Grant Approval Memo

Grantee:	Alaska Impact Alliance
Request Amount:	$250,000.00
Project Title:	UReCares Stipend and Respite Program 2026
Grant Term:	1/1/2027 to 12/31/2027
Trust Staff:	Tina Voelker-Ross

Staff Analysis:

- What does this project do?

  This funding will support continued efforts by the Alaska Impact Alliance (AIA) to support families with children in kinship placements through direct support mini grants. Trust funds will provide direct financial stipends to relative caregivers across Alaska through the UReCares Stipend & Respite Program. These direct stipends to kin families work to strengthen protective factors, reduce caregiver stress, increase family stability, and decrease the likelihood that children will enter the formal foster care system. Trust funds will support stipends that help caregivers meet essential needs such as housing, food, transportation, and child-related expenses, as well as respite services that provide temporary care so caregivers can attend to health, employment, or personal needs. Trust funds will support the direct stipends, personnel, program coordination, caregiver engagement, data collection and indirect costs.

- Who is receiving the funds?

  The Alaska Impact Alliance (AIA) is a statewide nonprofit based in Anchorage that brings together prevention partners, including families, tribal organizations, agencies, and communities, to build stronger systems of care and reduce the need for child protective services in Alaska. With a vision that every child grows up safe, loved, and connected to family, culture, and community, AIA supports initiatives like the Family Resource Center Network, 907 Navigation App and the UReCares Stipend & Respite Program.

- Why is staff recommending this project?

  This funding supports direct support for beneficiary families involved with or at risk of involvement with the child welfare system. The program serves caregivers and children who reflect most Trust beneficiary categories, including individuals experiencing mental illness, substance use disorders, intellectual and developmental disabilities, and traumatic brain injuries. Financial stipends for kin families reduce stress, improve caregivers' ability to meet basic needs, and promote placement stability for children who have already experienced trauma. Respite services provide essential relief that supports caregiver health and reduces burnout. By preventing family disruption and decreasing the likelihood of children entering state custody, this project advances the Trust's goals of promoting stability, improving well-being, and reducing long-term costs associated with higher-intensity services. Staff recommend this project because it directly supports Trust beneficiaries and stabilizes families who would otherwise face significant risk of system involvement.

  The *AIA UreCares Stipend & Respite Program Implementation, Outcomes and Insights: 2024–2025* report shows that 219 kinship caregiving families across Alaska were served in 2024–2025, with more than $363,000 distributed directly to them. Survey results indicated 100% participant satisfaction, and protective factor scores improved in both program years. Please review the attached report for full details on this essential program.

One of the Trust's statutory advisors also recommends continued Trust support of the UReCares Stipend and Respite Program. At the February 2026 Trust board meeting, Alaska Commission on Aging Director Marty Lange presented data on senior grandparents raising grandchildren. He noted that 15,306 grandparents in Alaska are responsible for raising 7,000 children outside the foster system, while 739 children in foster care are placed with kin. According to the *Senior Snapshot 2025*, 28.3% of Alaska Native and American Indian adults age 55+ reported caring for grandchildren.

Mr. Lange highlighted challenges faced by these families, including barriers to adding grandchildren to insurance, increased household expenses, limited incomes, minimal TANF support compared to foster care payments, and risks to housing or senior services eligibility when seniors take in their grandchildren. He encouraged continued support for the UReCares program to help stabilize and sustain kinship families.

- Will this be a multi-year project?

No. While this request is part of an ongoing, multi-year effort that has required annual Board of Trustees approval and has consistently demonstrated strong outcomes and statewide demand, this is the final year of funding for the Alaska Impact Alliance broader project. However, the data strongly supports continued investment in the UReCares program, which provides direct support to Trust beneficiary families. In many ways, UReCares is similar to the Trusts mini-grant program but is targeted to assist and stabilize kinship families. Continuation of the UReCares program in future years would be a valuable addition to the Trust mini grant programs.

Trust Five Year Funding History

Fiscal Year	Project Title	Amount	Status	Final Expended
2026	Reimagining Child Welfare in Alaska	$350,000	Active	Grant ends 10/31/26
2025	Reimagining Child Welfare in Alaska	$400,000	Closed	$400,000
2024	Reimagining Child Welfare Project	$400,000	Closed	$400,000

Comp Plan - Area of Focus	Strategic Priority Area
Area of Focus 1: Early Childhood & Youth	Priority 1: Prevention & Early Intervention

Project Description (from grant application)

The UReCares Stipend & Respite Program addresses the growing strain on relative caregivers, primarily grandparents and extended family members, who are raising children impacted by parental substance use, mental health challenges, incarceration, or death. In Alaska, these caregivers often step in to prevent children from entering formal foster care, yet they frequently do so with limited financial resources, minimal access to formal supports, and high levels of emotional and physical stress. Without adequate support, these caregiving arrangements are at risk of disruption, which can lead to increased child welfare involvement and poorer outcomes for both caregivers and children.

