



News You Can Use !

Head Start, Early Head Start and Migrant/Seasonal Head Start Programs

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

This newsletter highlights the issue of grandparents raising grandchildren. The target audiences are Head Start, Early Head Start and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start regional TA Specialists, Child Development Specialists and Liaisons, and program staff. In this issue, grandparents share the joys and challenges of caring for their grandchildren through real-life stories and experiences.

Early Head Start National
 Resource Center @ ZERO TO THREE
 2000 M Street, NW, Suite 200,
 Washington DC 20036
 Phone: (202) 638-1144 Fax: (202) 638-0851
 Website: <http://www.ehsnrc.org>

Volume 1, Issue 1
Part 1

December 2007

VIP's in an Increasingly Complex World

...Grandparents envision the dreams that their young are unable to see...and when their children and grandchildren succeed they are actually living out their grandparent's dreams...

In recent years, grandparents raising grandchildren has received more focused attention



For many families, grandparents are the world's unsung heroes/heroines and Very Important Persons (VIP's). They have lived to experience good times and worrisome times; and many are envisioning retirement. However, when parents are unable to care for their children, millions of grandparents across the county demonstrate their commitment by stepping in, taking charge and assuming the role of caring for their grandchildren. For many grandparents, this "see-a-need-and-fill-it" ethic is an automatic response to what will prove to become an awesome responsibility. Yet, grandparents raising grandchildren is not a new concept. In fact, in some families it is considered the role of the grandparent to raise the grandchildren, as is the case for many Latino, Asian and African families. In the case of Migrant families whose parents often travel long distances away from home to work, grandparents are often a great resource in caring for young children.

in Head Start, Early Head Start, Migrant and Seasonal Head Start and child care programs around the country. The Administration for Children and Families (Region IV) in collaboration with the Administration on Aging published *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: A Call To Action* in January 2007; and this report along with the realization that kith and kin primary care providers are often grandparents has helped to raise the level of awareness around this issue. This edition of News You Can Use will provide a quick profile on grandparents raising grandchildren, use real life stories from grandparents to highlight some of their challenges and triumphs, and include resources and tips for staff, grandparents and families.

Grandparent Highlights

- ☺ VIP's
- ☺ A National Look
- ☺ Edition Profile
- ☺ Grandparent's Voice's
- ☺ HS/EHS Staff Tips

Next Issue Highlights

Mental Health & Holiday Blues

Inside this issue:

A National Look	2
A Profile of Grandparents	2
Impact on Families	3
In Their Own Words	4
Grandparents Need	5
Quick Tips for Staff	6
Resources	8

At-A-Glance: *National Look at Grandparents Raising Grandchildren*

Did you know that??:

- Of the 5.7 million grandparents in the U.S. living with grandchildren 42% are the primary caregivers of their grandchildren (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Region IV, 2007).
- 26% of children born in 2001 were in relative care at 9 months of age [generally residing with their grandmothers] (Kreuder, J.L., Ferguson, D., & Lawrence, S., 2005).
- The southern region of the United States currently has the greatest percentage of grandparent-headed families in the country at 47.2% (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Region IV, 2007).
- 30% of grandparents are currently working; 11% are retired and still work; and 50% are retired and not working (American Association of Retired Persons [AARP], 2006; 2002).

The average age of today's grandparent is 48 years, which is much younger than some might typically imagine (AARP, 2006).

In fact, Simmons and Dye (2003) reported on the racial/ethnic backgrounds of grandparent-headed households in the United States and found that:

- 41.6% of Caucasian children live with grandparents
- 51.7% of African-American children live with grandparents
- 34.7% of Hispanic children live in grand-parent headed households

A Profile of Grandparents in this Edition

Eight grandparents were interviewed by phone for this edition of News You Can Use to provide a real account of their current roles as primary caregivers. Some of the grandparents were supported by EHS/HS programs and some were supported by other forms of childcare. However, their stories and experiences are similar to many grandparents raising grandchildren around the country.

(Interview questions adapted from questions used in May 2007 focus group conducted by Jacquie Davis; personal communication, July 2007.)

