

One Response to *Colorado nonprofits try to sort out recovery act funding at workshop*

1.  [Shirley Berens](#) says:

September 8, 2009 at 4:05 pm

In the stimulus package I see no funding for grandparents seeking custody, adoption and visitation of their grandchildren. See my article below.

A National Statement

Grandparents Need Help
2009

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Grandparents Resource Center
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Today's topic is about America's grandparents and grandchildren. What a wonderful relationship I find this to be. Throughout history, grandparents and elderly members of the family have carried on the eternal torch for families, handing down their wisdom, and family history through their relationships with their grandchildren, in the stories that they tell to them. Even as I look around this park today, I notice in the families the same trend of caring, although in much different circumstances, where grandparents find themselves raising grandchildren of other family members. What is important here is family. As a nation we need to focus on making families strong, so

children can feel safe, secure, and well nurtured, so they can grow to become good citizens no matter the economic times.

If we think about what's going on today in our society, our thoughts come face-to-face with tragedies like that of Columbine High School, where many children were slain by other angry children. These angry children cried out pitifully in their own way, but, perhaps no one heard them, so they channeled their anger and frustration into buying guns and killing their classmates. I am sure we all know the effects of such a tragedy. My question is: where are we headed in our society today? Where is GOD in our lives, in our society? It is interesting to observe that, we only realize the importance of God and family values, only when tragedies like that of Columbine visit our communities and neighborhoods.

Today, as a result of fading family bonds and the oppression of the presence of God among us, parental responsibilities has greatly slacked, good family values and morals are frowned upon, in the guise of freedom and liberty. Grandparents are now fighting wars on the streets to rescue their grandchildren from hurtful and sometimes fatal situations of drugs, alcohol, aids, divorce, and neglect of their grandchildren. These are the day-to-day emotional tragedies that families face in our society. It is during these times of tragedy that grandparents step up to the line to help raise this generation of children. Many grandparents have given up their retirement, vacation trips, or just the sheer leisure of post-parental environment. Many grandparents can't afford means of transport, or take vacations as they might have planned. Instead, they find themselves changing diapers,

frequenting grocery shops, reading bedtime stories to their grandchildren, getting up in the middle of the night to soothe away their grandchildren's nightmares due to traumatic experiences. Some grandparents have even sold their homes, and cashed in their life savings just to pay attorney fees so they can get custody of their grandchildren who have been placed in foster care.

In America today, there are about 6.1 million grandchildren being raised by their grandparents, averaging about 1 in every 20 children. Today's statics show the following information about grandchildren being raised by grandparents:

- 6.1 million

The number of grandparents whose grandchildren younger than 18 live with them. Source: 2006 American Community Survey

Grandparents as Caregivers

- 2.5 million

The number of grandparents responsible for most of the basic needs (i.e., food, shelter, clothing) of one or more of the grandchildren who live with them. These grandparents represent about 40 percent of all grandparents whose grandchildren live with them. Of these caregivers, 1.6 million are grandmothers, and 896,000 are grandfathers.

- 1.7 million

The number of grandparent-caregivers who are married.

- 1.4 million

The number of grandparents who are in the labor force and also responsible for most of the basic needs of their grandchildren.

- 918,000

Number of grandparents responsible for caring for their grandchildren for at least the past five years.

- 477,000

Number of grandparents whose income is below the poverty level and who are caring for their grandchildren.

- 730,000

Number of grandparents with a disability who are caring for their grandchildren.

- 544,000

Number of grandparents who speak a language other than English and who are responsible for caring for their grandchildren.

- \$42,111

Median income for families with grandparent-caregiver householders. If a parent of the grandchildren was not present, the median dropped to \$31,405.

- 73%

Among grandparents who care for their grandchildren, the percentage who live in an owner-occupied home.

Source for statements in this section: 2006 American Community Survey

Grandchildren

- 5.7 million

The number of children living with a grandparent; these children comprise 8 percent of all children in the United States. The majority of these children, 3.7 million, live in the grandparent's home. Source: Families and Living Arrangements: 2006

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- 2.1 million

The number of children who live with both a grandmother and a grandfather.

Source: Families and Living Arrangements: 2006

- 30%

Among children younger than 5 whose mothers worked outside the home, the percentage cared for on a regular basis by a grandparent during their mother's working hours. Grandparents and fathers were the two biggest sources of child care by relatives when mothers went to work.

