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“Grandparents sprinkle stardust over the lives of children.” - Alex Haley

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

A Report to the Ohio General Assembly on the Problems and Concerns of Ohioans Raising Their Children’s Children.

Submitted to Ohio Senate President Richard Finan and Ohio House of Representatives Speaker Jo Ann Davidson by the Ohio Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Task Force

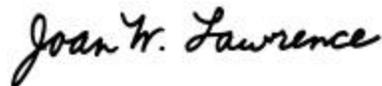
A Letter from the Chairperson

The task force extends its heartfelt thanks to Senate President Richard Finan, House Speaker Jo Ann Davidson and the Ohio General Assembly for their generous funding of this report. We hope that the recommendations within are clear and to the point, and welcome any questions or need for clarification that you might have.

After examining, in-depth, and witnessing, first-hand, the daunting hardships faced by grandparents raising grandchildren in Ohio, we are, to a person, all the more certain of the value and necessity of this project; and all the more grateful and proud to be a part of it.

The selflessness and devotion of so many grandparents raising grandchildren is heartwarming and inspiring, as is the affection and appreciation returned by the children they are raising. It is true that “Ohio succeeds when our families succeed,” and these grandparents are playing a vital, noble role in that success. They are keeping our families together.

Sincerely,



Joan W. Lawrence
Director, Ohio Department of Aging
Chair, Ohio’s Grandparents Raising Grandchildren’s Task Force

“For me there wasn’t a choice. You know it was either (stay with my unfit daughter) or let her (granddaughter) go to foster care. For me, there was no choice there. It was a pretty obvious decision.”

Background & Overview

In Ohio and throughout our nation, grandparents are increasingly being called upon to serve as parents to their grandchildren.

Recognizing the special circumstances often accompanying these types of parental relationships, the Ohio General Assembly allocated \$81,000 (via 1997's Amended Substitute H.B. 215) for the formation of a statewide task force on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren.

The task force was asked to ascertain the number of Ohio grandparents raising grandchildren; specify their major needs and concerns; develop a strategic action plan to address those needs and concerns; and submit that plan to the 123rd Ohio General Assembly no later than June 1, 1999.

This report contains all of the information requested, including the strategic action plan. The plan is put forth here in a form that identifies, and makes specific recommendations in 12 areas of major concern voiced by grandparents raising grandchildren in Ohio.

Early in 1998, the task force contracted with the University of Cincinnati's Institute for Policy Research to conduct a statewide needs-assessment on grandparents raising grandchildren. The survey, involving 6,307 randomly selected households in Ohio, found that:

- *Grandparents are filling the role of primary parents to their grandchildren in 10 percent of all Ohio households with children. According to 1990 census data 167,199 Ohio children live with their grandparents. In 32,340 Ohio households with children, the grandparent is the primary caregiver.*

While grandparents express some concern about their own health and finances, the overwhelming majority display a touching altruism, saying that they are far more concerned with the health and overall well-being of the grandchildren they are raising. Their specific worries and concerns most often pertain to the education, health coverage and overall safety of their grandchildren.

As indicated throughout the enclosed action plan, the task force strongly recommends that Ohio take steps to formally recognize the grandparents as the parental authority where the grandparent has the primary parenting responsibility, thereby granting them easier access to the public benefits and support systems now available to biological parents and non-related foster parents in this state.

Due to a continuing shift in traditional family structure, **grandparents now provide care for grandchildren in roughly 10 percent of Ohio households with children**. As this issue has become of mounting concern to those throughout our state and nationwide, the need to formally address the matter has become increasingly crucial.

In 1997, the **Ohio General Assembly allocated \$81,900 in biennium budget funds (via Amended Substitute House Bill 215) for the formation of a statewide task force on "Grandparents Raising Grandchildren."** The General Assembly called for the Ohio Department of Aging (ODA) to organize and chair the task force, specifying that the task force would consist of 15 members, including representatives from the following agencies (in addition to ODA):

- Ohio Department of Human Services (ODHS);
- Ohio's area agencies on aging;
- Ohio county departments of Human Services;
- the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies.

Judith Y. Brachman, former ODA director and former task force chair, also appointed a probate judge and a representative from the American Association of Retired Persons to the task force, as well as two Ohio grandparents actively raising their grandchildren and organizing related support groups.

The General Assembly's request of the task force was two-fold:

1. Determine the approximate number of Ohioans raising grandchildren and delineate their specific needs and concerns;
2. Develop a statewide action plan to address those needs and concerns, and submit the plan to the Ohio General Assembly by June 1, 1999.

