

Kathryn Perticone, MSW  
 Binghamton, New York

## GRANDFAMILIES HOUSING

### Description:

A grandfamily house is a housing option that caters specifically to the needs of grandparents who have assumed custodial responsibility for raising their grandchildren. This option creates an enriching, supportive, and safe community for multigenerational families to thrive.

New York State Grandparents Assuming Custodial Responsibility for Raising Their Grandchildren*		
Households	Grandparents	Households
Number of <i>households</i> headed by grandparents who have custodial responsibility for raising their grandchildren	Number of <i>grandparents</i> with custodial responsibility	Number of grandparent-custodial <i>households</i> where the grandchildren's parents are <i>not</i> present
129,805	132,010	44,417
*U. S. Census Bureau, 2007 American Community Survey, Tables B10002, B10050		

Close to 290,000 children in New York State live in households that are headed by their grandparents. Across the United States, there are almost five million children living in grandparent-headed households, up from 3 million in 1995. In a significant proportion of these households, the grandparents have assumed total custodial responsibility for raising their grandchildren. Often, the parents of these children are not present in the household; but, in many cases, the grandparents are caring for both the grandchildren and those children's parents.

This growing phenomenon crosses all socio-economic classes, geographic areas, races, and ethnicities; and some causal factors have been identified: the parents are unable or unwilling to carry out their parental duties because of alcohol or substance abuse, incarceration, mental health problems, teenage pregnancy, divorce, poverty, or unemployment; the grandchildren may be victims of child abuse, violence, or neglect; and/or the parents may be dead, deployed into the military, or suffer from debilitating diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

Grandparents experience a variety of issues when taking on a custodial responsibility. For example, grandparents of all ages experience significant financial burdens when assuming the added expenses of raising grandchildren— younger-aged grandparents are often forced to give up their jobs; elderly grandparents must stretch their fixed incomes to absorb these costs. If they are unable to gain *legal* custody or a guardianship arrangement, financial problems are compounded by a lack of legal authority to make medical, school-related, and other decisions regarding their grandchildren. Elderly grandparents find they are

unfamiliar with the current culture and norms of their grandchildren's school and social environments.

In addition, when surveyed, grandparent caregivers identified both isolation and housing difficulties as primary sources of concern. The greater majority of custodial-grandparent households are located in urban areas, where family-size and age-eligibility regulations in rental properties often prohibit grandchildren from readily moving in with their grandparents, forcing the grandparents into the disruption of finding alternative, and affordable, living arrangements. Older grandparents may also experience the frailties and impairments that are more prevalent with age. The grandchildren also face the disruption of relocating from their homes, their friends, and their schools, as well as, often, the emotional and physical upset of being separated from their parents. Custodial grandparents need information, referral and access to services, counseling, and respite. The grandchildren need transportation, activities, counseling, and help with school work.

It was from such concerns that grandfamily housing was created. Typical supportive services offered in these developments include site security; age-specific programming; caregiver support groups; access to community-based aging, children, and family services; tutoring services; and transportation. However, the variety of services offered depends on the surveyed needs of each development's residents. In addition to programming, the construction of the development includes universal design features, such as handrails, wide hallways, elevators, and call buttons, to address the differing needs of the development's varying resident age groups. The organization of the resident community also includes well-defined policies to ensure safety, behavior standards, and conflict resolution.

The first grandfamily house was established in Boston, MA, in 1998. Boston's GrandFamilies<sup>®</sup> House was developed out of four years of research and a collaboration between Boston Aging Concerns—Young and Old United and The Women's Institute. The multiunit building has 26 family-sized apartments that are adapted to the needs of both the grandchildren and their aging caregivers. Amenities include grab bars in the bathrooms and showers, a playground, wide hallways, elevators, shared laundries on every floor, and a live-in manager who organizes the residents and handles concerns. Additional onsite services include van transportation, before-school and after-school tutoring, a fully functioning pre-Kindergarten for three- and four-year olds, and an AmeriCorps volunteer to work with the children. When necessary, services for residents are brought in and events are held in the community room.

The success of the Boston project is greatly attributed to its ability to obtain special, tenant-based Section 8 vouchers, which were created by the State of Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development and the City of Boston specifically for grandparents raising grandchildren. The section 8 vouchers,

along with the help of pro-bono attorneys who brought together public and private funding, financed this breakthrough initiative.

