



A PLACE TO CALL HOME:  
BUILDING AFFORDABLE HOUSING  
FOR GRANDFAMILIES



**generations  
united**

Because we're stronger together<sup>®</sup>

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across the United States, more than 2.65 million children live in grandfamilies – families in which grandparents, other adult family members or close family friends are raising children – with no parents in the home.<sup>1</sup> 140,675 of these children are in foster care with relatives.<sup>2</sup> Although a relatively small number of children, it represents 32 percent of all children in foster care in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Parental substance use, death or incarceration are common reasons that cause grandfamilies to come together. Since these traumatic situations typically do not come with any planning time, the housing challenges grandfamilies face are unique.

The grandfamily caregiver's home, whether rented or owned, is often too small for their suddenly expanded household. They may not be able to make modifications to their own properties or they may rent apartments and find themselves unable to get additional space for the children. Depending on where the grandfamilies live and whether the caregivers have legal custody of the children, regional HUD offices, local housing authorities and private housing owners who rent their properties as "Section 8" subsidized housing may not recognize grandfamilies as "families" who are eligible for this housing. Grandfamilies may also not qualify for priority housing vouchers that other families can get if the children are at risk of entering foster care.

Even worse than inadequate space, caregivers may lose their homes. They may be renting through private lease agreements that prohibit children as residents.

Advances have been made to help grandfamilies with their housing challenges. Over the last two decades, the first federal housing law specifically for grandfamilies was enacted, and about twenty specialized grandfamilies housing developments are serving the families in various communities around the country. Some communities facilitate the construction of Accessory Dwelling Units, which could be used by homeowners to expand their homes and house the children they suddenly find themselves raising. "Handyman" programs may also exist to help grandfamilies childproof or make other necessary modifications or repairs to their homes. For grandfamily caregivers who rent, some HUD regional offices, local housing authorities and private housing owners align with federal policy and consider "grandfamilies" as "families" for purposes of subsidized housing.

Despite progress, challenges persist around the country. In this report, Generations United seeks to highlight existing housing solutions and recommend additional advances that can be made to support grandfamilies.



photo courtesy of PSS/WSF Grandparent Family Apartments

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### KEY FACTS AND FINDINGS

- More than 2.65 million children live in grandfamilies or kinship care without a birth parent in the home.<sup>4</sup>
- Of these children, 140,675 children are with relatives in the foster care system, representing about one-third of all children in foster care.<sup>5</sup> These children in "kinship foster care" are typically with relatives who are not licensed foster parents, in part because of barriers caused by state licensing standards. Consequently, these children do not receive monthly maintenance payments or assistance with housing and other services.
- The number of children living in foster care without a foster care maintenance payment increased by 32 percent between 2011 and 2017, from 81,838 to 108,426 children.<sup>6</sup> Experts presume that the vast majority of these children live in grandfamilies.<sup>7</sup>
- About 30.5 percent of children whose grandparents are responsible for them and have no parent in the home are poor, compared to 18.4 percent of children in the general population.<sup>8</sup>
- Over 60 percent of grandparents responsible for grandchildren have raised their grandchildren for at least three years, with most raising their grandchildren for five or more years.<sup>9</sup>
- Although affordable housing is a challenging issue for many Americans, grandfamilies are in a unique situation. The caregivers are often responding to an urgent situation with little to no planning time to find suitable housing and no legal relationship to the children.
- Very low-income grandparent-headed households who rent have the most severe housing affordability problem of all families. Almost half of these grandfamilies spend more than 50 percent of their gross monthly income on rent.<sup>10</sup>
- Less than one-third of income-eligible grandfamilies receive housing assistance.<sup>11</sup>
- Barriers to receiving housing assistance include HUD offices, local housing authorities, and private housing owners who will not recognize grandfamilies as "families" for purposes of that assistance.
- There are at least 19 specialized grandfamilies housing programs with on-site services in various communities around the United States with the potential for nationwide expansion.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Urge the U.S. Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Interior and the Treasury to provide clear written guidance that their housing programs cannot block assistance from lawfully eligible households that include grandfamily caregivers without legal custody of the children they raise.
- Work to ensure that states align their standards with the National Model Family Foster Home Licensing Standards, which address housing barriers for relatives to become licensed foster parents.
- Enact pending federal legislation to facilitate the expansion of specially designed grandfamily housing and provide direct assistance to grandfamilies for their housing stabilization: The Grandfamilies Act and The Family First Transition and Support Act.
- Encourage Congress to increase federal investments in affordable housing programs that can benefit all grandfamilies, including those on tribal lands.
- Advocate that city and county governments facilitate the construction of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) for grandfamilies.
- Work with HUD offices, state, tribal, county and city governments, local housing authorities and private housing owners to facilitate affordable housing for grandfamilies.
- Support tribes in addressing their housing needs through model policies and specially designed grandfamilies housing that address their own community needs.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Fund and establish a National Grandfamilies Technical Assistance Center to coordinate expertise around grandfamily housing issues, programs and developments.
- Ensure that kinship navigators around the country are partnering with state, tribal and local governments and agencies, local housing authorities and specialized grandfamily-housing.
- Create a comprehensive toolkit for developing grandfamilies housing to support the creation of additional programs.
- Raise awareness about grandfamilies and their housing challenges among lenders, federal, tribal, state and local governments and agencies.
- Ensure that state, tribal and local government agencies, which administer the HOME housing program, the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and Indian Community Development Block Grant (ICDBG) include housing for grandfamilies in their yearly Consolidated Plans and Action Plans as priorities or eligible types of housing to be assisted.<sup>12</sup>
- Create a peer learning community on grandfamilies housing to spread promising practices.



### RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Encourage the U.S. Census Bureau to regularly and publicly report on grandfamily housing needs.
- Ensure improved, overall data collection on American Indian and Alaska Native grandfamilies and their housing and other needs.
- Conduct additional research on specialized-grandfamily housing, including the perspectives of young adults who grew up in that type of housing.

## INTRODUCTION

*After taking on the responsibility of raising her granddaughter, Magdalena discovered her rental home had extremely high lead levels. Rather than mitigating the lead, the landlord chose to evict the new grandfamily, relying on a provision in the lease agreement that they only rent to adults. Three weeks before Christmas during an epic snowstorm, Magdalena found herself searching for a lead-free rental, so that the child welfare agency would not remove her granddaughter from her care.*

Across the United States, more than 2.65 million children live in grandfamilies – families in which grandparents, other adult family members or close family friends are raising children without parents in the home.<sup>13</sup> These families frequently come together at a moment's notice, often with a call in the middle of the night from a parent, the police or a child welfare agency telling them they must take the children or they will end up in foster care with strangers. Parental substance use, death or incarceration are common reasons that cause grandfamilies to come together. Since these difficult and traumatic situations typically do not come with planning time, the housing challenges grandfamilies face are unique. In an instant, the home of the new grandfamily caregiver can become inadequate for their suddenly expanded household. Older adults who are retired and living in small apartments can find themselves raising related children and unable to get additional space for them. Depending on where the grandfamilies live and whether the caregivers have legal custody of the children, housing authorities, HUD offices, and private housing owners who rent their properties under the "Section 8" Housing Voucher Program may not recognize them as "families" for purposes of this housing. Grandfamilies may also not qualify for priority housing vouchers that other families can get if the children are at risk of entering foster care. Even worse than inadequate space, caregivers may lose their homes. They may be renting through private lease agreements that prohibit children from living there. Evictions are common and can happen at very difficult times, as Magdalena and her granddaughter know all too well.

Progress is being made to address these and similar housing challenges faced by grandfamilies. There are now at least nineteen specialized grandfamilies housing programs with on-site services in various communities around the United States. These innovative programs and other housing solutions offer potential for nationwide expansion. In this report, Generations United seeks to highlight these solutions and recommend additional advances that can be made to truly support "grand" families.

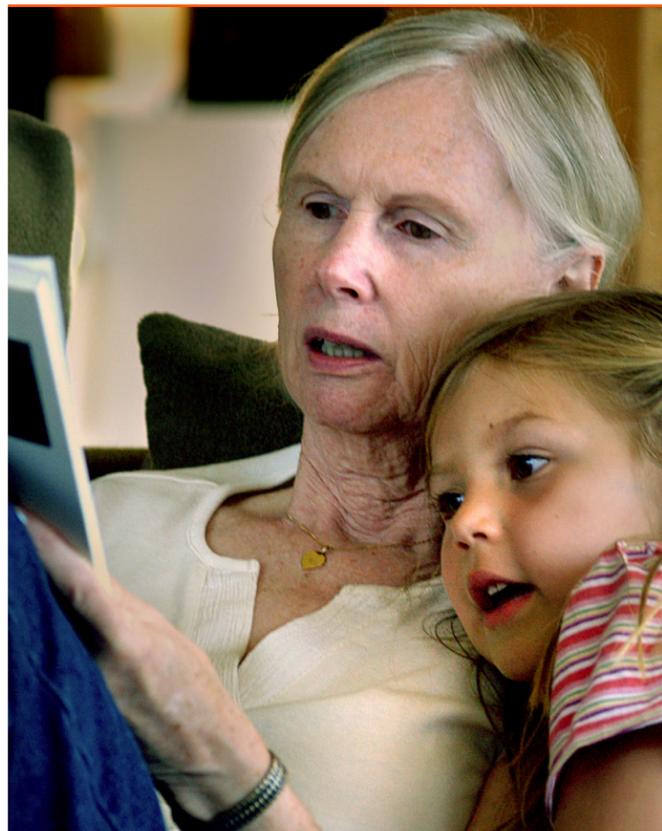


photo by Richard Alder

## HISTORY OF GRANDFAMILIES HOUSING REFORMS

In 1998, GrandFamilies House in Dorchester, Massachusetts opened its doors as the first housing program specifically for grandparents raising grandchildren. Building on its pioneering work, several more developments have opened around the country; the latest opened its doors in 2018 in Washington D.C.

