



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



Voices of Children 2018

DEDICATION

Thank you Mary Pleger!

We are delighted to dedicate the *2018 Voices of Children* book to a woman who has been a key partner in launching supportive services for grandparents and relatives raising children and their families in Southeast Washington, **Mary Pleger!**

Mary has the distinction of serving as one of our State's very first Kinship Navigators. Working for Catholic Charities for the past 25 years Mary has partnered with Casey Family Programs, and the Southeast Washington Aging & Long Term Care organization to develop, sustain and grow this essential service for Kinship Care families. She is a woman of action whose professionalism, dedication and critical thinking ability has left a trail others could easily follow. Mary understands the deep impact of poverty and thoughtfully coordinates services to ensure respectful, timely and meaningful resources are available to those most in need. One example of her efforts was the development of a Legal Clinic in Yakima, offered in collaboration with Casey Family Programs, and the local Volunteer Attorney Services. This resource has made a significant difference in the lives of Kinship Care families.

If one were to look behind the curtains at the development of supportive resources for Kinship Care Families in Washington State they would most likely see Mary Pleger contributing in some manner. She is someone you can count on. Mary is the first one to arrive and pull up her sleeves, and she will stay until the final details have been completed. Her ability to keep smiling, even when faced with the harshest of challenges, has served to inspire many others. Mary is professional, is generous with her time, collaborative, and well versed in the effective strategies that best serve the populations she serves.

We appreciate Mary's leadership and wish to recognize that many of our state's Kinship Care families are in a better place today thanks in part to the dedicated efforts of Mary Pleger.

With our deepest appreciation, we say: ***Thank you, Mary Pleger!***



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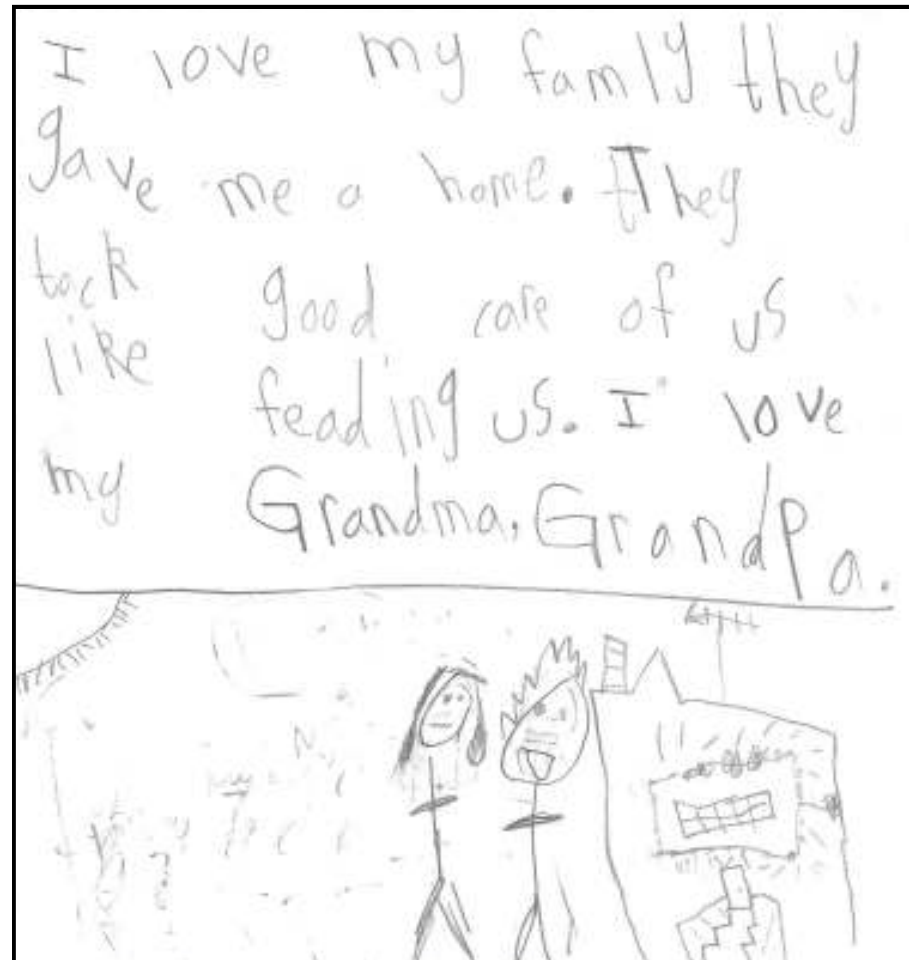
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Winning Contest Entries : Ages 5-7





