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 Tennessee, there are 101,510 children living in grandparent-headed households (7.3% of all the children in the state). There are another 24,774 children living in households headed by other relatives (1.8% 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 Tennessee, 61,252 grandparents report they are responsible for their grandchildren living with them [9,660 in Memphis]: 31% of these grandparents are African American; 1% are Hispanic/Latino; and 66% are White. 42% 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 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.
The Tennessee Department of Children’s Services (DCS) has established the Relative Caregiver Program for kinship caregivers who are raising children who are in their physical and legal custody. Some financial support may be provided, depending on need. DCS has contracted with community-based agencies at three sites across the state to provide services to kinship families in sixteen counties. Services include individual and family counseling, legal services, financial aid, respite, recreation, homemaker services, support groups, training, concrete needs and case management. Services to the children may include child care, a children’s activity group, mentoring, tutoring, and recreational activities. Contact: Elizabeth Black, Kinship Care Program Coordinator, at (615) 532-5636 or elizabeth.black@state.tn.us. The three sites for the Relative Caregiver Program include: Upper Cumberland Development District offers a variety of services in 14 counties—(Cannon, Clay, Cumberland, Dekalb, Fentress, Jackson, Macon, Overton, Pickett, Putman, Smith, Van Buran, Warren and White) to grandparents and other relatives who are raising their kin’s children. Services include case management, emergency services, counseling, respite care, legal advice and counseling, and support group activities. Contact: Patty Jones, Program Director, at (931) 432-4111 or pjones@ucdd.org. University of Tennessee Boling Center for Developmental Disabilities provides emergency start-up services, counseling, respite care, legal advice and counseling, and volunteer mentoring for kinship care families. Homemaker services for caregivers and monthly recreational groups on Saturdays are also provided. The Center also provides a range of core services for children with disabilities. The Center serves Memphis and Shelby Counties. Contact: Juanita Williams, Program Director, at (901) 448-3926 or jawilliams@utmem.edu. Family & Children’s Services Relative Caregiver Program provides quarterly education sessions, monthly support group meetings, family therapy services, and consultation and representation by the Vanderbilt Legal Clinic. The educational group provides speakers on various topics such as childhood and adolescent development, loss and adjustment issues, parenting skills, legal rights in the health care and welfare systems, issues around drug and alcohol abuse, and stress management. The support group is offered twice monthly. During the monthly evening support group, a simultaneous Children’s Therapeutic Activity Group is facilitated by a social worker. Family & Children’s Services provides leadership in the development of the groups, offers individual and family therapy at no cost to the participants, and provides financial and material assistance as needed. The program serves Davidson County. Contact: Shalonda Cawthon, Director, at (615) 251-1211 or shalonda.cawthon@fcsnashville.org.

Tennessee State Kinship Advisory Board was established in April 2002 by Tennessee’s Department of Children’s Services and funded by The Brookdale Foundation. The Advisory Board is comprised of a group of policy makers, lawmakers, and relative caregivers who are working together to build support for kinship families throughout the state of Tennessee. Contact: Elizabeth Black, Kinship Care Coordinator, Department of Children’s Services, at (615) 532-5636 or elizabeth.black@state.tn.us or Servella Terry, Family to Family Co-Coordinator, Department of Children’s Services, at (615) 532-5616 or servella.terry@state.tn.us.

The Senior Neighbors-Relatives As Parents Program (RAPP) of Chattanooga sponsors a network of monthly support groups for kinship care families - one at a senior center, one based in a large city elementary school, and one at a rural Head Start center. RAPP provides recreational and respite care activities for caregivers. Respite events include holiday parties, brunches, field trips and a number of Saturday afternoon “Book Club” meetings. RAPP also implemented “Book Club” activities for children and adolescents. The program serves Chattanooga and the surrounding areas. Contact: Joyce Clem, Director of Intergenerational Program, at (423) 755-6105 or interg@bellsouth.net.

