

**Montana Kinship Navigator Program
Montana State University Extension**

Progress Report

**Reporting Period:
March 2019 – December 2019**

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Goal 1: Assist kinship providers in being educated about, locating and participating in programs and services to meet the needs of the children they are raising and their own needs.

Objective 1: Change the name of Montana GRG Project to Kinship Navigator Program (MTKNP) to be more inclusive of relative caregivers.

Activities:

- **Revise and reprint current materials to reflect the expanded role of the project. This includes the printing of informational packets to send to new kinship caregivers, brochures for the general public, fact sheets to support kinship caregivers, postcards, and pullup tabletop displays for use at meetings and conferences (examples provided).**
 - In progress as we are waiting for the new website URL. MSU switched to a new web system and the IT department is working to finalize. We have adapted many of the hard-copy informational materials and have been printing limited batches until we can add the URL.
- **Modify the current Montana GRG website to include the expanded role of the project including all associated webpages.**
 - Website nearly complete but waiting on a new URL. Please see notes above.
- **Notify state partners, local GRG contacts, and others of the expanded role and name change to avoid confusion.**
 - We have advertised on our Facebook Page and through our newsletter. We held a state partners meeting on September 5 in Helena. Heidi has attended and presented at 10 various conferences/events that have been held during this progress report period to spread the word about the expanded role and name changes.
- **Work with DPHHS to have consistent messaging and terminology related to kinship caregivers who are inside and outside of the child welfare system so that caregivers understand what resources are available to them based on their status.**
 - Agreed upon language now refers to families/children **inside** the CPS system as “formal”, and those **outside** the system (no direct CPS involvement) as “informal”. MSU Extension agents and our previous Director, Dr. Sandy Bailey, created a MontGuide (publications through MSU Extension) specific to navigating both the “formal” and “informal” systems (*see Navigating the Resources MontGuide*).

Objective 2. Serve an estimated 300-400 kinship caregivers, either through participation in support groups, caregiver programs, or individual contact.

Activities:

- **Place information about the MTKNP in the Montana 211 system**
 - As of January 1, 2020, updated information was submitted and accepted.
- **Disseminate an estimated 100 packets of information to new kinship caregivers during the contract period.**
 - Since September 2019 we have disseminated 340 packets – bringing our current total to 953 information packets distributed since April 2019 (tracking began).
- **Serve an estimated 250 kinship caregivers through local support groups.**
 - On track. We will know more once Support Group Leaders complete and submit their evaluations (required by February 2020).
 - Support groups are ongoing in the following MT Counties: Blaine (Fort Belknap Indian Reservation), Cascade, Deer Lodge, Flathead, Gallatin, Glacier (Blackfeet Indian Reservation), Hill (Rocky Boy Indian

Reservation), Mineral, Missoula, Silver Bow, and Yellowstone. Counties not listed are under “review” to assess interest and community needs. MSU Extension Agents are in each county to help facilitate needs assessment.

- **Serve an estimated 150 kinship caregivers through the toll-free telephone or email systems to provide individual services and referrals needed to care for children. An estimated 75 are caregivers of children in the CPS system.**
 - Specific to kinship caregivers, we are currently averaging 6 phone calls/month; average of 11 emails/month.
 - This had been low, however, after each meeting with Regional Administrators both our call and email log increased slightly. Currently we have served approximately 75 kinship caregivers – this is an increase of 290% (from Mar 2019). This number is expected to climb in 2020 due to increased partnership with both Post Adoption Services and Foster Care Licensing.
- **Work with the support group leaders serving the seven reservations to assure they have current information on available state resources and services.**
 - We continue to work with the reservations. At the support group leader training in Bozeman on September 17-18, 2019 we had 3 Native American facilitators register and attend. There is additional individual representation in our State Partners group.
 - Our Program Director (Suzanne Stluka) started having monthly meetings with our MSU Extension tribal agents in November 2019 to increase awareness of resources and services.
- **Write and disseminate a kinship caregiver newsletter three times per year to an estimated 1,000 contacts via email and standard mail. Highlight services available for kinship caregivers in each newsletter with contact information.**
 - On track. We distributed 743 newsletters in March 2019 and saw a slight increase in the number of newsletters distributed in November (780) – an almost 5% increase.
- **Hold a kinship caregiver leadership training in April 2019 for an estimated 26 kinship caregivers that will include legal information; advocacy; and communication when the child’s parent is incarcerated.**

**Note: the majority of this activity will be paid for through another funding source.

 - Completed. 24 care providers attended from 13 counties (Big Horn, Gallatin, Yellowstone, Hill, Rosebud, Blaine, Mineral, Cascade, Ravalli, Phillips, Jefferson, Lewis & Clark, Chouteau).

Objective 3. Work with the six DPHHS regions to inform CPS caseworkers and staff of the services and support provided through Montana Kinship Navigator Program (MTKNP).

Activities

- **Work directly with State kinship navigators in Great Falls and Billings, if positions are funded.**
 - This is not completed – we are unaware of any other hired navigator positions in those locations.
- **Add regional offices and any CPS requesting caseworker to the Montana Kinship Navigator mailings, and email listservs for notification and information such as newsletters, to keep them informed of activities and resources.**
 - We have added them to lists. Heidi has reached out to meet with them, and has visited Billings, Great Falls, Kalispell, Miles City, and Bozeman. Scheduled to meet with Missoula, Helena, and Butte by the end of February 2020. Due to staff turnover, Heidi is meeting with both the Great Falls and Billings offices again in February 2020.

