

Kinship caregivers eligible for state financial support

Monday, January 9, 2006

By KATIE LIBECCO

VINDICATOR STAFF WRITER

Ohio residents caring for children of extended families could receive a portion of the \$10 million allocated by the state for a new program for kinship caregivers.

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services has created the Kinship Permanency Incentive program that will provide financial support for minor children in legal and physical custody of kinship caregivers. The program went into effect Jan. 1.

Kinship caregivers are defined in Ohio law as any relative or nonrelative adult who has a long-standing relationship or bond with the child and/or family, according to OJFS.

Eligible families will receive an initial payment of \$1,000 per child to defray the costs of the initial placement, and may receive \$500 every six months up to a maximum of \$3,500 per child to support stability in the home.

"It's an opportunity to get children out of foster care and promote keeping the family unit together," Carmen Stewart, spokesman for Job and Family Services, said. "It also promotes a commitment from the caregiver."

Denise Stewart, executive director of Mahoning County Children Services Board, said she expects the program to begin providing funding to families in a few months.

One reason for the delay Stewart cited was the implementation of state policies and the application process. To receive money, a family must contact Job and Family Services and have a home study done by the agency.

To qualify for money through the program, a court has to determine that the child was abused, neglected, dependent or unruly and that it is in the child's best interest to be in the legal custody or legal guardianship of the kinship caregivers.

The \$10 million in funding will come from Ohio Temporary Assistance for Needy Families money. There were more than 186,000 grandparents in Ohio who were the primary caregivers for their grandchildren, according to the 2000 U.S. Census.

Anyone interested in receiving money through the program should contact Mahoning County Children Services at (330) 941-8888.