SECOND TIME AROUND:
GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN
Grady County OHCE Leaders Lesson
April 2014

Introduction:
Across the United States, almost 7.8 million children are living in homes where grandparents or other relatives are the householders, with more than 5.8 million children living in grandparents’ homes and nearly 2 million children living in other relatives’ homes. These families are often called “grandfamilies.”

More than 2.5 million grandparents are taking on the responsibility for these children. Many other relatives also take on this responsibility, although data are not available on other relatives. Often they assume this responsibility with neither of the children’s parents present in the home. In fact, nearly 1 million children are living in homes where the grandparent is the householder and neither parent is present in the home (comparable data are not available for children living in homes where another relative is the householder and neither parent is present.) (AARP, 2014).

The purpose of this lesson is to familiarize OHCE members with the challenges and issues facing “grandfamilies” and to create awareness of the needs of these families.

Materials Needed:
1. Leaders Guide
2. Member Handouts
3. A copy of “Starting Points for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren” (Oklahoma Department of Human Services, August 2008).

Optional:
The three videos which were shown during the Leaders Training are available. If your group is holding their meeting at the Extension Office, we will be glad to help you access those to show during your group meeting. If you have a laptop and would like those videos loaded onto your computer to be shown at your group meeting, please make arrangements before your meeting for the loading of these videos onto your computer.

THE ISSUES—WHY GRANDPARENTS ARE RAISING GRANDCHILDREN

Grandparents rearing grandchildren is not a new phenomenon; however, it has become more prevalent in recent years, particularly for European Americans. Some groups such as African Americans and Native Americans have long histories of grandparents' involvement in raising their grandchildren. But for many others, this family form is relatively recent.
The 2000 U.S. Census reported close to six million children living in households with their grandparents—a nearly 30% increase over the number reported in the 1990 census. Furthermore, grandparent-headed households continue to be the fastest growing type of household in the U.S. and have been since 1990. There are an estimated 2.5 million grandparents who are rearing their grandchildren without help from the childrens' biological parents.

There are numerous reasons why grandparents are being called upon to rear their grandchildren. But generally, they have one common thread: grandparents are stepping in due to a family crisis. Grandparents report that they are rearing their grandchildren for many reasons, such as:

- teen pregnancy
- an adult parent’s substance abuse
- financial problems
- incarceration
- death
- homelessness
- Deployment

Because of the increase in the numbers of grandparent-headed families, more information has become available. Researchers are examining family relationships and well-being. Policy makers are working to adapt or change family policies that impact families where grandparents are raising their grandchildren. (Bailey, 2011).

(Leaders: If video access, please show “Develop an Understanding of the Reasons for the Existence of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren.”)

Issues Facing Grandchildren

Children being raised by grandparents or other family members have often experienced many challenging situations or disruptions in their care. Major disruptions in a child's life, such as not living with their parents anymore, can affect every aspect of their life – behavior, thoughts and feelings. The way a child responds to life changes differs from how we as adults respond. They may not be able to talk about their feelings, which may include sadness, depression and hopelessness. Children go through stages in how they respond or cope.

The three stages of responding to major life changes are: protest, despair and detachment. Each stage has certain behaviors, thoughts and feelings. For example, the protest stage is characterized by temper tantrums, thinking the parent will return, and feelings of fear and isolation. In the despair stage, children may be quiet and withdrawn, blame themselves and demand attention. Detachment may include making new friends, thinking relationships aren't important, and feeling depressed. How children handle stress during a major change, such as a loss of the parents’ daily presence, also depends on the child's situation, attachments (relationships) and genes. A grandparent can help the child by showing love and support, following a set routine, and talking to teachers. It's important that grandparents seek help for themselves. They can do so by talking to trusted friends, family doctors or spiritual advisors, or by contacting supportive community services. (eXtension, 2012).

(Leaders: Show Video #2—”Issues GRG Families Face” if available)
Resources for Grandparents:

Grandparents raising grandchildren need all types of resources. Since many grandparents live on fixed incomes, financial resources which may include food and clothing are needed. The Oklahoma Department of Human Service through the Oklahoma Areawide Services Information System has designed an information booklet which is downloadable from the internet. The booklet entitled “Starting Points for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren” addresses issues concerning child development, mental health, education, child care, custody and legal questions along with including a resource guide.

(Leaders—Please review this booklet and share small portions of information from the booklet. For example, you may want to highlight each section and talk about the main topics of the booklet. Or, you may want to turn to one particular section such as the Community Resources section beginning on page 57 and discuss resources available in Oklahoma to grandparents and grandfamilies)

Each family is different with different issues. In addition, the issues facing children in today’s society are much different than those faced by previous generations. Grandfamilies need special support systems. Grandparents need opportunities to connect with other grandparents raising grandchildren; these support groups help to encourage these caregivers along with providing opportunities to discuss issues and exchange information about available resources.

(Leaders—Show video 3: “Resources for GRG Families” if available)

How can OHCE members help GRG?

Opportunities to help “grandfamilies” are numerous. Here are a few suggestions:

1. **Respite care**—OHCE members may have the opportunity to provide relief for grandparents in the form of babysitting or respite care. Grandparents may be overwhelmed physically and emotionally; providing a time for them to care for themselves along with providing a break away from the children may help to keep grandparents energized.

2. **Resources**—As discussed earlier, grandparents on fixed incomes are faced with many financial challenges when raising grandchildren. OHCE members are very generous. Consider the following:
   A. Utility payments are sometimes very difficult to make. Donations can be made to families to help with these payments.
   B. Food “poundings” or “showers” are great ways to help grandfamilies.
   C. Donating children’s clothing, especially for special occasions, could be one option. Special occasions could include starting school or holidays.
3. **Education**—Using the booklet “Starting Points for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren,” develop an educational display that may reach grandfamilies.
4. **Brainstorm**—Your OHCE group may be a “grandfamily.” Representatives from your OHCE group may want to meet with these grandparents to discuss ways that your group can best serve this family.
Conclusion:

Grandfamilies are growing in number. These families are faced with many challenges which can be overcome with education, commitment, and resources. Information through the Department of Human Services is available for Oklahoma families along with information about community resources. OHCE groups are positioned to help these families and the opportunity to serve can make a huge difference for these families.

RESOURCES


Reference to commercial products or trade names is made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service is implied.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director of Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. This publication is printed and issued by Oklahoma State University as authorized by the Dean of the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and has been prepared and distributed at a cost of $2.40 cents for six copies. (04/14) (SGR).