

Help For Second Time Around Parents

by Eileen Beal

Growing numbers of grandparents (and other kin) are stepping up to the plate to be full-time moms and dads to their grandkids.

Fueled by drugs, divorce, the faltering economy, dramatic cuts on funding for social service programs, and rising incidences of incapacitating mental illness, the number of grandparents assuming care of their grandchildren has jumped dramatically—30%—in the last 15 years. “We get about 50 calls a month, with a spike in August and September and around the holidays because that’s when callers need more help and resources,” says Maridell Couture, LSW, director of the Cuyahoga County Department of Adult and Family Services Grandparent/Kinship Care Program.

In most cases grandparents are between 50 and 60 and still working. And, in most cases, these rescuers are unprepared for the on-going emotional, physical, and financial upheaval that becoming a second-time-around parent will cause in their life. Becoming a “parent” in your 50s and 60s is far different than becoming one at 20 or 30, says Mary McNamara, LSW, coordinator of the Care and Caregiving Initiative at Fairhill Center. “Some grandparents have to go back to work to cover the new expenses,” she adds. “[And] since they sometimes have to move to get the space they need, they aren’t downsizing as they’d planned, they are up-sizing.”

Making the system work for you

The good news is that there are many good resources available to help with grandparenting. If you are persistent, assertive, and know where to look/who to contact, you can get: free legal advice; one-on-one help qualifying for the state’s cash assistance to kinship caregivers program, its medical coverage program for children not living with parents, and its child care assistance program; tutoring, counseling and respite services; and find out about grandparenting support groups. “When [grandparents] network in support groups, they don’t just find out about community resources, they find peer friendships and what others are doing in the same situation. That helps them ‘normalize’ things and see that they are not alone and release some of the grief, shame, and guilt,” says McNamara.

The best place to begin a search for grandparenting resources is the Cuyahoga County Department of Senior and Adult Service’s Grandparent/Kinship Care Program. Services offered include: free legal workshops (the next one is July 27th); a free resource guide (*Grandparent & Other Kinship Caregiver Resource Guide*); one-on-one help from trained “system navigators,” who provide help and guidance locating social services in every municipality in the county; up to 64 hours of free child care (respite care) a year; and information on grandparenting support groups. “Getting in touch with a

navigator is easy, just call,” says Couture. “Many of the services are free and most are not based on income.” To register for the workshop, get the guide or contact a navigator, call: (216) 420-6772.

Another good information source is the Law for Laymen Program co-sponsored by the Cuyahoga County Bar Association and the NAACP. “The six-week series starts in mid-August—just in time for school—and is totally focused on kinship care issues and helping families take care of their kids,” says the Association’s executive director, Barbara Greenberg. To contact the Association regarding time and location, call (216) 621-5112.

Other good sources of help and information on caring for a grandchild include:

Bellflower Center’s Kinship Care Program	(216) 229-2420
Fairhill Center’s Kinship Care Program (including resource library)	(216) 421-1350 #182
First Call for Help/Senior Information Services	(216) 436-2000
Jewish Family Service Association	(216) 292-3999

The following Internet sites also offer information and resources for those caring for their grandchildren:

AARP Grandparent Information Center
www.AARP.org/grandparents

Child Welfare League
www.cwla.org/programs/kinshipcare

Children’s Defense Fund’s Kinship Care Program
www.childrendefense.org/childwelfare/kinshipcare/resourcekit/default.aspx

Foundation for Grandparenting
www.grandparenting.org

Generations United
www.gu.org (click on kinship care)

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (Ohio study)
www.state.oh.us/age/grandparents.pdf

Grandparents Rights Organization
www.grandparentsrights.org

Grand’s Place
www.grandsplace.com

Directory of Grandparenting Resources (Ohio)
<http://sandusky.osu.edu/gparent/gparent.htm>

Books, Guides and Directories

Grandparents as Parents, S. de Toledo and D. E. Brown

Raising Our Children's Children, Deborah Doucette-Dudman

Robert Lives with His Grandparents, Martha W. Hickman

The Grandparent Guide, Arthur Kornhaber, MD

Older Adults Resource Guide, Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging (free: 216-621-8010)