

Dane County Kinship Care Newsletter

February 2026

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Kinship Care is built on relationships, and every day we see the powerful impact your compassion has on the children you welcome into your home.



DANE COUNTY KINSHIP CARE

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Supervisor Scoop

Jennifer Edds



This Black History Month, we pause to recognize the strength, leadership, and lasting contributions of Black communities — past and present — and to reaffirm our commitment to equity, dignity, and opportunity for all.

We also want to offer our sincere thanks to kinship caregivers across our community. Kinship caregivers — grandparents, aunts, uncles, older siblings, and other relatives or close family friends — step forward when it matters most. You provide stability, love, and a sense of belonging for children during times of change and uncertainty. Your care helps children stay connected to family, culture, and community, and it makes an immeasurable difference in their well-being and future.

We recognize that this role is meaningful — and it can also be demanding. Many kinship caregivers take on new responsibilities with little time to prepare, balancing work, parenting, school involvement, medical appointments, and legal or financial challenges. Your commitment is an act of care and courage, and you should not have to carry it alone.

As we honor Black History Month, we also recognize that for many families — particularly Black families — kinship care is shaped by both deep traditions of mutual support and the impacts of historical and current inequities. We are grateful for the ways kinship caregivers hold families together, protect children's sense of identity, and keep connections strong across generations.

To every kinship caregiver: THANK YOU for showing up, for advocating, and for providing the everyday support that helps children feel safe and loved. Your dedication strengthens not only the children in your care, but our entire community.

The dedication you show, especially in the small, everyday moments, is what truly helps children begin to heal and trust again



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Kelsey Cares

Mental Health Moments

Fostering means opening your home and heart to children who have experienced loss, trauma, and instability. It is deeply meaningful work. It is also exhausting, emotionally complex, and relentless in ways that are hard to explain to anyone who hasn't lived it. That's why self-care for foster parents isn't a luxury. It's a necessity.

Why Self-Care Is Different for Kinship Parents

Foster parents carry unique stressors: navigating the child welfare system, managing visits, appointments and court dates, supporting children through big emotions, and holding space for uncertainty about the future. Many foster parents also balance birth children, jobs, and relationships on top of it all.

Over time, this constant emotional output can lead to burnout, compassion fatigue, or the quiet feeling of running on empty. Self-care is about sustainability. I strongly feel that your daily choices contribute far more to your wellbeing than expensive spa days or seminars. I love using the Swiss cheese model of self-care analogy when talking with parents; layering up is your best defense against burn out.

Make the time or pay for it later

Many parents feel guilty prioritizing themselves. There's always one more need to meet, one more appointment to schedule, one more behavior to manage. But caring for yourself models healthy regulation, boundaries, and resilience for children. When you are rested, supported, and emotionally grounded, you are better able to respond rather than react. Your calm becomes a co-regulating force for a child whose nervous system may already be overloaded.

Practical Self-Care Ideas

Self-care doesn't have to be time-consuming or expensive. It does have to be intentional.

- Build in micro-breaks. Even five minutes of quiet, a walk around the block, or deep breathing between tasks can help reset your nervous system.
- Say yes to help. Respite care, supportive friends, or a trusted babysitter are protective factors when fostering.
- Stay connected. Foster parenting can feel isolating. Connecting with other foster parents, support groups, or therapists who understand trauma can make a huge difference.
- Lower the bar. Not every meal needs to be homemade. Not every battle needs to be fought. Not every job needs to be finished. Conservation of energy is a skill.
- Check in with yourself regularly. Ask, "What do I need right now?" and try to answer honestly, without judgment.

Emotional Self-Care Matters

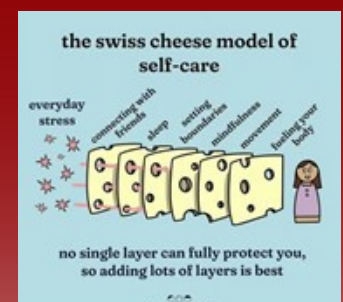
Foster parents experience grief that often goes unacknowledged: the grief of reunifications, disrupted placements, or loving a child without knowing how long they'll stay. Giving yourself permission to feel sadness, anger, or exhaustion is part of caring well. Talking openly with a therapist, partner, or trusted friend helps prevent those emotions from piling up. You don't have to be endlessly strong.