For over twenty years, Generations United has been tracking and assisting these housing programs, in addition to working in other ways to create affordable housing opportunities for grandfamilies. Our housing work began in 1999, with a survey of caregivers and those who directly support them and discovered that affordable housing was one of the families' most serious concerns.<sup>14</sup>

After the survey results, to increase visibility of grandfamilies' housing challenges, Generations United organized Congressional briefings. We also worked with other organizations to successfully enact a change to the federal HOME housing program that effectively allows more revenue to housing developments specifically for grandfamilies.<sup>15</sup>

This early housing work culminated in LEGACY - Living Equitably: Grandparents Aiding Children and Youth - the first federal legislation to create affordable housing opportunities for grandfamilies. LEGACY takes its name from the powerful Academy Award-nominated documentary, *Legacy*, about a grandfamily's housing and other struggles in Chicago. A *Legacy* outreach campaign provided mini grants to various sites around the country that helped the families. The campaign also produced a toolkit that raised media and public awareness about grandfamilies and their challenges obtaining affordable housing.

Among the work that led to passage of the LEGACY bill, the Children's Defense Fund, Generations United and several other organizations collaborated to

organize the first national GrandRally on Capitol Hill. The successful 2003 GrandRally drew more than 850 caregivers and their supporters from over half the states to tell federal lawmakers about the challenges they face and how to help them. The caregivers spoke of their need for affordable housing. Two months later, major provisions of LEGACY were included in a large housing bill that became law. The new law called for training of U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) personnel on issues facing grandfamilies; a national study by HUD and the U.S. Census Bureau of grandfamilies' housing needs; and grants for demonstration projects to create grandfamilies housing.

Although LEGACY authorized funds to accomplish the program's objectives, it lacked a specific appropriation. Consequently, HUD did not implement the law. Generations United advocated for a specific appropriation, while also convening a national grandfamilies housing symposium with housing developers and service providers from around the country. Following a second, larger GrandRally in 2005, lawmakers appropriated \$4 million to implement LEGACY through the Section 202 housing for the elderly program.



photo by TianLin Zhu

Once the funding was in place, HUD took action to implement the LEGACY provisions:<sup>16</sup>

- 1. Training.** In 2007, HUD – with its subcontractor Generations United – broadcasted a three-hour training on grandfamilies, their housing needs, and LEGACY to HUD’s regional and headquarter staff.
- 2. National Study.** After the training, HUD released its 2008 *Intergenerational Housing Needs and HUD Program Options* Report to Congress.
- 3. Demonstration Projects.** In December 2008, HUD awarded \$3.9 million for demonstration projects, one in urban Chicago and the other in rural Tennessee. The Chicago development opened in 2011 and has 10 units consisting of three and four bedrooms that can serve up to 34 residents. The Smithville, Tennessee development opened the same year and has nine two-bedroom units plus a manager’s unit for up to 20 residents.

As LEGACY was becoming law and since that time, other specially designed grandfamily housing programs have opened in various areas around the country, including the first ground-up development in the South Bronx known as PSS/WSF Grandparent Family Apartments. These housing programs serve grandfamilies both inside and outside the child welfare system.

For those relatives caring for children in the custody of child welfare agencies, Generations United worked with partners at the American Bar Association (ABA) Center on Children and the Law, the National Association for Regulatory Administration (NARA) and the Annie E. Casey Foundation to address unnecessary barriers for relatives to become licensed foster parents. We collectively created the NARA Model Family Foster Home Licensing Standards, which addresses many challenges caused by state standards, including numerous housing requirements that prevent relatives from being licensed and getting the support, services and pathways to permanency

that come with that designation.<sup>17</sup> The NARA Model removes common barriers that do not impact the child’s safety such as square footage requirements, mandating separate bedrooms for each child even when they are related, and obligations to have private outdoor play space.

A few years later, the Family First Prevention Services Act (Family First) became law and included a provision directing the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to identify Model Standards to break down unnecessary barriers caused by licensing standards. HHS turned to the NARA Model and “relied heavily” on it. States and tribes are required to compare their standards to the National Model and report back to HHS. The goal of this process is to break down these unnecessary barriers.

Despite these programs, policies and their successes, there remains much to be done to improve affordable housing opportunities for grandfamilies.



## TIMELINE: GRANDFAMILIES HOUSING REFORMS



## GRANDFAMILIES ARE DIVERSE

For the 2.65 million children who live in grandfamilies, services and supports vary dramatically across the country, and grandfamilies typically do not get the resources that they or the children need.<sup>18</sup> 140,675 of these children are in foster care with relatives.<sup>19</sup> Although a relatively small number of children, it represents 32 percent of all children in foster care in the United States.<sup>20</sup> The foster care system is relying on relatives, but is not supporting the relative caregivers or the children as they should. The system often places children with relatives as “kinship foster parents” without licensing them or providing the children in their care anywhere near the same level of assistance as a child in non-relative foster care. Newly released data compiled and analyzed by *The Chronicle of Social Change* show that the number of children living in a home without a foster care maintenance payment increased by 32 percent between 2011 and 2017, from 81,838 to 108,426 children.<sup>21</sup> *The Chronicle* analysts believe these children are primarily, if not exclusively, in kinship foster care with either grandparents, other relatives or close family friends, i.e., fictive kin.<sup>22</sup>

The limited available data on grandfamilies demonstrates that children whose grandparents are responsible for them span the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic spectrum.<sup>23</sup> However, the children in these families are more likely than other children to be poor. About 30.5 percent of children whose grandparents are responsible for them and have no parent in the home are poor, compared to 18.4 percent of children in the general population.<sup>24</sup> About 58 percent of children whose grandparents are responsible for them are White, 27 percent are Black or African American, 3 percent are American Indian and Alaska Native, 1 percent are Asian and 17 percent are Latino or Hispanic.<sup>25</sup> As for the caregivers, the national data on their race and ethnicity mirror that of the children they are raising. Grandfamilies come together because the parents are unable to raise their children. That inability may

be due to many reasons, including parental opioid, other substance and/or alcohol use, incarceration, death, teenage pregnancy, mental illness, and cognitive or physical disability. It is because these things can happen to anyone that we see this diversity among the families.

Also due to the many traumatic and difficult reasons parents are unable to raise their children, the children in grandfamilies are more likely than the general population of children to have social, emotional, physical and behavioral challenges. They have frequently been exposed to drugs or alcohol in utero and many of the children have special needs.<sup>26</sup> Caregivers are frequently stressed because they are caring for children at a time in their lives they did not expect to be, and they are often socially isolated from their peers.<sup>27</sup> They may feel a sense of shame and guilt about their own adult children who are unable to parent.<sup>28</sup>

Which parental factor causes the grandfamily to form also undoubtedly influences how long the caregivers raise these children. For most caregivers, the commitment is a long time, and stable housing is critical. Over sixty percent of grandparents responsible for grandchildren have raised their grandchildren for at least three years.<sup>29</sup> Forty five percent of all grandparent caregivers have raised their grandchildren for five or more years, and another 15 percent have raised their grandchildren for 3 to 4 years.<sup>30</sup>



photo courtesy of PSS/WSF Grandparent Family Apartments

## GRANDFAMILIES HAVE RESTRICTED ACCESS TO SERVICES

Despite raising these children for many years, grandfamily caregivers often cannot access critical services for the children. For those children in kinship foster care, access can be easier than for those not in the formal system. The state or tribe generally has legal custody of the children in kinship foster care, so caseworkers and judges can facilitate entry into housing programs, in addition to other services and benefits. If the relative is licensed as a foster parent, the child can receive monthly foster care maintenance payments, services and a pathway to supported permanency through Guardianship Assistance Programs and adoption subsidies.

A major factor impacting access issues outside of foster care is that many of these children do not have a legal relationship, such as legal custody or guardianship, with their caregivers. They may lack such a relationship for many reasons. Often their caregivers may have difficulty finding an affordable lawyer or they may not want to go through the expense, delay, and trauma of suing the birth parents for such a relationship. Without a legal relationship to the children or a foster care placement of them, caregivers can have trouble enrolling the children in school; accessing special education services; consenting to vaccinations and health care; obtaining health insurance coverage; and finding affordable housing suitable for the children.

A legal relationship is not required under federal law to access the array of public benefits and income supports that may be available, including the “Section 8” Housing Voucher Program, which subsidizes housing rents for low-income individuals and families. However, access can be challenging for other reasons. For example, to obtain a Temporary Assistance for Needy Family (TANF) child-only grant, which is typically the only source of potential

ongoing support for the children, caregivers usually have to assign to the state or tribe their right to collect child support from the parents. Caregivers often do not want to pose another problem for the parents who are trying to re-parent or caregivers may fear retaliation from the parents if they assign child support collection to the state or tribe. The federal government allows states and tribes to waive that assignment for good cause, but few jurisdictions actually have a clear practice that allows caregivers to access that exemption. TANF and Medicaid for the child are often linked, so restricting access to one can impact the other. Other federal supports, like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or “food stamps,” require caregivers to share a lot of information, including their income. In many cases, it may be retirement income that is too high to qualify for SNAP, even though the children are at risk of food insecurity.

American Indian and Alaska Native children can face barriers accessing tribal services if they are not enrolled in their tribe. Tribal enrollment can be difficult for American Indian and Alaska Native children being raised in grandfamilies unless the children’s parents are available to help during that process.

