

## Grandparents and Other Relatives Raising Children: Providing Services for Caregivers of All Ages

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### INTRODUCTION

According to the U.S. Census 2000, more than six million children across the country are living in households maintained by grandparents or other relatives.<sup>1</sup> Currently, more than 2.4 million grandparents in the U.S. have taken primary responsibility for meeting the basic needs of their grandchildren.<sup>2</sup> Although the age range of grandparent caregivers is broad, 71% percent of these grandparents are under 60 years old.<sup>3</sup> Factors such as parental substance abuse, incarceration, HIV/AIDS, death, poverty, and even 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)<sup>4</sup> provides the most comprehensive services to caregivers over 60 years old. Through the NFCSP, states are authorized to use up to 10% of program funds to provide supportive services to grandparents and other relatives over the age of 60 who are raising relatives' children.<sup>5</sup>

The information presented in this fact sheet is intended to stimulate dialogue on the NFCSP and to encourage collaborative efforts in meeting the needs of all grandparent and other relative caregivers and the children in their care. This fact sheet will emphasize the need to expand the system of services to all ages of relative caregivers to address the unique challenges of caregivers under age 60. Furthermore, this fact sheet will highlight successful program models for all relative caregivers, including those under age 60.

### CHALLENGES FOR RELATIVE CAREGIVERS OF ALL AGES

Relative caregivers raising children have a wide variety of service and support needs. Most caregivers do not expect to assume the care of a relative's child. Lifestyles, homes, and financial resources may not be sufficient for assuming the responsibility of caring for children. Additionally, relative caregivers under age 60 may be raising children of their own. They may be employed or planning for retirement. Regardless of age, this unexpected responsibility may change the lives of relative caregivers dramatically.

Caregivers raising kin children face significant challenges. For example, many relative caregiver families do not have access to adequate housing. It is difficult for relative caregivers to obtain useful information and assistance on services that can help them. Further, relative caregivers with no legal relationship may have limited ability to access medical, educational, or financial services to meet children's needs.

**Physical and Mental Health of Caregivers-** A study of relative caregivers receiving child-only Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) grants revealed that relative caregivers have poorer health than their non-caregiving counterparts.<sup>6</sup> On average, relative caregivers in their early 50s had the same level of physical health to that of a 70-year-old in the general non-caregiving population. Because 75% of the relative caregivers in the study were under 60 years old (with an average age of 52), the results may suggest that since the full group had such poor health, caregivers under 60 have abnormally poor health.

**Vulnerability to Poverty-** Regardless of age, grandparent-maintained families, with or without parents present, are more likely to live in poverty than parent-maintained families.<sup>7</sup> Twenty-six percent (26%) of grandparents over 60 who are raising grandchild(ren) live in poverty, while (22%) of grandparents under 60 raising grandchildren live in poverty, despite the fact that they are over twice as likely to be working.

**Potential Challenges for Caregivers Under Age 60-** Relative caregivers under the age of 60 face several unique challenges. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of

these caregivers are in the workforce, compared to 29% of those over 60.<sup>8</sup> Because relative caregivers under 60 comprise the majority of working-caregivers, they may experience additional stress and require employer support, assistance in navigating social services, and help in accessing accurate information. Relative caregivers under age 60 may also spend their savings or retirement (time and money) to help care for children.

### SERVICES AVAILABLE THROUGH THE NFCSP

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging (AoA) administers the NFCSP program and provides funds to the states. States in turn fund Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) to provide five categories of supportive services. Supportive services include:

- Information to caregivers about available services;
- Assistance to caregivers in gaining access to the services;
- Individual counseling, organization of support groups, caregiver training;
- Respite care; and
- Supplemental services to complement care provided by caregivers.<sup>9</sup>

Since NFCSP funded programs can only provide supportive services to caregivers over age 60, it is especially important for service organizations to be creative in piecing together resources to meet the needs of relative caregivers under age 60.

### NEED FOR COLLABORATION

Comprehensive support to relative caregivers can be provided through partnerships and collaborations, such as those between community service providers and AAAs. Many of the services provided for relative caregiver families require creative collaboration between and within the aging network and children and youth organizations.

By working through a variety of service providers in the aging network and the child welfare system, more families are likely to be identified and educated on services available to them. As providers consider programs and ways to serve caregivers, including those under age 60, it is important to remember that providing supportive services to caregivers is also a child welfare issue. Because the availability of resources, programs, and services varies from state-to-state, services providers must cooperate and creatively design and fund programs for relative caregivers of all ages.

The NFCSP is the largest source of Federal funding for services to caregivers. However, other public and private resources are available to serve the broadest spectrum of caregivers through collaboration. Potential collaborative partners include: Cooperative Extension Services, AARP, Departments of Child Welfare, State Boards of Education, Public Health, Bar Associations, Medical Societies, Medical Auxiliaries, youth organizations, Museum Programs, Head Start, and local school districts.

**Funding and Programming Resources-** The Brookdale Foundation's Relatives As Parents Program (RAPP) is a comprehensive nationwide network of support groups providing high quality services to relative caregivers of all ages and their families. To accomplish this, RAPPs create collaborative partnerships with community organizations and other service systems including family services, child care, aging, education, legal, health care, mental health, cooperative extension services, and universities. For more information on the Brookdale Foundation RAPP grants, call 212-308-7355 or [www.brookdalefoundation.org](http://www.brookdalefoundation.org).

