

# Executive Summary



## Family Matters: Multigenerational Families in a Volatile Economy



# A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

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Cover photo of man with girl drawing is courtesy of Community Renewal Team Inc.

## About Generations United

Generations United is the only national membership organization focused solely on improving the lives of children, youth, and older people through intergenerational strategies, programs, and public policies. Since 1986, Generations United has served as a resource for educating policymakers and the public about the economic, social, and personal imperatives of intergenerational cooperation. Generations United acts as a catalyst for stimulating collaboration between aging, children, and youth organizations, providing a forum to explore areas of common ground while celebrating the richness of each generation.

## Disclaimers

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## Survey Methodology

Harris Interactive® fielded the study on behalf of Generations United from September 27-29, 2011 via its Harris Poll QuickQuerySM online omnibus service, interviewing a nationwide sample of 2226 U.S. residents age 18 years or older; 136 respondents from this survey currently live in a multigenerational household. Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region, household income, and age of children in the household were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the U.S. general population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to be invited to participate in the Harris Interactive online research panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with non-response, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100 percent response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

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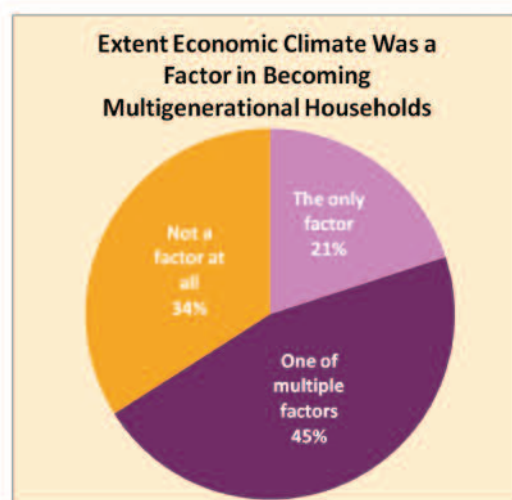


Today more than 51.4 million Americans of all ages – or about one in six – live in multigenerational households, a more than 10% increase since the start of the Great Recession in 2007.<sup>1</sup> Some multigenerational families choose to live together; others form because of the widespread impact of the nation’s economic downturn and uncertain recovery.

For many, the main motivator is compassion. When elderly relatives become frail or have trouble making ends meet, adult family members take them into their homes and become caregivers while often experiencing economic stress themselves. When young adults cannot find work or have trouble caring for their children, they come home to their parents – calling to mind a line from one of Robert Frost’s poems: “Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.”

Whatever the reasons, multigenerational households are an increasingly important part of the socioeconomic fabric of the United States. This represents a reversal of the long-term trend towards living in nuclear families – one that creates both challenges and opportunities for policymakers and the private sector.

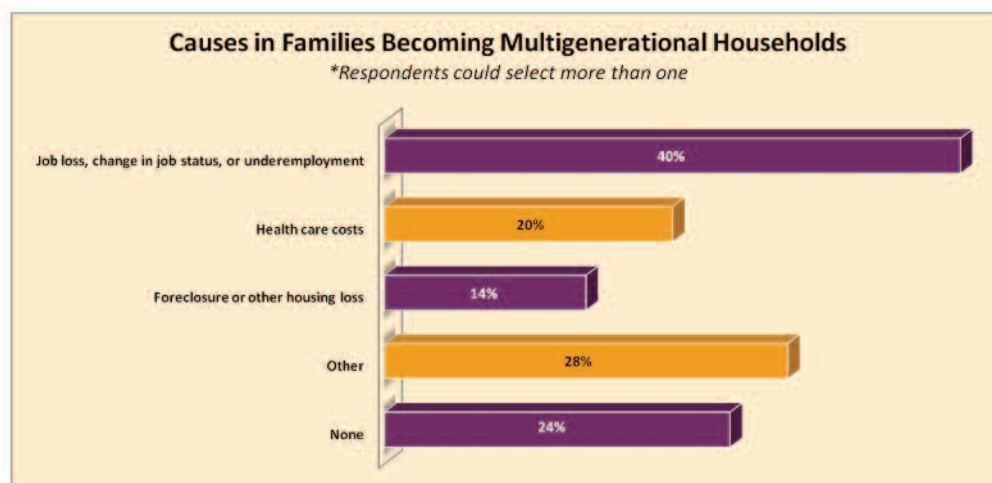
What motivates Americans to live in a multigenerational household today? To explore that question, Generations United recently commissioned a nationwide survey by Harris Interactive.<sup>2</sup> The survey, conducted from September 27 to 29, 2011, found economic conditions were a significant factor:





