

**Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast**  
**Advances in Supporting Kinship Caregivers - Part 1 (Rhode Island) TRANSCRIPT**

Presenters: Female Narrator; Tom Oates, Child Welfare Information Gateway; Lori D'Alessio, Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth, and Families; Melissa Aguiar-Rivard, Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth, and Families; Dorn Dougan, Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth, and Families

[00:00:00]: [Music Introduction]

**FEMALE NARRATOR** [00:00:02]: This is the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast, a place for those who care about strengthening families and protecting children. You'll hear about the innovations, emerging trends and success stories across child welfare direct from those striving to make a difference. This is your place for new ideas and information to support your work to improve the lives of children, youth, and families.

**TOM OATES** [00:00:31]: Welcome back to the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. Tom Oates here and glad to have you with us once again as we look at and share the stories of innovations, partnerships, experiences that are happening across the country that are improving child welfare practice and helping to improve the lives of children, youth and families. You know, we're spending some serious time and energy over the next few episodes looking at advances in how kinship caregivers are being supported by child welfare agencies and partners. We've seen over the past number of years the increase in kinship navigator programs to help relative caregivers work their way through the licensing processes, court and legal processes, or accessing supports and services that are available to them. But now we're seeing some growth - growth in the form of additional services and types of services. Growth in how caseworkers and agencies are relating to and engaging kinship families. And even expansions in how states and jurisdictions define a kin family and expand who is eligible for services and supports. So, for the next few episodes, we're going to spend time talking about various advances happening across the country. So, this episode kicks off the series with what's happening in Rhode Island. We spent some time with three members of the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth, and Families. Melissa AguiarRivard is the Chief of Practice Standards for Recruitment, Development and Support. Lori DAlessio was the Deputy Chief of Licensing. And Dorn Dougan is one of the state's division directors.

[00:02:08]: Now there are a few kinship related programs that they've enacted, including a targeted and dedicated FamilySearch engagement team - a peer-to-peer program that mimics many aspects of kinship navigator programs and an overarching customer service approach to supporting families that includes, as you'll hear that team describe it, managing emotions first. There is a great deal happening across the nation in myriad ways. So, we're happy to spend a few episodes sharing some of these through this series. Okay. Learning more about the advances in supporting kinship caregivers coming out of Rhode Island with Melissa AguiarRivard, Lori DAlessio, and Dorn Dougan. Melissa, Dorn, and Lori, welcome into the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. And, and Melissa, if it's okay, I'd like to start with you. And first off, just help set the table here and walk me through the difference in approaching placements with recruited resource families. And what we would typically think of when we talk about kinship caregivers things.

**MELISSA AGUIAR RIVARD** [00:03:14]: Sure, thanks, Tom. So, in Rhode Island when we're talking about our recruited families and the differences between recruited to traditional foster care and kinship is really the timeline around decision making. So, for many families who have thought about foster care as a goal for them and their family, they've taken some space to consider what that means to them as individuals, to consider what this means for them as a family system. And so, they, in most cases, come prepared. They have questions around what those impacts will look like. They have opportunities to

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think through what a child in their care would mean for their family. What type of terms of characteristics of children would fit in there in their family system. And so, there's been opportunity to talk through those areas and for us to learn a little bit about them and what they're looking for from an experience perspective. When we think about kinship, it's different. We know that for our kinship families, this is typically an emergency. We say often in Rhode Island, there isn't a grandparent I know that says, you know what, I think I want to be the parent to my granddaughter or son someday. It's really typically not something that we hear. And so, for families who are a relative caregiver, it is often on a critical basis. It is often really quick. They don't have much time to consider all the questions that those traditional families do. And it's really game time. It's about what do I need in this moment to say yes and to feel successful. And so, those are the, the bigger differences is really time, the opportunity space to reflect and think about effects.

**TOM OATES** [00:04:54]: Yeah, it can be, it's an, it's an emotional time. It's a life altering time for both the recruited family and kinship caregivers, but in completely different ways. And, and while one has time to ramp up and prepare, the other does not. And so, this leads me into something, something when we talked earlier, you had used the phrase managing the emotions first because there are a lot of emotions and abrupt emotions, as you mentioned, with the kinship caregiver family. Can you dive into what you mean by managing the emotions first and then, I guess how it's applied when working with families.

