

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast
Advances in Supporting Kinship Caregivers - Part 5 (New Mexico) TRANSCRIPT

Presenters: Female Narrator; Tom Oates, Child Welfare Information Gateway; Nicholas Njua, New Mexico Children, Youth, and Families Department; Anthony Beltran, New Mexico Children, Youth, and Families Department

[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 [00:00:33]: Welcome into the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast, Tom Oates here with you. Now, this episode wraps up our series focusing on advances in supporting kinship caregivers. Now, over these episodes we've explored programs, methods, and changes occurring within state child welfare agencies, tribal child welfare agencies, and partner organizations. Now, while we've shared all these different types of improvements that help formal and informal kinship families adapt to the unique and abrupt changes they face caring for family members, we've also listened to how they're working to get the resources and supports needed to care for children. And also to make sense of the new faces and requirements that come with engaging the child welfare system. Now, I'd offer for you to go back and listen to the other four episodes in this series if you haven't yet. Now, in all these episodes, you'll hear a few themes, including that all of these professionals recognize that A.) kinship caregivers face different challenges. They've been given a job with almost no notice and one they may have not asked for. And B.) the workforce itself may need a significant shift in how they perceive, connect with, and set expectations for kinship families.

[00:01:49]: Now, in this episode, we hear from New Mexico's Children, Youth and Families Division - CYFD. We're joined by Anthony Beltran, the acting bureau chief of CYFD's Placement and Adoption Resource Bureau and Nicholas Njua, CYFD's kinship supervisor. You'll hear how kinship caregivers are supported within CYFD. And with that includes an internal mindshift, which includes communicating across the agency and putting new management and supervision processes that emphasize the value of kinship caregivers. You'll also hear about policy changes that streamline the licensing process for kinship caregivers. Removing steps viewed unnecessary to save time and shift to a more supportive process. And working with a longtime contract partner that serve as a single point of contact for the array of supports, guidance and services many kinship families need to create an environment where their new family can thrive. Okay, let's get to it as we wrap up our series focusing on advances in supporting kinship caregivers. Looking at New Mexico's Children, Youth and Families Division with Anthony Beltran and Nicholas Njua here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast.

[00:03:06]: Anthony Beltran, Nicholas Njua, thanks so much for joining us here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. And I want to get right into where the state of New Mexico is changing its workforce and its practice and the culture that's around it. And so first, I want to talk about some of the messaging. And there is messaging that obviously that the state wants to get across to caseworkers, to trainers and managers. But I'm curious to how that messaging, how that communication changed to place a larger emphasis on placement with relatives?

ANTHONY BELTRAN [00:03:41]: Definitely, Tom, thank you for that question. So, you know, with, with Children, Youth and Families Department, we've always had a strong emphasis on relative placements, increasing those relative connections. And so, that has, has always been there, I would say. However, I think over the last several years with some changes in legislation about prioritizing relative placements and connections, you know, I think there was still some, there's always work that can be done within the child welfare system, right, it's an ever-changing system. And so, you know, really, we wanted to take what we were already doing and, and make it even better. And whether it was increasing the capacity of the things that we were already doing or, you know, creating entirely new systems changes. And a lot of that came down to starting what I would like to say is a cultural shift within CYFD.

[00:04:55]: And what I mean by that is really, you know, taking a deeper dive into how our workforce prioritizes relative placements. And, and, and more so than just upper management saying this is, this is the new thing, this is what we have to do. But really taking value in the importance of why it's important to place with relatives, why it's important to maintain those connections. And so, really changing, you know, our workforce's perspective on not only it's something we have to do but why we have to do it. And so that really comes down to, you know, creating an atmosphere within CYFD that lifts up our relatives and our kinship families and really, you know, strengthens the importance of that. So, you know, taking deeper looks into families, not making knee-jerk reactions. Because, you know, we've all heard the term, you know, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree, which I think oftentimes we can get stuck in that, you know, especially when we're assessing safety. But really, like recognizing that there's a lot of positives - and a lot more probably than negatives - in placing with relatives, maintaining those connections. And so it just really started with that cultural shift. Really comes from the top down to the field, right. So, we're talking all the way from our executive management down into the field and into our workers and just ensuring that everybody is on board with that.

