

Strengthening Relative Caregiver Families:

Providing Best Practices for Caregivers

Dusty J. Cantrell, Program Manager
Hope Bright, Team Leader

University of Tennessee SWORPS

Northeast Tennessee Relative Caregiver Program



THE UNIVERSITY OF
TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE

SWORPS
RELATIVE CAREGIVER
PROGRAM

Grant Provided by



What is the Northeast Tennessee Relative Caregiver Program?

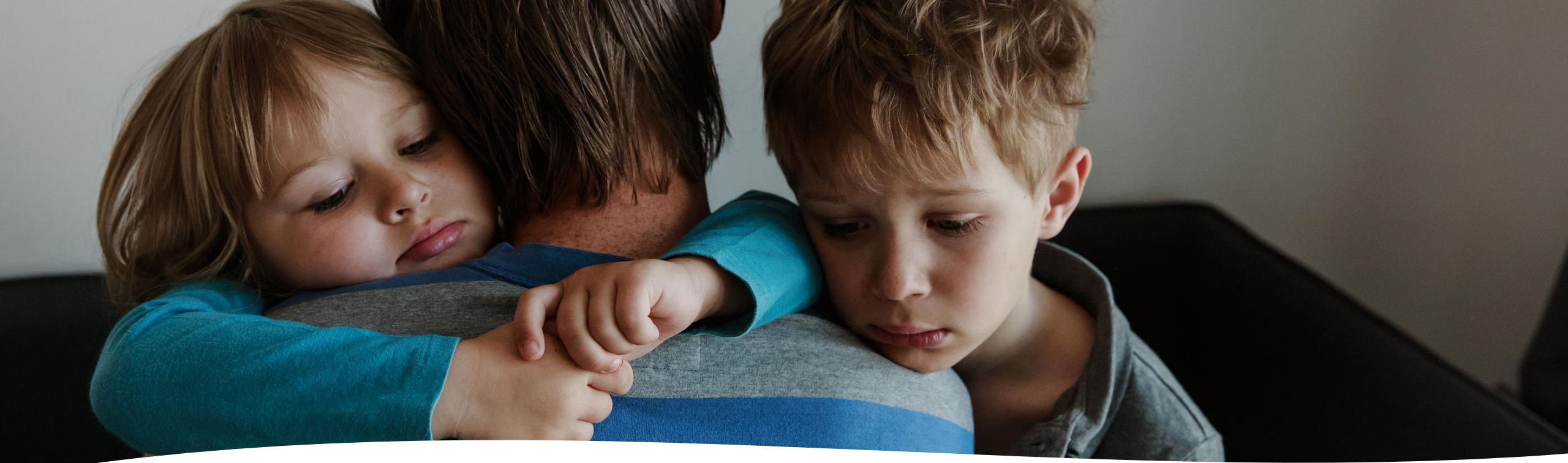


Serves families in northeast Tennessee who are raising related children

Focuses on preventing foster care placement and maintaining safe, stable homes for the child(ren)

Provides home visits, support groups, resource connections, financial assistance, advocacy, and fun, free outings for the families

Provides coaching and supports for emotional, practical, and long-term stability



Why Relative Caregiving Matters in Prevention

Children in relative care experience greater stability and less trauma

- Maintains cultural identity and community connections
- Reduces exposure to stranger care, institutional care, and repeated placements
- Strengthens the natural safety net of family and community

Building Parental Resiliency: Protective Factors

Caregivers are coached to build on:

- **Parental resilience (FS)**
- **Concrete supports in times of need (FS)**
- **Social connections/maintaining familial bonds (WB)**
- **Parenting knowledge (M)**
- **Children's social and emotional competence (M)**



Parental Resilience: Trauma-Informed Coaching

Many children come with histories of abuse, neglect, or abandonment.

- Facilitate caregiver understanding of trauma responses and support healing
- Engage in coaching around age-appropriate problem-solving and decision-making strategies and emotional regulation
- Provide referrals and warm transfers for additional services
- Partner to develop caregiver driven-service plans and action steps

Concrete Supports: Meeting Urgent Needs for Caregivers

“Even though I had already raised a family, I found myself in a strange place raising my grandchildren. My family coach has shown us kindness and compassion in the most difficult time of our lives.” *Rose-Northeast Tennessee Relative Caregiver*

Many families respond to the need to be a relative caregiver with just a phone call and little preparation.

- Ensure homes are child-safe & families are stable to prevent custody issues
- Address the caregiver’s most immediate concrete needs

Social Connections/Maintaining Familial Bonds: Nurturing Healthy Supports

- **Caregiver Support Groups-** monthly
- **Caregiver Family Enrichment**—quarterly
- **Quarterly Advisory Board(QAB)**



Parenting Knowledge: Fostering Family Growth

The relative caregiver's own **family wisdom** and experience are at the center of service delivery.

- **Support groups**
- **Educational topics**
- **Advocacy**





Social-Emotional/Mastery Competency: Connecting Generations

BIG QUESTION: What do you want to pass on to the next generation?

- Identifying and Assessing Mastery Skills
- Setting Educational Goals
- Exploring Career Pathways
- Building a Support Network

Why This Work Is Prevention.

Prevents entry into foster care and reduces repeat maltreatment:

NE RCP Program-99.8% continuous placement rate and rarely disrupt/end in state custody(Family Stability)

- **Strengthens families to care for their own**
- **Supports the child's healing without more separation and trauma**
- **Reunites children with the birth family if appropriate**
- **Interrupts generational patterns by building safe, capable households**

Outcomes That Matter

Children remain safely with their families:

- Caregivers report increased confidence and reduced stress. (**Family Stability/Well-Being**)
- Social/emotional, cognitive, and life skills are passed onto the next generation. (**Mastery**)



Stories from the Field:

“Rose’s Story”





Referrals- (865) 974-4422 (Leighanne Sisk)

rcpreferrals@utk.edu

Northeast Tennessee RCP Contacts:

[Relative Caregiver Program - Social Work Office of Research & Public Service](#)

<https://www.tn.gov/dcs/program-areas/prevention/relative-caregiver.html>

Dusty Cantrell, Program Manager (865) 755-3290/dcantre3@utk.edu

Hope Bright, Lead Family Coach- sbrigh14@utk.edu