

 BLOOM WORKS



Background Checks for Kin Caregivers: Kin Caregiver Experiences

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April 17, 2023

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This learning sprint is part of a series of deep dives and user research to develop new model licensing standards for kin. Learn more about the new model standards here:

<https://www.childwelfareplaybook.com/kinship-caregivers>

Overview and Approach

Bloom set out to identify evidence-based best practices for agencies running background checks on kin caregivers, in order to:

- Make the process of submitting to a background check less confusing and intimidating for kin caregivers
- Ensure children and youth are placed with kin caregivers as quickly and efficiently as possible
- Expedite kin caregivers' eligibility for stipends, especially title IV-E eligible payments

To understand background check processes, we:

- Met with **6 subject matter experts** and
- Submitted one researcher to a series of background check processes for working with children in a daycare facility in Pennsylvania, writing **ethnographic field notes** about the experience.
- Participated in and processed notes from **45 deep dive conversations** with state and Tribal child welfare agency representatives.

To understand kin caregivers' experiences, we:

- Conducted and analyzed an **online survey** which was circulated nationally by Think of Us, Foster Success, Generations United, the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA), Straight From the Heart (a CPA in CA), Paper Prisons Project, Washington state kinship network, and Resource Family Working Group members.
 - We asked about kin caregiver experiences and what they thought should be considered when evaluating safety for placements.
 - We received responses from **97 kin caregivers**.
 - Most, 76 respondents (78%) had been kin caregivers and had completed background checks. A small minority (4 respondents, or about 4%) had been kin caregivers but had not completed background checks. Fifteen respondents (about 15%) had only considered becoming a kin caregiver.
- We also conducted **5 semi-structured interviews** with kin caregivers located in Washington, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Utah.
- We pulled relevant data from **4 interviews conducted for the Kin-first Culture sprints**, with kin caregivers in Washington state.

Summary of Findings

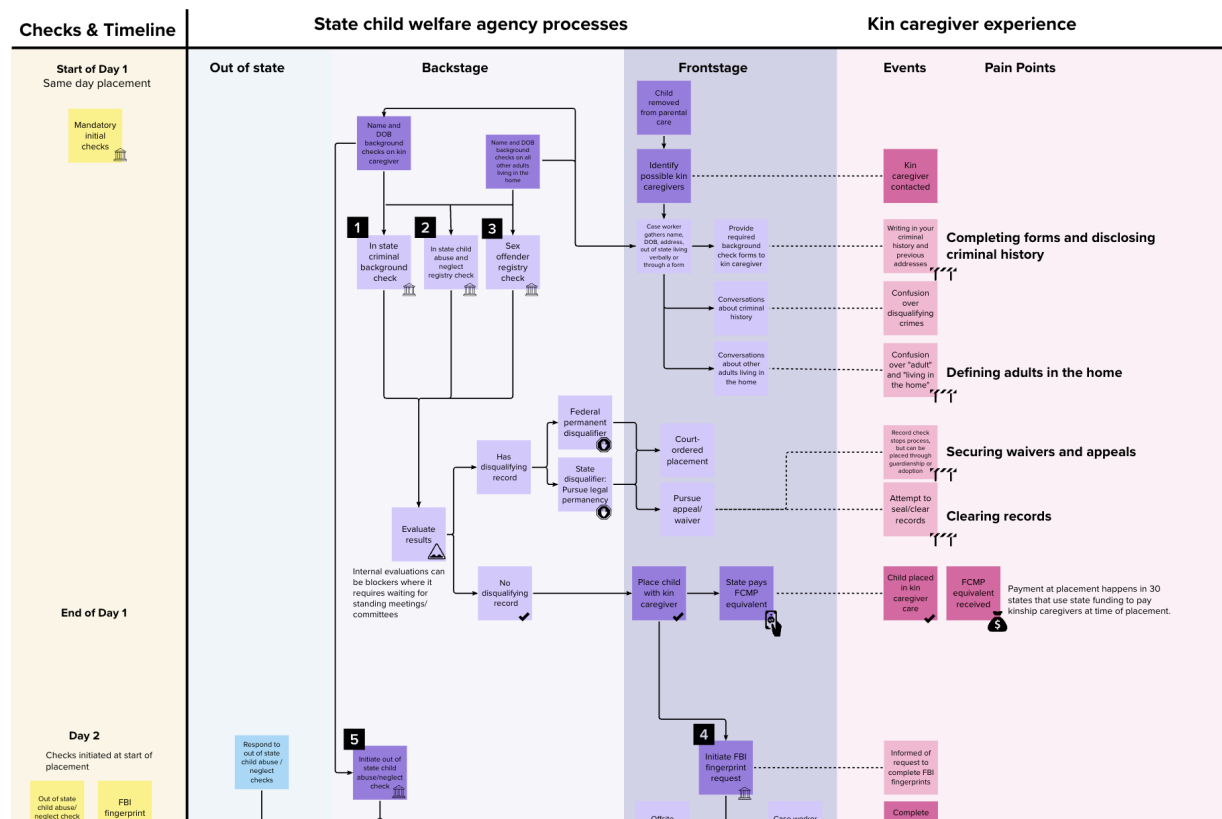
Kin caregivers spoke about the background check process as one small but important step, and potential blocker, in an overwhelming time of transition.

