

# Heart Beat



The Newsletter of the Public Children Services Association of Ohio

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*PCSAO:  
Advocating for  
safe kids,  
stable families  
and supportive  
communities.*

## An Unbelievable Journey... Worth Every Step

By **SANDRA POWERS**, Co-PRESIDENT OF THE  
OHIO GRANDPARENT/KINSHIP COALITION

I have been on an unbelievable journey, a journey full of pain and rewards. I am a grandparent raising a grandchild. I am 60 years old and have three grown daughters.

sandwich generation with many, many layers.

My daughter, Pam, was 17 years old when she gave birth to my granddaughter, Tasana. Pam had been involved with drugs and was a constant runaway. She tried to be a mother but her youth and drugs were a stronger call than being a mother. I began to watch Tasana more and more and eventually was taking full time care of her. I did not have custody.

and we were self-employed. Children have needs and expenses. We returned to a life we thought we had left behind. There were school activities, homework, sports, doctors, dentist and everyday needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. I left working with my husband and found

a better paying job but still most of my paycheck was taken up with day care. We had no insurance and were struggling. When Tasana was four she choked on a peanut that required surgery to remove it from a lung. We had no idea how to pay for this.

(See **Journey**, page 2)



**Sandy Powers embraces her granddaughter, Tasana, following Tasana's graduation from the Northwest Career Center in Columbus. Sandy began taking care of Tasana when her granddaughter was three months old.**

Custody became an issue when I took Tasana to the health department for her shots. When asked who I was, I responded: "the grandmother." I was quickly informed I had no rights and could not get the necessary shots. I pleaded but to no avail. A few weeks later I returned and told them I was Tasana's mother and she got her shots.

Finances have been a challenge from the start. My husband and I still had a teenager at home, one in college,

I have three small grandchildren, ages; 4 years, 21 months and 18 months. I look after a 98-year-old mother. I work two jobs. I am a widow of three years and I am raising a 17-year-old granddaughter who has been with me since she was three months old. I am juggling many phases of life at once. I am not of the sandwich generation. I am a club

### Need Kinship Care Support?

Many Ohio counties have implemented kinship care support programs which are overseen by the county public children services agency. Often the programs are located in other community agencies. To find out if your county has a kinship program, contact your public children services agency. The "Relatives Caring for Children: Ohio Resource Guide" contains information about programs and agencies available to help kinship caregivers. The guide can be accessed at [http://jfs.ohio.gov/ocf/kinship\\_care.stm](http://jfs.ohio.gov/ocf/kinship_care.stm). For general information about kinship programs in Ohio, contact the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, Office for Children and Families at 614-466-9274.

### Special Kinship Care Edition

The Ohio Grandparent/Kinship Coalition 2

Kinship Care in Summit County:  
The Key to Keeping Families Connected 3

#### THE INSERT

HB 130: Improving Support  
for Kinship Caregivers

HB 130 Helps Grandparents  
Raising Grandchildren



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## The Ohio Grandparent/Kinship Coalition

# A Strong Voice for Grandparents and Other Kinship Caregivers

By SANDRA POWERS, Co-PRESIDENT OF THE OHIO GRANDPARENT/KINSHIP COALITION

The Ohio Grandparent/Kinship Coalition was developed in June 1998 when Ray Odem, Don and Sandy Powers, Laura Landry Meyer, Barbara Fuller, and Clara Clasen met in Columbus with the vision

• Facilitating statewide conferences  
Other coalition activities include working committees and a quarterly newsletter. Working committees focus on

sionals in Ohio. Any person wanting to receive the quarterly newsletter or submit an article for publication may contact Barbara Harvey at bharvey@summitkids.org. ♥

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*Coalition members share a common goal: To identify kinship care issues and propose solutions to governmental and other agencies on behalf of grandparents and other kinship care providers.*

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and goal of establishing an Ohio organization for grandparents and agency representatives to support grandparents and other kin who were raising children. As concerned grandparents and professionals, they saw the need to develop an advocacy group for grandparents who were raising their grandchildren with little or no help from government and legislative bodies. They wanted to bring grandparents and agencies together for the purpose of sharing information and resources and be an advocate for all grandparents who thought they were along in making changes and impacting governmental entities.

