

# Kinship Care Families Need Our Support

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**Written by: Anna Thomas**

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**Utah children live in all kinds of households and family arrangements. We want to support all of them in getting a healthy, happy start in life! And that means supporting the people who are taking care of them, temporarily or permanently, in Kinship Care families.**

That's why Voices for Utah Children is a proud member of the Utah Kinship Coalition. This group is dedicated to supporting the families that support the kids who end up in their lives, sometimes in surprising ways.

**What is a "Kinship Care" Family? In short, “Kinship Care” is a way to describe a circumstance where children are living with or being raised by members of their family, or close friends of the family, in place of – or in addition to – their parents.**

A “Kinship Care” household could look like:

- Grandparents who have temporary custody of their grandchildren while the family works toward reunification of the child with their parents, with support from the Division of Child and Family Services.
- An aunt who is letting her sister, and her sister’s child, live with her in order to support them while her sister is out of work and unable to afford rent, groceries and other necessities on her own.
- A close family friend who has agreed to take care of three children, who are as close to him as his own nieces and nephews, while their mother is serving a short jail sentence.

Utah’s many Kinship Care families face some unique challenges, and they often need extra support. Compared to foster families, for instance, Kinship Care families are less likely to receive financial, legal and emotional support.

Kinship caregivers may suddenly need to figure out how to:

- arrange child care;
- enroll a child in school;
- sign a child up for health insurance; and

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- cover all the costs associated with having one or more children!

This can be especially difficult for grandparents who, already having raised children in a different era, must quickly learn how to navigate complicated modern systems of education, medical care, child care and mental health.

Children who find themselves in the care of nonparent family members, or of close family friends (sometimes referred to as “fictive kin”), almost always have endured some trauma that has led to their current situation. That means Kinship Care families typically are caring for one or more children with complex emotional and mental health needs. Both the kinship caregiver and the child need support, education, new skills and financial stability to weather the challenges.

Fortunately, some programs exist to provide support to kinship families. However, the reach of these programs are limited, and kinship families still need a lot of support from their neighbors, church community, local schools and others.

Voices for Utah Children and its partners in the Utah Kinship Coalition have prepared this  [helpful brief about Kinship Care families in Utah](#). We hope to help legislators, policymakers and other state leaders to understand the importance - and benefits! - of these unique households, so that we can ensure that they get the help they need while take care of the children we all care about.