Through this project, we will provide direct financial stipends and coordinated respite services to eligible relative caregivers. The stipend component helps offset the everyday costs of raising children, such as food, clothing, transportation, and school related expenses, while the respite component offers temporary, reliable care options so caregivers can attend to their own health, employment, or personal needs. In addition to these direct supports, the program connects participants to peer support networks and resource navigation to strengthen long term stability.

The primary beneficiary group is relative caregivers, also known as kinship caregivers, many of whom are older adults or individuals on fixed incomes, along with the children in their care who are at risk of entering the formal foster care system. Secondary beneficiaries include the broader child welfare system and communities, which benefit from reduced system involvement and stronger family preservation. The program is open to eligible caregivers statewide, and participants are selected through a lottery process to ensure fairness and equitable access to limited resources. The families served through this program reflect all Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority beneficiary categories, as many caregivers and children experience intersecting needs related to mental health, substance use disorders, intellectual and developmental disabilities, traumatic brain injuries, and Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

The program will serve communities across Alaska, with an emphasis on reaching both urban and rural areas, including those with limited access to formal services. Delivery strategies are designed to be flexible and culturally responsive, ensuring accessibility for Alaska Native families and geographically isolated households.
Expected outcomes include increased caregiver stability and well being, reduced caregiver stress and burnout, improved child safety and placement stability, and decreased reliance on formal foster care systems. We also anticipate strengthened informal support networks and increased access to community based services for participating families.

This project is supported by strong community partnerships, including collaborations with tribal organizations, child welfare agencies, behavioral health providers, and caregiver advocacy groups. These partners contribute to referral pathways, program design, and culturally relevant service delivery. The program builds on established trust within communities and leverages prior successful implementation of caregiver support initiatives, demonstrating both need and readiness for continued investment.

Grantee Proposed Evaluation Measures (from grant application)

Project success will be measured through a combination of participation data, caregiver reported outcomes, and an ongoing third party evaluation conducted in partnership with the University of Alaska Anchorage. Together, these approaches allow us to assess program reach, quality, and impact, while also contributing to a growing longitudinal dataset on relative caregivers in Alaska.

How much we did:
We will track the total number of relative caregivers and children served, the number of applicants and participants selected through the lottery process, and the total dollar amount of stipends distributed. We will also document geographic reach across Alaska and collect baseline demographic information,

including household size, income levels, family relationships, and Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority beneficiary categories represented within participating households.

How well we did:
We will measure program implementation and participant experience by tracking the percentage of selected participants who successfully receive stipends and complete program requirements, as well as timeliness of stipend distribution. Caregiver satisfaction will be assessed through surveys that capture ease of access, clarity of communication, and perceived usefulness of the support. Participants will also self report how stipend funds were used, providing insight into whether funds are meeting intended needs such as housing stability, food security, transportation, and child related expenses.

Is anyone better off:
We will assess changes in caregiver and family well-being using validated and program specific tools. The Protective Factors Survey will be used to measure changes in family functioning and well-being across domains such as resilience, social connections, and concrete supports. Additional surveys will capture caregiver experiences with the program, including perceived impact on financial stress, caregiving stability, and overall quality of life. Measures will include the number and percentage of caregivers reporting reduced stress, improved ability to meet basic needs, and increased confidence in maintaining their caregiving role.

Through our partnership with the University of Alaska Anchorage, we will also collect and analyze deeper outcome data, including caregiver motivation, morale, challenges, sources of joy, and emerging needs. This evaluation captures trends in service utilization, including which programs caregivers are currently accessing and which they are most interested in being referred to. As this is the third year of data collection, we are able to compare outcomes over time and strengthen our understanding of how direct financial support impacts family stability and well-being.

These combined measures provide a comprehensive and data informed approach to evaluating program effectiveness and documenting meaningful improvements in the lives of relative caregivers and the children they support.

Proposed Project Performance Measures (developed by the Trust)

How much did you do?

a. Total number (#) and amount ($) of stipend applications received during the reporting period.
b. Number (#) and amount ($) of stipends awarded during the reporting period.
c. Number (#) of kinship caregiving families served during the reporting period.
d. Number (#) of children served during the reporting period.
e. Provide a synopsis of geographic reach across Alaska, including the number (#) of stipends awarded by community, as well as baseline demographic information (household size, income level, family relationships, Trust beneficiary categories represented within participating households).

How well did you do it?

a. Provide a narrative about the UReCares Stipend Program that describes the timeline, activities, successes, challenges, and any lessons learned during the reporting period.
b. Provide an overview of the results from the participants satisfaction survey, including the number (#) and percentage (%) of participants (kinship caregiving families) who were satisfied with the services received through the project.
c. Provide a narrative that identifies the ways participants utilized the UReCares stipend and the general categories of items/services the stipend was ultimately used.

