Promising Practices in Encouraging & Supporting Grandparents and Relatives Raising Children

Presented by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) in partnership with Brookdale Foundation Group
Brookdale Foundation Group Relatives as Parents Program (RAPP):
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The National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) is very grateful to the Brookdale Foundation Group for partnering on this guidebook designed to highlight the successful Relatives as Parents Programs (RAPP) operated by Area Agencies on Aging. The Brookdale Foundation Group provides seed grants to not-for-profit organizations to encourage and promote the creation or expansion of RAPP services for grandparents and other relatives who have taken on the responsibilities of surrogate parenting.

We hope this guidebook will make the aging network across the nation aware of how important and successful these RAPP program efforts have been in helping and supporting grandparents and other relatives who are raising children.

Hopefully this knowledge will encourage the replication of RAPP supportive services to relative caregivers throughout the aging network.

Many thanks to Brookdale for its leadership in this area.
Introduction

The National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a), in partnership with the Brookdale Foundation Group, created this guidebook to encourage replication of the successful Relatives as Parents Programs (RAPP) operated by the aging network across the nation. The RAPP programs have been a lifeline to grandparents and other relatives who find that they are suddenly raising children, due to the death, incarceration or otherwise unavailability of the child’s parents.

The Brookdale Foundation Group launched RAPP in 1996 in the form of $10,000 seed grants and technical assistance to successful nonprofit applicants. The program’s goals are to:

1) provide accessible support groups and other supportive services to relative caregivers and the children in their care;

2) encourage cooperation and collaboration among various service delivery systems (i.e., childcare, mental health, aging, family services, education, legal and health care);

3) ensure the development, expansion and future continuity of local services; and

4) create replicable models of service.

Although many kinds of entities can operate a Relatives as Parents Program, the aging network has a special relationship with RAPP. The aging network has a strong commitment to supporting older adults and offering intergenerational programming, making it a natural sponsor for RAPP programs. Where a RAPP is centered in an Area Agency on Aging, Title VI program or State Unit on Aging, the program can draw on many additional resources and programs already available, including information and assistance, case management, counseling, legal assistance, nutrition and senior wellness programs, transportation assistance, and volunteer programs. All of these services can help grandparents and other relatives re-enter the world of child rearing while keeping themselves physically and mentally well.

Nonetheless, partnerships with children’s organizations and other groups are the key to the success for RAPP, which provides both aging and children’s services. All partners must be committed to team and intergenerational concepts. Area Agencies on Aging and Title VI programs will need to learn the new language, culture and organization of the “children’s network” of partners and resources. Thus, it is essential to have a wide array of actively involved partners and a staff committed to thinking outside of the box.

The end product is worth the effort. As the aging network extends itself to learn about child caregivers and the support they need, it will find new partners and coalitions, create new ways to share and stretch dollars, and help keep the older generation firmly bonded with younger generations.

So read on as we share the stories of 11 successful aging network sponsors of RAPP programs that have made a difference in the lives of many relatives raising children. We hope you will find some inspiration and motivation to create your own programs, and that we can someday tell your story, too!
Profiles

Testimonial from KinCare Grandmother

(Submitted to Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc., RAPP program, Big Stone Gap, Virginia):

As a disabled grandmother with three grandkids living in the home with me, I cannot describe what the KinCare Program has done for me in the past three years. We have benefited from the Holidays for Kids program, summer pool parties and the Boy Scouts, who provide a kids night out party. With these KinCare programs, we have been able to participate and learn how to make crafts, sharing and reading, and how to work with children on projects that benefit everybody. My grandkids have learned how to share with others and to see what they can accomplish when everybody works together.

I am also on the KinCare Advisory Council that meets quarterly with many agencies that are involved. We evaluate the programs to see where we are weak and could use some improvements. Also, at our quarterly meetings we see where our strengths lie. One of the best parts of the program is that Mountain Empire Older Citizens not only addresses concerns of the children, but of the caregivers as well.

KinCare has provided educational programs that address issues of correct discipline for children, stress, health care, estate planning, mental health issues, housing and special services available to KinCare relative caregivers.

As a KinCare grandmother, I have learned to improve my grandkids’ lives and to me that is an amazing thing to say.

Sincerely,

Cindy Nave
The Illinois Department on Aging’s Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Program was established in 1996 with a two-year, $10,000 Brookdale Foundation award. In FY 2006, the Department provided $67,000 to local organizations and Area Agencies on Aging to assist relatives regardless of age with emergency needs.

Services: Five Area Agencies on Aging used the funding to develop local support groups. The Department assumed administrative responsibilities for a task force on grandparents raising grandchildren. The task force has grown to include local, regional and state organizations, faith-based associations, educational institutions, extension services, state agencies, Area Agencies on Aging, and relatives raising children. The task force meets quarterly throughout the state and advocates for relatives raising children. The Department also provides referrals and advocates on behalf of relatives, assists with accessing services, funds support groups and special initiatives, develops resource materials, and provides training and technical assistance.