Source: Who's Minding the Kids? Child Care Arrangements: Spring 2005

Many of these grandchildren have broken minds, broken bodies, and broken spirits along with broken hearts. So many children are placed in foster care against their desires, and then sold off in foster-adoptions. Many others end up in institutions where they are drugged up in order to keep their defiant behavior under control. Recently I read in the papers about such institutions now being pursued for improper care and maltreatment of the children within their confines. My own grandson had been in such an institution, and the system spent over \$1 million on him in a period of 8 years, drugged him up into a mental and learning disability. Yet, grandparents who, out of love, have sacrificed their retirement and life's savings to raise these children are being denied the necessary assistance they need to provide the vital nurture and love that no foster home or institution can ever give to these children. Grandparents are suffering financially,

emotionally, and physically. They shed many tears in their homes for the well-being of their grandchildren. They are trying to raise grandchildren, many of who are brokenhearted and broken minded, with little or not financial help, either from the parents or the welfare system.

We have something called TANF (temporary aid to needy families) which is really only temporary. And only grandparents and other relatives who are certified as kinship caregivers are eligible. Grandparents really need something permanent. Such permanency in assistance to grandparents I call PANF (permanent aid to needy families). This assistance would insure stability for children in grandparents/kinship homes. Children with broken hearts and spirits would never have to worry about having to live anywhere other than with their grandma's or other loving family members. Grandparents are truly giving these children safe and stable homes and need to be supported because it is obvious that they are giving up the rest of their lives in order to raise these children.

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program became the TANF Bureau within the Office of Family Assistance in May 2006. The Bureau has primary responsibility for the administration of the programs authorized under titles IV-A and XVI of the Social Security Act.

Through its divisions and program units, the Bureau provides assistance and work opportunities to needy families by granting states, territories and tribes the federal funds and wide flexibility to develop and implement their own welfare programs. The assistance is time-

limited and promotes work, responsibility and self-sufficiency. The TANF block grant is administered by state, territorial and tribal agencies. Citizens can make application for TANF at the respective agency administering the program in their community. The federal government does not provide TANF assistance directly to individuals or families.

History

Under the welfare reform legislation of 1996, (the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act – PWRORA – Public Law 104-193), TANF replaced the welfare programs known as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program and the Emergency Assistance (EA) program. The law ended federal entitlement to assistance and instead created TANF as a block grant that provides States, territories and tribes federal funds each year. These funds cover benefits, administrative expenses, and services targeted to needy families. TANF became effective July 1, 1997, and was reauthorized in February 2006 under the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005.

Mission

TANF is designed to help needy families achieve self-sufficiency. To carry out its mission, the TANF Bureau: 1) develops legislative, regulatory, and budgetary proposals; 2) presents operational planning objectives and initiatives related to welfare reform to the Director; 3) oversees the progress of approved activities; 4) provides leadership and coordination for welfare reform within ACF; and 5) provides leadership and linkages with other agencies on welfare reform issues, including agencies within DHHS, relevant agencies across the Federal,

State, local, and Tribal governments, and non-governmental organizations at the Federal, State, and local levels.

Goals

States receive a block grant to design and operate their programs to accomplish the purposes of TANF.

These are:

- assisting needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes
- reducing the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work and marriage
- preventing out-of-wedlock pregnancies
- encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

Organization

The TANF Bureau is comprised of the following divisions:

Division of State TANF Policy. The Division drafts regulations and provides policy and guidance for the TANF programs operated by States, DC, and the territories of Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. It assesses plans and amendments. The Division also evaluates operations to determine compliance with program requirements and provides advice on penalty actions to be taken, including corrective action plans designed to remedy operational deficiencies. Further, Division provides technical assistance to grantees and information to the public on these topics.

Division of State and Territory TANF Management. The Division is responsible for providing technical assistance to States, Territories, localities, and community groups. The Division also oversees the implementation of the Healthy Marriage and Promoting Responsible Fatherhood programs authorized by the Deficit Reduction Act of

2005.

Division of Data Collection and Analysis. The Division is responsible for all aspects of the collection, compilation, analysis, and dissemination of statistical and financial data on the TANF program and the Aid to the Aged, Blind and Disabled programs in Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

Division of Tribal TANF Management. The Division is responsible for providing program guidance and technical assistance to:

1. federally recognized American Indian tribes and certain statutorily identified Alaska Native entities in development, implementation, and administration of tribal TANF programs,
2. federally recognized tribes and tribal organizations in implementation and administration of Native Employment Works (NEW) programs,
3. federally recognized tribes and tribal organizations in implementation and administration of Tribal TANF – Child Welfare Coordination projects and, where appropriate, providing general and specific information, guidance, and technical assistance to tribes and state and federal agencies on issues relating to these programs, related legislation and other initiatives affecting these programs.