Is anyone better off?

a. Provide three (3) testimonials from stipend recipients that describe how the stipend has impacted their family.
b. Number (#) and percentage (%) of participants who used the stipend in each identified category.
c. Provide a narrative overview of the results from the Protective Factors Survey used to measure changes in family functioning and well-being.
d. Provide a narrative overview of the results from the Caregiver Experiences survey used to measure perceived impact on financial stress, caregiving stability, and overall quality of life (e.g., # and % of caregivers reporting reduced stress, improved ability to meet basic needs, and increased confidence in maintaining their caregiving role).
e. Provide an electronic copy of the overall program evaluation conducted by the University of Alaska Anchorage, as well as a brief synopsis highlighting outcome data.

Sustainability (from grant application)

Yes, this project is designed to continue beyond the Trust's funding period. This request represents the fourth year of a program that has already been implemented successfully and has demonstrated strong demand, positive outcomes for caregivers and children, and effective statewide reach.

We are actively working toward long term sustainability by engaging with state partners and legislators to explore ongoing funding through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program. These discussions are focused on establishing a more permanent public funding stream to support relative caregivers and prevent unnecessary entry into the foster care system.

At this time, however, there is no alternative funding source that can provide direct financial stipends to relative caregivers at the scale and flexibility offered through this program. Continued support from the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority is critical to maintaining this component of the program while longer term funding solutions are pursued. The Trust's investment allows us to sustain a proven model, continue serving families across Alaska, and bridge the gap until a dedicated, sustainable funding source is secured.

Grant Approval Memo

Trust
Alaska Mental Health
Trust Authority

Who We Serve (from grant application)

The UReCares Stipend and Respite Program directly serves Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority beneficiaries by supporting relative caregivers and the children in their care who experience a wide range of behavioral health and disability related needs. While the primary focus of the project is on relative caregivers, the families served reflect all Trust beneficiary categories, including individuals experiencing mental health challenges, substance use disorders, intellectual and developmental disabilities, traumatic brain injuries, and Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias.

Many children being raised by relative caregivers have been impacted by parental mental health conditions, substance use, or trauma, placing them at increased risk of entering state custody and experiencing poor long term outcomes. At the same time, caregivers themselves may be Trust beneficiaries, particularly older adults or those managing their own health or cognitive challenges while raising children. By stabilizing these family systems, the program provides direct and indirect support across multiple beneficiary groups.

Trust beneficiaries will be better off as a result of this project in several specific ways. Direct financial stipends increase access to basic needs such as housing, food, transportation, and child related expenses, reducing financial strain and improving overall stability. This support helps caregivers maintain safe, consistent placements for children, reducing the likelihood of entry into the foster care system and minimizing further trauma. Caregivers also report improved mental and emotional well being when financial pressure is reduced and they are better able to meet the needs of the children in their care.

In addition, the program strengthens protective factors that are closely tied to improved outcomes for Trust beneficiaries, including caregiver resilience, social connections, and access to concrete supports. Through participation, families are also more likely to engage with community-based services and supports, increasing connection to behavioral health resources when needed.

Overall, this project advances the Trust’s goals by promoting stability, preventing higher cost system involvement, and improving quality of life for beneficiaries across generations. It supports families in remaining safely together, which is a critical factor in long term health, well being, and community resilience.

Estimated Numbers of Beneficiaries Served Experiencing (from grant application)

Mental Illness:	62
Developmental Disabilities:	64
Alzheimer’s Disease & Related Dementias:	2
Substance Abuse	46
Traumatic Brain Injuries:	12
Secondary Beneficiaries (family members or caregivers providing support to primary beneficiaries):	852
Number of people to be trained	3

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Trust
Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority

Project Budget (from grant application)

Personnel Services Costs	$40,000.00
Personnel Services Costs (Other Sources)	$0.00
Personnel Services Narrative	UReCares Program Salary $40,000

Other Costs	$210,000.00
Other Costs (Other Sources)	$0.00
Other Costs Narrative	- Program Evaluation $3,000.00 - Marketing $3,000.00 - Direct Family Allotments $200,000.00 - Indirect Costs $4,000.00 Other Total $210,000.00 **Key Points:** **$200,000 of $250,000 goes directly to beneficiary families**

Other Funding Sources (from grant application)

n/a	$0.00
Total Leveraged Funds	**$0.00**

THE ALASKA IMPACT ALLIANCE URECARES STIPEND & RESPITE PROGRAM

Implementation, Outcomes, and Insights: 2024–2025

URECARES RECIPIENT TESTIMONIALS

"I feel so much more supported and had a huge relief over this summer thanks to this program."

"Though the money was a huge benefit to our family, knowing that there are people out there that understand and appreciate what we've been through was of the greatest help and a positive motivator."