We present our findings in 4 parts:

1. **Process maps:** we mapped the current process, highlighting pain points and offering an ideal process map as a future state example, that would address issues and expedite compensating kin caregivers.
2. **Pain points:** kin caregivers experienced challenges in the background check process, which we illustrate with quotes.
3. **Promising practices:** some kin caregivers' also had positive experiences from the background check process, and we heard about some promising practices from child welfare agencies interviewed in deep dives.
4. **Profiles:** appended are 5 short narrative profiles of kin caregivers highlighting their unique experiences.

Process Maps

Current process

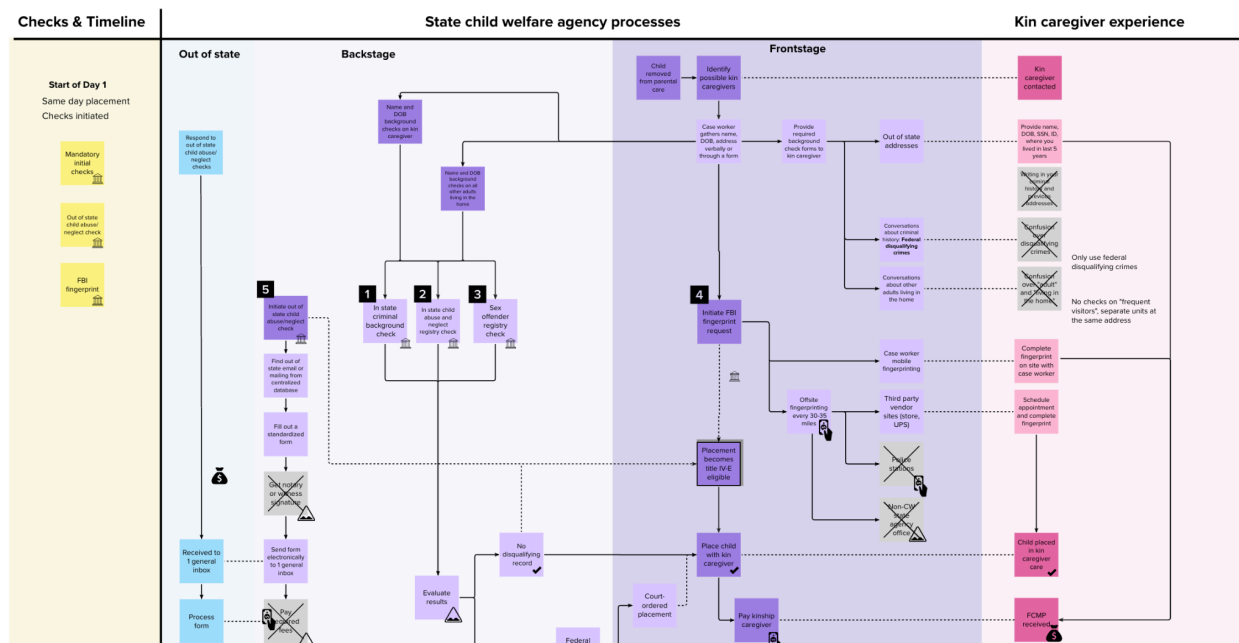


[The current process map](#) provides an overview of the steps that state child welfare agencies initiate when running background checks. By mapping on kin caregiver pain points, we visualize where kin caregivers face barriers when going through a background check.

