

HELPING GRANDPARENTS RAISE GRANDCHILDREN WHO SUCCEED

ABOUT THIS SERIES

The area of human services is a long-standing priority for members of the Association of Small Foundations (ASF). According to the ASF 2007-2008 Foundation Operations & Management Report, ASF members gave more than \$620 million to human services in their most recent fiscal year, second only to education. At the core of human services is the well-being of children and families. This Discussion Guide, one of a series, is designed to: provide clear and concise information to ASF members and other small foundations on strategies for supporting nonprofits that serve vulnerable children and families; and to share concrete ways that small foundations can invest in creating productive adulthood for vulnerable children.

This Discussion Guide series is funded by and draws learning, and resources of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The Casey Foundation is the largest philanthropy in the U.S. dedicated to improving the lives of vulnerable children and families. The Casey Foundation is driven by its mission to find the most effective solutions that narrow the gap between children growing up in areas of concentrated poverty and their peers. Their work reflects the core belief that children do well when their families are strong and families in supportive communities are able to raise healthy and productive children.

MAKING THE CASE

Across the United States, millions on grandparents are raising grandchildren, and the number continues to rise. These grandparents are providing critical support to their grandchildren, keeping families together when parents are unable care for their children for reasons including drug abuse, child abuse, neglect, poverty, incarceration or mental or physical illnesses (including HIV/AIDS). Poverty is a serious threat for these children, with one-third living below the poverty line.

It is likely that in your corner of the country and the communities in which you work, there is a need – and a gap you can help fill – for effective and creative grantmaking in support of improving the lives of families in which grandparents are raising grandchildren.

One example of effective and creative grantmaking to fill this gap is the Relatives as Parents Program (RAPP) of The Brookdale Foundation Group in New York. In this grant program, the Brookdale Foundation Group provides two-year, \$10,000 seed grants to local and state agencies to encourage and promote the creation or expansion of services for grandparents and other relatives who have taken on the responsibility of surrogate parenting due to the absence of the parents. Said one grandparent in Virginia about the program: “As a disabled grandmother with three grandkids living in the home with me, I cannot describe what the [Relatives as Parents Program] has done for me in the past three years. We have benefited from the Holidays for Kids program, summer pool parties and the Boy Scouts, who provide a kids night out party. [Relatives as Parents Program] has provided educational programs that address issues of correct discipline for children, stress, health care, estate planning, mental health issues, housing and special services available to [Relatives as Parents Program] relative caregivers.”

This discussion guide is focused specifically on strategies for supporting nonprofits that address the needs of helping grandparents raise grandchildren to succeed. This guide includes the fact sheet *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren* from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, suggestions on ways you can invest in this specific area, questions for discussion, and where to find additional information and resources. Whether you already fund human services and education, or are considering doing so, the guide will spark your thinking – and that of your peers – and deepen your understanding of effective strategies to support nonprofits and their programs to improve the lives of vulnerable children and families in your corner of the country.

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren*

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The Data

- **Millions of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren.**

Since 1990, the number of children living in households maintained by grandparents has increased by 30%.¹ In 2000, 5.8 million grandparents were living with one or more grandchildren.² Of these, 2.4 million grandparents were solely responsible for meeting the basic food, shelter, and clothing needs of their grandchildren.² Such grandparents keep families together when parents are unable to care for their children due to factors such as drug abuse, child abuse and neglect, poverty, incarceration, or mental or physical illnesses including HIV/AIDS. In 2001, 1.4 million children (1.9% of all children) were living in their grandparents' homes without their parents present.³

- **Relationship with the Foster Care System.**

Although some grandparents care for grandchildren under the auspices of the foster care system, most do not. If even half the children raised by grandparents and other relatives were to enter the formal foster care system, taxpayer costs would increase by more than \$6.5 billion per year.⁴

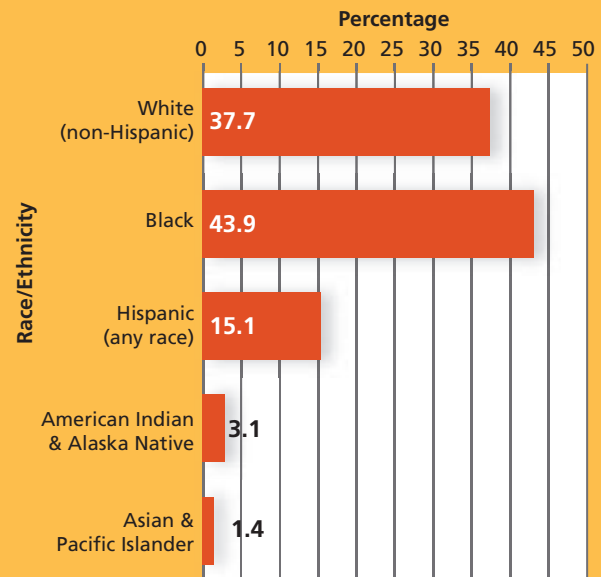
- **Race/Ethnicity.** A disproportionate percentage of grandparents and grandchildren in these families are African-American. In 2001, 43.9% of grandchildren living with grandparents without parents present were African-American.³