## PROGRAM MODELS FOR RELATIVE CAREGIVERS OF ALL AGES

**Virginia-** Mountain Empire Older Citizens (MEOC), the AAA in Big Stone Gap, Virginia, coordinates KinCare-a program for grandparents and other relatives raising children. KinCare provides assistance and referral, in addition to other services, and is available to any relative-headed family. Families receive a comprehensive assessment, and are given information and resources. MEOC uses NFCSP funds for the support group aspects of its program. Other funds, including TANF funds, state funds and Brookdale Foundation RAPP funds are used to pay for the intake and resource directory services. All services are provided by MEOC regardless of age or income. For more information, contact Carol Moore, KinCare Director (276) 523-4202 or cmoore@meoc.org.

**Illinois-** Most of Illinois' 13 AAAs are serving relative caregivers under age 60 through support groups, gap-filling services, and respite. The AAAs use state funds available from the Illinois Department of Aging. Those funds have no age restriction on their use. The AAAs serve relative caregivers over age 60 using NFCSP funds. The AAAs also use NFCSP monies to fund their support groups, which any relative caregiver, regardless of age, is permitted to attend. For more information, contact Barbara Schwartz, Coordinator, Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Program, (217) 524-5327 or Barb.Schwartz@aging.state.il.us.

**Wisconsin-** The "Grandparent Support Network of Winnebago County" provides monthly support group meetings, family meals, and outreach efforts via workshops and media for grandparents raising children. A "patchwork" of funding from 14 agencies, partner organizations, local grants, and NFCSP funding allows for services to be provided to grandparents and relative caregivers of all ages. For more information contact Christine Kniep, Family Living Educator, Winnebago County Phone: 920-232-1973 E-mail: christine.kniep@ces.uwex.edu

**Washington State-** In Pierce County, the Washington Aging and Long Term Care AAA offers support groups for caregivers of all ages. NFCSP funds are not directly used to fund the groups, but are used to pay part of the program coordinator's salary. However, the support group facilitators are primarily volunteers. Childcare is provided during two of the groups through a collaborating agency and volunteers. Two other support groups are affiliated with school districts, which provide the meeting facilities, a family support worker, and a behavioral therapist to facilitate the groups. For the last two years the AAA has been using NFCSP funding to provide individual and family counseling to caregivers over age 60 through the mental health agency with which it subcontracts. Because the counseling is offered through a mental health agency that serves youth and families, younger relative caregivers may be referred to other programs within the agency and community. For more information about this program, contact Connie Kline, Program Specialist (253) 798-3782 or ckline@co.pierce.wa.us

**Oklahoma-** Oklahoma's Department of Human Services (DHS), Aging Services Division developed the Oklahoma Respite Resource Network, which provides life-span respite care to various categories of caregivers, including grandparents and other relatives raising children. The program is centrally administered through DHS. NFCSP funds are used to pay for respite for relative caregivers age 60 and older. For those under age 60, state funds are used to finance the program. An approved caregiver receives a voucher and can purchase respite service from any provider 18 years or older not living in the same home with the caregiver. For additional information, contact Diana Everett, Respite Coordinator (405) 522-6241 or diana.everett@okdhs.org.

**Oregon -** Using NFCSP funds, the Mid-Willamette Valley Senior Services Agency provides supplemental services to the grandparent caregivers. AAA staff refer caregivers under age 60 to community partners who can provide services to them.

For more information, contact Debbie Waring, Family Caregiver Support Program Coordinator (800)-469-8772 x491 or debbie.waring@state.or.us

## POLICY INITIATIVES

The need to develop services for relative caregivers of all ages is paramount. Services to relative caregivers can be more comprehensive and not limited by age-eligibility requirements. Currently, creative programming and blended funding are the most successful means to providing services to all ages of caregivers. While collaborative programs are able to serve relative caregivers under 60, policies must be considered that serve relative caregivers under age 60 more effectively. Potential and proposed policy initiatives include measures to address how all caregivers can have access to appropriate housing, necessary respite care, and information through kinship navigator programs.

## CONCLUSION

The 60-year-old eligibility requirement is a legislative limitation. The NFCSP illustrates a federal acknowledgment that all relative caregivers raising children need support, and is a call to action. Funds through the NFCSP are a resource to develop and enhance services to relative caregivers who are stepping in to raise relatives' children. Those tasked to serve relative caregiver families can begin to meet the needs of all relative caregivers, regardless of age, through creative collaborations and partnerships within and among aging, children's and community organizations.

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For further information, please contact: Generations United, 1333 H Street, NW, Suite 500 West, Washington, DC 20005-4752; e-mail: gu@gu.org. The GU web site at www.gu.org contains additional information about grandparents and other relatives raising children.

*Generations United (GU) is the national membership organization focused solely on promoting inter-generational strategies, programs, and policies. GU represents more than 100 national, state, and local organizations representing more than 70 million Americans. It is the only national organization advocating for the mutual well-being of children, youth, and older adults. 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.*



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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census 2000 SF1, table P28, Relationship by Household Type for Population Under 18 Years.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census 2000. DP-2, Grandparent Caregivers in the United States, the 50 States, and the District of Columbia.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. Census 2000. 1-Percent Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) file.

<sup>4</sup> Public Law 106-501. Section 316.

<sup>5</sup> Public Law 106-501. Section 373(g)(2)(C).

<sup>6</sup> Wood, R.G. & Strong, D.A. June 2002. *Trends in Welfare-to-Work: The Status of Child-Only TANF Families: Evidence from New Jersey*. Issue Brief, #3. Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

<sup>7</sup> 2000 Census Integrated Public Use Micro data [IPUMS] data set, as derived by the University of Minnesota Population Center.

<sup>8</sup> 2000 Census Integrated Public Use Micro data [IPUMS] data set, as derived by the University of Minnesota Population Center.

<sup>9</sup> Public Law 106-501. Section 373(b)(1-5).