**A legal relationship is not required under federal law to access the array of public benefits and income supports that may be available, including the “Section 8” Housing Voucher Program**

## GRANDFAMILIES AND FAMILY FOSTER CARE LICENSING:

JJ HITCH

JJ Hitch recalls that life had always been difficult in his childhood household. With a mother who suffered from mental illness and a father who used alcohol to numb his pain, JJ, his two younger brothers, and his little sister, Toni, were used to chaos—and worse. But everyone has a breaking point and that day came early for Toni. She remembers the day when her father returned home from a business trip and she witnessed her last violent outburst over not grabbing him another beer. Rationally, the six-year old girl walked into her room, packed two suitcases, road her bike two blocks to her grandparents' house and declared her intent to live there. Her grandmother knew the situation at Toni's house was bad and opened her home warmly. Shortly thereafter her three older brothers followed the brave little girl. When their father protested, Child Protective Services became involved and formally placed the children with their grandparents.

"You can imagine the impact this had on my grandparents. My grandfather was 72 at the time and just retired after 49 years with Chrysler. My grandmother was 62 and still working; in fact, she continues working to this day," JJ recalls. "Suddenly my grandparents had complete responsibility for four kids. At 14, I was the oldest; Toni was the youngest. The expenses were incredible: my grandparents had to buy bedroom furniture, clothes, food for four growing kids. Their income was very limited so it was extremely difficult for them." For three years, JJ's grandparents received limited public benefits to help meet some of the children's needs, but the support would have been enough to meet the children's needs had the grandparents been licensed foster parents.

So, JJ's grandparents pursued becoming licensed foster parents, but their house was too small

to meet the state foster care requirements. JJ's grandfather, great-grandfather, and great-uncles pooled their resources and time to build a larger house, but the new one still didn't satisfy state regulations, so the family had to install handrails, paint, and build additional rooms.

The family pulled all-nighters to make sure the house would be finished on time, so JJ and his brothers and sister wouldn't be split up. Between home construction costs and meeting the children's basic needs, JJ's grandparents had to file bankruptcy. The family was spending more than they could bring in. JJ recalls a time they were six months behind on the house payment and were being threatened with eviction.

"We all felt responsible," he explains. "It ruined my grandparents' credit."

"My grandparents were eventually licensed through the state and were provided as much money as the state allotted, but it was not equivalent to the support that strangers received at the time, to take care of children in need." JJ's grandparents later adopted him and his siblings and, according to JJ, "three of the four of us are doing outstanding."

"My grandfather eventually passed away in his comfortable chair with his kitty on his lap under his right arm. My grandmother and youngest brother still live in the house. I live closer to work and about 100 miles away from the place I will always call my home and visit weekly. We still have the debt, it still needs fixing, nevertheless, we have the family that deserves to be around us. I will always have the memories of peace and long conversations with that man here, on 10 rough acres of his estate. We will always keep this space no matter the cost."

"Even though my grandfather didn't live long enough to see Toni walk across the stage to graduate high school, the birth of her beautiful baby girl, nor I graduate with my Master's- his legacy lives through us." JJ now works in the medical field for a nonprofit called Eversight as a clinical recovery technician. Eversight creates vision by corneal transplantation through the healing power of donation. JJ drives to all the hospitals and morgues in the lower peninsula of Michigan to perform surgical procedures through the brave act of donation after death. "Since I started the position in January of 2019, I have helped restore vision for over 500 people, with no plans of stopping."

JJ's story is a success, but he is always sure to say that it is only because of the help of his grandparents.

And JJ's success came at great cost. His grandparents struggled for years to make monthly house payments and recover from bankruptcy. Much of their hardship came from the cost of home renovations that licensing laws required. Policy makers did not create these laws with related foster families in mind.

Addressing unnecessary barriers to licensing relatives as foster parents could have helped JJ and his siblings have a safe and stable home with their grandparents without inflicting serious ongoing damage on the family's finances.



photo courtesy of JJ Hitch

## GRANDFAMILIES FACE UNIQUE HOUSING CHALLENGES

In addition to the array of general access issues, affordable housing is one of the most basic and critical needs for grandfamilies. Housing is a challenging issue for many Americans, and the housing “cost burden” of grandfamilies is similar to that of American families in general. Cost burdened families pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing and consequently may have difficulty affording food, clothing, transportation and medical care. About 75 percent of grandparent-headed and other relative-headed renter households with income levels at 30 percent of median family income spend 30 percent or more of their gross monthly income on housing.<sup>31</sup>

However, in addition to the high cost of housing for many, grandfamilies face additional barriers that most families do not. Grandfamilies are typically responding to an urgent situation and find children on their doorsteps with little to no warning. Their families literally grow overnight unlike any other type of family. Different than birth or adoptive parents or non-related foster parents, they do not have the legal paperwork or the planning time to help them access housing. Consequently, their problems are unique:

- Many of these caregivers live on fixed incomes and/or in small apartments and houses that are not suitable for children.
- They may no longer be able to afford the rent or mortgage and upkeep of their apartments or houses after assuming the extra expenses of raising children.
- If they live in some senior housing where children are not allowed to live, they are often subject to eviction if the children are discovered.
- The presence of additional children may violate their private lease agreements.
- If they do not have legal custody of the children, they are often unable to convince HUD, private owners or local housing authorities to recognize their need for larger apartments.
- When children are child welfare system-involved, relatives have difficulty becoming licensed due to state standards that have more to do with socioeconomic bias and litigation than with safety.
- On tribal lands, American Indian and Alaska Native grandfamily caregivers and other residents face much higher incidents of plumbing, kitchen and heating problems, structural deficiencies, and overcrowding than the general population.

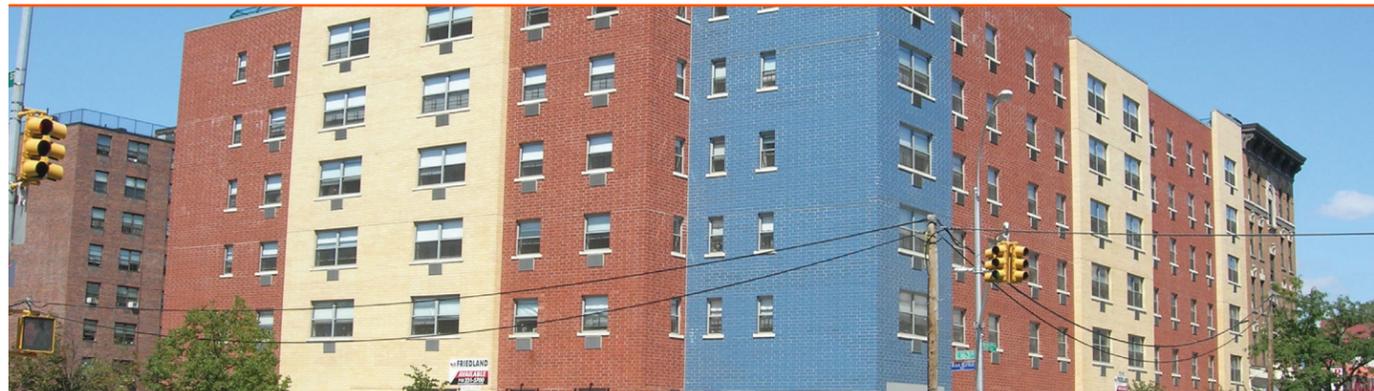


photo courtesy of PSS/WSF Grandparent Family Apartments

## HOUSING DATA: GRANDFAMILIES

Although about ten years old, the HUD report on *Intergenerational Housing* provides some useful insights into grandfamilies' housing challenges. We lack newer publicly available data, but suspect these challenges have likely gotten worse in the years since that report was published:

- **Very low-income grandparent-headed households who rent have the most severe housing affordability problem of all families.** Almost half of grandparents raising grandchildren who rent their homes and have incomes at or below 50 percent of median family income spend more than 50 percent of their gross monthly income on rent.<sup>32</sup>

### **Less than one-third of eligible grandfamilies receive housing assistance.**

About 55 percent of grandparent-headed households are eligible for public housing assistance, yet only approximately 30 percent receive some form of assistance. Nearly 41 percent of other relative headed households are eligible for housing assistance, and only roughly 29 percent receive assistance.<sup>33</sup>

## HOUSING DATA: AMERICAN INDIANS AND ALASKA NATIVES ON TRIBAL LANDS

Housing data is also very limited for American Indians and Alaska Natives in general and is nonexistent for American Indian and Alaska Native grandfamilies. However, a study by HUD, *Housing Needs of American Indians and Alaska Natives in Tribal Areas: A Report From the Assessment of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian Housing Needs*, which was published in 2017, sheds some light on American Indian and Alaska Natives on tribal lands:

### **Physical housing problems for American Indian and Alaska Native households in tribal areas are much more severe than for U.S. households on average.**

34 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native households have one or more physical housing problems compared with only 7 percent for all U.S. households. These physical problems include plumbing, kitchen deficiencies, heating, electrical, and condition or structural issues.<sup>34</sup>

### **Overcrowding is much more prevalent in tribal areas.**

Overcrowding, as defined by more than one person per room, existed in 2 percent of all households in the U.S. and 16 percent in American Indian and Alaska Native households in tribal areas.<sup>35</sup>

## COMBINED HOUSING DATA

### **The majority of grandfamilies, and American Indians and Alaska Natives on tribal lands, own their own homes.**

About 60 percent of grandparents and other

relatives raising children are homeowners, and roughly 68 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native households in tribal areas were homeowners in 2013–2015.<sup>36</sup>

## HOUSING AND OTHER SUPPORTS FOR GRANDFAMILIES HELP CHILDREN THRIVE

Despite housing and other challenges, children in grandfamilies thrive. Decades of research comparing the outcomes of children in foster care with relatives to those in foster care with non-relatives demonstrate just how well children fare in relative care. Children in foster care with relatives have more stable and safe childhoods with a greater likelihood of having a permanent home.<sup>37</sup> About 36 percent of all children adopted from foster care are adopted by relatives and 11 percent of children who exit foster care, exit into guardianships.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, children in foster care with relatives are less likely to re-enter the foster care system after returning to birth parents.<sup>39</sup> These children also experience fewer school changes, have better behavioral and mental

health outcomes, and are more likely to report that they “always feel loved.”<sup>40</sup> Children living with relatives keep their connections to brothers, sisters, extended family and community and their cultural identity.<sup>41</sup>

Research further shows that when caregivers in grandfamilies receive services and support, children have significantly better social and mental health outcomes than children of caregivers who do not receive services and support.<sup>42</sup> Examples of services and supports that demonstrate improved outcomes include support groups, mental health services, case management, and kinship navigator programs that connect grandfamilies to services and resources, including affordable housing.<sup>43</sup>



photos courtesy of Plaza West

## GRANDFAMILIES WELCOME HOME: MS. CASSANDRA GENTRY AND PLAZA WEST GRANDPARENT APARTMENTS

Grandfamily housing is helping households like Cassandra Gentry's, who were among the first residents to move into Plaza West, a 12-story apartment building in downtown Washington D.C.

