

Origins of Advocacy for September as National Kinship Care Month

Two persons and three organizations originally promoted September as Kinship Care Month.

In 2012, Gerard Wallace Esq., who is founding director of the NYS Kinship Navigator, was also acting director of the National Committee of Grandparents for Children’s Rights and recruited Cate Newbanks, who operated a kinship program in Virginia, to become the permanent director of the National Committee. Gerard and Cate were looking for ways to promote kinship care and decided to submit a resolution to the “We The People” website at that White House. This site sought public petitions and required a minimum number of sign on’s. The resolution proposed February as Kinship Care Month, because Gerard and Cate looked to Black History Month and George Washington’s birthday as a focus. George Washington had raised his two step-grandchildren so he was a kinship caregiver. The petition did not get enough signatures.

After 2012, Wallace visited Senators Schumer and Wyden’s offices and Congresswoman Bass’s to advocate for the resolution. Newbanks approached Senator Kaine. Wallace also attended the Child Welfare League’s 2014 annual conferences and used their hill visit day to continue talking to congressional leaders. Starting in 2014, both their home states and the U. S. Senate (Res.266, 2015) issued resolutions/proclamations.

By 2015, New York and Virginia had gotten resolutions.

In 2015, the Child Welfare League of America’s (CWLA’s) Charlene Ingram arranged a national webinar to promote the idea. Wallace drafted a power point and he and Newbanks presented to over 300. For a short time, the National Committee renamed itself as the National Kinship Alliance for Children, but the organization lost funding and has ceased operations. A guide was created by Wallace and the NYS Kinship Navigator staff, especially Rae Glaser (who in 2020 succeeded Wallace as director). The Guide presented various advocacy tools. Some of its pages are updated and included on these pages.

Other state legislatures and governors began issuing resolutions, often local and state organizations focused on kinship care promoted the idea. Advocacy continued at the CWLA conferences With Wallace’s drafting assistance, Senator Wyden and Congresswoman Bass introduced resolutions. Since then, advocacy in D. C. has been assisted by the efforts of the CWLA’s John Sciamanna, Shaquita Ogletree, and its president Christine James Brown.

To date: New York has held six annual statewide celebrations in Albany, along with many other local events, with similar celebrations occurring in many states, along with support in D.C from the Children’s Bureau.

Wallace retired from the NYS Kinship Navigator in 2020 but still works to promote National Kinship Care Month and is a now senior fellow at CWLA and a member of AARP NY’s Executive Council. The NYS Kinship Navigator continues to promote National Kinship Care Month in both New York State and nationally.