You Are the First Line of Defense

The foster care system relies on caregivers who are healthy, supported, and whole. When foster parents burn out, children lose stability. Taking care of yourself is not stepping away from parenting duties, it's protecting it.

So, this is your reminder:

You matter. Your needs matter. Your well-being matters.



Kinship Care Newsletter

Did you Know?

Black History Month & Out-of-Home Care



Black History Month is recognized in February, and provides an opportunity to affirm black identity and celebrate the significant contributions black people have made to society. These are individuals who, despite historical systemic racism and inequalities, helped improve society. While we often think of figures from the past, we also have many current cultural leaders who have a powerful and meaningful impact today. They serve as role models for black children, helping them see themselves in these influential roles. When children see themselves in inspiring people, they are more likely to believe in their ability to reach their goals and dreams. Black History Month celebrates black culture and inspires black children to pursue their aspirations. Representation matters. Here are a few current figures who were either in foster care or kinship during their formative years.

Malcolm X – His father passed away when he was six years old. It is alleged that white supremacists murdered him. Shortly after, his mother fell ill and was no longer able to care for him or his siblings. Malcolm spent time in foster care and moved between many different homes. During his time, he was separated from his siblings and moved around frequently. His time in foster care directly influenced his later activism and fight for Black liberation and justice.

Tiffany Haddish – Tiffany entered foster care as a child after her mother had an accident and couldn't care for her children. She was separated from her siblings. Tiffany became a comedian and says her time in foster care helped her find humor. She learned to develop a sense of humor to avoid being bullied at the group homes. According to her book, "The Last Black Unicorn," Haddish moved between foster care and group homes. Her comedic talent helped her find humor in difficult times. Tiffany was able to reunify with her siblings, and they were placed in kinship care with her grandmother. Today, Haddish runs the "She Ready Foundation," which provides suitcases to children in foster care.

Eddie Murphy – spent a short time in foster care while his mother was too sick to care for him and his brother. Eddie used comedy to cope with being separated from his family. He was able to reunite with his family once his mother recovered. Eddie's humor propelled him to stardom with his time on SNL and many classic movies!

Simone Biles – entered foster care at age 3 because her mother could no longer care for her due to her drug and alcohol problems. Simone and her three siblings moved through several foster homes before her grandparents stepped in. That was when Simone was able to reunite with her younger sibling, as both girls entered kinship care with their grandparents. Simone's older siblings went into kinship care when Simone's grandfather's sister took them in. Eventually, all four children were adopted by their respective caregivers. Simone was 6 years old when she was adopted. Simone thanks her parents for enrolling her in gymnastics. Today, Simone is an Olympic gymnast with multiple gold medals. She credits her grandparents, whom she calls her parents, Ronald and Nellie, for their love and dedication in raising her.

Alonzo Mourning – Before becoming a renowned NBA star, Alonzo spent his teenage years in foster care. He credits his foster parents, who were also his high school basketball coach, for recognizing Alonzo's potential in the sport. Today, he is an NBA Champion and has created programs to help young people succeed. He also advocates for children in foster care through his program, Alonzo Mourning Foundation. The goal of his foundation is to build preventative care for at-risk youth.

Victoria Rowell – spent most of her childhood in multiple foster homes. After aging out of foster care, she pursued a career as an actress. Today, she is known for her roles on "The Young and the Restless" and "The Rich and the Ruthless." Her foster families supported her interests in ballet and acting. Victoria has written extensively about foster care, including in a memoir called "The Women Who Raised Me." Now, Victoria is an advocate for foster care and organizations that support foster children. Her foundation, "Rowell Foster Children's Positive Plan," provides scholarships to foster youth in California to pursue fine arts and sports, helping them overcome the trauma they endure in foster care.

