

Audit at a glance



Administration of Child Welfare Placement Services

MARCH 2023

ABOUT | When a child is removed from their home because of reported abuse or neglect, child welfare agencies prioritize placing them with “kin” first — family members or close family friends who have a relationship with the child.

Denver Human Services’ Child Welfare Division administers kinship placement in the City and County of Denver, and its staff certify the kinship caregivers who take in children removed from their homes.

Meanwhile, the agency’s Financial Services Division oversees an “imprest fund” that provides emergency financial support for families and caregivers served by Denver Human Services.

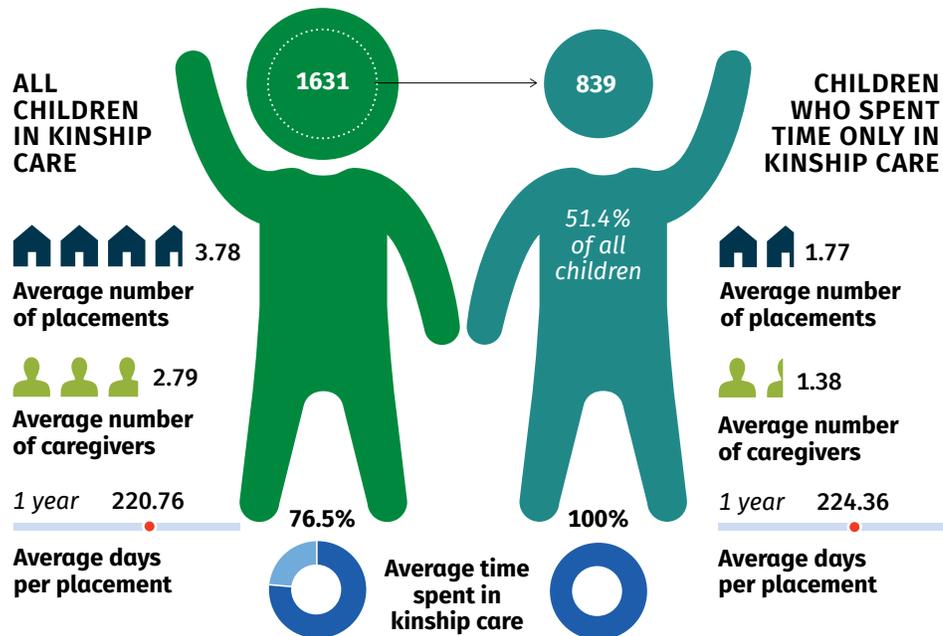
In the report

FINDING: The kinship caregiver certification process lacks formal training and guidance

Because child welfare services are supervised by the state but run by the county, Denver Human Services has little flexibility in changing policies or requirements around the kinship care certification process. Nonetheless, our audit found issues with aspects that are within the agency’s control.

At a glance: Local children in kinship care through Denver Human Services

This data is based on Denver Human Services’ records of children who were placed in kinship care for at least one day from Jan. 1, 2018, through June 30, 2022.



Source: Auditor’s Office analysis of child placement records from the Trails system as of Sept. 14, 2022, and as provided by Denver Human Services.

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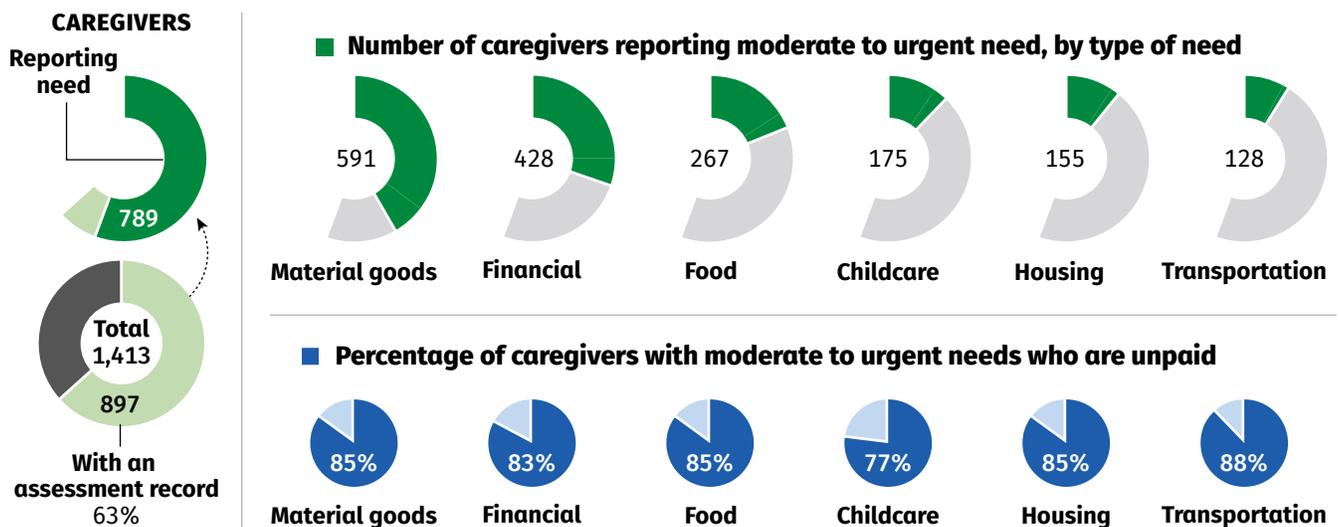
- Caseworkers and other staff in Denver Human Services’ Child Welfare Division do not have consistent training or clear procedures for certifying kinship caregivers.
- Because of this, child welfare managers cannot ensure these staff have the knowledge and tools they need to best serve both the local children removed from their homes and their new caregivers.
- Child welfare services is an inherently difficult line of work – which brings added stress on caseworkers and increases the chance they may leave their positions. But the Child Welfare Division does not have documented strategies to address this systemic risk of staff turnover.
- When Denver Human Services does not adequately manage the kinship caregiver certification process, the caregivers themselves can also miss out on needed financial aid – especially if they are not given thorough, accurate, and timely information.

FINDING: The policies and procedures for Denver Human Services’ imprest fund are insufficient and outdated

- “Imprest funds” are similar to petty cash accounts. Denver Human Services uses its imprest fund as an emergency resource to help those it serves pay for food, rent, childcare, and other time-sensitive expenses.
- But the agency’s procedures for its imprest account are missing important elements referenced in city fiscal rules. For instance, they do not include important steps agency staff do take to ensure the money is used responsibly and for its intended purpose.
- Additionally, because the fiscal rule for petty cash accounts no longer mentions imprest funds by name, staff within Denver Human Services are unsure what guidance still applies to the agency’s fund.
- Limited documented guidance for how to maintain and secure the agency’s fund could also impact how staff review and approve expenses, keep checks secure, and resolve recordkeeping issues.

Kinship caregivers’ reported needs

Our analysis of Denver Human Services’ child welfare case records seems to support caseworkers’ belief that the kinship caregiver certification process is not serving the caregivers who likely need it most. This graphic shows the number of caregivers who reported “moderate” to “urgent” needs among several general categories of needs and what percentage of each group didn’t receive monthly payments. The vast majority were not typically accessing certification-related funds either because they could not fulfill the certification requirements or because they chose not to become certified.



Source: Auditor’s Office analysis of kinship caregivers’ needs assessment records from the Trails system as of Sept. 14, 2022, and as provided by Denver Human Services.

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