As a statewide 501 C (3) non profit, the coalition is comprised of kinship caregivers, child welfare agencies, and service providers. Additional coalition goals include:

- Educating kinship caregivers and agencies regarding state and national programs and issues affecting kinship caregivers
- Networking with other caregivers and agencies
- Linking caregivers with services in their area
- Assisting new kinship care programs

the following topics of concern to kinship caregivers: legislative and legal; financial and other resources; support groups; raising awareness; and child abuse and its impact on kinship placements. A quarterly newsletter is published and made available to kinship caregivers, agencies and other profes-

Meetings of The Ohio Grandparent/Kinship Coalition are open to the public. The Coalition will meet three more times this year:

- July 28, 10:30 am - 3:00 pm  
Annual Picnic, Whetstone Park  
3923 North High Street  
Columbus, Ohio 43214
- Sept. 22, 10:00 am - 12:30 pm
- Nov. 17, 10:00 am - 12:30 pm  
The Overbrook  
Presbyterian Church,  
4131 North High Street,  
Columbus, Ohio 43214

## An Unbelievable Journey (continued)

It was at this time we learned of the Ohio Works First Child Only assistance that would provide a medical card and small amount of money. It helped, but the struggles continued. Tasana lived with a daily reminder that we were not her parents, but we needed to be her parents. She felt constant fear that her mother would return and take her, even though we had guardianship of her. She spent eight years sleeping on the floor of our bedroom because of her fear that Pam would return and kidnap her. She has struggled through her teen years trying to figure out where she fits and who she is.

Three years ago my husband died. It brought up a lot of abandonment issues for Tasana. It also left me as a single mother of a teenager. Because we were aware that retirement funds did not recognize a child we had raised for 14 years as our own, Tasana would not receive survivor benefits. I had no idea how I was going to make it. With a lot of help we managed to adopt her before his death. This entitled Tasana to his death survivor benefits. My husband died with peace and Tasana felt secure for the first time in her life.

It has been a painful and difficult journey, filled with feelings of fear, shame, anger, hurt, sadness, guilt and grief. But there is one emotion that is stronger than all the rest and that is love - love for my granddaughter who needed to be cared for and kept safe and healthy. I feel that raising her was better than worrying about her. We have been through a lot and my life was put on hold and changed forever. But when Tasana and I have some time together and she puts her arms around me with a big hug and says "I love you," this journey has been worth it all. ♥

# Kinship Care in Summit County: The Key to Keeping Families Connected

By DR. OLLIE M. COLLIER-JONES, DIRECTOR, KINSHIP CARE, SUMMIT COUNTY CHILDREN SERVICES, AND CURRENT VICE PRESIDENT OF THE STATE OF OHIO GRANDPARENT/KINSHIP COALITION

Summit County Children Services created its Kinship Care program in May 2000 in an effort to reduce the number of children who lose family connections due to their parent's inability or unwillingness to reunify. Children may reside with adults other than a blood relative under the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, Ohio House Bill 484. Summit County Children Services recognized that grandparents and other kin raising children needed a positive yet structured outlet; parenting a child who has been traumatized through abuse or neglect is very different than parenting a child who has not. Kin children do better in a home where there is a prior relationship. A comprehensive Prevention and Supportive Service

Department was designed to meet the urgent and ongoing needs of grandparents and other kinship providers who take on the crisis placements of someone's child, either temporarily or long term.

A strong mission was developed to reflect the commitment of the agency and department. The mission is that Summit County Children Services Kinship Care Department is committed to building and sustaining families and providing children with a safe and permanent home. The commitment is to locate and identify kin who are able and willing to provide temporary or permanent care for children who

enter out-of-home care due to abuse, neglect or dependency; in order to prevent or eliminate the need for child placement in licensed foster homes.

