



## “Achieving Racial Equity in Child Welfare through Kinship Care “

Prepared for  
 Michigan Supreme Court's State Court Administrative Conference  
 "Changing Perceptions and Practices: Addressing Disproportionate Minority  
 Representation in Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Systems"  
 Kellogg Hotel and Conference Center- East Lansing, MI  
 October 6, 2010  
 Sondra Jackson and Sharon Lowe, Presenters



## Objectives:

- Discuss the historical/philosophical basis for Kinship Care in the Child Welfare system
- Provide a broad overview of the national Kinship Care policy/legislative agenda
- Describe the necessity of a family preservation approach to service delivery that is time limited, culturally appropriate and strengths-based
- Provide information about some of the promising practices around the country

## Kinship Care Statistics

### **Who are the children in Kinship care?**

- About 6 million children live with relatives with or without parents in the home.
- 4.5 million children with grandparents, 1.5 million with other relatives
- Over the past decade child welfare agencies have become increasingly reliant on relatives as a first option for placement
- An estimated 125,668 children in the US are in the child welfare system living with relatives

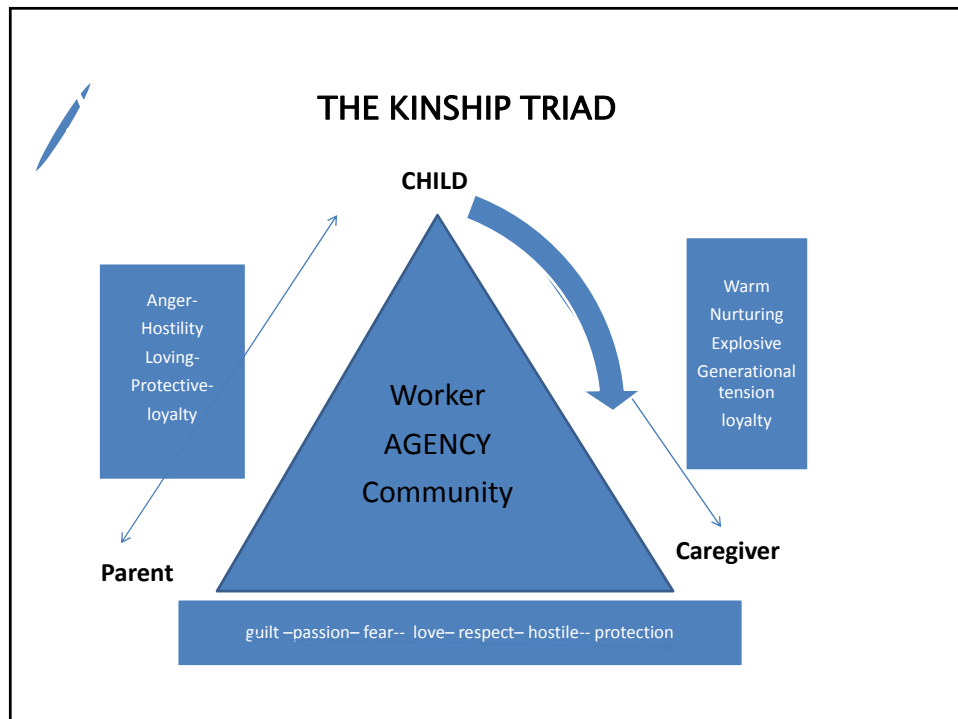
## Kinship Care Legislation

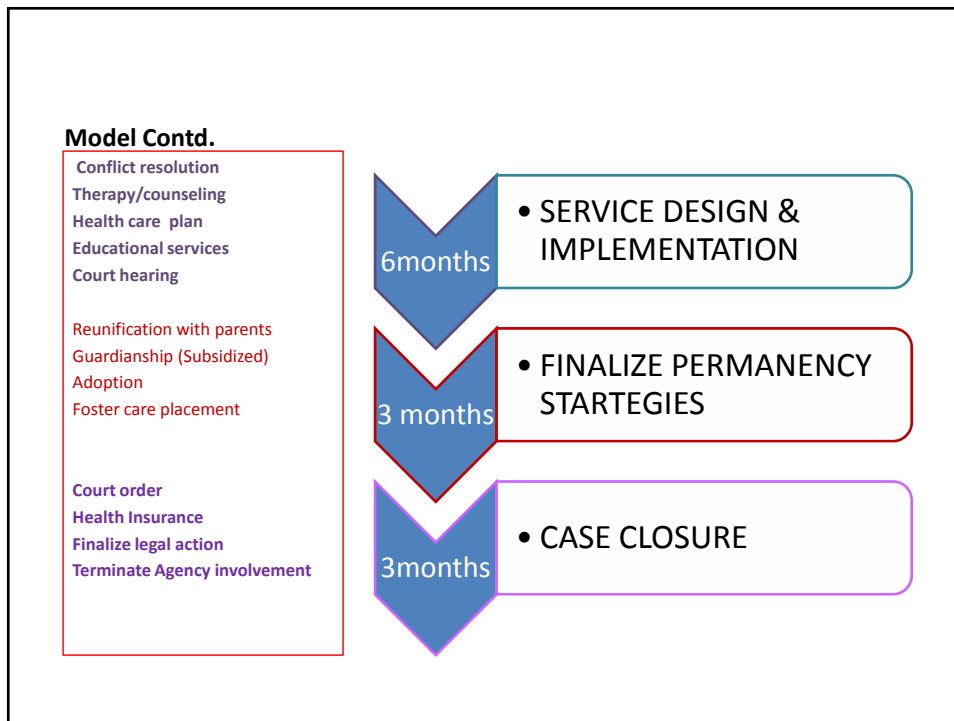
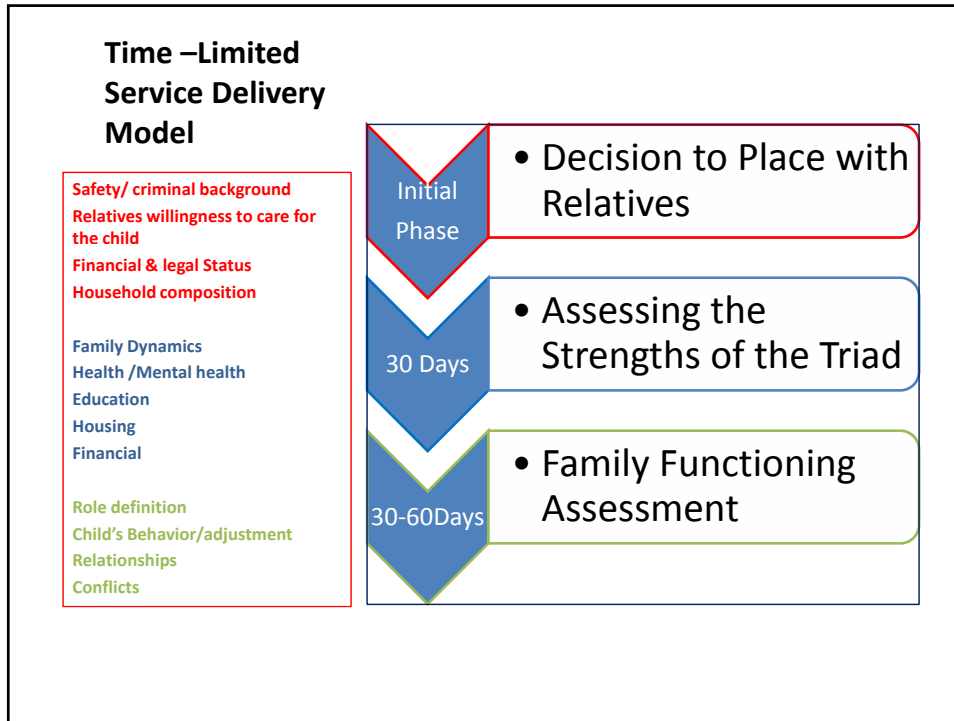
- **Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 Act (HR6893)**
  - ✓ Notice to Relatives When Children Enter Care
  - ✓ Establishes a Kinship Navigator Programs
  - ✓ Establishes Subsidized Guardianship Payments for Relatives
  - ✓ Allows states to establish separate licensing standards for relative and non-relative foster parents

## Financing Kinship Care

***What are states doing to support kinship Care families?***

- TANF
- Foster Care
- Adoption Assistance
- Subsidized Guardianships
- Child Support Systems