The Department on Aging has trained personnel in other agencies, including Child Abuse Hotline, Advocacy Office, Post Adoption/Guardianship, Extended Family Support Services and Inter-state Compact. This training has resulted in referrals and seamless access to services. The Department on Aging and AARP are currently meeting with the Department of Human Services to discuss policy revisions to the TANF/Child Only Grant program. The Chicago Department on Aging has formed a city task force on grandparents raising grandchildren.

Many Area Agencies on Aging regularly hold joint meetings of caregiver resource specialists and grandparents raising grandchildren support group facilitators. The Department mentions these groups in emails concerning caregiver and relative issues.

Key Partners: State agencies (Department of Children and Family Services, Healthcare and Family Services, Public Health, Human Services, Corrections, Transportation, Office of the Attorney General and Illinois State Board of Education); county agencies (Guardianship Assistance Desk of Cook County, Sangamon County Circuit Clerk, Mid-Illinois Senior Services); and private and nonprofit organizations (Parent Place, community hospitals, state and local universities, legal services, extension offices, AARP, churches, Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, Voices for Illinois Children, Sergeant Shriver Center for Poverty Law, homeless organizations and social service agencies, Brookdale Foundation and Generations United)

The number of support groups continues to grow. Presently there are 90 statewide support groups.
Outcomes and Results: The number of support groups continues to grow. Presently there are 90 statewide support groups. For FY 2007, the Illinois state legislature increased the program's budget by $200,000. It also passed two key bills: 1) HB4406 to provide a renewable $1,000 college grant to eligible high school seniors who have been raised by a grandparent and are receiving a TANF/Child Only Grant; and 2) HB4242 to require the Department of Children and Family Services to try to locate and place children with relatives.

Replicability: These supportive services can be easily replicated with the right partners. By expanding services to include children's advocacy groups, the aging network is becoming familiar with services to assist children and youth, and the children's groups are now learning about resources to assist seniors and caregivers.

Funding Sources: Brookdale RAPP Seed Grant, Illinois General Assembly General Revenue Funds, Older Americans Act/National Family Caregiver Support Program

Lessons Learned:
1) Select key personnel from participating agencies to assist with advocacy, policy implementation and interpretation, and program development.
2) Form liaisons with front-line workers and include every state program that deals with relatives.
3) Make RAPPs as inclusive as possible.
4) Develop listservs to provide information.
KinCare, a program of Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc. (MEOC), provides services to relative caregivers of all ages living in the Central Appalachian region of southwestern Virginia.

Services: KinCare support groups and grandparent meetings are held monthly at four different locations across the service area. MEOC has just launched a new on-line support group for Kincare parents. Other services include counseling, case management, crisis intervention and follow-up, transportation, legal assistance, support groups, socialization activities, educational information, referrals, assistance with school supplies, art supplies, books, and many other supportive services. All services and transportation are provided at no cost to KinCare families.

MEOC’s case management department provides referrals to KinCare and assesses all referrals of people 55 and older. The KinCare Director does the assessment for those under the age of 55, using the Virginia Uniform Assessment Instrument, a kinship care intake form, consent form and behavioral symptoms checklist. MEOC also provides toys, books, art supplies and gifts. The program makes mental health referrals to community mental health agencies,
including the Southwest Virginia Children’s Advocacy Center (CAC), a program of MEOC. The major identified need was for child abuse treatment services. The program developed a referral process for KinCare children and families that includes case management, support and more intensive therapy.

Key Partners: Mental health agencies and researchers at Virginia Tech University, University of Virginia at Wise and Radford University. Other partners include advocacy organizations, attorneys general, Catholic Charities, childcare organizations, community colleges, Cooperative Extension, East Tennessee State University, family crisis support services, Head Start, medical centers and hospitals, police departments, probation and parole officers, and social services departments. In addition, the Advisory Council has members from faith-based organizations, AARP, child protective services, Boy Scouts, public housing authority, local school systems, local community college, AmeriCorps and legal services.

Outcomes and Results: From July 1, 2004 to June 30, 2005, the KinCare program provided supportive services to 148 kinship care families in the region who were raising 298 relative children. Children being raised by KinCare families are safer and better protected from further abuse. MEOC met and exceeded its goal of having 95% of KinCare children in case management remain in the home and have no further reports of abuse and neglect, as measured by Multidisciplinary Team case tracking logs and KinCare case records. The KinCare program provides follow-up for KinCare families and evaluates child safety within the home through phone calls, support groups and socialization activities—98% of KinCare participants expressed satisfaction with services.

