Across the United States, more than 6 million children are being raised in households headed by grandparents and other relatives as parents struggle with substance abuse, mental illness, incarceration, economic hardship, divorce, domestic violence, and other serious problems. These family members (or “kinship caregivers”) are caring for children both inside and outside the foster care system. This fact sheet provides information and resources to help with the challenges they face.

National and State Data

The Children

- Nationally, 4.5 million children are living in grandparent-headed households (6.3% of all children under age 18). This represents a 30% increase from 1990 to 2000.

- There are another 1.5 million children in the United States who are living in households headed by other relatives (2.1% of all children under 18).

- In Oklahoma, there are 57,601 children living in grandparent-headed households (6.5% of all the children in the state). There are another 14,825 children living in households headed by other relatives (1.7% of all the children in the state).

The Grandparents

- Nationally, 2.4 million grandparents report they are responsible for their grandchildren living with them: 29% of these grandparents are African American; 17% are Hispanic/Latino; 2% are American Indian or Alaskan Native; 3% are Asian; and 47% are White. 34% of these grandparents live in households without the children’s parents present. 71% are under the age of 60; 19% live in poverty.

- In Oklahoma, 39,279 grandparents report they are responsible for their grandchildren living with them [5,218 in Oklahoma City and 3,482 Tulsa]: 13% of these grandparents are African American; 5% are Hispanic/Latino; 12% are American Indian and Alaskan Native; and 65% are White. 46% of these grandparents live in households without the children’s parents present.

Additional Information

- United States Census data on grandparents who are responsible for meeting the basic needs of their grandchildren can also be broken down by county, congressional district, and other categories. Log on to http://factfinder.census.gov. Additional data on grandparents and grandchildren are available at www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/grandparents.html.

- Additional national and state data on grandparents raising children is available on AARP’s website at www.aarp.org/confacts/grandparents/census2000.html.

*These data are taken from the U.S. Census Bureau Table DP-2. Profile Selected Social Characteristics:2000.
Programs That Can Help

- The Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Aging Services Division, has established a statewide Grandparents Initiative that has three main components. The first is an annual statewide conference for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren sponsored in partnership with the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, Oklahoma Disabilities Council, Oklahoma Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, the Older Women’s Initiative, and the AARP. The initiative also offers a resource guide, Starting Points for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, and a Grandparent’s Information Clearinghouse, the Oklahoma Area-wide Service Information System (OASIS), toll-free at (800) 42-OASIS. Contact: Judy Leitner, Director of Community Relations, at (405) 522-4510 or judy.leitner@okdhs.org.

- The Tulsa Area Agency on Aging Grandparents Raising Grandchildren offers bi-monthly support group meetings for kinship caregivers. Free child care is provided with pre-registration. The agency hosts educational sessions with a variety of speakers from different kinship caregiver support organizations. Contact: Barbara Almon, Organizer & Facilitator, at (918) 596-7688, or at balmon@ci.tulsa.ok.us.

- The Grandfamilies Housing Task Force meets to address housing issues for grandfamilies. The task force has recently begun the planning stages for a new grandfamily housing project for low and moderate-income families in a town west of Oklahoma City. The housing complex is specially designed to meet the intergenerational needs of the grandfamilies and also offers social services. Contact: Judy Leitner, Director of Community Relations, at (405) 522-4510, or judy.leitner@okdhs.org.

- The Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Aging Services Division has also helped to develop a Lifespan Respite Program for a wide range of caregivers, including grandparents and other relatives raising children. The program has a simple application process and relatively few guidelines. To qualify, the caregiver must have an annual income of $60,000 or less. Once the caregivers are approved for respite, the Department of Human Services issues a voucher that can be used to purchase respite services from the caregiver of their choice. The program also publishes and makes available a Respite Guide for Families and Providers, which provides assistance on selecting providers. Contact: Margaret Linnemann, Foster Care Programs Manager, at (405) 521-4368, or Margaret.Linnemann@okdhs.org.

Children in Foster Care

Sometimes state child welfare agencies place children in foster care with grandparents or other relatives. Most state agencies call these placements “kinship care.” In Oklahoma, the Department of Human Services, Children and Family Services Division reports:

Number of children in kinship care: As of April 12, 2002, the Department of Human Services had a total of 8,983 children in out-of-home placements. Of these children, 2,792 (31%) were placed with kin.

Preferences for kinship care: State policy requires that kin be considered first when an out-of-home placement is sought for a child under the Department’s care. The kinship caregiver must have had a relationship with the child and family prior to the child needing an out-of-home placement.

Kinship care licensing: There is no separate approval process for kinship foster parents. Kin have to meet the same approval standards and requirements as non-kin foster parents, but the child welfare agency may waive the space standards for kin. Licensed kin receive the same foster care payment rate as non-kin foster parents.

