

## Chapter 6 : Staffing Resources

# Navigator Practice Profile

The goal of the kinship and adoption Navigator is to support kinship caregivers and adoptive parents in accessing the services, resources, and social support they need to care for themselves and the children in their homes, through a trauma-responsive and equity-oriented approach. We provide these services with the objective of improving placement stability and well-being for all children and caregiver/adoptive parents.

The work of identifying services and supporting families is rooted in the six key principles of the Inclusion, Equity, Diversity, and Access (IDEA) Framework, which includes the continued analysis of historical factors and inequities; prioritization of solutions that balance power and promote social justice for families; elevation of inclusion and community voice; confrontation of all forms of discrimination and exclusion; understanding intersectionality and the sustained commitment to advance equitable practices with families, partners and colleagues.

### Core Practice Skills

#### Engagement

Engagement begins at first encounter and is established through an honest, respectful, and empathetic approach. We create a place for the family to tell their story by actively listening, maintaining transparency, and communicating humbly. We communicate through our words and body language our belief that the family is the expert on their situation. Through collaboration and partnership, we establish relationships with the kinship and adoptive families we serve, public agencies, and community organizations.

Genuine engagement with children, families, and community members requires intentional examination of our own biases and active listening to understand and honor each person's unique experiences, perspectives, strengths, and challenges.

**Inclusion**

Inclusive practice begins in partnership with children, families, and caregivers. The families that we serve are the experts on their own circumstance and the decision-makers about which services and supports they need. We actively center their voice, experience, and needs through strengths-based and open-ended questions to avoid making assumptions about a family's experience. During conversations, we acknowledge, validate, and respond to discrimination and experiences with oppressive systems and oppressive practice.

We continuously work to develop self-awareness of how our own identities shape our behaviors, beliefs, and opportunities. We use humility to be the bridge of awareness and accountability to one another and the families we work with. We continually learn about intersectional identities and the ways in which those identities are affected by social service systems to better understand a family's experience working with OhioKAN. Our commitment to practice skills of inclusion ensures that we use language and phrases that families can relate to and understand.

**Assessment**

We listen, gather, and make meaning of information families share with us to understand the individual's and family's strengths, needs, perspectives, and wishes. We know families are experts of their own experiences and create opportunities for them to express their needs. We understand that the needs of families can change; therefore, this collaborative process is ongoing through formal and informal interaction with the family.

We use this same practice skill as we gather information related to the strengths and needs of communities where OhioKAN families reside. Throughout this process, we have regular discussions focused on the historical and current systematic ways the communities we work with were/are currently marginalized to further improve how we address disparities and mitigate additional trauma or re-traumatization. Remaining curious of community needs and strengths assists us to identify gaps in services.

**Intervention**

When sharing information and connecting to services, we empower and actively assist kinship and adoptive families in obtaining support, that is individualized and intended to achieve their identified goals. We know that families are the experts on their strengths, needs, and experiences. We partner with families to achieve their goals, work in the community to identify the services and supports they ask for and offer referrals to community organizations and partners. We actively note when community services are not available or accessible and make efforts to increase the service array.

Meeting the needs identified by the family is our priority. In our collaboration with families, we explore and prioritize ways to remain solution focused and avoid reinforcing inequitable systems. We recognize that communities of color and other populations marginalized by systems are often met with discrimination and experience barriers to accessing services. To address access challenges, disparities, and mitigate trauma, we have regular discussions focused on the historical and current ways communities are marginalized by systems. We actively identify, document, and elevate service gaps and barriers.

**Collaboration**

We work to build a diverse and collaborative coalition of stakeholders, including youth and families with lived experience, from a cross-section of our community that will help us connect families to the services and supports they ask for, identify service gaps, and develop new service capacity to support the identified needs of kinship and adoptive families. As we work and learn with families, we uplift their intersectional identities and unique experiences, remain strengths-based, and commit to shifting power towards families. In our work with families, we also avoid damage imagery and drawing upon stereotypes. The needs of kinship and adoptive families will evolve in our community, and we will continue to search for new and innovative collaborations to meet their needs.

### Active Learner

Learning is an ongoing and vital component of the work we do in our community and with individual families. We approach families as partners and allies, with cultural humility and empower them as experts to inform us about their strengths and needs. We approach this work with curiosity and improve our understanding of why and how people are marginalized by systems in order to advance equitable realities both internally and for the children, families, and communities that we serve. To promote continuous learning, we use the Observation Rubric monthly with our Coaches, participate in practice calls, receive feedback on areas of strength and growth, and set goals to build on our skills.

