Voices of Children Raised by Grandparents and Other Relatives 2017 Contest

A compilation of poems, essays, and drawings submitted by children living in Washington State to the 2017 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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To order more copies of this booklet or for additional information about the 2017 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 Chloe Sagara

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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.
FOREWORD

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 Judy Lin!
We are delighted to dedicate the 2017 Voices of Children book to a skilled attorney who has been instrumental in the development of legal representation for Kinship families in Washington State.

Judy Lin is a Senior Managing Attorney for the King County Bar Association. With over 23 years of Family Law experience, she has helped to develop a framework for pro-bono representation assistance serving some of our most vulnerable families. Judy’s innovative efforts also resulted in our state’s first pro-bono Kinship Legal Support program in King County. Judy has consulted on policies and laws supportive of Kinship families, and has provided training to peers across our state on legal strategies related to Kinship care. She has also contributed valuable information to help create an updated comprehensive legal guide dedicated to serving grandparents and other non-parental caregivers in partnership with Legal Voice.

Judy has a remarkable ability to bring clarity to complex legal concepts. She stepped forward a number of years ago to help address legal issues faced by kinship caregivers, especially related to third-party custody. She was an active participant on the legislative kinship legal committee and brought not only knowledge, expertise, and good ideas, but a willingness to talk with caregivers about their personal situations. They say that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery: Judy’s successful pro bono efforts have inspired other programs across the state.

Over the years, Judy has been incredibly generous with her time. She has graciously shared her wisdom and has been a joy to work with. She is a grounded, intelligent, dedicated and compassionate legal expert who has made a significant difference in the lives of Kinship families.

We appreciate her leadership and wish to recognize that many of our state’s children have a permanent placement with a family member due in part to the dedicated efforts of Judy Lin.

With our deepest appreciation, we say: Thank you, Judy Lin!
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Winning Contest Entries : Ages 5-7

I love you because you protect me!

Casey
Age 7
Family is like gears, they all connect together!
Hi am here to tell you about why I love living here with my grandma and grandpa and how it has made a positive difference in my life. When I’m feeling sad and I want to give up they come and help me. When I get mad they don’t get mad and don’t hurt me. They are the best grandma and grandpa I could ever have. Even though I make mistakes sometimes, they still think I am the best star; and this is why I love them. They are nice to me and they are kind. They got me a new back pack because I tore my old one. Even though I get angry and hurt them they never hurt me and be mean to me. I love my grandma and grandpa!

Thomas
Age 10
I am Taryn. I have been raised by my grandma since I was 3 years old. I love her so much she does so much for me. I don't know where I would be without my grandma. She is the love of my life. I never want to lose her. I have been through tough times when I am feeling down. She cheers me up. Grandma has made sure I am busy like cheerleading, basketball, baseball, gymnastics. We were also involved with church. I am now taking violin lessons. We go on vacations together. My grandma comes to school and has breakfast with me when I have bad dreams. My grandma is always there to comfort me.
Brittany
Age 15

When I was eleven up until thirteen, I would have to protect my sisters. I didn't have time to hang out with friends because I was scared of what would happen when I'm not home. Although, it didn't change when I was there, it just made me feel better knowing I can protect them. My parents were either gone or in their room with their friends doing drugs. There was a time when someone had passed out and the ambulance had to come. After making sure my sisters were safe, I snuk in my parents room and saw them doing whatever they could to save his life. Living with my aunt and uncle who love and teach what is right from wrong is amazing. They have created a stable life style for my sisters and I, and have persuaded me to participate in sports, which I have qualified for state. However, even though we say it's great we still miss our mom and hope one day she will realize what she gave up on. I am very thankful for my Aunt and uncle who took us away from all the drug abuse we had been living with.
Hi, my name is Summer, I live with my grandparents, Diana and Levi, with my brother Payton. My brother and I live with our grandparents due to the death of our mother, and we don’t live with our dad because he was the one who caused our mother’s death.

The positive things my grandparents do to make a difference in my life is, they always help me through everything, such as sports, grades, problems.

They help my brother as well, my brother payton has ADHD and that makes him hyper. They work with my brother’s teachers, to make sure he is doing good, and he is.

