



WARREN DILLAWAY / Star Beacon

A **SUPPORT** group has been started to help people who are rearing children that are not their own due to a variety of circumstances. The group encourages relatives or people with a special bond, neighbor or god parent, that are rearing children whose parents are not able to provide care for a variety of reasons.

Kinship Support Group reaches out to caregivers

By **WARREN DILLAWAY**
Staff Writer

ASHTABULA TOWNSHIP -- Area residents that have stepped up to the plate to rear children of relatives, or those with a special connection to them, are receiving support from a new support group.

The Kinship Support Group formed late in 2009 with hopes of helping people rearing other people's children, said Katie Lane,

Kinship Coordinator for Ashtabula County Childrens Services.

"The state has found out foster care has been diminishing," Lane said of the new emphasis to help relatives, or God parents or neighbors with a unique bond, find the support needed to help rear the children.

"I help them navigate the system," Lane said of her role in the process that can

be very challenging for grandparents, uncles, aunts or neighbors seeking to do right by a child.

"I have about 300 families I have been involved with (in the last three years) and it is probably triple that," she said of the families in the county facing difficult circumstances relating to parents that can't, or aren't able, to rear their own children.

Lane said there are many reasons why children may need care from somebody other than their parents. She said some parents have been killed, custody may have been moved away from the parents by the state or many other unique circumstances.

Area residents trying to help the children said the group has been helpful to them.

"We're in the process of trying to get custody of our two grandchildren. Without the support ... I don't know what I'd do. It makes you feel like you are not alone," said Melissa Baldwin of Lane and the

support group.

Debbie Sanders said she is rearing her two great nephews, 10 and five years old, and the group has been helpful. "We are all raising somebody else's kids. We meet once a month here and talk about things," she said.

Sanders said they are able to express needs and provide practical services like pass on clothes as the children grow.

While the caregivers are finding support there are three groups of children that are meeting at the same time, Lane said. She said the adults then get a break but the children, placed in groups by age, also receive something from the experience.

State Senator Capri Cafaro, during a recent support group meeting, encouraged all the people helping the children. "It really is uncharted territory. You want to do the right thing but you don't know how," she said of the many challenges.

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