Florida’s Relative Caregiver Program
A national model for easing the financial burden of kinship care

Florida recognizes grandparents as instrumental to ensuring the well-being of children. While the ultimate goal is to ensure that kids remain with their biological parents in a healthy environment, sometimes circumstances are so extreme that there is no choice but to remove a child from the parents’ home. When that happens, grandparents are often the next best hope for providing these children with a stable, loving home.

Most grandparents derive great joy from this role. But it often brings many challenges and responsibilities, too. To help strengthen family bonds and relieve economic pressures, Florida created the Relative Caregiver Program, through the Department of Children and Families. This program provides financial assistance to certain relatives who are caring for a dependent child and links them with services.

Florida’s Relative Caregiver Program provides the caregiver with a monthly cash assistance payment, which is greater than traditional cash “welfare” payments and is determined by the age of the child in care. Participants may also be eligible for other services (including subsidized child care) that support the child’s well-being and healthy development.

Like other assistance programs, applicants must meet certain eligibility requirements. However, unlike other programs, such as food stamps, the Relative Caregiver Program does not consider the caregiver’s income and assets in determining eligibility. Consequently, most children in the Relative Caregiver Program are also eligible for full Medicaid benefits as well as for Florida’s Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment Program.

To continue receiving benefits, participants must adhere to rules designed to ensure the well-being of the child. For example, children must maintain up-to-date immunization records, and school-age children must attend school regularly.

While the assistance provided through the Relative Caregiver Program can never make up for all that is lost when a child is removed from his or her parents, it provides much-needed assistance to caregivers who sacrifice much to ensure the children in their care lead healthy and happy lives.