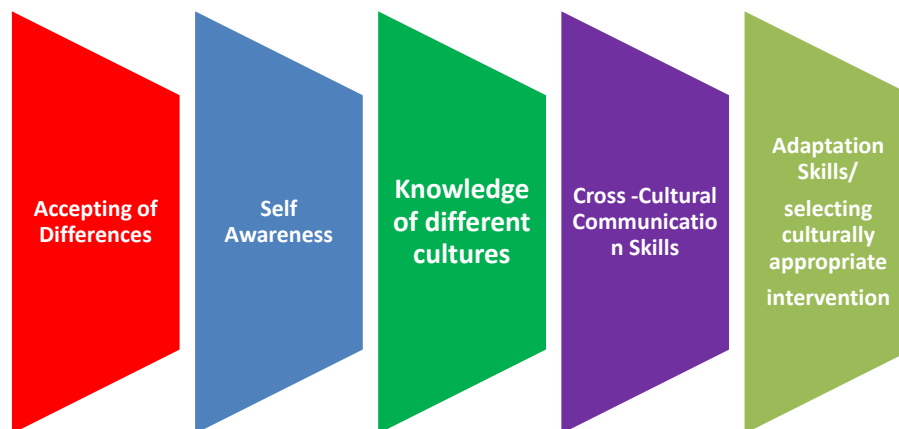


## Kinship Care Service Delivery Model

**What are the characteristics of a service delivery model for relative care?**

- ▶ Family preservation approach
- ▶ Recognizes the significance of the Kinship triad
- ▶ Strengths-based
- ▶ Focuses on safety, permanency and wellbeing
- ▶ Time limited
- ▶ Recognizes the importance of culture
- ▶ Utilizes the extended family in decision making and planning
- ▶ Provides clear policy direction
- ▶ Provides needed resources to the kinship family

## Cultural Competency



## Recommendations/Summary

The needs of children and families must be met irrespective of the type of arrangement that is made for the care of children.

Adequate financial support and services must be made available to preserve and strengthen the family.

Subsidized Guardianship must be recognized in federal law.

## Recommendations /Summary (contd.)

Agencies and programs must develop integrated policies, practices and procedures that respond to kinship families in a culturally appropriate manner.

Kinship care families who assume permanent responsibility for their relative children must have access to a range of post permanency services and supports.

**For More  
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- ▶ Since its inception in 1971, BACW recognized that the lack of focus on African American children and families in the child welfare system was related to the lack of Black professionals involved in decision-making positions. As an advocate for the employment of Black executives in key administrative positions, BACW serves as a resource, support network and voice in an effort to alter and positively influence these conditions.

## “A Kinship Care Model for African American Children”

**Dr. Sharon McDaniel Lowe**

**Case Study: A Second Chance, Inc.**

*A kinship care agency*

*Changing Perceptions and Practices: Addressing Disproportionate Minority representation in Michigan's Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Systems.*

**Tuesday, October 6, 2009 - East Lansing, MI**

## Five Key Measurements of Success (CFP-BSC)

- ▶ Child Welfare agencies demonstrate improved cultural competency and movement away from structural racism.
- ▶ Children/young people of color and their families are safely diverted from entering the system by being maintained in their homes, communities, and tribes when possible and appropriate.
- ▶ Race/ethnicity does not predict outcome of child welfare agency decisions at key decision points.

## Five Key Measurements of Success (CFP-BSC) cont.

- Children/young people of color have improved outcomes related to place when placement is necessary.
- Child Welfare services and collaborative efforts are matched to the needs and strengths of children, families, kin, communities, and tribal networks.

## ASCI's Conceptual Framework

- ▶ Racial Equity in Child Welfare is grounded in the conceptual framework of Culturally Competent Policies, Procedures, Practices, and Staff.
- ▶ *A Second Chance, Inc.*, a kinship care agency servicing over 1,000 children and youth daily, embraces the truism that **every youngster deserves a safe, stable and nurturing family environment.**



## A PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP FOR RACIAL EQUITY

- Based on this concept, our 15-year partnership with Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Office of Children & Youth Services - many years under the leadership of Dr. Marcia Sturdivant - provides a national model for achieving and sustaining racial equity in CPS investigations, placements, and permanency outcomes.



## Racial Equity Solutions: Family & Community

- ▶ A viable solution for Racial Equity for youth of color rest in placement with family members and god parents in their own communities, where youth have the benefit of continuing cultural ties with extended family and conditions for reuniting with birth parents are the most favorable (i.e., Kinship Care and Service to the Triad).



## The Origins of Kinship Care

- African-American youth languishing in “foster care drift.”
- Children and youth fare best when raised by loving and caring family with whom they have a positive and healthy relationship with family committed to safety, permanence & well-being.
- Extended family caring for young family members has its cultural genesis in indigenous populations around the world.
- The cultural roots of **kinship care** have been traced to West **Africa**, Polynesia, Oceania, and other parts of the world (Hegar, 1999).
- Biblical literature recounts widows and children of deceased men who, by tradition, become the financial responsibility of a surviving brother or uncle.
- In the Latino community, there are similar customs and practices of familial accountability.