Fifty of the 223 units are reserved for grandparents who are raising grandchildren.

The project – a partnership between Mission First Housing Group and Bible Way Church – includes on-site services like after-school tutoring for Cassandra's grandson, Tay Sean, and great-granddaughter, Jada. Residents also have access to medical screenings and summer programs.

“This...is going to make the kids more successful. They're going to be able to go out and meet the criteria of the social industry today,” said Cassandra, who connects with other grandparent caregivers through the grandfamily community life program at Plaza West. “I think that's so important. And for the grandparents to have that type of support is just astronomical.”

Plaza West is a colossal leap from where her family started.

After raising her three children, Cassandra didn't think she'd be a repeat parent. Then came her grandson, Tay Sean, whose mom left him with her and never came back. Cassandra also started raising her great-granddaughter, Jada, whose father (Cassandra's grandson) was killed in 2016.

When she raised her kids, Cassandra was financially stable, working two jobs.

Now, she's on a fixed income. She needed a new place to live with her grandson and great-granddaughter. Prior to Plaza West, she didn't know where to turn.

These housing concerns aren't unique to grandparents who take on caregiving responsibilities with no warning. Many of these caregivers, like Cassandra, live on fixed incomes and/or in small apartments and houses that are not suitable for children. At some places, the presence of additional children may violate their private lease agreements.

Senior housing wasn't an option for Cassandra.

“They won't even allow us to fill out the application when we tell them that we have kids,” she said. “We're seniors, we are on a fixed income. We just have children...so what do we do?”

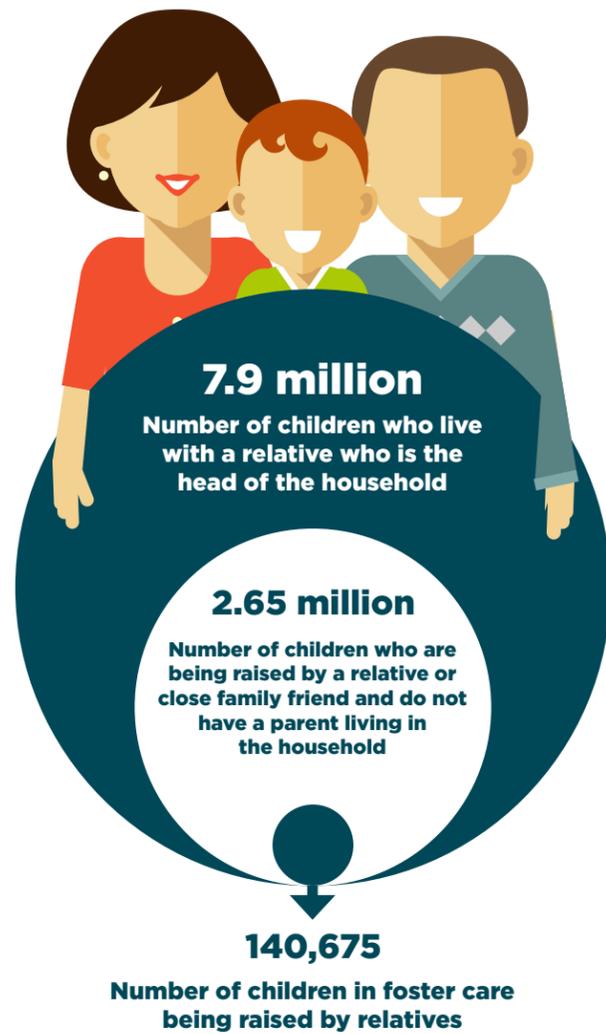
She knew what to do in 2018, when she heard about the Plaza West apartment building.

“There's a growing recognition in the United States, right now, that grandfamilies in general are on the rise,” said Elizabeth Everhart, senior development manager at Mission First Housing Group. “What we've discovered too is that many times the seniors and the children are both suffering trauma from the lack of the parent being present in the household.”

When Cassandra considers all that Plaza West offers, she's grateful for her good fortune.

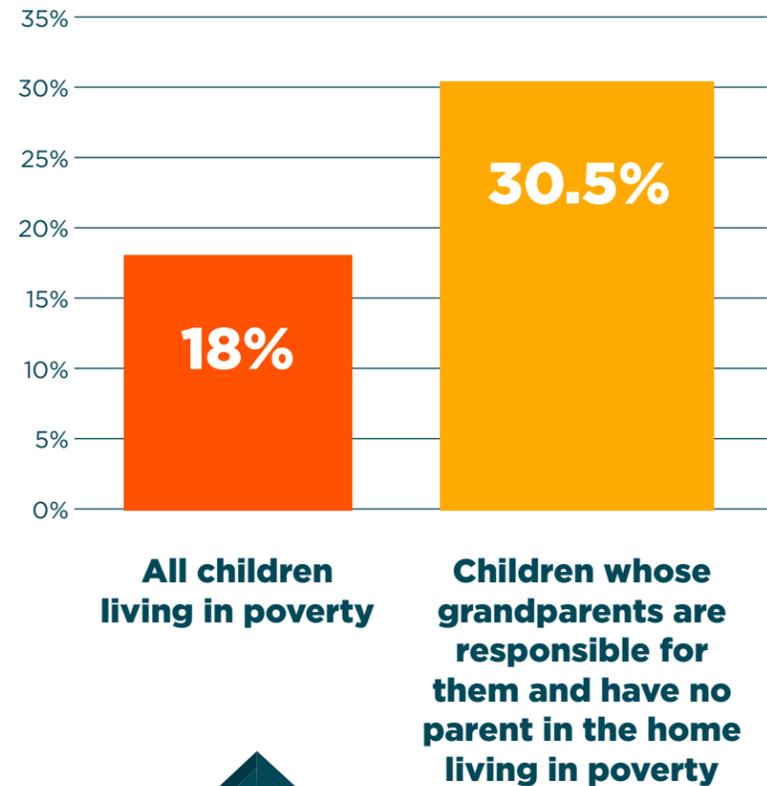
“I can go live anywhere, but I can't get support services anywhere,” she said. “Most of us are on disability or social security. We're older, so we needed... [places] like this. We needed housing and now we have it.”

Portions of this profile were taken from Mission First Housing Group's video, *Welcome Home 2018 Video: Grandfamilies at Plaza West*.



### Children Thrive in Grandfamilies

### Child Poverty in the United States



60 percent of grandparents responsible for grandchildren have raised their grandchildren for at least 3 years



All of these data points are cited in this report's "Key Findings", except for the 7.9 million children number. That number is calculated based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2018 1-year estimates, available at data.census.gov, table number S0901.

## GRANDFAMILIES HOUSING SOLUTIONS

### “Section 8” Housing Voucher Program Subsidized Rental Housing – Clarify Legal Custody Issues

Despite over twenty years of grandfamilies being denied housing due to the lack of legal custody of the children, the Fair Housing Act makes clear that grandparents and other relatives cannot be required to have legal custody of the children in their care in order to qualify for assisted housing. HUD can provide clear directives to states and localities clarifying that legal custody is not required for “Section 8” Housing Voucher Program project-based housing vouchers or Section 202 housing for the elderly. In their rule books and various required housing plans, local housing authorities can further clarify that legal custody is not required for “Section 8” Housing Voucher Program tenant-based rental assistance or public housing.

The Federal Fair Housing Act protects individuals and families from discrimination on the basis of race, national origin, color, religion, sex, familial status, and disability in all housing transactions, public or private.<sup>44</sup> Familial status is defined to include grandparents and other relatives raising children with or without legal custody:

*Familial status means one or more individuals (who have not attained the age of 18 years) being domiciled with –*

1. *a parent or another person having legal custody of such individual or individuals; or*
2. *the designee of such parent or other person having custody, with the written permission of such parent or other person.*

*The protections afforded against discrimination on the basis of familial status shall apply to any person who is pregnant or in the process of securing legal custody of any individual who has not attained the age of 18 years.*<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore, analyses of HUD housing programs by the National Housing Law Project, memos from regional HUD offices, and at least one federal court decision, *Hann v. Housing Authority of Easton*, have found restrictive definitions of family to be in violation of the Fair Housing Act.<sup>46</sup>

The HUD Occupancy Handbook clarifies how family composition can be verified:

- A. *Owners may seek verification of family composition only if the owner has a clear, written policy. Verification is not required.*
- B. *Owners may use a policy to verify family composition to determine whether children reside in the household 50 percent or more of the time, as well as to determine the appropriate unit size for the family ...*
- C. *If an owner determines it necessary to verify family composition, information may be collected from sources listed in Appendix 3.*<sup>47</sup>

According to that Appendix, acceptable sources of verification are birth certificates; divorce actions; drivers’ licenses; employer records; income tax returns; marriage certificates; school records; social security administration records; social service agency records; support payment records; utility bills; and Veteran Administration records.<sup>48</sup>

### “Section 8” Housing Voucher Program Subsidized Rental Housing – Make Family Unification Program (FUP) Vouchers Available to Grandfamilies

The “Section 8” Family Unification Program (FUP) may also be accessed by grandfamilies. FUP is a program that gives priority “Section 8” vouchers to families for whom lack of stable housing puts the children at risk of entering foster care. Around the country, grandfamilies are not consistently treated as “families” who could qualify for this program. Some local housing authorities, HUD regional offices

and private housing owners allow grandfamilies in policy or practice to be included as “families” whereas others do not. Explicitly clarifying in federal, state and local policies that this program should allow relatives raising children to use these vouchers would help the program continue to meet its goal of preventing children from entering foster care due to the housing conditions of a family member.

