

# COMMITTING TO OUR FAMILIES

A signature series of *Families in Society* at the Alliance for Children and Families

## Intergenerational Family Connections: The Relationships that Support a Strong America

Family is and always has been the building block of an enduring and vibrant American society, and even as demographics continue to change, intergenerational connectedness within our families plays an increasingly critical role in our resiliency and success as a people.



From time to time the State has made strenuous efforts to mould the Family according to its needs; but ultimately the State itself must always be moulded by the Family, since it is in the Family that the citizen is made.

—Helen Bosanquet, a leader of the Charity Organisation Society, introducing the debut issue of *The Family*, now *Families in Society*, in 1920.

FAMILIES  
IN SOCIETY

# Family Connections Matter

**The notion that Americans are ruggedly independent, forging alone into the horizon, just isn't true.**

Americans celebrate individual accomplishments, but we are most often nurtured toward those accomplishments within a family structure. In fact, families are at the core of the building blocks needed for caring, supportive, and thriving people of every age.

"Family" can mean more than one thing; indeed, research shows that positive human development requires more than a strong bond between parent and child. Extended

family—such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins—and community are integral to improving a person's health and welfare. So, strong connections across the generations within the extended family can lead to better well-being and resiliency, the capacity to bounce back from tough challenges, and the ability to be productive, contributing members of society.

**Intergenerational family bonds are very important across age, income levels, and distance.**

Recognizing that some families may be more resilient than others, Generations United and the Alliance for Children and Families embarked on research that further explores certain family characteristics and bolsters one focus of the United Nations 20th anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2014: the strength of intergenerational solidarity and social cohesion.

Setting out to take America's temperature on family connections across the generations, an original Harris Poll survey of 2,022 adults 18 and older was commissioned. Structured around extended family, we explored the relationships and roles across generations that support or inhibit intergenerational solidarity and the transfer of care and resources between family members of all ages.

Survey data, as shown in this pamphlet's infographic, continue to confirm the genuine interdependence between and reliance on family members of multiple generations. This insight on the importance of connectedness provides a call to action for innovative community supports and policy considerations that not only replicate what is working, but also find new and innovative solutions for families needing help.

**Connectedness,**  
the obligation to take  
care of family members,  
and **resilience,** the capacity  
to rebound from adversity  
strengthened and more  
resourceful, are vital to the  
functioning of strong  
families.

The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the state. *United Nations, 1948*

International Year of the Family (IYF), first proclaimed by the UN in 1994, is a worldwide initiative in which countries celebrate and explore ways to promote overall family well-being. The 20th anniversary of IYF offers an opportunity to review the successes and challenges faced by families. The UN encourages the exploration of family-oriented policies and strategies that confront family poverty, ensure work-family balance, and advance social integration and intergenerational solidarity.



INTERNATIONAL  
DAY OF FAMILIES  
15 MAY 2014

**Intergenerational solidarity**, the ties between family members and among different age cohorts in the larger community, and **social cohesion**, the bonds between people in a stable society, contribute to well-being and create a sense of belonging.

## We're There for Each Other

For Stephenie Schillaci Olguin, *familia* is a way of life for her family in the United States and Mexico. Born in Mexico City to an American father and a Mexican mother, she grew up amid close relationships between parents, siblings, and grandparents, as well as multiple generations of aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Her mother, in particular, instilled the importance of familia early on: that every member is valued, trust is essential, and space must be created for familial bonds to grow. This intentionality reinforces connectedness and responsibility, which isn't seen as a burden. Family members routinely contribute time, resources, and other support. "We have difficult times like any family, but at the end of the day we're there for each other."

Through marriage, Stephenie's family—larger now in members and miles between them—is still one of unity and shared values. "We may only visit Mexico once or twice a year, but the effort put into our relationships year round means that distance geographically doesn't mean distance emotionally."

Technology also bridges physical divides. "At least three times a week, if not every day, we communicate through Skype, WhatsApp, Vonage. It's easy to bring everyone together for big events, like weddings, as well as quick check-ins."

Upholding the importance of familia has other benefits. "By valuing responsibility, sharing, and engagement, I'm a better employee, friend, and co-worker. I approach these roles as I would my family, with more understanding and by recognizing how much stronger we are together than apart."



# Intergenerational FAMILY Connections MATTER

## INTERGENERATIONAL BONDS ARE IMPORTANT TO FAMILY MEMBERS



Families report stronger levels of connection as household income rises

Adults over **65** are more likely to feel a strong connection with living family members

Learn more:

**generations  
united**  
Because we're stronger together™  
[gu.org](http://gu.org)

**ALLIANCE**  
for Children & Families  
[alliance1.org](http://alliance1.org)

Strong connections across generations within our extended families can lead to better well-being, the capacity to bounce back from tough challenges, and the ability for all of us to become contributing members of society.

