

Key Messages

Kinship & Alternate Care Awareness Week

- September 18 to 22, 2023 is Kinship & Alternate Care Awareness Week. It is an opportunity to recognize the important role of kin across the province in supporting safety, well-being, and permanency for children and youth.
- During Kinship & Alternate Care Awareness Week, child welfare agencies celebrate the family and community members who support children and youth when they need it most.
- Kin are individuals who have a relationship with a child or youth. This may include biologically related kin, members of cultural communities, or individuals with other social, emotional, or community connections, such as teachers, coaches, or neighbours.
- Broad kin networks are directly linked to better outcomes and positively contribute to the well-being of children and youth involved with the child welfare system.
- In 97% of investigations, children and youth are not required to move. However, when a move is required, most children and youth are placed in kinship service or customary care (2% of investigations) and fewer are placed in kinship care or other placement types (1% of investigations).
- When it is not possible for children or youth to live with their primary caregiver, child welfare agencies first look to family and community for placement options.
- Five-year trends in child welfare data show consistent rates of kinship service placements and a decrease in other placement types including kinship care. These trends fit with child welfare redesign, improvements with family search and engagement, the child welfare sector's 9 Reconciliation Commitments, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action, the One Vision One Voice Race Equity Practices, and legislative obligations.



Kinship & Alternate Care and Well-being

- Research in child welfare shows that children and youth who are supported and cared for by people they know feel safer, happier, and have better long-term outcomes.
- Kin preserve critical relationships and connections so a child or youth can grow up with a secure sense of familial and cultural identity and belonging.
- Kinship and alternate caregivers help to ensure children and youth remain connected to their families and communities, so they experience a strong sense of identity, culture, and belonging.
- Indigenous and Black children and youth are overrepresented in Ontario's child welfare system. The child welfare system has legislated responsibilities for equitable service delivery that keeps children with families and communities.
- Child welfare agencies have also observed that an increasing number of 2SLGBTQ+ children and youth, especially trans and non-binary young people, are interacting with the child welfare system due to a lack of support from and identity rejection by their primary caregivers. Amidst rising anti-2SLGBTQ+ hate, it is critical we examine the ways in which cis-heteronormativity persists across systems of care and impacts service planning.
- All aspects of identity, including sexuality, gender, and gender expression, are critical to service planning, particularly for Indigenous, Black, racialized, and 2SLGBTQ+ children and youth. Kinship and alternate care can help ensure children and youth maintain connections integral to their well-being, identity, culture, and belonging.
- Kinship and alternate care placements facilitate strong relationships with supportive adults, improves resiliency, and helps children and youth thrive.



Our Calls to Government

Research has shown that children and youth who are supported and cared for by people they know feel safer, happier, and have better long-term outcomes. It is essential that the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017* (CYFSA) and associated policies, tools, and protocols prioritize family-based care and continued connections to culture, community, kin/kith, and alternate caregivers. Part of this work must involve addressing legislative barriers that undermine the capacity of kin/kith and alternate caregivers to care for children and youth. For example, kin/kith and alternate caregivers often struggle to access identity documentation of children and youth in their care; this can frustrate the timely coordination of supports and services the children and youth need to thrive.

Kin/kith and alternate caregivers also need access to enhanced financial support and increased access to community-based, culturally relevant, trauma-informed supports and services that promote stability, as well as the health and well-being of the young people in their care. During Kinship & Alternate Care Awareness Week 2023, agencies are calling on the Ontario government to:

- **Ensure kin/kith and alternate caregivers receive financial assistance that meets their unique, individualized needs.** Often kin/kith do not expect to become caregivers and, when they do, there is an immediate need to set up care for children and youth and balance new and ongoing expenses. This pressure is acutely felt by kin/kith and alternate caregivers with a low and/or fixed income. While there are sources of financial support available, they are limited. OACAS suggests mirroring the financial assistance provided to foster caregivers by expanding Ontario Permanency Funding to provide equitable, predictable, and ongoing financial support to kin/kith and alternate caregivers through per diems and/or targeted subsidies. It is critical that kin/kith and alternate caregivers receive adequate financial assistance to help the children and youth in their care thrive.
- **Increase access to culturally-relevant, trauma-informed, community-based care.** Enhanced investments are needed to ensure kin/kith and alternate caregivers, as well as the children and youth in their care, have timely access to the support they need. Priority areas of investment include health, mental health, education, and childcare. It is important to note the



inaccessibility of culturally-relevant, trauma-informed, community-based care that responds to the needs of children, youth, kin/kith, and alternate caregivers with intersecting identities. This gap is acutely felt by marginalized communities and must be addressed.

- **Promote access to justice.** It is critical to ensure kin/kith and other caring adults have access to options outside of the courtroom responsive to their unique needs, such as mediation, arbitration, and family group conferencing. At times, kin/kith and alternate caregivers also require legal support and services as they navigate interactions with the Ontario child welfare system and associated proceedings under the CYFSA. Kin/kith and other caring adults must have consistent, timely access to independent legal advice and representation to make an informed decision about the options available to them.



Write Your MPP

Use the message below to write your local MPP by letter or email about Kinship & Alternate Care Awareness Week 2023.

Look up your riding [here](#).

Find your local MPP (and their contact details) [here](#).

Your MPP is interested in the priorities of their constituents. We recommend personalizing your message by explaining why these issues matter to you.

Template Letter

[NAME], MPP
[NAME OF RIDING]
[CONSTITUENCY OFFICE ADDRESS]

Dear MPP [NAME],

My name is [YOUR NAME] and I am one of your constituents in [NAME OF RIDING].

September 18 to 22 is Kinship & Alternate Care Awareness Week. This week is an opportunity to join child welfare agencies in celebrating the family and community members who support children and youth when they need it most.

When it is not possible for children or youth to live with their primary caregiver, child welfare agencies first look to family and community for placement options (e.g., Kinship Service, Kinship Care, Customary Care). Kinship placements can involve biologically related kin, members of cultural communities, or individuals with other social, emotional, or community connections, such as teachers, coaches, or neighbours.

Family engagement, kinship networks, and lifelong connections for children and youth support their safety, well-being, and permanency. The involvement of kin early and throughout child welfare planning prevents placement disruptions and increases positive outcomes for children, youth, and families.



Prioritizing family and community placements is a critical part of the work to address overrepresentation and disparities in outcomes for Indigenous, Black, racialized, and 2SLGBTQ+ children and youth. By placing children and youth with a caring adult they are connected to, they can maintain connections integral to their well-being, including culture and community, as well as receive identity affirming care.

Research has shown that children and youth who are supported and cared for by people they know feel safer, happier, and have better long-term outcomes. It is essential that the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017* (CYFSA) and associated policies, tools, and protocols prioritize family-based care and continued connections to culture, community, kin/kith, and alternate caregivers. Part of this work must involve addressing legislative barriers that undermine the capacity of kin/kith and alternate caregivers to care for children and youth. For example, kin/kith and alternate caregivers often struggle to access identity documentation of children and youth in their care; this can frustrate the timely coordination of supports and services the children and youth need to thrive.

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alternate caregivers, as well as the children and youth in their care, have timely access to the support they need. Priority areas of investment include health, mental health, education, and childcare. It is important to note the inaccessibility of culturally-relevant, trauma-informed, community-based care that responds to the needs of children, youth, kin/kith, and alternate caregivers with intersecting identities. This gap is acutely felt by marginalized communities and must be addressed.

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Children and youth have the rights to be safe, cared for, nurtured, and maintain connections with their extended family and community. Please join me in advocating for enhanced supports and services for kinship by lending your voice at Queen's Park.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]

[ADDRESS + POSTAL CODE]

[CONTACT INFO]

