



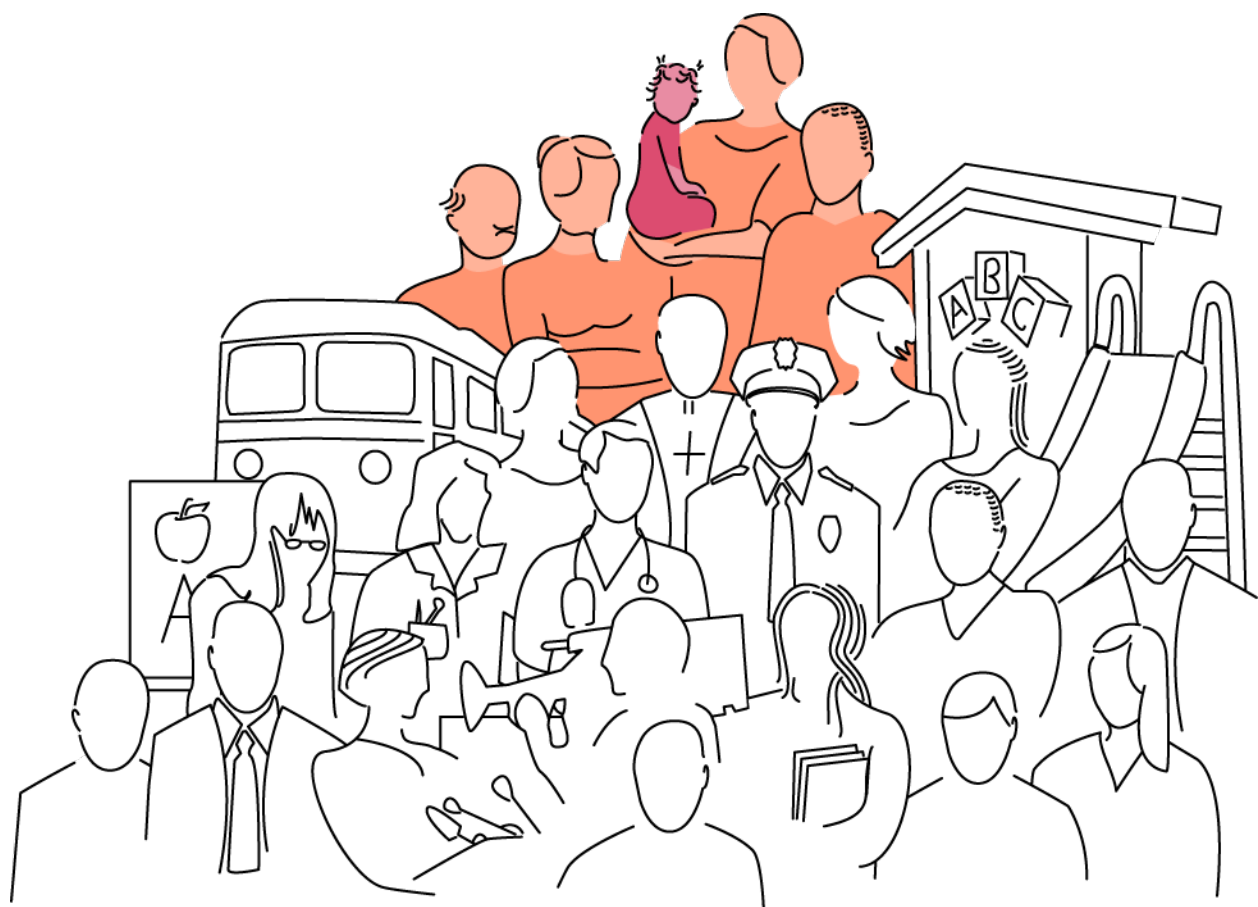
Center for Urban Child Policy

Advancing Public Policy to Improve the Well-Being of Children

GRANDPARENTS AND GRANDCHILDREN IN SHELBY COUNTY

This policy brief discusses the important ways that grandparents in Shelby County provide emotional support and stability, improving outcomes for young children.