[00:06:46]: And you brought up kind of the mindshift, that has to get across - the apple doesn't fall far from the tree - that, that adage. So were there actually anything specific that CYFD was asking staff to change in how they viewed relatives compared to perhaps how relatives were viewed previously, kind of challenging your own knee jerk reaction?

ANTHONY BELTRAN [00:07:10]: Yeah, no, definitely. I think one of the changes that we made is revisiting our relatives, which I think oftentimes because, you know, we are a very policy driven agency, I mean, we are a policy driven agency. But we're also a people agency, right? And we recognize that people change over time. And that sometimes - oftentimes I would rather say - is we come into families lives because of an incident, right, or multiple incidents. It's, you know, our relatives don't necessarily seek us out. And sometimes when we get a child into custody and we're trying to identify a relative, that relative might not be in a position at that point to be able to care for that particular child. And that's okay, you know, because we are, we're a crisis driven agency. And, but just because they might not be ready at that point, doesn't mean that they can't get to a point, right?

[00:08:13]: And so, really not just kind of marking off our relatives when it doesn't work to suit the immediate need but rather being able to come back to those relatives and say, you know, I recognize that you would struggle doing this work right now, anybody would. You know, what can we do that gets you to that next step, right. And, or if you're not willing to be a placement, that doesn't take away the value of your connection to that child or youth, you know, but how can, how can you be of importance to that child's life? Whether it's ensuring that they're having visits or maybe that, you know, this relatives who couldn't be a placement, maybe they can help out with babysitting or taking the child to little league or, you know, being a visit host. And so, and to tell you what a visit host is, is that it's kind of

something that we utilize, a tool that we utilize where we identify relatives or fictive kin who, maybe they're not placement, maybe they are a placement for that child, but that they help us to do to supervised visitations with the birth parents and the children.

[00:09:32]: So that way we take the, the agency part out of it, right. Because we all know, like historically, you know, you have these visits in the office and it's, I mean, you're stuck in this little ten by ten room, it's a government agency, yeah, we might have some toys there, a couch or whatever, but it's it's not normal, right? It's not a normal setting. And sometimes these visit hosts, they can create that normal setting so that families can live in a regular, you know, visit in a regular environment. You know, maybe having visits at a park or having visits at their house. And so, we've even started to utilize relatives for those types of settings as well so that way, a little bit of that pressure comes off of families because they can, they can begin to strengthen their relationship with their children in more normalized settings as opposed to being in a state agency office. So those are some of the things that we've began to change in how we work with families. That it's not just one way is how they can be involved with our agency, but rather there's multiple ways that families can support families.

TOM OATES [00:10:54]: If it's okay, I want to dive into that a little bit because you're talking about kinship and relative connections. And they may not be able to serve as caregivers. But you're stressing this network, like this network really around, around the child. And you brought up the great idea of, of where a meeting or where visit can be hosted. And what's the difference between a sterile office that has some toys versus someplace where I actually see family, my family pictures on the wall. And then it kind of creates that environment. But does that put extra pressure on CYFD to kind of establish and maintain not only the caregiver connection that you have, but now a connection with this wider network. So, I'm curious what CYFD is doing to establish and maintain those, those relative connections outside of just the caregivers.

ANTHONY BELTRAN [00:11:52]: Yeah no, again, I think that it comes down to, you know, there's gotta be some trust with those families and that oftentimes, you know, because we're, you know, what's the way, I'm trying to say this the best way I could say it. But you know, it's very much so, like, oh, you want to be a part of this child's life, you've gotta do a background check. We've got to check you out. We gotta make sure you're safe. Those types of things. But really like recognizing, like, not every situation is black and white. And so sometimes it's okay for us to trust in, in families that, you know, for instance, prudent parenting. You know, that's a, that's a big piece that we've implemented over the years, is really entrusting our families to make those types of decisions. And so, that along comes with our relatives, right, is like entrusting that, you know, yes, we're gonna, we're gonna vet them. We're going to make sure that, you know, the situations are as safe as possible, but also kind of giving those relatives and fictive kin the steering wheel to be able to kind of create that environment.