The task force, **now chaired by Joan W. Lawrence** (who replaced Judith Y. Brachman as ODA director in February 1999), has met quarterly since November 1997. In February 1998, the task force arranged for the University of Cincinnati's Institute for Policy Research to initiate a statewide needs-assessment survey on grandparents raising grandchildren in Ohio.

The institute conducted a **statewide phone survey of 6,307 randomly selected Ohio households** between April and July of 1998. In order to ascertain pertinent information related to special needs and concerns of grandparents raising grandchildren, the institute conducted **in-depth phone interviews with 186 grandparents raising grandchildren** as identified in the initial phone survey.

Major findings of the survey, in line with nationwide estimates, indicate:

- Grandparents are involved with raising and providing most of the care for the children in 10 percent of Ohio households with children.
- Within the above-referenced 10 percent, one of four grandparents - roughly 32,340, statewide - is the sole provider for his/her grandchildren.
- Reasons most often cited for grandparents assuming parental roles include the following conditions/problems related to the biological parents: substance abuse; divorce/separation; employment; abandonment; teenage pregnancy; pursuit of education; finances; death; physical or mental illness/disability; homelessness; child abuse/neglect; and incarceration.
- The average care arrangement is approximately six years in duration.
- The average age of a grandparent raising a grandchild or grandchildren is 55, though 16 percent are age 65 or older.
- Over half of the children cared for by grandparents are age 6 or younger.
- Half of the grandparents provide care for more than one grandchild.
- 87 percent of grandparents raising their grandchildren are female.
- 43 percent of grandparents raising grandchildren are not currently married.
- 51 percent of grandparents raising grandchildren have annual household incomes below \$30,000; 25 percent have annual household incomes of less than \$15,000.
- Only 11 percent of grandparents raising grandchildren are legal guardians for the children; just 9 percent have formal temporary custody.
- 9 percent of grandparents raising grandchildren receive child support; 14 percent receive financial support from public assistance; and 8 percent receive social security for the child.
- 99 percent of grandparents raising grandchildren have never participated in a grandparents support group; roughly 60 percent consider the availability of such groups and related counseling services important.

According to the survey, major concerns of Ohio grandparents are related to their own *finances* and their grandchildren's **education, safety** and **health coverage**.

The survey listed several services deemed most important by grandparents raising grandchildren:

- | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| • Counseling | • Tutoring |
| • Legal information | • Stress reduction programs |
| • Respite services | • Information and Referral |

The survey was put into a 52-page narrative report accompanied by more than 100 pages of additional data and an extensive bibliography. The report was issued in August 1998. After receiving the report, the task force immediately set about drawing up the requested action plan, drawing heavily on the survey data as well as the broad range of personal, academic and professional experience brought to the table by the 15 task force members.

The action plan is driven by the task force's organizing philosophy that:
“Grandparents serving as parents to their grandchildren are serving a highly valued, critical role in nurturing children and strengthening family life in Ohio. Given the advanced age of many involved, compounded by the problems inherent when the bonds between children and their natural parents are severed, this task is often difficult - and sometimes overwhelming. Our state should do its best to ensure that grandparents assuming this duty have access to the same kinds of public benefits and support available to biological and legalized foster parents.”

Strategic Action Plan

Concern # 1: Legal Relationships

Of the grandparents who provide most of the custodial care for their grandchildren, more than three-fourths have no formal agreement establishing them as legal guardians of their grandchildren. Nearly two-thirds admit they have concerns pertaining to their legal rights under the arrangements. The effect on grandparents raising their grandchildren is that, without some mechanism that recognizes the existence of the legal relationship, the grandparent may be unable to enroll the grandchild in school or grant consent for medical treatment.

Recommendation #1

- *Establish proper legal relationships between grandparents and grandchildren so that grandparents may act in the best interest of themselves and their grandchildren.*

Action Steps

- A.** Change Ohio law to recognize a notarized affidavit stating that the grandparent is the child's full-time caregiver as proof of that grandparent's physical custody and legal right to enroll his/her child in school or authorize medical care.
- B.** Educate grandparents and Human Services personnel about the development and recognition of such notarized affidavits by schools and medical agencies. The education would be provided by Ohio's aging network and Training Ohio's Program Staff (TOPS) via the ODHS videoconferencing system.
- C.** Expand ODA's free, statewide legal services (operated under PRO Seniors Inc. of Cincinnati) to include information regarding grandparents raising grandchildren.
- D.** Educate grandparents about the legal documentation necessary to establish a legal relationship with their grandchildren.

“Whether it’s drugs, alcohol, or mental illness, it’s basically the same. This child of yours is not capable of looking after children.”

