Across the United States, more than 6 million children are being raised in households headed by grandparents and other relatives; 2.5 million children are in these households without any parents present. As the children’s parents struggle with substance abuse, mental illness, incarceration, economic hardship, divorce, domestic violence, and other challenges, these caregivers provide a vital safety net to children inside and outside of the foster care system. This fact sheet provides important information and resources for the grandparents and other relatives raising children in your state.

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 Wisconsin, there are 46,461 children living in grandparent-headed households (3.4% of all children in the state). There are another 14,704 children living in households headed by other relatives (1.1% of all children in the state). Of the children living in households headed by grandparents or other relatives in Wisconsin, 25,373 are living there without either parent present.

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 Wisconsin, 23,687 grandparents report they are responsible for their grandchildren living with them [7,052 in Milwaukee]: 25% of these grandparents are African American; 7% are Hispanic/Latino; 3% are American Indian or Alaskan Native; 2% are Asian; and 61% are White. 35% 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/families/grandparents/.

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

- **The Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (GRG) Partnership of Wisconsin** is a statewide network of more than 200 kinship caregivers and service providers that work together on issues and concerns facing grandparents raising grandchildren. Spearheaded by Grandparents United for Children’s Rights, Inc., the Wisconsin Bureau of Aging & Long Term Care Resources, and the University of Wisconsin Extension, the GRG Partnership provides information on local services available to kinship care families, including social and legal services, and public benefits. The partnership also has developed a statewide network of support groups and four regional trainings on how to start support groups. In addition to a statewide needs assessment for kinship care families, the GRG Partnership offers a range of educational programs for kinship caregivers and the public. For more information, go to www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/grgp/. The website offers a list of Wisconsin grandparent support groups, fact sheets, and a resource guide called Grandparents/Relatives Raising and Nurturing Dependent Children (GRAND). **Contact:** Mary Brinntall-Peterson, University of Wisconsin – Extension, at (608) 262-8083 or mary.brintnall-peterson@ces.uwex.edu or Barbara Robinson, Bureau of Aging & Long Term Care Resources, at (608) 266-7498 or robinbj@dhfs.state.wi.us.

- **The Grandparent Network of Winnebago County** is a collaborative effort to provide support for grandparents and their grandchildren. Along with monthly support group meetings, child care is provided for grandchildren during meeting times, and supper is provided for both grandparents and grandchildren. Professionally-led education programs on a variety of issues ranging from parenting skills to legal rights are available as well; topics are chosen based on requests from members. A quarterly newsletter provides updates and information to members and an informational packet is available to grandfamilies as well. The program also offers outreach programs to community groups to help them learn more about grandfamilies and their needs. **Contact:** Chris Kniep, at (920) 232-1973 or christine.kniep@ces.uwex.edu.

- **The Wisconsin Extension** discussion group in Polk and Burnett counties prints and distributes an informative state-wide quarterly newsletter on topics ranging from disciplining your grandchild and parenting skills to managing stress and grandparent’s legal rights. The group also has occasional meetings depending on the needs of its members. You may also log on to their website at www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/polk. **Contact:** Marilyn Kooiker, Burnett County, at (715) 349-2151 or marilyn.kooiker@ces.uwex.edu.

- **The Racine Kin Connection** holds a support group for grandparents and other relatives raising children the second Tuesday of each month. The group provides an opportunity for caregivers to share their experiences and information. The group provides child care and a light supper. **Contact:** Diane Gautsch, Next Generation Now, at (262) 635-1920 or racinekinconnection@yahoo.com. The website is www.geocities.com/racinekinconnection.

- **The Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Legislative Task Force** is the arm of the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Partnership of Wisconsin (described above) that focuses on legislative activity in support of kinship care families. **Contact:** Ethel Dunn, Grandparents United for Children’s Rights, at (608) 238-8751 or www.geocities.com/Heartland/Prairie/6866.