Knoxville’s Knox County Community Action Committee Office on Aging RAPP Program provides bimonthly newsletters, support groups, transportation, group recreational activities (field trips, plays and carnivals) and computer training with internet access for kinship caregivers in Knox County. Contact: Edna Eickman, Coordi-
• **The Advocates for the Aging offers a Relative Caregiver Program** to kinship care families in the Cookeville area. The program offers support groups with speakers and counselors to address the needs and concerns of the caregivers. It also provides the families with emergency care and legal services. The program assists the kinship caregivers with child care expenses and provides the families with respite and recreational activities. **Contact:** Lisa Carter, RAPP Coordinator, at (931) 432-4111 or lcarter@ucdd.org.

• **The McMinville Warren County Senior Center** offers the Warren County Relatives as Parents Program (RAPP). The program provides kinship caregivers with parenting classes and educational programs that address issues regarding raising children today. It also hosts social events and activities for the grandparents and children to attend. **Contact:** Cheryl Mingle, Executive Director, at (931) 473-6559 or wacosrctr@blomand.net.

# 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 Tennessee, the Department of Children’s Services (DCS) reports:

**Number of children in kinship care:** As of March 2002, there were 9,330 children in out-of-home placements. Of these children, 665 children (7.1%) were placed with relatives.

**Preferences for kinship care:** State policy requires that kin be considered first when an out-of-home placement is sought for a child DCS’s care. There is an expedited approval process for persons who have a prior existing relationship to a child in state care. These persons may become fully approved foster parents in a very short period of time.

**Kinship care licensing:** There are no separate approval standards for kinship foster parents. Kin have to meet the same approval process and requirements and receive the same foster care payment rate as non-kin foster parents.

**Subsidized guardianship programs:** In addition to foster care payments and other benefits available to kin raising children in the foster care system, some states also have subsidized guardianship programs. Most of these programs offer ongoing subsidies to children who have left foster care to live permanently under the legal custody or guardianship of relatives. Tennessee currently does not have a subsidized guardianship program.

**State kinship care contact:** Questions about kinship foster placements should be directed to Elizabeth Black, Kinship Care Coordinator, Department of Children’s Services, at (615) 532-5636 or elizabeth.black@state.tn.us.

**Training and support for kinship foster parents:** Anyone interested in becoming a foster parent, including kinship caregivers, is required to attend a 30-hour pre-service training program called PATH (Parents As Tender Healers). **Contact:** Elizabeth Black, Kinship Care Program Coordinator, at (615) 532-5636 or elizabeth.black@state.tn.us.

Through the Relative Caregiver Pilot Program, the Tennessee Department of Children’s Services provides assistance to eligible relatives within the third degree of relationship to a child for whom they have temporary legal custody. In addition to financial assistance, the caregivers may also receive child care, counseling, parenting skills, support group, respite and transportation services. The pilot program is scheduled to expire on June 30, 2004. Call your local Department of Children’s Services for more information or visit www.state.tn.us/youth/ to find your local office.
Public Benefits

Children are often eligible for state and federal benefits even if their caregivers do not have legal guardianship or custody. These programs include:

Financial Assistance: Cash assistance may be available to children and their grandparents and other relative caregivers through the Family First/TANF Program.

- 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 grant — based on their income and subject to work requirements and time limits.

Call (888) 863-6178 or log on to www.state.tn.us/humanserv/famfir.htm.

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 (888) 863-6178 or log on to www.state.tn.us/humanserv/famfir.htm.

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 the Tennessee Medicaid and TENNCARE programs. In some cases, caregivers may also be eligible for free coverage under Medicaid. For more information about how to apply for Medicaid and TENNCARE, call (800) 669-1851 or log on to www.state.tn.us/tenncare.

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 law may be helpful to grandparents and other relatives raising children:

Power of Attorney (Public Acts, Chapter No. 71, Senate Bill 526): This law states that any parent who cannot care for his or her child due to hardship may grant any state resident the power of attorney to be legally responsible for their child. This authority may be delegated without the approval of a court by executing in writing the power of attorney on a form provided by the Department of Children’s Services.

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

National Resources

| AARP Grandparent Information Center | (800) 424-3410 | www.aarp.org/grandparents |
| Adoption Information Clearinghouse  | (888) 251-0075 | www.calib.com/naic/pubs/r_grand.cfm |
| The Brookdale Foundation Group     | (212) 308-7355 | www.brookdalefoundation.org |
| Child Welfare League of America     | (202) 638-2952 | www.cwla.org |
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.