Replicability: Replication requires a wide array of actively involved partners and a staff committed to thinking “outside of the box.” The key elements for replication include: 1) embracing intergenerational programming, 2) having an extensive case management department, 3) seeing people as friends, neighbors and friends, and not just as “clients,” 4) looking at need identified by the relative caregivers and not just what professionals think they need, and 5) providing transportation to programs.

Funding Sources: Brookdale RAPP Seed Grant, Older Americans Act/National Family Caregivers Program, special Virginia General Assembly appropriation, Center for Independent Living—The Junction Center for Independent Living, local governments, state department of social services, foundations and charities, and community donations

Lessons Learned:
1) Be flexible, and understand that Kinship care programs are both aging and children’s services.
2) Anticipate that the need is far greater than imagined and grows daily.
3) Put together funding from a wide variety of sources to achieve program stability and viability.
4) Develop a child abuse continuum of care that includes prevention, intervention and treatment.

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Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

St. Joseph, Michigan
Planning and Service Area: rural
population age 60+: 289,820
Brookdale grant: 1996, 2005

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The program supports grandparent and relative caregivers in caring for their children. The goal is to ensure permanent placement with relatives in lieu of foster care, address special needs of children being raised by relative caregivers, advocate for relative caregivers and raise awareness of their needs as well as their contribution.

Services: Services include regular outreach to teachers in the tri-county area for referrals of new families, telephone support groups, informational speakers, family recreational events, breakfast gatherings, information and referral, newsletters, and free childcare and mileage reimbursement for meetings and events. Challenges include funding (average annual budget is $30,000); insufficient staffing (25 hours of staff time); restrictions on local foundation funding, which cannot be used for administrative costs; limited transportation available for caregivers in rural areas; and a methamphetamine crisis that is increasing the number of parents who, because of their addiction or incarceration, are leaving their children with relative caregivers. Additionally, TANF/Child Only Grants are the only source of financial assistance.

Continual advocacy and justification for funding are necessary to counteract the pervasive yet unspoken attitude that grandparents and relatives are merely fulfilling their responsibility to care for children due to their parents’ inability to do so.

Beginning in the fall of 2006, the program launched a pilot project with one area school district with a large number of identified kinship families in all grade levels. With support from the Parent-Teacher Association, the program is holding activity nights several times a year. It includes support groups for caregivers and activities for children and teens. The pilot project will determine whether school-based support groups will have a higher rate of attendance due to the familiar environment and location.

Key Partners: Michigan State University Cooperative Extension Service, Andrews University School of Social Work, Office of Services to the Aging/Michigan Kinship Care Network, Child and Family Services, county health and human services departments, intermediate school districts, sheriffs departments, Head Start, service and charitable organizations (Lions, Rotary, Kiwanis, Angel Tree Ministries, The Way Back, Salvation Army, American Red Cross, Boy and Girl Scouts), local churches and senior centers, Wal-Mart and local food stores.

Only four children of enrolled families have entered foster care from relative placement in the past 10 years.
Outcomes and Results: To date, 290 families have been enrolled. The program developed special programs for families of prisoners (125), those raising teenagers (82) and those raising very young children (56). The program has a high rate of permanent placement with relatives. Only four children of enrolled families have entered foster care from relative placement in the past 10 years.

Replicability: All the programs and services are replicable. The program is unique in the large number of families served on an extremely limited budget in a rural area. Keys to successful replication include financial and in-kind support from the AAA, a variety of programs and services to meet differing caregiver needs, community collaborations, a dedicated and skilled RAPP coordinator and caregiver-driven programming.

Funding Sources: Brookdale RAPP Seed Grant, National Family Caregiver Support Program, United Way of Southwest Michigan, St. Joseph/Benton Harbor Rotary, Berrien Community Foundation, Department of Health and Human Services Early Learning Opportunity Act, Cass County Youth Council, and local businesses and retail stores providing supplies

Lessons Learned:
1) Keep the program structure and services flexible and creative to meet the changing needs of caregivers as they occur.
2) Constant fundraising is key to a successful program. Contact local foundations to obtain funding to sustain the program.
With funding from the National Family Caregiver Support Program, the Central Illinois Agency on Aging, Inc. (CIAA) provided a grant to Bradley University for free individual counseling and support groups for grandparents age 55 and older who are raising grandchildren as well as caring for older seniors. Often the caregiver falls into both categories and is doubly challenged providing care for both a spouse and a grandchild or adult disabled child who has stayed at home and never learned any life skills.