**MELISSA AGUIAR RIVARD** [00:05:35]: Absolutely. So, it is very emotional for our families when they receive that initial call. They have a lot of questions around what happened to my family. Why am I being the one that's referenced as an opportunity to foster or be the person that it will be the new caregiver for the child.? And so with that, there comes a lot of uncertainty. And with uncertainty, there can be anxiety, there can be anger. There's at times frustration, sadness, and there's a distinct shift in role that happens. And so, when we talk about managing the emotions first, we really train not only our teams, but also those who are working and engaging with families around the concept of work with the family on level setting their fear, help them understand what the process looks like through the lens of we understand this is really challenging for you and really managing again, that emotion of shock. We really work through the stages of grief with our families in those initial few days to think through what are they experiencing? How do we work through those areas so then we can get to the side of planning and placement?

[00:06:46]: We know that unless we're able to address those areas, it's going to be hard for a family to really fully able to engage in the process. And for us in Rhode Island we license all of our kinship caregivers. And so, in order for them to be licensed and work through those planning processes, we meet them where they are, which is managing those emotions that are really present in those initial few days.

**TOM OATES** [00:07:11]: With that change, there's clearly new people in the caregivers' lives, right? And we always focus on the young people and bringing them in, in placement and permanency. We focus on the relationships and the environment in the home. But along that you've paid attention, including actually putting in energy and putting in time, between the relationship, a new relationship that the caregiver has - and that's with the caseworker. Can you tell me why that's so important? And then, when I said you put in the energy and the time, what does that energy actually look like?

**MELISSA AGUIAR RIVARD** [00:07:50]: Absolutely. Well, we believe that really the foundation of this work is building relationship with family. And that's really about creating an environment of reciprocal trust. If we cannot establish a set of trusting principles with our families, we're going to have a challenge

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in being able to articulate needs and meet goals. And so, really developing those relationships, we do a lot of work that our teams around what that looks like. How do you work with a family on simple, common courtesy areas such as returning family phone calls, answering questions. If you don't have the answer to the question, let them know, the family know that you don't have an answer, but you'll get back to that family and do follow through with that and get back to the family.

[00:08:36]: Allow opportunities for a family to be able to be in a space of venting without criticism. And just really sorting through what are the emotions that are really raw and we want to work through versus emotions that we have to pay a little bit more attention to because it may impact an area of the permanency of that child. Meaning if there's a safety, maybe, concern that we have to address. And so really again, how we do that is training. It's a lot of conversation with our teams around, how do you build just general relationships? And it's really about customer service. We do a lot of foundation work on simple customer service principles and how do you establish that. Our division resource families works with staff at many different levels. We provide new hire training. So, those that are coming on board to state systems, we do training for them. And then we also do ongoing trainings for our teams around these areas. Because again, it's, it's really just a good reminder for families to, or actually, staff to know what families are going through. You have to remind folks of that.

**TOM OATES** [00:09:43]: I want to be able to touch base on, on the workforce impact later in this conversation, and we'll do that. But for folks listening and as we embark on this series of showcasing the advancements in supporting kinship caregivers, you brought up a couple of ideas of the relationship between the caregivers and the caseworkers. That it's not merely a handoff and a familiar face that you're able to put a young person into. We're talking about building that relationship and building that bond. And besides the actual tangible supports and navigating the system, when we talk about now advancing support for kinship caregivers, I think a lot of folks who are going to hear as we have all of these episodes, that this next level of support starts to deal with - as you talked about just a few minutes ago - managing and understanding the emotions.

[00:10:44]: Dorn, I want to move over to you because part of this, what's happening in Rhode Island, as far as I understand, is a tangible action for FamilySearch and engagement. And that's not necessarily playing just detective, hey, I found a name, let's call them. But it's a separate team, if I'm not mistaken. And can you explain the roles and the duties of that team?