My nana and papa are the best thing that has happened to me, they are really nice, they are loving and I love them so much.

When we lived with our dad we were not doing good, now we are, we use to get bad grades, and always get in trouble. Now that Payton and I live with our nana and papa, we have really good grades and don’t get in so much trouble, and that’s it, thank you.
I love living here with my grandparents. I enjoy my family. They’re the most important to me. My brothers live here with us too. I just enjoy living here so much I really love it. And I have my own room. I love love love being here so so so much.

Shawna
Age 7
Living with my grama and papa is the best because they are always with me, they get me to school and back and they take care of me. They always buy food when we run low. They can keep me healthy and safe. They get me thing’s I need and they love me. They always keep their promises, that is a very important thing. They gave me a home, when my mom didn’t. I love them very much.

Abigail
Age 7
I am 6 years old.
My mom and I live with grandma and grandpa. I love living at grandma and grandpa's house. They have a huge yard to run and play. I have lots of toys and I have a bike.
Audrey
Age 7
I love my Gramma because they help me with my homework.

Izzy
Age 7
I love living with my Aunt Amiee and Uncle Mitch because we don’t want to sleep in a car anymore. Aunt Amiee’s house doesn’t have any bugs in our house. Aunt Amiee’s house has bedtime and at mom’s house it has no bedtime. Aunt Amiee gives me snuggles every day and mom didn’t. I love living with my Aunt Amiee and Uncle Mitch.

Jasmine
Age 7
Abbiegail
Age 6
Hi my name is Nevaeh
I will tell you about my grandparents. My grandparents feed me they take me on trips then they buy me clothing. They let me play on my tablet. They help me with my homework. I am glad they gave me a home. I love my grandparents.
I was running at the beach with my sister. It was a sunny day and we were playing tag and running.

Ruben
Age 7
I love my Grandma
Living with her means everything to me.
She protects me from bad things.
She tries her best to help me grow to be my best.
and raises me to make good choices.
She teaches me who my family is. My cousins, aunties, and uncles. My whole family.
We do family parties and picnics.
It means I don't have to move.
It means I stay with her it is my home too.
It means I stay in the same school and have the same friends.
It means I get to learn my culture.
Living with grandma means everything to me.
I love my Grandma she is tremendously amazing.
I feel safe living with my Grandma it makes me feel comfortable.
I don't have to worry about a thing I am safe.
I couldn't imagine what it would be like without her.
Me and my Grandma my Grandma and me I love her she loves me.
My Grandma is very patient when I got mad.
How I live with my grandma makes me want to stay.
Living with my Grandma means everything to me.
Rosmarie
Age 12

My family is strong all together!
My name is Chance. I’ve lived with Grandma and Grandpa with my sister’s Xena and Beverly for 7 years. Mom’s a drug addict. One of her friends was supposed to take care of us but she was very mean and didn’t keep any of her promises. It was horrible. One day she called Grandma. Gramma wanted us, and Wendy finally agreed.

The first thing we did after we got to Grammas was see our mom. I was so happy. Gramma and Grampa make sure that we have time with her. It’s good for both of us. Gramma also lets us visit other family.

They helped us get healthy. They let us have toys and clothes that aren’t broken or ripped. We even have a cat. And fish. Having Grandpa’s cooking is like heaven!

Gramma helps us learn new things (and homework) and get new friends. They help us get a good education in a safe school. Grampa has to drive me every day, and he volunteers at my school as a Watchdog.

Now I am on a baseball team. It’s great.

They love us. It is awesome living with my grandparents. When we got there I knew I was home.

Chance
Age 11
My Grandma

Loving. Caring. Making real food like enchilada's. A Mexican food dish. She taught me to knit. She taught me to cook. She taught me to write and everything unique. But more important, she taught me to love.

I love my Grandma!
I have so much reasons that I am happy to live with my Grandma and Grandpa.

Grandma & me

She cooks for us!

She helps me

She helps with my work

Grandpa & me

When something breaks he fixes it and more!

Alizah
Age 10
I am happy to live here because I am going to go to college in the future. I know my grandparents will support me when I need them. I love them very much.
I'm very LOVED, I'm safe, and I get to do ALOT of fun times.

