

# Direct Cash Transfers to Support Reentry

Kinship Reentry Program  
Evaluability Assessment | 2023

**Kinship Reentry is the first known direct cash transfer+ program in the United States to support families welcoming back their loved ones from incarceration.**

This brief summarizes key takeaways from Chapin Hall's initial evaluability assessment of the Kinship Reentry Program, a direct cash transfer+ program created by the Osborne Association in New York City. In addition to providing vital financial assistance, Kinship staff go above and beyond to support families in navigating complexities of reuniting with their formerly incarcerated loved ones, many of whom have served long sentences.

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## Introduction

Reentry following incarceration is a [difficult yet critical transition](#) for the person returning as well as their loved ones. Ample research suggests that [housing](#), [employment](#), and [family unification](#) supports are vital to post-release success. Significant national [investments](#) have been made to support reentering individuals and address the multiple barriers they face. The process of welcoming a loved one home can be stressful, but families' needs are often overlooked. Whereas [evidence](#) shows that the majority of people returning from incarceration live or desire to live with kin, very few programs offer services to support families. Research on "what works" for families of their formerly incarcerated individuals is limited.

The [Osborne Association](#) is a nonprofit organization in New York City that supports people involved in the criminal legal system. In 2020, the Osborne Association identified this lack of focus on families and launched an innovative direct cash transfer program. Kinship Reentry Program ("Kinship") aims to support reuniting families, prevent homelessness among formerly incarcerated individuals, and increase public safety. In addition to cash, families receive wraparound services and supports (described below). While several localities are experimenting with direct cash transfers for reentering people, Kinship is one of the first programs, if not the first program, in the country to focus specifically on families<sup>1</sup> who are welcoming back their loved ones after incarceration.

<sup>1</sup> We use the word "families" and "clients" interchangeably throughout this brief. These terms do *not* refer to a reentering person who is coming back from incarceration. For Kinship, a client is the family member who is welcoming back their loved one from incarceration.

## Objectives and Methods

Two years into implementation of Kinship, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago partnered with the Osborne Association to assess and document the initial stages of Kinship implementation, refine the existing logic model, understand referral procedures, learn how the program is perceived and experienced by families and staff, identify desired short- and long-term outcomes, and assess program readiness for rigorous evaluation in the future. Table 1 describes our activities and objectives.

**Table 1. Data Collection Activities, Objectives, and Descriptions**

Objective	Data Source	Description
Understand program design logic and operational context	Review of program materials	Kinship operational manual; Kinship promotional material; Kinship logic model draft created by Osborne staff; Kinship referral and intake documentation.
Understand program design logic and refine the original logic model created by Osborne	Theory of Change Workshop	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Two-hour workshop with 7 Kinship staff and Osborne leadership. Participants responded to 4 questions:</li> <li>2) What is the problem I observe (the issue Kinship is addressing)?</li> <li>3) Why do I think the problem is happening (hypothesis)?</li> <li>4) What will I do to address it (intervention)?</li> <li>5) What do I expect to happen as a result (expected outcomes)?</li> </ol>
Learn how families experience Kinship	Family interviews	15 semi-structured interviews with heads of household who participate. Families were identified and recruited by Kinship staff.
Learn how staff and stakeholders experience Kinship	Staff and stakeholder interviews	11 semi-structured interviews with Kinship staff and leadership; members of the Osborne leadership team who conceptualized and support Kinship; and stakeholders who provide services or referrals.
Examine data to develop a client profile	Analysis of Kinship program data	Osborne shared demographic data on 249 individuals who underwent intake from August 2021 to April 2023.

## Initial Findings

Working in partnership with Osborne, we conducted the mixed-method activities described in Table 1. Our objective was to capture Kinship implementation and ascertain evaluability. In this section, we describe the core program components and provide a summary of our initial findings.

**Kinship provides a monthly charitable gift for 12 months.** After being determined to be eligible, participating families receive \$500 per month. This gift status prevents the cash transfer from affecting other public benefits or having tax implications. Families are trusted to deploy the funds at their own discretion, with a few restrictions: tobacco, alcohol, lottery tickets, and illegal substances, and the requirement to provide receipts. Families unanimously lauded the cash transfer as enabling them to support their returning loved ones (with bedding, food, transportation, clothing, recreation) and providing a financial cushion during a difficult time.