"It's amazing what this program offers caregivers, the support we need to provide for our loved ones. I wouldn't change anything about this program. Thank you for the love and support this program has provided and done for my family."

Report written by
Charity Carmody, DLP, MBA and Matthew Cuellar, Ph.D., MSW

Data Analysis by
Matthew Cuellar, Ph.D., MSW, Ruby Steedle, MS, Sarah K. Cowan, Ph.D.,and Charity Carmody, DLP, MBA

URECARES STIPEND AND RESPITE PROGRAM 2024-2025 AT A GLANCE

Recognizing a growing and largely unmet need across Alaska, the Alaska Impact Alliance (AIA) launched the UReCares Stipend & Respite Program in 2024. The program was created to support relatives and extended family members who stepped into caregiving roles for children unable to safely remain with their parents. These caregivers assumed responsibility outside of the licensed foster care system and often without access to formal supports or resources.

- **219 kinship caregiving families** served over 2024-2025
- **512 individuals supported** in 2025 alone
- **Over $363,000 distributed** directly to families in 2024-2025
- Families represented communities across Alaska
- Protective factor scores improved in both program years
- **100% participant satisfaction** in 2025
- Program expanded from 99 families in 2024 to **120 families in 2025**
- **$250,000 planned for distribution in 2026**

The UReCares Stipend & Respite Program data demonstrate both a clear and continuing need for kinship caregiver support across Alaska and the program's effectiveness in meeting that need. With participation growing from 99 families in 2024 to 120 families in 2025, more than 500 individuals supported in 2025 alone, and families represented from communities statewide, the demand for assistance remains strong. At the same time, improvements in protective factor scores, 100% participant satisfaction, and more than $363,000 distributed directly to families indicate that the program is producing meaningful, positive outcomes for caregivers and the children in their care.

INTRODUCTION

In 2024, the Alaska Impact Alliance (AIA) launched the UReCares Stipend & Respite Program in response to a growing and largely unmet need across Alaska: relatives and extended family members were stepping in every day to raise children who could not safely remain with their parents, often without formal support systems in place.

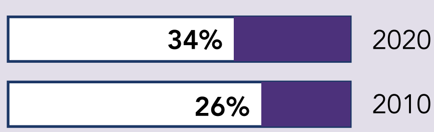
Across Alaska, approximately half of all children involved with the Office of Children's Services (OCS) are placed with relatives connected through family ties, marriage, or tribal custom (The AFCARS Dashboard, 2026). However, the AIA understood that the actual number of children being raised by relatives was likely much higher, as many caregiving arrangements occur informally before any state agency becomes involved. In communities throughout Alaska, relatives frequently assume caregiving responsibilities privately and without formal recognition or financial assistance.

Kinship caregiving is especially common in Alaska because of the state's strong rural communities and Indigenous cultural traditions that emphasize caring for children within extended family systems whenever possible. In many Alaska Native and American Indian (AN/AI) communities, caregiving responsibilities are shared across generations, and relatives often respond quickly during times of crisis to ensure children remain connected to their family, culture, language, and community. Alaska's geographic isolation and the remoteness of many communities also create a strong reliance on interdependence, where families and neighbors depend on one another for support, caregiving, and overall wellbeing. In rural areas where formal services may be limited or difficult to access, extended family networks often serve as the primary safety net for children and families.

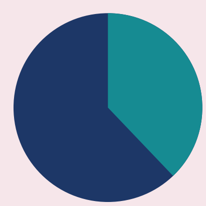
National research reflects many of the same trends seen throughout Alaska. According to Generations United (2022), a national organization focused on strengthening intergenerational families and supporting kinship caregivers:

More than 2.6M children in the U.S. are being raised by grandparents, relatives, or close family friends without a parent living in the home

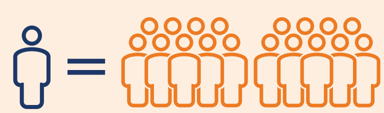
The percentage of foster children living with relatives increased from 26% in 2010 to 34% in 2020



More than 137k children in foster care are placed with relatives, representing more than one third of all foster placements nationally



For every child in formal foster care living with relatives, an estimated **18 additional children are being raised informally by kin** outside of the child welfare system



These national findings closely align with conditions in Alaska, where relatives often become caregivers long before formal systems intervene. The data reinforces the importance of investing in kinship caregiver support programs like UReCares.

Additional Alaska-based research highlights the important role elders play in caregiving across the state. According to the Alaska Commission on Aging Senior Snapshot 2025, 28.3% of Alaska Native and American Indian (AN/AI) adults age 55 and older reported caring for grandchildren (2025). This reflects the strong tradition of multigenerational caregiving within AN/AI communities and demonstrates the significant responsibility many elders carry to help maintain family and cultural continuity for children.

