

Hello , my name is Brenda Ryan ; Founder and executive director of Keys to Serenity. I started my non profit after the loss of my daughter Sheena to a fentanyl overdose on 6/9/16... Keys to Serenity provides support to families that have lost a loved one due to an overdose , provides programs for people in recovery and provides programs for kids affected by family addiction .. After my daughter passed away , I wanted to obtain custody of my 5 yr old grandson , at that time there was no information available to find out what my rights were as a grandparent or how to start the process of legal guardianship. This is one of the main reason I started my non profit , I wanted to be able to provide these parents that had lost a child to addiction the information that I obtained so that they would not have to do all the research that I did so that they can have that time to properly grieve for their child .

I did obtain custody of my grandchild Wyatt and have been caring for him for the last 3 years , he is now 8 years old and at times I think wow I am too old for this ! (my husband is 68 yrs old and I am 50 something) lol .. but thru trials and tribulations and of course a lot of adjustments , we are learning how to parent again , is it easy , no but we have adjusted to these changes in our lives and we love him with all our hearts and are committed to being there for him thru adulthood . There are many reasons that children end up in kinship care , divorce , teenage pregnancy, incarceration, illness , substance abuse or death are just some of them ..Around 2.7 million grandparents nationwide are raising grandchildren.

In Ohio there are around 100,000 grandparents responsible for their grandchildren that live with them and these numbers are increasing due to the opioid epidemic , and sadly around 20 percent of these grandparent live in poverty .. Many of these children arrive with pre existing problems including abuse , neglect , exposure to substance abuse and loss of a parent due to death or incarceration . This situation can cause risks for everyone in the household , however caring for a grandchild can be positive and rewarding . Grandparents bring experience, stability, perspective and of course love . I can't stress the importance of these grandparents and other kinship providers to get the appropriate support and assistance , by providing a 800 number to receive the information and that they can get all their questions answered in one phone call.

There are so many grandparents that have contacted me that have no idea that there are resources for them. The better the grandparents or kinship providers are able to meet their own needs , the better that they can provide care for the children in their home . I recently started a program called Keys to Parenting Again ; this monthly program provides information and support to kinship providers in hopes of being a resource to each other and to make us stronger and better for the sake of our children . I urge you to support HB 14 and want to thank State Rep Janine Boyd and State Rep Brian Baldrige for sponsoring this very important Bill and for giving me the opportunity to come today to speak for the grandparents and kinship providers that are loving and providing for their grandchildren here in Ohio. Thank you to committee members for taking the time to listen ..