

# Grandparents and Other Relatives of Children Removed From Their Parents' Custody and Grandparent Subsidies -- December 2010.

EXHIBIT C

SEPTEMBER 2011 UPDATE

## H.1.RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ASSISTING RELATIVES WHO HAVE KIN IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

1. To provide more information to relatives about the process when a child enters the foster care system and ways the relative can be involved in the process.

ACTION	STATUS
<p>A handbook for relatives will be written that describes the foster care system process and how relatives can be involved. Juvenile Judge Joyce Warren wrote a similar handbook for parents in dependency and neglect cases. DCFS also has a publication (PUB-11) <i>What Happens When Your Child and Family Are Involved with DCFS</i>, which is designed to explain the system to caregivers with a focus on parents. Both of these can be used as a template. It is important that it is written in an easy to understand format. DCFS, the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), and Arkansas Voices will work to develop the handbook and look for ways to publish and publicize it. Arkansas Voices has volunteered to lead the development of the handbook with input and final approval from AOC and DCFS. Funding is needed to publish the handbook. DCFS will revise their publication to also focus on relatives. (Timeframe: Publication will be completed by the first quarter of 2011.)</p>	<p><b>DCFS:</b> Per email from Dee Ann Newell the introduction to the book is ready however she will need to follow Judge Warren's booklet in outlining the steps in dependency court proceedings and DCFS case conferences---unless her book is not current or up-to-date. She indicated if we had any suggestions they were welcomed.</p> <p><b>AOC:</b> The AOC provided a copy of the booklet, <i>A Booklet for Parents, Guardians, and Custodians in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases</i>, or more commonly known as the <i>Green Book</i>, authored by Judge Joyce Williams Warren, to Dee Ann Newell, with Voices of Children and continually provides it to DCFS caseworkers upon request. The AOC also provides copies of the DVD "The Clock is Ticking." The AOC also provided Dee Ann Newell copies of the law regarding the legal rights of grandparents and relatives, foster parents and caregivers in juvenile proceedings. The AOC also agreed to provide input in the form of editing assistance once the book was completed. To date, the AOC has not been requested to provide any input on editing.</p>
<p>A training will be provided by DCFS to relatives about the foster care system process and how relatives can be involved. It should also include a component to assist relatives with issues they may be dealing with as their relationship with the child changes. For example, they may be assuming the role of a foster parent or the child may be adopted by another family. It is suggested that kinship relatives should also be trained as trainers so that they may provide training to other relatives and serve as resources to relatives. DCFS will conduct several sessions around the state and also at their state-wide foster parent conference and local conferences. (Timeframe: Training will be completed by June 30, 2011 and incorporated into ongoing trainings.)</p>	<p><b>DCFS:</b> Foster/Adopt Pride Training consists of 9 three hour training modules. These modules help prepare relatives and other prospective foster/adopt homes for issues they may encounter when providing care to child who has experienced the trauma of out of home placement due to abuse or neglect.</p> <p><b>69 Foster/Adopt PRIDE series were offered on a statewide basis for fiscal year 2011.</b></p>



A training will be provided to child welfare professionals (i.e., DCFS workers, Attorneys Ad Litem, DCFS attorneys, parent counsel, CASA volunteers, and service providers) by DCFS and AOC on the importance of reaching out to relatives, relatives rights under state and federal law, and how to engage relatives in the process to provide better outcomes for children and families. *(Timeframe: AOC will conduct the training "Engaging Relatives" for juvenile judges, Attorneys Ad Litem (AAL), parent counsel, and CASA at their annual Children in the Courts Conference in May 2011 for judges and attorneys. This training may also be attended by the DCFS field attorneys. AOC will conduct the training for CASA volunteers at the CASA Conference in September 2011. DCFS will have their training completed by June 30, 2011.)*

**DCFS. New Staff Training. New Family Service Workers are required to attend competency based training which is provided in 8 training modules consisting of 3 days of classroom instruction over a ten week period. Each series consists of 144 classroom training hours.**

