

Kin-First Culture

A Kin-First culture is one where Washington State partners, stakeholders, and communities collectively invest resources and align practices to prioritize kinship families due to their invaluable impact on children. It also helps create a bridge to families who have often felt overlooked by society. The purpose is to provide early and consistent support to Washington State kinship families.



Why a Kin-First Culture?

Research shows that children in kinship care experience more stability than children in general foster care.

National research shows that compared to children in non-relative care, children in the care of relatives experience greater well-being in several different areas, including:

- Less time spent in foster care
- More stability in placement
- Greater likelihood of remaining with siblings
- Better behavioral and mental health outcomes
- Lower probability of experiencing abuse by a caregiver
- Greater likelihood of staying connected to their extended family and keeping ties to their cultures, backgrounds, and customs, which is critical to their well-being
- Higher likelihood of achieving permanency through guardianship with their relative caregivers to maintain life-long connections with their family if they are unable to safely return home

As of August 2022, 52% of children-in-care in Washington State were placed with kinship caregivers.

What could a Kin-First culture look like?

- A Strong Community Network to support Kin Culture
- Leading with Kin Philosophy
- Develop policies and business processes that reflect equity, stability, and relational permanency for children living with kin – relative search, continuity of care, placement, and licensing
- Centering those with lived experience

We don't know the exact details of what kin-first culture would look like in WA state yet — that's where our co-design process comes in.

How do we get there?

A shift to a Kin-First Culture will change how DCYF serves children and their families. It will also require collective and coordinated work with our community and tribal partners, stakeholders, and private agency partners. Because it's important to get this shift right, DCYF will employ a co-design process that centers the children and families with lived experience. Stakeholders and partners will help to determine **what** changes DCYF needs to make, **when** we should make them, and **how** we will measure success.

In phases, our co-design facilitators will conduct in-depth interviews, gather insight from those interviews, and share the findings regularly for more feedback.

The first phase will be with DCYF employees. The second and third phases will include kinship caregivers, youth, families, private agency and community provider partners. Caregivers, youth and families who participate will be compensated fairly for their time, and the co-design facilitators will use a trauma-informed interviewing approach. The goal is to understand more about caregivers and children needs, where they go to get their needs met, and what breakdowns occur in getting the needed services and supports.



Washington State Department of
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

What is co-design?

Co-design is a practice that includes users as part of the design team who serve as experts of their experience (Sanders and Stappers, 2008).

A small, cross-functional team of engineers, designers, product managers, procurement, and subject matter experts partner with DCYF staff to quickly explore an organizational problem or challenge — in this case, defining a kin-first culture.

Who is the co-design facilitation team?

New America's New Practice Lab provides DCYF with a professional, trauma-informed user research team to facilitate our co-design work. Rather than make recommendations directly, their role is to surface and synthesize recommendations across our employees, families, and external partners. Marina Nitze leads this team.

What are Discovery Sprints?

Discovery Sprints are a useful method to quickly build a common understanding of the status of a complex organization, system, issue, or service. They create paths toward solutions by identifying specific, actionable next steps for the people at the organization who will carry that work forward.

While discovery sprints are primarily focused on meeting with real people (foster families, foster youth, and/or staff, depending on the topic at hand), they also include literature reviews, reviews of best and promising practices from other child welfare systems, and parallels from other, complementary spaces. A detailed breakthrough of the discovery sprint process can be found at <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tENIb4d2eHZiFmUHVNJLbt-xZVkB3RTUXXWOOhxjw/edit>.

How will this impact staff?

To create a true kin-first culture, we need participation from caregivers, stakeholders, and partners from all parts of the state. Co-design participants will spend time with the co-design facilitators, sharing their experiences, expertise, concerns and ideas for what a kin-first culture could mean for children and families, and how we will collectively achieve this shift.

After the completion of each co-design phase (approximately once a month), the co-design facilitators will share the findings in a webinar you are encouraged to attend. You may have more ideas, suggestions, and concerns when you hear their insights and early recommendations. We welcome these constantly.

The intent is not to present a master plan in one big fanfare announcement at the end. Instead, we want to co-design with you, with families, and with our external partners iteratively. Your feedback is not just welcome — it's necessary if we are to do this well.

If you have questions, email kincodesign@dcyf.wa.gov

Staff, stakeholders, and partner involvement is critical for the Kin-First Culture Co-Design to succeed. Please consider your capability and capacity to contribute to this exciting opportunity!



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