**Kinship offers tailored wraparound services.** Our data analyses and observations converge to indicate that Kinship staff go above and beyond to support their clients. Families connect with their Kinship case managers at least twice a month by phone or text; participate in two mandatory financial literacy sessions at the beginning of the program to help them learn about budget management and how to grow credit; participate in 4 virtual home visits where staff make sure the formerly incarcerated loved one has a safe space to live; receive support in advocating with landlords if housing conditions are subpar; and have access to other formal and informal supports offered by Kinship staff.

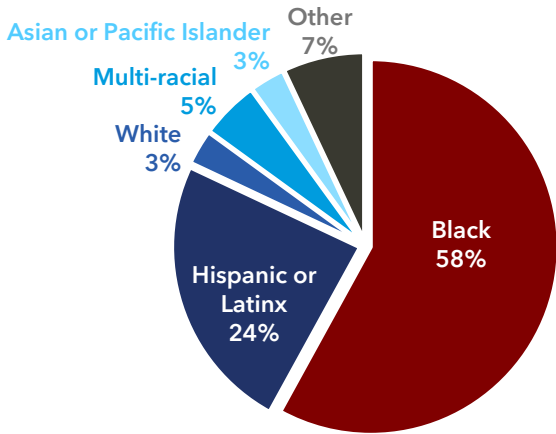
As of April 2023, of 57 enrolled families, 80% successfully completed the program, with 59 other family members still actively engaged at that time. The families we interviewed endorsed the value of the financial literacy program and were extremely enthusiastic about the quality and range of supports offered. Families expressed the wish for more families to benefit from the program. Some families stated that the somewhat abrupt cessation of cash payments was a bit challenging and that an extension or gradual reduction would be helpful.

**Participating families are racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse.** Based on our analyses of administrative records of 249 families who completed intake, we have seen that Kinship families are predominantly people of color, the vast majority (89%) are women, and clients are diverse in age, income, and highest educational achievement (see Figures 2, 3, and 4). The minimum age of participating family member was 24 and the maximum age was 86, with a median age of 52 years old. Families also had diverse relationships to their formerly incarcerated loved ones, with families welcoming children, parents, intimate partners, close friends, and distant family members whose incarceration ranged from 2 to more than 30 years.

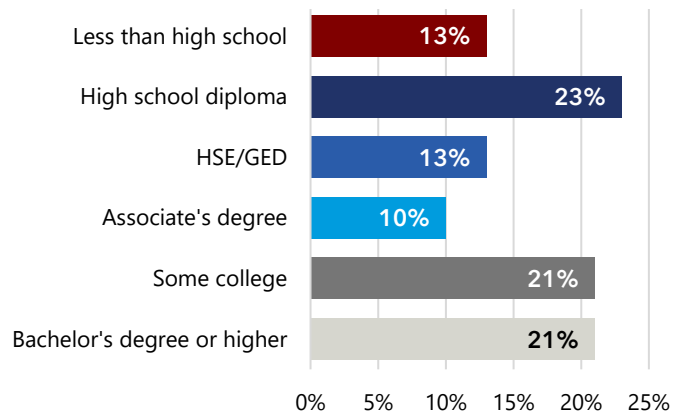
**Figure 1. Key Components of the Kinship Reentry Program**



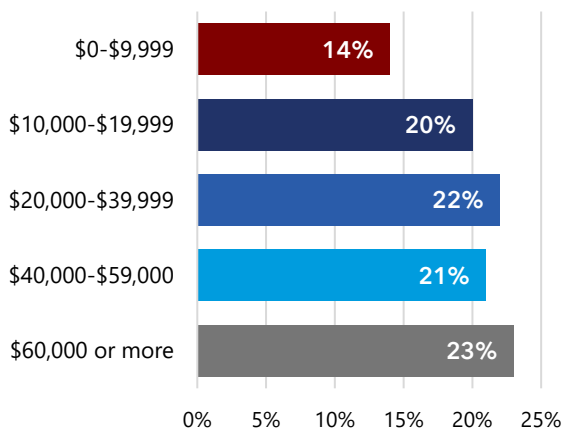
**Figure 2. Kinship Clients: Race and Ethnicity**



**Figure 3. Kinship Clients: Highest Educational Achievement**



**Figure 4. Kinship Clients: Annual Income**



As a group, Kinship families can generally be characterized as low income. Almost half are not in the labor force or are unemployed. While annual income varies among kinship clients (see Figure 4), almost 80% report having an annual income of less than \$60,000, which is below the New York City’s median household income of ~\$70,000 in 2021 as reported by the [U.S. Census](#). Most receiving families (92%) are stably housed. While enrolling in Kinship, a slight majority (53%) of kin expressed a preference for their loved one to integrate permanently in the household, and 46% said they aimed for independent living. Housing goals are a joint decision of family members and the formerly incarcerated individual and depends in part on their relationship (such as parent-child or partners)

