

Kinship Program provides vital support

By Ken Bielecki
JFCS Executive Director

In our ever-changing society, many grandparents find themselves stepping into a role they never anticipated: raising their grandchildren. At Jewish Family & Community Services, we recognize the unique challenges these kinship caregivers face. That's why we're proud to offer our Kinship Program, a vital support group for caregivers aged 60 and older who are raising their relatives' or loved ones' children. The importance of this program cannot be overstated.

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JFCS and Akiva host pajama drive

Jewish Family & Community Services and Akiva Academy collected over 350 pajamas during their annual drive. The pajamas were donated to infants, children, and adolescents who are in the care of Mahoning Children Services Board.

“We are grateful to all who donated,” said Ken Bielecki, JFCS executive director. “These generous donations will bring comfort and warmth to children.”

JFCS staff participate in career fair

Nicole Balog-Bickerstaff, senior outreach coordinator, and Laura Haas, LISW, clinical social worker, of Jewish Family & Community Services participated in Hubbard High School’s January career fair for all grade levels. Each student had a chance to speak with representatives of many organizations about various career paths. Colleges, trades and trade schools, military and police, dance academy, healthcare, and other organizations participated.

Grandparents who suddenly become primary caregivers often experience a profound shift in their daily lives. What was once a time for relaxation and leisure can quickly transform into a period of renewed responsibility and unexpected challenges. These kinship caregivers may find themselves navigating unfamiliar territory, from managing modern technology to understanding current educational systems.

Our Kinship Program serves as a beacon of support, offering a safe space where caregivers can share their experiences, fears, and triumphs. Led by our dedicated team, including Senior Outreach Coordinator Nicole Balog-Bickerstaff and clinical social worker Laura Haas, the group provides much-needed emotional support and practical resources. The group meets bi-weekly, is open to new participants, is free to attend, and is open to everyone in the community.

Life changes dramatically for grandparents taking on the role of primary caregiver. They may face financial strain, health concerns, and the emotional toll of dealing with their adult child's inability to parent. Moreover, they often grapple with outdated parenting techniques and health beliefs, which can impact their grandchildren's well-being. Our program addresses these issues head-on, offering education on modern parenting strategies, health information, and coping mechanisms.

The purpose of our Kinship Program extends beyond mere support. We aim to empower these caregivers, equipping them with the tools and knowledge they need to provide the best possible care for their grandchildren. Through our sessions, participants learn about available community resources, legal rights, and strategies for managing the unique stressors of kinship care.

Perhaps most importantly, our program fosters a sense of community. Kinship caregivers often feel isolated in their new role, but our group allows them to connect with others facing similar challenges. This peer support can be invaluable, providing encouragement, practical advice, and a reminder that they're not alone in their journey.

We understand that taking the first step can be daunting. That's why we encourage anyone who might benefit from our Kinship Program to reach out. Whether you're a grandparent raising a grandchild or know someone who is, we're here to help. To learn more about our program or to join our supportive community, please call Jewish Family & Community Services at 330.746.7929.

Remember, you're not alone in this journey. Our Kinship Program is here to support you every step of the way, helping you navigate the challenges and celebrate the joys of raising the next generation. Together, we can ensure that both caregivers and children thrive in these unique family structures.