- **In Their Best Interests, Inc.** has two programs for kinship care families in the Milwaukee area. When children who are crime victims, victims of trauma, have lost a parent due to homicide or when children who have experienced domestic violence are placed with a kinship caregiver, the Fostering Healing Program provides targeted in-home support for the child and the caregiver. The program also helps kinship care families apply for crime victim compensation. Fostering Family Ties for Children is a joint effort with the Volunteer Lawyers Project of LegalAction of Wisconsin, Inc. The project provides volunteer attorney assistance to grandparents and other family members raising children in the areas of guardianship, kinship support, access to medical insurance and health care, school matters, and some Supplemental Security Income (SSI) questions. **Contact:** Henrietta Brown, Co-Director, at (414) 344-1220 (ext. 12) or itbi.brown@sbcglobal.net.

- **The University of Wisconsin Extension** offers a unique view of kinship care from the perspective of the child in their
publication, *Through the Eyes of a Child: Grandparents Raising Grandchildren*. The fact sheets cover issues ranging from the importance of close relationships to child development. The fact sheets are available online at www.uwex.edu/relationships. The University of Wisconsin Extension has also put out a publication on how the laws apply to grandparents and grandparent caregivers. You may access *Wisconsin Laws: Grandparents’ Rights and Responsibilities* online at www1.uwex.edu/ces/pubs.

## 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 Wisconsin, the Department of Health and Family Services reports:

**Number of children in kinship care:** As of December 2004, there were 9,940 children living with relatives and receiving a monthly grant through the Kinship Care program. Children may be placed with Kinship Care relatives voluntarily by the parent(s) or by court order.

**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.

**Kinship care licensing:** There is no separate licensing program for kinship foster parents. Kin have to meet the same licensing standards and training requirements and receive the same foster care payment rate as non-kin foster parents. Kinship Care relative caregivers are not licensed, but they must meet basic eligibility criteria, including a criminal background check, before payment is approved.

**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. Wisconsin currently does not have a subsidized guardianship program.

**State kinship care contact:** Questions about Kinship Care should be directed to June Paul, State of Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, at (608) 267-2079 or pauljc1@dhfs.state.wi.us. Questions about foster care should be directed to S. Kate Johnson, State of Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, at (608) 266-6874 or johnssk@dhfs.state.wi.us.

**Training and support for kinship foster parents:** Support services for kinship foster parents are offered by the Wisconsin Foster and Adoptive Parent Association. A quarterly newsletter and two conferences educate and inform kinship caregivers on a variety of important issues. You may log on to their website at www.wfapa.org. **Contact:** Sherry Benson at (715) 735-3879 or tbwcrew@cybrzn.com.

## 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 Wisconsin’s Kinship Care Payment Program. Call (608) 267-2079 (in Milwaukee, (414) 220-7035) or log on to www.dhfs.state.wi.us.

**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 (608) 267-2079 (in Milwaukee, (414) 220-7035) or log on to www.dhfs.state.wi.us.

**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 Wisconsin’s Medicaid and BadgerCare programs. In some cases, caregivers may also be eligible for free health coverage under Medicaid. For more information about how to apply for these programs, call (800) 362-3002 or log on to http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/badgercare/index.htm.

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 web site at www.benefitscheckup.org.

State Laws

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

**Standby Guardianship (WIS. Stat. A. § 48.978):** This law allows a child’s parent or guardian to designate a standby guardian to oversee the daily care of a child if the parent dies or is incapacitated.

1 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 (888) 687-2277 www.aarp.org/grandparents
Adoption Information Clearinghouse (888) 251-0075 http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/
The Brookdale Foundation Group (212) 308 -7355 www.brookdalefoundation.org
Child Welfare League of America (202) 638-2952 www.cwla.org
Generations United (202) 289-3979 www.gu.org
GrandsPlace 860) 763-5789 www.grandsplace.com
KINship Information Network (772) 501-0502 www.kinsupport.org
National Aging Information Center (202) 619-0724 www.aoa.dhhs.gov
National Committee of Grandparents For Children’s Rights (866) 624-9900 www.grandparentsforchildren.org
The Urban Institute (202) 833-7200 www.urban.org

Fact sheets are updated quarterly. Changes or additions should be e-mailed to the AARP Grandparent Information Center at gic@aarp.org. Please write “State Fact Sheets” on your e-mail subject line.