## FAMILIES ARE CONNECTED AND CARE

Ways in which families connect and nurture resilience

Laughing  
together

88% agree

Trusting  
one another

85% agree

Supporting  
one another

87% agree

Feeling responsible  
for each member

85% agree

Being emotionally  
close

76% agree



# FAMILY MEMBERS ARE INTERDEPENDENT ON EACH OTHER AND GIVE OF THEIR TIME AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES

74%

spend time on **social/emotional support**

average 12 hrs/week

48%

provide time for **financial/legal/medical decisions**

41%

contribute toward **medical expenses**

annual average \$1,100

61%

give money for **basic needs** such as housing, food, clothing, transportation

annual average \$3,800

24%

contribute money for **child care or caregiving**

annual average \$600

32%

contribute money for **education**

annual average \$1,700

1 in 2



help each other w/ **transportation**

average 5 hrs/week

6 in 10



give time for **chores/maintenance**

average 7 hrs/week

4 in 10



give time for **child care or caregiving**

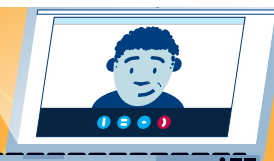
average 9 hrs/week

**Hispanic respondents' families** are significantly more likely to contribute money and time, and at higher percentages in all support areas.

## TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP FAMILIES SUPPORT EACH OTHER AND SUSTAIN CONNECTIONS

+50%

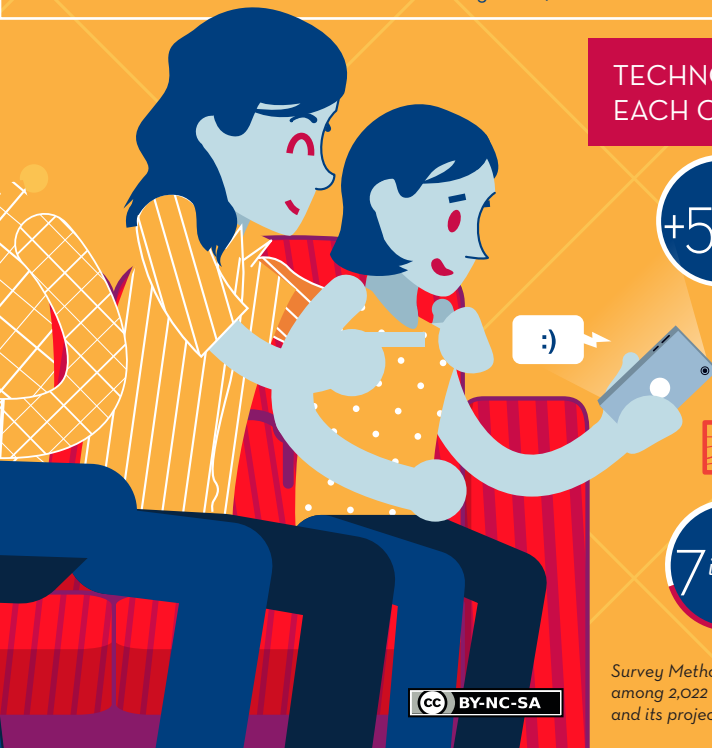
of adults use it to stay connected and to communicate frequently



7 in 10



say it has had a positive effect



# Support Multigenerational Families

## Every generation is part of America's future success.

More than any time in history, we are living longer; it is not unusual to have living grandparents and even great-grandparents. This increased lifespan greatly adds to the available human capital assets within families and in communities. Yet, in many ways, we are still thinking in two-generation solutions.

Research shows that the majority of Americans are part of a multigenerational family, and these families are geographically, financially, and emotionally connected already. However, our current policies and practices are segmented by age rather than being more inclusive.

Given this landscape, data gathered from our survey, what we know from our work, and related research done by others, the Alliance for Children and Families and Generations United advocate the below principles as a guide for policy and practice across the everyday systems that families interact with: government, businesses, education, health care, and more. These and other stakeholders can and should commit to supports that strengthen intergenerational family connections and, ultimately, society as a whole. It is time to break down the silos and unleash the power we have when people of all ages come together.

## Recognize all generations in the family when creating public policies, person- and family-centric practices, and community building initiatives.

The web of care and connections among all generations in the family is essential for a strong America. This survey not only elevated many of the ways families are responsible to and for one another, but also identified how fragile these bonds can be, particularly for families with lower household incomes.

Join us in celebrating the strength of American families and exploring further the commitment policymakers and other community leaders must make to support stronger connections among family members of all ages. Our families deserve no less.