[00:13:10]: And that it's not so much that we have to monitor every single thing day in and day out. The pressure is, these are built, too, to take some of that pressure off our agency so that workers aren't burning out because they've got to monitor all these different visits and they've gotta do A, B and C, X, Y, and Z. But really like to, by creating those extended networks I think it also makes the work a little bit - I wouldn't say easier - but it also creates a network for us to like, it's not, it's not only about the families, but also like our agency. Like because we, we're creating a better system altogether. And so, in theory, this should take some of the stress off. I don't know if that answered your question or not, Tom.

TOM OATES [00:14:01]: Well, it does and if we talk about like, the workforce in general, we've just discussed some of the mind shifts or the approaches in dealing with and working with families and

caregivers and relatives. But you talked about a little bit of the structure of the workforce itself. So, in terms of supporting kinship caregivers and advancing the way that the state is engaging with families, I'm curious then as you get into the workforce conversation, the actual workforce conversation, this also has to change a little bit about how staff are managed, how they're supervised, what those procedures are. I'm curious to what changes may have occurred to that day-to-day supervision and management procedures that were going on.

ANTHONY BELTRAN [00:14:47]: Yeah. No, definitely. You know, over the course of the last two years, we've actually began and we have implemented a new supervisory framework platform that we utilize for supervision. And it's really going from changing supervision as one of those things where okay, here's our monthly supervision. We're going to staff cases. Let's go down the list. But more about how are we building capacity in those workers. And one of those things is like, you know, trying to create an atmosphere and supervision where workers can more regularly reflect on some of the decisions that they have to make and some of the decisions that they they have made. And maybe looking back at like could some of those things be done a little differently? And I think, you know, of course that that covers a lot better area than just relatives. But that's a big part, is helping, helping workers to think differently and reflect in supervision. And also looking at personal biases. That's a big part of the supervisory framework is looking at some of the ways that, you know, the things within us that make some, you know, that, that we make decisions based off of and helping to recognize that.

[00:16:20]: I think that plays a real critical role when we're looking at working with relatives and fictive kin is because we have those conscious and unconscious biases that, that live within us. And so, having a platform, a supervision session that helps us to really dive into that, I think has tremendously helped our staff. And that's what we're hearing with staff is like, supervision is more reflective and it means more to us because we're really getting down to like, you know, the why's in supervisions as opposed to just the what we have to do. So, so that is, I would say, the biggest thing that we've changed over the last couple years to help change that framework within supervision. And, and it creates accountability on both ends, you know, from the supervisor and the worker, you know, having buy-ins during those supervision sessions as opposed to maybe being one-sided where a supervisor historically has just said, okay, let's do supervision. These are the things that you need to do, right? And, but more that it's like it's a, it's a give-and-take between the two parties. And it's going to, it also is going to help build capacity for our supervisors who can really see what their workers need and how they can overcome some of these maybe issues that they might have or that they're struggling with, with the work that they're doing, including the work with relatives, fictive kin. But to really like, you know, have that additional support.

TOM OATES [00:17:56]: It's the environment and this planting the seeds for change, right? And when, when I've heard business organization leaders talk about change, they talk about people, processes, and tools. And, Nicholas, I don't want to leave you out of this because we've gone through a lot of what we're doing in terms of the mindset of the people. But I'm curious to what the tools that may have been introduced to help support all of this shift. What's been new that has been implemented across the state?

