

The Healthy Grandparent Program: *Building Stronger Grandparent Caregiver Families*

The Challenge:

The number of grandparents and great-grandparents raising children grows annually. Census 2000 found 2.4 million grandparents were primary caregivers for more than 4.4 million children. Grandparent caregivers are more likely to be female, younger, unmarried, African-American, poor, under educated and living in the South than grandparents who are not raising children. Many of the children come into the care of grandparents because their parents are involved in drug abuse associated with child neglect/abuse, parental incarceration, parental HIV/AIDS, and parental death.

The Goal:

Strengthen families and improve family function where grandparents are the primary caregivers.

Where To Learn More

Judith S. Salzer, PhD, MBA, RN,
CPNP
Associate Dean for Strategic
Management
School of Nursing
Medical College of Georgia
Augusta, Georgia 30912
Phone: (706) 721-5198
Email: jsalzer@mail.mcg.edu

An Innovative Solution:

The Healthy Grandparent Program, established by the Medical College of Georgia School of Nursing in 1998, is supported by an annual competitive grant from Georgia's Department of Human Resources Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program with matching funds from the Medical College of Georgia School of Nursing.

What It Is

- A multidimensional, interdisciplinary, home-based intervention model that uses a strengths-based case management approach and individualized family plans to promote family well-being.
- Program staff includes the program director (a nurse practitioner), program coordinator (a full-time social worker), and a part-time nurse. Nurse practitioner students and community volunteers also participate.

What It Does

- Monthly home visits by a registered nurse or nurse practitioner student during the first year of participation provides screening, health problem monitoring, targeted education and support for life style changes. Referrals are made for appropriate physical and/or mental health services with follow up occurring on subsequent visits and phone calls.
- A monthly support group provides grandparents with a new peer group whose members understand what they're going through.
 - An educational component is provided by nurse practitioner students, community partners or the program coordinator.
 - Child care provided during support group meetings enables children to interact with other children who are being raised by grandparents.
 - Student child life specialists guide the age appropriate activities of the children with the assistance of college students or other community volunteers.

How It Stands Out

- Participating families have shown an increase in resources, increase in social support and increase in family stability. They are more involved in improving their health status and feel more confident advocating for themselves and the children they are raising. Most significantly, the families' feelings of empowerment are increased.
- The program taught grandparents how to easily access resources such as: community food banks, free or low cost health care, pro bono legal services, and state or federal programs including TANF (temporary assistance to needy families), food stamps, WIC, SCHIP, Medicaid, and prescription drug programs through various drug companies. The grandparents often needed assistance to better understand how to complete required paperwork and appreciated knowing who to call and what information would be needed to obtain resources for which they qualified.
- Participants showed a statistically significant increase in social support as measured by the Family Support Scale after program participation. Grandparents overwhelmingly focused on the social support they experienced as a primary advantage of the program, especially support received from peers. Peer support proved to be both empowering and a buffer for stress for the grandparents interviewed. More information on the family support scale is available at: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/ehs/perf_measures/reports/resources_measuring/res_meas_phin.html.
- Grandparents saw the positive influence participation in the program had on their grandchildren. Enabling the children to bond with others "in the same boat" was perceived as very positive but may have been a projection of the grandparents' feelings about their own peer support.
- Even with access to available public resources and the benefits of the Healthy Grandparent Program, many families' overall resources remain insufficient to fully meet child-rearing needs – pointing to the need to enhance the array of public resources available to these families as part of a long-term solution to their challenges.
- Through its *Promoting Safe and Stable Families* initiatives, Georgia is unique as it targets grandparent and other relative caregivers needing special support. The Healthy Grandparent Program is part of a loose coalition of organizations and groups that are built around that approach.