**DORN DOUGAN** [00:11:10]: I can. We're very fortunate in Rhode Island that we have a separate unit. Some of the families that Melissa was talking about may have come to us through word of mouth of a parent or someone that's involved in our system. But sometimes families come in and we don't have anyone identified as a possible kin and making connections for the, for the kids in the family for a multitude of reasons. And we're very fortunate that we have a team of two that are bachelor's level staff that literally can search. They use various search engines they, comb the records, they look for whatever avenue, they have social media, to reach out to possible connections for our families. And one of the things that they do is they call and they introduce themselves. And as you can imagine, folks that, that don't have any idea that they have a loved one that's become involved in the child welfare system may be taken back. And one of the things they try and do is on that initial call, is that's where the relationship starts to build. Having a general conversation with the person on the other end, walking them through and hearing what they have to say and their ambivalence and asking those questions and really helping them process the information they're hearing so that we could get to a place to have a conversation to see if could be a connection for the family or placement for the child.

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[00:12:37]: So, it's really unique in that we do have a team that's working in this area and that's their primary responsibility. And they work very closely with the other divisions. In particular, their ongoing workers, they will send requests and they don't just drop the requests on their desks, they work with them about who should we call, how, you know, how do we approach this? And then when they make those calls, they're the link that connects them. So, if we have someone that says, yeah, I want to be a connection, well, okay, here's who you reach out to and kinda do some of that, kinda almost hand-holding to help them be comfortable wherever they're at and no judgment. If they say no, we can't do that, then the next role is okay. Do you know anybody else that can who may be in a different position for you. So, it's really judgment free but reaching out and it's kind of unique in that it's not just a person's name and basic information and then dropped on somebody's desk. It's really handed off in a nice, solid way.

[00:13:42]: Yeah. What is that a hand-off like? I mean, you mentioned it's a separate **TOM OATES** team, a separate dedicated team. So, what's that relationship between the folks that operate FamilySearch and engagement, and your caseworkers - how, how is that relationship internally within the workforce happening?

**DORN DOUGAN** [00:14:00]: So, it starts with, you know, everything starts with a form in a bureaucracy. So, it starts with filling out that form. But ultimately, once they get that basic information, there's phone calls initially going back and forth between the worker and the person that's running that search. And then there's impressing conversations about, hey, here's what we've got, this is what came back. Are you familiar with any of those and really starting that conversation and digging in to okay, I'm going to take the lead on this and make some initial phone calls, so that way there you can handoff, have a conversation with this person and they're going to be expecting your call. So, it makes it a much nicer handoff than just handing a piece of paper to someone. Or for the family, not really knowing who's going to call them back - but yes, so and so will give you a call back, and this is what you can expect of that conversation. So, it's a nice pairing on both ends, both for the staff and for the individuals that may be considering getting involved with, with this child, youth, and family.

**TOM OATES** [00:15:03]: I'm curious - besides the actual search tools and search capabilities - but I'm really curious about the key skills and experience that you feel are necessary for FamilySearch engagement, because it becomes real personal, real quick.

**DORN DOUGAN** [00:15:24]: It absolutely does. We have two of the most talented people in the positions right now. And what we see with them is this calmness when they're making calls. This ability not to react when someone may be very taken back. And we've had people have yelled and, you know, kind of been very upset, you know, what are you talking about? I don't have a family member, blah, blah, blah. But the ability just to soothe that and help talk through the process with the individuals and have that calming effect to let them know it's okay. You can ask these questions. We realize it's, this is a very emotional thing to hear all of a sudden out of the blue. And now we're not only telling you this information, but also we want to know what you can do. To be able to sit with them and let them feel what they're feeling and then kind of ask those questions. You know, that ultimately, what is it that you'd like to do and have that calmness to be able to let people know and kind of give that permission to say, you know what, I'm not in a place right now, I can do this. So, that's okay. We can circle back and it doesn't have to be a one and done conversation, here's my name and number you can call me.

[00:16:34]: And we've had people that, you know, said no, absolutely not. And then, you know, a day or two later called and said, you know, I've thought about it, can we have another conversation? Which it,

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you know, for that family, it's really so important to allow people to have that space and time to come back and say, you know what? I changed my mind. Maybe there is something I can do. So, it really works well if you have individuals that can take that breath, take that time to give people space, and then come back and say, okay, let's have this conversation again. Maybe it seems different.

