



What is a Kinship Champion?

Kinship Champions are employed by an LDSS or VA to serve as key partners with families by helping them make informed decisions, assisting them in pursuing their choices and implementing their agency's commitment to increasing the use of kinship caregivers. Kinship Champions:

- ▶ Are defined as one or more individuals available to caseworkers and supervisors as experts on best practices to support and help kinship families.
 - The kinship champion is a resource to the primary caseworker as assigned in CONNECTIONS and will work in concert with the caseworker.
 - Have an extensive knowledge of the options, processes, and supports necessary to place children with kinship caregivers and safely sustain those placements.
- ▶ Can assess family needs and caregiver's ability to meet needs of child.
- ▶ Recognize the value of kinship placements and supportive networks and are trained to understand and assist with the unique needs of kinship caregivers while respecting the culture and diversity of families.
- ▶ Are aware of how best to access resources available through the community and the New York State (NYS) Kinship Navigator (KN) and will coordinate with other available resources such as housing, schools and Non-parent caregiver grants (child-only grants).
- ▶ Provide education and advocacy on behalf of kinship families to promote placement stability and positive permanency outcomes and promote internal change to support kin-first culture.
- ▶ Possess strong empathy and understanding of the unique role, needs and challenges of kinship caregivers.
- ▶ Are integral to promoting and maintaining a kin-first culture within your agency.
- ▶ The job of the Kinship Champion may look different from county to county. The following tasks must be completed either by the Kinship Champion or coordinated with designated staff to create and maintain a kin-first culture:
 - Search, engage, notify and assess potential kin caregivers for children entering or at risk of entering foster care.
 - Provide kin with the required notification that their related child is being removed and placed into foster care.

- Introduce potential kin caregivers to the system and guide them through the various placement and permanency options and help them make informed decisions.
- Explore kinship resources' willingness to serve as kinship placement and assess their ability to safely care for the child either in an emergency or non-emergency situation.
- Offer tailored support to families stepping up to care for their kin, including concrete items such as pack-n-plays, baby formula and clothing, and/or information about the kinship foster home approval process, Medicaid, etc.
- Collaborate with voluntary agencies and develop strong relationships and referral processes with community that can provide tailored, culturally appropriate, and relevant services to children, parents, and kin and other kin interested in supporting the child, but not necessarily be a caregiver.
 - New York examples: Kinship Navigator Website, local Kinship Programs, Permanency Resource Centers (for guardians), mental health referrals, referrals for temporary assistance for nonparent caregivers, translation services.
- Provide guidance and support for kin who choose to become foster parents during the approval process.
- Serve as an onsite expert for colleagues on kinship placement policies, processes and best practices.
- Advocate in the broader context of influencing and informing policy and practice guidelines in their county.