We endeavor to improve our response and array of supports to build their strengths and address their needs. We embrace this commitment through continuous quality improvement activities such as actively reflecting on our practice, drawing insights on program delivery, and ongoing training and coaching. We also work to continuously examine our own biases, participate in listening and learning from diverse communities, and contribute new knowledge to the broader field of kinship and adoption Navigator programs.

### Reflection

Self-reflection on our practice with families and communities is an essential part of our sustained commitment to advanced equitable realities for the children, families, and communities we serve. We also have the responsibility to build and maintain an equitable, safe, and inclusive environment within our organizational community by reflecting on how we interact with each other. Self-reflection is a skill that takes practice. It requires us to be open to others and to hold ourselves accountable while also practicing self-compassion and forgiveness.

#### *When Receiving an Initial Contact,*

- During the initial contact, keep in mind this may be the caregiver/adoptive parent's first interaction with OhioKAN. It is important that their experience with you is marked by professionalism, acceptance and humility. The caregiver/adoptive parent is exercising strength and courage by calling, and it is a privilege to receive their call. One of the objectives of this initial call is to determine if OhioKAN is the right program for the caregiver/adoptive parent (Engagement)

- During the initial contact, explain your role and create space for the caregiver/adoptive parent to tell you their story to gently lead the caregiver/adoptive parent to answer the screening questions (outlined in SACWIS). This connection with the caregiver/adoptive parent is a conversation, rather than a formal interview. It is likely that the answers to the screening will present themselves while they share their story. Do ask for clarity, be mindful to not make assumptions about what you are hearing. Ask the caregiver/adoptive parent for their contact information. (Engagement and Assessment)
- Approach the conversation through a trauma-responsive lens by understanding the trauma kinship and adoptive families may experience remaining empathic, and staying solution focused. (Engagement, Assessment, and Inclusion)
- If the caregiver/adoptive parent does not meet the service criteria for OhioKAN, explain why and refer them to the appropriate service provider(s) or resource, if possible, to address their concerns. (Intervention)
- If the caregiver/adoptive parent meets OhioKAN criteria, explain how OhioKAN can support them. Ask the caregiver/adoptive parent if they would like to participate in the OhioKAN program and get their permission to gather a bit more information about their situation through the BASICS. (Assessment)

### **Our Core Practice Skills in Action for Families Screened into OhioKAN**

*When I open an OhioKAN service episode,*

- After the caregiver/adoptive parent has been screened in to OhioKAN and given consent to participate in the program, complete the BASICS assessment with the caregiver/adoptive parent to gain an initial understanding of the family's strengths and needs. Through open, transparent, and nonjudgmental communication, you show the caregiver/adoptive parent you see them, respect them, and believe they know what is best for their family. Explain that the BASICS helps you learn about their needs so that you can provide them with tailored support. Let the caregiver/adoptive parent set the pace for the conversation while they share more details about why they called OhioKAN and what services and support they're looking for. (Engagement, Inclusion, Assessment and Active Learner)
- Based on the caregiver/adoptive parent's responses to the BASICS assessment and by practicing self-reflection on what you have learned from the family and their needs, determine whether you can respond to their needs with referral information. (Assessment, Reflection, and Inclusion)
- If the caregiver/adoptive parent is receiving Connect Service Levels, provide the caregiver/adoptive parent with the appropriate referrals and information to community providers and resources. Ensure the caregiver/adoptive parent knows they can reach out to you at any time to address any needs or concerns that arise; provide the caregiver/adoptive parent with your email and phone number. (Engagement and Intervention).
- Let the caregiver/adoptive parent know that you would like to follow up with them to see

how they are doing and check if they have any other needs you can help with. Ask the caregiver/adoptive parent if you may follow up with them within two

- weeks and if they have a preferred contact method. (Engagement and Assessment)
- Ask the caregiver/adoptive parent if they are willing to participate in a satisfaction survey after the follow-up. (Active Learner)

*When I follow up with the caregiver/adoptive parent after sharing initial referrals,*