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- **66%** of adult respondents living in a multigenerational household reported that the current economic climate was a factor in their family becoming a multigenerational household, while 21% reported that it was the only factor.
- **40%** reported that job loss, change in job status, or underemployment was a reason their family became a multigenerational household.
- **20%** reported that health care costs prompted them to form a multigenerational household.
- **14%** reported that foreclosure or other housing loss prompted them to form a multigenerational household.



When asked a set of questions about their personal experience, adults living in multigenerational households responded:

- **72%** agreed that “My family’s multigenerational household arrangement improved the financial situation of at least one family member.”
- **63%** agreed that “Social Security plays a vital role in the financial stability of our multigenerational household.”
- **52%** agreed that “My family’s multigenerational household arrangement has made it possible for a family member to continue school or enroll in job training.”
- **82%** agreed that “There should be more government programs and policies that are supportive of multigenerational households like mine.”

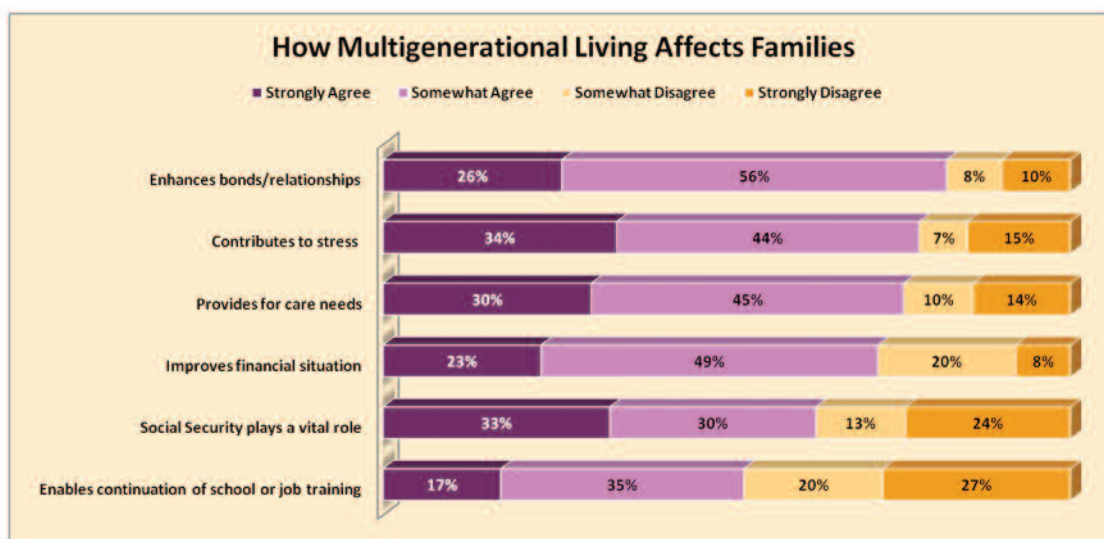
Adults living in multigenerational households also reported that the arrangement had an impact on family relationships:

- **82%** agreed that “My family’s multigenerational household arrangement has enhanced bonds or relationships among family members.”

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- **78%** agreed that “At times, my family’s multigenerational arrangement can contribute to stress among family members.”
- **75%** agreed that “My family’s multigenerational household arrangement has made it easier to provide for the care needs (such as child care, older adult care, or special medical care) of one or more of my family members.”

Clearly, the current economic climate has driven the dramatic increase in the number of multigenerational households nationwide. Moreover, the survey responses make it clear that multigenerational living arrangements can offer significant advantages for families struggling to cope with adverse economic circumstances. At the same time, such arrangements can be stressful. There is a need for both public and private initiatives to help multigenerational households overcome obstacles and contribute to a future in which Americans of all generations have a fair chance to thrive.



