

Grandfamilies: A Blueprint for Coordinated Action

Summary of results from November 19, 2013 Convening

On November 19th, 2013, Generations United's National Center on Grandfamilies convened its fourth gathering of national grandfamilies/kinship care experts. Roughly every five years since 1997 we have held one of these convenings, which are critical to coordinating and prioritizing our collective work. With support from both Casey Family Programs and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, we invited 39 caregivers, direct service providers, kinship leaders from national nonprofits and government agencies, and a youth raised by his grandmother. The all-day meeting resulted in this blueprint, which will guide our future collective work. We will continue to act on this blueprint through Generations United's National Grandfamilies Partnership Working Group's quarterly meetings. For more information on the work of Generations United's national Center on Grandfamilies visit www.gu.org.

SHARED VISION: Every child living in a grandfamily thrives because grandfamilies are empowered, and the necessary supports are available to them to ensure this can happen.

CORE VALUES: Asset-focused, culturally informed, evidence-driven, family and youth-centered

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Grandfamilies and those who advocate with them have had many accomplishments in the five years since the last convening. Key highlights include:

- Successful third and fourth national GrandRallies on Capitol Hill
- Passage and implementation of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Fostering Connections Act)
- Implementation of Guardianship Assistance Programs (GAPs) in 33 jurisdictions around the country
- 10th anniversary of the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP)
- Opening of two LEGACY affordable housing demonstrations in Smithville, Tennessee and Chicago, Illinois

Grandfamilies: A Blueprint for Coordinated Action

LESSONS LEARNED (IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER):

1. Kinship caregiver, foster parent, and youth voices were critical to passage of the Fostering Connections Act and must be part of all our advocacy efforts.
2. Focusing on the “children” in our messaging work has been instrumental in improving the image of the families and increasing supports.
3. Bringing all family members to the table when addressing children’s needs is critical.
4. The best laws only help grandfamilies once they are implemented.
5. Persistence is key.
6. There is a need to acknowledge and address the inequities in supports that relative caregivers have depending solely on whether they are licensed foster parents or not.
7. Every conversation about kinship care should start with values and philosophy.
8. It is critical to have culturally informed and culturally sensitive policies and programming.

ELEVATING, ENGAGING, AND EMPOWERING CAREGIVERS AND YOUTH IN POLICYMAKING:

This is an overarching area that impacts all the others that follow.

Key Strategies:

1. Diverse caregiver and youth voices must be central in developing action plans affecting them.
2. Caregivers and youth should be engaged as lead advocates in moving those action plans forward.
3. Caregiver and youth testimonials about the need for and impact of change are critical– e.g., with respect to GAP, affordable housing, foster care licensing requirements that preclude placement, and children kept out of school and not receiving health care because of caregiver’s lack of a legal relationship.

Needs/Next steps:

- Scan current kinship advocacy efforts/capacities
- Identify key caregivers and youth for each state and at least one tribal partner to have a kinship advocacy team (modeled on foster alumni network and Second Chance model)
- Collect, coordinate, and update training tools and materials
- Develop everyday language for speaking about emerging issues using caregiver/youth voice

Grandfamilies: A Blueprint for Coordinated Action

- Develop, implement, and evaluate ongoing caregiver training plan
- Determine how to use social media
- Hold Capitol Hill hearings and briefings
- Create ombudsman/watch group

COLLECTIVE ACTION PRIORITIES FOR NEXT FIVE YEARS:

The group lifted up the first two items in this list as action priorities, and acknowledged the others as important, but did not rank them. The caregiver and youth voice is critical to moving each policy area forward – please see above.



DIVERSION

Who is doing what?

- Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) Kinship Diversion debate paper on its website and on www.grandfamilies.org
- Family Connection/kinship navigator grants are collecting data
- Several states are looking more closely at this issue including:
 - PA has due process lawsuits occurring – new lens for looking at diversion
 - Erie, NY looking at diversion model and what is needed
 - DE and VA are looking at supportive diversion model

Research/data needs

- How many kids are diverted? Are they entering foster care after unsuccessful diversion attempts?
- How are they doing? Long-term well-being data is needed.
- Are there trauma data connected to service systems? How many kids are going into other systems (e.g., juvenile system)? Does Child Trends have a tool to help with this?
- What are the numbers of diverted families accessing benefits? e.g., Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- How much does assignment of child support to the state affect kinship foster parents? Do they not want to be licensed because the state pursues the parents for enforcement?
- What is the value of support groups (pilot study by Grandfamilies Outcome Work Group - GrOW)?
- Are there models of successful supported diversion programs in states, counties or tribal communities?

Grandfamilies: A Blueprint for Coordinated Action

- Are any innovative approaches being used by tribes?
- How many caregivers of diverted children establish a legal relationship in court?
- How many children return to their biological parents and how soon after diversion?
- What is the best way to determine if caregivers were able to make informed decisions not to pursue licensing?

Opportunities

- There is external pressure for agencies to examine diversion policies
- Child welfare policymakers seem ready to take a fresh look at effect of diversion on children and families

Messaging

- Lift up impact of diversion on children, caregivers, and parents
- Focus on the trauma to children and uncertainty about the future
- Highlight the legal and emotional limbo for children and families
- Show what it means in the long-term for children
- Frame it with a connection to civil rights laws and perhaps engage in litigation
- Shine a light on organizations that are successful
- Discuss the cultural appropriateness of diversion for families in tribal settings



SUSTAINABILITY PLAN FOR UPDATING GRANDFACTS SHEETS AND WWW.GRANDFAMILIES.ORG

Who is doing what?

