13th Annual

Voices of Children

Raised by
Grandparents and
Other Relatives
Contest 2016
Voices of Children
Raised by Grandparents
and Other Relatives
2016 Contest

A compilation of poems, essays, and drawings submitted by children living in Washington State to the 2016 Voices of Children Raised by Grandparents and Other Relatives Contest.

Initiated by the Washington State Relatives as Parents Program (RAPP) and the Kinship Oversight Committee.

Coordinated by:
Family Education and Support Services
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Olympia, WA 98502

To order more copies of this booklet or for additional information about the 2016 Voices of Children Contest contact Shelly Willis at Shelly@Familyess.org or call 1-877-813-2828

This booklet can also be found online at: www.dshs.wa.gov/kinshipcare

Book designed by: Rosa Venancio and Katie Hatam

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Please note: All entries in this book are printed as received. Some formatting changes have been made. Last names have been removed to protect identities.
FOREWARD

Most children find safety and comfort in the arms and care of their family, including grandparents and other relatives. For more than 2 million children in the USA, living with a grandparent, aunt, uncle, or other family member has become a permanent or long-term arrangement.

Kinship Care often comes as a surprise to both the child and the relative caregiver. When parents are unable or unwilling to care for their children, placing with a relative caregiver can have many advantages. Kinship Care reduces the trauma children experience when placed with strangers. It enhances children’s sense of identity and self-esteem, continues the connections children have to their siblings and other relatives, and strengthens the family's ability to give children the support they need.

What does it mean to a child who can’t live with their parents to know he or she is safe, loved and has a place to belong?

Some answers to these questions are offered in this small but powerful book as children ages 5 - 19 from across Washington State relate their experiences living in Kinship Care.

Some are funny, some serious or even sad, but all are sincere and offer testimony to the value, sense of family, and love each young author experienced in living with a relative caregiver.

Enjoy your reading!

Shelly Willis,
Executive Director
Family Education and Support Services
DEDICATION

Thank you Dennis Mahar!

We are delighted to dedicate the 2016 Voices of Children book to this special man who has a long and distinguished career in Social Services, and Public Administration. Dennis Mahar is a valued member of our community who has demonstrated a profound commitment to the well-being of Kinship Families.

He has been a strong champion for our most vulnerable populations including our very youngest to our very eldest citizens on local, State and National levels. While serving the past 35 years as the Executive Director of the Area Agency on Aging of Lewis, Mason and Thurston Counties, Dennis also worked on the Boards of the United Way, and the Food Bank of Thurston County. He currently serves as the Chair of the Washington Association of Area Agencies on Aging, and has been active with the Washington State Senior Citizens Lobby. In addition, Dennis serves at the National level by engaging with both the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging and AARP.

This distinguished man has done a remarkable job of making sure that a strong backbone of support is available to aid Family Caregivers locally -- and across our State. Dennis, himself, a self-proclaimed "kinship kid", understands the issues impacting Kinship Families, and he rolls up his sleeves and takes action at the Front Line—as well as Policy—levels. He has successfully hosted past Voices of Children ceremonies where his message of hope and the value of family were well received. He has also ensured that his Advisory Council was well informed on issues facing Kinship Families and has advocated for solutions to complex community problems.

To know Dennis is to know he cares deeply. He considers all aspects of service delivery from the front line to Policy and has been consistent in helping to build a strong scaffolding of support for Kinship Families in Washington State.

Kinship Families in our state are stronger and more sustainable thanks to the dedicated efforts, relentless compassion, and thoughtful advocacy of Mr. Dennis Mahar. Thank you Dennis!
Voices of Children 2016

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Nevaeh
Age 6
Winning Contest Entries : Ages 5-7

She lets me play on my bike.
They love me so much.

They let me play on my tablet.

I love you!
I Love LiVeg hier Bekus it is fun so much
I Love my anty This is The Best Plas to Liv and I Love y uki so much he cese so much This is my Bruthrs BaskBall gam. We are all thir. I Love my Bruthr so much
I love my grandma and grandpa and they love me. They take me to Church. And they take me on trips and play football with me. Until while my mom gets well, then I can go home and be safe this time.

Syrus
Age 8
Ever since I got adopted by my grandparents, I have had a roof over my head, good meals, and clean clothes on my body every day. But most importantly I have love and a good family.