**TOM OATES** [00:17:10]: Yeah, you had used the phrase, let them feel what they're feeling. And a lot of, a lot of times we're, we're in reactive mode, we're in speed mode. And, and you just kind of gave a little permission to like, hey, just slow down and let somebody - again, we're managing with the emotions first. So, so, I think there's an appropriate title that you've given FamilySearch and engagement. And I don't wanna, I don't want to just gloss over "and engagement". Why is that so important to this role?

**DORN DOUGAN** [00:17:45]: If we don't engage folks first and hear what they're saying and make them feel like they're heard, it begins to shut doors that we really don't want shut. So, by engaging them, and hearing them and inviting them into the conversation, and being able to feel what they feel and then be able to hear what next steps might be available. People feel that, people have an understanding that they're being welcomed in and not kinda being forced and put on the spot or, you know, manipulated in any way. So, it really gives a different feel rather than just, you know, okay, yes, no, we're done.

**TOM OATES** [00:18:25]: Well, you mentioned it also that hey, call me back if you want, that keeping that door open, keeping, starting to build that relationship that you mentioned. Maybe it's a day, maybe it's a day or two later when somebody calls back and says, Hey, tell me more. And, and, and you haven't made somebody make that quick knee-jerk decision while the emotions are swirling.

**DORN DOUGAN** [00:18:47]: Right. And it's so important, especially because this is what they do. They understand, they're not, you know, kind of checking that box and moving on. They're available to have that conversation. If some folks need to process it more than one time, they're available and they can do that. It doesn't have to be a one and done, it can be a two or three call process for people really to be able to feel what they're feeling and, and then say, okay, I'm comfortable here. I can do x, y, and z. And having that permission to take the time, I think we get better outcomes with that for our families, especially our kin relationships. It really is a nice pairing because they've had that time, it starts you off on a good path. And when you hand that relationship over to the case worker, that's kind of sets the expectation, that give-and-take and that there's an understanding that it's no judgment and we're going to work together as opposed to having something done to you.

**TOM OATES** [00:19:46]: It also points to the value of having a dedicated team, somebody that can follow up, somebody that's going to put this at the forefront because while caseworkers are, again, juggling and they've gotta move, and they've got a lot, a huge case load to deal with. You know, you can't exactly have that, okay, onto the next one. While a dedicated team can go back and can circle back and can follow up and kind of start to maintain that relationship. So Melissa, now let's move over to talk about once, once you've got a kinship relationship set. Now, the, Rhode Island also offers peer-to-peer mentoring for kinship. And clearly we're talking about a program that those new kinship caregivers have the opportunity to connect with past or even current kinship caregivers. And that seems common, a lot of states have implemented some sort of peer-to-peer mentoring. But can you explain how this program in Rhode Island may be a little different than what somebody may think of when they think of a typical kinship navigator program?

**MELISSA AGUIAR RIVARD** [00:20:53]: Absolutely. So, kinship connections, as you noted, Tom, is a peer-to-peer mentoring program. For us here in Rhode Island, it is a completely voluntary program,

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meaning that casework teams provide the information to the caregiver, contact information, and can also do a direct referral to our team. However, once that call is made to engage in the conversation around what kinship connections is and what the support looks like, a family can at that point say not at this time, it's not something I feel I can benefit from or I'm not ready for. And then once that process ends - so, meaning if there's a pause and we don't continue engagement, we do have always an opportunity for families to re-engage. So, at any point in time, they can come back, they can do a self-referral. They can discuss with their caseworker and we can engage them in a discussion on picking up those supports again.

**TOM OATES** [00:21:48]: So, if a family decides to engage - whenever they do - give me a sense of the structure. If somebody's looking to mimic this, what would you tell them in terms of frequency or topics or resources involved in, and what actually happens within the peer-to-peer mentoring relationship.

**MELISSA AGUIAR RIVARD** [00:22:05]: Absolutely. So, it's really centered around the needs of the family at the time. So, the, in terms of what we do for structure, it's really about what is the voice and choice of the family. Meaning if the family says, you know what, I think I want to start off with weekly contact and wherever that frequency of weekly means to them - could be daily, twice a week, three times a week - we will ensure that we have a mentor who matches to provide that cadence that's comfortable of contact, as well as potentially an experience. So, if there are similarities of teammates of ours, peer mentors currently, that may have a similar family story or history we will try to match those folks.

