

## Grandparents and Other Relatives Raising Children: Their Inclusion in the National Family Caregiver Support Program

### 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<sup>1</sup>. About 2.5 million grandparents living with their grandchildren have the primary responsibility for meeting the basic needs of these children<sup>2</sup>. 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) became law in 2000, through the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act<sup>3</sup>. The NFCSP was reauthorized and amended on September 30, 2006. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging (AoA) administers the program and provide funds to the states. They in turn fund Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) — to provide five categories of supportive services to grandparents and other relatives aged 55 and older who are relative caregivers of children, and family caregivers of individuals aged 60 and older.

In spring 1999, when the NFCSP was originally introduced in Congress, it did not include grandparents and other older relative caregivers of children. Instead, it was designed solely to provide services to family caregivers of individuals aged 60 and older. Generations United (GU) was supportive of the NFCSP and thought it was important to help caregivers. However, GU also thought it was important to acknowledge older individuals not only as the receivers of care, but also as the givers of care, which they so often are. As a result, GU worked to include grandparents and other relatives in the NFCSP by testifying before the relevant Senate Aging Committee, and submitting legislative language to include the caregivers of children in the law. In 2006 GU advocated for lowering the age to 55, which subsequently increased the percentage of eligible grandparents headed families from 29% to 47%.

This fact sheet is intended to provide an overview of the provisions of the NFCSP and an idea of what some AAAs around the country are doing to help these families. It is hoped that the information in this fact sheet, in addition to the related user-friendly guide<sup>4</sup>, will encourage other AAAs to replicate successful models and help support these families.

### PROVISIONS OF THE NFCSP

Congress appropriated \$155.7 million to be spent for the NFCSP in 2007, more than a \$30 million increase from the NFCSP's first year in 2001. According to the law, the AoA releases the money to states based on each state's percentage of the population aged 70 and older.

The money that is distributed to states is allocated to the AAAs based on intrastate funding formulas. The AAAs provide support services to the caregivers or contract for service provision. Up to ten percent of the funding appropriated for the NFCSP can be used to provide support services to grandparents or older relatives over age 55 who are raising relatives' children or providing care to individuals with severe disabilities, including children<sup>5</sup>. Except for this limitation, funds under the NFCSP are not earmarked. States and AAAs may use the funds to provide any and all of the

five categories of support services authorized by the NFCSP to relative caregivers.

### ♥ DEFINITION OF GRANDPARENT OR OLDER RELATIVE WHO IS A RELATIVE CAREGIVER

The NFCSP defines “grandparent or older individual who is a relative caregiver” to mean:

*... a grandparent or stepgrandparent of a child, or a relative of a child by blood, marriage, or adoption who is 55 year of age or older and –*

- (A) lives with the child;
- (B) is the primary caregiver of the child because the biological or adoptive parents are unable or unwilling to serve as the primary caregiver of the child; and
- (C) has a legal relationship to the child, such as legal custody or guardianship, or is raising the child informally.

When GU submitted language to include relative caregivers in the NFCSP, it intentionally included the “informal” caregivers. Although there are few formal national studies on the issue, ample anecdotal evidence suggests that the majority of relative caregivers are “informal;” which means they are raising children without a legal relationship such as guardianship or legal custody. As a result, GU thought it was critical that they be included in the language of the law.

### ♥ SUPPORT SERVICES

The following are the five categories of support services delineated in the NFCSP:

- (1) **information** to caregivers about available services;
- (2) **assistance** to caregivers in gaining access to the services;
- (3) **individual counseling, organization of support groups, and training assist the caregivers** in the areas of health, nutrition, and financial literacy, and in making decisions and solving problems relating to their caregiving roles;
- (4) **respite care** to enable caregivers to be temporarily relieved from their caregiving responsibilities; and
- (5) **supplemental services**, on a limited basis, to complement the care provided by caregivers.

These categories are written to be flexible and respond to the needs of the caregivers in the area being served.

The NFCSP requires the AAAs to coordinate its provision of support services (or of the agency it contracts with) with the activities of community agencies and voluntary organizations that are providing similar supportive services. Some of the most successful AAAs that serve these families are those that have collaborations with a broad range of community based organizations, including organizations associated with serving children, such as schools and Head Start programs.

## ♥ PRIORITY LANGUAGE

The NFCSP includes a provision stating that states must give priority for services to caregivers who are older individuals with greatest social need and economic need, and to older individuals providing care to individuals with severe disabilities, including children or individuals over the age of 18.