- **Poverty and Access to Public Subsidy Programs.** Almost one-third of children cared for by their grandparents live in poverty, but only 17% receive public assistance and only 18% receive food stamps.⁵

- **Age and Health Status of Grandparents.** Close to 30% of grandparents caring for grandchildren are over age 60.² More than half report at least one limitation in activities of daily living, such as difficulty in climbing a flight of stairs.⁶ Caregiving grandparents are more likely to be depressed than non-caregiving grandparents (25.1% versus 14.5%).⁶

- **Age, Health Status, and Life Success of Grandchildren.** Children being raised by grandparents, about one-quarter of whom are age 5 or under,⁵ face challenges often due to their poverty status and to the experiences that led to their grandparents taking on their care.

Race/Ethnicity of Grandchildren Living with Grandparents, Without Parents Present (2001)



Source: Kreider & Fields (2005).³ Survey of Income Program Participation

More than one-third do not have health insurance,⁵ and more than one-quarter under 6 years of age had no well child care in the past year.⁷ About twice the percentage of children cared for by relatives (including grandparents) as by their own parents suffer limiting physical health conditions (14% vs. 8%) and are in only poor or fair health (7% versus 4%).⁸ About 9% of 6-17-year-olds being raised by grandparents have high levels of behavioral or emotional problems.⁷ Nevertheless, among children in the foster care system, those raised by relatives (including grandparents) are better off than those raised by non-relatives, perhaps because they are more likely to remain connected to their siblings, relatives, and culture.^{9,10} They are less likely to be placed in special education, to repeat a grade, or to be truant, delinquent, or run away,¹¹ and their lives are more stable: they are more likely to stay within the same community and school system.¹⁰

* This issue brief focuses on grandparents caring for grandchildren without parents present in the household.

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The Issues

- **Legal Arrangements.** Grandparents raise grandchildren under a variety of legal and custody arrangements, which result in differing legal rights, eligibility for financial subsidies, and relationships with birth parents. Depending on their legal arrangements, grandparents may have difficulty registering children for school or accessing benefits for them such as health insurance,¹ and they may need legal services to help and guide them.
- **Needs for Health and Social Services.** Both grandparents and grandchildren may have greater than average needs for mental health, physical health, and supportive social services, and they benefit when they receive them.¹² Unfortunately, they may not always be able to receive the services they need⁸ – especially if they are outside the formal foster care system – and they may feel lonely and isolated.¹
- **Affordable Housing.** Taking in grandchildren can mean crowded housing conditions, which can hamper grandparents' ability to gain legal custody or lead to eviction, if grandparents are living in places where the number of tenants is restricted or children are not allowed. Federal legislation (the 2003 LEGACY bill) to create public housing demonstration projects for multigenerational families has not yet been fully funded.⁴

Options for Philanthropy

- **Support kinship navigator programs (hotlines or help desks)** that help grandparents learn for which public programs they may be eligible, and where they can find support and services. Connect these hotlines to follow-up service programs.
- **Flexible programs, comprehensive services, affordable housing, and social support.** Support (1) affordable housing; (2) flexible, in-home and community-based legal, physical and mental health, and social services for grandparents and grandchildren; (3) support groups, informal supports, and social networks; (4) respite programs for grandparents who may need time off from caring for their grandchildren; and (5) child care services to help working grandparents.
- **Support advocacy for policies** such as: (1) affordable housing; (2) enhanced eligibility for physical and mental health services, Food Stamps, and TANF (cash assistance); (3) subsidized guardianship programs for children who are in the foster care system (such programs provide income support to grandparents and more permanency for children without severing relationships with biological parents or requiring continued oversight by the foster care system); and (4) "preventive" subsidized guardianship arrangements to help keep children from entering the foster care system.¹³

Resources

Background

AARP: <http://www.aarp.org/families/grandparents/>

Administration on Aging: http://www.aoa.gov/prof/notes/notes_grandparents.asp

Child Welfare League of America: <http://www.cwla.org/programs/kinship/>

Children's Defense Fund: http://www.childrensdefense.org/site/PageServer?pagename=research_publications_kinship_care

Generations United: www.gu.org

The Annie E. Casey Foundation: <http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/lmcl/readingroom/documents/Kincare.pdf>