- The map starts when a child is removed from parental care, and ends at the point that a kin caregiver completes the background check steps required for licensure.
- The backstage processes are operational steps that happen behind the scenes, and denote points at which child welfare agencies face blockers that slow down the process.
- With frontstage processes, we highlight where child welfare agencies interact with kin caregivers and what parts of the process are visible to caregivers.
- Steps that are mandatory for title IV-E funding eligibility are noted as federal regulatory requirements. This map represents the common processes across states, with average timelines to complete each step.

Average times calculated in the map are drawn from the [data set](#) collected through conversations held with 45 state and Tribal title IV-E agencies.

Ideal process



The ideal process map presents a visualization of how we imagine the background check process can be expedited to work more efficiently for both child welfare agencies and kin caregivers, and remove blockers that create confusion for kin caregivers.

In this map, we visualize the importance of:

- Initiating all mandatory checks early, including out of state child abuse/neglect registry and FBI fingerprinting checks – at the start of placement for mandatory checks and out of state child abuse/neglect registry checks, and within 15 days for fingerprinting.
- Making funding available after the initiation of out of state child abuse/neglect registry and FBI fingerprint checks. This is in place of waiting on the results of these checks, which can delay financial support by up to 145 days for kin caregivers and children and youth in their care.
- Removing non-mandatory steps to eliminate blockers and speed up kin caregivers' eligibility for title IV-E funded reimbursements.
- Removing non-mandatory steps that create confusion for kin caregivers by:
 - Using the federal disqualifying crimes list and not adding state-specific disqualifiers.

- Not requiring checks on frequent visitors or people who have separate units at the same address.
- Making fingerprinting options easily available and accessible through mobile fingerprinting and third party vendors.

Pain Points

We heard from a variety of kin caregivers regarding their experiences with different parts of the background process. This list of pain points may not be exhaustive, but it was strongly felt by those we heard from. Kin caregivers struggled with:

1. **Defining adults in the home**
2. **Scheduling and coordinating appointments**
3. **Completing forms and disclosing criminal history**
4. **Securing waivers and appeals**
5. **Clearing records**
6. **Enduring long wait times for approval and funding**

1. Defining adults in the home

How adults in the home are defined and who in the home needs to submit to a background check can create confusion and barriers to completing the process. There are gray areas regarding what age someone is considered an adult for the purposes of the background check, what distinguishes frequent or overnight visitors from those who reside in the home, and how a property or address is defined in the case of multi-unit properties.



There have been situations where we have had a relative who lived in a Tribal apartment building, where **they [the state child welfare agency] wouldn't place with that relative because everybody in the department apartment building would have to pass a background check.** I know for a fact, they're not going to do that, you know, in town [off-reservation]. They don't require everybody [living in an apartment building] to go in and take a background check."

— Interviewee, child welfare agent for a Tribal Nation

The lack of clarity on how to define adults in the home is tough. Beyond that, we heard from kin caregivers that **the process created strain in their relationships and supports** — something we know is crucial in the early stages of kin caregiving.

“

I had an investigator call and ask if I could take [my relative], and I said yes. **The boyfriend I had at the time did not pass the background check.** It did not matter if [my] boyfriend did not live in my house, I had to do something else. So, the baby went to foster care. **I broke up with the boyfriend and said “my family is more important.”** Then the baby got placed with me.

— Interviewee, kin caregiver, Washington

2. Scheduling and coordinating appointments

It can be challenging for kin caregivers to access fingerprint appointments at locations and times that are easily available to them. **Kin caregivers told us about having to complete these steps in different towns from where they lived, which was difficult while also juggling childcare responsibilities and having to take time off work to get the process done.**

“

Over time, **different departments within the County HHSA requested fingerprints and wouldn't accept my fingerprint results from their own internal departments, even though sometimes they had been done within a prior month's time.** This was a headache as it happened repeatedly over time. A centralized depository for fingerprints that all agencies could access would be nice. – Prevent repetitive finger print requests.”

— Survey respondent, kin caregiver, California

We also heard from kin caregivers that it was confusing to have several different checks, and being asked to do repetitive checks. When one member of our research team underwent the background check process for daycare workers, she was continually confused tracking different checks – and the format for the letters showing results to the Pennsylvania state police check and the Pennsylvania child abuse and neglect check were very similar, making the job of distinguishing between them even more difficult. Our findings emphasized the need to clearly separate among the checks, while bringing these processes into a centralized place, and ensuring kin caregivers have access to the technologies necessary to complete them.