**Services:** CIAA provides services to both English and Spanish-speaking populations, but has difficulty finding transportation and translators for the latter group. Many of the grandparents tend to still be working and are under age 55, which means the AAA cannot use federal funds for programs. Often CIAA has had to request state funds, if available, to provide services for the younger Hispanic population. It also works with Prairie State Legal to provide pro bono attorneys. “They have been especially helpful to these grandparents in dealing with complicated legal issues,” said Joanne Thomas of the Central Illinois AAA.

The University of Illinois Extension Service provides nutritional counseling at the support groups during the year. Monthly community speakers provide information to the grandparents at the support groups.

The annual Christmas party reaches roughly 150 grandparents and grandchildren and gives them the opportunity to “just be” grandparents instead of “parents” for a few hours. CIAA/Bradley provide stress management sessions for the grandparents while volunteers watch the kids swim, play basketball, or do crafts or tumbling activities.

CIAA has conducted its second “Caregiver Nite Out” event, which provided caregivers and grandparents raising grandchildren with a free meal, evening entertainment and door prizes. The event allows the caregivers to de-stress and rejuvenate themselves. The “Nite Out” is followed by a Caregiver Conference with 12 breakout sessions of information, a free breakfast and lunch, and a keynote speaker. Thirty-plus informational booths are available as well as door prizes. A “one-stop shop” concept aids caregivers and grandparents raising grandchildren in accessing available services without spending countless hours researching resources.

A “one-stop shop” concept aids caregivers and grandparents raising grandchildren in accessing available services without spending countless hours researching resources.
Key Partners: Bradley University, Bradley Honors Fraternity, University of Illinois Extension Service, Neighborhood House (a facility that provides childcare and senior activities), CIAA staff volunteers and families, Calling Connection Network (local agencies and organizations committed to providing services to family caregivers), and Prairie State Legal (provides free legal services to seniors)

Outcomes and Results: Support groups have served grandparents from six counties with individual counseling and support. Counselors have discovered other unmet needs and made referrals through the Family Caregiver Information and Assistance Manager to other local service providers.

Replicability: If a local university were available to partner with a service provider, then this model would work in any community by making use of social worker/counselor-based educational programs of study. A key to success is doing homework to find out about available services in the area and networking with those providers. CIAA has created new partnerships with a variety of social, health and educational entities.

Funding Sources: Brookdale RAPP Seed Grant, National Family Caregiver Support Program, and other local grants

Lessons Learned:
1) Expect that it may take time to make inroads in rural areas or minority communities.
2) With communities of different cultures, plan to work with someone who speaks that language.
3) Partner with a local university to provide counselor-based educational programs.
The Michigan Office of Services to the Aging (OSA) is involved with kinship care on both an administrative level and as the State Unit for Aging for Michigan. As part of implementing the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP), OSA required each of the state’s 16 AAAs to allocate a minimum of 5% of their Title III-E funds, or a minimum of $25,000, to support grandparent caregivers in their PSA. Kinship caregivers are eligible to receive the same five categories of service as any other caregiver served through the NFCSP.

Services: Community services include information and assistance, support groups, counseling, and educational activities. All kinship care families are eligible to participate regardless of age. Respite and supplemental services are only available to kinship caregivers 55 years of age or older. Where available, funding from the Michigan Strong Families/Safe Children Initiative supplements NFCSP funds and can be used to support respite services for kinship caregivers under the age of 55 years.

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OSA also allocates state administrative funds to support the Michigan State University School of Social Work
Kinship Care Resource Center. The center provides technical assistance to groups across the state that are working
to serve this population, offers a toll-free line for I&A, sponsors training, and advocates on behalf of kinship care
families. Prior to creation of the Resource Center, OSA directly provided training and developed materials in support
of kinship families.

**Key Partners:** Michigan State University School of Social Work Kinship Care Resource Center, Area Agencies on
Aging, Michigan Department of Human Services County-based Multi-Purpose Collaborative Bodies, Kinship Care
Resource Center, National Senior Service Corps (FGP/RSVP), OSA Field Representatives

**Outcomes and Results:** All Michigan AAAs have supported services for kinship care families. Approximately
7% of caregivers served through the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP) in Michigan are kinship
care families.

**Replicability:** Networking and sharing best practices with local service providers allowed services to be replicated
without re-inventing the wheel.

**Funding Sources:** Brookdale RAPP Seed Grant, Title III administration funds, Title III-E/NFCSP, TANF funds/Department
of Human Services, United Way, private and public foundations, senior millage funds, local school district
funding, and donated goods and services

**Lessons Learned:**
1) Allow local communities to develop the services they feel are needed rather than mandating a particular service.
2) Serve kinship families from a strength-based approach.
3) Urge AAAs, Title VI programs, and aging network service providers to work with children-centered organiza-
tions and service delivery systems to meet the needs of kinship care families.
4) Approach the provision of services to kinship care families in rural areas differently than urban areas.
The Area Agency on Aging District 7 Inc. (AAA7) RAPP program seeks to serve relatives raising grandchildren in several ways, including providing information and assistance, conducting support group meetings and sponsoring recreational activities. The goal is to assist families by providing support so that they can keep providing care in raising their related children. The nature of Rio Grande offers unique challenges to the program in terms of finding enough volunteers to support the effort.

