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Kinship caregivers fill a huge hole in Mich. children's lives *More can be done to support those relatives who have stepped up to help*

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A collaborative project of
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MICHIGAN'S CHILDREN

Nearly 60,000 Michigan kids are in the care of grandparents, other relatives or close family friends who are providing vital support when parents are no longer able to care for their children.

A new KIDS COUNT report released today from the Annie E. Casey Foundation calls for immediate attention from policymakers to strengthen this important network for Michigan's youth. Michigan, for example, has no comprehensive guide or help for caregivers to access support and programs, and \$200,000 a year in state funding for a statewide kinship center at Michigan State University ended two years ago.

"Research confirms what we all suspect – kids do better when they remain in safe, stable and most of all, familiar, settings," said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, director of the Kids Count in Michigan project at the Michigan League for Human Services. "There is perhaps no greater trauma for children than to be separated from their parents and the homes they know. Kinship care works to ease the negative impact."

Stepping Up for Kids: What Government and Communities Should Do to Support Kinship Families calls for more help for these caregivers – who are often older and living on limited means and may not know how to tap available resources such as mental health, health care and financial support.

According to the report, more than 2.7 million children in America are being raised by grandparents or other relatives at some point in their lives. In the last decade, this long-time practice has grown – jumping 18 percent. One in every 11 kids will live with extended family for at least three consecutive months at some point before age 18.

In Michigan, some 60,000 or 2 percent of all children are being cared for by relatives—inside and outside the foster care system.

Of those, about 5,700 children are in relative foster care. The report shows that 78 percent of the 5,700 are not in licensed foster homes, meaning caregivers offer their own financial support or kids depend on a minimal cash assistance payment.

Foster care payments are \$426 a month per child compared with just \$158 a month for a child living in an unlicensed kinship setting. A Children's Rights lawsuit settlement requires more kinship caregivers in Michigan to become licensed in order to access services and foster care payments.

(more)

The Department of Human Services has recently focused substantial efforts to expedite the licensing of relative caregivers in the foster care system.

Many family members and friends who take on parental responsibilities with their often-limited incomes struggle to meet the basic needs of children — a problem that could be alleviated with increased access to and awareness of government and community programs.

“This can be a win-win and cost us less in the long run. By supporting kinship caregivers, we can help kids thrive and give them a better chance at becoming successful adults,” said Gilda Z. Jacobs, president and CEO of the Michigan League for Human Services.

The report finds that African-American children are twice as likely as the general population to be raised by extended family and close friends at some point in their lives. Death, child abuse or neglect, military deployment, incarceration or deportation can result in extended family members becoming primary caregivers.

Recommendations for policymakers to help the 60,000 Michigan children and their caregivers include:

- Developing a robust center offering online and telephone information and referrals.
- Creating a strong network of community support groups.
- Continuing with the plan in the Children’s Rights lawsuit settlement that creates a pathway for licensing kinship caregivers, offering them more training and financial support.
- Offering training for court workers and Children Protective Services workers that helps with understanding the broader family dynamics involved with a kinship caregiver.

Stepping Up for Kids includes the latest kinship care data for every state, the District of Columbia and the nation. This information is available at www.aecf.org/kinship.

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The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization whose primary mission is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today’s vulnerable children and families. For more information, visit www.aecf.org. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Kids Count in Michigan at the Michigan League for Human Services is supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, The Skillman Foundation, the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan Foundation, and United Ways. More Michigan data can be found at <http://datacenter.Kidscount.org>. The Kids Count in Michigan project is a collaboration between the League and Michigan’s Children.

The Michigan League for Human Services is a statewide, nonpartisan policy and advocacy group dedicated to achieving economic security for all in Michigan. It is celebrating 100 years of research and advocacy in 2012.