[00:22:47]: And we really then develop the programming around what the needs are for that caregiver at the time. So structurally, again, it can be whatever cadence is developed and it's a six month at minimum relationship. So, families would be engaged for six months. At the six-month mark, we ask how is this going? Do we want to make any adjustments? Do you want to re-engage, consider ongoing support? If so, we continue. Otherwise, we can wrap services, ensure they're linked to other resources in the community. And then we also provide a survey at the end that just asks for a before mentor and after mentor questions around their comfort level in the support they received, and how they are doing with system navigation.

**TOM OATES** [00:23:33]: Any surprises coming out of that survey, though? I mean, just -

**MELISSA AGUIAR RIVARD** [00:23:36]: Yeah. So, for us, we see a lot of feedback around this understanding of the complexity of the system and policies. I think for us, families in the very beginning, it's really hard for families to wrap their mind around what is it in terms of a process that caseworkers and teams have to follow. There are specific timelines, activities. And of course, to a family that is very overwhelming to understand and absorb. So, we have found that in terms of families feeling knowledgeable - it's a huge piece of the work is that they feel more knowledgeable, more well-versed in process.

[00:24:18]: And then the other big area of feedback - it's not a surprise, but it definitely reinforces the work, is just the ability to connect. Us spelling, spending, rather, special time on that beginning sense of matching for families really brings us to a place where families feel holistically supported. That we took some time to really look at their history, their story, their experience, and identify someone who could align with that and really help correct them through, course-correct, support the work, engage families in a way that may not have felt engaged if they didn't have someone who aligned with what they were experiencing themselves. So, that's been wonderful. And I would say the third piece is we often have families - at the very bottom is a question that says, would you consider becoming a mentor? And many

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families say yes. They check off a yes mark and it's really because of the support they received. So, that's always wonderful to see and humbling as well.

**TOM OATES** [00:25:18]: So, let me turn this around a little bit and talk about the mentors themselves because even if they are current kinship caregivers and they've currently got a family to manage, what kind of support is provided to them because gosh, the emotions and the questions that have to come to them. Who's, you know, how do you guys have their back?

**MELISSA AGUIAR RIVARD** [00:25:39]: Absolutely. So, there is a program manager that is also a kinship caregiver herself who supports this program. And really, that role is about looking at 10 mentors that we currently have working with families, and providing them what they need from a self-care perspective. So, there's individual supervision that happens. There's group supervision that happens. We also provide training opportunities. We also offer retreats, meaning that there are opportunities for these families to come together - or the mentors to come together, rather - with their program manager, just to talk through what are some of the themes that we're seeing? How can we support through things like caregiver understanding, helping support the caregiver, and what those roles look like. So, there's a lot of focus on even managing the mentor relationship emotions first, around the perspective of if they're feeling challenged in their ability - if their cup isn't full, if you will - how do we help them refill that cup, refill energy so they can support others? So, there's a lot of time around working at that, understanding that. You know, like anything it can really feel depleting when you're providing that level of support. So, how do we replenish that through a collaborative program management style?

**TOM OATES** [00:27:05]: So, you've talked about clearly the families and your caseworkers and the staff and the team and the division - but again, it takes a village and I'm curious to who else is in that village from your community partners and how you are able to, to bring them in, to leverage them in supporting not only the mentors but the mentees, as well.

**MELISSA AGUIAR RIVARD** [00:27:28]: Absolutely. So, we work with many of our community providers around, really, this concept of being an anchor and it's actually something that I haven't mentioned yet. But it's really what here in Rhode Island we believe in and it's being anchors to the children and the families that are in the care of Rhode Island. So, it's really a core piece of the work we do. We consider all resource families and our community members as well as staff anchors. And that's really what we look at our community providers to do is to anchor our efforts at DCYF, anchor the support of their own communities and how do we wrap around folks? And so, we have relationships with providers that offer things like support groups to these families. We have some community team members who offer clothing closets, if you will. So, it's a office that you can go to and you can pick up some really tangible items for these children that are coming into care and to support families.

