ONTARIO KINSHIP SERVICE STANDARDS

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Prepared by

Ontario Child Welfare Secretariat
Policy Development and Program Design Division

Ministry of Children and Youth Services
# Ontario Kinship Service Standards

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Ontario Kinship Service Standards in Ontario is to meet the safety needs and to promote permanency for children who are currently receiving child protection services from Children’s Aid Societies, and who are being cared for by members of the child’s extended family or community. These standards (Kinship Service) apply to all of the supports and services provided to children who are not admitted to the care of a society. The Kinship Service Standards are intended to facilitate provision of care and support that is consistent with family and community traditions for children unable to remain with their family due to protection concerns.

It is common in many communities for children to either live temporarily or to be raised in kinship living arrangements. These arrangements do not require the involvement and screening of a Children’s Aid Society unless they are initiated as the result of an identified protection concern.

It is anticipated that the majority of kinship arrangements will require a short-term period of intervention by the Children’s Aid Society in order to support the safety and well-being of the child. The initial assessment will focus on the ability of the kinship caregiver to maintain the child in a safe home until there is a permanent option developed for the child. The goal of the society is to continually work with the child’s family and extended family or community towards establishing a stable and permanent home for the child. In some circumstances, the most appropriate permanent option for the child will be the kinship arrangement.

In all circumstances the kinship service standards will apply until it is determined that the child is no longer in need of protection intervention and a permanency plan has been established for the child.

For children placed with members of the child’s extended family or community and admitted to the care of the society (Kinship Care), the child in care standards will apply.

The new standards for kinship service are the framework within which these services will be delivered. They establish a minimum level of service for child welfare practitioners and supervisors in Children’s Aid Societies, and create a benchmark that reflects desired outcomes for the child. The standards are the baseline for demonstrating the level of service required to meet the positive outcomes required for the child and kinship caregiver that is expected within the ministry’s overall accountability framework for child welfare.

The delivery of kinship service is an evolving service area within Children’s Aid Societies and will require ongoing development and refinement.

Kinship Service Standards are intended to be used in conjunction with current and future child protection standards in Ontario, as well as the revised Ontario Child Welfare Eligibility Spectrum.
How the Standards Were Developed

The Child Welfare Transformation Agenda (2005) provided a policy framework for the provision of child welfare services that would maintain the focus on child safety while enhancing permanency options for children receiving services from Children’s Aid Societies in Ontario. A key component of the Child Welfare Transformation is the Pillars of Permanence that include:

- Admission Prevention
- Kinship Service
- Kinship Care
- Customary Care
- Legal Custody
- Foster Care
- Adoption
- Youth Leaving Care

Kinship Service and Kinship Care are service directions that are relatively new within the field. A jurisdictional review of the research on North American kinship models was undertaken and the Child Welfare League of America kinship standards were reviewed and provided broad practice guidance for the development of Ontario Standards.

The Child Welfare Secretariat’s Kinship Working Group and Permanency Reference Group, that consisted of senior child welfare staff from Children’s Aid Societies and a broad based representation from stakeholders, provided advice and expertise on the current state of kinship implementation in various communities. A Symposium on Kinship also provided best practice information on the delivery of kinship services and the perspective of kinship families and children placed in kinship arrangements.

The Kinship Service Standards were also developed in conjunction with the newly developed Child Protection Service Standards in Ontario.

SCOPE OF THE STANDARDS

The standards guide child welfare practitioner(s) at each phase of service delivery to children that are or may be placed with a member of the child’s extended family or community for protection reasons, but are not admitted to the Society’s care. The standards outline practices for searching for kin, assessment, service planning, supporting services, the interface with protection services and the criteria for the closure of kinship service cases. The standards also set out expectations for supervision and consultation throughout the phases of service.

The standards do not prescribe how Children’s Aid Societies will organize or structure their staff to provide kinship services. There could be a wide range of approaches to kinship that may be provided through protection, children services or resource departments within a society.

The standards have been written in a manner that articulates minimum expectations for service delivery to ensure that the safety of the child is the paramount consideration without limiting the exploration of a range of permanency options and creative case planning for a child.
that may benefit from a kinship placement. The standards are intended to support a child-focused, collaborative, strengths-based approach to service delivery.

It should be recognized that standards cannot anticipate and meet all the unique and often complex needs of every child and kinship family in the province. The kinship service standards maintain a consistent focus on the safety and well being of the child. Once safety is assured the focus for consideration of options is the child’s permanency plan. If a standard does not adequately meet the safety needs of child then alternative strategies, such as obtaining a court order and/or assessing alternative plans for the child’s care should be considered and implemented.

FORMAT AND LANGUAGE OF THE STANDARDS

Each standard includes the following five sections:

- **Standard**: outlines the specific tasks or activities that are performed by the worker. The standard will provide the baseline for measuring the level of service required with the ministry’s overall accountability framework for child protection and well-being.

- **Intent**: articulates the rationale for the standard.

- **Outcome**: articulates the desired outcomes for children and families specifically related to each standard.

- **Practice Notes**: focuses on how the standard is achieved by explaining in more detail the activities and/or concepts required by the standard.

- **References**: include references to relevant sections of the *Child and Family Services Act* as well as to key research/literature that has informed the standards or practice note.

In this document, the terms “child”, “parent”, “caregiver”, and guardian” also include “children”, “parents”, “caregivers” where the plural is appropriate.