Sofia
Age 8
My Grandma is my mommy who chases me and my brother.

I love going to the moon and back a million times.

Mom

Alyssa

Age 9
Mariah
Age 10

My grandma is a very good woman because she does many things for me. This Christmas we did not have a lot of money but I still got what I wanted. Sometimes I get on her nerves but she does not get mad and that is what I like about her. She buys me clothes and food and even toys. When ever I want them. She is the best. I love her.

Denys
Home

Denys
My friends house

She takes
Me many places
(Fun places)

We go out to dinner all the time

Denys
Side

At Parks

She gets
Me in sport.
I love to draw every day after school. Even I like to say lots of names. My most favorite thing is to learn at school. I even like writing poems. My nana and papa loves me.

Kaiyaa
Age 8
Ayzha
Age 9
I'm Lily and I would like to tell you how my grandma Kelley and papa Rick make a positive difference in my life. I feel safe and secure with my Grandparents because I know that they will do whatever they have to do to make me safe. I'm in a school I feel safe in.

I'm in the Excel program. I love reading.

My Grandma Kelley will always be there for me and my sister Delilah. My grandma makes sure we have food and clean clothes.

My papa Rick makes sure we are warm and have a roof over our heads.

I'm always doing lots of activities.

That's how my grandparents make a positive difference. I love my grandparents there awesome!

Lily
Age 10
Audrey
Age 9
I was born into this world
And so…
I was raised by my Grandparents
Ya know?

They help me to know
They help me to see

That I am important, and
Jesus loves me

Grandma taught me to brush
My teeth and wash my face
And to put everything back
Into its place.

One of the most important things,
My grandpa said

Is to keep my self respect
And a level head

So if I stop and think and try to understand,
I will grow to be a
Special kind of man
My story

I was a normal kid I lived with my mom and dad. Then we started living in a car. I started to feel like something was wrong. I was scared of something. I had this feeling where it was like I wasn’t there anymore and I still do. When I went home with nana I was scared. I was thinking what’s going to happen. Now I understand why I live with nana. My parents are crazy people and that’s no lie. I’m so glad I have nana to provide me with food and water. A house a warm bed a tv. There are some things I worry about like where are my dogs and will I ever live with mom and dad again.

Quinn
Age 9
My name is Anthony and I have been living with my grandmother since I was born. I am ten years old soon to be 11 years old. My grandmother has two challenges however that hasn’t stopped her from taking care of me. One of the challenges is she can’t drive, if she could drive we wouldn’t have to rely on people to get our grocery, haircut’s and doctor appointment’s (like physical, dentist and eye appointments.) but that hasn’t stopped her from taking care of me, and second of all she doesn’t speak english. When she goes to my school conferences her daughter translates for her. My grandmother’s daughter help’s her with the bills and takes her to get her errand’s done, she even helps her get her mailed organized and read.

Living with my grandmother has made a positive difference in my life because she showed me to be a honest, kind, loving person and I owe her everything I have. I am truly blessed because my grandmother is up in age. If and when she goes to heaven with my mother, I am surrounded by loving people but in the meantime I want to live with my grandmother, that way we can take care of each other if it wasn’t for my grandmother I don’t know where I would be.

Anthony
Age 10
My Auntie’s List of Love

My auntie gives me food when I’m hungry. My auntie gives me video games on weekdays and weekends. I love my auntie better than anybody.

Issac
Age 8
When I was little and very young, God saw my struggle and knew what had to be done.

Bring them together, this woman and boy, they shall no longer suffer. I shall fill them with happiness and joy.

God knew what he was doing when he joined these two hearts.

What God has brought together. Let no man tear apart.

She's my number one fan, she's my whole world, I am so blessed God brought together this boy and this girl.
Izabel
Age 9

I am grateful for education, love, meals, warmth, lights, clothes, and a home.
I love being with my aunt & uncles because they treat me like a daughter and I have been living with them for 4 years almost 5 years. I like them as father and mother because they treat me with love and show us how to be clean, how to eat healthy, cook and most important thing is that they get us what we mostly need at home like food, clothes, and shoes. They celebrate my birthday but it’s really big because my friends come and my family come. I came to live with them when I was 8 almost 9 and in 2nd grade because my parents did bad things. I didn't listen at first but these 4 yrs I learned a lot of things for when im older and this what I didn't get from my parents.