Objective 4: Begin developing an evidence-based rural kinship navigator program. (This will need revision based on the clearinghouse regulations.)

Activities

- **Begin planning to meet requirements for first level of evidence-based kinship navigator program.**
 - Late Summer 2019 Dr. Brianna Routh came on board as the evaluator. She presented information at the state partners meeting on Sept. 5. This is currently on-going.
- **In collaboration with DPHHS, track the number of children who are being formally cared for by kin.**
 - Still working with DPHHS to formalize the process to get updated numbers.
- **In collaboration with DPHHS, track children in the CPS system who live with kin to assess placement disruptions as compared to those who are not placed with kin.**
 - Still working with DPHHS to formalize the process and considering placing into one of the evaluation mechanisms.
- **Follow-up with a targeted 10% of kinship caregivers who contact the Montana Kinship Navigator Program three months after first contact to assess their usage and satisfaction with services provided.**
 - Cannot use clearinghouse standards for the formal evaluation, however informal tracking indicates that 75% of the 75 individuals served (during this reporting period; 10% is 8 caregivers) rated their satisfaction as “Strongly Satisfied” and 25% “Satisfied”. Current efforts are exploring methods to assess usage of services provided.
- **Disseminate a written survey through the local support groups to gather data on kinship caregiver ability to access resources, increase selfcare, and reduce parental stress.**
 - This will need to be revised due to the larger clearinghouse evaluation requirements. We are having challenges meeting those requirements, but in the meantime, we are collecting year-end evaluations in order to hopefully inform the clearinghouse. The goal is to inform the feasibility of a randomized evaluation as well as better understand what programming is across the state.
 - Dr. Routh and staff created a state formal evaluation – Program Manager distributed to all Support Group Leaders. We will know more after evaluations are submitted in February 2020.

Goal 2: Promote effective partnerships among public and private agencies to ensure kin caregivers are being served.

Objective 1: Increase visibility of an estimated 16 partners (public and private agencies) to enable easier knowledge and access of services to kinship caregivers.

Activities

- **We have been expanding our reach, meeting with new partners and updating records for those who have changed positions.**
 - Agencies and organizations include: PCAN, Tribal Social Services, U of M Center for Children-Families-Workforce Development, MSU, Generations United, DPHHS, After School Alliance, Great Beginnings/Great Families, Foster Care Licensing, Missoula Aging Services, MSNA, ECCC, Children’s Special Health Services, TANF, OPI, Washington State Kinship Navigator Program, Regional Administrators CPS, MT Board of Crime (LSOC), Post Adoption Services, Lifespan Respite
- **Update web links to other public and private agencies on the MTKNP website and encourage other agencies to link to the MKCN page.**

- In progress
- **Revise and update kinship caregiver MontGuide to include all kinship caregivers and link to other public and private agencies.**
 - On-going: 4 are completed, and two are currently under final review.
- **Link the University of Montana’s Child, Family & Workforce Development site to the MTKNP site.**
 - On-going; once we have the new URL we can link this site.

SUSTAINABILITY

Now known as the Montana Kinship Navigator Program (MTKNP), this project has been serving Montana for 16 years. This expanded project will continue to utilize Montana State University Extension resources, and to seek future funding from grants and other funding opportunities. Although continued funding for a full-time Program Manager may not be possible at the end of the state funding (September 2020), we will have accomplished several goals toward creating a full spectrum kinship caregiver program in Montana by: 1) Developing stronger relationships with DPHHS and the caseworkers serving families in CPS; 2) Providing resources and education to the support group facilitators across the state of services for kinship caregivers both within the CPS system and outside of the system; 3) Expanding education of caregivers about resources and services available to them; 4) Developing leadership among kinship caregivers so that they can assist peers in their support groups about resources and services; and 5) Updating service provider information for both caregivers and agency/organizations who are providing services.

BRIEF VIGNETTES

VIGNETTE #1: Community Involvement

This was one fun "problem" to tackle! I was able to connect E. with the Regional Supervisor (S.J.J.) and the two of them are excited to develop this project together. This is from S.J.J.: "This is wonderful! In the past we got toys donated from Toys for Tots. We have never had a family sponsored before. I think all I would be able to do is provide sex, age, and interests. I can't give out names. I could ask my supervisors to identify families on their caseloads in need, maybe families who just started reunification/ trial home visits. This is a great idea. Thank you so much!"

VIGNETTE #2: Direct Service Involvement

In September 2019, we received a call from a grandparent curious as to if and how to obtain guardianship of four grandchildren currently in another state. She is looking for the "beginning information" (her words in a voicemail). We sent her a Resource Packet highlighting those areas dedicated to legal guardianship; both Navigating and Advocating MontGuides, as well as contact information for her local support group. Received the following email: "Thank you so much for the help. I have been in contact with the local CPS Foster Care Licensure and have started the paperwork. You and the program are a blessing 😊".

VIGNETTE #3: Direct Service Involvement

Last week we received a call from an aunt in eastern Montana who was feeling overwhelmed at the prospect of caring for her young nephew. Out of confusion she called our WarmLine and our Program Manager, Heidi was able to suss out key pieces of information to send her the correct and up to date resources. We received this small email this week: "Thank you! I will print the documents you sent and wait for the U.S.P.S. to send the rest. We thank you so much for brightening our day. To finally hear someone can help us is a miracle. Thank you again".

VIGNETTE #4: CPS Partnership

A kinship caregiver was referred by a caseworker in the Great Falls office. They called looking to see if she had "missed any resources". Heidi was able to get new and updated resources to them, as well as walk them through legal documents they were completing.

