

TRAINING, COACHING & BEYOND:

BUILDING A FOUNDATION TO SUPPORT KINSHIP SERVICES



FFTA



The Family Focused Treatment Association (FFTA) works to advance best practices and advocate for policies that support families in providing care and treatment for their children. FFTA's Kinship Therapeutic Foster Care (KTFC) program is based on their philosophy that all youth belong in families, preferably their own families. FFTA's vision is that youth in out-of-home care with treatment needs can have those needs met by relatives or those with whom they have a family-like relationship (referred to as kin). These youth are more likely to stay safe, achieve permanency, and thrive when their kinship caregivers have access to the full array of training, services, and supports, including financial support, available through therapeutic foster care.

From January 2020 through December 2022, FFTA, with funding from the Duke Endowment, implemented a pilot of KTFC in three counties in North Carolina. The goal of the KTFC pilot was to implement the program, train staff and kinship caregivers, assess agency implementation facilitators and barriers and examine outcomes for kinship caregivers and youth.

When developing the KTFC pilot, FFTA focused on:

- prioritizing agency culture to be more kin friendly and informed,
- developing training for staff working with kin and
- developing training for kinship caregivers providing the KTFC intervention.

These 3 elements have been the foundation to supporting the agencies that are expanding their kinship services through the addition of KTFC.

"A kin-first culture embraces the value of kinship care and strives to eliminate barriers for all kinship caregivers interested in becoming verified foster parents. This can be done by developing and implementing policies that encourage inclusivity, voice, and a sense of urgency to move kin caregivers through the verification process."

Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services (n.d.), p. 11.



Assessing Agency Culture

Prioritizing agency culture to be more kin friendly and informed was a key component when beginning the project. Agencies that felt they were kin friendly soon realized they had more work to do to be truly kin informed. Through self-evaluation, the agencies were able to identify their strengths and needs and work in partnership to develop a plan to focus on implementation of the KTFC intervention. FFTA utilized 12 implementation drivers, specifically focused on kinship work, to assist agencies with ongoing assessment and implementation.

Implementation Driver	Definition/Activity
Leadership	Leadership articulates and regularly communicates why kinship therapeutic care is an important part of the continuum Leadership is a champion for the initiative Leadership communicates clearly and frequently with staff and stakeholders
Competency	Staff are selected/hired due to their background working with kinship care or lived experience
Training	Staff are trained in kinship specific competencies to understand the experience of kinship families Staff are trained in therapeutic specific models (e.g. Trauma informed care)
Supervision/ Coaching	Supervisors reinforce the components of the kinship TFC intervention in regular supervision Supervisors provide coaching as appropriate on addressing kinship-specific practices
Fidelity	Caseworkers are regularly observed to assess their engagement and assessment skills
Shared Vision, Values and Mission	There is a shared vision among leadership and stakeholders about the kinship therapeutic care initiative Staff understand the importance of kinship connections Staff embody an attitude that welcomes, and not excludes families Staff understand the unique circumstances and needs of kinship families and the generational and environmental trauma from racism and system oppression that can impact how kin engage

Continued



Implementation Driver	Definition/Activity
Performance Assessment	Supervisors and managers have performance standards related to kinship specific practices built into performance assessments The organization regularly assesses staff performance for competency and skills related to kinship specific practices
Facilitative Administration	Leadership designates/allows resources to ensure success Practice, policies or procedures are changed as needed to support and align with the support of kinship connections
Systems Intervention	There is a system in place to address systematic barriers to identifying, engaging, licensing and supporting kinship connections
Decision-Support Data Systems	A quality assurance/improvement mechanism exists to understand performance and improve the functioning of the initiative Staff at all levels regularly review qualitative and quantitative data to understand the initiatives impact on families
Stakeholder Engagement	All members of the kinship triad are actively involved in case and treatment planning and involved in the development of the services
Cultural Responsiveness	Staff understand the cultural considerations of working with kinship families The organization engages and builds relationships with trusted community-based organizations that serve similar populations

For more information about the drivers, see Active Implementation Research Network (n.d.). Drivers were adapted by Child Focus from the AIRN model.

