assembly to support relative caregiver(s) of a minor child. It is a partnership between the Department of Human Services (DHS) which issues TANF grants and the Department of Children’s Services (DCS) which administers this program and contracts with community-based agencies to deliver services to caregivers. DCS takes the lead role in service delivery in this partnership. The program was first launched in three regions and went statewide in 2006. It is still in operation.

Target Population: Relative caregivers of a minor child, whose income is below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level.

Goals:

- Increase the number of at-risk children who are able to be raised in safe, permanent homes by further strengthening the caregiver’s ability to maintain a supportive and stable environment for related children.
- Ensure the safety and well-being of children in relative care through mandated reporting of any further abuse or neglect that may occur.
- Reduce the number of children entering the foster care system and being separated from their families.

Caseload Data: 4,718 children served in state fiscal year 2010.

Cost: Cost information is unavailable but budget has been cut 15% for current fiscal year. RCP was originally funded with TANF block grant but is now funded with state dollars. Relative caregivers do not receive ongoing financial assistance through RCP.

Evidence: Outcome data only; no evaluations have been done on this program.

Assessment: A case manager working for a contracted service provider agency uses the Family Advocacy and Support Tool (“FAST”) developed by John S. Lyons, PH.D. to assess families for this program.

Eligibility: The child must be under 18 (or under 19 if in high school or a vocational program) and not in state custody. The caregiver must:

- be the child’s primary caregiver,
- be related to the child by blood, marriage, or adoption,
- agree to an in-home assessment,
- be committed to providing a home for the child for as long as necessary, and
- not be in receipt of Families First Kinship Care or FFKC payments (this only applies if the caregiver is seeking start-up or emergency financial assistance – see services overview below). See separate fact sheet on FFKC for more information on that program.

Services Overview:

- The RCP provides the following array of services through community-based organizations: information and referral, support groups, respite care, child care, recreational activities, transportation, advocacy to prevent

children from entering or re-entering state custody, legal consultation and representation, family and child counseling, training, mediation, family conferencing, and children's therapeutic activity groups.

- No monthly payment is tied to the program. However, one-time emergency or start-up assistance may be available annually to caregiver(s) who do not receive payments under the FFKC pilot. RCP also provides material assistance (beds, refrigerator, stove, etc.) when needed.

Findings:

- According to Betty Smith of the Department of Children's Services, of the 4,718 children served in the 2009-2010 state fiscal year, only 55 came back into the child welfare program, and 54 of those were placed in non-relative foster care. An additional 250 were reunited with their families.

Implications for Policymakers and Program Developers to Consider:

- In Tennessee, the child welfare agency takes a more active role in working with informal caregivers and RCP targets children outside the child welfare system to help keep them out of that system.
- RCP provides an unusually comprehensive array of services.
- RCP is a partnership between Tennessee's TANF and child welfare agencies.

Resources: <http://www.tennhelp.com/RelCareGiver/program>; www.tennhelp.com/RelCareGiver/money

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