U.S. Government: <http://www.usa.gov/Topics/Grandparents.shtml>

Program Models

Grandparent Family Connections: http://family.umaryland.edu/community_services/gfc.htm; fstriede@ssw.umaryland.edu

Edgewood's Kinship Support Network: <http://www.edgewoodcenter.org/programs/>

GrandFamilies House and housing issues: http://ipath.gu.org/documents/A0/GU_Housing_Actionfinal.pdf

The Brookdale Foundation's Relatives as Parents Program: <http://www.brookdalefoundation.org/relativesasparents.htm>

Prepared by Deanna S. Gomby and Lisa W. Deal for the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Design by Craig Snelgrove, San Francisco. To recommend amendments, please contact clyerly@aecf.org.

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HOW YOU AS A FUNDER CAN ACT

There are many ways that you as a funder can act to support grandparents raising grandchildren that succeed. Strategies that have proven to be effective in communities across the United States include:

Support kinship navigator programs.

Kinship navigator programs are generally hotlines or help desks that help grandparents learn for which public programs they may be eligible, and where they can find support and services. As a foundation, you could also connect these hotlines to follow-up service programs.

Support the services grandparents raising grandchildren need: flexible programs, comprehensive services, affordable housing, and social support.

Unlike many other complex issues, the services and support grandparents raising their grandchildren need are well known. Consider funding: (1) affordable housing; (2) flexible, in-home and community-based legal, physical and mental health, and social services for grandparents and grandchildren; (3) support groups, informal supports, and social networks; (4) respite programs for grandparents who may need time off from caring for their grandchildren; and (5) child care services to help working grandparents.

Fund and engage in advocacy on issues that will help grandparents raise their grandchildren to succeed.

While foundations cannot engage in partisan political activity, lobbying or earmark grants for lobbying purposes, they can fund and engage in advocacy! Common funding strategies for advocacy include giving project support or general operating support to organizations that engage in advocacy and issuing reports on advocacy work. Funders can also engage in advocacy by bringing together grantees, policymakers, or other interested persons to discuss a particular legislative or other policy issue; educating the public on issues by writing letters to the editor, putting information up on its Web site, hosting a public forum, taking out ads and much more. To learn more about how private foundations *can and cannot* engage in advocacy, see the ASF Primer listed in Additional Resources below.

Issues to consider doing advocacy work around to support this population include: (1) affordable housing; (2) enhanced eligibility for physical and mental health services, Food Stamps, and TANF (cash assistance); (3) subsidized guardianship programs for children who are in the foster care system (such programs provide income support to grandparents and more permanency for children without severing relationships with biological parents or requiring continued oversight by the foster care system); and (4) "preventive" subsidized guardianship arrangements to help keep children from entering the foster care system.

Give more than money.

Foundations have much to offer beyond their philanthropic funds. A few ideas include:

- Provide space (i.e. conference room) at your foundation, if available, for grandparent support group meetings.
- Convene a group of diverse stakeholders to talk about and draw awareness of the challenges both the grandparents and the grandchildren in these relationships face.
- Convene your grantees for a peer learning workshop to share best practices in serving this special population.
- Post a list of local resources for grandparents raising grandchildren on your foundation's website.

RESOURCES AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

1. Annie E. Casey Foundation (www.acef.org)
2. Generations United (www.gu.org)
3. AARP (www.aarp.org/grandparents)
4. Children's Defense Fund (www.childrensdefense.org)
5. Child Welfare League of America (www.cwla.org/programs/kinship/)
7. National Administration on Aging (www.aoa.gov/prof/notes/notes_grandparents.asp)
8. The Brookdale Foundation Relatives as Parents Program (RAPP) and publication *Promising Practices in Encouraging & Supporting Grandparents and Relatives Raising Children* (www.brookdalefoundation.org/relativesasparents.htm)
9. Grandparent Family Connections (www.family.umaryland.edu/ryc_best_practice_services/grandparent_family_connections.htm)
10. Edgewood's Kinship Support Network (www.edgewood.org/whatwedo/kinship)
11. Family Funders Network (www.familyfunders.org)
12. State Fact Sheets for Grandparents and Other Relatives Raising Children (www.grandfactsheets.org)
13. Grantmakers for Children, Youth, and Families (www.gcyf.org)
14. ASF Primer *Funding and Engaging in Advocacy* (www.smallfoundations.org)

OTHER DISCUSSION GUIDES IN THIS SERIES

This discussion guide is one in a series on specific topics related to supporting nonprofits that serve vulnerable children and families. For other discussion guides, and for information on hosting an ASF Local Program please contact ASF toll-free at 888-212-9922 or asf@smallfoundations.org.