NICHOLAS NJUA [00:18:31]: I think like Anthony rightly said just the fact that the supervisory framework was introduced, most supervisors make use of this framework and that's what they implement in their supervisory practice. This has helped to build capacity and bring supervisors closer to the workers out there in the field. And in fact, like Anthony said, it's not like the supervisor saying you, this is your job description, this is what you have to do, but it's something that actually is a conversation between the two to see how they can best implement the objectives of their unit or department. So, in this case, in

my situation it was the kinship and adoptions unit. In my supervisor practice, I have like both individual supervisions with the kinship specialists or the adoptions specialist, and at the same time, I have a unit supervision where each and everyone explains and provides, gives, contribute in what they feel is best for the unit or department to move forward. And the supervisory practice framework actually has like, it has a tabulated kind of principles that have to be utilized during supervision and that is only one way to help build capacity of both the supervisors and the workers.

ANTHONY BELTRAN [00:20:08]: You know, and I would just add to something Nicholas said when he was talking about his unit staffings. I think that's also another big part of this framework is that we're utilizing group staffings to help build capacity with our workers because they actually get to coordinate their efforts with other workers who were doing similar duties as them and to really utilize each other as mentors. And, you know, help to strengthen that unit. And get some consistency too. Because, you know, that's I mean, you can have one great worker who's out there, just rockin' it, doing what they need to do. But then you might have a newer worker who is, maybe they don't have the experience or you know, maybe they, they struggle with some of the work. And so, being able to like connect those workers as well and, and creating that culture within their own units so that they're supporting one another, I think is really important as well.

TOM OATES [00:21:14]: Well, I talked about, like you've just mentioned, we've been discussing the people a little bit on the tools, but the processes and procedures - Anthony, you said it when we first started talking - this is a policy and procedure based agency. And though adhering to the policies and the procedures sometimes becomes a fall back, but then again, policies and procedures can help also implement change if they're directed in the right way. And when you're talking about a state that is working with kinship caregivers and you're maybe working towards getting them licensed, we talked about the workforce change, but I'm curious to the policy changes that have helped streamline the licensing process for kinship caregivers, what has been done at that level?

ANTHONY BELTRAN [00:22:00]: Great. Great. Yeah, so, one of the biggest things is that we, we wanted to hear from our relatives and our fictive kin on some of the strengths and weaknesses within our agency. And one of those was, you know, licensing, you know, we heard from families that, you know, the licensing process was hard. It was, you know, it created more stress in their lives because they had to do so many of these things to care for their relatives who they were already committed to it, that was never in question. But then they had to jump through all these hoops, right. And so we listened to them. We, we heard what about the process works, what doesn't work, what they felt was unnecessary in looking at licensing. Because one of the things with our department is we have licensing standards that cover all families regardless of whether they're relative, fictive kin or our community resource homes. And so, everybody has to go through the same process, same training, same home study, everything.

[00:23:14]: And so, what we did was we created a work group that was focused on relative and fictive kin licensing. And so we, we really took a deep dive into that to see, you know, what, what items within our licensing standards are necessary for us to ensure the safety and well-being of children that are being placed with relatives and fictive kin. And what items can we, you know, maybe take out. And one of the biggest things was the home study assessment itself. So, you know, I don't know if you all are familiar with safe home study, it's a home study format that we use. It's a nationally recognized assessment tool. And, you know, this is a tool that many agencies throughout the nation utilize. But that's our home study assessment. And so what families were finding was that it was very intrusive. There was a lot of questions within that assessment that we asked families that they didn't feel was

important, you know, in us being able to really assess whether or not they could safely care for the children.

[00:24:29]: And end just to kinda give a little bit on that. Like, this is the same kind of assessment that's used for like, private adoption agencies. You know, where yeah, they really dive into a lot of that. But with relatives, they're like this is, do you really need this information to determine if I'm, if I can care for my relatives? And so, we looked at that and so we came up with our own relative assessment, which we're, you know, we haven't finalized yet, but we're hoping in the coming months we're going to be implementing that. And so, we took all the fluff out of it and really focused on the information that we needed in order to give a good comprehensive safety assessment. And what we realized is we really didn't need all that fluff. We didn't need to ask all these questions. Like a lot of these questions that we had to ask, you know, it didn't change one way or the other, you know. And so we created that.