- Reach out to the caregiver/adoptive parent within two weeks of when their service episode opened using their preferred method of contact. (Engagement)
- Ask the caregiver/adoptive parent if they have been able to access the services you provided referrals for and if so, how did it go. (Assessment)
- Ask if they have other needs you can support with and record their response in the OhioKAN Database. (Assessment and Active Learner). Inform the caregiver/adoptive parent that the OhioKAN program is available to them as often and for as long as the program can be of assistance. (Engagement)
- If the caregiver/adoptive parent determines that they do not have any other needs, begin discussing the process for closing the service episode (Intervention) and let them know that they will receive a request to complete a satisfaction survey to give feedback on the services received. (Active Learner)
- If the caregiver/adoptive parent has not yet accessed referred services, ask if they would like additional support and/or have additional needs. (Active Learner and Engagement)
- If the caregiver/adoptive parent requests additional support and/or has additional needs, continue services accordingly. (Engagement and Intervention)
- After the conversation, take a minute to regroup and reflect on how it went. Focus on how you're feeling, what you did well and what you want to improve on for next time. If needed, journal, engage in a few minutes of mindfulness, or reach out to your Coach for a debrief, support and/or guidance. (Reflection)

### **Our Core Practice Skills in Action for Families Screened into the Collaborate Service Level of service**

*As I prepare to meet with adoptive and kinship families,*

- If you did not handle the initial inquiry, you will review the BASICS to ensure you have an understanding of the family's story and what precipitated the call as well as any potential service areas where you would like to gain more information. (Assessment and Inclusion)
- Reach out to the caregiver/adoptive parent to introduce yourself, explain your role, describe the Support Planning process, and request the opportunity to meet to learn more about what they need and to plan together for services. Ask who they would like to invite to participate in the meeting and schedule the meeting day, time and method that is accessible for the family (Assessment/Active Learner/Collaboration)

- Collect the necessary resources you will need when you meet with the caregiver/adoptive parent, e.g. BASICS, Support Plan, information on referrals provided in the initial binder (Intervention)

*When I meet initially with an adoptive parent or kinship caregiver/adoptive parent,*

- Introduce yourself, explain your role, and plan to co-create a Support Plan during the meeting so you can gain an understanding of the family's diverse identities, strengths, and needs. (Engagement and Inclusion)
- Let the caregiver/adoptive parent know you appreciate their outreach to OhioKAN and that you value their input and insight into their family's strengths and needs. (Engagement and Active Learner)
- Develop the Support Plan together through an equity-oriented lens by using open-ended questions, appreciative inquiry, and motivational interviewing and actively listening to what the caregiver/adoptive parent says. Respond to answers in an empathic, strengths focused and nonjudgmental manner. (Assessment and Inclusion)
- Reflect to the caregiver/adoptive parent your understanding of their circumstances, strengths, needs, and any culture-specific factors to ensure you understand what the caregiver/adoptive parent is saying. (Engagement/Assessment/Collaboration)
- Based on information gathered, co-develop a Support Plan with the caregiver/adoptive parent by identifying formal public services, community resources, and social supports that are culturally appropriate for the family and align with the caregiver/adoptive parent's goals. Use your knowledge of local resources and consult the OhioKAN info hub to identify needed trauma responsive and equity-oriented services, resources, and supports. (Intervention)
- Provide the caregiver/adoptive parent with the name, address, and phone number of the specific services, resources, and supports via their preferred method of communication (email, text message, or mail). (Intervention)
- Explain what happens next – establish the frequency and objective of follow up meetings in partnership with the caregiver/adoptive parent, schedule the next meeting, including location (virtual meeting, in-person, or phone), and discuss how the caregiver/adoptive parent can contact you. (Engagement)

*When I am assisting with a referral,*

- Once you have worked with an adoptive parent or kinship caregiver/adoptive parent to identify their needs, begin working with them to provide referrals. We always offer the family a choice to connect to their referrals through a warm transfer. A warm transfer is personally connecting the family with the service provider. A warm transfer can be done by connecting the family via phone to the provider or taking the family to the appointment and introducing them to the provider. If the caregiver/adoptive parent does not prefer a warm transfer, we respect their wishes because we believe that families are inherently capable of finding

solutions to the circumstances and challenges they face. (Intervention)

- When offering referrals, ask the caregiver/adoptive parent if they have the necessary resources to access the referral. For example, do they have transportation to the counseling services that are being recommended? (Assessment)
- If a family needs flexible funds or hard goods, explain the process and anticipated timeline, ensure they understand what documentation and signatures you will need to complete the request, and ensure you have the appropriate information to deliver the flexible funds or hard goods if the request is approved. (Intervention)
- When we learn that families are experiencing system level challenges such as services that are not available or accessible, we elevate to the appropriate party which may include the Benefits Coordinator, Coach, and Regional Director. (Inclusion and Collaboration)

