Thank you

This Child Welfare Peer Kinship Network and this webinar are made possible by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

We thank them for their support.

www.aecf.org
Welcome to the Child Welfare Peer Kinship Network

- We’ll be having our last 2014 webinar on December 9th from 3 to 4 PM ET on the kinship provisions of the new federal *Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act*

- Post emails to peerkinshipnetwork@childfocuspartners.com to ask questions of each other

- Visit www.grandfamilies.org/RESOURCES/ChildWelfarePeerKinshipNetwork.aspx for:
  - Recordings and power points of two previous webinars
  - Resource materials
  - The recording and slides from this webinar, which will be available within the next few days
Report available at
www.aecf.org/resources/the-kinship-diversion-debate/
What is Kinship Diversion?

- This term is defined various ways

- For our purposes, we mean when a child welfare agency:
  - investigates a report of child abuse or neglect
  - determines that a child cannot remain safely with parents/guardians, and
  - helps to facilitate that child's care by a relative instead of bringing the child into state custody
Why Focus Attention on Kinship Diversion?

- Kinship diversion policy and practice affect a significant number of children and families who come to the attention of the child welfare system.

- Few jurisdictions systematically track and analyze the impact of diversion on children’s safety, permanence and well-being.

- Diverting children to kin without adequate attention to their safety, stability and permanence makes child welfare agencies more vulnerable to legal challenges.
Why Focus Attention on Kinship Diversion? cont’d

- A careful assessment of kinship diversion policy and practice will help states and localities clearly define parameters of kinship diversion

- States and localities must ensure that all kinship care practices appropriately protect birth parents’ rights and maximize the chance for successful reunification

- Understanding kinship diversion is critical to helping agencies understand the full continuum of needed interventions and supports for kinship families
Understanding the Diversion Debate

- This kinship diversion inquiry engaged experts on both sides of the debate

- More than 50 interviews were conducted with:
  - Public agency administrators and supervisors
  - Prevention, child protective service and foster care caseworkers
  - Clinicians, researchers, policy advocates and judicial personnel
  - Policy experts and judges

- National experts were also asked about the possibility of an acceptable “middle ground” in the diversion debate – referred to for discussion purposes as a “supported kinship diversion model”
Critics of Diversion

- Too many children are being diverted to live with relatives without necessary safeguards and supportive services for children, caregivers, and birth parents.

- Children are being prematurely directed to live with relatives instead of providing struggling parents with intensive services needed to keep children safely at home.

- Relatives may be pressured into taking responsibility for children without being given explanations of placement options and supports, including licensed foster care.
Families are best served when children are brought into state custody and relative caregivers are licensed as foster parents.

Diversion disproportionately affects families of color, effectively denying them higher stipends and more intensive services offered through licensed kinship foster care.

Diversion is more motivated by budget deficits and the desire to keep placement numbers low than a desire to honor family strengths.
Advocates of Diversion

- Families are often better able to care for children without government involvement as long as the agency has:
  - considered appropriate in-home services
  - carefully assessed the child’s safety
  - provided the kinship triad with appropriate services

- The continuum of kinship arrangements should be broad enough to reflect the child’s needs, risks and family preferences
Advocates of Diversion cont’d

- “Drive-by diversion” hurts children and families, but kinship diversion grounded in strong policy and good casework can be a critical option

- Foster care means the state calls the shots – there is a power imbalance because the state has the power to take away the child

- Philosophical opposition to licensing kinship foster parents because the system shouldn’t “pay family to care for family”
Supported Diversion: A Middle Ground

Although there is no evidence-based model for supported diversion, child welfare experts identified several critical components:

- **Appropriate risk assessment** – How is the agency ensuring the safety of children who are diverted to live with kin?

- **Facilitated Team Decision Making and full disclosure of options** – Do family members have meaningful input into the diversion decision and understand the full range of placement options?
Supported Diversion: A Middle Ground cont’d

- **Appropriate needs assessment and services for the kinship care triad** - *Is the child welfare agency providing all members of the kinship triad with adequate needs assessments and the right services to address identified needs?*

- **A “way home” for birth parents** - *How does the child welfare agency ensure that the birth parents get the support they need to resume safely caring for their child?*

- **Caregiver legal status and permanency considerations** - *How will the child welfare agency assure that the caregiver has the requisite legal authority to make key decisions for the child?*

- **Appropriate tracking of diverted children and families** - *How do child welfare agencies know if diversion has a positive impact on children and families?*
Research on Kinship Diversion: The Missing Pieces

- Prevalence and types of diversion
- How children and families fare in kinship diversion
- Supports and services for the kinship triad
- Diversion vs. foster care
- Fiscal Implications
- Diversion Trends
Future Policy and Practice

- Reflect on the components of the supported diversion middle ground

- Conduct thoughtful analysis of current:
  - policies
  - practices
  - philosophies that guide policies and practices
Questions & Answers and Sharing of Your Diversion Practices

Mary Bissell: mary@childfocuspartners.com
Questions about the Network

Ana Beltran
anab@spyros.com

Rebecca Robuck
rebecca@childfocuspartners.com