

Return on Investment

KARE Family Center—Tucson, Arizona



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The **KARE Center** logo is a drawing called “The Long Journey Home” by artist Leonard Chana.

The drawing represents Chana’s memory of being raised by his own grandmother and extended family. For him, elders were the stability of the community, standing on solid ground as they welcome back the children who stray so far from home.

The grandmother’s wisdom is represented by dark moons, and the bright innocence of the children is represented by the suns.

The drawing now stands as the KARE Center’s interpretation of the place of elders and kin in a child’s life.



The Kinship Adoption Resource and Education (KARE)

Family Center located in Tucson, Arizona is an all-inclusive center for grandparents, relatives and adoptive parents caring for children under the age of 18. It is one of only a few large multiresource models in the country.

The mission of the KARE Family Center is “To provide and enhance the safety, stability and well-being of kinship and adoptive families through education, advocacy and community collaboration.”



Arizona’s Children Association helps create and sustain a healthy family environment.



Casey Family Programs’ mission is to provide and improve—and ultimately to prevent the need for—foster care.

For more information: kares@arizonaschildren.org or contact the KARE Family Center, 4710 E. 29th Street, Building #7, Tucson, Arizona 85711. 520.323.4476.

KARE Family Center, Tucson, Arizona

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

“To provide and enhance the safety, stability and well-being of kinship and adoptive families through education, advocacy and community collaboration.”

INTRODUCTION

The Kinship Adoption Resource and Education (KARE) Family Center in Tucson, Arizona, is a one-stop multiservice center, where grandparents and other relatives caring for children, as well as people with adoptive children, receive support and services to help raise children successfully. KARE, established in 2002, is the first such “kinship and adoption” center in Arizona, and one of only a handful of multiservice kinship centers in the country. KARE is a program of Arizona’s Children Association, Casey Family Programs, and many other collaborators, including Pima Council on Aging, the Pima County Cooperative Extension and the Department of Economic Security. There are also KARE support services in Phoenix, Prescott, Flagstaff, Yuma, and Apache Junction, Arizona. This report reflects the data and outcomes of services in Tucson.

The goal of the Center, as agreed by the collaborative partners, is to prevent children from entering foster care and ensuring that every child has a safe, permanent family.

The partners believe that current funding policies regarding kinship families can be targeted to fund and support (1) children already in foster care and living with relatives, and (2) children living with relatives not in the foster care system. Both strategies reduce costs to public child welfare agencies and juvenile courts. Savings from the reduced numbers of children in foster care ought to be reinvested in programs that keep children out of the system and in their neighborhoods and communities. This report describes how targeted reinvestment will produce sustained outcomes provided by KARE.

“KARE has helped me in so many ways to navigate systems and acquire services for my grandson.”

— Jessie Hetherington, Informal Caregiver



KINSHIP SERVICES AND DATA

Since opening in 2002, KARE has served 5,480 families or about 940 new families annually.

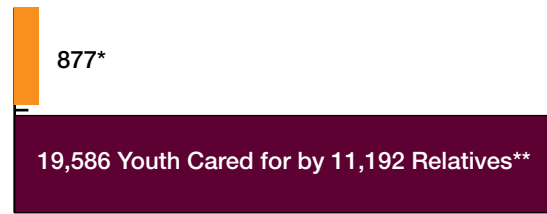
The Center serves kinship families in harmony with the definition of kinship care put forward by the Child Welfare League of America: “The full time care, nurturing and protection of children by relatives, members of their tribes, godparents, stepparents or any adult who has a kinship bond with a child.” KARE also serves families who have adopted children, including non-related children adopted out of the foster care system, or relative families in an adoption process with the state or the courts.



