

## Extended-family guardians face federal funding crunch

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Often, a grandparent is disabled or not able to work, or an aunt already has three kids of her own to support.

Nearly 1,000 children in Arizona live with extended family members instead of in foster homes.

But while federal funds help pay for foster care and adoption, they do not pay for permanent guardianship, leaving many of these families struggling to financially support these children, according to a report released Wednesday by Fostering Results, a nonprofit organization.

"In our opinion, it makes little sense," said Carol Kamin, president and CEO of Children's Action Alliance. "This lack of federal funding violates our American family values. Living with grandparents gives kids the benefits of having a family."

The report, titled "Family Ties," states that a lack of federal funding is hurting children who are fortunate enough to find safety, permanence and security with grandparents and other caregivers as an alternative to foster care.

"If it's a grandmother who's on disability, limited income, it's hard to take three kids into care and be able to support them," said the alliance's Beth Rosenberg.

Since 1999, Arizona has used state tax dollars and welfare reform dollars to support children living with permanent guardians.

But the Arizona Department of Economic Security reported that funding is half a million dollars short this year, meaning 150 children may not stay permanently with relatives.

"Last year, they had a deficit," Rosenberg said. "DES has not stopped putting kids in guardianship . . . but at some point they're going to have to do that."