- National Kinship Alliance for Children with 7000 members has a warm line staffed by caregivers, volunteers, and board members. They would love to turn it into national call center, but they have no resources. They rely on grandfacts sheets and www.grandfamilies.org to provide assistance.
- Many organizations get calls from caregivers. Need national number rather than individual organizations doing it.
- AARP hosts www.grandfactsheets.org with a fact sheet for each state and DC. Corrections and updates can be sent to AARP's email on the sheets, but there is no annual process for regular updates.

Grandfamilies: A Blueprint for Coordinated Action

- Generations United and the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law with the support of Casey Family Programs created and maintain www.grandfamilies.org, which has a database of state laws and legislation affecting the families, analyses of the legal issues, and additional resources.

Research/data needs

- Add a query to www.grandfamilies.org: How did you use this? Share impact.
- Put question on Brookdale listserv to ask about use of www.grandfamilies.org and grandfact sheets.
- Additional resources are needed for the regular updating of www.grandfamilies.org.
- Streamline the information and process for updating the grandfact sheets and seek additional resources for a dedicated person to manage the updates. This group can go through the sheets to determine what is most needed for caregivers.
- Run existing resources through the core values that framed the convening. Are there gaps?
- Identify a contact for each state for grandfacts sheets updates.

Opportunities

- Identify resources needed and secure funding
- Connect with 2-1-1
- Annie E. Casey Foundation will take this issue (updated fact sheets and www.grandfamilies.org) back to its leadership to see about possible funding
- Partner with the Brookdale Foundation
- Share publications and resources with ABA/Generations United for www.grandfamilies.org
- Partner with MSW, law or other programs to sustain resources
- Develop a national warm line – caregiver to caregiver
- Expand www.grandfamilies.org to include policies too

Messaging

- What is the return on investment of these resources? How do we quantify impact? Who says the fact sheets are critical? In which ways?
- Website statistics are available, but Casey Family Programs would prefer actual stories of how the resources are used.

Grandfamilies: A Blueprint for Coordinated Action



CHILD WELFARE FINANCE REFORM

Needs:

- Obtain consensus among advocates about the reform that is needed
- Identify what already works
- Include non-traditional stakeholders and larger community in advocacy efforts
- Develop a unified message among core principles:
 - Increase preventative services
 - Increase post-permanency
 - Increase support for informal grandfamilies
 - Increase family finding and engagement
 - Seek equity for children in foster care and kinship care
 - Reduce congregate care (use it for short duration only for treatment purposes)
 - Reduce incentives for long term foster care (ETVs) while respecting culturally informed placements
 - Reduce non-evidence based practice

Case for action:

- Opportunity for momentum building on waivers and the Fostering Connections Act
- Some political will and awareness of need
- Potentially touches everything that grandfamilies' need – both inside and outside the foster care system



LEGAL SERVICES

Needs:

- Collect stories of how legal services improve grandfamilies's lives
- Cut across the legal silos and bring providers together
- Unify the legal community's voice through the soon to be launched National Kinship Legal Network
- Integrate the judiciary into the solution
- Train more pro bono attorneys on kinship issues
- Enact more de facto custody laws to provide legal access to caregivers

Grandfamilies: A Blueprint for Coordinated Action

Case for action:

- Availability of legal services going down
- Price of legal representation going up
- Increasingly complex services system and need for permanency make legal custody and guardianship more necessary than ever
- Legal services directly facilitate access to key services



GUARDIANSHIP ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS (GAPs)

Needs:

- Adopt GAP in 20 remaining states
- Conduct more research on cost/benefits
- Motivate state, tribal, and local champions
- Train more stakeholders
- Identify successful states and tribes for peer technical assistance, case studies, and lessons learned
- Obtain stories from grandfamilies who benefit from GAP; and those who could benefit from GAP
- Convene states and tribes that have taken the option and those that have not, so they can learn from one another

Case for action:

- 33 jurisdictions have taken the GAP option
- Stories and successes should be available in those jurisdictions
- Guardianship is another permanency option (and more culturally appropriate option for some families) when adoption and reunification are ruled out



FOSTER CARE LICENSING

Needs:

- Establish collective buy-in on model standards
- Address culture of fear in agencies
- Develop messaging on how to sell model standards to the states

Case for action:

- Becoming more of an issue because of GAPs (if not licensed, not eligible for federal GAP)
- Qualified and willing families are being excluded
- Current licensing requirements do not always address safety

Grandfamilies: A Blueprint for Coordinated Action

- Lack of consistency among licenses around the country
- Standards are often biased, culturally inappropriate or culturally insensitive



ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

Needs:

- Convene federal agencies with focus on serving grandfamilies
- Train relevant state, tribal and local government agencies on how grandfamilies qualify for assistance programs
- Appropriate more resources for National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP)
- Make 10% NFCSP spending on grandfamilies mandatory or incentivized
- Provide more state education about how NFCSP funding can be used for grandfamilies
- Improve coordination of federal/state action on NFCSP
- Lift up NFCSP case studies
- Remove unnecessary restrictions on public housing (legal custody, senior housing)
- Develop toolkit on how to do grandfamily housing
- Reauthorize Family Connection grants
- Develop specialized training for 2-1-1 operators
- Put kinship navigators in every state
- Create a national kinship navigator
- Enact more state educational and health care consent laws

Case for Action:

- Opportunity within AoA to survey the NFCSP programs and highlight their successes – e.g., good NFCSP models from CA, TX, and WA
- Affordable housing continues to be a critical issue and the federal government is willing to enforce existing housing laws
- Data from Family Connection/kinship navigator grants can be used to show how vital these navigators are to grandfamilies

COLLECTIVE NEXT STEPS

For questions, comments or to get involved, please contact Ana Beltran, Special Advisor, Generations United's National Center on Grandfamilies at abeltran@gu.org or Jaia Peterson Lent, Deputy Executive Director, Generations United at jlent@gu.org.