



Great Ideas! for Family Leaders

Special Edition – November 2017

Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Dear Family Leaders,

Grandparents have a special role in a child’s life and today, many grandparents are the primary caregivers for their grandchildren. We see evidence of this every day in our family-run organizations. Many of us who have raised our own children with mental health needs are now raising our grandchildren. More and more grandparents and great-grandparents are attending support groups and training to help their grandchildren with mental health needs. We recognize family-run organizations are always on the frontline, so we have dedicated this special edition of ***Great Ideas! for Family Leaders*** to the topic of supporting grandparents.

We honor and thank those grandparents who have stepped in to care for their grandchildren at a point in their lives when they expected to be finished with child-rearing responsibilities. You are very special, indeed!

Jane Walker
Executive Director
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RISE IN NUMBER OF GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN

Many family-run organizations report an increasing number of requests from grandparents - and even great-grandparents - raising grandchildren. In 2013, the Pew Research Center reported 2.7 million grandparents had primary responsibility for parenting 2.9 million grandchildren under the age of 18, living with them. This is a 12% increase since the year 2000.

There are many reasons for this increase. Some grandparents are raising their grandchildren because their child has died, has a mental illness, is incarcerated, or has had their parental rights terminated due to physical, emotional or sexual abuse and chronic neglect. Substance abuse is the most common reason for this to occur. According to a 2016 report from Generations United, (***Raising the Children of the Opioid Epidemic: Solutions and Support for Grandfamilies***), the opioid epidemic is one factor that has resulted in the increase in the number of grandparents taking on the primary parenting role of their grandchildren. As the number of children in foster care has increased, due in part to the opioid crisis, child welfare systems are relying on grandparents and other relatives to raise these children.

GRANDPARENTS STEPPING UP

Grandparents around the country are stepping up to fill the gap when parents can no longer provide care for their children. The term ‘**grandfamilies**’ has been used to describe these new family groups and is defined as families headed by grandparents and other relatives who are sharing their homes with their grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and/or other related children. A majority of these children experience traumatic events before going to live with their grandparents or other relatives. However, research is showing that when these children can be raised by relatives, they have an increased sense of belonging, more stability, better health outcomes, and factors in their home that lead to resiliency and healing.

Grandfamilies – a relatively new term used to describe grandparents and other relatives who are sharing their homes with their grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and/or other related children.

NEEDS AND CHALLENGES OF GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN

Many grandparents find themselves entering retirement with the new and challenging reality of raising a second family. This was clearly not in their life plan. While hoping to gain some freedom from work schedules and home/family responsibilities, they are suddenly faced with a myriad of new responsibilities: caring for young children, school meetings, appointments with doctors, counselors, and possibly the court system. Traumatic events that many children experience prior to leaving their parent’s home can increase the risk for health problems and behavioral health issues. However, these grandparents are less likely to receive supports and services for children who have experienced trauma. Most grandparents do not know where to turn for information on services and supports, extra financial strain, unique challenges when parents are incarcerated, as well as questions around custody, adoption, guardianship, and consent issues.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FAMILY-RUN ORGANIZATIONS

Developing specialized programs for grandparents to address their unique situation is an opportunity for family-run organizations that addresses a growing need in the community. Some strategies might include:

- Conducting targeted outreach at senior centers, churches, libraries, and other community locations to ensure grandparents are aware of all the support services available.
- Including grandparents in all parenting and training programs offered to families.
- Developing a resource list specifically for grandparents with information on state laws relating to adoption, custody, guardianship, consent issues, local services available for grandparents and links to helpful guides for grandparents.
- Hiring grandparents to provide one-to-one peer support services for other grandparents raising their grandchildren.
- Facilitating support groups for grandparents.

- Providing training and informational/educational brochures on:

- ✓ Parenting skills
- ✓ Understanding and navigating educational issues, specifically special education
- ✓ Navigating the child-serving system; education, child welfare and protection, juvenile justice
- ✓ Accessing state-specific information on legal issues including adoption, custody, guardianship, and consent issues
- ✓ Managing their own physical and mental health along with their grandchild's physical and mental health

"My biggest thought is, Lord, just let me – keep me in good health and a sound mind to be able to maintain on my own...so I can care for my grandkids."

SHARE YOUR PROGRAMS AND IDEAS ON SUPPORTING GRANDPARENTS



For decades family-run organizations have been working across generations with children, youth and parents. Our work now expands across three and sometimes four generations to grandparents and great grandparents. That's not a stretch for family-run organizations! Please let us know how your family-run organization is serving grandparents so we can share this with our network of local and state family-run organizations.

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RESOURCES

There are many excellent online resources specifically for grandparents and grandfamilies.

- **Generations United's National Center on Grandfamilies**
The Center works to enact policies and promote programs to help grandfamilies address challenges. Their work is informed by a national network of grandfamily caregivers. The website contains a wealth of information on existing state laws and policies affecting grandfamilies along with annual reports on issues affecting grandparents. www.grandfamilies.org .
 - ✓ 2016 Raising the Children of the Opioid Epidemic: Solutions and Support for Grandfamilies
 - ✓ 2017 *In Loving Arms: The Protective Role of Grandparents and Other Relatives in Raising Children Exposed to Trauma* Infographic and Full Report
 - ✓ *State Grandfamilies Fact Sheets*
www.grandfamilies.org/State-Fact-Sheets
- **American Grandparents Association** is a membership organization for grandparents. The website is a resource for people 50+, providing services and information about health, money, family, travel, and more. – aga.grandparents.com/

- **The American Association for Retired Persons (AARP)** has a comprehensive section of their website devoted to grandparents including a Grandfamilies Guide with information on legal, financial, housing, childcare and other critical topics for grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. <https://www.aarp.org/relationships/friends-family/info-08-2011/grandfamilies-guide-getting-started.html>
- **The Grandparent's and Other Relative Caregiver's Guide to Raising Children with Disabilities**
Published by the Children's Defense Fund, this Guide for grandparents provides information on getting assistance for children with special needs. <http://www.childrensdefense.org/library/data/grandparents-relative-caregivers-guide-raising-children-with-disabilities.pdf>
- **Extension is part of the US Department of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Program.**
Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: Doubly Stressed, Triply Blessed is a multimedia program – with video and written curricular materials – designed to introduce members of the public and social service professionals to the pressing issues and concerns faced by grandparents and other relatives raising children and to present concrete ideas for addressing these problems at both the individual and community level. www.extension.org/category/family_caregiving_grandparents_raising_grandchildren
- **National Kinship Alliance for Children**
The website has *The Grandkin Guide, Frequently Asked Questions and Answers for Relatives Raising Children* – http://kinshipalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/TheGrandKinGuide_lowres.pdf
- **ChildTrends** is a research organization dedicated to research about children and families. This is the place to go for national and state data associated with grandparents who live with grandchildren. It also discusses the extra support grandparents may need as the primary caregivers to children. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/children-living-with-and-cared-for-by-grandparents-state-level-data-from-the-american-community-survey/>
- **Relatives as Parents Program (RAPP)** is a program of the Brookdale Foundation Group. Their website provides a listing of local and state RAPP programs and publications on topics such as *Developing Rural Relatives As Parents Programming: Promising Practices- A Collection of Practice Wisdom from Across Rural America* and a *Simulation Toolkit* to help others understand the stresses of grandparent raising grandchildren. www.brookdalefoundation.org/

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