“

I just did this, do I really have to do this again, this is the same purpose. It's for caring for the same kids. So can I not? And then we didn't have to redo them. But if I hadn't been savvy and hadn't called them and said, This is stupid. I don't want to do it again. They probably would have gone and done it again.”

— Interviewee, kin caregiver, Washington

3. Completing forms and disclosing criminal history

Filling out complex and life-changing paperwork can be difficult, especially at an overwhelming time. Kin caregivers told us that it is important for the process to be as simple as possible, and ideally, if it could be done online ahead of any necessary appointments so they can fill out paperwork at a time that works best for them.



When I finally found a location to do it they weren't over booked so the appointment did not take very long. Filling out the questionnaire took the longest. It would be better to do [it] online so it can be done prior to the appointment."

— Survey respondent, kin caregiver, California

From some kin caregivers, we heard that it is difficult to talk about personal information, and can feel invasive to disclose events about the past. **Not knowing about what parts of their history is disqualifying** can also add to confusion about what they need to share. It also requires recalling an extensive level of detail about their past that they may not have easy access to. When one of our research team set out to complete background check requirements for daycare workers in Pennsylvania, she quickly found herself listing the names and ages of every person she had lived with since 1978 for the PA child abuse and neglect check. This was an enormous undertaking.

Beyond just standard paperwork, in some states, an initial step before running a background check involves kin caregivers being asked to write down their entire criminal history. **Writing down criminal history is intimidating and can be confusing**, since dates of occurrences, arrests, charges, and verdicts can differ and court systems are notoriously slow. Caregivers may not know the names of offenses and what they were charged for and what they pled down to can be different. Most people do not have complete or precise records of police and court proceedings, especially if these records were from years or decades prior.

If caregivers submit a criminal history that is incorrect or incomplete, and it doesn't match what comes back on the background check, they may be accused of trying to conceal their past by caseworkers or background check evaluators. Even worse, we also heard that in some states, if the criminal history that kin caregivers disclose does not exactly match the criminal records of the courts, the system will add the applicants additional criminal details to their permanent criminal record as a "self-disclosure." **This can create duplicate information for the same crime and means that when applicants complete the form, they may be literally writing their own criminal history into existence.**



So like let's say you got pulled over for reckless driving in 2021. But then you got found guilty in like 2022. So it goes on your record as 2022. But if you write down 2021, **the background check unit actually adds that information to your criminal history. So now it looks like you have two instead**

of just one because they trust that you know what's going on with your history. And they want to capture all of your history.”

— Interviewee, kin caregiver and social worker, Washington

4. Securing waivers and appeals

Caregivers who have a criminal history or records in the child protective services (CPS) database may need waivers, exemptions, or appeals during the approval process. This can add time, slow down approval, and delay payment. Caregivers need clear information about the goals of the background check (ie. which crimes are disqualifying), the process, and time-frame. When receiving the results of the background checks, in the case that there is a criminal history or CPS record, caregivers need clear information about their options for securing waivers, exemptions, or submitting appeals.

“

I have my own background, I have a founded finding. So most people who have a founded finding, have to get that remedied before a child can be placed with them. **So my grandson was placed with me, and what happens is that you have to do an administrative waiver, right? And that's the whole deal, right? You've got to do background checks. You've got to give statements for everything that you've done. You've got to get people to sign off for you. You got to do this 40 page deal.”**

— Interviewee, kin caregiver, Washington

Waivers, exemptions, or appeals can be intensive and prolong the time to placement or payment.

States should weigh the necessity of evaluating criminal records against the potential harm to a child that is kept or removed from care with a kin caregiver.

“

They might do the criminal background check and find out that there are some minor, like misdemeanor convictions from 10 years ago, [or even] a felony that happened 40 years ago, literally 40 years ago in their background. **And they're like, “Oh, we can't approve new until you do this other appeal process,” and that takes them literally months for [the state agency] to do their own appeal process. Meanwhile, this child is not with their grandparents or auntie uncle or even tribal members.** They're in a non-Indian home, waiting for [the state agency] to slowly, very slowly make their way through the process they created.”