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- Create policies and practices that ensure equitable access to resources that strengthen family connections and resiliency for all income levels, but particularly for families with household incomes less than \$50,000.
  - Consider the factors in many Hispanic families that build family connections and explore how they might be promoted and adapted when designing supports for families that report less cohesion.
  - Enact policies and practices that support—and ultimately grow—the financial and time exchanges already happening in families across generations in areas such as health care, education, and caregiving in order to achieve the greatest social and financial impact.
  - Improve access to and use of new technology to strengthen connections between family members of all ages.

## Supporting Research

### Common Themes of Resilience Among Latino Immigrant Families

*Jodi Berger Cardoso and Sanna J. Thompson*

### Digital Dwelling: Technology in Couple and Family Relationships

*Katherine M. Hertlein*

### Generational Reciprocity: What Does It Mean in the 21st Century?

*Sandra Timmermann*

### Mechanisms for Fostering Multigenerational Resilience

*Jan Johnston, Whitney Bailey and Grace Wilson*

### The Return of the Multi-Generational Family Household

*Paul Taylor, Jeffrey Passel, Richard Fry, Richard Morin, et al.*

### Together Again: Multigenerational Households on the Upswing

*Constance Rosenblum*

### Uncovering Stories of Family Resilience

*Cynthia A. Lietz*

### Family Matters: Multigenerational Families in a Volatile Economy

*Generations United*

### Policies and Programmes Supporting Intergenerational Relations

*Donna M. Butts, Leng Leng Thang and Alan Hatten-Yeo*

### Upstream Intergenerational Transfers

*Frank A. Sloan, Harold H. Zhang and Jingshu Wang*

## We Help Each Other

One principle that drives the Thomas family is, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

That is why Leon and Dorothy Thomas took in their youngest daughter, Tasha, and their two grandchildren while she’s going through a divorce. It’s also the reason that another daughter, Tracy, who was diagnosed with schizophrenia, lives at home instead of a residential facility. “We’re all family,” the grandmother said. “We help each other in times of need.”

The Thomas family moved from North Carolina to Virginia in 1966, when Leon got a job at the Naval Weapons Station and Dorothy got a job with Newport News Public Schools.

When Leon had a pacemaker implanted recently, their oldest daughter Tonya drove three hours, regularly, visiting him and conferring with physicians about his condition.

Tasha, who also has health challenges, supports Dorothy because of a recent foot surgery. Tasha cooks, grocery shops, and transports her mom to doctor visits. She also prepared her parents’ taxes using online tax services. “Tasha is much more savvy technologically than I am,” says Dorothy, “but I’m getting there!”

Dorothy, who supplements Tasha’s child care, uses social media to maintain contact with her five other grandchildren who live out of town. Dorothy’s daughter, Tecla, shares family photographs through Facebook to keep the family abreast of what’s happening in Georgia.

“When we experience challenges, we’re reassured that everything will be alright,” said Dorothy. “Being there for each other through good times and bad is really important to our family.”





**Generations United's** mission is to improve the lives of children, youth, and older adults through intergenerational collaboration, public policies, and programs for the enduring benefit of all. 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. Learn more at [www.gu.org](http://www.gu.org).

**Alliance for Children and Families** is a 100-year-old organization whose mission is to strengthen the influence and capacities of the nonprofit human-serving sector through our network of 500 member organizations. The Alliance, as a highly effective intermediary and partner, works with and through these members to create and drive knowledge, innovation, best practice replication, and research, such as that found in our premier journal, *Families in Society*. Knowing that impact is not about programs and services but instead about the positive and lasting change achieved, the Alliance champions our network's vision of a healthy society and strong communities for all children, adults, and families. Learn more at [www.alliance1.org](http://www.alliance1.org).

## About Nielsen & The Harris Poll

On February 3, 2014, Nielsen acquired Harris Interactive and The Harris Poll. Nielsen Holdings N.V. (NYSE: NLSN) is a global information and measurement company with leading market positions in marketing and consumer information, television and other media measurement, online intelligence and mobile measurement. Nielsen has a presence in approximately 100 countries, with headquarters in New York, USA and Diemen, the Netherlands. For more information, visit [www.nielsen.com](http://www.nielsen.com).

This survey was conducted online within the United States between March 12 and 14, 2014, among 2,022 adults ages 18 and older by Harris Poll via its Quick Query omnibus product. Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region, and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.



Celebrating 95 years in 2014, *Families in Society* at the Alliance for Children and Families is America's oldest and one of its most revered social work journals. It advances a knowledge-into-practice approach to family and community research through innovative scholarship and critical analysis on the issues related to the capabilities of individuals and families, including consideration of the biopsychosocial, economic, and cultural factors that affect well-being. Through the journal's signature series, "Committing to Our Families," the Alliance and its esteemed research and advocacy partners provide an in-depth focus on these significant issues that are facing America's families.