**Services:** AAA7 offers a unique support group that brings together AAA staff and volunteers, including high school seniors involved in the National Honor Society and Future Educators of America. The students volunteer their time to assist in providing organized activities to children while their caregivers are in support group meetings. Volunteers from a local church also assist with childcare services.

Support group meetings include speakers talking about mental health, and drug and alcohol abuse; education about available services; and time to share their feelings, ideas and concerns with the group or with the program coordinators. Recreational activities are held quarterly for caregivers and their children, including pizza parties, picnics, holiday parties and trips to the movies.

The RAPP program provides information and referral on legal services, adoption assistance, emergency and/or permanent custody, respite services, recreational activities, educational materials, Medicaid, and TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families). Support group meetings include a monthly dinner to which the children are invited. This shared meal offers families the opportunity to be strengthened and to develop relationships with other kin care families in an informal setting. AAA7 staff work with community corporations and local restaurants to offset the cost of the monthly meal.

The program also offers legal assistance, including online Pro Se (self-representation) Legal packets for obtaining custody, and monthly counseling on legal aide, court-appointed attorneys, end-of-life care and other issues. Family service agency representatives address Medicaid and financial services.
The RAPP program provides information and referral on legal services, adoption assistance, emergency and/or permanent custody, respite services, recreational activities, educational materials, Medicaid, and TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families).
Texoma Kincare Project

Sherman, Texas
Planning and Service Area: rural/urban population age 60+: 32,550
Brookdale grant: 2004

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The Texoma Kincare Project initiated a pilot therapeutic counseling program targeting grandparents who were raising grandchildren, but were unable to pay for private counseling or qualify (based on age or income) for nonprofit or public services.

This three-county area has a higher percentage (20.2%) of older adults age 60+ than the rest of the state, and at least one county has a very high number of child protective service investigations. Census data from 2000 show that grandparent caregivers comprise about 14% of the age 65+ population in the Texoma region.

Services: The project, facilitated by a licensed professional counselor, offers grandparents 12 therapeutic sessions to address complex and emotional issues. Topics addressed the grandparents’ own grief due to loss, anger and guilt.

Grief counseling topics covered:

1) Loss of self-confidence in abilities as a parent and grandparent.
2) Loss of relationship with spouse and inability to fulfill their own marriage.
3) Loss of an anticipated retirement lifestyle, social activities and friendships due to new parenting demands.
4) Loss of income saved for long-term health needs due to unforeseen childcare, medical and legal expenses for the grandchild.
5) Grief from inability to raise their own child to become a responsible and loving parent.
6) Grief from inability to have “normal” grandchild relationships due to parenting and disciplinary roles.
7) Anger demonstrated by the grandchild as a result of loss of parents and loss of a “normal” childhood.
8) Loss of personal health and well-being due to parenting demands.
9) Anger toward the child arising out of these losses.
10) Skills needed to cope and deal with identified loss, guilt and anger.
11) Techniques that can be incorporated to maintain emotional and physical health in order to continue to care for the grandchild as long as possible.
12) Methods to prepare the grandchild for future loss when the grandparents will no longer have the capacity to maintain a parenting role.

Census data from 2000 show that grandparent caregivers comprise about 14% of the age 65+ population in the Texoma region.
Key Partners: School counselors, attorneys, medical social workers, state agencies involved in children’s services, and local nonprofit service providers offering counseling for children. Licensed professional counselors (LPCs) are encouraged to offer pro bono services to referred grandparents, screened by the AAA caregiver specialist.

Outcomes and Results: Participants in the Mental Wellness Project agreed that they are much better able to cope with their feelings than prior to the project. The Austin College Sociology Department is currently conducting research on the outcomes for participants who took part in the therapeutic program, as compared to grandparents who did not participate.

Replicability: The program can be easily replicated in any area. It has a training curriculum for LPCs designed to make them more aware and sensitized to the complex emotional issues relating to kinship care. The infrastructure for counseling support works best by setting up a pro bono panel of LPCs willing to donate one to three hours per month to new grandparents raising grandchildren. In this case, the LPC facilitator went before several professional groups to offer professional awareness training and recruited her peers to assist in this project.