Arizona



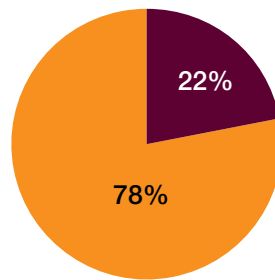
 Kinship Foster Care Youth
 Youth in Kinship Care in General Population



Pima County



 Kinship Foster Care Youth
 Youth in Kinship Care in General Population

KARE Service Population



 Children Not In Foster Care***
 Children In Foster Care***

KARE Intake Data, 12.2006

KARE serves an ethnically diverse population:

- » 43 percent Hispanic/Latino (5-10 percent are monolingual in Spanish)
- » 37 percent European American
- » 12 percent African American
- » 4 percent Native American (Tohono O’odham, Yaqui, Dine and others) and
- » 4 percent of multi-ethnic origin.

All core services are offered in English and Spanish.

“We must teach our children the way to go home again.”
—Leonard Chana, Tohono O’odham Artist

Source

* March 2008 DES Child Welfare Report

** 2006 US Census Bureau Grandparents Responsible for Grandchildren and adding 15 percent for other relatives.

Note: June 2008 DES Child Welfare Formula of 1.75 youth per family

KINSHIP ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

The percentage of children being raised by relatives in the United States has increased since 1990. The increase in some states, including Arizona, has been exponential. According to the U.S. Population Survey of 2002, about 20 percent of the children cared for by relatives were in formal relative foster care; the vast majority, 80 percent, were in the care of relatives not involved with state custody.

According to the Urban Institute, while child welfare agencies traditionally work with foster parents having no relation to the children in their care, over the past 15 years agencies have increasingly relied on relatives. Today, both by mandate and best practice trends, almost all child welfare organizations consider kin to be the first placement choice. Typically one-third of children in state-supervised out-of-home placements are placed with relatives (R. Geen, “Foster Children Placed with Relatives Often Receive Less Government Help,” 2003). These children, however, are often placed in relative homes that are “non-licensed” and thus do not access the kind of payments, medical services and other supports universally enjoyed by licensed foster care providers. This lack of support is exacerbated by the finding that many relative caregivers are grandparents living on fixed incomes.

According to Geen (“The Evolution of Kinship Care Policy and Practice,” 2004) “The links between payment and licensure, and the haphazard evolution of licensing policies and practices, complicate efforts to provide fair or uniform compensation for kin caregivers. Kinship caregivers receive less supervision and fewer services than non-kin caregivers, thus kin may not receive the support they need to nurture and protect the children in their care, *even though their needs for support may be greater.*”

Federal policies regarding services and supports to kin families have been limited until very recently; 80 percent of children in kinship care nationally are cared for as a private family decision without formal court involvement or services from the child welfare system. In Tucson, KARE’s services are directed to these 80 percent, while maintaining close collaboration with custodial institutions such as Child Protective Services (CPS) and the county Juvenile Court.

KARE’s mission is to provide basic services to keep families stable. Generally, that help is directed at the much larger proportion of “private” or “informal” kinship families who have no service eligibility through the state. These children and families need the same services as those in the formal foster care population. In Pima County, the public agencies, especially Child Protective Services (CPS), have recently come to rely significantly on KARE to help support kinship families under their investigation and/or ongoing supervision.

“The KARE Center keeps children from entering our foster care system, that’s why we need KARE in our community.”

—Honorable Suzanna Cuneo, Juvenile Court Commissioner

A recent significant rise in out-of-home placements in Pima County may account for the corresponding sudden spike in CPS referrals to KARE. From September 2007 through August 2008, fully 45 percent of all kinship referrals to KARE have come from Pima County CPS case managers directing that clients seek services, such as guardianship and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) from KARE, rather than providing that assistance themselves. These referrals reflect a 150 percent increase from 2006, the last year for which referral data were available.

Cost Analysis

The State of Arizona Department of Economic Security indicates that the average 2007 payment to a foster home was \$1,004 per month or \$12,048 per year. The estimated costs of case management, ancillary (non-medical) and administrative costs add an additional \$6,000 per year to the cost of foster care and yield an annual per child cost of approximately \$18,048.