***Kinship families appreciate staff support.***

Our observations and interviews indicate that program coordinator and case managers go “above and beyond” to meet families where they are and provide tailored supports. Such support is critical for any family reuniting with their loved one after incarceration. However, for some it is particularly significant because it happened during the pandemic, at a time when most people felt isolated and vulnerable. Staff efforts do not go unnoticed by the families, several of whom have shared that “staff feel like family.” Check-ins between case managers and clients are supposed to occur a minimum of 2 times per month but our observations and data analyses show that they average 3 to 4 times per month. Check-ins are a line of communication between case managers and clients to express any concerns and needs. The mode of communication varies based on client preference (for example, phone, text, or video call).

**Staff are welcoming. It’s hard for me to open up. They create an open environment. I lost both parents [during COVID and during my participation in the program]. My case manager helped, gave me a referral to grief counseling.**  
**- Kinship client**

***Demand exceeds program capacity.*** More than half of the families interviewed and some stakeholders shared that they wished more families could learn about the program and take advantage of it. Kinship now has a waiting list of eligible families. Families and reentering individuals learn about Kinship through a range of sources, from probation and parole officers to cellmates, service providers, and other forms of “word of mouth.” Although we did not discern a systematic recruiting strategy, the program has no difficulty attracting families. Osborne staff explained that while they wish to make the program available to more families, because the need is certainly there, the program currently has the capacity to serve only about 100 clients per year. Osborne leadership is actively exploring ways to expand the current capacity and meet the growing need.

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## Program Readiness for Future Evaluation

In addition to exploring the program model, a fundamental objective of this inquiry was to determine the feasibility of a rigorous systematic evaluation in the future. Such an effort would require:

- a theory of change and logic model, which are clearly evident;
- an established program model that articulates procedures (including recruitment, assessment, and monitoring) that can be replicated with integrity, which is largely in place;
- articulated desired outputs and outcomes that are measurable and relevant (well established, although not yet measured);
- sufficient number of families and returning persons to populate a study;
- resources to support both programmatic and evaluation objectives; and
- a qualified research team that can partner on all aspects of program development, adaptation, implementation, and evaluation.

At this time, Osborne is considering efforts to refine the model and serve as a trainer and technical assistance provider to other community agencies who can adapt and implement the Kinship model. This would require additional program development and more systematic approaches to referral and recruitment, eligibility screening, assessment, and service provision. There is little doubt that Osborne has the capacity to successfully conduct these activities, particularly in partnership with an evaluation team. Additional effort is needed to determine the specific number of families needed to support a rigorous trial, but it is likely to require a minimum of 100 families annually enrolled in services annually. The ultimate number and resources required will depend on the outcomes to be measured and the effect sizes for existing reentry interventions. Measures are likely to include indicators such as family well-being, housing stability among reentering individuals, and recidivism. Additional collaborative efforts are needed to select quantitative measures for a formal evaluation.

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## Conclusion

Kinship is a unique, promising intervention to support families who are welcoming home loved ones following incarceration. Chapin Hall’s initial evaluability assessment included several activities to support an evaluability determination, support the development of a logic model (and subsequent instrumentation), and inform an initial appraisal of program processes. Data and observations converge to suggest that Kinship is becoming well-known and there is burgeoning interest in adapting the model in other locations and settings. Importantly, Osborne’s approach to families embeds a level of commitment and individualization that is somewhat rare and may be difficult to replicate. Future efforts might attempt to further articulate and distill the effective programmatic, interpersonal, leadership, and management strategies that enable staff to help families feel so capably and effectively supported. As the program director stated, “Whatever these families need, we are there.”

We look forward to future discussions and planning future efforts in close collaboration.

## Statement of Independence and Integrity

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Chapin Hall partners with policymakers, practitioners, and philanthropists at the forefront of research and policy development by applying a unique blend of scientific research, real-world experience, and policy expertise to construct actionable information, practical tools, and, ultimately, positive change for children and families.

Established in 1985, Chapin Hall's areas of research include child welfare systems, community capacity to support children and families, and youth homelessness. For more information about Chapin Hall, visit [www.chapinhall.org](http://www.chapinhall.org) or @Chapin\_Hall.

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The opinions, findings, and recommendations expressed in this publication are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the funder or program.

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