Concern #2: Access to Assistance

Nearly two-thirds of grandparents raising grandchildren are worried about their financial ability to care for their grandchildren. Often, they may be unaware of assistance for which they, or their grandchildren, may qualify.

Recommendation # 2

• Make grandparents raising grandchildren aware of policies and eligibility requirements for Ohio’s Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/Ohio Works First (OWF) and the Kinship Care Family Preservation Supportive Services programs. Passed into law as H.B. 408 in 1997, OWF gives Ohio’s 88 county departments of Human Services the flexibility to use federal block grant money (via the 1996 Federal Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act) to serve the needs of the families in their communities. The Kinship Care Family Preservation Supportive Services program is available through the local county children services agencies to provide financial and supportive services to families caring for relative children.

Action Steps

- A.** Educate grandparents about the availability of Ohio’s cash assistance program as well as eligibility for Medicaid either for the grandchildren only, in which case the income of the grandparent is not deemed to the grandchild or for both the grandparent and the grandchild depending on the income of the grandparent.
- B.** Develop a resource booklet and Web site (at ODA) informing grandparents of eligibility requirements and available resources.
- C.** Distribute the booklet and advertise the Web site at ODA, ODHS and various other related agencies to reach as many grandparents raising grandchildren as possible.
- D.** Expand ODA’s computerized Benefits Eligibility Screening System (BESS) to include special screening for grandparents raising grandchildren and modify ODHS’s CRIS-E to make it easier to identify grandparents who have primary responsibility for raising their grandchildren.
- E.** Encourage the Judicial College of the Ohio Supreme Court to disseminate information that grandparents have rights equal to those of other legalized parents in matters of child support.
- F.** Enhance tracking systems to ensure that public assistance (such as child support) for a child is actually going to the person(s) who is raising and providing for the child.
- G.** Educate grandparents that the ODHS provides the Kinship Care Family Preservation Supportive Services (Ohio Administrative Code 5101:2-39-073 and 5101-10-6-39) to grandparents without requiring that the family have an open case with the public children services agency as long as it can be established that the grandparent is the child’s primary caregiver.
- H.** Eliminate the limits to the Kinship Care Family Preservation Supportive Services program.
- I.** Develop a relative home approval process that will allow grandparents to receive maintenance payments.

“Maybe activities for both the grandparent and the grandchildren would be helpful to get them together to relate to one another. I think the kids know they are not with their parents. And kids that are with their parents don’t understand these kids.”

Concern # 3: Health Needs

More than three-fourths of Ohio grandparents raising grandchildren express concern about their children’s health; and 62 percent say they are specifically concerned about their children’s health-care coverage. (An estimated 298,000 Ohio children are without health insurance.)

Recommendation # 3

• Ensure that grandparents know that all children below 200% of the federal poverty level qualify for health insurance, regardless of relation to parental authority.

Action Steps

- A.** Promote Healthy Start, Ohio’s version of the federal Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), since it is inclusive of children being raised by their grandparents.
- B.** Educate grandparents raising grandchildren about Healthy Start via county departments of Human Services and the state’s aging network.
- C.** Ensure CHIP workers understand that eligibility guidelines are inclusive of children raised by their grandparents.
- D.** Educate grandparents and CHIP workers as to the availability of CHIP II that covers children between 150% and 200% of the federal poverty level.

“I got cheated of my time, this wonderful time. I had all these things planned that I was going to do. So sometimes I detect a little selfishness there. Of what I lost, what we all lost. We all lost.”

Concern #4: Immunizations

More than half of Ohio’s children cared for by their grandparents are age 6 or younger, an age range wherein immunizations are critical to the child’s health. Grandparents not legalized as parental custodians face problems when attempting to grant authorization for immunizations and medical care for their grandchildren.

Recommendation #4

• Ensure that all grandchildren raised by grandparents receive all necessary immunizations by easing the way for grandparents to give medical authorization.

Action Steps

- A.** Educate grandparents raising grandchildren and Ohio's Human Services workers regarding immunization program, Project LOVE. (Education will occur primarily through the state's aging network, the Training Ohio Program Staff (TOPS) program via ODHS's videoconferencing system.)
- B.** Support promotion of a law recognizing the use of notarized affidavits to transfer medical consent from biological parents to grandparents and mandate that public health departments and private medical agencies accept such affidavits from grandparents raising grandchildren as medical consent to obtain necessary childhood immunizations.

“Custody is one of the biggest obstacles. You can’t get any of these services unless you have custody. You are taking care of this child, but have no legal rights to put them in school. When I went to get (my granddaughter) her shots, I was honest and told them I was her grandparent, and I couldn’t get the shots.”