— Interviewee, child welfare agent for a Tribal Nation, Northwest

5. Clearing records

Kin caregivers with criminal records may also be pushed into less desirable legal arrangements based on their records, perhaps forfeiting much needed financial support. State agencies should weigh the necessity of evaluating historical criminal records against the potential harm of withholding financial support that will benefit a child or youth in care with a kin caregiver.



But then, seemingly out of nowhere, passing my background check became an issue and [the state agency] continued to threaten to take my kin away from me if I didn't shift my case to being under the jurisdiction of a Tribal Nation. [The agency] wouldn't tell me the issue with my background check. **I went so far as to have her record cleaned/sealed, thinking that would solve the problem. But [the state agency] said "no, we won't tell you the problem, and also it's your husband, too."** [The agency] encouraged me to adopt to get around this. But I didn't want to do this."

— Interviewee, kin caregiver, Tribal Member, Northwest

We also heard that caregivers who have a history of being in care can face additional administrative barriers because of the difficulty of clearing a non-criminal record with CPS.



I have an issue in my background, from DCFS from Child Protective Services from when I was a kid. They weren't going to be able to get the process of the paperwork to clear that out before the date and it needed to be decided where the kids were going to be. And so that's when we decided well we'll just circumvent that and go for legal guardianship because they don't have that same process. **And so the difference is that it doesn't automatically kick any of those services into gear like it would if it was in foster care."**

— Interviewee, kin caregiver, Utah

6. Enduring long wait times for approval and funding

Many kin caregivers had to wait a long time for results from background checks, or delays in initiating an already lengthy process. This affected their trust in the child welfare agency and their commitment to centering the needs of children in care.

“

I'm not saying to cut corners, but the fact that they could have started the background check process and the certification process so much earlier is something that I will feel angry about forever.

— Interviewee, kin caregiver, Pennsylvania

Waiting for background checks to be assessed can delay essential funding and payments to kin caregivers who are taking on the unplanned expense of caring for a new child in their family.

“

We took this on, because we care about the child and the parent. But that doesn't mean we suddenly had an extra \$900 a month to pay for daycare. So can the agency help us? ... [The state agency tells us:] “We can pay for daycare if you become foster parents,” and we're like, “that's fine.” That's okay. I've been a foster parent before. That's not a problem. You know, “we'll do that.” So then getting that and then **waiting for the background check stuff to come back so that they could do our approval was just time consuming.**”

— Interviewee, kin caregiver, Virginia

Promising Practices

We also heard about positive experiences that kin caregivers had with background checks, and we learned about novel practices that some states are using to improve the background check process. While not exhaustive, we heard about the following promising practices:

1. A less punitive mentality
2. Flexibility on scheduling and payments
3. Accepting affidavits
4. Sharing results with applicants

1. A less punitive mentality

Kin caregivers are supportive of being background checked in order to assess caregiver safety to care for a child. However, they also believe evaluations should consider how kin caregivers may have changed over their lives.



If this is your kid, or your grandkid, or your best friend's kid, we already know why you're at the table. So can we start with a different mentality? Because ultimately when we're interviewing strangers for foster care, we're trying to discover if you're a predator, like that's literally what we're doing. Are you going to harm a child? Why are you here? But if you know why the person is here because **it's a family member, we should really just be looking for basics, your basic safety stuff and like what's happening right now in your life. I think we could throw anything I would say over five years. Ignore it. Like what is happening now?"**

— Interviewee, kin caregiver and social worker, Washington

Kin caregivers noted the motivation for becoming a kin caregiver is to support family and kin, which is different from foster care parents who may need further interrogation to assess suitability to take on a child to whom the parents will be a stranger. They described how **it is important to center the needs of the child and weigh perceived safety risks against the risk of removing a child from their kin connections.**



When assessing safety of relative caregivers it's going to be challenging to counterbalance the benefit of retaining kin connection by placing kids with people from their own community or people who are their actual relatives, knowing that our problems tend to clump – generational trauma, and exposure to behaviors that are not super helpful. We then go and repeat behaviors and have those challenges. **So how do you gather the right kind of data to support a family involved with the child welfare system in a way that is not judgmental, that is not classist, not**

racist? That does not jump to conclusions about the relative safety coming from that environment versus the relative danger of removing a child completely from their true identity.”

— Interviewee, kin caregiver and licensed foster parent, Washington

In particular, we heard recommendations to focus on crimes within the last 5-10 years, and not dig up records from many years in the past, especially if they do not have an impact on child safety.

