

RELATIVES STEP UP FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

yet California does not equitably support foster children living with a relative

I am a 57-year-old mother of four grown children and 13 grandchildren. My granddaughter Abbie and her half-sister Layla entered foster care two years ago when their mother began using drugs. Child protective services asked if the girls could live with me. They were hungry, frightened and the only belongings they had were in a paper bag. I was scared and the social worker provided very little information about being a parent in the foster care system. Because Layla is not my biological grandchild, she immediately received a clothing allowance and state foster care benefits. The support for Abbie is different and hardly covers her basic needs. I have fought hard to keep these girls together. I had to parent both of them the same, even though the difference in support for Abbie and Layla is so great. They are equally amazing and deserve equal support. If I had adequate support, I would be able to provide more healthy activities like sports or dance. But these things are too expensive, so we make do.

-Sharon M.

Sharon is not alone. More than a third of California's 50,000 foster children live with a relative and 45% are in Los Angeles County. The majority of these children do not receive the support provided to other foster children simply because they are placed with kin. Relatives are the backbone of the child welfare system.

36% of California's foster children are placed with relatives.

Foster children placed with relatives are like any other—they have been removed from their homes due to abuse



or neglect, and taken into state care with the promise that they will be shielded from further neglect. Studies show that placing children with relatives can mitigate trauma, reduce behaviors that can lead to placement in a group home and increase the likelihood of achieving success later in life. Relatives also provide consistency, stability and preserve family and community connections.

Despite the importance of family members to improving their well-being, many children placed in the homes of relatives do not receive the financial support to meet their basic needs. This is true despite the fact that California requires relatives to meet the exact same licensing requirements as all foster parents.

Children placed with relatives receive the short end of the stick. Federal financial support for children placed in foster care is based on antiquated rules that have not been updated since 1996, and the bulk of children in foster care in California don't qualify for this federal support. The state steps in to support those foster children who are ineligible, but only if they live with an unrelated foster parent. They refuse to pay the same benefits for children placed with relatives.

California and Oregon are the only two states that refuse to ever provide state foster care benefits to relatives.

Here's what California pays to support a non-federally eligible foster child:



\$351/month for a child in a relative home



\$799/month in a non-relative home*



\$8,300+/month for a foster child to live in a group home

*the rate can be as much as \$3,000/month if the child has special needs

The state has determined that the minimum amount of support necessary to care for a foster child is \$799/month, yet they turn around and provide only \$351/month if that same child lives with a relative. It defies reason!

Our child welfare system is on shaky ground. Without grandparents and other relatives willing to step up and support children in foster care, our entire system would likely collapse.

To ensure that all of California's foster children have what they need no matter who their foster parent might be, the Alliance and our partners have launched a campaign called **Step Up: Supporting Relatives, Protecting Children.** Step Up seeks to educate the public and law makers about the grave inequity that exists in our child welfare system in order to bring about change that can keep more foster children in safe, loving families. Learn more and join the Step Up coalition by visiting our dedicated website at stepupforkin.org.

Los Angeles Times

Tuesday, September 3, 2013

OP-ED

Families who foster deserve parity
Relatives who care for a child deserve the same benefits as non-related foster parents



I am a single mother caring for my six-year-old daughter. My niece, Nicka, 2, was placed in foster care as an infant and spent time in multiple homes. I couldn't bear the craziness of her early life, so I decided to give her a stable home. Before Nicka came to live with me, I worked nights at Denny's and spent my days in community college. Once Nicka came, I had to give up school because Nicka needs lots of attention and counseling every day. When she lived with a foster parent, Nicka received funding for the therapy, but I pay out of pocket. When she lived with a foster parent, she received more than \$1,000 a month for her care. I receive \$351 a month, which barely covers the cost of gas to get Nicka to her appointments. I'd like to adopt Nicka, but the system won't let me until I get an apartment with a second bedroom, which I can't afford right now. I'm really worried about our future. I would love to finish my education and get a good job so that I can provide for my daughter and Nicka, but it seems like an out of reach dream.

-Ana T.

"The system needs to support relatives who are willing to step up to the plate." Read the Alliance's complete Los Angeles Times op-ed from September 3, 2013 at kids-alliance.org/relatives or latimes.com.