[00:28:24]: And then we also have other organizations that offer trainings for us and opportunities for families to come together and receive more of that natural support building. So, we are very thankful for our partners who have really rallied around, not only families, but the department's mission around supporting the caregiver health. And keeping in mind that kinship caregivers are really just such a core piece of what we do. And we need to be able to honor those families and provide them with holistic support. So, not just DCYF, but it really needs to come through the community, as well.

**TOM OATES** [00:29:00]: Yeah. And not just in tangible, yes, but emotional, right? What's, what are we getting on the outside and how are we dealing with it on the, on the inside. Well, to be that anchor, Lori, I want to bring you in here. You're also talking about being anchors for your own team and your own

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staff. So, I'm curious that, to learn how are the FamilySearch and engagement teams and your peer-to-peer mentoring, how is this affecting the actual caseworkers? Considering these are, these are things now maybe off their plate and allow them to actually do the 50, 60, 70, 80 hours of work that they've got every week?

**LORI D'ALESSIO** [00:29:46]: Yeah, sure, Tom. So, one of the things that we have tried to spend a lot of time on with our staff is to get them to really understand and wrap around that, be an anchor, they are as equally as part of the process as all of us are. And I think one of the things that we look at is that we have been trying to really train our staff to have that understanding. Melissa said it earlier, sort of it takes a village. And one of the examples we could say is 50 percent of our families that are kinship providers are grandparents. And so, having staff understand that those grandparents had their own degree of grief and loss with this process. Because again, no grandparent chooses to say, I hope one day I will be the primary caretaker to my grandchildren. Rather, they would want to be those family members that were support. So, I think, to that holistic approach that Melissa mentioned as well, is that really just looking at as an agency, how we can support our staff. How they can be involved in the process. And really looking at every case is unique.

[00:30:56]: One of the model or mission of of our division is that every child deserves a family. So, let's get creative and let's figure it out. And bringing the staff into that process, I think helps, because they are the voice of the child. And so, we look at for, in Rhode Island, anybody can be a kinship provider in terms of whatever relationship you may have. So, it's not only grandparents, but it's those coaches, teachers, mentors, someone from their church community. And so, having that child's worker's voice and advocating for them is important because I think we do come up with some creative placement options. And I think having, if staff quote unquote, have the buy-in, I think we have more successful placements. So, we have been working really hard again with new staff that come in our division, going over this kinship sort of philosophy and having them have an understanding of it, having, we ensure that staff have a positive approach. Understand that grandparents are going to be angry. They don't want us in their home. They have been maybe caring for their grandchild for the last two or three years and they now have DCYF involvement. So, it's really a lot of education. We do these one pagers, so to speak. Melissa and her team take it on the road, is her language, where they're out at our regions working with staff, explaining the process, having them engage in this. And so again, we've really taken a sort of jump all in approach and with the creation of Dorn's unit several years ago and now having some newer staff, I think we're having a lot of success.

[00:32:45]: And so I think again, if you don't have staff support, placements will be, they will ultimately fail because something gets broken in the process. So, a lot of communication with staff and really just training them about this. And for many this is new. They don't understand, they never understood that this would be something that, never thought of the neighbor being the kin, that doesn't mean Kinship, quote unquote. And it does, because that neighbor may have babysat that child for the last month or so when that family may have moved in. So, I think we're doing an excellent job internally with really educating people.

**TOM OATES** [00:33:26]: And, I want to dive into that if I can a little bit, of going through what you've incorporated to, well, to stress managing emotions first. And for new folks, it's, it's new. For senior folks, it can be different in terms of the way that they're approaching their work. So, I'm curious, when you look back at the efforts that you've, sounds like you've had some success in, what were the key aspects of getting success? Because we're talking a little bit of a culture shift here. So, what worked along the



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way or maybe may you want to do differently next time or if you're advising somebody else in another jurisdiction who's trying to make a similar change, what would be those things you'd recommend?

