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## **NJ 2-1-1 Partnership**

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### **NJ 2-1-1 Portal Provides Access to Kinship Navigator Program Support to Caregivers begins anew July 1 – Annual Enrollment Required**

(Whippany, NJ) At this time of year when we are honoring parents for all they do, it seems fitting to recognize the thousands of other relatives who step forward to fill the shoes of mothers and fathers who, for one reason or another, are unable to actively parent their children. In New Jersey, since July 1 of last year, 3,400 of those who have done so have looked to the Kinship Navigator Program for guidance and financial assistance, and in the process nearly 6,000 children's lives were made more secure. Since 2008, NJ 2-1-1 has served as a port of entry for this program.

"Our families told us what they need to strengthen their families, and we listened," said Allison Blake, Commissioner, NJ Department of Children and Families. "Often all they need is something simple like a bed so the child they're caring for has a place to sleep. It may be an item we all take for granted, but it can have a deep impact on a child's life."

"People who need assistance can call 2-1-1 at any time of the day or night on any day of the year. When they do, a call specialist will take basic information from them, enter it into our secure system and transmit it to the appropriate Kinship Navigator Agency for follow-up the next business day," explains Janice Kaniewski, NJ 2-1-1's call center director.

A new program year starts on July 1, with the beginning of the state's fiscal year. Both past program participants and those who are applying for the first time, must apply every year to receive benefits. Those benefits include such things as support groups, medical assistance, help with housing, legal services and help with one-time expenses like furniture, moving costs and clothing for the child.

Once the connection is made, eligibility is confirmed and the paperwork is in place, three layers of assistance become available. Initially, Kinship Navigator staff will discuss the caregiver's needs and help them connect to existing programs and services.

Additionally, agency staff will determine if a caregiver is eligible for Kinship Navigator Wrap-Around Program which is designed to provide temporary financial assistance.

The third piece of the Kinship Navigator Program is the Kinship Legal Guardianship (KLG) Program. To obtain legal guardianship, caregivers must have been caring for a child for at least one year and be willing to be responsible for the child until he/she reaches the age of 18 (21 if the child is disabled). Caregivers who have legal guardianship may also be eligible for a government subsidy.

There are four agencies in New Jersey that are responsible for implementing the Kinship Navigator Program. NJ 2-1-1 takes the guesswork out of who to call for assistance.

“We are pleased to have been given the opportunity to work closely with the NJ Department of Children and Families, Commissioner Blake and her staff to promote the Kinship Navigator Program” states NJ 2-1-1 board President Gina Plotino. “Connecting these special families to the help they need when they need it, is why we’re here.”

Visitors to [www.nj211.org](http://www.nj211.org) will find information about this and many other programs and resources created to assist children and families as they grow. To read more on this topic visit [www.nj211.org/early-childhood](http://www.nj211.org/early-childhood).

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#### **About NJ 2-1-1**

The statewide information and referral service began in 2002 when the United Ways of New Jersey spearheaded efforts to give people-in-need an easy way to find health and human services and the Board of Public Utilities designated the NJ 2-1-1 Partnership as the sole administrator of the three digit dialing code. Statewide coverage began in 2005. **In 2015 alone, the NJ 2-1-1 Partnership provided resource assistance to over 372,000 people who called 2-1-1 or visited our website.** With roughly 3,000 agencies in the organization’s resource database and over 10,000 programs and services listed, NJ 2-1-1 provides the public with front door access to non-profit, government and faith-based services, as well as disaster response information. Follow us on Twitter @NJ211 and FB <https://www.facebook.com/nj211partnership/>.