

# Kinship Assessment and Support for Kinship Caregiving (ASKC)

The Kinship Care Program was initially modelled after foster care in Alberta. Home assessments and supports were developed for adoptive caregivers, adapted for foster caregivers and then utilized for kinship caregivers. Although enhancements have been made over the years, until recently there has not yet been a specific focus on kinship support and assessment with its own design.

There are unique factors that need to be taken into account when assessing a home for kinship care. Unlike other placements, kinship care placements are most often made prior to the full completion of all screening and assessment activities. Many placements to kinship care still occur at a time of crisis and with little preparation time. Kinship caregivers most often have an existing relationship with the child's parents and there are new boundaries to negotiate; these pre-existing relationships as well as other relationships can change significantly. Changing relationships, loyalties and unanticipated stress are not accounted for in a foster care home assessment. While kinship care may result in increased stability for children and caregivers, in order to ensure adequate support for caregivers, kinship homes need to have a well-developed, explicit assessment tool. Indigenous ways of knowing and being also need to be introduced to better ensure caregivers experience respect and cultural safety. Kinship caregivers are better supported when kinship care workers are knowledgeable about kinship issues (i.e. family dynamics, mediation, etc.) as well as skilled at navigating available cultural and community resources, training opportunities, court processes, Children's Services expectations, financial entitlements and how to advocate on caregivers behalf.

## The Kinship Assessment Advisory Committee

In 2015, the Kinship Assessment Advisory Committee was created as research and practice identified a need for a kinship specific assessment that considers the unique needs of kinship caregivers. The Advisory Committee primarily comprised of DFNA, Metis Settlement, ministry and regional staff directly involved in kinship care. The purpose of the Advisory Committee was to review existing processes and practices and to propose a new approach to assessing and approving kinship caregivers. The intent was to identify program and process improvements to better support children and their families within a kinship care context, and included a particular focus on Indigenous children and families.

- Feedback received from staff and partner agencies included concerns with the use of the Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE) model of home assessments for kinship caregivers.
- Assessment is treated as an event as opposed to a continuous process.
- Provision of supports is often delayed and lacking in flexibility.
- Systemic barriers exist to being able to meet concrete needs of the family in a responsive, individualized and creative manner.

The opportunity to pilot an alternative approach to assess and support kinship caregivers allows us to look at an assessment that:

- incorporates the **simultaneous roles of assessment and providing support** through relationship building,
- emphasizes and enhances the of kinship workers with increased knowledge and responsibility regarding child safety decisions in a team based approach,
- occurs in the **context of the kinship continuum** rather than as an isolated activity,
- is **culturally sensitive**,
- explores **unconscious bias** and **introduces** Indigenous world views,
- recognizes **the role of Elders, ceremony and the knowledge/guidance contained within**,
- focuses on the **caregiver's need for information and support** and, engages the **caregiver as a collaborative member of the child's case planning team**

## Assessment & Support for Kinship Caregiving (ASKC) Pilot

The vision of the ASKC was to **change kinship assessment practice** in Alberta to a practice that it is **more inclusive and supportive** of the **unique situation facing kinship caregivers**. Initial child intervention practitioner training took place in the fall of 2018 and the Pilot began in DFNA and regional sites across the province in January 2019.

The ASKC pilot was grounded in ceremony and guided by Elders and informed by the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. An Indigenous worldview is intentionally introduced throughout the tools and practice, however it is designed to be suitable for all cultures.

A streamlined process, where assessment initiates at first contact and continues with integrated support throughout the kinship caregiver's involvement with Children's Services. This reduces the number of professionals involved with a family, minimizing confusion and approval processes.

Through relationship building, a more thorough understanding of the family is achieved with the goal of increased child safety and well-being. The child intervention practitioner assesses for safety and ability of caregiver(s) to meet the needs of the child placed in their home. Child and caregivers are provided opportunities to express their views and opinions, while supporting worker transparency regarding worries or concerns. Caregivers are included at all decisions points in the ASKC tool.

It is a holistic approach, moving beyond solely finding a placement. Indigenous knowledge of the four domains (physical, mental, emotional and spiritual) guides the gathering of information. A child's network is incorporated and built upon. Signs of Safety tools are also integrated throughout.

### ASKC Documents include:

- Assessment and Support for Kinship Caregiving (ASKC) Tool
- Kinship Care Support Plan
- Kinship Assessment Pocket Reference

### What We Have Learned So Far

There is a beneficial shift in practice philosophy regarding assessing and supporting kinship families for all staff. Practitioners report confidence in their assessment of kinship family's strengths, worries and support needs. Using the new Assessment and Support for Kinship Caregiving model takes time. The process is inclusive of the dual roles of assessing and providing support. Kinship workers are more fully integrated into the casework team, leading to a more thorough and ongoing assessment of child safety and well-being.

The Pilot has been extended and expanded to December 2020. This will allow for a more fulsome evaluation of the ASKC model and practice.

For more information, please email: [CS.ASKCKinship@gov.ab.ca](mailto:CS.ASKCKinship@gov.ab.ca)