Although kinship caregivers provide essential stability and safety for children, many are not eligible for the same financial support available to licensed foster parents. Caregivers are often grandparents living on fixed incomes, relatives supporting multiple children in the home, or families living in rural communities with limited access to services and resources.

Many kinship caregivers also encounter barriers when attempting to access public assistance programs because their caregiving arrangements are informal and do not involve legal guardianship, foster care licensure, or court-ordered custody. Even when relatives are providing full-time care for children, they may not qualify for childcare assistance, foster care reimbursements, or other financial support programs that require formal legal documentation. As a result, many families carry the full financial and emotional responsibility of raising children without access to systems designed to support caregivers.

Recognizing both the urgent need and the opportunity to strengthen family stability, The Alaska Impact Alliance partnered with the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority to develop the UReCares Stipend and Respite Program. The program was intentionally designed with guidance from researchers and national experts to ensure it reflected both evidence-informed practice and the lived experiences of kinship caregivers.

The AIA collaborated with researchers from the NYU Cash Transfer Lab, the University of Alaska Anchorage Department of Social Work, and a researcher from Bloomworks, a consulting organization specializing in family-centered systems design and innovation. The AIA also consulted with leaders from two established kinship support programs in other states to learn from their implementation strategies and program structures. These partnerships helped shape a flexible, caregiver-centered program model designed to meet the practical needs of Alaska families.

The UReCares Program was created to provide direct financial assistance, respite support, and resource navigation services for kinship caregivers throughout Alaska.

PROGRAM DESIGN & APPLICATION PROCESS

UReCares is the first statewide initiative of its kind developed by the AIA. Because no comparable statewide program previously existed in Alaska, anticipated demand was unknown at program launch. To create a fair and transparent application process, the AIA established a randomized blind lottery system that could be used if requests exceeded available funding.

Applications were submitted directly through The Alaska Impact Alliance website. Outreach efforts included referrals from child-serving agencies, schools, OCS staff, community organizations, social media, campaigns, earned media coverage, and caregiver networks.

The program was intentionally designed to reduce barriers for kinship caregivers. No income, employment, or housing eligibility requirements were imposed. The AIA recognized that many relatives assume caregiving responsibilities during family crises and often do so without formal legal custody documentation despite functioning as full-time caregivers.

The UReCares Program serves unlicensed relative caregivers who are Alaska residents age 18 or older and have primary caregiving responsibility for a child (under age 18) who cannot safely remain with their biological parents. Eligible caregivers must not reside with the child's biological parents and cannot be licensed foster parents. Caregivers may be related to the child through blood, marriage, or tribal custom, including certain stepparents by marriage when the biological parent is no longer residing with the child and the stepparent has assumed primary caregiving responsibility. To ensure equitable access to resources, only one unlicensed relative caregiver per household was eligible to apply.

The program was designed to support both caregivers and children by strengthening family stability and well-being. Through financial assistance and respite support, UReCares helps families maintain important family, cultural, and community connections; access essential services and supports; reduce caregiver stress and burnout; strengthen protective factors and childhood resilience; and prevent children from entering non-relative foster care placements whenever possible.

To ensure equitable statewide access, recipients were selected through a randomized blind lottery process, ensuring that all eligible applicants had an equal opportunity to receive support regardless of geographic location or economic circumstance.

The stipend structure was intentionally flexible. General stipends could be used at the caregiver's discretion to address household and child-related needs, while respite stipends were intended to support caregiver wellness and self-care activities. Because the UReCares Program is a grant-funded assistance program, benefits provided to participating caregivers were considered non-taxable grant support.

To help evaluate program impact and family wellbeing outcomes, participating caregivers completed program surveys throughout their participation, including the nationally recognized Protective Factors Survey, which measures key indicators related to family functioning, resilience, social connection, and caregiver wellbeing. Surveys were administered multiple times during the program to help assess changes over time and inform ongoing program development.

Through effective planning and administration, the program was ultimately able to serve every eligible applicant during both the 2024 and 2025 program years. Once eligibility was confirmed, participating caregivers uploaded required eligibility documentation through a secure encrypted file-sharing system to protect confidential family information. Caregivers then selected their preferred payment method, either electronic funds transfer (EFT) or paper check. Payments were issued through Melio, allowing for secure and efficient statewide distribution of stipend and respite funds.

2024 PROGRAM OUTCOMES

The first year of the UReCares Program demonstrated strong statewide participation and rapid implementation.

Statewide Participation

- Applications were accepted between June 10 and June 30, 2024
- Families from 35 Alaska communities submitted applications
- A total of 99 eligible caregivers completed all required paperwork by July 22, 2024

Direct Financial Assistance

Participating families received three rounds of financial support. On August 1, 2024, each participating family received an initial $500 general support stipend. On September 1, 2024, each family received a $650 respite support payment. Finally, on October 1, 2024, families received a final $500 general support stipend. More than $163,000 was distributed directly to kinship caregiving families throughout Alaska. Families used these flexible funds to help cover essential needs including groceries, clothing, transportation, school supplies, childcare expenses, utilities, and respite opportunities.