The term “multigenerational household” can be defined in different ways. Similar to Generations United’s poll, the Census Bureau defines it as “one that contains three or more parent-child generations.” Using this definition, the Census Bureau reported that 3.8 percent of all U.S. households in 2010 were multigenerational.<sup>3</sup>

The Pew Research Center, which recently published two important studies of multigenerational households, uses a different definition. It includes households that consist of at least two generations of adults. For example, a married couple living with one of their aging parents or a mother or father whose adult child returns to live with them after college would count as multigenerational in their data. Pew also includes “skipped generation” households, ones in which a grandparent (or grandparents) lives with one or more grandchildren whose parents are not present. AARP’s Public Policy Institute issued a fact sheet with a similarly broad definition. However it does not include households composed of parents and children when the parent is the householder regardless of the age of the child.<sup>4</sup>

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### Que Spencer, Virginia Beach, VA

Que is a full-time student at George Mason University in Fairfax, VA. When school is not in session, she lives in Virginia Beach, VA with her grandmother Josephine Merrick; parents Volanda and Jeffrey Spencer; sister Jefrea, and brother Derric.

My grandmother moved in with us over three years ago. We love having her live with us. We've always been a close family and we enjoy each other's company—talking and going to church together. And we love her cooking!

My grandmother really didn't want to move to Virginia Beach. She's a very independent woman and had lived in North Carolina all her life; it's where her heart is. She still owns the house my grandfather built when they married 66 years ago. She visits there whenever possible.

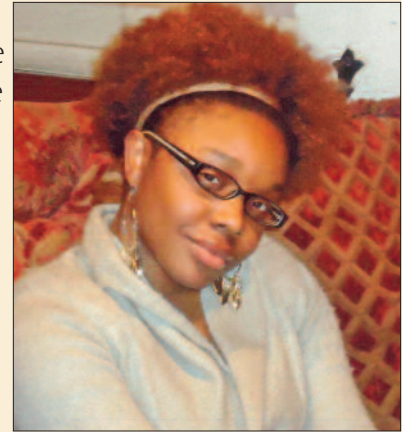


Photo by Volanda Spencer

Although it was very difficult for her to leave her home, her declining health dictated the move. My grandmother is diabetic. When she was living on her own in North Carolina, she wasn't always eating properly. Sometimes, we'd call her house and she wouldn't answer the phone. Later, we would find out that she had fallen. Fortunately, a neighbor or friend always came along and helped her before anything really bad happened. After a while, though, the episodes scared my grandmother and she realized she needed to be close to family.

Now, she's eating the proper foods and her diabetes is under control, but arthritis makes it difficult for her to walk. We all pitch in to help care for her. She helps us by talking to us and giving us a different perspective on things. We all benefit from her lifetime of experiences and her wisdom. She holds the key to our family history.

I think the biggest issue we face is getting time off of work to take my grandmother to doctor appointments. It would be a lot easier on us—especially my mother—if workplace policies took into account how many families now are caregivers for either younger or older generations. Like most families in this situation, we could use more support.

The broadest definition of “multigenerational” results in a finding that 11.9 million of the 113.6 million households in the U.S. in 2009 – or 10.5 percent of the total – were multigenerational, a share of the total almost three times greater than the Census Bureau counted in 2010. The 11.9-million total breaks down as follows: about 6.9 million multigenerational households consisted of two adult generations; about 4.2 million consisted of three or more generations; and the rest consisted of “skipped generation” households.<sup>5</sup>

Pew's skipped-generation methodology appears to undercount grandfamilies – households typically headed by grandparents who share their homes with grandchildren for whom they are responsible, often with neither of the child's parents present in the home. Census Bureau data indicate that at

least 2.5 million grandparents report that they are responsible for their grandchildren.<sup>6</sup>

Differing definitions notwithstanding, it is clear that the economic downturn that began in 2007 triggered a dramatic increase in both the number and prevalence of multigenerational households nationwide.

This trend is not likely to be reversed, even if and when the United States eventually experiences a robust recovery. The reasons include the aging of the 78 million baby boomers and the increasing numbers of Hispanic and Asian households, both native-born and immigrant, whose cultural traditions often encompass caring for young and old in multigenerational settings. African American families also have a rich history of relying on each other to get through hard times.<sup>7</sup> The rates of multigenerational families among African Americans have increased during the Great Recession.<sup>8</sup>

Multigenerational households typically face many challenges – from meeting basic monthly household costs, to covering the medical expenses of uninsured family members, to providing adequate living spaces in houses and apartments not designed for multigenerational living. In this era of political gridlock, it may seem that not much can or will be done to help. But this report identifies many public and private initiatives that are both warranted and broadly affordable.

