



FACT SHEET: CHILDREN THRIVE IN GRANDFAMILIES

More than 2.5 million children across the U.S. are raised in grandfamilies (also known as kinship families).¹ These are families in which grandparents, other adult family members, or close family friends are raising children, with no parents in the home. The parents are not caring for their children for many reasons, including parental substance use, incarceration, military deployment, severe disability, deportation, teenage pregnancy, or death. When children cannot remain in their parents' care, research shows they do best in grandfamilies.



"Most people go to grandma's house and get spoiled, but for me it was the only safe place I had...getting to live with grandma was like 'going to grandma's house' all the time. I had more love there than anywhere else in my life." - Chad, Oregon

CHILDREN IN GRANDFAMILIES HAVE BETTER OUTCOMES THAN CHILDREN WITH NON-RELATIVES

Compared to children in non-relative foster care, children in the care of relatives experience:

INCREASED STABILITY

- Fewer placement changes²
- Better educational outcomes and educational stability³
- Less likely to re-enter the foster care system⁴

ACHIEVE PERMANENCY

- Relatives are willing to adopt or become permanent guardians when reunification with parents is not possible
- 34% of children adopted from foster care are adopted by relatives⁵

BETTER BEHAVIORAL AND MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES⁶

MORE FEELINGS OF BELONGING AND ACCEPTANCE⁷

- Report they "always feel loved"⁸
- More likely to like who they live with (93% vs. 79% for non-relative foster care)⁹
- Less likely to try to run away¹⁰
- More likely to express preference for maintaining connections and placement with kin¹¹

INCREASED LIKELIHOOD OF LIVING WITH OR STAYING CONNECTED TO SIBLINGS¹²

GREATER PRESERVATION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS AND CONNECTIONS TO THEIR FAMILIES¹³

IT'S HARD FOR GRANDFAMILIES TO GET HELP

Despite the crucial role grandfamilies provide for the children in their care, grandparents and other relatives often do not have access to the critical supports and services they need. Grandparents and other relatives often become caregivers to their relative children with little to no warning. They are usually unaware of what supports and services are available to them or face obstacles in accessing supports and services.

While some grandfamilies are formed when the child welfare system becomes involved with a family, many caregivers step in to care for the children to prevent the need for child protective services. The vast majority of kinship families are raising children outside of foster care, and as a result are less likely than foster parents to be eligible or have access to important supports, services and benefits. In fact, for every one child inside the foster care system with relatives, there are 18 children being raised by relatives outside of foster care.¹⁴ Even relatives who are raising children inside the foster care system often get fewer supports and resources than non-relative foster parents.

Due to the difficult and unexpected circumstances that lead children to be in the care of relatives, children and caregivers in grandfamilies face greater health, mental health, social and financial challenges than those in the general population.¹⁵ It can be difficult for families to get the help they need.¹⁶ Grandfamilies experience:

- Less access to economic and educational resources and social supports.¹⁷
- Less access to legal resources due to financial restrictions and awareness of available resources.¹⁸
- Limited access to mental health services for depression, stress, behavioral or emotional issues because of stigma, accessibility, cost, and lack of information about grandfamilies.¹⁹
- Limited understanding of available services and supports or how to apply, particularly caregivers outside of the formal child welfare system.²⁰
- Children in grandfamilies are less likely to receive needed early intervention or special education services.²¹
- Families struggle to access affordable child care that meets the needs of the children.²²
- Less than one-third of eligible grandfamilies receive housing assistance.²³
- Less than half receive SNAP (Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Program/formerly the Food Stamp Program).²⁴
- Nearly half of children in grandfamilies had caregivers who had not received any payment for caring for the child, such as foster care or adoption assistance payments, Social Security survivor benefits, child support, or TANF.²⁵
- Unique challenges faced by caregivers in rural areas with limited access to supportive services.²⁶

"If not for being raised by my grandparents, I would not have a cultural identity, I wouldn't know my family lineage and my son would not bear the name Tcha-LQad—a name that is 17 generations old. My grandparents raised me in old, traditional ways—no running the streets or going to dances like other kids my age. Instead, I was involved in the spiritual side of life. My passion was going to drum circles and listening to old people talk and perform ceremonies. That helped me develop a real sense of pride and belonging."

- Ray, Skokomish Reservation near Shelton, Washington

CHILDREN DO BEST WHEN CAREGIVERS RECEIVE THE RIGHT SUPPORTS AND SERVICES

Research shows that the social, behavioral and mental health outcomes for children in grandfamilies are better when families receive supportive services than for those who do not receive supportive services.²⁷ Examples of supportive services include kinship navigator programs that provide a single entry point for learning about housing, health services, and financial and legal assistance,²⁸ along with improved household resources²⁹ and access to mental health services.³⁰

“There is real love there” - Janay, California, speaking about being raised in her grandmother’s home



“This program has been a lifesaver for me and my grandkids. When school started, I did not have the funds for book bags and school supplies, [the program] made sure that they had them as well as information for school uniforms...When the kids were having behavior problems, we got counseling and not only that - somebody was always calling to check on me and making sure I had everything I needed.”

- Grandparent Caregiver, GA, describing support from the GRANDD Program³¹

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Endnote 31:

- GRANDD (Grandparents Raising and Nurturing Dependents with Disabilities) is a program of Innovative Solutions for Disadvantage and Disability in Georgia. The program is focused on the provision of supportive services to grandparents raising grandchildren or other relative children with developmental disabilities, chronic health conditions and learning and behavior disorders. Project GRANDD provides support groups, individual/family case management, training, education and referrals to support stable, safe and loving families.

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ABOUT GENERATIONS UNITED'S NATIONAL CENTER ON GRANDFAMILIES

Founded in 1986, Generations United's mission is to improve the lives of children, youth, and older adults through intergenerational collaboration, public policies, and programs for the enduring benefit for all. Generations United's National Center on Grandfamilies is a leading voice for families headed by grandparents, other relatives, and close family friends. The Center's work is guided by an advisory group of caregivers, known as GRAND Voices, and organizations that set the national agenda to advance public interest in support of these families. Center staff conduct federal advocacy and provide training to grandfamily practitioners, advocates and caregivers to elevate their voices to improve policies and practices. The Center raises awareness about the grandfamilies' strengths and needs through media outreach, weekly communications, and awareness-raising events. It offers an annual State of Grandfamilies report and 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 (gu.org and grandfamilies.org). Generations United is also home to the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network, the first-ever national technical assistance center for those who serve grandfamilies and kinship families (gksnetwork.org).

