

FACT SHEET

GRANDPARENTS AND OTHER RELATIVES RAISING CHILDREN: CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUPS



INTRODUCTION

According to the U.S. Census 2000, about six million children across the country are living in households headed by grandparents or other relatives. More than 2.4 million of these grandparents have the primary responsibility for meeting the basic needs of these children. Factors such as parental substance abuse, incarceration, HIV/AIDS, death, poverty, and military deployments are causing growing numbers of grandparents and other relatives to step forward to keep families together.

The National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP) was enacted in 2000 as part of the Older Americans Act (OAA). Administered by the Administration on Aging (AoA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the NFCSP allows for all states, working in partnership with Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) and local community-service providers, to offer five categories of supportive services for grandparents and other relatives aged 60 and older who are relative caregivers of children.

Among the five categories of supportive services provided under the NFCSP is individual counseling, organization of support groups, and training caregivers to assist them in making decisions and solving problems related to their caregiving roles. This fact sheet is intended to provide information on the growing networks of caregiver support groups for grandparents and other relatives raising children throughout the United States, and on other available resources for starting a support group. For more information about the NFCSP, please visit Generations United at www.gu.org for a fact sheet and user guide about the program, or go to the AoA website at www.aoa.gov.

THERAPEUTIC BENEFITS OF SUPPORT GROUPS

The challenges faced by today's caregivers can be physically and emotionally overwhelming. Relative caregivers frequently suffer from stress related illnesses, such as depression, diabetes, hypertension, insomnia, and gastric distress. Additionally, stress may be compounded by the fact that children being raised by relative caregivers, including those in the foster care system, exhibit a variety of physical, behavioral, and emotional problems to a greater degree than the general population of children. Older caregivers may also experience a sense of isolation if the active social lifestyle they shared with peers is no longer compatible due to the caregiver's responsibility for children.

Research conducted by AARP Knowledge Management and the AARP Grandparent Information Center in 2003 to better understand the most effective ways to reach and assist grandparents and relatives raising children found that support groups "...benefit grandparent caregivers by providing both information and psychological/emotional support." In addition, caregivers feel that they acquire better child rearing skills, and a time of respite, as a result of support group attendance. To download the report in full, visit http://research.aarp.org/general/gp_2003.html.

Participation in support groups can result in greater physical and emotional stability for caregivers, allowing them to fully focus on the best interests of the children in their care. This, in turn, fosters a safer, more stable, and consistent living environment for children.

THE BROOKDALE FOUNDATION GROUP RELATIVES AS PARENTS PROGRAM (RAPP)

The Brookdale Foundation Group in New York coordinates the largest network of caregiver support programs in the country through its Relatives As Parents Program

(RAPP). RAPP was established in 1996 to help meet the needs of grandparents and other relatives who have taken on the responsibility of parenting as kin caregivers for children outside the foster care system, when the biological parents were unwilling, or unable to do so. The RAPP program provides \$10,000 seed grants over a two-year period to local and state agencies. Local agencies either start a new support group, or expand a current one by adding one or more components such as respite care, therapeutic children's groups, educational seminars, and individual and family counseling. State agencies work to initiate new relative support groups, develop a statewide network linking current programs and interested agencies, and establish or expand an inter-system task force to work on issues related to relatives as surrogate parents. RAPPs currently offer services to relative caregivers and their families in 45 states.

RAPP applications and guidelines are available on an annual basis, generally in the fall, with applications due the following spring. Grants are awarded to up to 15 local community-based agencies and five state agencies throughout the United States. For more information on the Brookdale's Relatives As Parents Program, visit their website at www.brookdalefoundation.org, call (212) 308-7355, or write The Brookdale Foundation, 950 Third Avenue, 19th Floor, New York, NY 10022.

INCREASING ACCESS TO BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES

With funding from the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), GU has partnered with the Brookdale Foundation Group since 1998 to replicate its local Relatives As Parent Program (RAPP) model in behavioral health facilities around the country. GU's RAPP follows Brookdale's model of issuing seed grants over a two-year period to local or state agencies, in this case behavioral health facilities, to either start a new support group, or expand a current one. Notable successes of this initiative include:

- The University of Maine Center on Aging in Orono, ME, in conjunction with Family Connections, funded in 2002 and 2004, conducted a state forum, developed and offered specialized training, published a series of articles on the mental health needs of kinship care families, and produced a series of policy recommendations.
- Jewish Family Service in Torrance, CA, funded in 2000, developed groups specifically for teens, and replicated RAPP in other areas of their community.
- Family and Children's Service in Nashville, TN, funded in 1998, grew their program from a support group with therapeutic childcare to a full-scale Relative Caregiver Program with three sites around the state.

For more information on the Behavioral Health Initiative, visit GU's website at www.gu.org.

GENERATIONS UNITED KinNET PROJECT

In response to the increasing need for supportive services to assist caregivers in making decisions and solving problems related to their changing family roles, Generations United (GU) partnered with the Brookdale Foundation Group to create KinNET, a network of support groups focused on relatives caring for kin in foster care. GU's KinNET Project was funded in fall 2000 through a cooperative agreement with the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The project resulted in a best practices video, an annotated kinship care bibliography, and an independent evaluation by researchers at Syracuse University.

The evaluation found that flexibility in program type is essential to meet the myriad needs of attendees. In addition, successful support groups provide access to services, information, and ongoing connection among participants and agencies. Ancillary services such as childcare, children's activities, transportation, and respite are also important to the groups' success.