The success achieved in Boston's GrandFamilies® House has been replicated in other parts of the United States and in New York State. In 2005, in the South Bronx, the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), in collaboration with Presbyterian Social Services and West Side Federation for Senior and Supportive Housing, built PSS/WSF GrandParent Family Apartments, which was the first-ever grandfamily complex in New York. The \$12.8 million construction project includes a six-story building with 40 two-bedroom apartments, 10 three-bedroom apartments, an apartment for a live-in resident manager, 5,760 square feet for community and supportive services programs, 6,051 square feet for retail and office space, 12 parking spaces, and a landscaped courtyard. On-site services include after-school programming for children; sports activities; computer instruction; respite care for grandparents; and workshops on health, entitlements, taxes, and legal assistance. The complex has a social worker onsite who is available to provide assistance and support to residents of all ages. NYCHA leased the Prospect Avenue site to the developer for \$1 a year in a 99-year ground lease, and will contribute a public housing subsidy that will keep the rents affordable. Additional funding was provided by New York State and private sources.

In addition to the Boston and South Bronx developments, similar housing has been developed in Hartford, CT; Buffalo, NY; Chicago, IL; Phoenix, AZ; Detroit, MI; and Baton Rouge, LA.

To date, grandfamily houses have been developed only in urban areas, reflecting the fact that a larger proportion of grandparents raising children live in urban areas. However, in other geographic areas, custodial grandparent households live in single family homes in the wider community, as well as in scattered units in conventional apartment buildings. In contrast to the large apartment buildings that are more typical of grandfamily housing in urban areas, a grandfamily house could be implemented in both suburban and rural settings on a smaller scale; for example, using four-family homes, a street with a number of duplex homes, or a small number of dedicated apartments in multiunit family housing or senior housing.

Grandfamily houses are specific buildings. However, as the phenomenon of grandparents raising grandchildren continues to grow, an increasing number of aging services providers have begun to target attention and services specifically to this population, regardless of where they are living. For example, the New York City Department for the Aging's Grandparent Resource Center—the first of its kind in the nation—was established in 1994. The Center provides a number of supportive services that include information and referral, recreational activities, educational workshops, advocacy, and case assistance to people who are raising grandchildren and other young relatives and who need services to help them cope with this new role. The Center also sponsors a network for grandparent support

group facilitators to exchange ideas, collaborate on events, and receive specialized training.

**Benefits:**

- Provides a tailored response to a specific set of family circumstances that present a unique set of issues, challenges, and opportunities.
- Provides a safe, supportive, and stable living environment for children whose parents are unable or unwilling to provide such an environment.
- When unable to live with their parents, children are able to remain with family members rather than enter the foster care system.
- Provides a supportive community environment for grandparents who take on this unexpected role at a later stage of life.
- Reduces isolation typically faced by these multigenerational families.
- Each development flexibly provides programming and services in direct response to the surveyed needs and preferences of the development's residents.
- Housing is affordable for low-income populations.
- The model demonstrates the successful use of already existing subsidy programs (Section 8 vouchers; public housing).
- Physical aspects of the buildings are designed to provide the optimal environment for the entire age spectrum, as well as making the living environment accessible and easily negotiable by residents of all ages with disabilities or frailties.
- Development by a collaborative team, together with involvement by community-based organizations, results in a safe, secure, well-maintained, aesthetically pleasing building.

**Impediments or barriers to development or implementation:**

- While the number of custodial grandparent households is growing, there continues to be a low general awareness of this population among community members and policy makers, as well as a lack of understanding of the unique needs and issues faced by these aging grandparents and displaced grandchildren and the implications for the wider community of those needs going unmet.
- This population is relatively hidden because, often, grandparents do not file for legal custody of their grandchildren.

- These households are not thought of as “high need” by the general public because family-raising-family is looked at as what is expected.
- The grandfamily house concept is relatively new and not well known to developers, service providers, and policy makers.
- Each existing grandfamily house serves a limited number of families, and there are long waiting lists.
- Grandfamily houses have high start-up costs, as most custodial grandparent families are low-income, thereby requiring subsidized housing.
- Sponsors need to advocate for use of limited Section 8 housing vouchers.
- There is not a functioning grandfamily house model in rural or suburban areas for replication, so any development would be a pilot program.
- Custodial grandparent households in rural and suburban areas may not live in close proximity to one another and may not be willing to relocate to another area or school district in order to live in a grandfamily house. In such cases, the Grandparent Resource Center model may be a viable alternative.
- In rural and suburban areas, needed services and activities are not as readily available as they are in urban areas.