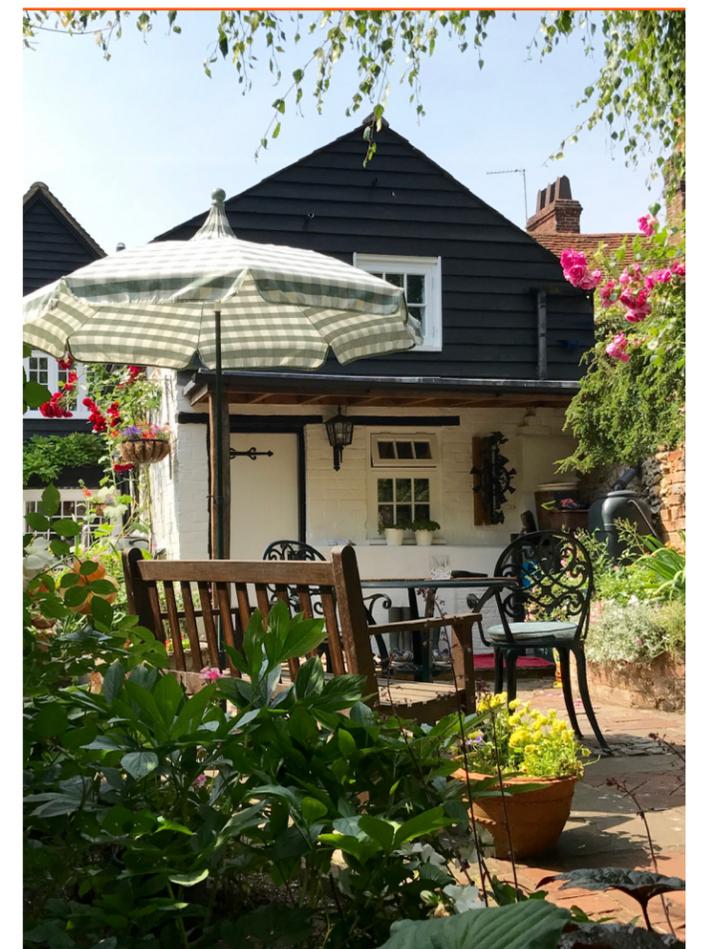
### Build Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) for Grandfamilies

The 60 percent of grandparents and other relatives raising children who own their homes may need more space due to the arrival of children. Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) are smaller dwelling units built on the same lot as, attached to, or incorporated into a single family home.<sup>49</sup> ADUs are expanding around the country in response to our nation’s affordable housing crisis and can address the needs of many grandfamilies whose space is too limited to take on the care of children and/or to meet foster care licensing standards. Cities and counties vary in their support of these ADUs, with some not allowing them. There is a balance to strike between allowing ADUs to be built safely and with regard to zoning, parking and other concerns. For a grandfamily who can use some of the equity in their primary residence to get these ADUs built, it can provide a space solution in the short-term and a potential source of rental income in the long-term.

Advocate that city and county governments facilitate the construction of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) for grandfamilies.

### Offer “Handyman” Programs

“Handyman” programs are generally local programs that provide free or discounted parts and labor for repairs, maintenance, and home modification for older adults, generally over age 62 or people with disabilities. Some communities fund “handyman” programs through HUD Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Indian Community Development Block Grant (ICDBG), and Older Americans Act (OAA) funds, while other programs are funded by city or private funds.<sup>50</sup> These types of programs are important for grandfamily caregivers who may not have the resources to childproof or make other necessary repairs to their homes. Depending on the funding source, “handyman” programs can and should be expanded to serve caregivers without regard to age or disability, as many of them are struggling to house and raise their unplanned and unexpected grandfamilies.



## GRANDFAMILIES AND TRIBAL HOUSING:

GrAND VOICE ROBYN WIND-TIGER

A few years ago, Robyn Wind-Tiger, a citizen of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, got a call that her then 3-month-old grandson was severely injured. Right away, she stepped up to care for him. He lived with her through his court case until he was reunified with his parents a year ago.

He was 4-and-a-half years old at the time. He's currently court ordered to be in her home three days a week.

Robyn was able to act fast and continue to care for her grandson because of tribal housing. It's a resource she had a hard time accessing when she was a new mom.

Imagine waiting nearly two decades for a house. That's what she did.

As soon as Robyn's son was born, she applied for a house and she, finally, got it when her son was 18 years old.

In the process, she experienced unique barriers that included long wait times.

"I think partly a lot of that is due to changing administrations," Robyn said of the Title VI Loan Guarantee Program.

It's funded through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Office of Native American Programs (ONAP), under HUD's Public and Indian Housing.

Robyn continued, "They sometimes change the rules on who is prioritized."

She experienced that shift at year 10 on the list. She got excited when someone from the tribal housing authority called and said she was next. She remembers looking at the house and being assured she could break the lease with her landlord.

Then, amid preparing for the move, she got another call, explaining she had been skipped over for a veteran who needed housing.

To be clear, Robyn is proud to work for the Muscogee-Creek Nation Foster Care and Adoption Program and does not want to sound like she's overly criticizing the housing authority. However, she does think housing issues are a major concern for grandfamilies.

"I certify families to be foster parents or adoptive parents for the tribe," said Robyn, who also chairs the Substitute Care Committee for the Oklahoma Indian Child Welfare Association. "Grandparents will need housing because they suddenly have several children to raise."

As if the struggle for housing isn't enough, those who once had a home repossessed (even as far back as the 1970s) are not eligible to apply for a tribal house.

For those who are granted housing, maintenance is another barrier.

When Robyn picked up her 3-month-old grandson, he was hurt and hospitalized, being nourished through a feeding tube.

She brought her grandson home and her air conditioner stopped working during the 90-plus degree Oklahoma weather. She informed housing. To which they said: "The fan's still turning. So, it's still working."



photo courtesy of Robyn Wind-Tiger

It took five years for housing to fix the A/C. In the meantime, she borrowed a window unit from tribal housing and, at one time, got hit with a \$500 monthly electric bill. At a minimum, her bill was two to three times higher than usual due to using the window unit. So, Robyn cut back on clothes and activities for her grandson to make the payments.

In her work with foster and adoption parents, Robyn comes across other licensing obstacles. She explained that most of the families in need of tribal housing are multigenerational. That makes certifying some of these homes as foster homes challenging.

Say, a parent commits a crime that gets them kicked out of tribal housing and grandma has to raise the children.

Robyn said, "She has to either leave the house she's in with her family or kick some of the family out before she can" raise her grandchildren.

Grandma or the family member: whoever leaves struggles again to find housing.

If the house is crowded, there is help to build on extra rooms to comply with licensing, but the resources are limited and the waiting list is long for homeowners.

Robyn believes more can be done to help grandparents and other relatives raising children when it comes to housing.

One solution that Robyn has highlighted is the Bridge Meadows model for Oklahoma. Robyn visited the intergenerational living community with the other GrAND Voice Members at Generations United's 2019 conference in Portland, Oregon.

"That is my dream! If I win the lottery, that's what I'm going to do," said Robyn, who brought the model to the attention of some of her tribal council members. Of them, she added: "Maybe I can get them interested in it because they know it's a problem. They get calls too from grandparents that need help."



photo courtesy of Robyn Wind-Tiger

### Address Tribal Housing Issues

Similar to “handyman programs,” some tribes are facilitating rehabilitation efforts. The National American Indian Housing Council has “model rehabilitation,” in addition to “lease to own” and other policies, which have been approved by HUD and tribes can use to address their specific needs.<sup>51</sup>

### Partner with Kinship Navigator Programs

Thanks to the Family First Act and separate federal appropriations in 2018 and 2019 to support kinship navigator programs, more of these programs are being developed, enhanced or evaluated around the country, and should be used as a critical tool to connect grandfamilies and affordable housing. Kinship navigator programs provide information, referral, and follow-up services to grandparents and other relatives raising children to link them to the benefits and services that they or the children need.

Kinship navigator programs must be key partners with state, tribal, county and city government agencies, local housing authorities and any specialized grandfamily-housing developments in their area. Kinship navigators can provide information and referral for grandfamilies and also educate front line housing staff on grandfamilies’ strengths and needs. Regardless of housing policies, grandparents and other relatives will continue to be unlawfully turned away from existing affordable housing opportunities unless frontline housing staff and grandfamily caregivers themselves are educated on the legal custody issue as it relates to assisted housing, FUP, and other housing opportunities that may exist where they live. Kinship navigator programs should be well versed in these policies, in addition to free or reduced handyman services, the local rules concerning ADUs, and foster care licensing standards as they impact relatives.