While the terms “placement and placement plan” are used in *Ontario Regulation 206/00 Part II* to describe an out of care kinship service living arrangement for a child, the Standards do not use this term. The term kinship arrangement is used in an effort to differentiate this kinship service from other circumstances where the child is admitted to the care of the society and the society becomes the legal guardian.
## Standard 1 - Searching for Kin: Collaboration with Extended Family and Community

| Standard | In the event that a child’s admission to care is likely and/or imminent, priority is given to finding a safe alternate living arrangement for the child with a relative, extended family member, or a member of the child’s community.  

In the case of an Indian or native child, the child’s Band or native community are key contributors to the planning process.

*Ontario Regulation 206/00, Part II applies where the society has determined that the child is in need of protection and cannot be adequately protected if he/she remains with the person in charge and the society proposes or is apprised of a plan to place the child (i) under a supervision order, or (ii) under an order for custody, or (iii) with the agreement of the person in charge of the child.*

The search for kin caregivers is a continuous process throughout the provision of service to the family and to the child. Society decisions related to Kinship service options are made jointly between worker and supervisor or in some circumstances the decision to pursue a kinship service option may be imposed upon the society by the court. |
| Intent | The purpose of seeking alternative living arrangements within the child’s own extended family or community is:  

- To minimize the impact of removal from primary family and/or community on the child;  
- To build on existing relationships and to promote stability for the child;  
- To encourage and empower parental involvement in decision making and planning for the child;  
- To encourage the child’s involvement in planning for their own care;  
- To enable continuity of relationship between family and community members with the child;  
- To provide a viable alternative to admission to care;  
- To maintain the integrity of the child’s connection to aboriginal and other distinct cultural groups;  
- To engage the extended family or community in permanency planning earlier in the intervention process;  
- To increase the likelihood of reunification with primary family. |
| Outcomes | The initial search for alternative living arrangements for the child within the extended family or community will result in:  

- An increased likelihood that the child will be able to live within
extended family or community, and not be admitted to the care of the society;
- An increased likelihood that the family will be active participants in the development and support of an alternative care plan for their child;
- Increased likelihood that the society will achieve an early permanency plan that provides stability for the child;
- Increased access to family information that will be helpful in the development of a social history, if required at a later date, and help the child to better understand their personal story.

<table>
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<th>Practice Notes</th>
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| Searching for kin begins when the child protection worker determines that a child is in need of protection or the child’s family may indicate that the family requires support from their extended family or community, to assist in caring for the child.  
The search for kin intensifies when a child protection worker determines that a child in need of protection requires an alternate living arrangement or the child’s family request assistance in searching for member of the extended family or community that may be able to care for the child.  
Searching for kin can also occur when alternatives are being sought for a permanent home for a child who is currently in the care of the society |

**Considerations:**
- **Planning** - early attention by the child protection worker to the development of a family genogram and/or ecomap will increase the possibility of identifying caregivers that are able and willing to provide kinship service. This discussion with the child’s family will result in information about alternative options or additional supports for a child that can be followed up in a timely manner if the need arises.

- **Confidentiality** - some families may be reluctant to identify possible kin or community resource options out of a desire to keep their family difficulties private. Respect for these concerns must be balanced by the benefit to the child of living with persons or receiving the additional support of a member of the child’s family or community who is known to the child. Under these circumstances it will be important to assist the family in considering options with a focus on the child’s needs and best interests.

- Where the family does not consent to the disclosure of information or the search for kinship members, the worker may consult with the society’s legal staff to review the privacy rights of the family and to consider other legal options available to the society.

- **Searching for kin caregivers may require a range of strategies, such as:**
  - Phone directories
  - Internet searches
  - Internal agency records
  - Ministry of Transportation
  - Other community resources
  - Other societies
### References

*Child and Family Services Act subsection 1 (3) and 51 (3.1) and 57(4) will be relevant references. Regulation 206/00, Part II - Family and Community Placement*

### Definitions

**Relative:** with respect to a child, is a person who is the child’s grandparent, great-uncle, great-aunt, uncle or aunt, whether by blood, through a spousal relationship, or through adoption

**Extended family:** means persons to whom a child is related by blood, through a spousal relationship or through adoption and, in the case of a child who is an Indian or native person, includes any member of the child’s band or native community.

**Community member:** is a member of the child’s community with whom the child has an established relationship, e.g., a neighbour, teacher, coach, volunteer, member of a church or religious community, and includes a person who has ethnic cultural or religious ties with the child or the child’s parent, relative or sibling or a person who has a meaningful and beneficial relationship with the child.
Standard 2 - Initial Screening and Assessment of Kinship Service Home

Prospective kinship service caregivers for children considered to be in need of protection but not in the care of the society are screened and then assessed in order to evaluate the safety and capacity of both the home and caregivers to care for the child. The assessment is intended to occur before the child moves to the home of the kinship service caregiver wherever possible. However, there may be circumstances where the parent or the court has already placed the child with a kin caregiver. This standard also applies in those situations.

Where the assessment has not been completed prior to the child moving to the kinship home, the worker shall complete all requirements of the regulation within the time frames.

This standard does not apply when assessing a plan put forward by a parent during a protection investigation.