Overcoming Bias and Maintaining a Kin Culture

Moving to a kin first culture and maintaining the culture is possible when agencies utilized the **12 implementation drivers,** developed a plan to address **training needs of staff** and developed a plan to address **training needs of caregivers.** During the pilot, agency pairs identified bias as being a primary challenge they had to overcome when implementing the program and putting a plan together to address training needs of both staff and caregivers. Specifically, agencies had to address bias that staff held in relation to the kinship caregivers and that managers held in relation to staff working with kinship caregivers. In the chart below, the bias that was expressed is shared along with the manner in which the bias was resolved.

Common Bias Statements and Bias Busters

Kinship Caregivers Bias	Bias Buster	Child Welfare Staff Bias	Bias Buster
Families are resistant to engage	If engaged early and given a chance to make an informed decision kin will engage	Staff are resistant to engage families. Apple does not fall far from tree mentality	There are a lot of kinship champions in child welfare agencies and need to be engaged and supported
Families do not want training	Kin want to be educated on how they can support their relatives	Staff already have training to teach them how to work with families	Many staff shared they did not have training on how to effectively engage kin. Needed more scripts on how to engage
Families do not have time	Families do have limited time so you need to provide training in a time frame they can digest and providing at a time that is feasible for their schedule	Staff do not have time to do additional training	Being kin first is the job. Shift thinking to prioritize and make time
Families can be trained with all other foster parents and still get needs met	Kin caregivers have a unique experience and do better when given a chance to learn with their peers		

"The kinship triad [explanation] helped us really get an understanding of why kinship placements are more difficult. So just a more of an understanding of — Putting yourself in their shoes kind of thing. So I think that was helpful for us to realize when we are calling relatives and they're not calling us back or they're hesitant, it makes us a little more understanding."

KTFC Pilot Partner

"As a result of training in KTFC, staff reported better understanding the difficulties kinship caregivers face in acknowledging youth who have endured trauma perpetrated by family members as well as embracing their role as parent as opposed to grandparent or aunt/uncle/ other family member."

Rushovich et al.,
KTFC Pilot Report



Developing Kinship Specific Training for Staff

Through self-assessment, the pairs in the pilot identified initial training for staff working with kinship caregivers as an immediate need. It was important to start this training with all the partners prior to beginning of the KTFC intervention as both the public and private agencies needed this foundation to strengthen their partnership and increase their kin first culture. In partnership with University of North Carolina School of Social Work and Child Focus Partners, FFTA created a kinship overview training curriculum to assist the public and private providers as they increased staff competency.

Training Objectives Critical for Building a Foundation for Understanding Best Practices in Kinship Care

- **Define kinship care** and articulate the benefits for youth and youth in foster care
- **Articulate the values and beliefs** that guide attitudes and actions on behalf of kinship families
- **Understand how implicit bias and structural racism** may impact efforts to achieve positive and equitable outcomes for youth and youth of color
- **Identify how personal mindsets** and organization's culture impact engagement of kinship families
- **Articulate the differences** between traditional foster care and kinship care
- **Name policies and practices** that help address the unique needs of kinship families and those that might impede engagement with the kinship triad (i.e., the youth, birth parents, and kinship caregivers)
- **Identify the unique dynamics** of the kinship triad and how it is impacted by the new caregiving relationship
- **Articulate strategies to identify and address** changing family dynamics of kinship care to mitigate risk
- **Assess unconscious and conscious** biases related to the kinship triad
- **Recognize and articulate how trauma impacts** the caregiving relationship and how kinship families engage with the agency, as well as with one another
- **Identify and describe the providers in the region** that engage and offer services and supports to meet the holistic needs of kinship families as well as informal community stakeholders who can offer support
- **Identify methods** used to engage kinship families in the co-design of services and supports to include their personal perspectives, experiences, and ideas
- **Identify the benefits and barriers** of a public/private partnership and articulate strategies to mitigate challenges

As a result of the training the public/private partners were able to begin the KTFC pilot from the same lens and developed a common language. This training also supported the agencies as they developed shared vision, values and mission working with and supporting kinship families.

"Implement kinship specific training aimed at educating kin about their unique role and the expectations of the agency. Trainings should be culturally appropriate and trauma informed, recognize the unique family dynamics associated with kin care, and include examples that reflect the life circumstances of the kin participating."

WikiHow (2017), p. 7.



Developing Kinship Focused Training for Caregivers

The partners in North Carolina focused on licensing kinship caregivers as therapeutic kinship parents which required the private agencies to train the caregivers as therapeutic foster parents. North Carolina has an established therapeutic foster care curriculum to assist families with obtaining the 10 additional training hours needed for a therapeutic foster care license. However, this training is not specific to kinship caregivers and needed to be revised so the training could meet the needs of the relatives participating in the KTFC intervention. Our team utilized the North Carolina training as a framework to help agencies meet the standards for therapeutic licensing but added components to meet the needs of the families.

