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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Relatives Are Increasingly Relied Upon by Child Welfare Agencies during Opioid Epidemic**

More than 1/3 of all children placed in foster care because of parental alcohol or drug use are placed with relatives.

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Sept. 12, 2016 — With the rise in heroin and other opioid use, more relatives are raising children because the parents have died, are incarcerated, are using drugs, are in treatment or are otherwise unable to care for their children, according to a new report from Generations United. After years of decline, the numbers of children in foster care are increasing. Experts say the opioid epidemic is responsible for this trend.

Alcohol and drug use are the most common reasons for removing children from their homes, next to neglect. More than 1/3 of all children placed in foster care because of parental alcohol or drug use are placed with relatives.

“With the rise in heroin and other opioid use, relatives are increasingly being asked to care for these children. And they are stepping up and saying yes.” said **Donna Butts, executive director of Generations United**. “This is good for the children and our country because decades of research confirms that children who cannot remain with their birth parents thrive when raised in ‘grandfamilies’ by relatives and close family friends. These families need and deserve our support.”

The percentage of children in foster care with relatives has increased from 24% in 2008 to 29% in 2014. The vast majority of children being raised by relatives are being cared for in grandfamilies outside of the foster care system. For every child in foster care with relatives, there are 20 children being raised by grandparents or other relatives outside of the formal foster care system.

“Children do best with family. Public policies should better support children and caregivers in grandfamilies inside or outside the formal foster care system. Public policies should also offer services to birth parents of children affected by substance use disorders, said **Jaia Peterson Lent, deputy executive director of Generations United**. As a country, it is our moral imperative to provide the support needed to keep children safely with their parents or other family members whenever possible.”

For generations, substance use – including opioids, crack cocaine, meth, and alcohol – have led grandparents and other relatives across races, ethnicities and geographic areas to step in to care for

children. The opioid epidemic is the next chapter in this narrative that demonstrates a need to better support these grandfamilies so the children in their care can flourish.

The report offers recommendations to help guide the development of supportive federal and state policies and services for grandfamilies. They include:

- Reforming federal child welfare to prevent children from entering or re-entering foster care
- Ensuring children in foster care are placed with families, prioritizing placements with relatives when possible and providing the supports they need to care for the children
- Making sure grandfamilies get the full range of legal and financial options, information, assistance and support they need to help the children thrive

Generations United will release a hard copy of *The 2016 State of Grandfamilies in America* report **Sept. 13 at a reception, from 5:00pm to 7:00pm**, in **room 215** of the **Dirksen Senate Office Building on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC**. Nationally-syndicated *Washington Post* columnist **Michelle Singletary** will emcee the event.

Generations United will honor **Senator Orrin Hatch** with its 2016 Grandfamilies Champion Award at the event.

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The report, which also includes profiles of grandfamilies, is available at <http://goo.gl/2Tb4IU>.

To schedule an interview with one of our experts, contact Alan King at [aking@gu.org](mailto:aking@gu.org). Experts available for comment include:

- **Donna Butts, executive director, Generations United**
- **Ana Beltran, special advisor, Generations United's National Center on Grandfamilies**  
(Ms. Beltran can also do interviews in Spanish)
- **Jaia Peterson Lent, deputy executive director, Generations United**

**About Generations United:** *For nearly three decades, Generations United has been the catalyst for policies and practices stimulating cooperation and collaboration among generations, evoking the vibrancy, energy and sheer productivity that result when people of all ages come together. We believe that we can only be successful in the face of our complex future if generational diversity is regarded as a national asset and fully leveraged. The National Center on Grandfamilies is a critical part of Generations United's mission and strives to enact policies and promote programs that support relative caregivers and the children they raise. [www.gu.org](http://www.gu.org)*