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Kinship-ND program aids caregivers who care for children when their parents can't

BISMARCK, N.D. – Every day grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, family friends, and other significant adults open their homes and provide care and stability informally to children and youth whose parents are unable to care for them. The North Dakota Department of Human Services' Kinship-ND program helps caregivers with immediate short-term needs and connects them to other existing financial resources, programs, services and other support.

"According to the U.S. Census Bureau, about four percent of the children in our country live in households that do not include their parents," said Kinship-ND project navigator Christiana Pond. "The grandparents and other adults with significant relationships with the children who assume the caregiving role make it possible for children to maintain family and community connections. This is important for child well-being."

This past year, the Kinship-ND program assisted 243 caregivers in North Dakota who were caring for 448 children. About half of the caregivers were grandparents.

The top needs last year were financial help, food and supplies, and child care, Pond said.

When children join a household, finding room in a budget for their needs can be a challenge. The Kinship-ND program can reimburse caregivers up to \$500 for groceries, and up to \$300 per child for clothing and other supplies needed when a child moves in.

Kinship-ND does not replace existing public assistance programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Kinship Care, which provides ongoing financial help to qualifying households. Some caregivers may qualify for both Kinship-ND and the TANF Kinship Care programs.

Pond said her work supports a key department priority: strong, stable families, by helping grandparents and other relative caregivers navigate the maze of programs and services and address unique needs. For example, caregivers may need information on establishing legal guardianship, budgeting for the added needs of children, understanding an Individual Education Plan or other educational supports, or connecting to licensed child care.

To participate, caregivers do not have to be working with a human service zone or tribal social service office. Caregivers can learn more at www.KinshipND.com or by contacting Pond at 701-328-1453, 711 (TTY) or kinship@nd.gov.

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The households participating in the program have included children of all ages; 42% of the children were age 5 and younger, 27% were ages 6 to ten, and 31% were ages 11 to 17.

Licensed foster parents who are related to a child in their care do not qualify for financial help through the Kinship-ND program, but instead receive financial reimbursement for care-related costs through North Dakota's foster care program.

The Kinship-ND program is funded through the federal Children's Bureau and authorized in the 2018 federal Family First Prevention Services Act. The Kinship-ND program started providing navigator services and offering short-term financial help to North Dakotans in March 2021.

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