Gabriela
Age 12
I think living with my grandparents is the best thing that has ever happened to me, I mean, they are there for me. I love my awesome family! There the best thing god created.

Grandpa grandma Shawna Micheal me
Grandpa and grandma love us really care and love us.
Always make sure we are rested for school.
They are not selfish. They always help other people.
Give all over the state so that we can play in our hockey tournaments.

Proud of us.

Lots of laughter in my home... Grandpa is really funny.

Respect others.
Every night they say I love you.
Never give up and try harder they tell me.
Teach us to help others when bullied.

Sleep with the angels they always say.

Ivan
Age 11
Shiala
Age 8
Life With Grandma & Grandpa

Life with grandma can be a dream.

My Grandmother’s heart is as big as the moon.
And the unconditional love she gives me everyday.
Every meal that she makes and serves, is a very special moment with everyone at the table everyday.

My Grandfather took me to his garden, showing me every plant he grew. Every moment, was a very special moment with him. Every time we had to fix something, he show me how to do it. Those are always moments that I will treasure forever.

I love Grandpa & Grandma.

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Vanessa
Age 12
I wake up in the morning and I’m feeling just fine the sun is shining brighter then I ever thought possible it’s a beautiful summer day ya it’s a beautiful summer day I’m gonna walk to the beach feeling sand between my toes and the waves upon my ankles the sun warming my face on my family vacation. It’s such a beautiful day so I’m gonna go out for a swim yes I’m feeling just fine with my best friend by my side on my family vacation it’s such a beautiful day ya on my family vacation it’s such a beatiful day!

Samantha
Age 10
What life is like living with Relatives

What is it like living with relatives besides your mom and dad? I haven't lived with my mom and dad and I used to live with my grandma. But now I live with my great aunt and uncle.

My life has been very good with my great aunt and uncle. I have 5 cousins who are very nice to me. We all get to do fun stuff, like go to the swimming pool and go to the Seattle Space Needle. For Christmas they even bought me a laptop and I'm typing this letter on it!

Living with relatives can be hard sometimes. It takes a long time to get used to the rules and the people around me. Sometimes I say the wrong words, or do the wrong things. Even if living with relatives can be hard sometimes, I know my great aunt, uncle and all my cousins love me.
The Brown Haired Little Girl

Once upon a time a beautiful little girl was born. She had beautiful dark brown hair and two different colored eyes, one blue and one dark brown. When she was 2 ½ month old she went to live with her Grandaddy and Grandnan. They took real good care of her, she was happy. She also lived with her autistic uncle. Then 2 years later her cousin came to live with her too. They all got along. The family was happy. One of the little brown haired girl eyes changed to green. When she was six, her two year old brother came to live with her. It was hard because he was mean. The little brown haired girl made friends the best she could with her brother. Now she is 10 years old her hair has turned lite brown and her one eye changed once more. She now has one dark brown eye and a hazel brown eye. She still is a nice girl, but is sometimes confused at times. She never sees her father and a half sister who is one. She sees her mother all the time but that is not always happy. One thing that this little brown haired girl does know, is, that her Grandaddy and Grandnan is always on her side, believes in her and loves her forever.

Mary
Age 10
My Voice

I have been living with my aunt and uncle for over two years now. During this time, I have grown in more ways than one and have had many experiences and opportunities. I now eat healthy foods, get enough sleep, and I'm doing great in school, thanks to their guidance.

I have learned how to swim, I play soccer, I love to go camping, and I enjoy going on adventures. All of these things I had never had the chance to do before.

Now that I am in a good and loving home, I have the opportunity to set goals for the future like going to college.

I am so thankful to them for being such great parents and helping me be better in so many ways.