One major component that was added was the focus on self-care. This concept is embedded throughout the training to help the kinship caregivers to see the need for them to focus on their care as much as they focus on the relatives they were caring for. For many caregivers, self-care does take a back seat when providing care to others. It is important to address self-care early and often with kinship caregivers to ensure they are meeting their own medical, mental health, spiritual and relational needs outside of their role as a caregiver. The curriculum developed included 4 self-care check-ins to promote this concept throughout the 10-hour course.

Self-Care Check-ins

What's Different?
What is challenging about parenting in a kinship placement?



Fill Your Bucket
What brings you joy?

Network
Who in the room can support you?

Training Modules for Caregivers

1. **Role of the Kinship Therapeutic Foster Parent**
   - review of roles and responsibilities as a therapeutic kinship provider
   - review kinship triad and the treatment team
2. **Safety Planning**
   - establishing rules
   - setting boundaries
   - utilizing safety plans
3. **Trauma informed Behavior Management**
   - trauma's impact on brain and behavior
   - trauma informed behavior management techniques
   - preventing trauma triggers
4. **Mental health**
   - diagnoses, treatment, and behavior management
   - stigma in mental health
   - common diagnosis
   - effects of trauma on caregivers
5. **Substance Misuse**
   - prevalence and stigma of substance misuse
   - effects on the brain
   - commonly used substances
   - effective treatment
   - supporting family members
6. **Crisis Intervention**
   - defining crisis and recognizing warning signs
   - maintaining safety in the crisis
   - de-escalating crisis
   - processing response to crisis

"FFTA, in conjunction with Child Focus and UNC, developed a comprehensive approach to implementation of KTFC including training and coaching of staff and kinship caregivers, and supervision of kinship caregivers. This approach was designed to provide the necessary expertise to guide staff so that they implement KTFC with fidelity and create optimal conditions for a culture of kinship support at the public and private agencies. TTA (training and technical assistance) included training, learning communities, and coaching for staff and training and supervision for kinship caregivers. The goal of the TTA is to encourage placement of youth with well-trained and supported kinship caregivers, so that the family is safe, stable, and nurturing."

Rushovich et al.,
KTFC Pilot Report



Supporting Staff and Kinship Caregivers Beyond Training

The training for both staff and kinship caregivers provided participants with skills and knowledge needed to work in partnership to support the child/youth placed in the home. Training also allowed both parties to receive a better understanding of the unique challenges and dynamics that are specific to kinship care. In order to effectively reinforce concepts of the training FFTA and agencies focused on providing effective coaching and consultation to both the staff and the families participating in the pilot.



Reinforcing Concepts from Training

FFTA Provided the Following to Staff

1. Ongoing learning communities with their partner pairs that reinforced concepts from original training
2. Coaching sessions with their partner pair to process learning community/ strengths/barriers
3. Case consultations to process individual cases and apply concepts
4. Participation in partner meetings to reinforce concepts from training, learning community and coaching

Private Agencies Provided the Following to Caregivers

1. Weekly consultation and coaching that emphasized the training concepts
2. Skill building activities to support skills learned in training
3. Ongoing support and crisis response

By prioritizing agency culture, developing training for staff working with kin and developing training for kinship caregivers, FFTA was successful with implementing KTFC. KTFC pilot agencies were able to enhance their work in all three areas by addressing the barriers that impacted implementation and through partnership with their partner pair. Through ongoing training and coaching, all partner pairs were able to develop methods to enhance their agency's kin first culture, train staff in the key components needed to work with kinship caregivers and provide kinship caregivers valuable training.

Citations

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FFTA Family Focused Treatment Association

FFTA is a leading non-profit association in North America with a legacy of advancing best practices and advocating for policies that support families in their care and treatment for children.

With roots in treatment foster care going back over 35 years, today FFTA has nearly 500 member organizations, from 47 states and multiple provinces in Canada, delivering a full array of services to families across formal and informal mental health and child welfare systems.

FFTA's vision for the future is more communities, where those who support families feel supported, and all can thrive. We do this by leveraging collective knowledge, proven solutions, innovation, and inclusion to advance wellness for all families and communities.

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