## A Public and Private Agency Response

- A Second Chance, Inc. was established in July of 1994.
- Allegheny County Children, Youth and Families is the primary funding source of ASCI.
- Kinship foster care/Kinship care is the main provision of service.
- ASCI specializes in Kinship Foster Care, Reunification, Kinship Adoption, Subsidized Permanent Legal Custodianship for Kin.

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## A Second Chance, Inc. At-A- Glance

- Serviced well over 10,000 children; 4,500 kinship caregivers; and 4,000 birth parents.
- 60% of our children reach reunification within the first year of service.
- 22% of our children have closed to adoption.
- 7% Subsidized Permanent Legal Custodianship.
- 4% move on to independent living.
- 3% had their caregivers become their legal custodians.
- Others have moved to a more restrictive placement setting.

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## Services and Programs of A Second Chance, Inc.

- Point of Contact Kinship Care
- Family Services Unit
- Permanency Services
  - FACT
  - Adoption
  - Subsidized Legal Custodianship
  - Independent Living
  - Aftercare

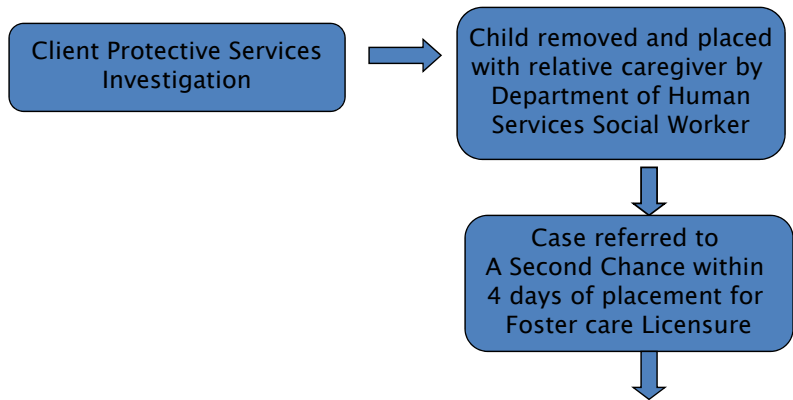
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## Services cont.

- Support Services
  - Mental Wellness
  - Bridges to Learning
  - Support Groups/Enrichment Workshops
  - Kinship Collaborative
  - Dance for Life
  - New-to-You
  - Moving with Dignity

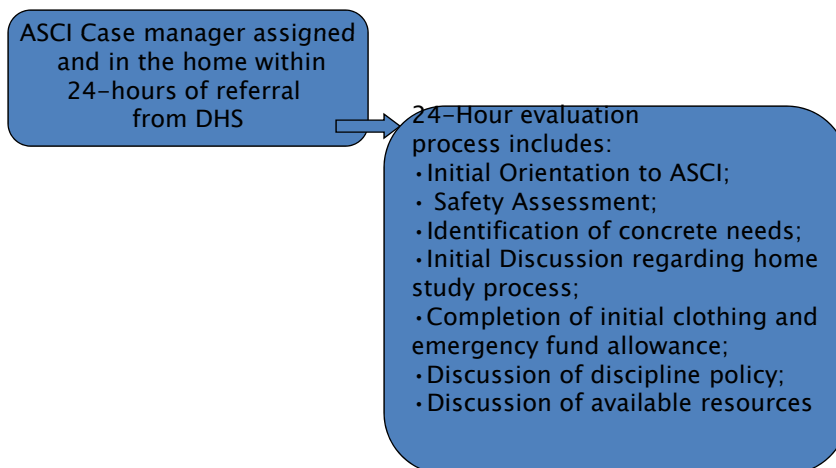
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## Kinship Foster Care Process