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Caregiver Supports

► The Odyssey Project

The Odyssey Project at the University of Wisconsin–Madison is an award-winning, free educational program that helps adults facing economic and personal barriers — such as low income, single parenthood, homelessness, or past incarceration — access higher education and build confidence through a two-semester humanities course taught by UW faculty.

Students earn college credits while improving reading, writing, and critical thinking skills, and the program provides supportive services like childcare, textbooks, and community building to help whole families succeed. It also includes related programs for children (Odyssey Junior), continued learning for alumni, and special offerings such as courses in correctional facilities.

Website: <https://dcs.wisc.edu/programs/odyssey-project/>

► You Are Not Alone: Hope & Healing for Relative Caregivers

Wednesday March 11, 2026

We know that relative care is the best option for children needing out-of-home care. We also know that caregiving can be difficult and isolating. This hybrid course gives voice to the authentic experiences, challenges, lessons learned, and successes of Wisconsin caregivers like you, as well as the loved ones who have had children in care, to offer comfort, hope, and healing. You are not alone.

Register Today at <https://relativehopehealing.eventbrite.com>

► Free Expungement Clinics

If you live in Dane County, did you know that you may be eligible to have certain convictions expunged or certain arrests removed from your record?

- 2 Clinic Dates Available: February 26 and April 14
- Pre-Registration Required – Call (608) 729-1200

At the Clinic receive:

- FREE criminal record reviews with an attorney.
- Advice regarding your eligibility for arrest removal and correction, expungement, and pardon.
- Assistance with paperwork and filing court documents IF eligible.
- Information about your rights related to employment and criminal records.
- Advice for answering job application and job interview questions about your background.
- Job leads & information about FREE career training opportunities.

► Information on Social Security Disability Benefits

WI FACETS will be presenting information on Social Security Disability benefits, who qualifies, how to apply, appeal and post entitlement issues.

Date: Feb 4, 2026 12-1pm

Register here: https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_pgpuAViZSC6nx8KXWZ2i2w#/registration

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Caregiver Supports



A Word About Boundaries and Trust

As grandparents and grandparents-to-be, we naturally want the best for our children and grandchildren. When we learn about choices like freebirthing that may feel unfamiliar or even concerning, our protective instincts kick in.

But here's what we've learned over 21 years of serving this community: the strength of our relationships with our adult children directly determines the depth of our relationships with our grandchildren. And strong relationships are built on trust, respect, and honoring boundaries—even when we disagree.

If your adult child is considering freebirth or any birthing choice that differs from what you would choose, your role isn't to convince, lecture, or interfere. Your role is to listen, ask thoughtful questions, and offer support. They've likely done extensive research. They're navigating their own values, beliefs, and circumstances. And ultimately, these are their decisions to make about their bodies, their babies, and their families.

So educate yourself. Read about freebirthing and other alternative birthing practices. Understand the landscape. But remember that knowledge is for your awareness, not your arsenal. Use it to ask better questions and offer more informed support—not to challenge or undermine your child's choices.

The grandparent-grandchild relationship you dream of? It flows through your relationship with your adult child. Protect that relationship fiercely. Choose connection over being right. Choose presence over persuasion.

Heating Assistance Resources



1. Energy Services (through Home Energy Plus/WHEAP)

Emergency heating help and referrals for furnace repair or replacement assistance through state-funded initiatives like the HE+ HVAC Program Services. To qualify you generally apply first for energy assistance and then may be referred for heating system repairs when furnaces are unsafe or inoperable.

Website -- <https://energyandhousing.wi.gov/Pages/AgencyResources/energy-assistance.aspx>

2. Project Home (Weatherization & HVAC Assistance)

Project Home runs weatherization services in Dane County which can include furnace repair or replacement for qualifying homes, at no cost, once you've applied through energy assistance. Their services focus on making homes more energy efficient and safe.

Website -- <https://www.projecthomewi.org/programs/weatherization>

3. Keep Wisconsin Warm/Cool Fund (KWW/CF)

The Keep Wisconsin Warm/Cool Fund (KWW/CF) is a state-wide non-profit charity that assists low-income households who cannot afford to pay their energy bills.