TANF Bureau Regional Program Units. The Program Units provide program and technical administration of the TANF block grant and collaborate with ACF, States and other grantees.

Institutions are overflowing with children without parental care.

Youth detention centers are overcrowded with children who have gotten into trouble from nonviolent crimes. Foster homes are so full and overcrowded with neglected and dependent children that County Agencies and Departments of Human Services are seeking out more

foster homes just to house these children. Yet, grandparents are constantly being denied petitions for custody of their own biological grandchildren, and are being told they are too old, or given some other reason. Whereas many children placed in foster homes suffer malnutrition, maltreatment and in many cases, death, county child welfare agencies continuously pull children out of their biological homes and place them in these foster homes. Colorado is the second highest in the nation in foster care placement of children. New York ranks first. It is high time state officials of human services take a human look at where children truly belong – placement with suitable family members, if for some reason biological parents are incapable of fulfilling their parental responsibilities toward their children. So grandparents and other relatives raising children need help, financially, emotionally, and physically. Nine out of ten grandparents who talk to me about the problems they face raising their grandchildren, also need daycare or respite care. They need a day off sometimes just to get some rest so they can keep going from one day to then next.

Women are being incarcerated at an alarming rate, with numbers tripling in the last 10 years. Instances of parental incarceration, many times, leave children homeless and without mothers to care for them. The rise in female incarceration is being fueled by more arrests on drug offenses and related crimes of theft, forgery, and commonly, welfare fraud. Young or teenage mothers also get caught in gang-related crimes. Reports show that most female inmates are poorly educated and lack job skills. They have children and little means of support. Many have been physically or sexually abused by a spouse or

a family member. Their necessary to support their children. Often, these women will deal-drugs forge checks or steal to support their children. When mom is incarcerated, the children are lucky if they are placed with their grandparents or other relatives. Family members will take care of these children until mom is out of jail, pull their acts together, and are ready to resume parenteral roles in their children's lives. Otherwise these children are in foster homes eventually adopted out and never will have the opportunity of growing in their rich family heritage.

The morals and values that we all grew up with, those values that our own grandparents instilled in us, have been smashed and destroyed by false teachings and expectations of today's society. Children don't know who God is. Schools are barred from teaching about what it means to be human, and where we came from. Violence runs through a place where children could learn about life and good morals. But how many schools have turned into a battlefield where children are taught, not to live, but to survive in our society. Children are afraid to go to school; they lock their doors at night so no one will come in to harm them. They think that they have to carry a weapon to protect them.

More and more families are getting torn apart, family members fighting with each other over children. Children need their families to get along with each other. Children want to enjoy the company of all thier family members, not just their parents. Children can lose one or the other parent in a blink of a tragedy. Many of the grandparents that come to the Grandparents Resource Center have had their own

children killed, and want desperately to see their grandchildren. In most cases the surviving parents deprive the bereaved grandparents of visitation with their grandchildren.

Looking at the trend of family life today, it is imperative that America returns to the extended family system that use to be the haven of security, good morals, and family values for children. Family members must work together for the sake and well being of the children.

Unnecessary family disagreements and tooth picking situations are harmful to our children's well being. Our families need all the help they can get to raise our children and to make America a better place to live.

I present these three following questions:

1. Where are these families going to find help?
2. When is our city, state and nation going to do something to help?
3. What are we going to do, and how are we going to do it?

I know I don't have all the solutions to my grandparent's problems, but I can tell you one thing: I hear all the problems day after day from the grandparents and parents who call my office. And I have come to one conclusion: that it takes GOD and our willingness to follow God's ways to straighten out the mess in our society today. It will take a commitment from each and every one of us, including leaders of our

children and in our communities across America. It will take faith, commitment, and willingness to go far beyond the call of duty.

I personally challenge each and every one of us here today to get up tomorrow and think about what we can do to make a difference in our community. We need to put into action those things we genuinely believe would help make families strong and secure in our community, especially for our children and the elderly. I know that grandparents have made these commitments by reaching out and taking in their grandchildren.

And so finally I would like us all to give our grandparents and kin raising children a hand of applause, because they all have earned a “Purple Heart for Bravery” by going beyond the call of duty in raising their grandchildren. These extended family’s members need our support!

Sincerely,

Shirley M. Berens
Founder
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