[00:25:30]: Additionally, we looked at licensing standards and we created - one, we, because the assessment was a shortened document meant that we could actually shorten the time frame towards full licensure for families. So as, you know, currently, families have to go through the licensing process within 60 days. Now it's 30 days. And, and really it's a lot of the pressure is taken off of the families because what needs to happen within those 30 days are things that our agency needs to get done as opposed to what the families need to get done. We've also created waivers within our licensing standards. So, basically anything that is non-safety can be looked at and waived as a standard that we can waive in order to get the family fully licensed. So, for instance, you know, you've, we've got our pre-service training. Families would have to get that done - which was 32 hours of pre-service training - they had to get that done within that short amount of time, that 60 days. And oftentimes families were, you know, they were struggling to get training completed.

[00:26:47]: And so, we've created an opportunity where we can, you know, waive those time-frames to complete the training and that it's not gonna, you know, create an issue where we can't license the family because they didn't get the training done. But we can say we're going to waive that time-frame. We're still going to go through all the other steps and, you know, we'll get the training done when we get the training done, right, but it takes some of that pressure off. Because we also have to recognize that a lot of times these families didn't come to us. We came to them. You know, we're asking them to do these things. It's a lot different when it's a community resource parent who has spent the last several years really thinking about whether or not they want to become a resource parent and preparing themselves for it. Versus a relative who gets a call in the middle of the night and says, can you care for your grandchild? You know, we need, we need to place this child with a relative. And now they've got all these things that are, that are laying in front of them that they have to complete. So, really creating a system that allows us to like take some of that pressure off. And if there are things in there that we can waive, then it's less pressure for our families, ultimately.

TOM OATES [00:28:00]: Yeah, you just hit the overarching theme for this series. And that's recognizing that these relative caregivers, their life is changing overnight and most of the time they didn't ask for it. And so, how do you make their transition, emotionally, what they've gotta do for their home and to take in, to take in relatives that are also going through so much. And recognize that you cannot put the same level of requirements or standards even have to change based on the fact that somebody is opening up their heart, opening up their home, but it's a decision that they didn't make that was brought to them. And kind of making that mindshift of, of what the relatives are being asked to do. Well, I want to switch - go ahead, Anthony, go ahead.

ANTHONY BELTRAN [00:28:54]: You know, one of the things that I always, you know, think about is that when you've got a family who's, who's not a relative and wants to be a resource parent, they have the opportunity to go through the licensing process, and then once they're approved, then they take placement. And so with relatives that's, there are certain situations like that, but for the most part, they're having to go through the licensing process and take placement simultaneously, which means that they're doing double duty compared to the other individuals who are going through the, you know, the traditional pathway towards becoming a resource parent. And so by creating this new licensing process for relatives and fictive kin and shortening those timeframes, we can get these things done in a shorter amount of time and take that pressure off so families can focus on the important part, ultimately. And that is caring for their family, you know, stabilizing, making sure that we get the appropriate services in. We can get all this licensing stuff done, cross it off our list, we're good. And then now we can focus on the real work, which is caring for those children and youth.

TOM OATES [00:30:13]: Yeah, taking in your relatives, the one thing that will do is take up your time. And so, the less time someone's now asked to not only be parents, but now to go through either training or licensing, the better because that's the one thing that, that goes away when, when you take on being a parent is your time. So, I did want to switch gears a little bit and Nicholas talked about it earlier about the kinship navigator program within the state. Now CYFD partners with - and correct me if I'm wrong - it's the Southwest Family Guidance Center for its kinship navigator program. Could you guys explain what that contract entails? What the state and Southwest Family Guidance Center, what your agreement looks like?