Website -- <https://kwwf.org/>

4. Community Action Coalition For South Central Wisconsin, Inc.

CAC offers various support for low-income residents, including utility and energy bill counseling and connections to assistance programs like WHEAP or Weatherization.

Website -- <https://www.caescw.org/>

5. Heat4Heroes

The Heat for Heroes Campaign is uniquely designed to avert life-threatening, energy-related emergencies by helping struggling Veterans keep their heat and power on; while also providing adequate resource connections with other State, County, and Veteran services for optimal, long-term household stability.

Website -- <https://heat4heroes.org/>

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Upcoming Events & Training



Luke's Closet 2026 Events

2026 Shop & Eat Events

- April 11th
- September 19th



ONGOING VIRTUAL SUPPORT GROUPS

Dates and times of groups are subject to change. Check the calendar of events on the Wisconsin Family Connections Center website for the most accurate schedule for each group.

ADULT ADOPTEEES

This group is open to adult adoptees. Topics alternate between open discussion and structured facilitated discussion. This group meets on the second Wednesday of each month at 7:00 PM.

BIRTH PARENT SUPPORT

Open to any birth parents who have had a child placed for adoption, no matter what type of adoption or agency involved. This group meets on the second Tuesday of odd months at 6:30 PM.

ONLINE BOOK CLUB

Join us as we read through and discuss a book together (with relevance to out-of-home care or adoption). Check online for the current book selection. Days and times of group meetings will vary.

REUNIFIED PARENTS

Designed for parents who have recently reunified, or are in the process of reunifying (transitioning to reunification within the next month). This group meets monthly on a Wednesday at 7:00 PM.

OPEN MIC TEEN SUPPORT

Designed for teens in foster, adoptive, reunified, kinship, and/or guardianship families to socially connect and discuss topics related to family dynamics. This group typically meets on the second Tuesday of the month at 7:00 PM.

TRAUMA INFORMED PARENTING

Designed for Wisconsin foster, adoptive, reunified, kinship, and guardianship caregivers with a high level of need due to complex trauma histories. This group meets on the third Monday of each month at noon.

KINNECT RELATIVE CAREGIVERS OF CHILDREN

Designed for grandparents, uncles/aunts, siblings, or other relatives acting as the primary caregiver for children. This group meets on the last Thursday of every month at 11:00 AM.

REGISTER TODAY!

Registration is required to attend any group. Scan the QR code to visit our Eventbrite Collection of Virtual Support Groups and register today!



info@wifamilyconnectionscenter.org | 1-800-762-8063 | wifamilyconnectionscenter.org



CLOTHING FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER / ADOPTIVE / KINSHIP CARE
AVAILABLE VIA DELIVERY, APPOINTMENT OR SHOP & EAT EVENTS

DELIVERY

Complete an online request form and clothing will be delivered to the location of your choice, including your home. **Delivery options** (current business hours listed online):

- MADISON EAST Trinity Lutheran, 1904 Winnebago St.
- MADISON EAST YMCA, 711 Cottage Grove Rd.
- MADISON NORTH Dane Co. Human Services, 1202 Northport Dr.
- MADISON SOUTH Dane Co. Human Services, 2306 S. Park St.
- MADISON WEST YMCA, 5515 Medical Cir.
- MIDDLETON St. Luke's Lutheran Church, 7337 Hubbard Ave.
- MT. HOREB Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mt. Horeb, 315 E. Main St.
- SUN PRAIRIE Our Savior's Lutheran Church, 550 Lincoln Dr.
- SUN PRAIRIE YMCA, 1470 Don Simon Dr.
- VERONA Memorial Baptist Church, 201 S. Main St.
- YOUR HOME



SCAN or CLICK
FOR DELIVERY!
stlukes-elca.org/lukes-closet

APPOINTMENT

Have a personal shopping experience where you and/or children select the clothing. Call 608-234-0146 to schedule an appointment with our volunteer.