- Most of the grandparents interviewed for this edition have more than one grandchild and up to eight.
- Four are currently caring for one grandchild and four are caring for multiple grandchildren.
- The collective age-range of grandchildren who have been or are currently in the care of our interviewed grandparents is six months to twenty-one years of age.

A Profile of Grandparents...cont'd

Most of the children who came into to the care of their grandparents did so for one or more of the following reasons:

- Both parents were incarcerated
- Parent wanted to work and needed childcare and a place to live
- Parents were teenagers
- Parent-to-be was not ready to become a parent
- Parents had addiction problems; baby born with drugs in system

Even though the sample of grandparents interviewed for this edition was small, their individual reasons for becoming primary caregivers to their grandchildren mirrored those of the 1,500 grandparents surveyed by the AARP Foundation Grandparent Information Center in 2006. Other reasons for grandparents raising grandchildren cited by the survey and *Lean On Me: A Film About Grandparents and Other Relatives Raising Children* (2006) were:

- Parental unemployment
- Parent(s) in the military
- Parent(s) deceased

Raising Grandchildren & The Impact on Families



Whether the grandchildren came into their grandparents' care as newborns or later in childhood, the grandparents interviewed for this edition shared the impact on their families. While some families were impacted by only one of the issues listed below, other families were impacted by multiple issues. The grandparents' responses indicated five major areas of impact on families:

- Family bonds grew closer between and among immediate and extended relatives
- Family and/or friends grew apart
- Families experienced financial challenges
- Grandparents struggled with letting their adult children take leadership as parents
- Grandparents struggled to find the emotional and physical energy to be both parents and grandparents

In Their Own Words...Grandparents Share Their Stories

The following seven grandparents' shared their own individual experiences of raising grandchildren, highlighted many common themes, and gave voice to some of the realities of becoming a primary caregiver for the second time around. Their names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

Donna

Donna described her close-knit family as initially "torn-apart" when her teenage daughter got pregnant. "My daughter got pregnant while she was living at home and the father was not involved. She began stealing from us and bought things for her boyfriend. She moved out of our home and was living in hotels. Eventually my daughter and the baby moved in with the father's family. CPS became involved when the father had domestic violence charges filed against him." It was then that Donna and her husband obtained joint custody of their grandson with his mother. The family has since rallied around them and has been very supportive. Still, a challenge for Donna is knowing that she and her husband were supposed to have an "empty nest." "Being older and having to start all over again with an 18-month-old running around was a real adjustment. I'm having trouble keeping up with him." Donna wanted nothing more than to "teach her daughter how to be a mom." Although her daughter does not live with her, she comes around periodically and visits the baby.

Dawn

When Dawn got her now 5-year-old granddaughter at 21 months, the parents were unable to care for the child because they were both incarcerated. Dawn's daughter was addicted to drugs when the baby was born. As a consequence, Dawn's granddaughter was taken at birth and placed in foster care. "My daughter has since created a more stable life for herself. She's got a job, her GED, is married, and has retained the services of an attorney. She has met with my granddaughter three times and is attempting to get her back." Her daughter now lives in another state, and Dawn's fear is that if her daughter gains custody of her granddaughter, she and the rest of the family will not be able to see the little girl they have become so close to. So in Dawn's case, while she stepped in to help, there is now increased tension between her daughter and the rest of the family.

Julie

Julie has five grandchildren, has cared for four at one time, and is currently raising her four-year old twin granddaughters. The twins were born with drugs in their systems due to their mother's addiction problem. Though Julie's daughter went into a drug rehabilitation center and moved in and out of Julie's home for the first 4 years, her daughter was unable to become stable enough to care for the twins. Julie filed for custody and was granted guardianship for both babies. Julie had a difficult time with family and friends. "Family and friends don't always understand. People told me I shouldn't be doing this and relatives thought I was being too nice to my daughters to let my grandchildren move in and out. My husband thought I was putting my children and grandchildren over him. Some of my friends, who were used to not having children anymore stopped inviting me to dinners."