The kinship service assessment process, as outlined in Ontario Regulation 206/00, Part II requires that the society use its best efforts to complete the following:

1) Where the child is not yet living with the kinship family, a child protection worker or a person designated by the society will:

   - In the case of an Indian or native child, consult with the child's band or native community;
   - In the case of an Indian or native child, where consultation could not occur before the initial assessment, there must be ongoing efforts to consult with the band or native community throughout the subsequent assessment process;
   - Collect identifying information on all persons over the age of 18 residing in the prospective kinship home;
   -Ascertain the nature of the relationship between the child and each person over the age of 18;
   -Review the society's records and files for information relating to any person over the age of 18 living in the home;
   -Conduct a personal interview with the proposed primary caregiver;
   -Conduct a private interview with the child in keeping with the child’s age and developmental capacity.
   -Obtain consents for criminal records checks as well as consents for disclosure of information by any children’s aid society in Ontario or child welfare authority outside the province of Ontario for the proposed primary caregiver.

In addition, a child protection worker, or a person designated by the society will conduct an assessment of the home environment including an assessment of the physical aspects of the home.

An evaluation of the proposed kinship service home based on the kinship...
family’s strengths, needs, resources and possibility of offering a permanent plan will be completed and documented in case notes, no later than 30 days after completion of the evaluation.

Within 7 days after placement a child protection worker or a person designated by the society will:

- Conduct a home visit to the kinship home where the child is now living;
- Meet in private with the child and conduct an interview appropriate to the child’s age and developmental capacity;
- Contact and obtain consents for criminal records checks as well as consents for disclosure of information by any children’s aid society or child welfare authority outside the province of Ontario on each person over the age of 18 living in the kinship service home.

The society will:

- Initiate criminal records checks and child welfare records checks outside the province of Ontario within 7 days of securing the above consents;
- Review the information received as a result of the criminal records checks and child welfare within 7 days of receiving the information; and
- Assess this information and document any decisions or actions taken with respect to the information.

Within 30 days after the child has moved to the kinship service home a child protection worker or a person designated by the society will:

- visit the home;
- meet in private with the child (as appropriate to the child’s age and developmental capacity);
- interview the primary caregiver; and
- obtain supervisory review and approval of the Kinship Service Plan.

Exclusion Criteria: A family will be excluded from the approval to provide care as a kinship family for a child if:

- The child would be at risk of abuse or neglect by virtue of living with the kinship family that would not be mitigated with supports available.

Where a decision has been made between worker and supervisor to exclude kin from providing care to a child:

- The decision is communicated to the kin within 7 days of making the decision; initially through a verbal notification and followed up with a written notification;
- The reasons for the decision are documented in the Kinship Service file.
- Where applicable a written notification of the decision is sent to the worker assigned to the protection family.

2) Where the child is already living with the kinship family, and the Society is notified of the plan after the child’s placement Ontario
Regulation 206/00, Part II requires that the society use its best efforts to ensure that within 7 days of obtaining information that the child is living with the kinship family, a child protection worker or person designated by the society will:

- Collect identifying information on all persons over the age of 18 residing in the prospective kinship home;
- Ascertain the nature of the relationship between the child and each person over the age of 18;
- Contact and obtain consents for criminal records checks as well as consents for disclosure of information by any children’s aid society or child welfare authority outside the province of Ontario on the primary caregiver and each person over the age of 18 living in the kinship service home;
- Review the Society’s records and files for information relating to any person over the age of 18 living in the home;
- In the case of an Indian or native child, consult with the child’s band or native community;
- Conduct a personal interview with the primary caregiver;
- Conduct a private interview with the child in keeping with the child’s age and developmental capacity.

In addition, a child protection worker, or a person designated by the society will assess the physical aspects of the home.

An evaluation of the proposed kinship service home based on the kinship family’s strengths, needs, resources and possibility of offering a permanent plan if needed will be completed and documented, in case notes, no later than 30 days after completion of the above. The evaluation will include any procedures not followed (including reasons) and any additional steps taken.

The society will:

- Initiate the criminal records checks and child welfare records checks outside the province of Ontario within 7 days of securing the above consents;
- Review the information received within 7 days of receiving it;
- Document in case notes any decisions or actions taken with respect to this information.

Within 30 days of receiving information that the child is living in a kinship home, a child protection worker or a person designated by the society will visit the home, meet in private with the child as appropriate to the child’s age and developmental capacity, interview the primary caregiver, and obtain supervisory review and approval of the Kinship Service Plan (see Standard 4).

- If a child has been moved by the family into a kinship home before screening and assessment could occur and it is determined that the child is in need of protection in the kinship home, immediate action must be taken to ensure the safety of the child.
- Where a complaint is received regarding the care provided to the child by the caregiver, the information will be provided immediately to the worker assigned to the protection file and the
appropriate assessment and investigation steps will be undertaken.

Once approved, the worker assigned to the kinship family will visit with the child and the kinship service family in their home a minimum of once every three months until the kinship service file is closed.

*Ontario Regulation 206/00 Part II, Family and Community Placement*, requires that requests from other jurisdictions for information from the society’s files and records relating to kinship service assessments will be provided within 7 days of receiving the request. Requests must be accompanied with consent from the person to whom the information pertains.