Family Support & Resource Navigation

In addition to financial assistance, participating families were connected to community resources based on their individual needs and requests. Caregivers received referrals to behavioral health services, caregiver supports, local assistance programs, and other community resources intended to strengthen family stability and caregiver wellbeing.

Building Peer Support Connections

To help reduce caregiver isolation and increase access to information, the AIA created a private online Facebook community, Alaska Kinship Caregivers of Children. All UReCares participants were invited to join, and the group was also shared with agencies and organizations supporting relative caregivers statewide. The online community provides caregivers with an optional space to access program updates, share resources, and connect with other caregivers across Alaska.

2025 PROGRAM EXPANSION & OUTCOMES

Building on the success of the inaugural year, the UReCares Program expanded significantly in 2025, increasing both the number of families served and the overall level of direct financial support distributed statewide.

Between May and September 2025, the program distributed more than $200,000 directly to 120 kinship caregiving families across Alaska through multiple rounds of stipend and respite payments. Some of these families were returning participants from 2024. Families received approximately $1,650 or more per household, helping reduce financial strain while supporting children's stability and connection to family.

2025 Statewide Reach & Family Demographics

The program reached families in communities across Alaska, including Anchorage, Petersburg, Wasilla, Juneau, Kenai, Fairbanks, Palmer, Metlakatla, Sitka, Bethel, Dillingham, Kodiak, Seward, and numerous smaller and rural communities.

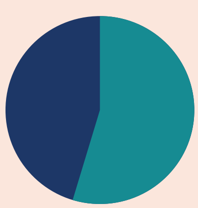
- 120 families participated in the program
- 512 total individuals were supported through the program
- 213 adults participated
- 299 children and youth ranging from infancy through age 17 were impacted

Program participants were most commonly grandparents (52.5%) and aunts (33.3%), although siblings, stepparents, cousins, and uncles also served as primary caregivers. The data indicate that kinship caregiving is often a long-term commitment, with nearly 40% of caregivers having provided care for more than five years and an additional 32.6% caring for children between one and three years. These findings highlight the sustained responsibility assumed by relatives who step in to provide stable and nurturing homes for children in their families.

Economic Need & Family Challenges

Program data demonstrated that many kinship caregiving families were experiencing significant economic strain:

More than half of participating households reported annual income below $75,000



Many caregivers were balancing caregiving with employment, retirement, or unemployment

Families frequently reported caring for children impacted by:

- mental illness
- substance use disorder
- developmental disabilities
- traumatic brain injury

Findings reinforce the importance of flexible direct financial assistance for maintaining family stability and reducing crisis situations.

CUMULATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS 2024–2025

Cumulative research findings from both years indicate that the UReCares Program provided meaningful support to kinship caregiving families while highlighting the ongoing financial and behavioral health challenges many families continue to face. Across both years, 99 families were served in 2024 and 120 families were served in 2025. The program supported caregivers across diverse family structures, geographic locations, and income levels throughout Alaska.

Demographic and Household Characteristics Comparisons

Overall, the demographic profile of respondents remained relatively stable between 2024 (N=98) and 2025 (N=120), with English continuing to be the primary language spoken in nearly all households. Childcare utilization rates remained virtually unchanged, while modest shifts were observed in school enrollment patterns, employment status, marital status, and the racial/ethnic composition of children in care.

CAREGIVER RELATIONSHIPS

- Marriage remained the most common marital status, but the proportion of married respondents declined from 46.9% in 2024 to 38.3% in 2025.
- The percentage of respondents who were single increased notably from 17.3% to 25.0%.
- Divorced respondents increased slightly from 18.4% to 20.8%.
- The proportion of widowed respondents rose from 4.0% to 6.7%.
- Those living with a partner decreased slightly from 7.1% to 5.8%.

CHILDCARE/EDUCATION

- Childcare use among caregivers remained essentially unchanged, with 26.5% utilizing childcare in 2024 and 26.7% in 2025.
- Approximately three-quarters of respondents in both years reported not using childcare services.
- Most school-aged children continued to be enrolled in public schools, although the proportion decreased from 80.6% in 2024 to 75.8% in 2025.
- Enrollment in non-public schools increased from 7.1% to 10.9%.
- The percentage reporting that not all school-aged children were enrolled in school increased slightly from 12.2% to 13.3%.

EMPLOYMENT

- Full-time employment remained stable at approximately half of respondents (48.9% in 2024; 49.1% in 2025).
- Part-time employment increased from 6.1% to 9.2%.
- Seasonal employment declined from 5.1% to 1.6%.
- The proportion of respondents who were unemployed increased slightly from 17.3% to 19.2%.
- Retirees decreased from 16.3% to 12.5%, while the percentage of students increased from 1.1% to 2.5%.