## ♥ MATCHING AND MAINTENANCE OF EFFORT REQUIREMENTS

The NFCSP has a requirement that each state match 25 percent of its federal allocation. The NFCSP also includes a maintenance of effort requirement, which provides that funds made available through the NFCSP must supplement, not replace, any federal, state, or local funds spent by a state or local government to provide similar services.

## PROGRAM EXAMPLES

Thanks to the NFCSP, AAAs around the country have started to provide services to grandparents or other relatives raising children. These successful programs established models for other AAAs to support these families.

Oklahoma's Department of Human Services, Aging Services Division helped develop the Oklahoma Respite Resource Network which, since March 2000, has been providing lifespan respite care to various categories of caregivers, including grandparents and other relatives raising children. Now, with NFCSP funds, the program has expanded and all eleven of Oklahoma's AAAs are involved. The AAAs have been promoting the respite program through presentations and other outreach activities

The Family Support Center's kinship support group in Olympia, Washington has developed a program, called "Kin-Pal," in which children develop pen-pal relationships with kinship kids in Columbus, Ohio. The program was developed when a support group leader was contacted by the facilitator of a kinship support group looking for ideas for their support group. Many of the kinship caregivers in the support group reported that their grandkids were having a difficult time with writing in school. Kin-Pal was developed to improve the writing skills and also to provide these children the opportunity to connect with other children like themselves. In addition the group sponsored two, six-week workshops called Teen Empowerment, which covered topics ranging from self esteem, communication and family dynamics, to healthy relationships with family and peers. The group also runs workshops for Vietnamese kinship caregivers.

The Northwest Washington AAA tribal kinship care program focuses on providing individualized referrals to attorneys familiar with tribal law and kinship issues. The AAA has a Tribal Outreach Coordinator on staff who specializes in relative caregivers' needs.

Supplemental services, which are included in the NFCSP's fifth category of services, are also being provided to grandparents and other relatives raising children. For example, six of the thirteen AAA in Illinois are using NFCSP funds to provide legal services to grandparents and other relatives raising children.

AAAs around the country have implemented or in the process of implementing programs for grandparents and other relatives raising children. Now, with the new provisions to the NFCSP funds, the AAAs are able to expand their services to individuals aged 55 and older who are raising children or are providing care to individuals with severe disabilities, including children. Several of these AAAs use NFCSP funds in conjunction with other federal, state, and private funds, because the NFCSP funds alone are often not enough to cover the newly eligible population.

## CONCLUSION

The NFCSP is a federal program that provides much needed funding to AAAs wanting to support grandparents and other relatives raising children. To be most effective the program will need increased funding and Aging Networks will need ongoing training and education on how they can better support grandparents and other relatives. However, the NFCSP as it exists is a critical first step in helping support caregivers across the United States.



*Generations United (GU) is the national membership organization focused solely on improving the lives of children, youth, and older people through*

*intergenerational strategies, programs, and public policies. GU represents more than 100 national, state, and local organizations and individuals working on behalf of more than 70 million Americans. Since 1986, GU has served as a resource for educating policymakers and the public about the economic, social, and personal imperatives of intergenerational cooperation. GU acts as a catalyst for stimulating collaboration between aging, children, and youth organizations, providing a forum to explore areas of common ground while celebrating the richness of each generation. .*

*Since 1997, one of GU's main initiatives has been its work to support relative caregivers and the children they raise. GU's National Center on Grandparents and Other Relatives Raising Children seeks to improve the quality of life of the caregivers and the children they are raising by addressing the unique needs of each generation. It provides a wide variety of resources, technical assistance, and training to service providers and professionals across the country, and educates policymakers on the importance of adopting intergenerational public policies and programs.*

For further information, please contact: Generations United, 1331 H St., NW, Suite 900, Washington, DC 20005, (202) 289-3979, Fax: (202) 289-3952, e-mail: [gu@gu.org](mailto:gu@gu.org). The GU web site at [www.gu.org](http://www.gu.org) contains additional information about grandparents and other relatives raising children

- <sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000. Summary File 1, Table P28, Relationship by Household Type of Population Under 18 Years.
- <sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau (2002). American Community Survey Summary Tables. PCT014. Grandparents Responsible for Own Grandchildren Under 18 Years by Sex of Grandparents in Households.
- <sup>3</sup> Reauthorization Older American Act 2000.
- <sup>4</sup> Generations United (2003). A guide to the National Family Caregiver Support Program and Its Inclusion of Grandparents and other Relatives Raising Children (Revised, September 2003). Available through Generations United. 202-638 or [www.gu.org](http://www.gu.org)
- <sup>5</sup> Reauthorization of Older American's Act 2006

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