

Caregiver's Corner Column (September 2013)

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: A Growing Caregiving Concern

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According to the U. S. Census Bureau there were 7.1 million grandparent headed households in 2010 with 82% or 5.8 million of these households with grandparents raising grandchildren under the age of 18. This is a 1.3 million increase in grandparent headed households with grandchildren under the age of 18 since the 2000 census. The 5.8 million children raised by their grandparents represent nearly 13% of the total number of children in the United States. These same trends have occurred in Michigan where there were 152,469 grandparent headed households in 2010, and 69,515 grandchildren living in homes where their grandparents were responsible for them.

Many current trends including divorce, HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, child abuse, and incarceration contribute to this grandparent caregiving phenomenon. This unfortunate cultural phenomenon has led to ever increasing challenges for grandparents struggling to raise their grandchildren.

Although, this trend is disturbing the good news is that there are loving, dedicated, and often heroic grandparents. It is important that we let these grandparents know that they are not alone and provide them with the support that they need in this often difficult and unexpected caregiving role. To this end, here is some practical advice from the AARP Grandparent Information Center:

- Take care of yourself and make healthy lifestyle choices such as getting proper nutrition, exercise, health screening and medical care. "Think of good health as your gift to your grandchildren."
- Face your feelings whatever they may be. Guilt, anger, and frustration are all common feelings for grandparents raising grandchildren. It is important recognize these feelings then do what you have to get on with your life. It may help to attend a support group and/or discuss your feelings with someone else, a friend, relative, or professional.
- Make sure that you are taking occasional breaks from caregiving to recharge your batteries, and be sure to include some fun activities in your life. When you do take time for yourself you will feel happier and healthier and your grandchildren will enjoy being around you.
- Don't hesitate to ask for help. You may be surprised at how many friends, family and neighbors are willing to help you out. You may also want to connect with a support group, your faith community, or a local service provider for assistance.
- Get organized by setting realistic goals and priorities. This will help you to better manage your limited time. To be successful in doing this you may need to first manage your attitude by recognizing that "you don't have to do everything" and "you don't have to be perfect."

It is also important for caregiving grandparents to have access to educational and community-based resources and support. To this end, here are just some of the available resources to assist grandparents raising grandchildren:

- **Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Educational Support Groups** – In Kent County contact:
 - Grand Rapids Community College - (616) 234-3483 or www.grcc.edu/olc
Note: GRCC also provides periodic grandparent trainings and grandparent/grandchildren wellness day camps.
 - Life Guidance Services/Cherry Street Health Services - (616) 954-1991 x 204
- **Information and Referral Services** – Information on a wide variety of services in the community is available free of charge by dialing 2-1-1. Aging specific information and service provider referrals can be obtained by contacting the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan at (616) 456-5664 or 888-456-5664.
- **Legal Hotline** – Michigan residents 60 and older can receive free legal advice on general legal issues affecting seniors including issues related grandparent or kinship care. The toll-free number for Michigan residents is (800) 347-5297.
- **The Kinship Care Resource Center** – Provides statewide services to relative caregivers including a toll-free legal hotline; information and referral on finances, support groups, and other community resources; sponsors workshops, trainings and conferences; and provides advocacy support. For assistance call (517) 355-9600 or contact the hotline at (800) 535-1218.
- **GrandFacts** – Are fact sheets designed for grandparents and other relatives raising children with state-specific data and programs as well as information about foster care, public benefits, educational assistance and state laws. Visit www.grandfactsheets.org to download this free resource.

Caregiver's Corner is provided as a public service of the **Caregiver Resource Network**. The Caregiver Resource Network is a collaboration of West Michigan organizations dedicated to providing for the needs and welfare of family and professional caregivers within the community. Funded by the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan with Older American's Act Title III-E, Family Caregiver Support funds. For more information consult our website at www.CaregiverResource.net or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664.