RACE/ETHNICITY

- English remained the predominant language, increasing slightly from 95.9% in 2024 to 97.5% in 2025.
- Children identified as Alaska Native/American Indian (AN/AI) continued to represent the majority of children in care, though the percentage decreased slightly from 53.1% to 50.8%.
- The proportion of non-AN/AI children increased from 43.8% to 48.3%.

Between 2024 and 2025, most caregiver characteristics remained consistent, particularly childcare utilization and full-time employment rates. Modest shifts were observed in education and employment patterns, with fewer children enrolled in public schools and more attending non-public schools, alongside an increase in part-time employment and a decline in seasonal work. Marital status also changed, with a lower proportion of married respondents and a higher proportion reporting being single. Additionally, the racial and ethnic composition of children in care became slightly more balanced, as the proportion of non-AN/AI children increased while the proportion of AN/AI children decreased slightly.

Financial & Caregiving Context

Average household income among participating caregivers varied considerably across kinship relationships. Cousin caregivers reported an average annual income of approximately $34,722, while aunt and uncle caregivers averaged approximately $67,708. Many caregiving households also reported incomes ranging between $39,000 and $47,000. In addition to these income variations, research findings indicate that kinship caregiving is often a long-term responsibility rather than a temporary arrangement. Specifically, 55.6% of cousin caregivers, 83.3% of stepparent caregivers, and 47.3% of grandparent caregivers reported providing care for five years or longer, highlighting the sustained and enduring nature of kinship caregiving roles.

Behavioral Health & Developmental Needs

As part of the survey, participants were asked to identify any Alaska Mental Health Trust beneficiary categories affecting members of their immediate family, including the children's birth parents. Program data indicated that many participating families reported being affected by significant behavioral health and developmental challenges. Among 2025 participants, 100% of cousin caregivers reported that intellectual or developmental disabilities had affected their families, and 75% of sibling caregivers reported that mental illness had affected their families. Grandparent caregivers also reported elevated rates of family impact related to substance use disorder (36.5%) and intellectual or developmental disabilities (42.9%). Collectively, these findings highlight the emotional, behavioral, and financial complexity experienced by many kinship caregiving households.

Caregiver Wellbeing & Protective Factors

Research findings suggest the UReCares Program positively impacted caregiver wellbeing and resilience. The Protective Factors Survey (PFS), a nationally recognized assessment used by family support, prevention, and child welfare programs across the United States, measures key family strengths associated with positive child and family outcomes. The survey assesses protective factors including family resilience, social support, concrete support in times of need, and nurturing and attachment. The scores reported here represent average participant scores across all PFS domains, with higher scores indicating stronger overall protective factors and family resilience. In 2024, average participant scores increased from 118.12 to 134.00, while in 2025 scores increased from 116.59 to 122.00. These improvements suggest increased caregiver resilience, stronger social supports, and improved family functioning over the course of participation. Further qualitative assessment could help explain differences in the magnitude of gains observed across years. Caregivers also reported increased confidence accessing community resources. In 2025, caregivers who mostly agreed they felt confident navigating resources increased from 31.1% before participation to 39.3% after participation. Additionally, neutral responses declined from 7.8% to 3.7%. In sum, these findings suggest the program improved both caregiver stability and confidence in accessing support systems.

Increased Connections to Services

Participation in the UReCares Program was also associated with improved access to healthcare, behavioral health, and educational supports for participating families. Between 2024 and 2025, Medicaid enrollment increased from 76.5% to 84.4%, behavioral health service utilization rose from 22.4% to 25.4%, and participation in K–12 educational support services grew from 10.2% to 15.6%. These increases suggest that caregivers became better connected to critical support systems while participating in the program, helping to strengthen the overall well-being and stability of both caregivers and the children in their care.

Family Cohesion & Caregiver Value

Caregivers consistently reported a strong sense of purpose and connection to their families through their caregiving roles. More than 90% strongly agreed that caring for relative children improved the children's lives, while more than 93% strongly agreed that they were doing the right thing by serving as caregivers. In addition, approximately 95% reported that caregiving had strengthened their families. These findings highlight the deep commitment kinship caregivers have to maintaining family stability, preserving important relationships, and promoting the safety and well-being of the children in their care.

PROGRAM SIGNIFICANCE

Ongoing Financial Need

While the program produced positive outcomes for participating families, research findings also highlighted ongoing financial challenges among kinship caregiver households. Approximately 20% of caregivers reported uncertainty or concern about their ability to cover unexpected expenses, underscoring the financial vulnerability many families continue to face. At the same time, more than 95% of caregivers agreed that financial support improved their ability to care for children, and 85.2% strongly agreed that direct financial assistance strengthened their caregiving capacity. Interest in additional economic supports also remained high, with reported interest in SNAP benefits increasing from 18.4% in 2024 to 21.3% in 2025. Together, these findings reinforce the ongoing need for flexible financial assistance and sustained support systems that help kinship caregivers provide stable, nurturing care for children over the long-term.