Karen

"My daughter and the father of her baby were both 15 when she got pregnant with my granddaughter. My daughter and one-year-old granddaughter both live with us now and we want to make sure our daughter finishes high school. Though we're helping my daughter raise her child, the father is in my granddaughter's life." In raising her granddaughter, Karen had forgotten about the time commitment in raising children. She has long days (beginning at 5 am when her granddaughter awakens) which last until midnight when the baby goes to sleep. Though Karen's family plans to move to a smaller home, and has depleted all of their savings and refinanced everything to care for the baby, they "wouldn't trade it for anything." They love their daughter and their granddaughter.

Connie

Connie's daughter wanted to work and Connie offered to care for her grandchildren rather than sending them to childcare outside of the family. However, as much as she wants to be there for the 3 grandchildren she is raising, Connie still needs time away. She doesn't mind staying home "when they go somewhere" with their mother. Connie stated that, "Sometimes moms need to bond with kids more and be more involved. Expose them to things." Connie felt like she took over being her grandchildren's parent, even though her daughter has lived with her for most of the children's lives. Connie's greatest challenge has been, "Not stepping in but stepping back and letting the parents take over. If the child makes a mess get mom to clean it up and allow parents to be parents."

What Grandparents Need

For many grandparents who have already raised their own families, caring for a very young child is a big adjustment. Grandparents often need:

- Financial assistance
- Supportive counseling
- Advocacy
- Legal assistance
- Respite care (e.g. another caregiver or agency arranging care for children ranging from a few hours to a few days to give the primary caregiver a break)



The following stories can help us more fully understand and appreciate grandparent's needs:

Rena

For Rena who raised a 21-year-old granddaughter from birth and is now raising a 5-year-old granddaughter, her family had financial difficulties and she has health challenges, but somehow they have made it work. "Grandparents need financial help to raise grandchildren – money to care for themselves and the babies. We need security. The paperwork and "red tape" is also difficult. Respite care is a must for grandparents raising grandchildren."

Julie

Julie wishes there could have been more financial support when she began caring for her four grandchildren, two of whom she is still raising. "I make too much to get help but not enough to get ahead. Some help with diapers, respite care or even someone to volunteer to baby-sit for a few hours would have been welcomed. I'm doing the best I can with what I have. So I found that you have to take time for yourself. Having a good advocate helps, especially when grandparents find themselves in family court and making all kinds of decisions that they can sometimes feel unprepared for."

Loretta

Loretta has permanent custody of all five of her grandchildren after a lengthy court battle and the children moving back and forth between herself and her daughter. She would like to eventually adopt all of her grandchildren. Loretta could have also used a lawyer for legal help. "There was nobody to help. I got a pro-bono lawyer but could only get help with temporary custody. The legal system needs to help grandparents more. The court system makes decisions/plans for these children, but then sends them back into the community with the same challenges that put them into the court system in the first place."

Supporting Families: Quick Tips for Staff

Most of our grandparents were grateful for the assistance of Head Start and Early Head Start programs. Many felt supported in their new role as parent/grandparent and expressed what was most helpful to them:

- EHS staff who listened and were patient.
- Home-visitors who provided age-appropriate activities and toys, and supportive behavioral and play strategies for grandparents in working with their grandchild.
- EHS staff that linked grandparents to other resources as needed (e.g. WIC; legal services; food programs).
- EHS staff that helped make the grandchild's transition from EHS to HS smooth.

Featured Grandparent's: Final Thoughts of Wisdom

Our grandparents were asked to give advice to other grandparents raising grandchildren and here are some of their responses:

- *Once you see a problem with your children, look for help.*
- *Find a Kinship Care Program close by and get involved.*
- *Take one day at a time. Ask for strength, patience and understanding.*
- *Make lemonade out of lemons.*
- *Love "em" and give "em" a lot of attention.*
- *Family's all you've got in this lifetime. Be patient. It might look bad right now but it will get better the next day.*
- *Explore the possibility of joining a Grandparent Support Group.*
- *You have to take care of yourself.*

And finally, all of the grandparents shared the same general feeling about raising their grandchildren. Despite all of their challenges and need for more resources, most of our grandparents stated that they would "not change a thing" in raising their grandchildren. In fact, Donna summed it up nicely by saying that her grandson is "the sun in the morning and the moon and stars at night."

