Solutions and Support for Families Affected by the Opioid Crisis

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“No area of the United States is exempt from this epidemic—we all know a friend, family member, or loved one devastated by opioids”
How Does the Opioid Crisis and Opiate Use in Families Affect Children?
• 8.7 million children in the U.S. have a parent who suffers from a substance use disorder
• Most birth parents with opioid or other substance use disorders have a deep longing to parent

• The desire to be a good parent is severely impacted by their addiction, the effect of opioids on the brain, and the barriers they face finding treatment and support
Because of the Opioid Crisis….

• More relatives are raising children because:
  1. Parents have died
  2. Parents are incarcerated
  3. Parents are using drugs
  4. Parents are in treatment
  5. Parents are otherwise unable to take care of their children
The Opioid Crisis and Adverse Childhood Experiences
• The opioid epidemic has exposed children to numerous Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)

• ACE study tied 10 traumatic childhood experiences to poor life outcomes
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Physical neglect
- Emotional neglect
- Exposure to domestic violence
- Household substance abuse
- Household mental illness
- Disappearance of parent through separation, divorce, death, or abandonment
- Incarcerated household member
• Children who experience six or more ACEs: Greater likelihood of depression, drug abuse, anxiety, and behavioral/learning difficulties
• 51% of children involved with the child welfare system have experienced at least four ACEs (compared to 13% in the general population)
Kinship Caregivers Reduce Future Traumas

• Placing children with grandparents (or other relatives) has been found to
  - reduce future trauma
  - mitigate the long-term effects of early trauma
  - provide protective factors that promote resiliency and healing
Grandfamilies: Statistics
• Opioid abuse/overdose deaths of parents is responsible for over a third of all children who are removed from their homes

• Ohio spent approximately $45 million in 2016 for placement costs of children in custody due to parental use of heroin or opiates
• 2.6 million children are being raised in kinship care with no birth parents in the home (4% of all children in the U.S.)
• For every child in foster care, there are 20 children being raised by grandparents
• 233,699 children (in Ohio) live in homes where the householders are grandparents or other relatives (8.9% of the children in Ohio)
Demographics of Grandparents Raising their Grandchildren (2015)

- 57% were in the workforce
- 40% were over the age of 60
- 20% were living below the poverty line
- 25% had a reported disability
- 42% have been providing care for five or more years
Challenges for Kinship Caregivers

• Suddenly assuming an unexpected role and surrendering the traditional grandparent role
• Forced to navigate unfamiliar and complex systems
• Coping with the challenges of raising children with high rates of trauma exposure
• Financial concerns due to taking on the unexpected expense of children
• Legal issues related to custody and future legal issues
• Medical and Psychological Concerns of the child (and self)
• Finding time, energy, and resources to attend to own needs
Benefits of Grandfamilies

• Positive child-caregiver relationships with adults who model healthy relationships (e.g., safety, belonging, and feeling loved)
• Relationships with extended family and a cultural identity
• Stable living environment - stability and permanency
• Increased sense of purpose
What Grandfamilies Need

• Approaches that prioritize placing children with relatives

• Trauma-informed training and mental health services to the children and caregivers

• Connecting the family to comprehensive community-based supports
Key Programs for Grandfamilies
National Resource – Generations United

- https://www.gu.org/
- Provides key resources (e.g., *The State of Grandfamilies in America: 2017; Raising the Children of the Opiate Epidemic: 2016*)
- Provides information on pending and recently passed legislation (e.g., *Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act*)
- Financially supports the development of new programs and resources
Ohio START Program

• Attorney General DeWine initiated the Ohio START (Sobriety, Treatment, and Reducing Trauma) pilot programs in 17 Southern counties of Ohio.

• Qualifications:
  1. Must qualify for in-home or out-of-home services through public children’s services
  2. Present evidence of substance abuse (score of 3 or higher on the UNCOPE screening tool

• Parents and Children with ACE scores greater than four are referred for further assessment and treatment.

• Case workers and family peer mentors work weekly with the family
Local Resources

- County Public Children Services Agencies (Kinship Childcare program, Kinship Permanency Incentive Program)
- Department of Job and Family Services
- Ohio Grandparent/Kinship Coalition
- Kinship Navigator Program
- Grandparent Project
New Policies for Grandfamilies
Family First Prevention Services Act (Family First)

• Became federal law on February 9, 2018 as part of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018

• Family First is a landmark child welfare law that aligns with the principle that children do best in families

• Requires states to implement kinship navigator programs that are meeting U.S. DHHS standards of promising practices
Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act

• Signed into law by President Trump on July 9, 2018


• Will establish a Federal Advisory Council to support grandparents raising children

• Council charged with identifying, promoting, coordinating, and disseminating information about resources and best practices
Recommendations

• Prioritize placement with relatives, when possible
• Encourage a continuum of tailored, trauma-informed services and supports for children, birth parents, and kin caregivers
• Provide needed financial assistance
• Provide needed social services
• Provide an array of legal options and improve access to legal assistance
We all must change the fundamental question from

“What is wrong with you?”

to

“What happened to you?”
Questions?
Resources

• Generations United – https://www.gu.org/
• Optimal Aging Institute Website – www.bgsu.edu/oai
• Ohio Grandparent/Kinship Coalition – http://www.ohiograndparentkinship.org/
• Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (Resource Guide for grandfamilies) – www.odjfs.state.oh.us/forms/ search for JFS 08146)
• Lucas County Children Services – Kinship Caregivers – http://co.lucas.oh.us/1926/kinship-caregivers/
• GenerationRx – https://generationrx.org/
• Take Charge Ohio – https://www.TakeChargeOhio.org