

## ***Kinship Care & Adoptions***

*Helping children feel safe and secure again*

In Arizona more than 96,000 children live in households headed by their grandparents, and another 37,000 live with other relatives.

For children whose parents are often struggling with substance abuse, mental illness, incarceration, domestic violence, economic hardship and other challenges, these alternatives provide safe homes and a sense of permanency.

This year the Kinship Care and Adoptions program will help nearly 6,400 children maintain a sense of kinship and belonging as they make a new home in the care of grandparents and other relatives.

Sadly, many grandparents caring for grandchildren live on fixed incomes, making the addition of a child, and often siblings, a financial hardship. Other relatives may face similar challenges when they are already raising children in their homes. Budgets are stretched thin by the need for food, clothing, child care, school supplies and other daily expenses.

To help these children, the Kinship Care program conducts home studies on grandparents and other relatives, provides ongoing placement supervision, supports these children as they learn to deal with their history and adjust to their new home, and helps relatives understand the impact of abuse and neglect, including how it affects the child's behavior and how they can help the child to heal and feel safe and secure once again.

### **Kinship Welcome Packets**

Kinship welcome packets are designed to help children make a successful transition into their new home. This year the program would like to focus on the approximately 125 families accepting 190 children from out-of-state into their homes. On average, 70% of these children are school age and 30% are younger.

Suggested items for the packets range from the small and practical, such as toiletries, to those that are larger and designed to promote family activities and a sense of belonging. As noted below, some have been chosen because they also help begin conversations that allow caregivers to think about the past experiences of these children, and how they can provide help and support.

#### *Suggested Items*

For the child(ren):

- Hygiene items – toothpaste, tooth brush, deodorant, etc.
- Academic items such as flash cards (nearly all of the children are academically delayed due to the disruptions in their lives)
- Stuffed animals (these can be very reassuring for younger children)

For caregivers:

- Journal – to help them track how the children and the family are adjusting
- Day timers – a good conversation starter as it can be used to help caregivers understand that there will be many appointments for services for the child including those with the school, counselor, doctor, dentist, caseworker, etc.
- Stickers – begins the conversation about discipline and reward systems
- Parenting books/magazines

Family Activities:

- Board and other games
- Photo frame for a picture of the child or new family photo
- Photo album
- Disposable camera with photo processing included
- Tickets for family activities (zoo, museum, movies, etc)

Practical Items:

- Nightlight – these can be practical, and can also be used to begin a conversation about the child: “We don’t know if the child needs a nightlight or not, as we don’t know about all of trauma this child may (or may not) have experienced at bedtime.”
- First Aid Kit
- Sun block (also a conversation starter as it provides a natural opportunity to point out that children from other states are not used to Arizona summers and need to learn about sun screen and drinking a lot of water)

*We at Easter Seals Southwest Human Development thank you for helping the children and families we serve in the Kinship Care and Adoptions program feel welcomed into their new families.*

*For more information, go to [www.swhd.org](http://www.swhd.org) or [phoenix.easterseals.org](http://phoenix.easterseals.org)*