Family Impact & Participant Feedback

Participant satisfaction remained exceptionally high throughout the program, with 94% of 2025 participants reporting that they were very satisfied and the remaining 6% reporting that they were satisfied with their experience. Families primarily used stipend funds to meet essential needs, including food and groceries, clothing, school supplies, child and family activities, household expenses, and self-care. Beyond the financial assistance, caregivers reported meaningful emotional benefits from participating in the program. Ninety-one percent indicated that they felt more valued in their caregiving role after receiving support, while nearly half (49%) reported feeling much better overall. Caregivers consistently shared that the program helped alleviate financial stress while also providing a sense of recognition, support, and connection, reducing feelings of isolation often associated with kinship caregiving.

Critical Support

The UReCares Program continues to address a critical gap for Alaska's unlicensed kinship caregivers by providing direct financial support, respite assistance, resource navigation, and peer connection opportunities. Across 2024 and 2025, the UReCares Program provided support to 219 unique kinship caregiving families throughout Alaska, demonstrating both the scale of need and the program's growing statewide reach.

Findings from both years of the UReCares Program demonstrate that kinship caregivers are highly committed to providing stable, nurturing homes that keep children connected to their families, cultures, and communities, often while navigating significant financial and emotional challenges. By supporting caregivers before children enter the formal foster care system and helping stabilize existing informal care arrangements, the program reduces childhood trauma, preserves critical family and cultural connections, strengthens community-based caregiving networks, helps prevent unnecessary foster care placements, and contributes to lower long-term costs for public systems.

Overall, cumulative findings suggest the UReCares Program increased caregiver resilience, strengthened confidence accessing services, improved family stability, and reinforced positive family relationships. At the same time, the research highlights the ongoing need for long-term investments in financial assistance, behavioral health services, respite support, and kinship caregiver stabilization programs throughout Alaska.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

The UReCares Program represents a relatively low-cost intervention that supports family stability before crises escalate into more costly child welfare, behavioral health, or foster care system involvement. By helping relatives maintain caregiving arrangements and access needed supports, the program strengthens protective factors while reducing risks associated with placement disruption and family instability.

The program's value extends beyond direct support to caregivers. Research consistently demonstrates that children who are able to remain safely with relatives experience greater placement stability, maintain stronger family and cultural connections, and often experience fewer adverse outcomes than children placed with non-relative caregivers. By supporting kinship caregivers, UReCares helps children remain in family-based settings outside of the formal foster care system whenever possible, reducing reliance on more expensive child welfare interventions.

For Alaska, this approach represents a meaningful return on investment. Formal foster care placements require substantial public expenditures related to case management, court involvement, placement payments, transportation, behavioral health services, and ongoing system oversight. In contrast, kinship care leverages existing family relationships while providing targeted supports that help relatives meet children's needs. Even preventing a small number of foster care entries or placement disruptions can generate significant cost savings for the state.

The benefits extend beyond fiscal savings. Children who remain connected to family members often experience less trauma associated with removal, maintain continuity in relationships and community ties, and may be better positioned for successful reunification with their parents when reunification is appropriate. By strengthening caregivers' capacity to provide stable homes, UReCares contributes to improved child wellbeing, family resilience, and long-term positive outcomes that benefit both families and communities across Alaska.

Taken together, the program's demonstrated improvements in caregiver protective factors, confidence accessing resources, and family stability suggest that modest investments in kinship support can yield substantial social and economic returns by helping families remain safely connected and reducing the need for more intensive public interventions.

LOOKING FORWARD

As the UReCares Program enters its 2026 program year, statewide demand continues to grow. The 2026 program received a record number of applications from kinship caregiving families across Alaska, further demonstrating the significant and ongoing need for direct support services for relatives raising children. Thanks to the continued partnership and investment of the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, $250,000 in direct financial assistance and respite support will be distributed to kinship caregiving families during the 2026 program year. The Alaska Impact Alliance remains committed to strengthening family stability, preserving cultural and family connections, and ensuring caregivers throughout Alaska have access to meaningful support as they continue caring for children in their homes and communities.

The continued growth and success of the UReCares Program demonstrates both the effectiveness of direct caregiver support and the substantial unmet need among kinship caregiving families across Alaska.

With continued investment, The AIA aims to expand the number of families served statewide, increase access to respite and stabilization supports, and strengthen caregiver peer support networks. In addition, continued investment will help the AIA improve connections to behavioral health and community resources and continue advocating for informal kinship caregivers throughout Alaska. Without a doubt, these efforts help ensure Alaska's children remain safely connected to family, culture, and community, which remain among the strongest protective factors for long-term child well-being.

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