

MAKING IT WORK:

Using the Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP) to Close the Permanency Gap for Children in Foster Care

A Summary

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Fostering Connections Act) established the federal Title IV-E Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP). It gives states the option of providing ongoing financial assistance with federal support through Title IV-E GAP for children who leave foster care for guardianship with a relative caregiver. *Making It Work: Using the Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP) to Close the Permanency Gap for Children in Foster Care* examines the benefits of Title IV-E GAP and best practices in states implementing the GAP. It provides a snapshot of state activities early in the implementation process so progress can be tracked over time. *Making It Work* is a valuable resource for agency staff and stakeholders in states that have not yet decided to apply for GAP funds and for those in states that are currently implementing GAP and want to enhance the reach of the program. It will help states find ways to improve the permanency continuum for children.

Making It Work is based on a survey conducted with state officials, and in some cases other stakeholders, from the 29 states and the District of Columbia that had approved Title IV-E GAP programs as of September 2012.

States and American Indian Tribes with Approved Title IV-E Guardianship Assistance Programs (GAP) As of September 2012

Alabama	Louisiana	Oklahoma
Alaska	Maine	Oregon
Arkansas	Maryland	Pennsylvania
California	Massachusetts	Rhode Island
Colorado	Michigan	South Dakota
Connecticut	Missouri	Tennessee
District of Columbia	Montana	Texas
Hawaii	Nebraska	Vermont
Idaho	New Jersey	Washington
Illinois	New York	Wisconsin
	Port Gamble S'Klallam Indian Tribe	

Interviews were conducted and information on related policies was collected by staff from the ABA Center on Children and the Law, Casey Family Programs, ChildFocus, Child Trends, Children's Defense Fund, and Generations United. Each of these organizations has a long-standing commitment to helping children in foster care connect with family. Casey Family Programs assisted with funding for the survey.

The report's overview presents the following key findings from the survey:

- States with and without previous guardianship assistance programs recognize the benefits of Title IV-E GAP for children. Eight of the 30 jurisdiction that applied for GAP had no previous program.
- Guardianship assistance provides an important permanency option for children for whom neither return home nor adoption is appropriate.
- Twenty-seven of the 30 jurisdictions implementing Title IV-E GAP are also providing guardianship assistance with only state funds to children not eligible for Title IV-E GAP.

- Eighteen states and the District of Columbia extend Title IV-E GAP to age 21 for youth who have disabilities that warrant continuation of assistance and/or for youth who moved to guardianship at age 16 or older and are engaged in school, working and/or preparing for work. Four states extend Title IV-E GAP to age 19 and the remaining states stop Title IV-E GAP at age 18.
- Sibling groups, older youth, other children considered “hard to place” and American Indian children are getting special attention as GAP implementation gets underway in the states.
- Title IV-E GAP helps highlight the importance of permanency and kin to a range of stakeholders, including agency staff, the judiciary, relatives and the broader community.
- Although few states have data available at this early stage, a number are anticipating fiscal benefits from GAP.

Making It Work describes several key elements of Title IV-E GAP implementation that came up repeatedly in the GAP survey. First, states were clear that it is critically important to ensure GAP is used appropriately as permanency decisions are made for individual children. The requirement to first decide that return home and adoption are not appropriate was taken seriously by states. Second, states were giving careful attention to defining “relative” to enable GAP to reach all children who can benefit from guardianship assistance. For example, of the 30 jurisdictions, 22 include fictive kin – such as a family friend or god parent – in their definition of relative, as well as persons related by blood, marriage or adoption. Third, licensing often received attention in planning for GAP implementation. Finally, there was the recognition of the need to get all staff and stakeholders trained and engaged so they understand how guardianship and GAP fit in the permanency continuum and can ensure all eligible children truly benefit from GAP.

The report also identifies implementation challenges and lessons learned in the states. Lessons learned by the states can be summarized briefly in six key points:

1. Build support for permanence and kin in order to build support for guardianship and GAP.
2. Engage staff and stakeholders early in GAP implementation and keep them engaged.
3. Be clear about who is eligible for the Title IV-E GAP program and highlight how additional children can benefit from state-supported guardianship assistance.
4. Find ways to promote licensing so it becomes less of a barrier to placing children with relatives.
5. Look to what other states have done. Don’t try to reinvent the wheel.
6. Capture data in the state’s information system necessary to track the impact of GAP.

In the report, there are boxes throughout the overview that summarize activities in the 30 jurisdictions surveyed. The report also includes a fact sheet and narrative for each of the jurisdictions based on their interviews and policies, as well as a list of resources from each that may be helpful to others. In addition to Appendix I, which includes the state fact sheets and narratives, the eight other appendices include the methodology, identify state contacts and contacts for collaborating organizations, and also include as a variety of resources on the Fostering Connections Act and GAP.

Making It Work is available at www.fosteringconnections.org and www.childwelfarepolicy.org and on the websites of many of the collaborating organizations.