KARE services cost an average of \$381 per child. Additionally, slightly less than 40 percent of the relative caregivers qualified for and received a TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) payment from federal and state funds. When the average KARE Family Center cost is added to the TANF payments of \$267 per month or \$3,204 annually, the annual cost per child served is \$3,585.

In 2007, KARE served 2,100 children. About 30 percent (630) were in court supervised care and living with relatives (some who may become licensed as a foster home). The other 70 percent or at least 1,470 children served by KARE did not enter foster care.

Relative caregivers frequently report that KARE services are the principal reason they remain able to provide informal kinship placements. If KARE services helped prevent formal foster care placements in just 1 in 5 of the 1,470 informal kinship children served by KARE, the savings or avoided costs in Pima County are more than \$4.2 million each year.

Most of these referred families do not go on to become involved in regular foster care, because their needs are being met through KARE. They maintain involvement for extended periods using support and casework services.

These figures reflect December 2008 approximate costs, however, recent state budget cuts due to the economic downturn may cause these figures to fluctuate.

FURTHER STUDY OF COST SAVINGS NEEDED

To more firmly establish the number of children who avoid foster care and attain positive caregiver and youth outcomes through KARE services, a comparison group study is needed where some families would receive KARE's array of services and other families would receive the typical services. However, we believe that the placement avoidance estimates provided in the cost analysis are conservative. The estimates are based on conversations with kinship caregivers and public child welfare agency caseworkers and administrators.

KARE APPROACH

The KARE approach reflects the reality that kinship care is growing both nationally and in Arizona. Tools are needed to keep children safe, stable and well nurtured. The KARE Family Center approach is based in part on adult education principles and serves to strengthen the skill sets of adult caregivers so they may help children safely recover from wounds of abuse and neglect experienced in removal from birth homes. KARE also focuses on supporting youth in developing their personal cultural identity and successfully transitioning to adulthood. KARE is based on a community center model. The Center is viewed as a refuge by families who frequently drop in to speak with staff, read a book, or obtain resources.

“KARE is a positive engine that helps me, as a grandparent raising two grandchildren, to find many needed resources.”

—Mary Brooks, Formal Caregiver

Access to services at KARE is *voluntary* and is on an open entry-and-exit basis. Families are welcome to self-select into a multitude of services on an as-needed basis. KARE welcomes families through all of their development processes and stages. Families flow in and out of “case managed” (case management, behavioral health, and senior adult case management) and “non-case managed” (recreation, support groups, community education, spa nights, family outings) services as needed. As issues are resolved through case management, families can remain with the Center and access other services. When children are reunified with their parents, the family is supported and services are available at KARE. Collaborations abound, but, as staff often say, the principal collaboration at KARE is with the caregiver families themselves.

KARE’s philosophy is one of inclusion and involvement. Staff recognizes that the learning process is mutual, and that respect for family stories, each of which are unique, is the cornerstone to progress and change. Staff employs the understanding that no matter their age or their burden, people can and do make positive life changes. People who receive the KARE “basic basket” of services frequently go on to become volunteers, advocates and mentors on behalf of others.

The Center employs a variety of service modalities, including individual work, grandparent support groups, therapeutic groups, art, learning enrichment activities for children and caregivers, and respite opportunities; job preparation for youth, young adults and caregivers; adult education, and multiple opportunities for youth and caregivers to participate and contribute meaningfully in the KARE community.

Staff (Casey Family Programs and Arizona’s Children Association) include: three case managers, two kinship foster care licensing specialists, two senior adult service specialists, a specialist for children of incarcerated parents, an administrative assistant, three administrators (management team), a community outreach specialist, part-time child care workers and drivers, along with a large number of community volunteers, many of them caregivers.