NICHOLAS NJUA [00:31:02]: The contract with Southwest Family Guidance Center is actually aimed at providing the kinship navigation program across the state. And, because the Southwest Family Guidance Center is already an experienced entity implementing such services, we contract with them and they provide a coordinated and comprehensive array of resources for relatives and the kinship caregivers for children to increase stability in the family setting all across New Mexico. Now, as far as this contract is concerned, we target any individual who is a relative, a godparent, member of a child's tribal clan, or an adult with significant bond that's fictive kin who are raising children or youth because the biological parents are not able or willing to do so. So, the Southwest Family Guidance Center is actually our main navigator when it comes to the kinship navigator program. So, for this contract, also, we open the referrals to both CYFD Protective Services, the Juvenile Justice Services, Early Childhood, Department of Aging and Long-term Services Department, Human Services Department, Department of Health, hospitals, managed care organizations, medical personnel, childcare. It's open to so many areas so that Southwest Family Guidance Center will be able to provide effective services.

[00:32:43]: Then another thing that I would like to touch as far as this contract is concerned is on the service deliverables. What are the requirements for the Southwest Family Center when it comes to providing these services as committed by our contract. One of the principal things we expect them to do is that they should create a streamlined and simplified referral and intake procedure for all formal and informal referrals and walk-in caregivers. So, intake can call through phone, in-person and online interaction. So, one thing that we should also understand is that prior to the introduction of kinship, the kinship unit, the Southwest Family Guidance Center was already implanted in New Mexico, was already providing such services. So, they're really, really experienced in navigating these resources to provide the kinship services.

[00:33:43]: Then another thing that we put in the contract is that the Southwest Family Guidance Center is expected to provide topical education related to kinship care, such as caregiving, self-care, mental

health, legal assistance, social media, important technologies, child development, childhood trauma, financial planning, etc. They also have to provide assistance in completing guardianship packets to help caregivers register their children for school and apply for medical services. We also ensure that they develop a collaborative relationship and referral process with civil legal service providers in order to refer caregivers to legal services as appropriate in relation to obtaining guardianship or custody orders, child/parent visitation, public benefits and financial matters, housing and culturally appropriate legal services to immigrant caregivers.

[00:34:46]: So, we ensure that the Southwest Family Guidance Center provides advocacy and guidance to the caregivers to access federal, state, and local benefits including but not limited to the important systems for many families, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance, weekly supplemental security income, housing income, support division, Medicaid, child support, etc. So, in a nutshell, the Southwest Family Guidance Center it's a framework of experience. Actually implements, to the best of my knowledge, the kinship navigation program in New Mexico. And we make sure that they follow the contract that we have contracted with them to the fullest. And we also go ahead and we have monthly meetings to interact with the Southwest Guidance Center to see the extent of implementation of the navigation program. So, that's what we do as far as the contract is concerned.

TOM OATES [00:35:57]: You said in a nutshell, I think that may be a bushel of nuts, but all in one location. And so I think for, for, for folks listening, what New Mexico may have, in terms of a luxury partner, is a single resource that is able to access an array of services so families aren't asked to constantly call somebody else or we don't do that, they do that. And so you've got a single entity that can help do all of this. And I'm curious, if a family's engaged with the Southwest Family Guidance Center, do they have a single point of contact that helps them go through all this because I'm sure the questions and the needs just keep coming and to always have a single point of contact to help guide you through - or at least a single referral service to guide you through - has to be a benefit.

NICHOLAS NJUA [00:36:57]: Correct. They have a single point of contact and they can be distributed now based on the needs of the caregiver family. But as far as the initial contact is concerned, there's a single point of contact.

ANTHONY BELTRAN [00:37:13]: Yeah. And they have staff who are obviously helping with these services. And so, they would be assigned to the appropriate staff with Southwest Family Guidance and would have that opportunity to, to work with that particular case worker with them. Now, of course, you know, if they, you know, get some services, come back, go away and then come back, they might end up getting assigned to somebody differently. They may not. But yeah, that's definitely something that we want to make it as least restrictive as possible. So, I know that they want to ensure that they have the right person assigned to their cases and can help walk them through that process. And hopefully not, you know, leave anything unresolved, too, right, you know. So, that way, you know, they're trained to ask the important questions. Because a lot of times families don't know what they need. They're just trying to, you know, talk to somebody and have us tell them what they need to do, right? They don't know the whole process they need to go to to get a guardianship finalized or or what type of services are even out there. Like, you know, they might have an idea but having somebody that can explain that to them.