It is understood that requests for criminal and child welfare records outside of North America may be difficult to obtain. The society is expected to make its best efforts to obtain these records through established international processes. Where records are not obtained the protection worker will document the efforts to seek information and reasons the records have not been made obtained.

| Intent | Screening of a kinship service home is essential to promote the protection, safety, and overall well being of the child. The intent of this standard is to:

- Complete the assessment in a timely manner to enable the safety, stability and security of the child,
- Establish that the initial focus of service is the assessment of risk to the child and the identification of any safety concerns within the kinship service family;
- In the case of an Indian or native child, consult with the child’s Band or native community to seek recommended options for the child;
- Form a preliminary evaluation of the ability of the caregiver to meet the immediate needs of the child;
- Provide a baseline of information to determine next steps in case planning, which may include a more in-depth assessment of the kinship service provider if the kinship service arrangement is expected to exceed (or has already exceeded) 30 days;
- Secure and document in the case records information about the kinship family’s strengths and resource needs in order to plan for any immediately needed supports, and to anticipate longer-term supports if it is expected that the child will reside with the kinship service family longer than 30 days.

| Outcomes | The initial screening of kinship service care providers, whether prospective or already actively providing care, will result in:

- A file being opened under the kinship provider’s name (see Standard 5 - File Opening and Contents);
- A determination about the appropriateness of the kinship family to provide short-term service to the child (i.e., less than 30 days); or
- A determination to engage the kinship family in a more in-depth
assessment, with a view to becoming a longer-term resource for the child if needed. Collection and assessment of preliminary information to assist in permanency planning for the child;

- A balance of concern for the safety of the child when living with the child’s family and the desire to minimize the impact of separation for the child;
- Engagement with the prospective kinship provider and/or community in a way that respects their relationship with the child and seeks to both maintain and encourage such relationships.

### Practice Notes

Informal kinship service care-giving is often predicated on an existing relationship between the child and prospective kinship caregiver. Therefore, attention needs to be paid not only to the safety and general suitability of the family and the specific needs of the child, but also to the wishes of the child or youth.

In situations where multiple kinship plans are being proposed, family centred conferencing should be considered to help determine a preferred course of action. In the case of an Indian or native band, the involvement of the child’s band or native community is essential in the consideration of all proposed kinship service plans.

A child’s parent may oppose a proposed kinship plan which otherwise appears to be a legitimate option. All efforts should be made to secure the consent of the family to pursue the kinship option in lieu of alternatives which may be more intrusive (e.g., Supervision Order, custody order, admission to care). A clinical decision should be made to either pursue the kinship option with parental consent or in the absence of consent the society may initiate a protection application and seek a court order that will facilitate placement with the kin caregiver. Another alternative may be for the proposed kin caregiver to make a court application for custody of the child. These decisions will be determined by the circumstances of the individual case.

Where a child in need of protection has already been placed by the parent with a family or community member, and the society has been apprised of the plan after the fact, the possibility exists that the kinship/community family may refuse to participate in the screening process. A clinical decision will be required to determine if a protection application should be made to the court to permit supervision of the kin placement or to seek an order placing the child in the society’s care. Documentation of the situation and any decisions made will be in case notes in the protection file and the kinship service file, if one has been opened.

1. **Safety.**

There may be situations in which concerns are raised in this initial assessment such as a history of previous child protection involvement, family violence or police involvement with the kinship family or community member where the child is proposed to be, or is already, placed. In this event, it is critical to ascertain:

- What relevance the behaviour that resulted in police or child
welfare involvement has to the caregiver’s current ability to care for the child;
• What changes the individual or family has made since the previous child welfare and/or police involvement;
• How the individual or family made these changes and what support services were engaged;
• How the changes are being sustained, and what impact the presence of the child in the home will have on maintaining these changes;
• Given this historical information, whether there are safety implications for the child in the home.

If a safety concern related to the kinship service family is identified, and a decision is made nonetheless to support that kinship service option, it is critical to decide and to document how the safety concern will be reduced or eliminated by the family. The worker will obtain supervisory review and approval to support the decision.

If there is an ongoing safety concern, and a decision is made not to pursue that particular kinship option, or to discontinue the kinship living arrangement, action must be taken immediately to protect the child.

2. Primary Caregiver Interview. The initial interview focuses on the primary needs of the child and the ability of the caregiver to meet these needs. To complete the assessment the interviewer will gather the following information related to the caregiver’s:

• Relationship to the child;
• Relationship to the child’s parent;
• Understanding of the circumstances and perspective of the caregiver on the circumstances that led to the child’s need for an alternative home;
• Understanding of the child’s need for safety; wellbeing and stability;
• Understanding of the child’s immediate needs and challenges, and ability to manage the child’s day to day care in a supportive and informed way;
• Openness to participating in planning for the child and willingness to manage the child’s day to day care;
• Parenting skills, and intended disciplinary and child management techniques;
• Health status, including drug or alcohol use, and smoking habits;
• Physical and mental capacity of the kinship provider to care for the child in light of the child’s age, behaviour and developmental status;
• Anticipated impact of the child on family dynamics, routines, finances, etc;
• Family or community supports to assist in the care of the child;
• Ability to take on the care of the child without undue hardship;
• Understanding of the time frames proposed for the kinship service and willingness/ability to be flexible should the situation change;
• Need for immediate supports, and what these might be;
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- Ability of the kinship family to manage conflict among extended family members and put the safety and well-being of the child first;
- Motivation for offering to provide kinship service, and any conditions or reservations expressed.

The primary caregiver will be asked to provide consents related to criminal records checks and child welfare records checks.

The primary caregiver will also be asked to share information about the composition of the household, not only of all people living in the home who are 18 or over for the purposes of obtaining their consent to criminal records checks and child welfare records checks, but also specifics relating to the other children living in the home and their response to having the child and sharing the space and resources of the family.