My gramma helps me keep on track for homework, studying, and chores. Even when she pops her top, gets really mad and starts yelling, I know she still loves me. Grumpy grampa’s grumpy a lot but deep down in his heart I will always have a place.

Gramma says you need to learn something new every day. They’re always trying to teach us new stuff, and how to be better people. One of the many things I love about my grandparents is that they let me see my mom and didn’t separate me and my siblings. In fact, we even got to meet our oldest brother for the first time last summer.

My grandparents give us all that we need. Even though they might not be the perfect grandparents, or the funnest, they are all I need, and all I want. I wouldn’t trade anything for them. Someday I’ll get to live with my mom again, but until then, I love my life here.
Winning Contest Entries: Ages 13-19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What They Wanted - What We Got</th>
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<td><strong>They wanted:</strong> grandchildren born healthy and happy.</td>
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<td><strong>They wanted:</strong> to be able to put a few dollars away for retirement.</td>
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<td><strong>They got:</strong> bills taking care of children that weren’t theirs.</td>
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<td><strong>They wanted:</strong> to have grandchildren on weekends and holidays and spoil rotten then send home.</td>
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<td><strong>They got:</strong> three of us all the time to parent and teach and discipline and fight.</td>
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<td><strong>They wanted:</strong> temporary custody so mom could go to rehab then we could go home.</td>
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<td><strong>They got:</strong> full custody with no end in sight.</td>
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<td><strong>They wanted:</strong> to be able to retire and spend time together, to relax and enjoy life.</td>
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<td><strong>They got:</strong> to retire early to take care of us; doing homework, and conferences, and carpool s, and PTA.</td>
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<td><strong>They wanted:</strong> laughter and hugs and love.</td>
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<td><strong>They got:</strong> scowls, and muttering, and disrespect, and theft, and attitude.</td>
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<td><strong>They wanted:</strong> peace, and calmness, and order.</td>
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<td><strong>They got:</strong> chaos, us always fighting with each other, and our stuff left everywhere constantly.</td>
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<td><strong>They wanted:</strong> appreciation for what they were providing.</td>
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<td><strong>They got:</strong> I want cell phones, laptops, notebooks, name brand clothing, and more and more and more.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>They wanted:</strong> “you’re the best gramma and grampa ever.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>They got:</strong> “you’re not fair, this sucks, and I hate living here.”</td>
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**What we got:** unconditional love, and everything we ever needed, and a chance to grow up and have a good life without drugs, without alcohol, without abuse or neglect. We were lucky. We got them.

Beverly
Age 17
What a Blessing it is to Have Relatives
By: Esther

My aunt and uncle are one of a kind
I love them so much
I’m glad they’re mine
They lift me up
Through my ups and downs
I am so thankful to have them around
Life is not perfect
It’s full of many shapes and colors
But I’m glad to know that we have each other
To have this peace
To have a place to call home
With my aunt and uncle by my side
I’ll never be alone
They’ve been there for me
Through thick and thin
Their love is so strong
They don’t have to pretend
I appreciate my relatives
Mine are as special as can be
I love my aunt and uncle very much
Thank you God for giving them to me

Esther
Age 17
Entries of Merit: Ages 5-7

Anozira
Age 5
I like mom and they call me titty!
Melena
Age 6
No, buddy, I know how much I love my auntie.

Michael
Age 7
Doing Everything - Go to School, travel, play, stay healthy, seeing my doctors, dentist and my family stays with me when I'm in the hospital. I'm loved.
Entries of Merit: Ages 8-12

I like living with my grandma because she takes me places and she is very kind. She does fun stuff with me and she loves me very much.

Aiden
Age 11
Have you ever met someone that can change the world? That's who my grandma is. My personal hero is my grandma. She is a hero because she is trustworthy and she is awesome in so many ways. Some are that she makes us food and gives us clean clothes in the morning. I have known my grandma for my whole life.

My grandma is a hero because she is thoughtful, this is true because she takes us out for dinner. She is trustworthy and always there when you need her. She is my hero because she is supportive and really easy-going most of the time. She took us, Chloe and me in when we had no place to live. My grandma has changed my life for the better. She feeds us and finally she also gives us clean clothes and, with that, she puts them on the heater!

Something special I do with my hero is going to Maui every year! This is something I enjoy doing with my hero. I like going in the pool together. I also enjoyed watching the lion dance. I thought the funniest part was when the lion nearly pushed me into a fountain. Finally, I really like that you wanted to take us on this trip.

