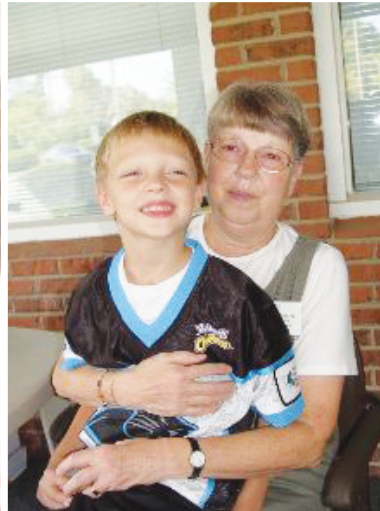


Grandparents: The New Emerging Caregivers

- Lavern Weathers



There are an estimated 6 million children in the United States living in families headed by a grandparent or other relative caregiver.¹ As these numbers continue to climb, more and more grandparents are suddenly finding themselves in the role of caregiver for their grandchildren. They have accepted the role of primary parent or guardian for many different reasons including death, incarceration, drug addiction or illness of the birth parents.

These grandparents range in age from 45 to 82 years old and work tirelessly day in and day out to provide a safe, loving home for their grandchildren to thrive and grow. Often this role means that the traditional role and perks of grand parenting are missed. Gone are the days of being Granddaddy, Poppy, Nana, Granny or Grandma. One grandmother, raising her grandson, longingly says, "I'd like to be just his grandmother even if for one day."

For these special grandparents, there is help and support offered through special initiatives such as the Kinship Care Grandparents Raising Grandchildren program. Monthly support group meetings provide an opportunity for grandparents to join together and talk about their individual experiences, their joys and sorrows and the daily challenges they face. Often knowing that they are not alone and being with others facing the same situation provides tremendous comfort.

Statistics show that kinship families are fast becoming more common place everyday. There is also evidence that points out that while the children in kinship care families may often have difficulty adjusting, they do better when placed with relatives rather than in other alternative placement arrangements. Their

overall chance for success increases when placed in the home of a caring concerned relative.

As a Social Worker and a strong supporter of these groups, I have been impressed and humbled by what I've learned from these special grandparents. These are our local families, our immediate future and an essential part of the cornerstone of our society. This becomes our collective opportunity as a community to reach out and embrace this new emerging family with the same zeal and enthusiasm as we would our own, each in his own way.

Another retired grandmother remarked: "I have always wanted to go on an archaeological dig. I had saved my money to do just that when I retired. Then she paused and smiled before saying with her eyes filled with pride, "I'm now spending my dig money on my grandchild."

¹ www.grandfactsheets.org

Lavern Weathers is a Social Worker with the Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services. She has over 20 years experience in the social services field and was instrumental in creating the Family Caregiver Support Program grandparent support group, now celebrating its first anniversary. A grandmother herself to a two year old grandson, Lavern feels honored and privileged to work with these special grandparents.

For more information regarding the Kinship Care Grandparents Raising Grandchildren program, contact: