

# Healthy Grandfamilies: Strengthening Families Across Generations

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# Presentation Objectives

- Learn why education and support are crucial for grandfamilies
- Understand how Healthy Grandfamilies (HG) works and is structured
- Hear about *Caring for Our Kin* curriculum
- Explore the challenges and strengths specific to grandfamilies in Tyler County, WV

# Grandfamilies

Households where grandparents serve as primary caregivers for one or more grandchildren.

# Center for Healthy Grandfamilies

- Started in 2015 and continues as collaboration of WVSU Extension and WVSU Dept. of Social Work
- Free program funded by the WV State Legislature, the USDA, and other sources
- Statewide County Coalitions - boots on the ground

# Center for Healthy Grandfamilies

- Education in support group setting
- Social support
- Direct services – food, clothing, emergency assistance
- Referrals, resource coordination, follow-up

# Kinship Families in the U.S.

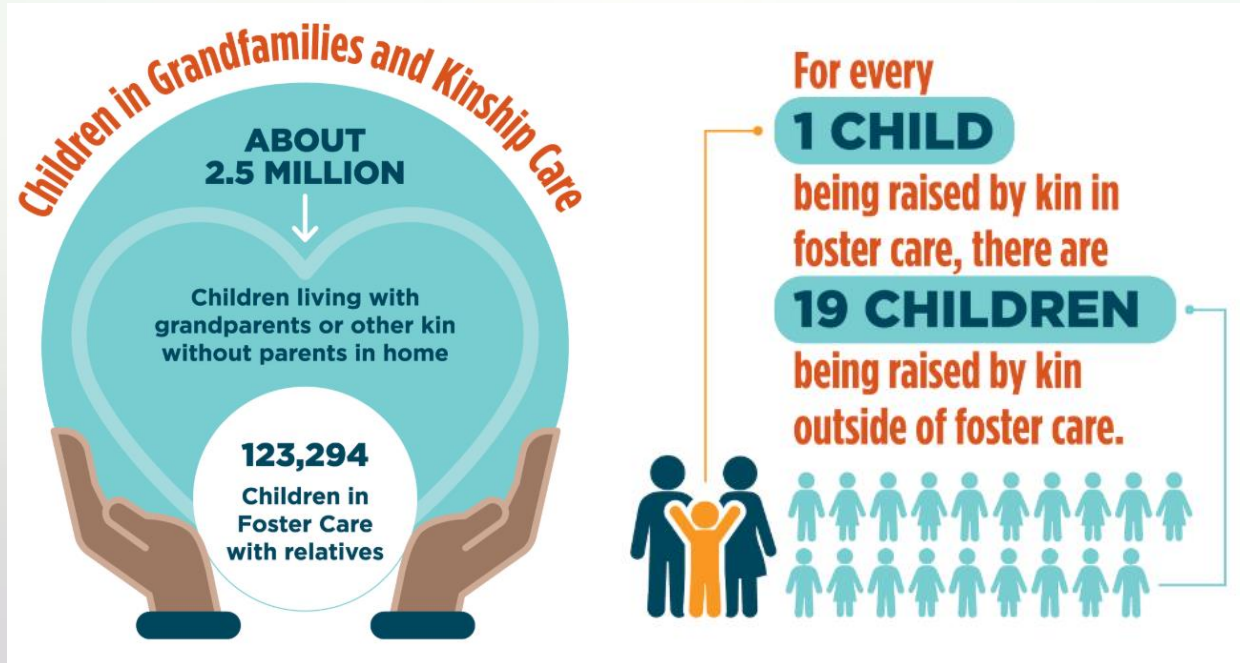
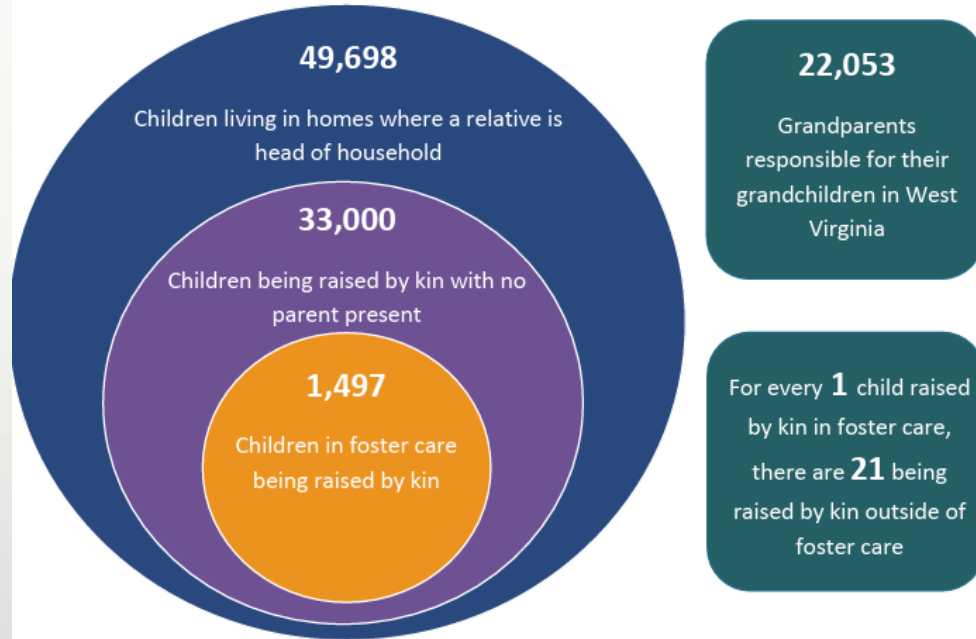


Image credit: Generations United, 2024.

# West Virginia

## Grandfamilies Data



**generations united**  
Because we're stronger together™

The Brookdale  
Foundation  
Group

**AARP**

**ABA**  
AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION  
Center on Children  
and the Law

casey family programs

children's  
defense fund  
Leave No Child Behind

childfocus™

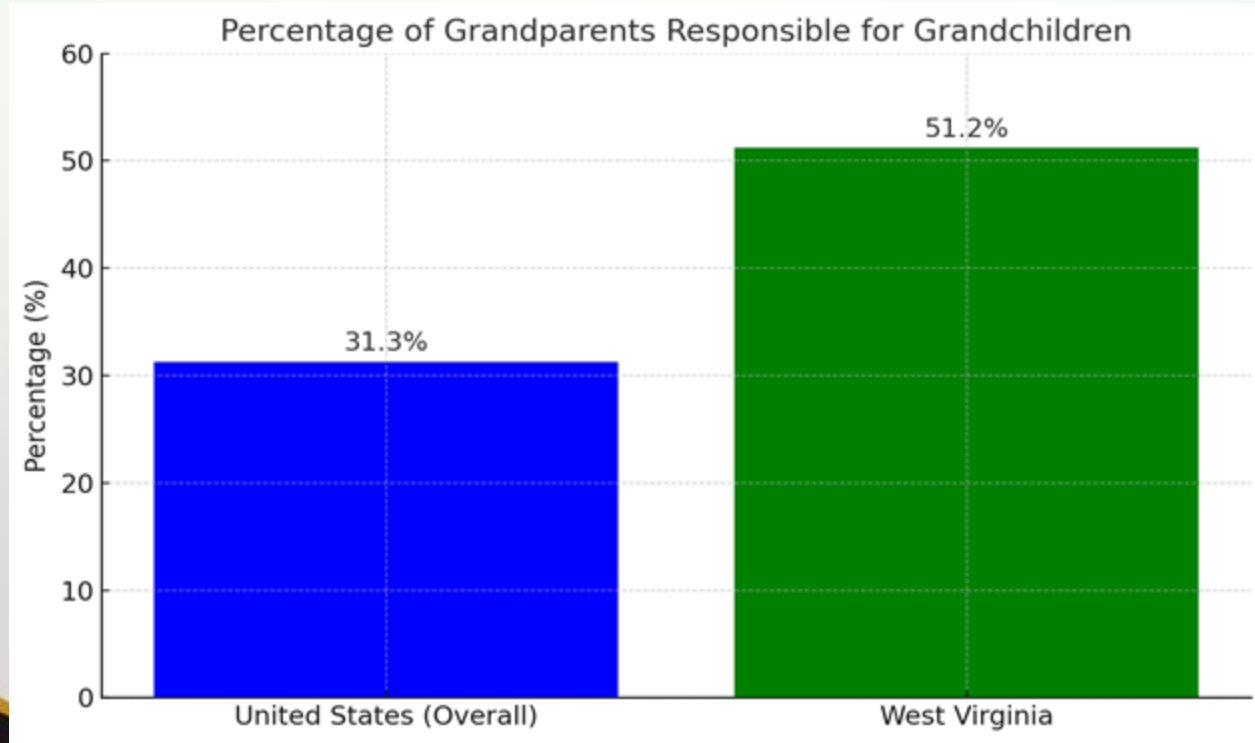
Dave Thomas  
Foundation  
for Adoption

# West Virginia

- 3<sup>rd</sup> highest percentage in the nation of grandparents raising their grandchildren
- 3<sup>rd</sup> highest for grandparents raising their grandchildren who were also living in poverty.

(U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey)

# Grandparents Responsible for Grandchildren



(Chart adapted from U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey)

# Kinship Care



Image credit: Generations United, 2018.

# Why Support is Needed

## Grandfamily Caregivers Experience Chronic Stress Due to:



Financial strains



Concerns over the behaviors and needs of the children they are raising



Navigating service systems



Difficult relationships with the children's birth parents<sup>vi</sup>



Children in grandfamilies experience limited access to mental health services for depression, stress, and behavioral or emotional issues.<sup>vii</sup>



Improved access to mental health supports and concrete material supports (such as financial, food and nutrition, housing, etc.) improves mental health outcomes for children and caregivers in grandfamilies.<sup>viii</sup>

# Being a Grandfamily



**WVSU Healthy Grandfamilies 'a godsend' for grandparents raising grandchildren**

July 29, 2025



# Common Factors Leading to Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

- Death of parent
- Abandonment or neglect
- Incarceration
- **Substance use disorder**
- Unemployment and/or financial problems
- Mental Illness
- Divorce
- Teen pregnancy
- HIV/AIDS
- Abuse
- Military deployment

***What's the main reason?***

# Key Issues and Challenges

- Myth – “We messed up the first time so how will we be able to do it now?”
- Guilt & Shame
- “I wanted to spoil my grandchildren” - new role, unrecognizable life, an emotional roller coaster
- Health status
  - Chronic conditions, physical limitations
  - The energy required
  - Forgo their own health to care for kids

Kids’ trauma, grief, loss, and abandonment AND their own

# Key Issues and Challenges

- Legal – guardianship, custody, adoption, accessing services
- Family dynamics – navigating communication and boundaries with biological parents
- Understanding addiction/substance use
- Helping kids manage emotions and behavioral issues
- Navigating unfamiliar systems including schools
- Digital media literacy
- Self-care
- **Isolation**

# Education as a Best Practice for Supporting Grandparents

Amy Young

Center for Healthy Grandfamilies

WVSU Extension Service

# Extension Education



PennState Extension



Caring for Our Kin

12-Part Kinship Caregiver Support Group Curriculum

A Partnership Between Penn State Extension and West Virginia University Extension to Support Kinship Caregivers



West Virginia University  
EXTENSION SERVICE

# Partnerships and Curriculum

- Penn State Extension, West Virginia University Extension, and West Virginia State University Extension
- Includes 12 separate educational lessons which includes activities and handouts
- Teaches grandparents skills that will help them better care for their children and themselves

# 12 Module Course Overview

1. The Grand Plan
2. Act Your Age
3. Your Unique Child
4. Listen to This!
5. Dial Down the Drama
6. Digital Media Literacy
7. It's a Matter of Law
8. Back to School
9. Fostering Resilience
10. Healing Hearts
11. Care for the Caregiver
12. Just for the Health of It!

# The Grand Plan

- Learn about the Caring for Our Kin Program
- Get to know one another
- Participate in Icebreakers
- Personal goals
- Discover resources in their community



# Act Your Age

- Milestones
- Developmental stages (up and downs)
- Understanding Adverse Childhood Experiences
- Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences
- Brain changes

# Your Unique Child

- Common developmental challenges
- Temperament and how it compares to their personality
- Emotions and how to help children express them appropriately

# Listen to This

- Identify positive and negative styles of communication
- Learn how Adverse Childhood Experiences affect the way a child communicates
- Learn strategies that help children resolve conflicts and solve problems

# Dial Down the Drama

- Identify their own parenting/discipline style
- Learn the difference between discipline and punishment
- Practice positive disciplinary techniques
- Explain how ACE's can impact behavior

# Digital Media Literacy

- Learn what digital media literacy is and why it is important
- Learn how to monitor children's use of technology use
- Learn about positive and negative effects of technology on children
- Learn what the internet is doing to our brains

# It's a Matter of Law



- Learn about the different legal arrangements that govern kinship care situations
- Learn free or low-cost legal services that are available to assist them with court proceedings their caregiving relationships
- Recognize the different right and responsibility that come with different legal arrangements
- Distinguish between guardianship and adoption

# Back to School

- Identify their rights using the legislation contained in the McKinney-Vento Act
- Identify the documentation needed for kinship caregivers to participate in educational decision making
- Distinguish between an IEP and a 504 plan
- Complete a school planning worksheet to identify and address issues related to their child's education



# Fostering Resilience

- Learn how Substance Use Disorders have a basis in brain chemistry
- Identify stigmatizing words to describe SUD and not stigmatizing words that could be used instead
- Learn ways kinship caregivers can support children who have a biological parent experiencing SUD
- Strategies for preventing substance use related harms

# Healing Hearts

- Define anticipatory grief, disenfranchised grief, and ambiguous loss
- Discuss the stages of grief
- Discuss effects of grief and loss on children and adults
- Learn coping skills that help children and or adults with grief and loss

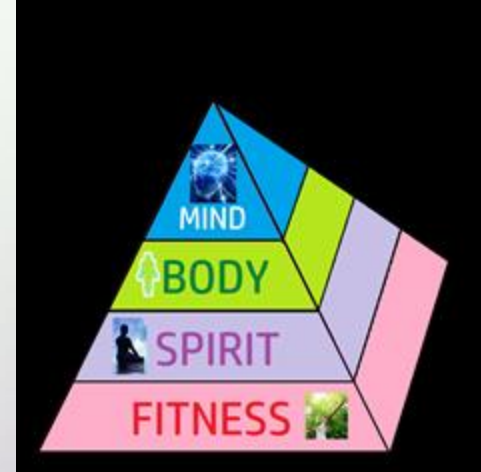


# Care for the Caregiver

- Identify stressors in the caregiver life
- Recognize the source of stress and warning signs
- Learn the eight dimensions of wellness
- List strategies for self-care and develop a self-care plan

# Just for the Health of It

- Learn basic nutrition using MyPlate
- Learn tips for how to eat healthy on a budget
- List ways to get active together with their children and youth
- Learn strategies for cultivating healthy sleep habits



# Potential Outcomes

## Positive:

1. Discussions
2. Sense of community
3. Supportive interaction
4. Knowledge gain

## Challenges:

1. Individuals monopolizing the discussion
2. Staying on topic
3. Triggers
4. Frustrations with support organizations

# Coordinator Perspective – Tyler County WV

Julie Bolin

WVU Tyler County Extension

# Coordinator Perspective – Tyler County WV

- Background
- Challenges
- Successes
- Impact



# Coordinator Perspective – Tyler County WV

- Background
  - Program began in 2022-2023
  - Tailored to what participants wanted



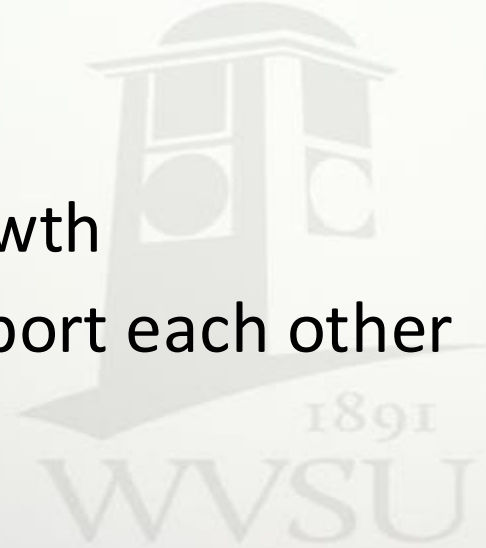
# Coordinator Perspective – Tyler County WV

- Challenges
  - Transportation
  - Internet access
  - Literacy



# Coordinator Perspective – Tyler County WV

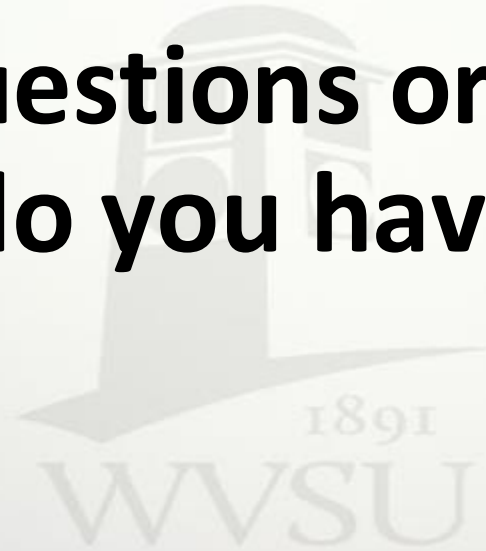
- Successes
  - Program growth
  - Families support each other



# Coordinator Perspective – Tyler County WV

- Impact
  - 15+ families served
  - Financial benefit
  - Emotional support

**What questions or thoughts  
do you have?**



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