**LORI D'ALESSIO** [00:34:16]: So, one of the things that we recommend is talk a lot about the shift with the worker philosophy, but also having the child's voice in the process. When a child is removed from home, it's a traumatic experience, and asking that child, who is a support to you, who do you go to maybe after school. Are you involved in a team or a club? Because sometimes we will have parents that they're not happy that their child just got removed. And they may be a little bit angry with us. But if a child is old enough to voice that they have a teacher or a coach, or again, I mentioned someone within their church community - we will explore every option. So, it is a shift because for some, kinship in their mind means a blood related relative. And for us, it doesn't. Someone can be like an aunt and be referred to as an aunt, but they're really not the aunt. And that's okay.

[00:35:13]: So, what has worked is worker engagement in the process. The child's voice, when they're old enough to be able to give us options or suggestions. And really just nothing is off the table. We have a philosophy at the department is, we will make it work. We have to figure out how to do it. So, if it's extra services and supports, or if is providing grandma with extra gift cards because she needs to get stuff for her home immediately. We offer beds, bunk beds, car seats. We try very hard to give the families as much support as we can. Not just the clinical support, but the, sort of the tangible monetary support to be able to provide and be successful. I think we've done really well and we have more of our children are in kinship care than not. And one of the things that we also look at is for maybe a child is removed today and not placed with kinship, but with Dorn's unit and within our division, it doesn't mean that they can't go to kinship two days from now or a week from now. Maybe that aunt was on vacation and wasn't available Friday at midnight, but now it's Tuesday and they're back. And so, we are constantly looking for kinship. It's not a one and done. And so, I think we've had a lot of success. I think it's, this success comes from, it really is a buy-in and you have to believe in it. And if you don't, that's where we get some bumps, But, I would think we have more buy-in than not. So, it's a positive for us.

**TOM OATES** [00:36:53]: And it points back to, I think, that the key lesson here and that's, and it was something Melissa said about customer service. And you find a way to get it done, no matter what it is and not even having the lines of formal versus informal kinship care. Just whose, how do you serve the customer the best way you can, and that's, and, and that's the young person. And trying to also support your customer in terms of the caregiver and the mentor and what all the things that they need. It sounds like you guys have decided that there's one thing they need - they need an anchor. And I appreciate you guys walking me through how all of this pieces together with Dorn's team and the mind shift that have changes and the supports that, that come across.

[00:37:48]: And so, I think there's going to be a lot of recurring themes through this series of advancements in supporting kinship caregivers. But having you guys stress the emotions first and not overlook that. That someone's walking into this situation that they didn't sign up for. So, they may be a customer that didn't know they were a customer a day ago, but they are now. And the way you're treating it and approaching it is unique and I thank you guys for sharing. So, Lori DAlessio, Melissa AguiarRivard, Dorn Dougan, thank you guys so much for sharing with us here and for your willingness to take things in a new path for supporting kin families here. And thank you guys again for your time and for your willingness to join, join with us here and share your story on the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast.

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**Advances in Supporting Kinship Caregivers - Part 1 (Rhode Island) TRANSCRIPT**

[00:38:48]: Now, some of the other episodes we'll have in this series will focus on tribal and rural communities coming out of the State of Washington. So, stay tuned for those episodes coming your way. Hey, you know, head on over to [childwelfare.gov](http://childwelfare.gov) for this episode webpage - just search podcasts - and we'll have a series of kinship related resources and information from Child Welfare Information Gateway available for you, including previous episodes of the podcast that focused on kinship navigator programs. And we'll also have a link to the It's All Relative: Supporting Kinship video series and discussion guides from our friends over at the Child Welfare Capacity Building Center for States. You can find all the episodes of the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast on Apple podcasts, Google Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, and SoundCloud - subscribe and make sure you receive new episodes each and every month. Again, my thanks to Melissa AguiarRivard, Lori DAlessio, and Dorn Dougan from the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth, and Families for their time and willingness to join us. And of course, my thanks to you for joining us here, as well, here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. Until next time, I'm Tom Oates. Have a great day.

**FEMALE NARRATOR** [00:40:06]: Thanks for joining us for this edition of the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. Child Welfare Information Gateway is available at [childwelfare.gov](http://childwelfare.gov) and is a service of the Children's Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families. The views and opinions expressed on this podcast do not necessarily reflect on those of Information Gateway, or the Children's Bureau.