### Recommendations

*The recommendations that follow address a variety of audiences including: federal, state, and local policymakers, employers, and foundations. In offering these recommendations, we are fully aware that making progress on them in the present economic and political climate may be slow and challenging. Nevertheless, Generations United believes it is important to set reasonable goals and to pursue constructive policy options that can better meet the needs of Americans living in multigenerational households.*

*Individuals, faith communities, and other community organizations can also assist multigenerational families in need of help – for example, by setting up support groups offering trained or informal respite care arrangements, and providing paid leave for multigenerational caregiving.*

### **Saving Dollars While Making Sense – ideas for promoting intergenerational shared sites to support multigenerational families**

- Encourage foundations to extend their bricks-and-mortar funding to proposals for initiatives and facilities serving multiple generations.
- Adapt government programs to allow demonstration funding for development of multigenerational sites; adapt the Older Americans Act to support multigenerational services; provide incentives for schools to incorporate multigenerational programs; and review policies and regulations that may inhibit the development of shared sites.
- Urge local governments to work with potential sponsors to reconsider any policies or regulations that may act as barriers to shared sites.
- Encourage housing developers and architects to incorporate shared sites in multi-unit housing developments and apartment complexes, both new and rehabbed.

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## How Lawmakers Can Help

### Explore innovative housing options for multigenerational families

- Create more options to adapt homes or property to accommodate multigenerational families and encourage banks and other mortgage lenders to adjust lending requirements for multigenerational borrowers.
- Evaluate local policies, codes, and regulations and remove unnecessary barriers to adapting homes to better serve the needs of multigenerational families.
- Launch a new demonstration to adapt the Elder Cottage Housing Opportunity (ECHO) program to allow low-income families living in single-family homes more flexibility in adding additional barrier-free bedrooms and bathrooms.
- Identify and publicize exemplary initiatives that serve grandfamilies, by adapting existing structures or building new ones.
- Promote additional affordable housing for grandfamilies by demonstrating to private developers the benefits of providing such housing and by providing demonstration funds and incentives for state and local governments to stimulate such housing.

### Improve supports and services for caregivers

- Increase funding for the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP) to \$250 million.
- Fund the Lifespan Respite Care Program at its authorized level (\$71.1 million).
- Provide interagency incentives to leverage caregiver-support resources.
- Encourage federal and state programs that involve home visitation to assess and refer household members of all ages to appropriate voluntary services.
- Enact a refundable federal caregiver tax credit to provide modest but much-needed financial support for anyone who cares for a dependent family member.

### Protect and preserve the Affordable Care Act (ACA)

- Continue to implement the ACA to ensure that all Americans, including individuals living in multigenerational families, have access to improved, affordable healthcare coverage and services.

### Strengthen Social Security and protect benefits for all generations

- Help all Americans who contribute to and rely on Social Security by maintaining benefits and by making the changes needed to ensure that program revenues and outlays are in balance for the long run.
- Help students by restoring the Social Security student benefit so that it covers students through college.
- Help grandfamilies by changing Social Security regulations to permit more children being raised by grandparents or other relatives to qualify as dependents eligible for survivors benefits and student benefits.





Photo by Glenn Kaupert

## Adrian Charniak, Riverside, IL

Adrian Charniak (center right) shares a house in Riverside, IL – a Chicago suburb – with her husband Ron, her mother, Lillian, and grandson Joey. The Charniaks also take care of Ron's mother, Alvina, who lives three miles away.

We became a multigenerational household when my father passed away 13 years ago, which left Mom living alone in a very bad neighborhood. After her house was broken into, my husband Ron said she had to come live with us. Joey, our grandson, has lived with us for 12 years.

Joey is our gift. Neither of his parents could really care for him. We didn't want to see him go to foster care. So we pulled up our suspenders and went to court. I made every court appearance – more than 100 of them – to make sure he'd be able to stay with us. I had a pension, but I spent it all on court costs. He's worth it!

Joey calls me "Babi" – that's Czech for "grandma." And he calls my mom "Double Babi." The other day he got up early and he came in and told me, "Babi, I made the coffee, fed the dog, fed the cat, and brought in the paper. You've got an easy day today!" Joey goes to a good school in a wonderful school system. Now he's getting all A's... mostly!