Funding Sources: Brookdale RAPP Seed Grant, Title III-E Older Americans Act/National Family Caregiver Support Program

Lessons Learned:
1) Provide evening group therapy sessions to accommodate working grandparents.
2) Provide simultaneous play therapy sessions for grandchildren at the same location.
The Northwest Regional Council’s RAPP, part of the Area Agency on Aging for Northwest Washington, focuses on providing information, supports and services to Native American grandparents raising grandchildren. The two principal components of this program are legal services and support groups for grandparents raising grandchildren.

This RAPP program serves all six federally recognized tribes in Northwest Washington: Lummi Nation, Nooksack, Samish, Sauk-Suiattle, Swinomish and Upper Skagit. In addition, several activities have also included the Tulalip Tribe.

**Bellingham, Washington**

Planning and Service Area: urban/rural population age 60+: 61,603
Brookdale grant: 2003

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The program provides information and assistance and outreach to elders in each tribal community. The coordinator also spends time with tribal staff at health clinics, senior meal sites, social work offices and in the courts to locate elders who may need assistance and services.

**Services:** Services include information and outreach regarding grandparents raising grandchildren, and training.

Through RAPP funding, the Northwest Regional Council offered two day-long conferences on grandparents raising grandchildren in tribal communities. One conference focused on the Indian Child Welfare Act, its intent and effect on grandparents raising grandchildren. The second conference focused on nutrition and other parenting issues for grandparents raising grandchildren.

In 2003, the Northwest Regional Council developed a “Legal Guide for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren.” This resource has been widely distributed throughout Washington State and to several other states that have requested them. The guide discusses different legal categories and steps that grandparents may wish to explore such as guardianship, foster parenting, adoption and informal care. In addition, the guide summarizes key aspects of the Indian Child Welfare Act and how this act affects kinship care.

On several different occasions, support groups for tribal grandparents raising grandchildren have been started. Challenges include finding appropriate and available meeting space, as well as childcare, so that the grandparents can attend.

**Key Partners:** Washington Department of Social and Health Services, and the six federally recognized tribes in Northwest Washington plus the Tulalip Tribe

**Outcomes and Results:** This project has produced two regional conferences and a legal resources guidebook. In addition, depth has been added to outreach to the six federally recognized tribes in the form of recognition, information and resources for grandparents raising grandchildren.

**Replicability:** The key elements that make this project work are staff and cooperative relationships between the Northwest Regional Council and tribal communities in the region. Replicating services could be accomplished because the Tribal Outreach Coordinator has documented work on this program.

**Funding Sources:** Brookdale RAPP Seed Grant, Kinship Care, National Family Caregiver Support Program

**Lessons Learned:**

1) Have a consistently available, centrally located meeting place for support groups for grandparents raising grandchildren.

2) Provide weekend respite opportunities complete with childcare and family activities that are free or low cost.

The RAPP serves all six federally recognized tribes in Northwest Washington: Lummi Nation, Nooksack, Samish, Sauk-Suiattle, Swinomish and Upper Skagit.
**Grandparents Raising Grandchildren**

*Idaho Falls, Idaho*
Planning and Service Area: rural
population age 60+: 21,800
Brookdale grant: 2003

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The Area VI Agency on Aging/EICAP (East Idaho Special Services Agency, Inc.) provides “comprehensive supportive services” to relatives of all ages raising children, despite limited funding. The Area Agency on Aging said it offers “a strong, consistent support group” in Idaho Falls; however, it does not have the resources to offer supportive services in other areas.

**Services:** In addition to the support group, RAPP services include an annual Legislative Forum with state legislators, attorneys and judges, who listen to the concerns of the grandparents about their lack of rights in the state of Idaho; a directory; and a resource library of books grandparents can check out. There is also a well-attended annual party and picnic, which help to bring in those grandparents who are not able to go to support group meetings. The AAA also has sponsored a Legal Summit.

The RAPP program conducted a pilot project with the Department of Health and Welfare called the Foster Care PRIDE Program. It used a national curriculum, “Parent Resources for Information, Development and Education,” to certify Foster Families in Idaho. It revised the curriculum to better meet the needs of grandparents raising grandchildren. There are nine monthly sessions, which include a free dinner. The Department of Health and Welfare provides the manuals, training materials and the instructor. A University of Idaho professor, and several trained grandparent participants to teach the classes.

“We have learned a lot this year, and hope to make it even better next year,” explained Emily Hoyt from the Area VI AAA. “This is a time-consuming project for all and requires a commitment from the grandparents as well.” She added, “I would like to find funding to provide childcare next year.”

The AAA has encouraged the involvement of other organizations, such as the Idaho Volunteer Lawyers program.

**Key Partners:** The Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (GRG) Community Advisory Council includes representatives from the Community Services Director for Eastern Idaho Community Action Partnership, Children and Family Services
Department, foster care, child protection, Head Start, as well as school counselors, attorneys, local congressional staffer, clinical therapist, retired teachers and grandparents. It is participating in a pilot project with Idaho Legal Aid and the Idaho Bar Association to provide legal guidance and education.