As the future comes closer, my aunt and uncle are planning to adopt me. This is music to my ears because I will finally have a permanent home and family that I know love me and will never give up on me.
I have been raised by my Grandmother since I was 4 months old. My grandmother made sure I was taken care of while she worked. She has always been there for me. I have had dance lessons, baseball, gymnastics, karate, Girl Scouts. She has such a good heart. My grandmother retired and went back to work to make sure I would have the necessities I need. She has taught me how to cook, bake, clean and be a good person. All my friends like to come to my house, we play games, and have fun. It’s sad my mom & dad made the wrong choices, but I’m so thankful for my grandmother. I know she has given up a lot for me. She also takes me and my friends to Silver Wood, Great Wolf Lodge, the ocean. She’s a lot of fun and I’m so thankful for her.

Kaitlyn
Age 15
My Family Boat

My family is like a boat to me
I will stay afloat in the ocean of life
If someone sinks my boat I will rebuild it but never replace the parts
I will keep my family with me forever
They build me up and take care of me
Through good and bad, they have always been there for me
I will never replace them, but just make the relationship stronger
I hope that one day I won’t have to rebuild the boat, because I know I will float forever
But everything has a flaw and my boat does, but I still love it so much
They always keep me from drowning in sadness, they never tip, they always stay upright
They never judge me for what I do, I will forever love them
We will sometimes have our quarrels but that’s nothing compared to losing them forever
They are the light in the darkness in my heart and soul, they keep me lit no matter
They even supported me to my problems of identity
I will forever float with them
I will never give up on them and abandoned them.

Cloey
Age 14
Living with my uncle & aunt has always meant a new opportunity because they have showed me that I can be something greater then what I ever thought. They have gave me opportunities to go places so I can learn more about what I want to be. They have also given me hope. Hope that I will do great things. Ever since me & my siblings came to live with them they excepted us & filled us with hope about the places we can go after getting a degree. They lifted our spirits by making us dream about all the great things we could accomplish in life. A dream that I never thought of before until they gave me a chance to start a second life with a family.
My Uncle and Aunt

My Uncle and Aunt are very outstanding
Other than my other uncles and aunts
They are very noble, My Uncle,
He is very chill and
Every day he works too
Rough to earn money for us.

Also, My Aunt
Needs us to be careful in life and
Don’t do anything bad.

Furry is my Aunt,
And she’s very dependable.
The way she
Helps others out is
Excellent!
Right away, they act like a mother and father to me!

Juan
Age 13
The Celtic Love Knot represents unbroken loops, which are inseperable from each other much like family no matter if they share 100%, 50%, 20%, or 3% of the same blood as you. I’m proud to have my auntie because though I hardly knew her when I moved in she’s been a stand for who I truly am and has taken care of my little brother despite how it impacts her.

Amaris
Age 18
I can say that I had a hard life when I was little. Mom on drugs, my sister, 10, taking care of me and my little brother. Living in a house that was never clean. Mom never home and when she was, she had lots of boyfriends there that abused her. We were hungry all the time. Well that was in the past.

Now I live with wonderful, amazing grandparents. I couldn't ask for more. They do so much and I don't think I have shown them how much I appreciate what they have done for us. They let me do sports. They help with homework. They drive me to school when the weather is bad. They make sure I do what I am supposed to do, when I'm supposed to do it. They go out of their way to make sure we're happy and safe. They're always there for me no matter what. Why? Because they love me.

So yeah, I had a hard life in the past, but that was then. I'm not going to hold onto the bad memories, only the good ones. I know that since I have this family there will be plenty more.

Xena
Age 14
My name is Erica and im going to tell you my story before I lived with my aunt and now that I'm living with my aunt. Before I lived with my aunt, I was insecure about a lot of things in my life. Those insecure made me nervous. So I didn't have any friends to talk too. Now that I live with my aunt, I am confident about what I do and how I look. Also now that I live with my aunt I don't feel abandoned. I feel that I can talk to someone about my feelings. Even my teachers have noticed how I have changed because I'm used to be shy and unsure but now I speak out in class and I also am confident.
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<td>Sofia</td>
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<td>Xena</td>
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WITH MANY THANKS
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Mrs. Trudi Inslee  First Lady, State of Washington
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Terri Jeffreys  Mason County Commissioner
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