The Kinship Care Program was designed to be an additional resource available to child welfare social workers to address child safety concerns and permanency needs, which would essentially be folded into the larger child welfare system. Child safety decisions made in the Kinship Care program would naturally be coordinated with decisions made in the rest of the system. ♥

## The Summit County Kinship Care Program

### Goals and Accomplishments

**At its inception, Summit County Children Services formed the following objectives for its Kinship Care program:**

- \* Increase relative placements
- \* Increase the effectiveness and provision of support services to children in kinship care
- \* Increase supportive services to ensure that no child lose family connectedness due a potential kinship caregiver's limited resources
- \* Increase ongoing supportive services to kinship caregivers on a regular basis
- \* Increase direct assistance to the kinship caregiver in the initial stages of placement to integrate the child in their home without creating undue stress and trauma to the household
- \* Increase basic training to cover the following topics of concern:
  - the effects of abuse and neglect on children
  - parenting the second time around
  - parenting a child with emotional, behavioral and academic issues
  - family visitation
  - separation and attachment issues
  - caregiver's legal obligation to protect
  - committing to permanency through legal custody or adoption
  - \* Increase incentives for families to want to modify their lifestyle to parent a relative child
  - \* Increase respite services to kinship caregivers
- \* Increase day care assistance to kinship caregivers as needed to ensure to support caregiver's need to work
- \* Increase the number of clothing vouchers and school supplies for the child placed in their home
- \* Increase monthly support and informational meetings to kinship caregivers
- \* Ensure that all children in kinship care placements have basic beginnings of a "life book." (a record of the child's life history while in care)
- \* Ensure that all children in a kinship placement receives a Family Team Meeting staffing within seven days of placement to ensure that there is an agreed upon permanent placement plan for the child

(See GOALS, page 4)

## Goals and Accomplishments

(continued)

\* Identify meeting places in the community to hold the monthly informational and support groups

\* Assure that all children have a development assessment prior to the official closing of the case and that all recommended services are in place

\* Assure that all children in the custody of the agency aged 16 and above have an Independent Living Assessment

\* All kinship care placements leading to adoption or legal custody shall be automatically referred to The Family Place (Summit County's support group for kinship caregivers) upon case closings for post kinship service as needed

**Since the implementation of Summit County's Kinship Care Program, the agency has achieved the following outcomes:**

\* TANF dollars received through the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services allowed the agency to provide youth advocates and mentors to all children in a kinship placement as needed. The funding also enabled the agency to provide educational enrichment, tutoring, caregiver counseling, beds, bedding, emergency food certificate assistance, and cab passes for grandparents to use for child related appointments

\* Summit County kinship caregivers receive \$100.00 per month for six months per child they care for. The money helps provide for the child's food and other needs

\* Quarterly clothing vouchers are provided for each child in kinship care

\* Summit County assists its kinship caregivers with diapers and car seats as needed

\* A kinship social worker makes weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly home visits to care givers in Summit County depending on the need and the nature of the case.

\* Weekly kinship care support groups take place mid-morning and early evening. Support groups offer onsite child care and a hot meal for the child and caregiver

\* The agency provides food certificates to the caregiver at the time a child is placed in their home to supplement the food until their monthly purchase orders begin

\* The agency developed and implemented a five-module, two-hour education and enrichment series which met state and COA standards ♥

### Components of the Summit County Kinship Care Program

- \* Referral process
- \* Relative placement checklist
- \* Home study assessment of placement
- \* Family Team Meetings
- \* Assessment need of services and supportive resources
- \* Case management
- \* Post kinship care services
- \* Weekly support groups
- \* Monthly information meeting
- \* Annual Appreciation Dinner
- \* Annual Luncheon
- \* Annual Family Fun Day
- \* Caregiver Standards and Policy Handbook
- \* Education



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## HB 130: Improving Support for Kinship Caregivers

HB 130, effective July 20, provides simple forms that can provide grandparents caring for their grandchildren with temporary legal rights to provide for their grandchild's educational and medical needs, without taking custody. Locate the Power of Attorney and Caretaker Affidavit forms in the Relatives Caring for Children: Ohio Resource Guide, online at [http://jfs.ohio.gov/ocf/kinship\\_care.stm](http://jfs.ohio.gov/ocf/kinship_care.stm)

By CRYSTAL WARD ALLEN

PCSAO EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CHAIR OF THE OHIO KINSHIP CARE ADVISORY BOARD

Each day, thousands of grandparent and other kinship caregivers do what we ask of them by stepping up to care for their extended family when a crisis hits. Most of the time, families manage this without government intervention or involvement.

For those cases involved with the child welfare system, we know how valuable it is to have a safe, familiar resource for these children - as the trauma of removing children from their home - even an abusive or neglectful home, is great.

For most children, placement with a safe, familiar face significantly softens that trauma and contributes to a better adjustment and performance in school and in the community. We have also found kinship placements are usually more stable: When behavior challenges are present, the kinship caregiver is typically more invested and bound to the child's success - perhaps because this child is "family".

### Current Supports for Kinship Caregivers

Regardless of whether kinship families are involved with the child welfare system, there are several resources available to support caregivers:

\* Child Only Ohio Works First cash assistance (approximate

ly \$243 per month for the first child, plus \$70 per month for each sibling)

\* Medicaid

\* Child Care Subsidies (for low income working caregivers)

\* Other local supports (check with your county's department of job and family services or children services agency to connect with your local kinship navigator program)

\* New HB 130 Grandparent Affidavit and Power of Attorney forms

### Foster Care Arrangements

If children are in the custody of a public children services agency (CDJFS or CSB) due to issues of child abuse, neglect or dependency, the agency will actively search for safe, stable relative home to place the children. Initially, the agency will require a fingerprint background check, do a site and safety review, and ensure that the caregiver understands the child's needs and is connected with resources to care for the child.

Federal law prohibits payment of a foster care per diem unless the kinship caregiver becomes a licensed foster caregiver. In addition to what is described above, requirements include:

\* Completion of a 24-hour training program (must be renewed annually by completing an additional 20-hour training)

\* Detailed regulations regarding the physical home environment, discipline, etc.

Many kinship caregivers choose not to become licensed, but remain dedicated to long time care of the children in their home. For those caregivers, it is hoped that judicial custody of the children will be transferred - the court can consider this a year after the Grandparent Affidavit or Power of Attorney forms have been used. It can also be considered if the child has been in the custody of children services, and the reunification plan with parent(s) has not been achieved. Advantages of such a judicial custody transfer include ensuring permanence and stability for the child and empowering the kinship caregiver with the knowledge that they are in charge of raising this child.

While most of the children raised by kinship caregivers are not in the custody of the child welfare system, those who are often have special needs due to the abuse or neglect they have experienced. While the child is in temporary custody, the public children

service agencies offers a continuum of support services and has a case plan that involves the caregiver. A permanency decision should be made within one to two years. If the decision does not include reunification with the parent(s), either termination of parental rights will free the child for adoption, or legal custody will be transferred to the kinship caregiver. Whatever decision is made, the caregiver still needs support.

### Future Policy Recommendations

The Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care makes a number of important recommendations to best utilize our federal funding to support safe, stable children. One of the recommendations includes authority for states and counties to use federal funds to support kinship caregivers that have judicial custody with a monthly cash subsidy that is similar to an adoption assistance payment. Just as federal adoption assistance is limited to special needs children, this recommendation would be limited to abused and neglected children that have been in the custody of the child welfare agency. It is an exit strategy from agency custody - with direct support to the kinship caregiver that has been awarded permanent, legal custody of the child. You

(See KINSHIP, back side)

# HB 130 Helps Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

By JOAN W. LAWRENCE, DIRECTOR  
OHIO DEPARTMENT OF AGING

More and more grandparents are taking on a labor of love and raising their grandchildren. Long after they thought their child rearing days had passed, they are rediscovering the day-to-day duties of parenting a new generation in a new era. Many are finding that things have changed significantly since they were parents, and as grandparents, they lack the legal standing to get basic services for their grandchildren. A new Ohio law will eliminate many legal obstacles and help them raise their grandchildren.