“

Now as somebody who has a single incident of drugs – you know, a criminal conviction for drug use or assault, and it's from 5, 10, 20 years ago, the longer it is historical, and the person has a clean record, the less weight I would give it.

— Interviewee, kin caregiver and social worker, Pennsylvania

When asked what should disqualify someone from being a kin caregiver, we heard:

“

Any crime against children. I do believe the length of time for other criminal history should be looked at, such as drugs or or their minor offenses if they are in the far past. Sometimes people do change and are able to be a loving, caring environment and home despite their history.”

— Survey respondent, kin caregiver, California

2. Flexible scheduling and payments

Caregivers have busy schedules, so flexible appointment scheduling with availability on evenings and weekends, and with fingerprinting options near their homes are important. These options are often available in states that work with third-party vendors who have contracts with local stores. We also heard about promising fingerprinting options like mobile fingerprinting machines or machines that are directly located within child welfare agencies. It is important that when states make fingerprinting options available at external sites, they do not require out-of-pocket costs for kin caregivers, who may not have the resources to pay up front and be reimbursed later.

“

There were some forms, and then we needed to do the fingerprinting which we eventually found **we could get done at the local UPS, but only during certain hours because apparently only certain staff knew how to use it.** We had to pay something for that, I don't remember if they did or didn't reimburse us, I forget.”

— Interviewee, kin caregiver, Pennsylvania

“

So we both missed our appointments but then this makes it pretty simple for you to go in and reschedule your appointment. So I have rescheduled my appointment. I think I missed my

appointment a second time. I have no good excuses other than **I was totally overwhelmed and we live way out here so I had to go into [the city] to get my fingerprints done, which is like 40 minutes away to get anywhere.** To drop the kids, the little one off at daycare, I have to go 30 minutes to drop them off and then 30 minutes back home if I'm doing drop off or pick up that day."

— Interviewee, kin caregiver, Washington

3. Accepting affidavits

In the emergency background check process, South Carolina was the only example where they an in-state criminal background check does not need to be completed in order to place a child with kin or fictive kin:

“

We don't even require the criminal check to be completed prior to the same day check. They take a signed affidavit saying that the person has no disqualifying crimes, and then it is the state's job to verify this. For kin and fictive kin.”

— Interviewee, child welfare agency staff, South Carolina

4. Sharing results with applicants

In Arizona, instead of a background check result being sent to the case workers for evaluation, there is a physical card (similar to a library card) that is sent directly to the applicant through their vendor Fieldprint. This card allows kin caregivers to prove they have passed the necessary background check for multiple purposes (e.g., foster parenting and employment).

“

Yeah, like you get like that's like a little driver's license, look, I passed this wonderful FBI clearance. So you can reuse it like so for our licensed families who also wanted to go volunteer to school or become a teacher like now it's a central kind of registry almost. We can check in what happens is, every time there's any arrests or anything happens with these people, we will get notified, kind of like an employer.”

— Child welfare agency staff, Arizona

When one of our research team underwent the background check process in Pennsylvania for daycare workers, she received her own results from the background checks, which meant she was granted the chance to make a choice about whether or how to present the results to a potential employer. This felt good as it respected the applicants' privacy. However, sending results to applicants can introduce further delays in the process, and applicants may not know how to read or

interpret their results. A combination of sending results directly to adjudicators, and making them available for caregivers to access directly, may be advisable.

Profiles

After interviewing 5 kin caregivers, we surfaced key quotes and paired them with vital information about their situations. They are presented here, anonymized and headed with pseudonyms.

Joana

Background: 41-year-old kin caregiver and social worker in Washington state

Caregiver to: 3-year-old and 13-year-old

Legal arrangement: Dependency

Pain points: Writing in criminal history and appointment scheduling

When Joana first stepped in as a kin caregiver to her cousins' 2 kids, she and her husband did their initial background checks based on their names and dates of birth, and had to fill out a background check form. That was difficult because her husband has a criminal history – mostly petty crimes from his adolescence. With her previous experience working as a social worker and helping people fill out these forms, she knew it would be a problem if what they wrote down didn't perfectly match the results of the background check – as anything they listed that didn't perfectly match the official record would get added to his permanent criminal record as a "self-disclosure".