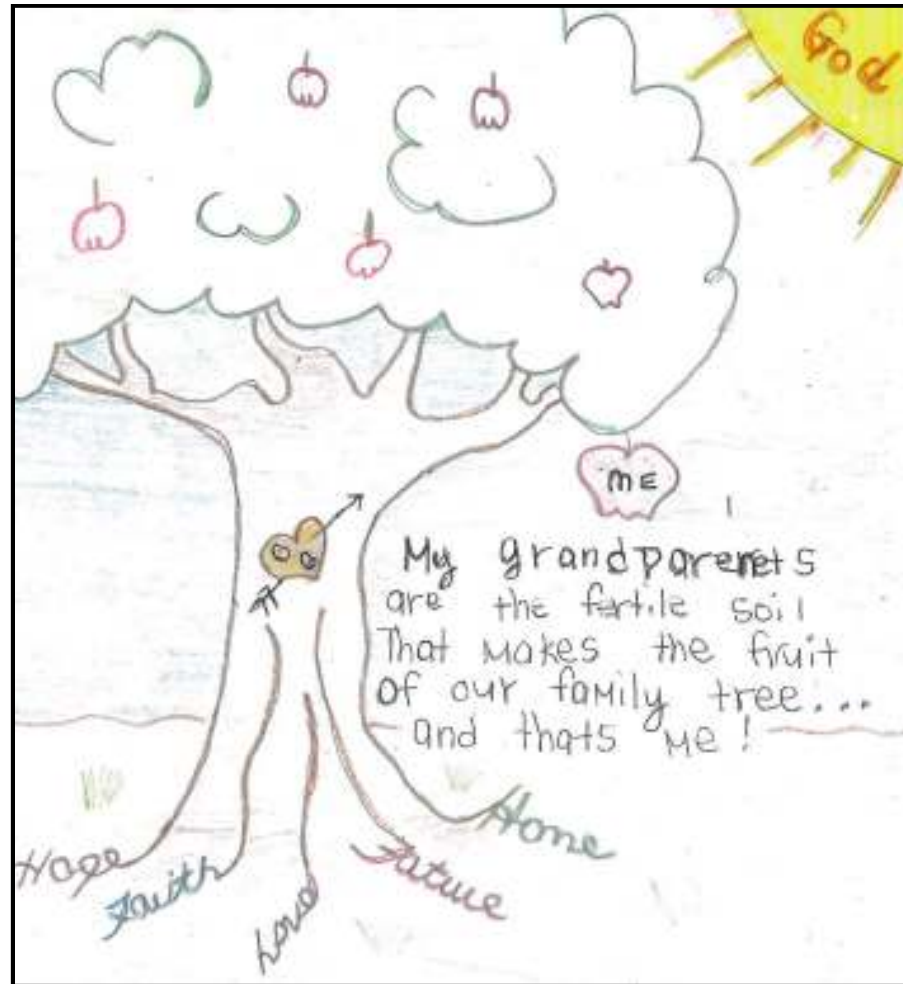
Izzy-Miranda
Age 7



Winning Contest Entries : Ages 7-12



**Gracie Marie
Age 10**



Ayzha
Age 11



Winning Contest Entries : Ages 13-19

Living with a Grandparent is hard because you don't get to see your parents often. When you live with a grandparent you get to experience more on life skills. They help you with things just like parents do. They never leave your side and always make you happy when your sad. Grandparents are just like as if your living with your regular parents.

