

Grandfamilies & Kinship University (GKU)

Program Overview for Prospective Scholars

What Is GKU?

[Generations United](#) Grandfamilies & Kinship University (GKU) is a national leadership and community impact program for grandparents, aunts, uncles, adult siblings, and other relatives and close family friends who are raising children full-time.



Across the country, more than 2.5 million children are being raised by grandparents, relatives, and close family friends, often at a moment's notice and without support.

These kinship and grandfamilies often form overnight. A parent may be facing substance use, incarceration, a mental health crisis, or death. Caregivers step in without warning, often without the training, financial support, or services that are typically available to foster families. Yet they keep children connected to family, culture, and community during some of the most difficult moments of their lives.

Unfortunately, the systems designed to support these families are rarely shaped by caregivers and are often difficult to find, access, or navigate.

GKU exists to change that.

This program is designed for caregivers like you.

Launched by Generations United, GKU builds on nearly three decades of leadership in kinship care by applying what the field has learned to a program that places caregivers at the center of solution design.

Through leadership training, peer learning, and community-based projects, caregivers build the skills, tools, and relationships to turn their lived experience into action, support their own families, and create change for others like them.

Participants in the program are called Scholars, recognizing the leadership and lived experience they already bring.

What Could This Look Like for You?

Tanya, a GKU Scholar, is a 43-year-old aunt raising her teenage niece after her sister struggled with substance use. With no roadmap and no one to call, she stepped in and began navigating schools, health care, and finances on her own.

Through GKU, Tanya builds confidence, connects with other caregivers, and identifies a need in her community. In her second year, she partners with a local food bank to launch a pantry day for kinship families that continue beyond the program.

Through GKU, Tanya turns her lived experience into a lasting community solution.

Is GKU Right for You?

GKU is for kinship caregivers of all ages and backgrounds who want to grow and make a difference in their communities.

You do not need a title, a formal role, or years of experience to apply. What matters most is your lived experience of raising children and your desire to do something with it.

Scholars come from many different experiences. Some are grandparents who have been raising grandchildren for years. Some are younger relatives who stepped in recently and are still finding their footing. Some already lead support groups, faith-based programs, or community efforts. Some simply want to connect with people who understand what they are carrying.

Every one of them belongs here.

You may be a good fit if you:

- Are a grandparent, aunt, uncle, adult sibling, godparent, or close family friend raising or who has raised a child
- Have lived experience in a kinship or grandfamily arrangement
- Are connected to your community in some way
- Want to grow as a leader or advocate, at whatever level feels right for you
- Are ready to commit time and energy to a meaningful program

How the Program Works

GKU is a two-year program that runs from Fall 2026 through Spring 2028.

In Year One, Scholars focus on learning, connection, and developing their leadership and advocacy skills.

In Year Two, Scholars build on that foundation by leading a community project (such as a support group, resource, or small program) in partnership with a local organization.

Timeline at a Glance

- Application deadline: June 8, 2026
- Review and selection period: Mid-to-late June 2026
- Scholars notified: Late June 2026
- Program kickoff: Fall 2026
- The program runs from Fall 2026 through Spring 2028

Year One: Learning and Leadership

Year One is focused on building your skills, confidence, and connections with other caregivers. This is your time to learn, connect, and grow. You are not expected to lead a community project during this year.

The program begins in September 2026 with an in-person Leadership Accelerator, with travel and lodging fully covered. After that, the program continues virtually through the spring with training sessions and peer discussions you can join in from wherever you are.

Year One Activities Include:

- **One required in-person kickoff gathering** — travel, lodging, and meals are fully covered
- **Five online group sessions** — you will need internet access and a device such as a computer, tablet, or smartphone
- **Small group conversations** with other caregivers
- **Occasional short readings or reflection activities** to support your growth — these are kept manageable and accessible, and may include written, audio, or discussion-based options

Time commitment: On average, Scholars should expect to spend 5–10 hours per month on coursework and activities. Because you will be part of a small group of caregivers learning and growing together, consistent participation in Year One activities is important.

During Year One, you also will:

- Build relationships with other kinship caregivers
- Strengthen your leadership and advocacy skills
- Learn how systems like schools, health care, and child welfare affect your family
- Identify needs and opportunities in your community

Year Two: Leading a Community Project (Summer/Fall 2027 through Spring 2028)

Year Two is for Scholars who are ready to take what they learned and put it into action.

Scholars design and lead a community project that responds to a real need identified during Year One. You will partner with a local organization to bring your idea to life and create something that directly supports kinship caregivers in your community.

These projects can take many forms, such as a caregiver support group, food pantry, or new resource. They are grounded in real needs and designed to continue beyond the program.

During Year Two, you will:

- Design and launch a community-based project
- Receive funding to support your work
- Participate in sessions on project planning, budgeting, and communication
- Receive coaching throughout the year
- Develop a plan to sustain your project beyond the program

What You Will Receive

As a Scholar, you will receive:

- A stipend recognizing your time and lived expertise
- Travel and lodging for the in-person kickoff
- Leadership training and learning opportunities throughout the program
- Ongoing peer support and connection
- Individual coaching and guidance
- A Certificate of Completion
- Funding to design and lead a community project in Year Two

How to Apply

To apply, you will complete a brief application sharing your experience as a kinship caregiver, how you are connected to your community, and what you hope to do with this opportunity.

There is no wrong answer. We want to hear your story in your own words.

Applications are reviewed by a committee to bring together a strong group of caregivers from different experiences and communities.

Application deadline: June 8, 2026

Apply [Here](#)

Video Submission Option

The application includes two questions that you may answer by recording a short video (2–3 minutes) instead of typing, if that feels more comfortable for you:

- Why are you interested in participating in GKU?
- What kind of community project might interest you?

If you choose this option, record your response using the camera app on your phone and email the video to kgillespie@gu.org with your first and last name in the subject line. Video responses must be received by June 8th. Even if you submit a video, you must still complete all other sections of the application.

Questions?

We know this is a meaningful commitment, and we want you to feel fully informed before you apply. If you have questions about the program or what participation could look like for you and your family, please reach out.

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