Subsidized guardianship programs: For relatives within the fifth degree of relationship who have been caring for a child in child welfare custody and receiving a foster care payment, the Oklahoma Department of Human Services
Children are often eligible for state and federal benefits even if their caregivers do not have legal guardianship or custody. These programs include:

**The Relative Support Program:** Through the Relative Support Program, The Oklahoma Department of Human Services Family Support Division provides assistance statewide to eligible relatives within the fifth degree of relationship to a child for whom they are caring on a full-time basis, regardless of the legal status of the child to the relative. The Program is a flexible voucher program aimed at preventing child welfare involvement. In addition to the child-only grant, Medicaid, and child care, funds are available for such things as: school supplies, activity fees, clothing, shelter-related expenses, legal issues related to obtaining guardianship or legal custody, and counseling services for the child or caregiver. Call your local Department of Human Services office for more information or visit www.okdhs.org/icounties/default.asp to find your local office.

**Financial Assistance:** Cash assistance may be available to children and their grandparents and other relative caregivers through Oklahoma’s Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

- A “child-only grant” is for the child and based *only* on the child’s income.
- An adult caregiver may also be included in the TANF grant — based on their income and subject to work requirements and time limits.

Call (405) 521-4391 or log on to www.okdhs.org.

**Food Stamps:** Kinship care families may also be eligible for food stamps to help meet their children’s food and
nutrition needs. For more information, call (405) 521-4391 or log on to www.okdhs.org.

**Health Insurance:** Grandparents and other relative caregivers may apply for free or low-cost health insurance on behalf of the children they are raising through Sooner Care. In some cases, caregivers may also be eligible for free coverage under Medicaid. For more information about how to apply for Sooner Care, call (800) 987-7767 or log on to www.ohca.state.ok.us/consumer/.

**Other Benefits:** Other state and federal benefits may also be available to eligible children, such as child care subsidies, disability benefits, and special education services. For more information about these, download CDF’s benefit guides for grandparents and other relatives raising children at www.childrensdefense.org or call (202) 662-3568. For more information on the federal benefits that may be available to caregivers, log on to the National Council on Aging’s Benefits CheckUp website at www.benefitscheckup.org.

### State Laws

The following state laws may be helpful to grandparents and other relatives raising children:

**Medical Consent (Okla. Stat. Ann. tit. 10, § 170.1):** This law allows a parent or other person with legal custody or guardianship to authorize, in writing, any adult person caring for the child to consent to medical or dental treatment. This law states that any relative, related to a child within the third degree, who has permanent care and custody of the child has the same rights to authorize medical care, dental care, and school-related medical care (e.g., immunizations, physicals) as are given to legal guardians if: 1) the relative completes the relative caregiver’s authorization affidavit; 2) the child is residing full-time with the relative and the relative contributes the most support for the child; and 3) the parent(s) have expressed no intent to return for the child and the relative is unable to contact the parent(s). The affidavit is not valid for more than one year, unless the relative has legal custody.

**Education Consent (Okla. Stat. Ann. tit. 70, § 1-113):** This law states that each school district may, but is not required to, allow for the establishment of a child’s residency by affidavit. The child may be enrolled in school when an adult who resides in the school district and has assumed permanent care and custody of the child files an affidavit with the school district. The adult does not have to have formal legal custody of the child.

1Laws change and are subject to different interpretations. These general descriptions are not intended as legal advice in any particular situation.

### National Resources

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<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Phone Number</th>
<th>Website</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AARP Grandparent Information Center</td>
<td>(800) 424-3410</td>
<td><a href="http://www.aarp.org/grandparents">www.aarp.org/grandparents</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption Information Clearinghouse</td>
<td>(888) 251-0075</td>
<td><a href="http://www.calib.com/naic/pubs/r_grand.cfm">www.calib.com/naic/pubs/r_grand.cfm</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Brookdale Foundation Group</td>
<td>(212) 308-7355</td>
<td><a href="http://www.brookdalefoundation.org">www.brookdalefoundation.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Child Welfare League of America</td>
<td>(202) 638-2952</td>
<td><a href="http://www.cwla.org">www.cwla.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Generations United</td>
<td>(202) 638-1263</td>
<td><a href="http://www.gu.org">www.gu.org</a></td>
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<td>Grand Parent Again</td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="http://www.grandparentagain.com">www.grandparentagain.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>GrandsPlace</td>
<td>(860) 763-5789</td>
<td><a href="http://www.grandsplace.com">www.grandsplace.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>National Aging Information Center</td>
<td>(202) 619-0724</td>
<td><a href="http://www.aoa.dhhs.gov">www.aoa.dhhs.gov</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>National Committee of Grandparents for Children’s Rights</td>
<td>(866) 624-9900</td>
<td><a href="http://www.grandparentsforchildren.org">www.grandparentsforchildren.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Urban Institute</td>
<td>(202) 833-7200</td>
<td><a href="http://www.urban.org">www.urban.org</a></td>
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Fact sheets are updated once a year. Suggested additions should be emailed to the AARP Grandparent Information Center at gic@aarp.org. Please write “State Fact Sheets” in the subject line of your email.