**Outcomes and Results:** “The experienced support group members networking with new participants is truly a success,” Hoyt explained. The practiced grandparent-caregivers share their expertise and knowledge with others. “They have the gift of first-hand knowledge in dealing with all the frustrations both legal and emotional, and the experience to have a calming effect on grandparents just starting their new role of parenting again.”

**Replicability:** The key elements to replicating this program are to understand existing resources, potential clients and the community. It is also essential to educate the community about the issue. “You MUST be a strong advocate to get the message across and be determined to make a difference,” Hoyt said.

**Funding Sources:** Brookdale RAPP Seed Grant, National Family Caregiver Service Program, Department of Health and Welfare, Casey Family Program and AARP

**Lessons Learned:**
1) Be a strong advocate for the program and educate the community about the issue.
2) Be persistent.
3) Remember that challenging others can help the program succeed.
Duluth Area Relatives as Parents Program

Duluth, Minnesota
Planning and Service Area: rural
population age 60+: 68,350
Brookdale grant: 2002

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The Arrowhead Area Agency on Aging is one of several agencies engaged in a collaborative effort to develop a RAPP program in Duluth, Minnesota, that began in 2001. Since the inception of RAPP, the AAA’s role has primarily related to assistance with group facilitation, planning and grant writing.

Services: After a year of planning, the Kinship Caregiver Coalition, with the AAA as the applicant, received Brookdale Foundation funding to implement a “Duluth Area Relatives as Parents Program.” The focus of the program was to:
1) develop a central point of expertise and advocacy for kinship caregiving families in the Duluth area, 2) improve kinship caregivers’ access to qualified legal advice and representation, 3) increase the acceptance and support for kinship families by professionals and the broader community, and 4) better address the emotional needs of the children cared for by kinship caregivers.

A program coordinator, employed and supervised by another Coalition member, was hired to direct the program work plan. The work plan called for provision of direct services to kinship caregivers (one-to-one), including information, education, referral to other community services, monthly support group and educational meetings for kinship caregivers, educational forums on legal issues, presentations to organizations and agencies to inform them about the program and issues faced by kinship caregivers, and programming for children being raised in kinship families to address their emotional needs.

Key Partners: Legal Aid Services, Lutheran Social Services, parish nurses, grandparents and other relatives raising grandchildren, Duluth Family Services Collaborative and the County Social Services agency. Outreach was directed to schools, public health, mental health crisis staff, early childhood education programs, churches and the criminal justice system.

Outcomes and Results: The program has provided monthly support/education meetings for kinship caregivers; educational forums on the legal issues involved in kinship caregiving; advocacy, information/referral assistance services to individuals who are caring for their relatives; and community education on the issues of kinship caregiving. Finding adequate funds to sustain the Duluth program proved to be difficult. The program experienced setbacks as budgets were reduced and the agency employing the program coordinator experienced major reorganization. The program has since been spun off to another agency funded through the Minnesota Kinship Caregiver Association—a state-level recipient of Older Americans Act funding for this purpose. The geographic service boundary has also changed to encompass a much larger area.

Replicability: This program can best be replicated by approaching it as a coalition of community providers. As with any new service program, early challenges included concretely defining the services to be offered, and doing the perpetual outreach and education needed to build a good referral network to the program. Even though the strategies for outreach were solid and executed according to plan, referrals to the program were slower than anticipated.
Funding Sources: Brookdale RAPP Seed Grant, Older Americans Act and in-kind contributions from interested persons and organizations

Lessons Learned:
1) Collaborate with as many community service providers as possible.
2) Educational forums should respond to the identified needs in your area.
3) Recognize that constant fundraising will be a requirement for any successful program.
MAC Relatives as Parents Program

Salisbury, Maryland
Planning and Service Area: rural
population age 60+: 51,517
Brookdale grant: 2005

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The MAC Area Agency on Aging’s RAPP has been in operation in Wicomico County, since June 2005. The goals are to: 1) establish a RAPP support group, 2) organize a resource advisory group to include representatives from social service, elderly peers, civic organizations and educational agencies, to ensure cooperation and collaboration, and 3) increase community awareness of older adult kinship caregiver concerns such as income and health hardships, children’s well being, service needs, and state and local policies.

Services: In FY 2005, the program worked to recruit, serve and provide an avenue for grandparent and relative caregivers to obtain support in a peer setting and learn from the experiences of others. It established links with community resources, brainstormed to learn topics of importance to relative caregivers (such as dealing with disruptive behavior), and provided self-care activities to boost their self-esteem. As an Area Agency on Aging, MAC has numerous programmatic resources, which have helped to enhance and compliment the RAPP initiative.