### Align with National Model Family Foster Home Licensing Standards

The new National Model Family Foster Home Licensing Standards, released in February 2019, give states and tribes licensing standards to consider,

which address many of the barriers that relatives face to become licensed foster parents. Under the Family First Act, states and tribes that are approved to operate Title IV-E child welfare agencies are required to compare their existing standards with the National Model and report back to HHS. As part of that requirement, they must tell HHS how they are using existing federal authority to waive non-safety (as defined by each state or tribe) licensing standards.

The Family First Act built on long-standing federal law that states and tribes must be “in accord” with national standards. However, up until 2019, the federal government did not point to any such standards, so the states and tribes created their own standards without any federal guidance. Because tribal communities have always used relative care as a preferred placement, tribal licensing standards have generally been sensitive to issues faced by relatives seeking foster care licensure. State-developed standards, on the other hand, have often caused unnecessary barriers to relatives becoming licensed foster parents.

States now have guidance that seeks to address unnecessary barriers to licensing relatives and non-relatives. The National Model standards, modeled on the NARA Standards, does away with strict square footage requirements. “Bedroom” requirements are replaced with “sleeping space” language, allowing for children to sleep on their grandma’s sofa bed provided other children in the home are treated similarly. Both sets of standards break down barriers for rural families with standards allowing for drinking water to be well or bottled water and not requiring bathroom facilities to all be in one room.

The NARA Model includes an important principle that “If necessary, the agency should assist the applicant with costs associated with meeting the standards.”<sup>52</sup> Several states and tribes, but not all, have a designated source of funds they can use to purchase necessary items, like cribs or fire extinguishers, and help with making necessary repairs to meet licensing standards.

### Expand Specially Designed Grandfamily Housing

During the last twenty years, at least nineteen housing programs have been specifically created for grandfamilies in communities around the country. These programs share some common features including services for the families available on-site, special design features for both the caregivers and children, and a community of peers that can support one another. These programs are sometimes stand-alone developments of just grandfamilies like PSS/WSF Grandparent Family Apartments in the South Bronx, New York and Grandparent’s House in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Others serve more than one population. Sankofa House in Chicago serves grandfamilies and youth who have aged out of foster care, and Bridge Meadows in Oregon serves grandfamilies who have typically come through the foster care system, and seniors who serve as “elders” to the children. Others, like the newest one, Plaza West Grandparent Apartments in Washington, D.C. are located next to a development of smaller senior apartments where the grandparents can eventually transition.

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“This place is a godsend.”

—Grandparent resident in grandfamily housing<sup>53</sup>

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There are many challenges to developing this type of housing, which is undoubtedly why more of these programs do not exist:

- **The financing is extremely complicated.** These programs are typically created using a mix of public and private financing. Most rely on the federal Low Income Housing Tax Credit program for construction, which is administered by state housing finance agencies and run through the U.S. Treasury Department (Treasury), and “Section 8” Housing Choice Program project-based vouchers, available through HUD, which limit rent to 30 percent of the grandfamily’s monthly gross income.

With these vouchers, grandfamilies housing programs are able to serve the neediest of grandfamilies.

- **Fair housing issues are raised by targeting populations.** Although the Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of familial status, thereby allowing grandfamilies to access affordable housing, it can also provide challenges to housing programs specifically for these families. Fair housing can raise the question of how to target grandfamilies for this housing without renting to parent-headed families who apply and/or how to prioritize older caregivers. For some programs, these issues have not come up. For others, they are barriers that were overcome by adept attorneys. And, for at least one program, fair housing concerns were reportedly serious enough to cancel their plans to build housing for grandfamilies.
- **Ongoing, stable funding for on-site services is difficult to secure.** On-site services are an essential component of these grandfamilies housing programs, and on-going funding for these services is critical. Some programs are able to sustain their service programs through a partnership with a well-supported non-profit organization while others have secured dedicated local government funding. However, many others must continue to search out new or renewed funding sources each year.

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“I was in a one-bedroom apartment with three children. I had one in the dining room, one in the living room, and one in my bedroom. So, it’s like 8:00 p.m. and I can’t even do dishes. I could sit in the bathroom for three hours until I went to bed, but really you can only do so much in your bathroom every night, you know? It’s nice [to] have the space. I can get my dishes done at night. It’s the little things like that which make me excited.”

—Grandparent resident in grandfamily housing<sup>54</sup>

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## CONSIDERATIONS IN DEVELOPING NEW SPECIALLY DESIGNED GRANDFAMILIES HOUSING:<sup>55</sup>

- **Talk with existing grandfamilies housing programs to learn from them.** See the chart of available programs and connect with a peer who has accomplished what you wish to create.
- **Identify the target population and determine the extent of their need.** The target market can be identified with the help of kinship navigator programs, local child welfare agencies, Area Agencies on Aging, caregiver support groups, community- and faith-based organizations, public school systems, and other community partners. Explore how many children are in each grandfamily to ensure that enough large apartment units are built to accommodate the target population. Three- and four-bedroom apartments may be needed.
- **Conduct a feasibility analysis** to include site selection, building plans, short and long-term financial forecasts (both expenses and revenue), characteristics of the target population, program policies and procedures, and staffing patterns.
- **Select a neighborhood with good community institutions, easy access to public transportation, retail, and social supports.** Research shows that these types of neighborhood conditions can positively influence the emotional well-being of grandparents raising their grandchildren.<sup>56</sup>
- **Try to acquire project-based “Section 8” Housing Choice Program vouchers, so the financially neediest families can be served.** Without these vouchers, some grandfamilies housing developments have had to turn away grandfamilies who wanted to live in their housing, and consequently have had empty units.<sup>57</sup>
- **Engage key, interested parties in the planning and development stage.** Experts in the field, as well as prospective tenants, should be involved in determining how to best meet the needs of the target population. The involvement of grandfamilies as key players is particularly important. They should be empowered to take as much ownership in the program as possible. Providers should not assume they know the residents’ needs. Efforts to involve residents in planning design features and setting and implementing policy must be genuine.
- **Identify and partner with an anchor service agency that is well connected to the community to provide on-site services and make referrals to other providers.** For those referrals and other on-site services, partner with an array of service providers, including kinship navigators.
- **Incorporate on-site case management.** Attempt to hire and train grandfamily caregivers as the providers of on-site case management, as research shows that they are often more successful than degreed professionals at connecting caregivers with resources.<sup>58</sup> Ensure that the case managers are well versed in the financial supports that may be available to grandfamilies, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) child-only grants, Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the National School Lunch Program, and other available benefits and resources like affordable local health care providers and where to get important vaccines for both the children and their caregivers. Ensure that case management adapts to the needs of the caregiver and child populations as they age.

- **Develop a plan for the provision and coordination of mental health and other on-site services.** Engage mental health professionals to provide mental health services, including individual counseling, on-site to the caregivers and the children.<sup>59</sup> Other useful on-site services include support groups, childcare, tutoring, and caregiving educational sessions. These services must evolve with the age of the residents. Teenagers have very different needs than toddlers. However, for all childhood ages, according to a study conducted by the University of Minnesota in partnership with Generations United, the most critical service offered was probably onsite “out-of-school time” programming.<sup>60</sup> These programs provide organized activities and homework help for resident children, while offering caregivers much needed respite. During the summer, these programs also provide breakfast and lunch to the children, filling an important void in food assistance that occurs in summer months for grandfamilies who rely on the National School Lunch Program, a federally-funded program that provides reduced-price or free meals to eligible school children during the school year.<sup>61</sup>
- **Support caregivers with physical limitations by incorporating accessibility features and practices.** Accessibility needs may also extend to resident children and visitors, so all of these individuals must be taken into consideration. Some housing programs report that they underestimated the extent of these needs.<sup>63</sup> In addition to grab bars in showers and near toilets, wide hallways, and safety call buttons in bathrooms, grandfamily housing managers should implement practices such as, where parking is available, assigning individual parking spaces closer to the building for residents with limited mobility, including those who may not technically be considered “handicapped” for purposes of special parking tags.
- **Provide flexible community space that can accommodate varying uses and changing needs over time.** For example, toddlers will need safe playground space, while older children and teens will need active indoor/outdoor space, such as basketball courts and a community gathering room. Allow the common areas to be used during evening hours and weekends when programmed services are not provided. These common areas are important areas to the families and should have accessible bathrooms nearby. To address possible vandalism and other safety concerns, consider training and providing a stipend to grandparent residents to staff the rooms when they are not being used for services. Grandparents living in these types of development report feeling disrespected if they cannot use these rooms. One grandparent resident told a researcher, “[t]hey need to have it accessible because it makes no sense having places and no place to go. You can’t go nowhere on the weekend—everything is locked up.”<sup>64</sup>

“You don’t have to be afraid to ask the people in your building for what you need, because we all live here for the same reason.”

-Grandparent resident in grandfamily housing<sup>62</sup>

“We have a lot of grandparents who cannot really travel and it’s the greatest thing ever to just say, ‘you can go downstairs,’ and have homework help and people who really care and try to assist you.”