I still love my parents even tho thoughts happen in life that our parents might regret. Life as a kid is hard even tho you know your parents aren't here to guid you through life as you go and at least I have someone who reminds me of my mom and not have her forgotten. The main person who has been here for me my who life is my Grandma Joanne. I appreciate and love her and she provides for us even if she don't have the money.

Kemiya
Age 13



From the age of 3 to now 18 my grandma has been the one there for me when my parents were too unstable to do their job. She raised me on her own, which I admire. At first yes I was sad that my parents were not around but I soon realized that where I was, was best for me. My grandma has taught me many things such as responsibilities. I was taught to write with good handwriting and to turn everything in and ask when I needed help. She has taught me to cook and bake. I mean I'm not gourmet chef but I know the essentials which is very helpful. My grandma has impacted my life because she wanted to and because of that I am still in high school, graduating this year on time first in the family and attending college. I plan on being successful and being the best I can possibly be so, thank you grandma.

Xzavia
Age 18



Voices of Children 2018

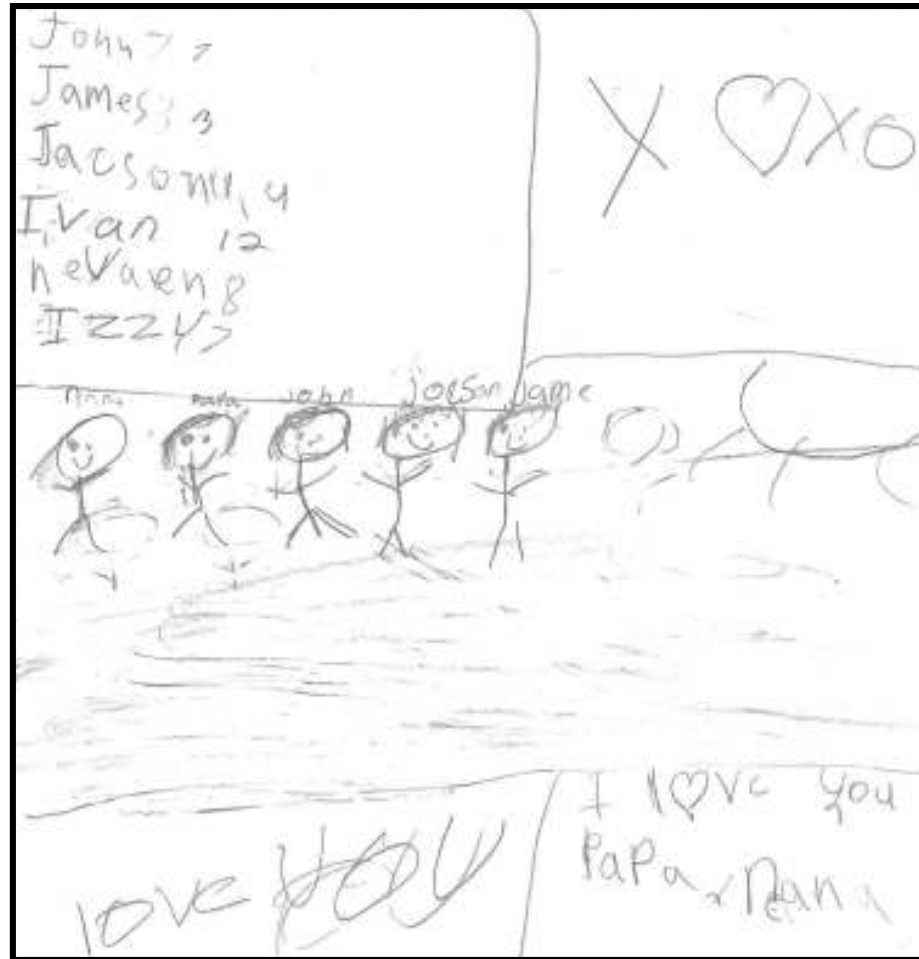
Entries of Merit : Ages 5-7



Chevelle
Age 7



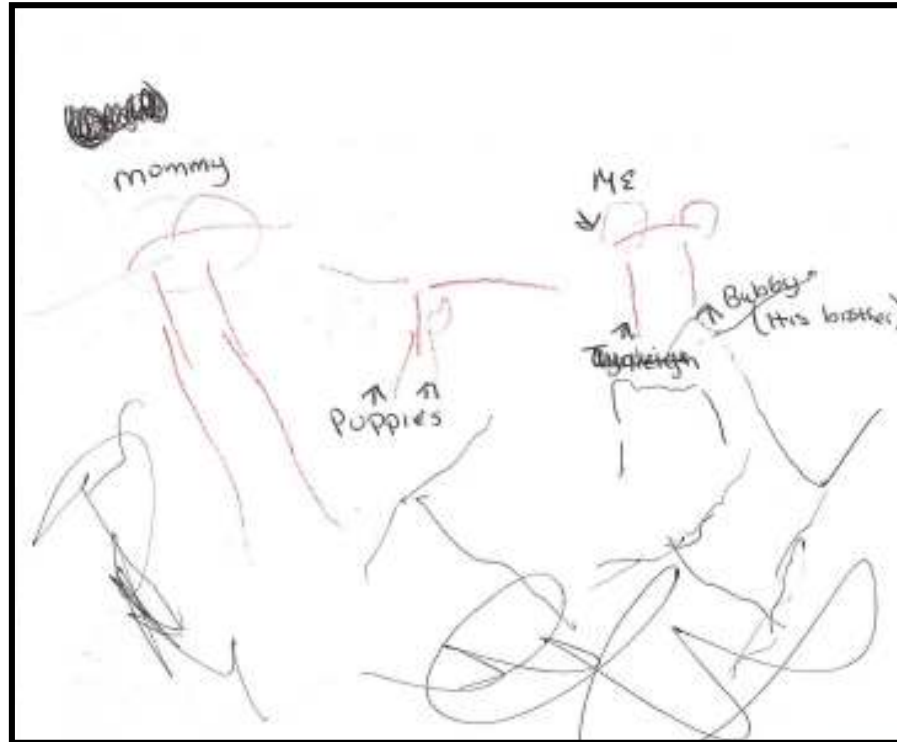
Isabella
Age 5