Grandma, thank you for being my hero I look forward to going to Maui next year with you because of all the fun things we did I hope we can see the lion dance again.
My life living with my grandmother, instead of my birth parents.
I have lived with my grandmother all my life.
My grandmother has always put a roof over my head and feeds me, clothes me and educates me to be respectful, honest, caring and understanding.
I am a ten year old boy that is trying to work hard for an education. I'm trying to learn more to get smarter and go to college free, but I'm not sure if I want to go to college because I don't want to leave my grandmother behind.
I hate to leave my grandmother alone, she means a lot to me, so I might stay with her because she took care of me since I was a baby, she's like a mom to me.
My grandmother gave me a place to live when I was a little baby. I want to take care of my grandmother and protect her like she is doing since I was born.
My days are full of sunshine because of my Grandpa and Grandma.
Since I've been living with my grandparents, it's made a big difference in my life. My grandparents used to not be a big part of my life, just a background piece in fact! Now they play a huge role, loving and caring for me! If things didn't start changing, I never would have known how much I love them. So all the things changed for the better. I give them my love every day, no matter what the weather, we'll always be together.
The Best Gramma and Grampa

Hi, I’m Chance and I’m going to tell you how I got to live with my gramma and grampa.

When I was three, my mom had us live with her friend Wendy because she was a drug addict and couldn’t take good care of us.

Wendy made me basically live in the basement. I had a wood mattress thing on the floor for my bed. The only time I got to leave the basement was to go to the bathroom and when my uncle came to babysit us. I even had to eat in the basement. I couldn’t visit anyone, especially my mom.

About a year later Wendy went to gramma and said, “you take Chance and Xena, and I will take Beverly.” Grampa said, “All or none.” She said, “none,” but came back a couple weeks later and said, “Here, you take them.” Gramma asked, “Where are their clothes.” She said, “In the laundry.” We never got them.

As soon as Wendy left, gramma said, “Kids, get in the car.” She took us to visit mom. We are living with gramma from now on. We are happy now and we are able to do a lot of things.
I love my family because they love me for who I am. I also love them because they treat me the way I would want to be treated.

Chevelle
Age 11
Love is

my Grandma and knowing that she’s always there for me.
a good pencil, lots of paper, and time to draw.
going to Grandpa’s house in Oregon, going to the beach with my family,
and playing in the sand, laughing.
when I am upset and thinking of Grandma and remembering that when I am
afraid she reminds me that no matter what, I
can do anything.
being creative, having fun, laughing, building anything out of paper.
spending time with friends like John.
family, spending time together on the couch watching TV, going on vacation,
and just having fun.
creating something that you love and that you know everyone will love too.

Love is happiness.

seeing someone else's creative beauty, like their art. Love is Tuna Toasties,
with pita bread, tuna, and cheese on top.
Tuna toasties made by Grandma with love.
a car trip with family, all smiles and happy memories.
forgiving someone when they hurt your feelings.
remembering only the good times and forgetting the bad ones.
doing your best for people that you love.
helping someone with their homework.
helping someone do something even though you really hate doing that chore.
a family dinner.
healing and strength.
looking at a photo albums of old pictures that bring back good memories.

Ezekiel
Jasmine
Age 8

I learned to read
Voices of Children 2016

Jayce
Age 8

5 other homes could not take care of me, Mommy and Daddy could take care of me and we are living happily ever after.

Me, Brother, Dad

28
Before am sitting and borings

After places am travelling

Jonni
Age 10
Mary Lou
Age 12
How I live with my relatives: How they are like my mom and dad we got to take fun trips.

I love living with them!

Washington
San Diego
Thank you Mama

You are the best thing that ever happened to us and if we ever lost you we don't know what we would do and thank you for every thing we know were not perfect but that is why you love us and we would not have it any other way.

love us

our family

Nigel & Audrey
Ages 12 & 14
Living with My Grandparent’s has made a positive difference in my life because I don’t have to worry about having to stay in the house all the time, I can go outside, ride my bike or play football.

What I really like about living here is I get clean clothes, really good food and a Grandpa that helps me read every night and I can learn from.

Sometimes I don’t do what I’m supposed to do like when I don’t do my chores or slough off.

I really feel that Grandparent’s are the closest thing to “Living Angels.”

My Grandma has lots of surprises when it comes to going somewhere, going out to eat or going to the store.

When I first moved here, my Grandma had a cat named Zero. She is the best cat you would ever have, anyway, that’s why I love living here.