-Grandfamily housing site staff<sup>65</sup>

- **Nurture the existence of an active resident council and incorporate their recommendations and skills.** Nurture the caregivers as “elders” in the community whose opinions are valued and whose skills are shared. Encourage them to engage in storytelling, cooking, sewing and other activities collectively with the children.
- **Staff a secure 24-hour front desk with court orders on file,** so staff knows which adults are limited in visiting families and children.
- **Develop written policies and procedures that are well articulated and in place before opening the housing.** Policies should address a wide variety of issues. Staff should thoroughly review and explain those policies with the families and provide each family a copy. Necessary policies include:
  - tenant screening
  - residency requirements, including any minimum age restrictions
  - whether parents may live in the unit or have overnight visits
  - how grandfamily caregivers and/or children will be transitioned to other housing when they no longer qualify for the housing program

- how to handle family crises, such as a relative’s sickness, hospitalization or death
- whether providers can require residents to participate in case management and other supportive services as a condition of residency, and whether eviction will result if they do not participate

- **Consider transitional units that allow caregivers to remain a part of the community and serve as elders to the other children, and other units that allow adult children to continue to live with their grandparents or other relatives.**<sup>66</sup> The thought of moving for many grandfamilies is very stressful. Imagine being an 80-year old grandmother who must move again. Furthermore, adult children may continue to live with their relatives. A joint study by Generations United, CFED, and Citi found that some grandparent caregivers continued to provide for their grandchildren financially after they reached adulthood either because they were in college or because they did not earn enough to live independently.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, many adult children reciprocate the nurturing and evolve into their relative’s caregiver.<sup>68</sup>
- **Have a robust operating budget with planned continuity** that can cover costs of intensive security, resident programs, support services, maintenance, and contingency funds.
- **Develop and implement an evaluation plan of the housing program.** A professional evaluation can help facilitate continued service funding. Conduct ongoing quality improvement based on the plan.

## SPECIALLY DESIGNED GRANDFAMILY HOUSING AROUND THE UNITED STATES

State	Name	Location	Number of Units	Bedroom Size	Mixed Population (includes households other than grandfamilies)	Supportive Services offered
Arizona	Grandfamilies Place of Phoenix	Phoenix, AZ	56	2 and 3 bedrooms	No	Yes
Arizona	Las Abuelitas Family Housing	South Tuscon, AZ	12	2 and 3 bedrooms	No	No
Connecticut	CRT Generations	Hartford, CT	24	2 to 4 bedrooms	No	Yes
Illinois	Roseland Village	Chicago, IL	10	3 & 4 bedrooms	Yes	Yes
Illinois	Sankofa House	Chicago IL	58	studio, 1, 2, 3, and 4 bedrooms	Yes	Yes
Louisiana	The Grandparents House (aka Urban Villa Apartments)	Baton Rouge, LA	30	2 bedrooms	Yes	Yes
Maryland	Clare Courts	Baltimore, MD	30	1, 2, and 4 bedrooms	Yes	No
Massachusetts	Franklin Field Housing Development	Boston, MA	15	2 bedrooms	Yes	Yes
Massachusetts	Grandfamilies House	Boston, MA	26	2, 3, and 4 bedrooms	No	Yes
Missouri	Pemberton Park	Kansas City, MO	36	2, 3, and 4 bedrooms	No	Yes
New Jersey	Elm Street Apartments	Paterson, NJ	4	3 bedrooms	Yes	Yes
New York	PSS/WSF Grandparents Family Apartments	South Bronx, NY	50	2 and 3 bedrooms	No	Yes
Ohio	Kinship Village	Cleveland, OH	30	1 and 2 bedroom apartments; 2 and 3 bedroom townhomes	Yes	Unknown
Oregon	Bridge Meadows	Beaverton, OR	41	family townhomes	Yes	Yes
Oregon	Bridge Meadows	North Portland, OR	36	family townhomes	Yes	Yes
Oregon	Ilip Tilixam	Grand Ronde, OR	3	3 bedrooms	Yes	Yes
Tennessee	Fiddler’s Annex	Smithville, TN	9	2 and 3 bedrooms	No	Unknown
Washington, DC	Plaza West	Washington, DC	50	2 and 3 bedrooms	Yes but separate	Yes
Wisconsin	Villard Square	Milwaukee, WI	47	1, 2 and 3 bedrooms	No	Yes

## GRANDFAMILIES AND THEIR FIRST GROUND-UP SPECIALIZED HOUSING DEVELOPMENT: PSS/WSF GRANDPARENT FAMILY APARTMENTS

The mission of the PSS (Presbyterian Senior Services)/WSF (West Side Federation for Senior and Supportive Housing) Grandparent Family Apartments is to provide safe and affordable housing and support systems that enable grandparents raising grandchildren to reach their full potential and their grandchildren to gain the emotional and educational tools essential for success.

PSS was a pioneer in supporting grandparents who unexpectedly found themselves caring for their grandchildren. In the early 1990s, PSS began running support groups and providing services to this special population. In 2005, PSS partnered with the West Side Federation for Senior and Supportive Housing to open the first residence in the U.S. built specifically for grandparents raising grandchildren.

The fifty-unit apartment building has 40 two-bedroom and 10 three-bedroom modern apartments - all designed to accommodate the needs of both older adults and children. The building offers 24-hour front desk service, a library, a laundry on each floor, senior and youth community rooms, and green roof garden and relaxation area. Rents are subsidized with tenants paying thirty percent of their adjusted income.

The on-site PSS Kinship Program, professionally staffed by social workers and educators, offers a wide variety of services to both residents and others in need of support. Examples include after-school activities, academic support and field trips for youth, and case assistance, support groups and social activities for the grandparents.

One resident grandparent, Margherita, met with PSS Youth & Young Adult Services staff to discuss her grandson's performance at school. "It was

stressful knowing that his academic advancement was in doubt," she says. "With the tutoring he was given, I can happily say that he is doing better in school now. I feel comfortable sending him to your program knowing the emphasis PSS puts on education. I feel like he is changing positively."



-Margherita and staff member Jamari Payton  
photo courtesy of PSS/WSF Grandparent Family Apartments

The PSS/WSF Grandparent Family Apartments are funded with the support of: Kinship Funds from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services; the U.S. Administration on Aging National Family Caregivers Support Programs through the NYC Department for the Aging and the West Side Federation for Senior and Supportive Housing.



photo courtesy of PSS/WSF Grandparent Family Apartments

## RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are directed at policymakers, advocates and professionals serving grandfamilies.

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Urge HUD, Interior and Treasury to provide clear written guidance that their housing programs cannot block assistance from lawfully eligible households that include grandfamily caregivers without legal custody of the children they raise.
- Work to ensure that states align their standards with the National Model Family Foster Home Licensing Standards, which address housing barriers for relatives to becoming licensed foster parents and receive ongoing monthly assistance to meet the needs of the children, services and a pathway for the children to exit foster care into supported guardianship or adoption with their relatives.
- Enact pending federal legislation to facilitate the expansion of specially designed grandfamily housing and provide direct assistance to grandfamilies for their housing stabilization. The Senate version of The Grandfamilies Act, ([H.R. 2967](#) and [S.1660](#)) introduced in May 2019 by Senator Bob Casey (PA) and Rep. Danny Davis (IL), includes much needed ongoing funding for on-site services at these programs. The Family First Transition and Support Act, ([H.R. 2702](#) and [S. 1376](#)) introduced in May 2019 by Senator Sherrod Brown (OH), Senator Debbie Stabenow (MI), Rep. Karen Bass (CA), and Rep. Don Bacon (NE), includes funding for crisis stabilization services for grandfamilies with children who are in foster care, or at risk of entering or reentering foster care. Those services include housing.
- Encourage Congress to increase federal investments in affordable housing programs that can benefit grandfamilies:
- More FUP vouchers and "Section 8" Housing Choice Program vouchers;
- An expansion of Low Income Housing Tax Credits;
- Better supported Indian housing programs administered by HUD's Office of Native American Programs (ONAP); and
- Additional funds for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Indian Community Development Block Grant (ICDBG), Bureau of Indian Affairs Housing Improvement Program for Native Americans, and Older Americans Act (OAA) "handyman" and home modification programs for grandfamily caregivers regardless of age or disability.
- Advocate that city and county governments facilitate the construction of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) for the majority of grandfamily caregivers who own their own homes.
- Work with HUD offices, tribal, state, county and city governments, local housing authorities and private housing owners to facilitate affordable housing for grandfamilies:
- Ensure that these entities do not require grandfamily caregivers to have legal custody of the children they raise in order to qualify as a "family" for the "Section 8" Housing Choice Program tenant-based vouchers.
- Ensure that local implementation of the Family Unification Program (FUP) explicitly includes "grandfamilies" as "families", so that they can get tenant-based housing vouchers when their

housing situation puts the children at risk of entering foster care.

- Support tribes in addressing their housing needs through model policies and specially

designed grandfamilies housing that address their own community needs.

## PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

- Fund and establish a National Grandfamilies Technical Assistance Center to coordinate expertise around grandfamily housing issues and developments, among other subjects, in addition to serving as a national kinship navigator that coordinates state and tribal kinship navigator programs.
- Ensure that kinship navigators around the country are partnering with state, tribal and local governments and agencies, local housing authorities and specialized grandfamily-housing. Kinship navigators can both serve as sources of information and referral for grandfamilies and educate front line housing staff on grandfamilies' strengths and needs.
- Create a comprehensive toolkit for developing grandfamilies housing to support the creation of additional programs. The toolkit should include best practices and lessons learned regarding all steps of a housing program for grandfamilies, including development, financing, management, and supportive services.
- Raise awareness about grandfamilies and their housing challenges among lenders, federal, tribal, state and local governments and agencies. If potential funders are aware of the issues, they can adjust their funding plans and priorities.
- Ensure that state, tribal and local government agencies, which administer the HOME, ICDBG and CDBG programs, include housing for grandfamilies in their yearly Consolidated Plans and Action Plans as priorities or eligible types of housing to be assisted.<sup>69</sup>
- Create a peer learning community on grandfamilies housing to spread promising practices through regular facilitated calls and discussions.

## RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

- Encourage the U.S. Census Bureau to regularly and publicly report on grandfamily housing needs, as it did in the 2008 report.
- Ensure improved, overall data collection on American Indian and Alaska Native grandfamilies and their housing and other needs.
- Conduct additional research on specialized-grandfamily housing, including:
  - Study those who lived in grandfamily housing as children and have reached adulthood. Explore what works from their perspective to inform existing and new housing programs.<sup>70</sup>
  - Study grandfamily households that remain intact after children reach adulthood to shed light on these families' long-term housing needs and the prevalence of this living arrangement. For ongoing supports, it would be helpful to understand the extent to which adult children assume the caregiver role.<sup>71</sup>

## GRANDFAMILIES AND A PLACE TO CALL HOME: BRIDGE MEADOWS

When Rita got a call from Oregon's department of human services, she had no idea how her life would change in an instant. Six years ago, she was living with her sister's family in a suburb of San Francisco while working on a bachelor's degree in healthcare administration. When she picked up the phone, she learned that her granddaughters, then seven and eight, had been removed from their home due to parental neglect and were now in Portland's foster care system.

"Would I come and do the classes and take responsibility for them? And I said, 'yes, I'll be there as soon as I can.' And within two days I was on a plane with just one suitcase and the clothes I had on my back," recalled Rita. The required background checks and training took two months. Only then did the Oregon department of human services hand the children over to Rita and help her new multigenerational family find a suitable place to live.

Ultimately, that place was Bridge Meadows, an intergenerational housing community in Portland that provides a rare commodity: affordable 3-4 bedroom townhomes in a community built to keep siblings formerly in foster care together. Today, 30 children and their adoptive parents (often grandparents) now call Bridge Meadows home. An additional element rounds out the community: elders who want to give back. Older adults between 55 and 95 live in apartments on-site, supporting the families by mentoring and caring for the children. Elders take the kids to swimming lessons, help with homework, or just provide the love, oversight and companionship that leads to becoming extended family members. In return, elders gain a purpose, a crucial one – and a reprieve from the social isolation common to older Americans.

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It was just a quick errand: Rita would be gone 15 minutes, 20 max. But her two granddaughters ran to her as if they didn't know when they'd see her next. "Wait, wait, I want a hug!" screamed Denise, 11.

Michelle, 13, followed close behind. "I love you, Grandma! I love you, Grandma!" they murmured. "I love you, too, baby," she replied to each of them.

The burst of affection for such a short absence was the only sign the girls might have faced some chaos in their lives. Brightly framed photos of the girls hung on the walls, and their shoes were lined up neatly underneath. The school year had just ended, and earlier that day, the girls had been upstairs, listening to music while cleaning their rooms, putting clothes aside to give away – as instructed by Grandma.

Rita wanted the girls to know that this is a real home and a real family – even if the middle generation, the girls' parents, is absent. "I've put myself on the back burner. I'm not travelling; I'm not lying on a beach in Hawaii," she says. "I'm bringing up my grandchildren and I'm good with that."

In one of Bridge Meadows' townhomes, all with porches and small gardens facing a central courtyard and a grassy area for the kids, 13 year-old Michelle struggled to put her finger on how her life has changed since she has lived at Bridge Meadows. She used to be confined indoors often. "At Bridge Meadows, there's room to play outside. And people don't stay in the house; they actually hang out," she said.

Dr. Derenda Schubert, Executive Director of Bridge Meadows, says, "Our goal is to increase health and wellbeing for all generations through connection and relationship. The community support is powerful medicine. Though we can't erase the

trauma of foster care, we can build resilience, trust and love. We can ensure that nobody feels like they are alone here.”

Rita says, “I love Michelle and Denise to the moon and back. They are my life. This is what I chose to do. They know I’m here, and I’m sticking it

out until I see them walk across that floor to get that high school diploma, and then that college degree. Bridge Meadows has been a blessing for our family. I can look toward Michelle and Denise’s future because of this community where the girls are safe and we have a home with so much love around us.”



photo courtesy of Bridge Meadows

## CONCLUSION

“One of our clients, a woman of 60, sought our help to relocate from her studio apartment. Eight years earlier, she had taken in her three grandchildren and since that time they had all lived together in that one room. Although the studio was subsidized, she had been unable to convince the housing... authorities to allow her to transfer to a multi-bedroom apartment because they did not recognize the children as her family. Her case, while dramatic, was not alone.”

**-July 2000 Congressional Briefing Testimony of Janet Van Zandt, Executive Director of Boston Aging Concerns-Young and Old United<sup>72</sup>**

Almost twenty years later, these stories still exist. As recently as September 2019, we heard from a grandmother who was raising three grandchildren in a one-bedroom apartment because the local housing authority would not recognize them as a “family.” Other grandfamilies struggle to stay together because of housing, with a young adult recently admitting that she and her siblings were living in her car for a while to avoid her younger brother and sister entering unrelated foster care.

Work remains to be done. More specialized grandfamily housing developments around the country must be built, along with clear HUD, Interior and Treasury directives to serve all grandfamilies, and improved awareness of these families and their needs among state, tribal, county and city government agencies, HUD regional offices, local housing authorities, and private housing owners. Innovative solutions such as common-sense foster family licensing standards, Accessory Dwelling Units and “handyman” programs will further support “grand” families and their critical role raising children and keeping families together.



photo by Christine Urbaniak

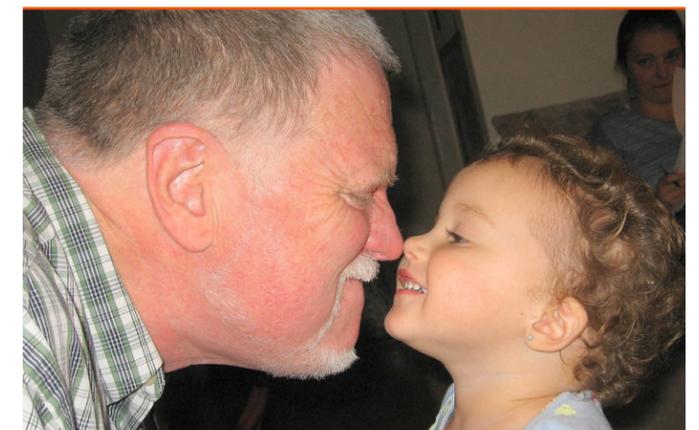


photo by Julie Jones-Green

For over twenty years, **Generations United's National Center on Grandfamilies** has been a leading voice for families headed by grandparents, other relatives and close family friends. Through the Center, Generations United leads an advisory group of organizations, caregivers and youth that sets the national agenda to advance public will in support of these families. Center staff conduct federal advocacy, provide technical assistance to state-level practitioners and advocates, and train

grandfamilies to advocate for themselves. The Center raises awareness about the strengths and needs of the families through media outreach, weekly communications and awareness-raising events. It offers a broad range of guides, fact sheets and tools for grandfamilies, which cover issues from educational and health care access to financial and legal supports and can be found at [www.gu.org](http://www.gu.org) and [www.grandfamilies.org](http://www.grandfamilies.org).

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SIX HALF DOZEN : DESIGN STUDIO/[www.sixhalfdozen.com](http://www.sixhalfdozen.com). On page 5. graphic "Children Thrive in Grandfamilies" by Theodore Topolewski/[orchardpath.com](http://orchardpath.com)/OrchardPath Creative LLC.

### PHOTO CREDITS

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### DISCLAIMERS

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State	Children in Foster Care Raised in Grandfamilies or Kinship Care <sup>73</sup> 2017 (%)	Children in Foster Care Raised in Grandfamilies or Kinship Care 2017 (#)	Children in kinship care in the United States <sup>74</sup> 2016 - 2018 (%)	Children in kinship care in the United States 2016 - 2018 (#)
Alabama	12%	680	6%	67,000
Alaska	25%	686	6%	11,000
Arizona	45%	6,603	4%	72,000
Arkansas	24%	1,146	5%	38,000
California	34%	17,531	3%	282,000
Colorado	24%	1,382	3%	33,000
Connecticut	36%	1,497	2%	16,000
Delaware	13%	100	5%	11,000
District of Columbia	20%	151	8%	9,000
Florida	44%	10,811	5%	193,000
Georgia	30%	4,008	3%	88,000
Hawaii	45%	718	5%	17,000
Idaho	32%	504	2%	7,000
Illinois	43%	6,915	3%	90,000
Indiana	38%	7,992	4%	59,000
Iowa	36%	2,128	3%	20,000
Kansas	30%	2,307	3%	20,000
Kentucky	4%	362	9%	96,000
Louisiana	35%	1,553	6%	66,000
Maine	35%	557	2%	6,000
Maryland	43%	1,662	2%	34,000
Massachusetts	27%	2,910	2%	27,000
Michigan	37%	4,362	2%	52,000
Minnesota	41%	3,947	2%	29,000
Mississippi	39%	2,095	8%	56,000
Missouri	29%	3,627	4%	55,000
Montana	47%	1,797	3%	7,000
Nebraska	34%	1,432	2%	12,000
Nevada	39%	1,720	5%	33,000
New Hampshire	29%	426	3%	7,000
New Jersey	35%	2,073	3%	65,000
New Mexico	24%	633	6%	29,000
New York	18%	3,410	3%	130,000
North Carolina	27%	2,853	4%	84,000
North Dakota	21%	309	3%	5,000
Ohio	21%	3,127	4%	113,000
Oklahoma	31%	2,857	5%	44,000
Oregon	35%	2,803	4%	36,000
Pennsylvania	38%	6,359	3%	77,000
Rhode Island	42%	778	2%	5,000
South Carolina	5%	199	7%	74,000
South Dakota	23%	368	3%	7,000
Tennessee	11%	918	4%	66,000
Texas	35%	11,222	3%	249,000
Utah	28%	816	2%	17,000
Vermont	27%	348	3%	3,000
Virginia	7%	319	3%	55,000
Washington	35%	3,943	3%	51,000
West Virginia	22%	1,470	6%	24,000
Wisconsin	40%	3,057	2%	26,000
Wyoming	32%	342	3%	4,000

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