3. **Home Environment.** The initial screening of a kinship service home will include an assessment of the physical characteristics of the home, and a determination as to its safety and suitability. Among the factors to take into consideration are:

- General condition of the home: space, cleanliness, privacy, sleeping arrangements, adequacy of furnishings (including infant equipment and adequacy of childproofing if the child is a toddler);
- Heat source and any safety issues arising;
- Functioning smoke detectors installed to current provincial fire safety standards (one on each level of the house);
- Water source and any safety issues pertaining to this;
- Pets - their care and temperament;
- Any obvious hazards or safety issues (e.g., weapons storage, smoking, swimming pools or ponds, etc.) inside or outside the home.

If significant safety issues that would reflect a moderate or severe risk to the child are identified during the home visit, these are discussed with the caregiver and a plan developed to address the concerns. The worker and the supervisor will review any issues that are not resolved between the caregiver and worker, in an effort to seek a solution to any ongoing or potential safety issues.

4. **Interview With the Child.** Ascertaining the child’s openness to the prospective kinship living arrangement is also critical in the planning and decision-making process. The interview with the child is held in private in order to allow the child the freedom to express any concerns or misgivings about the kinship home. The interview format will be adjusted to take into account the child’s age and developmental ability to participate. Areas to include are the child’s:

- Familiarity with and/or relationship to the kinship provider, including experience with the other children in the home;
- Understanding of the circumstances necessitating an out-of-home living arrangement;
- Specific feelings and wishes respecting living options, if able to
| | articulate a preference;  
| | • Perception of the benefits of the kinship living arrangement;  
| | • Perception of any disadvantages or risks anticipated in the kinship living arrangement;  
| | • Perceptions of supports needed to promote stability and success of the kinship living arrangement;  
| | • Understanding of the anticipated time frame for the kinship living arrangement;  
| | • Wishes related to contact with the child’s family;  
| | • Wishes related to contact with community and cultural heritage;  
| | • General comfort level with the plan.  

The initial assessment concludes with a decision by the worker that addresses the following:  
• Whether the plan is realistic, safe, and viable;  
• When the kinship living arrangement could reasonably commence, if it hasn’t already;  
• What level of supervision and support by the society is anticipated on an ongoing basis;  
• An indication about the possibility of permanency (e.g., obtaining custody) within the kinship family, if needed;  
• If applicable, the reasons the kinship home is not recommended for the continued care of the child.  

The assessment will be signed by the worker and approved by the supervisor.

| References | Ontario Regulation 206/00, Part II, Family and Community Placement  
| | Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies, Ontario Kinship Model  
| | Child Welfare League of America Standards of Excellence for Kinship Care Services |
### Standard 3 - Comprehensive Assessment of Kinship Service Family

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<td>A comprehensive assessment of the kinship family is required if:</td>
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<td>- The child has resided with the kinship care provider longer than 30 days;</td>
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<td>- There is concurrent permanency planning for the child or the child’s siblings that explores the option of the kinship home as a possible permanency plan.</td>
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The comprehensive assessment will be completed within three months of the child’s move to the kinship service family, and in conjunction with the protection service plan.

The outcome of the assessment is communicated to the prospective kinship service providers within 7 days of a decision being made.

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<td>The comprehensive assessment is an extension of the work begun in the initial assessment of the home and will include components outlined in Ontario Regulation 206/00 that must be completed within first 30 days of the child’s move to the kinship service home or the society being apprised of a child’s move to the kinship home. The comprehensive assessment includes members of the kinship service family and is best completed in conjunction with the service planning in progress between the child’s primary family and agency protection staff and in the case of a native child, with the child’s Band or native community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The purpose of this assessment is to:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Elicit more detailed information on which to base a decision to consider the use of the kinship home for the ongoing care beyond the first 30 days;</td>
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<td>- Provide a clear understanding of the strengths inherent in the kinship family;</td>
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<td>- Identify clinical issues and ongoing support needs within the kinship family;</td>
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<td>- Provide a broader base of information on which to establish case directions and permanency planning for the child;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Identify any outstanding or newly arising safety concerns and note how they will be mitigated.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An assessment of the kinship family specific to the needs of the child;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development of an implementation plan for meeting the child’s needs if action is required;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Important information gathered about the extended family dynamics and relationships;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increased stability of kinship living arrangement through early identification of required interventions and supports;</td>
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<tr>
<td>An indication of the child’s adjustment within the family when the</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practice Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>The comprehensive assessment extends beyond safety issues and the collection of basic information about the kinship service family, and includes:</td>
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**Relationships**
- Dynamics between the child, parents, prospective kinship caregivers, and any other key people specific to each situation;
- Other children already being cared for in the kinship home, their relationship to the kinship service providers, and their reaction to the kinship service plan;
- Current perspective of the caregivers on the circumstances necessitating out-of-home care for the child;
- Review of motivation for offering to provide kinship service, and any conditions or subsequent reservations expressed since the child’s was placed in the kinship arrangement;
- Ongoing ability of the kinship family to manage conflict among extended family members and put the safety and well-being of the child first;
- Sensitivity and/or understanding of the caregivers to the child’s sense of loyalty and commitment to the child’s parents;
- Support of the caregivers for the reunification plan and/or facilitating access;
- Potential to be a long-term permanent resource for the child, if needed.