John
Age 6



Lunabelle
Age 5



**Tyleigh
Age 3**



Zoey
Age 7



Voices of Children 2018

Entries of Merit : Ages 8-12



Dakota
Age 12



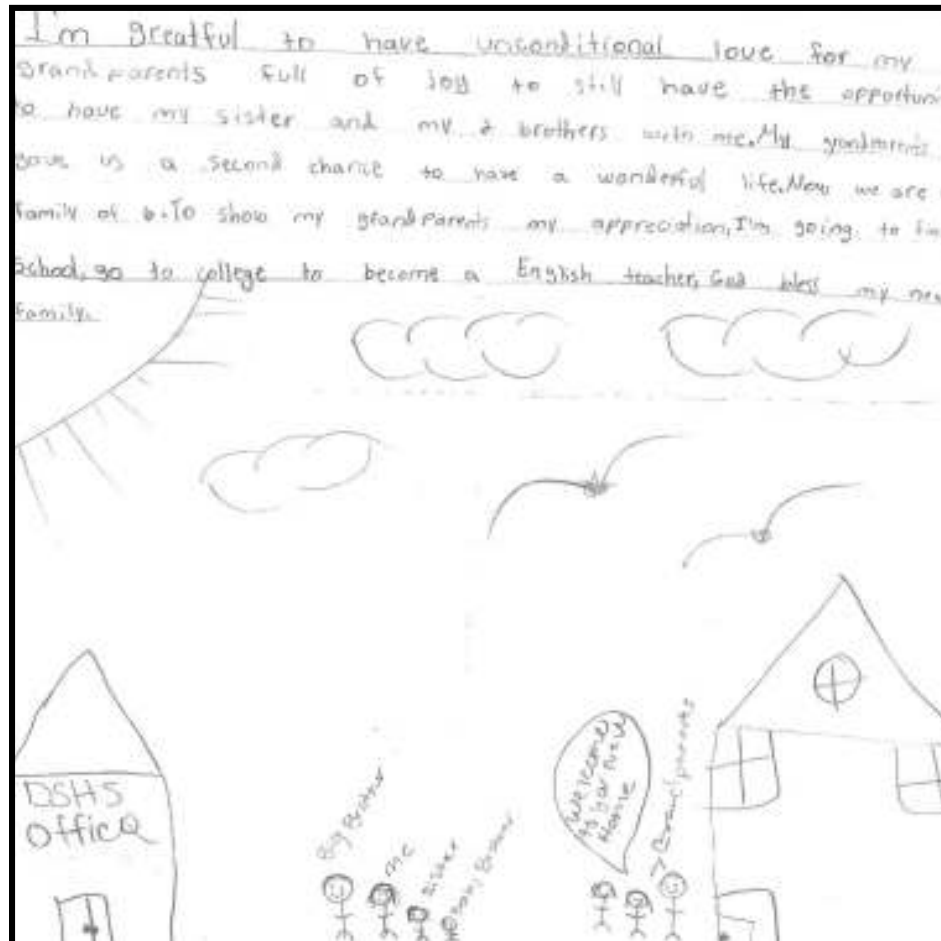
The story of a great life by, Abigail

If you are looking for a great story you need to hear my story. I originally lived with my mom but... I wanted to have a sleep over but I called mom and asked the night it was time to go home and asked if



I can stay a couple of more nights and then the last night when it was time to go home my mom called and asked if I could stay a couple of more nights. Then it turned into a couple of weeks then months even years But... it ended up to be a great life because they are perfect grandparents.