The final reason is that I have lived here almost 2 years and I really love it so far.

By, Noah
My Grandparents

(Grandma & Papawear)

Living with my grandparents is wonderful indeed. They love us deeply which has planted a seed.

They've taken us places we've never been. Teaching us the history of our land.

We know for fact no matter what we do, they will always be here.

For my Tonnica, & Mary Lou. 

By Ronald
My Grandparents have planted the seeds to help me grow.

I love my Grandparents.

Ryan
Age 11
Voices of Children 2016

I love my family!

this is my whole family

Sommer
Age 8
When I was younger we used to go to a beach as a family. And we ate our food on the soft sand with a blanket underneath us and when we were done we went into the water. I loved the waves drift me away to shore and when the sun came down I was still in the water, but when I looked at shore, it was so AMAZING! I could hardly believe I was there, I was stunned at the view. My mouth was wide open. And for the last time, slowly, I let the waves take me to shore and when the sun was down, the sky was as bright as a firefly. And the moon so amazing. It was time to go, and I got a souvenir, it said.

Vanessa
Age 11
Entries of Merit : Ages 13-19

only the greatest heroes save the lives of the needy despite how it may impact their own lives.

Family is built off love, trust, and connection making it much more than mere blood.

Amaris
Age 17
Hi my name is Amanda

My name is Dishawn. I have lived with my grandma for 10 years. I came to my grandma in 2009. So that means I was 5 years old. Now I am 13 years old.

We moved several times for our family had to travel from Place to Place. After that we got a 1 bedroom apartment on a drug house. Days before Christmas we had to pay the rent. For my brother J J and my sister Holley.

I had a bed for a baby in the same room and my grandma slept on the floor in the front room.

Most of my life my dad is in jail and my mom was in jail for a period. So that means I had to live with my grandma with my sister and brothers. But I don't like 2016 because my best friend died. But if you did not know my best friend was my grandma. So that means my Grandma is my BFF. But all I have to say is my family is the most important thing in the world.

I love my family.

Just would like to say thank you for reading this.

By: Amanda
Hello my name is Deshawn, and I would like to share a story with you. Do you ever get that feeling when you see your parents drinking and doing drugs that you wish you could stop them? Well, let me tell you something... I felt the feeling but I was too young to understand it. This habit my parents had affected my education, my personal hygiene, and my personal hygiene issues. Until my auntie and uncle saw the action. They helped turn my life around with their constant reaching in school. Also a great athlete in cross country role model to other students around me. In the end of this brief essay I am truly blessed to have a loving auntie and uncle who take care of me and support me.
That's enjoyable to be with my uncle because I don't know when I would've been with him. That's really why I don't get a lot of stuff to eat. We have good clothes and good things that I get now. I'm happy that I'm with him because I wouldn't have got to go places when we got to go without him and I would still be skinny. If I wasn't with him, I was always hungry and most of the time we had to walk to other family houses to sleep but now it's better that I get to stay in one place, I think that I don't have to go to other people's houses to sleep. I got used to stay in one place and I thought now when I get to go new things a lot of time but now I do.
You would do everything for me
I'm a rock head when I was born
I've never listen to what I have done
She's a person always have my back
She had taught me skill that I needed
I used to be a dude of a street
Like an orange doesn't have skin
I was a bullier of a top of the class
Like a broken code hurts a PCU
She is a lesson to change myself
She is a Fire flyer of the night
She is a LED of light
She is my only aunt.
From street into home
From worthless into incredible
I'm the only nephew. _Nhat_
In my favorite restaurant with my beloved uncle for my dinner that we planned together.
The smell of a warm steamed coconut with fish.
That the waitress service to us.
People asked Am I his daughter?
No! But that man took care and protected me like I’m his daughter.
Warm and cheerful smile on his face.
He gave me every time he pick me up from school.
In the hot tropical weather,
My favorite snack sapodilla fruit in his hand.
While he waited for me outside of school.
It’s embarrassing and childish.
"Who said that to a 12 years old girl?"
That is what I thought.
But now I miss every single moment that we spend together.

Sochenda
Age 15
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WITH MANY THANKS

This booklet is a tribute to grandparents and other relatives of Washington State. It is a collaborative effort that could not have been possible without the support, guidance, and partnership of those listed below. Thanks to each of you for your tremendous spirit and dedication to those we serve.

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Thank you!
Voices of Children 2016