[00:38:31]: And I think it's more than just Southwest Family Guidance's responsibility, but it's also CYFD's responsibility and so, Nicholas supervises two kinship specialists who cover our kinship guardianship cases throughout the state. And they're the ones who actually manage these contracts.

Southwest Family Guidance, we've got some other legal contracts with Pegasus, DNA legal services. And so, they're very accustomed to these contracts. And so, when families even call us, it's more than us just referring them, oh call Southwest Family Guidance. They'll do what you need to do. But you know, we're that entity, too, that they can reach out to us and we can explain the process to them. We can tell them what's out there for them, what services they can tap into. So, I think that's also very important is that, you know, we have points of contact within our agency to help guide families, as well.

TOM OATES [00:39:29]: You know, you a couple of times have talked about - like any state would - talked about trying to make sure you're delivering on people's needs. And so, I want to spend a little time exploring New Mexico and what you guys have done to kind of connect more with the communities or at least some of the unique communities in New Mexico. Though, like many other states, you've got urban cities, you've got rural, you've got suburban, you've got tribal nations that you're dealing with, as well. And I'm curious with that diversity what some of the challenges may be in implementing programs across the different regions of the state.

ANTHONY BELTRAN [00:40:07]: I think it's, you know, as is with any, you know, rural situation is having those resources in those communities, right? And so, you know, with these contracts that we are implementing, you know, we've tried to tap into some of those more rural areas, but it's a work in progress, right? And so, I think just the struggle is, is that you can, sometimes you can only work with what you have, right? And so, you know, we struggle with that because we are a population of majority of communities are rural, you know, here in New Mexico, with the exception of a handful of cities or towns that are over 10,000 people. And so with that, it's a struggle to have the appropriate services in those communities. And so, yeah, so we're, it's not something that's going to happen overnight. But eventually, we want to figure out ways that we can tap into those communities. Get more providers out to work in those more rural communities. But, it's a work in progress. I wish I had, we had the solution to say, you know, we could be in every community and serve every population. But unfortunately that's, that's not always the case. So, I think it's ultimately comes down to finding the right providers out there that we can tap into that can expand their services.

[00:41:50]: And I think that's something that we want to do with these contracts that we have with Southwest Family Guidance and the legal contracts is, as we see successes in these contracts, how can we down the road look at expanding so you can get into these other communities. Because while it's great to have, you know, this support service in Albuquerque, that doesn't mean that a smaller community, you know, in the southern part of the state doesn't equally need the same type of service. So, I think that we want to eventually expand some of these already existing programs if we can to help meet that, you know, that hole, for lack of words.

NICHOLAS NJUA [00:42:40]: Just to add, there is one good thing, too, as far as the tribe or tribes is that CYFD actually has like an ICWA unit with the supervisor and we kind of collaborated with this unit to help us penetrate the tribes. And as much as we collaborate with the ICWA unit, they actually follow the tribal, the cultures in everything we do as far as child welfare is concerned as well as the kinship program is concerned. So, that's a good thing too with the CYFD, just having a special unit for the tribes.

TOM OATES [00:43:24]: Well, part of that is making sure that there's communication and listening to the various regions, to what they need. And this has set me up for the, as we wrap things up, you guys just spent some time in Rio Arriba County bringing community members together to help explain the kinship navigator program. And first I'd, I'd love to find out what the experience is like, but for the audience,

could you give us a sense of what the county makeup is? Are we talking a rural county? Are we talking suburban or - explain to me a little bit if you could, about what makes up Rio Arriba County.