**Classroom training is preceded by a one week in-office orientation phase, and is supplemented with field instruction and standardized on-the-job training activities when not in the classroom.**

**Engagement skills and best casework practices for working with families (parental and relative) are covered throughout all training modules in this training series. Modules 4, 5 and 6 specifically touch on legal requirements (law and licensing standards) related to relative placements.**

**10 New Staff Training Series were offered on a statewide basis for fiscal year 2011.**

**AOC: The AOC conducted two trainings that included information about the rights of grandparents and adult relatives under the Fostering Connections Act and Arkansas law. The training also covered the importance of kinship care, strategies how to engage relatives as stakeholders, and the important role relatives play in stable permanency outcomes for children in Arkansas. Ann Beltran, Special Advisor to Generations United, presented at the Children and Courts Conference on May 5, 2011. Connie Hickman Tanner, AOC Director of Juvenile Division Courts, presented at the CASA Conference on September 9, 2011.**

DCFS will review a sample relative notification letter from a national resource to see if the DCFS notification letter can be made friendlier and easier to understand. It is suggested that longtime caregivers review the letter for feedback. *(Timeframe: Letter will be included in the next promulgation packet.)* As part of the legislative report, it is suggested that the steps DCFS is already doing to help locate relatives be included. DCFS and Arkansas Voices will work together to find ways to make sure relatives feel welcomed in DCFS local offices (e.g., signage in a DCFS office that lets them know they are important). *(Timeframe: First meeting will take place in November 2010.)*

**DCFS. Regarding sample relative notification letter, the Division revised and updated letter 2/11. Both English and Spanish versions are available. Samples of the letter are attached.**

**DCFS. During 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2011 posters and brochures were mailed to the area directors for posting in county offices. DCFS has confirmed that all the signage is posted.**



2. To ensure DCFS adoption specialists let adoptive parents know if there are biological relatives who have close relationships with the child

ACTION	STATUS
<p>In some cases the adoptive parents are not aware that there are relatives who have a close relationship with the child. Many times these are very important relationships for the child to continue for their well-being. The decision is up to the adoptive parent whether the relationship should be continued. <i>(Timeframe: Training will take place at monthly DCFS adoption specialist meeting in November 2010 and incorporated into ongoing trainings.)</i></p>	<p>DCFS. Our first training was in November, 2009 with Lisa McGee training on Fostering Connections. We discuss relative placements at almost every staff meeting. Adoption staff has previously been active in the discussions about subsidized guardianship and understand their role in ruling out the possibility of adoption prior to guardianship. We have been informed and active about the possibilities of relative placement as is reflected in our subsidy profiles. Adoption Specialists and Supervisors understand relatives may be considered after TPR.</p>

**H.2. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ASSISTING RELATIVES WHO ARE RAISING KIN OUTSIDE OF THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM**

1. Help relatives obtain legal guardianships through the court system by creating a pro se guardianship form for uncontested guardianships.

ACTION	STATUS
<p>The Arkansas Access to Justice Commission will lead a work group that includes the Administrative Office of the Courts, the Division of Aging, Arkansas Voices, AARP, and a Legal Service Attorney to: (1) create a form pro se guardianship petition and instructions for uncontested guardianships of minors; and (2) develop ways to publicize the form through programs that serve relative caregivers. <i>(Timeframe: Form and instructions will be completed by the end of the first quarter of 2011.)</i></p>	<p>AOC. Served on an advisory committee that developed this form and provided assistance in its development</p>

2. The Department of Workforce Services will evaluate the current programs funded through the TANF block grant to determine if the programs should be continued and if programs that assist relative caregivers would be a more effective use of the TANF money.