**The Child’s Needs**
- Parenting considerations - ability to provide age-appropriate supervision, ensure the safety of the child by providing a stable, nurturing environment, and to manage the impact of separation;
- Disciplinary practices, including how they discipline their own children, and discussion of acceptable and unacceptable disciplinary practices with respect to the child’s safety and well-being;
- Their understanding of any specific needs of the child and how they propose to meet these;
- Ability to support and nurture the child’s cultural identity;
- Ability to support the child’s school program;
- Ability to respond effectively to the child’s sense of loss or abandonment;
- Ability to participate, if need be, in the child’s treatment plan.

**Ongoing Safety Considerations**
- Ability of kin to co-operate with the society, report disclosures of abuse, incidents of a serious nature, or disruptions of the kin living

- child is already living with the kinship caregiver;
- An early assessment of the kinship home as a permanency option for the child, if needed;
- An ongoing review of concurrent planning for the child that links the kinship arrangement to the protection service plan for the child’s primary family.
arrangement, and to engage with the case plan;

- Any dynamics or reactions of kin with respect to the historical abuse or neglect of the child;
- Recognition of any risks posed by the parent(s) of the child, and ability/willingness to protect the child from these risks;
- Lifestyle issues, e.g., alcohol or other drug use in the kinship home;
- Physical safety of the home.
- Ability to meet the health needs of the child.

### Practical Considerations

- Adaptations made by family to address the physical and mental capacity of the kinship provider to care for the child in light of the child’s age, behaviour and developmental status;
- Anticipated impact of the child on family dynamics, routines, finances, beyond the initial 30 days;
- Formal and informal supports already available to the family, and a projection of what might be needed to sustain the child in the kinship service home beyond the initial 30 days.

The society will exercise diligence in the screening and assessment of kinship service homes. For example, if a prospective kinship provider has a history of significant physical or mental health issues, it is appropriate to seek input (with a signed consent) from the person’s physician or other professional as appropriate.

The comprehensive assessment concludes with a decision by the worker and in the case of an Indian or native child, the decision is taken in consultation with the child’s band or native community and addresses all or some combination of the following when considering a kinship arrangement that continues beyond the initial 30 days:

- Whether the plan is realistic, safe, and viable;
- When the kinship living arrangement could reasonably commence, if it hasn’t already;
- What level of supervision and support by the society is anticipated on an ongoing basis;
- An indication about the possibility of permanency (e.g., obtaining custody) within the kinship family, if needed;
- If applicable, the reasons the kinship home is **not** recommended for the continued care of the child.

The assessment will be signed by the worker and approved by the supervisor.

### References

- Ontario Regulation 206/00, Part II, Family and Community Placement
- OACAS Ontario Kinship Model
- CWLA Standards of Excellence for Kinship Care Services
### Standard 4 - Kinship Service Plan

**Standard**

Kinship service living arrangements for children in need of protection are supported by a written plan. The plan is developed in collaboration with the primary family, the child (where the child is 12 years of age or older), the kinship service family, and the society. In the case of a proposed kinship plan for an Indian or native child, the child’s band or native community is consulted and involved in the development of the plan.

A written Kinship Service Plan will be:
- Completed within 30 days of a child’s moving to a kinship service home;
- Reviewed and updated within 3 months of the child’s moving to a kinship service home or earlier if done in conjunction with the protection service plan, if the kinship service file is still open;
- Reviewed and updated in conjunction with the protection service plan until the kinship service file is closed.

The Kinship Service Plan will identify:
- Specific needs of the child and how these will be addressed;
- Specific supports required by the kinship service family and how these will be acquired;
- The anticipated length of time the child will be living with the kinship service family and/or the plan for permanency for the child;
- Any other decisions or issues that need to be articulated, e.g., access arrangements, commitment to notify the Agency if the child returns home, and any other expectations specific to the case.

Review of the Kinship Service Plan will focus on:
- Whether the plan is still realistic, safe, and viable;
- What level of supervision and support is still required by the society, and a projection of the additional length of service to the home, including rationale;
- The possibility of permanency planning.

The Kinship Service Plan is developed in conjunction with the service planning process between the child’s family and society protection staff and will include components of Ontario Regulation 206/00 that must be completed within 30 days of the child’s move to the kinship service home or within 30 days of the Society being apprised of a child’s move to a kinship service home. The kinship service plan and subsequent updates will be signed by the kinship service caregiver, the child, the child’s parent(s), if the child’s parent or child 12 years of age or older is unable to sign include an explanation for not obtaining the signature(s), the kinship worker, and the kinship worker’s supervisor. In the case of an Indian or native child, a representative of the Band or native community will be requested to sign the plan. A copy of the plan will be provided to the kinship family.
### Intent

A written service plan is intended to:

- Serve as a focal point for service to the child within the kinship service family, formalizing commitment to a particular set of identified goals;
- Provide a framework for accountability in the delivery of service to the child and kinship family;
- Identify the community services and supports necessary to promote stability of the kinship arrangement;
- Formalize a plan for accessing the services and supports, and adapting them as necessary;
- Maintain consistent focus on the needs of the child, with special focus on the plan for family reunification or other permanency options as required;
- Establish agreement on issues relating to the child’s safety;
- Provide a plan for means of determining when the kinship file should be closed.