HB130, sponsored by Representative Linda Reidelbach, was signed into law by Governor Taft and became effective July 20. This bill gives grandparents the power to enroll their grandchildren in school, access medical care for the child and make other important decisions for the good of the grandchild. It is a huge step in the

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**Grandparents give children family stability and an important link to culture and traditions. Without the commitment of kinship caregivers, the numbers of children in need of homes would overwhelm Ohio's foster care system. Finally, kinship caregivers save Ohio's taxpayers millions of dollars by caring for children who might otherwise be placed in the foster care system.**

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right direction to support these individuals.

Recent years have seen a drastic increase in the number of grandchildren who depend on a grandparent as their primary caregiver. This usually happens due to a sudden and unexpected circumstance, such as when a parent dies, becomes chronically ill, goes to prison or abandons the children because they are not able or willing to care for them.

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**Over the last ten years, Ohio has experienced a 14 percent increase in the number of children living in grandparent-headed households, compared to 30 percent across the nation, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. This translates into more than 157,000 Ohio children being raised solely by their grandparents.**

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Despite the circumstances that led to the parent being unable to care for the grandchildren, the fact remains that the grandparents are also parents. They are often hopeful that their child will someday return to their parent. In fact, this hope is not unfounded. On average, the grandparent's role as parent lasts six years.

A 1998 study, conducted by the Institute for Policy Research at the University of Cincinnati, showed that 80% of the time, a formal custody relationship is never established. The study found that 25 percent of grandparents caring for their grandchildren lived in poverty. Nearly two-thirds of

I was her grandparent, and I couldn't get the shots."

There are a number of reasons why kinship caregivers, and in particular, grandparents do not seek formal custody arrangements. Grandparents are fearful of the court system and the formal child welfare system. They may not be able to afford the cost of formal proceedings. They do not know where to turn for legal assistance and are concerned that a court proceeding, which they perceive as adversarial in nature, will further harm relations with their own children. HB 130 should relieve some of those fears and ease the stringent

legal process for caregiving grandparents.

This new law is important to Ohio's kinship caregivers and society. Kinship care is the most desirable option for children who cannot live with their parents.

The Ohio Department of Aging believes this new law is critically important to grandparents raising grandchildren and we urge them to contact their Area Agency on Aging toll-free, at 1-866-243-5678, to learn more about services available to help them in their important role as grandparents. ♥

## Kinship Caregivers (continued)

can access the full Pew report at [www.pewfostercare.org](http://www.pewfostercare.org).

Some states have already received special federal permission to use their federal child welfare funds to fiscally support kinship caregivers with judicial custody. These states, such as Illinois, are experiencing successful outcomes for abused and neglected children.

Many states also allow enhanced kinship caregiver eligibility for childcare subsidies. Of course, child care subsidies would still only be available for working caregivers, and would still be means tested. But it is time to begin the conversation here in Ohio, to increase the income eligibility for relative caregivers who need child care for the kids in their home. These children arrive unexpectedly, unplanned, and often create impossible financial burdens for the caregiver. Child care subsidies are an investment in proper care and supervision for our children, and are an important vehicle for Ohio's citizens to continue as productive members of our economy versus becoming a governmental burden.

### Conclusion

Children who have the support and involvement of their extended families are fortunate. Especially when families are in crisis, the benefits of grandparents, aunts and uncles, siblings or that non-related "Aunt" Barbara offer children a sense of love and nurturing that they desperately need. It is essential that society recognize and support the willingness of kinship caregivers to raise our children when needed. ♥