ACTION	STATUS
<p>A request for proposals has been developed by DWS and will soon be sent to organizations to submit a proposal to conduct the evaluation. <i>(Timeframe: Evaluation will be completed by September 30, 2011.)</i></p>	<p>DWS. Memorandum of Agreement executed with the UALR School of Social Work on June 2, 2011. Dr. Lillie Wichinsky is the principal investigator/lead on the project. Met with the UALR team on June 8, 2011 to discuss the project. Project began in early July and to be completed by October 31, 2011. Interim findings to be submitted by September 30, 2011.</p>



3. The Division of County Operations and the Department of Workforce Services will include as part of their training for staff members of local offices the importance of assisting relatives and to make sure relatives know about the programs that can assist them in raising their kin.

ACTION	STATUS
<p><i>(Timeframe: Training will be completed by the first quarter of 2011 and incorporated into ongoing trainings.)</i></p>	<p>DWS. Training has begun and is ongoing with DWS TANF local office staff. The training has been integrated into our regular training sessions.</p> <p>DCO. Since DCO serves over 1.2 million Arkansans each year, many of the adults have the potential to become a relative caregiver at some point in their life. For this reason, it was determined that the improvements being made to the public assistance eligibility and enrollment systems would both advise people about our services and simplify access. The new features include electronic case records and on-line (<a href="http://access.arkansas.gov">access.arkansas.gov</a>) program descriptions and eligibility pre-screeners with on-line application capability. By late fall we will have 8 mobile enrollment vans that will operate at community events throughout the state and an Integrated Voice Response System is currently under development. The DCO staff are being trained in all of the new business processes so they can inform all customers about the new options for accessing our services. The training will continue to be modified as appropriate throughout the year.</p>

4. The Division of County Operations, the Division of Workforce Services, and Arkansas Voices will work together to find ways to make relatives feel welcomed in local offices (e.g., signage) and to update the handbook for relatives that describes the services available to relatives caring for kin. Funding is needed to publish the handbook. *(Timeframe: First quarter of 2011.)*

ACTION	STATUS
<p>Signage will be installed and handbooks will be published. <i>(Timeframe: First quarter of 2011.)</i></p>	<p>DCFS. During 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2011 posters and brochures were mailed to the area directors for posting in county offices.</p> <p>DCO. The formal announcement of the new website is being made on September 23 in association with the grand opening of the Access Arkansas Processing Center in Batesville. Once announced, DCO will be placing signage in all county offices to promote <a href="http://access.arkansas.gov">access.arkansas.gov</a>. The significance of the agency's modernization efforts is to promote greater efficiency in the eligibility and enrollment system. This efficiency, through automation, will allow county caseworkers to spend more quality time with customers. It is through this process that relative caregivers will be able to learn more about the range of services available to them.</p>



### H.3. GENERAL RECOMMENDATION

1. DCFS, Division of County Operations, Division of Aging, Arkansas Voices, and AARP will work together to find opportunities to educate the public and other service professionals about the important role of relatives in raising children and the resources available.

ACTION	STATUS
<p>Look for opportunities and grants to hold public forums and conduct public campaigns.</p>	<p>DCFS. The Division uses every opportunity we have to emphasize the importance of relative placements. DCO. DCO will be hiring a full-time Outreach Coordinator to manage the operations of the new Mobile Enrollment Vans and to ensure that all Arkansans are aware of the agency's services and our new access options. We are also developing Express Lane eligibility and Ex-Parte renewal processes to expedite these processes with very little involvement from the applicant/client. Since many of our clients work, changes that will reduce their involvement in the enrollment and renewal processes have been a priority.</p>
<p>Education other service professionals (e.g., medical professionals) who come into contact with relatives raising children about the resources available to relatives so that they can refer them to services.</p>	<p>DCFS. We will continue our work to educate stakeholders and community folks about all aspects of child welfare.</p>

2. Dedicate more state funds for substance abuse treatment for parents.

ACTION	STATUS
<p>There is very little state funding for substance abuse treatment for parents. If more parents could receive quality treatment, the number of children in the foster care system and the number of children being raised by relatives would be less.</p>	<p>DCFS. The Division is utilizing numerous substance abuse grants that have been awarded to the state. An announcement on these programs has been provided.</p>