### Outcomes

- Will achieve clarity of expectations for the kinship family and the Society;
- Will obtain a commitment to advocacy for children and the kinship service providers who care for them;
- Will provide a focus for review and determining next steps;
- Collaborative approach to planning which is inclusive and respectful of primary family, extended family, community and cultural groups where they are involved;
- Provides a structured assessment and decision making process that supports the development of early permanency planning.

### Practice Notes

The Kinship Service Plan will reflect the uniqueness of each kinship situation, and set service goals that promote the stability of the living arrangement. The process of developing the Kinship Service Plan will take into account:

1) **The child’s:**

- Safety, especially as it relates to family access (informal and formal);
- Age and developmental capacity;
- Emotional and psychological needs;
- Response to separation from parent(s) and siblings;
- Medical, behavioural, and educational issues;
- Strengths and peer relationships;
- Adjustment within the kinship family and ongoing service needs;
- Assessment and/or treatment needs;
- Cultural identity.
2) The Kinship Service family’s need for:

- Funding support, which will include information respecting assistance that may be available through Ontario Works; or episodic assistance from the CAS, or other sources;
- Immediate practical “start-up” assistance (e.g., furnishings, equipment);
- Formal or informal training and support;
- Child care and/or respite services;
- Referral to medical, therapeutic, recreational, and other community services;
- Supportive social work contact in managing complicated or stressful extended family dynamics;
- Any other linkages specific to the child or kinship family’s circumstances.

3) The plan for permanency for the child, including:

- The anticipated length of time that the child will reside with the kinship service family;
- The prospect of family reunification and associated timelines for assessing the child and family’s readiness for reunification;
- Concurrent planning in situations where the child is unlikely to return to the primary home and the kinship home or other alternatives are being considered as a permanent resource for the child.

4) Any other key element that need to be articulated in the plan, and will provide direction on day to day functions and requirements such as:

- Process for obtaining consent of the parent or guardian for medical treatment, in situations where the child is unable to consent to his/her own treatment and the kinship caregiver does not have legal authority to consent to the child’s treatment;
- Process for making significant decisions relating to the child, e.g. educational, medical, religious upbringing, etc;
- Access arrangements, whether formal or informal;
- Any case-specific expectations or conditions under which the society would be notified of developments pertaining to the child or kinship family.

References

Family and Community Placement
OACAS Ontario Kinship Model
CWLA Standards for Excellence in Kinship Care Services
## Standard 5 - Kinship Service File Opening and Contents

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<td>A Kinship Service file will be opened when:</td>
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<td>- There has been at least one face to face meeting with the proposed or active kinship service provider in response to the family’s expressed intention to provide ongoing kinship service; or</td>
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<td>- The society has been apprised that the child is already living in the home and the screening and assessment process is about to commence.</td>
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A Kinship Service file is opened in the name of a prospective Kinship Service provider and shall contain:

- Consents for release of child welfare and criminal records information on all persons over the age of 18 living in the home;
- Completed child welfare and criminal records checks;
- Initial or preliminary assessment (includes recommendation to support the kinship placement, any decisions made as a result of information gathered from criminal records and/or child welfare checks, decision to proceed to comprehensive assessment for arrangements that will extend beyond 30 days or decision to close);
- Any reports of a serious nature including Serious Occurrence Reports, or concerns related to the care of the child while in the kinship home, and the documentation of the assessment or investigations of those concerns;
- Case notes;
- The Kinship Service Plan;
- Any written agreements made on closing, e.g., the written agreement with the kinship provider to notify the society of any changes of family circumstances that would impact on the safety of the child, such as a caregiver being served with notice of an application by the child’s parent to vary a custody order;
- Copy of closing letter to the kinship family;
- Closing summary signed by worker and supervisor.

If the file remains open for service beyond 30 days, the file also contains:

- Comprehensive assessment of the Kinship Service home;
- Updates to the Kinship Service Plan.

Case notes in a Kinship Service file should reflect compliance with the required timelines (completed within 24 hours), as well as contacts and developments relevant to the case.

- An assessment of the kinship family specific to the needs of the child;
- Development of an implementation plan for meeting the child’s needs if action is required;
- Important information gathered about the extended family dynamics and relationships;
- Increased stability of kinship living arrangement through early identification of required interventions and supports;
• An indication of the child’s adjustment within the family when the child is already living with the kinship caregiver;
• An early assessment of the kinship home as a permanency option for the child, if needed;
• An ongoing review of concurrent planning for the child that links the kinship arrangement to the protection service plan for child’s primary family.

A Kinship Service file may be re-opened:
• If after closure following reunification with primary family, the child is again in need of protection and requires placement outside the primary home and the kinship service family expresses a desire to care for the child again;
• For short-term intervention to assess the situation and if appropriate to provide short-term supports necessary to sustain the stability and continuity of the kinship service living arrangement and to prevent an admission of the child to care where no protection concerns exist but without the assistance of the society there may be a potential protection concern. A referral to a community link should always be considered as an alternative to re-opening the kinship service file;
• If protection concerns exist the kinship family would be opened as a protection file for investigation, assessment and service.

On re-opening, if a year has elapsed between the initial child welfare and criminal records checks done 18 years of age or older living in the kinship service home, or if new information has come to light that would indicate a need for new records checks, these will be initiated within the timelines prescribed for initial screening.

Kinship Service providers have access to the contents of their file.