SHOP & EAT EVENTS 2026

Events are held 9:00am - 1:00pm at St. Luke's Lutheran Church, 7337 Hubbard Ave., Downtown Middleton:

- Saturday, April 11
- Saturday, September 19

These will be the only events in 2026. New shoes will be available at both events. Optional pre-registration will open 3 months prior to event.

- Delivery/Appointments/Shop & Eat events may be accessed seasonally or as needed.
- Shoes are only available at Shoe, Shop & Eat events.



www.stlukes-elca.org/lukes-closet

10-2025



WI Family Virtual Support Groups

Virtual family support groups in Wisconsin offer free, confidential, and accessible peer support for caregivers, parents of children with mental health challenges, and families serving in kinship care.

Thank you for the commitment you make to children and youth — your consistency and compassion do not go unnoticed



DANE COUNTY KINSHIP CARE

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More Events & Training



Braid It Forward

- Sign Up Form link:
<https://forms.gle/oxGkpTr4u7dNXuUu9>
- Website link:
<https://braid-it-forward.github.io/>

BRAID IT FORWARD

Give your child a confidence-boosting style, complete with festive beads and accessories!

Available styles:



Braided Ponytail



Braided High Pigtails



Silk press



Braided Low Pigtails

Book your appointment
or check out our page!

Price:
\$50 style
\$15 blow out (add-on
optional)



Madison College Dental Hygiene Clinic

February -- Children's Dental Health Month
Offering FREE:

- Kids Dental Cleaning
- Flouride
- X-Rays
- Dental Education

All month long offering free services to kids ages 2-18 years old. They still have appointments available!
Call 608-258-2400

Children's Dental Health Month
ALL FEBRUARY LONG!

FREE

- Kids Dental Cleaning
- Fluoride
- Xrays
- Dental Education

Children ages 2-18 yrs

Madison College

Please schedule an appointment
by calling 608-258-2400

Madison College Dental Hygiene Clinic
1705 Hoffman Street
Madison WI



DANE COUNTY KINSHIP CARE

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Kinship Care Contacts

Kinship Care Consultants

Susan Crooks

Kinship Care Consultant

P: 608.215.5123

E: crooks.susan@danecounty.gov

Carolyn Fatsis

Kinship Care Consultant

P: 608.320.5714

E: fatsis.carolyn@danecounty.gov

Kate Gravel

Kinship Care Consultant

P: 608.345.3046

E: gravel.kate@danecounty.gov

Sarah Kasel

Kinship Care Consultant

P: 608.335.0074

E: kasel.sarah@danecounty.gov

Rachael Wilson

Kinship Care Consultant

P: 608.692.1437

E: wilson.rachael@danecounty.gov

Behavioral Health Specialist

Kelsey Schroeder-Gasser

Behavioral Health Specialist

P: 608.332.7748

E: schroeder-gasser.kelsey@danecounty.gov

Social Service Specialist

Emily Jo Peterson

Social Service Specialist

P: 608.772.9330

E: peterson.emilygo@danecounty.gov

Out-of-Home Care Program Specialist

Erin Salzwedel

Out-of-Home Care Program Specialist

P: 608.334.4417

E: salzwedel.erin@danecounty.gov

Kinship Care Supervisor

Jennifer Edds

Kinship Care Supervisor

P: 608.215.2204

E: edds.jennifer@danecounty.gov



Weekly Zoom Check-In for Your
Well-Being
TUESDAYS

11am-1pm – Weekly ZOOM
meeting for Level 2 foster parents
Zoom Link:

<https://countyofdane.zoom.us/j/92431300554pwd=qnnsYtGoxrEUkKEB4xqIL69SIWeiGT.1>

Zoom Meeting ID: 924 3130 0554
Passcode: 443140

Kinship Care Office

1202 Northport Drive

Madison, WI 53704

P: 608.381.5800

E: KinshipCare@danecounty.gov

The work you do is not always easy or visible, but it is deeply important.
Thank you for the steady care you provide to children and youth



DANE COUNTY KINSHIP CARE