“

So like let's say you got pulled over for reckless driving in 2021. But then you got found guilty in like 2022. So it goes on your record as 2022. But if you write down 2021, the background check unit actually adds that information to your criminal history. So now it looks like you have two instead of just one because they trust that you know what's going on with your history. And they want to capture all of your history.”

With a lot of items in his record dating back to his late teens and early 20s, Joana told their case worker that there was a criminal history, but because they didn't have exact dates, they wouldn't be writing it out. When the history did come back, the perception from the background check unit was that Joana and her husband were trying to hide something – perhaps because the message from the social worker had not been passed on.

Later on in the process, after fingerprints had been done, Joana and her husband completed their home study and received an automated email scheduling asking them to complete fingerprints a second time. She contacted the unit and asked them if they could avoid repeating the process – but not all caregivers would know to push back on repeat requests for fingerprint background checks.

“

I just did this, do I really have to do this again, this is the same purpose. It's for caring for the same kids. So can I not? And then we didn't have to redo them. But if I hadn't been savvy and hadn't called them and said, This is stupid. I don't want to do it again. They probably would have gone and done it again.”

Carol

Background: 48-year-old kin caregiver and social worker in Virginia

Caregiver to: Newborn

Legal arrangement: Foster care

Pain points: Delays and financial needs

Carol and her husband stopped foster parenting about 2 years before they got a call. Their former foster daughter had a newborn, and needed support. They agreed to help. Already familiar with the process, they filled out packets of paperwork with their backgrounds and social histories. They signed up to be fingerprinted at a local tanning salon. It was a fine experience. But both Carol and her husband worked full time and knew the costs of daycare were going to be a problem.

“

Daycare prices are not cheap anywhere you live and it certainly wasn't cheap where we were living and we didn't plan for a newborn. We took this on, because we care about the child and the parent. But that doesn't mean we suddenly had an extra \$900 a month to pay for daycare. So can the agency help us? We can pay for daycare if you become foster parents, and we're like, that's fine. That's okay. I've been a foster parent before. That's not a problem. You know, we'll do that. **So then getting that and then waiting for the background check stuff to come back so that they could do our approval was just time consuming.**”

Delays were not the only issue. Carol and her husband had to wait for the background check to return so they could get approval in order to qualify for assistance with the cost of daycare. But Carol said the child welfare agency sent them to other sources of financial support before they agreed to help — revealing that if Carol and her husband became foster parents again then they could receive assistance.

“

Well, we felt like they were giving us kind of a circular issue of like, “well there's no funding.” They made us go and apply for childcare assistance on our own in our locality. Based on our income, well, we're not going to qualify because like I said we both work full time. But do we make enough to pay \$900 out of the blue? So we were like “okay, no, **we don't qualify for this reason, because we made too much and we don't qualify because we weren't a biological or adoptive relative of the child.** So we didn't meet certain criteria for her to be eligible under our name, even regardless of income.” We're like, “Hey, guys, this isn't the answer. We don't have this.” They're like, “well, **we can pay for daycares if you become foster parents,**” and we're like, that's fine. That's okay. I've been a foster parent before. That's not a problem.”

Melissa

Background: Kin caregiver in Utah

Caregiver to: 2 grandsons, a 3-year-old and 4-year-old

Legal arrangement: Guardianship

Pain points: Non-criminal CPS record as a minor

When Melissa received a call from CPS about her 2 grandchildren, she was willing to step in to provide emergency placement for them while their parents tried to figure out their situation. When it was clear that wasn't going to work, the case worker was going to initiate foster care, but there was a problem with her background check. It was a decades-old unfounded allegation in the CPS database from when she was a child and in DCFS care. As a result, they hired a lawyer to get guardianship, knowing that providing foster care would not be an option.

“

I don't think we got to make the decision. I think the circumstances made the decision for us.”

After six months of waiting for an appointment to clear her record, Melissa and her husband could no longer afford to pay the lawyer. She set about a 3-years-long process to try to remove this from her record on her own. but bureaucratic intricacy and costs prevented her from succeeding.