Concern #5: Emotional Health of the Child

More than four of five Ohio grandparents raising grandchildren indicate they have concerns about their grandchildren's mental health; over two-thirds consider the availability of counseling services important.

Recommendation #5

- *Increase recognition of the emotional needs of grandchildren raised by grandparents, as well as the availability of counseling services to them.*

Action Steps

- A.** Provide financial assistance for court- or agency-ordered physical and/or mental health evaluations of grandchildren raised by grandparents. Referrals should be made to mutually agreed upon professionals within close proximity to the child.
- B.** Educate grandparents raising grandchildren on the eligibility for and availability of mental health services for children, including those services provided through the Children's Health Insurance Program. This education will be offered through Ohio's aging network and via the county departments of Human Services.
- C.** Establish guidelines for the development of a model support group for children being raised by their grandparents; develop additional support groups based on a successful model.
- D.** Educate schools about grandparents raising grandchildren, with special emphasis on sensitivity to the child's home situation and learning environment.

“Raising your grandchild has its challenges, but outweighed by the rewards. Seeing her happy, seeing her succeed, having her wrap her arm around me and getting a great big hug - that’s the best reward

Concern #6: Physical Health of the Grandparents

The primary concern of grandparents raising grandchildren in Ohio is staying healthy enough to optimally accomplish the task of raising their grandchildren. Special attention should be paid to the physical stresses placed upon older persons serving in the role of parents.

Recommendation # 6

- ***Expand availability of health services for grandparents raising grandchildren.***

Action Steps

- A.*** Promote preventive health services (e.g., screening and monitoring) for grandparents raising grandchildren who are eligible for Medicare.
- B.*** Examine age requirements and other eligibility criteria pertaining to health-care benefits available to older persons (in this case, grandparents raising grandchildren).

“He keeps me on my toes, gives me someone to toss a baseball to; keeps me thinking young.”

Concern #7: Emotional/Mental Health of Grandparents

More than half of Ohio grandparents raising grandchildren indicate concerns about their emotional health; and nearly three-fourths consider the availability of counseling services (for themselves) important.

Recommendation #7

- ***Expand services and resources promoting preventive and recuperative emotional/mental health services for grandparents raising grandchildren.***

Action Steps

- A.*** Provide mental health outreach services to grandparents raising grandchildren through the county boards of mental health, the aging network and county departments of human services.
- B.*** Expand respite opportunities for grandparents raising grandchildren by increasing the number of licensed child-care providers via training and subsequent licensing by ODHS.
- C.*** ODA should develop more grandparents raising grandchildren support groups in Ohio (currently, there are only about 20 statewide).
- D.*** ODA should provide technical assistance (e.g., creating an agency umbrella to apply for grants) to existing grandparents support groups.

“Many of these people aren’t fully prepared when their grandchildren come to live with them. It can be a lot to handle, even under the best circumstances.”

Concern #8: Social Activities

Opportunities for recreational and social activities top the list as the most important service for grandparents raising grandchildren: 81 percent rated such activities as important for their grandchildren; and 76 percent rated joint recreational/social activities with their grandchildren (aka “quality time”) as important to them both.

Recommendation #8

- *Encourage intergenerational activities to strengthen family structures.*

Action Steps

- A.** Develop intergenerational summer Day Camps.
- B.** Develop intergenerational recreational/social programs via collaboration with **Generations United**, a national coalition dedicated to intergenerational policy and programs.
- C.** Approach Ohio corporations to sponsor intergenerational activities for grandparents raising grandchildren.
- D.** Explore the Wellness Block Grant, Child Abuse Prevention, the Ohio Governor’s Children and Family First initiative, and private foundations as potential funders of intergenerational programs administered by the state’s area agencies on aging.
- E.** Educate recreation and parks’ departments, public libraries, YMCA/YWCAs and other social, recreational and educational centers on the need for joint activities for grandparents raising grandchildren.
- F.** Conduct a training for public library associations so that they are better prepared to understand their community’s need for intergenerational activities and educational resources for grandparents raising grandchildren.
- G.** Conduct a Grandparents Raising Grandchildren workshop at ODA’s 1999 Multidisciplinary Institute on Aging to emphasize the importance of intergenerational relations.

Concern #9: Increase Financial Assistance to Low-Income Grandparents

Financial assistance available to grandparents and other relatives providing care for Ohio children is, generally, much lower than that provided to non-related foster parents. Though federal regulations give states flexibility in determining an objective and equitable basis for allocating funds for foster care of children, grandparents raising grandchildren in our state receive, on average, \$220 per-month (per-child) less than non-related foster parents. The licensing requirements necessary for an effective foster care system pose significant barriers to grandparents, though kinship placement is a preferable option for the effective raising of children.

