

Kinship Caregiving: Challenges and Solutions for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren and Relatives as Parents

Grandparents who find themselves as parents to their grandkids face a whole lot of new challenges that range from the practical to the legal to the financial and emotional.

The population has grown – and with it, a need for support and for policies that will help families thrive.

AAA 1-B funds two programs for grandparents raising grandchildren (GRGs) through Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency and Catholic Social Services of Washtenaw. Many of the participants in the programs came to our Listening Sessions in early 2019—designed to take input for planning purposes—to advocate for more help.

In response, our Advisory Council formed an ad hoc committee to study the issue over the summer, including the “pain points” for grandparents raising grandchildren, barriers, access to community services, and to make recommendations:

Some findings:

- Nearly 15,000 grandparents are raising their grandchildren in the six-county area served by AAA 1-B (Livingston, Macomb, Monroe, Oakland, St. Clair and Washtenaw). The highest proportions are in Livingston and Monroe.
- Just under 7,000 of GRGs are over age 60 (the remainder are between ages 30 and 59).
- A higher proportion of younger grandparents are living in poverty, but grandparents over age 60 have higher rates of disability.
- Depending on the source, between 1.05% and 5% of grandparents in our service region are the primary caretakers of their grandchildren.
- The top reason grandparents become the primary caretakers of their grandchildren is substance abuse, followed by mental/emotional illness.
- The majority of grandparents do not have legal standing when it comes to their grandkids. That means they are not legal guardians nor adoptive or

foster parents. Not having legal standing means grandparents can't enroll their grandkids in a new school, for example.

- Many GRGs say there isn't enough support, including counseling

Some recommendations:

- Offer more support groups, counseling and social events for the emotional well being of GRGs
- Provide more financial assistance to cover expenses including clothing, food, school supplies and health insurance
- Offer more education and information to GRGs, service providers and policy makers
- Offer parenting training in coping with drug abuse issues, behavioral issues and contemporary child-rearing norms
- Offer more respite programs to GRGs, who are often stressed out
- Advocate for laws that would support kinship caregivers, including offering free legal assistance; that would include the establishment of a kinship caregiver advisory council at the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services
- Help kinship caregivers access Michigan Department of Health and Human Services' Family Independence Program Child Only grant and other financial resources that offer a payment benefit to financially eligible GRGs
- Advocate for more financial support for the Kinship Caregiver Resource Center at MSU

The report will be shared with state legislators, the region's aging network leadership, select foundations, the Aging and Adult Services Agency, and other stakeholders.