“

I've spent three years trying to clean this up. And it's not even a charge. It's not, there's nothing to it and I can't get it to go away. So I haven't, it's a problem with me. As well as probably a problem with the system. You send that in and you get back the thing saying that it's the wrong petition, and that you need to do the judicial one. So then I'll send the judicial one in with the case numbers and everything and they say that the case numbers don't match up. Because there was never a case because it never went to court so they don't have a case number. It's not in there. **So somewhere in there, I'm getting lost in this paperwork loophole.”**

Under guardianship, not only did Melissa have extra legal costs, but also was not eligible for any emergency expenses or financial supports that would have otherwise benefitted her grandchildren. What's more, Melissa fears this issue would come up again in the future, if she pursued her interest in a Child Development degree, for example. This DCFS record acts as an indelible reminder of her time in state dependent care.

“

I've gotten to this place where I've ended up volunteering for the school and then one thing led to another and now I'm on the policy council and I'm doing these things for the school, and I want to maybe look into this possibility of furthering this Child Development degree and I don't know if that's going to come up again. **I've done a lot of hard work to get away from those things that I had there growing up and I don't want to have it there, but it is what it is.**

Sheila

Background: 60-year-old Kin caregiver and business analyst in Pennsylvania

Caregiver to: 17-year-old granddaughter

Legal arrangement: Unknown

Pain points: Delays in background check and certification process

Sheila was called at work about a situation at her daughter's house and that she would need to pick up and provide temporary care for her eldest granddaughter. She described the initial checks being very quick, just verifying her identity. That first weekend, her granddaughter got sick. She called Children and Youth Services (CYS) who were closed, and made the decision to take her to an urgent care for needed antibiotics. She ended up paying out-of-pocket for these and other medical and dental costs for about 6 months because she had neither the Medicaid card nor medical records of her granddaughter, or other support she would have received as a certified foster parent.

A couple of months into the emergency placement, Sheila started asking about how to become a certified foster parent as her daughter's situation had not changed. She was told by CYS it was too early to consider certified foster care. The initial 60 day investigation got extended out another 30 days after which point CYS decided to enter her as a dependent into the foster care system, and a more detailed set of background checks and paperwork needed to be completed.

“

There were some forms, and then we needed to do the fingerprinting, which we eventually found we could get done at the local UPS store, but only during certain hours because apparently only certain of their staff knew how to use it. We did have to pay something for that. And I think they, I don't remember if they did or didn't reimburse us, I forget.”

Sheila was given a 60 day window to complete the entire certification process, or else her granddaughter would be removed from her care and entered into another foster family. It was an anxiety-filled wait, as the results only came through on day 57 or 58. While waiting and asking if an extension was possible if the background checks didn't come back in time, she was told no exceptions would be made.

“

Streamlining the background checks is something that needs to be done. And I'm not saying to cut corners, but the fact that **they could have started the background check process and the certification process so much earlier is something that I will feel angry about forever.**”

Danielle

Background: 37-year-old licensed foster parent and kin caregiver in Washington

Caregiver to: 2 nephews in care, 6-year-old and 14-year-old **Legal arrangement:** Foster parent

Pain points: Transitioning from foster to kin caregiving

When Danielle and her husband moved back to Washington after almost a decade in the military they decided to become foster parents. They had both grown up in difficult circumstances so they wanted to support kids going through similar circumstances. At the time, the background check was relatively simple, though it took a few months to complete. She described the difficulty of talking about her upbringing with the child placing agency, and having to disclose hard parts of her childhood.

“

I am still trying to find a way to talk about coming from a family like that without being judged for it.”

A few years later after their own experiences as foster parents, Danielle found out her nephews had been entered into foster care. She described this experience as challenging. She had made difficult decisions to sever connections with her sibling, but was called to help her nephews.

“

I genuinely thought maybe he'll [my nephew will] do better there [with a non-kin resource family] where he doesn't have all this history and he doesn't know where he came from. But then I realized I came to terms with that... **You go looking for your history. Like there is an inevitability to wanting to know who you are and where you came from.**”

Danielle's process to eventually caring for her nephews was relatively simple because she was already licensed as a foster parent and had gone through the background check process. When she reflected on what safety means in the context of kin caregiving, she said she believes that it's important to consider the risk of harm when removing a child from family settings that may have experienced intergenerational trauma and hardship.

“

We then go and repeat behaviors and have those challenges. So how do you gather the right kind of data to support a family involved with the child welfare system in a way that is not judgmental, that is not classist, not racist? **That does not jump to conclusions about the relative safety coming from that environment versus the relative danger of removing a child completely from their true identity.**”