*When I have ongoing meetings (virtual meeting, in-person or phone) with adoptive and kinship families,*

- Check in with the caregiver/adoptive parent to inquire about progress being made on each element of their Support Plan. Discuss any successes or challenges they have encountered since the last meeting. Ask the caregiver/adoptive parent how you can assist them in overcoming their challenges. (Engagement)
- Review the Support Plan and work with the caregiver/adoptive parent to address any barriers that may have arisen since the last meeting. (Intervention)
- Discuss with the caregiver/adoptive parent any adjustments they would like to make to the Support Plan, e.g., timelines, goals that have been met or need to be added. (Assessment)
- Confirm changes to the Support Plan, as needed. (Intervention)
- Review the comprehensive needs assessment to assist the caregiver/adoptive parent in identifying any additional areas of support. (Assessment)
- Confirm the caregiver/adoptive parent would like to meet again and finalize meeting details such as location and date/time. (Assessment)

*When a family identifies their needs have been met,*

- Once the caregiver/adoptive parent lets you know that all their needs have been addressed, begin discussing the process for closing the service episode. (Intervention)
- Make sure the caregiver/adoptive parent understands that the OhioKAN program is available to them as often and for as long as the program can be of assistance until the child reaches adulthood or is no longer living in a kinship/adoptive home. (Engagement)
- As needed, encourage the family to continue services and supports.
- Gain the caregiver/adoptive parent's permission to contact them in four weeks to check in with them to see if OhioKAN can be of any further assistance (Assessment)
- During the pre-episode closure check-in, let the caregiver/adoptive parent know they will receive a request to complete a satisfaction survey to give feedback on the services they



received. (Engagement and Active Learner)

*When I am out in the community engaging with families and partners,*

- When reaching out to community agencies to understand their services and make connections, find a moment to express OhioKAN's commitment to working with Kinship Families of all backgrounds. (Engagement, Collaboration, and Inclusion)
- When working with system partners, find opportunities to educate them about the unique needs of K&A families and how they can best be served and supported. (Inclusion and Collaboration)
- Advocate for and otherwise support the development and increased accessibility of needed supports and services within the community. (Engagement and Collaboration)
- If system partners exhibit any kind of discrimination and exclusion, try your best to advocate for the family by educating systems partners about the family's intersectional needs, strengths, and barriers (Inclusion and Engagement). If discrimination continues, work to contact and refer the family to services that are respectful and inclusive of all families. (Inclusion and Collaboration)

### **Our Core Practice Skills in Action for Reflection**

*When I reflect,*

- When working with families, during a follow-up call for example, take a minute to get grounded in your conversation by providing an overview of the last call from your perspective. Share relevant reflections about resources and the experience thus far with the family. Take a moment for the family to reflect and provide any clarifications on the last call from their perspective or confirm shared understanding. (Engagement and Reflection)
- When you feel uncomfortable, get curious about it. Reach out to your Coach or someone you trust to debrief. (Reflection and Inclusion)
- When you realize you may have hurt or offended someone by what you have done or not done, apologize and take steps to make amends and improve. (Reflection and Active Learner)
- When someone comes to you about how you may have hurt or offended them – listen and ask questions to make sure you understand, thank them for bringing this to your attention, take accountability and apologize. Reflect after the conversation on ways you can prevent a situation like this in the future. (Reflection and Active Learner)
- Identify your own strengths, biases, areas of growth, and places where you need to ask for help. (Reflection and Inclusion)
- Ask for feedback, support or guidance. (Reflection and Active learner)
- Continually examine your own power and privilege and how you are using it. (Reflection and Inclusion)
- Notice when you're judging someone or telling yourself negative stories about another person's motives or intentions. (Reflection and Inclusion)

- Notice when you are reaching your limits of physical and emotional energy and take steps to care for yourself. (Reflection)
- Reflect on how your intersectional identities are similar and different than those of the families you are working with and colleagues. Even if you have shared experiences, differentiate your own experiences from the experiences of the individuals you are working with. (Reflection and Inclusion)
- Questions to ask myself as I reflect (Reflection, Inclusion, and Engagement). In what ways...
  - Did I support inclusion?
  - Did I create opportunities for this family to be vulnerable?
  - Did I respond to vulnerability?
  - Did the family lead this conversation?
  - Can I grow moving forward?