#### **Resource—examples:**

- GrandFamilies<sup>®</sup> House, 214 Harvard Street, Boston, MA 02124. Developed by Boston Aging Concerns—Young and Old United (BAC-YOU), The Women's Institute for Housing and Economic Development, and Boston YWCA.
  - *Mind the Gap—Grandparents Raising Grandchildren*: a description of Boston's GrandFamilies<sup>®</sup> House:  
<http://www.bos.frb.org/commdev/c&b/2002/spring/gf.pdf>.
  - Program brief for GrandFamilies<sup>®</sup> House, including funding breakdown:  
[http://johnpilling.net/I\\_Love\\_LA/Intergenerational\\_Center\\_files/grandfamilies%20house.pdf](http://johnpilling.net/I_Love_LA/Intergenerational_Center_files/grandfamilies%20house.pdf).
  - Article by BAC-YOU and The Women's Institute for Housing and Economic Development:  
<http://www.peaceworkmagazine.org/pwork/0399/039902.htm>.
  - PSS/WSF GrandParent Family Apartments in the South Bronx at 163<sup>rd</sup> Street and Prospect Avenue, Bronx, NY, 10459. Developed by West Side Federation For Senior and Supportive Housing, Inc. (WSFSSH) and Presbyterian Senior Services (PSS). <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/first-affordable-housing-in-ny-for-grandparent-led-families-comes-to-the-south-bronx-55234287.html>.

- Description of apartments, Presbyterian Senior Services Web site: [http://www.pssusa.org/index.asp?Type=B\\_JOB&SEC=%7BE0BACB81-7379-479F-AA58-5FDDE453DF7B%7D](http://www.pssusa.org/index.asp?Type=B_JOB&SEC=%7BE0BACB81-7379-479F-AA58-5FDDE453DF7B%7D).
- Eight-minute video of the GrandParent Family Apartments in the South Bronx: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nlogRucpkTc>.
- Urban Villa “Grandparents House” Apartment Community, Baton Rouge, LA. Developed by the Urban Restoration Enhancement Corporation (UREC), The Grandparents Information Center of LA (which is housed on site), and a number of other partners: <http://www.urecbr.com/affordablehousing.htm>. Urban Villa Grandparent’s House, 7325 Caprice Drive, Baton Rouge, LA, 70812, (225) 357-8883. UREC Main Office, 6315 Greenwell Street, Suite #1, Baton Rouge, LA, 70812, (225) 356-8871.

#### Resource—written and web:

- S. Salimi, P. Stein, and S. Solomon (November 22, 2005), *Affordable Housing Initiatives For Grandparents Raising Grandchildren*, a briefing paper. New York City Council, Human Services Division, Committee on Aging. <http://webdocs.nycouncil.info/attachments/69954.htm>
- Generations United, Washington, DC: extensive information on grandfamilies, including State Fact Sheets, GrandFacts, and links to other resources: <http://www.gu.org/Defin8191322.asp>.
  - *Fact Sheets*: <http://www.aarp.org/relationships/friends-family/grandfacts-sheets/>.
  - **New York State Fact Sheet**: <http://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/relationships/friends-family/grandfacts/grandfacts-newyork.pdf>: Provides contact information for 58 agencies and organizations across New York State that provide information, programs, and assistance for "kinship care"; that is, grandparents and other relatives who have assumed custodial responsibility for the children and grandchildren of family members. Also provides legal information and laws specific to New York State.
- Grandparent Resource Center, New York City Department for the Aging: for more information: 212-442-1094.
- New York State kinship care information: New York State Office of Children and Family Services, (518) 473-1327, [Jamie.greenberg@dfa.state.ny.us](mailto:Jamie.greenberg@dfa.state.ny.us).
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (May 30, 2007), *Affordable Housing for Intergenerational Families*, power point presentation for satellite training.

[http://www.gu.org/documents/A0/Affordable\\_Housing\\_Intergenerational\\_Families.pdf](http://www.gu.org/documents/A0/Affordable_Housing_Intergenerational_Families.pdf).

- R. Karaim (2006), "Grandfamily Housing," *AARP Bulletin Today*. Washington, DC: AARP.
- C. Davies (June, 2002), *The Grandparent Study 2002 Report*. Washington, DC: AARP, Grandparent Information Center. A national survey of 1,500 grandparents conducted by Roper ASW for AARP.