EHS NRC would like to thank all of the grandparents for agreeing to be interviewed and for sharing their personal stories.

RESPONDING TO GRANDPARENTS AROUND THE COUNTRY

AARP Foundation Grandparent Information Center (GIC)

The AARP Foundation GIC was established to support grandparents and grandchildren in finding resources that strengthen health, finances and family linkages. The GIC provides written materials on grand parenting issues, and links to needed and supportive resources (e.g. housing; financial; legal) in local communities. This information can be helpful for EHS staff in supporting grandparents and families in identifying assistance and resources beyond HS and EHS programs. All web-based materials with active links are listed in the resources section.

ACF Region IV

In response to the needs in the southern region, ACF Region IV has served on a coalition of public and private agencies that has begun working together to address the needs of grandparent-headed families. The Governor of Georgia, in collaboration with the Georgia Division on Aging and Area Agency on Aging, committed to developing 12 Kinship Care Centers across the state. These centers allow grandparents to receive information about needed services and resources from a central location.

Other States

Other states have also developed kinship centers and other facilities to support grandparent-headed families. The Florida Kinship Center and the New Jersey Kinship Navigator Program are 2 such programs. In Dorchester, MA, GrandFamilies House established in 1998, was the first housing initiative of its kind in the country specifically developed for grandparents raising grandchildren (Gottlieb and Silverman, 2003). GrandFamilies House provides apartments for 26 local area grandparent-headed families in which the grandparent has permanent custody of the grandchildren.

Enhanced Home Visiting Project (EHVP)

The Office of Head Start launched the EHVP in 2004. This 3-year national initiative was designed to develop and support home visiting models which recognize that, when a caregiver of an Early Head Start child is not the child's parent, it is important that the caregiver has the knowledge, training and skills necessary to help the child develop to his or her highest potential, including the development of such important skills as language, reasoning, and problem solving. Of the 23 funded programs, 18 programs enrolled and supported mostly grandmothers or other female relatives who were caring for their grandchildren. For more information on participating programs please see the link to the EHS NRC website in the resources section of this edition.

For More Information...check out these resources

RESOURCES

American Association for Retired Persons (2006). Grandparenting: The joys and challenges. Washington, DC: Author.

American Association for Retired Persons Grandparent Information Center. (2006). Lean on me: A film about grandparents and other relatives raising grandchildren. Washington, DC: Author.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Region IV. (2007). Grandparents raising grandchildren: A call to action. Washington, DC: Author.

WEB-BASED RESOURCES

Gottlieb, A.S. and Silverstein, N.M. (2003). Growing pains and challenges: GrandFamilies house four-year follow-up evaluation. Gerontology Institute, University of Massachusetts: Boston.

<http://www.geront.umb.edu/inst/pubAndStudies/GFHFfinal.pdf>

Kreader, J. L., Ferguson, D., and Lawrence, S. (2005). Infant and toddler child care arrangements. National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_628.html

Simmons, T. and Dye, J.L. (2003). Grandparents living with grandchildren: 2000. U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, U.S. Census Bureau.

<http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/c2kbr-31.pdf>

State of New Jersey. (2003). New Jersey: A state fact sheet for grandparents and other relatives raising children.

<http://www.spannj.org/Family2Family/kincarenj.pdf>

WEBSITES

AARP Grandparent Information Center (GIC)
1-888-OUR-AARP (1-888-687-2277)

<http://www.aarp.org/families/grandparents/gic/a2004-01-16-grandparentsinfocenter.html>

The Florida Kinship Center
University of South Florida

<http://www.flkin.usf.edu/>

Early Head Start National Resource Center @ ZERO TO THREE

Information on the Enhanced Home Visiting Project
<http://www.ehsnrc.org>

EHS NRC Resources & Upcoming Events

Fall 2007



Save the Date

12th Annual Birth To Three Institute: August 4-7, 2008

Marriott Wardman Park Hotel in Washington, DC

- *Want to present at the 12th Annual Birth To Three Institute? Call for Proposals is available online at www.ehsnrc.org through January 5, 2008.*
- *Stay tuned for information on an EHS NRC audio conference on supporting grandparents planned for June, 2008.*