SOCIAL OUTCOMES

Since 2002, the KARE Family Center has contributed significantly to positive changes for kinship families in southern Arizona. The program has remained in solid partnership with the original five collaborators who helped form the service center starting in 2001:

- » Arizona’s Children Association
- » Casey Family Programs
- » Pima Council on Aging
- » Department of Economic Security
- » Pima County Cooperative Extension

Twenty-five other collaborating programs and agencies provide support services for both adults and children, such as the legal information clinic facilitated by pro bono attorneys; a school and community relations office; the Sahuaro Girl Scout Council, Pima County Health Department and area schools that house KARE’s grandparent support groups.

Significant mission-driven social outcomes include:

- » Since 2002, more than 2,100 families obtained a consensual guardianship through the Pima County Probate Court. Families accomplished this via attorney-driven classes at KARE, which resulted in greater child living situation stability and in grandparents able to make crucial daily decisions, including enrollment of children in school and receiving emergency medical care. Prior to KARE intervention, neither schools nor the courts provided assistance for guardianships.
- » Caregivers gained speedy access to the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) grants administered by the Department of Economic Security through a service on-site, resulting in economic stability. Previously, kinship families rarely knew about or received the benefit.
- » Families have accessed timely legal information and support for making significant decisions regarding long-term or permanent placement for children.
- » Children are more likely to remain at home with kin instead of entering foster care because KARE services/training stabilize and strengthen families.
- » Older teens receive transition services to facilitate their entry into the world of work and financial independence instead of becoming truants, drug users or drop outs as is often the case for foster children or kin children left without services.

“The KARE job club has helped me to get ready for the work world and has taught my grandmother how to be more supportive. I don’t know where I would have ended up without KARE.”

—Teen Job Club Participant

DISCUSSION

In the months spent gathering data and seeking facts for this document, the numbers of referrals to Child Protective Services have shown a significant upward trend in Pima County. Correspondingly, referrals by Child Protective Services to KARE spiked 225 percent in just months.

Despite KARE supports to informal kinship providers, Pima County continues to have a significant reliance on formal foster care. The rate of children in out-of-home care in Pima County is 8.3 per 1,000, compared to the Arizona statewide rate of 6.0 per 1,000 and the national rate of 6.7 per 1,000. Without KARE Family Center supports, the local placement rates would likely be more exaggerated. Policy makers are encouraged to examine the practices and community conditions that lie behind the placement data and formulate collaborative strategies that will bring local placement rates more in-line with Arizona and national rates. Such strategies should be developed and implemented in a manner that does not compromise child safety.

“KARE services are the model because they work to strengthen kin caregivers and then integrate the children into the multigenerational family. That is what we want.” —Honorable Raul M. Grijalva, United States House of Representatives Congressional District Number 7 of Arizona.

SUMMARY

This report documents some of the powerful and far reaching impacts that KARE, a collaboration of non-profits, has in the Tucson community. It also reflects the collective knowledge and experience that collaborators bring to the table when they work hand-in-hand with government and business to make the community a better place to live and work.

Investing in the KARE Center creates value for everyone. KARE has a history of creating cost-efficient methods to deliver quality services to reach more families. Non-profits embrace a different kind of bottom line—one that focuses on people.

New federal legislation, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, will keep thousands of kin, adoptive and foster children safe and stable. Increased reliance on kin as caregivers for maltreated children will focus attention on the wisdom of investing additional public and private resources into improving these children's future.

KARE offers, a unique return on investment—one that is social by anticipating, preventing and then solving problems; and the other economic, through saving taxpayer dollars and generating positive outcomes that keep children out of expensive care options, such as state foster care and group homes.

ENDNOTES

1. The AARP 7-06 "State Fact Sheet for Grandparents and Other Relatives Raising Children," state that in Arizona 9.7 percent or 96,062 children under age 18, live with grandparents and another 36,720 children live with other non-parent relatives. KARE is utilizing the US Census Bureau survey and focusing on grandparents who are solely responsible for grandchildren and adding 15% to include other kin. <http://www.grandfactsheets.org/doc/Arizona%2007.pdf>



KARE Family Center Folklore performers—2008.

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ARIZONA'S CHILDREN
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