March 2009 update



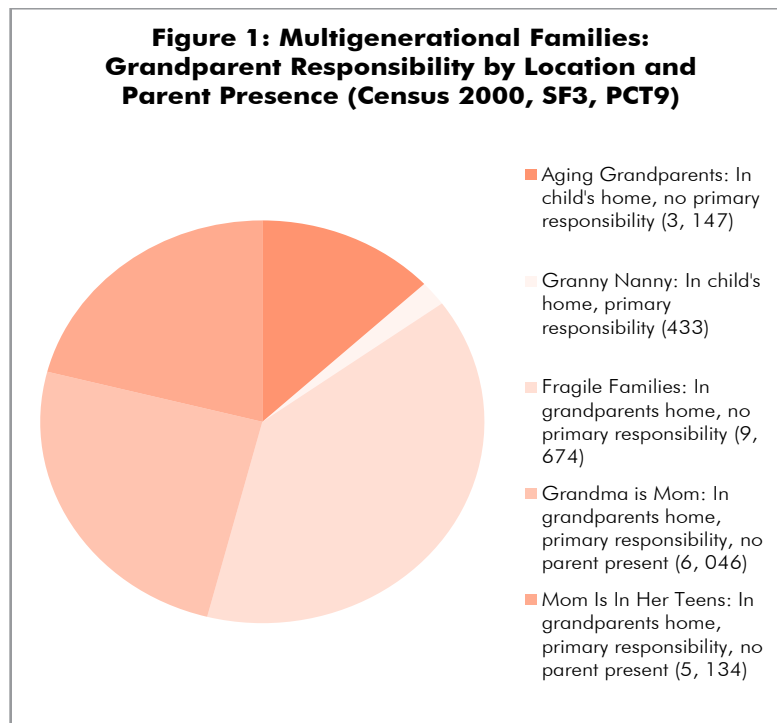
Research suggests that the positive influence of grandparents can promote healthy cognitive, social and emotional development in young children (Deleire and Kalil, 2002).

In Shelby County, 1 in 10 children live with their grandparents (ACS 2006).

Multigenerational families take a number of forms In some of these families, parents care for their children as well as for their aging parents. In other families, grandparents care for their child and their grandchildren. In still other families, the middle generation is not present.

Since the 1980s, there has been a dramatic rise in the number of urban, poor and non-white families in which a single mother and her child live with her parents (Acs and Koball, 2003; Kaestner and O'Neill, 2003).

In Shelby County, 1 in 7 families with children also have grandparents present (ACS 2006).



- » African American households are more likely to include grandparents (two-thirds of multigenerational families in Shelby County are Black) (ACS 2006).
- » Multigenerational families are likely to be poor: 1 in 3 (30%) families where grandparents have primary responsibility for grandchildren live in poverty (ACS 2006). 1 in 4 (23%) 3 generation families live in poverty.
- » Grandparents top of the list of non-parental child care providers (Pebley and Rudkin, 1998).

When are Grandparents Likely to Assume a Larger Role in Raising Children?

Parents turn to their own parents for help during times of transition.

Major life changes – divorce, illness, loss of a job, birth of a child and substance abuse – are events that precipitate the formation of multigenerational families (Denham and Smith, 1989; Pebley & Rudkin, 1999; Acs and Koball, 2003; Newman and Chen 2007).

Grandparents step in when no parent is available, due to financial hardship, substance-abuse, or prison (Conway and Hutson, September 2007; Mumola, 2000; Young and Smith, 2000).

How do multigenerational families benefit young children?

Grandparents play many roles in the lives of their grandchildren. Grandparents are stress buffers, provide family roots, and mediate between their children and grandchildren. Grandparents impart wisdom, recite family stories, provide comfort, serve as role models and child care providers (Denham and Smith 1989 pg 346; Sands and Goldberg-Glen 2000).

Grandparents limit transience and instability, improving the outcomes for young children (Deleire and Kalil, 2002).

Parents, Grandparents and Public Policy

Changes in welfare laws have increased the incentive for parents and children to live with grandparents. Eligibility for TANF requires that minor parents live with a responsible adult (generally her parents) and participate in school or training (Acs and Koball, 2003).



Too often, grandparents lack the formal and legal authority they need to access resources that should be available to help care for grandchildren. Grandparents caring for grandchildren often do so as an informal arrangement, without formal legal or custodial rights. Without guardianship rights, grandparents have a hard time obtaining cash assistance, health insurance, health care, educational services, legal services and child care (Bryson and Casper, 1998).

Local Support for Grandfamilies

The American Association of Retired persons (AARP) has many resources for grandparents caring for grandchildren. They address legal questions such as custody and applying for public assistance for grandchildren. There are many chapters located in the Mid-South region. For more information, call 1-888-OUR-AARP.

The Shelby County Relative Caregiver Program is administrated by The University of Tennessee Boling Center for Developmental Disabilities. They are a “comprehensive public/private collaboration designed to support children whose parents are not able to raise them, and are being cared for by a grandmother, aunt, uncle, or other extended family members.” For more information, call 1-901-448-3133 or send an email to Juanita Williams at jawilliams@utmem.edu.

The Memphis and Shelby Council on Aging also has information and programs for senior adults caring for grandchildren. They may be reached at 1-901-515-2066.



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