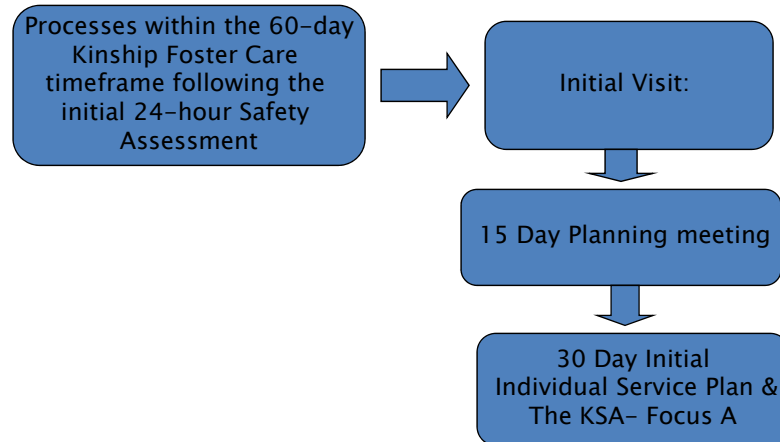
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## Kinship Foster Care Process cont.



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## Kinship Foster Process cont.



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## Racial Equity at the Social Worker level?

### Social Worker Level

- A 4-part assessment tool, the Kinship Strength Assessment (KSA) is administered to the kinship triad (the youth, the birth parent, & the caregiver) during the first 30 days of placement to evaluate bonding and attachment to relatives, preferences for long-term placement, desired permanency goals, willingness to participate in birth parent visitation and other critical domains along the spectrum of family permanence.
- Culturally competent staff that are from the communities in which the families and children reside.
- Trained professionals at every level of the organization that reflect the client base.
- Mandatory ongoing training the challenge our assumptions and biases ( Use of Casey Family Program tools and Racial Equity Material).

### Kinship Caregiver Training: S.A.R.K.S.

- Comprehensive, culturally responsive kinship caregiver training curriculum emphasizing that safety is paramount in kinship placements and the chief cornerstone in building *family permanence*.
  - This original curriculum exceeds state regulatory requirements for licensing relatives as foster parents and is described by most experts as comparable to PS-MAPP training due to topics designed to prepare families for the various dimensions in kinship care.
- ▶ An overwhelming number of kinship caregivers, up to 98%, receive certification as a licensed foster care provider for their kin.
  - ▶ *A Second Chance Inc.* implements a model of best practices with ongoing enrichment workshops to train kinship caregivers in critical domains, including permanency options, safety, discipline, family relationships, etc. with youth in their care.

## Racial Equity at the Agency Level

- Ongoing organizational assessments to challenge assumptions of social workers and leadership via Leadership Academy and ongoing mandatory trainings (via survey of staff and clients).
- Use of Casey Family Programs skill-based tools (e.g., Racial Equity material, Knowing Who You Are, etc.) agency wide.
- Family Surveys and Program Evaluation.
- Modifying Services to meet family needs (e.g., In-home training).
- Ongoing policy and procedures evaluation at the program and organizational level.
- Ensuring legal mandates reflect culturally responsive intervention strategies (e.g., On-site FBI Fingerprinting).
- Mission, Vision, Operating Principles, and Value Statement are posted and reviewed monthly with staff.

## State Level Response to Racial Equity in PA and its impact at the local child welfare level

The use of Kinship Placements as the preferred placement alternative when children are in need of out of home placement

The use of Family Finding strategies to locate family members.

The use of Family Group Decision-making Meetings for every child /family prior to placement.

The use of Subsidized Permanent Legal Custodianship for children placed in kinship care settings.

Strong relationships between Courts, Department, and local child welfare leaders.



## Racial Equity Challenges at all levels

- ▶ Removal rates have decreased in Allegheny County, but African American children represent well over 54% of the child welfare population and only 12% of the overall African American Population.
- ▶ Assumptions within the larger child welfare community that kinship caregivers are caring for their kin for money and do not desire permanency for the youth in their care.
- ▶ Assumptions within the larger child welfare and legal community that Kinship caregivers are not willing to become adoptive or guardianship parents.
- ▶ Foster care per diem to kinship caregivers is less than Traditional Care providers.
- ▶ Assumptions that Kinship Families cannot meet licensing standards across the state.
- ▶ Poor use of Kinship Care as a diversionary strategy for child welfare with no supports in some counties in PA and may place children at risk.
- ▶ No Uniformity in the Provision of Kinship Care polices, procedures and practices across the state.

## *Race Equity Successes*

- Primary success lies in safe and stable Kinship Placements and reunification within the first year of removal.
- Children are placed in same communities, attend the same schools, already bonded with their kin, and is a same race placement;
- Staff members are culturally informed and practice strength-based engagement with the triad;
- ASCI a national Kinship Model;
- Ongoing organizational and programmatic assessments,
- Committed local, state, and national officials to the concerns of Kinship Care.



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