Recommendation #9

- ***Encourage the General Assembly to commission and fund a study of how best to increase financial assistance to low-income grandparents.***

Action Steps

- A.** Grant the ODHS the authority to waive current requirements of the Kinship Care Family Preservation Supportive Services program (Ohio Administrative Rules 5101:2-39-073 and 5101-10-6-39) if the child under a grandparent's care does not have a current case with a public children's services agency and the grandparent has a notarized affidavit stating that the grandparent is the child's primary caregiver.
- B.** Expand Ohio's Kinship Care Family Preservation Supportive Services project (as delineated in the above-referenced sections of the ORC) to increase fiscal support to grandparents raising grandchildren for "start-up" responsibilities (such as clothing) in proportion to "start-up" support currently received by foster parents.
- C.** Modify the Kinship Care Family Preservation Supportive Services project (again, as delineated in the above-referenced sections of the ORC) to lessen the required administrative supervision (i.e., the requirement that open case records be maintained for each child receiving assistance). This could be accomplished through the use of a notarized affidavit stating that the grandparent is the grandchild's physical custodian. This will allow grandparents raising grandchildren to receive assistance without the "open case" status now required.
- D.** Study the inequity between grandparents raising grandchildren and foster caregivers and the advisability of modifying licensing requirements to allow grandparents raising grandchildren to receive payments equal to those of non-related foster parents.

Concern #10: Grandchild Care

Approximately 56 percent of Ohio's grandchildren being raised by their grandparents are age six or younger. Given that 45 percent of the grandparents raising grandchildren in our state are still employed, the need for daycare services in this area is significant.

Recommendation #10

- ***Provide accessible and affordable child care for grandparents raising grandchildren.***

Action Steps

- A.** Inform grandparents about child care resource and referral systems that are existing private and non-profit agencies.
- B.** Educate grandparents raising grandchildren about child care tax credits.
- C.** Assist grandparents (whose income does not exceed 185 percent of the poverty line) with the cost of childcare, using the same Ohio Child Care Development Fund requirements as those for traditional parents.
- D.** Notify childcare centers and home providers that grandparents can enroll grandchildren in child care and authorize medical attention with notarized affidavits.

E. Educate childcare providers about grandparents raising grandchildren through the early childhood network and home daycare provider training. This education would be provided in partnership with public TV stations and Training Ohio's Program Staff (TOPS) on the Human Services network and videoconferencing system.

Concern #11: School-Age Care

Grandchildren of school-age require different kinds of care than their younger counterparts, namely: after-school care; transportation and tutoring. The grandparents raising them indicate finances are the number one obstacle to overcome in procuring these services. Tutoring and transportation services are deemed important by 70 percent and 54 percent, respectively, of Ohio's grandparents raising grandchildren.

Recommendation #11

- ***Expand child care to encompass after-school care and tutoring.***

Action Steps

- A.** Involve the Department of Education in expanding public school services to include transportation for both before- and after-school programs.
- B.** Expand ODA's Seniors Teaching And Reaching Students (STARS) program to involve STARS' tutors in after-school programs.
- C.** Train STARS volunteers and other tutors and mentors regarding diverse family structures, particularly those pertaining to grandparents raising grandchildren and the special circumstances/needs that may arise from these parenting relationships.

Concern #12: Adoption Proceedings

Less than 3 percent of Ohio grandparents have legally adopted the grandchildren they are raising. Roughly 25 percent express concern about the cost of adoption proceedings. When re-unification with natural parents is not possible, social agencies favor adoption by relatives, such as grandparents, as it often solidifies already established relationships and gives children a valuable connection to their extended family.

Recommendation #12

- ***Increase support for grandparents willing to adopt their grandchildren. The Federal Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-272) buttresses the belief that states should seek the most family-like setting for adopted children; and that relatives are more likely than non-relatives to advance the best interests of the adopted child.***

Action Steps

- A.** Educate grandparents interested in adopting their grandchildren about adoption subsidies (Title IV-E, Non-recurring Post-Adoption Special Services Subsidy, State Adoption Maintenance Subsidy and State Special Services Subsidy), adoption tax credits, and services available through the local public children's services agencies (PCSAs).
- B.** Create advocacy positions to serve as liaisons and ombudsmen to assist with adoption proceedings and related legal issues.

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Task Force

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Quotes from grandparents taken from: Landry Meyer, L. (1999)
Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: An Investigation of Roles and Support
Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

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