NICHOLAS NJUA [00:44:03]: Rio Arriba County is actually a rural county and it has a lot of problems, both cultural problems, economic problems, and maybe it's one of the counties with their height and weight. And when I mean, that's one of the reasons why we actually decided to pilot this program with Rio Arriba because we know we have a high rate in this county that actually needs our support. And talking about the program, I think 80, 90% of all the community providers that we contacted actually participated and it was an amazing program because it saw the presence of all providers that we invited, each and every one explained and introduced themselves to the community, how the community can benefit from the services that they provide. And it provided an opportunity for us to network with each other and see how we can put all our resources together to continue to help resource families, to continue to help kinship caregivers in the Rio Arriba County. My intention was actually to pilot this project in Rio Arriba and then expand to other areas of the state. And I think it was actually a success. Each provider that participated was really thankful that we initiated such a pilot project. And for the community members that participated, there were, some of them were really wowed by the fact that there was such resources available for them. Yet they had no information about them. So, this provided, like, the information they needed to take back home and be able to move forward as far as kinship is concerned.

TOM OATES [00:46:02]: Did you learn anything from that time that may shape what, you know how CYFD operates in the future?

NICHOLAS NJUA [00:46:11]: Of course, we did. And that was the fact that it's actually necessary and important for us to reach out to the community, to actually organize community events and make ourselves available to the community in such events. Because we had, we not only have like handouts, we had a lot of packets and parcels and gifts that the different providers brought forth. We had reached out to community agencies that have gift packets, gift tags or things like that, and were highly supported. So we did raffle draws and many people were happy with what they have picked. We mainly want for them to let us understand that just reaching out to providers by phone and giving them information about resources that are available to support them as kinship caregivers is not enough, reaching out to them in person, through these community events was really, really helpful. I think that's one of the things we learned from that event.

TOM OATES [00:47:25]: I really think that one of the things that people hopefully can take away from this conversation - and the others in our series on looking at advances in supporting kinship caregivers - is helping, really it's helping to bridge the gap and understanding what that gap is for someone who gets a call at night or is looking to support their family, or may not be able to be a caregiver, but can still provide support and become a member of, of, of that young person's network. And what an agency can do to recognize the gap and bridge it, be it with the right partners or the right contract or the right information being shared. These are all ways that it's just helping kind of reduce that burden, the burden to licensure, the burden to just make my home accessible or acceptable for raising young people that just come into their, into their lives in a new way like this. And to hear what you guys are doing in New Mexico, I appreciate what you're sharing. I appreciate you guys taking the time. And it sounds like that you've got a few things that people can learn from.

ANTHONY BELTRAN [00:48:39]: And I just want to say, too, I want to highlight successes that we have and this is just one success. But I was, this morning I was in an all staff meeting in one of our local

counties, Otero County, which is on the border of Mexico. And we were talking about resource families and licensure, and they actually reported that 50% of their licensed resource families in Otero County are relatives. Which means, you know, 50% of our kids or if not more, are placed with relatives. But, you know, out of I think they said 30, like 30 plus families that they have licensed half of them are relatives, which is huge because coming as a worker who did licensing in the same county, five plus years ago, our numbers weren't even close to that. So, you know, that just goes to show you over the course of the last several years, how much the importance of relative placements and connections has really made it an impact.

TOM OATES [00:49:45]: Anthony Beltran, Nicholas Njua, thank you guys so much for your time, for the work you're doing and being willing to share that work with us here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway. Alright. As a reminder, go check out the other episodes of this series to hear from those working in Rhode Island, Washington State, Nevada, and within the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe. Lots of different programs and approaches discussed across these episodes. As always, you can find the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast on Apple podcasts, Google Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, and SoundCloud. Go ahead and subscribe to make sure you get episodes as they're released each and every month.

[00:50:27]: Now if you head on over to childwelfare.gov, just search podcast, you'll find this episode's webpage. We'll have links to the other episodes in this series, along with a series of resources to help your work supporting and engaging kinship families. Hey, thanks so much for being a part of this podcast. We appreciate your willingness to spend time with us as we try to share what's working across the child welfare field to improve practice and help to strengthen families and protect children. And thanks of course, to Anthony Beltran and Nicholas Njua from New Mexico's Children, Youth and Families Division for their time today, here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. I'm Tom Oates, have a great day.

FEMALE NARRATOR [00:51:11]: Thanks for joining us for this edition of the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. Child Welfare Information Gateway is available at 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.