

KINSHIP CHRONICLES

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Lessons Learned: DHR Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Summit

The Division of Aging Services and Georgia State University Gerontology Institute have collaborated to conduct a research evaluation of the DHR Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Summit that was held this past November. The Summit's goal was to bring together all of DHR divisions/offices to discuss the issues that grandparents raising grandchildren face Georgia. The following are some statistics that resulted from the Summit:

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Information Gained About (GRGs) Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

--Prior to the Summit, only 15% of participants polled considered themselves very knowledgeable about GRGs.

--Since the Summit, 65% of participants polled reported that their knowledge had significantly or moderately increased.

DHR Interagency Networking

--Prior to the Summit, 14% of the participants polled had never contacted another DHR agency about GRGs. After the Summit, the percentage of those with no contact dropped to 5%.

--The number of participants reporting moderate to extensive contact with other DHR agencies about GRGs increased from 58% prior to the summit to 70% since the Summit.

A full evaluation report will be completed and distributed to all Summit attendees by August 2008.

Cliff's Notes on Caregivers

Submitted by Cliff Burt, Division of Aging Services

National Study of Employers

Families and Work Institute's latest National Study of Employers (2008) has been released. The study shows significant changes for U.S. workers since 1998 and employers with more ethnic and racial minorities in top and senior level positions. It also provides details regarding increased choices regarding flexible workplaces, caregiving leave, child and elder care assistance, and health care/economic security benefits.

The 2008 National Study of Employers is the largest and most comprehensive study of the programs, policies, and benefits designed to respond to the changing workforce. The report includes interesting findings related to the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA): 22% of employers offer more than the 12 weeks of mandated maternity leave, yet 18 to 21% of all employers surveyed appear to be out of compliance with FMLA. The NSE is funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and is downloadable at <http://www.familiesandwork.org/>

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Grandparents in the Southern Crescent are very glad to have GLSP, some grandparents say, "they have made our load a little light to bear."

Georgia Legal Services Helps Create Stable Relationships

Submitted by Gloria Sanford, Southern Crescent AAA

Grandparents who are concerned with a financial situation, problems enrolling children in school and obtaining adequate medical care for their children are able to get problems resolved. Thanks to the Georgia Legal Services (GLSP) team, Southern Crescent is proud to have four of its ten counties devoted by the The Kinship Care Project. The grandparents in these counties have benefited greatly, with assistance in establishing stable relationships, information and assistance on adoption, legal custody, temporary guardianship and visitation rights. The support group looks forward to hearing from the GLSP team; grandparents have been able to get legal assistance like filling out paperwork on adoption, a process that would ordinarily be very expensive and unobtainable. Grandparents in the Southern Crescent area are very glad to have GLSP to which they say, "made our loads a little lighter to bear."

STAR Foundation Graduation

Submitted by Margaret Gant, Grandparent Connection

STAR Foundation Graduates



Sixteen students recently graduated from the STAR Foundation Employment Training Program, which prepares those with limited income obtain long-term meaningful employment. The STAR Foundation, a United Way agency, trains students in computer literacy, life skills for professional and personal growth, and job readiness at no cost to the participants. The grandparents Connection had three participants to complete the STAR Foundation ten week training program.

Ms. Daniels, grandmother of seven children received an award for perfect attendance. Ms. Brown, grandmother of three was elected speaker for the class. All grandparents attending this class received a computer for their home. The STAR Foundation is a community partner of the Grandparent Connection Program; the last three ten week session's totaled eight grandparents completed the training.

Collaboration News

Article information submitted by Diane Bonito, Office of Child Support

Agent Kim Aldridge from the Camilla Office coordinated a toy drive and donations for distribution to several grandparents at SOWGA Council on Aging luncheon in Pelham earlier in December. The grandparents were also treated to a wonderful serenade with holiday songs by a local talented singer. Doris Long, SOWEGA Kinship Care Coordinator was very thankful and appreciative of all of the help from OCSS. Ms. Long noted that, "the grandparents must have been surprised and delighted to receive so many wonderful gifts for their children." "Everyone involved in this effort did a magnificent job!"

Stories That Will Break Your Heart

Submitted by Kerrie Sirmans, Heart of Georgia Altamaha AAA

When you dive into the world of social services, you have to be prepared to hear stories of heartache, hardship and family breakdown. The essence of family in so many ways has been shattered in today's society; then you get to the heart of the story; when a grandmother stands up for her family and makes the commitment to keep it together. Or, that great-aunt that loves her family so much, that she will make her social security check stretch so that she doesn't have to go into foster care. Some of the stories sound familiar- others, not so much, but they all have the same message- FAMILY COMES FIRST.