<p>| Intent | The Kinship Service file contains information specific to the kinship care provider and immediate family, and contains information that for reasons of confidentiality need to be kept separately from the protection file. The only “crossover” document common to both the protection file and the kinship service file is the Kinship Service Plan. |
| Outcome | Keeping separate records both organizes and recognizes kinship service as a distinct and specialized service area. Information specific to the kinship family is maintained separately and confidentially (unless required by the Court). |
| Practice Notes | Timely documentation of kinship assessments and plans will assist the worker to determine the appropriate services to provide for the child and kinship family. Timely review of the documentation of kinship assessments and plans will assist the supervisor in advising and supporting the planning undertaken by the worker and allow for sharing of information between the kinship service worker, the kinship family, |</p>
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<tr>
<th>• Documentation of comprehensive kinship plans will contribute to the timely and structured review of a child’s safety and permanency plan.</th>
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<tr>
<td>the child’s family and the workers providing protection services.</td>
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## Standard 6 - Kinship Service File Closure

### Standard

The kinship service file is closed when one or more of the following criteria are met prior to the kinship service arrangement:

- The kinship home is excluded from consideration for the provision of kinship service for a child;
- Kin voluntarily withdraw from consideration as a potential home for the child after the screening and assessment process has begun.

The kinship service file is closed when one or more of the following criteria are met:

- The child return to their parent(s);
- The child is moved to another home or placement resource;
- The child remains in the care of the kinship family and
  - The child is no longer in need of protection intervention; or
  - Permanency planning goals have been met; or
  - The Kinship caregiver no longer requires the support of the Society to meet the essential needs of the child and
  - In the assessment of the worker, the kinship family will take the necessary measures to ensure the child’s protection in the future;
- The child remains with the kinship family and the kinship family no longer resides in the society’s jurisdiction and the case is transferred if required;
- The child turns 16 years of age and there is no existing order for supervision under the CFSA.

A recommendation to close the Kinship Service File is made by the kinship worker and approved by the worker’s supervisor.

The reasons for file closure are documented in the Kinship Service file in a closing summary, which is signed by worker and supervisor. The decision to close the kinship file will be communicated in writing to the worker assigned to the child’s family, if the protection file remains open.

The termination of society service to the kinship service home is confirmed to the home by letter, and may refer to any ongoing expectations outlined in the Kinship Service Plan.

While the society may provide short-term transition planning for the kinship family where there is no longer a need for protection intervention, the service provided will focus on supporting the child’s permanency and facilitating the kinship family’s access to community supports. In these cases, the kinship service file may remain open for up to 3 months with a clearly stated rationale for ongoing service.

### Intent

The overall intent of this standard is to:

- Describe the decision points that will determine file closure;
- Establish an overall focus on outcomes in kinship service cases;
- Establishes a process of checks and balances for decision-making that will help families to be able to support the child and no longer require the involvement of the Society.

### Outcomes
- Family integrity and healthy functioning is affirmed;
- Casework is focused and time-limited, reducing case “drift” in the system.

### Practice Notes
Kinship service is meant to promote healthy and independent family functioning that focuses on child safety, normal child development in a familiar, nurturing environment, and ultimately, permanence for the child. Another focus is to balance the provision of support against the risk of unnecessary intrusiveness into the family, or the risk of promoting an ongoing dependency on the society. Regular review of the Kinship Service Plan should result in decisions to close kinship service files where service goals have been met (including a plan for permanency) and no critical or unresolved safety issues exist.

It is not intended that kinship service files be kept open indefinitely. It is envisioned as a short term service.

A Kinship Service file may be re-opened for assessment and/or support:
- If after closure following reunification with primary family, the child is again in need of protection and the kinship service family expresses a desire to care for the child again; a reassessment of this plan will be required following Kinship Service Standards;
- For short-term intervention to assess the situation and if appropriate to provide short-term supports necessary to sustain the stability and continuity of the kinship service living arrangement where no protection concerns exist.

### References
*Ontario Regulation 206/00, Part II, Family and Community Placement*
1. Search for Kin
   - Obtain information to search for a safe alternate living arrangement for the child with a relative, extended family member or a member of the child’s community
   - Inclusion of the child’s band or native community in the search process

2. Initial Screening and Assessment of Kinship Service Home
   - Completion of file and police checks, interviews with caregivers and child
   - Response time – consistent with the regulations (7 days, 30 days)
   - Assessment of the home environment including physical aspects

3. Comprehensive Assessment of Kinship Service Family (worker assigned to kinship family)
   - Extensive review of child’s needs and kinship capacity
   - Assessment of ongoing safety considerations
   - Review of immediate plan and permanency options
   - Provides a clear understanding of strengths inherent in the kinship family
   - Provides a clear understanding of the supports required to meet the child’s needs
   - Provides a broader base of information on which to make decisions

4. Kinship Service Plan
   - Written service plan completed within 30 days
   - Review and update within 3 months of placement
   - Identifies the specific needs of the child
   - Identifies the supports to assist the child and the kinship family
   - Sets out time targets for care and decision making for the child
   - Review will determine if the plan is realistic, safe and viable

5. Kinship Service File
   - Open after face to face with kinship caregiver or if child already placed by family
   - Record file and criminal checks
   - Case Notes
   - Family Assessment
   - Initial Assessment
   - Comprehensive Assessment
   - Closure Summary

6. Case Closure
   - Kinship home excluded not approved
   - Kinship home voluntarily withdraws
   - Child is no longer in need of protection intervention
   - Kinship family no longer require Child Welfare supports