We have our share of challenges. Mom has had three heart surgeries and seven cancer surgeries. Ron – he's one great man! – has had a stroke and three major back operations. Joey was a cocaine baby who had seizures and still needs medications.

So there have been times when we've had three or four doctor appointments a week, week after week. Now I've got one big book – and everything we do has to go in that book!

*continued*

## How Employers Can Help

- Improve family leave policies by offering informal caregivers reasonable time-off rights and more generous paid-leave options.
- Extend health insurance coverage to include dental and vision benefits for children and elders dependent on family caregivers.
- Make other employee benefit programs more multigenerational-friendly by offering benefits such as on-site child care, eldercare information and referrals, health education and fitness centers, and proactive employee assistance and counseling programs.
- Support full implementation of the Affordable Care Act and enactment of affordable long-term care coverage.
- Support enactment of a federal caregiver tax credit to partially compensate working caregivers for the lost pay and high expenses they incur while caring for dependent family members.

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About six years ago we started a grandparents support group. We call it the Gift of Hope. It's named after the organ donor group. My son was an organ donor. One day, I was talking with another grandmother about how our grandchildren are the gift. "And we're the hope," she said.

We have 178 families in the group now. People come to our meetings from all over – not just the Chicago area. We find out what they need – shoes, clothing, a bed, school supplies – and we try to help. Then they form friendships. It's people helping people.

I'm so proud of the kids in our group! They have made honor roll and have gotten college scholarships. Two girls in our group have won essay contests. One grandmother in our group takes four buses to get to our meetings. She always comes. Her grandson is a star – gymnastics, baseball, football – and she's the reason.

But we also need the policies that help us.

We need more housing for grandparents – and not just for the very lowest-income. Grandparents in our group have taken mortgages out on their homes to pay the legal fees to adopt their grandkids. Now their homes are in foreclosure. People may think someone living on Social Security isn't poor. But if you're getting \$1,200 a month – and many households aren't even getting that much – you can't afford to spend \$1,000 on housing.

Lawmakers need to think about health care. Grandkids often have medical needs. I'm just grateful that in Illinois we have the All Kids healthcare program. It really makes things like doctor visits affordable. The grandparents in our group don't abuse it but we know it's there when we need it.

Politicians need to think about how much grandparents are saving the government. If all these kids went into foster care, with the foster parents being paid \$600 to \$800 a month – well, I recall a speaker at the GrandRally who said we're saving the government \$6.5 billion a year that way alone.

We have friends who are retired who are always telling me about their next cruise to Hawaii or wherever. I tell them I go on cruises every day. I cruise to school, I cruise to the mall, I cruise to the doctor's office, I cruise to the skateboarding park. Joey's my cruise to Hawaii, and you know what? I wouldn't trade my cruise for theirs.

<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center. "The Return of the Multigenerational Family Household." (March 2010.) Accessed on 28 November 2011 at <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1528/multi-generational-family-household>.

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of the survey, "multigenerational" was defined as three or more generations living together. Other definitions exist and are discussed in this report.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. "2010 American Community Survey Highlights." Accessed on 28 November 2011 at [http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/pdf/acs\\_2010\\_highlights.pdf](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/pdf/acs_2010_highlights.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Pew Research Center. "The Return of the Multigenerational Family Household and Pew Research Center. "Fighting Poverty in a Bad Economy, Americans Move in with Relatives." (October 2011.) Accessed on 28 November 2011 at <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/10/03/fighting-poverty-in-a-bad-economy-americans-move-in-with-relatives/?src=prc-headline>; See also "AARP Public Policy Institute. "Multigenerational Households Are Increasing." (April 2011.) Accessed on 29 November 2011 at <http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/ppi/econ-sec/fs221-housing.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Pew Research Center. "The Return of the Multigenerational Family Household."

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. "2010 American Community Survey Highlights." Accessed on 28 November 2011 at [http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/pdf/acs\\_2010\\_highlights.pdf](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/pdf/acs_2010_highlights.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Hyoun K. Kim and Patrick C. Mckenry, "Social Networks and Support: A Comparison of African Americans, Asian Americans, Caucasians, and Hispanics." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, Vol. 29, 1998. Accessed on 29 November 2011 at <http://www.questia.com/googleScholar.qst?docId=5001449931>

<sup>8</sup> Pew Research Center. "The Return of the Multigenerational Family Household."



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