For more information on the KinNET Project, and a list of KinNET sites around the country, visit GU's website at www.gu.org

OTHER SUPPORT GROUP MODELS

Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) across the country are providing caregiver support groups through traditional and innovative means. In this latter category, Michigan's Region IV AAA, the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren and Relatives as Parents Program, offers monthly telephone support groups through conference calls with a professional facilitator. To find the Area Agency on Aging serving your locale, visit the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 or visit www.eldercare.gov/Eldercare/Public/Home.asp.

SUPPORT GROUP RESOURCES

If no local support group exists in your area, Area Agencies on Aging can provide valuable information and assistance on how to get started. Additional information on support groups can be found through:

AARP Grandparent Information Center (AARP GIC) provides information and referral to national, state and local level support groups and agencies offering support for grandparents. The AARP GIC Support Group Database can be accessed by visiting <http://www.aarp.org/life/grandparents/>. The publication "Support Groups for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren" is available at www.aarp.org/life/grandparents/Articles/a2004-01-20-supportgroups.html. For more information email gic@aarp.org, or write to: AARP GIC, 601 E Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20049.

Grand Parent Again is another website that provides a listing of support groups by state. Visit the website at www.grandparentagain.com for more information.

North American Council on Adoptable Children has a network of support groups for parents including relative caregivers. Information can be found at www.nacac.org/pas_supportgroups.html. NACAC publishes fact sheets (available in print and on-line) on various aspects of group development and special needs. Topics include helping families cope with particular special needs. For more information, contact NACAC at: 970 Raymond Avenue, Suite 106, St. Paul, MN 55114, (651) 644-3036, or visit www.nacac.org.

Through the Eyes of a Child - Grandparents Raising Grandchildren is a series of nine fact sheets designed to help grandparents raising young children (birth to age 8). Developed by specialists at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and University of Wisconsin-Extension with feedback from grandparents and experts in the field, topics include understanding children's behaviors, the importance of close relationships and open communication, and maintaining contact with parents. Visit <http://www.uwex.edu/relationships/> to download these free tip sheets.

Empowering Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: A Training Manual for Group Leaders by Carole Cox is a 14-session workshop designed to help grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. To purchase this training manual, visit http://www.springerpub.com/books/gerontology/pub_1316_8.html.

A Tradition of Caring is a comprehensive six-module, nine-session curriculum, providing kinship caregivers with 27 hours of information and support related to kinship care. Sessions are designed to facilitate interaction and the sharing of experiences and support among participants. The curriculum is available for purchase at www.cwla.org/pubs/pubdetails.asp?PUBID=8480.

STATE FACT SHEETS

In a unique national partnership, the Children's Defense Fund, AARP, Casey National Center for Resource Family Support, The Brookdale Foundation, Child Welfare League of America, Generations United, The Urban Institute, and Johnson & Hedgpeth Consultants have created 51 fact sheets containing the most up-to-date state information related to kinship care for each state and the District of Columbia. Fact sheets include information on available support groups. These fact sheets are located on the GU website at www.gu.org/projg&ostates.htm.

CONCLUSION

A wide variety of support groups exist to benefit grandparents and other relatives, and the children they are raising. These groups provide a unique opportunity to access resource information, and to share challenges, experiences, and joys. Caregivers make emotional connections with others by coming to understand that they are not alone, and that there are many others who face similar challenges associated with raising children under difficult and stressful circumstances. Through support groups, caregivers also come to understand that they have the power and the resources to provide a stable and consistent environment for the children in their care.

This document was supported, in part, by a grant, No. 90-CG-2633 from the AoA, Department of Health and Human Services. Grantees express freely their findings and conclusions. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official Administration on Aging policy.

Generations United (GU) is the only national membership organization focused solely on improving the lives of children, youth, and older people through intergenerational strategies, programs, and policies. GU represents more than 100 national, state, and local organizations representing more than 70 million Americans. GU serves as a resource for educating policymakers and the public about the economic, social, and personal imperatives of intergenerational cooperation. GU provides a forum for those working with children, youth, and older adults to explore areas of common ground while celebrating the richness of each generation.



For further information, please contact: Generations United (GU), 1333 H Street N.W., Suite 500W, Washington, D.C. 20005-4752 (202) 289-3979, Fax: (202) 289-3952; e-mail: gu@gu.org. The GU web site at www.gu.org contains additional information about grandparents and other relatives raising children.

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- ¹ U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Summary File 1, Table P28, Relationship by Household Type for Population Under 18 Years.
- ² Simmons, T. & Dye, J.L. (October 2003). Grandparents Living with Grandchildren: 2000 U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Brief, C2KBR-31. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau.
- ³ Public Law 106-501 Section 316.
- ⁴ For more information about the NFCSF, please visit www.gu.org to obtain a fact sheet and user guide about the program, or visit the Administration on Aging website at www.aoa.gov.
- ⁵ Minkler, M. (1999). Intergenerational households headed by grandparents: Contexts, realities, and implications for policy. *Journal of Aging*, 13 (2) 199-218.
- ⁶ Altshuler, S.J. (1998). Child well-being in kinship foster care: Similar to, or different from, non-related foster care? *Children and Youth Services Review*, 20 (5), 369-388 and Pruchno, R. (1999). Raising grandchildren: The experiences of black and white grandmother. *The Gerontologist* 39 (2), 209-221.
- ⁷ Knowledge Management and the AARP Grandparent Information Center (2003). Lean on me: Support and minority outreach for grandparents and relatives raising children. Washington, D.C.: AARP.