To help launch the program, RAPP brochures were placed in social service agencies, medical centers and distributed to churches; fliers were handed out at civic events, health fairs and interagency meetings; and press releases were sent to two media resources. A “Let’s Get Acquainted Day” was held at the library for relative caregivers and their children. A summer fun day at a water/amusement park was sponsored by the program allowing children and family caregivers to participate in a fun event that they otherwise could not have afforded.

RAPP support group meetings are held monthly, and the Advisory Resource Committee meets quarterly. Meeting notices are sent out monthly to potential participants; however, attendance in groups can be low (six to 10 persons) and turnover is high. This problem was addressed by launching telephone conferencing to deal with immediate concerns and stay in contact with the caregiver. Major concerns of caregivers are financial help, dealing with children’s health and well being, and mental health issues. A high percentage of the children have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and/or bi-polar disorder. Day-to-day problems range from problems paying utilities to a case of bankruptcy. Information and referral resources are a vital service link.

Key Partners: Partnership for Families and Children/Wicomico Housing Management Board, Maryland Coalition of Mental Health/Wicomico Department of Health, University of Maryland Eastern Shore Cooperative Extension, Kinship Care/Wicomico Department of Human Services, Salisbury University’s Conflict Resolution Center and BEACON GrayShore Coalition, Head Start–Shore Up! Community Action Agency, and Wicomico County Library

Major concerns of caregivers are financial help, dealing with children’s health and well being, and mental health issues. A high percentage of the children served have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and/or bi-polar disorder.
Outcomes and Results: An evaluation of the program found that 1) several social service, medical and health agencies serve the same clients; 2) each agency has scheduled monthly meetings, many in the evening; 3) relative caregivers are reluctant to go out at night; and 4) older caregivers’ personal health problems determine their ability to attend meetings. Future efforts will be to collaborate with one or more existing groups to have joint meetings. Grandparent/relative caregiver issues were presented at a legislative forum with elected officials.

Replicability: Services can be easily replicated; however, it is importance to develop program activities around the immediate needs of the clientele. That means conducting research to determine what services are available.

Funding Sources: Brookdale RAPP Seed Grant, Older American Act III-E, state and local funding

Lessons Learned:
1) Plan carefully before rushing to set up a support group or provide services.
2) Do research to see if other local agencies are already providing similar services. Attend their meetings and get to know their clients who are relative caregivers.
3) Look for strong community leaders who can help expand your program.
4) Recognize that many ethnic groups tend to shy away from support group meetings. Keep in mind that communities are different. What worked in one area might not work in another.
Conclusion

We hope that this guidebook has provided valuable ideas for you and your colleagues to create and operate Relatives as Parents Programs that will serve grandparents and other relatives who have taken on the responsibility of surrogate parenting. This is an issue that crosses generations, and binds them together.

Clearly, the innovative programs portrayed in this document can be easily replicated. The most successful projects are built upon careful research and planning, community education, and working with coalitions long before actually launching a RAPP program. Sponsors need to establish credibility and trust with grandparents and the community. This may be harder to do in rural areas or when working with minority populations that tend to shy away from support groups and other services.

The aging network is well positioned to operate or work with RAPP programs. An Area Agency on Aging, or Title VI Native American aging program with its host of resources readily available for the older relative caregiver, can greatly enhance a RAPP program’s success. These resources include National Family Caregivers Support Program funding, nutrition services, senior center and supportive services, case management, wellness programs, transportation assistance, and information and referral.

AAAs and Title VI programs also have established networks and relationships with other community organizations that can benefit the relative caregiver. To be successful, the aging network will need to become more familiar with services to assist children and youth, just as children’s organizations need to learn more about resources to assist seniors and caregivers. The combination of these resources can only be a win-win for relative caregivers.

RAPP sponsors also need to keep in mind the individuality of their community and remember that what works in one area may not work in another. Several programs have enlisted the resources and skills of their local universities or colleges. In rural areas, transportation may be a challenge that will need to be overcome.

Feel free to use these models as a template for building your own program to encourage and promote the creation or expansion of services for grandparents and other relatives.

As pointed out by Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc. (MEOC), Big Stone Gap, Virginia, successful replication requires a wide array of actively involved partners and a staff committed to thinking “outside of the box.” MEOC says the key elements for replication include: 1) embracing intergenerational programming, 2) having an extensive case management department, 3) seeing people as friends, neighbors and friends, and not just as “clients,” 4) looking at needs identified by the relative caregivers and not just what professionals think they need, and 5) providing transportation to programs.

We wish you luck in your endeavors!

Feel free to use these models as a template for building your own program to encourage and promote the creation or expansion of services for grandparents and other relatives.
For additional information, contact:

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