Recently, I was speaking with a great-grandmother who is raising her 5 year old great grand-daughter. Her grand-daughter was only eleven years old when she had her child. The history of the families we work with so often involve issues of drug use, child neglect or abuse, incarceration, and death.

I have been a social worker for a long time, and the stories you hear can touch you in ways you're not always prepared for. I never could have imagined hearing some of the stories I have of the families we serve. Thanks to their trusting me with their story, I have developed an appreciation, not only for Kinship Caregivers and their families, but more importantly, my own.

Kinship Care in Georgia Mountains

Submitted by Julia Jessie, Legacy Link AAA

Legacy's Kinship program has exceeded staff expectations for SFY 2008. Four new groups are slated to be in operations in SFY 2009 bringing the total up to twelve. With the increased number of counties serviced, plans are being put in place to have Grandparent Facilitators in each county. This pilot program is working beautifully in the joint county support groups in Towns and Union counties, and will be implemented in other counties.

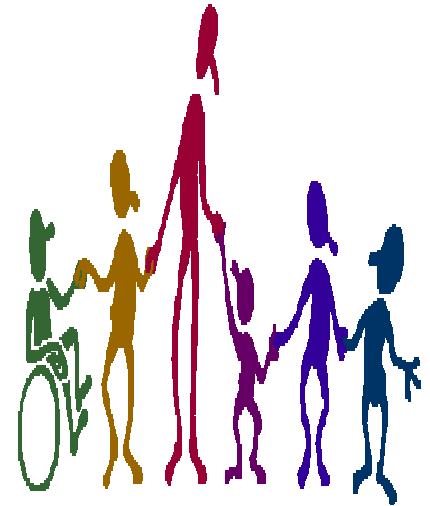
The jovial atmosphere evident at meetings is contagious. Enthusiasm is passed on to new participants thus creating an atmosphere conducive to sharing and learning. This signals to kinship staff that we are serving a two-fold purpose: providing education and resources to Grandparents/Relative Caregivers, plus creating a marketing vehicle for the Kinship Care Program via the speakers to in turn relay information back into the community. AVITA, Mental Health, Family Connections, and County Extension offices are valuable resources for Legacy's Kinship Care staff. The Kinship Care staff takes pride in the fact that they have been instrumental in helping educate the service providers regarding kinship care families.



Can You Keep My Children For a Few Days?

Submitted by Georgia Jopling, CSRA AAA

A great aunt's response to that simple question has completely changed 4 lives. The few days have stretched into 5 years and now this relative has 3 children at a time when she thought she would only be responsible for herself. The children's mother or father has never offered to help with the children. For a long time, the aunt tried to manage with her small income; she lived in a rural area and had never asked for help before. The cost of supporting the family was becoming too great so she sought help. That is when a friend told her about the Kinship Care Center at the Medical College of Georgia in Augusta. The center connected her with the local DFCS office where she was approved for TANF and Medicaid for the children. During the summer, the Kinship Care Center sent all 3 children to camp thus keeping them engaged and out of trouble. The center has taught this great-aunt about her legal rights and the children's rights, she has been able to exchange ideas to other relative caregivers in the kinship care support group. These children have blossomed under her care; possibly avoiding foster care. Now in her sixties, raising children, she is facing different issues from most of her peers...but she is not alone.



Grands Who Care Support Groups

Submitted by Claire Mangraviti, Mercy Senior Care

In Rome, grandparents/relative caregivers set an ambitious agenda of topics to be covered in 2008 and we have literally hit the ground running with our presentations including: using exercise to develop a healthier lifestyle, on osteoporosis, fire prevention, and sexual abuse of children. Our Mother's Day Celebration included pampering, beauty tips and makeover by a Mary Kay consultant. Later in May the director of Floyd Against Drugs and a Floyd County Police Officer will lead a discussion about what to look for and how to talk to children about drugs. Chang, the drug sniffing dog and his handler will be our guests at a later meeting to be attended by grandparents and grandchildren.

In our monthly Summerville Support Group meetings, we have learned much from the presentations on children and drugs in Chattooga County, on the Extended Family, a support system for families of prisoners, on planning ahead for summer activities and on services offered by the Georgia Legal Services Program. We look forward to a discussion on alcohol abuse and the impact on children and families.