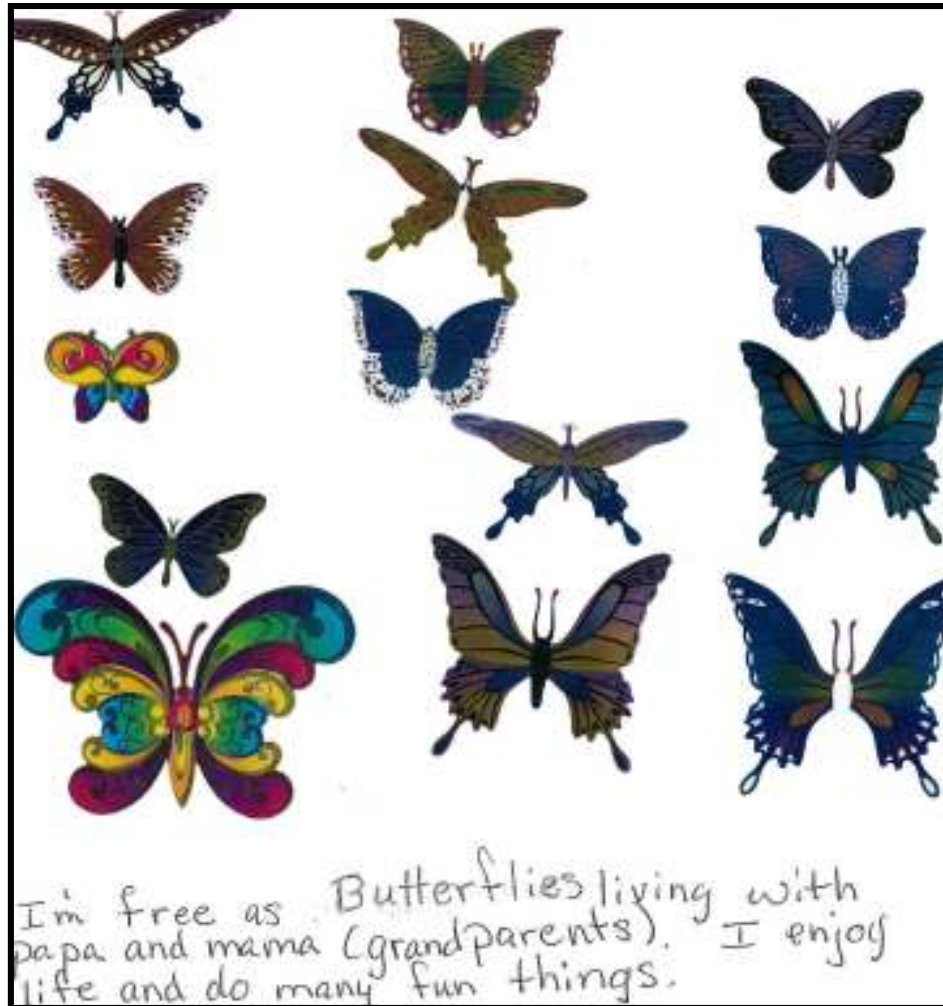
Abigail
Age 8



Margarita
Age 11



Gunny
Age 8



Sofia
Age 9



My Grandma and Grandpa are my Guardian Angels. They took me and my siblings into their home due to my mom's drug usage they give us lots of love, food, and clothing they make sure we have what we need there was a total of 5 of us 2 went to college there was only 3 after my great grandma past away. My grandparents took 3 more grandkids in. They have a big heart to take care of all 6 of us. There are times where I see them struggle and I see them worry but that does not stop them do what they can do for all of us. They might not have everything, but they have a big heart when my grandma hugs me I feel her love. Both my grandparents are so loving and carrying all they want for us kids to do good. I sometimes cry because of my mom's drug usage, and I go to my grandma and tell her what I feel she will give me a big hug and hold me tight and tell me how much she loves us and that everything is going to be okay. I know she hurts just as much as we do but she plays a part and doesn't show it. I would never leave my grandparents. My grandpa is a hard-working man he makes sure that we are always have food on the table clothes on our back. I appreciate both in my life without them I have no idea where we all would be at. Thank you, Grandpa and Grandma, for being in our life. We love you guys for all that you do for us. We love Grandma and Grandpa

Ivan
Age 12



Joseph
Age 9



Hi I'm Hennessy this is the story of living with my nana and papa. I was adopted by my nana and papa when I was 5 years old. We now live in Yelm Washington. I see my mom every other weekend.

What is being adopted

When you're adopted you could be adopted by family or a stranger you have never meet, I was adopted by my family so I've known them. Then there is living with a stranger, well I'm not very knowledgeable on being adopted by a stranger but if you were I bet you were terrified. But on the bright side you get to know the stranger that is now your mom or dad.

Is being adopted bad?

Well not really if anything its better because you were adopted because you or your parent were in a bad situation. But for me it's both wonderful both ways. Its actually good being adopted.

All and all it has changed my entire life live with my nana and papa. Next, I'm going to write even more than this. I hope you enjoyed my story how this whole adoption thing works.

Hennessy

Age 10



Hi my name is Anthony and I live at Sunnyside WA. Being raised by my grandmother has made a positive difference in my life. She provides me with the daily bread, a roof over my head and my necessities. I love my school because I have my friends and the teachers give me an education. I will study harder to do my homework, and better my grade. My current grades are: media tech: C, enrichment: B, math: B, Ela: C, and History: A. My grandmother has had challenges all her life one is she can't drive. And second she can't read or write any English. But that hasn't stopped her from raising her 8 kids and me. I love my grandmother and I will help her and protect her as long as I can. And this is the reason why living with my grandmother has made a positive impact on my life, and her raising me to become a better person.

Anthony
Age 12



Destinee
Age 8